

Revelation 3:14 – “Beginning of the creation of God”

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According to [Revelation 3:14](#), Jesus is the “beginning of the creation of God.” There are three primary views regarding what this means:

1. Jesus is the start of God’s creation (first being or thing that God ever created)
2. Jesus is the source of God’s creation (being from which all that God created came)
3. Jesus is the ruler of God’s creation (supreme ruler over all that God created)

In the first view, Jesus *is* a part of God’s creation. In the second and third views, Jesus *is not* a part of God’s creation. In the second, He is the person from whom all things got their start. In the third, He is merely declared to be over all of God’s creation. A representative of the first view may be found in [Reasoning from the Scriptures](#) published by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society (p. 409):

Some take the view that what is meant is that the Son was “the beginner of God’s creation,” that he was its “ultimate source.” But Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon lists “beginning” as its first meaning of ar-khe’. (Oxford, 1968, p. 252) The logical conclusion is that the one being quoted at Revelation 3:14 is a creation, the first of God’s creations, that he had a beginning.

A representative of the second view is Simon J. Kistemaker who writes in his [Revelation](#) commentary (p. 169):

The Lord calls himself the “origin [Greek archē] of God’s creation.” We should not interpret the word origin passively, as if Jesus were created or recreated, but actively, because Jesus is the one who generates and calls God’s creation into being (John 1:1; Col. 1:15-18; Heb 1:2). What then is the purpose of this description? To show that Jesus Christ made all things and thus possesses and controls them. Also, all things were made to praise and serve him.

This view finds expression in the [Holman Christian Standard Bible](#) which translates the phrase as “Originator of God’s creation.” A representative of the third view is John F. Walvoord who writes in [The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#) (p. 940):

As “the Ruler of God’s creation” Christ existed before God’s Creation and is sovereign over it (cf. Col 1:15, 18; Rev 21:6). This description was in preparation for the stern word of rebuke which Christ would give the church in Laodicea.

This view finds expression in the [New International Version](#) which translates the phrase as “ruler of God’s creation.”

So, proponents of the first view understand “beginning” to mean that Christ was the *start* of God’s creation (cf. “the first of God’s creations”). Proponents of the second view understand “beginning” to mean that Christ was the *starter* of God’s creation (cf. the HCSB’s “Originator”). And, proponents of the third view understand “beginning” to mean that Christ is the head over

God's creation (cf. the NIV's "ruler"). Which of these views most faithfully represents what John intended to convey when he paired "beginning" with "God's creation"?

The phrase "the beginning of God's creation" in Greek is *hē archē tēs ktiseōs tou theou*. No one disputes the translation of *tēs ktiseōs tou theou* as "of God's creation." The question is, how should *hē archē* be translated? Interestingly, *archē* often carries the meaning of "beginning" or "ruler" at various places in the Bible. Consider the following examples:

- Beginning (see also Genesis 43:20; Deuteronomy 11:12; John 1:1; 15:27; 16:4; Acts 11:15; 26:4; Philippians 4:15; Hebrews 1:10; 3:14; 7:3)
 - In the **beginning** (*archē*) God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1)
 - But all these things are merely the **beginning** (*archē*) of birth pangs (Matthew 24:8)
 - I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the **beginning** (*archēs*) (1 John 2:13)
- Ruler (see also Genesis 40:21; Daniel 2:37; Luke 12:11; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Colossians 1:16; 2:10, 15)
 - And they will appoint for themselves one **leader** (*archēn*) (Hosea 2:2 [1:11 English])
 - For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor **principalities** (*archai*)... (Romans 8:38)
 - Remind them to be subject to **rulers** (*archais*), to authorities... (Titus 3:1)

On the other hand, it is very difficult to find instances in the Bible where *archē* means "beginner" or "originator". The following sources all indicate that it is valid to take *archē* this way:

- [NET Bible](#) (see footnote on Revelation 3:14): "From a linguistic standpoint all three meanings for *arch* are possible."
- [Thayer's Greek Lexicon](#) lists the following as a possible definition: "That by which anything begins to be, the origin, active cause."
- [John Piper](#): "But the phrase can mean 'that from which creation begins' just as easily as it can mean 'the beginning part of creation.'"
- [Robert L. Thomas](#) (pp. 302-303): "Heretical groups through the centuries of the Christian era . . . have assigned a passive meaning to *archē*, 'one begun.' . . . The view that takes *archē* in the active sense to mean 'beginner,' 'originator,' or 'initiator' is clearly preferable."

