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MINISTRIES

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A Nobody Trying to Tell Everybody About Somebody,

Pastor Mark Driscoll

# Creation: God Makes Research Brief

From Pastor Mark Driscoll

Prepared by a research team

## I. Other Religions on Creation

### **Judaism**

The theology of Rabbinic Judaism is formulated on the Hebrew Scriptures and the authoritative rabbinical writings of the first six centuries. These writings teach that God sovereignly formed creation in accordance with His plan. Many scholars have pointed out the similarities between Genesis 1-2 and the Babylonian creation myth, *Enuma Elish*. However, the differences between the narratives are evident as well. The *Enuma Elish* is a story of many gods struggling with each other for supremacy through the process of creation, while the OT proclaims simply that God alone created the world and all its creatures.

### **Islam**

Orthodox Islamic doctrine asserts that the Koran is the eternal word of God, written on a tablet in heaven and dictated in a revelation to Mohammed (570-632 A.D.) by the archangel Gabriel. The overarching purpose of the Koran is to proclaim that Allah is the one, true God and to call people to worship him. In Sura XLI, Mohammed proclaims that Allah created the earth in two days, ordered it, blessed it, and distributed food in it in four more days, made the seven heavens and furnished them with lights and guardian angels. This Sura argues that such a great god should not be confused with lesser gods. (See also Sura XVI for more on the Islamic doctrine of creation.) (Barbara Sproul, *Primal Myths*, p. 151)

### **Hinduism**

The existence of the universe in Hindu thought is governed by the Trimurti of Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the sustainer), and Shiva (the destroyer). Because of the cyclical view of time taught in Hinduism, many Hindus see little conflict with creation and evolution. In Hinduism, God is both within and without of his creation. ("Hinduism" in *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker, p. 430-31.)

### **Buddhism**

Buddhism generally ignores the question of the origin of life. The cosmology of Buddhism borrows some of the basic components of Hinduism, namely reincarnation and karma, but also modifies them drastically. Buddha taught that there cannot be such a thing as a soul but rather only the sequence of one moment giving rise to the next. This no-soul doctrine leads to a denial of an eternal creator God, independent of creation. Therefore, there are many gods in Buddhism. ("Buddhism" in *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker, p. 171-2.)

### **Mormonism**

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints hold to the authoritative teaching found in the *Book of Mormon*. Mormons believe that space, matter, and energy are eternal. They do not have any absolute origin. God is more of an architect and organizer of this raw material (similar to

Plato's demiurge) than a sovereign creator who creates ex nihilo. ("Mormonism" in *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker, p. 655-56)

### **Jehovah's Witnesses**

The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that God is one in person. Jehovah's first creation was his "only-begotten Son" who was "used by Jehovah in creating all things." Jesus is not the agent of creation but rather Michael the archangel who became a man. The JW's hold that the universe is billions of years old and that each of the six days of creation described in Genesis 1 was 7000 years long. (See CARM entry on "Jehovah's Witnesses" at <http://www.carm.org/jw/doctrines.htm>)

### **Naturalism**

Naturalism views creation as merely the product of time, energy, and chance. As Carl Sagan famously said, the cosmos is all that is, and was, and will ever be. This worldview is summarized by Bertrand Russell: "That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins-- all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of the unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built." (Russell, *Mysticism and Logic*, p. 47).

### **Strangest creation story we found**

The strangest creation story found was from one of the North American tribes called the Joshua. These Native Americans lived near the mouth of the Rogue River in southern Oregon. Their creator, Xowalaci, (the "Giver"), is fallible. Twice he attempts to create human beings and twice he fails, producing dogs and snakes. Only by the intervention of the first man is a woman finally created out of his dream. (See "Joshua" in Sproul's, *Primal Myths*, p. 232-236)

## **II. Doctrine of Creation in Christian Theology**

### **Patristics**

The doctrine of creation was vital for the church fathers and their defense of the gospel against pagan influences. Patristic speculation on the creation of the world answered the need both for a theologically acceptable interpretation of Genesis and for a continuing response to the perceived aberrations of Platonism and Gnosticism. Over against the Platonic cosmogony, which viewed matter as eternal and the created world as quasi-necessary corollary of God's own being, second and third century Christian apologists expounded on the biblical account of the personal Creator creating solely by his sovereign will. The scriptural depiction of God fashioning the world from primeval chaos appeared superficially compatible with Plato's vision of the demiurge bringing order to eternal, formless matter. Arguing that the biblical account was more ancient, and thus

more veracious, Justin Martyr (*1Apol.* 59) and ostensibly also Clement of Alexandria (*Str.* 5:89.5-6) were content to affirm that God created the world by an ordering of preexistent matter. Other apologists, absolutizing the freedom of the Creator and the contingency of the world, espoused a creation *ex nihilo*, “out of nothing” (Tatian, *Or.* 5.1-3; Theophilus, *Autol.* 2.4; Tertullian, *Herm.* 21.2-3).

