The New Testament (NT) presupposes the Old Testament (OT) teachings on nature and occasionally quotes OT nature passages (Matt 5:17; Acts 3:21; 7:49; 2 Pet 3:13; Heb. 1:10; 2:5-8). God created “heaven and earth,” gives life to all creatures and sustains creation. Nature is not to be worshiped. It witnesses to God the creator who alone is to be worshiped. Nature has value because God created it and sustains it. Jesus’ incarnation and bodily resurrection show that matter is not inherently evil.

The NT focuses on the reconciliation of humanity with God and the resulting ethical implications. Yet it also promises the final redemption of the material creation. Redemption involves the reversal of the damage caused by the human Fall on both humanity and nature.

Synoptic Gospels

God created all things (Mark 10:6; 13:19; Matt 19:4; 24:21; 25:34). God is Lord of heaven and earth (Matt 11:25; Luke 10:21) and the resurrected Jesus shares this authority (Matt 28:18). God is actively involved in nature. He gives life to all, lovingly cares for animals and plants, and provides sun and rain to meet human needs (Matt 5:45; 6:26-33; Luke 12:6; 24:38).


Nevertheless, some aspects of nature are not as God originally intended due to the human Fall
and demonic influence. Disease, death and natural disasters are negative aspects of nature that Jesus overcame through miracles (Matt 4:24; 12:22; Luke 13:16). Jesus’ miracles show his divine power and authority over nature and encourage faith in him (Matt 8:23-27; 14:22-33; Mark 4:37-41; Luke 8:22-25). He performed creation miracles such as multiplying loaves and fish to feed the hungry (Mark 6:34-44; 8:1-9). He calmed storms by speaking a word (Mark 4:39-41; Matt 8:23-27), much as God created by speaking (Gen 1). Many miracles are local reversals of the curse from the Fall that brought death, disease and hardship (Gen 3:14-19). Jesus healed diseases (Matt 4:23-24; 8:8) and raised the dead (Matt 9:18-25; 11:5; Luke 7:11-15, 22). The miracles are a foretaste of the new creation, which will have perfect harmony in nature and no death or disease. The multiplication of loaves and fish anticipate the super-productivity of nature in the new creation predicted by the OT prophets (Mark 6:34-44; 8:1-9; cf. Isa 11:6-9; 25:8; 30:23-26; 66:17-25). Jesus’ healings and resurrections of the dead confirm his identity as the Messiah in fulfillment of Scripture (Luke 7:18-23; Matt 8:16-17). By touching the sick, Jesus rejected the Jewish tradition that the diseased are ceremonially unclean (Mark 1:40-45; 5:25-34).

Jesus frequently used nature in his teachings about spiritual truth. He drew ethical lessons from nature (e.g. Matt 5:44-45; 6:11, 25-33). He used nature parables and metaphors to teach spiritual truth and to call people to faith (Mark 4; 6:34; Matt 13; 10:16; Luke 13:6-9; 21:29-30). Since God providentially cares for animals, people should trust God for their needs (Matt 6:25-33; 14:19). Although material things are not inherently evil, they should not preoccupy a person (Matt 6:19-24, 33; 13:22). The pursuit of God’s kingdom and righteousness is the highest priority (Matt 6:33).

As in the OT, cosmic signs accompany significant redemptive actions of God in history. A divinely appointed star guided the Magi to the newborn Messiah-King (Matt 2:1-11). When Jesus
died on the cross, there were earthquakes and some righteous dead were resurrected, affirming that Jesus is Son of God (Matt 27:51-54). The resurrection of Jesus was accompanied by an earthquake (Matt 28:2). The return of Christ will be preceded by cosmic disasters, including earthquakes, plagues, famines, changes in the courses of astronomical bodies, and the darkening of the sun and moon (Matt 24:27-30; Mark 13:24-27).

