

# **‘The Earth’s Future: Narrative, Gospel, Mission.**

## **A Theological Projection through the Canon of the Christian Scriptures.’**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Christian mission is shaped by many things not least of which are perceptions of the created order and eschatology. The nature of the transition from earth to new earth has profound consequences in that it determines understanding of how the creation fits within the purposes of God. Some argue for annihilation or massive dissolution of the created order at the Parousia thereby devaluing all perceived to be doomed. This earth-centred theological question of transition, and its implications for holistic mission, has not been adequately researched in its own right. A comprehensive examination of the whole Canon is required: one which brings together all the relevant texts into a coherent theology of the earth that clarifies the degree to which the earthiness of the earth is integral to the new creation. This original research develops such a theology in a narrative framework that projects forward to the presence of this earth in the new creation. Throughout the Biblical narrative, the research identifies a triangular relationship from creation to new creation in which God, humankind and non-human creation are all inextricably linked, and in which the earth’s future is consistently presented as integral to the ultimate purposes of God. The earth was subjected to corruption due to the sin of humankind but as humankind finds liberation in Christ so will the creation find freedom from all consequences of the sin of humankind. The research establishes a trajectory throughout the narrative that consistently projects forward towards a full restoration of these relationships and that therefore the new heaven and new earth will be the result of a resurrection-like transformation and reconciliation of the present created order. The Biblical texts normally utilized to justify annihilation or dissolution are examined carefully and found to be wanting for such claims. The *missio Dei* includes the renewal of the whole earth as the Kingdom of God reaches fulfilment in the Parousia even as the Gospel calls persons and nations to faith. Consequently, the mission of God’s people needs to be likewise holistic and conducted in such ways as to reveal and anticipate the future hope of the uniting of heaven and earth in the already begun new creation.



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A Theological Projection through the Canon of the Christian  
Scriptures.’**

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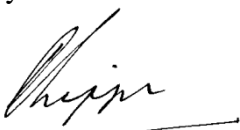
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Oxford Centre for Mission Studies



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This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed  ..... (Candidate)

Date 30 November 2014 .....

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This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote.

Other sources are acknowledged by midnotes or footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version.  
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Footnotes are used for longer lists of references, supplementary material  
and useful quotes.  
More extensive lists of references and other supplementary material can be found  
in the Appendices.





## CONTENTS

<b>1 – Introduction: Rationale, Proposal, Methodology, Presuppositions, Literature.</b>	<b>1</b>
Rationale	3
Proposal	14
Overall Approach	18
Methodology	23
Presuppositions	25
Literature	29
Structure	42
<b>2 – The Earth Narrative in the OT 1: Old Testament Trajectory in Expectations for the Earth: The Case for the Affirmative.</b>	<b>43</b>
Old Testament Overview	43
Genesis and the Cursing of the Ground	49
A Pattern of Blessing and Curse	69
Additional Descriptions of the Earthly Purpose of God	74
Conclusion	79
<b>3 – The Earth Narrative in the OT 2: Old Testament Trajectory for the Earth: Challenging the Case for the Negative.</b>	<b>81</b>
The Language of Cosmic Collapse	82
Psalm 102:25-26 and Isaiah 51:6 and the Earth ‘Wearing Out Like a Garment’	94
Environmental Metaphors for Spiritual Life?	105
Conclusion	111
<b>4 – The Earth Narrative in the Person of Jesus: Incarnation, Resurrection, Ascension.</b>	<b>113</b>
A Kingdom That Embraces the Earth	113
Incarnation	115
Resurrection	122
Ascension	145
Conclusion	151
<b>5 – The Earth Narrative: ‘New Creation’ in the New Testament.</b>	<b>153</b>
New Creation Overview	154
New Creation and Christology	158
Particular Indicators of New Creation	162
The Holy Spirit and New Creation	165
The Two Uses of the Phrase ‘New Creation’	167
Paul Minear’s Exploration of New Creation	174
Conclusion	183
<b>6 – The Earth Narrative: New Testament Texts Affirming Creation’s Continuity.</b>	<b>185</b>
The Case for the Affirmative	185
Romans 8:19-23	188
Colossians 1:15-20	198
Ephesians 1:10 and Matthew 28:18	203
Acts 3:21 and Mathew 19:28	205
John and God’s Love for the Cosmos	207
Conclusion	208

<b>7 – The Earth Narrative: New Testament Texts that May Question the Earth’s Continuity.</b>	211
Overview of the Issues	211
Matthew 5:18 and Mathew 24:35	216
Hebrews 12:25-28	226
2 Peter 3:10-14	234
Conclusion	247
<b>8 – The New Heaven/Earth Narrative in Revelation 20:11-22:5: The Nature of the Transition?</b>	249
Revelation Overview	250
New Heaven, New Earth: Key Texts	253
Revelation 5:10	253
Revelation 20:11	258
Revelation 21:1-5	263
Revelation 21:2, 9-27	274
Revelation 21:24-26	282
Revelation 22:1-2	286
Revelation 22:3	290
Conclusion	291
<b>9 – Summaries, Conclusions and the Locus of Mission.</b>	297
Summary of Theological Findings	298
Summary of Hermeneutical Findings	300
Implications of the Alternative Conclusions	305
The Locus for Church and Mission	311
<b>10 – Mission for the New Heaven/Earth: Motivation, Imagination, Continuity, Contextualization.</b>	317
Hope	318
Imagination	324
Continuity and Discontinuity, Knowns and Unknowns	339
Contextualization	344
Conclusion	347
<b>11 – Mission and Gospel in the Context of a Real Future for This Earth.</b>	349
Mission	349
Scholarly Contributions to Mission as Anticipation	353
A Gospel That Anticipates	355
Eden-Shaped Mission as Anticipation	358
Four Particularly Relevant Expressions of Mission as Anticipation	368
Cambodian Examples of Mission as Anticipation	373
Other Examples Of Mission as Anticipation	376
Conclusion	380
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	383
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	389
<b>APPENDIX B</b>	395
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	399

## **Introduction:**

### **Rationale, Proposal, Methodology, Presuppositions, Literature**

The mission of the Christian church expresses the world view of its practitioners. While many factors may shape this world view, one of the more profound influences is eschatology and, in particular, what might be the long term purposes of God for the created order. Frequently mission is directed by a world view in which a dichotomy between the spiritual realm and the physical and social realms gives the spiritual greater weight and significance. This dualism results from devaluing the non-spiritual, material and social realms usually because these are regarded as integral to the world of evil and therefore doomed to the destructive forces of God at the final judgement. Only in the spiritual realm can there be salvation. So escape from the physical world and its inherent corruption is necessary for salvation to be complete.<sup>1</sup>

Alternatively, mission may develop out of a holistic world view in which the material, social and spiritual realms are created by God. Now everything needs the transforming work of God to put to right all damaged by sin and its consequences. In this perspective, the earth is not doomed but rather has a real future as God renews all things and transforms this earth into the new earth.

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<sup>1</sup> This dualism is a characteristic of Gnosticism as noted by Farrow (1999), Harvey (1999:130-134) and Snyder who uses a variety of terminology to describe this dualism (2011:61). Note Rudolph, 'Radical dualism was a prime factor in the gnostic conceptual framework.' (1992:1033), Perrin, 'Both the libertine and ascetic expressions of Gnosticism are rooted, paradoxically, in the common vision of an ontologically debased cosmos.' (2005:256) and Yamauchi, 'Cosmological dualism was an essential feature of Gnosticism—an opposition between the spiritual world and the evil, material world' (1998:272). Whatever may be in the diversity of expressions across Gnosticism, this profound dualism seems to be seminal for all. In this sense, the devaluing of the created order in favour of spiritual concerns, Gnostic world views have been a frequent issue in the Christian church. Note also the challenge raised by MA Williams who disputes the use of the term 'Gnostic' as a catch-all reference for those with such a world view (1996).

Though expressed here as two generalizations, nevertheless one or other of these two world views shapes much of motivation, vision and practice in how Christian mission engagement actually functions in the world. Many have analysed this question of dualistic or holistic world views. For example, NT Wright has surveyed the dichotomist world views of the cultures surrounding the Old Testament people of God (2003a: Part 1). Farrow has examined the recurring Gnostic-like intrusions into Christian orthodoxy over two millennia of church history (1999). O'Donovan similarly examines the need for a Christian appreciation of the created order, as well as history and eschatology, if Christian practice is to be consistent with who God is in the resurrected Christ (1994).

A pivotal question for whether a dualistic or holistic perspective might best reflect a Biblical world view is what will happen to this earth when Christ returns. What is the nature of the transition from current earth to new earth? Is there continuity through transformation (restoration and renewal) such that this already existing earth will become the new earth and all redeemable by God in the current earth be carried forward into the new earth? Or is there profound physical and social discontinuity in which the current earth ceases to be, or is completely disintegrated, and nothing of the present earth is brought into the new earth except the souls and/or spirits of the faithful?<sup>2</sup> How will the new heaven and the new earth come to be? The dualistic expectation of discontinuity presumes a new *ex nihilo* creation or at least a reconstruction of the cosmos out of the scattered fragments of the dissolved heaven and earth. The holistic expectation of continuity looks for a transformation in which all the presence of evil and its consequences are totally removed with heaven and earth united as one in perfect holiness. Annihilation, dissolution, or transformation, this is the question.

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<sup>2</sup> 'souls and/or spirits' is used here simply to be inclusive; to emphasize the point. It should not be taken as a comment one way or the other on the question of a bipartite or tripartite nature for humanity.

## RATIONALE

The need for such research is well established. Rietkerk (1989:31), Elsdon (1992:169), Kuzmic (1999:140-143), Samuel and Sugden (1987:152-153), Hessel-Robinson (2010:12-14), Granberg-Michaelson (1987:4) and many others all confirm this divide in how the question is resolved. All describe the major differences of perspective that this produces for mission. These world views may be assumed or consciously developed.<sup>3</sup>

A spectrum of views exists on the earth's future ranging from annihilation of the cosmos though to the new earth being this earth transformed. These perspectives can be arranged into four main broad groupings. While all four contain a mix of continuity and discontinuity, these range from very high levels of discontinuity in the first through to a much stronger claim for continuity in the fourth.

(1) The whole created order will be annihilated or extinguished.<sup>4</sup> As we will see, this view is frequent amongst many traditional Dispensationalists and very common at a congregational level. (2) The creation or cosmos, the whole of the heavens and the earth, will be so severely dissolved, disintegrated or broken apart, that it will be as if all is reduced multiple fragments adrift in space.<sup>5</sup> This is the position of Adams discussed in Chapter Seven (217-219, 230, 232-233). Lindsey argues that the destruction at the end of the millennium will be a total break up or dissolution of the entire universe with all material substance reduced to a dissociated collection of atoms that God will re-assemble into the new heaven/earth (1970:179, 1973/84:270-271). (3) The earth itself

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<sup>3</sup> For a more recent assessment see [http://www.alternet.org/belief/155126/apocalypse\\_soon:\\_why\\_are\\_christians\\_so\\_obsessed\\_with\\_the\\_end\\_times/?page=entire](http://www.alternet.org/belief/155126/apocalypse_soon:_why_are_christians_so_obsessed_with_the_end_times/?page=entire) (Last accessed 8 October, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> That is, everything except the spiritual realm will cease to exist.

<sup>5</sup> That is at least, a complete collapse of the whole of the cosmic order of our solar system and all bodies within it.

will continue but there will still be a high level of destruction sufficient to doubt that those aspects of the earth that are part of everyday experience for humankind will continue. Grudem suggests that the surface of the earth that will be destroyed, 'the ground and the things on the ground' (1994:1160-1161). JR Williams suggests there will be 'total destruction' far greater than the devastation of nuclear explosions or the crashing of a large meteorite into the earth (1992:413-414) though the earth will nevertheless be 'renovated' (479). This will be not annihilation but massive dissolution (480).

In each of these three groupings, an actual, technical and tangible description of the breaking apart of the created order is taken to be the meaning of the cosmic imagery used in Biblical eschatological statements. However, each of these three perspectives uses language such as 'destruction' and 'dissolution' with obvious differences in meaning from one to the next. The third is perhaps the most ambiguous and diffused as little description follows on the extent of this devastation.

(4) The fourth grouping, unlike the other three, regards the cosmic imagery as metaphorical and not descriptive of what happens to the material world at Christ's return. While not denying that a global judgement of God will have serious physical consequences for the earth, this position claims that this is not the point of the imagery. The final judgement is of a different kind to previous judgements out of which this imagery developed. With such a massive impact on human society, the final judgement may bring violence and devastation to all things human and evil with consequences for the earth in so far as the earth is affected by humanity. This is more a refining and liberating event for the earth, surgery not execution. The earth itself is not doomed to

massive destruction but to restoration and transformation in that this earth,<sup>6</sup> and all that is good within it, will become the new earth when God, the Lamb and the New Jerusalem descend to be here (Revelation 21). With the presence of these three, transformation will bring a qualitative renewal to all facets of the earth and the created order.

Important here is Donaldson's valid observation that quite a dichotomy exists between 'scholarly circles' and 'congregational Christianity' (2011:xiii-xiv, 29) due to the widespread and pervasive influence of Dispensationalist eschatology, Schofield's Study Bible (1917/1996),<sup>7</sup> and the prophecy movement (in which enthusiastic identifying of Biblical prophecy with current events encourages a doomsday pessimism for the earth). Scholarly opinion aligns more with positions three and four above whereas congregational Christianity aligns far more with positions one and two. In congregational life, Dispensationalist<sup>8</sup> ideas have been influential far beyond those who identify themselves as Dispensational. Weber provides a history of the impact of classic Dispensational eschatology, an influential stimulus for the pessimistic view of the earth's future (2004). The growth and spread of Pentecostalism (often, though not always, Dispensational) has contributed to these perspectives. American Evangelicalism has had an influence beyond the USA through various media and American missions. MD Williams concludes that Dispensationalism, with its 'metaphysical distinction between nature and supernature, between the material and the spiritual' ... 'has risen to near dominance of a large segment of modern evangelicalism' (2003:187, 183).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Transformation definition Chapter 1:23.

<sup>7</sup> See Mangum & Sweetnam (2009) for a history of the impact of the Schofield Bible.

<sup>8</sup> See the description of Dispensationalism below. Chapter 1:31-35.

<sup>9</sup> Dispensationalism is found within nearly all Protestant denominations regardless of the theological distinctives of each. However, a substantial proportion of those with a doomed-earth view would not see themselves as Dispensationalist. Many who hold to this doomed-earth view have never heard of Dispensationalism nor necessarily hold to many of the other key items in Dispensationalist eschatology.

Wide ranging and deeply ingrained in the church as this perspective may be, very little scholarly research advocates for the dissolution of the cosmos for any of the three versions above including within Dispensationalism.<sup>10</sup> Adams (2007) is an exception. In this research we are not arguing against a scholarly developed theological thesis, nor against Dispensationalism as such, but against a pervasive doomsday view of life and earth frequently found across the Christian church. This is a pessimistic belief<sup>11</sup> more cultural than theological,<sup>12</sup> often more subconscious than theologically thought through, more based on a small selection of proof-texts and strong statements about how bad everything is because Satan has so much power and influence. It is a mood, a subculture, a diffused movement, a paradigm or world view.<sup>13</sup> Often, as Worthen comments on world views, it is ‘the semiconscious and unverifiable assumptions that shape a person’s perception of reality’ (2014:15).<sup>14</sup> Consequently many Biblical scholars simply assume that particular texts speak of the earth’s annihilation or dissolution without seriously exploring the proper disciplines of exegesis.<sup>15</sup>

Evidence of the presence of such pessimism at congregational level, and in much mission practice, is reflected in the following.

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<sup>10</sup> See below Chapter 1:31-35.

<sup>11</sup> A ‘hermeneutic of despair’ as one colleague described it.

<sup>12</sup> A ‘theoculture’ as one friend suggested.

<sup>13</sup> This is a self-perpetuating reality across the church through a prevailing doomsday worldview which shapes mission for both Dispensationalists and many others. Advocacy for this worldview comes from scholars who may or not be Dispensationalist though expressed as statements on proof-texts and not as developed theology. Much more influential are popular level preachers and the constant diet of bad news in the media. Dispensationalism is a significant influence on this worldview but without Dispensationalism this world view would continue regardless because it is so deeply ingrained into the culture of much of the church.

<sup>14</sup> Note also PG Hiebert (2008) on worldviews: ‘The assumptions that people make about the nature of things, the categories in which they think, and the logic that organizes these categories into a coherent understanding of reality’ (15). ‘Worldviews are what people ... take as given realities, the maps they have of reality that they use for living’ (15). ‘Worldviews both enable us to see reality and blind us from seeing it fully’ (23) and include ‘deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or pictures and images that shape how we understand the world and how we take action’ (29).

<sup>15</sup> The texts most commonly referred to include Matthew 5:18, 24:35, 2 Peter 3, Revelation 20:11, 21:1.



- Middleton describes the ways in which ‘most evangelicals today are “dispensationalist by osmosis”’ (2014:303). They may not be Dispensationalists (or even have any idea what this is), nor aligned with the primary doctrines of Dispensationalism, but they have absorbed something of the dualistic and pessimistic world view espoused by Dispensationalism. He also notes that much mission work across the world has come out of the USA church and thereby exported to the global church this same pessimistic world view and its inevitable shaping of mission priorities (2014:295-312).<sup>16</sup>
- Glasser and McGavran in their survey of mission theologies endorse the perspective that ‘the present world will pass away. The world must be evangelized before the last day can come’ (1983:104-105).
- Many publications for church communities argue against this pessimistic culture and world view. These expose a major need as seen by scholars. NT Wright’s many publications and public presentations demonstrate that he is aware of the issue in congregations across the globe.<sup>17</sup> Other examples expressing this need in congregational Christianity are in Alcorn (2004), Alexander (2008), Burge (2010), Middleton (2014), Moo & White (2013), Rietkerk (1989), Sizer (2007), Snyder (2011), Walsh & Middleton (1984), and in many of the ecotheology publications considered below.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See also Kuzmic, ‘Missionary expansion of the twentieth century is largely marked by the spread of the American version(s) of pre-millennialism – dispensationalism’ (1999:147).

<sup>17</sup> See for example <https://www.facebook.com/pages/N-T-Wright/260878103965254>  
<http://ntwrightpage.com/> (Both last accessed 28 April, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Chapter 1:35-37.

- Bosch summarizes this mission perspective as ‘world-denying premillennialists’ (1991:315-319).
- Kuzmic surveys the impact of eschatology of much evangelical mission work. ‘Since the world, especially in the view of the dispensationalists, is expected to grow worse and worse as part of God’s programme for the last days, it makes no sense to try and improve society. It would only be a waste of time and energy’ (1999:144). The departure of Christians in the ‘rapture’ reinforces this perspective that mission must be all about getting people to chose faith in Christ (1999:145).
- Cambodian Dispensationalist missionary, Forrest McPhail, argues that Old Testament prophetic material for Israel is not relevant to the church as it refers to the millennial Kingdom yet to come (2014:Factors 6-7). For this and other reasons the church’s mission is not to engage with the issues of poverty but to stay focussed on proclaiming the Gospel for conversion as the Kingdom has no relevance for Christian mission before the millennium.<sup>19</sup>
- Over the two decades I have been in Cambodia, I supported and mentored a wide variety of Christian mission workers while being more directly involved in three particular roles: pastoral leadership of an international church of missionaries, relief and development workers, and other professionals;<sup>20</sup> training of Cambodian church leaders;<sup>21</sup> and Cambodia board chair of an organization that cared for trafficked and

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<sup>19</sup> Dispensationalist blogger Jesse Johnson (2011a & 2011b) argues likewise.

<sup>20</sup> International Christian Fellowship of Phnom Penh. In an average year, the church included around 400 adults from about 35 nationalities and a wide variety of denominations.

<sup>21</sup> The Theological Education by Extension Association of Cambodia (TEE is a particular method utilized in multiple TEE programmes around the world in training church leaders. The Timothys All Project; a programme unique to Cambodia which specializes in mentoring and training for the most senior leaders of the Cambodian church.

extremely abused women and children.<sup>22</sup> Conversations with those who advocate a strong priority for evangelism as the essence of mission are typical of any other missionary community. Eschatology directly affects mission perspectives regardless of the extent to which this may or may not be thought through. For the past 25 years, a large number of Christian entities have set up in Cambodia representing a diverse range of mission activities. Most of these entities also have a mission presence in many other countries. From my conversations with a variety of mission workers in Cambodia, undoubtedly eschatology directly impacts whether or not mission is understood dualistically or holistically. From time to time tensions arise in the Christian community around the questions of mission priorities usually the result of some missionaries advocating church-planting as having a unique validity in mission. My own experience in this context and several others, having worked for many years with Christian leaders from many different countries, different denominations, and with different understandings of mission, leaves no doubt that a large proportion of the global Christian community has a mission theology very much shaped by a pessimistic expectation for the future of the earth.

- The central idea for mission that regards the future as having no hope for the earth is that salvation enables the faithful to leave the earth and go to heaven. This conceptual framework is one which sees departure from the earth as the primary agenda for mission. The need for faith to get to heaven is standard fare for those who argue against holistic mission. Assumed in this perspective, the earth is doomed, nearly everything in the world is only going to get much worse, and its end imminent. So heaven must be the final destination of the saved. Humankind's greatest need, therefore, is to hear the Gospel that faith might follow. Without faith

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<sup>22</sup> Hagar International.

only judgement follows so saving souls for eternity in heaven must have the highest priority. Individuals departing for heaven drives mission perspectives. Examples include:

- Middleton (2014), Snyder (2011) and NT Wright (2007) have each published refutations of this perspective having described how pervasive this is across church life. All three critique the focus in many of the songs and hymns sung in churches around the world that feature heaven alone as the final destination of God's people.
- Middleton provides an extensive critique of the typical understanding of 'The Rapture' which is strong evidence of the departure perspective in the minds of many (2014:221-226).
- B.I.B.L.E. as an acronym for 'Basic Instructions/Information Before Leaving Earth' is used as a song title and the title or subtitle of a number of popular publications.<sup>23</sup>
- Johnston argues strongly for the importance and priority of evangelism in his survey of mission agendas. The beginning point for his advocacy is 'Conversion is necessary in order to get to heaven' (1978:137).
- In Cambodia, this same perspective is typical of those who are dualistic rather than holistic in mission practice. The conceptual framework is one in which the faithful ultimately leave the doomed earth behind.

Generally, for those who adopt one of the first three positions above, the consequence of these expectations is that, where practiced, holistic mission is more out of principles of obedience, compassion and justice than any sense of seriously contributing to the

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<sup>23</sup> These are found easily through a Google or Amazon search.

final outcome of God's Kingdom in the new earth. The exception is the spiritual life of the individual as this alone will last beyond the destruction of the earth. Some also see all except evangelistic work as having little value because of this expected dissolution of creation.<sup>24</sup> Many, who understand the Kingdom of God as present and growing holistically in the world, suspect that eventually much of the Kingdom's achievements will be destroyed to make way for another creation.<sup>25</sup> They may be persuaded that holistic mission is right and that the Kingdom is present and growing, but the stumbling block is the influence of a pessimistic view of the last day on which the earth will be destroyed. This understanding of eventual annihilation or dissolution of the earth results in a 'Yes, but' response to the concept of a present and growing Kingdom. The question of transition is problematic.

The pessimistic view raises many questions about the character of God and the nature of His presence and work in His world: about the purposes and scope of holistic mission and about what is God's Kingdom, how it grows from small beginnings into a future completion; and about what gives significance and value to the service of Christians. Some fundamental understandings of Christology are profoundly affected.

To date, this theological question of transition and its implications for holistic mission has not been adequately researched in its own right. It is, in an abbreviated and limited way, included as a sub-point in other studies, expressed in popular level books, or argued for in journal articles, but not extensively as the primary research question.

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<sup>24</sup> Holistic work in all the rest of life often is regarded as right and good but its impact is temporary; it may last a long time but it will not survive the final day. In practice then, many appear to live with a level of tension between a commitment to holism and a suspicion that eventually much may well be of more limited value because God, as they understand it, will sooner or later destroy the earth and nearly everything within it – except individuals. The more they have expectations of an imminent return of Christ, the stronger is this perspective.

<sup>25</sup> The contradiction in such a perspective is self-evident.

Middleton (2014) provides a more substantial argument for the earth's continuity centred on the necessity of the earth for full restoration of humankind. Most studies tend to look at some but not all the relevant Biblical material rather than search for an earth theology that integrates all the Biblical narrative.<sup>26</sup> The stance taken generates selectivity. A comprehensive examination of all the relevant material is required: one which brings together all the relevant texts<sup>27</sup> into a coherent theology of the earth that clarifies the degree to which the earthiness of this earth is integral to the new creation.<sup>28</sup>

In particular, the question is whether or not the earth material follows an intrinsic pattern or configuration, a 'world view' (NT Wright 1992),<sup>29</sup> 'logic' (Middleton, 2006), 'trajectory' (Sugden<sup>30</sup>)<sup>31</sup>, or 'continuum' (DL Turner 1992), that integrates, shapes and flavours the Biblical narrative throughout and which has sufficient strength to provide a hermeneutical lens for the reading of the whole Bible.<sup>32</sup> And if such a stance is woven into the Biblical text, does it set up a certain inevitability for how we might then read the vision of the eventual outcome of God's mission as portrayed in Revelation 21:1,

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<sup>26</sup> In addition to those listed below in the Literature Survey, there are several important advocates for the proposal examined in this research. Each would be strengthened by a thorough Biblical Theology of the earth's future as this is the typical lack in their arguments. See Bauckham (as reflected in most of his works), Dumbrell (2001b), Murray (1992), O'Donovan (1994), Snyder (2011), Walsh & Middleton (1984), Wolters (2005), CJH Wright (1983 & 2006), NT Wright (as reflected in most of his works).

<sup>27</sup> That is, one which considers, for example, Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Peter 3:7-13, Psalm 102:26 and Ephesians 1:9-10, Matthew 24:29-35 and Colossians 1:15-20.

<sup>28</sup> With regards to the curse on the earth in Genesis 3:17-19, limited theological study has been undertaken on how and when the curse will be lifted and how this might contribute to optimism or pessimism regarding the earth's future. Minear is an exception (1994). See Chapter 5:174-183. Furthermore the relevant theological implications of creation, incarnation, resurrection, the Kingdom of God, eschatology and ecotheology need to be brought together into the discussion of these texts and their significance for the primary issue.

<sup>29</sup> For a history of the language and concept of 'world view' see Worthen (2014:chapter 1).

<sup>30</sup> In conversation.

<sup>31</sup> Brueggemann, for example, frequently uses the concept and language of trajectory though curiously not with any particular eschatological reference and not at all in his classic on The Land (2002). See also his Theology of the Old Testament (1997) and 'Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel' (1979).

Similarly, with regards to Biblical trajectories for mission, see Bauckham (2003: Chapters 2 & 3).

<sup>32</sup> Yoder's evocative conceptualization of such an integrated world view is captured in his expression 'working with the grain of the universe.' (1988:58) That is, a cosmic order for which there is only one power or 'mover of history', who alone is Lord of all creation, and any failure to work in all things from this truth is to work against the grain. CJH Wright likewise speaks of a missional hermeneutic that facilitates a reading 'with the grain' of the whole text of Scripture (2004b:134-135).

‘Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.’?

The purpose of this original research is to see what theological perspective or perspectives the Bible presents on the question of transition and to what extent it is consistent. If there is a consistent perspective, is there a recurring earth theology which enables us to project forward to the ultimate purposes of God for the earth? And if so, how might this change or influence approaches to mission? There will be discontinuities in the transition into the new heaven/earth in the removal of all sin and evil, and all the consequences of sin. Our concern here is not with the broad mix of what may or may not be continuous but with the continuity or otherwise of the physical realm because this shapes perspectives on everything else. Will the earth (1) cease to exist in advance of a new *ex nihilo* creation; or (2) require a complete re-construction following a future cosmic disintegration; or (3) continue but with a the level of final destruction that leaves little that can be incorporated into the new heaven/earth other than the planet itself; or (4) be restored and transformed as Christ perfectly purifies all that has been corrupted? What is the character of the making of all things new (Revelation 21:5)? What might the resurrection of Jesus’ material body indicate to us of the material future of the earth? Will anything of nations, societies, human achievement and culture be a part of the new earth when it comes?

In other words, is the earth cursed and doomed to extinction or at least to massive dissolution? Or is it corrupted and polluted yet with a radical reconstruction of some kind already under way in Christ which He will bring to fruition when He returns with the New Jerusalem?

## PROPOSAL

The proposal, to be explored through an examination of the Biblical narrative, is that a substantial relational triangulation exists between God, creation and humankind; that the earth is far more than merely the backdrop or stage upon which the divine-human drama unfolds through history. Non-human creation is distinct from God and humankind but is neither superfluous nor dispensable. In this symbiosis, the earth is woven inextricably into the saga of the divine-human drama which finds its perfect integration and fulfilment in Christ and ultimately in the final transformation of all liberated through the cross and the resurrection. The Biblical narrative begins in harmonious triangulation, collapses into a discordant triangulation and then, in Christ, a reconciled triangulation restores harmony.<sup>33</sup>

The Biblical drama has three main actors all with speaking parts; God, humankind and non-human creation. Each one of these three involves another set of relationships. God is Trinitarian. Humankind ranges across Israel, the nations and multiple individuals ‘from every tribe, language, people and nation’ (Revelation 5:9). Non-human creation is both living and non-living and includes the heavens above, the earth and all beneath the earth. God is creator of all, creation proclaims His glory and humankind, as creatures in

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<sup>33</sup> The use of a triangle to explain the relationship between God, humankind and non-human creation has often been repeated since its use by CJH Wright (1983). He has repeated this in many of his subsequent publications. Others who have used this same triangle include Bauckham (1986:238-239, 2010:146), Bookless (2008:36-45), Davis EF (2009:30), Knox (1988), Marlow (2009: 109-111, 250ff), Moreau, A Scott, Corwin, Gary R & McGee, Gary B (2004:75-76), Santmire (1985:175-176).

See the variation of this triangle by Block in which the triangulation is God/earth/living things with a second triangle within the first which represents the human role in serving each of the other relationships. This version of the triangle does not contradict Wright and others but does draw out more the way humankind is to function (Block 2010:123-132).

‘Triangulation’ is a term used in a number of contexts including politics, social sciences, surveying, and psychology. The relational use here takes up its use in interpersonal relationships which gives a more dynamic and organic character to the word than simply ‘triangle’.



the image of the creator God, is given responsibility and privilege within this creation. A significant relationship quality occurs across this spectrum.

Non-human creation is the instrument in God's hand to bring either curse or blessing to His people. As such the earth's well-being reflects the state of the relationship between God and humankind. The earth's burden is to be the innocent casualty that results from being a real player in the Biblical narrative. Human sin morally and spiritually pollutes the earth itself. The judgement of God against humankind likewise has consequences for the earth. The earth can only find freedom from this corruption when the business of sin between God and humankind is resolved once and for all. The non-human creation is not evil in and of itself but suffers the consequences of human sin and the breakdown of the relationship between humankind and the Creator.

Sin and judgement break the harmony in Genesis 1-2 between these three primary players. The consequences of sin and the resulting curse (Genesis 3:14-19) bring discord, disintegration and fragmentation not only between God and humankind but also between God and creation, within the created order and within the human community. The integration in Christ in whom 'all things hold together' (Colossians 1:17) is broken. The reverse of this disintegration is also in Christ and begins in Christ's incarnation. He represents the three primary characters of the triangle in Himself; all three have a presence in the essence of who He is. He is divine while yet human and as human He is of the dust of the earth. All come together in Him, in His person. The Biblical narrative both prepares the scene for incarnation and reveals the drama which follows in death, resurrection and beyond. In Christ, what was dis-integrated is now being re-integrated. What begins in incarnation finds completion in the integration of heaven and earth as a fit place for the full presence of God as portrayed in Revelation

21. In obedience unto death, even death on a cross, Christ once and for all deals with the necessary consequences of human sin. As humankind finds liberation from the consequences of sin, so the created order finds liberation in that same freedom. Integral to this proposal is that the triangulation projects forward to a future for the earth of restoration and renewal.

This triangulation potentially becomes a lens or perspective through which to read the narrative from Genesis to Revelation. Such a lens might also be described as a hermeneutical key or principle. So, just as the coming of Christ provides a theological lens for re-reading the Old Testament to see beyond the immediate to the larger eschatological context centred in Christ, so too a reading of the Bible through the lens of confident hope and great value for the earth shapes both literal and theological interpretations. This is a dialogical relationship in which literal and theological interpretations challenge and refine each other.<sup>34</sup>

Inevitably, the Bible is read through some lens or other with regards to the future of the earth. It might be a complete disengagement from the earth; an exclusively spiritualized perspective in which hope has very little to do with all that the earth represents. Many are influenced by assumptions that the earth is doomed just as many read through the lens of hope for the earth. Whichever it is, a paradigm-shift difference occurs, in the full sense as presented by Kuhn (1996), in how both literal and theological interpretations develop. This question of which lens one reads through is not an optional extra for Biblical hermeneutics. As becomes clear through the following chapters, many presume much in their exegesis as a result of how much their lens has pre-disposed them to a particular conclusion.

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<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 1:27-28.

A number of ecotheology writers have discussed the need for an ecological Biblical hermeneutic.<sup>35</sup> This is essential for adequate theological examination of the ecological challenges. If this study does confirm the legitimacy of a reading shaped by real hope for this earth, it will greatly enhance the case for an ecological reading.

The focus of this research is to test out this proposal; to examine whether a literal exploration of the relevant texts of the Bible results in a strong endorsement of this triangulation together with a strong theology of hope for earth.<sup>36</sup> If this theology of hope is justified, does it in turn set up a legitimate pro-earth hermeneutical lens? Particular attention is given to those texts typically used to argue for the alternate vision. Do these texts justify the claim that the earth will be destroyed, have they in fact been misinterpreted, or does the Bible actually present us with two mutually exclusive possibilities?

If the conclusion of this study is that this earth will become the new earth, and if the Biblical hope builds upon the order of creation which is highly valued throughout the Bible, then we can see something of the character and substance of what will be in the new heaven/earth. If this is case what of the earth continues and what does not? The mission question then is how in mission the Christian church might express and anticipate this hope in present engagement with the world.

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<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 1:36-37.

<sup>36</sup> For an explanation of literal and theological interpretation see Chapter 1:27-28.

## OVERALL APPROACH

As noted above<sup>37</sup> and examined in the Literature examined below,<sup>38</sup> there is no developed theological scholarship that argues for the earth's demise in Dispensationalism or otherwise. While Dispensationalism may be a frequent source of the pessimistic view, this research is not a critique of Dispensationalism.<sup>39</sup> Rather, it addresses a popular and very common eschatology found at congregational level across the global Christian community.

It would be ideal to approach the issue as an open-ended question and postpone any conclusion as long as possible. However, to leave the matter hanging until the end would produce considerable unhelpful repetition making it much more difficult to give due weight to the developing theological narrative. Postponing the theological narrative would shift the discussion to a piecemeal collection of individual texts and run the risk of being not much more than proof-texting.

Such an investigation would set up a kind of battle-of-the-texts in which those assumed to be for the earth would be set up against those assumed to be pessimistic. This kind of approach is one reason why there have been conflicting opinions on what the Bible says about the earth's future. Combined with inadequate exegesis it encourages an assumption that one has to decide which texts to privilege over the others.

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<sup>37</sup> Chapter 1:6, 11-12.

<sup>38</sup> Chapter 1:29-41.

<sup>39</sup> Multiple critiques of Dispensationalism already exist. See, for example, Allis (1978), Bass (1960), Hoekstra (1979), Miladin (1972), Rietkerk (1989), Sizer (2007), and MD Williams (2003). For an overview of Progressive Dispensationalism see Blaising & Bock (1992), Clouse (2008: 252-253).

Working with a proposal allows for a more theologically integrated exploration. It facilitates a fuller consideration of the narrative in that the literal work builds up a theological perspective along the way. The risk in this approach is that the literal work may too quickly rush to a desired conclusion without an adequate consideration of the alternatives.

The approach adopted here is somewhat determined by what might be more useful for mission practitioners.<sup>40</sup> So the following is not a review of the contribution to theology by any particular scholar but rather works with and highlights those scholars who have argued for a full and integrated theology that embraces all from creation to eschatology in which the creation remains a key player in the Biblical drama.

Discussions which focus on particular theological scholars tend to be contained within academic circles and not readily accessible nor useful to practitioners.<sup>41</sup> Research that resonates with mission practitioners is that which takes seriously the presuppositions from which they work, which connects their own work and story with the larger narrative of God's work, and which is comprehensive rather than just a piece of the puzzle.<sup>42</sup> Narrative theology<sup>43</sup> integrates well with mission theology as both engage with human experience through time.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> As Stuhlmacher states, 'the purpose of biblical theology is to serve the church, by interpreting the Holy Scriptures of both Old and New Testaments, so that the original witness of the Bible can be understood as a message relevant for today' (1987:1).

<sup>41</sup> This is partly because the traditional subjects do not include so many of the issues facing Christians today and partly because logical structures of thought are somewhat culturally constructed.

<sup>42</sup> 'Central to this interest in narrative among practical theologians is the recognition that human beings interpret and make sense of their world through a story. That is to speak of story, not in literary categories, but as the essential shape of a worldview' (Bartholomew & Goheen 2004:147). CJH Wright argues that mission is an engagement with the story of what God is working out from creation to new creation, from Genesis to Revelation. As 'We live in a storied universe' (2004b:126) so the story of the *missio Dei* is the essence of all mission.

<sup>43</sup> For discussion on Narrative Theology, see Adeney (2009), Alter (1981), Bartholomew & Goshen (2004a & b), Beaumont (1997), Comstock (1987), Fackre (1983), Frei (1974, 1987), Gilmour (2008), Hauerwas & Jones (1989), Henry (1987), House (2005), Jacobs (2003), McGrath (2001:167-170), Pennington (2012), Poirier (2008), Ward (1991), Weinberger (1991). Note also the discussion on the

Yet this research does have a place in the academy in that a body of opinion exists that regards the new heaven/earth as this earth transformed but needing a more substantial theology of the place of the earth in the ultimate purposes of God. This study will seek to demonstrate more forcefully that any thought of earth's disintegration denies the theological thrust that builds up steadily throughout the Bible.<sup>45</sup>

This study will not argue for one or other view of the millennium. Whichever version of a-, pre- or post-millennialism one advocates, this research concludes that this earth will become the new heaven/earth when New Jerusalem descends.<sup>46</sup>

There are very real scientific questions on the long term viability of the earth. However, our question is theological – the earth's future at the return of Christ as presented in the Biblical narrative, not what might happen when the sun burns up.<sup>47</sup>

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value of a 'narrative hermeneutic' for mission in Bauckham (2003:12-26). See also E Peterson (2013) on 'Living into God's Story' and Fackre, 'Narrative speaks in the idiom of the earth.' (1983:345). McGrath in support of Narrative Theology states that it avoids 'the dulling sense of *abstraction*' and appeals 'to the imagination' (2001:169).

<sup>44</sup> That is, better able to relate to and personally apply Theology expressed narratively as they see how their own personal story meshes with the story of God's engagement with the world in which they live: better able to recognize the connection between their own personal experience and the developing work of God in their world. Story is much less abstract than the systematic logical formulations of ideas. Systematics is equally essential in the life of the church and each has its own limitations. Some doctrines are more helpfully expressed systematically and others narratively. Eschatology and mission are both unfolding realities for which narrative better enables people to see how their lives fit within the larger story of the work of God.

<sup>45</sup> See the Literature survey below for those who advocate the restoration and transformation of this earth into the new.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, these pre-millennial endorsements of a restored earth eschatology see Finger (1985a:175), Ladd (1974), Thiessen (1979:401-402), DL Turner (1992).

<sup>47</sup> As we will see in the chapters to follow, the cosmology of the Biblical writers (as much as this may be identified) is utilized more to generate strong imagery than to present any particular expected outcome for God's purposes for His creation. Their world view is far more theologically shaped than a product of ancient perspectives on the 'science' of the cosmos. For a more extensive discussion of these questions and an integration of theological and scientific realities, see Ellis (2002), GL Murphy (2002), Peacocke (1971, 1979), Polkinghorne (2002), R Russell (2008), and D Wilkinson (2010). Wilkinson sees the resurrection of Christ as reflecting what God might do to re-order the physical world such that the current forces towards eventual dissolution are transformed. Bauckham and Hart, also with reference to the resurrection of Christ, suggest 'a radical refashioning of the very foundations of the cosmos as we know it' (1999:69-70).

A thorough Biblical Theology on this question provides a foundation upon which research utilizing a Systematic Theology methodology might examine this question of how the theology and science of the

The research will not attempt to explain the degree to which the final transition will involve catastrophe. Any visitation from God involves much upheaval and nothing suggests that the last one will be any different. The thoroughness of this final universal transition implies a level of devastation.<sup>48</sup> Yet while the physical realm undoubtedly will be affected, the focus in this study is whether or not the earth continues and becomes the new earth through a thorough Genesis to Revelation investigation of the earth's role and significance.

Many areas of scholarship provide background for this research such as ecotheology, eschatology and missiology. This research takes up a particular question and perspective not addressed comprehensively, yet the question of the earth's future has a significant bearing on all three.

### **Terminology**

The following key terms are used often with variation in usage indicated as needed.

EARTH. Following Bouma-Prediger, the 'earth' is the focus of this study. We could just refer mostly to the 'creation' but 'The term *earth* is not abstract; it is specific, precise, concrete, denoting the very stuff of which we are made.... *Earth* does not promote an unhealthy dualism of culture over against nature; creatures human and nonhuman together inhabit this one planetary home' (2001:17. Emphasis original.). 'Earth' has a greater sense of the immediate, the personal and social, the dust of which we are made and the ground upon which we develop a sense of place and meaning. 'Creation' is used

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earth's future might cohere. A particular challenge here is the ever changing theories of scientists regarding this future. See Ellis (2002).

<sup>48</sup> Note that this last day is one of both judgement and restoration. Focussing upon judgement only, and thereby seeing only devastation, misses the point that the judgement day includes putting to right all that has been damaged by sin and brining the blessing of new creation.

either to provide some variation in terms used or to give greater emphasis to the whole of God's handiwork.

HEAVEN AND EARTH. Consistent with usage in the Bible, this phrase refers to the whole of God's creation.

HEAVEN(S). This word is not precise in its Biblical usage but unless otherwise stated in the context, in this study it will refer to the place where God dwells and has His throne. Heaven(s) may be spatial in meaning referring to the expanse above the earth both visible (sky, clouds, sun, moon, stars) and invisible (whatever is beyond and above the visible). Heaven(s) may be used more in the sense of a place beyond the visible expanse above; the dwelling place of God in particular but more generally a term for all that surrounds the throne of God, all which is present there with Him.<sup>49</sup>

NEW HEAVEN/EARTH. The anticipated fulfilment of the Biblical narrative in new heaven and new earth is more simply written as 'new heaven/earth' as this highlights the vision of Revelation 21-22 in which heaven and earth integrate into one and the same place.<sup>50</sup>

KINGDOM. Kingdom of God refers to the Kingdom inaugurated in the First Advent that grows gradually until its completion in the new heaven/earth at the Second Advent. It is not used as in classic Dispensationalism of a millennium period after the return of Christ, nor with the distinctions between the Kingdom of heaven and the Kingdom of God in classic Dispensationalism.

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<sup>49</sup> For more detailed discussion on significance of heaven, see Chapter 7:222-223, 242-243, 8:266-267, and Appendix A.5:392.

<sup>50</sup> See Chapter 8:263-295.



PAROUSIA. Terms such as the Parousia, the return of Christ or the second coming of Christ refer, not as in Dispensationalism to the coming of Christ before the millennium, but the coming of Christ at the final judgement when he will bring New Jerusalem and establish the new heaven/earth. No distinction is made between ‘coming for’ and ‘coming with’ believers.

“TRANSFORMATION. Transformation expresses the changes necessary for the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God, and for the new creation to be complete. It includes the restoration of all things from the destructive consequences of sin and judgement, the reconciliation of all things through the cross, the establishment of peace, and holiness and justice throughout the new heaven/earth, in accordance with the Biblical narrative for God’s ultimate purposes. Transformation of all the earth includes everything essential for all things to fully express the glory of God. Transformation ranges from personal sanctification and healing of all in Christ through to the radical metamorphosis of nations that each may take its place in the new heaven/earth. Transformation includes changes to physicality as implicit in the resurrection body of Jesus. Transformation brings a qualitative change to all the earth in that heavenly realities will infuse the earthly. Transformation requires the complete ending of sin and death, and the removal or absolute destruction of all that is evil and beyond redemption.”

## **METHODOLOGY**

Thorough examination of our proposal requires four interlinked phases: (1) the exegesis of relevant passages together with a more general survey of relevant texts; (2) the development of a theological synthesis of these to see what is being said of the purposes of God for His earth and the process by which the transition into the new earth might

develop; (3) an exploration of how the practical implications the transition might be identified and described; (4) consideration of what this could mean in practice in the life and mission of God's people today. These four are identical to Hays' methodology as outlined in The Moral Vision of the New Testament (Hays 1996).<sup>51</sup>

To allow the theological synthesis to develop as we follow the Biblical narrative, phases one and two are integrated throughout Chapters Two to Eight. Consistent with Hays, the search in these phases is for a theological 'coherence' which might then serve as a hermeneutical lens in the reading of the narrative (Hays 1996:187-189, 193-205). This integration engages both literal (exegetical) and theological interpretation.<sup>52</sup> Methodologically, this process fits well with Biblical Theology<sup>53</sup> though not as a search for a theological centre or organising principle which unifies and integrates everything.<sup>54</sup> Biblical Theology is an established method in which the Biblical narrative provides a chronological structure for the examination of a particular themes or motifs in the Canon.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Hays labels these four 'tasks' as Descriptive, Synthetic, Hermeneutical and Pragmatic. Note the endorsements of Hays' methodology from Gallant (2004), Matera (1997), Meilaender (1997), Schmidt (1997), Spohn (1997). For critical review of Hays' work see, Bretzke (1998), Burrige (1998), Cranfield (1998:169-171), Gundry-Volf (1999), LT Johnson (1997), DB Martin (1998), Matera (1997), Meilaender (1997), DJ Moo (1999), Porter (1997), Schmidt (1997). Mostly the criticisms focus on whether or not Hays has been true to his own method, and whether or not his 'three focal images' are sufficient to encompass the breadth of meaning found in the Bible. The method itself is not a primary issue.

<sup>52</sup> On the distinction between literal and theological interpretation see Chapter 1:27-28.

<sup>53</sup> In Biblical Theology, as described in Alexander & Rosner (2000), selection of a theme and exploring the development of the theme through Scripture is a well-established method. While strictly speaking this examination of just one theme is not a theology of the whole Bible, it does take more seriously the historical development of theology within the Biblical narrative.

<sup>54</sup> See the discussion on the question of a unifying theme for Biblical Theology in Bartholomew (2004:1-19).

<sup>55</sup> Select Bibliography for Biblical Theology. Alexander & Rosner (2000). Bartholomew et al (2004), Beale (1997), Brueggemann (2002), Carson (1995), Childs (1992 & 2002), Dumbrell (2001a & 2001b), Dyrness (1998). Gibson (1997), Goldsworthy (1986, 1991, 1992, 1996, 2002, 2003, 2012), Hafemann (2002), Hafemann & House (2007), Hasel (1984), Köstenberger (2012), Osborne (1991), D Peterson (1992), Scobie (1991a & 1991b), Trueman (2002), Vanhoozer (1994). See the insightful discussion on the relationship between Systematic and Biblical Theology in Hart (2004). See also RE Murphy (2003), Köstenberger (2012), Scobie (1991a, 1991b, 1992).

The third phase (Chapter Ten) brings an essential discussion in the movement from theology to practice. The need is address the challenges of contextualization not only because of the movement from past texts to diverse present contexts, but from a future reality with all its mix of knowns and unknowns to this same collection of diverse contexts. The new heaven/earth can only be imagined but this is an informed imagination. Not only does a significant volume of Biblical material flesh out expectations for this new earth but, if this research validates the claim that this earth will become the new earth as God heals and purifies all things, then the created order also provides input for informed imagination.<sup>56</sup> This third phase examines the disciplines needed for developing mission practice that anticipates the future.

## **PRESUPPOSITIONS**

The investigation of the proposal is based on the following premises.

### **The Canon**

This research works with the Biblical text as it is in the Canon of Old and New Testaments and as normally accepted in the Christian church. This is the Biblical text upon which mission and church life is established.<sup>57</sup> This research, to be useful for Christians serving across the spectrum of mission activities, must develop from the same foundation. Furthermore, to be relevant for practitioners it must address the whole theological question of transition to new earth, the whole Canon and the whole narrative

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<sup>56</sup> Note that O'Donovan asserts that the created order is essential for all moral living. 'The order of things that God has made is *there*. It is objective, and mankind has a place within it. Christian ethics, therefore, has an objective reference because it is concerned with man's life in accordance with this order' (1994:17. Emphasis original.). The creation has a particular part to play in all our reflection on Christian practice (Psalm 19, Romans 1:19-20, and much of the Wisdom Literature) and this same 'objective reference' has as much relevance for mission practice as it does for ethics.

<sup>57</sup> Therefore this is not an exercise in Biblical criticism though awareness of some of the issues may be essential when texts are examined closely.

from Genesis to Revelation. This stance is consistent with Hays' methodology who gives 'pre-eminent authority' to the Canon. Like Hays, 'the aim .... is not to provide an apologetic justification for biblical authority' (1996:296).<sup>58</sup> So while hermeneutics cannot ignore the contributions of tradition, reason or experience, Scripture has the privileged and primary position as in 'the mainstream Christian tradition of canonical reading' (Hays 1996:198).

Furthermore, this research accepts that blended in with the realities and idiosyncrasies of human authorship is a divine involvement (2 Timothy 3:16) which suffuses the whole of the Scriptures, and makes it reasonable to look for a degree of consistency on the future of the earth. It is intellectually and theologically inadequate to address claimed inconsistencies, as often is the case when comparing Romans 8 with 2 Peter 3, solely by resorting to the view that different Biblical authors hold irreconcilable views. Such a resort does not wrestle adequately with the Church's apostolic and historic view that the Canon be considered as a whole. This research considers the plausible hypothesis that there is consistency in the Canon on these matters.

### **Eschatology**

This research understands that an eschatological or teleological sub-text occurs throughout the Biblical narrative. In its most simple expressions it is a narrative of promise and fulfilment with a stark and inevitable apocalyptic resolution. Developed further, it is the unfolding narrative from creation to new creation with focus upon the place of Christ in the history of humankind. From the beginnings of Genesis, God is revealed as purposeful, as having an agenda that will be completed. This research recognizes this eschatological perspective as something already established and focuses

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<sup>58</sup> 'Readers who wonder why the Bible should be accorded some normative status will have to look elsewhere.' (Hays 1996:10)

upon one particular question because of its significance for the greater whole. What is the place of this earth in this larger narrative?

Apocalyptic thought, a particular expression of eschatology, is manifested in three ways: (1) the genre of particular writings such as the book of Revelation; (2) apocalyptic language and imagery within non-apocalyptic genres for which we will see examples in the following chapters; (3) an apocalyptic perspective which is not necessarily expressed in apocalyptic genre or imagery. This last aspect is recognized as having a significant seasoning effect within the ever-present eschatological flavouring of the New Testament.<sup>59</sup>

### **Literal and Theological Interpretation<sup>60</sup>**

This research engages both literal<sup>61</sup> and theological<sup>62</sup> interpretation of the Bible.<sup>63</sup> Labelling a hermeneutical position is problematic as these terms are not used consistently. Interpretations which claim to be literal and yet ignore genre, rhetoric, figurative expressions, narrative structure, or the immediate as well as the theological context, cannot qualify as literal interpretation no matter what popular assumptions

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<sup>59</sup> Further consideration of apocalyptic can be found in Chapters 3:85-91, 5:174-176, and 7:211-215, 239.

<sup>60</sup> Hays' first Task is the application of both literal and theological interpretation on particular Biblical texts. Hays' second Task is also theological interpretation but across the full breadth of the Canon to identify how particular texts come together theologically.

<sup>61</sup> 'Literal' interpretation here refers to the outcome of the various exegetical disciplines as applied to a particular text in which the text is examined in its own context in its own right.

<sup>62</sup> 'Theological' interpretation here refers to the consideration of a text in the light of the whole Biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation and in the light of the theological insights gained by the Christian community over the last two millennia. For example, Psalms 2 and 110 read literally examines what they mean in their context: read theologically, they are considered in the light of the various ways the New Testament applies these Psalms to Christ. The theological provides another layer of meaning and helps fine-tune the literal. The term 'spiritual interpretation' (used by some) is too ambiguous in that 'spiritual' for many means non-material and non-social, and thereby implies that 'literal' is more physical, prosaic or technical. 'Theological interpretation' is the preferred expression as it is much more able to encourage an integration of literal and other readings which does not compromise either. It should be noted that the whole Bible is spiritual (2 Timothy 3:16) and therefore all interpretation that is true to the text is spiritual – both literal and theological. See Beale (2004a) who repeatedly has cause to challenge the idea that literal and spiritual are mutually exclusive thereby suggesting that those who set up spiritual and literal as if they opposing alternatives understand neither.

<sup>63</sup> Which is not to deny other approaches to interpretation of the Biblical text such as, for example, philosophical, reader-response, devotional and critical.

might be.<sup>64</sup> Literal meaning is what the text means in its immediate context following careful exegesis. It ceases to be literal if it is simply a matter of historical-grammatical work (as is often practiced) and neglects the other essential literary factors. This study will examine both literal and theological interpretation as the accumulation of examined texts sets up a theological understanding of the earth's future. The more the narrative develops, the more a theological reading becomes evident and able to stretch appreciation of the individual text. In this research, a literal meaning is only established when all the literary qualities of the text are recognized. Newport summarizes the point well, 'When the language used is figurative, the literal sense is the figurative sense' (2002:164)

The hermeneutical issues identified in the study fall into two broad categories. First, there are the disciplines for discerning a text's meaning, such as genre, use of imagery, and context. Secondly, interpreting the text out of an assumed world view is a frequent issue. These differences in hermeneutics are at the core of the arguments for either restoration or annihilation (or dissolution) for the earth's future. A summary of the hermeneutical observations of this study is in Chapter Nine.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Dispensationalism has popularized a version of 'literal interpretation' and 'literal fulfilment' by demanding a fixed meaning for the words used in prophetic material, by requiring that figurative expressions, genre and rhetoric are not relevant in prophetic material, and by presuming that genuine interpretation and fulfilment cannot be spiritual. While the focus of such claims is on texts interpreted to refer to the nation of Israel, the tendency has been to apply these same claims to most predictive material. All of these are based upon external presumptions and contrary to much of what the Bible reveals itself about its literary qualities. In so doing, Dispensationalism imposes theological interpretations upon the text; the very thing they claim they alone do not do: though to be fair most established theological traditions do likewise one way or the other. Contrast two very different positions on the meaning of 'literal' interpretation in Chapter 5 of Ryrie (1995) and Chapter 2 of Sizer (2007).

<sup>65</sup> Chapter 9:298-303.

## **LITERATURE<sup>66</sup>**

A wide collection of literature is applicable for the topic. However, no substantial theological work appears to argue for the earth's ultimate disintegration. Widespread as this perspective is, it is more a pessimistic worldview or presumption at congregational level applied in various ways rather than a developed theological perspective that addresses the full range of Biblical material. It will suffice to survey four areas of literature that might be expected to address the issue of transition of this earth to new earth and its mission implications: Eschatology, Dispensationalism, Ecotheology, and Mission Theology. In each, most have little to say on how mission is shaped by what is to come in the new earth. Ecotheology publications give greater attention to this transformation though the practical response, namely attention to the physical environment, is much narrower. There are numerous comments on the way Dispensationalist perspectives have significantly undermined appreciation for holistic mission practice.

### **Eschatology**

Specific eschatology texts, or the eschatology section of systematic theologies, have no significant contribution on the earth's future. Comments are usually brief, at most a paragraph or two. Perhaps this is not surprising given the range of topics typically associated with eschatology: heaven and hell, death and judgement, millennium, resurrection and immortality, and the details of when and how for Christ's return. Some also describe the possibilities for the events preceding the Parousia.<sup>67</sup> Bavinck is the

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<sup>66</sup> For each of these four areas surveyed here, approximately 200 books and articles were examined.

<sup>67</sup> See the summation of Dispensationalist literature in the next section where such discussion is typically the dominant theme.

exception who argues at length that the usual texts used to justify complete destruction are not referring to the substance of things (2008:715-730).<sup>68</sup>

The pessimistic view is only argued in a line or two, emphasizing texts such as 2 Peter 3:10 or the others that we will investigate below. The particular negative view advocated in Dispensationalism is addressed in the next section. JR Williams advances further reasons than simply noting specific texts (1992:482-484). He claims that (1) the earth is wearing out, (2) the curse of the ground requires eventual destruction, (3) Romans 8 describes the earth as in bondage to corruption, and (4) a new heaven and earth is needed so that there will be a 'proper dwelling for the *new humanity*' (484. Emphasis original.). He does not address the counter arguments.

As might be expected in texts of systematic theology, the wide range of doctrines and the many areas of interest in the eschatology sections leaves little room for addressing particular issues. The transition from earth to new earth is given no more than a paragraph or two if addressed at all.<sup>69</sup> Some argue for the earth's renewal,<sup>70</sup> some for the earth's destruction<sup>71</sup> and some say nothing.<sup>72</sup>

The arguments put forward in favour of a renewal of this earth, when addressed, focus on the implications of incarnation and/or resurrection, or the logical implications of the nature of the Kingdom of God, or those texts regarded as pivotal.<sup>73</sup> Some vacillate indecisively with regards to those texts which utilize extreme figurative language

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<sup>68</sup> See also Hoekema (1979:274-287) for a summarized account arguing for a transition of this earth into the new earth.

<sup>69</sup> Based on John 14 and 17, Miley simply states that heaven cannot have an earthly location (1989:473-474).

<sup>70</sup> For example, L Berkhof (1941:736-737), Culver (2005:1153-1155), Finger (1985a:175), Grenz (2000:624-626, 645-652), Horton (2011:988-999), Peters (1992), Thiessen (1979:400).

<sup>71</sup> For example, Grudem (1994:1160-1161),

<sup>72</sup> MJ Erickson (2013), Lewis and Demarest (2014).

<sup>73</sup> See in particular Chapters 2 and 6.



though acknowledging figurative language to be just that. Some do assert a figurative interpretation though usually without much discussion. We will see examples below.