The patristic writers understood that the doctrine of God as creator was vital in opposing heresies like Gnosticism, which posed the greatest threat to the formative Christian cosmology. Gnosticism attributed the material world to a process of devolution or degeneration from the divine *pleroma* (spiritual idea of fullness from which everything emanated), instigated by a subversive intermediary demiurge in some cases identified with the Old Testament Creator. Irenaeus of Lyons took this radical Gnostic dualism to task in the first two books of his *Against Heresies*, insisting that the one high God was alone Creator, and by the agency solely of his own Logos (*Haer.* 2.24-5; 2.9.1-2.10.4). (See "Creation" in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, Vol. 1, ed. Everett Ferguson, p. 299)

Below are several quotations from the patristic writers on the doctrine of creation:

“Our God did not begin to be in time. He alone is without beginning, and He Himself is the beginning of all things.” Tatian (c. 160, E), 2.66.

“God is not born, nor made. He is of an ever-abiding nature without beginning and without end. He is immortal, perfect, and incomprehensible. Now, when I say that He is perfect I mean that there is no defect in Him and that He is not in need of anything. Rather, all things are in need of Him... He has no name, for everything that has a name is related to created things. He has no form, nor any bodily members... He is neither male nor female. The heavens do not limit him.” Aristides (c. 125, E), 9.264.

“God formed Adam, not as if He stood in need of man, but so that He might have someone upon whom to confer His benefits.” Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.478

“For with Him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things. He speaks to Him saying ‘Let Us make man after Our image and likeness.’” Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.488.

“God completed all His works in a specified order. At first, He laid them out in their unformed elements, so to speak. Then He arranged them in their finished beauty. For He did not inundate the light all at once with the splendor of the sun. Nor did he immediately temper darkness with the moon's soothing beam. He did not adorn the heaven all at once with constellations and stars. Nor did He at once fill the seas with their teeming monsters. He did not endow the earth all at once with its various kinds of vegetation. Rather, He first gave it existence; then He filled it.” Tertullian (c. 200, W), 3.493.

“The truth is, a great matter was in progress--out of which the creature under consideration was being fashioned... Imagine God wholly employed and absorbed in it-- in His hand, His eye, His labor, His purpose, His wisdom, His providence, and above all, in His love. All of these things

were dictating the lineaments of man. For, whatever was the form and expression that was then given to the clay, it was in His thoughts that Christ would one day become man.” Tertullian (c. 210, W), 3.549.

“The *immediate* Creator, and, as it were, the very Maker of the world was the Word, the Son of God. By commanding His own Son, the Word, to create the world, the Father of the Word is the *primary* Creator.” Origen (c. 248, E), 4.601.

“It cannot be said that God made the world for His own sake. For He can exist without the world... It is evident, therefore, that the world was constructed for the sake of living beings, since living beings enjoy those things that it consists of.” Lactantius (c. 304-313, W), 7.198.

“God designed the world for the sake of man. But He formed man himself for His own sake. Man was, as it were, a priest of a divine temple, a spectator of God's works and of heavenly objects. For he is the only earthly being who is able to understand God, for he is intelligent and capable of reason... On this account, he alone of all the other living creatures has been made with an upright body and stance. So it seems he was raised up for the contemplation of his Parent. For this reason also, he alone received language... so that he may be able to declare the majesty of his Lord... So it is plainly most just that man should worship Him who bestowed such great gifts upon him. He should also love his fellow man, who is united with him in the participation of the divine justice.” Lactantius (c. 314, W), 7.271.

“In six days, God made the works of his hands. On the seventh day, he made an end, rested on it, and sanctified it.” Barnabas (c. 70-130, E), 1.146.

“In the day that they did eat, in the same day did they die, and became death's debtors.” Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.551.

“No man can give a sufficient explanation of this six days' work, no can he describe all of its parts. He could not do this even if he had ten thousand tongues.” Theophilus (c. 180, E), 2.99.