Jesus was resurrected with a physical body of “flesh and bones” that could be touched, embraced and eat fish (Matt 28:9; Luke 24:39-43). Yet his body was transformed (Mark 16:12) so it could pass through doors, disappear and sometimes not be recognized (Luke 24:15-16, 31, 36). Jesus’ resurrected body was a foretaste of the future transformed physical world and the resurrected bodies of believers. Although heaven and earth in its present form will pass away (Matt 5:18; 24:35), some type of future physical creation is implied. After Jesus’ return, God’s kingdom will encompass the whole earth (Matt 13:37-43; cf. 6:10). The righteous will be resurrected to eternal blessing (Matt 26:29; Luke 14:14; 22:29-30) and will “inherit the earth” (Matt 5:5). There will be physical aspects to the kingdom, such as eating and drinking (Matt 26:29; Luke 22:29-30), but believers’ bodies will be transformed since there will be no more death or need for human procreation (Luke 20:35-37).

The Gospel of John

Although John’s Gospel and Epistles focus on spiritual life, they do not denigrate the material world. In contrast to docetic and Gnostic views, matter is part of God’s good creation and is not inherently evil. Jesus, the eternal Word of God, became physically incarnated in a human body made of flesh (John 1:14; 1 John 4:2-3). John stresses the physical, human aspects of Jesus, including fatigue, tears and hunger (John 11:33, 35, 38; 19:28).
Jesus was resurrected with a physical body that could be touched and could eat fish (John 20:17, 20-28; 21:9-14). Yet his body was transformed to transcend normal human limits so he could pass through closed doors (John 20:26). Jesus’ resurrected body is a foretaste of the resurrection bodies of believers, whom Jesus will raise physically to eternal life, yet without disease or death (John 5:28-29; 6:40; 11:24-25). This implies a physical dimension to the eternal life of the righteous.

The eternal divine Word of God created all material and spiritual things (John 1:3; 17:24). The Gospel’s prologue (1:1-14) echoes the Genesis creation narrative, where God created by speaking, “let there be...” (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24). The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit all give life, both the physical life of all beings (John 1:3-4; 5:21) and the eternal spiritual, resurrection life of believers (John 5:21; 6:33, 63; 20:31).

Nature metaphors abound in Jesus’ teachings. Jesus is the bread that gives eternal life (John 6:25-40). The Holy Spirit is the water that gives life (John 4:14). God’s people are sheep that Jesus tends (Mark 6:34; John 9:36; 10:15) and those who would destroy them are wolves (Matt 10:16; John 10:12). Jesus is the good shepherd that gives his life for his sheep (John 10).

Miracles demonstrate Jesus’ power, glory and deity and can build faith in him (John 2:1-11; 9:30-38). Miracles met physical needs, such as hunger (John 2:1-11; 6:1-14), and healed diseases, such as blindness and lameness (John 5:1-11; 9:1-41). Jesus overcame death by resurrecting a man who had been dead four days (John 11:38-44). He demonstrated his creative power by changing water to wine and multiplying bread and fish. Miracles also have symbolic significance: the wine points to the superabundant productivity of nature in the new creation (John 2:1-11). The multiplied bread points to Jesus as the manna that provides eternal life (John 6:31-39, 48-51). The resurrection of Lazarus anticipates the resurrection of the righteous to eternal life (John 11:23-25, 43; cf. 5:28-
29).

God’s values strongly contrast with an earthly, materialistic perspective. The command not to “love the world” (1 John 2:15) does not refer to the physical planet, but evil moral values in rebellion against God (1 John 2:16). References to the “world” as the planet are never negative (John 17:15, 18; 21:25). More often, “world” either refers to all people, whom God loves (John 3:16), or to people and values opposed to God (John 14:17; 15:18-19).

1. Acts

God is creator of heaven and earth and everything in them (4:24; 14:15; 17:24). God sustains nature, directs its operation and gives life to all creatures (14:17; 17:25, 28). Nature witnesses to the existence of God and shows that only God the creator should be worshiped (14:15-17). He designed earth as a habitation for humanity and provides human physical needs through nature (17:26).

God is Lord over all creation (7:49; 17:24). Christ ascended to heaven and reigns as Lord over all things (3:21). When Christ returns, all creation will be “restored” as promised in the prophets (3:20-21; cf. Isa 11:6-9; 65:17-25; 66:22). Nature will not be destroyed but the damage from the Fall will be removed.