Some of the literature quite strongly affirms the continuance of this earth even while acknowledging some discontinuity if all sin and evil is removed at the Parousia. Mostly this assertion is woven into the material rather than as a subject in its own right. None provide a developed Narrative or Biblical Theology of the earth's place in the purposes of God.<sup>74</sup>

### **Dispensationalism**

Dispensationalism brings a particular eschatological schema that has profoundly influenced the global church and general opinions on the earth's future.<sup>75</sup> The history of this influence has been analyzed<sup>76</sup> and many publications outline the Dispensational schema.<sup>77</sup> However, despite Dispensationalism historically being the largest single contributor across the global church to the question of transition, very little Biblical or Theological attention addresses our question in Dispensationalist literature. The focus of eschatological discussion is rather on the events prior to the millennium and the millennium itself. What happens at the end of the millennium, the transition into new heaven/earth, receives either no comment at all or simply a few lines or a paragraph. No Biblical Theology on the earth's future exists, simply references to a small number of

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<sup>74</sup> Examples of affirmations of the renewal of this earth in eschatology literature include: Bauckham & Hart (1999), Bavinck (1996), O'Callaghan (2011), Hoekema (1979), König (1989), Rietkerk (1989), Thompson (2010), Travis (1982), D Wilkinson (2010), NT Wright (1999a).

<sup>75</sup> For critical reviews of Dispensational see Chapter 1:18n39.

<sup>76</sup> Blaising (1992), Boyer (1992), Clouse (2008), Macchia (2008), Mangum & Sweetnam (2009), Partridge (2008), Weber (2004, 2008). In these we see the extent to which the pessimism of Dispensationalism feeds on a growing general pessimism in the culture of the USA. This is a pessimism that developed out of the Civil War of 1861-1865 and was reinforced by subsequent economic depressions, world wars, the cold war, and, through the electronic media, a rapidly increasing awareness of major crises across the world. Coupled with these for many Christians was the fascination with claimed contemporary fulfilment of Biblical prophecy and the shift away from a perceived Christian dimension in the life and culture of the USA.

<sup>77</sup> See the Bibliography for publications by Bateman, Bigalke, Chafer, Lindsey, Pentecost, Quiggle, Ryrie, Scofield, Thiessen, Walvoord, Wilkerson.

texts understood to be relevant. Most of the prophetic or eschatological material applies to particular understandings of increasing global crisis and sin, rapture, tribulation, Armageddon, judgement, and the establishment of the millennial messianic Kingdom. In all this, the earth continues till the end of the millennium.

Dispensationalism is less focussed on the division of history into particular dispensations or economies and much more concerned for two particular issues. One is the resolve to maintain the sharp distinction between Israel and the church while the other is to maintain a particular understanding of literal interpretation. In these, the impetus for the movement was the perception that the alternative theologies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries spiritualized or allegorized interpretations of eschatological texts to the serious neglect of material and social promises. To ensure the material fulfilment of promises to Israel, for Dispensationalists the millennium on earth has great importance preceded by a pre-tribulation rapture with a post-tribulation coming of Christ in judgement to establish the millennium. Following the millennium, the cosmos will be destroyed to make way for the new heaven and the new earth.

Dispensationalism is not a uniform movement.<sup>78</sup> There are four general variations with the most recent expression moving away from the more pessimistic views of the others.<sup>79</sup> Within any one of these variations it would be wrong to presume uniformity. Progressive Dispensationalism, having been influenced by the material and social

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<sup>78</sup> Dispensationalism as an eschatological schema can be found in many Protestant denominations and as part of many different doctrinal perspectives.

<sup>79</sup> Blaising and Bock identify three, (1) Classic Dispensationalism with the main scholars being Darby, Scofield and Chafer, (2) Revised Dispensationalism – Walvoord, Ryrie, Pentecost, (3) Progressive Dispensationalism in which Blaising and Bock are primary contributors (Blaising & Bock 1993:22). A fourth version is Hyper- or Ultra-Dispensationalism: see Ironside (1938), Ruckham (1985).

realities of an ‘already but not yet’ Kingdom of God to be fulfilled in the new heaven/earth, is much less inclined to be pessimistic about the earth’s future.<sup>80</sup>

Lindsey, perhaps the most influential writer at a popular level, does not argue for the annihilation of the earth but a massive nuclear disintegration of the whole cosmos into separate atoms which God then reassembles into a new creation (1970:179-180). ‘Jesus Christ is going to recycle the late great planet earth’ (1972:113). Although Lindsey has produced multiple publications, his comments on this transition to the new heaven/earth amount to about one page in total with reference to 2 Peter 3. Walvoord likewise has many publications on eschatology but minimal comment on the end of the earth. He does write of annihilation, ‘The entire physical universe .... will apparently be dissolved, reduced to nothing’ (1998:208). As well as 2 Peter 3, he argues from Revelation 20:11, 21:1. Like Lindsey, Walvoord sees the end as some kind of extreme nuclear catastrophe. Usually, Dispensationalists describe the end of the earth as ‘destroyed’ or as ‘dissolution’ without clarity whether this is in the Lindsey or Walvoord sense as summarized above. For both, and many other Dispensationalists, the rise of nuclear science, nuclear weaponry, and the Cold War have provided considerable opportunity for speculation as to how the earth might come to an end when the millennium concludes. Chafer’s *Dispensational Systematic Theology* allocates two lines to the question of the ‘Passing of the Present Earth and Heaven’ referencing ‘Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; Hebrews 1:10–12; 2 Peter 3:3–13; Revelation 20:11; 21:1’ to verify his conclusion (1948/76:Volume 4, Chapter 25:XL).<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> For material on Progressive Dispensationalism, see Bateman (1999), Bigalke (2005), Blaising & Bock (1992, 1993), Saucy (1993).

<sup>81</sup> See also Chafer & Walvoord 1974:366-367. Regarding Revelation 20:11, ‘Because of the destruction of the present earth and heaven, the judgement of the great white throne apparently takes place in space’ (367).

Dispensational publications usually describe at length the particular hermeneutic which directs their Biblical interpretation.<sup>82</sup> While acknowledging that genre, context and figurative imagery should be taken seriously, these are often overridden by strong concerns for (1) maintaining the Israel-Church distinction, (2) whether or not the text applies to the beginning or the end of the millennium period in the Dispensationalism schema, (3) a strong emphasis on the plain, normal or literal sense of words, especially in prophetic texts, and (4) ensuring that interpretation not become corrupted by spiritualizing the physical and social realities expected in prophetic material. This is further complicated by more than one fulfilment of many prophetic texts across the immediate context in the Old Testament era, the first advent, the coming of Christ at the commencement of the millennium and the events at the end of the millennium. The interpretation and the expectations of fulfilment may be figurative in one and prosaic in another. The immense and complicated range and categorization of detail in the Dispensational schema makes any attempt to critique the schema and its interpretation of texts particularly challenging.

The more powerful influence of Dispensationalism is not in the actual comment about the end of the earth at the end of the millennium but in facilitating a pessimistic world view across the church in which everything is so evil and threatening that total destruction seems to be the only reasonable option. Dispensationalism is generally supportive of all attempts to identify prophetic texts with particular current events. These events are always extremely negative which produces a profoundly pessimistic

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<sup>82</sup> See Chafer (1948/1976:Vol 1), Pentecost (1958), Quiggle (2013), Ryrie (1995), Scofield (1979). Explanation of Dispensational principles of interpretation is common throughout most Dispensational publications. The primary difference between Progressive Dispensationalism and its earlier expressions is in these hermeneutics. See Chapter 1:32n79, 33n80.

perspective for everything to do with life, society and the world.<sup>83</sup> No consideration occurs as to what God may think of His creation. All attention focusses on the inevitable and imminent crisis because everything is so bad and the prophecies speak of catastrophic doom. Combine this with the arguments for a prosaic literalism and references to 2 Peter 3, and assumptions at popular level are that cosmic imagery describes ultimate destruction for the created order.

### **Ecotheology**

Most ecotheology literature may not comment on the earth's future at the Parousia but does presume value and hope for the earth. Even those most pessimistic about the impact of humankind on the earth hope that God will not abandon His creation. Several publications referenced in the footnotes that follow describe Dispensational eschatology's negative impact on ecological concerns. A number also survey the growing positive engagement by other evangelical writers.

Most materials focus on the value and goodness of creation, the effects of human activity and neglect, and what stewardship and dominion mean. These tend to dominate the discussion along with consideration of the nature of humankind's relationship to the earth in general and other living creatures in particular. A number of quite different approaches are evident.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> In the predictions of Dispensationalism, everything must continue to decline before the return of Christ. Any attempt to improve society is often seen as working against the thrust of history as ordained by God. Such improvements could delay the return of Christ and therefore should not be included in Christian mission especially as the return of Christ could be imminent. This is a pessimism that welcomes bad news.

<sup>84</sup> These are summarised in several publications including: Conradie (2005a), Grizzle, Rothrock, Barrett (1998), Gushee (2010), Horrell, Hunt, Southgate (2008), Horrell, Hunt, Southgate, Stravakopoulou (2010), Marlow (2009).

Yet, plenty do argue for continuity of this earth into the new earth. This is never as the primary theme of the writing, usually at most a chapter, except some journal articles which focus on the question of continuity. The argument put forward is fairly consistent across the publications and also with the argument of this research. Secondary details vary but the overall thrust is one of restoration of this earth.<sup>85</sup>

In the publications surveyed, when eschatology is minimal then the burden of responsibility lies with humankind rather than God and hope appears guarded and anxious. On the other hand hope in God, when rightly understood, never diminishes human responsibility to act but does change how much hope rather than anxiety flavours and energizes action.

However, as we also will see below in the mission material,<sup>86</sup> when eschatology is taken seriously, the anticipated new earth to come motivates and shapes ecological action, because it is this earth renewed.<sup>87</sup> Many who say little about eschatology and the new earth, often assume hope due to the intrinsic value of God's creation.

Of particular interest to this research is the quest for an ecological hermeneutic: is there a legitimate ecological reading of the whole Biblical text and how might the text establish this?<sup>88</sup> If so, what exactly should this perspective entail?<sup>89</sup> What is its primary

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<sup>85</sup> For example: Bouma-Prediger (2001), Bridger (1990), Hendry (1980), Lilburne (1989), Phan (1995), Santmire (1985), Stuhlmacher (1987), Sugden (1996).

<sup>86</sup> Chapter 1:37-41.

<sup>87</sup> For example: Bridger (1990), Stuhlmacher (1987).

<sup>88</sup> In broad terms, an ecological hermeneutic is a cohesive theological framework that takes the well-being of the creation seriously, together with a set of hermeneutic principles, which jointly guide the reading of Scripture in the search for discerning what theology and the Bible have to say about the range of environmental issues with which we are confronted in the world today. Horrell, Hunt and Southgate describe it as 'the search for 'a Christian tradition reshaped and rearticulated in light of the ecological challenges that we face today' (2010:3).

<sup>89</sup> Examples of this search for an ecological hermeneutic can be found in: Brueggemann (2002: Chapter 12), Horrell (2010), Horrell, Hunt, Southgate (2008, 2010), Horrell, Hunt, Southgate, Stravakopoulou

focus? Is this ecological hermeneutic about creation care and human responsibility, or about the triangular nature of the relationships involved, or about the status of the earth itself in the purposes of God? Before an ecological hermeneutic can be identified a more fundamental hermeneutic must be established. What value does the earth have in the mind of God and how does this earth fit into the *missio Dei*? Santmire in his appeal for ‘The Ecological Motif as an Interpretative Framework’ puts the stress on ‘creation and redemption, redemption and creation.’ Anything less is reductionist and thereby inevitably inadequate (1985:217).<sup>90</sup> Without a thoroughly developed theology of the eventual purposes of God for this earth, all attempts at an ecological hermeneutic will be unstable.

## Mission

The following three quotes illustrate the different responses amongst Christians on the impact of eschatology on mission.<sup>91</sup>

If we start feeding hungry people then things won't get worse and if things don't get worse then Jesus won't come back! (Mustard Seed Associates Newsletter 2005).<sup>92</sup>

The confidence in the future vindication of God's way with evil and the redemption of the world enables us as a community of faith, hope, and love to put ourselves collectively on the line in the struggle against corruption and decay (Presbyterian Church USA 2005).

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(2010), Marlow (2009), Santmire (1985). See in particular the contributions of Conradie (2005a, 2005b, 2010a, 2010b) in his advocacy for ecotheology to be integral to all doctrinal formulations thereby calling for a reformation of all doctrine. The collection of essays in Edwards (Ed) (2001) likewise argues for an ecotheology that integrates with all of life and theology.

<sup>90</sup> Because creation and redemption are ‘symmetrical’. ‘All things are sustained by God and governed by God, even while – within the human environment – they are being ravaged by sin. All things finally shall be consummated in glory by God, when every creature shall enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God.’ (Santmire 1985:217) In effect, Santmire is stating that only within the triangulation being proposed in this study can an adequate ecological hermeneutic be legitimate.

<sup>91</sup> A fourth might be, ‘It is reported that Martin Luther once was asked what he would do if the Lord were to return tomorrow. His response? “I would plant a tree!”’ Engel & Dyrness (2000:160). While it may be possible that Luther did not say anything like this (no record of it anywhere in his writings), the fact that it is often quoted indicates that for many it captures something valuable.

<sup>92</sup> This is what ‘one very earnest young woman blurted out’ when someone ‘tried to persuade the students to not only be concerned about sharing the gospel with the poor but to also help them with their physical needs.’ ‘On the issue of integral mission, eschatology matters.’ The article goes on to criticize this perspective especially because it is quite frequently expressed by Christians. It is not unusual to hear some Christians speak of the need for everything to get worse so that the Parousia can happen. See the discussion of such eschatological views for environmental engagement in Maier (2010:244-265).

It is mainly in the Eucharist where the Church clearly foreshadows the coming Kingdom of God. There, as well as in the icons, the monastic life, and all expressions of Orthodox spirituality, an interaction of past, present and future is manifested, and an anticipation by this world of the world to come is clearly presented. From there the mission of the Church starts (Vassiliadis 2005).

Each reflects a different understanding of mission yet claims an anticipation of eschatological realities. Although not entirely explicit in these quotes, there are substantial differences in what exactly to expect when the day comes and what this might mean in the present. Eschatology is clearly much more than ‘traditional, dogmatic theology ... a kind of appendix not too closely related to the central themes’ (Gutierrez 1974:161). Yet, while it may be true that ‘One of the most striking characteristics of twentieth-century theology is the rediscovery of eschatology’ (Bosch 1991:498), and that ‘the eschatological dimension is manifested particularly clearly in missionary circles’ (479), a survey of multiple books and articles overall reveals surprisingly little shaping of mission by perspectives on eschatology.<sup>93</sup>

Bosch describes the main approaches as ‘models’ of eschatological expression in mission thinking. These are: the absolute transcendence of God which largely disengages eschatology from mission practice; the existential in which eschatology is essentially expressed in the personal and private response of the individual; actualized or realized eschatology which regards the eschatological hope already manifested in human society; and salvation-historical in which God’s sovereign purposes are being worked out in and through human history recognising the necessity of right understanding of both first and second advent (1991:502-503). As Bosch summarizes well, ‘Practically all contemporary schools of eschatology and missionary thinking, in

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<sup>93</sup> However, many mission texts, particularly from the USA, are written with an assumed pessimism about the earth and consequently the focus in mission is on evangelism and the salvation that rescues people from the judgement to come.



one way or another, are offshoots of the salvation-historical approach' (1991:503-504).

The following perspectives all largely fit within this model.

(1) In the light of the realities of the end, especially if seen within an expectation of Jesus' imminent return, the mission task is urgent.<sup>94</sup> Here, mission is generally understood narrowly as evangelism with all else of much less importance or relevance.<sup>95</sup> Usually, this perspective includes a necessity to preach the Gospel to the whole world before Jesus will return.<sup>96</sup>

(2) Dispensational perspectives on mission develop out of the particular eschatological schema in which Israel and the church are treated as quite distinctive entities with different Biblical material relevant to each.<sup>97</sup>

(3) Eschatology has little impact on the why and how of mission; though this is probably because some eschatological perspective is taken for granted. Most publications probably fall into this grouping.

(4) A stronger exploration of eschatology is integral to understanding the already-but-not-yet character of the Kingdom of God and the transformation of heaven and earth. In this perspective, understanding the *missio Dei* in and through the Kingdom is fundamental for understanding mission 'between the times' to use Padilla's title (1985).

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<sup>94</sup> Dispensationalism is usually the eschatological stance that generates conclusions that Christ's return is immanent.

<sup>95</sup> For example: Klaus (2005), Peskett (1997), Pocock (2009), Scherer (1990), Verkuyl (1978).

<sup>96</sup> Based on Matthew 24:14, Mark 13:10, Luke 21:24. For example: Glasser & McGavran (1983:104-105), Huffard (1991), Thompson (1971).

<sup>97</sup> See the example of McPhail above (Chapter 1:8). Dispensationalist blogger Jesse Johnson (2011a & 2011b) argues likewise.

This exploration may be expansive<sup>98</sup> or merely cursory but mission consequently is understood holistically and very much dependent upon the achievements of Christ in both advents.<sup>99</sup>

(5) Of particular interest for this study, within the last grouping a smaller number raise the question of working back from the future into the present. That is, anticipating the future in the mission engagement of the present: not just looking back to creation and history, not just directed by God's Kingdom agenda, but looking to what we know of new heaven/earth for shaping our current practice. However, most leave the practical details unexplored with the possible exception of Lord (1997), Volf (2001), Moltmann (1999) and Sugden (2003). Chapters Ten and Eleven explore what a greater fleshing out of this could mean for holistic mission practice. As this mission question is the end-focus of this research, some appropriate endorsements follow.

Dyrness summarizes his work on a Biblical Theology of Mission:

For the NT makes it plain that our works will follow us. So we can invest ourselves in the seemingly hopeless work of making our society and its institutions more just because by faith we see through them to the heavenly Jerusalem. ... Such a faith, Miguez-Bonino believes, "makes it possible for the Christian to invest his life historically in the building of a temporary and imperfect order with the certainty that neither he nor his efforts is meaningless or lost." (1998:183).

Hays argues for 'the recovery of the church's identity as the eschatological people of God, prefiguring God's healing transformation of the world. The church must be a

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<sup>98</sup> A good example of an extensive exploration of mission within an eschatological framework in which heaven and earth transformed into new creation can be found in CJH Wright (2006). While repeatedly stating that the whole of this current created order will be transformed into the new heaven and new earth, he does not develop a complete Biblical Theology on the way the Biblical narrative projects forward to a restoration of this earth.

<sup>99</sup> For example: Bradshaw (1993), Costas (1984, 1989), Dempster (1991:22-43, 1993:51-54), Dyrness (1998), Gnanakan (1989), Padilla (1985), Peskett & Ramachandra (2003), Samuel & Sugden (1999), Senior & Stuhlmüller (1983), Tizon (2008).

*community* living in conformity to the paradigm of the *cross* and thereby standing as a sign of the *new creation* promised by God' (1996:469. Emphasis original.).

Bosch's summary is that the church 'is called to flesh out, already in the here and now, something of the conditions which are to prevail in God's reign. Proclaiming its own transience the church pilgrimages toward God's future' (1991:374). The church 'As the first fruits of the reign of God it anticipates that reign in the here and now' (Bosch 1991:387).

Likewise from Samuel and Sugden:

The Christian faith stimulates us to look for the actualization of the kingdom in history in terms of justice, equal access to the creation that God intended for all, and the creation of human community through love, worship, work, and play. In the light of the present and coming kingdom, Christians can invest their lives in the building of a historical order in the certainty that neither they nor their efforts are meaningless or lost (1999:189).

If mission is include an anticipation of the future new heaven/earth, the future fleshed out in the present, these comments highlight that hope, if it is authentic, must transform practice.<sup>100</sup> When hope is weak or vague, so will the practice be. A strong appreciation of what is to come must be forceful enough to secure a hope that motivates real anticipation within current practice. The proposal before us, if substantiated throughout the Biblical narrative, will clarify the nature of Christian hope. In turn the vision for this earth, transformed into New Jerusalem, new heaven/earth, will facilitate exploration as to what shape this might generate for mission practice.

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<sup>100</sup> Note also: The appearance of Jesus was 'to inaugurate the last days of God's reign on earth and to call out a people to announce and embody that reign.' (Engel & Dyrness 2000:28) Mission then is 'an anticipation of what God one day will do when Christ returns in glory to renew the earth' and '*grows out of all that God has done in creation and new creation.*' (37. Emphasis original). 'God wants the church to be a preliminary picture of the Kingdom that Christ will bring.' (Sider 1996:77) 'Christian ethics, then, is *living in the Old Age on the terms of the New.*' (Rasmussen 1987:127. Emphasis original). 'Faithfulness in mission depends on the church's aligning itself with God's eternal salvific purposes. Sensitivity to this pull of the future will protect the church from a distracting concentration on lesser goals' (Driver 1993:96). 'The community of disciples must make present now that which will be perfectly realised at the end' (Kavunkal 1996:81).

## STRUCTURE

Chapters Two to Eight take up the first two phases of the methodology specified above.<sup>101</sup> Phase three is the subject of Chapter Ten and the practical possibilities, phase four, are explored in Chapter Eleven.

### OLD TESTAMENT:

**Chapter Two** examines the overall narrative of the earth's significance and status.

**Chapter Three** looks more closely at those passages utilised to argue for the eventual demise of the earth.

### NEW TESTAMENT:

**Chapter Four** examines the significance of Christ's personhood; in incarnation, resurrection and ascension.

**Chapter Five** looks at the already manifesting new creation.

**Chapter Six** analyses the material that endorses a future for the earth.

**Chapter Seven** addresses those passages believed to justify dissolution or annihilation.

**Chapter Eight** examines how Revelation 20-22 contributes to our understanding of the transition and the nature of the new heaven/earth to come.

**Chapter Nine** summarises the findings and reinforces the argument by considering the consequences if the proposal had been found to be unjustified.

**Chapter Ten** takes up the hermeneutic issues involved in application and examines the challenges of hope, imagination, continuity and contextualization from future to present.

**Chapter Eleven** considers a range of practical mission engagements in how word/Gospel, deed and sign might point forward and bring hope that has sufficient substance to stimulate participation in the discipleship of Christ's Kingdom.

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<sup>101</sup> Chapter 1:23-25.

## The Earth Narrative in the OT - 1

### Old Testament Trajectory in Expectations for the Earth:

#### The Case for the Affirmative

Does the Old Testament allow us to foresee the earth's status in the promised new earth? Is there a relationship triangulation of God, humankind and non-human creation integral to the whole narrative such that theologically the earth's future is bound up in the future of this relationship? This chapter addresses the threefold relationship in the Old Testament pattern of blessing and curse and the range of Old Testament material that speaks highly of the value of the earth in God's purposes. Texts typically used for the alternative view will be the subject of the next chapter.

#### OLD TESTAMENT OVERVIEW

The Old Testament does not know of an earth-less existence for humankind, nor does it diminish the value of the earth in its celebration of the transcendence of God and the presence of God in heaven: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.' (Isaiah 66:1). From the dust of the earth in life and death<sup>1</sup> through to the inheritance of the earth,<sup>2</sup> humankind has an enduring affiliation with the ground. Humankind is 'from earth' (Psalm 10:18) such that an interdependence of some kind exists, as this chapter examines.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:7, 3:14, 19, Psalms 22:15, 44:25, 90:3.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 37:9, 11, 29, cf. Matthew 5:5.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Genesis 2:7, 3:19, 18:27, Job 34:15, Ecclesiastes 3:20, Psalms 49:12, 18, 78:39, 90:3, 103:14-16, 104:29, 139:15, Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:2, plus the many expressions used to convey the 'dust of death'.

Biblical narrative is rich with plots and sub-plots. While a major plot is the history of God's dealings with humankind, the recurring interdependent relationship between humankind and the earth is a significant sub-plot. The Biblical narrative from beginning to end is primarily theological in character as the narrative tells the story of God, the sovereign creator of all things, covering the full range of character development, revelation and work, promise and fulfilment, and engagement with the other players in the drama. It recounts the story of the coming of God, not just in the everyday of human history but most particularly in the history of one people and the fulfilment of His purposes for them in the coming of His Messiah.

Within this drama of relationship between God, His people and all other peoples, a sub-plot recurs concerning the impact of earth and people on each other. Expressed in various ways, the narrative of the earth's significance is a constant framework for the fortunes of the people and purposes of God, whether explicitly stated or not. A pattern emerges in the opening chapters of Genesis, confirmed repeatedly in subsequent Old and New Testament material, which provides a 'logic' (Middleton 2006) and trajectory for what we might expect for the future. The earth is not merely a prop or stage in the great drama of God's dealings with humankind. Rather it has a real part to play – a key role – and without this major part, the whole drama would need rewriting.

A number of scholars emphasize this relationship. More than most, Fretheim studies this three way relationship throughout the Old Testament. He argues for '*a relational model of creation*' (2005:269. Emphasis original.) in which there are 'both distinctions and commonalities' for God, humankind and the non-human creation (271) with each having a particular 'vocation' toward the others (273-284).

Brueggemann prefaces the Second Edition of his work on The Land (2002:xi-xxiii) by discussing the shifts in Old Testament scholarship since the First Edition. He refers to ‘The *recovery of creation* as a major motif’ (xii-xiii. Emphasis original.). Habel and others in The Earth Bible Project argue that in this narrative the earth is a subject or character that may not be human as such, yet still functions in the drama as ‘living subject, as distinct from a lifeless object’. ‘There are three grand narratives in the Scriptures – the story of God, the story of humanity and the story of the earth’ (Habel 2001:24).

CJH Wright has long been an advocate for the narrative’s triangular interplay. Whether the land of Israel, the earth cursed or the new creation to come, Wright rejects the relegation of the land and earth ‘to the role of ‘background scenery’ (2004a:76). Hayes states that the earth is ‘persona’ and ‘actor’ in the Biblical drama (2002:243). So the earth is called to bear witness,<sup>4</sup> to rejoice and be glad,<sup>5</sup> cry out and shout,<sup>6</sup> to praise God and declare His glory,<sup>7</sup> to hear the word of God (Jeremiah 22:29) and to answer (Hosea 2:21-22).

As examined below, human sin defiles the earth, just sin defiles a person, implying something more of moral and spiritual pollution than just the destructiveness of invasion, storm or drought in God’s judgement.<sup>8</sup> The earth mourns<sup>9</sup> and so trees wail (Zechariah 11:2), but also rejoice (Psalm 96:12, Isaiah 44:8), praise (Psalm 148:9), know (Ezekiel 17:24), may be jealous (Ezekiel 31:9) and clap (Isaiah 55:12).

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<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 4:26, 30:19, 31:28, Psalm 50:1-23, Micah 1:2.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 48:11, 96:11, 97:1, Isaiah 14:8, 35:1-2, 49:13, Ezekiel 35:14, Joel 2:21

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 65:8, 65:13, 66:1, 89:12, 93:3, 98:4-6, 100:1, Isaiah 14:31, 35:2, 42:11, 44:23, 49:13, 52:9, Jeremiah 51:48, Habakkuk 2:11.

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 19:1-4, 29:1-9, 50:6, 69:34, 89:5, 96:1-3, 11-13, 97:6, 148:1-14, 150:6.

<sup>8</sup> Leviticus 18:25, 27, Jeremiah 2:7, 16:18, Ezekiel 36:17-18.

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 24:1-20, 33:7-9, Jeremiah 4:23-28, 12:1-4, 12:7-13, 23:9-12, Hosea 4:1-3, Amos 1:2, Joel 1:5-20.

The earth participates in the Biblical drama and not just as a disengaged neutral stage-floor. The earth plays its part as the drama unfolds between God and humanity. CJH Wright describes this as ‘a thermometer that reveals both the temperature of the theological relationship between God and Israel ..., and also the extent to which Israel was conforming to the social shape required of them in consistency with their status as God’s redeemed people’ (2004a: 96).<sup>10</sup>

### **The High Value and Goodness of the Earth<sup>11</sup>**

The Old Testament is rich with frequent exalted descriptions of the earth. The evidence for this progresses from the verdict of ‘very good’ in Genesis 1:31<sup>12</sup> through to the many ways in which the prophets describe the vast and plentiful abundance that comes forth from the earth when God’s blessing comes upon His people.<sup>13</sup> From each person ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’ (Psalm 139:14) and the goodness of family and community life through to the wonders of forests, mountains and pastures, the earth is a place of beauty and goodness. It could not be otherwise when the LORD is creator/maker of heaven and earth.<sup>14</sup> Nothing ever is outside His powerful rule. His perfect sovereignty over all produces a confidence in His capacity to achieve every purpose: from creation, to judgement, to redemption and restoration. He is King over all the earth (Psalm 47:2, 7-9, 48:1-8) and will be King over all the earth (Zechariah 14:9). If eyes are open to see, the glory of God Himself can be seen in all that He has made; such is the wonder of this earth and ground that shapes our lives (Psalm 19:1-4, cf. Romans 1:19-20).

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<sup>10</sup> See also Middleton’s integration of the earth in the salvation narrative and the place of the earth in the restoration of humankind to full humanity (2014:36-92).

<sup>11</sup> Various summations of the wealth of Old Testament material on this can be found in many Ecotheology publications. See also, for example, Fretheim (2005), Van Dyke et al (1996:41-55) and CJH Wright (2006:Chapter 12).

<sup>12</sup> cf. Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21 where the repetition is clearly more than just good poetry.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Psalms 8:1-9, 19:1-4, 24:1-2, 33, 65, 93, 104.

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 14:19, 22, 2 Kings 19:15, 2 Chronicles 2:12, Psalm 115:15, 121:2, 124:8, 134:3, 146:6, Isaiah 37:16



Statements on God's commitment to His creation are many, not least of which is the rainbow (Genesis 9).<sup>15</sup> 'The earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD' (Psalm 33:5) and this love endures forever<sup>16</sup> stretching across the full expanse of the heavens and the earth (Psalm 36:5-6, 57:10-11, 108:4). 'His work is perfect' (Deuteronomy 32:4) and He is 'loving toward all He has made' (NIV Psalm 145:13, 17). Because this love lasts forever the earth has a real hope. Out of this earth comes a vast abundance of good gifts as surveyed below when considering how God brings blessing from the earth to His people. CJH Wright's summation is that '*The creation is intrinsically good*' and so the earth has '*intrinsic value*' (2006:398-399. Emphasis original.).<sup>17</sup>

The Old Testament recurringly stresses the capacity of God to act with enormous sovereign power and this is foundational for creating confidence in God's commitment to the earth. By His word He makes great things happen, from creation itself<sup>18</sup> to the various ways He engages with human history.<sup>19</sup> Numerous expressions of God's ownership of all the earth, and sovereignty over all the earth, imply a perfect capacity to achieve all of His purposes. Repeated statements emphasize His limitless power in creation, in the Exodus, in military victories, over the cosmos, in the affairs of nations, in judgement, in the everyday concerns of life, in personal challenges, and over the weather. Around half of the Psalms explicitly state a confidence in the sovereign power of God which is implicit in all the rest.<sup>20</sup> Job 38-41 and Isaiah 40-41, two of the longer

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 2:66-68.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Chronicles 16:34, 41, 2 Chronicles 5:13, 7:3, 6, 20:21, Ezra 3:11, Psalms 100:5, 106:1, 107:1 (and this love is "unfailing"; vv. 8, 15, 21, 31), 136:1-1-26, 118:1-4, 29, Jeremiah 33:11.

<sup>17</sup> These affirmations of creation's value before God do not in themselves prove that the earth continues beyond the final judgement but they do place a weighty burden of proof on those who would argue otherwise.

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 1, Job 38:8-12, Psalms 33:6, 9, 104:7, 148:5.

<sup>19</sup> Psalms 18:15, 76:6, 106:9, 107:20, 29, 147:15, Isaiah 46:11, 50:2, 55:10-11.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Psalm 88 is one of the bleakest of Psalms and yet the very fact that the Psalm is addressed to God is an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty. While the Psalm lays out sorrow after sorrow, the opening declaration ('God of my salvation') provides a context for all these expressions of death-like despair.

Old Testament statements of sovereignty, merely express more forcefully what is portrayed in many different ways throughout the Old Testament. The source of hope and confidence for all questions about the future is God's sovereign capacity: hope exists for all He has made because He is the sovereign creator and King who loves all that He has made. This hope is the foundation and framework for all Old Testament thinking about the future – even when experiencing the bleakest and most horrifying of destructive judgement.<sup>21</sup>

### **A Vision for the Earth's Future**

God's intention for the earth is clear, both now and when Messiah comes, 'all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.'<sup>22</sup> This is not a pessimistic view. This is not a perspective that sees a dualistic divide that devalues the physical and social world as if they have no value and goodness. Other expressions of this global and earthly ultimate purpose include for the Son, 'I will make ... the ends of the earth your possession' (Psalm 2:8), with 'everything under his feet' (NIV Psalm 8:6-8). For the faithful, the earth is their eternal inheritance (Psalm 37:9, 11, 18, 29, 34). Even though the earth suffers deeply in times of great upheaval, God ultimately will be 'exalted in the earth' (Psalm 46:10) and bring salvation upon the earth (Psalm 74:12). God is 'the hope of all the ends of the earth' (Psalm 65:5), renews the face of the earth (Psalm 104:30) and will rule 'to the ends of the earth' (Psalm 72:8). The earth is 'founded forever' (Psalm 78:69)<sup>23</sup> and salvation comes so that His glory might live on the earth as faithfulness and righteousness bring heaven and earth together (Psalm 85:9-13).

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Lamentations 3:18-26, Habakkuk 3:16-19.

<sup>22</sup> Numbers 14:21, Psalm 57:5, 11, 72:19, 108:5, Isaiah 11:9, Habakkuk 2:14, 3:3.

<sup>23</sup> cf. Psalm 93:1, 96:10, 104:5.

In anticipating the coming of God in Messiah's rule and in the Servant (The Kingdom of God being a New Testament term for these Old Testament expectations), the prophets employ a rich and diverse portrayal of renewed earth. An abundance of images capture the purposes of God for the earth including an Edenic transformation of the earth itself. The devastation of judgement is not the end. Rather the Kingdom will bring new hope, new joy, new life, new fertility, and new prosperity to the earth itself. Chapter Four explores this further.<sup>24</sup>

This high view of the earth's significance throughout the Old Testament lays the foundation for the substance of much eschatological expectation. This consistency of thought is not easily dismissed for a more negative future for the earth.<sup>25</sup>

The status of the earth in the purposes of God is partly the question of the long term effect of the cursing of the ground in Genesis 3. So we begin the more detailed exploration of the Old Testament with this passage. As the narrative unfolds, the question is whether or not the examination of this passage generates a coherent and integrated theological perspective and if so what is it.

## **GENESIS AND THE CURSING OF THE GROUND**

(17) And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; (18) thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. (19) By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17-19).

Any consideration of the plans of God for His creation must address the cursing of the ground in Genesis 3:17-19, both the meaning of the statement and how it plays out in

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<sup>24</sup> Chapter 4:113-115.

<sup>25</sup> Again, the burden of proof rests with those who wish to claim otherwise. Their arguments are examined in Chapter 3:81-112.

the rest of the Old and New Testaments. The essential question for this research is whether or not God has left the curse in place and if so, what does this suggest about the earth's future? If not, when and how is the curse removed?

Assumptions as to the nature and continuance of the curse are numerous. For example, 'The curse upon the earth still remains and has not been lifted. Even after the resurrection of Christ, animals and trees (as well as mankind) still die' (Seraiah 1999:51). In this writer's experience, it is not unusual to come across Christians with a negative view of the viability of the creation partly based upon assumptions as to the nature and impact of this curse. Is such pessimism consistent with the Biblical material? Others see the curse as removed, 'lifted', in the covenant with Noah (e.g. Boss 1993:139, 168, Gnanakan 1999:36) or 'partly reversed' (Boss 1993:153). Beisner advocates 'an increasing reversal of the effects of the curse, a progressive transformation' (1997:25).

Understanding each of the items in God's statement in Genesis 3:17-19 best develops by examining how these items fit together and how the judgements of Genesis 3 unfold in the following chapters.<sup>26</sup> For this, Davies has articulated the probability of a chiasmic structure the binds together the series of events and meanings from the cursing of the ground for Adam, the worker of the ground, through to the limiting of this curse in the covenant with Noah, the man of the ground (1986). He notes the correlations between the growing wickedness (from 'precondition' in Genesis 3 to the exasperation of God

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<sup>26</sup> Following Genesis 3, von Rad, commenting on the murder of Abel, writes that 'Sin has grown like an avalanche' (1972:108) and reaches the extremes of Genesis 6:5 resulting in the Flood. See also Wenham (1987:117) & Westermann (1984:304).

over human wickedness in Genesis 6:5-7) and the responses of God from Genesis 3 to the self-imposed restraint and covenant commitment to the earth in Genesis 8:20-9:17.<sup>27</sup>

In Genesis 3:17-19 questions are forthcoming about the words ‘curse’ and ‘ground/soil/land/earth’. The flexibility of meaning for both these key words adds to the need to discern with care the exact effect of this curse. Furthermore, the brevity of detail in Genesis 3 also serves as a caution. Yet, despite these limitations, the development of the theme of blessing and curse throughout the Old Testament generates a deepening of meaning that feeds into how we might understand the New Testament material.

## Language

### CURSE<sup>28</sup>

Curses express a desire for misfortune or malediction to come upon another as a result of some action or failure with a ruthlessness commensurate with the offence. The Old Testament uses several words, each with varying meanings and levels of severity from context to context. Gordon concludes, ‘Distinctions between the main curse lexemes ... are difficult to sustain to any meaningful extent. ... The interchangeability of terms is also illustrated in the use of *ʿrr* at Gen 5:29 and *qll* at 8:21 for God’s cursing of the ground’ (1996b:492).<sup>29</sup> These words serve various purposes; to warn lest a particular course of action is followed in future, to express a desire that calamity will come upon

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<sup>27</sup> The two possible structures of the chiasm identified by Davies both provide evidence of how the narrative from Cain to Noah is an integrated exposition of how the curse in Genesis 3 grows in severity until after the flood when God commits to limits on the impact of the curse. ‘And what does the parallelism between this Noah story and the Eden story imply for the literary shape of the curse story? It emphasizes, of course, that the curse story has an open ending: formally, its plot may be terminated with the amelioration of the curse, but this by itself constitutes a new beginning, and by means of this epilogue (this is how I would prefer to consider 9:20–27) the future possibilities of the new divine-human relationship are suggested’ (Davies 1986:38-39).

<sup>28</sup> See JS Anderson (1998), Brichto (1963), Combs (1989), LS Ford (1982), Gordon (1996a, 1996b, 1996c), Magdalene (2000), LO Richards (1998), Savran (1994), Scharbert (1977a, 1977b), Thiselton (1974), Urbrook (1992).

<sup>29</sup> See also Motyer (1982:248-249) & Scharbert (1977a:415, 1977b:265).

another (perhaps because the person stating the curse is unable to ‘apply the sanction personally’ (Gordon 1996b:491)), to the expectation that God Himself will bring judgement and destruction on another.

Often the effect of the curse was to expel someone from a community, to deprive them of the provision of their land, or to take away what was most precious to them. Scharbert observes how ‘a curse formula might be directed against the territory in which a person lived or against things necessary to his sustenance... This explains the use of the curse formula with reference to the ground in Gen. 3:17’ (1977a:409). Wenham’s summation is that, ‘In the Bible, to curse means to invoke God’s judgement on someone, .... they were in fact dependent on divine will for their effect.’ Therefore, ‘What is striking is that here God himself pronounces the curse: its effectiveness is thus completely guaranteed’ (Wenham 1987:78).<sup>30</sup>

Particularly relevant to the cursing of the ground in the following discussion, Magdalene states that curse is a breach of relationship (2000:301).

#### GROUND<sup>31</sup>

Typically ‘*’ādāmā*’ is translated as ‘ground’ in connection with the cursing of the ground in Genesis (3:17, 3:19, 5:29, 8:21). It is from the ‘*’ādāmā*’ that the blood of

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<sup>30</sup> The degree to which an assumed power may be in the words themselves to implement the curse is dependent on the power and status of the person or their relationship with a higher power. Often it appears to be a short-hand way of expressing the certainty of God’s inevitable judgement on those who break His law. Scharbert warns against ‘adopting a purely magical understanding of the curse formula’ because normally ‘the activation of the misfortune was closely connected with an intervention from Yahweh’ (1977a:412. See also Scharbert (1977b:265-266), Brichto (1963:215) & Magdalene (2000:302)). Thiselton, in endorsing the inappropriateness of resorting to explanations based on magic, states that ‘the effectiveness of blessing and cursing depends in large measure ... on the strength and status of the speaker’ (1974:295) confirmed, he suggests, by Balaam’s denial of any power to bless or curse contrary to the will of God (296).

<sup>31</sup> See Grisanti (1996), Janzen (1992a, 1992b), McKeown (2003), Millar (2000), Ottosson (1974), Plöger (1977), CJH Wright (1996).

Abel cries out and from which Cain is driven so that he can no longer work the ‘*’ādāmā*’. However the more frequent word in Genesis 1-11 is ‘*’ereṣ*’. Both can be translated as land, earth or ground with much overlap in usage, yet they are not quite identical. Although not decisive, some appreciation of the difference between these two words and how they are used enables a better appreciation of what the curse means.<sup>32</sup>

‘*’ādāmā*’ tends more towards the surface of the earth, and the soil or dirt of which it is comprised; ‘Cultivated Land’ (Plöger 1977:90-92) or ‘agricultural land’ in Genesis 2-4 (G Wenham 1987:58).<sup>33</sup> ‘*’ereṣ*’ may be more a reference to the whole earth. Sometimes ‘*’ādāmā*’ ‘can carry a universal significance approaching the common meaning of “eres”’ (Grisanti 1996:270) with reference to the whole earth. Both can refer the land of all the earth or a particular stretch of land though ‘*’ādāmā*’ ‘does not carry the political overtones’ sometimes found when ‘*’ereṣ*’ refers to particular land (Grisanti 1996:274).<sup>34</sup> ‘*’ereṣ*’ often has a more cosmological emphasis to distinguish the earth from heaven (Ottosson 1977:394-397) yet there are many instances where the two appear to be used interchangeably. Because in the Old Testament both may have a broad range of usages that are often synonymous, the context is essential for discerning clarity as to whether or not the particular nuances of each word should receive significance.

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<sup>32</sup> Brueggemann emphasizes that the language of land conveys far more than just physical realities (2002:2). Without making distinctions between ‘*’ādāmā*’ or ‘*’ereṣ*’, Brueggemann argues that the language of ‘land’ is always symbolic while also referring to ‘*actual earthly turf*.’ It expresses ‘the wholeness of joy and well-being, characterized by social coherence and personal ease in prosperity, security, and freedom.’ ‘A symbolic sense of the term affirms that land is never simply physical dirt but is always physical dirt freighted with social meanings derived from historical experience’ (2002:2. Emphasis original.). In exploring all that this means, he repeatedly gives primary focus to the land as Yahweh’s gift and that the goodness of land is only appropriated within such a perspective.

<sup>33</sup> Likewise CJH Wright (1996:519).

<sup>34</sup> See also Plöger (1977:93).

‘*’ādāmā*’ not ‘*’ereṣ*’ is cursed in Genesis 1-9 (3:17, 3:19, 5:29, 8:21)<sup>35</sup> but the consequences extend eventually to the whole earth (*’ereṣ*) as human sin increases and God resolves to ‘destroy the earth’ (*’ereṣ*, Genesis 6:13, 9:11) in the flood.<sup>36</sup> In the rationale for such a severe condemnation, ‘*’ereṣ*’ features throughout Genesis 6-9<sup>37</sup> though ‘*’ādāmā*’ appears to be the preferred term when the surface of the ground is in mind, or the creation of humankind (Genesis 6:7), or the curse of the ground (Genesis 8:21), or the occupation of Noah in the context of earth-wide vision as a ‘man of the ground’ (Genesis 9:20). The significance of a possible shift in emphasis from ‘*’ādāmā*’ to ‘*’ereṣ*’ may suggest that the initial curse in Genesis 3:17-19 was somewhat contained but as human sin increased to fill and corrupt the whole earth so too did the consequences of God’s judgement. The effect of the curse in the flood is far more severe than the hardship in cultivating the land in Genesis 3:17-19 (CJH Wright 1996:520).

### Genesis 3

The cursing of the ground changes the relationship between Adam and the ground from which he originated (Genesis 2:7). Instead of the abundance of the Garden of ‘pleasure’, ‘delight’ (Wenham 1987:61) or ‘bliss’ (von Rad 1972:78), the ground becomes a place where producing the essentials of life requires hard labour (Genesis 3:17-19). However, difficult questions surround this change due to the very limited information and the two quite flexible words brought together in the cursing of the ground. How much was the

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<sup>35</sup> But note the use of ‘*’ereṣ*’ for the cursed land in Isaiah 24:1, Jeremiah 23:10, Zechariah 5:3, Malachi 4:6.

<sup>36</sup> A similar distinction in word meaning is possible in Genesis 4:10-14. The blood of Abel cries out from the ‘*’ādāmā*’ (v. 10), Cain is then cursed from the ‘*’ādāmā*’ (v. 11), Cain will gain nothing from any attempt to work the ‘*’ādāmā*’ (v. 12), and the consequence is that Cain is doomed to be cut off from ‘*’ādāmā*’ and so to be a fugitive and wanderer across the ‘*’ereṣ*’ (v.12, 14). The curse of the ground in Genesis at least appears to have a more localized or grounded significance though the consequences are more comprehensive.

<sup>37</sup> In particular note Genesis 6:5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 17, as well as the extreme nature of the flood as expressed by ‘*’ereṣ*’ in the narrative in chapters 7 and 8. But note also the use of ‘*’ereṣ*’ to express God’s intended future for Noah’s descendants; 8:22, 9:1, 7, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19.



Garden representative of the whole earth before this? Was the ground of thorns and thistles always there beyond the Garden? Was there some fundamental change to the quality of the ground such that something ontological happened because of the curse? Is the ground itself cursed or the man's experience of working the ground? Clearly not all ground everywhere produces thorns and thistles nor lacks the fertility to require back-breaking toil just to survive.<sup>38</sup>

One aspect of these questions is the position one takes on the creation process itself. If, prior to the advent of humankind, the earth for millions of years was changing through significant seismological events then it is more problematic to suggest that such things as natural disasters are to be included as evidence of this curse. Palaeontology looks at fossil records which suggest that death (animals dying, animals eating each other) was a real part of the world before the fall. Roberts challenges the implications of those who speak of the fall as introducing various unpleasant things as if they were not present before the curse. 'Death, predacity, volcanoes, earthquakes. They were all there from the beginning.' 'There is little [I would say no] evidence that nature has been altered in a fundamental way' (1991:16. Parentheses Roberts. See also Munday 1992.). Irritating insects, extreme weather (flood and drought, heat and cold), variations in soil quality from one part to the next: it becomes difficult to argue convincingly that none of these were present before the curse. Bauckham asks if there is 'evil in nature?' noting the things in nature that bring devastation to humanity. He advocates that the destructive things of nature are evidence of incompleteness rather than seeing these as 'departures from God's creative purpose' (1986:240-241). Dumbrell challenges the assumption that 'It was very good' (Genesis 1:31) means that the creation was perfect or finalized. Rather the goodness is to be understood as 'efficient' in that God's intention at that time

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<sup>38</sup> Though this begs the question as to the extent to which the nature of the earth today is representative of the earth outside of the Garden.

has been fulfilled (2001b:20-21, quoting Kohler & Baumgartner 1958:349). There are questions therefore as to what exactly was the situation in the Garden and outside of its boundaries. Did the Garden experience the destructiveness of earthquake and the risks of carnivorous animals? Maybe the Garden was a secure place protected from some or all of these, or perhaps immune in some way? So what exactly did change because of this cursing of the ground?

Although somewhat ambiguous,<sup>39</sup> Genesis 2:5ff indicates that because of the lack of two things, rain and humans to work the ground, vegetation was somehow confined to the Garden (or at least beyond the Garden, there was significantly less than the Garden's wealth of plant life).<sup>40</sup> In this 'barrenness' (Skinner 1930:55) God plants the Garden. Humankind is given the task of working and keeping (Genesis 2:15) apparently, if Genesis 1:26-28 is included in the mandate, with a view to extending this spread of vegetation across the earth in anticipation of which God waters the earth (2:6). Von Rad notes the ambiguity of what exactly the mist refers to (1972:76) and that the Garden is probably 'a park of trees' (1972:77). The Garden seems to be 'a real geographical region' (Spanner 1987:62, cf. Genesis 2:10-14). Humankind is given responsibilities that extend beyond the Garden (Genesis 1:26, 28) implying in the initial work statements that this mission given to Adam would continue with the same readiness of the ground to produce abundantly as was the case when God planted the Garden in the East (Genesis 2:8).

Implied here is the creation as an unfinished work when Adam is placed in the Garden, not fixed and static but a work-in-progress. Adam's responsibilities include extending

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<sup>39</sup> See GJ Wenham (1987:57-60).

<sup>40</sup> Westermann says that the expression referring to the two different types of representative plants 'means that there were no plants at all' (1984:199).

God's Garden into all the earth. Bauckham expresses this as 'continuity between God's activity in the creation of the world and his activity in human history. ... Nature is an unfinished process ... and human history must be seen as one novel development in nature's history' (1986:239).

Bauckham also argues for 'the now common theological notion of *continuing creation*' in which God is actively 'sustaining, directing and renewing creation' (1986:239). Continuing creation, *creatio continua*, is variously understood.<sup>41</sup> It is not a denial of *creatio ex nihilo*. However, in recognising *creatio continua* as present in God's work, greater flexibility follows in understanding how there might be more for creation through the work of humankind, how the curse may be applied, and how there can be greater continuity from the good creation of Genesis 1 to the creation vision in Revelation 21-22. Continuing creation, as understood here, emphasizes the work of God in ordering and shaping what He has brought into being in Genesis 1 (where order is brought to the uninhabitable earlier state), and Genesis 1:26-30 and Genesis 2 (where humankind is given responsibility to increase and work the ground in all the earth thereby continuing the shaping work of creation). Tillich expresses the creativity of God as God's Originating Creativity, God's Sustaining Creativity and God's Directing Creativity (1951:252-270)<sup>42</sup> thereby breaking down any segregated view without integration and consistency in God's creation work from the beginning to 'the *telos* of creativity' (264. Emphasis original).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Essentially it is a question of how one uses the language of creation. If the emphasis is on bringing into existence what previously did not exist, *creatio continua* becomes particularly problematic. If, however, the emphasis is on creation as God shaping and moulding what already exists then *creatio continua* expresses God's continual sustaining and providential oversight of all He has made. However, it does not necessarily involve Pantheism or Process Theology to be a valid description of some aspects of God's on-going involvements with the creation.

<sup>42</sup> Reumann (1973) works with a similar three-fold break-up of the creation work of God; creation ex nihilo, creation as providence and creation as ordering.

<sup>43</sup> For a fuller discussion on *creatio continua*, especially the difficulties in describing the mechanics of this for scientists and others, see Barbour (1989: 122-151), Bauckham (1986:229-244), Birch

When banished from the Garden, humankind finds the ground now cursed is not nearly so yielding and instead more readily produces thorns and thistles than edible plants of the field. 'God ... holds back the natural productivity of the land' (Young 1994:140). However, Spanner suggests that nothing has changed except a 'change of outlook and relationship' such that 'Common and hitherto delightful tasks became suddenly burdensome.' 'Harmony' has given way to 'discord' and 'displeasure' as the three-fold relationship shifts radically (1987:73).

What exactly happened? Genesis 3:17-19 does not clarify how the ground was affected nor exactly by whom, though the passage implies that it was God's response to human rebellion that caused the change to the ground. The effect is clear; the productivity of the land to generate vegetation, especially vegetation that provides readily available food for humankind, reduces significantly. Without the Garden's fertility, the ground becomes unfriendly and reluctant to supply the fruit of the man's labour, labour which becomes burdensome.

What exactly caused this change? Four possible perspectives are, (1) God Himself did something to change the nature of the ground itself. This is perhaps the most straightforward reading of the text and consistent with some of the subsequent references to the curse. (2) God intervenes on a day-to-day, case-by-case, basis to bring blessing or withhold it. This pattern recurs frequently throughout the Old Testament though seems to be less than what Genesis 3 presents. (3) Human environmental neglect or action damages the ground. We know this can be true but this fails to fit with the actual causes of the curse given in Genesis 3 where unwanted thorns and thistles result from more than just the eating of a piece of fruit. (4) Human attitudes, affected by sin,

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(1991:74-79), Brunner (1952:33-35), Dumbrell (1994:20-22), Hermisson (1984:127), Houston (1979:105-118), Peters (1984:372-390), Polkinghorne (1995:101-108).

affect perceptions and experience of the land. This is potentially true but not the point in so far as Genesis 3 describes what happened. Thorns, thistles and back-breaking work come from more than just perception.

Many commentators tend to be non-committal in handling this passage. This is perhaps not surprising as von Rad states:

The passage touches on the unfathomable relationships between man and earth: it does not attempt to explain more closely what it says about the disturbance which began with man and now has also brought the earth under the domination of misery. It only established the fact. (1972:95)

True, Genesis 3:17-19 does not provide explanation; it just states what has happened and what will happen. However, several factors suggest that God has acted and the ground is not what it was before. (1) The curse is understood not merely with reference to Genesis 3. In the immediately following passages in Genesis, a much stronger assertion is made regarding God's action in bringing about a cursed ground (Genesis 4:10-14, 5:29, 6:12-13, 7:4, 8:1, 8:21-22). The more ambiguous statement in Genesis 3 becomes a clear statement in Genesis 8 that God did it; the means is unspoken but the effects are clear – unproductive land and terrible flooding rain. (2) The pattern of the Old Testament is one of God's recurring action to bring blessing or curse and the ground or earth is fundamental to the means by which God does so. Brueggemann has argued well for the centrality of land in the relationship between God and His people (2002). Sin brings environmental disorder with suggestions of the uninhabitable formlessness of Genesis 1:2 whereas faithfulness brings blessing and order in the environment. (3) Thorns and thistles elsewhere in the Old Testament are signs of God's judgement (Kidner 1967:72).<sup>44</sup> Thorns and thistles represent the pre-Garden barrenness or at the very least, the state outside the Garden. The ground, in effect, is taken back to an earlier time, the creation dismantled to be less than what it had become, to something

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<sup>44</sup> See Isaiah 5:6, 7:23-25, 32:13, 34:13, Jeremiah 12:13, Hosea 9:6, 10:8.

like the ground prior to the gardening work of God (Genesis 2:8-9). (4) God's response to human sin is one of punishment; He acts against humankind, and so deprives humankind of Eden's quality of life and this includes a significant reduction in the fertility of the ground for Adam.

Human disobedience brings several consequences as pronounced in Genesis 3:14-24, not just cursed ground. There are shared features in the specifics for each. The serpent is alienated in relationship with other animals and with the woman and her seed. The woman and the man experience a breakdown in their relationship. The woman experiences a new physical hardship in childbirth and the man a new hardship in work. A new inequality exists in their relationship. Serpent, woman and man will return to the dust of the ground from whence they came.<sup>45</sup> For each comes a new disharmony, a disruption to the relatively peaceful ordering of all things. Each experiences the created order as less than what it was before the ground was cursed; a reversal in God's ordering of creation for the benefit of humankind. Now arises the suffering of a crushed head, painful childbirth, and painful work. For all being cut off from the generous provision of the Garden becomes reality. The created order becomes somewhat dysfunctional as if 'God's curse should be understood as His easing up on His sustaining influence on the natural order so that it begins the process of disease and decay' (Young 1994:142). 'The world is almost uncreated by God' (Birch 1991:94).

The ground has changed under their feet from place of blessing to place of struggle; from life-giving place (Genesis 2:7, 9) to death-bound place (Genesis 2:17, 3:19, 24); from a source of joy to a source of pain (Hughes 2004:92). Cut off from the Garden and

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<sup>45</sup> The promised death (Genesis 2:16-17, 3:3) may not be immediate but it will come. The meaning of the death provisions for humankind will need further consideration when Chapter Four addresses the significance of resurrection.

the tree of life, humankind now faces the inevitable dust of death.<sup>46</sup> Good eating was one of the blessings of the Garden. Forbidden eating brings judgement. The serpent must eat the dust of the ground. The man can only eat the plants of the field after painful toil rather than the good eating of already provided fruit from the trees (Genesis 1:29, 2:9, 16).

The ground suffers from God's judgement against human sin as God reduces the ground's capacity to provide for humankind. More than just a practical relationship, expressed here is a spiritual relationship in which the relationship between humankind and the ground reflects the relationship between God and humankind. God's judgement reduces the capacity of humankind to serve the earth and the capacity of the ground to bring blessing to humankind. The curse brings 'degradation' to the ground in which 'Instead of submitting readily to Adam's dominion, it would rebel against him.' That is, 'it would behave toward Adam as Adam had behaved toward God' (Beisner 1997:19). Now Adam is 'working with recalcitrant soil' (Hamilton 1990:203) in a 'mutual recalcitrance' (von Rad 1972:94).<sup>47</sup>

It is essentially relational. Humankind is from the ground and now returns to the ground. Humankind began in harmony with the ground and now experiences disharmony with the ground, and with one another. 'Harmony gives way to discord' (Wenham 1987:88). The curse is not so much about the ground as about the relationship with the ground, 'a relational skewing between humanity and earth' (Young 1994:139) and the 'estrangement of humanity from the life-giving soil' (Waltke 2001:95). This

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<sup>46</sup> cf. Genesis 18:27, Job 10:9, 34:15, Psalm 22:15, 90:3, 103:14, 104:29, 146:3-4. Deprived from humankind's unique privilege, the tree of life, humankind is reduced to the life-cycle of decay and death as found in the non-human creation. The delay of death, in that it does not immediately follow the forbidden eating, does not lessen the reality of human death as a consequence of human sin. See G Wenham for comment on those who suggest otherwise (1987:67-68, 73-75, 82-83).

<sup>47</sup> In both cases, the cause is human sin and God's judgement against human sin.

relationship both before and after the fall is symbiotic: humankind is to serve the ground (Genesis 1:28, 2:15), the ground is to provide life essentials (Genesis 1:29, 2:16), but with the curse this mutuality becomes dysfunctional. Dyrness summarizes, ‘Rebellion against God disrupts relationship ... between people and the land’ (1987:55). ‘One is continually brought up against the fact that morality, response to God, and fertility of the earth are interrelated’ (57). ‘All of God’s work involves the earth, humankind, and divine purposes in intimate interrelationship’ (59) which is ‘organic’ in nature (52). Cooper discusses the ‘integrity’ of creation before the disruption of Genesis 3 by which the ‘interdependence’ or ‘wholeness’ of the ‘order’ of creation emphasize the relationships of ‘harmony’ in the multitude of right relationships in pre-cursed nature (1990:9-21).<sup>48</sup> Likewise for Spanner:

To the Bible therefore life is not a property of the thing-in-isolation. It consists in cognitive and responsive relationships with things and especially with persons; and death is the ruination of those relationships. ... Relationship is the key category, ... in the whole of Genesis 3 (and beyond). This can hardly be over-emphasized (1987:71).

Van Wolde refers to the creation as a ‘network of *all* created phenomena’ in which there are reciprocal relationships between the created phenomena (1998:26-27): ‘*relational*, because it is based on interdependency’ (1998:28. Emphasis original.) so ‘the earth is cursed because of humankind, so strong is its relationship’ (1998:30). Furthermore, an ‘earth-orientedness’ occurs in all creation including humankind (1998:31). Bauckham writes of an interdependent and progressing relationship between continuing creation, human history and salvation in which salvation includes restoring the damage caused by sin and moving the work of creation towards eschatological completion (1986:239-240). Brueggemann argues against ‘The reductionism of ... theology’ to the ‘categories of natural science’ which ignore that ‘transactional quality of this relationship’ between

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<sup>48</sup> See also CJH Wright (2004a) where this interrelationship is developed extensively, as well as Birch (1991:71-74, 82-83, 93-95), Boss (1993:39), Brueggemann (1976:15), Davies (1986:45), Dumbrell (1994:28-29), Towner (2001:48), von Rad (1972:95), Waltke (2001:95).



