

## Colossians 1:15-20 Exegesis

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15a. “And He is the *image*<sup>1</sup> of the *invisible* God, ...”

A. The one true God is “invisible” (1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:27); He **cannot** be seen by mortal humans (1 Tim. 6:13-16); and **has never been** seen by mortals at any time in history (John 5:37; John 6:46; John 1:18; 1 John 4:12,20). This is what makes an intermediary (mediator, agent) necessary in all of God’s personal interactions with mankind. It precludes any of the OT references to men speaking face to face with Yahweh God as actually encountering the Person of the Father Himself. Instead, they encountered “the Messenger of the LORD,” who called to Abraham, saying: “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now **I know** that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from **Me**” (Gen. 22:12 NKJ). He is the one who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and said, “**I am** the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exod. 3:2,6 NKJ). He was sent to lead Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land (Exod. 23:20-23; Judges 2:1-4). He alone has been authorized to possess and use the title “Elohim” (God) and the personal name “Yahweh” (Exod. 23:21). For these reasons He was called “the Messenger of His Presence/Face” (Isa. 63:3). It is clear from both Testaments that God has always used a Mediator or Agent to interact with mankind and enter into and confirm His covenants.

B. The Son as “the image” of God: Hebrews adds the following fuller description of the Son as God’s image: “who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person,” (Heb. 1:3 NKJ). The mediatorial role of the Son is stated in 1 Tim. 2:5. The Son as the “image of the invisible God” is the same Mediator called “the Messenger of the LORD” and “the Messenger of His Presence/Face.” Jesus is called God’s “Messenger” in Rev. 1:1-2.

15b. “... first-born of all creation.”

A. The term “first-born” (πρωτό-τοκος proto-tokos lit. “first-produced”) refers to the first-procreated from a parent. **It always refers to the first in sequence regarding procreation.** The Greek word occurs 109 times in the LXX (15 times in Genesis alone – Gen. 4:4; Gen. 10:15; Gen. 22:21; Gen. 25:13; Gen. 27:19,32; Gen. 29:26; Gen. 35:23; Gen. 36:15; Gen. 38:6,7; Gen. 41:51; Gen. 43:33; Gen. 46:8; Gen. 48:18; Gen. 49:3), and 8 times in the NT (Luke 2:7; Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15,18; Heb. 1:6; Heb. 11:28; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 1:5). While priority (first in rank) is also occasionally implied, such is always derived from the fact that he/she was produced first in sequence. **“First-produced” (first-born) never refers to first in rank without being first in sequence.** This concept looms large over the entire passage.

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<sup>1</sup> εἰκὼν – “(1) as an artistic representation, such as on a coin or statue image, likeness (MT 22.20); (2) as an embodiment or living manifestation of God form, appearance (CO 1.15);” (Friberg Analytical Greek Lexicon)

1. In Rom. 8:29, the Son is “*the first-produced among many brethren.*” He was begotten **before** all the people of faith of Hebrews 11, otherwise they cannot be among the “*many brethren*” (cf. Heb. 2:17) among whom He is the “*first-produced.*” He cannot be “***the Founder and Finisher of the Faith***” (Heb. 12:1-3) of Abraham if He originated after Abraham, which is why John recorded that Jesus said: “*Before Abraham was I exist*” (John 8:56-58).

B. The clause “*of all creation*” (genitive case) limits or confines the term “*first-produced*” to within a particular class or kind.<sup>2</sup> The primary function of the genitive case is to LIMIT or CONFINE the substantive that it modifies to a class or kind. In this case, “*first-produced*” must be understood in relation to the category of “*all creation*” which includes finite time (beginning with Day one of creation week). This is fatal to Trinitarianism’s “co-eternal” doctrine **because it requires that the Son had an origin in time.** But it is also fatal to the Unitarian claim that the Son’s origin was exclusively at His human birth.

1. the genitive clause “***all creation***” also precludes the possibility that it refers only to the new creation which is sometimes claimed by Unitarians.