“God made heaven and earth and the things that are in them in six days.” Methodius (c. 290, E), 6.339.

### **Augustine**

Augustine of Hippo wrote the following on Genesis 1 in *The City of God*, Book XI, chapter 4:

“Of all visible things, the world is the greatest; of all invisible, the greatest is God. But, that the world is, we see; that God is, we believe. That God made the world, we can believe from no one more safely than from God Himself. But where have we heard Him? Nowhere more distinctly than in the Holy Scriptures, where His prophet said, ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.’ Was the prophet present when God made the heavens and the earth? No; but the wisdom of God, by whom all things were made, was there, and wisdom insinuates itself into holy souls, and makes them the friends of God and His prophets, and noiselessly informs them of His works. They are taught also by the angels of God, who always behold the face of the Father, and announce His will to whom it befits. Of these prophets was he who said and wrote, ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.’ And so fit a witness was he of God,

that the same Spirit of God, who revealed these things to him, enabled him also so long before to predict that our faith also would be forthcoming.

But why did God choose then to create the heavens and earth which up to that time He had not made? If they who put this question wish to make out that the world is eternal and without beginning, and that consequently it has not been made by God, they are strangely deceived, and rave in the incurable madness of impiety. For, though the voices of the prophets were silent, the world itself, by its well-ordered changes and movements, and by the fair appearance of all visible things, bears a testimony of its own, both that it has been created, and also that it could not have been created save by God, whose greatness and beauty are unutterable and invisible. As for those who own, indeed, that it was made by God, and yet ascribe to it not a temporal but only a creational beginning, so that in some scarcely intelligible way the world should always have existed a created world they make an assertion which seems to them to defend God from the charge of arbitrary hastiness, or of suddenly conceiving the idea of creating the world as a quite new idea, or of casually changing His will, though He be unchangeable.

But I do not see how this supposition of theirs can stand in other respects, and chiefly in respect of the soul; for if they contend that it is co-eternal with God, they will be quite at a loss to explain whence there has accrued to it new misery, which through a previous eternity had not existed. For if they said that its happiness and misery ceaselessly alternate, they must say, further, that this alternation will continue for ever; whence will result this absurdity, that, though the soul is called blessed, it is not so in this, that it foresees its own misery and disgrace. And yet, if it does not foresee it, and supposes that it will be neither disgraced nor wretched, but always blessed, then it is blessed because it is deceived; and a more foolish statement one cannot make. But if their idea is that the soul's misery has alternated with its bliss during the ages of the past eternity, but that now, when once the soul, has been set free, it will return henceforth no more to misery, they are nevertheless of opinion that it has never been truly blessed before, but begins at last to enjoy a new and uncertain happiness; that is to say, they must acknowledge that some new thing, and that an important and signal thing, happens to the soul which never in a whole past eternity happened it before.

And if they deny that God's eternal purpose included this new experience of the soul, they deny that He is the Author of its blessedness, which is unspeakable impiety. If, on the other hand, they say that the future blessedness of the soul is the result of a new decree of God, how will they show that God is not chargeable with that mutability which displeases them? Further, if they acknowledge that it was created in time, but will never perish in time,-that it has, like number, a beginning but no end,-and that, therefore, having once made trial of misery, and been delivered from it, it will never again return thereto, they will certainly admit that this takes place without any violation of the immutable counsel of God. Let them, then, in like manner believe regarding the world that it too could be made in time, and yet that God, in making it, did not alter His eternal design.”

On the days in Genesis 1, Augustine (*The City of God*, Book XI, chapter 7) wrote the following:

“We see, indeed, that our ordinary days have no evening but by the setting, and no morning but by the rising, of the sun; but the first three days of all were passed without sun, since it is reported to have been made on the fourth day. And first of all, indeed, light was made by the word of God, and God, we read, separated it from the darkness, and called the light Day, and the darkness Night; but what kind of light that was, and by what periodic movement it made evening and morning, is beyond the reach of our senses; neither can we understand how it was,

and yet must unhesitatingly believe it. For either it was some material light, whether proceeding from the upper parts of the world, far removed from our sight, or from the spot where the sun was afterwards kindled; or under the name of light the holy city was signified, composed of holy angels and blessed spirits, the city of which the apostle says, "Jerusalem which is above is our eternal mother in heaven;" and in another place, "For ye are all the children of the light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness."