Creator and creation (1997:528). Consequently, it fits well to describe the effect of the curse as essentially relational; a ‘dissonance’ or ‘disturbance’ for the ‘unfathomable relationships between man and earth’ (von Rad 1972:95) in how each part serves the rest.

With regards to the four possibilities noted above,<sup>49</sup> both the first and the second fit with the limited details of the text. God has acted, and real and substantial changes have resulted. There appears to be no more Garden and the Edenic conditions are now nowhere to be found. The relational triangulation is now without the peace and mutuality of the Garden’s created order and so hardship comes for all. All relationships become dislocated and the earth and its internal relationships are subsequently the means by which God expresses his displeasure with the breakdown in the relationship between Himself and humankind. Yet the state of the ground/earth is not fixed and static as is revealed in the application of the curse throughout the rest of the Old Testament. As we shall see, the measure of the relationship between God and His people is in the rise and fall of the severity of the hardships of working the ground and the extent to which the earth brings either blessing or curse.

#### **Genesis 4**

(8) Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. (9) Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” (10) And the LORD said, “What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground! (11) And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. (12) When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth” (Genesis 4:8-12).

The fratricide of Cain indicates a greater descent into rebellion against God and the impact on the ground appears to be greater so as to reflect God’s greater displeasure.

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<sup>49</sup> Chapter 2:58-59.

Cain breaks the relationship between himself and YHWH as established in Genesis 4:1 (van Wolde 1991:28). Now the cry of protest rises up from the ground, an appeal to YHWH for vindication as it were (SR Driver 1938:66), in that the blood of Abel has returned to the ground from which he came but in a most immoral and offensive way. The ground responds in ways which bring to mind the groaning of Romans 8:19-23. “‘Life is in the blood’ (Lev 17:11),<sup>50</sup> so shed blood is the most polluting of all substances’ (GJ Wenham 1987:107. See also Scullion 1992:51). This curse, therefore, carries a much greater weight. Adam himself was not directly cursed as such, Cain is, and this curse comes to him from the ground itself (Genesis 4:11).

Cain is even more alienated from the ground than Adam. Adam remained with a place on the ground where he could work the soil albeit with hardship. Cain however is not allowed any such locality or ‘landedness’ (Brueggemann 2002); he is condemned to wander as if the ground cannot participate in any closer relationship than this. GJ Wenham points out that most modern commentators understand being cursed ‘from the land’ as banishment from the cultivated areas of the ground (1987:107), ‘a wandering vagrant’ (108) (Genesis 4:12, 14). Furthermore, he is cut off from the presence of God (Genesis 4:14). Westermann suggests that Cain’s punishment of alienation and wandering is reminiscent of the curse imposed on the serpent in Genesis 3:14-15 (1984:306).<sup>51</sup> Cain’s building of a city (Genesis 4:17) certainly appears to be inconsistent with a life of vagrancy but neither the text nor the commentators provide much explanation. Von Rad concludes:

God’s judgement on the fratricide is more terrible than the punishment in ch. 3. Something ... much more terrible had happened: the earth, man’s maternal basis of life, had drunk a brother’s blood. ... The punishment goes far beyond that inflicted in ch. 3.17ff. The relation of the fratricide to the mother earth is disturbed much more deeply. It is so shattered, in fact, that earth has no home for him (1972:106).

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<sup>50</sup> Note also Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 7:26, 17:10-14, Deuteronomy 12:23, 21:1-9, and especially Numbers 35:33.

<sup>51</sup> See also RK Hughes (2004:106), Mathews (1996:275).

This incident strengthens the case that the essence of the matter is relationship; the greater the breakdown in relationship as sin increases, the greater the curse. The crisis of relationship between two brothers, one of the strongest of relationships, brings first murder, then ‘he lies impertinently directly to God’s face, ... more hardened than the first human pair’ (von Rad 1972:106),<sup>52</sup> followed by an almost complete break for Cain from both YHWH and the ground. Davies (1986) explores the relational dimensions of the incident, Cain and Abel, Cain and YHWH, Cain and the ground, concluding, along with van Wolde, that the main theme of the story is ‘the theme of brotherhood’ (van Wolde 1991:38). All relationships in this passage are ‘fractured’ (RK Hughes 2004:106). Cain begins as worker of the ground thereby having some relationship with the ground. But this is ‘completely disrupted’ (van Wolde 1991:33) and so ‘YHWH severs the tie between Cain and the soil’ (34). Greater offensiveness results in no ground for him to work; no place where he belongs. God allows him no option but to wander like one who has no ground at all (Genesis 4:12).

The murderous actions of Lamech (Genesis 4:18-26), descendant of Cain though ‘more depraved’ than Cain (GJ Wenham 1987:114), give evidence of the worsening rebelliousness against God. Fratricide extended into ‘the execution of vengeance’ (von Rad 1972:112) and so as Towner states, ‘By examining the way in which the relationship between adam and ’ādāmâ oscillates, one can discern the movement between curse and blessing that is at the heart of the primeval history’ (2001:62).

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<sup>52</sup> See also Westermann (1984:304), Driver (1938:65-66), Skinner (1930:108), GJ Wenham (1987:106). In this context Skinner notes several passages in which God listens to those who cry out for His help (Exodus 22:23, 27, Judges 4:3, Psalm 107:6, 28) and several (Job 16:18, Isaiah 26:21, Ezekiel 24:7-8, 2 Kings 9:26) in which ‘blood exposed on the ground thus clamours for vengeance is persistently vivid’ (1930:108). Likewise see GJ Wenham (1987:107, 117).

## Genesis 5-9

(20) Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. (21) The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. (22) As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease” (Genesis 8:20-22).

Lamech’s expectation (prophecy?) in Genesis 5:29 introduces the flood narrative and God’s resolve in Genesis 6:5-7, 11-13 because He can no longer tolerate the wickedness of humankind even as He acknowledges that Noah was not like all the rest.

From Genesis 3 to Genesis 6:1-4, sin increases along with the growing population of the earth. Genesis 6:5-7 moves from the particular (specific sins and specific people) to the universal (von Rad 1972:117). In consequence of this extreme of human sin, the earth (*’eres*) itself is corrupted and full of violence (Genesis 6:11-13). Human sin of whatever kind impacts the ground: relationally linked, humanity and earth are not independent of each other. All humankind has become extreme in evil. God is grieved to the point of deciding to bring an end to the human race and the animals for which humans have responsibility. So the flood is to destroy the earth (Genesis 6:13, 9:11). BW Anderson captures the pervasive violence (Genesis 6:13) by describing the scenarios of Genesis 3-6 in terms of violent and offensive disruption to the order of God’s creation and the relationships integral to it (1984:164). The flood, as clearly articulated in Genesis 7:22, ‘everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died’, is a far more severe expression of the cursing of the ground (Genesis 5:29, 8:21) than the hardships of work in Genesis 3. God commits to wash humankind from the face of the earth. The flood soon follows.

However, even though God's patience is pushed to the limit by the extremes of human sin, grace prevails (Genesis 8:20-22). It is anticipated in Lamech's statement (Genesis 5:29), in God's recognition of Noah's righteousness as God finds favour with him (Genesis 6:8-9), in God's remembrance of Noah when the flood reaches its peak (Genesis 8:1), and then in God's pleasure in Noah's sweet-smelling burnt offerings once dry land was found (Genesis 8:20-21). Grace and blessing prevail over curse and destruction.<sup>53</sup>

God's commitment to preserve the ground and the seasons exhibits His grace even when 'the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth.' 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind' (Genesis 8:21-22). Here, astonishingly significant promises of mercy follow despite the fact that the wickedness of humankind remains most extreme. This is 'a profound turning point in the Yahwistic primeval history, ... one of the most remarkable theological statements in the Old Testament. The contrast between God's punishing anger and his supporting grace, ... is here presented almost inappropriately, almost as an indulgence, an adjustment by God towards man's sinfulness' (von Rad 1972:122, 123).

Here are four noteworthy features for the earth. (1) The cursing of ground is not static but rises and falls with the extent of human sin. The flood is of immensely greater impact than the curse that Adam experienced. Adam suffered hard ground, Cain banishment from the land, and at the time of Noah, God planned to destroy the land, exiling humankind from the ground in the most extreme way. (2) Grace and blessing

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<sup>53</sup> See also Bauckham (2009:38-39). It is often noted that grace has already been expressed several times in the narrative; an implied future ending to the enmity between the woman and the serpent (Genesis 3:15), coverings for ashamed Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21), God's grace to Eve in the birth of children (Genesis 4:1-2, 25), the favour of God towards Abel (Genesis 4:4), a protective mark for Cain (Genesis 4:15), and the provision of warning and an ark for Noah and family (Genesis 6:9-22).

prevail over curse even when sin pushes God's patience and grace to the limit. (3) God resolutely commits to real limits to this cursing of the ground. (4) The narrative depicts a three-way interactive configuration (God, humankind and non-human creation), that God is determined to hold together.

The covenant with Noah brings a new commitment to the ground; never again destroyed as it was in the flood. Blessing and grace prevail over sin and curse. God limits His judgement on rebellious humankind whether through withdrawing the ground's blessings or through imposing earth-shattering punishment. Does He remove, lift or reverse the curse?<sup>54</sup> He places the curse within boundaries. Thereby is implied a future in which ultimately the blessing of God will prevail absolutely. The curse may still be in place but, by inference, its days are numbered.

The curse on the ground is limited because God resolves that grace and blessing will prevail over judgement which affirms the three-way relationship. The relationship between God and humankind is the impetus for the specifics of the relationship between God and the earth, and humankind and the earth. The playing out of the curse on the ground is at all times a product of the rise and fall of the relationship between God and humankind. The future of the earth is never independent of the state of the God-humankind relationship. It is deeply subservient to this relationship so as grace extends to humankind as promised, so grace extends to the earth.

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<sup>54</sup> Von Rad suggests that it is an 'annulment' of the curse (1972:122).

## THE PATTERN OF BLESSING AND CURSE

Deuteronomy expresses the triangulation demonstrated in these early chapters of Genesis in prescribing the pattern for these relationships for the remainder of the Old Testament narrative. Blessing and curse are integral to the covenant arrangements in Deuteronomy. Obey, and abundance of blessing will follow, but disobey and life will be cursed with terrible and great hardship. Here is a more comprehensive discussion of this same pattern. Edenic blessing flows until disobedience brings not blessing but curse; and as the sin increases, so does the severity of the curse until sin becomes intolerable and God cuts off His people from the land. But then grace prevails, ‘Never again....’ (Genesis 8:21-22). Deuteronomy applies this same grace-shaped pattern of blessing and curse to the people of Israel with the promise of restoration for the repentant after the curse of landlessness (Deuteronomy 30).<sup>55</sup>

Deuteronomy 28-30, in describing this pattern for the subsequent history of God’s people, leaves no doubt that blessing (salvation) brings renewed earth and prosperity: God’s blessing comes from the earth in children, livestock and crops (Deuteronomy 28:1-14, 30:1-10). Curse brings the opposite: exile from the land, just as in Genesis there was exile from the Garden to an environment of hardship (for Adam) or exile and landlessness (for Cain) or the complete loss of land in the flood. Without the blessings there will be disease, drought, defeat and conquest, insanity, and conflict on every side (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Deuteronomy presents a pattern which ebbs and flows, rises and falls, as neither blessing or curse is static but variable in severity, specifics and

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<sup>55</sup> The risk here is in oversimplifying the pattern by treating it as something formulaic. There are other factors at work with the centuries of slavery in Egypt (cf. Genesis 15:16) providing an example of the larger context within which particulars are worked out. The pattern is a theological reality rather than a short-term model that encourages simplistic conclusions. God’s time frame is very different (Psalm 90:4) and the pattern needs to be appreciated with such realities as Isaiah 55:8-9 in mind.

extent in accordance with the faithfulness or otherwise of the people of God. Cursed ground is not a once and for all fixed state. It is neither measurable nor the same from time to time, place to place, people to people. The relationship between God and people largely determines the well-being of the land/ground/earth. The remainder of the Old Testament is a commentary, a theological reflection on history, based on these principles.<sup>56</sup>

Implicit here is the expectation that if God's grace ultimately prevails and all is put right, then the earth must have a future as the source of God's blessing. The covenant with Noah and the covenant described in Deuteronomy 30 make this more explicit. Even if cursed and scattered, God will bring back His people and restore them. Such blessing brings restoration of the land from which the blessing so often flows. The Prophets and the New Testament give this increasing eschatological expression.

Christensen's detailed analysis of the structure of Deuteronomy 28-30 demonstrates the parallels and the integration of ideas in the interrelationship between blessing and curse (2002: 666-748). The earth is a real player in God's response. The several references to Egypt reflect the reversal of God's redemption from Egypt (Deuteronomy 28:27, 28:60, 28:68, 29:2, 29:16, 29:25). Curse seems to take people back to a time before God's action to bring blessing: 'A complete reversal of Israel's history' (694). As Brueggemann captures it (2002), from 'landed' (blessed or cursed) to 'landlessness' (exile). Yet the covenant commitment from God indicates this will not be the conclusion. When they return to God they will be landed people once again and this land will bring prosperity and joy.

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<sup>56</sup> God's covenant with Israel, the focus in Deuteronomy, gives expression in more nationalistic terms to what is an established pattern in God's dealing with humankind in Genesis 1-11. This is further expressed in the integration of the nations in the promise to Abraham, and the place of the nations in many of the Psalms (e.g. Psalm 2) and in the expectations of the Prophets, particularly Isaiah.



The Old Testament often describes God's judgement in terms that allude to the experience of Genesis 3-9.<sup>57</sup> The land is defiled or polluted by human sin<sup>58</sup> and Isaiah 24:6, Jeremiah 23:10, Zechariah 5:3 and Malachi 4:6 specify 'curse' of the land as the essence of what is happening in God's judgement. Jeremiah 23:10 identifies desert-like conditions as evidence; the kind of environment where thorns and thistles prevail<sup>59</sup> and working the ground for daily sustenance is back-breaking. Isaiah's description likewise: darkness reminiscent of the primordial formlessness (Isaiah 24:1-23),<sup>60</sup> with the new day of Messiah's coming breaking into this darkness.<sup>61</sup> The Prophets often portray judgement as if cut off from the kind of conditions found in Eden; lack of rain, infertile soil, failed crops, withered fruit trees as.<sup>62</sup> The land brings no blessing or joy; no nourishment and certainly no milk and honey.

The Prophets give numerous examples of the earth as directly involved in the judgement of God whenever it comes. At times even the cosmos and weather patterns are affected. The normal provisions for a blessed life are cut off. The impact is so severe that the earth itself mourns<sup>63</sup> and again described as cursed.<sup>64</sup> Curse brings a reversal in the creation, a return to times of threat and deprivation. This pattern is discussed at length

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<sup>57</sup> Several indications of God's intentions are expressed in terms of blessing and curse. The pivotal call to Abraham is one of promised blessing for all peoples across the earth but curse for any who stand in the way (Genesis 12:3). In the long narrative of Balaam and Balak, in which there are many direct and significant parallels with Genesis 3, the desire by Balak for the cursing of Israel is thwarted by God's intervention and the commitment of God ultimately to bless and not curse Israel is re-affirmed. The parallels with Genesis 3 are well developed by Savran (1994). Jeremiah uses the language of curse to make clear that God's purposes for blessing lie with the exiles in Babylon. Blessing will come (Jeremiah 29-33) but curse for those who prefer a different path (For Jeremiah's use of curse language, see JS Anderson (1998).

<sup>58</sup> Isaiah 24:5-13, Jeremiah 3:1-3, 3:9, 16:18, cf. Genesis 4:10-11.

<sup>59</sup> See also Genesis 3:18, Proverbs 24:30-31, Isaiah 5:5-6, 7:23-25, 9:18, 10:17, 32:12-14, 34:13, Jeremiah 12:13, Ezekiel 2:6, 28:24, Hosea 2:6, 9:6, 10:8, Micah 7:4, Nahum 1:10. When God's judgement is most severe even the thorns and briars are consumed in the fires; Isaiah 9:18, 10:17.

<sup>60</sup> See also Isaiah 5:30, 8:22, 45:7, 47:5, 50:3, 59:9 Jeremiah 2:6, 4:28, 13:16, 23:12, Lamentations 3:2, 6, Ezekiel 8:12, 30:18, 32:8, Joel 2:2, 2:31, Amos 4:13, 5:18, 20, Micah 3:6, Nahum 1:8, Zephaniah 1:15.

<sup>61</sup> Isaiah 9:2, 29:18, 42:7, 16, 49:9, 58:10, 60:2, 61:1, Ezekiel 34:12, Joel 2:31.

<sup>62</sup> See this Chapter:59n44, 73n66-68.

<sup>63</sup> Isaiah 24:1-20, 33:7-9, Jeremiah 4:23-28, 12:1-4, 12:7-13, 23:9-12, Hosea 4:1-3, Amos 1:2, Joel 1:5-20. cf. Hayes (2002).

<sup>64</sup> Isaiah 24:6, Jeremiah 23:10.

by Hayes (2002), DeRoche (1980a, 1980b, 1981), and Dyrness (1992). Allusions to the primordial condition are frequent in those passages where the earth mourns as if the cosmos itself returns to the time when darkness ruled (Genesis 1:2).<sup>65</sup> Two particular points follow here. (1) The imagery may suggest a winding back of time to when the earth was uninhabitable (Genesis 1:2) but the actual experience may be more localised and cannot be absolute if humankind is to survive. (2) The frequency with which the earth is directly involved in God's judgement strengthens the argument that the creation is an essential player in the relationship triangle.

Curse comes from the earth as much as through invading armies and societal breakdown. The recurring emphasis on the divine intervention of God to bring such desolation prevents any dismissal of these conditions as merely the product of human action through environmental irresponsibility or the scorched earth policies of invading military forces. Commenting on Jeremiah 12, Fretheim writes:

Again and again, we read how human sin has an adverse effect upon the earth, indeed upon the entire cosmos. Because of human wickedness it does not rain (3:3, 2:12, 5:24-25, 14:4); the land is made desolate (12:10-11; see 23:10); the animals and birds are swept away (12:4; see 4:25, 9:10, 14:5-7, Hos 4:3, Zeph 1:3); and the land is polluted (3:2, 9, 16:18; see 2:7, Is 24:5) and mourns (12:4; ....) to God (12:11) (2000:100).

'Land blessed by God is well-watered and fertile (Deut 33:13-16; cf. Gen 2:8-14), so that when cursed it lacks such benefits' (GJ Wenham 1987:82). To some degree or other the creative ordering of the earth such that it provides for and blesses humankind is wound back, reversed, uncreated and each of the characteristics of this formlessness is now found in Israel and beyond: darkness, lack of vegetation and rain, and anxiety about the threats from the sea. Blessing builds upon the creative and redemptive works of God; curse works in the opposite direction. Faithfulness to God brings God's

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<sup>65</sup> References are frequent amongst scholars to the 'reversal of creation' (For example, DeRoche 1980a, 1980b, 1981, DM Russell 1996:93), 'a kind of "un-creation"' (Bauckham 2010:93), 'the "undoing" of creation' (Murray 1992:167), or 'decreation' (Hayes 2002:284). Marlow uses 'unmaking' as well as 'reversal' and 'undoing' (2009:191-194, 229-230).

increased blessing; rebellion brings a return to those times of a less-formed and more threatening earth<sup>66</sup> and/or to the slavery and conditions in Egypt.<sup>67</sup>

As promised in Deuteronomy 28-30, this pattern consistently recurs throughout the Old Testament.<sup>68</sup> The blessing of God is in a land of ‘milk and honey.’<sup>69</sup> In the next section of this chapter, and the following chapter, we will explore the expectations of the blessings in the Messiah’s future rule and see the earthy and Edenic character of much of this.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the blessing of Messiah’s rule includes the removal of the curse. Every reference to the renewal of the earth so that it brings prosperity and joy implicitly indicates that the curse of the ground is ending. Every promise of rain, of new life in the desert, of abundant crops and wine, and of the removal of thorns and thistles,<sup>71</sup> is a statement that cursed ground is no longer a factor in the lives of God’s people. God’s people may anticipate blessing from the earth when the new day comes and Messiah rules. This is as one would expect given the consistent rhythm of the relationship between God, humanity and the creation as played out in the Old Testament narrative. ‘In the OT generally, blessing and peace are tied to fertility and the goodness of the earth’ (Dyrness 1992: 266).

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<sup>66</sup> The terminology used in the following descriptions of God’s judgement has possible allusions to the formless, empty darkness of Genesis 1:2. Psalm 107:40, Isaiah 24:10, 34:11, 40:23, Jeremiah 4:23. See Chapter 3:93-96 for a summary of the use of darkness in descriptions of judgement. It is as if the imagery is suggesting that the consequences of God’s judgement will render the world uninhabitable as it was before God brought order and filled the earth with the essentials of life.

<sup>67</sup> That is, exiled from the land to a place of oppression. cf. Deuteronomy 28:68, Hosea 8:13, 9:3, 9:6.

<sup>68</sup> For example: Genesis 1:22, 28, 9:1ff, 24:35, 26:3-4, 12, 28:4, 39:5, 48:3-4, Exodus 23:25, Leviticus 25:21, Deuteronomy 2:7, 7:13-14, 8:7-10, 11:24-31, 12:15, 14:29, 15:4-6, 14, 18, 16:15, 24:19, 26:15, 28:1-14, 30:1-10, 16, 33:1-29, Psalm 37:22, 65:1-13, 67:6, 84:1-12, 112:1-3, 128:1-6, Isaiah 30:18-25, 32:15-20, 44:3, 51:2-3, 55:12-13, 65:16-17, Jeremiah 17:7-8, Ezekiel 34:24-27, Malachi 3:10-12, (plus references to blessing in increase in the numbers of descendants which is physical/earthly in nature, and healing from physical diseases.)

<sup>69</sup> Exodus 3:8, 17, 13:5, 33:3, 20:24, Numbers 13:27, 14:8, 16:13-14, Deuteronomy 6:3, 11:9, 26:9, 15, 27:3, 31:20, Joshua 5:6, Jeremiah 11:5, 32:22, Ezekiel 20:6, 15, [milk – Isaiah 55:1, Joel 3:18] [honey – Deuteronomy 8:7-10, Psalm 81:16].

<sup>70</sup> For example, Isaiah anticipates the renewal of desert and wilderness in the recurring imagery of mountain and desert. Isaiah 2:1-5, 4:3-6, 24:23, 25:6-8, 32:2, 15-20, 35:1-10, 40:1-11, 41:17-20, 44:1-5, 49:11-12, 52:1-2, 7-10, 56:6-7, 62:1-12, 66:7-14.

<sup>71</sup> Isaiah 32:12-20, 55:12-13. cf. Genesis 3:17-19.

The pattern set up in Genesis, described in Deuteronomy, and applied in the prophets, establishes a profound logic with implications for eschatological projections from the Old Testament: if blessing prevails over curse (Genesis 8:21), if grace prevails and covenant commitment brings a self-imposed resolve from God to preserve the earth (Genesis 8-9), if the promises of God for a new day when all is put to right in the rule of His Messiah are real, if the sovereignty of God is more than sufficient to overcome even the worst of human evil, then the earth of necessity also has a future within the ultimate purposes of God for humankind. However much the statements of judgement included desolation for the earth, the Old Testament presents a message of hope and not despair. Grace and blessing will prevail. Once again the earth will bring forth and ‘the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps, and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it’ (Amos 9:13).

They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again (Jeremiah 31:12).

### **ADDITIONAL DESCRIPTIONS OF THE EARTHLY PURPOSE OF GOD**

Parallel to, yet integrated into the same narrative of blessing and curse, is the recurring declaration of global promise and purpose which repeats the intentions stated in Genesis 1:28. God repeats his instructions for Adam to Noah and sons, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth’ (Genesis 9:1). God goes to severe lengths to ensure this is acted upon when He scatters the peoples of the earth over the whole face of the earth when they attempted to centralize in one place (Genesis 11:1-9). God’s purpose in Abraham’s call

is likewise global (Genesis 12:3) and further repeated as the ultimate purpose of God's work through Abraham's descendants.<sup>72</sup>

As argued above, the earth has considerable value for God and consistent with this in the ultimate purposes of God, He will fill the earth with His glory. This earth inevitably then is foundational for the promises of God in which God's Messiah comes to deal with sin and all its consequences. The blending together of promises for God's people and promises for the earth's renewal as one great work of God is a package-deal that shapes the whole narrative and its consummation.

Many Psalms, some more strongly than others, reiterate and reinforce this whole earth vision,<sup>73</sup> the Prophets likewise,<sup>74</sup> particularly with regards to the coming of God or the Messiah. The frequency of the promises for the earth, including its agriculture and its capacity to bring blessing to God's people, is very significant and more than merely metaphorical expressions.<sup>75</sup> Making sense of this repeatedly expressed global and international purpose, with its abundance of earthly blessing, is extremely difficult if the earth itself is not a real part of the final outcome. Just as Israel's land is bound up in the quality of relationship between its people and God, so the lands of the nations likewise can anticipate sovereign intervention from God for the renewal of the earth.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Genesis 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14, 49:10, Exodus 19:5-6, Deuteronomy 28:10. 'It is thus richly significant that God confers on Israel, as a whole people, the role of being His priesthood in the midst of the nations. As the people of Yahweh, they have the historical task of bringing the knowledge of God to the nations, and bringing the nations to the means of atonement with God. The priesthood of the people of God is thus a missionary function' (CJH Wright 1998:21).

<sup>73</sup> Psalms 2, 8, 9, 18, 22, 24, 33, 45, 46, 47, 48, 57, 58, 66, 67, 68, 69, 72, 74, 82, 83, 86, 87, 89, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 102, 105, 108, 110, 113, 115, 117, 138, 145, 147, 148.

<sup>74</sup> Isaiah 2:1-4, 9:1-3, 11:1-16, 12:4, 14:1-2, 19:21-25, 25:1-12, 42:1-10, 43:1-9, 45:1-25, 49:1-26, 51:1-8, 52:7-15, 54:1-17, 55:1-13, 56:1-8, 60:1-22, 61:1-11, 62:1-12, 65:17-25, 66:1, 10-24, Jeremiah 1:5, 10, 3:17, 4:1-2, 16:19, 33:9, Hosea 2:18-23, 14:4-7, Amos 9:11-12, Micah 4:1-3, Habakkuk 2:14, 3:3, Zephaniah 2:11, 3:9, 20, Haggai 2:6-7, Zechariah 2:10-13, 8:20-23, 14:9, Malachi 1:11.

<sup>75</sup> As argued in the next chapter.

<sup>76</sup> Explored in more detail in the next chapter. 'One reason for Israel's existence is that creation is under curse for disobedience, and Yahweh insistently wills that the world should be brought to blessing. Israel's life is for the well-being of the world' (Brueggemann 1997:431).

Two particular expressions of hope for this earth represent the full range of the material as both draw upon a wider realm of ideas, imagery and allusions. First, Zion and Jerusalem, the mountain and city of God and the temple, encompass the ultimate hopes of the Old Testament.<sup>77</sup> The frequency of references to Zion, Jerusalem, the city, and the mountain indicates that this was a substratum of understanding familiar to most: ‘a complex cluster of interlocking themes of immense theological significance’ (Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman 2000:980).<sup>78</sup> Though nuanced in particular ways, the vision for all that Zion represents remains consistent. Zion, whether presently or in the future, embodies the throne and presence of God or His anointed,<sup>79</sup> the reign of God over all the earth and all its nations,<sup>80</sup> the integration of the spiritual, material, social and moral aspects of the impact of God’s presence and rule.<sup>81</sup> Both implicitly and explicitly, it frequently and confidently asserts that God will dwell in Zion forever and from there rule the earth to put all to right and bring prosperity and blessing.<sup>82</sup>

Zion as a hope for the future is never presented as if the promises of a secure future are for some other Zion, some kind of replacement or a duplicate. It is always the familiar place, the one known already. Even if in ruins, restoration will follow. Any sense of God starting again elsewhere, with a different city on some other newly-made planet earth, is absent.

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<sup>77</sup> See also Chapter 8:274-290.

<sup>78</sup> See also Dumbrell (2001a:5-27), Gowan (2000), Hess & Wenham (1999), Seitz (1991).

<sup>79</sup> Psalms 2:6, 9:11, 43:3, 46:4-5, 48:1-14, 50:2, 68:16, 74:2, 76:2, 78:68-69, 84:7, 87:1-7, 99:9, 102:16, 110:2, 116:19, 132:13, 135:21, 146:10, Isaiah 8:18, 18:7, 24:23, 35:5, 40:9-10, 52:7-10, 59:20, 60:14, 62:11, Jeremiah 3:17, Ezekiel 48:35, Joel 3:16-17, 21, Amos 1:2, Micah 4:2, 7-8, Zechariah 2:10, 8:2-3, Malachi 3:1.

<sup>80</sup> Psalms 2:1-12, 9:11, 48:2, 50:1-4, 68:29, 87:1-7, 97:1-12, 99:1-2, 102:12-16, 21-22, 110:1-7, 135:1-21, Isaiah 2:1-5, 11:9, 12:1-6, 18:7, 51:3-16, 52:7-10, 56:7, 60:1-14, 62:1-12, 66:18-23, Jeremiah 3:17, Ezekiel 5:5, Micah 4:1-8, Zechariah 2:10-11, 12:3.

<sup>81</sup> Psalms 65:1-13, 74:2-3, 12-21, 132:13-16, Isaiah 25:6-8, 30:19-29, 35:1-10, 51:1-3, 60:1-14, Jeremiah 31:12-14, Joel 2:23-27, Zechariah 8:4-12.

<sup>82</sup> Extensive discussions on the significance of Zion can be found in Alexander (2008), Dumbrell (2001a:5-27, 2001b:82-83), Gowan (2000), Hess & Wenham (1999), Seitz (1991), DL Turner (1992).

The second expression of hope is the promise of new heavens and new earth in Isaiah 65:17-25, 66:22-23.<sup>83</sup> The expression ‘the heavens and the earth’ embraces the whole created order and as such is a promise of new creation. If we treat this text in isolation, together with the presumption that ‘new’ refers to something that had not existed beforehand, then support for a second *ex nihilo* creation might be valid. However, as the following indicates, neither of these is defensible.

Isaiah’s earlier promises of a ‘new’ reality speak of new qualities for the existing earthly realm.<sup>84</sup> The servant’s justice will transform nations bringing life, healing, light and freedom (Isaiah 42:1-9) and the earth itself is called to sing a ‘new song’ in praise of God (Isaiah 42:10-12). The new things of God will transform this earth bringing fertility to the soil and water to drink (Isaiah 43:18-21). A new name is appropriate for the existing Zion because of the righteousness within and the transformation of the environment around it (Isaiah 62:1-7). God, whose creation activities Isaiah often describes,<sup>85</sup> will bring new order and creativity to the whole of this creation. Isaiah 65:17 expresses as generalization what is already proclaimed in particulars.

Other links draw a wealth of imagery into the nature of this new creation. The inclusion of renewed Jerusalem (Isaiah 65:18) integrates the anticipated future for Zion, as summarized above, with the vision of new heavens and new earth. The new life envisioned in 65:20-23 alludes to multiple examples of what Messiah will bring.<sup>86</sup> The reference to a new order for animals links with Isaiah 11, which in turn alludes to

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<sup>83</sup> See de Gruchy (1999), A Gardner (2001), Jackson (2010:17-32, 116-127), Mathewson (2003), Motyer (1993:528-544), Watts (2005:921-926, 933-942).

<sup>84</sup> Isaiah 41:15, 42:9-10, 43:19, 48:6, 62:2.

<sup>85</sup> Isaiah 4:5, 40:26, 28, 41:20, 42:5, 43:1, 7, 15, 45:7, 8, 12, 18, 48:7, 54:16, 57:19. God fashions and forms (45:18), shapes and orders, which is clearly as much His creative activity as bringing into existence.

<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 2:75n73-74, 76n79-81.

Genesis 3:14-19.<sup>87</sup> A Gardner (2001:208n10) sees several links between Isaiah 65:17 and Isaiah 35 in which the gathering of all into Zion celebrates healing and blossoming for the environment and for human bodies. Isaiah 60 describes the nations bringing their wealth from the earth into Zion. The anointed one will proclaim good news which includes the restoration of Zion (Isaiah 61:1-6).

Zion is called to rejoice in anticipation of the impact of God's compassion; restoration will come (Isaiah 54-55) even to the extent that the curse of Genesis 3:14-19 will be removed forever (Isaiah 55:12-13). God's covenant commitment to the earth from the time of Noah will continue; the earth and therefore Zion will not ever come to an end (Isaiah 54:9-10).<sup>88</sup>

The promise of new heavens and new earth does not stand alone. The language in itself may not require a stance one way or the other on whether or not this is a second creation. However the context leaves little room for manoeuvre. The book of Isaiah delivers a relentless series of scenarios of hope for Zion and Israel in particular and the nations and the earth in general. Consistently, the hope is for the existing realm: an imaginative transformation of the familiar ground and society which overflows with abundance and peace, safe and secure in the presence of God.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> See Chapter 3:107-111.

<sup>88</sup> cf. Dumbrell (1984:39-40, 194-197), Murray (1992:36-38). Note Jeremiah 33:20-21, 25-26 (Middleton 2005:68).

<sup>89</sup> Bauckham & Hart caution against too presumptuous an understanding of the nature of the new reality in the mix of continuity and discontinuity, familiarity and unknown given the difficulties of eschatological language (1999:96-108): perhaps leaning a little too much towards an emphasis on the unknowns. See Chapter 11:328-330.



## CONCLUSION

A pattern of relationships and expectation exists throughout the Old Testament that projects an excellent future for this present earth. The substance of the earth is integral to all that God promises for His people when He comes to restore and bless in great abundance. The devastation of the earth in God's judgement is not a reference to the final outcome. Rather, ultimately God will prevail with His grace and the blessing flowing from the earth plentifully. Here is a three-fold symbiotic relationship,<sup>90</sup> a triangulation of interdependency (without lessening the sovereignty and independency of God), and a theological unity of purpose and vision.

This chapter has set out invaluable evidence laying a solid foundation for a theology of earth, creation, new creation and new earth, and the means by which this earth might transition into the new earth. However, there are questions about language and imagery as well as particular texts that for many have been the source of a much more pessimistic expectation. We turn next to these questions.

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<sup>90</sup> In addition to the publications already mentioned in this chapter, there are various ways in which scholars have examined this symbiosis; both as God intended and its dysfunctional state because of human sin and God's judgement against humankind. Marlow explores the triangular nature of the relationship in Hosea, Hosea and Isaiah 1-39 (2009). Bauckham (1986), Fretheim (1987) and Rust (1971) describe the way nature is a real player in the relationship between God and humankind. Fretheim also refers to this relationship as triangular (27) and symbiotic (28). See also Chapter 1:14n33 for a list of others who have expressed this symbiosis as triangular.



**The Earth Narrative in the OT - 2**  
**Old Testament Trajectory for the Earth:**  
**Challenging the Case for the Negative**

Having identified a relationship configuration in numerous Biblical texts that gives value and significance to the earth, this chapter analyses those passages interpreted to mean that the earth is doomed. If the triangulation of God, humankind and non-human creation effectively projects a continuation of the creation beyond the return of Christ, then particular challenges to such a view need attention. Will the curse that consumes the earth (Isaiah 24:6, cf. Jeremiah 23:10) endure forever? In the previous chapter the message was one of grace prevailing over curse and that the days are limited for the curse and all its manifestations. Investigation of these serious challenges is imperative before concluding what the Old Testament vision might be.

We will examine three areas of material at the heart of the claim for annihilation or dissolution:<sup>1</sup> (1) the language of cosmic collapse, (2) the statement that the earth will wear out like a garment (Psalm 102:25-27, Isaiah 51:6), and (3) the spiritualizing of earthly imagery as if environmental renewal is really just about personal and interpersonal experience (the peace of Isaiah 11:6-8 for example).

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<sup>1</sup> As described in Chapter 1:6, 11-12, 29-41, this perspective is not so much a developed theological argument but more a collection of proof-texts that are used to argue for major cataclysm at the commence of the pre-millennial kingdom (for dispensationalists in particular) and which are assumed to establish a pessimistic view of the earth's future at the final judgement. In each of the three sections that follow, an eventual dissolution at least is assumed, stated without a developed argument, as figurative possibilities of the language are not addressed, nor context given due weight in establishing the significance of the imagery.

Much of this chapter relates to the literary nature of the Old Testament: first, in the way figurative imagery contributes to meaning, secondly in the role of context (both the immediate context and that of the larger narrative) to bring meaning, and thirdly in the use of allusion and reference to enhance meaning. Considerable scholarship has contributed to appreciating how Biblical writers utilize various imagery including Caird (1980), Quinn-Miscall (2001), and the Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (Reyken et al 1998). However, commentaries on the relevant texts tend to make little comment, nor discuss the options. They either simply state that the cosmic language is figurative or that the text indicates that the cosmos will eventually be destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

## **THE LANGUAGE OF COSMIC COLLAPSE**

Does the Old Testament language of judgement and the devastation of earth and cosmos indicate that eventually God will destroy the earth before the new earth comes? Many understand this language to mean just that, particularly when shaped by a Dispensationalist perspective, and at a popular level it is very common to hear comment in churches to this effect. ‘The end of the space-time universe’ (NT Wright 1992:333)<sup>3</sup> is one way annihilation has been described with the implication that the new earth will be another *ex nihilo* creation.

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<sup>2</sup> As noted in Chapter One, no developed theology argues for the ending of the earth but rather particular texts are used with minimal discussion and without attention to context, literary qualities or the whole Biblical narrative.

<sup>3</sup> Wright argues against such a view. Becker describes it as ‘ontological nothingness’ (Quoted in Russell 1996:197).

How are we to understand the scorched earth passages? How are we to understand the passages of cosmic dismantling and collapse?<sup>4</sup> A survey of the usage of cosmic language in these texts produces several important observations.<sup>5</sup>

**1. Time frame.** Most, if not all, of these texts refer to events that have already happened: for example, David saved from Saul's murderous intent; the destruction of Jerusalem, Israel, Egypt, Edom, Babylon or nations in general; drought, plagues, famine and locust plagues. In not one of them did the actual sun, moon and stars suffer any damage nor the earth destroyed. So though the imagery is extreme, actual cosmic collapse and disintegration did not happen nor the total destruction of earth and human society. For example, Isaiah 40:3-4, which is applied in the New Testament as fulfilled in John the Baptist, speaks of mountains levelled and valleys filled in. Yet the time of John the Baptist did not bring one vast flat plain. Isaiah 34:4 introduces the judgement on Edom: 'All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall wither like a leaf withering on a vine, or fruit withering on a fig tree.' It appears to speak of a total collapse of the cosmos. Yet the land of Edom still existed after Edom's demise.<sup>6</sup> Both before and after v. 4 it assumes the earth would still be there after the devastation. Cosmic disintegration imagery used of past events confirms it was not a literalistic technical description.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The main relevant texts are Psalm 18:7-16 (2 Samuel 22:8-17), Isaiah 13:10-13, 24:1-23, 34:4, 9, Jeremiah 4:23-28, Ezekiel 32:7, Joel 2:10, 2:30-31, 3:15, Amos 8:9, Micah 1:4, Habakkuk 3:6-12.

<sup>5</sup> See Middleton for a similar survey of the relevant imagery which also makes clear the metaphorical intent of the cosmic imagery (2014:109-126).

<sup>6</sup> The first four verses of the chapter present the broad sweep of God's judgement against nations. This general overview serves as an introduction for the particular expression of this against Edom (34:5-15). Edom, the nation, is destroyed. Edom, the land, continues but without human habitation.

<sup>7</sup> A fuller list would include: Isaiah 13:10, 13 (judgement against Babylon), Isaiah 24:1, 3-5, 18-20, 23 (judgement against Zion, Jerusalem and the nations), Isaiah 34:4 (judgement against Edom that impacts the hosts of the heavens), Ezekiel 32:7-8 (judgement against Pharaoh), Joel 2:2, 10-11, 30-32, 3:15-16 (judgement against Zion and quoted by Peter as being fulfilled in Acts 2:16-21), Amos 8:9 (judgement against Israel), Micah 3:6 (judgement against false prophets of Jacob and Israel), Habakkuk 3:11 (judgement at Gibeon: Joshua 10:11-13), Zephaniah 1:15 (judgement against Judah).

**2. Context.** Often the larger context of the text clearly indicates that cosmic upheaval is not in mind. Whether about earthquake or the darkening of sun and moon, the material before and/or after such references speaks of the earth as continuing, as still being there after the catastrophe. No hint occurs of any kind of second creation, simply descriptions of how life will be on the earth after the devastation has passed. The promises of new life through the rule of Messiah in all nations are addressed to contexts in which this cataclysmic judgement has already happened. In other words, the earth continues as the scene of God's work and blessing.

The judgement against all nations in which 'The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining' (Joel 3:15) does not result in such devastation as to prevent Zion and Jerusalem from flourishing and the mountains and valleys flow with wine and water (Joel 3:17-18). The darkening of sun, moon and stars in Isaiah 13:10 was not the end of the cosmos at the time of the collapse of the Babylonian empire in the sixth century BC. Likewise for Egypt (Ezekiel 32:7). Edom's end involving the fall of the starry host and ground of burning sulphur has not prevented the ongoing occupation of this same land over the centuries since then (Isaiah 34:4-9). Zion continues occupied after the ruination described, for example, in Jeremiah 4:23-28, Amos 8:9. The passages we examine in detail below provide good examples of the importance of context to appreciate imagery.

The devastation described in Isaiah 24:1, 3-4, 18-20 is not absolute in that throughout Isaiah 24-27 there are numerous expressions of great future blessing coming from the land for God's people. Both in terms of the state of the land following judgement (Isaiah 24:1, 7-13, 25:2, 27:10-11) as well as the eventual outcome in God's

restoration (24:23, 25:6-10, 26:1-2, 19, 27:13), the land/earth<sup>8</sup> is presumed to exist still and be habitable. Motyer notes that the ruined city of Isaiah 24:10 is described as ‘formless’; the same word used to describe the earth in Genesis 1:2 prior to the creative shaping of the earth that it might become habitable. He concludes that the city’s fate is the same as the whole land, ‘This is what they chose: a world without the ordering hand of God and this, in faithful divine justice, is what they got’ (Motyer 1993:204). The hermeneutical challenges of Isaiah 24-27 may be many,<sup>9</sup> and the devastation extreme, but the recurring presence of this earth as the scene for God’s eventual reign on Zion is assured (Isaiah 24:23, 25:6, 25:7, 25:10, 26:1-2, 27:13).<sup>10</sup>

**3. Use of figurative language in Biblical literature particularly in prophetic and apocalyptic material.** Metaphorical and other forms of imagery often are used not so much to convey the details of an event but rather to highlight in that event the ultimate sovereign power of God no matter what the circumstances as well as the high level of drama and psychological weight of the moment for those present.<sup>11</sup> The events may be real but the details are less important than the significance of the episode for what it says about God and the impact He has on hearts and minds.

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<sup>8</sup> In these four chapters the word ‘*eres*’ is used 29 times; ‘*’ādāmā*’ just once (24:21). The question of what exactly might happen to the earth is made more challenging in that it can be meant in the sense of both ‘earth’ and ‘land’. More likely the whole earth when contrasted with the heavens (24:18, 21) and perhaps also when equated with the ‘world’ (24:4, 26:9, 26:18, 27:6) but also in other places it refers to particular land or ground (Isaiah 25:12, 26:1, 5, 10, 15, 27:13). See the discussion in Watts (2005a:366-415).

<sup>9</sup> See Biddle (1995), Chisholm (1993), B Doyle (2000), Hibbard (2006), DG Johnson (1988), Otzen (1974b), Skjoldal (1993), Sweeney (1988), Watts (2005a:366-415).

<sup>10</sup> The correlations between Isaiah 24-27 and Romans 8:19-23 as identified by J Moo (2008:83-89) give further credence to the view that Isaiah 24-27 expects that the future hope for God’s people will be upon this earth.

<sup>11</sup> See Marlow (2009) for an examination of figurative language in the Amos, Hosea and Isaiah 1-39 that makes considerable use of the creation in figurative imagery. EF Davis (2009), similarly, identifies the way the agrarian world of the Biblical writers provides a rich source of material for figurative expressions. See also Middleton (2010:95-106).

Forms of figurative language found in the Bible include metaphor and synecdoche, hyperbole and simile, analogy and irony, word plays and various others. Blended together with various allusions to earlier times, they strengthen the impact of the imagery. In addition to exploring the usage of each of these forms, Caird describes the use of absolutist language noting that ‘that it is characteristic of Semitic style to express ideas absolutely and to leave the listener to fill in for himself the implicit qualifications’ (Caird 1980:57). This feature is particularly frequent in statements that express the serious and massive impact of God’s judgement on rebellious nations. The absolutist language reflects the total seriousness of the offensive sin that has brought on the judgement of God rather than attempting to describe the actual effects in an emotionally detached way.<sup>12</sup>

#### APOCALYPTIC<sup>13</sup>

Apocalyptic expression makes considerable use of figurative imagery. Russell (1996) explores Jewish Apocalyptic literature, including the Old Testament, and concludes it is humankind not the creation that is fallen, that a strong solidarity exists between humankind and creation, that the judgement of God is not against the creation but humankind, and that while the creation may be a real part in this judgement, the literature nowhere expresses a pessimism about the long-term viability of creation. He concludes that ‘the apocalyptists clearly were not disposed toward a spiritual-material dualism’ (133) and ‘the expectations of the apocalyptists are for a future existence in *this* renewed world’ (132. Emphasis original.). The specific impact of those images of greatest upheaval, when placed within the context of the whole document of each book, is not one of doom but rather of hope for this material world.

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<sup>12</sup> Exuberant, flamboyant, poetic, dramatic, exotic, and attention-demanding language is standard when the severity of God’s condemnation of sin is being addressed and is difficult for those more used to relatively bland and technically accurate prose.

<sup>13</sup> Further consideration of apocalyptic can be found in Chapters 1:26, 5:174-176, and 7:211-215, 239.



## IMAGERY RE-USED

It is customary in Biblical descriptions of God's acts to re-use the imagery and language used of past times, whether prophetic or apocalyptic, to describe current and future events. The specific details may be different but the greater interest of the authors is in the consistency of God's powerful and dramatic visitations upon human society, and the ground on which they live and upon which they depend. Typical amongst these descriptions are the pre-ordered state of the early days of creation (such as echoes of Genesis 1:2), the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Exodus and the Sinai theophany. These were times of great upheaval and threat and yet in each God proves to be sovereign and more than able to overcome. So 'Increasingly in Jewish apocalyptic writings the hope of a new creation was developed and expanded so that almost every reference to the past became an expression on the future' (Childs 1992:393).

Some texts incorporate popular notions of cosmology about the separation of ocean/sea/deep (and the mythical beasts that live there), land and the heavens above. This ordering maintains the sun, moon and stars in their rightful places and thereby keeps darkness at bay. When God's judgement comes it is as if He withdraws from maintaining and preserving the order of things and so dysfunctional disorder comes. The land itself comes under threat from both darkness and the waters of the deep such that the distinctions between light and darkness, land and water, are lost and the earth returns to the state of Genesis 1:2.<sup>14</sup> Allusions to these images are present even when the force of destruction is an invading army functioning with the ancient equivalent of a scorched earth policy. These describe the consequences of such an extreme military blitzkrieg as if taken back to the earlier times of pre-ordered

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 2:72n65 for some of the language scholars use to describe this imagery.

creation when the earth was uninhabitable, or the barren unproductive cursed earth or the devastation of the flood.

#### THEOPHANIES RE-VISITED

Prophetic and apocalyptic texts use the imagery of earlier theophanies, particularly that of Exodus 19 and 20, to describe subsequent powerful and dramatic interventions by God.<sup>15</sup> For our purposes, the earthquake-like descriptions describe not the end of the earth but the massive significance of the coming of God in the thunder that rolls so deeply that one feels the vibrations in the ground under the feet. On Mt Sinai, an extreme, earth-shaking storm represents God's presence. See Appendix A.1:389 for a more detailed outline of the use of storm imagery.

#### DARKNESS

Various images of darkness convey the consequences of God's displeasure with human sin.<sup>16</sup> For example:

- a. Darkness expresses great hardship akin to the uninhabitable primordial world, the presence of God in the thick storm clouds of a theophany, or the general consequences of human sin.
- b. Darkness in different images of sun and moon no longer giving light portrays the effect of God's judgement cutting off favour and blessing.
- c. Darkness conveys the consequences of invading armies with the smoke and dust of total devastation filling the sky.

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<sup>15</sup> The use of theophany is described under many headings in The Dictionary for Biblical Imagery. (Ryken et al 2000). Not only is such imagery quite common there is also a freedom to play with the imagery and shift its nuances from one context to the next.

<sup>16</sup> Darkness 'is a symbol of divine absence' Forbes (2007:86). He argues that the darkness at the time of Jesus' death expresses the divine abandonment. (83-96).

- d. The reverse of darkness, the granting of brilliant light, expresses the gift of new life and healing.

A more detailed outline of the use of darkness imagery, essential for understanding references to the dissolution of sun and moon, is in Appendix A.2:389-391.

#### EARTHQUAKE

Earthquake-like imagery (without conveying any sense of destruction for the earth itself) is used when:

- a. Thunder causes the earth to shake to capture the dramatic weight of God's presence and actions.
- b. The earth shakes at the power of God's voice (Psalm 29:8).
- c. The earth shakes when God brings down judgement.
- d. Future judgements against nations will repeat past earth shaking (Haggai 2:6-7, 21-22).
- e. Foreign kings can cause the earth to shake (Isaiah 14:16-17).

A more detailed outline of the use of earthquake imagery is in Appendix A.3:391.

#### FLOOD

Flood imagery can represent the uninhabitable earth before God separated water from land, or the flood in Noah's time, or the flood that drowned Pharaoh's army. Descriptions of the devastation of an invading army that leaves the land a mess, or to some other calamity, utilize this same imagery. And yet the context of each usage

usually includes expressions of hope for this material world as an important facet of the fulfilment of God's to His people and the nations.<sup>17</sup>

#### FALLING STARS

Reference to stars is terminology often utilized to refer to powerful personalities whether human or angelic. So falling stars is quite likely a reference to the fall of powerful identities.<sup>18</sup>

#### CHAOS AND THE DISORDERING OF CREATION

The influence of various mythologies from other ancient cultures on the language and imagery of the Old Testament continues to stimulate discussion. In particular is the notion of 'chaos' and the influence of *Chaoskampf* on Old Testament imagery. This is not the place to engage with the debate though a number of points help appreciate the language about the earth's future. Whereas, for example, Angel (2006) argues for the presence of 'chaos' as a strong motif in much of the Old Testament, Tsumura (2005), RS Watson (2005) and JH Walton (2008) present strong cases for this to be not the case.

In large measure it is a question of what is meant by 'chaos': how chaotic does it have to get for it to be described as chaos? The argument against *Chaoskampf* as a description of the primordial state in Genesis 1:2, and of Old Testament judgement, is that this concept is not the same as the devastation that comes when God's judgement hits hard. 'Chaos' implies a level of confusion, bedlam and disarray as if

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<sup>17</sup> See for example, Psalms 69:1-2, 14-15, 77:16-19, 104:5-9, 107:23-30, 124:2-5, 144:7, Isaiah 5:30, 8:7-8, 24:18-20, 28:1-2, 17, 30:30-31, 43:2, 16, 54:9-10, Jeremiah 47:2-4, 51:42, Ezekiel 26:17-21, Amos 7:14, Jonah 2:1-6, Nahum 1:7-8, Habakkuk 3:9-15.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel 12:3, Amos 5:26, Obadiah 4. Note also Acts 7:43, 2 Peter 1:19, Jude 13, Revelation 1:16, 20, 2:1, 28, 3:1, 6:13, 12-14, 8:10-12, 9:1, 12:1, 4, 22:16.

it is beyond the control of anyone. The Old Testament never suggests anything but the sovereign power and authority of God and that even in the worst of circumstances, He remains the master with absolute supremacy. So the imagery is not so much one of chaos, though it may feel that way to those suffering in the midst of it, but rather devastation that brings a degree of uninhabitable earth as was the case in the primordial state<sup>19</sup> or during the Flood. For our purposes here, such imagery refers to a certain state of affairs on this earth with no suggestion that the earth ceases to be or will be replaced.

**4. Reading with a Modernist lens.** The neat categories and literalistic empiricism of post-Enlightenment thought, with its tendency to dualism, do not readily fit the world of Old Testament imagery. The free-flowing and very flexible imagery has little concern for scientific exactitude and certainly does not devalue the material and social in favour of the spiritual and personal as if having one without the other was plausible. Much miss-reading of this imagery is the product of such a mind-set which reads poetry as prose, and metaphor and hyperbole as an almost photographic representation. Many write on the default dualist mind-set in many cultures. For example: Nisbett in The Geography of Thought (2005),<sup>20</sup> NT Wright in his survey of the determined anti-dualist stance of the Biblical writers even though the cultural world around them was the opposite (2003a), Farrow's survey of dualism in the history of Christian theology over the past two millennia (1999), or the challenge to

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<sup>19</sup> See the discussion in Tsumura Chapter 1 (2005) in which he concludes that the state of the earth in Genesis 1:2 is not chaos but 'desolate and empty' or 'an unproductive or uninhabited place'. 'Formless' would then be an acceptable alternative if we understand this means it is uninhabitable; without the ordering essential for human life. JH Walton writes that "'formless and empty" in verse 2 refer to a non-functional and non-productive condition' (2008:58).

<sup>20</sup> Nisbett's argument is that different environments stimulate different ways of thinking. His contrast between Greek and Chinese worldviews is developed in order to examine the ways that dualism or holism are facilitated by different contexts.

Western dualism in the appreciation of the creation Psalm 104 in Fijian (Walker-Jones 2001) and African (Ntreh 2001) readings of the Psalm.

The assumption that ancients thought about the world in the same way as post-Enlightenment Western culture creates difficulties. JH Walton states that each observes the world with a very different paradigm. Most people today ‘believe that something exists by virtue of its physical properties’ with variations according to what one sees of the place of evolution: in effect, a scientific framework or presumption (2008:56). In the ancient world ontology was not objective (something observable by detached subjects) but functional: nothing to do with material status but everything to do with its function and role.<sup>21</sup> Walton concludes, ‘Something only exists when it has a role and purpose in an ordered system. ... In such an ontology, to bring something into existence (i.e., to create something) means to give it a function and role, not to give it physical properties’ (56-57). To discuss the destruction of something is then more about it becoming dysfunctional vis-à-vis the viability of human society. Hence, much of the cosmic collapse imagery is about the earth (though usually more about a particular location) becoming uninhabitable but with no suggestion that it would cease to exist.

Miscall challenges the ‘powerful Western tradition that privileges mind over body, intellect over imagination, concept over image’ (1991:103). The result, he writes, is that ‘The most prevalent and familiar perspective, or group of perspectives, are the historical-theological perspectives ... which are concerned with the changing historical portrayals of Israel and Israelites in themselves and in their world’ (104).

He advocates a more literary approach so as to draw out the imagery and rhetoric in

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<sup>21</sup> See also Mafico (1986) who more emphasizes relational characteristics between human beings and creation with purposeful action being a facet in how the non-human relates to the human.

the text which in turn reveals a 'Labyrinth of Images' so much more than just objective historical meaning.

Similarly, Mafico states, 'The realm of nature and that of man were not distinguishable: man saw himself as part of nature and nature as part of society. Nature and man did not stand in opposition and did not have to be apprehended by different modes of cognition' (1986:4). For modern humankind the world is an objective 'it'; for the ancients nature was 'a living presence confronting them with its joy, anger, or even indifference' (4). There exists therefore for ancient humankind (quoting Frankfort) 'only one mode of thought, one mode of expression, one part of speech – the personal' (4-5). The universe was not inanimate, 'not contemplated with intellectual detachment, but was experienced as life confronting life'(5).

In conclusion, reading ancient texts as if they are disengaged and objective predictors of the existence or otherwise of the material world, is problematic at best. All of the factors just surveyed come to bear on the question of how we make sense of the language and imagery of those texts which speak of massive devastation not just for human society but also to the earth and the cosmos. While the upheaval and ruin of judgement may be extreme, the Old Testament does not see the material world as doomed or needing replacement with another, or in any way less significant in the creation work of God. Whatever else may happen, however described, the earth remains.

## PSALM 102:25-26 AND ISAIAH 51:6 AND THE EARTH 'WEARING OUT LIKE A GARMENT'

How should these two texts be understood? In particular, how do these particular verses serve the larger meaning of the whole passage or are they stand-alone statements? Both sit within a larger and diverse flow of poetic imagery and within the context of the story of Zion's devastation by the Babylonians.

### Psalm 102:25-27

(25) Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. (26) They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away; (27) but you are the same, and your years have no end (Psalm 102:25-27).

Verse 26 of this Psalm is probably the only reference throughout the Psalms<sup>22</sup> that might pose a challenge to the conclusion of the previous chapter.<sup>23</sup> Is this a propositional statement or is there perhaps more to these verses once considered within the poetry and perspective of the whole Psalm?<sup>24</sup>

Psalm 102 is a personal lament (or complaint) with wide relevance for all who are groaning over the destruction of Zion and the personal anguish this brings. Sufficient common experience exists in the Psalm for it to be valid as a corporate penitential

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<sup>22</sup> Throughout the Psalms there are multiple expressions of the worth of the earth, God's commitment to the earth, the glory of God that fills the earth and the permanence of the earth so that God's purposes might be fulfilled. And yet this strong affirmation of the earth does not even appear to at least raise the obvious question amongst most commentators. The meaning of Psalm 102:26 is written as if nothing of the rest of the Psalms regarding the heavens and the earth has any bearing on this verse. How should we understand v. 26 if the perishing of the earth is antithetical to the recurring affirmation of the earth throughout the Psalms?

<sup>23</sup> It would be most unwise to privilege this verse over the wealth Old Testament material which rejoices in the goodness of the earth and its positive place in the transformation and blessing that Messiah will bring.

<sup>24</sup> Many commentaries make no comment at all on v. 26, or simply repeat the words as if that is all to be said with the implication that the earth is doomed, or rephrase though still retaining a pessimistic future for the earth.



expression. Mays states that the ‘compositional unity of the psalm is impressive’ (1994:322-326) thereby affirming that verses 25-27 should not be interpreted in isolation.<sup>25</sup>

The Psalm expresses great hope and expectation for Zion (vv. 12-22, 28). Zion will be ‘rebuilt’ (NIV v. 16 - which is the most likely sense given the allusion to Zion’s destruction in v. 14) and both for Israel and the nations, there will come a day when all will gather before Yahweh in the restored Zion to bow down before Him and praise Him (15, 21-22. Likewise v. 28, where the reference to the ‘presence’ of Yahweh refers to Yahweh’s presence in Zion). No suggestion is present of a dualistic spiritualizing of this hope. Zion is a real place, earthy and with full material substance. The anticipation of Israel and the nations coming together in Zion to praise Him is a recurrent theme of the Old Testament. For the Psalmist to suggest otherwise – or spiritualized in some way – would be a significant break from this dominant Old Testament motif.