C. the NKJV reading “***over all creation***” is wrong. There is no preposition “over” (ὑπερ) ὑπερ. The NKJV reading is apparently due to Trinitarian bias which alters the text in an attempt to bypass the problem of an origin for the Son.<sup>3</sup>

a. If “***over (all creation)***” was implied (referring to rank alone), the object of the implied preposition (“*of creation*”) must be in the accusative case (as in Eph. 1:22) because (ὑπερ) ὑπερ only means “over” when its object is in the accusative case.<sup>4</sup>

16a. “For ***by Him*** all things were created, ...”

A. “*by Him*” ἐν αὐτῷ, the preposition is “ἐν,” and its object (Him) is in the dative case. The preposition ἐν + dative case object has a very broad possible range of meanings. Wallace lists 10 possible nuances as follows:<sup>5</sup>

1. *Spatial/Sphere: in (and various other translations)*
2. *Temporal: in, within, when, while, during*
3. ***Association (often of close personal relationship): with***
4. *Cause: because of*
5. ***Instrumental: by, with***
6. *Reference/Respect: with respect to/with reference to*
7. *Manner: with*
8. *Thing possessed: with (in the sense of which possesses)*
9. *Standard (-Dative of Rule): according to the standard of*
10. *As an equivalent for eis (with verbs of motion)*

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<sup>2</sup> Wallace, GGBB, p. 76 defines the basic force of the genitive case as follows: “The ***limiting*** function of the genitive can be seen in ‘the kingdom ***of God,***’ specifying whose kingdom it is; ‘Simon ***of Cyrene,***’ indicating which Simon is in view; “the flesh ***of birds,***” where the kind of flesh is marked out.” (emphasis mine)

<sup>3</sup> The KJV & NKJV tend to exhibit more Trinitarian bias than most other versions (cf. 1 John 5:7).

<sup>4</sup> Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 383

<sup>5</sup> Wallace, GGBB, p. 370

Of this list, #4 and #6 could potentially allow that the Son did not yet exist when “*all things were created*.”<sup>6</sup> However, that potential argument is thwarted by 16b since later in the same verse δι’ αὐτοῦ (through Him) is placed in apposition to ἐν αὐτῷ (in Him).

B. “*all things* ...” in vss. 16 (twice), 17 (twice), 18 (once), 20 (once).

1. The correct translation of τὰ πάντα is “*all things*” (lit. “the everything”). The term “all” is an adjective with the definite article used as a substantive. It is inflected in the **neuter gender** which means it necessarily refers to “*all things*” not just persons.<sup>7</sup> This neuter term τὰ πάντα is used 29 times in the NT alone, always meaning “*all things*.”

C. “... ***were created*** ...” ἐκτίσθη: The verb is aorist tense, passive voice, indicative mood. The aorist tense indicates **a single historical event** during which “*all things*” were created in the past. This cannot refer to a “new creation” since almost everything related to the new creation has yet to be created. The passive voice “*were created*” means that the Son was not the primary cause of the action of creating (since God was the primary cause of the action) but is consistent with something accomplished through a secondary agent.

1. The clause “*created all things*” or “*all things were created*” also occurs in Eph. 3:9 & Rev. 4:11, in both it refers to **the original Genesis creation**.

16b. “... *both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities* ...”

A. This statement defines “*all things*” in the previous clause. They are all created things **that have existed since the original creation**, including both the seen and unseen, what is in heaven and on earth, including both angelic and human realms and authorities.

B. “*created*” + “*heavens and earth*” occurs in (LXX) Gen. 14:19,22; Deut. 4:32; Psalm 32:9; Isa. 45:8, always referring to the original creation.

C. The most important passage for comparison is Rev. 10:6 because, like the above passage, it refers to **the creation of all things within the heavens and earth**. It is clear from all of these that the original creation was meant.