The Apostle Paul

Although he never met Jesus during his earthly lifetime, the Apostle Paul wrote many letters to the Churches he was helping promote his understanding of meaning of Christianity. By doing so, he became most influential theologian of the biblical writers. His thought is rich with reflection about nature and how it fits into God’s work.
God created all things (Rom 1:20; 11:36; Eph 1:4; 3:9; Col 3:10; 1 Tim 4:3-4). God gives life to every creature and sustains creation (Rom 11:36; 1 Tim 6:13). All things exist to bring glory to God and Christ (Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16).

Paul’s view of creation, nature and the material world are Christocentric. Christ is the agent of creation, the source of life and the sustainer of all things (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16-17). Christ, who is the fullness of deity and existed prior to creation (Col 1:15, 17, 19), created all material and spiritual things (Col 1:16). All things were created for Christ (Col 1:16) and his power “holds everything together” (Col 1:17).

The resurrected and ascended Christ reigns as Lord over all things (1 Cor 15:25-27; Phil 3:21; Eph 1:18-23) and is supreme above all creation (Col 1:18). One day, all created beings in heaven and earth will acknowledge the lordship of Christ (Eph 1:10; Phil 2:10-11). In the end, death will be destroyed and all creation will be subjected to God (1 Cor 15:25-28). Paul expands Isaiah’s vision that every knee will bow to God (Isa 45:23; 66:23) to include the entire created order. There is no barrier between the material and spiritual creation, since everything is under the rule of God and Christ, who sums up all things in himself (Eph 1:10; 4:10; 1 Cor 15:28). Paul is not negative about the physical world, including the human body. Through the incarnation, God’s eternal Son took on a real physical body, while fully retaining his deity (Rom 1:3; Phil 2:5-8; Col 1:19, 22; 2:9). This affirms that matter is not evil. Each part of nature, including plants, animals and astronomical bodies, has a unique glory consistent with God’s design (1 Cor 15:38-41). Nothing is unclean in itself, including all foods (Rom 14:14, 20; cf. 1 Cor 6:12). The Lord is for the body and the physical body should be used to honor God, since the Holy Spirit indwells Christians, whose bodies belong to Christ (1 Cor 6:13-20; Rom 6:13). Hence fornication, gluttony and other bodily sins dishonor Christ
(1 Cor 6:15; Phil 3:18-19). Paul’s negative references to “the flesh” do not refer to the material body, but to the sinful nature inherited from Adam, which inclines all people towards evil (Rom 5:11-21; 7:18; Gal 5:19-21). Setting one’s “mind on things above rather than things on earth” (Col 3:1-2), means focusing on moral and spiritual values rather than sinful desires (Col 3:5-17; cf. Phil 3:19-20). The “earthly members” that believers are to consider dead are evil desires, greed, pride, etc. (Col 3:5-17; cf. Rom 6:1-14; 13:14).

Paul asserted that Nature reveals the existence of God and basic aspects of his being (Rom 1:19-20). Reflection on nature suggests that the world was created and that God alone should be worshiped. There is a clear distinction between the creator and creatures. To worship any created thing is to deny God the glory that is his due as creator (Rom 1:21-23). Worshiping any aspect of nature or images of birds, animals or humans is to give created things the place the creator rightfully deserves in human hearts (Rom 1:21-32). Nature gods are really demons and should not be worshiped (Rom 1:23, 25; 1 Cor 8:5; 10:19-22; Gal 4:8). When anything is substituted for the transcendent God, the basis for ethics is also undermined (Rom 1:24-32), Paul believed.

Since God is to be honored above all else, the spiritual takes priority over the physical dimensions of life. Idolatry is more than merely worshiping animal carvings. It includes anything that becomes the supreme focus of life other than God (Phil 3:19; Eph 5:5; Col 3:5). One should discipline the body (1 Cor 9:25-27) and not be mastered by physical desires (1 Cor 6:12-13). Material things are not evil, but the love of money and material things should not consume a person, lest they replace God as the basis of security (1 Tim 3:3, 8; 6:9-10, 17; 2 Tim 3:2). No food or drink defiles (Rom 14:2, 6), but preoccupation with food is imbalanced and Christian dietary freedom should be exercised with consideration for others (Phil 3:19-20; Rom 14:14-22; 1 Cor 8:1-13). Sex
is God’s good gift to be enjoyed within marriage and practiced with self-control (Rom 13:13; 1 Thess. 4:3-7; Gal 5:19). The physical life has value, but it must be subject to the spirit since people are not merely animals dominated by biological drives.