God has created the heavens and the earth (v. 25) and this is good. What then is the meaning of declaring that ‘They will perish...’ (v. 26)? These two verses seem to add a third theme to the lament and restoration of Zion themes that have dominated the Psalm to this point. The primary question is the meaning of verse 26.

‘Perish’ usually refers to God’s judgement against humankind rather than the non-human creation. In asserting this, Van Dam and Otzen conclude that the earth may suffer enormously in God’s judgement; not in its own right but as the means by which God judges humankind (Van Dam 1996:223-225, Otzen 1974a:16-23). For this reason some have suggested that the ‘They’ refers to the enemies mentioned in v. 8 and while

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<sup>25</sup>.See also Culley’s discussion on the composition of the Psalm (1993).

this may be a more typical usage of ‘perish’, Allen argues ‘there are too many verses in between for this to fit so simply. ... Such a reference would be abrupt, though not impossibly so. But Isa 51:6 is so suggestively similar that its influence cannot be ignored’ (Allen 1983:11).<sup>26</sup> A better alternative exists for its meaning.

While most translations and commentaries consistently adopt the future tense it would appear that this results mostly from assumptions for the meaning of the verse. The future tense in Hebrew can be difficult to determine and as we shall see, the translation offered by Allen, ‘They may perish’, is more in keeping with the overall expectation of the Psalm (1983:8) while the future tense draws out more the stark contrast.<sup>27</sup>

The Psalmist is very confident that Zion will be restored, and by implication that the earth has a real and enduring future. Two attributes of God establish this confidence. First, He is eternal, He endures forever (vv. 12, 18, 24, 26-27). This is reinforced by contrasting God’s permanence with the impermanence of all else without Him (note the transience of the life of the Psalmist in vv. 3, 11, 23). Nothing else endures as He does. Confident hope follows because He endures forever. He will bring to completion every covenant promise and not allow any thwarting of His resolve to restore all things. The statement about the heavens and the earth sits between two confident assertions of the eternity of God’s existence (vv. 24, 27).

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<sup>26</sup> Alden states that the garment imagery in Psalm 102 here refers to the wicked but in Isaiah 56:6, 8 it refers to ‘this present world order’ (1996:596).

<sup>27</sup> See Rappel (1999). Abstract: ‘R., in Part II of a series (see 386), continues his analysis of Psalm 102, commenting on vv. 15-29. He compares the Hebrew text with the translations of the KJV, the RSV, the R. Knox translation, and the JPS (1972) noting their deficiencies and highlighting nuances of the original missed by them.’

Secondly, Yahweh is enthroned as the eternal King over all nations and all creation (v. 12, 15, 19-22, 25) as argued by Allen.<sup>28</sup> He continues:

Creator and creation are distinct: God is so much greater than they and must outlive them, as people outlive their clothes! God stands in stark contrast not only to the suffering specimen of humanity represented by the psalmist (vv 13, 14) but even to the huge world of space (Sedlmeier, VT 45 [1995] 245). Unlike material things, Yahweh alone is immortal and immune from decay (cf. Isa 48:12, 13; 51:6). God has not merely all the time in the world, but much, much more. Yet through the covenant the God of creation has joined hands with a chosen people and bonded with them. Because Yahweh lives, they will live also, safe in the divine presence—and not only the present generation of God’s “servants” who now lament the ruined state of Zion (v 15) but their posterity (cf. Ps 69:36, 37 [35, 36]). The psalmist hugs this assurance to his heart as an implicit hope that it will happen in time for him to personally be released from his suffering and find God’s pledge of life fulfilled. “Thy kingdom come” is his prayer (2002:22).

We are now in a position to determine the point of v. 26. The Psalmist uses contrast to draw out these unique qualities of God. Highlighting God’s permanence derives from comparing Him with everything that is not. Everything else may be transient but not God. Even if there was risk of the worst case scenario – the destruction of the very earth of which Zion is a real part – God ensures that He will rebuild Zion so that all may gather there to praise Him.

Here we have a rhetorical device that features a contrast in absolutes in order to make the point. The eternal endurance of God contrasted with the most enduring and rock-solid reality known to humankind, the creation itself. Even if the heavens and earth were to perish (which is the implied outcome if God is not eternal), the God who created all things has the capacity to preserve all the work of His hands. As His handiwork, these

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<sup>28</sup> On v. 25, Allen writes ‘Ludwig observed that the formula אָרֶץ אֱרֶץ, “found the earth,” is associated with Yahweh’s kingship (Pss 24:1, 2, 7–10; 89:6–15 [5–14]; cf. Isa 40:21–23), while in Ps 78:68, 69 it is linked with Zion in that the building of the temple is a repetition of creation. Accordingly, the collocation of divine enthronement (v 13), the rebuilding of Zion, and creation in this psalm is not accidental but represents an appeal to a composite tradition. Here the founding of the earth may be an echo of the usage in Second Isaiah (Isa 48:13; 51:13, 16), where it is associated with the proclamation of a new act of salvation (Brüning, *Mitten im Leben*, 255). So the psalmist is reverting to the theme of Yahweh as king. He alludes to the third of a traditional triad of divine-royal motifs. God is not only enthroned forever over a realm that must be manifested in time and space with Zion as its capital: divine kingship was established at creation (cf. Pss 24:1, 2, 7–10; 93:1, 2), a fact that Zion itself was designed to mirror (Ps 78:68, 69)’ (2002:22).

things have a fundamental and intrinsic value that calls into question every suggestion that they will not endure. Even if the most substantial reality could fade away like a worn out garment, because God is faithful, eternal and powerful, it will endure with Zion restored and the nations drawn into the praise of God who is present there. Even if the earth is as fragile and as transitory as a piece of cloth, God will not allow it to self-destruct so as to ensure complete restoration.<sup>29</sup>

The point is one of comparison rather than an absolute statement, though articulated absolutely. The hyperbole in the contrast expresses the eternal endurance of God which brings hope for Zion to the Psalmist. Consistent with this is Caird's observation, quoted above, on the use of absolutist language.

If Allen is correct in concluding that the Psalm has three strophes (1983:13-14),<sup>30</sup> then the comparison is further confirmed in the contrast between the first and the second strophes as indicated by the strong 'but' of v. 12 at the beginning of the second.<sup>31</sup> Lament dominates the first strophe (vv. 1-11) and confident hope for God's purposes in Zion dominates the second (vv. 12-22). The third strophe (v. 23-28) is both shorter and repeats the comparison: lament in v. 23 followed by confident hope in the eternal God in vv. 24-28.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Note Ryken's observation, 'Because garments are so valuable in a subsistence economy, their wearing out (Ps 102:26, Is 51:6 8, Heb 1:11) or being eaten by moths (Job 13:28, Prov 25:20, Is 50:9, 51:8) becomes an image of terror' (Ryken et al 2000:318).

<sup>30</sup> 'The psalm bears an abundance of evidence of skilful technical construction as a vehicle for its thought' (Allen 1983:14).

<sup>31</sup> Westermann notes the 'transition from lamentation to another mode of speech' in the use of 'but' at the beginning of verse 12 (1965:72).

<sup>32</sup> See also Culley (1993). He notes the introduction of the cosmic material in vv. 25-26 but describes it as a juxtaposition that is left to the readers to figure out but which he himself does not resolve. Brueggemann argues for groaning and sighing in lament / complaint as a prerequisite for the restoration of Zion. He establishes this pattern in a number of passages and concludes, 'The only ones saved, the only thread of continuity in this city that does not continue, are the ones who *sigh and groan*.' (1984a:12. Emphasis original.). Psalm 102:19-20 describes Yahweh looking to hear the groans of those suffering the loss of the city. The strophes are not disconnected themes but inextricably woven together by the ways of Yahweh who brings restoration to the broken-hearted. 'The discontinuation of

AA Anderson similarly states, ‘Heavens and earth are symbolic of all that is permanent and enduring ... but, in comparison with Yahweh, they are like a garment which is worn out sooner or later’ (1972:711). Similarly, ‘The creator’s longevity guarantees future generations ... the survival of God’s people and their worship in the rebuilt sanctuary’ (Schaefer 2001:251). The point is not a comment about the creation but about the Creator. As He is eternal, so He can be trusted to keep all His promises. It is ‘God’s eternity in the light of the impermanence and frailty of the whole framework of this old earth.’

In conclusion, a piecemeal analysis of the Psalm does not enable a clear understanding of v. 26.<sup>33</sup> The thrust of the Psalmist’s hope is material. Zion will endure, be restored and the glory of God will be present there to receive praise. A failure to appreciate how v. 26 serves the Psalmist’s material hope comes from decontextualizing the verse thus allowing the imposition of a dualistic worldview to determine meaning. Hope is strong for the rebuilding of Zion. To paraphrase, the heavens and earth could perish (wearing out like a garment), even though they appear to have such solidity and permanence, but it will not be so because Yahweh is the eternal Creator and King and the heavens and earth belong to Him. Zion, as a microcosm of God’s creation, will be restored.<sup>34</sup>

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the *city* does not discontinue the *story*.’ (1984b:97. Emphasis original.) The recurring narrative of engagement between God and His people integrates the themes of lament and hope; of transience turned into enduring restoration.

<sup>33</sup> For example, Dahood (1970:8-22). Here only a verse by verse examination occurs with no attempt to see the Psalm as a whole. Leupold (1959:713-714) neglects the significance of the Psalmist’s longing for Zion. This is a place of physicality and locality and the Psalm does not suggest, explicitly or implicitly, that hope for God’s glory in the praises of the nations gathered in His presence is anything other than the restoration of the material Zion that is known and loved.

<sup>34</sup> The quoting of Psalm 102:25-27 in Hebrews 1:10-12 reinforces the conclusion that the point is theological rather than cosmological. The writer to the Hebrews uses the Psalm as one of several quotes in Hebrews 1 all referenced to argue for the supremacy of Jesus.

## Isaiah 51:6

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended (Isaiah 51:6).

Restoration of Zion is the dominant theme of Isaiah 51:1-16. As with Psalm 102:26, should we regard Isaiah 51:6 as a propositional statement or part of the flow of ideas that make up the whole passage?

Twice in the passage Isaiah uses the same rhetorical device of comparison with a garment to draw out the contrast between the transient and the eternal nature of God. The transient are the potentially transitory nature of creation (v. 6) and those who ridicule the faithful (v. 8), each contrasted with the eternal status of God's salvation and righteousness (vv. 6, 8).

Again, it is the thrust of the whole passage that sets up how to understand these contrasts. As in Psalm 102, the expectation of restoration for both Zion and wilderness is the prevailing discourse (Isaiah 51:3, 11, 16). This restoration, which recurs throughout the Old Testament,<sup>35</sup> will extend from Zion to all nations (vv. 4-5). God has acted mightily in the past in creation (vv. 9, 13-16), in the calling of Abraham and Sarah (vv. 1-2) and exodus (vv. 9-10, 14) and thereby more than sufficiently demonstrated a capacity to restore Zion and extend light, justice and Edenic renewal to Zion and beyond to the nations.

Holmgren (1969) outlines a chiasmic structure for vv. 1-11. The passage begins and ends with remembrance of the past that inspires real confidence for the future of Zion (vv. 1-3, 9-11). Central to the structure is the flow of God's salvation to the nations and islands

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<sup>35</sup> See Chapters 2:46-49, 2:74-78, 3:107-111, 4:113-115, 8:263-289.

(v. 5). Within the embrace of assured restoration for Zion, and enclosing the hope for the nations, God's righteousness and salvation is asserted (v. 4-5, 6-8). Salvation is coming and will last forever. God can be trusted to make it so because He is righteous; He is faithful and just.

As in Psalm 102, the thrust of the passage is for a material restoration for Zion. Zion, even though it appears now in ruins, is the location of God's future action of salvation for the nations. Again, it would be strange indeed for the prophet to affirm the future of the land and its city and then state the opposite. Throughout Isaiah, in the evidence we have seen thus far, the hope for Zion and the nations does not suggest some kind of non-physical spiritualizing nor the replacement of the earth. The context determines the meaning of the earth wearing out like a garment.

Ludwig surveys the 'prolific use of creation terminology and imagery' in Deutero Isaiah (1973:345). He argues against those who 'submerge' this material under the exodus event because the creation material stands in its own right as evidence of the capacity and commitment of God to overcome all threats and challenges. So God is sufficient to restore and perfect Zion but also to extend this blessing into something so radically new (42:9, 43:18, 48:6) that it would become an Edenic new heavens and new earth (Isaiah 65:17-25).<sup>36</sup>

As in Psalm 102, contrast and hyperbole are combined as a rhetorical technique to compare the eternal nature of God's salvation with the relative transience of all else. Again the point is that even if the most enduring reality known to humankind were

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<sup>36</sup> Hutton has demonstrated that the use of known imagery and allusions to other imagery are intentionally utilised in Isaiah 51:9-11 and elsewhere to establish the sovereignty of God in both creation and history so as to affirm as strongly as possible that there is hope for Zion (2007:271-303).

inclined to vanish, God ensures its future even as He fulfils His salvation promises in Zion. This is not a comment about the creation but about the Creator. Everything about Him endures more than anything else.

The challenge of the tense of the verbs is repeated. Most translations assume the future tense as if this is the only option. Watts translates the condition of the heavens and earth in v. 6 in the present tense and for the other two uses of the garment simile, he uses the present for Isaiah 50:9 but the future for 51:8, 'The moth will eat them up like a garment' (2005b:751). The future tense more strongly draws out the contrast in absolute terms but the rhetoric points beyond the simplistic view that this is about the creation.<sup>37</sup>

The statement about the earth's inhabitants dying like gnats in v. 6 also exposes the hyperbolic character of the contrasts. No suggestion follows that humankind will cease to be. Though stated absolutely, the exaggeration is to make the point that the eternal solidity and permanence of God's salvation is so much more enduring than even the human race. The accusers of God's servants are both described using this garment simile (50:9, 51:8). In the first, they are merely temporary and in the second, the contrast highlights that God's salvation has even more eternal reliability than those who revile the righteous. Koole lists those scholars that incline to this view and those who do not. He argues for the conclusion that the heavens and earth are temporary. While he recognizes that the point is one of contrast, he fails to attend to the context of hope for Zion and the creation nor does he adequately explore the way the poetry uses

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<sup>37</sup> Much discussion centres on the text and translation of 'vanish like smoke'. The point is that compared to God's eternal salvation, the heavens have no more durable substance than dissipating smoke. See Jacobson (1995:191-196), Koole (1998:154), Williamson (1999:101-111). Included here is consideration of 'dissolved like salt' as a possible translation.



overstatement to make the point.<sup>38</sup> His use of syntax and semantics are not persuasive because he examines the evidence through the lens of an isolated reading of the verse.

Williamson reaches an alternative conclusion:

[The intention is] to contrast the transitory nature of the created order with the durability of God's salvation / deliverance and righteous saving power. ... The point is obvious: the prophet takes what he regards as the most durable things known to his audience in order to make the rhetorical point that even if they should pass away, God's salvation will not (1999:105 & 108).<sup>39</sup>

Williamson argues for a translation of v. 6 that reflects the thought sequence of 'Even if ..., yet ....' for this contrast to feature the permanence of the things of God. Examples of the same thought pattern are in Isaiah 32:19-20 and 54: 'Though ..., yet....' He also prefers translations which shift away from the future tense with its implication of certainty that distorts the rhetorical impact of the poetry (1999).

Perhaps most telling is the context of v. 6 in which affirmation of God's sovereign capacity includes confidence for the future of Zion and the creation. In creation itself, and in the devastation of judgement or the excellence of restoration, God is still one who is sovereign and the prophet repeatedly draws attention to this as the ground of hope (vv. 3, 9-10, 13-16). As noted in the previous chapter, this earth plays a pivotal

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<sup>38</sup> 'The ... question is whether the text states that this end of the world is imminent or that it is using a rhetorical figure, comparable with the dialectical negation (H. Kruse, VT 4 [1954] 385-400), in which the first proposition with its negative content merely emphasizes what the second expresses positively. Thus Joseph Kimchi already explains: heaven and earth will sooner perish than God's salvation. Ps. 89:3; 119:89 etc. presuppose the evident durability of the cosmos, Houtman, 122f., and the same assumption is said to be made in our line, cf. Jer. 31:35f.' (Koole 1998:155).

<sup>39</sup> Other scholars offer similar summaries of this contrast though as just noted, Koole's view neglects the implication for the earth.:

'If we think creation is permanent (Gen. 49:26; Ps 148:3-6), it is as nothing compared to the permanence of what God in His righteousness means to do for the salvation of the world' (Koole 1998:155).

'The heavens and the earth that seem to be so stable are in fact less enduring than the salvation God has promised.' (Grogan 1986:295)

'This is not an apocalyptic verse concerning the end of the earth. The writer intends on emphasizing the permanence of God's salvation, which is even more permanent than the creation itself. In the ancient Near East the universe (or rather, matter) was an uncreated entity. In the Babylonian creation epic matter had apparently always existed and was later formed by Marduk into the heavens, the earth and the netherworld. There is no discussion concerning the end of the material world' (JH Walton et al 2000).

role in the provision of God's blessing. Consequently, because God's salvation and righteousness are eternal, the creation needs an enduring future because so much of the substance of salvation as developed throughout the Old Testament, and in Isaiah 51, is not just salvation from sin and its consequences in judgment but also salvation for the fullness of the blessings of the earth that God has for His people. Zion's hope is in God's commitment to this creation and the massive power at His disposal to overcome all obstacles even if other forces are at work could suggest a very different outcome; even if the worst possible catastrophe threatened the very existence of the heavens and the earth, God has the capacity to prevail and ensure the continuation of the creation so that His promises can be fully realized. Hope for Zion's restoration is because the earth will not perish. The God who is Creator is eternal, infinite in power, totally righteous/faithful and whose salvation is also eternal, assures Zion's people that He will prevail.<sup>40</sup> Even if it were true that the earth could be wearing out, this is neither the whole story nor the end of the story. Creation is secure in this God. Twice in this chapter, mighty acts of God in and for creation precede reassurance of Zion's future (51:9-10 and then v. 11; 51:13-16a and then v.16b).<sup>41</sup>

Isaiah 51:1-16 in turn is not an isolated passage. The following chapters express Zion's hope. The repeated imperative to 'Awake!' (51:9, 51:17, 52:1) followed by the imperative to sing and shout for joy (54:1) continue the expressions of hope for Zion. 'All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God' (52:10). God's sovereignty over creation is again a recurring theme in chapter 54. The following chapter concludes with a promise that the curse of the ground (55:13, cf. Genesis 3:17-19) will come to an end. Expressed in various poetic images, Zion's hope is because the creation is secure in

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<sup>40</sup> Note in particular 51:1-5, 8, 10-13, 15-16.

<sup>41</sup> Note also: Hutton challenges interpretations of Isaiah 51:9-11 that fail to comprehend the allusions in the passage to a wider body of literature (2007:281).

God's hands. As in Psalm 102:26, the conclusion that v. 6 means the end of the heavens and the earth is completely antithetical to the whole sweep of the hope being presented for Zion, the nations and all else.<sup>42</sup>

### **ENVIRONMENTAL METAPHORS FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE?**<sup>43</sup>

Are the many statements about renewal of the earth in the expectations of the psalmists and the prophets simply metaphors for the spiritual (non-physical) life to come for God's people?

In addition to the tendency among some to regard all expectations of earth renewal as not for this earth at all<sup>44</sup> but for a second yet-to-be-created new earth, there are strands in popular theology that tend to understand these passages as metaphors for the spiritual life of God's people. We have already noted a number of the assumptions at work in such dualism and the misreading of various Old Testament texts that feed these assumptions.

Earlier in this chapter, we reviewed the many facets of figurative language in the Old Testament. The challenge with metaphors is to let them do their work, to resist the temptation to find some precise and tightly defined meaning so that the metaphor can stimulate imagination which mostly is why metaphors are used.

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<sup>42</sup> See also further discussion on Zion in Chapter 2:76-78, 8:274-289.

<sup>43</sup> Metaphors function through the imaginative consideration of possibilities. For a more extensive consideration of the importance of imagination, see Chapter 10:324-339.

<sup>44</sup> Except that classic Dispensationalism applies most of these texts to the millennial period and not to the new heaven/earth.

As Landy states:

The prophetic word is transformative, induces a changed perception of the world. In that sense it is metaphorical, transporting us somewhere beyond, or to a different place, unsettling and destroying, the familiar. Metaphor is not just the transfer of X to Y, but the movement through both terms to a different conception; metaphors are never complete, but always ready to link up with other metaphors (2000:27).

Landy, with regards to poetic text, writes against those who assign 'different sections or verses to different hands, by unravelling it' because this 'domesticates the prophet to our expectations' (2000:30). Metaphor and poetry are much more than mere words. As Miscall advocates, the imagery in Isaiah is a 'Labyrinth' of 'many corridors' and 'verbal threads' in which there are 'multiple entrances and centers' (1991:117). Unless followed down these corridors of allusions in imagery and metaphor, there develops a risk of further reductionism by minimizing the metaphor's scope or missing the point entirely. 'But words and images in words can also turn into idols, into crafted images and figures that are wooden and stony, that are fixed and cannot move' (Miscall 1991:117).

For example, Brassey risks failing to allow the metaphors of the 'Transformation of Nature' do their work (2002:63-81). He limits the significance of the metaphors found in Isaiah 40-55 to the desert road back to Zion from Babylon. This may have been the setting in which the metaphors were written<sup>45</sup> but a limitation to this setting neglects the much wider impact of this transformation as is the case in the whole-of-the-earth and all-of-the-nations passages in these chapters. Furthermore, he argues that the juxtaposition of the earth renewal passages with the renewal of the people indicates that the point is 'spiritual rather than physical' renewal for Israel. This argument does not adequately recognize the many allusions and references to the earth as the means of both judgement and blessing. Driving a wedge between the many manifestations of

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<sup>45</sup> Such metaphors appear to have been well known long before the days of the return from Babylon and understood to be more than referring to the specific environment of the road back to Israel. For example Isaiah 11:6-9, 32:2, 15-20, 35:1-10, Amos 9:13.

renewal does not allow the flexibility needed for the metaphors to do their work nor adequately allow for the whole of life integration that the metaphors point towards. The spiritual and the physical are not antithetical.

Jenkins discusses the ‘misconstruing’ of Biblical metaphors so as to ‘minimize the moral claim they make on the present.’ He argues that:

Preaching on Isaiah 11 and 56 has often coopted the dynamic prophetic word for the sake of a static utopian vision of society that values the status quo more than freedom, difference, and change and that effectively reinforces the oppressive powers of the present age (including political and economic powers) in the name of God’s future (2007:67).

The ‘Labyrinth’ and ‘corridors’ (Miscall 1991:106) of allusions in metaphors that utilize images of the physical world, including the wealth of material included in Chapter Two, make it extremely difficult to see how spiritualising of the imagery is acceptable. Isaiah 11 is an example of this tendency to apply the imagery of environmental transformation to human spirituality.

### **Isaiah 11:6-9**

(6) The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. (7) The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (8) The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. (9) They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:6-9).

The vision of radically changed relationships between animals, and between animals and humans, in vv. 6-9 is undoubtedly metaphorical but with what in mind? Discussion ranges from vegetarianism for humans and/or animals in the new heaven/earth through to this having nothing to do with animals but being about peacefulness throughout humankind in the millennial kingdom.

CJH Wright claims:

They could not conceive of God's future multinational redeemed people without *land*, even though it would be land that transcended the imagination of any geographer or even zoologist! The transformation of nature in passages such as Isaiah 2:2; 11:6-9; 35:1-10; Jeremiah 31:1-14 and Hosea 2:18-23 is clearly not intended to be taken literally. Yet neither should it be simply spiritualized, or taken as *merely* metaphorical. God's redemptive purpose for his creation may be beyond our imagination (2004a:186. Emphases original.).

The wider context has much to do with shaping how we might approach such a metaphor. We have already noted the inappropriateness of Post-Enlightenment objectifying of creation into isolated components together with the spiritual and physical dualism that devalues the material world of creation. A fully developed creation doctrine that endorses the value of the created order as described in the previous chapter, brings a strong challenge to the spiritualization or reduction of the impact of such a metaphor to the human realm alone. The Old Testament does not conceive of a world where human and non-human are unrelated or as only related through the coincidence of location. Furthermore, this passage is one of many that together provide us with multiple perspectives of the renewal of the earth and the integration of God's people therein. To ignore the weight of the many renewed creation images presented throughout the book of Isaiah, so as to apply this only to humankind, neglects an essential requirement of hermeneutics.

The metaphor may have implications for animal and human diet but, as we shall see, this is not the point. Some have attempted to unpack this option.<sup>46</sup> The metaphor certainly does have implications for peace throughout human society but how exactly does it do so? The immediate context provides two helpful visions, one before and one after this metaphor, which provide some of the landscape contours for our imaginations. The first is the rule of Messiah (11:1-5) that will fill the earth with righteousness and

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<sup>46</sup> See Arnold (2004), Munday (1992), Olley (2001).

justice, with wisdom and knowledge, with right judgement and faithfulness in all things. This rule has amongst its features a S/spirit of knowledge and understanding (v. 2). This last feature is the core of the second vision that comes at the end of the metaphor in question (11:9). A simile describes the extent to which the knowledge of God will fill the earth; it will be to the extent that the ocean is full of water. This knowledge<sup>47</sup> will not be confined to the mountain of God (v.9),<sup>48</sup> an allusion to both Eden (cf. Genesis 2:10, Ezekiel 28:13-14) and Mount Zion at least, but extend throughout the earth and, by implication, have impact on all the earth. Mountain is both a synecdoche and a metaphor for the full blessing of God in that what begins in Zion ultimately fills every nation and the whole earth. So the context points us beyond just humanity, or mere dietary questions, and away from reducing the vision to a simple spiritual application.<sup>49</sup>

The metaphor itself points us towards its significance. In more general terms it calls to mind the material in Scripture on the origins of conflict between animals and between humankind and the serpent in Genesis 3:14-19. More specifically, the reference to the child and the viper alludes to the enmity between serpent and the child of the woman in Genesis 3:15. So the metaphor draws us back and yet also points us forward. It suggests a world without the conflicts and enmities of the curse of God's judgement (a metaphor for the earth set free from the curse of Genesis 3:14-19) while simultaneously

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<sup>47</sup> cf. Isaiah 32:4, 37:20, 40:28, 43:10, 45:3-6, 49:4, 52:6, Jeremiah 22:16, 24:7, 31:34.

<sup>48</sup> Each reference to this mountain is also an allusion to the others through the book of Isaiah so that each has its own focus but also includes the vision of the others. In many of these, vision for wilderness/desert is also a part of the big-picture vision for the earth. cf. 2:1-5, 4:3-6, 24:23, 25:6-8, 32:2, 15-20, 35:1-10, 40:1-11, 41:17-20, 44:1-5, 49:11-12, 52:1-2, 7-10, 56:6-7, 62:1-12, 66:7-14.

<sup>49</sup> Russell condemns reductionist interpretations of Isaiah 11 as follows:

'Likewise, reducing to objective language Isaiah's magnificent vision of the messianic kingdom in which the wolf and lamb and cow and bear graze together and the lion eats straw like the ox destroys the significance of the image (11.6, 7; 65.25). As Moule retorts, "what blasphemous injury would be done to great poetry and true mythology by laying such solemnly prosaic hands upon it." Isaiah envisions the messianic age as a world, in which all relationships--human and animal--are restored. To require the transformation of the digestive system of the carnivore to that of a herbivore is senseless. It violates the image of a reality in which even the worst of enemies--even those physically designed to oppose one another--reside in peace. To press too literally Isaiah's vision is thus to destroy its impact upon the imagination. This reality will exist. Its description, however, far surpasses the meaning of a literal interpretation' (1996:35-36).

expanding our perspectives to see the global and peaceful rule of Messiah that fills the earth (a metaphor for new earth and new creation). Other references to the ending of the curse are in the book of Isaiah, further strengthening the case that this is the focus of the metaphor.<sup>50</sup>

DG Peterson takes further the connection between Isaiah 11 and Genesis 1-3. With reference to 11:8:

By implication, death itself will be defeated by the sovereign, transforming power of God. ... Renewal of the creation and the renewal of those who inhabit it go together in the prophecy. ... Restoration of humanity's proper dominion over the created order is suggested by the prediction that 'a little child shall lead them' (cf. Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:6-8) (2003:133).

The allusion in v. 6 to the child of Isaiah 9:6-7 reinforces the expansive nature of this metaphor. The child who leads (Isaiah 11:6) implies a reference to the child who rules on David's throne (Isaiah 9:6-7). The 'root of Jesse' (Isaiah 11:1 & 10) is also suggestive of such a child who's rule extends across the animal realm as well as Israel and the nations (Isaiah 9:1-7). Isaiah 11:6-9 is a metaphor of both Eden and new earth, of both the Zion of God filled with glory and the whole earth rich with the blessings of grace. Given the trajectory we noted in the last chapter, in which the full blessing of God for Israel and the nations comes so often through the fertility, prosperity and abundance of the earth, this is hardly surprising.

The imagery of Isaiah 11:6-9 recurs elsewhere and each occurrence further fleshes out the metaphorical vision of Messiah's earthly rule when the new earth is fully accomplished (Isaiah 2:2-4, 35:9, 65:25).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Isaiah 32:12-15, 55:13, 65:25 plus the many references to cursed-land conditions when God's judgement comes and Edenic conditions when His blessing is abundant.

<sup>51</sup> 'When the true order of creation is restored the whole earth is the Lord's hill, indwelt by his holiness' (Motyer 1993:125).



Quinn-Miscall refers to the metaphor as a ‘vision of the peaceable kingdom’ (2001:53).<sup>52</sup> Watts sees it as a ‘picture of pastoral tranquility’ (2005a:210) with imagery of shepherd children and their flocks able to graze without fear from predators. However, we have argued that it is this yet so much more. Brueggemann writes, ‘The king to come who effects social rehabilitative well-being ... causes the rehabilitation of the earth’ (1997:617) and with reference to Isaiah 65:17:

That is, whatever is amiss in creation will now be restored and made whole, even the most deeply embedded distortions in Yahweh’s world. ... The culminating verse (on which see also Isa 11:6–9) indicates that the new creation now promised concerns not only Israel, not only the entire human community, but all of creation, so that hostilities at every level and in every dimension of creation will be overcome (1997:549).

To regard this simply as about peaceful relationships amongst human beings is to enfeeble the imagery and to deny the very real context in which it sits: the immediate context of the whole-of-the-earth transforming rule of Messiah and the broader context in which the earth is given such weight and goodness in the blessing of God (see Chapter Two) for all the nations. It is a metaphor for a curse-free world yet not simply a return to Eden because it also points forward to the whole earth filled with the knowledge of God, not just the area around the source of the four rivers in Genesis 2:10-14. This knowledge of God comes as Messiah rules in accordance with Isaiah 11:1-5, incorporating in His rule all the facets of transformation and renewed creation as promised from Genesis to Malachi.<sup>53</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Old Testament presents a consistent vision of hope for the earth. When Messiah rules and the curse is finally and fully removed, the blessing that pours forth from the

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<sup>52</sup> With reference to the series of paintings by Edward Hicks.

<sup>53</sup> See quote from Stuhlmacher, Chapter 5:164n28.

fertile and well watered ground will renew and transform such that new creation is perfected and the earth transformed into the new earth. These passages that have been the focus for those who present a pessimistic view of the earth's future do not support conclusions of this kind. Rather they are consistent with the conclusion of Chapter Two in expressing the vision of this earth fully restored. In particular the most severe judgements of God against rebellious humankind never present the earth as doomed.

The narrative is a consistent one. The triangulation remains intact and however much the judgement of God may be cataclysmic, it will not demolish this triangular relationship. The vision is all-embracing, an integration of all things, a narrative that stimulates a most imaginative range of imagery. The language of hyperbole, extreme contrasts, metaphors, and allusions to the most dramatic visitations from God, all serve to shout loudly that this creation belongs to the one who brought it into existence, shaped and formed it, and in every way possible is sufficient in greatness to generate total confidence that His vision for the earth and His people will come to fruition.

This is the context of expectation in which the incarnation of the Son of God is set in the Biblical narrative. To what extent, and how, does the incarnation integrate into the three facets of the triangulation that progresses through the Old Testament narrative? To this question we now turn.

## **The Earth Narrative in the Person of Jesus: Incarnation, Resurrection, Ascension**

With the advent of Jesus of Nazareth, the ebb and flow of blessing and curse gives way to a radical new act in the drama: in many ways foreseen as the preceding narrative is infused with the promise of something more. A new day would end the tidal realities of blessing and curse through the final prevailing of grace and blessing over sin and curse. Into the context of a comprehensive range of expectations comes Jesus in incarnation, resurrection and ascension. Does the incarnation itself continue the Old Testament trajectory of the triangulation of God, humankind and the non-human creation? First, however, a brief overview of the central core of Jesus' ministry, the Kingdom of God.

### **A KINGDOM THAT EMBRACES THE EARTH**

The Gospel writers report that Jesus repeatedly drew attention to the Kingdom of God: a new term for the Old Testament expectation of the rule of God in and through the Messiah (Mark 1:14-15).<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of providing theological and eschatological context for the significance of Christ Himself for the created order, a summary of the breadth the Kingdom's embrace is helpful. This term, the Kingdom of God, encompasses the full spectrum of promise as developed throughout the narrative from

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<sup>1</sup> It is not the purpose of this study to unpack all facets of this Kingdom, nor to justify the following summary as to its substance: it has already been explored more than adequately. The following are merely a representative sample of the relevant material. Given the Kingdom's centrality to the *Missio Dei* and the mission of the followers of the Messiah, it is not surprising that considerable attention is given to the Kingdom in mission publications from across the globe. See Arias (2001), Beasley-Murray (1986), Bright (1953), Christian (1999), Dyrness (1998), Ladd (1974), Ridderbos (1962), Rottenberg (1980).

creation to the end of the Old Testament era.<sup>2</sup> All aspects of life on earth are within the scope of this Kingdom. Much has been written on the Kingdom over recent decades with considerable agreement on its ‘already but not yet’ character.<sup>3</sup> This is a Kingdom inaugurated in the first advent through the presence and person of its King, Jesus of Nazareth, which then grows with increasing impact on all of life and society, and will reach its completion and perfection when this same Jesus returns to this earth. The beginnings are in the coming of Messiah: an event that stretches across 70 years as each aspect of this period plays its essential part in the inauguration.<sup>4</sup> The Gospel’s call to faith and discipleship invites people to be part of, not excluded from, the Kingdom.

One particular feature of the Kingdom is vital. The Kingdom promises reach into each and every area of life and earth because the Kingdom is expected to bring complete transformation to all of life: from personal inner purification through to environmental renewal, from the removal of all beyond redemption through to cessation of all military and political conflict and aggression. It is the negation of those negations repeatedly condemned in the Old Testament and the putting to right of all that is less than the righteousness and holiness of God. The multiple expressions of promise highlight the integration of life in systems and structures such that to fulfil the purposes of God in one facet, requires transformation in all the other aspects. This earth is not peripheral but vital for the full range of Kingdom promises. The Kingdom brings blessing which frequently comes from the earth in abundance, fertility and prosperity.

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapters 2:46-49, 74-78, 3:107-111, 4:113-115, 8:263-289.

<sup>3</sup> Also ‘present but also future’ or ‘the presence of the future’.

<sup>4</sup> Conception and birth, baptism and temptations, ministry and sufferings, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension/enthronement, Pentecost and the destruction of the temple in 70CE (to mark the final end of the old that must make way for the new).

Jesus identifies Himself with the Old Testament hope for a restored earth populated with nations of forgiven people who serve Yahweh in which no more suffering or evil occurs and where God richly blesses even the least. Nothing in Jesus suggests any kind of dualistic character for this Kingdom; no divide between the personal and the social or the spiritual and the material.<sup>5</sup> Jesus repeatedly gives much weight to the significance of His Kingdom for the fulfilment of the package of promises from Genesis to Malachi. This package is thoroughly holistic. The exception being the exclusion of all inherently evil, persistent in rebellion, and beyond redemption.

The continuance of this earth is fundamental to the fulfilment of the Kingdom: the promises of the Kingdom demand it.<sup>6</sup> Far too much substance and imagery in the Old Testament expectations feature the earth itself for there to be any possibility of Kingdom fulfilment without this earth's continuance, transformation and renewal. Jesus' incarnation brings Him into this context of Kingdom expectation and the Gospel writers portray Him as embracing it.

## **INCARNATION**

The origins of humankind are in the basic materials of earth. 'The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground' (Genesis 2:7). Earthly dust as the origin and destiny (Genesis 3:19) of humankind is a recurring motif<sup>7</sup> and integral to the essence of being

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, if He did, we would have to conclude that His world view was antithetical with that of the Old Testament.

<sup>6</sup> 'The biblical testimony to the *earthly locale of the kingdom of God* speaks indirectly in favour of the belief in the eschatological transformation of the world rather than its annihilation.' (Volf 1990:29. Emphasis original.)

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 2:7, 3:19, 18:27, Job 7:21, 10:9, 17:16, 21:26, 34:15, Psalm 7:5, 22:15, 22:29, 30:9, 44:25, 90:3, 103:14, 104:29, Ecclesiastes 3:20, 12:7, Isaiah 41:2, Daniel 12:2, plus the many usages of 'dust' to express mourning and devastation. The 'dust of death' (Psalm 22:15) imagery is extended to expressions of mourning that involve dust and ashes. Dust is used in various ways to express the devastation of judgement however it comes.

human, being flesh.<sup>8</sup> Humankind is ‘of the earth’ (Psalm 10:18). When John reports that ‘The Word became flesh’ (John 1:14), this flesh is of the dust of the earth. The earth is not merely the platform on which the main characters (God and humankind) play out their roles rather it is one of the players; intimately and integrally present in each and every one of humankind. The Word that created this humankind of the dust of the earth is now the Word that embraces the creation in incarnation giving it acute value and significance. So, ‘In the perspective of St John’s Gospel creation has simultaneously a christological and anthropological focus’ (Stylianopoulos 1983:366). One now cannot speak of creation without immediate and direct implications for the one who is ‘the Word become flesh’: any lessening of the worth or value of creation calls into question the pre-eminence and essence of Christ Himself.

The incarnation of Jesus brings two natures together in one integrated personality yet without losing the distinctives of either (*hypostatic union*).<sup>9</sup> Jesus is at all times both fully divine and fully human. Nothing of one lessens the other in any way. So Jesus, the divine Son of God, is of human flesh, of the dust of the earth. To be human, of the dust of the earth, is to possess a physicality integral to one’s being, is to have a real and substantive kinship with all created material. John’s bold statement expresses the high importance of this (1 John 4:2-3) affirming the fleshly reality of Jesus is fundamental to authentic belief. This same Jesus has been well examined, ‘what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands’ (1 John 1:1). Jesus is of the earth: no greater endorsement of the earth’s worth, value and goodness is possible.

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<sup>8</sup> As too are the breath of God that gives life and the image of God that shapes human distinctiveness.

<sup>9</sup> As concluded at the Council of Chalcedon in 451CE.

The use of the word *logos* (John 1:1-14) intimately links Jesus with creation. First, in the passage itself, Jesus is the Word by which all comes into being. With direct allusions to Genesis 1, He is the life and light of all creation. He is integral to the existence of the earth. The creative Word of God has a rich history in the Old Testament from the voice of God that commands in Genesis through to the sustaining Word in Psalm 33 which continues to order the earth for human habitation. This powerful earth-creating, earth-sustaining Word is Jesus. The one on whom the whole earth depends now even more intimately associates Himself with the earth in the most profound way possible, ‘bringing the story of creation to its height by a new creation from the womb of the old’ (NT Wright 1998:1217).

Secondly, as Peacocke states, ‘In Greek thought *Logos* stood for reason in both the sense of the human capacity to discern and make order and in the sense of the principle of rationality of the cosmos.’<sup>10</sup> Quoting Jenkins he adds, ‘Man had an essential affinity with this ordering rationality of the universe’ (1971:158-159). He also describes *logos* with reference to Hebrew concepts of wisdom and word.<sup>11</sup>

Thirdly, Proverbs 8:30 (cf. 22-31) speaks of Wisdom as the craftsman at the side of Yahweh as He brings the earth into being. Paul says Jesus is the Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30); the one by whom all things were created and are held together (Colossians 1:15-17). The language of *logos* in the context of ‘All things came into being through him’ (John 1:3), personified now in flesh, points to the personified wisdom of Yahweh who both created the earth and remains present to rejoice in all He

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<sup>10</sup> See also Morris (1971:115-126).

<sup>11</sup> ‘This *Logos* language expressed the Christian understanding that the coming of Jesus Christ had been definitive for the understanding of the way in which man and the universe fit together and that within the being of God there was present a creativity which was personal, which ordered the universe, which awoke the response in man corresponding to this order, which existed eternally but was manifest in the man Jesus in history’ (Peacocke 1971:158-159).

has made.<sup>12</sup> Like Wisdom, *logos* permeates, orders and structures the universe as ‘incarnation and creation are thoroughly continuous in the purposes of God ... The incarnation in Jesus is not the sudden arrival of an otherwise absent Logos, but rather the completion of a process already begun in God’s act of creation’ (Need 2003:403). So ‘To tear the incarnation away from creation here, or anywhere, is to do damage to the theology of both’ (404).

‘The Word became flesh’ is rich with reference and imagery that directly draws the creation itself into the drama of incarnation. So incarnation is ....

a repudiation of all attitudes to the stuff of the world which saw it as evil, alien to its Creator, a prison from which a non-material reason, or 'soul', must seek release. God was to be seen as achieving his ends by involvement with, immanence in, expression through the very stuff of the world and its events in space and time. Moreover, the assertion that Jesus was the ultimate revelation of God's being to men in a mode they could understand and appropriate, amounted ... to an affirmation that 'nature' in its actuality, materiality and evolution, of which Jesus was indubitably a part, is both potentially at least an expression of God's being and the instrument of his action (Peacocke 1979:289).

For God Himself, in Christ, to associate Himself so perfectly and intimately with the material world is to make a sublime statement of endorsement. The merit and goodness of creation is not just because God made it, not just because He declared it to be good (Genesis 1:31) but also because ‘an even stronger reason for a positive affirmation of both the reality and the worth of the created order – namely, the doctrine of the incarnation’ (Peacocke 1979:288-289).

Jesus embodies all as one, the Wisdom of creation, the rationality/*logos* of creation, and the Word of creation. Consequently, in the person of Christ a new order of creation arises that does not come about through the ending of the old. Rather the new embraces the old, merges with it and, as we shall see in the following chapters, will emerge with it

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<sup>12</sup> For further discussion on this blend of Word, Rationality and Wisdom in the use of Logos in the context of John 1:1-18, see for example, Houghton (2007:9-10), Morris (1971:115-126), Need (2003:397-404).



into new heavens and new earth: Christ the first fruits and ultimately all of created reality.<sup>13</sup>

The Creator, who has in incarnation so closely associated Himself with the material world, is the same one described as ‘too pure to behold evil.’ (Habakkuk 1:13). He may engage with the realities of evil to judge and purify but He maintains some distance between Himself and this evil.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, it follows that in incarnation this same God united so intimately with the material world affirms beyond doubt that physicality in its own right is not evil. The earth is worthy to be incorporated into the very person of God Himself in an ontological union in which the divine and the humanized dust of the earth retain their natures in just one personality. The coming together of the earthly and the divine does not corrupt or pollute the divine in any way nor does the divine ‘diminish through a total identification with the material dimensions of creation’ (Gnanakan 1999:33). There may be evil in the world but the material world in and of itself is fundamentally good; so good that intimate fellowship between the divine and the human in Jesus is perfectly acceptable.

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<sup>13</sup> There is no suggestion in this perspective of Pantheism (everything that exists is infused with divinity and that the divine is only found infused within everything) or Panentheism (everything is infused with divinity though the divine still exists independently of everything else). Both are variously understood. Incarnation does not draw the entire physical reality into Christ Himself as if thereby all matter is infused with divinity. The absolute endorsement of the creation in the incarnation does not require that the totality of dust and flesh be incorporated into His own personhood. The extent of the material in Jesus was not all physical reality but a perfectly sufficient representation to justify the conclusions being drawn here. For an alternative view which more positively speaks of Panentheism see Bauckham (1986:242-244) though he defines it as ‘a vision of the universe in God’ and qualifies it with other facets of God’s relationship with the created order.

<sup>14</sup> Perhaps most graphically illustrated in Ezekiel’s description of the departure of God’s glory from the temple (Ezekiel 10:1-22) and reflected in the banishment from the Garden in Genesis 3:23-24.

In anticipation of the cross, incarnation is the first act in the reconciliation of God to all things (Colossians 1:15-20). In Christ's personhood, the wall of estrangement between God and His creation begins to crack.<sup>15</sup>

While many doctrinal explorations of the incarnation make no reference to its implications for the material world, for or against, some do.<sup>16</sup> The following range of comments demonstrates the comprehensive significance of the incarnation especially with regards to the significance of the material realm.

Gelderloos rejects the 'anthropocentric' views of incarnation that fail to see the implications for all of creation (1992:36-39). Rust (1971:15-33), regarding both incarnation and resurrection, concludes this is a promise of redemption for nature as well as humankind because 'The new humanity is the center of the new creation' (33), which 'in Christ means a new humanity in a new order' (30). For Rust, humankind is bound to the natural environment in 'a structure of covenants' (25)<sup>17</sup> such that incarnation must never be thought of as merely a benefit for humankind alone. Elsdon (1992:140-144) states that in the incarnation, a convergence of the themes of creation and redemption and the goodness of creation is carried forward from the Old Testament such that creation is 'central to the gospel rather than being peripheral to it' (143). Jaki (1980) argues that incarnation brings the importance of both creation and history into far greater prominence. The incarnation is 'the foundation of Christian ethics' and

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<sup>15</sup> The estrangement between God and creation has been described in Chapter Two and the contribution of the primary events of the First Advent to this reconciliation is explored in the following chapters.

<sup>16</sup> The rejection of the incarnation as an endorsement of the worth of creation is not stated: at most it could be considered as implied in the silence. Packer makes the statement, 'The Scotist speculation, popularized by Westcott, that the incarnation was primarily for the perfecting of creation, and only secondarily and incidentally for the redeeming of sinners, finds not the least support in the New Testament' (Packer 1962:557-561). While this is merely expressed as a trade-off between competing priorities, he nevertheless makes no further comment about the significance of the incarnation of the divine Word for the creation.

<sup>17</sup> Note Murray's similar claim (1992).

‘creation renewed and restored’ (O’Donovan 1994:143). ‘In Jesus we meet the moral order itself revealed as incarnate’ because incarnation is ‘a perfectly theological concern to ground the moral order in creation’ (147).<sup>18</sup>

Given the Greek background to the word *logos* used of Jesus, D Wilkinson writes of Jesus as the ‘rationality behind and inherent in the Universe’ (2002:129) and consequently of the high value the incarnation gives to history and the world of earth and flesh: ‘It is a heresy to suggest that Christianity is just about the spiritual’ (136). Burrell (1996) reflects on the Word in creation and incarnation and challenges the reductionism that occurs if one without the other shapes theology and practice. In incarnation we see ‘the redemptive act as restoring that original order and indeed transforming it to an unimaginable intimacy’ (217).

The Old Testament narrative presents the earth as present in almost every episode of history and every engagement between God and humankind. The earth’s goodness and its future restoration are integral to appreciating the momentous birth of the divine incarnate one. Building upon the expectations of earth restoration in the promises of the Kingdom here is a commanding and authentic endorsement of the very high value the creation has in the mind and purposes of God. Furthermore, in creation and incarnation,

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<sup>18</sup> Note also: Gorringer writes of incarnation as foundational to all engagement with culture and the social and material world of humanity. ‘If flesh taking is true, then bodies and what we do with them, all the issues of housing, food, clothing and so on, are declared issues of decisive importance’ (2004:126). Incarnation gives value to the enterprises of justice, culture, economics and politics, ‘Because the Logos is the ground of all creation whatever is true, good and beautiful derives from it. There is, as it were, a taken form of the divine Logos wherever these things are found.’ (200) Human dignity in all its facets is evidenced in the incarnation (232). ‘The Word takes flesh, becomes culture: this is at the heart of any theology of culture’ (257). Consistently, Meilaender in addressing Bioethics begins with incarnation because, ‘Incarnation Honors Our Bodies’ (2004:118).

Kirkpatrick states, ‘The Incarnation explicates our covenantal and sacramental relationship to God and all of life. (2009:193) ‘In the incarnation, Christ is “the recapitulation of creation.”’ (205 quoting Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, Book III, 16.6) So ‘Understanding our relationship to the earth incarnationally calls us toward the future kingdom: the renewal of all creation in a metaphysical unity involving the spiritual and the physical, the personal and the social, the human and the cosmic’ (2009). See also Houston (2003:80-97).

Lilburne reflects on ‘incarnational praxis’ in the context of land and place (1989).

John presents the same Word as integral to both. The divine Word creates and shapes/orders the creation and then, despite the realities of sin and its consequences for the earth, intimately engages with it and embodies it in human flesh ‘to the end that all creation may be disclosed in its true nature as a burning bush ablaze with the glory of the triune God’ (Stylianopoulos 1983:365). Consequently, as Torrance concludes after extensive discussion of incarnation and creation, ‘the Incarnation together with the creation forms the great axis in God’s relation with the world of space and time, apart from which our understanding of God and the world can only lose meaning’ (1969:67-68). Here is a new act of creation, the beginnings of new creation.<sup>19</sup>

## **RESURRECTION**

Resurrection confirms the incarnation as authentic. His resurrection embraces every significance of Jesus’ incarnation bringing even greater weight and breadth for the significance of the earth following the assertions of His ministry (word and deed), sufferings and death. Resurrection is God’s statement of affirmation (Romans 1:4):<sup>20</sup> as developed below, it is His declaration that Jesus is worthy to be, and is, Lord and Messiah, Son of God and Man. God’s pronounces the verification of all represented in Jesus personhood. It is in resurrection that Jesus is justified.

NT Wright through his extensive exploration of resurrection in Jewish and Christian literature argues that it be understood as physical (2003a). Resurrection is more than just ‘life after death’ in that it envisages a future real physicality for the faithful in a

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<sup>19</sup> ‘The Creator redeems, and the Redeemer creates.’ Rasmussen (2002:397). Rasmussen is reflecting more generally on God’s redemptive work in creation. The incarnation fully and completely fuses creation and redemption together as one work or reality.

<sup>20</sup> Note the Acts sermons’ high place for resurrection in the evidences presented to confirm that “... God has made this Jesus, the one you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” (Acts 2:36). Acts 2:14-36, 3:11-26, 4:8-12, 5:29-32, 10:34-43, 13:16-41, 17:22-31.

restored earth. Wright rejects all suggestions of an end to the ‘space-time universe’ throughout Jewish literature (1992:333) because resurrection is integral for the restoration of Israel after Israel’s enemies have done their worst. He makes the same claim for the New Testament material (for example 1996:320-368). He consistently presents Jesus as the inaugurator of new creation, not through any kind of dissolution of this earth but by its restoration and renewal. The resurrection of the crucified Jesus is the theological trump card that leaves the question of creation’s value as beyond all doubt.<sup>21</sup>

O’Donovan argues that incarnation is foundational for appreciating resurrection as a vindication of creation, ‘the Word become flesh and dwelt among us ... as creation restored and renewed, to which God is immediately present in the person of the Son of man’ (1994:143. cf. pp. 140-151, 158-162).

Torrance is emphatic that Jesus’ incarnation is fundamental to appreciating Jesus’ resurrection. They are inseparable (1976:13, 17-18, 20-26, 31-34, 42-45, 46-60). Incarnation and resurrection come together ‘in such a way as to effect a renewing of creation and the setting of it on a new basis in which it is eternally bound up in the life of God himself.’ This ‘makes our minds reel with its immeasurable significance’ (1976:21).

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<sup>21</sup> What is surprising in NT Wright’s works is the relatively little attention that he gives to the incarnation. It gets a mention and is presented as the foundation for confirmation of creation’s worth (for example 2003a:667-675) but in the trilogy in which he presents his thesis most thoroughly (1992, 1996, 2003a), incarnation is not an item in any one of the indices. One would have expected greater attention given to incarnation as it is at the heart of the impact of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Wright nevertheless develops a strong case to conclude that if it is not physical then it is not resurrection. Wright emphasizes that the resurrection narrative of John 20 draws heavily and intentionally on the Prologue which in turn draws on the creation material of Genesis 1-2. Tidball (2006) while endorsing Wright’s observation develops the parallels between the Prologue and John 20 in more detail as he suggests that Wright’s description is somewhat limited.

With regards to any dualism between the natural and the supernatural, as if these are independent of each other, and as if God largely confines Himself to the latter, Torrance states:

This participation of the incarnation and resurrection in the natural order of things, however, must not be understood as an interruption of the natural order or an infringement of its laws, but rather the contrary. As acts of God, who is the creative Source of all order in space and time, they are essentially ordering events within the natural order, restoring and creating order where it is damaged or lacking, and it is in the terms of that *giving of* order that they constitute the relevant boundary conditions within the natural order where it is open to the transcendent and creative reality of God (1976:23. Emphasis original).<sup>22</sup>

The incarnation and resurrection are consistent with the ebb and flow of God's ordering of the earth in the blessings and curses of the Old Testament narrative. There has always been immediacy in God's participation in the workings of the creation. 'Within the created order there is a complex network of teleological and generic relations' (O'Donovan 1994:33). Incarnation, as continued in resurrection, brings an intimacy of perfect incorporation or embodiment. This is a level of creation ordering never before to be found. It is not just a practical participation as previously; now this participation is ontological. Rightly, this new order is called New Creation.

Theologically speaking, the crucifixion calls into question every assertion about the person of Jesus. His death challenges the veracity of His claims and all conclusions drawn as to the nature of His incarnation: including the *hypostatic union* and its affirmation of the worth of creation and the beginnings of new creation out of the old in the person of Jesus. Resurrection states that even death cannot dispute these claims. Resurrection is God's declaration that nothing has been found to invalidate these assertions.

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<sup>22</sup> Moltmann notes one facet of how this might be; 'And matter is always process-matter, i.e. matter in process of transformations. Matter is not just given reality but at the same time an open potentiality. Matter is subject to processes of ongoing transformation with a determined past and an as yet indeterminate future' (2007a:145).

For our purposes, resurrection repeats the creation message of incarnation while adding substantial reinforcement. Here still is the Word become flesh; the divine intimately associated with the earth blessing it with presence and participation. But in resurrection this repeat of incarnation's creation message comes out of the most severe testing of incarnation possible: a violent death that calls into question the claim of divine presence in human flesh. Resurrection is the ultimate verdict that the implications of death against the claims of incarnation are demonstrably false.

Resurrection endorses all facets of the cross: the worthiness of Christ to die in the place of others, the victory of Christ despite the worst that His enemies could heap upon him, the sufficiency of Christ's death to deal with the just requirements of God's righteousness and holiness for guilt and sin, and the worthiness of Christ to be seated at the right hand of God with authority to implement God's purposes for all creation. Each one of these has implications for the others. It is the weight of resurrection for the earth that is our particular concern for 'Every kind of deistic dualism between God and our world is rejected by the resurrection of Christ' (Torrance 1976:65).

Resurrection's confirmation of incarnation's reality needs to be further explored in four areas: the evidence for stating that the resurrection of Jesus is bodily, the nature of the resurrection body, the significance for creation in the defeat of death, and the use of the term 'vindication' to describe the impact of the resurrection for the creation.

## **Bodily Resurrection**

Just as Jesus was seen and heard, handled and observed closely (1 John 1:1) in His earthly life before death, so he is likewise examined in resurrection.<sup>23</sup> The accounts of His encounters with others speak of real physicality. Even the extra quality of movement into locked rooms does not deny the disciples' observations of His material reality.

Harris argues against a real physicality for Jesus' resurrection body but his argument is not persuasive (1990). The weaknesses of his argument are, (1) too little weight is given to the world view context as NT Wright establishes; (2) by defining the capacity of the resurrected Jesus to appear as if out of nowhere as 'Nonmaterialistic'(141), without justifying such a term even as the narrative presents Jesus as embodied, he sets up a dichotomy that then influences his reading of other texts; (3) his conclusion that Jesus' ascension happened many times before the one recorded in Acts 1, and that Jesus' body transitioned back and forth between material and nonmaterial forms, further undermines that embodiment that the narrative regards as a given; (4) lack of attention to the integration in the flow of Paul's points in 1 Corinthians 15 has resulted in Harris concluding that some of Paul's evidence points to an 'exchange' (i.e. replacement) of one body for another (191-205). Essentially, he has based much of his understanding on assumptions that go beyond the available evidence. Consequently, even though he identifies correctly the indissoluble link between humankind and creation (250-251), he is unable to assert any particular hope for the earth.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Note that in this statement, John makes no distinctions between pre and post resurrection observations.

<sup>24</sup> 'But precisely how God will bring in the new heaven and earth is not clear, whether after subjugation or after annihilation, whether by transformation or by replacement' (Harris 1990:252). Gillman (1982) in a similar way ends up sitting on the fence with regards to the question of the resurrection body's physicality.



The reports of physicality are not qualified nor stated in any other way than with matter-of-fact simplicity:

- a. The absence of the body in the tomb while yet the burial cloths were still in their correct place.<sup>25</sup>
- b. The women holding onto His feet (Matthew 28:9).
- c. When they ‘saw’ him (recognized Him by His physical appearance), they bowed down (Matthew 28:17).<sup>26</sup>
- d. The two on the Emmaus Road walked for some time with Jesus, engaged in conversation, and until meal time regarded Him as another flesh-and-blood human being (Luke 24:13-35). The length of this report serves to highlight that they had plenty of opportunity to see something different but they did not.
- e. The evidence of physical reality that Jesus insisted the disciples observe even though he had appeared rather than entered the room,<sup>27</sup> ‘Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have’ (Luke 24:39). Furthermore, He ate fish in their presence in what seems to be a deliberate act to remove any doubt as to His bodily presence (Luke 24:36-44. John 20:19-23).

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<sup>25</sup> Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12, John 20:1-8. See NT Wright (2003a:443, 689).

<sup>26</sup> Delayed recognition does not mean necessarily that Jesus’ resurrection body was significantly different in appearance implying some lack of physical continuity. Apart from the human tendency to be slow to recognize something beyond our expectations (like unexpectedly meeting someone we know on the street in another context/country when our minds are on other things and especially if we thought they were dead), Tidball (2006:175-176), in exploring the way John’s Prologue sets the scene for the resurrection narrative of John 20, notes that failure to recognize Jesus is featured in John 1:10-11. And so there is delay in Mary and Thomas in John 20 in their recognition of Him. This delay appears to be given some emphasis in the narrative so as to highlight the way that resurrection brings recognition: that is, resurrection confirms and endorses those truths of the Prologue that for a time were not appreciated and received. The delays in recognition in Luke 24 may be the utilization of the same literary device of featuring non-recognition so as to present more effectively the resurrection’s power to enable people to see Jesus better than ever before. Perhaps we might describe that as a kind of dramatic pause.