1. Paul divided “*all things*” into three categories:

a. all things ... in the heavens and on earth (currently)

b. all things ... visible and invisible (currently)

c. all things ... including thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities (current)

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<sup>6</sup> However, this potential argument is thwarted by 16b. where later in the same verse δι’ αὐτοῦ (through Him) is placed in apposition to ἐν αὐτῷ (in Him).

<sup>7</sup> Wallace, GGBB, p. 294 “*The adjective is frequently used independently of a noun. That is, it can function as a substantive ... Usually, though not always, such a substantival adjective will have the article with it to point out that its use is indeed substantival. ... Furthermore, when the adjective is substantival, its gender is generally fixed by sense rather than by grammatical concord. That is to say, if it refers to a male, it will usually be masculine; if it refers to a female, it will usually be feminine, if it refers to an entity or concept, it will be neuter.*”

2. All of these things have existed continuously since the original creation. Nothing in the context limits them to a new creation; none are unique or even remotely applicable to an alleged “new creation” **until** the curse is removed from the earth (Rom. 8:16-25). This language leaves nothing out of the present original creation, just as in Rev. 10:6, and their creation is past and complete.

a. The “visible” things of the **new** creation have not yet been created (the “*new heavens and new earth*” and “*New Jerusalem*”) according to (Isa. 65:17-18 & Rev. 21:5), nor our resurrection to immortality. Paul referred to the things concerning the new creation as being “*not seen*” and the present creation and order as “*seen*” (2 Cor. 4:18).

b. That the **original** angelic realm has been put under subjection to Christ upon His ascension (Eph. 1:20-21; 1 Pet. 3:21-22) does not **create new** “*thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities,*” but only promotes the risen Christ above the existing ones.

c. The original human “*thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities*” still exist and have not yet been replaced by the creation of new “*thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities.*” This is why we are commanded to obey the current (yet temporary) governing authorities (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). The new “*thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities*” do not yet exist and will not until the Kingdom comes (Rev. 20:4-6). If the “*thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities*” of the new creation have already been created, Christ would now be seated on the Throne of David in Jerusalem instead of beside God on His Throne awaiting His Kingdom to be established (Psalm. 110:1; Heb. 10:13; Rev. 3:21), and the saints would already be resurrected, serving as “*kings and priests*” and seated on the “*thrones*” described in Rev. 20:4-6. Likewise, the 12 Apostles would already be resurrected and seated “*on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*” (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30).

d. The verb translated “*were created*” is in the aorist (past) tense, indicative mood, which requires that everything indicated was already completed.

16c. “... all things **have been created through Him** ...”

A. At the beginning of this verse Paul used the aorist indicative (simple past) – “*were created.*” But when repeating the same concept he used the perfect tense of the same verb, “*have been created.*” The perfect tense indicates a single past completed action (like the aorist) but adds the concept that the continuous result of that past act (of having created all things) **continues to the present**. This requires that “*all things*” in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, authorities, thrones, etc. **have already been fully completed and remain so now**. This can only refer to the original creation.

B. It is true that the preposition ἐν (in) at the beginning of vs. 16 is somewhat ambiguous because it could potentially have any of the 10 possible nuances listed above. However, when the same point was restated in this clause the preposition is very specific, δι’

αὐτοῦ (“through Him”). This cannot mean anything other than the creation of “all things” was done through God’s Agent who was PRESENT and ACTIVE when “all things” mentioned were previously created and completed. Paul made it perfectly clear that this Agent of God, through whom all things were created, was His Son. The preposition διὰ + genitive case (personal) object (δι’ αὐτοῦ “through Him”) means “agency, by, through,”<sup>8</sup> referring to the one through whom the action is performed.