Yet in some respects we may appropriately speak of a morning and evening of this day also. For the knowledge of the creature is, in comparison of the knowledge of the Creator, but a twilight; and so it dawns and breaks into morning when the creature is drawn to the praise and love of the Creator; and night never falls when the Creator is not forsaken through love of the creature. In fine, Scripture, when it would recount those days in order, never mentions the word night. It never says, "Night was," but "The evening and the morning were the first day." So of the second and the rest. And, indeed, the knowledge of created things contemplated by themselves is, so to speak, more colorless than when they are seen in the wisdom of God, as in the art by which they were made. Therefore evening is a more suitable figure than night; and yet, as I said, morning returns when the creature returns to the praise and love of the Creator. When it does so in the knowledge of itself, that is the first day; when in the knowledge of the firmament, which is the name given to the sky between the waters above and those beneath, that is the second day; when in the knowledge of the earth, and the sea, and all things that grow out of the earth, that is the third day; when in the knowledge of the greater and less luminaries, and all the stars, that is the fourth day; when in the knowledge of all animals that swim in the waters and that fly in the air, that is the fifth day; when in the knowledge of all animals that live on the earth, and of man himself, that is the sixth day."

### **Martin Luther**

Martin Luther wrote the following comments on Genesis 1: "The first chapter is written in the simplest language; yet it contains matters of the utmost importance and very difficult to understand. It was for this reason, as St. Jerome asserts, that among the Hebrews it was forbidden for anyone under thirty to read the chapter or to expound it for others. They wanted one to have a good knowledge of the entire Scripture before getting to this chapter... The commentators, with their sundry, different, and countless questions, have so confused everything in the chapter as to make it clear enough that God has reserved His exalted wisdom and the correct understanding of this chapter for Himself alone, although He has left with us this general knowledge that the world had a beginning and that it was created by God out of nothing. This general knowledge is clearly drawn from the text. As to particulars, however, there are differences of opinion about very many things, and countless questions are raised at one point or another." (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 1, ed. Pelikan, p. 1)

"We assert that Moses spoke in the literal sense, not allegorically or figuratively, i.e., that the world, with all its creatures, was created within six days, as the words read. If we do not comprehend the reason for this, let us remain pupils and leave the job of teacher to the Holy Spirit. However, these days are distinguished in this way: on the first day the formless mass of heaven and earth was created, to which later on light was added; on the second, the firmament; on the third, the earth, with its fruits, was brought forth out of the water; on the fourth the heavens were adorned by the creation of the sun, moon, and stars; on the fifth, the fishes of the

sea and the birds of the air; on the sixth the land animals and man were created.” ((Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 1, ed. Pelikan, p. 5)

“What Moses calls heaven and earth are not the kind they are now, but the crude and formless masses which they were up to that time. The water was dark; and because it is lighter by nature, it surrounded the still formless earth itself, like an ooze or a dense fog. This primary matter, so to speak, for His later work God, according to the plain words of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:11), did not create outside the six days but at the beginning of the first day. So far as I can see, Moses until now makes no mention of the first day because later on those unordered masses of the crude heaven and earth were given shape, and, as it were, highly perfected and made separate entities. What he later calls the abyss and water namely, the formless and crude mass of water, not yet arranged in an orderly manner and not yet graced with its specific shape this he designates here as heaven. (Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 1, ed. Pelikan, p. 6)

Luther summarized his understanding of Genesis 1:1 as follows: “The very simple meaning of what Moses says, therefore, is this: Everything that is, was created by God. Furthermore, at the beginning of the first day were created the crude mass of mire or of earth, and the mists or waters. Into these, within the remaining space of the first day, God introduced light and made day appear, in order to expose to view the crude mass of heaven and earth, rather like an elementary seed, but one suited for producing something.” (Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 1, ed. Pelikan, p. 7)

### **John Calvin**

John Calvin wrote in his preface to his *Commentary on Genesis*, “Since the infinite wisdom of God is displayed in the admirable structure of heaven and earth, it is absolutely impossible to unfold The History of the Creation of the World in terms equal to its dignity. For while the measure of our capacity is too contracted to comprehend things of such magnitude, our tongue is equally incapable of giving a full and substantial account of them.”