<sup>27</sup> cf. John 20:19.

- f. The second time when Jesus appeared to the disciples behind locked doors when Thomas was urged to touch and observe the body of Jesus with its crucifixion wounds (John 20:24-29).
- g. Mary held on to Jesus at length and had to be told to let go (John 20:17). Okure (1992:181-182) notes that the verb is misrepresented when translated as ‘touch’ and more accurately means holding or handling. The point is not, ‘Do not touch me – because something about my body makes this inappropriate.’ but ‘Time to let go of holding on to me because we both have things to do.’ Mary’s embrace refutes any suggestion that Jesus is less than bodily.
- h. Jesus at first appeared to be just another man (perhaps in the distance) to the disciples out fishing until His suggestion of fishing on the other side of the boat produced an excellent catch (John 21:1-14). Jesus cooked the meal and ate with them. They recognized Him – in His physical appearance.
- i. Physicality is assumed rather than stated in Acts 1:3 and 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 and his visibility as continuous with the known incarnate body of Jesus.

These weighty affirmations of physicality in the resurrected Jesus further remove any suspicion of a temporal arrangement in the *hypostatic union*. Furthermore, nothing hints or suggests that this resurrection body of Jesus was anything other than the same body that was His from conception nor is there any suggestion that somehow His body was dissolved and then reconstituted. His body appears as the same as before with nail scars and other marks of appearance confirming it to be one and the same. The worth of human flesh, and the earth from which it comes, is validated.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> NT Wright (2003a) refutes at length the possibility that such stories of bodily resurrection were inventions by the early church to address supposed issues of the day.

**‘With what kind of body?’ (1 Corinthians 15:35)<sup>29</sup>**

The probable background to why this question should be of concern to the Corinthians is in the increasing number of the dead, compounded by the particular character of the spirituality practiced in the Corinthian church (as evidenced by the fifteen references to ‘spiritual’ through the letter (Lincoln 1981:40)). As ‘spiritual’ is associated with most of the practical issues in the church, resurrection is just one of many areas distorted by this overall perspective. Lincoln argues that ‘spiritual’ and ‘heavenly’ may be ‘virtually synonymous’ in the Corinthian eschatological schema (1981:34). It seems that the Corinthians were unprepared for the death of their fellow believers whose bodies were now decomposing in the ground (1981:35). Erroneous understandings of resurrection are revealed in the questions being asked. The repeated emphasis on ‘the dead’ and the reminder of the burial of Christ (v. 4) suggests that the focus is on resurrection for those already dead whose bodies are now decaying (Dunn 2002:7-8, Fee 1987:776, Lincoln 1981:36).<sup>30</sup>

Before addressing the nature of the resurrection body, Paul asserts absolutely that the certainty of the resurrection of Jesus leaves no doubt as to the resurrection of all in Him (1 Corinthians 15:1-34). Without reducing the physicality of the resurrection appearances he references, Jesus’ body has capacity beyond the normal limits of human flesh. He passes through the grave clothes without disturbing them, enters into locked rooms, and seems able to change localities by just appearing. So what kind of body is this?

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<sup>29</sup> Wegener discusses the rhetorical character of Paul’s discourse (2004). In dramatically drawing out the contrasts in quite absolute terms, Lincoln acknowledges that Paul ‘may indulge in a little exaggeration for the sake of his argument’ (1981:37).

<sup>30</sup> Furnish notes that here Paul is not providing an outline of his theology or eschatology but addressing quite specific questions and issues (1999:105-106).

In developing his understanding of the resurrection body, is Paul describing the composition or substance of this body<sup>31</sup> or describing new characteristics and qualities? What continuity of physicality might we expect in the resurrection body? Or is the resurrection body a replacement body? As Dunn describes, Paul's concept of 'body' is broader than a simple physical organism in that embodiment, for Paul incorporates the whole of personhood including its relational capacities (2002:8-10).<sup>32</sup> Consequently, questions of continuity, discontinuity and transformation are complex yet fundamental to appreciating the implication of bodily resurrection for the earth's future.

Paul begins by noting that there are various kinds of bodies (vv. 36-41). As argued by Fee (1987:781-785), Jones (2006) and Asher (2001), Paul's emphasizes the origins of diverse bodies in the creation work of God.<sup>33</sup> He includes earthly and heavenly bodies (vv. 40-41) which helps establish the validity of both the earthly and the heavenly man within the purposes of God (vv. 47-49). The need for seeds first to die establishes a precedent for bodily new life beyond the grave (v. 36). The Corinthians ('you', v. 36) may sow seeds 'But God' determines the body that each seed generates (vv. 38-41). Then in vv. 42-44, Paul presents a series of contrasts in which 'sown' becomes a metaphor for the creation of the human body to be raised subsequently in resurrection, from 'perishable' to 'imperishable', 'dishonor' to 'glory', 'weakness' to 'power', 'natural' to 'spiritual', which is repeated as a logical necessary sequence, 'If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.'<sup>34</sup> Fee notes that 'The clauses have no expressed subject; "body" is most likely intended as the subject for *both* verbs in each

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<sup>31</sup> As argued by Padgett (2002:160-161).

<sup>32</sup> Furnish understands Paul's use of body as a reference to the 'whole person' (1999:113. Emphasis original).

<sup>33</sup> Both Furnish (1999:113) and Jones (2006:728) note the several parallels between Genesis 1 and 1 Corinthians 15:39-41.

<sup>34</sup> Note the lack of any suggestion of replacement; one body for another. The resurrection body is the previously dead body now raised with new qualities. It is still the body of the individual.

set, thus implying genuine continuity between the present body and its future expression' (1987:874. Emphasis original.), thus indicating that 'Inherent in the imagery, and crucial to it, is the fact of continuity. The one "life" is in two modes, one before and one after death and resurrection' (1987:782). Comparison of natural and spiritual bodies follows by contrasting the earthly body of the first Adam and the heavenly body of the last Adam (vv. 45-49). The reference to the pre-fall first Adam (Genesis 2:7) in v. 45 reinforces the contrasts of the original and eschatological states of resurrected persons. For our purposes, there are particular questions.

First, in Paul's contrast, what is the difference between the 'natural' or 'psychical' body and the 'spiritual' body?<sup>35</sup> Two factors from the wider context are essential. First, the consistent evidence throughout the Biblical narrative is that God values all He has made, holds it in high esteem, and promises to include the material world in the restoration and Kingdom to come.<sup>36</sup> Physicality matters. Human flesh matters. This is the world view framework for all New Testament writers and the primary thrust of NT Wright's investigation (2003a).<sup>37</sup> Secondly, the physicality of the resurrection body of Jesus as noted above. 'Resurrection ...vindicating the created order' as 'the emphasis of the resurrection narratives is upon the physical reality of the restored body' (O'Donovan 1994:56-57).

The contrasts that Paul has already made (vv. 42-44) do not refer to two bodies (before and after) but one body sown with particular qualities. But upon raising this same body, these limiting qualities have changed into qualities of an opposite character: from

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<sup>35</sup> For the use of 'physical' instead of 'natural' in the NRSV, see below. Such mistranslations contribute to misunderstanding of Paul's contrast. See Lincoln (1981:204n20).

<sup>36</sup> As examined in Chapters Two and Three.

<sup>37</sup> Russell (1996) argues similarly with regards to Jewish and New Testament apocalyptic: whatever cataclysmic events may occur they do so within a worldview in which creation has value and has an endurance through and beyond the upheavals of judgement and history, extreme as these may be.

perishable, dishonourable, weak and natural to imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual. These latter qualities are essential to the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15:50). Embodiment continues, but new qualities now feature. It is the same body, without the limitations of the body as originally created, without all the damage and corruptibility of sin, and without the corruption of the grave that makes human flesh perishable. In resurrection, a spiritual and heavenly dimension incorporates profound new qualities previously found only in the resurrection body of Christ Himself: the first-fruit of new creation. It is a body suitable for the new order of created physicality.<sup>38</sup> But how is this body no longer ‘natural’ but ‘spiritual’?

If these descriptions depict a change in the substance or composition of the body then we would have two particularly difficult expressions: a body made of *psychikos* and a body made of *pneumatikos*.<sup>39</sup> Neither concept occurs in Paul’s writings and neither fits any sense of embodiment within the flow of Paul’s contrasts in this chapter.<sup>40</sup>

Andrew Johnson (2003) argues that Paul in 1 Corinthians uses the *psychikos* – *pneumatikos* distinction epistemologically in chapter 2:14-15 and ontologically in chapter 15:44. In both he argues that the difference that the Spirit makes is not material but in the change needed to be part of the new creation. The ‘way of knowing’ suitable to the old age does not work in the new. The Spirit needs to generate a new ‘way of knowing’ appropriate for the new and ‘a new ontology that corresponds to the new epistemology that he describes’ (296). He asserts that in the ontological transition Paul

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<sup>38</sup> Any suggestion that Paul is speaking of the physical body being replaced by a spiritual body is the result of imposing an assumed dualism from a particular world view and without reference to the terminology Paul uses nor the flow of ideas as Paul addresses the nature of the resurrection body.

<sup>39</sup> ‘The concept of a “spiritual body,” of course, is an oxymoron’ (Wegener 2004:450).

<sup>40</sup> Lincoln: ‘Thus ‘spiritual’ in connection with the body should not be confused with adjectives such as ethereal or immaterial. Nor should it be understood as describing a substance, for just as the psychical body does not describe a body consisting of a psychical substance so neither does the spiritual body signify one made of a spiritual substance’ (1981:42).

describes, ‘there is a definite *material continuity implied in the whole process*’ (298. Emphasis original). That is, ‘God does not abandon even the decomposed fleshy material, but somehow redeems and transforms it so that it is capable of being the material of the new creation’ (298). This is the logical pattern of Paul’s descriptions in 1 Corinthians 15 of the material of the seed transforming into the material of the plant. Different embodiment expressions of the one body, and of the earthly man, take on the likeness of the heavenly man so as to be ontologically suitable for life in the new creation. Corruption marks the old flesh, but in resurrection comes the new clothing of incorruptibility; the perishability of the old replaced with the imperishability and immortality of the new. If Paul was suggesting a contrast between material and non-material existence, Johnson states that Paul would have certainly used the word *sárx* not *psyche* (301).<sup>41</sup> He adds, ‘Flesh and blood ... *as they are*’ (305. Emphasis original.) cannot inherit the Kingdom until clothed with the incorruptibility of the resurrection body. Then, by implication, flesh and blood suitably renewed to take its place in new creation.<sup>42</sup> The resurrection body of Jesus is one of ‘flesh and blood’ but no longer merely that. His resurrection body already has experienced the infusion of the new qualities Paul has listed out.<sup>43</sup>

NT Wright’s case is more extensive though essentially the same in argument and conclusion (2003a:312-374). The references to Genesis, the failure to use the obvious word *sárx* if he had been advocating something non-material, the context of a Jewish established tradition of resurrection as physical, and the focus on the change from

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<sup>41</sup> As he does in v. 39 in distinguishing the various bodies of ‘flesh’ in humans, animals, birds and fish.

<sup>42</sup> ‘The resurrection of the body to be a ‘spiritual body’ no more means that the body is resolved away into spirit than the fact that we are made ‘spiritual men’ in Christ means that our humanity is dissolved away in him. To be a spiritual man is not to be less than man but more fully and truly man. To be a spiritual body is not to be less body but more truly and completely body, for by the Spirit physical existence is redeemed from all that corrupts and undermines it, and from all or any privation of being’ (Torrance 1976:140-141).

<sup>43</sup> See also the extensive discussions in Lincoln (1981:39-54) and Fee (1987:785-803) which present the same conclusion as Johnson, Torrance and NT Wright.

corruption to incorruptibility, are all identified as features of an unfolding logic that Paul uses to describe continuity and discontinuity in the one body soon to be transformed into the physicality most suitable for new creation in new heaven and earth.

Wright suggests new terminology is needed:

This new mode of embodiment is hard to describe, but we can at least propose a label for it. The word “transphysical” seems not to exist. ... The “trans” is intended as a shortening of “transformed”. “Transphysical” is not meant to describe in detail what sort of body it was that the early Christians supposed Jesus already had, and believed that they themselves would eventually have. Nor indeed does it claim to explain how such a thing can come to be. It merely ... puts a label on the demonstrable fact that the early Christians envisaged a body which was still robustly physical but also significantly different from the present one. If anything – since the main difference they seem to have envisaged is that the new body will not be corruptible – we might say not that it will be less physical, as though it were some kind of ghost or apparition, but more. “Not unclothed, but more fully clothed” (NT Wright 2003a:477-478).

Secondly, in Paul’s contrast, what is the difference between the ‘earthly’ body of the first Adam and the ‘heavenly’ body of the last Adam (vv. 45-49)? As for the previous question, key background perspectives should be given due weight. Furthermore, Paul continues with a series of contrasts that build on his earlier ones even as he uses this first and last Adam contrast to elucidate the difference between ‘natural’ and ‘spiritual’. An appropriate sequence in human experience follows (v. 46) even as we transition from death in the first Adam to life in the last Adam (v. 22). The strong use of creation themes in the chapter (Jones 2006:728) together with the Genesis focus for the first Adam as ‘from the dust of the ground’ who ‘became a living being’ (Genesis 2:7), clarify that the contrast is with Adam as created before sin changed everything. As Jones concludes, ‘Paul wishes here to found the miracle of the resurrection, not on God’s soteric dealing with sin – though he will do this elsewhere – but on the ontological and eschatological possibilities inherent in God’s original creative act’ (2006:727).<sup>44</sup>

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44 Of Adam becoming a living being, Jones writes, ‘This inceptive verb γίνομαι εἰς, as an ingressive aorist, clearly indicates entrance into a state. These syntactically balanced phrases are not simply a fine linguistic achievement. They also describe the momentous events of cosmic history. The changes of state represent the two essential acts of God in creation and resurrection. Paul is here affirming the goodness of the original creation and the surpassing glory of the final, transformed creation. So this



As Paul contrasts the qualities of the two Adams, he writes of a new kind of spiritual life in the change from ‘natural’ to ‘spiritual’ (vv. 45-46). The first Adam had life but the second in resurrection has new life-giving qualities. Fee continues the motif of qualitative difference between the two by laying out the evidence for quality rather than origins being the point of the contrast between earthly and heavenly (1987:792-793). The issue is ‘what kind of body?’ For Paul, the ‘heavenly vision’ (Acts 26:19) on the Damascus Road remained a feature of his understanding of the resurrected Christ.<sup>45</sup> While Paul writes of the first Adam’s nature in the dust of the earth (vv. 47-49), he no doubt knows that in the last Adam’s embodiment he too was of the dust of the earth; like the first Adam, the second Adam is also human, *anthrōpos*, in resurrection (v. 47-49). But the last Adam was so much more. His resurrection body has heavenly qualities.<sup>46</sup> So resurrection of the dead brings spiritual and heavenly qualities to those raised like Christ (cf. vv. 20-23).<sup>47</sup> Just as new heavenly realities transform the natural body with new spiritual qualities, these same heavenly realities will transform the limitations of the body of earth. The reference to the glory of heavenly bodies in vv. 40-41 suggests that glory is the most probable feature that Paul has in mind for what is ‘heavenly’. Paul’s conclusion in v. 49 does not speak of replacement but the addition of new heavenly qualities to affect this transformation. In the discussion above on the

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text, dense as it is, proposes two book ends on the plan of God, declaring the organic relationship between protology and eschatology. In God's plan there are two kinds of life, the protozoic and the eschatozoic, and they circumscribe the whole of human and cosmic history. In this sense, as Geerhardus Vos already saw, eschatology precedes soteriology’ (2006:715).

<sup>45</sup> See Fee (1987:793), Hultgren (2003:366-370), Lincoln (1981:47-48).

<sup>46</sup> Lincoln: ‘Paul is saying that the second man is heavenly and not that the second man is from heaven.’ ‘In verses 48, 49 *ἐπουράνιος* is ... applied to believers as well as to Christ, and this can hardly mean that believers have come from heaven’ (1981:46).

<sup>47</sup> Lincoln’s argument is that the Corinthians had significantly overstated the ‘spiritual’ and ‘heavenly’ facets of the life they already had in Christ. This produced a weakening effect on expectations of resurrection. Consequently, Paul addresses two issues in one statement. Resurrection is real and brings significant change. Death is not the end, but nor is the present experience of the spiritual and the heavenly all there is. Much greater spiritual and heavenly realities remain for the future when in resurrection, new qualities will be put on (Lincoln 1981:33-54).

embodiment of the resurrected Christ, His earthly body continues, though now transformed.<sup>48</sup>

To inherit the Kingdom requires more than mere ‘flesh and blood’ (v. 50).<sup>49</sup> The earthly body first must ‘put on’, be clothed with, new qualities. Verses 51-54 imply that Paul writes of two scenarios, the raising of the dead who will ‘put on imperishability’ and the living who will ‘put on immortality’. But both the resurrected dead and the immortalized living are ‘changed’.<sup>50</sup>

Philippians 3:21 expresses the same transition. The bodies we now have will be ‘conformed’<sup>51</sup> to the body of Christ because ‘He will transform’<sup>52</sup> our bodies so that their character changes from one of ‘humiliation’ to one of ‘glory’. 2 Corinthians 3:18 describes this transformation as a present continuous work of the Spirit. Like 1 Corinthians 15:49,<sup>53</sup> this metamorphosis<sup>54</sup> conforms believers to the image of Christ that they might share in His glory. Philippians 3:21 features confident hope for the future, 1 Corinthians 15 features the contrast between creation and resurrection in new creation, 2 Corinthians 3:18 features the process of this transformation as already begun in the work of the Spirit.

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<sup>48</sup> Fee, Lincoln and Morris discuss the more probable original text for the verb as hortatory subjunctive rather than future for the tense in most translations. ‘Let us bear’ indicates that the heavenly qualities of the resurrected Christ are qualities that the Corinthians should even now strive to practice (Fee 1987:794-795, Lincoln 1981:50-51, Morris 1985:220).

<sup>49</sup> See Dunn (2002) for an alternative view in which he claims the resurrection body as described in 1 Corinthians 15 is not one of ‘flesh and blood’.

<sup>50</sup> See Fee (1987:802), Furnish (1999:116), Andrew Johnson (2003:305-306), Mare (1976:291).

<sup>51</sup> See W Grundmann (1971:787).

<sup>52</sup> See J Schneider (1971: 957–958).

<sup>53</sup> Note Romans 8:29-30 which also transitions believers from their present state to being conformed to the image of Christ and then to glorification in Christ.

<sup>54</sup> See Behm (1967a:755-759).

Resurrection brings radical change. Questions of continuity and discontinuity inevitably follow. Paul presents the contrasts discussed here in a series of absolute statements whose rhetoric (cf. Wegener 2004) clearly features particular contrasts but does not describe every facet of resurrection.<sup>55</sup> Discontinuity is specific: bodies are no longer perishable, dishonourable, weak and natural. Qualities essential for the coming Kingdom must replace those limitations inherent in the created order for humankind. This replaces new qualities for old, not the body itself. As for Jesus so for all in Him, a transformed spiritual and heavenly body made suitable the future. Paul's concept of 'heavenly' is 'Christocentric' (Lincoln 1981:52-53). The second man inaugurates a 'new order of humanity' which 'transcends the old and it is the concept of the heavenly dimension which helps the apostle to indicate the eschatological 'plus' factor in the newness of the new creation inaugurated by Christ's resurrection' (Lincoln 1981:53).

Fee is right in arguing that continuity and transformation best describe Paul's rhetoric:

Nonetheless, Paul was equally convinced that Christ's resurrection was not the resuscitation of a corpse, but the transformation of his physical body into a "glorified body" (Phil. 3:21) adapted to his present heavenly existence. It is this reality that ultimately controls the present argument. Thus, the long debate over whether the stress lies on continuity or discontinuity is a bit misguided. Paul's concern obviously lies with both; however, it is far better to speak of continuity and transformation. With what kind of body? As with Christ, the same yet not the same; this body, but adapted to the new conditions of heavenly existence; sown one way, it is raised another, but the same body is sown and raised (1987:777).

In so far as the resurrection body of Jesus, and the future resurrection bodies of believers, indicate the impact of the parousia on the earth, the discontinuous is in whatever holds the earth back from being the new earth. Such limitations may be inherent in the original order of creation or in the impact of sin on the earth. Like the

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<sup>55</sup> See Wegener (2004:453).

resurrection body, the liberated earth takes on new qualities so that it might be an appropriate locale for the new heaven/earth.<sup>56</sup>

The bodily nature of Jesus' resurrection assures us that everything of incarnation continues; it is the incarnate Word who is resurrected and transformed. This personal and intimate ontological participation in the earthly world of material reality is secure. Resurrection signifies that 'redemption is not an escape to a better world but an extraordinary transformation of this world .... the transformation of this material, bodily world' (RF Collins 1999:18).<sup>57</sup>

### **Death Defeated**

Paul confidently speaks of Jesus' resurrection as the defeat of death itself (1 Corinthians 15:50-56). Death is the consequence of sin, the death of Christ atones for sin, and the resurrected life of Jesus destroys death. The Gospel writers and Paul leave no doubt that the coming of Christ's Kingdom brings new life and a freedom from death. For example, in John's Gospel references to life abound, 'everyone who lives and believes in me will never die' (11:26): life which is both a new quality of life (John 10:10) and also enduring beyond even death. Paul argues that life is one of the gifts to flow out of the death and resurrection of Jesus and, as in John, this life is 'eternal' and comes through the Spirit 'so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life' (2 Corinthians 5:4). We who were dead have been 'made alive' with Christ (Ephesians 2:1-6). 'Christ

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<sup>56</sup> Andrew Johnson argues for resurrection as expressing 'what will be redeemed/transformed in the new creation. This ... suggests a definite material continuity between 'this age' and the new creation and that the discontinuity between them does not have to do with fleshly existence per se, but rather with how Sin has corrupted our current fleshly existence' (2003:309).

<sup>57</sup> As Brueggemann expresses it: 'Resurrection is the gift of power to the powerless (see Mark 5:1-20; Luke 19:1-10) and the invitation to the dispossessed to enter new power, freedom, and life, that is "turf". In the Old Testament the resurrection motif is undoubtedly expressed as the call to exiles to leave exile and return to land. Thus crucifixion/resurrection echoes the dialectic of *possessed land lost/exiles en route to the land of promise*' (2002:169. Emphasis original.). See also Moltmann (2007a:141-149).

Jesus, ... abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (2 Timothy 1:10). Resurrection is the victory over death that brings immortality and resurrection to all in Him (1 Corinthians 15).

References to death point back to Genesis 3 where the coming of death for humankind is the consequence of disobedience. Commentators vary in their views as to the exact nature of the relationship between sin, mortality and death in Genesis 2-3.<sup>58</sup> But suggestions that some delay between sin and death makes a connection unlikely (von Rad 1972:95)<sup>59</sup> are not justified as immediacy is not a logical requirement for the link between sin and death to be valid. Nor is death merely 'part of the natural order of things' (Skinner 1930:83) in that Genesis 3 and subsequent references indicate that death, for humankind, is a consequence of sin.<sup>60</sup> Denials of the punishment nature of death, and claims that the passage is simply etiological (Westermann 1984:265-267), neglect the texts which state otherwise.<sup>61</sup> Cut off from the tree of life – by inference, the tree of immortality – humankind enters the world of mortality as already real in non-human life (cf. Munday 1992:51-68).<sup>62</sup> As Dumbrell puts it, there was 'relational immortality' that was 'conditional': it all depended on which tree one went to for life (2001b:26). The sequence of the narrative points to death as the ultimate cost of God's

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<sup>58</sup> See Gulley (1992b:110-111), Harris (1988:188), PS Johnston (2000a:443; 2003:532-536), Morris (1996a:265-267), KH Richards (1992:108-110), Ryken et al (2000:198-199).

<sup>59</sup> Though correct in noting that the continuance of life for a time is evidence of grace.

<sup>60</sup> Genesis 2:17, 3:3, 3:19, 3:22, followed by the introduction of violent death/murder (4:8, 4:15, 4:23) and the exasperated response of God to the extreme corruption throughout human society (6:11-13). References to death as simply the end of life without any negative implications, or those which regard death with dismay, are not necessarily mutually exclusive with those texts that specify the link between sin and death.

<sup>61</sup> In addition to those listed in n. 34 above, see also for example Deuteronomy 24:16, 30:15-19, Psalm 90:7-10, Ezekiel 18:4, as well as the texts noted in articles of n. 32 above in which death is described in negative terms.

<sup>62</sup> cf Munday (1992:51-68). GJ Wenham argues that to be expelled from the Garden and the life giving presence of God 'was to enter the realm of death' (1987:74).

displeasure: the break down in relationships through the curse of God is but the first fruits of a far greater calamity: life itself stripped away in death.<sup>63</sup>

If the defeat of death, followed by the gift of life, is as complete as the New Testament presents then the significance of this for the earth is a question that inevitably must follow. In Genesis 3, the coming of death as a consequence of sin weaves together human death and the ground's curse. The reversal of one facet of this in Jesus' death and resurrection implies a reversal of the other. If life replaces death then earth's restoration replaces earth's curse. Paul reflects on this in several places as we shall see in Chapter Six. NT Wright states of 1 Corinthians 15:35-41 and the beginnings of 'new creation', 'Genesis 1 – 3 forms a subtext for the whole chapter, and even when Paul appears to be merely offering illustrations these, too, are drawn from the creation stories' (2003a:313). Furthermore, the reversal in Christ of the consequences of Adam's sin in the passage (v. 22) establishes the Genesis 3 narrative within the train of thought that Paul employs to expound the impact of resurrection. This bodily new life is not confined to just those persons who are 'in Christ' (v. 22): Paul fills out the implications with references to 'the kingdom' (v. 24) in which 'everything' is brought under His rule 'that God may be all in all' (v. 27-28).

We have already noted the ebb and flow of the impact of human sin on the created order in Chapter Two.<sup>64</sup> The trajectory of that pattern or logic is that a final and complete break-out from the curse of death in and through the resurrection of Jesus must also liberate all else caught up in that list of broken relationships in Genesis 3:14-19. If resurrection destroys death, how much more must the lesser consequences of the fall

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<sup>63</sup> The conclusion of Paul is clear, death results from sin and Adam's sin was the cause of death entering human reality. See Romans 5:12-21, 1 Corinthians 15:21-26.

<sup>64</sup> Chapter 2:49-74.

also find liberation from curse and restoration to fullness of life? Whatever may be the consequences for the earth from the sin of humankind, resurrection brings restoration of all things to their rightful place in the creation of God and the beginnings of new creation.

## **Vindication**

Is the word 'vindication' a valid way to describe the impact of resurrection for the creation? It is often used so by O'Donovan:

The resurrection of Christ, upon which Christian ethics is founded, vindicates the created order in this double sense: it redeems it and it transforms it. For the resurrection appears in the Gospels under a double aspect, as the restoration of Jesus from the dead and his glorification at God's right hand. (1994:56)

Vindication is a recurring motif in the Old Testament both with regards to the injustices suffered by the faithful and the righteous, and also for the covenant community that has been devastated by invading and occupying foreign powers. As NT Wright explains, resurrection is a feature of this vindication: resurrection of both person and community, the former in bodily presence sometime beyond death and the latter in the restoration of the peace, prosperity and security of the people of God in their own land (1996:320-368, 2003a:85-128, 129-206).<sup>65</sup>

To vindicate is to clear of accusation, blame, suspicion or doubt; to provide justification or support for something to be recognized as right and true; to authenticate a claim; to justify or prove worth or value or importance; to defend, maintain, or insist on proper

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<sup>65</sup> Passages listed as expressions of the hope for vindication include Psalms 37:6, 103:6, 135:14, Isaiah 50:5-8, 62:1-2 (Harris 1990: 165-166), Hosea 2:16f, Jeremiah 3:19ff, 29:10ff, 31:1ff, Ezekiel 37:1ff, (cf. also Deuteronomy 32:39, 1 Samuel 2:6, 2 Kings 5:7) (Torrance 1976:29), Micah 7:2-10, Daniel 9:26-27, 11:31-35, 12:10-11, Jeremiah 50:6-8, 28, 51:6-10, 45-57, Zechariah 2:6-12, 14:2-9, Deuteronomy 30:2-5 (NT Wright 1996:320-368. Wright here also develops the Mark 13 passage, with its parallels with the destruction of Babylon material in the prophets, as the coming vindication of Jesus.). A more extensive list can be found in NT Wright 2003a:85-128.

recognition. Is creation in need of vindication; has it been wronged in some way, unjustly treated, falsely accused? There are two ways in which this has been the case.

The first feature of vindication is the recurring impact of human sin on the created order as examined in Chapter Two.<sup>66</sup> The earth itself is innocent yet suffers deeply through the corruption of the flesh (Romans 7:5-8:13) by the sin of humankind and curse of the earth as God responds to human rebellion. From the cry of the blood of Abel out of the earth (Genesis 4:10) through to groan of the creation (Romans 8:19-22), the earth has suffered through no fault of its own.<sup>67</sup> Justice demands the vindication of the earth; set free from the false implication that it is at fault; set free from the brokenness of relationships which characterized it after the curse of the ground. Justice requires restoration to its proper place and freedom to become all that God had intended at the beginning. And this justice and redemption requires the redemption and restoration of humankind; one without the other would break the synergistic, theological and relational interdependency between them.

Resurrection, redemption and earth's restoration are deeply intertwined. Torrance (1976:61-85<sup>68</sup>) argues this at length arguing that one cannot speak of the redemption of persons without addressing the relationship between those creaturely persons and the creation they both inhabit and of which they are intimately a real part: 'the restoration of the true creaturehood to man' includes the link with creation without which 'man could not survive as man' (79).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Chapter 2:49-74.

<sup>67</sup> Note the references listed in Chapter 2:48n9 in which 'the earth mourns'.

<sup>68</sup> Torrance states with regards to Hebrews 12:24, 'Abel was not vindicated, but Jesus was; and by his vindication put an end to the unfinished business of nature's justice' (1976:74).

<sup>69</sup> That is, restoration to full humanity, if it is to be true to the character of true humanity in Genesis 1-2, must involve a restoration of humankind to its designated role in the created order. 'Creation's acute disappointment at fallen humanity's failure to rule as God intended will be reversed' (Harris 1990:251).



O'Donovan develops this indissoluble link between redemption and creation's longing for its 'original integrity' in that resurrection points to 'a restoration of Adam's lordship in the natural order' (O'Donovan 1994:24).

When we describe the saving work of Christ by the term "redemption", we stress the fact that it presupposes the created order. "Redemption" suggests the recovery of something given and lost. When we ask what it is that was given and lost, and must now be recovered, the answer is not just "mankind", but mankind in his context as the ruler of the ordered creation that God has made; for the created order, too, cannot be itself while it lacks the authoritative and beneficent rule that man was to give it. In speaking of the redemption of all creation, of course, we must not allow the idea to float free in independence of "the revealing of the sons of God", for which, according to Saint Paul, it waits (Rom. 8:19ff) (O'Donovan 1994:54).<sup>70</sup>

NT Wright's focus in writing of vindication is upon the cry for justice for the suffering covenant people both personally in resurrection and nationally in restoration as they cry out for vindication as the true faithful people of God. The wicked may prosper for a time but resurrection will bring vindication for the long-suffering faithful. Wright argues for understanding of both in holistic terms with real physicality being fundamental to this hope. In this way he speaks of resurrection as vindication; firstly for Jesus Himself and then for all caught up in Him, creation included. In the terms of Daniel 7 and 12, resurrection vindicates Jesus as the true sovereign Son of Man with dominion over all creation (2003a:408-411). With particular reference to Mark 13, Wright also elaborates on the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in 70AD as the vindication of Jesus as the true prophet of God: and if His validity as God's prophet is verified by the fulfilment of His predictions, then His credentials as the Lord of Creation who inaugurates authentic new creation are vindicated (1996:320-368).

The second feature of vindication for creation is the challenge in the cross to all that the incarnation represents of the value of the earth. The cross, in effect, is an accusation that

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<sup>70</sup> Note also O'Donovan's summation of the Spirit's work in John 16:8-11 as vindication of the value of creation (1994:105-106).

the Word become flesh is merely a temporary arrangement, and the authentication of the high value of the earth is in fact questionable. No greater challenge exists to every facet of the *hypostatic union* than His humiliating and violent execution. This defiance of incarnation took place in the context of ...

... the only great culture that is basically non-dualist. It was precisely with that dualist culture that the Christian church had to struggle so hard ... in order to remain faithful to the fundamental character and content of the New Testament message. That is why it laid such enormous emphasis upon the resurrection of Jesus in body and even in flesh in order to maintain the integrity and wholeness of the humanity of the Incarnate Son (Torrance 1976:42).

Resurrection vindicates the creation by endorsing in the strongest of terms the claims and the personhood of the incarnate one. Harris (1990:165-170) and NT Wright in particular (1996:320-368) develop the impact of Christ's resurrection as vindication for Him (in that He was executed unjustly) and vindication of all represented by His person and work. Both Harris and NT Wright state that resurrection affirms the high value of creation though not with a particular sense of vindication for creation except in so far as vindication of Jesus Himself implies.<sup>71</sup> Neither strongly makes explicit the connection as a vindication of creation as O'Donovan does.

In conclusion, resurrection presents a strong case for the worth of the created order as explored above with particular reference to its physicality, the character of the resurrection body, the significance of the end of death, and the vindication inherent within. Resurrection affirms the continuance of biological life. Russell's summary is consistent with the conclusions above: 'Through his life and ministry the kingdom of God was initiated, and ... his resurrection "shines as a messianic light on the whole sighing creation, giving it in its transience, an eternal hope that it will be created anew

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<sup>71</sup> See also JAT Robinson (1962) who argues for Resurrection as vindication though primarily as vindication of the personhood of Jesus (44-45, 50). As the Christ, He is vindicated as the Son of Man who inaugurates the new creation (51) and the messianic age, but this new creation and the resurrection body to come is not developed in any way with regards to the future of this earth and creation. Likewise see Nickelsburg (1992:684-691).

as the ‘world without end’” (Russell 1996:145, quoting Moltmann). He continues, ‘Resurrection affirms the importance of all material existence.’

## ASCENSION

If in ascending to the presence of the Father, Jesus’ bodily existence was lost, every conclusion thus far presented in consideration of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus is undermined. Unless the *hypostatic union* is permanent, Docetism or Adoptionism become logical consequences and the significance of incarnation, though confirmed in resurrection, becomes questionable. It is not unusual to ignore this question of bodily ascension in discussions on the ascension. The exception is in discussions of Eucharist and the church as the body of Christ and whether or not a physical presence of Christ is in one or the other.<sup>72</sup>

There have been various challenges to the historicity of the ascension for which discussion can be found in Farrow (1999:15-40), Dawson (2004:31-52), Stott (1990:45-50) and various Bible Dictionaries.<sup>73</sup> However, while the descriptions of the actual event are few and brief (Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:9-11), New Testament theology assumes it as real in that the presence of Christ at the right hand of God is pivotal for Christology.<sup>74</sup> In the eyewitness account in Acts 1:9-11, nothing suggests that what they saw was any different to what they had been seeing since the first resurrection

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<sup>72</sup> Bray concludes that the physical reality is in Jesus Himself who is at the right hand of God and not in Eucharist or the body of Christ. ‘The ascension is also important because it reminds us that the body of Christ is now no longer present within the time and space framework, but belongs to the Son of God in eternity. This has a significant bearing on the use of “body of Christ” imagery to describe both the church and the eucharist. Augustine and the Reformers were both insistent that this had to be understood as a spiritual, not as a physical reality. For the Reformers in particular, this meant that the medieval doctrines of transubstantiation and the visible church as the body and bride of Christ could not possibly be true’ (Bray 1988:47).

<sup>73</sup> For example. Gulley (1992a), JM Robinson (1962).

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter 4:149n80.

appearances. The repeated use of words for seeing (eyes, looking, and sight) somewhat labours the point: they were eyewitnesses.

Fuller, without argument, states simply:

We may understand this to mean, not that he has passed to some far corner of the sky, beyond the last star, or among the stars, but that he has been exalted to a place beyond and above all material creation. We also understand that Jesus' ascension involves a change of state, as the curtain closes, not to open again until his return (1994:392).

However, as argued by others, He cannot be 'beyond and above all material creation' and yet also take that material creation with Him in His own incarnate person. There cannot be 'a change of state' without calling into question the very essence of His personhood.

In recent decades the implications of the bodily ascension of Christ regarding creation and earth have been addressed by Torrance (1976), followed by Farrow (1999),<sup>75</sup> and their contributions have been reviewed by Dawson (2004) and Sleeman (2007).

Torrance states that 'the context of the whole movement of the incarnation and the saving acts of God within it' argues against any notions of 'a progressive spiritualization or materialization of the body of Christ' between resurrection and ascension because there must be in the ascension 'a correlation with the incarnation' (1976:123). This is pivotal in his position. From incarnation to ascension an 'indivisible continuum'<sup>76</sup> flows with an objectivity that is ...

... irrevocable and invincible. It is irrevocable, for it is bound up once and for all with the incarnate reality of God in Jesus Christ – even he does not, cannot, go back on it; and it is invincible because it has a depth and range which we are unable to overtake or transcend, for it is grounded in the transparent reality of the Lord God himself (176:173).

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<sup>75</sup> Regarding Torrance (1976) Farrow writes, 'To this work we gladly acknowledge a significant debt of inspiration and guidance.' (1999:263n24). NT Wright describes Farrow's work on the ascension as 'magisterial' (2007:120).

<sup>76</sup> For elaboration on this 'indivisible continuum' see Torrance (1976:129, 169).

Torrance has set the framework for understanding the full extent of God's redemptive work: new creation of all things, the whole physical universe, gathered up in the reconciling and renewing impact of resurrection, in turn gathered up into the heavenlies, and then eventually caught up in the Parousia to come:

As surely as the saving work of God was carried out in the physical existence of Jesus Christ, as surely as his body was broken and his blood was shed for us, and as surely as he rose again from the dead in his human identity and physical existence, so surely will we be saved in our physical and creaturely being (176:142).

The alternative is clear he argues. If for any reason the reality of word become flesh is weakened or reversed or denied, if the essentials of incarnation do not continue embodied in Christ for all time, then ... 'Cut off from Jesus Christ the fact of the incarnation of the Son of God in this world, and everything becomes fragmented, and paradoxical, and empty of decisive significance' (Torrance 1976:178). If the incarnation is any less real and substantive in resurrection, ascension or Parousia then dualism and a vague mysticism will dominate all Christian hope.

Farrow (1999) surveys the millennia of church history and the ebb and flow of dualism and its consequences in the Christian church. Like Torrance, O'Donovan (1994) and NT Wright (2003a), he argues for the continuance of the physicality of incarnation in resurrection and ascension. Farrow endorses the work of Irenaeus 'in teaching the coherence of all things around the incarnate Word' (1999:55). Irenaeus, like the apostle Paul, 'refused to allow cosmology to control christology' (53). Two primary questions for Farrow are the presence and absence of Christ, and the divinity and humanity of Christ. His exploration of history exposes the consequences of confusion on these matters when, (1) Christology loses appreciation for the continuance of incarnation (*hypostatic union*) in bodily ascension as the incarnate Christ absent from the earth for now while materially present at the right hand of God; (2) Pneumatology is weak and

not able to ensure confidence that Christ is present through the Holy Spirit because Christology is ambiguous on the absence of Christ; and (3) Eschatology becomes too weak to facilitate a real hope that the now absent and incarnate Christ will come again to be present with His people in the renewed earth.<sup>77</sup>

Farrow claims, ‘In his advent and enthronement the long-awaited messianic Son had reorganized, not just the nations, but the whole of creation around himself’ (1999:31). ‘The doctrine of ascension in the flesh leads ... to a vision of new creation in which God is God, and humanity authentically human, and the world a fruitful place’ (266). Because of the physical presence of Christ, ‘Heaven itself ... had to be reinterpreted’ (31). ‘In his own undivided person he becomes ... the continuity between creation and redemption’ (53). New creation of this earth has already begun in that the Son takes up this earth into himself: and this incarnate reality continues unbroken into the presence of God, is presented to God and endorsed by God. This earth has a hope and a future for as long as the Incarnate One continues to be of the flesh of this earth. In His person, hope for humanity and the earth of which it is a real part, is the one and the same hope.<sup>78</sup>

The ascension, says O’Donovan, is bound up in incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection ‘in a knot of mutual intelligibility’ (1994:14)<sup>79</sup> and by this material incarnation-ascension sequence ‘we learn how, through a unique presence of God to his creation, the whole created order is taken up into the fate of this particular representative man at this particular moment of history, on whose fate turns the

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<sup>77</sup> Both Farrow (1999) and O’Donovan (1994) emphasize the importance of each doctrine in the spectrum from Creation to Eschatology. Each has a part to play in both world view and practice and whenever one is weak, distortions are inevitable in the others to compensate. For our purposes in this study, the place of this earth in Eschatology is as much about Creation, Christology, Kingdom and Teleology as it is about “The End Times.”

<sup>78</sup> See Chapter Five for a survey of the New Testament material that affirms that the new creation is this earth renewed.

<sup>79</sup> Torrance with regards to the objectivity of resurrection and incarnation describes this as continuing ‘... to disclose an infinite depth of intelligibility’ (1976:175).

redemption of all.’ This created order taken up into the incarnate Christ now taken up in resurrection and ascension to the presence of God in a ‘reaffirmation of creation’ (O’Donovan 1994:15).

The impact of the bodily ascension of Christ for the hope of the earth is not just a matter of an enduring incarnation. Ascension is an event frequently assumed throughout the New Testament and is a critical factor in much New Testament theology.<sup>80</sup> Ascension brings opportunity for the presentation of the Lamb who was slain (Revelation 4-5), the one obedient unto death (Philippians 2:5-8), the Son of Man (Daniel 7:13-14), to the Father as worthy to rule. He is confirmed as worthy and sits down at the right hand of God (Ephesians 1:19-23). As such He is Lord of heaven and earth, Lord of creation, with sovereign power and authority to implement the full purposes of God for the restoration of all that has been devastated by the consequences of human sin. Hope for the earth is in the sufficiency of the ascended and enthroned Christ to make it so.<sup>81</sup>

Both Dawson and Sleeman set out to develop the practical implications of the Ascension for the people of God.<sup>82</sup> Both endorse Torrance and Farrow yet are limited in these practicalities due to a lack of seeing the Ascension’s full significance. Dawson (2004) neglects an adequately developed appreciation for the created order, the full breadth of the new creation in the coming of the Kingdom of God, and an eschatology that resounds with expectations of renewed earth and restored nations (as found, for example, in O’Donovan (1994)). References to these frameworks of meaning are

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<sup>80</sup> **In anticipation:** Daniel 7:13-14, Matthew 26:64, 28:18, Mark 14:62, 16:19 Luke 9:31, 51, 24:51, John 1:18, 3:13, 6:62, 7:33, 8:14, 21, 13:1, 3, 33, 36, 14:2-5, 28, 16:5, 7, 10, 17, 28, 17:11, 13, 20:17. **In actuality:** Acts 1:8-11, 22, 2:33-35, 3:21, 5:31, 7:56, Romans 8:34, 10:6, Ephesians 1:19-23, 4:8-10, Philippians 1:23, 2:9-11, 3:10-14, Colossians 3:1-4, 1 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 1:3, 4:14, 6:19-20, 7:26, 8:4, 9:11, 24, 1 Peter 3:21-22, Revelation 4-5, 12:5.

<sup>81</sup> See the discussion of Christ’s enthronement in De Ridder (1971:171-183).

<sup>82</sup> Such implications are important considerations given the missional interests of this study.

sporadic in his work and seemingly without the substance needed to understand the full practical impact of Jesus' ascension. Consequently Dawson's practical application, even while attempting to be holistic, is individualistic rather than social,<sup>83</sup> and without any significance given to the valuing of the earth or seeing the environment as worthy of attention. Unlike Torrance and Farrow, he does not include an expansive vision for the whole creation caught up in the incarnate Son with resurrection for persons and nations in the new earth when the Son brings heaven with Him to earth at His return.

Sleeman's opening line in his chapter on the ascension is most fitting, 'to bodily go where no man has gone before' (2007:140). Star Trek fans may cringe but in Christ, and for the first time since the fall, a flesh-and-blood man has ascended into the presence of God Himself. Sleeman's chapter, at least for the first half, addresses the question, 'What on earth is the heavenly Jesus doing?' (150). He explores the question by examining particular texts in Acts, Hebrews, Revelation, 1 Corinthians, Colossians and Ephesians, and 1 Peter. This selective use of texts, and like Dawson, lacking a sufficiently strong Kingdom of God framework, has produced an insightful yet limited answer to his question. If, for example, Psalm 2 or Isaiah's messianic visions had been included as well as the already-but-not-yet Kingdom, then greater practical comprehensiveness would have resulted.<sup>84</sup> The work of Christ ascended to the right hand of God embraces more than just New Testament texts in which some reference to ascension is present. The second half of the chapter more directly reflects on the contribution of Torrance, Farrow and Dawson with perhaps stronger insight into the implications than that found

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<sup>83</sup> Note NT Wright's more comprehensive application: 'Not only Jesus' resurrection, but also his ascension, carried inescapable political significance' (NT Wright 2003a:656).

<sup>84</sup> That is, Sleeman's practical expressions of Jesus' ascension are selective due to a selective use of New Testament material. The breath of Jesus' agenda as Lord of heaven and earth is as comprehensive as the whole of the created order. Consideration of His exaltation to the right hand of God to implement this agenda must reflect not just the items arising from a limited use of the New Testament but the full and comprehensive vision of new creation and the Kingdom of God. Otherwise, the question, 'What on earth is the heavenly Jesus doing?' cannot be adequately answered.



in Dawson. His discussion on 'public theology' (181-185) is more comprehensive than Dawson's 'Christ in the Marketplace' (2004:198-200) though still without an environmental interest.

Both Dawson and Sleeman expose the limitations of a good appreciation of the Ascension when the larger theological themes of the narrative are weak. The implications of the Ascension for mission, which Dawson and Sleeman discuss, requires integration with, not isolation from, the full narrative from creation to the new creation of the Kingdom of God.

## **CONCLUSION<sup>85</sup>**

The anticipated new day that grows in vision and expectations throughout the Old Testament era is one in which the material world will find its restoration and renewal in the purification and transformation of God's people throughout the nations. The Kingdom of God incorporates many earthly realities. In incarnation, resurrection and ascension, the Word of creation embodies with humankind and the very dust of the earth. Thus, in the incarnate Son of God, the earth narrative continues consistently and with each new episode in the narrative confirming and validating the trajectory of the OT.

Jesus Himself perfectly embodies the triangulation of God, humankind and non-human creation. As Farrow summarizes, Christology determines cosmology not the reverse. Here is a perfect and high endorsement of the earth's value and continuance. It is when,

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<sup>85</sup> Others who have affirmed the earth because of incarnation, resurrection and ascension include: Bauckham & Hart (1999:122-127), Schaeffer (1970:41), P Scott (2000).

as Torrance and Farrow demonstrate, alternative cosmologies are allowed to dominate, or the New Testament squeezed into an external set of assumptions, that the *hypostatic union* is reduced to Docetism or Adoptionism in incarnation, and/or resurrection, and/or ascension. If annihilation of the earth happens at any time, the essence of the person of Christ becomes problematic. For the preservation of orthodox Christology, continuity for this earth is essential.

Building upon this Christology, the following chapters investigate how the remainder of the New Testament material relates to the earth and its future.

## The Earth Narrative: 'New Creation' in the New Testament

This chapter examines the evidence in the New Testament that new creation has already commenced and whether or not it is inclusive of this earth. This evidence is in the person of Jesus, in His ministry, in the work of the Holy Spirit, and in the Pauline use of the phrase 'new creation'. Also explored is the particular contribution of Paul Minear. The issue is whether or not this evidence of new creation is sufficiently inclusive of the present earth as to indicate that the transition of the earth into the new earth has already commenced. If so, any future dissolution of the earth would be an inexplicable incongruity. Do we see new earth emerging out of the existing creation yet inclusive of it and embedded in it? Does the new creation provide evidence of the triangulation we have followed through the narrative? Does the evidence of new creation establish this earth as secure in the ultimate purposes of God?

Confusion follows if the word 'creation' primarily means bringing the physical world into existence. The more Biblical perspective tends to take creation *ex nihilo* for granted and so speaks more of creation as God's continual shaping and ordering of all that exists. The 'created order' is often a better expression as it embraces not only what is but also how all things intersect and function: all things in creation include the multi-faceted nature of human society. So, if this earth is to continue, 'new creation' is more about a re-ordering of creation, a restructuring, a restoration, or a sanctification of all things.<sup>1</sup> Such a reordering of creation is evidenced in Jesus' resurrection, inclusive of the new creation in incarnation and yet with something more in the transformed physicality of Jesus' resurrection body.

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<sup>1</sup> On sanctification note Zechariah 14:20-21; cf Wolters (2004:261-285).

## NEW CREATION OVERVIEW

The Kingdom of God, understood as an already-but-not-yet presence, provides a hermeneutical lens for appreciating new creation.<sup>2</sup> This impact of the Kingdom for creation is an already-but-not-yet new creation. So even as a new creation presence permeates the New Testament, expectation of a completed new creation look to the fulfilling of the promises of new heaven and new earth. Several extensive studies of new creation as a recurring motif in the New Testament demonstrate this comprehensive character and presence as initiated in Jesus' first advent though not without differing conclusions.<sup>3</sup> Discussions on those passages commonly referred to in support of the earth's renewal, often include comment on the new creation implications.<sup>4</sup>

Scholars have demonstrated the extent to which first century Jewish eschatological expectations were that, 'Israel would be restored within a restored cosmos' and thus resurrection is both 'a reaffirmation of the covenant and the reaffirmation of the creation.' (NT Wright 1992:332).<sup>5</sup> Beale notes that while the term 'new creation' occurs just twice in the New Testament, it is found in 'paraphrastic variants' in at least five other passages (Romans 8:20, 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 3:14, 21:1, 5) with the theme 'explicitly' to be found in several others (Ephesians 2:10-17, Colossians 1:15-20, 3:10-11, Matthew 19:28, Titus 3:5, James 1:18). (1997:23n24). For Beale, having surveyed

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<sup>2</sup> The Kingdom of God is a term which incorporates the person of the King (Christology), the exercising of the King's rule (through the power of Word and Spirit, the powerlessness of suffering and cross, the impact of resurrection and the exalted supremacy of His throne), the King's agenda (His own people in a new heaven/earth in which all is reconciled to God), and the King's realm (the whole creation already experiencing renewal as the Kingdom grows). See also the summary at the beginning of Chapter Four.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Beale (1997), Hubbard (2002), Jackson (2010), Minear (1994), DJ Moo (2006), Reumann (1973). See also Bauckham & Hart (1999:127-132).

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Six. For Romans 8:19-23 see Lincoln (1981:189), Russell (1996:159-173), NT Wright (2003a:258). For Colossians 1:15-20 see Dumbrell (2001b:306-308), Russell (1996:173-186), NT Wright (1991:114-115, 2003a:239).

<sup>5</sup> Wright extensively reviews this background (1992:Part III, 2003a:chap 3-4) and similar work can be found in Collins (1998), Dumbrell (2001b:Part 1), Hubbard (2002:11-76), Jackson (2010), Russell (1996:37-133).

the New Testament reference to the ‘last days’, new creation is to be understood within the context of the already present ‘last days’ that commenced with Christ’s first coming (1997:12-18). New creation is ‘the Refinement of the “Already and Not Yet” Eschatological Centre’ (1997:18).

### **The Language of Newness**

Any discussion on new creation or new earth must address the meaning of the Greek terms translated by the English ‘new’, particularly given the pronouncement in Revelation 21:5, ‘I am making all things new (*kainos*)’. While *kainos* and *neos* and their cognates have differences in their origins, by the time of the New Testament writings a significant degree of synonymous usage occurs, with both terms having qualitative and temporal implications.<sup>6</sup> The context determines which way the usage leans each time. New Testament usage picks up the eschatological movement from Old to New Covenant, and often the nuances identified by consideration of the broader context of the already-but-not-yet Kingdom fulfilment. Frequently the new has come, not by replacing the old with something that previously did not exist, but by significantly changing the nature or quality or substance of the old such that the old continues but is also transformed into the new.

However, distinctions do appear in some passages with *kainos* featuring more the qualitative changes and *neos* the more temporal. The latter and its derivatives quite often refer to the young age of a person.<sup>7</sup> Also, *neos* is preferred if stressing the contrast

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<sup>6</sup> See Harrisville (1955:69-79), Haarbeck et al (1986:669-674). Haarbeck (1986:674-676), Behm (1965:447-454), Behm (1967b:896-901), RF Collins (1992:1086-1088).

<sup>7</sup> Luke 15:12-13, *neos* used for ‘younger’ son; Luke 22:26, ‘youngest’. John 21:18, Acts 5:6, 1 Timothy 5:1-2, 11, 14, Titus 2:4, 6, 1 Peter 5:5, likewise. Derivatives of *neos* used for young/youth Matthew 19:20, Mark 10:20, Luke 18:21, Acts 26:4, 1 Timothy 4:12. Used for novice in 1 Timothy 3:6.

between old and new. ‘The distinction is not observed consistently in the New Testament Usage, but it holds to quite a large extent’ (Bauckham & Hart 1999:77).

If one wanted to suggest temporal newness, something existing for the first time, perhaps *neos* would be the more likely word to use. Yet the apparent interchangeability of the two words for new wine and new wineskins,<sup>8</sup> for new covenant in Hebrews,<sup>9</sup> and when Paul uses both with regards to being a new person in Christ,<sup>10</sup> shows how cautious one must be with such conclusions.

To whatever degree *kainos* may or may not reflect temporal change, the primary interest in the New Testament expressions of new creation is in qualitative newness. A temporal newness comes with the advent of Jesus but beyond that the qualitative changes dominate the material.

### **Everything New**

The recurring motif of renewal in the New Testament accords with several Old Testament passages which anticipate renewal. Isaiah 42:9-10 includes the earth: ‘See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the end of the earth!’ Terrible judgement will come, but then, in earth encompassing terms, ‘I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert’ (Isaiah 43:18-19). Foundational to the ‘new things’ being announced (Isaiah 48:6) is ‘My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they stand at attention’

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 9:17, Mark 2:21-22, Luke 5:36-39.

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 8:8, 13, 9:15 (*kaivos*), 12:24 (*neos*).

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 4:24 (*kainos*), Colossians 3:10 (*neos*).

(Isaiah 48:13). Implicit in the announcement is the assurance that all of heaven and earth will be included in the new realities God will bring through His servant. The anticipation brings an exaltation that integrates creation and redemption in praise of God (Isaiah 49:13). The promise of ‘new heavens and new earth’ (Isaiah 65:17, 66:22) further reinforces the expectation that the new work of God through His servant will impact all creation.

Jeremiah 31, with its promise of ‘new covenant’ (v. 31), is also set within a passage that joyfully anticipates renewal of the blessings that come from the earth. And strategically in the flow of ideas, the very next section (Jeremiah 32) tells the story of Jeremiah’s investment in that earthly future as he buys the field at Anathoth. Joel 3:18 and Amos 9:13 form part of this wide ranging expectation of what will eventuate when God brings the new earth He has promised. The already-but-not-yet Kingdom of the New Testament engages this eschatological concept of newness. Not surprising then is the number of references to newness in the New Testament resulting from the presence of Jesus. Each points to something new in the order of creation. See Appendix A.4:391-392 for a list of new things that result from Jesus’ presence as Lord of Heaven and Earth.

Together with the expectations examined in Chapter Two,<sup>11</sup> these various renewal promises anticipate a new creation because the earth, and the people of God, has undergone a substantial transformation. The motif of new creation encompasses the earth but does not imply its prior destruction.

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<sup>11</sup> Chapter 2:46-49, 2:74-78.

## NEW CREATION AND CHRISTOLOGY

As developed in Chapter Four, the incarnation, resurrection and ascension of Jesus demonstrate the value of the earth and the essential continuance of the creation. In the following, the presence of ‘new creation’ in the person of Jesus is the focus. New creation has already begun: ‘the Word made flesh – the new creation “already” present’ (Hays 1996:433). Here is ‘the new creation in Jesus’ (NT Wright 2003a:667).

Russell reflects at some length on Jesus’ presence, and the Kingdom He brings, as the inauguration of new creation: restoration of the creation is implicit in the Kingdom’s presence (1996:139-159). He endorses Davies and Allison on Matthew 1:1 with its reference to the ‘*Biblos geneeseōs*, an account of the genealogy’ of Jesus, as presenting a ‘counterpart to the story of Genesis (cf. Luke 3:38)’ (1996:141). The Gospel of the Kingdom is the message of new creation (Dumbrell 2001b:183-190). The Gospel of John, ‘by introducing the Logos ... in Jesus the embodiment of divine revelation, the creative Word of God, the divine Wisdom come into the world to bring life ... in the prologue, sets before us the parameters of a new creation’ (Dumbrell 2001b:236). NT Wright states that ‘the classical biblical texts which speak of the original creation’ shape 1 Corinthians 15 and thereby expresses a new creation vision in resurrection.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> ‘The stories of creation and fall, as told in Genesis 1:26–8 and 3:17–19, lie below the surface throughout, and the later parts of the chapter will allude frequently to the same passages. The great Psalm which speaks of humankind’s vocation to rule the creation as the creator’s vicegerent (Psalm 8), is explicitly quoted in verse 27, where it is closely aligned with the messianic Psalm 110 and with the multiple echoes of Daniel.<sup>12</sup> This is not a mere ‘appeal to scripture’, as though Paul were mounting an argument about something else and needed to drag in a few proof-texts; he is thinking his way through a theology of creation and of humankind, and the biblical allusions indicate the narrative of which the resurrection of Jesus now forms the climax, helping the story to its intended goal’ (NT Wright 2003a:334).



Beale states<sup>13</sup> that the new creation has begun in Jesus' death and resurrection (1997:19). Jesus 'is a formative microcosmic model which determines the nature and destiny of people, and the rest of creation, on a macrocosmic scale' (1997:50). For the 'new cosmos' the resurrected Christ 'is literally its beginning.' The earth shakes and gives up its dead (Matthew 27:51-53), and so 'New creation is in mind wherever the concept of resurrection occurs...' (Beale 1997:19). The earthquake signifies 'the beginning of the end of the old creation and the inauguration of the new creation' (Beale 1997:19). For Beale, the shaking of the creation represents its re-shaping: in the context of resurrection it suggests the earth itself experiencing the beginnings of its own resurrection. 'These are significant observations, since the idea of resurrection occurs so much throughout the New Testament; likewise Christ's death can be seen as part of the process of new creation.' He concludes, 'The idea is this: *Christ's life, and especially death and resurrection through the Spirit, launched the glorious end-time new creation of God*' (1997:20, 23. Emphasis original.).

With regards to 1 Corinthians 15, Johnson states that the chapter presents a new ontology, that only makes sense if '*in the realm of the crucified and risen Christ there is already the start of "new creation"*' (2003:296. Emphasis original). That such inferences are in mind is clear in Paul's presentation of the death and life contrast between Adam and Christ (1 Corinthians 15:21-26) .