None of these sources, however, list any biblical references outside of Revelation 3:14 as examples of this usage (though Thayer's Greek Lexicon does list two extra-biblical references which exemplify this usage). In fact, an actual survey of the data reveals that such a usage is at

best rare and at worst non-existent when it comes to the biblical text. For instance, out of the 54 instances of *archē* in the New Testament (excluding for the moment Revelation 3:14), none appear to carry this sense.

What about the actual form of the phrase used in Revelation 3:14? In Revelation 3:14, the word *archē* is in the nominative case and the phrase *tēs ktiseōs tou theou* is in the genitive case. The word *archē* is used 55 times in the New Testament, 172 times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX), and 64 times in the Apocrypha. Those numbers drop to 4, 28, and 9 respectively, though, when you apply the filter of nominative *archē* followed by a word in the genitive case. An examination of these 40 instances (again excluding for the moment Revelation 3:14) is revealing:

- [27 instances](#) appear to mean “beginning”
- [13 instances](#) appear to mean “ruler”, “rule”, “chief”, “summit”, or some synonym for head or top

This examination further confirms what was expressed above: *archē* exhibits the meanings of both “beginning” and “ruler” but does not appear to exhibit the meaning of “beginner” or “originator.” Furthermore, this examination reveals an important similarity between instances when nominative *archē* followed by a genitive means “beginning” and when it means “ruler.” Namely, in almost all cases, the “beginning” or “ruler” is a part of the group indicated by the genitive. Thus, for instance, Abib—which is the “beginning” of months for Israel—is a part of the group “months” (Exodus 12:2; cf. 13:4). Or, wars, earthquakes, and famines—which are the “beginning” of birth pangs according to Jesus—are a part of the group “birth pangs” (Mark 13:8). Similarly, Behemoth—which is the “chief” of the creation of the Lord—is a part of the group “the creation of the Lord” (Job 40:19). And, the Levites listed in Exodus 6:16-25a—which are the “heads” of the family of the Levites—are a part of the group “the family of the Levites” (Exodus 6:25b).

The few exceptions to this rule are when the genitive following the nominative *archē* indicates possession (e.g., Psalm 139:17; Ezekiel 31:3) or less often description (e.g., Proverbs 17:14). This is clearly not the case in Revelation 3:14, so it seems to follow that whether John means to call Jesus the “beginning of God’s creation” or the “ruler of God’s creation”, in either case he is identifying Jesus as *a part* of God’s creation. It should be noted that proponents of the translation “ruler of God’s creation” (e.g., Walvoord above) do not normally make this additional assertion. However, from this examination, making this additional assertions seems to be required.

So, is Jesus the “beginning” of God’s creation or the “ruler” of God’s creation? And, what does it mean to say that Jesus is a part of God’s creation either way? To answer those two questions, an examination of the context of Revelation 3:14 is in order.

Revelation 3:14 is the beginning of God’s message to the church of Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22). This message to the Laodicean church, in turn, is the last of seven messages to churches in Revelation 2-3. These seven messages share a great deal in common in terms of their form and content. For instance, each ends with a promise to overcomers and the phrase “He who has an

ear....” In addition, each begins with a description of the risen Christ who is speaking to the church, and in each case the description harkens back to some aspect of Christ recorded in Revelation 1. The following table demonstrates this latter similarity for the first six messages in Revelation 2-3:

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands (2:1)	having turned I saw seven golden lampstands (1:12) ... and in His right hand He held seven stars (1:16)
The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life (2:8)	I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore (1:17-18)
The One who has the sharp two-edged sword (2:12)	out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword (1:16)
The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze (2:18)	His eyes were like a flame of fire and His feet were like burnished bronze (1:14-15)
He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars (3:1)	from the seven Spirits who are before His throne (1:4) ... and in His right hand He held seven stars (1:16)
He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens (3:7)	I have the keys of death and of Hades (1:18)

So, when John refers to Christ as “the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God” (3:14), it is not surprising to find that this description also finds its roots in the first chapter of the book. Namely, in Revelation 1:5, John introduces Jesus as “the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

At first glance, the connection between Revelation 3:14 and 1:5 doesn’t seem obvious. Other than the repeating of “faithful witness,” no word is common to both. However, there is also a link in the phrase “ruler of the kings of the earth.” The Greek word *archōn* (“ruler”) in Revelation 1:5 is a cognate of *archē* (“beginning” or “ruler”) in Revelation 3:14. In fact, this connection argues for the translation “ruler” in 3:14 instead of “beginning”.