1. The following examples illustrate the **active presence** of the agent through whom the action is done; δι’ αὐτοῦ (through Him: διὰ + masculine personal pronoun) or δι’ οὗ (through Whom: διὰ + masculine relative pronoun) is used in all of the following):

a. John 1:3 *All things were made **through Him***

b. John 1:10 *He was in the world, and the world was made **through Him***

c. John 3:17 *“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world **through Him** might be saved.*

d. Acts 2:22 *“... Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you **through Him** ...*

e. 1 Corinthians 8:6 *“yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, **through Whom are all things,**”*

f. Hebrews 1:2 *“has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, **through Whom** also He made the worlds;”*

g. Hebrews 2:10 *“For it was fitting for Him [Jesus], for Whom are all things, and **through Whom are all things,** ...”*

2. δι’ αὐτοῦ (through Him) can be expressed also with ἐν αὐτῷ (in Him) as at the beginning of the verse. Wallace points out this usage as follows: “If ἐν + dative is used to express agency, the noun in the dative must not only be personal [which it is – “Him”], but must also be the agent who performs the action.”<sup>9</sup> When either #3 or #5 definitions for ἐν in the above list of 10 possibilities are applied, there is perfect harmony between all things having been created ἐν αὐτῷ (in Him) and δι’ αὐτοῦ (through Him), as being synonymous expressions.

3. Scripture never claims that the Son was the Creator (which implies source), or even a co-creator (which implies equality), but rather that God (as the source) created all things δι’ αὐτοῦ (through Him) as a secondary and subordinate Agent. This consistently makes God the primary source of everything, and the Son secondary and subordinate to the Father (John 14:28) rather than being co-equal with the Father as in Trinitarianism.

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<sup>8</sup> Wallace, GGBB, p. 368

<sup>9</sup> Wallace, GGBB, p. 373

16d. "...and for Him."

A. The Son is both the Agent through whom God created all things and the Heir of all things based on Psalm 2:7-8, "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession'." (NKJ).

1. Heb. 1:2 "... His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds."

2. Thus the Son, as God's protégé, worked under God in creating His own ultimate inheritance.

17a. "And He is before all things, ..."

A. The Son is PREVIOUS to "all things" (incl. persons) which were created "through Him." While "before" can sometimes refer to rank, the fact that He was called the "first-produced of all creation" requires sequence and should inform the interpretation of this term. He is superior to all things because He is before all things.

17b. "... and in Him all things hold together."

A. This poor translation is often used by Trinitarians to prove that Jesus as Man is holding the whole creation together. But "hold together" in English is present tense. However, the Greek verb is συνέστηκεν (perfect tense). This indicates a past completed action with results of that previous action continuing to the present. It indicates that the creation continues on the course that was established at the beginning when "all things were created through Him." It does not indicate that the Son was or still is actively involved in maintaining either the original creation or the new creation. This error in translation is also likely due to Trinitarian bias regarding the alleged divinity of Jesus.

B. Heb. 1:3 has similar statement regarding the Son, "upholding all things by the word of His power" (NKJ). This is not likely a statement of Jesus as Man, but as "the Messenger of the LORD," because as Man Jesus stated that He was powerless to do anything from Himself (John 5:19,30; John 8:28).

18a. "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the Beginning, ..."

A. The underlined statement comes from Prov. 8:22 LXX's statement by "Wisdom." "The Lord made me the Beginning of his ways for his works," and continues through vs. 31 describing the role of someone who was God's assistant during the six-days creation. Thus everything was created through the one speaking, who claimed to have been "begotten" before the creation of all things. Thus this Person in Prov. 8 was "first-produced of all creation" and "the Beginning of the creation of God." It is hard to miss that both Paul's and John's treatment of the Son's role in creation come directly out of this passage. Solomon then identified "Wisdom" in Prov. 8 with God's "Son" in Prov. 30:1-4, as did Paul in 1 Cor. 1:24,30 & 1 Cor. 2:6-8. Jesus referred to "Wisdom" speaking in Luke 11:49, which in Matt. 23:34 Jesus says it was Himself speaking.