The end of death signifies the reversal of the curses against the created order together with due recognition of the already-but-not-yet Kingdom (Dumbrell 2001:284-289,

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<sup>13</sup> With reference to 2 Corinthians 5:15, 17, Revelation 1:5, 3:14, Colossians 1:18 and Galatians 6:14-15.

Lincoln 1981:33-54).<sup>14</sup> These scholars together bring a strong argument for appreciating the new creation beginnings for this earth in the person of Jesus.

**In the incarnate Logos, the Light and Life of creation are embodied** (John 1:3-5). Chapter Four<sup>15</sup> explored the integration of creation material in the prologue of John's Gospel. In the Word become flesh, the light and life of creation<sup>16</sup> are present in the person of Jesus. The implicit thrust of the passage is of a new expression of creation which incorporates the earth in the body of Christ. With regards to this life, Beasley-Murray states that, 'Life in the kingdom of God or new creation is *now*, not a hope reserved for the future' (2002:lxxxvi. Emphasis original.). In John the concept of life is 'life in creation and life in the new creation' (2002:252). So, the recurring motif of life in this Gospel, the life embodied in incarnation, is a recurring signal that new creation has begun.<sup>17</sup>

### **From First to Second Adam**

'It is certainly not coincidental that in resisting the Devil in the wilderness He is depicted by the Gospel writers as doing what Israel should have done in their wilderness wanderings, and even what Adam should have done in the Garden of Eden' (Beale 1997:29). Direct and indirect references<sup>18</sup> to Christ as the new Adam are sufficient in Paul to indicate that this contrast was a key part of his theological worldview. Jesus is of Adam (Luke 3:38) but as Paul develops it in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45-49, all that Adam was meant to be is now completed in Christ. Adam represents

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<sup>14</sup> See also the discussion on death in Chapter 4:138-141.

<sup>15</sup> Chapter 4:115-122.

<sup>16</sup> cf. The light and life themes in Genesis 1-2. Light points forward to the presence of God in the fulfilled new creation of new earth and heaven (Revelation 21:23-25).

<sup>17</sup> There is, of course, a substantial spiritual dimension to this new life. Any appreciation for the creation's part in new life is not to diminish in any way the essential presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>18</sup> Contrast with Adam is implicit in Philippians 2:5-11 and Colossians 1:15-20.

the old humanity and Christ the new. The old possessed all the consequences of Adam's rebellion including the brokenness of creation and all the relationships within creation.<sup>19</sup>

The new humanity is caught up in Christ Himself in whom the breadth of new creation already has begun to increase through His reconciling work on the cross.<sup>20</sup> There are implications for humankind's relationship with the creation as the second Adam, the perfect image of God, transforms those in Him into this new humanity and thereby restores the relationships broken by sin including with the creation (DJ Moo 2006: 481).

In Christ, this earth is already transitioning into new creation as expressed in incarnation and resurrection, in the creation significance of the Word/Logos made flesh, and in the new humanity already begun in the New Adam. In so far as Jesus is the new creation, yet is of this earth, of a human mother, and continues to be recognisable as such post-resurrection, the degree of continuity we see in Jesus indicates the continuity we may expect for the earth.

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<sup>19</sup> Beale has an extensive exploration of the significance of Jesus as Second Adam and the significance of this for temple and new creation (2004a:171-192). The temple as 'symbolic of creation' (176) brings further endorsement of new creation in Jesus given His references to Himself as the temple of God. See also the discussion in Dumbrell on new creation and the Second Adam in Colossians 1:15-20 (2001b:306-308).

<sup>20</sup> "The *doctrines of Christ as the Last Adam, and the image of God and God's son and Messiah* are to be understood as references to Christ re-establishing a new creation as God's new, reigning viceregent,' so Christ 'has begun to do what the first Adam should have done and to inherit what the first Adam should have, including the glory reflected in God's image' (Beale 1997:25. Emphasis original.).

## PARTICULAR INDICATORS OF NEW CREATION

The signs and wonders of Jesus demonstrate His sovereignty over creation. In particular, we see creation functioning in new ways at the command of Jesus: all of these infer the beginnings of a renewed creation.<sup>21</sup>

**Water transformed into the best of wine** thereby signals the beginnings of the abundance of the promised new creation (John 2:1-11).<sup>22</sup> Barossee (1958) and Phillips (2004) propose that John intentionally has presented the Gospel narrative so that the seven days of Genesis 1:1-2:3 provide a background that perhaps even more strongly regards new wine as new creation. Certainly the Prologue of John makes clear that he has creation in mind inferring that John understands each of the signs as indicators of new creation.

**Storms are stilled** indicating the removal of the threats of nature in general and the sea in particular. The significant background reference to Jesus' calming of the storms suggests that these incidents are more than just isolated happenings.<sup>23</sup>

**Food is multiplied** so that great abundance comes from meagre rations; an abundance promised throughout the Old Testament as the consequence of fertile land, good rain

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<sup>21</sup> Each is understood within the already-but-not-yet Kingdom presence. Each of these is at the very least symbolic of the new order that comes into the creation in Jesus.

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 27:28, Deuteronomy 7:15, 11:14, 33:28, 2 Kings 18:32, 1 Chronicles 12:40, Psalm 104:15, Proverbs 3:10, Isaiah 36:17, 55:1, Jeremiah 31:12, Hosea 2:22, Joel 2:19, 24, 3:18, Amos 9:13-14, Zechariah 9:16-17, 10:7.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 8:23-27, 14:23-33, Mark 4:36-41, 6:45-51, Luke 8:22-25, John 6:16-21, cf. Psalm 89:9, 107:29, Isaiah 9:1, 25:4, 27:1, 32:2, 42:10, 43:16ff. Salvation comes as the sea is driven back in the Exodus: a frequent reference throughout the Old Testament from that day on. Yet also storm and sea can be terrible instruments of judgement as well as symbols of danger and threat in the cosmology of the day. Jesus' actions on the sea are loaded with considerable meaning. See also Chapter 8:271-272.

and secure homelands.<sup>24</sup> This abundance signals the beginnings of the end to the hardships of labour (cf. Genesis 3:19) because in Jesus' miracle a new order of creation is present.

**Bodies are healed** transforming physical brokenness into physical wholeness. Exorcisms, the binding of the strong man of Genesis 3:15 (Matthew 12:29), cleanse the creation through disempowering the powers of the old order (Colossians 2:15).<sup>25</sup> Beale see these miracles as the 'inaugurated end-time kingdom,' ... 'the beginning of the new creation,' and the 'beginning reversal of the curse of the old fallen world' (Beale 1997:29). Likewise Dumbrell, 'In these victories, the presence of the kingdom of God is revealed strikingly, not as an ideal, but as a new physical reality. The dawn of the new creation has begun!' (2001b:190).

**Women are honoured in new ways.** Genesis 3:14-19 prescribes a disordering of creation as a consequence of human sin which distorts all relationships including how women experience life. Jesus' honouring of women and the inclusiveness of his relationships with them, as well as the positive roles women took up in the early church, all point towards a restoration of the order of creation in which all relationships function without disharmony or hardship.<sup>26</sup>

**Sabbath for humankind – restoring the relationship of Genesis 1-2.** Guelich notes that for the issues of both Sabbath (Mark 2:27) and divorce (Mark 10:2-9), Jesus'

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<sup>24</sup> Matthew 14:15-21, 15:32-39, 16:5-16, Mark 6:35-44, 8:1-9, 15-21, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:5-14, 21:1-14.

<sup>25</sup> cf. Psalm 103:4, 146:8, 147:3, Isaiah 29:18, 30:26, 35:5-6 (note the new creation expectations that surround these verses), 42:16, 53:5, 57:18-19, 58:8, Jeremiah 30:17, 33:6, Ezekiel 47:12, Hosea 6:1, 14:4, Malachi 4:2.

<sup>26</sup> Here as elsewhere, imagery that anticipates a reversal of the curses of Genesis 3 needs to be considered in the light of the many expressions of the future which see the new heaven / new earth as like the Garden but also so much more.

starting point is the order of creation. His words therefore point towards a re-ordering of creation (1989:124). With the shift to Sunday because of Christ's resurrection, Beale writes, 'The continuation of a Sabbath, a day of 'worshipful rest' on Sunday, is a sign reminding us that the spiritual 'rest' of the new creation has begun in Christ' (1997:39).

**Mark 1:13 'He was with the wild animals.'** 'Does this mean Jesus has reversed the effects of the fall? More likely Mark's presentation of Jesus with the wild beasts depicts him as the victorious Messiah of Israel living in harmony with the animate world in keeping with the promises found in Isaiah (11:6-8, 65:25)' (Dumbrell 2001b:183).<sup>27</sup> Isaiah's imagery points back to the disharmony of Genesis 3:14-19 and signals its reversal.<sup>28</sup>

**All food is declared clean** thereby announcing a cleansing or renewal of creation (Mark 7:19).<sup>29</sup> Reumann develops this further by examining the new freedoms in the new creation regarding meat offered to idols as presented by Paul in 1 Corinthians (1973:24-31).

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<sup>27</sup> Here is 'a relationship found only at creation (Gen 1:28; 2:19-20) and expected for the age of salvation, the new creation (Isa 11:6-9; 65:17-25; Hos 2:18; 2 *Apoc. Bar.* 73.6). Thus Jesus' peaceful coexistence "with the wild animals" boldly declares the presence of the age of salvation when God's deliverance would come in the wilderness and harmony would be established within creation according to the promise, especially of Isaiah (11:6-9 and 65:17-25) (Guelich 1989:38). Guelich continues with a suggestion that here Adam is contrasted with Christ: Adam's rebellion brought disruption to the created order between humankind and the animal world. Christ by His obedience when likewise tempted, and most severely at that, has begun the restoration of the created order so damaged by the respective curses and the consequent relationships of enmity. This is '...befitting the presence of the new age of salvation.' (1989:39) 'Against this background Jesus comes from the wilderness into Galilee in 1:14-15 to proclaim this good news from God about the coming of the Kingdom' (1989:42).

<sup>28</sup> 'Mk. 1:12f., however, goes far beyond any such comparisons (cf. also Matt. 6:26/Lk. 12:24; Matt. 10:29/Lk. 12:6). In the very concise Marcan version of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, we find the remarkable statement: " ... and he was with the wild animals." As Fritz Neugebauer and Erich Grässer have recently shown, this comment has messianic-eschatological significance: *Jesus appears here in expectation of the culmination of his messianic mission, when he ushers in the time of messianic peace in fulfillment of Isa. 11:1-8.* Thus the messianic expectation of Isa. 11:1ff is in no way spiritualized in the New Testament; on the contrary, it is Christologically appropriated and confirmed' (Stuhlmacher 1987:6).

<sup>29</sup> cf. Mark 7:1-23, Matthew 15:1-20, Luke 11:38-41. See also Acts 10:15, 28, 11:9, Romans 14:14-23, 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, 10:18-33, 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

The overview above of evidences of new creation in the coming of Jesus demonstrates that each of the curses of Genesis 3:14-19 has already begun to break down, at least symbolically if not actually, through the presence of Jesus and the Kingdom. Like the Kingdom, the beginnings may be very small but nonetheless very real. Furthermore, Guelich suggests that Mark 7:37, “‘He has done all things well’”, echoes the words of Gen 1:31 regarding God’s work at creation ... and may reflect the hope of the restoration of fallen creation’ (1989:397).<sup>30</sup>

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT AND NEW CREATION**

The Holy Spirit, as one would expect from a Triune Creator, is integral to the created order.<sup>31</sup> Genesis 1:2 sets the scene for all of God’s providential participation in creation as confirmed in Job 33:4 and Psalm 104:30, ‘When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground’ (cf. 27-28). With the coming of Messiah and His rule, comes also the outpoured Spirit carrying the expectations of creation renewal through the Spirit.<sup>32</sup> Implied then, in references to the Spirit’s work, is the presence of new creation.<sup>33</sup>

**By this Creator Spirit, Jesus is conceived** and at His baptism the Spirit’s presence suggests new creation coming in the presence and rule of Messiah (Russell 1996:141). Russell (1996:142-144), Hagner (1993:58), and Davies and Allison (1988:331-334)

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<sup>30</sup> Russell surveys the presence of new creation in the words and works of Jesus (1996:144-156). Such broad sweeps through Jesus’ ministry echo the particular insights found in pondering the possibilities of specific incidents. For example, S Miller develops the allusions to new creation in the anointing of Jesus in Mark 14:3-9 (2006:231-236).

<sup>31</sup> See Edward’s exploration of the Holy Spirit’s engagement and participation in the whole of the created order (2001:45-66).

<sup>32</sup> Isaiah 11:1-10, 32:15-20, 42:1-5, 44:3-4, 61:1-11, Ezekiel 36:26-30, 37:14, 47:1-12, Joel 2:29-3:1 (cf. 3:16-19). See Appendix A.8:394-395.

<sup>33</sup> Ultimately all materiality is Spiritual. The dichotomy between them, as often assumed across the Christian community, is false. See Knight (2006:xviii-xix, 31-32).

discuss the possible new creation reference in the presence of the dove at Jesus' baptism. On Matthew 1:18, Hagner writes:

The reference to the Holy Spirit here suggests that God is about to act graciously through this child. The promised deliverance and fulfillment of the promises rest upon the coming of an era marked above all by the presence of the Spirit; thus this little phrase sounds a distinctively eschatological note. Hill's argument that the reference to the Spirit here is an allusion to the new creation (the counterpart to the role of the Holy Spirit in Gen 1:1–2) is therefore theologically sound, although it may be more than Matthew means to say (1993:17).

**By this Spirit of new creation, new birth comes from above (John 3:1-8).** Beasley-Murray lists a number of references that suggest that such a birth alludes to 'an adaptation of the Jewish hope of a new creation' (Beasley-Murray 2002:47).

**Jesus 'breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."' (John 20:22).** Beasley-Murray writes that the Spirit imparts the life of the new age and that, 'New age and new creation are complementary ideas in eschatological contexts' (2002:381). Consequently, with reference to 2 Corinthians 5:17, he argues that the new creation that came in Christ Himself is 'actualized' in disciples by the Holy Spirit. Paddison agrees; 'The Spirit that rested on Jesus and accompanied him throughout his ministry ... is now 'breathed' out to us in act of new creation (20:22)' (2007:271).

**In Peter's Pentecost proclamation, he quotes from Joel 2 (Acts 2:16-21).** Dumbrell observes how at Pentecost two 'great opposites', divine and human, are brought together 'in a grand anticipation of the reality of the new creation' (Dumbrell 2001b:109). He argues that Genesis 1-2 sets 'the general eschatological platform' (Dumbrell 2001b:12) and upon this bedrock all history moves towards new creation. Therefore, any significant outpouring of the Holy Spirit alludes to the Spirit as an agent in the ordering of creation in Genesis 1:2 and so to new creation as the Spirit in new ways engages with the created order.



**The Spirit is the *arrabōn*, the down-payment or fore-taste, of the full inheritance to come (2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:22, Ephesians 1:14).** This inheritance includes the earth (Matthew 5:5) and the multiple facets of new life in the Kingdom of God. ‘Indeed, the Holy Spirit is what causes Christians to be existentially linked with the new world to come’ (Beale 1997:30).

Each of the above brief explorations of the significance of the Holy Spirit expresses the many ways in which the Spirit is integral to all of God’s work in creation and redemption. Embedded in any movement of the Spirit in the redemptive work of God is the renewal of creation in that the Spirit is critical in all aspects of both creation and redemption. Both come together in the Spirit in ways which parallel the coming together of both in Christ.<sup>34</sup> If the earth were finally to be dissolved, New Testament Pneumatology would become alienated from its Old Testament setting because the Holy Spirit who brooded over creation is the foretaste of the new creation, bringing the incarnate Jesus to conception, Christians to new birth, and renewing the earth.

## **THE TWO USES OF THE PHRASE ‘NEW CREATION’**

The outcome of explorations into what Paul meant by the term depends on the extent to which context is allowed to shape its meaning. If the immediate concerns of Paul in these two passages are all to which one attends, new creation is understood as anthropological; a reference to the inner transformation of those in Christ. However, if the wider context of Paul’s eschatological framework, and the sequence of ideas in both letters, receives due consideration then the meaning incorporates anthropological, social

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<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 6:188-208.

and cosmological dimensions. Does the term ‘new creation’ refer to the big-picture renewal of the whole earth or the inner transformation of the individual in Christ?<sup>35</sup>

### **Galatians 6:14-15**

(14) May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (15) For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! (Galatians 6:14-15).

Paul presents his case: the external and legal issues are not the point. New creation is what matters and new creation is expressed in self-denial, putting to death the inner drive to sin (5:24) by appropriating the extent to which Christ’s death was ours (2:20), putting to death the world’s concerns (6:14), so that one is free to live by the Spirit (5:16-25) that good may be practised towards others (Galatians 6:1-13). In stating that *kainē ktisis*, new creation, is what matters, emphatically introduced with *alla*, ‘but’, Paul is not necessarily limiting himself to just the application made here. RN Longenecker claims, ‘as Betz observes regarding *καινή κτίσις* ... “The brevity of the expression makes it almost a certainty that it was known to the Galatians” (*Galatians*, 319 n. 79)’ (1990:295).

Hubbard extensively explores what Paul had in mind (2002:188-232). Noting that Galatians 6:11-18 is a recapitulation of the letter, he concludes that the letter revolves around a series of contrasts and that the statement of 6:15 captures these two mutually exclusive opposites. The matter of circumcision is no longer the issue. This thinking represents concerns for external appearances, law, Jew-Gentile conflict, sin and death. New creation represents the alternative, concern for the internal realities, faith, Jew-

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<sup>35</sup> Context cannot be ignored in discerning Paul’s use of key terminology. See White (2008:90-106) for an overview of Paul’s larger vision of creation.

Gentile harmony/peace, life and Spirit. Hubbard builds his case with reference to similar contrasts in Romans 6 and 7 and the background of new covenant in Jeremiah 31 and new heart and spirit in Ezekiel 36.

He concludes that the particular focus of Paul's thought in Galatians 6:15 is soteriological, anthropological and pneumatological. However, he also acknowledges that other writings, particularly apocalyptic, address different questions and legitimately understand new creation with different focus:

But because their analysis of the plight was very different, so too was their perception of the solution. Pitted against earthly and heavenly powers, the apocalyptic writers envisioned a totally refashioned cosmos. Reflecting on the dilemma of sin and inability, Paul spoke of the inwardly transformed person. Both solutions are appropriate to the plight, and both could be adequately summarized with the phrase *new creation* (2002:239-240. Emphasis original).<sup>36</sup>

However, Paul's expression allows for a broader understanding of the concept of new creation than the particular focus of his use of the term here. Hubbard, with reference to both 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15 concludes, 'the two new-creation statements are syntactically identical, being formulated absolutely without subject, verb or article: new creation!' (2002:222).<sup>37</sup> Hays considers that Paul's bold assertion includes both the big-picture eschatological expectation and the inner transformation that it brings (1996:19-27). So, unlike Reumann (1973:97), Hays rejects the legitimacy of 'new creature' as a translation of Paul's language or intent. Reumann fails to appreciate that while Galatians 6:15 focuses on inner transformation, Paul's strong Christology includes the whole creation within Christ's reign and purpose.<sup>38</sup> The larger context in

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<sup>36</sup> See the review in Dunson (2010) on the tension between anthropological and cosmological emphases for new creation.

<sup>37</sup> DJ Moo reaches a similar conclusion on account of the 'abruptness' of Paul's statement (2006:475).

<sup>38</sup> For example, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Romans 8:19-39, 10:26, Ephesians 1:9-10, Colossians 1:15-20.

which Paul's expresses his world-view suggests inner transformation as one essential dimension of a much larger whole.<sup>39</sup>

Jackson (2010:83-114), critiques Hubbard's anthropological conclusion as a neglect of Paul's eschatological framework in which the Jewish soteriological/anthropological, social and cosmological expectations for new creation are reshaped into an already-but-not-yet eschatology. Here the cross and resurrection feature as the beginnings of the anticipated new creation. Jackson identifies evidences of Paul's inaugurated eschatology in various contrasts throughout the letter that Paul draws together into a conclusion expressed by the assertion, 'new creation'. In particular, Paul sets up his argument with reference to the resurrection (Galatians 1:1) which is reinforced in the reference to the new life that is his already through the cross (Galatians 2:20).<sup>40</sup>

Beale notes that 'three out of the four most explicit new creation texts in the New Testament refer to Christ's resurrection (2 Cor. 5:14-17; Col 1:15-18; Rev. 1:5 and 3:14)' (1997:20). NT Wright also notes the 'sequence of "cross – new creation"' as having the 'marks of resurrection upon it' and resurrection draws in Israel's expectation of the renewal of creation. Paul, says Wright, 'keeps Genesis 1 and 2 in the back of his mind at all times' (2003a:224).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> New creation is not to be understood in merely individualistic terms. The consequence of living out new creation is experienced collectively, 'faith working through love', as the almost parallel expression in Galatians 5:6 indicates (cf. Ephesians 2:10). 'Peace' is listed as one of the consequences of 'new creation' living (6:16). Beyond Galatians, expressions of new creation include Ephesians 2:15, the incorporation of all in Christ into one 'thus making peace'. There is a corporate purpose in God's new creation work (Ephesians 3:10) as seen in the strong corporate expression of the self's new creation in Ephesians 4:24 (cf. Ephesians 4:1-32ff, Colossians 3:10, cf. 3:5-17ff.).

<sup>40</sup> Jackson also stresses the importance of Isaiah (neglected by Hubbard he claims) for Paul's eschatology in which anthropological, social and cosmological emphases recur (2010:17-32), the same three fold soteriology in 'Early Jewish Literature' (2010: 33-59), and the social context of his readers in which 'new creation' was well-known parlance for the Roman Imperial cult and its promises of a new world order that embraced the same three realities (2010:60-80). Jackson also argues that Romans 8:18-25 provides a much needed explication of his perspectives on the three-fold new creation (2010:150-169).

<sup>41</sup> Further evidence of significance of creation in Paul's thinking and writing is presented in the next chapter (Chapter 6:188-204).

For Paul, the transformation of personal behaviour in Galatians 6:14-15 is but one of many expressions of the ‘new creation’ inaugurated in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Anthropological concerns may be the focus in Galatians 6:15 but these are one consequence of a much larger reality in which creational renewal has already commenced across the created order. The exclamation of ‘new creation’ suggests that the anthropological is further evidence of a much larger reality.

## **2 Corinthians 5:17**

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Corinthians 5:17).

As for Galatians 6:15, RN Longenecker (1990:295), Hays (1996:19-27) and Hubbard (2002:222) state that the syntax is exclamatory suggesting that the particular concerns of the immediate context are one part of a larger whole that is already known. RP Martin’s conclusion is that:

The accent falls on a person (τις) entering the new order in Christ, thus making the *καινή κτίσις* an eschatological term for God’s age of salvation ... Paul is talking of a “new act of creation,” not an individual’s renovation as a proselyte or a forgiven sinner in the Day of Atonement service. There is even an ontological dimension to Paul’s thought ... suggesting that with Christ’s coming a new chapter in cosmic relations to God opened and reversed the catastrophic effect of Adam’s fall which began the old creation. To conclude: ἐν Χριστῷ, *καινή κτίσις* in this context relates to the new eschatological situation which has emerged from Christ’s advent (2002:152).

Dumbrell’s summation of this same reality is that ‘the end time has broken into the present (2 Cor. 5:17)’ (2001b:281). The new creation of individual persons is the beginnings of creation’s redemption (Romans 8:18-23) in the movement towards full harmony between heaven and earth as Christ sums up all things in Himself (Ephesians 1:10). (Lincoln 1981:189). NT Wright links the sequence of ideas in 2 Corinthians 3-5 from new covenant through new creation (4:4-6) through to his ministry of reconciliation that ‘embodies’ new creation (2003a:305). For Russell, Paul’s use of the

term 'new creation' reflects the strong parallels between creation and redemption in Christ (1996:211).

Hubbard (2002:133-187) identifies several features in the flow of ideas expressed by Paul that mirror much of the material in Galatians 6. These are the recurring emphasis on the personal work of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22, 3:3, 6, 8, 17-18, 5:5), the contrast between external appearances and oratory skills (the focus of his critics) and the internal transformation (which empowers and shapes Paul's ministry). Paul contrasts his former with his present life (2 Corinthians 5:16). Both grow out of the background of new covenant and inner transformation in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Both contrast the change from death to life. Consequently, for Paul substantial change has come in motivation, perspective and priorities.

Hubbard also notes particular references in Paul's argument that draw our attention to creation and the creation agenda of God. Paul's contrast of old and new covenant in Chapter Three reminds us of the broad sweep of God's unfolding purposes. The Spirit's pivotal role in 3:17-18, given Paul's awareness of the Genesis background to all his theology, draws us back to the Spirit as an agent in God's creation. Christ is the image of God (4:4) who through the Spirit is transforming us into His image (3:18). Hubbard states that here we see further evidence of Paul's 'Adam-Christ typology, clearly demonstrating the roots of this imagery in Paul's reading of Genesis.' 'εἰκὼν, then, functions as part of Paul's theology of creation/consummation' (2002:157, 172-173, 185). The death and life of Christ for all in 5:14-15 likewise alludes to what was lost in the first Adam but restored in the Second.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Hubbard further develops the broad sweep of new creation with reference to the allusion to Genesis 1 in 2 Corinthians 4:6. 'What is significant about 4.6 is that Paul views conversion through the lens of Genesis and deems the initial creation to be a fitting analogy to God's New Covenant work in the

However, Hubbard claims that Paul is not thinking cosmologically in 5:17 even though there are several references in the text to creation themes. Paul, he says, is aware of the big picture of new creation but in 5:17 emphasizes the inner change of transformation through the Spirit as the agent of new creation. Jackson argues that Hubbard leans too far towards an anthropological emphasis (2010:115-149). He also argues for an Adam-Christ comparison as evidence of Paul's new creation perspective (2010:136-147). Paul's critics are of the Adam world, Paul is of the new creation in Christ. Jackson identifies several Isaianic references in 2 Corinthians 5 (2010:116-127) and concludes that, 'the soteriology of the Isaianic material consistently maintains a connection between the individual, the nation of Israel and the world in which they lived' (2010:147). Therefore, 'new creation' for Paul is equally comprehensive. A new anthropological reality exists because of the presence of this holistic new creation.

In summary, while the particular focus for Paul in Galatians 6:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:17 may be individual and anthropological, driving a wedge between anthropological and cosmic conclusions would be a great injustice to the range of expressions and allusions in the canonical Pauline material that draw upon either the dominant themes of the early chapters of Genesis and/or the Jewish expectations of restoration of the individual, the community and the cosmos. The abrupt introduction of the 'new creation' exclamation in these two texts draws the personal issues into the larger reality of the new created order already inaugurated in Christ. The exclamation seems to be Paul's way of strengthening the personal implications by highlighting that the personal is part of a much larger new reality, new creation. Our discussion shows that continuity will not be

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hearts of the believers. Moreover, as 3.16-18 suffuses Deuteronomy 34 with prophetic hopes of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, 4.6 merges the primordial events of Genesis with the eschatological vision of Isaiah and considers both to be realized Christologically in conversion. This same confluence of themes (creation, conversion, Christology, and Isaiah) will surface again in 5.17' in an 'almost symbiotic relationship' (Hubbard 2002:160).

limited solely to the population of the new heavens and new earth. If redeemed persons continue into the new heavens and new earth, the affirmation of their continuity is not separate from the continuity of the whole creation.

### **PAUL MINEAR'S EXPLORATION OF NEW CREATION<sup>43</sup>**

There is much value in featuring the contribution of Paul Minear to an appreciation of new creation in the New Testament. First, because he is not afraid to explore the allusions and potential intertextual links that others mostly have passed over. Secondly, the Genesis 3 curses and their expression in the Cain and Abel narrative of Genesis 4 play a significant part in the shaping of his New Testament conclusions. Thirdly, new creation has been a major theme in several of his more recent publications building upon earlier works in apocalyptic and Revelation studies. Several themes recur in Minear's work and an exploration of these themes is the most succinct way to capture his insights into the New Testament vision of new creation.

### **Apocalyptic<sup>44</sup>**

Minear's New Testament Apocalyptic (1981) claims that interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy must refer 'to the lexicon of metaphors and images provided by the Old Testament.' It requires an imagination 'congenial to the figurative, poetic, parabolic, and mythical character of the prophets' messages' with strong recognition for 'the ways in which biblical thinking about the end was shaped to correspond to thinking about the beginning of God's creation' (1981:61). So 'the interpreter must become highly aware

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<sup>43</sup> For a list of relevant publications by Minear, see the Bibliography on page 422.

<sup>44</sup> Further consideration of apocalyptic can be found in Chapters 1:27, 3:85-91, 7:211-215, 239.



of this fusion of perspectives, for it is native to all Christian apocalyptic' (1981:72). Those who fail to discern this language well will miss the evidence of new creation.<sup>45</sup>

Some language is frequent in apocalyptic discourse and understanding comes by exploring the multiple uses so as to identify the significance of any particular term or imagery.<sup>46</sup> In other words, the language intends to convey not concrete detail but the enormous weight, significance and dramatic impact of God's presence or word or action.

No Christian prophet tried to explain the meaning of these references to solar disasters, a fact that suggests the audience was expected to understand the language. The vocabulary was fully indigenous to the community in which the prophet functioned. Modern readers, therefore, must compare this idiom not with modern views of the cosmos but with an ancient outlook within which an intelligible message was conveyed without undue difficulty (Minear 1981:52-53).

In apocalyptic descriptions the visible in descriptive, poetic imagery reveals the invisible.<sup>47</sup> The point is not historical or cosmological speculations but the questions of faithfulness, service and vocation (1995a:116; cf. 71-118).<sup>48</sup> In apocalyptic genre and language, comes a 'fusion of perspectives, for it is native to all Christian apocalyptic' (Minear 1981:72).

Minear's insights into the possibilities of apocalyptic language facilitate his exploration of the linkages between Old and New Testaments and in particular the extent to which

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<sup>45</sup> Minear warns against the presumptions that want to fit 'the heavenly visions into human measurements of months and years' for this lures us into the visible and the human and so 'distracts the attention of the church from its real enemies and its ultimate choices' (1981:121). He rejects much of the miss-use of apocalyptic that treats it as 'an algebraic formula in which we may detect one-to-one correspondence between each detail in the vision and a corresponding historical reality' (1981:93).

<sup>46</sup> An example is the adjective *μέγας* variously translated as loud, mighty, great, large, etc. Minear's survey leads him to conclude, 'A perfectly lucid and ordinary adjective has through the centuries of one cultural tradition become the tag which conjures up important aspects of the invisible world: its mysterious, ominous, marvellous, destructive and redemptive potencies. As such a tag, the same adjective has come to evoke a wide gamut of human reactions to that world: fear and trembling, awesome and reverent joy' (1970:221).

<sup>47</sup> See Appendix A.2:391 for Minear's example of this in the light and darkness contrast.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Matthew 24:45-46.

Genesis provides a conscious framework for theological reflection in the early church.

Evidence of this can be seen in the following explorations by Minear.

### **The Blood of Abel**

(10) And the LORD said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! (11) And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. (12) When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth" (Genesis 4:10-12).

The references to Abel (Matthew 23:35, Luke 11:51, Hebrews 11:4, Hebrews 12:24) form a significant part in Minear's appreciation of the reversal of the Genesis curses in the death and resurrection of Jesus (in particular see 1995a:43-70). Abel's death in Genesis 4:10-12 expresses the consequences of Genesis 3. In particular, the significant place given to ground/earth in this statement builds upon the cursing of the ground now polluted by blood and death. This pollution symbolizes not only the disorder and disharmony of the curses but also the coming of death. The blood of Abel epitomizes all that Adam has brought into the world (Minear 1994:xiv, 62-81) and the first and second Adam contrast in the context of creation's anticipated liberation (Romans 8) points towards the earth's new creation in Christ (Minear 1995a:1-42).

Minear argues that Matthew 23:35/Luke 11:51 reflect this significance for the blood of Abel as Jesus refers to the long history of all Cain's murderous descendants who polluted the ground with righteous blood. These represent all who stand against God: all who as Adam's children live in sin and death, and in the curses of Genesis 3. Minear also links John 8:44 and 1 John 3:4-17 with these passages to indicate all that is represented by the blood shed by Cain, from the initial deceits of the devil through to blood, death and cursed ground (1994:90, 1997:38). Matthew provides a similar background (Minear 2000:215) as does Luke (Minear 1994:31-61).

It is Jesus who turns this around totally. Abel's blood polluted the ground and his blood cried out to God from the ground (Genesis 4:10). Jesus' blood also cries out (Hebrews 12:24) with a superior message of new covenant. 'Both Jesus and Abel had been murdered, but only in one case did the murder become a channel of grace' (Minear 1981:148). Implicit here is a message of overcoming, of reversal. Sin and death no longer rule and the polluted ground is set free of its curse. Here are two package deals; the first filled with sin, death, disharmony, hardship and blood soaked earth. Through cross and resurrection Jesus brings a far superior reality that reverses the first package deal and thereby brings in a second; one full of life and harmony free from curse and pollution. Through this blood of the new covenant, already those in Christ have returned to Mount Zion: an image rich with Old Testament expectations.<sup>49</sup> Suffice to note at this point that the blessing that flows into Zion and from there to all the earth is filled with implications for the undoing of the curses of Genesis 3.

In the earth references that follow, Minear suggests that each alludes to the blood of Abel crying out from the earth and to the consequences of Jesus' death and resurrection in the undoing of the curses of Genesis 3 and 4. Out of the earth now comes another reality; new covenant, new creation, life not death, peace not disharmony, blessed earth not cursed earth.

### **Earth Shaking**

There is an established usage of earth-shaking imagery in the Old Testament<sup>50</sup> that Minear builds upon in looking at several references to the earth-shaking impact of Jesus' death and resurrection (1981:49-61, 1995a).

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<sup>49</sup> See Chapters 2:46-49, 2:74-78, 3:107-111, 4:113-115, 8:263-289.

<sup>50</sup> See Appendix A.3:391.

In Jesus' warning of Matthew 24:29, the imagery points to a focus on darkness and much upheaval in the heavenly realms. Minear argues persuasively that 'A darkened sun was used as shorthand for the punishment of peoples who resisted God. His *no is* darkness' (1981:54. Emphasis original.). Matthew, following this reference, reports two earthquakes, one at the time of Jesus' death (Matthew 27:51-54) and the second at the time of Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 28:2). Both earthquakes are not mere seismic events; they are also statements of the breaking down of the old (all that the temple's curtain represents) and the coming of the new in resurrection. Minear links the Matthew earthquakes (1995a:71-118, 1995b:72-80) with the earth shaking in Hebrews 12 (1995a:43-70) and the earthquake of Revelation 11:19 which sets up the scenario of Revelation 12 (1991a:71-77).

In each Minear claims a strong intertextual link with Genesis 3-4. The earth has been cursed and from the earth comes the cry of murder. Out of the earth there now comes a new cry and given the imagery of earth shaking, this cry is one of power and might. Hebrews links 12:24 and 'the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel' with references to earth shaking. There were warnings in the past when the earth shook (12:26a) and the promise when God would shake both heavens and earth (12:26b quoting Haggai 2:6). These earthquakes serve more than one purpose. They provide warning: just as now the better word than the blood of Abel urges people not to refuse the Kingdom now caught up in the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22-25). Earthquakes also may be part of the clean-up of God's judgement removing all that does not fit in His Kingdom (12:27-28).

Essentially, though only in brief summary here, Minear presents us with a stark contrast in the New Testament. It is a contrast he draws out in multiple ways as he surveys the

Scriptures. In the Hebrews 11-12 context, the cloud of witnesses beginning with Abel, the sprinkling of blood and the two opposite mountains involve a long history full of both judgement and the expectations of new creation. This history fills the voices of Hebrews 12:24ff. Here there are two different voices involving the earth. The blood of Abel confirms the cursing of the earth through the rebelliousness of Eve, Adam and Cain. The promised death has come in the most disturbing of ways; fratricide. The blood of Christ proclaims life and the earth shakes because the earth itself finds liberation from the blood of Abel and the curse it represents. 'To accept the voice from the earth of Cain's curse and to welcome the voice of Jesus' blood is to enter this unshakeable kingdom, freed from the legacy of Cain. In other words, the shaking of heavens and earth in the blood of Jesus is the epicentre of all earthquakes' (Minear 1995a:61).

## **Earth**

With these larger background observations in mind, Minear explores particular texts in which the earth seems to feature in some form or other. In each he finds allusions to Genesis 3-4 and the inferences that in Christ there comes a radical overturning of the curses of old. Across these examples, a pattern emerges without which the linkages and implications might easily be missed.

THE MAN BORN BLIND, whose healing vividly dramatizes light out of darkness (John 9:5),<sup>51</sup> was healed by Jesus through the application of mud to his eyes. Four times John reports the application of this mud from Jesus' spittle and the dust of the earth. Symbolically, the earth brings forth life and healing; the opposite of the curses of Genesis 3-4. In advocating this inference, Minear also considers this 'work' of Jesus

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<sup>51</sup> cf. John 1:4-9, 3:19-21, 5:35, 8:12, 11:9-10, 12:35-36, 46.

(John 9:3-4, 16, cf. 5:17) as linking back to the good work of God in Genesis 1 thereby suggesting that the ‘work’ of making mud to bring light, life and healing is equivalent to God’s creation work. Jesus’ work in essence then is the work of new creation (Minear 1994:89-95).

TWICE, WITH DELIBERATE INTENT, JESUS WRITES ON THE GROUND (JOHN 8:6, 8). He writes with his finger (cf. Exodus 8:19, 31:18, Deuteronomy 9:10, Luke 11:20).<sup>52</sup> The incident is located immediately before Jesus’ astounding creation claim, ‘I am the light of the world!’ (John 8:12). Earth and light in the context of life and death are rich with allusions to Genesis 1-4. This writing in the earth is a ‘sign’ of the ‘removal of the primal curse and a return to the first light of creation. ... the ending of God’s curse on the earth, ... Jesus’ declaration of light and life ... a logical next step. As in Adam the earth was cursed, so in Christ the curse is lifted’ (Minear 1991b:35, cf. 23-37). The earth formerly cried out from its desecration and spoke of curse and death. Now it speaks a message of life even for the condemned.

‘YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH’ (Matthew 5:13). Minear asks why salt and why the earth (1997:36-37)? Jesus speaks to those who like the prophets of old bear the suffering of persecution (Matthew 5:11-12), ‘all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to ...’ (Matthew 23:35). Prophets, like Abel, are vulnerable to the descendants of Cain who have continued the tradition of their forefather. There is a vocation of sacrifice. Minear presents a case for salt being a reference to where salt is included in the sacrifices offered to God and in the covenant (1997:36-37).<sup>53</sup> In other words, salt is not some generalized reference to seasoning or preservation but rather

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<sup>52</sup> cf. the dipping of the finger into the blood or oil in sacrifices: Leviticus 4:6, 17, 25, 30, 34, 8:15, 9:9, 14:16, 27, 16:14, 19.

<sup>53</sup> See Leviticus 2:13, Numbers 18:19, 2 Chronicles 13:5.

brings focus upon the covenant relationship between God and His people and the sacrificial obligations therein. Covenant tells the story of the unfolding purposes of God from the relationship dissolution in Genesis 3-4 through to the promises of renewal and resurrection for all creation through Christ's death and resurrection. Salt then is abundant with such allusions and nuances.

So why earth rather than 'cosmos' as in John 3:16? Minear suggests that the 'early Christians took very seriously the conviction that the earth itself had been violated by "all the blood shed on the earth" (Luke 11:47-51; Heb. 11:4; 12:24; John 8:44; 1 John 3:4-17)' (Minear 1997:38). Accordingly, they took with equal seriousness the need for the earth to receive God's blessing and for the restoration of the earth' (1997:38). The blood of Jesus, and those who follow Him into death, would salt the earth setting it free from its curse. Cross-bearers are the salt of the earth. In their taking up the cross, the blood of Jesus speaks through the earthquake of a new covenant which put all to right. The old curses have had their day and the new day has begun. (Minear 1997:31-41)

THE EARTH SAVES. The anticipated shaking of the heavens resulting in the falling of the stars (Matthew 24:29) anticipates the expulsion from heaven of Satan and the spiritual powers aligned with him. In the portrayal of this drama in Revelation 12, with its allusions to Genesis 3:15 in particular and the words of Jesus (Luke 10:18), the woman is saved by the earth: 'Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.' (Revelation 12:15-16). The massive earthquake in heaven (Revelation 11:19) sets the scene. The woman's child is exalted to the throne of God and as a consequence, Satan is thrown out. His extreme revenge against the woman for a time

brings brutality and terror to the earth. But the woman's life is saved. The earth saves her. The earth no longer represents death and curse (Genesis 3-4) but life. This is new creation (Minear 1991a:71-77).

'ON EARTH PEACE.' (Luke 2:14) Minear begins his exploration of the possibilities here with a review of the shepherd tradition in the Old Testament. The first shepherd was Abel whose blood desecrated the earth (Genesis 4:2). David, of course, features in the shepherd motif to which should be added Jeremiah's promises of prosperous flocks and pastures (33:12-13). The extensive shepherd passage of Ezekiel 34 has several links between Genesis 4 and the new blessing of the earth that Messiah will bring particularly in the change from the earth withholding its strength (Genesis 4:12) to the earth yielding increase (Ezekiel 34:27),<sup>54</sup> from thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:17-18) to trees yielding fruit (Ezekiel 34:27), and from enmity between creatures and wandering (Genesis 3:14-15, 4:12) to peaceful and secure homes (Ezekiel 34:25-31). Ezekiel states that all these are embodiments of the covenant of peace that comes with His servant David (34:22-25). 'On earth peace' in the context of shepherds and Messiah is a message of a new earth in which abundance and peace prevail rather than the harshness and conflict of Genesis 3-4. Luke builds upon this introduction with reference to 'blood of Abel' (11:51) as an example of all those who stand in the Cain tradition and oppose the prophets of God. The 'cup of the new covenant in my blood' (Luke 22:20) stands in stark contrast and points to a new order. Peace comes to the earth itself through the shedding of blood: only then can it yield its abundance and play its part in peace for all who live upon it. Until the earth is set free from the bondage to decay, there can be no peace. The good shepherd's blood brings peace 'far as the curse is found' (Minear 1994:1-30).

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<sup>54</sup> Minear suggests 'strength' rather than 'increase', cf. LXX. (1994:16).



## **Conclusion**

The particular value of Minear's contribution is his willingness to tease out the intertextual possibilities; to follow the threads of allusion and nuance as the New Testament resonates with the impact of Christ on the curses of Genesis 3-4. In these intertextual links he finds repeated reference to the lifting of these curses and the beginnings of a new order of creation full of life and free from the disharmonies imposed as God responded to human sin. He does not present his material as proving anything as such nor does he insist that every possible link is beyond dispute. Nevertheless the accumulation of links and allusions provides a reasonable probability that the New Testament writers were aware that Jesus' death and resurrection decree, out of the earth, the end of every curse so that life and new creation might begin.

For our purposes, Minear strengthens the case for the earth's future by providing (1) a reasonable argument for the extent to which the ending of the curses is woven into the New Testament world view and (2) a more integrated insight into the new creation's presence within and impact upon the earth.

## **CONCLUSION**

The many expressions of new creation that we find throughout the New Testament are consistent with the significance for this earth of the incarnation, resurrection and ascension of Christ (Chapter Four) and, as will be explored in Chapter Six, the eschatological vision found in particular texts.<sup>55</sup> Jesus, in person, in action, and in words, reveals a new reality in the narrative of the earth. New creation is already infiltrating the earth and its people. Consistently in these last two chapters we have

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<sup>55</sup> Romans 8:19-23, Colossians 1:15-20, Ephesians 1:10, Matthew 28:18, Acts 3:21 and Matthew 19:28.

found recurring affirmation of the value of the earth and its already-commenced renewal; a renewal that is more than simply purification and healing. This new creation is not distinct from or independent of the existing creation but the beginnings of a multi-faceted renewal of the earth. ‘The future has become a present reality’ (Dumbrell 2001b:260) not because new creation is ‘struggling to emerge out of the Old’ but through ‘the intrusion of the New’ (Keck 1993:31). The relational triangulation embedded in the narrative continues intact with no suggestion that a break will come through the extinguishing of the non-human creation. In fact, the wealth of evidence of what has already begun of the new earth in new creation reinforces the expectation that the earth is being renewed, to be further renewed and not destroyed. To commence creation’s renewal and then destroying it implies real challenges for the character of God. Continuity between creation and new creation appears to parallel the same continuity for the body of Jesus from incarnation to ascension as explored in the previous chapter. The many examples of new creation as already commenced, are further evidence of the consistent presentation of the high value of the physical realm and its indissoluble presence in this triangulation.<sup>56</sup> If new creation and new heaven/earth are one-and-the-same, then new heaven/earth is already a present reality for the earth.

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<sup>56</sup> Houston’s description of New Creation as Revelation, Relationship, and Redemption coheres well with the comprehensive vision of New Creation explored in this Chapter (Houston 1979:249-257).

## **The Earth Narrative: New Testament Texts Affirming Creation's Continuity**

Our exploration of the New Testament began with an overview of the Kingdom of God. We examined the future status of this earth through the lenses of Christology (Chapter Four) and of new creation (Chapter Five). These chapters demonstrated that Christology and new creation integrate substantially with this earth which suggests that the earth is integral to the ultimate purposes of God. Next we examine two sets of New Testament texts. The first is the material usually employed to demonstrate continuity for the earth (Chapter Six) while the second is those texts that many have taken as looking rather to the eventual annihilation or dissolution of this earth (Chapter Seven). Chapter Eight will focus on the vision of new heaven and new earth in Revelation.

### **THE CASE FOR THE AFFIRMATIVE**

To introduce the New Testament texts affirming the worth and endurance of the creation, we should note that several passages strongly affirm Christ's sovereign Lordship over creation.<sup>1</sup> These would seem strange if the purpose eventually was to destroy His own handiwork. Each has a sense of confident hope because the creation is secure in the hands of its Creator and Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:1-18, Romans 8:19-39, 1 Corinthians 8:6, 10:26 (cf. Psalm 24:1), 2 Corinthians 9:8-10, Colossians 1:15-17, and Hebrews 1:2-3.

Integration of creation and redemption recurs in Paul's letters. Both are the objects of Christ's work and integrated within the person of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Paul's strong Christology presents this integration as an indissoluble relationship.<sup>3</sup> The clearest passages are eschatological. Romans 8:19-23, Ephesians 1:9-10 and Philippians 2:9-11 express a not-yet, futurist Kingdom fulfilment while Colossians 1:15-20 expresses more a realized fulfilment.<sup>4</sup> Romans 8 links creation and redemption in the mutuality and interdependence of creation and humankind consistent with Old Testament thought.<sup>5</sup> Colossians embeds the link in Christ Himself; His personhood and His work.

Scholarship over recent decades has explored what NT Wright refers to as 'worldview' (1992) with particular concern for the writings of Paul.<sup>6</sup> Nuances may shift between scholars but the common thread is the claim that Paul writes with a specific narrative structure to his theology, with a particular concern to be faithful to the expectations of national restoration for the covenant people of God. This perspective sees Romans 9-11 not as a lengthy aside but the climax of God's faithfulness in both keeping covenant with Abraham's descendants and in fulfilling His commitment to extend the covenant blessings to all nations. This scholarship breaks out of the narrow Western pre-occupation with personal salvation and piety (mostly with Gentile focus) to conclude

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<sup>2</sup> As established in Chapter Four.

<sup>3</sup> Gibbs' seminal work on the integration of creation and redemption in Paul is often referred to by others due to his strong Christology in which this integration is in the person of Christ Himself as much as it is in the breadth and unity of His work (Gibbs 1971a). See also Reumann's survey of the integration of creation and redemption themes in the Old Testament prophets: creation being far more than just about origins in that God's multi-faceted providence over all He has made provides both confidence and substance for His redemptive promises (1973:57-82).

<sup>4</sup> A number of scholars discuss the integration of realized and future eschatology in Paul. Dunn, for example writes, 'It is precisely this assurance given by the "already" of the "Abba"-crying Spirit and the frustration of the "not yet" of the suffering body which constitute the eschatological tension' (1988:486). Hahne suggests Paul's futurist insights on Romans 8:19-22 are an intentional balance to the realized eschatology of vv. 4-16 (2006:173) and that the thought and perspective of Romans 8:19-22 is apocalyptic even if the literary form is not (2006:3). For an excellent detailed survey of the interplay between realized and future fulfilment in Paul's eschatology, see Lincoln (1981). See also DJ Moo (2006:469).

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 2:43-79.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to NT Wright's material see the list of contributors to this perspective in Constantineanu (2010:10).

that Paul persistently asks how the narrative of Christ's incarnation, and the events that followed, integrates with the narrative of restoration for the covenant people of Israel and consequently for all nations. In Old Testament terms this must include a restoration of the land.<sup>7</sup>

NT Wright asserts in nearly all his published material that this present earth of God's creation is the future locale of heaven and Kingdom. His position on the narrative structure of Paul's worldview is that the journey from creation to new creation, from fall to first and second advents, is at the heart of the thought world out of which Paul addresses the multiple challenges in the churches with which he corresponds. In particular, Paul functions theologically through the worldview of the Judaism of the time in which the Old Testament expectations of God's covenant faithfulness include a real restoration/resurrection of the land.<sup>8</sup>

This scholarship is relevant to this study in recognizing that much of what Paul (and others) writes in the New Testament comes out of an integrated theological perspective on creation and redemption history. So while particular facets of this narrative are not referred to directly, they remain integral to the worldview of the writer. Hence, all things fulfilled in Christ implies an optimistic hope for this creation. Paul's Christology, however expressed, echoes this hope. With this worldview narrative in mind, the following analyses of particularly relevant texts do not exegete every detail, but

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<sup>7</sup> As the expectations for restoration for Israel are described as extending to all the nations of the earth, what is initially a hope for the land of Israel becomes a hope for all the earth. See Chapters 2:46-49, 2:74-78, 3:107-111, 4:113-115, 8:263-289.

<sup>8</sup> Wright certainly has his critics (see the collection of reviews in Newman 1999) but not so much on the expectation of this earth's transformation into new heaven and new earth, Adams (2007) being a strong exception.

examine the theological question of the place of the earth within the narrative of Christ's first and second advents.

### **Romans 8:19-23**

(19) For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; (20) for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope (21) that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (22) We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; (23) and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:19-23).

#### CONTEXT<sup>9</sup>

As the chapter commences, Paul outlines the nature of life in the Spirit of God (alluding to the breath of life in Genesis 2:7) and the hope inherent in the Spirit's indwelling, and twice speaks of hope for the human, physical body.<sup>10</sup> Through the Spirit, the one who raised Jesus from death will give life to 'mortal bodies' (v. 11) and in time will bring 'the redemption of our bodies' (v. 23) presumably in resurrection.<sup>11</sup> Without Christ, and without the indwelling of the Spirit, human bodies would be 'dead' in sin (v. 10). 'Christians do not await release from their bodies, but the release of their bodies' (Gibbs 1971a:142).<sup>12</sup> Reference to the 'first fruits of the Spirit' (v. 23) in the context of the 'redemption of our bodies' may well indicate that Paul has in mind the resurrection of Christ as the first fruits of bodily resurrection for all in Him (1 Corinthians 15:20ff). 'As in 1 Cor 15:20, 23, where Christ is the *ἀπαρχή* of the resurrection from the dead, so here the *ἀπαρχή* of the Spirit is a pledge of bodily redemption' (Eastman 2002:265). As Dunn elaborates, creation is involved integrally in the redemption narrative right from

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<sup>9</sup> See White (2008:90-106) for a useful overview of Paul's cosmology.

<sup>10</sup> Note the recurring interest in the body and the need for liberation from its negative dimension. Romans 1:24, 4:19, 6:6, 12, 7:4, 7:24, 8:10, 11, 13, 23, 12:1, 4, 5. The question and answer that conclude chapter 7 set the scene for what follows and the continuance of Paul's interest in the body. Romans 12:1 ensures that there is no doubt that the body matters.

<sup>11</sup> Resurrection has been on Paul's mind as he crafts his treatise on the righteousness of God: see in addition to the verses just noted Romans 1:4, 4:17, 25, 5:10, 17-18, 21, 6:4-5, 8, 10, 13, 22-23, 8:34, 11:15, 14:9.

<sup>12</sup> See Garlington (1990) for an extensive exploration of the Romans 7 search for liberation as setting the scene for the liberation in Romans 8.

the beginnings of the letter.<sup>13</sup> The context for the creation hope in this passage is one of material hope for the bodies of the sons/children of God, for their material inheritance,<sup>14</sup> and for the earth of which these are an essential part. If the material realities ceased to be, our resurrection bodies ‘would be useless without them’ (Hendry 1980:216).

Creation motifs are frequent and important in Romans.<sup>15</sup> These are a feature of Paul’s flow of ideas from creation ignored despite its God revealing qualities (Romans 1:20-25), to the Adam-Christ contrast (Romans 5), to creation liberated (Romans 8:19-23), through to creation as no threat to God’s people (Romans 8:38-39).<sup>16</sup> With Paul’s developed interest in the creation in general and resurrection in particular leading into Romans 8:18-22, Paul takes the material world seriously.<sup>17</sup> With his eschatological framework and narrative always in mind, his comments about the creation in this passage indicate more than just anthropological salvation (which we shall explore below).<sup>18</sup>

The context of the creation theme in Romans 8 is the movement from suffering to glory, from groaning to liberation, for the sons of God (v. 19). The sons of God, adopted by

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<sup>13</sup> Dunn builds upon Paul’s focus on first and second Adam to argue for a strong creation motif in Paul’s theological framework and for the material substance of the liberation of creation in Romans 8 (Dunn 1988:466)

<sup>14</sup> Romans 4:13 speaks of those with faith inheriting the cosmos. The concept of inheritance adds further allusions to the materiality of the hope and the essential place of creation in this hope. In terms of Old Testament expressions of inheritance, land is fundamental (cf. Acts 7:5, 13:19). Jesus refers to the inheritance of the earth (Matthew 5:5) and the Kingdom of God is presented as inheritance (Matthew 25:34, Colossians 1:12-13, James 2:5 and Paul’s warnings that some may miss out on the inheritance of the Kingdom, e.g. Galatians 5:21, Ephesians 5:5).

<sup>15</sup> See for example, Adams (2002), Dunn (1988:412-513), Garlington (1990), Gibbs (1971a), Kraftchick (1987), Stuhlmacher (1987).

<sup>16</sup> Although Fewster argues for an anthropological significance for ‘creation’ in Romans 8, he does strengthen the sense of integration between the anthropological and creation realities in Paul’s world view (2013). See also the collection of essays in Gaventa (2013).

<sup>17</sup> Note Gibbs’ point that the beginning point for Paul’s cosmology is the Lordship of Christ over all of heaven and earth (1971b). His review of Paul’s cosmic perspectives argues that Paul’s Christology determined all else.

<sup>18</sup> The possibility that there is an Exodus narrative motif in Paul’s mind as he argues his case further strengthens the evidence that Paul’s ‘creation’ in Romans 8 is the material world of earth and cosmos. See Keesmaat (1999), NT Wright (1999b).

God through the Spirit, have a real future before them (Romans 8:17). The inheritance, here expressed as participating in the glory of Christ Himself (in whom is a transformed yet real physicality) and sharing in all caught up in Him, comes through suffering; the same sufferings as Christ endured. Sonship, in effect, has a precedent for all in the person of Christ: there will be an inheritance of glory but suffering is the path. If Christ is in the sons of God (v. 10) then the Spirit is within and the Spirit brings life to the body of each son (v.11).

This glory to come is so great that the hardships and heartaches along the journey towards this glory are not worth comparing with this coming glory in Christ (v.18). Yet the sufferings of the present remain sufficiently arduous for there to be much longing for this future glory. Real hope and anguish are in this waiting, with three participants in this ‘groaning’ of hopeful anticipation; creation, the sons of God and the Spirit of God. All three longing, though with different emphases, for the same day of hope and liberation that brings the glory of Christ (v.19-27). This coming glory ‘reverses’ the corruption of the glory of God revealed in His creation as portrayed in Romans 1:18-23 (Kraftchick 1987:84). God’s glory is lost (1:23, 3:23) as the evidence of the created order is ignored. Rightly seeking God’s glory (2:7, 10, 4:20) leads to the hope of glory in Christ (5:2, 6:4) as the Second Adam reverses the losses the First Adam brought into the creation order. Climactically Paul anticipates the fullness of glory in Christ in which creation again is a participant in the full expression of God’s glory (8:18-22).<sup>19</sup>

Creation’s hope is not some fringe benefit, optional extra or casual add-on. All that Paul states, from bodily redemption to creation’s liberation, or ‘renovation and

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<sup>19</sup> Stuhlmacher suggests this in terms of Jewish perspectives of salvation; ‘For those versed in Jewish tradition, Paul implies in Rom. 3:24ff. that justification through faith in Christ restores - or imparts anew—the glory and righteousness lost in the Fall (cf. *Vit. Ad.* 20f.).’ (1987:9)



transformation' (Stott 1994:239), is woven into a sequence of thought that flows from the indwelling Spirit to the sovereign Lordship of Christ over all creation, such that nothing has the capacity to prevent the liberation of either the children of God or of the creation of which they are a real part (vv. 35-39).<sup>20</sup> It is seminal to the hope of the children of God that liberated creation is essential for the redemption of bodies. This is not surprising because this intimacy of relationship between humankind and the creation is exactly the character of the interplay throughout the Old Testament narrative between Creator, creation and creation made in the image of God. 'Indeed, the glory that humans will experience, involving as it does the resurrection of the body (8:9-11, 23), necessarily requires an appropriate environment for that embodiment' (DJ Moo 2006:462).<sup>21</sup>

The passage has generated much discussion on several key questions.<sup>22</sup> The majority opinion appears to be consistent with the argument here. Primarily, the issues are what exactly is included in 'creation'? Who subjected the creation, when and why? What is the nature of this subjection, and how exactly is the nature of its hope in the 'revelation' of the children of God? Commonly lacking in these discussions is the framework or logic of understanding that the Old Testament narrative brings.<sup>23</sup> Given this narrative and the strength of the trajectory that Messiah's reign will liberate both the people of God and the earth on which they live, the broad sweep of Paul's pronouncement in

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<sup>20</sup> Note the narrative structure in Romans 8 identified in Hunt, et al (2008) and NT Wright (1999b) though with different emphases.

<sup>21</sup> With regards to Romans 8, and in addition to noting the need of creation for humankind to be human, Gregorios writes, 'The continuity between the order of creation and the order of redemption, rather than their distinction and difference, should be the focus of our interest. Humanity is redeemed *with* the created order, not *from* it.' (87) (Gregorios, Paulos M 1987: 'New Testament Foundations for Understanding Creation.' Granberg-Michaelson (1987:83-92) Though perhaps to be more consistent with the thought of Romans 8 the order should be reversed, 'Creation is redeemed with humanity.'

