

From creation to new creation

**From Creation to New Creation:
Biblical Theology and Exegesis**

Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Eds.)

Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 2013

Lita Cosner

On the occasion of a well-known scholar’s 65th birthday or his retirement (or another significant occasion), some of his students and colleagues may come together to produce a *festschrift*, or a collection of essays in his honour in his area of specialization. Such essays typically interact with the work of the honouree.

From Creation to New Creation is a *festschrift* for G.K. Beale (b. 1949), edited by two scholars who studied under him. Beale is an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, and was previously at Wheaton College for 10 years. The breadth of subjects reflects the huge impact Beale has had on biblical studies over the course of his career. Several of the essays are especially relevant for review in *Journal of Creation*; some of which deal with passages directly relevant to creation apologetics, and others of which highlight apologetically useful exegesis. Because the scope of the book is such that space will not allow for a review of each essay, this review will focus on the following essays, which are of most relevance to readers of this journal.

Eden: A temple? A reassessment of the biblical evidence

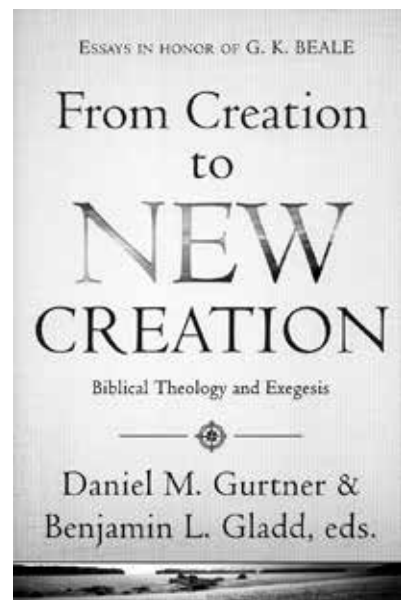
In Daniel I. Block’s essay, he questions the common view that Eden was described in cultic terms that indicated a temple function. In fact:

“Genesis 1–3 introduces readers to a world that could be considered sacred space by virtue of its divine origin but that the narrator fails (or refuses) explicitly to place in that category, either by using special priestly vocabulary or by means of a conceptual framework” (p. 5).

While there are obvious Edenic elements in the tabernacle and temple, Genesis does not characterize Eden itself as a temple (pp. 3–4). In fact, the temple itself is a solution to how God can interact with a fallen world, so there was no need for a temple in Eden, just as there is no need for a temple in the New Jerusalem.

It is exegetically significant whether Eden is being described in terms of the temple, or whether the temple contains elements looking back to Eden:

“The question is, should we read Gen 1–3 in light of the later texts, or should we read later texts in light of these? ... By themselves and by this reading the accounts of Gn 1–3 offer no clues that a cosmic or Edenic temple might be involved. However, as noted above, the Edenic features of the tabernacle, the Jerusalem temple, and the temple envisioned by Ezekiel are obvious. Apparently their design and function intended to capture something of the original creation, perhaps even to represent in miniature the original environment in which human beings were placed. However, the fact that Israel’s sanctuaries were



Edenic does not make Eden into a sacred shrine” (p. 21).

Because John Walton’s work attempting to show that Eden was depicted as a temple can undermine a historical interpretation of Genesis, this argument is useful for creation apologetics.

The shape of the Torah as reflected in the Psalter, Book 1

C. Hassell Bullock argues that the languages and images of the Torah colour book 1 of the Psalms (Psalms 1–41). Levitical terms and Exodus references abound. Particularly relevant for the readers of this journal, Creation imagery is also abundant. As Bullock points out:

“In Ps 19 David draws upon the imagery of creation and the gift of the Torah and reviews the power of sin. In the broad sweep, Ps 19 is a ‘little Torah’, beginning with creation and balancing that with God’s gift of the law (‘the Torah of the LORD’), much like the Pentateuch in its broader scope. The poet does not make an effort to duplicate exact phrases from the creation account, but he shares

the vocabulary of Gn 1–3, much as Ps 27 employs the language of the conquest. In fact, while other terms are common Hebrew vocabulary, the word ‘skies’ (‘firmament’, עִיקָר, *rāqīa*) is distinctive to the creation narrative, and the other occurrences in Ezekiel, Daniel, and the Psalms likely belong to that semantic center, suggesting that the Genesis narrative is the palette from which the psalmist takes his colors” (p. 44).