The Fall brought significant changes to nature. Nature no longer functions as God originally intended due to human sin. Both physical and spiritual death came from Adam’s sin (Rom 5:12-14, 17; 8:20-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22; cf. Gen 2:17; 3:8ff). As a result of the Fall, creation was “subjected to futility” (Rom 8:20), an allusion to the curse on the ground and pain in childbirth (Gen 3:16-19; see Fall). Nature is now in bondage to corruption, decay and death (Rom 8:21). Nature is not fallen, but it is a victim of human sin. Creation groans and suffers, longing to be set free from bondage to decay (Rom 8:19-21).

Through his death on the cross, Jesus conquered sin and death so those who believe in him will have eternal life (1 Cor 15:22, 57; Col 1:20-22; 2 Tim. 1:10). Yet death will not be finally vanquished from creation until Christ returns (1 Cor 15:23-26, 53-56). Jesus took away the sting of death (1 Cor 15:54-56), but neither nature nor redeemed humanity have yet experienced the full implications of Christ’s death. Through the cross, Christ will reconcile both spiritual and material things to God (Col 1:20-22). The reconciliation of humanity to God is part of God’s larger work of reconciling all things to himself (Col 1:20-22). All things will be restored to the proper functioning that God intended (Rom 8:19-23).

The credibility of the Christian message rests on Jesus’ resurrection in a physical body, not as an apparition (1 Cor 15:4-8, 14-17). Jesus’ resurrected body is a foretaste of the redeemed creation and the resurrection bodies of redeemed people (1 Cor 15:20, 45-49; 2 Cor 4:14; Phil 3:21). Since believers are united with Jesus’ resurrection, they too will rise from the dead (Rom 6:5; 1 Cor 15:21;
Phil 3:11). At Jesus’ return, God will transform the bodies of believers into imperishable bodies like Christ’s resurrected body (Phil 3:21; 1 Cor 15:50-57; 2 Cor 5:1-5). Like Jesus’ resurrection body, the resurrection body of believers will be physical, yet with a spiritual origin and character, glorious and eternal, and not subject to death and decay (1 Cor 15:42-44; 2 Cor 5:2, 4; Phil 3:21; Rom 8:18-19). This “spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:44) will be suitable for dwelling in a creation set free from bondage to decay (Rom 8:21). The eternal state of believers will not be a disembodied soul dwelling in heaven (2 Cor 5:4). The entire person will be saved, not just the soul (1 Thess 5:23).

The present form of this world will pass away (1 Cor 7:31) and a new age will come (Eph 1:21), in which creation will be perfected. Christian hope includes the deliverance of creation from bondage to corruption and futility (Rom 8:20-21; cf. Gen 3:15). The present suffering of creation is like birth pangs bringing a more perfect world (Rom 8:22). Nature eagerly awaits the resurrection and glorification of the children of God at Christ’s return (Rom 8:19), when the entire creation will be set free from bondage to decay and will share in the glorious liberty of redeemed humanity (Rom 8:21, 23).

Although believers are a “new creation” in Christ and have a transformed inner character (2 Cor 5:17; cf. Eph 2:10; 4:24), the culmination of the new creation is still future. Nature will be transformed (Rom 8:20-21), believers’ will be resurrected to glorious, imperishable bodies (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 5:4), and death will cease (1 Cor 15:20-24, 54-55). God gives the Holy Spirit to believers now as a guarantee of this glorious future (2 Cor 5:5).

Paul sees solidarity between nature and humanity. Since God gave humanity dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26, 28), nature suffers when humanity is not rightly related to God and nature will be perfected when humanity is redeemed. The human Fall enslaved all creation to corruption and death
(Rom 5:12-14; 8:20). When the redeemed children of God are glorified at the end of history, nature will share in this glory (Rom 8:19, 22-23).