There is still, though, one other connection to consider. Revelation 1:5 also includes the phrase “firstborn of the dead.” This same phrase is found in almost identical form in one other place in the New Testament: Colossians 1:18. At least two things make this significant for the interpretation of *archē* in Revelation 3:14. First, there are notable similarities between God’s message to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22 and Paul’s letter to the Colossians. Thomas writes,

Paul had commanded that the letter to Colosse be read in Laodicea (Col. 4:16). Quite possibly, the Laodicean church had copied Colossians and treasured it as they treasured other Scripture. It could well be that John in his use of hē archē tēs ktiseōs tou theou was appealing to their close familiarity with Colossians. The similarities between the message to Laodicea and Paul's two epistles to churches in the Lycus Valley are striking (cp. Rev. 3:21 with Col. 3:1 and Eph. 2:6; Rev 3:17-19 with Col. 1:27; 2:8, 18, 23 and with 2:2, 3). Paul uses very similar terminology in Col. 1:15 where he calls Christ "the first begotten of all creation" and in Col. 1:18 where he calls Him "the beginning (archē).

Second, in Colossians, Paul uses "firstborn of the dead" to explain what he means by "beginning" (archē). He writes, "...who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead...." By placing archē in apposition with "firstborn from the dead", Paul means to further explain the one by the other. Given the similarities between Revelation 3 and Colossians 1, it seems likely that John, like Paul, meant to link archē in Revelation 3:14 with "firstborn of the dead" in Revelation 1:5.

What does all this mean for Revelation 3:14 and the interpretation of archē (whether ruler or beginning) and Christ being a part of the creation of God? First, whereas the connection between archē in Revelation 3:14 and archōn in Revelation 1:5 argued for a possible meaning of "ruler" in the former, this secondary connection with Paul argues for the meaning "beginning" in Revelation 3:14 since that is the apparent meaning of archē in Colossians 1:18. Still though, the idea of rule or preeminence is present in Colossians 1:18 since Paul uses "firstborn" to explain what he means by Christ being the beginning. Second, the context of Colossians 1:18 carries significance for our interpretation: in Colossians 1:15-17, Paul pictures Christ as the **firstborn of all creation**. That is, Christ is preeminent when compared to all that God has made. In Colossians 1:18, however, Paul focuses on God's new work in bringing forth the church and declares that there too Christ is first and foremost. That is, Christ is preeminent when compared to God's "new creation," those brought forth from the dead.

This second observation is important because this is also the context of Revelation 1:5. In Revelation 1:5, it is the resurrected and exalted Jesus Christ that is granting grace and peace to John's readers (1:4). Jesus is pictured as the firstborn from the dead—the same phrase Paul used in Colossians to speak of Christ's preeminence among God's new creation (1:5). John also speaks of Christ's work in releasing his readers from their sins and making them a kingdom and priests to God the Father, language that validates a context not of the original creation but rather God's new work in bringing forth a redeemed people (1:5-6; cf. Revelation 5:9-10). Even the phrase "ruler of the kings of the earth," though used by John to speak of rules in the present creation (e.g., Revelation 6:15), is also used to speak of God's new creation (Revelation 21:24).

Taking all of this into account, we are ready to give a conclusion regarding Revelation 3:14. First, concerning the meaning of archē : Given the use of archē in Colossians 1:18, the use of firstborn in Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5, and the presence of "ruler" in Revelation 1:5, the best conclusion is to say that John intends to use archē in Revelation 3:14 with the meaning "beginning." Yet, as the beginning of God's creation, he is ruler; that is, He is the firstborn, the preeminent. Second, concerning what it means to say that Christ is a part of the creation of God:

When John writes of the creation of God, he is not referring to all that God made in the beginning. Rather, John is referring to those who have come forth from the dead, the church. Christ is indeed a part of this group. In fact, He is the pioneer—the first from the dead. In fact, the best way to summarize what John means when he calls Jesus the beginning of the creation of God is to say, with both Paul and John, that Jesus is the firstborn from the dead.

<https://nealmatt.wordpress.com/2012/06/29/revelation-314-beginning-of-the-creation-of-god/?fbclid=IwAR3VB5Mve3g7uAdfQ2FCL007ooyGUv17923SAZ-caZC8VVn29NfWf7nIvCA>