He concludes:

“The shift from the cosmos to humankind at 19:8[7] is no accident but represents the centering of the Genesis story on humanity, beginning with Gn 2, and the eventual redeeming factor of the Torah that is the major emphasis of the Pentateuch” (p. 45).

Furthermore, Psalm 33 brings together language and imagery from Creation as well as the parting of the Red Sea.

“By its combination of terms from the creation narrative (Gn 1) and the story of redemption from Egypt at the Red Sea (Ex 14, 15), the psalm brings together the theological notions of creation and redemption, implicitly linking the Lord’s work of creation to the miracle of redemption. God is Redeemer precisely because he is Creator” (p. 48).

The entire essay is informative and well worth reading, but the comments about the use of creation imagery in the Psalms is especially useful.

Narrative repetition in 1 Samuel 24 and 26: Saul’s descent and David’s ascent

A common argument that apologists must refute is that Scripture in certain cases is not historical, or a historical core has been embellished with non-historical elements. In

John D. Currid’s and L.K. Larson’s chapter, they take on the assertion that 1 Samuel 24 and 26 are so similar that they must be two retellings of the same event. They look at the narrative’s progression throughout the book to argue that the two accounts are different events, and the way they are portrayed reflects character development advancing the plot of Saul’s fall from the throne and David’s ascent.

“When all is said and done, it is difficult not to conclude that there is a purposeful compositional design of the two narratives. The character development of both Saul and David is clearly in evidence as the text moves along from 1 Sm 24 to 1 Sm 26. David becomes more honorable, bolder, generous, and God-fearing; Saul becomes less so” (p. 62).

Samson and the harlot at Gaza (Judges 16:1–3)

Another common criticism of Scripture is that its heroes are often recorded engaged in acts of sin, opening them up to the charge of hypocrisy. While it is no surprise that every ‘hero’ of the Bible except Christ was sinful, Gordon P. Hugenberger defends Samson against a misinterpretation of his visit to the harlot at Gaza recorded in Judges 16. He points out many similarities between Samson’s predicament and that of the Israelite spies going to Rahab’s house in Joshua 2, and that Samson’s intent to render the city defenceless (by carrying away the city gates) would have precluded his taking advantage of the more traditional hospitality of the town. There are purposeful parallels between Samson in Gaza and the spies in Jericho, and understanding this helps us to interpret the book of Judges more accurately.

Genesis 1–3 and Paul’s theology of Adam’s dominion in Romans 5–6

Roy E. Ciampa argues that understanding Adam’s reign and what that meant once he fell into sin is crucial for understanding Paul’s gospel. In Romans 5,

“Paul has concluded either that humanity abdicated the throne and transferred its authority to a reign of sin and death or that humanity continues to reign but, having chosen the route of sin and death, can do no other than extend a reign marked by sin and death rather than the reign of righteousness and life intended by God” (p. 111).

This requires a historical reading of Genesis:

“Paul’s reading of the early Genesis narratives reflects the relevance of his gospel message for the full depth of the problem of sin and death introduced by Adam and provides the foundation for the Christ-centered gospel of God’s solution not just to the problem of human guilt requiring forgiveness and justification but also for the wider problems of human corruption requiring the overturning of all of Adam’s corrupt reign and its replacement with the reign of righteousness intended by God from the beginning” (121).