<sup>22</sup> Note in particular, Adams (2000: 174-186), Bolt (1995), Cranfield (1975:405-417), Dunn (1988:464-495), Gibbs (1971a&b), Hahne (2006), Hunt et al (2008), DJ Moo (1996:508-521, 2006:459-463), J Moo (2008), Russell (1996:159-173).

<sup>23</sup> Dumbrell notes this context in a paragraph (2001b:277). DJ Moo comes part way towards acknowledging this but confines his point to selected texts in Isaiah (2006:462-463).

Romans 8 readily undermines those alternatives that reduce the passage to anthropological meanings only.<sup>24</sup>

#### CREATION<sup>25</sup>

The word 'creation' may have several possible usages but, in the context of Romans 8 (and Romans 1:20) its meaning is sufficiently clear for the purposes of this study.<sup>26</sup> As Dunn suggests, 'It is unlikely that Paul intended a precise definition (cf. v 39) but more than likely that his thought focused primarily on non-human creation' (1988:469).<sup>27</sup> Paul, in expressing hope for the resurrection of bodies, distinguishes creation from the children of God. Non-human creation fits best with such a contrast. The other possibilities for what might be included in 'creation' (those not in Christ and those angelic spirits in rebellion) are either unlikely to be longing (eagerly straining forward in anticipation) for the liberation of the Sons of God that enables participation in the glory of Christ, or have no need to be longing for liberation (faithful angelic spirits). Given the repeated personification of the non-human creation throughout the Old Testament,<sup>28</sup> it is problematic to claim that this cannot be the case here and that Paul

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 6:189n17.

<sup>25</sup> It is rare to find an anthropological reference in the word 'creation' in commentaries of recent decades. This is acknowledged by Fewster, a 'scholarly consensus ... in recent years' (2013:1), even as he argues in favour of an anthropological reading which he refers to as the 'minority position' (2013:169).

<sup>26</sup> Foerster notes several meanings but for Romans 8:19-22 says it is 'both organic and inorganic' nature (1965:1029). Esser appears to be in agreement though leaves it somewhat unresolved (1986:387). See also above the review of the broader context of Romans 8.

Bolt in acknowledging the contribution of Gibbs (1971a, 1971b) writes, 'Gibbs's insistence on the cosmological and ontological nature of Paul's thought concerning creation and new creation does represent a reemerging exegetical consensus' (1995:36). J Moo states that it is 'almost certainly' refers to the non-human creation (2008:75).

<sup>27</sup> Cranfield lists eight possibilities for what Paul may be referring to in 'creation'. His conclusion is that creation here is 'the sum-total of sub-human nature, both animate and inanimate' (Cranfield 1975:411-412). J Moo's work in exploring the links between Isaiah 24-27 and Romans 8:19-23 strengthens the case that non-human creation is the essence of Paul's use of 'creation' (2008). See Hunt et al. for a more extensive discussion (2008:547-555).

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 2:45-46.

really is speaking of something else. Creation here refers to the non-human and the non-angelic as one would expect given the Old Testament narrative.<sup>29</sup>

The argument that ‘creation’ only refers to human creatures lies behind a narrow anthropological reading of the passage. Bolt addresses ‘the twentieth century neo-orthodox inspired anthropological-soteriological reading of the travail of creation’ which regards the eschatological hope of creation as strictly human (1995:35).<sup>30</sup> In addition to many of the observations noted above to refute such a view, Bolt examines the structure of the repeated pattern of ‘assertion’, ‘substantiation and ‘result’ in Romans 8:18-30. He concludes ‘the three groanings here are distinct and separate phenomena; three parallel movements in the sequence of a crescendo all substantiating the basic thesis of verse 18.’<sup>31</sup> So in verses 19-22, ‘Paul is making distinct Christological-cosmological rather than anthropological-soteriological statements’ (44). DJ Moo similarly argues that the anthropological focus of Romans 8:19-22 does not subvert this Christological and cosmological larger narrative (2006:462). Hahne observes that ‘Anthropocentric theology’, with its concern for human soteriology, ‘misses the cosmic dimension of biblical thought’ (2006:1). In Romans 8, a narrow anthropological interpretation misses the material realities of resurrection in which are

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<sup>29</sup> However, Eastman’s thesis is worthy of serious consideration. While in no way diminishing the majority view just summarized, she argues for the inclusion of all unbelieving humanity in *πάσα ἡ κτίσις*, particularly the unbelieving people of Israel, by exploring the wider use of the ‘sons of God’ in Old Testament eschatology and locating the Romans 8 material on sonship within Paul’s flow of thought to explain the inclusion of both Jew and Gentile in the covenant commitments of God. God’s righteousness is revealed and vindicated in this inclusion as developed in Romans 9-11 towards which Paul lays out in chapter 8 his eschatological expectations of liberation in Christ (Eastman 2002).

<sup>30</sup> For example, ‘... the passage is not a “creation theology” but an expression of anthropology and soteriology. ... new creation ... [is] the new creaturehood of Christian believers, not a cosmic day-dream’ (Reumann 1973:99).

<sup>31</sup> Bolt notes that others (Nygren, Balz, Dunn) have given emphasis to the same structure of ideas: the three groanings are distinct and separate realities (1995:41-44).

embedded expectations for an ‘indissoluble interrelation of mankind and the world’ (Käsemann 1980:233) in a liberated and renewed creation.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, a full recognition of the creation’s legitimate groaning for liberation strengthens the anthropological features of Paul’s argument.<sup>33</sup> In general terms, the Old Testament trajectory for full blessing and inheritance for the faithful necessitates a restoration and renewal of the earth: the removal of the curse so that the earth can fulfil its mandate to be a means of considerable blessing for God’s people.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the transformation of the material world is essential for humankind to be fully human in the terms laid out in Genesis 1-2.<sup>35</sup> Such valuable reassurance, at this point of Romans 8, adds to the reasons given for believers to be hopeful. In particular, resurrection becomes meaningless without a creation capable of fulfilling all that resurrection of the body involves. In a context of life in the Spirit now, with inheritance and redemption of our bodies to come, a reassurance of creation’s liberation and future brings greater confidence for the anthropological hopes expressed in the passage. Hope relies on God being faithful to his covenant promises and consistent in His righteousness. Inclusion of creation within the glory to come reinforces the anthropological hope by expressing that God is being true to all His promises (cf. Isaiah 6:3, 11:9, Habakkuk 2:14). Eastman and NT Wright, for example, assert that Romans be seen as an integrated narrative of ideas to validate the inclusion of both Jew and Gentile in the covenant promises while yet ensuring that God has been righteous and faithful in doing so. This reinforces the place of creation in the anthropological features of Romans 8 because creation has always been an integral

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<sup>32</sup> With reference to Kaasemann, Williams suggests that the righteousness of God speaks of the faithfulness of God including His faithfulness to His creation (SK Williams 1980:241-290).

<sup>33</sup> See Gibbs (1971a:47) for a similar comment on the reliance of the anthropological hope on Christ’s Lordship over all creation.

<sup>34</sup> Creation’s role in the well-being of humankind is one of a number of its purposes. Creation also reveals the character and glory of God and expresses aesthetic qualities which bring God pleasure. As such creation has value and significance regardless of the human benefits that it provides.

<sup>35</sup> See the discussion of this in Chapter 8:253-258.

factor in God's commitment to Israel (Eastman 2002, NT Wright 1991:193-257, 2009:153-220).

#### SUBJECTION<sup>36</sup>

The aorist tense used of the subjection of creation (v. 20)<sup>37</sup> suggests a particular past event. As the beginnings of this subjection, Genesis 3:14-9 is the most obvious reference. Following this pronouncement, the impact of the curse is to continue for as long as humankind lives under the consequences of sin.<sup>38</sup> Dunn states, 'The thought is ... largely controlled by the Adam motifs—the reversal of Adam's fall naturally requires the reversal of the curse on the ground (Gen 3:17-18; so here vv 20-21)' (1988:469. See also Dumbrell 2001b:275-277, Adams 2002). The creation is in bondage until God lifts this collection of dysfunctional relationships imposed by Him and the resultant decay ended. The logic is that until the business of human sin is resolved completely once and for all, the judgement curse and its decaying effects will continue. It is most difficult to see how anyone one but God could be in Paul's mind as the one who imposed the subjection.<sup>39</sup> The cause may have been the sin of Adam and Eve but the choice and pronouncement of subjection come from God. No logical reason exists, nor suggestion anywhere in the narrative, as to why Adam would have chosen to condemn the creation to decay.

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<sup>36</sup> Much of what is noted briefly here builds upon the unfolding impact of the curse on the ground throughout the Old Testament as reviewed in Chapter 2.

<sup>37</sup> See Bolt (1995:46-47), Braaten (2005:20), Cranfield (1975:413), J Moo (2008:78).

<sup>38</sup> As advocated by Hunt et al, while the beginnings of creation's bondage began with Genesis 3, where the curse on the ground is somewhat limited, 'what Paul has in view here is a broader allusion to the unfolding story of Genesis 1-11.' (2008:561) in which the curse on ground expands to the whole earth in the flood incident. See also Braaten (2005:22-24)

<sup>39</sup> See the discussion in Bolt (1995:46-47), Braaten (2005:20), Hunt et al (2008:558:564), D Wilkinson (2002:238-240).

Dunn concludes, 'There is now general agreement that ὑπετάγη is a divine passive (subjected by God) with reference particularly to Gen 3:17-18' (1988:470).

The ‘groaning’ of creation is not a new concept. Beginning with the cry of Abel’s blood from the ground (Genesis 4:10), and continuing in the mourning of the earth as expressed in the prophets, a pattern is established which the creation’s suffering is real as God exacts His judgement on rebellious humankind. This is well described in Hayes (2002), Braaten (2005:19-39) and Marlow (2009).

Paul’s inclusion of ‘in hope’ as a feature of the subjection likewise is most consistent with the blessing and curse narrative of the Old Testament.<sup>40</sup> The earth lives in hope because ultimately humankind will be free of sin and its consequences which in turn will also liberate creation from the consequences of human sin in bondage and decay. Subsequently, creation’s impact on human life will change for the better having been set free from all that brings threat and limits the provision of human blessing. From the covenant with Noah, the Old Testament narrative, even in its most severe judgement moments, is filled with hope for an ultimate triumph of God over all that prevents the fullness of blessing for earth and people. The statement that hope is even present in judgement and subjection, further strengthens the position that this passage speaks most confidently that this earth has a real future beyond the coming of the glory of Christ. As Adams notes with regard to v.21, ‘Paul emphasizes that αὐτὴ ἡ κτίσις will be liberated. *This* creation will be redeemed. It will not “pass away”, to be followed by another creation’ (2000:182. Emphasis original).

## REVELATION

The glorification of Christ to come will reveal for all to see what always has been the case: ‘in Paul’s thought, of course, those “in Christ” are already “sons of God”’; what will be revealed is their status, and it will be revealed by the fact of their sharing in the

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<sup>40</sup> It is possible that Paul had in mind Genesis 3:15. Note Romans 16:20. (Elsdon 1992:164).

glory of God' (Dunn 1988:469). The glory to come is the glory of Christ Himself (v. 17-18) in which God's children participate. As the reality of being 'sons of God' is revealed (v. 19), so will come freedom. This freedom embraces the created order including the human body that awaits 'redemption' (v. 23). The redemption of the body fully realized as the creation is released from its bondage to human sin and its consequences. In this passage Paul seems to assume his readers know when such a revelation and liberation will occur. It is reasonable to conclude that this will be at the return of Christ when Christ is revealed and in this light, all else revealed likewise.<sup>41</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the passage makes little sense if annihilation, dissolution, or anything other than the restoration and transformation of this earth, is its claimed meaning. As Dunn states:

Paul's thought is clearly that creation itself must be redeemed in order that redeemed man may have a fitting environment. The Adam motif is still strong: Paul's Christological overtone is that redeemed creation will fulfill the role for which it was intended. ... creation is to be redeemed, not redeemed from. Just as the resurrection hope is hope of a resurrection body, so resurrection life is to be part of a complete creation (1988:470).

Romans 8:19-22 tells us little new; it simply clarifies the logic of the unfolding drama of Genesis to Malachi now that Christ has come. In the ebb and flow of the state of creation, as God deals with His people in blessing and curse, the earth is the innocent third party suffering through no fault of its own. So, longing for freedom from its sufferings fits with the frequent personification of the creation in the Old Testament: 'the earth mourns'<sup>42</sup> – or groans – over its brokenness, disorder and dysfunctionality<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See the discussion of the present age and the age to come as expressed in Romans 8 in Nygren (1949:329-349).

<sup>42</sup> See again Hayes (2002). See also J Moo who explores the intertextual possibilities between Isaiah 24-27 and Romans 8:19-22 and notes that Paul's vision of liberation of both creation and God's people is consistent with the hopes expressed in Isaiah (2008:74-89).

as God brings His judgement down on the rebellious. As the Messiah liberates His followers from sin and its consequences, restoring them to be free to inherit all that is in Christ, so inevitably He liberates creation from the curse, restoring it to participate in the same glory. This is ‘the cosmological equivalent of the redemption of our bodies by transformation’ (Keck 1993:32).

### **Colossians 1:15-20**

(15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; (16) for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. (17) He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (18) He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. (19) For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (20) and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:15-20).

For Paul, the heart of the practical issues which the Colossians faced was their theological deficiency in understanding the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ into whose Kingdom they had been incorporated (Colossians 1:13). In Him ‘are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and understanding’ (2:3) because ‘in Him all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form.’ (2:9).<sup>44</sup> He is the conqueror of all the powers that lie behind the false ideas and practices (2:15), the head over every power and authority and so in Him the Colossians already have a completeness/fullness (2:10) that makes the listed practices (2:16-23) redundant at best and a denial of the supremacy of Christ at worst.

To affirm the completeness found in Christ, Paul emphasizes His full supremacy in the hymn of 1:15-20.<sup>45</sup> Here he brings together the themes of creation and redemption in Christ Himself who is able to hold them together as one because of who He is and His

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<sup>43</sup> However the many nuances of the terms ‘frustration’ and ‘decay’ are explored by scholars and commentators, the negative impact of God’s curse on the created order robs the creation from being what it was made to be thereby setting up a deep hunger for release.

<sup>44</sup> Note the use of the present tense with regards to Christ’s bodily state.

<sup>45</sup> Whether or not this passage originated as a hymn by Paul or another is not at issue here.



absolute supremacy over everything. This integration of creation and redemption is not due to particular characteristics that they might have in common; rather it is the inevitable consequence of all that is true of Christ Himself. He draws them together in Himself and in His creative and reconciling work.<sup>46</sup>

Reumann (1973:43-45) analyses the structure of the hymn to confirm this integration of creation and redemption. He writes that ‘firstborn of creation’ (v. 15) and ‘firstborn from the dead’ (v. 18) are parallel introductions to the two themes. As reconciliation is presented as the pinnacle of His redemptive work, the creation is drawn into the work by the reference to ‘all things, whether on earth or in heaven,’ (v.20). Dumbrell offers a similar structuring to the passage and concludes, ‘It is clear that the second section advances the thought of the first’ (2001a:190).<sup>47</sup>

Allusions to other creation texts are present in Colossians. Dumbrell explores the use of *eikōn*, image, in v. 15 and *archē*, beginning, in v. 18 as both signifying that ‘A real relationship with Genesis 1:26-28 emerges;’ and to the first and second Adam contrast that Paul develops in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 (2001a:190-192).<sup>48</sup> Jesus completes what the first Adam failed to do with regards to humankind’s responsible participation in the created order (Dumbrell 2001b:274-276, 306-308). In addition, the comprehensive nature of Christ’s reconciling work is further strengthened by (1) the repetition of ‘all things’ which clearly embraces all creation (vv. 15-17); (2) the allusion to wisdom and creation in Proverbs 8;<sup>49</sup> and (3) the allusions to the

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<sup>46</sup> Commentaries generally affirm the inclusion of the creation in this reconciling work and write of a positive place for the earth in God’s ultimate purposes.

<sup>47</sup> Similar discussions on the unity in this hymn of creation and redemption in Christ can be found in Barth & Blanke (1994:245), Detering (2003:48), Dunn (1996:92), NT Wright (1990:454).

<sup>48</sup> See also Helyer (1983:175-177, 1994:239-240), RP Martin (1974:59), O’Brien (1982:43).

<sup>49</sup> See Bruce (1984:65), Detering (2003:49), Helyer (1994:240-241), Lohse (1971:50), RP Martin (1974:58), O’Brien (1982:43-44), Okure (2002:66-67), Simpson & Bruce (1957:192-196), NT Wright (1990:454-458).

prophets<sup>50</sup> (including those which integrate creation with God's redemptive work) in the description of Christ's ordering of, and peace-making in, His creation and in which He participates. These allusions further strengthen the conclusion that Paul's reference to the reconciliation of all things includes the material, social and spiritual worlds.

For our purpose the inclusiveness of the creative and reconciling work of Christ is seminal, 'Everything outside of the Creator Himself' (Barth & Blanke 1994:1999). Nothing that exists lies outside the scope of Christ's work, both past and present (1:15-16).<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, He continues to be involved in that He brings or integrates together in Himself all that exists (1:17). Relationally, all things fit together, integrated because each and every part is allied to Him. H Berkhof states that the language of integration relates to what we mean by 'system': in Christ all things form a system of systems which functions well as long as each part is related rightly to Christ Himself (1977:28-29). Creation exists, and functions,<sup>52</sup> because He has the supremacy and is head over all (1:18, 2:10) and the heir to the entirety of creation (1:15) as evidenced in His being the first to rise in resurrection (1:18). In every facet of this great work, Christ fully expresses the mind and purpose of His Father (1:3, 13, 19, 27, 2:2-39-10, 3:1, 17).

In Colossians 1:15-20 Paul assumes rather than explains the need for reconciliation, which he makes clear in Romans 8:19-22. Sin disrupted the harmony and integration of 1:17 as Paul describes the consequences in Colossians 1:13, 21, 2:8, 2:13-15, 18-23, 3:5-9. If 'all things' 'have to be reconciled to God through him, it follows that all things

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<sup>50</sup> See Barth & Blanke (1994:245-246), Nichols & Wintle (2005:72). DJ Moo summarizes the peacemaking material in the Old Testament background of Colossians 1:20; 'The establishing of "peace" is an important theme in Isaiah 24-27 (see 26:3,12; 27:5). See also, *inter alios*, Isa 9:7; 52:7; 55:12; 66:12; Jer 30:10; 33:6, 9; 46:27; Ezek 34:29; 37:26; Mic 5:5; Hag 2:9; Zech 9:10.' (2006:473)

<sup>51</sup> Similar lists or all-embracing statements in Paul strengthen the point that Paul in each list provides a representative sample of the totality of all that is (Romans 8:38-39, 1 Corinthians 3:21-22 15:24, Ephesians 1:10, 21, 3:10, 6:12, Colossians 2:10, 15). See Nicholls & Wintle (2005:64).

<sup>52</sup> Note the inclusion of spiritual and social functions and structures in Sumney's discussion of the inclusive breadth of 'all things' (2008:67).

have been estranged from their Creator' (Bruce 1984b:74). There has been 'a considerable dislocation, even a rupture' (O'Brien 1974:51). It is not just dissonance between God and humankind or between human beings but discord throughout the whole created order. The proper ordering of all things as originally shaped by Christ, all things fitting together well and all things in full harmony with God, has broken down. The symbiotic relationship between humankind and the earth is just as much a part of the breakdown. So the restoration of relationship between God and His people inevitably requires a restoration that includes the whole created order.

Paul states that the heart of this restoration across the creation is the death of Christ and the reconciling work inaugurated there (1:20). The cross brings peace, though Paul does not develop exactly how at this point except by implying that the cross deals with the ultimate causes of all discord across the created order. The totality of all created things reconciled to God implies reconciliation of all things to one another: not just vertical and horizontal but omni-directional and omni-dimensional. All things restored to their rightful place in the harmonious ordering of creation. Given that creation is Christ's in every way, created by Him and for Him (1:16), held together by Him (2:17), and indeed incorporated into His own personhood<sup>53</sup> as 'firstborn of creation' and 'firstborn from the dead' resurrection (2:15, 18), the logic is that the well-being of creation is integrated inextricably and absolutely into the essentials of Christ's personhood.

Paul immediately applies this to the reconciliation and its consequences that already are realities for the Colossian Christians (1:21ff). At this point, he chooses not to explore what might be beyond redemption, what God's judgement might condemn and exclude from reconciliation. DJ Moo reviews the arguments of those who impose excessive

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<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 4:115-122.

limitations on this reconciliation by not engaging with the impact of the emphasis on ‘all things’ (as well as the comprehensive expectation of peace found in the Old Testament prophets), and of those who fail to attend to the qualifications expressed elsewhere in Paul and thereby overstate the point (2006:469-474).<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, as argued in Chapter Four, the material or physical world is not in itself evil<sup>55</sup> as it has been physically incorporated into the person of Christ. So Paul’s celebration of the reconciliation of all things to God through Christ strongly affirms the rightful place of this earth, this already existing physical world, in the eternal purposes of God. As ED Martin states, ‘Colossians gives us no liberty to construe *all things* as less inclusive in reconciliation than in creation’ (1993:68. Emphasis original.).

Likewise, the ideas and values that shape people’s lives will be reconciled to God. These, too, are a part of the created order corrupted by human sin. The world views and culture<sup>56</sup> that set up the false ideas and practices, the powers (2:15) and the principles (2:20) that people live for and live by, already exposed in the cross for what they are, already disempowered, were established originally by Christ as good (1:16). In Christ they will be restored to the proper place as ‘all things’ created by Him are reconciled to Him (1:20).

Many commentators conclude that the reconciling redemptive work of Christ described in Colossians 1:20 includes the whole created order. O’Brien (1982:52-56) reviews several alternative positions and agrees with Lohse who concludes, ‘The universe has

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<sup>54</sup> Note the discussion on this in O’Brien (1974) and Arnold (1996:267-268).

<sup>55</sup> See also Chapter 2:46-49.

<sup>56</sup> The same terminology is used elsewhere of political and religious leadership (Luke 12:11, 20:20, Romans 13:1-3, Titus 3:1) or as a general reference to all powers (Ephesians 1:21, cf. 1 Peter 3:22). The point in 1 Corinthians 15:24-25 is that the rebelliousness and opposition of these powers that will cease. In recognising the human and social facets of these powers there is no cause to ignore the multiple ways in which these could be exploited by demonic influence as Ephesians 2:2, 3:10, 6:12, Jude 1:6.

been reconciled in that heaven and earth have been brought back into their divinely created and determined order through the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. ... Now the universe is again under its head and thereby cosmic peace has returned' (1971:59). Paul has so skilfully presented a seamless unity of creation and redemption in both the person and work of Christ that any other conclusion would be most difficult to sustain.<sup>57</sup>

The essential logic of the hymn is an integration of the present and future well-being of creation integrated inextricably and absolutely into the essentials of who Christ is and the nature of the peace accomplished in the cross. Christology once again determines cosmology; the hope of this earth is already determined in Him because the holistic unity of personhood, work and supremacy in Christ brings a confident hope which embraces the created order that Paul has featured so strongly.

### **Ephesians 1:10 and Matthew 28:18**

#### EPHESIANS 1:10

(9) He has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, (10) as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:9-10).

Whatever may be the challenges of the exact meaning in Ephesians 1:10 of *anakephalaiōsasthai*, 'sum up' or 'gather together', the parallels with Romans 8 and Colossians 1 are clear.<sup>58</sup> Here Paul presents an exalted Christology sufficient to embrace the full breadth of creation and redemption: Christ already enthroned as supreme over all (Ephesians 1:19-23) so that, in future, He will integrate all creation together as one. Paul uses his characteristic 'all things', a term which typically for him is fully

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<sup>57</sup> Discussion in many commentaries is more about fine-tuning the inclusiveness and the implications for the ultimate future of this creation which are implied rather than specified in Colossians 1:15-20.

<sup>58</sup> Flor notes that the prefix 'ἀνα' suggests this is to be done 'again', as in a second time, and that thereby the parallels with the sequence of Colossians 1:15-20 are more pronounced (Flor 2002:139).

comprehensive.<sup>59</sup> As reinforcement, he adds a reference to everything in both heavens and earth. Lincoln explores the further expressions in the Ephesian letter of the purpose of the Creator of all things (3:9, 4:6) to fill all things (1:23, 3:19, 4:10) such that the whole cosmos of heaven and earth is secure because of the absolute supremacy of the exalted Christ (1:19-23) (1981:135-168). Here the future of heaven and earth is identical: an integrated and unified cosmos throughout which God fills all with the impact of His full presence. The word ‘reconciliation’ is not present but the concept is, ‘a restoration of harmony with Christ as the point of reintegration’ (Lincoln 1990:33).<sup>60</sup> Liberation from the consequences of sin for the creation is not stated but again the concept is present. As in Romans 8 and Colossians 1, the earth is safe in the hands of the one who in every way has the supremacy, the capacity and the will to make it so.<sup>61</sup>

#### MATTHEW 28:18

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (Matthew 28:18).

Pennington argues that Jesus’ final words in Matthew 28 draw together a theological narrative that Matthew has skilfully developed through his careful use of the language of heaven and earth (2007). He concludes that Matthew has a very strong creation focus as expressed in the references to Genesis in Matthew 1:1 and 28:18 which serve as an *inclusio* for the Gospel regarding God’s purposes for all nations.<sup>62</sup> The recurring references to ‘heaven and earth’ reinforce this focus. This expression, writes

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<sup>59</sup> As noted above for Colossians 1:15-17. See also Chapter 6:204n51.

<sup>60</sup> Lincoln continues, ‘The summing up of all things in Christ means the unifying of the cosmos or its direction toward a common goal. In line with this letter’s close links with Colossians, a similar thought about Christ and the cosmos had been expressed in the Colossians hymn in terms of reconciliation and with explicit soteriological connotations (Col 1:20). Both passages appear to presuppose that the cosmos had been plunged into disintegration on account of sin and that it is God’s purpose to restore its original harmony in Christ.’

<sup>61</sup> As noted for other texts, there is no suggestion that this vision is for some other ‘heavens’ and ‘earth’ as if the present order of creation is to be replaced.

<sup>62</sup> See also Pennington (2008:34-40).

Pennington, is a ‘merism’ for the totality of creation and thereby draws together all creation as a unity. Furthermore, Matthew frequently draws out a contrast between heaven and earth in that the divine and the human are at odds due to human sin. Pennington explores how Matthew uses the singular for heaven when referring to creation as such but uses the plural when referring to the divine that contrasts with the human. This antithesis between heaven and earth shapes the transition from 6:10 (a prayer for the antithesis to end) to the claim of Jesus in 28:18 (that it has ended in Him). Having demonstrated great authority on earth throughout the Gospel, Jesus now has such authority in heaven and thereby, in Himself, breaks down the antipathy between heaven and earth, and brings unity.

Pennington concludes that Matthew has ...

*... an intentional focus on the theme of heaven and earth, specifically highlighting the current contrast or tense relationship between the two realms, between God and humanity. Yet Matthew does not only emphasize the contrast, but also the fact that this contrast or tension will be resolved at eschaton when heaven and earth are reunited through Jesus (6:9-10; 28:18). In fact, only by recognising the intensity of the tension that currently exists between heaven and earth can we fully appreciate the significance of the eschaton in which the kingdom of heaven will come to earth (2007:342-343. Emphasis original.).*

Both Ephesians 1:10 and Matthew 28:18 conclude with the same Christological focus for creation. Such is the supremacy of Jesus, and the creation agenda of unification that lies within His work, that already in Him heaven impacts the earth and when the time comes, all will come together in a unified and integrated harmony. Earth’s hope is in heaven in Christ. We will see more its fulfilment in our discussion of Revelation 21:1-22:5.<sup>63</sup>

### **Acts 3:21 and Matthew 19:28**

Who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets (Acts 3:21).

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<sup>63</sup> See Chapter 8:249-295.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28).

The *apokatastaseōs pantōn*, ‘restoration of all things’, in Acts 3:21 is consistent with the positive expectations for all the earth. We have already noted the extent to which the prophetic vision of the Old Testament includes a renewal of the earth. ‘Restoration’ does not seem consistent with any process that might involve annihilation or dissolution. Likewise, the regeneration or renewal, *palingenesiā*, of which Jesus speaks in Matthew 19:28, seems to take up these same expectations of restoration of all things. Hagner surveys the use of *palingenesiā* in Josephus, Philo and intertestamental writings in which the term expresses comprehensive renewal of Israel or creation (1995:564-565). However, Burnett (1983) offers a broader though inconclusive discussion on *palingenesiā* as he focuses more on the implications for the apostles themselves. Sim (1993) presents an alternative view largely based on his reading of Matthew 5:18 and 24:35.<sup>64</sup> Pennington understands the *palingenesiā* within the creation purposes of God as summarized above (2007:214, 326-327, 342)<sup>65</sup> and refers to the coming of heaven to earth in Christ as a ‘new Genesis’. Russell argues that it must be more than just ‘national restoration or even individual resurrection’ (1996:159).

Russell claims that *apokatastaseōs* and *palingenesiā* are ‘practically identical’ (1996:159). Adams says that both terms ‘look for a restoration of the created order’ (2007:181), and a ‘cosmic restoration’ (2007:255). RC Doyle says they are synonymous ‘involving cosmic and individual restoration with the re-assertion of God’s kingship, a new heaven and earth with new individuals in it’ (1999:22-25). Furthermore, while

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<sup>64</sup> Sim claims that these two texts in Matthew clearly refer to the complete destruction of the cosmos at the time of the Parousia and that Matthew 19:28 must therefore refer to the post-destruction restoration. See the next Chapter for an alternative view of Matthew 5:18 and 24:35 (Chapter 7:220-229).

<sup>65</sup> See also Pennington (2008:40-43).



perhaps not exactly synonymous, *anakephalaiōsasthai* in Ephesians 1:10 presents the same ‘universal reconciliation’. These three terms, consistent with the earth narrative and future that flows through the Old Testament and into the New, point towards the regeneration of this earth.

### **John and God’s Love for the Cosmos**

Should God’s love for the *kosmos*, the world, in John 3:16 be understood only as a reference to sinful humankind? Ecotheology brings discussion of the possibility of something more. John uses the term more than any other New Testament writer and frequently enough to indicate that the cosmos is a serious part of his narrative framework. Balabanski advocates four categories of John’s use and asks which applies to John 3:16 (2002). Her approach presumes that John works with distinct categories of meaning rather than a single concept with shades of emphasis that do not exclude the whole. That is, while sometimes using the term with some focus on a particular feature of the cosmos, such as the world in rebellion against God or humanity in general, the larger reference to the whole created order is not lost. John’s usage is fluid: he ‘uses the term in ways which evoke more than one of its possible meanings’ (Morris 1971:128). Bauckham concludes on John 3:16 that, while human inhabitants of the cosmos are the focus, ‘an awareness that humanity belongs to a wider created reality whose creator loves it should not be excluded’ (2010:163).

Klink (2008) more helpfully concludes that John has a cosmological narrative alongside the historical and ecclesiological ‘tales’ (2008:82-84). He describes it as a relational cosmos, alienated from God yet loved by Him (2008:75). The recurring distinctions in John’s Gospel of above and below, and of coming and going, add to the cosmic scale of the drama (2008:76-78). The Genesis allusions in the Prologue similarly enhance the

larger vision John portrays (2008:84-85). It is Christ's work to impact relationships across the cosmos with the Light and Life of creation. John's soteriology focuses on sinful humankind but the scope of His agenda is the whole creation. Klink concludes that John 3:16 may not in the immediate context refer to the whole cosmos, but the larger narrative of John in creation, incarnation, cross and resurrection embraces the creation so as to ensure John 3:16 is not read in isolation.<sup>66</sup>

## CONCLUSION

A number of perspectives place the earth in a positive and integral position in the unfolding impact of Christ's person and work – as the Old Testament has encouraged us to expect.

(1) As the earth is an essential feature of the Kingdom's breadth of expectations, Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom's inauguration and completion requires a real renewal of the earth not its termination.

(2) The incarnation, resurrection and ascension of Jesus engage the earth in the divine and thereby grant the earth a value and endurance that overrules all other cosmologies.

(3) The presence of new creation, already emerging out of, yet also including, the existing creation, provides another strong affirming perspective.

(4) Several statements capture in various ways the hope that this earth experiences in Christ: liberation, reconciliation, restoration, regeneration, and the unifying together of heaven and earth.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:19 is best read in a similar way: an immediate context that focuses on humankind but within a wider vision in which Paul understands the full scope of Christ's agenda to be the whole creation.

<sup>67</sup> As presented in this chapter; Romans 8:19-23, Colossians 1:15-20, Ephesians 1:10, Matthew 28:18, Acts 3:21, Matthew 19:28, John 3:16.

The narrative of Christ's first advent is the cornerstone of the larger narrative of creation to new creation fulfilled in His second advent. The statements examined in this chapter affirm the relational triangulation integral to the narrative and also provide greater certainty for the earth's future by arguing through these specific statements for the earth's inclusion in the ultimate purposes of God in Christ.

However, some challenge this position on the basis of other New Testament texts. To these we now turn.



## **The Earth Narrative: New Testament Texts that May Question the Earth's Continuity**

Within the changing dynamics between God and humankind that unfold in the narrative, the previous chapters have argued for a consistent hope for the earth presented in the promises of the Kingdom of God, in the personhood of Jesus, in the already commenced new creation, and in the particular texts examined in Chapter Six. However, for some<sup>1</sup> this narrative is not the issue but rather particular texts that present an alternative view that must overrule this theological narrative and all other texts. They regard these texts as irrefutable evidence of creation's doom. Do these texts cause us to doubt the theological projection in which the earth features inextricably in the future of God's people? If so, are there two distinct eschatological frameworks playing out in the Biblical narrative?

### **OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUES<sup>2</sup>**

Questions about apocalyptic imagery<sup>3</sup> dominate the passages usually called upon to conclude that the earth is heading for complete destruction.<sup>4</sup> Is such imagery actually describing cosmological realities or is the point more metaphorical, utilizing extreme cosmological imagery to produce the strongest possible rhetorical weight for anthropological and theological realities? The former is common at congregational level but also found in brief comments in scholarly works. The latter is the increasingly

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1:3-13, 29-41.

<sup>2</sup> Much of what follows builds upon the survey of Old Testament cosmic language in Chapter 3:82-93.

<sup>3</sup> See the three possible expressions of apocalyptic thought as noted in Chapter 1:26. Further consideration of apocalyptic can be found in Chapters 3:85-91, 5:174-176, 7:211-215, 239.

<sup>4</sup> Though less so for Matthew 5:18 & Luke 16:17.

typical conclusion reached in much scholarship. (For example Russell (1996), NT Wright's many publications and Collins (1998)). JJ Collins describes how apocalyptic intentionally stimulates the imagination and points the reader beyond the imagery itself to more profound realities in the stark battle between good and evil. He concludes:

The language of the apocalypses is not descriptive, referential, newspaper language, but the *expressive* language of poetry, which uses symbols and imagery to articulate a sense or feeling about the world. Their abiding value does not lie in the pseudoinformation they provide about cosmology or future history, but in their affirmation of a transcendent world. Even if the physical universe were to endure forever, there is no doubt that the social and cultural worlds we inhabit are constantly crumbling. ... The apocalyptic revelations are symbolic attempts to penetrate the darkness, which provide ways of imagining the unknown, not factual knowledge. The value of these imaginative ventures cannot be assessed by a correspondence theory of truth, but only by evaluating the actions and attitudes which they supported (JJ Collins 1998:282. Emphasis original.).

It is not that the authors of apocalyptic literature doubted that 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof,' but that within this secure knowledge of God's sovereignty over all He has made, in which the creation is safe and enduring in His hands, dramatic and extreme realities of conflict and judgement must be faced. The weight of these anthropological and theological realities is so great that the best imagery to capture this utilizes the most substantial realities known to all, the heavens and the earth.

Apocalyptic as a literary genre has troubled those for whom the medium is not familiar. The metaphorical thrust of the material seems to facilitate a turning away from the plain or literal meaning of the text.<sup>5</sup> However, the question is 'Plain or literal for whom?' Apocalyptic was a familiar genre in Jewish and Christian circles. Over the Second Temple period many writings used either the literary genre itself, or at least reflected an apocalyptic world view and/or apocalyptic imagery and language. The plain or literal meaning for first century readers was metaphorical. That the Apocalypse was sent to the seven churches of Asia Minor with the presumption that the genre would be appreciated by those who heard the 22 chapters read out in one sitting, suggests that the genre was

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<sup>5</sup> See the review of Dispensational literature in Chapter 1:31-35.

familiar at the time. The plain meaning for those times would not be prosaic or technical description.<sup>6</sup> Quoting Smith, Brower warns ‘that our conclusions will be those of “a contemporary, print-conscious readership, and not those of a first-century oral-conscious community hearing the text for the first time”’ (1997:120).

Adams (2007)<sup>7</sup> has defended a significant degree of literalism in cosmic imagery and language as a critique of NT Wright’s conclusions that apocalyptic imagery refers mostly to contemporary socio-political realities about to face the purifying judgement of God. Although he repeatedly affirms the value and goodness of creation, and the continuance of the creation through the massive cosmic dissolution that the language describes, he writes of the parousia as bringing not annihilation but such a level of destructiveness that everything, including sun, moon and stars, is fragmented completely and bears no resemblance to the created order as we know it: a return, in effect, to the world of Genesis 1:1. Adams’ descriptions of the comic dissolution scattered through his book have the earth completely breaking up, and the cosmos above likewise, such that there would be nothing formed but all would be particles floating around in space until God re-constructs the universe out of the debris. His use of the term *creatio ex vetere* (2007:233, 234, 256) to describe the new heaven and earth is misleading in that the level of destruction he presents would reduce the old earth to clouds of dust with earth, sun, moon and stars all mixed up together which then would be ‘recycled’ (2007:259. Emphasis original). He argues that NT Wright and others are wrong in giving so much metaphorical weight to the language. He argues that

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<sup>6</sup> Too often apocalyptic is read as a science student or an accountant might read Shakespeare if they are unable to step out of the limitations of their profession. Too often amongst the scholars who argue for literalistic readings of apocalyptic imagery, it is read like a Western modernist who has never spent time in non-Western contexts where language routinely has far more fluidity, is far more layered, and technical accuracy in description is often a secondary concern.

<sup>7</sup> As Adams’ provides a substantial alternative to the conclusions below on 2 Peter 3, it is necessary to scrutinize his claims at some length. His work is perhaps the most substantive to be published in recent years on these issues. Adams builds upon a focus on 2 Peter 3 to develop more general conclusions about cosmological imagery and the future of the cosmos.

descriptions of cosmic dissolution are about real cosmic and earthly massive collapse and so language of restoration or transformation for the existing earth for what will come is misleading.

However, several difficulties arise in Adams' argument

1. Although a critique of Wright's conclusions, Adams does not adequately engage with Wright's actual argument (See NT Wright 1992:121-144, 280-338).
2. Greater appreciation is needed of hyperbole as integral to apocalyptic description. His pejorative reference to the possibility of 'embellishment' suggests he undervalues one of the fundamentals of apocalyptic imagery (2007:49).
3. Despite claiming to, he does not adequately consider the context in which the language occurs. He finds little there to suggest metaphorical meanings.<sup>8</sup>
4. He appears not to appreciate how descriptions of calamity to come utilize the poetic descriptions of past events in which God came in dramatic and powerful ways to implement His judgement.
5. He needs to give more weight to how apocalyptic imagery is rich with metaphor and how hyperbole and metaphor are to impact the listener: what Bauckham and Hart, quoting Bellemin-Neol, discuss as 'the rhetoric of the unsayable' (1999:95). Adams

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<sup>8</sup> For example: (1) No consideration is offered of the context in Psalm 102 and Isaiah 51 in which real expectations dominate for a restoration of Zion (2007:30-34). So he concludes that the perishing of heaven and earth ultimately can only mean total dissolution of the earth. (2) Socio political realities dominate the prophets as the source of sin and the cause of judgement or as the means by which God judges. Yet Adams does not allow for the possibility of metaphorical significance in the cosmos rich imagery. Adams claims legitimacy for much of his work in the prophets on Raabe's examination of the interplay between universal and particular descriptions of judgement (2002). However, Adams significantly goes quite some way beyond Raabe in his attempts to legitimate a real cosmic literalism in the descriptions of judgement for all nations. (3) Regarding Wright's summation of the use of cosmic language in the Testament of Moses 10:1-10 (1992:3054-306), Adams claims, 'there is nothing in the immediate or wider context to indicate that the cosmic language has a socio-political reference.' (2007:73). Yet the whole document is about the socio-political realities being faced by Israel with regards to the Gentile nations surrounding them. God's Kingdom in creation continues as does Israel (which presumably includes its land). The descriptive and figurative language is unambiguously about judgement on the nations that threaten Israel.



sometimes dismisses the possibilities of a rhetorical figure of speech with various expressions like ‘more natural’ (207:44) or ‘perfectly reasonable’ (2007:49).

6. Consequently, he does not consider how cosmological metaphor works to present a message that has little to do with cosmology and everything to do with the weight of terror and glory whenever God comes to put things to right in judgement and in salvation.

Furthermore, Adams uses the material selectively.<sup>9</sup> He puts aside all the material that presents an alternative as ‘we must resist the temptation to harmonize disparate viewpoints’ (2007:257). He mostly disregards the place of this earth in the creation purposes of God as expressed throughout the Canon. For those who claim the same divine inspiration works through the idiosyncrasies of the various Biblical authors, the questions of consistency deserve far more attention. By confining himself to what he refers to as ‘*textual* evidence’ (2007:53. Emphasis original.), which he interprets with a degree of literalism, Adams has bypassed material that facilitates appreciation of how language works to communicate ideas.<sup>10</sup>

We now turn to those New Testament texts that are central to the argument for dissolution.

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<sup>9</sup> He does not attempt to reconcile this material with the more positive conclusion reached in his other publications (See Bibliography:401).

<sup>10</sup> See Reno for a critical appraisal of approaches to texts that neglect ‘theological exegesis’ (2004:385-408). Adams argues against such when he declines to take seriously the author’s ‘worldview or eschatological perspective’ (2007:53) in so far as these can be reasonably identified. In effect, he cuts himself off from the very evidence that points towards metaphorical rather than something more prosaic. Yet Adams claims a Stoic worldview for his exegesis of 2 Peter 3.

**MATTHEW 5:18 (LUKE 16:17) AND MATTHEW 24:35 (MARK 13:31, LUKE 21:33)**

For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished (Matthew 5:18).

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Matthew 24:35).

In these passages, to what exactly does the phrase ‘heaven and earth’ refer? And in Matthew 5:18, which ‘passing away’ determines the meaning of the other, ‘heaven and earth’ or the law?

The meaning and timing of the passing away of ‘heaven and earth’ in Matthew 5:18 and Luke 16:17 is linked with the timing of the law’s endurance. Before even the most minute details of the law pass away, heaven and earth will have passed away. A very conservative understanding of the law, combined with assumptions about a real cosmological significance for such language, usually results in a futurist focus for both the passing away of heavens and earth and aspects of the law: the presumed future cosmology of ‘heaven and earth’ sets up an understanding of the timing of the law’s passing.<sup>11</sup> Both *heōs*, ‘until’, clauses<sup>12</sup> usually are taken as chronologically synonymous. As they refer to the passing away of the law, this conclusion is reasonable. Both Fletcher-Louis (1997) and Hagner (1993:106-107) agree these are synonymous though with very different understandings as to the timing. Hagner states that the law will remain intact for as long as it must, until all is accomplished. Having reviewed the

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<sup>11</sup> Virtually all commentaries refer this passing of heaven and earth to the second coming or to the end of the millennium. Hendriksen may be an exception as he considers that the reference may have a more immediate significance (1974:292-292). Most appear to be non-committal as to what exactly it might mean for the actual earth. Traditional Dispensationalism takes it as descriptive of the complete destruction of the cosmos (see Chapter 1:3-4, 30-34) while some incline more towards a figurative expression of the ending of a particular form of the creation (For example, Lenski 1964:208).

<sup>12</sup> They are, ‘*until* heaven and earth disappear’ and ‘*until* everything is accomplished’. Both are presented as preceding the passing away of even the smallest detail of the law.

alternatives, he concludes that both clauses are eschatological and refer to Christ's return (1993:107-108).

France (1989:166-205) and Fletcher-Louis (1997) argue for a far more profound change to the law throughout Jesus' first advent including a strong sense of realized fulfilment. Both argue that Matthew presents us with a recurring emphasis on Jesus' presence and ministry as fulfilment.<sup>13</sup> The previous verse (17) is synonymous with regards to the timing of the law's future, fulfilment being another way of referring to 'until everything is accomplished' (v. 18). Jesus speaks of the need for the law's fulfilment in the wider context of Matthew's frequent referrals to realized fulfilment unfolding already in Jesus' pronouncements about the law. DJ Moo concludes that in Matthew the law has a particular prophetic focus and its fulfilment is in 'the eschatological will of God' (1992:457). Here is a 'transcendence of the law' (458) because 'Jesus, not the law, is now the locus of God's word to his people' (459).<sup>14</sup> For Luke 16:16 and Matthew 11:13, Moo suggests 'he must mean that John's coming has signalled a fundamental shift in the role and importance of "the Law and the Prophets"' (457) for 'the new era with its "new wineskins"' (458). In examining Jesus' several interpretations of the law as listed in Matthew 5:21-48, NT Wright states 'They emphasize ... the way in which the renewal which Jesus sought to engender would produce a radically different way of being Israel in real-life Palestinian situations' (1996:290). Already more than mere 'iotas and pen-strokes' of the law have passed away in that they are no longer valid in their current form. Yet Jesus' words state that not even miniscule details of the law will cease to be applicable until 'heaven and earth' pass away, even as He points beyond the

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<sup>13</sup> Fletcher-Louis lists the following as evidence of a strong fulfilment perspective throughout Matthew (1997:152). Matthew 2:15, 17-18, 23, 4:14-16, 8:17, 12:17-21, 13:14-15, 35, 21:4-5, 27:9-10, cf. 2:5-6, 3:3, 10:35, 11:10, 21:42, 22:44, 24:30, 26:64.

<sup>14</sup> 'The entire OT, in all its parts, is viewed as the promise component in a promise-fulfillment scheme of salvation history, and the Law cannot be excluded from this scheme' (DJ Moo 1992:457).

law to a Christological rather than legal orientation for the coming Kingdom. He speaks on the law as if the passing of heaven and earth is already happening. It is reasonable to assume that Jesus knew how much more would cease following His death, resurrection, ascension and the Spirit's outpouring on the church.

Matthew's affirmation of the law and its fulfilment does not lessen the importance of the law but rather the opening up of new possibilities because Christ has completed all that the law requires. Matthew's more exalted view of the law serves to highlight the even greater supremacy of Christ.

There are several strong and convincing evidences of this passing of the law throughout the New Testament: Jesus' teaching ministry (for example from Mark 7:19, 'Jesus declared all foods "clean."' cf. 1 Timothy 4:3-4);<sup>15</sup> the redundancy of substantial law requirements resulting from His death including all of the temple routine (as advocated at length in Hebrews); the freedom from law obligations argued for by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-32) and by Paul for the Gentile churches particularly with the shift from written code to indwelling Spirit as the focus in all matters of conduct;<sup>16</sup> Paul's acknowledgement of the law's passing applicability in that by faith we are no longer under the *paidagogōs*, supervision or tutor, of the law (Galatians 3:24-25); and the transference of language of temple service, offering and sacrifice away from cultic activity to the lifestyle of discipleship.<sup>17</sup> These all substantiate the claim that already a sizeable proportion of the law has passed away: because in these things much of the law

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<sup>15</sup> See Beale (1997:36-38) on the abolishing of various laws as new creation comes to Gentile believers.

<sup>16</sup> Note especially Ephesians 2:15.

<sup>17</sup> Romans 1:9, 12:1-2, 2 Timothy 1:3, Hebrews 12:28-3:5, Acts 13:2, Romans 13:6, 15:16, 27, 2 Corinthians 9:12, Philippians 2:17, 22, 25, Romans 12:1-2, 6:13, 15:16, Ephesians 5:1-2, Philippians 2:17, 4:18, 2 Timothy 4:6, Hebrews 13:15-16, 1 Peter 2:5, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:25-27, Colossians 1:22, 28, 2 Timothy 2:15, Hebrews 9:14, 28, Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:15, 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

is made redundant though its fulfilment in Christ's first advent. Schreiner (1989) examines opinion on how Christ's first advent, partly at least, abolishes the law. While debate might continue on the detail, no one claims that every detail of the law is still required. For the past 2,000 years, the church has understood that substantial requirements of the law have passed away out of applicability and obligation, and has functioned accordingly.

The second *heōs* clause is more open to possibilities than the English translations suggest. Until all is 'accomplished' or 'fulfilled' is language which expects something quite specific rather than the more open-ended words sense of the Greek, 'until everything happens.' If, as in the previous paragraph, the passing away of the law in its old covenant expression is happening already, and about to happen even more as the cross occurs and Gentile mission unfolds, then 'until everything happens' most likely embraces the full impact of the first advent of Jesus concluding in the destruction of the temple, as Jesus expected.

If the second *heōs* clause refers to something already happening, and if significant features of the law have already passed away, how can the first *heōs* clause be synonymous when the passing way of 'heaven and earth' suggests such massive destruction? The context, fulfilment and the end of more than just jots and tittles, requires a reference to something in the first advent of Jesus.

On this, Dumbrell concludes:

The phrase refers to the end of the present age, which was a regular use of the phrase in contemporaneous Jewish literature. ... What would perish in A.D. 70 was the Jewish world, and the Jewish age came to an end with the destruction of Jerusalem... that Biblical writers regularly used

end-of-the-world language metaphorically to refer to what they well knew was not the end of the world (2001b:328-329).<sup>18</sup>

In exploring the possibilities, we should note that Jesus on occasions, particularly in more public statements, was quite willing to use cryptic comments. Enigmatic or paradoxical remarks seem to have been made with the same intention as his use of parables (Matthew 13:10-17, Mark 4:10-12, Luke 8:10). The most immediate meaning is often not the point as Jesus provokes further reflection that the Spirit might then use to bring enlightenment. Given the sensitivities in the context to the issues of law, it would not be surprising for Jesus do be doing so here in Matthew 5:18.

Pennington (2007) has made it clear that Matthew is very intentional in employing ‘heaven and earth’ language. As summarized above,<sup>19</sup> Matthew’s Gospel is a journey of ideas from the conflicted relationship between God (often represented as ‘the heavens’ in the plural) and humankind (‘earth’) through to the coming of the Kingdom from heaven to earth, and the integration and harmony between heaven and earth that results from the establishment of Jesus’ authority in both realms (Matthew 28:18, cf. Matthew 11:25).

However, Pennington is less informative on the statements about heaven and earth passing away. ‘In 5:18 and 24:35 Jesus speaks of the future passing away of heaven and earth. This use evokes the sense of an eschatological end comparable to its beginnings in Gen 1:1’ (2007:194). With regards to Matthew 24:29-35, he briefly refers to

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<sup>18</sup> It is perhaps ironic that probably virtually all of those who would argue that heaven and earth have yet to pass away in fact already function as if it has, as if much of the law has. There appears to be much inconsistency between understandings of eschatology and understanding of the timing of the law’s passing. One does not see much compliance with the dietary, ceremonial, civil, criminal, cultic, and economic requirements of the law throughout the Christian community and yet many continue to hold on to the idea by implication that the law stands as it always has because heaven and earth have yet to pass away.

<sup>19</sup> Chapter 6:204-205.

apocalyptic language that suggests ‘calamitous times, an undoing of creation itself.’ (2007:157). He does not consider the possibility of a first advent reference in Jesus’ words and so, given his conclusion that Jesus brings the Kingdom of heaven to earth that the will of the Father might be done on earth, he leaves it unresolved as to what exactly Jesus meant, except to say:

While Jesus does say somewhat cryptically that “heaven and earth shall pass away” (24:35), he also speaks of the new genesis (παλιγγενεσία) to come at the end of God’s redemptive work (19:28) These two statements can be related together by understanding that there will be some type of purging of the earthly realm (cf. 24:29) with the goal of a new creation, *not* a non-earthly, heavenly kingdom (2007: 210. Emphasis original.).

Lincoln has argued at length that Paul’s canonical letters<sup>20</sup> bind heaven and earth together, both spatially and temporally, in the cosmos God has created and over which God in Christ continues to work out those purposes that bring together the whole cosmos in Christ. He concludes that, whatever spatial (heaven and earth) or temporal (already and not yet) ‘duality’ Paul may include in his argument, it is never a dualism that separates some of the created order as good and worthy of attention and the rest as disposable (1981:191-192).<sup>21</sup> ‘Heaven and earth’ is a catch-all phrase that embraces the whole created order, the whole of the cosmos including the dwelling place of God. Lincoln discusses several Pauline descriptions of all that God already has stored up in heaven in Christ, who is bodily present heaven, and explores the way Paul expresses hope for the earth now and at the parousia because ultimately heaven will come to earth with Christ’s return. Lincoln’s examination of Paul further supports the claim that much the same inclusiveness is in Jesus’ use of the phrase and this reflects a long-standing tradition for the term.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> As Paul’s letters pre-date the writing of Matthew, there is a reasonable probability that Paul’s use of language was known to Matthew.

<sup>21</sup> For further discussion on apocalyptic dualities without dualism see NT Wright (1992:297-299).

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 1:1, 2:1, 4, 14:19, 22, 24:3, Exodus 20:11, 31:17, Deuteronomy 4:26, 30:19, 31:28, 2 Kings 19:15, 2 Chronicles 2:12, Ezra 5:11, Psalm 69:34, 113:6, 115:15, 121:2, 124:8, 134:3, 146:6, Isaiah 37:16, Jeremiah 10:11, 23:24, 32:17, 33:25, 51:48, Habakkuk 3:3, Haggai, 2:6, 21, Matthew 11:25, Luke 10:21, Acts 4:24, 14:15, 17:24, Revelation 14:7.

However in Matthew 5:18, to what does the phrase ‘heaven and earth’ refer, the cosmos or something else? If cosmology, then substantial sections of the New Testament are out of step with Jesus in that the first century church functioned as if more than just ‘iotas and pen-strokes’ had already passed away thereby implying, at least, that ‘heaven and earth’ had likewise already passed away.

Taking seriously all that ‘heaven’ represents highlights the issues.<sup>23</sup> Lincoln notes some ‘fluidity’ (1981:184) in the use of *ouranos*, heaven, and its cognates in that the New Testament writers, Paul in particular, were not concerned to produce a technical precision that made distinctions between all that was above the earth. While some uses clearly refer to no more than what we might mean by the words ‘air’<sup>24</sup> and ‘sky’,<sup>25</sup> most of the time the language is inclusive, whether singular or plural, of that heaven (place) of the throne of God and the heavens above (space) in which it is located.<sup>26</sup> Lincoln concludes that Paul is not interested in the question of how many heavens there might be, even though in his day opinions varied as to how many (1981:77-84).<sup>27</sup> In other words, the language in Paul at least does not always attempt to distinguish precisely between heaven as all up there beyond the earth and heaven as the dwelling place of God. Apparently there usually was no need as the purposes of God embrace both equally: in Christ, the future of one is the future of the other.

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<sup>23</sup> Dictionary articles on heaven are generally quite limited in their treatment of the New Testament material though there are improvements following Lincoln’s contribution (1981). See PS Johnston (2000b:540-542), Morris (1996b:457), Reddish (1996:90-91), Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman (2000:370-372), Traub & von Rad (1968: 497-543).

<sup>24</sup> Matthew 6:26, 8:20, 13:52, Mark 4:32, Luke 8:5, 9:58, 13:19

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 16:2-3, 24:30-31, 25:64, Mark 13:25-27, 14:62, Luke 4:25, 12:56, 17:24

<sup>26</sup> Pennington’s observations (2007) on Matthew’s use of the singular and plural for heaven indicates a more precise use than Paul as Lincoln argues (1981). However, while the nuances of the language may differ, conceptually both Matthew and Paul work from the same world view with regards to the present distinctions between heaven and earth and the ultimate purpose of God to bring both together in Christ.

<sup>27</sup> The writer of Hebrews reveals at least an awareness of the idea of layers when he writes that Jesus has gone through the heavens to be exalted above the heavens (4:14, 7:26). Note also Paul’s reference to ‘the third heaven.’ (2 Corinthians 12:2) and Ephesians 4:10 which states that Christ ascended ‘far above all the heavens.’



‘Heaven/s’, as the place in which God dwells, has a high value in the New Testament and represents both the presence and throne of God, and all gathered up in His presence. See Appendix A.5:392 for details. If this ‘heaven’ passes away then then nothing would be left; not even the good things of the Kingdom of heaven that many passages speak of as being secure, safe and imperishable (Matthew 6:19-21, 19:21, 1 Peter 1:4). Given the inclusiveness of the term ‘heaven and earth’, this ‘heaven’ of God’s throne is one part of the spectrum of creation being embraced in this language. If a literal passing away of earth is problematic, such a possibility for heaven is inherently incomprehensible and the antithesis of hope.<sup>28</sup>

The passing away of heaven and earth in Matthew 24:35 (Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33) most likely refers to the same reality as the passing away of heaven and earth in Matthew 5:18 (Luke 16:17). The difference is in the timing and in what Jesus compares to the heaven and the earth. In Matthew 5:18, the law remains until the passing away of heaven and earth. In Matthew 24:35, Jesus’ words continue long after the passing away of heaven and earth. If Matthew 5:18 and Luke 16:17 require a reference to the first advent, which brought the passing away of much more than ‘iotas and pen-strokes’, then most likely it has the same meaning in Matthew 24:35.

NT Wright has argued that the primary, if not the only, focus in Matthew 24 and Mark 13 is the destruction of the temple in 70AD and the ending of the era that prepared the way for the coming of the new covenant in the rule of the Messiah (1996:320-368). His critics advocate that the descriptions do not fit well with merely the events of 70AD (cf. Newman 1999). Brower (1997) develops the way Mark expresses his interest in the

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<sup>28</sup> Adams’ statement that heaven as God’s dwelling place is not part of creation is problematic (2007:187). He does so to avoid the problems created by the literalism he wants to find in apocalyptic imagery. If ‘heaven’ exists in any dimension, and it is outside the personhood of God, then it must be created. Only God Himself is uncreated. See Acts 4:24, 14:15, 17:24, Revelation 10:6, 14:7.

temple and its inevitable destruction. He concludes, quoting Geddert, that 'Mark 13 is an anti-temple speech' (1997:140).<sup>29</sup> But what of the cosmological language in Matthew 24:29 (Mark 13:24-25, Luke 21:25)? 'Immediately after the suffering of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken' (Matthew 24:29). Whether a reference to Jerusalem in 70AD or the Parousia of Christ at the end of history, sufficient evidence occurs that it is figurative imagery rather than cosmological description: this imagery was used in Isaiah 13:10 and there is no reason to conclude it has lost the figurative sense in Jesus' use of the same imagery.<sup>30</sup>

Fletcher-Louis notes that Wright's treatment of Mark 13:31 (and Matthew 24:35) (1996:364), on which so much of the argument stands, is confined to one paragraph and relies upon a claimed hyperbole to draw out the contrasts that confirms Christ's word lasts forever. Wright does not refer the passing away of heaven and earth to the destruction of Jerusalem, as he does with the apocalyptic language in the passage. Fletcher-Louis argues, that this inconsistency weakens Wright's position (1997:148-149). Furthermore, Matthew 5:18 refers is to a particular time rather than simply being a hyperbolic statement to draw out a contrast.