According to Calvin, Genesis 1:1 teaches that God created ex nihilo: “In the beginning... Moses simply intends to assert that the world was not perfected at its very commencement, in the manner in which it is now seen, but that it was created an empty chaos of heaven and earth. His language therefore may be thus explained. When God in the beginning created the heaven and the earth, the earth was empty and waste. He moreover teaches by the word ‘created,’ that what before did not exist was now made; for he has not used the term *yatsar*, which signifies to frame or forms but *bara* which signifies to create... Therefore his meaning is, that the world was made out of nothing.” (*John Calvin, Commentary on Genesis 1:1*)

Calvin taught that the doctrine of creation establishes that the universe is not eternal: “Hence the folly of those is refuted who imagine that unformed matter existed from eternity; and who gather nothing else from the narration of Moses than that the world was furnished with new ornaments, and received a form of which it was before destitute. This indeed was formerly a common fable among heathens, who had received only an obscure report of the creation, and who, according to custom, adulterated the truth of God with strange figments; but for Christian men to labor in maintaining this gross error is absurd and intolerable. Let this, then be maintained in the first



place that the world is not eternal but was created by God.” (John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis 1:1*)

For a more extensive treatment of Calvin’s doctrine of creation see *Institutes*, Book I, chapters 14-16.

### **Reformed Debate**

The debate, especially in Reformed circles, over the exact length of the days in Genesis 1 is summarized nicely by a brief article written by Westminster Theological Seminary. (See <http://www.wts.edu/about/beliefs/statements/creation.html>) Basically, there has always been differing interpretations of the days in Genesis 1. While most of the Protestant Reformers, as we have seen above, held to 24-hour days (i.e. Luther, Calvin, Westminster divines), other Church Fathers influential in Reformed thought did not (i.e. Augustine). The point of the Westminster article is to show how this issue over the length of the days ought not to be thought of as a test of orthodoxy but rather an area that is open for theological debate. One modern Reformed scholar who follows Augustine in his interpretation of the days is Machen, who wrote: “It is certainly not necessary to think that the six days spoken of in that first chapter of the Bible are intended to be six days of twenty four hours each. We may think of them rather as very long periods of time.” (J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man*, p. 131).

### **III. Theological Significance of the Doctrine of Creation**

Despite disagreement of the length of the days in Genesis 1, the doctrine of creation has fueled the adoration and worship of many theologians throughout the history of the church. In Genesis 1-2, we read of an absolutely sovereign God who just “is.” He is not contingent on His creation. He has always existed and this ought to fuel our praise of Him. This is captured beautifully in the words of Presbyterian theologian Samuel Baird who wrote the following about Genesis 1:1 in 1860: “With this announcement the Spirit of God commences the sacred volume. He is about to put upon permanent record a revelation, intended to answer to answer all those questions which spontaneously spring, in the depths of the human soul, concerning our highest and eternal interests, - a revelation respecting the nature of God, the cause and the remedy of our ruinous estate, the purpose for which life is given, the immortality of man, and the alternative states of eternity, - themes which have perplexed and bewildered philosophers and sages in every age. The first line of the first page of this blessed book announces Him, whose nature and whose works are the theme of the whole. It unveils in sudden light a glorious One, whose luster increases through every page; like a morning sun, growing continually in radiant majesty, pouring abroad a flood of unapproachable glory, alone in a starless firmament. When the student of the sacred volume reads, in that first line, the sublime announcement, 'In the beginning, God' – he, at one bound, ascends a height as far above that lofty Olympus where fabled Jove sat enthroned, as the heavens are higher than the earth... Gazing abroad from this mountain pinnacle, - on the one hand is nothing but the eternity of God; on the other is the creation, just launching forth upon cycles, each one of which is the unfolding of a new chapter, in the revelation of the high and lofty One who inhabits that eternity.” (Samuel Baird, *The Elohim Revealed in the Creation and Redemption of Man*, pp. 51-52).

Throughout the OT, particularly the Psalms, the doctrine of creation functions both doxologically and apologetically. We see these twin functions in Psalm 96:3-5 which says: “Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens.” The doctrine of creation evokes the worship of Israel. God created all things, therefore His glory must be declared among the nations. The reason given by the Psalmist to praise YHWH is because the idols are worthless and YHWH created the heavens. The doctrine of creation also demonstrates God’s power and deity in contrast to the impotence and worthlessness of idols. The God of Israel is the creator and this is what makes Him fundamentally different from the false gods and idols of the nations.