B. The word ἀρχή means “beginning” (first in sequence) in the vast majority of places where it occurs. On rare occasions it refers to first in rank. However, when this occurs it is always clear from the context. However, here the context favors first in sequence throughout the entire passage from the fact that “*first-produced*” (first-born) always has this sense, and the clause “*first-produced from among the dead*” in 18b also means first in sequence.

C. Jesus claimed the title “*the First and the Last*” in Rev. 1:17 (quoting Isa. 44:6; Isa. 48:12), and the title “*the Beginning and the End*” in Rev. 22:13, showing that both “*the First*” and “*the Beginning*” are titles for Him. But these also show that such titles **refer to sequence not rank** because they are contrasted with the terms “last” and “end,” which do not refer to an inferior rank but sequence. A similar statement of sequence and not rank is made of the Son, where He is called “*the Founder and Finisher of the Faith.*” (Heb. 12:1-3; John 8:56-58).

D. In Rev. 3:14 Jesus called Himself “*the Beginning of the Creation of God,*” linking His statement of being “*the Beginning and the End*” to the original creation.

18b. “*the first-born from the dead; ...*”

A. The term “first-produced” (first-born) also refers to **sequence** (not just rank) regarding Jesus’ resurrection to immortality.

1. Acts 26:23 “*that the Christ would suffer, that **He would be the first to rise from the dead**, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.*”

2. This is also made very clear in 1 Cor. 15:20-23 where Jesus’ resurrection is twice called the “*first-fruits*” of our resurrection. This term is ἀπαρχή (first-fruits) is a compound of “from” + “beginning.” It refers to **first in sequence** not merely first in rank, the same as in Rev. 1:5. This term was used for the first offering to God of the barley harvest before the crops were used for other purposes.

18c. “*so that He Himself **might come to have** first place in everything.*”

A. “*so that*” (ὅτι + subjunctive mood verb γένηται - lit. “*might become*”) indicates **the intended outcome of what has been previously stated**.<sup>10</sup> In other words, because the Son was **first in origin** regarding the whole creation, because He was also the Agent of creation (which makes Him superior to the creation), and because He was also **first in sequence** regarding the resurrection to immortality, all of these facts have **the intended result** of making Him “first place” (rank) in absolutely everything. It is only **because** the Son is “first” in sequence in all of these things that “*might come to have first place*” in everything. That is, first rank follows and is derived from His being first in sequence.

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<sup>10</sup> Wallace, GGBB, pp. 471-477

19. "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him"

A. This is not inherent "divinity" (as in Trinitarianism) but rather the "filling" or complete "fulness" of God that can dwell in a human being (cf. Col. 2:9). This is shown by the following:

1. John 1:16 The Apostles received a portion "out from His fullness."
2. John 14:12 The Apostles then did "greater works" than Jesus because of God dwelling in them just as He dwelled in Jesus (John 14:10; Acts 2:22; Acts 10:38).
3. Eph. 3:19 Paul prayed that the Ephesians would also "be filled with all the fullness of God." The Apostles did not become divine beings, nor did Paul expect the Ephesians to become divine beings.

20. "and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven."

A. This last verse proves conclusively that "all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible," etc., mentioned in vs. 16, which were created "through Him," are part of **the original creation**.

1. "all things" must refer to the original (fallen) creation because these are the things that stand in need of "reconciliation" and "peace" with God. Therefore, the same "all things" which were created **through the Son** are also the "all things" to be reconciled back to God **through the Son**. (Compare Eph. 1:10).
2. "the blood of His cross" is what is able to reconcile the fallen creation to God. The new creation does not stand in need of reconciliation, peace with God, or the blood of His cross.
3. "whether things on earth or things in heaven" again (as in vs. 16) refers to the original creation which must be reconciled to God and must make "peace" with God. The same "all things" that were **created** by God through the Son are **reconciled** by God to Himself through the Son.
4. The reconciliation of "all things ... whether things on earth or things in heaven" is the ultimate goal, but has not yet been accomplished. "[H]aving made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him" (Eph. 1:9-10 NKJ; cf. Acts 3:19-21).