The temple, a Davidic Messiah, and a case of mistaken identity

Supposed errors in the New Testament’s citation of Old Testament are often occasions for skeptics to charge Scripture with error, so Nicholas Perrin does Christian apologists a service in examining a supposed error when Jesus cites Abiathar, instead of his son Ahimelech (or Abimelech), in connection with David and his men eating the showbread (Mark 2:26; 1 Samuel 21:1–9). His case proceeds in an orderly, logical fashion. First, he

establishes that at the time of Jesus, Judaism “seems to have applied the term ‘high priest’ not only to the unique officeholder but also to certain individuals, whether male relatives or colleagues, who were closely associated with him” (p. 165). He points out that Annas and Caiaphas were both called the high priest at the same time. “By first-century usage, Abiathar truly was high priest during the event at Nob, and Mark is, technically speaking, quite correct despite the scholarly charge to the contrary” (p. 168).

So Jesus and Mark were *not* wrong to say that Abiathar was high priest during the incident in question. That leaves the question: why would Jesus reference Abiathar and not Abimelech? Perrin shows that throughout the Gospel, Jesus is not only presented as the Messiah, but as the rebuilder of the temple and the reformer of temple worship. Abiathar was the priest deposed by Solomon after he supported Adonijah’s rebellion.

“Employing Abiathar as an emblem of a rebellious and therefore failed priesthood, Mark’s Jesus is in effect speaking a parable that draws upon a well-known story from history in order to explain the present. Drawing up lines of opposition between himself on the one side (represented by David) and the high priestly order on the other side (represented by Abiathar), Jesus anticipates the Solomonic enthronement of his final week (Mk 10:46–15:47)” (p. 175).

This convincing answer to “the Abiathar problem” has wider application, because it is an example where a more thorough knowledge of Jewish thinking of Jesus’ day, and understanding what Mark’s goal in writing his Gospel was, eliminate the problem entirely.

As Perrin says:

“The history of modern biblical interpretation reminds us that, more often than we care to admit, biblical criticism identifies problems in the

text that would not be problems were it not for our own mistaken assumptions” (p. 166).

How do you read? God’s faithful character as the primary lens for the New Testament use of Israel’s Scriptures

The New Testament cites the Old Testament Scriptures in ways that can be difficult for modern Christians to understand or fully appreciate. Rikk E. Watts suggests:

“For the NT authors, what God had done in Christ was necessarily entirely consistent with his previously revealed character as expressed throughout his ongoing dealings in word and deed with his people, the nations, and his creation at large. It is proposed that a citation of or an allusion to Israel’s Scriptures is best understood as invoking some principle concerning God’s character, and thus his intention, in a situation that is deemed similar to an earlier one or, given the significance of Jesus, the fulfillment of an earlier promise” (p. 202).

Both the OT and NT are concerned with revealing who God is and what He is like. The NT invokes the OT in many places to show that the way God speaks and acts in the New Covenant, particularly through the Person and ministry of Jesus Christ, is consistent with the way He spoke and acted in the OT.

From Creation to New Creation: The biblical epic of king, human viceregency, and kingdom

Christopher A. Beetham presents an argument that the 66 books of the Bible tell an overarching story of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.

“Despite postmodern suspicion of metanarrative, Scripture narrates an ultimate epic that claims to make sense of all the smaller stories

of the global community. Christian Scripture is the story of the Creator-King fulfilling his original creation intentions to establish the earth as the kingdom of God through flourishing human viceregency” (pp. 237–238).

This narrative works itself out through patterns of typology, especially focused on the descendants of Abraham and particularly the Davidic line. Of course, creation apologists would continue by saying that for the story to be a true revelation of God’s character, it must be a *historical* story.

A useful, wide-ranging survey

The purpose of the *festchrift* is to celebrate an author with essays dealing with areas in which the honoree has contributed. The book (as well as the several-page-long bibliography of Beale’s published works) makes it clear that Beale’s contribution has been wide-ranging indeed. And it is encouraging that in this work, several apologetically useful arguments are put forth.

While written by and to specialists in biblical studies, this book is well within the reach of serious students of Scripture. And while not all of the articles are written by biblical creationists, compromising views of creation do not come through in such a way as to limit the usefulness of this excellent book.