Jewish believers who knew YHWH was the creator God also ascribed the title and the power of the creator to Jesus of Nazareth. Wright writes: “What is so startling, and what we unquestionably do find in the New Testament, is that people who knew YHWH, the Holy One of Israel, to be *the* God and that YHWH was transcendently unique in all the rich dimensions of his scriptural identity, character and actions, constructed a careful, persistent, point-by-point identification of Jesus of Nazareth with this same YHWH.” (Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 105-6). One example of this is found in the gospels when Jesus identifies Himself with a title associated with the creator God: the Lord of the Sabbath. Both Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 20:8-11 show that God is LORD of the Sabbath. This makes Christ’s claim in Luke 6:1-5 astounding. Jesus declares, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

One example of Jesus exercising His power as Creator is His calming of the sea recorded in Mark 4:35-41: “On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, ‘Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?’ And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’ Jesus’ power of the natural order compelled the disciples to ask astonished questions about His identity: ‘Who is this?’

Commenting on this passage, Wright writes: “There could really be only one answer to that question, and the Psalms had already given it (cf. Ps. 65:7; 89:9; 93:3-4; 104:4, 6-9, and especially relevant for the amazed disciples, Ps. 107:23-32)... The New Testament unequivocally puts Jesus alongside YHWH in the primary biblical activity of God--the creation of the universe.” (Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 113)

In the New Testament, Jesus is described as the agent of creation, that is, the One by whom and through whom God created the world. This truth is found in the summit of Paul’s creation Christology in Colossians 1:15-20: “He (that is Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through

him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” Wright comments: “The repeated term *ta panta*, 'all things,' and the way it is expanded to include all possible realms of reality makes it unmistakably clear: Jesus Christ stands in the same relationship to creation as anything that is said of YHWH in the Old Testament. He is behind it and before it. He is the agent of its creation and the beneficiary of its existence. It belongs to Him as owner by right of creation and inheritance. He is the Source and Sustainer of all that exists.” (Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 113). Other key passages that point to Jesus being the agent of God’s creative action are John 1:3, “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made,” and Hebrews 1: 2b, “but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”

Paul describes the work of salvation wrought by God in the New Covenant through the Spirit-empowered preaching of Jesus Christ in the gospel as a work of divine creation. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 4:5-6: “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Paul likens the regenerating power effected in the hearts of believers to the generating power effected by God in Genesis 1:3.

Another key passage connecting Jesus with the doctrine of creation is 1 Corinthians 8:6: “yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” In the passage Paul is addressing the issue in Corinth about food sacrificed to idols. Paul's answer in 1 Cor. 8:6 echoes the Shema from Deut. 6:4. Bauckham comments: "Of the Jewish ways of characterizing the divine uniqueness, the most unequivocal was by reference to creation. In the uniquely divine role of creating all things it was for Jewish monotheism unthinkable that any other being other than God could even assist God (see Isa. 44:24). But to Paul's unparalleled inclusion of Jesus in the Shema he adds the equally unparalleled inclusion of Jesus in the creative activity of God. No more unequivocal way of including Jesus in the unique divine identity is conceivable, within the framework of Second Temple Jewish monotheism." (Richard Bauckham, "Biblical Theology and the Problems of Monotheism," in *Out of Egypt*, p. 224).

In 1 Corinthians 10:25-26 Paul quotes Psalm 24:1, another great doctrine of creation text, to establish the basic principle of freedom to eat anything. "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof" in the Hebrew text of Psalm 24 refers to YHWH. But Paul appears to be applying this to Jesus as Lord. God created all things through the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns sovereignly as Lord over all creation. Wright connects the doctrine of creation to the doctrine of mission: "The whole earth belongs to Jesus as Lord. The missiological, ethical and practical implications of such a worldview are staggering... For if the whole earth belongs to Jesus, there is no corner of the earth to which we can go in mission that does not already belong to Him. There is not an inch of the planet that belongs to any other god, whatever the appearances. A Christ-centered theology of divine ownership of the whole world is a major

foundation for missional theology, practice and ultimate confidence." (Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 112) Wright goes on to spell out in more detail how the doctrine of creation impacts the church's doctrine of mission: "Jesus is associated with all that the Old Testament Scriptures affirm about God as Creator. Since creation forms the platform of all God's mission in history, as well as being the final eschatological beneficiary of all God's redemptive intention, the centrality of Christ in that great mission of God within and for creation is clearly focused." (Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 113).