2. Peter

Since God is the creator of the world (1 Pet 1:20; 2 Pet 3:5), he seeks its purification and perfection. The “day of the Lord” will bring a “new heavens and earth,” in which nature will be perfected and righteousness will abound (2 Pet 3:10-13). “The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be burned up and the earth . . . will be laid bare” (2 Pet 3:10, cf. 12). There are two ways to understand this: (1) This world will be destroyed and God will create a new, perfect world. (2) The present heavens and earth will be renewed, purified and perfected. Several factors support the second interpretation: Burning is a frequent biblical symbol of judgment and purification (e.g. Matt 13:20, 40; Luke 3:17). The passage uses similar destruction and re-creation language concerning the Flood (2 Pet 3:5-7). Both the eschatological fire and the Flood bring judgment on ungodly humans. In this sense the world was “destroyed” by the Flood and a new world was formed (vv. 5-6). Jewish apocalyptic writings also use similar new earth/age language to refer to the perfection of creation. The new creation is “new” in its moral perfection and harmonious operation. In either interpretation, nature will be transformed and perfected.

3. Hebrews

[what can be said about the writer, these days?] God created everything (1:10; 3:3-4; 4:3; 11:3). He did not fashion the material universe from preexisting matter (11:3). The agent of creation was the Son of God and the word of God (1:2, 10; 3:3-4; 11:3), an allusion to Genesis 1 (cf. John 1:1-3).
Jesus sustains and upholds creation by his powerful word (1:3).

Humans are exalted above nature (8:7), although materially they are part of nature. The author cites Psalm 8:4-6 (which echoes Gen 1:26, 28), to show that God placed nature in subjection to humanity (Heb. 2:5-9). Yet sin corrupts the human relationship with nature and makes the dominion over nature flawed and incomplete (2:8). But Jesus, the first of a new race of humans, was exalted and has subjected creation to himself (2:9). The Son of God became fully human (“flesh and blood”), yet without sin (2:14, 17; 4:15).

Although Hebrews emphasizes spiritual salvation in heaven (11:10, 16; 12:22-23; 13:14), it looks forward to a redeemed nature and a restored human relationship with nature. In the “world to come” (the new earth), the human relationship to nature will be perfected and the ideal of Gen 1:26, 28 and Psalm 8 will be fulfilled (2:5). In eternity, redeemed humans will not be merely glorified spirits, but will also have resurrected bodies (6:2; 11:35).

4. Revelation

God created all things in heaven, on earth and in the sea (4:11; 10:6). God is “Lord of the earth” (11:4). Every creature was made to glorify and worship God. John foresees the time when all creatures will worship God the creator and Jesus Christ. Every creature in heaven, on earth, and in the sea will join humans and angels in worshiping God and Christ (4:11; 5:13). The prophetic promise that all humans will bow before God (Isa 45:23; 66:23) is expanded to include all creatures.

Nature is frequently used symbolically in the apocalyptic vision to describe Christ, God’s presence in heaven, extreme forms of evil, divine judgments, and the eternal blessings of the righteous (e.g. 4:5-7; 5:6; 6:1; 10; 13; 21-22).
Revelation focuses on eschatology. Due to the extreme evil of people who rebel against God in the last days, God will bring judgment through disease and environmental disasters, such as earthquakes, storms, intense heat, plagues and famine (16:1-21; 18:8). The OT shows a similar pattern of divine judgment on sin through nature (e.g. Gen 6:5-8; Ex 7-12; Isa 10:16-18; Jer 14). Since humanity was given dominion over nature (Gen 1:26), God’s judgment on human sin affects nature.

At the climax of history, the righteous will be bodily resurrected to reign with Christ, never again to experience death (20:5-6). After Christ’s return and the Final Judgment, God will create a new heaven and earth (21:1). He will remove the damage caused by sin to the created order. Although it is difficult to determine whether some aspects of nature in the apocalyptic vision are symbolic (e.g. 21:1, 23), nature plays a part in the new creation. There will be a new earth with rivers, springs and fruit trees with year-around productivity (21:1, 6; 22:1-2). All creatures will worship God (4:11; 5:13). There is some ambiguity about whether certain aspects of nature will be in the new creation. For example, there will be no sea (21:1, probably symbolic), yet sea creatures will praise God (5:13). God will “make all things new” and perfect nature (21:4-5). Death, disease, pain and suffering will not be a part of the new order (20:14; 21:4), since the curse on nature from the Fall will be removed (22:3). There will be a return to the ideal conditions of nature in the Garden of Eden and redeemed humans will have unrestricted access to the tree of life and water of life (21:6; 22:1-5, 14, 17, 19).

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Further Reading