D.A. Carson provides a helpful summary of Genesis 1 and shows how it grounds all human responsibility: "Genesis 1 portrays the beginning of everything in this created universe. On the face of it, this chapter, and the lines of thought it develops, establish that God is different from the universe that he creates, and therefore pantheism is ruled out; that the original creation was entirely good, and therefore dualism is ruled out; that human beings, male and female together, are alone declared to be made in the image of God, and therefore forms of reductionism that claim we are part of the animal kingdom and no more must be ruled out; that God is a talking God, and therefore all notions of an impersonal God must be ruled out; that this God has sovereignly made all things, including all people, and therefore conceptions of merely tribal deities must be ruled out.

Some of these and other matters are put positively by later writers of Scripture who, reflecting on the doctrine of creation, offer a host of invaluable conclusions. The sheer glory of the created order bears telling witness to the glory of its Maker (Ps. 19). The universe came into being by the will of God, and for this, God is incessantly worshipped (Rev. 4:11). That God has made everything speaks of his transcendence, i.e., he is above this created order, above time and space, and therefore cannot be domesticated by anything in it (Acts 17:24 - 25). That he made all things and continues to rule over all, means that both racism and tribalism are to be rejected (Acts 17:26). Further, if we ourselves have been made in his image, it is preposterous to think that God can properly be pictured by some image that we can concoct (Acts 17:29). These notions and more are teased out by later Scriptures.

One of the most important entailments of the doctrine of creation is this: it grounds all human responsibility. The theme repeatedly recurs in the Bible, sometimes explicitly, sometimes by implication. To take but one example, John's gospel opens by declaring that everything that was created came into being by the agency of God's "Word," the Word that became flesh in Jesus Christ (John 1:2 - 3, 14). But this observation sets the stage for a devastating indictment: when this Word came into the world, and even though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him (John 1:10). God made us to "image" himself; he made us for his own glory. For us to imagine ourselves autonomous is, far from being a measure of our maturity, the supreme mark of our rebellion, the flag of our suppression of the truth (Rom. 1)." (D. A. Carson, "January 1" in *For the Love of God*, vol. 1, p. 26)

The doctrine of creation in Genesis 1-2 is foundational to the Christian worldview. Christopher J. H. Wright comments: "Arguably the most fundamental distinction in all reality is presented to us in the opening verses of the Bible. It is the distinction between the Creator God and everything else that exists anywhere. God alone is uncreated, self-existent, noncontingent. God's being depends on nothing else outside God's own self. All other reality, by contrast, is created by God

and therefore is dependent on God for existence and sustenance. The creation is contingent on God. It cannot and would not exist without God. God did and could exist without it. This essential ontological duality between two orders of being (the created order and the uncreated God) is foundational to the biblical worldview.” (Wright, *The Mission of God*, 163)

The doctrine of creation forms the narrative foundation for the entire storyline of the Bible which shapes the Christian worldview. The doctrine of creation paves the way for the doctrines of redemption, doctrine of divine providence, the doctrine of man, and the doctrine of final judgment. D. A. Carson provides a helpful analysis of Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill in Acts 17 (D. A. Carson, “The Challenge from the Preaching of the Gospel to Pluralism” in *Criswell Theological Review* 7.2, pp.15-39) and demonstrates how Paul begins his entire gospel message with the establishment of the doctrine of creation. Carson writes.:

(1) Paul's approach, preaching to these people who had never read the OT and had never heard of Moses, was radically different from his approach in, say, the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13f.), where the burden of his preaching is that Jesus really did fulfill the OT prophecies, rightly understood, and that failure to bow to him would bring down OT promises of judgment. Clearly, such an approach would mean nothing to those who had never heard of the Hebrew Bible, much less read it.

(2) While some might have been mightily impressed by Athenian architecture, sculpture and learning, Paul "was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols" (17:16). In other words, his reactions were based not on aesthetics, but on a Christian analysis of the culture.

(3) When he is finally brought before the Areopagus, he begins with courtesy, but with remarkable restraint: "I see that in every way you are very religious" (17:22). Courtesy, yes; but there is no approval of their religion as an alternative way of salvation.

(4) Paul finds a way into his subject by referring to the inscription to an Unknown God" (17:23). Probably such altars reflected the fears of animistic strata in pagan culture. There are powers beyond what one can know, and just to be on the safe side it is important to offer sacrifices to all of them--even to unknown ones. By contrast, Paul insists he is introducing the God who is known, the God who has revealed himself.

(5) It has often been pointed out that there are other elements in the surrounding culture that Paul specifically confronts. Acts 17:18 specifically mentions "Epicurean and Stoic philosophers." In the first century, "philosophy" did not have the fairly esoteric and abstract connotations it has today. It referred to an entire way of life, based on a rigorous and self-consistent intellectual system. The ideal of Epicurean philosophy was an undisturbed life, a life of tranquility, untroubled by undue involvement in human affairs. The gods themselves are composed of atoms so fine they live in calmness in the spaces between the worlds. As the gods are nicely removed from the hurley-burley of life, so human beings should seek the same ideal. But over against this vision, Paul presents a God who is actively involved in this world as its Creator, providential Ruler, Judge, and self-disclosing Savior. Stoic philosophy thought of god as all-pervasive, more-or-less in a

pantheistic sense, so that the human ideal was to live life in line with what is ultimately real, to conduct life in line with this god/principle of reason, which must rule over emotion and passion. Stoicism was "marked by great moral earnestness and a high sense of duty."<sup>20</sup> Against such a vision, the God Paul presents, far from being pantheistic, is personal, distinct from the creation, our final Judge. Instead of focusing on "universal reason tapped into by human reasoning,"<sup>21</sup> Paul contrasts divine will and sovereignty with human dependence and need.

(6) Specifically, Paul introduces God as separate from the universe. He is the Creator (he "made the world and everything in it; 17:24), he is sovereign (he "is the Lord of heaven and earth," 17:24), and he is so transcendent that he cannot be domesticated by human forms of worship (he "does not live in temples built by hands," 17:24).

(7) Verse 25 is of enormous importance; God "is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." This passage not only insists that God sustains life and rules providentially, but that he is characterized by aseity. This fine word has largely dropped out of theological discussion, though the truth that God is the God of aseity was once a commonplace. It means that God is so independent that he does not need us. We cannot give him anything he lacks, or wheedle something out of him by cajoling him: he is God, the God "who is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything." He is the God who declares, "If I were hungry, I would not tell you" (Ps 50:12).

(8) All of the human race has descended from one man, himself created by God. This means that the one God rules over all, governing all people, their nations and their history ("he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live," 17:26). Thus, not only is there no room for racism or elitist tribalism, but one of the entailments of monotheism is that if there is one God he must in some sense be God of all, acknowledged or not.

(9) God's purpose in his ordering of history is to incite human beings to pursue him (17:27). The assumption, in other words, is that they otherwise would not. This hint at human rebellion is then further teased out and expanded: idolatry is a practice both culpably ignorant and evil, and all must one day answer to this Creator-God who is also Judge (17:29-30). None of this means that God is playing hard to get, or that he has hidden himself somewhere and must be discovered by noble feats of exploration: "he is not far from each one of us" (17:28). Paul even allows that such insight is recognized by some pagan poets (17:38).

(10) History is not going around and around in endless cycles, as many Greeks thought. History is teleological; it is pressing on in one direction, to the day of final judgment: God "has set a day when he will judge the world with justice" (17:31). Not only so, but there are developments within history; in modern theological parlance, there are salvation-historical or redemptive-historical, developments. History is constrained not only by creation at one end and judgment at the other, but by singularities. In particular,

God has largely overlooked the pagan nations of the world until this point, but "now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (17:30).

(11) Although it is none less than God himself who will judge on the last day (17:31a), he will do so through a particular man, a man accredited by the brute historical fact that God raised him from the dead. We need to observe three things. First, only at this point, after he has set out an entire worldview and even something of a philosophy of history, does Paul introduce Jesus. Second, so far as the record goes, Paul refers to Jesus' miraculous resurrection without mentioning either his divine status or his atoning death. Probably he was about to do so; the narrative gives the impression that at this point Paul is cut off before he can complete his address. Third, not only does the picture Paul paints contradict animism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism, but by so boldly introducing physical resurrection ascribed to God himself Paul is directly taking on one of the commonplaces in a great deal of Greek thought, namely neo-Platonic dualism. The spiritual is good; the physical world is bad. It is inconceivable that God, who is by definition good, would raise someone up to physical life, which is at least relatively bad. That is the very point that causes some to sneer (v 32). But Paul does not flinch: his insistence on the resurrection of Jesus, as reported here by Luke, is entirely in line with what Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians: "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1 Cor 15:14).

(12) Finally, whereas we can read this record of Paul's address in two or three minutes, doubtless he himself took an hour or two or more. We have only the skimpiest record. But what we have is crucial, as we try to think through what themes need to be articulated and stressed as we preach the gospel to modern pagans."