The temple as a microcosm of the cosmos, with particular reference to the meeting of heaven and earth in the temple, has received significant attention (for example, Beale 2004a&b, 2005, Alexander and Gathercole 2004, Alexander 2008). Fletcher-Louis, drawing on this scholarship, addresses the question of the meaning of the passing away of heaven and earth by exploring the use of the language of 'heaven and earth' for the

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<sup>29</sup> See also Bird (2008:55-58).

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 3:82-93 for a survey of cosmic language in the Old Testament and the figurative use made of this language. This background adds to the probability that a figurative meaning is intended in Matthew 5:18 and 24:35.

temple as reported by Josephus and Philo. He concludes that 'heaven and earth' at the time was as a reference to the temple in general and the curtain of the temple in particular. The temple represented the cosmos and the curtain of the temple the meeting place of heaven and earth; and symbolized the barriers between heaven and earth caused by human Godlessness. Therefore the passing away of heaven and earth embraces both the tearing of the curtain at the time of Jesus' death and the removal of the now redundant temple in 70AD. It is the beginning of the reconciliation between heaven and earth and anticipates the time to come when heaven and earth are one and the same place. Although Pennington (2007) does not consider this possibility, it does fit very well with the transition in Matthew from a divide between heaven and earth to an integration in Christ as the Kingdom of heaven comes to earth. Furthermore, the recurring statements from Jesus about the inevitable judgement of God on the old order, particularly in the period leading up to His trial and death,<sup>31</sup> give additional weight to the conclusion that in Matthew 5:18, Jesus is referring to the destruction of the temple.

With this conclusion, the passing away of the heaven and earth has a meaning which fits neatly with the context of both uses of the expression: the passing away of the now redundant requirements of the law and the passing away of the temple that enshrines the practical implementation of these requirements.

In other words, instead of suggesting massive destruction of God's creation, even heaven itself, the expression refers to events that are real features of the first advent. Its only cosmological significance is symbolically to express the breaking down of the

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<sup>31</sup> Matthew 21-26, Mark 11-14, Luke 19-22. In statements, parables and actions, Jesus indicates that the old order is doomed. This anticipation of the end of the old order dominates His ministry throughout the week between his entry to Jerusalem and his death.

barriers between God and humankind as the dawn of the Kingdom inaugurates in the series of events that make up the first advent of Christ.

### **HEBREWS 12:25-28**

(25) See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! (26) At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.” (27) This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. (28) Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:25-28).

The ‘removal’ of ‘created things’ following a whole creation ‘shaking’ has been understood as claiming a total break up or dissolution of the cosmos.<sup>32</sup> Based on the reference to Psalm 102 in Hebrews 1:10-12, PR Jones concludes that Hebrews 12:26-28 means ‘the material world is not eternal’ (1985:398) as do Mitchell (2007:288) and Bruce (1964:383-384). Oberholtzer concludes similarly with reference to 2 Peter 3:10-12, that this is ‘a complete removal and destruction and not just a simple transformation’ of the earth and heavens (1989:72). Bornkamm, without qualification, regards created and unshakeable as quite distinct categories as if the Kingdom includes nothing created (1979:199).

Adams argues for an extreme dissolution (though not annihilation) of the created order in Hebrews 12 (2007:182-199). He references the quote from Psalm 102 in Hebrews 1 but also builds on a particular understanding of the shaking of Sinai, the shaking expected by Haggai 2:6-9, and the use that Hebrews 12 makes of these. He argues for quite exact meanings for ‘removal’ and ‘created things’. The following addresses each of these arguments.

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<sup>32</sup> Adams claims that this is the majority opinion (2007:191).

**Language.** There are diversities of meaning and usage for each of the key words. None have a narrow and precise meaning.<sup>33</sup>

SHAKE/SHAKEN.<sup>34</sup> The shaking of the earth frequently expresses God's presence and action.<sup>35</sup> This conveys the enormity of God's might and glory as well as the weight and drama of His judgement against, or blessing for, His people. In the New Testament, shaking may be a description of a physical commotion of the ground, reeds or trees, or houses.<sup>36</sup> It may be a reference to great upheaval in the heavenly realms<sup>37</sup> or in the thoughts and feelings of human beings.<sup>38</sup> In this letter, only in Hebrews 12:26-28 is the language of shaking used (*saleuō* three times, *seiō* once). In no usage of the language of shaking is there any reference to absolute destruction. It may, or may not, refer to an actual physical disturbance of the earth. Bertram's examination of the language leads him to conclude that in Hebrews 12:26-28 the focus of the imagery is on the transition from the old order to the completeness of the Kingdom by the shaking of everything so that what does not belong to the Kingdom is removed (Bertram 1971:70). The upheaval may be great but the material world continues.

REMOVAL.<sup>39</sup> *metáthesis*, 'removal', conveys a sense of transition and so may refer to change, transformation, or relocation (Maurer 1972). It does not seem to have an ontological reference suggesting that something ceases to exist nor necessarily to have any sense of destruction. It is used in Hebrews of changes or alterations to the law and priesthood (7:12), and in Hebrews 11:5 of the taking up of Enoch. In Hebrews 12:26-28,

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<sup>33</sup> Lane examines these key words at some length (1998:478-488).

<sup>34</sup> See Bertram (1971) and Bornkamm (1979).

<sup>35</sup> Exodus 19:18, Judges 5:4-5, Psalm 68:8, 77:18, 114:4, 7. See also Chapter 5:177-189, Appendix A.3:391, Bertram (1971), Middleton (2014:109-127).

<sup>36</sup> Matthew 11:7, 27:51, Luke 7:24, Luke 6:48, Acts 4:31, 16:36, Revelation 6:13.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:25, Luke 21:26.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew 21:10, 28:4, Acts 2:25, 17:13, 2 Thessalonians 2:2.

<sup>39</sup> See Maurer (1972).

relocation or movement to another place is the focus vis-à-vis the unshakeable which ‘remains’ (Lane 1998:482).

CREATED.<sup>40</sup> Of the word group of which ‘created’, *poieō*, is part, Braun writes, ‘The two main branches of meaning, “to make” or “to do” on the one side, “to act” or “to behave” on the other, include a plenitude of nuances’ (1968:458). Hebrews reflects this same variability in the use of the word. Mostly it refers to a number of different activities with more of a sense of doing<sup>41</sup> than making or constructing something.<sup>42</sup> So ‘created things’ in Hebrews 12:27 has a range of possible references.

Lincoln suggests that a more accurate translation limits the removed things to those that are shaken ‘as created things are shaken’ (2006:99). So ‘created things’ is a reference to the nature of the shaking rather than providing content to what is removed. If this is the case then the removal of the created order is not the issue.

KINGDOM. In Hebrews, the only other reference to the Kingdom is in Hebrews 1:8. It clearly refers to the throne of Christ. Determining then how Hebrews understands the concept of Kingdom is mostly about what Hebrews regards as incorporated within the work and reign of Christ.

### **Haggai 2:6-9.**

(6) For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; (7) and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts. (8) The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts. (9) The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the

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<sup>40</sup> See Braun (1968).

<sup>41</sup> Hebrews 1:3, 6:3, 7:27, 8:9, 10:7, 10:9, 10:36, 11:28, 13:6, 13:17, 13:19, 13:21.

<sup>42</sup> In Hebrews 3:2 the word refers to God’s appointing of Jesus (Lane 1998:76). The making of something is the sense in God making the ages (1:2), making winds and fire as His angels (1:7), constructing the Tabernacle (8:5), and making level paths (12:13).

former, says the LORD of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the LORD of hosts (Haggai 2:6-9).

The inclusion of heaven, sea and dry land as well as the earth indicates the completeness and thoroughness of the shaking that is coming. Haggai certainly does not expect absolute destruction in that this shaking will enhance the temple in Jerusalem into which the treasures or desires (v. 7) and riches (v. 8) of the nations will come.<sup>43</sup> The shaking of heaven and earth will not destroy the temple or the wealth of the nations.<sup>44</sup> Such a shaking has happened before: Haggai begins this assertion with the words ‘once again’ (2:6) implying that such a shaking of the heavens would not be a new reality. Earlier shakings of the heavens obviously left the creation intact.

Adams claims Hebrews 12:26 carefully avoids reference to Zion/temple to make the point that this shaking is universal (2007:188-189). However, given the contrast between the old and new orders, and the association of the temple with the old, it is much more probable that Hebrews drops the temple reference in Haggai to continue the clear dichotomy between the old temple-centred practices and the heavenly Jerusalem.

The repeat reference to this shaking in Haggai 2:21-23, and its application in the breaking of political and military power in the nations, has no direct reference to any impact on the physical world. With a clearly figurative rather than cosmological focus by Haggai, strong evidence is needed to conclude that the writer to the Hebrews has changed the imagery to an essentially cosmological reference.

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<sup>43</sup> See the discussion on treasure (desire) in Alden (1985:586-587) and Baldwin (1972:51-52). Alden leans more towards a messianic reference while Baldwin does not.

<sup>44</sup> In his explanation, RL Smith supports the reference by Von Rad to Isaiah 2:2-4 and 60:1-22 as descriptions of Haggai’s inclusion of the wealth of the nations in the temple (1984:157-158).

**Hebrews 1:10-12.** Consistent with the conclusion reached in Chapter Three on Psalm 102:25-27,<sup>45</sup> the writer to the Hebrews treats this statement as theological rather than cosmological. It speaks to us of the Son who will be eternal.<sup>46</sup>

**Context.** Hebrews is a series of exhortations based on the stark divergence between the old order and the new, between the recurring and limited practices of the old covenant and the once-and-for-all achievements of the cross of Christ, the perfect High Priest. Lincoln states that Hebrews 12:18-29 ‘recapitulates the sermon’s message’ (2004b:319)<sup>47</sup> in an intense contrast between the old mountain and the new. In the following admonition (12:25-29), the recipients of the letter are urged to take seriously the inescapable power of the One who brings judgement because the localized shaking at Sinai will be dwarfed by the creation wide shaking to come. The extensive development of the nature of the old order throughout the letter implies that the removed created things are the whole order of cultic practices now void of relevance following the cross. All are urged to locate faith and hope in the far superior mountain, where Christ the mediator now can be found, as the old order will be removed and only the eternal things of the Kingdom may remain. This contrast is not between material and spiritual, or physical and Kingdom, but between the former and latter orders for finding rest in God. As Hebrews provides no immediate explanation of ‘created things’ or ‘unshakeable kingdom’, the wider context becomes the focus for what the author may have had in mind. The contrast of the two mountains a few verses earlier is the most probable source of clarification. This is preferable to imposing world-view assumptions based on other texts especially given, as noted above, the adaptable nature of the key

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<sup>45</sup> Chapter 3:94-99.

<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the word translated as ‘perish’, *àpóllumi*, suggests being lost rather than absolute destruction This is the only use of the word in Hebrews. See Oepke (1964:394-396).

<sup>47</sup> Lane refers to this as ‘a magisterial résumé of themes and motifs that have been introduced throughout the homily’ (1998:489).



words. As Lincoln argues, ‘words take on a particular force from their most immediate context ... interpreted within the other major assumptions that are clearly operative in Hebrews’ (2006:98).

Lincoln explores the choice Hebrews presents to its readers in terms of pilgrimage (2004a:34-37). The call to enter the coming rest (4:1-11), the example of Abraham (11:8-10) together with others (11:1-3, 13-16), the example of Jesus (12:1-2), and the anticipation of ‘the city to come’ (13:12-14), present the exhortation to the Hebrews as a future hope that is already theirs (12:22-24) yet with more expected from the One who has gone before them (2:10, 6:20, 10:20). However, this rest and city to come require a wholehearted re-alignment with the new order established in the cross of ‘Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel’ (12:24).

With these observations in mind, does Hebrews 12:25-29 suggest that a major disintegration of the earth is expected? Lane concludes, ‘Just as elsewhere in the OT the “shaking” of heaven and earth exhibits God’s destructive power and wrath toward Israel or the nations, so too here the “shaking” of earth and heaven should be read as a fixed metaphor for divine judgment’ (1998:480). If shaking of the earth is a standard metaphor for God’s judgement, we need substantial reason for concluding that Hebrews breaks away from this tradition into a cosmological reference. It is unlikely that Haggai, or the writer to the Hebrews, in referring to the shaking of the earth at Sinai, understood this as global (contra Adams 2007:189).<sup>48</sup> The word earth does not require such a meaning. Exodus 19:18 speaks only of the shaking of the mountain, or the ‘trembling’

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<sup>48</sup> Adams adds to the text for his conclusion when claiming that the Sinai event was a ‘terrifying and disruptive *physical* phenomena, including a global earthquake’ (2007:189. Emphasis original.). Furthermore, he changes the reference from ‘his voice shook the earth’ as a warning to a global earthquake of destruction.

of the ‘people’ (cf. Lane 1998:478), after which Moses was able to ascend to the top. The extension of the shaking in future to the whole created order is likewise unlikely to be a primarily cosmological reference but an extension of the localized theophany to a creation-wide presence of God with a voice of warning for all who will not listen (12:25). Hebrews uses the Haggai reference to stress that the future voice of warning will come from heaven and its effects will reach all of heaven and earth. Based on Haggai’s words, Hebrews 12:26 is an assertion which gives increased weight and authority to the future warning in the voice of God from heaven.

Hebrews holds together temporal (past, present, future) and spatial (heaven and earth) realities to enable the readers to appreciate what is already true in Christ, yet with a hope for more, as well as the call to set out in a life of pilgrimage towards the rest and city to come. The language of ‘heaven’ does not distinguish the material from the spiritual as such but to contrast the old covenant centred on the earthly Sinai with the new covenant centred on the heavenly Jerusalem. ‘Earth’ represents the inferior offerings of multiple priests (8:3-6), the old covenant established after the escape from the land/earth of Egypt (8:9) now replaced by the superior new covenant (8:7-13), the transient world of the faithful who knew they were sojourners in their own land (11:8-10, 13-16), and the voice at Sinai (12:25). In contrast, Hebrews repeatedly points readers to the heavenly realms and all found there in Christ (3:1, 4:14, 7:26, 8:1, 8:4-5, 9:23-25, 11:16, 12:22-24, cf. 10:34).<sup>49</sup> Consequently, most appropriately the warning voice comes from heaven. Such a voice brings a global rather than local shaking and the point of the Haggai quote is to accentuate the absolute strength and effectiveness of the heavenly voice warning of inevitable judgement if one follows the old ways.

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<sup>49</sup> Similar to the heaven and earth contrast in Pennington’s examination of Matthew’s Gospel (2007).

Adams concludes that the ‘shakeable things’ (12:27) are the whole physical heaven and earth (2007:190) in the immediately preceding verse (12:26). However, this breaks the pattern of contrast developed throughout Hebrews. There is no reason to shift to a different contrast to the one already established in Hebrews as to the difference between the shakeable and the unshakeable. The future shaking will impact all of the created order. Its weight and impact will not be confined to one locality but Hebrews seems to continue with the metaphorical tradition of an essentially judgement significance. All will be shaken, but not all will prove to be shakeable,<sup>50</sup> just as all works will be tested by fire and some will endure and some will not (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Similarly, Hebrews’ brief reference to the Kingdom requires substantial evidence to conclude that Kingdom here is any different to Kingdom throughout the New Testament in which the Kingdom embraces a major transformation of social, physical and spiritual realities. Nothing suggests that the ‘unshakeable’ features of the Kingdom exclude the material world.<sup>51</sup>

Likewise, ‘created things’, if taken to refer to things that have been made, need not be understood as merely physical realities. The spiritual, personal and social realities of human experience are also created as are those aspects of the law and its practices which have become superfluous following the fulfilment of the law in Christ and in the

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<sup>50</sup> The shaking of everything reveals what is shakeable and what is not, what is enduring and what will break up as it is no longer part of the new order. Without the test of being shaken, what is unshakeable remains less certain.

<sup>51</sup> Hebrews affirms the created order in several ways. The introductory expressions of the supremacy of Christ (Hebrews 1:1-8) include reference to Psalm 2 and the declaration from God that the Son will be granted the whole earth and the nations therein as his possession and inheritance. With reference to Psalm 8 (Hebrews 2:5-9), the reign of Christ over all things is affirmed. Lincoln identifies three strands of thought in Hebrews that establish that Hebrews stands within the tradition that ‘expected ... transformed bodies and transformed cosmos’ (2006:97). These are (1) the references to resurrection, (2) incarnation and resurrection of Jesus, and (3) the anticipated second coming of Christ to inherit the cosmos and bring complete salvation (2006:96-97). Adams notes the recurring references to God as the creator (2007:195-196).

cross. If the verb references things ‘done’ rather than things ‘made’ then the reference may be to the practices that have been made redundant by the person and work of Christ. This approach sits much better within the flow of the argument throughout Hebrews.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, both senses of the verb may be included if ‘created things’ is a reference back to Sinai and the practices inaugurated there (Hebrews 12:18-21).

The admonition to take God, the consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29), with great seriousness is based on the thoroughness and inescapability of the judgement of God as expressed in the warning voice from heaven that shakes the whole created order. This warning is an exhortation to take up the unshakeable in our service (worship) of God (12:28). To fail to listen to the voice of heaven is to remain locked into that order of practice doomed to be removed: and by implication, so will be removed those who place their hope in such things.

The positive affirmation of the creation throughout Hebrews, as summarised above,<sup>53</sup> together with the emphasis on the contrast between the old and the new with the various warnings to turn away from the old, enable a confident conclusion that the shaken and removed things are all those associated with the old order that began at Sinai while the unshakeable are all those centred on the new order to be found in Christ who even now draws the faithful to Himself in the heavenly Zion.

## **2 PETER 3:10-14**

(10) But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. (11) Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, (12) waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt

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<sup>52</sup> Note the observation above that the use of this verb in Hebrews is more commonly used of doing something than making something.

<sup>53</sup> Chapter 7:233n51.

with fire? (13) But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. (14) Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish (2 Peter 3:10-14).

Peter's imagery of fire and destruction has often been the primary source of argument for those advocating an end to the earth in Christ's return. Some English translations seem to present a clearly pessimistic view and most commentators presume that this a cosmological statement.<sup>54</sup> Some regard the imagery as figurative and not indicative of the end of the creation.<sup>55</sup>

Adams claims the author intends complete disintegration rather than annihilation (2007:200-235).<sup>56</sup> While often endorsing the value of creation<sup>57</sup> and also refuting the annihilation conclusion, he argues for a significant degree of intended literalism in the cosmological language. The cosmos destroyed but not quite absolutely. The level of destructiveness will be extreme and include sun, moon and stars. He claims:

Second Peter 3:5-13 presents in the clearest terms we have yet encountered in the New Testament the catastrophic demise of the cosmos. Attempts to read this passage in non-destructionist terms, I hope to have shown, are exegetically unsustainable. The writer has expressed the conviction that the existing created order will come to violent end as emphatically as he could (2007:234).

This is one step away from the most extreme form of discontinuity, a level of destruction that is as good as annihilation: no order, nothing recognizable, everything good disintegrated, nothing left but the ashes of conflagration throughout the cosmos.

However, inadequate investigation of context and rhetoric weakens Adam's conclusion. He gravitates towards cosmological conclusions even when the metaphors, other imagery, and context, point elsewhere. His exploration of the descriptions of 'The

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<sup>54</sup> It is interesting to see the shift in perspective amongst commentators since the publication of Bauckham's 1983 commentary in the Word series.

<sup>55</sup> See Bauckham (1983:303-322), Harvey & Towner (2009:119-125), Keating (2011: 178-185), Skaggs (2004:136-138), Sproul (2011:284-285).

<sup>56</sup> See earlier comments on Adams. Chapter 7:213-215.

<sup>57</sup> See his other works listed in the Bibliography:401.

Coming of God' is valuable (2006). But he does not give adequate weight to the poetic imagery of storm, fire, drought, flood and the desolation of an invading army's scorched earth practices (and the descriptive vividness it inspires). The coming of God typically brings great upheaval and cataclysm, which varies according to the means by which He comes, but not to the extreme of causing the earth to disintegrate.

Others who argue for much the same conclusion,<sup>58</sup> mostly do little more than simply repeat the texts as if a cosmological meaning is beyond dispute. Several points refute this argument. Verse 10 is the key verse and most of what follows addresses the possibilities for this verse.

- a. It would be surprising for Peter to have a view of the future in opposition to the thrust of the rest of the Canon of Scripture. J Moo claims that it is unacceptable to be dismissive of the supposed contradiction between Romans 8 and 2 Peter 3 as if they are irreconcilable and one must choose between them (2010:25-26, 30).<sup>59</sup>
- b. Often the context, the primary issue addressed by Peter, is not given the weight it should in shaping the meaning. The passage, which begins at 2 Peter 2:1, is anthropological (judgement on rebellious humanity) and theological (God will not be dismissed as disengaged or powerless) not cosmological: so strong evidence is needed to conclude that Peter has introduced the latter into his argument.

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<sup>58</sup> Generally, the advocacy for cataclysmic end of the creation does not address the metaphorical possibilities of the imagery. See Chafer & Walvoord (1974:366-377), P Gardner (1998:121), Harrington & Senior (2003:292), DR Helm (2008:258-260), Richard (2000:381-382), Strange (2003:266-275), Vinson et al (2010:351-354), Watson & Callan (2012:211). See also the Dispensational literature noted in Chapter 1:33-35.

<sup>59</sup> However, while his material on 2 Peter 3 and Romans 8 produces a degree of harmony between them, his conclusions on 2 Peter 3 could have been strengthened by a more thorough discussion on the concept of being 'found' (v. 10) within the context of the judgement focus of the whole passage (2 Peter 2:1-3:18). Likewise, his argument could have been enhanced by greater consideration as to how the apocalyptic imagery contributes to the concept of being 'found'.

In particular, the scoffers challenge reported in 2 Peter 3:4 is presumed to be cosmological in nature as if the claimed changelessness within creation is the point. ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!’ However, the nothing-changes argument is essentially about God: as the parallel challenge suggests ‘Where is the promise of his coming?’ The nothing-changes claim is evidence of an unwillingness or incapacity in God to deal with those who rebel in some way. So Peter’s response is to address the theological realities that warn so strongly all who would imagine that they will not have to face the judgement of God. The Letter of Jude usually is regarded as a parallel passage and ‘the judgment of most modern scholars, that 2 Peter is dependent on Jude, not *vice versa*, is accepted’ (Bauckham 1983:7). Jude’s material raises no cosmological concerns strengthening the argument that Peter likewise is not doing so. Bauckham notes that 1 Clement 23:3 and 2 Clement 11:2 are very similar and also without cosmological concerns (1983:284).<sup>60</sup>

Adams<sup>61</sup> argues against this conclusion as ‘unsatisfactory. There is little textual warrant for assuming that the issue is whether or not God can get involved in the world’ (2007:206). His assertion is difficult to sustain when the textual material seems to be addressing the challenge against God that He does not judge against sin. The thrust of the passage is the confident mocking of God as one who does not act.<sup>62</sup> Adams situates the material in debates between Stoic and Epicurean world views but his argument inclines towards a degree of circularity: the issue is cosmological

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<sup>60</sup> Other examples of such aggressive questioning of God’s motives and/or power can be found in Psalm 42:3, 10, 79:10, 115:2, Isaiah 5:19, Jeremiah 17: 15, Ezekiel 11:2, 12:22, Joel 2:17, Amos 6:3, Micah 7:10, Malachi 2:17. Bauckham thinks that these Old Testament models are a ‘much more likely’ background to Peter’s language (1983:289).

<sup>61</sup> See the critique of his work that relates to 2 Peter above. Chapter 7:213-215.

<sup>62</sup> The claim that God has not acted since the ‘beginning of creation’ (3:4) is refuted by Peter by referencing those times when God did act in judgement (3:6, cf. 2:4-6). Peter’s response to the accusation focusses on God bringing judgement not God destroying creation. The reference to future judgement fire also focusses on ‘the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.’ (3:7)

because that was the issue between the Stoics and the Epicureans, and this Stoic and Epicurean background is there because of the cosmological matters raised in the allegations against God. Likewise Adams presumes that because fire features in the passage and also in Stoic cosmology then Peter must be working largely within a Stoic world view (2007:209-217).<sup>63</sup>

- c. The dissolution arguments give too much significance to a narrow and limiting piecemeal account of the meaning of Peter's terminology. As noted in Chapter Nine,<sup>64</sup> this is a recurrent issue when using literalistic or fixed word meanings to justify annihilation. The words of conflagration and dissolution in 2 Peter 3 have a breadth of connotations. The dramatic tone of Peter's language suggests that the rhetorical intent of his language is important.
- d. The annihilation argument gives too little weight to the apocalyptic imagery with which Peter makes his point.<sup>65</sup> Peter's imagery has a metaphorical quality, cosmological language describing anthropological and theological realities. The collection of essays in Webb and Watson (2010), despite being a volume dedicated to the rhetorical character of 2 Peter and acknowledging Peter's use of apocalyptic

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<sup>63</sup> JD Charles state that Peter is aware of the Stoic world view but does not endorse the Stoic world view but rather argues for an alternative 'apocalyptic and eschatological perspective' (Charles & Waltner 1999:251). GH Clark presents two reasons why 2 Peter 3 is not Stoic in nature. (1) Stoic conflagration is gradual and cyclical whereas Peter is sudden, instant and not repeatable, and (2) Stoic conflagration is natural whereas for Peter it is divine judgement. 'Stoic physics is totally absent from the new testament.' (1993:229)

For further critique of the Stoic option as the background to the meaning in 2 Peter 3, see Bauckham (1983:294, 300-301, 315-316), J Moo (2010:30-38). While it might be argued that the scepticism about God's willingness to act was influenced by Stoic – Epicurian disagreement, the imagery utilized by Peter to refute such claims has a much stronger Old Testament background. The several references to Old Testament events in the passage strengthen the case that the Old Testament is the source of his fire imagery.

<sup>64</sup> Chapter 9:298-305.

<sup>65</sup> Further consideration of apocalyptic can be found in Chapters 1:27, 3:85-91, 5:174-176, and 7:211-215, 239.



imagery, fails to explore seriously how apocalyptic works as a rhetorical device in Peter's warnings.<sup>66</sup>

- e. A presumed pessimistic world view lies behind much use of this passage to justify annihilation.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, comment moves quickly to conclusion rather than addressing the impact of the context and the point of the imagery.

Having noted some inadequacies in the hermeneutics utilized for 2 Peter 3, the next task is to examine the passage.

**The context**, the primary theme through the whole of chapters two and three, is the judgement of God against sin and sinners (such as false teachers and prophets, blasphemers, scoffers, and arrogant slanderers (2:1-3, 10, 12, 18-19, 3:3)). This judgement may be delayed but when it comes it will be absolutely thorough and totally complete. There will be no hiding from it. The power of God's word in the past in creation and in the flood of judgement will be repeated when the fire of judgement comes. The timing question changes nothing (2 Peter 3:8-9). Very few survived the horrors of judgement against Sodom and Gomorrah (2:6). Similarly, few survived the judgement that came through flood (2:5, 3:6). The next will be through fire (3:7). Both involved much devastation and, as then so in the future, there will be no escape for those who rebel and those who mock. Only by the mercy and grace of God can there be any hope of survival (1:2-4, 3:13-15). Peter utilizes the language of fire and destruction for this expectation of judgement. The primary point is that none will be able to escape:

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<sup>66</sup> Note especially the chapters by Callan (2010) and DF Watson (2010) in which the apocalyptic language in 2 Peter 3:10-12 is recognised as such and then immediately treated as a prosaic description of cosmological realities. Rhetoric, particularly when employing apocalyptic imagery, intentionally points us beyond lexicon word definitions.

<sup>67</sup> See Chapter 1:3-13.

all exposed, all revealed, and the fires of judgement applied accordingly. The extreme language reflects the extreme offensiveness of dismissing God in the arrogant posturing and mutinous sedition against the Creator described in these two chapters.

Bauckham considers various sources that may have shaped Peter's use of language and imagery: Isaiah 34:4 (LXX) and Malachi 3:19 (LXX) in particular and 2 Clement 16:3 (1983:305). The focus in each is God's judgement against the evildoers. Cosmology does not feature. In Isaiah 34, the cosmic imagery of judgement against the rebellious nations is parallel with the destruction of Edom. The imagery is extreme whether heavenly (v.4-5) or earthly (vv. 2-3, 5-10) but with no thought of absolute destruction; the result will be uninhabitable landscape (11-15).

**The textual question** is problematic. *Katakaesetai*, 'will be burned up', in verse 10 of the Received Text, is most probably a later change away from the much more likely original *heurethēsatai*, 'will be found'.<sup>68</sup> Is being 'found' at odds with the perceived destructiveness of Peter's message? In fact, it fits quite well. Peter's point is that nothing will prevent full and total disclosure of the sins of humankind. All will be found – located – no matter where they might hide and all will be found to be as they truly are – exposed – and dealt with accordingly.

Preisker identifies six uses of the verb *hēuriskō*, find, and the first and fifth uses fit well with the thrust of Peter's admonition (1964:769-770). The first is the sense of being

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<sup>68</sup> See Bauckham: 'εὑρεθήσεται, "will be found" (⋈ B K P. *al*) is undoubtedly the best reading, as the *lectio difficilior*, which allows the other readings to be explained as corrections. The other readings are: εὑρεθήσεται λύομενα, "will be found dissolved" (P<sup>72</sup>); οὐχ εὑρεθήσεται, "will not be found" (sah, one MS of sy<sup>h</sup>); but these may well represent a *translator's* correction); ἀφανισθήσονται, "will vanish" (C); κατακαήσεται, "will be burned up" (A *al*); omission of the whole clause (ψ vg *al*). (1983:303). For a lengthier argument from Bauckham, see also 1983:316-321. Bauckham also notes the parallels with 2 Clement 16:3 which reinforces the reading of 'found' as original (1983:304-305, 320-321). See also Wolters (1987:405-413) and D Wenham's exploration of similar examples of being found in the New Testament which he regards as adding weight to Bauckham's conclusion (D Wenham 1987).

found after a search, about being located. The fifth has the sense of something more figurative, especially in the passive. This latter usage is not about location but condition, particularly the condition of one's moral character before the judgement of God. The first sense fits with Peter's insistence through the passage from chapter 2 that not one of the arrogant scoffers will escape no matter how long the delay might be in the coming of the 'day of the Lord'. No place to hide, the judgement of God against the ungodly searches out all without exception.<sup>69</sup> The fifth sense likewise fits well with Peter's emphasis. Pretence or cover-up will not succeed because all will be found to be exactly as they are and dealt with accordingly: total and perfectly accurate exposure. Such a concept is not unusual in Peter. See 1 Peter 1:7, 2:22, and, with particular reference to this passage, 2 Peter 3:14.<sup>70</sup> The point is that without exception, all will be found to be as they truly are; all revealed, all exposed, all disclosed, all laid bare, so that the judgement of God might be without escape. So Peter's exhortation follows perfectly from this, 'make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him' (2 Peter 3:14).<sup>71</sup>

So what is the point of the descriptions of such devastating destruction in vv. 10 and 12? Peter's language and imagery is apocalyptic in character: extreme, dramatic, terrifying, absolute. Making sense of his point is partly a matter of seeing how this brief sojourn into apocalyptic serves the broader message of the passage at large and partly a matter, as with all apocalyptic, of stepping back from the text to see the imagery the writer has in mind. Much exegesis of verse 10 and 12 gets lost in attempts narrowly to define word

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<sup>69</sup> Psalm 139:7-16, Isaiah 2:4-22, 29:15, Jeremiah 23:24, 49:8, Amos 9:3.

<sup>70</sup> See also the variety of applications of this sense of 'being found': 1 Samuel 25:28, Isaiah 26:21, Daniel 5:27, Matthew 1:18, 8:10, 21:19, 24:46, 26:40, 43, Mark 7:30, 11:13, 13:36, 14:37, 40, Luke 1:30, 7:9-10, 8:35, 12:37-38, 43, 18:8, 22:45, 23:2, 4, 14, 22, 24:24, John 11:17, 18:38, 19:4, 6, Acts 5:39, 13:28, 23:29, 24:5, 20, Romans 4:1, 7:10, 21, 1 Corinthians 4:2, 15:15, 2 Corinthians 5:3, 9:4, 11:12, 12:20, Galatians 2:17, Philippians 2:8, 3:9, 2 John 1:4, Revelation 2:2, 3:2, 5:4, 14:5.

<sup>71</sup> This is the conclusion advocated by Bauckham (1983), David (2006), Heide (1997), D Wenham (1987), Wolters (1987).

meanings within an assumed cosmology, rather than allowing Peter to present his point in his way, unusual as this might be to modern ears.<sup>72</sup>

**The passing away of the heavens**, *ouranoi*, is not about ceasing to exist but moving aside, completely out of the way as if not there at all.<sup>73</sup> The judgement of which Peter speaks involves the coming of God through the heavens to earth. In some form or other, such a presence of God, however extraordinary, enacts some mighty work of salvation and/or judgement. For a visitation of this kind, the imagery is of the heavens opening to allow complete freedom for the coming of God: ‘O that you would tear open the heavens and come down’ (Isaiah 64:1).<sup>74</sup> The heavens in effect are the gates through which God comes,<sup>75</sup> and so it is most appropriate that the heavens be rolled up like a scroll out of the way (Isaiah 34:4,<sup>76</sup> Revelation 6:14). Rowland’s examination of apocalyptic literature identifies a recurring concept of heaven opening for the purposes of revelation or judgement (1982).<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The cosmological world view of ancient times seems to have understood the heavens above as some kind of canopy or solid dome over the earth: a canopy which needed to be opened in some way for there to be movement or revelation between heaven and earth. Peter’s imagery is consistent with such a view. This contrasts quite significantly with modern understandings in which the heavens above are seen as essentially empty or gaseous space.

<sup>73</sup> See the discussion of ‘passing away’ in Chapter 7:242-246 and 8:267-272. See also Schneider (1964:681-682). It is as if the heavens (all that fills the space above) are no longer in the space between heaven (the place) and earth. God’s coming is to be unobstructed. The verb has a stronger sense of movement out of the way than any kind of ontological or cosmological change. For those inclined towards annihilation of the cosmos, presumed cosmology too readily encourages conclusions as to how the verb is employed in such passages as Matthew 5:18, 24:34-35, Revelation 21:1, leading to an ontological meaning rather than passing, moving, to another place.

<sup>74</sup> See also Genesis 11:5, 7, Exodus 19:18, 2 Samuel 22:10, Psalm 18:9, 12, Isaiah 34:4, 64:3.

<sup>75</sup> See Malachi 3:10, Psalm 24:7-10 as further ways of expressing the opening of the way for the coming of God. See Middleton’s discussion of this with reference to the same sense of the opening of heaven in Revelation 6:14 (2014:188-189).

<sup>76</sup> In Isaiah 34, the destruction of Edom is being anticipated; something which happened long ago and despite the language of cosmic catastrophe the material world continued: the heavens still existed in their usual place. The consequences of the judgement leave the earth in place though with much long-lasting devastation for the land itself. The Nabateans still managed to live there as the ruins of Petra testify.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Ezekiel 1:1, Matthew 3:16, Luke 3:21, John 1:51, Acts 7:56, 10:11, Revelation 4:1, 11:19, 15:5, 19:11. See also Bird (2008:49-58), S Walton (2008:60-73).

A second impact to this imagery of the heavens completely opened up is consistent with the concept of all being found: a sense of there being no place to hide.<sup>78</sup> ‘The point is that to bring about judgement the Lord must peel back all that stands in the way’ (David 2006:286). With the removal of the heavens above, the earth below is exposed and revealed and so ‘visible’ to God (Bauckham 1983:319). Nothing will prevent the ungodly being found, in both senses of the word as noted above, and the certainty is expressed in the loudness of the accompanying roar: possibly the intention is to suggest the loud reverberation of a raging inferno. Bauckham notes that this is probably ‘a standard element in theophany descriptions: God’s thunderous roar announces his coming as a wrathful warrior, and nature quakes and flees before him’ (Bauckham 1983:315).

The fact that Peter, in verse 10, can write of the *ouranoi* moving completely out of the way, and yet in verse 12 writes of the ‘heavens’ breaking up or dissolving in the flames, strengthens the argument that Peter is not interested in cosmological detail because this is not relevant to his concerns. The two outcomes are not necessarily mutually exclusive. However, if Peter was intending to describe the impact of the coming of God on the heavens above, then he has confused us as to how these somewhat different futures for the heavens can both be real.<sup>79</sup>

**‘The elements will be dissolved with fire,’** writes Peter, following the opening up of the heavens. This has proven to be problematic statement given the ambiguities of the word ‘elements’, *stoicheia* (vv. 10 & 12), and the assumptions made about how Peter

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<sup>78</sup> cf. Isaiah 2:10-22, 29:15, 53:3, Jeremiah 23:24, 49:8, Hosea 10:8, Amos 2:14-16, 5:19, 9:3, Revelation 6:15-16.

<sup>79</sup> Note the similar references to heaven opening in Revelation 4:1, 11:19, 15:5 and 19:11 and the various purposes for which this happens. Many other references to heaven in Revelation involve various things that come out of heaven thereby inferring additional allusions to the opening of heaven.

uses the word ‘destroyed’, *luthēsetai* (vv. 10, 11 & 12). This latter term has a range of meanings around the concept of loosening. ‘Destroyed’ or ‘dissolved’ may be legitimate translations as long as we recognize the various applications of the word: it commonly does not mean to cause something to cease to exist. It can range in meaning from ‘release’ or ‘set free’ through to ‘dissolve something into its parts’; that is to ‘break up’ (Büchsel 1967:335-337).<sup>80</sup> To dissolve or break apart is not to annihilate but to render something powerless to stand in the way of what God will do.

Options for the nature of the *stoicheia* include (1) the Stoic idea of all physical things consisting of the elements of water, air, fire and earth; (2) the heavenly bodies of sun, moon and stars; (3) the angelic powers; (4) the elements of the modern periodic table (Overstreet 1980); and (5) the realm of beliefs and values, and the powers behind them, as Paul uses the term, that shape the lives of humankind.<sup>81</sup> This last option is suggested by Heide (1997:52) who notes the reference to Paul’s writings immediately after this passage (2 Peter 3:14-16).<sup>82</sup> Bauckham (1983:315-316) affirms what he concludes as majority opinion that the second option fits best with the immediate context.

If the *stoicheia* are those heavenly bodies above (option 2), then their destruction (breaking apart) would be part of the opening up to exposure of all for judgement. This better fits with the flow of ideas in Peter’s sentence. If however the imagery of fire is more about purification and refining as is normal in the use of such imagery in the Scriptures, then a reference to the cleaning up of all that shapes human behaviour would

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<sup>80</sup> The English word ‘destroy’ is likewise a word with a wide variety of uses and usually without a sense of causing something to cease to exist. The media report that large areas of Pakistan have been destroyed by floods. My son’s surgeon stated that the tendons and nerves in his finger have been destroyed. We talk of destroying reputations and destroying the meal when the cooking is a flop. See also the same conclusion presented in DJ Moo (2006:466, 468).

<sup>81</sup> Galatians 4:4, 4:9, Colossians 2:8, 2:20. Note the use of the word in Hebrews 5:12.

<sup>82</sup> See the more extensive discussion of this option in Middleton (2014:190-199).

be perhaps the best fit, that is option 5. Certainly intense fire suggests images of refinery furnaces that purify (Malachi 3:2-3, 4:1) both to cleanse the hearts of God's people and to cleanse the land of evil and those who without repentance support that evil. While fire may be regarded as a reference to the total dissolution of the physical realm, the context in 2 Peter 2-3, with its primary concern about various expressions of rebellion against God, points us in a different direction. Even a casual survey of the uses of fire language throughout the Bible shows that the language of fire and furnace frequently is used figuratively.<sup>83</sup> When judgement and punishment is in mind, a real purpose of cleansing for both persons and the land or nation(s) is included. Peter does not necessarily have in mind the total destruction of the physical realm. The language does not require it and the context indicates something else. The earlier reference to fire in verse 7 points to fire as the 'judgment and destruction of the godless.'<sup>84</sup>

If Peter's view is that the world above involves layers, then the first reference to the *ouranoi* could well represent the upper layers while the *stoicheia* refers to the lower layers above (option 2) which break up such is the heat of the refining judgement of God (J Moo 2010:33). This would fit with the imagery of total and complete exposure before the judgement of God.

**The earth, *gē*, is laid bare.** With all above no longer covering the earth, the earth and the works within are fully exposed and easily found so as to be rightly dealt with.<sup>85</sup>

Bauckham's summary fits best with the flow of the ideas that Peter presents from

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<sup>83</sup> Appendix A.6:392-393 lists multiple references to fire and demonstrates just how extensive this imagery was.

<sup>84</sup> The imagery then in v. 12 is that of a fire so intense and extreme that even the realms above would feel the heat. The point is not about fire and cosmology but the absolute thoroughness of God's judgement and refining.

<sup>85</sup> Note the discussion in D Wenham on the use of the language of 'being found' in Jesus' eschatological teaching and the association of 'work' and 'find' in Mark 13-34-36 (1987:477-479).

human rebelliousness to the certainties of being found and judged. ‘It is true that in this context *gē* cannot be given the sense simply of “humanity,” but it can easily mean the physical earth *as the scene of human history*, the earth as the dwelling-place of humanity (cf. Matt 5:13; 10:34; Luke 12:49, 51; 18:8; John 17:4; and especially Rom 9:28)’ (Bauckham 1983:319. Emphasis original.). The use of *gē*, ‘a comprehensive reference to everything in the world instead of the physical earth itself’ (Heide 1997: 52), highlights the completeness of the coming judgement: no exceptions and no places where the scoffers cannot be found. Such a conclusion is reinforced by the very different impact for the earth and its works in the coming of God: the heavens are moved aside, the elements feel the heat, whereas the earth is found.

## **Conclusion**

Differences exist between the judgements of the past that Peter uses as examples and the final cataclysmic judgement that once and for all deals with sin. Even the most extreme judgements of the past, examples of fire and flood (2 Peter 2:4-7, 3:6), did not bring the end of the physical world. The world/cosmos was destroyed/perished (3:6), yet even with the damage to the environment the earth continued on. The language used is more typical of judgement against human sin, ‘the day of judgment and destruction of of the godless’ (3:7), than a description of God’s plan for His creation. Russell examines the place of creation in Jewish and New Testament apocalyptic material, and emphasizes the way the past examples of God’s judgement in the 2 Peter 3 passage set the scene for the final judgement portrayed in vv. 10-13 (1996:67-68, 186-197). Therefore ‘the passage rejects the idea of total annihilation ... [and] does not envision total destruction



and a new creation *ex nihilo*, but as in God's first intervention there will be a purging primarily related to sinful humanity' (195).

Peter's conclusion of 'new heavens and new earth' (v. 13) reinforces this conclusion in so far as Peter is mindful of the way the context of Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22 indicate a substantial renewal of the earth of that time.<sup>86</sup>

## CONCLUSION<sup>87</sup>

The conclusions reached in the exploration of these primary texts used to argue for dissolution and annihilation, do not deny the possibility of physical upheaval. But this is not the point of the imagery. Whatever the extent of physical destruction, nothing in these passages suggests the annihilation or dissolution of the material world of earth and heavens, nor that the earth ceases to be the earth, nor that the good things of the earth are lost, nor that the earth becomes uninhabitable.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> See Chapters 2:46-49, 74-78, 3:107-111, 4:113-115, 8:263-289.

<sup>87</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4 makes no reference to the earth's future but in the minds of pessimists about the earth it is associated with such a world view. The interpretation which sees Christians departing appears to reinforce the idea of there being no future for the earth. However, the opposite is the case. The key is in understanding what is common in many cultures in that the arrival of a person of significance generates particular cultural requirements. Rather than simply waiting for the person to arrive at the destination, it was considered essential to honour the person by travelling out to meet them along the way and then accompany them back to the destination. This is the imagery here and it was well known in the Roman world including what was standard in welcoming the arrival of the Emperor. The word 'meet' is the word used for such occasions. 'When a dignitary paid an official visit (*παρουσία*) to a city in Hellenistic times, the action of the leading citizens in going out to meet him and escort him back on the final stage of his journey was called the *ἀπάντησις*.' (Bruce 1998:102) Neither those alive in Christ nor those dead in Christ will have any advantage when Jesus returns in that both together will rise up to meet Jesus and then accompany him as He continues His journey to earth. See the useful and extensive discussion on rapture in Middleton (2014:221-227).

<sup>88</sup> Schwarz, with reference to Matthew 24 and 2 Peter 3, states 'The New Testament witnesses envision a consummation of the world which is not primarily destruction. It is rather the universal incorporation into the creative and transforming act of Christ's resurrection' (2000:389). He draws Romans 8 and Colossians 1 into the discussion to advance such a conclusion.

Jesus' words in Matthew 28:18 anticipate the breaking down of the present discord between heaven and earth. Peter's apocalyptic language, though cosmological, has a shock-and-awe purpose: extreme rhetoric and imagery for dramatic impact in building up to the exhortation to his readers about how they might be 'found' (2 Peter 3:14) when the day comes. The New Testament witness is coherent regarding the earth narrative. The texts reviewed in Chapters Six and Seven are consistent with the new creation narrative explored in Chapter Five and all three affirm the cosmological significance of incarnation, resurrection and ascension as explored in Chapter Four.

The logical consistency of the relational triangulation is preserved and this affirms the trajectory towards reconciliation between all three. It now remains to be seen if the concluding visions of Revelation are likewise consistent.

## The New Heaven/Earth Narrative in Revelation 20:11-22:5

Examination of the unfolding earth narrative from creation to new creation inevitably must address the relevant material in the book of Revelation. The volume of published material and the diversity of opinions expressed make any examination of the Apocalypse quite difficult. In this chapter one cannot do justice to the whole and so we will examine Revelation 5:10, 20:11-22:5 as these cover the material on the transition to new heaven/earth. There are two essential sets of questions in keeping with the narrative of God, humankind and non-human creation.

(1) In Revelation, what is the nature of the transition to the new earth? Will there be another earth created *ex nihilo*, or reconstructed out of the debris of a disintegrated cosmos, or is the expectation, particularly in Revelation 21, that transformation comes to this earth with all redeemed, purified, healed and put right? In particular, how best might the trajectory of the narrative thus far impact our reading of this transition? Does anything in Revelation cause us to doubt the hoped-for restoration we have been tracking through the triangular narrative of both Testaments?

If the narrative of triangulation evidenced thus far is valid, and that it projects forward with an optimistic vision for the earth, is it reasonable to conclude that it was through this same lens that the writer of Revelation made sense of all that he saw and wrote down?<sup>1</sup> And if so, is this perspective a valid lens by which today we might find understanding of the earth's future?

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<sup>1</sup> Given the wealth of Old Testament reference and allusion in Revelation 21-22, this is not an unreasonable probability.

(2) What is the nature or character of what is to come in the new earth? To what extent might the ‘trans-physicality’ of Jesus’ resurrection body inform our understanding the degree to which the new earth will be continuous with the old?<sup>2</sup> How best might we respond to Walvoord’s claim that ‘there is remarkably little revealed in the Bible concerning the character of the new heaven and the new earth’ (1966:311)?<sup>3</sup> What can we reasonably anticipate of the future for our mission in the present? If the earthly character of the vision is established, does this consolidate this earth as incorporated within the new heaven/earth?

First, a brief overview follows on a framework for understanding Revelation within which we will consider these questions and then examination of the key texts.

## **REVELATION OVERVIEW<sup>4</sup>**

Much is written on the hermeneutics appropriate for interpreting Revelation. The footnotes below list the commentaries<sup>5</sup> and other materials<sup>6</sup> consulted for this chapter.

As apocalyptic in genre, Revelation is rich with absolutism, hyperbole, metaphor,

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 4:126-138 for consideration of the familiarity of the resurrected Jesus. It would be unwise to presume that the Jesus’ resurrection physicality, is exactly what we can expect of the whole earth. The uniqueness of the divine/human person of Jesus may not be exactly as it will be for the rest of creation. Nevertheless, the ‘trans-physicality’ of the resurrection body of Jesus is the strongest evidence we have thus far as to what we can expect of the word to come.

<sup>3</sup> This claim reflects the Dispensational and dualistic world view Walvoord imposes on the Scriptures. Having concluded that the creation is doomed and of limited value, and having imposed an eschatological schema in which creation is merely a backdrop to the Biblical narrative, he omits the rich and extensive portrayal of the created order and the anticipation of its transformation. He argues from the Dispensational schema that relegates most of the promises for restoration and the Kingdom to the pre-millennial rule of Christ and therefore, as he concludes, not relevant to the new heaven/earth.

<sup>4</sup> A useful overview of the history of interpretation of Revelation can be found in Wainwright (1993).

<sup>5</sup> Aune (1998), Bauckham (1993a, 1993b), Beale (1999), Beasley-Murray (1978), Boring (1989), Ellul (1977), Hendriksen (1967), AF Johnson (1981), Minear (1968), Morris (1987), Mounce (1998), Osborne (2002), Schüssler Fiorenza (1985, 1991), RL Thomas (1995), Walvoord (1966), Wilcock (1991), Witherington III (2003), Yarbro Collins (1979),

<sup>6</sup> DL Barr (1984, 1986), Beale (1997, 2004a, 2004b), Garrow (1997), Hall (2002), Heide (1997), Lee (1998), McDonough (2008), McLeod (2000), McNicol (1979), J Moo (2009), Mouw (2002), Russell (1996), Schüssler Fiorenza (1977), CR Smith (1994), RL Thomas (1993), DL Turner (1992).

symbolism, and considerable allusions to the preceding texts of the Canon.<sup>7</sup> The literature suggests that Revelation defies attempts to package its message into simplistic categories; Historist, Preterist, Idealist and Futurist.<sup>8</sup> Bauckham describes Revelation as a multi-layered portrayal of the ultimate victory of God in Christ over every Rome/Babylon-like empire that sets itself up against God whether human or Satanic (1993a&b). In its many visions, Revelation ebbs and flows between recapitulation and progression.<sup>9</sup> Referring back to the first advent and forward to the second, these visions applied to the immediate world of the seven churches together with an ultimate vision in which promises given to them are realized fully in new heaven/earth.<sup>10</sup> With recapitulation as a real feature, Revelation is clearly not presenting its readers with a programmatic review of sequential events but rather featuring the several dominant themes by which the eventual outcome of the times in which the recipients live will be determined.<sup>11</sup> The recurring hermeneutical issues frequently noted in previous chapters continue in various opinions on how Revelation presents the transition to new heaven/earth. These include the impact of genre and metaphor, whether word meanings are narrow and fixed or more fluid, the role of context in exploring the point of the

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<sup>7</sup> See Ellul (1977:20-35) and Bauckham (1993a:1-22) for insightful comment on how Revelation brings letter, prophecy and apocalyptic together in one document.

<sup>8</sup> As Wilcock summarizes, 'Opinions about its historical references are broadly of four kinds: the preterist view, that it describes in veiled language events of John's own time, and nothing more; the futurist, that it is largely a prophecy of events still to come; the historicist, that it is a chart of the whole of history from Christ's first coming to his second, and beyond; and the idealist, that between messages for the first century and prophecies of the far future it deals chiefly with principles which are always valid in Christian experience' (1991:23).

<sup>9</sup> Recapitulation is the way various visions parallel each other by presenting different perspectives of the same reality. That is, repetition is used to present dominant themes in different ways. Progression refers to the ways there is sequence in the visions with increasing emphasis on the final moments of judgement and the completion of God's Kingdom plan as contained in the scroll. There is an additional structural reality in the way particular historical events are pivotal for the resolving of everything else: the establishment of the slaughtered Lamb as the Lord of heaven and earth (Revelation 4-5), the coming of the woman and child that results in Satan being cast out of heaven (Revelation 12), and the final consummation in judgement and the coming together of heaven and earth (Revelation 19-22).

<sup>10</sup> Revelation 2:7 (22:2), 11 (21:8), 17 (22:2), 26-28 (21:24), 3:5 (21:10, 22:4), 12, 21 (22:5). Most directly referred to in Revelation 21:7. The added references here from chapters 21-22 are from the summary of Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:52). Each is described in various ways in the intervening visions.

<sup>11</sup> DL Barr (1986) presents the case for a structure designed to expedite memorization following the recitation of the whole letter. While the intention was for the letter to be read aloud (Revelation 1:3), it would be easier to pass on the substance of the material to others by the techniques of extensive numbering, recurring places and images, recapitulation, and the three different scrolls (1:11, 5:1, 10:1).

imagery, the place of previous uses of the same imagery, and the significance of an established existing pattern in the unfolding drama of the creation to new creation narrative.

Revelation depicts the radical reversal from heaven and earth in great opposition to a new state of being in which heaven and earth merge together to become one. What already is real in heaven (Revelation 4-5) must likewise become real on earth (Bauckham 1993a:31). This coming down of heaven to earth to affect such a new reality is integral to the Parousia of Christ<sup>12</sup> who brings the New Jerusalem with Him. Thus new creation, already begun in the incarnation, is consummated in new heaven and earth.

Understanding the vision of the last two chapters requires an appreciation of the integrated structure of Revelation and the integrated flow of imagery throughout the letter. For example, the imagery of Revelation 21-22 fulfils the promises given to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. Minear lists these<sup>13</sup> and each expands the background for the portrayal of life in the new heaven/earth. Bauckham lists nine contrasts between Babylon and the New Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> Whether in promise to the faithful or in contrast to the evil empire, New Jerusalem embraces multiple expectations as developed throughout the book. Bauckham states, 'It should be clear that the images of Revelation are symbols with evocative power inviting imaginative participation in the book's symbolic world' (1993:18). The symbols, imagery and terminology are rarely just whatever their technical reference might suggest but urge the reader or listener to explore the allusions to their full extent. In this way, the brief and succinct imagery of

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<sup>12</sup> cf. Revelation 1:4, 1:7-8, 2:25, 3:11, 3:20, 4:8, 21:2-3, 22:7, 22:12, 22:17, 22:20.

<sup>13</sup> Revelation 2:7, 22:2 (Ephesus), 2:11, 21:4 (Smyrna), 2:17, 22:4 (Pergamum), 2:26-28, 22:16 (Thyatira), 3:5, 22:14, 21:27 (Sardis), 3:12, 21:22, 22:4, 21:2, 10 (Philadelphia), 3:21, 22:3 (Laodicea). (Minear 1968:59-60)

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix A.7:393 for Bauckham's list of contrasts.

Revelation 21-22 intentionally refers to the full expectation of God's fulfilled promises from Genesis forwards.

### **NEW HEAVEN, NEW EARTH: KEY TEXTS.**

What do the relevant texts in Revelation understand of the transition into new heaven/earth? Do these texts confirm or contradict the projection that the narrative thus far has presented?

#### **Revelation 5:10**

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth (Revelation 5:10).

This brief statement, 'they will reign on earth,' expresses a wealth of Biblical material on the nature of humankind as well as pointing towards the every-day activity of humankind in the new heaven/earth (Revelation 22:5). Consistent with the narrative that began in Genesis, this expectation assumes continuity for this earth in the fulfilment of the new heaven/earth.<sup>15</sup> Vicegerency for humankind is a recurring motif through the Canon and Middleton's work develops this more than most. His most recent publication (2014) argues for the continuance of this earth because it is fundamental to the full restoration of humanity for humankind. This develops his earlier examination of the *Imago Dei* (2005) which focussed more on the original purpose of God for humankind: to work with God in furthering His creation project.

The full restoration of the humanity, without the distortions of sin, looks back to Eden and forward to new heaven/earth. God's people will not be passive recipients of God's

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<sup>15</sup> However, commentators tend to focus more on background material in Exodus 19:5-6 and Daniel 7:18-27 or on discussing which textual version is the most probably original, present or future tense for 'reign'. See Aune (1997:362-363), Beale (1999:360-364), AF Johnson (1981:469-471), Morris (1987:99-101), Mounce (1998:136-137), Osborne (2002:260:261). The question of present or future tense for this reign on the earth may be a challenge on textual grounds alone but the other references to this reign in Revelation (1:6, 2:26, 20:4-6, 22:5) focus more on the future reign of God's people. There is an element of present reality to this reign (1:6) but the full expression of this reign has yet to be experienced. Clearly this fits with an already-but-not-yet Kingdom fulfilment.

blessing in the future any more than Adam and Eve were in Eden. Genesis 1:26-28, 2:5-9, 15-24 describe a vicegerent role for humankind. The image of God, within the context of God's creation work, points to responsible oversight. God rules over and shapes His creation, and instructs humankind to do likewise within the constraints of God's framework and God's supremacy.<sup>16</sup> As Middleton concludes:

When the clues within the Genesis text are taken together with comparative studies of the ancient Near East, they lead to what we could call a functional—or even missional—interpretation of the image of God in Genesis 1:26-27 (in contradistinction to substantialistic or relational interpretations). On this reading, the *imago Dei* designates the royal office or calling of human beings as God's representatives and agents in the world, granted authorized power to share in God's rule or administration of the earth's resources and creatures (2005:27).

Bauckham describes at length the need for a degree of realism in the language used to describe this 'stewardship' or 'dominion' (2010:1-36). Human innate capacity clearly is limited, God alone is absolute, human freedom is constrained by responsibility, and so care is essential, he says, so as to avoid the 'hubris' that often is found in the rhetoric of vicegerency in Eden. Middleton discusses at length the exact nature of human power and responsibility in Eden and concludes, 'humans are to exercise ... generous loving power. It is power to nurture, enhance, and empower others, noncoercively, for *their* benefit,' because this is the character of God's exercise of power in Genesis 1-2 (Middleton 2005:295. Emphasis original).<sup>17</sup> In Eden, human responsibility begins with 'to till the ground' (Genesis 2:5). More fully, to be human in Eden is to be holistically engaged, to be active participants, contributing and leading well, and relating rightly to the Creator, to the whole of humankind and to all else in the created order. Here is a symbiotic and active network of relationships.

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<sup>16</sup> Intellectual, moral, relational and spiritual capacities are undoubted components of this. The reference to 'male and female' suggests, though without clarification, that something of human sexuality is also integral to God's image.

<sup>17</sup> See the review of relevant literature and a summary of the issues in DJ Moo (2006:477-482). See also the many ecotheology publications in which stewardship and dominion are explored at length.



But Eden was never intended to be confined to a small corner of South Western Asia. Humankind was to multiply and spread out into new regions throughout the earth (Genesis 1:26-30). In this way, the creation project of God is to work with and through His vicegerents to ‘Edenise’ the planet including ‘the personal and social order’ integral to Edenic life, character and order (Dumbrell 2001b:11). God makes the earth habitable and then creates humankind to work with him in the furtherance of His creation project. It reaches the point of being very good but it is not completed. Multiplying and Edenising in new contexts and with growing diversity in the size of communities would require new learning and new ways to ensure integration between humankind and the rest of the created order.<sup>18</sup>

O’Donovan develops the role of humankind in the created order by describing the function of knowledge for human and moral responsibility. ‘Knowledge is the characteristically *human* way of participating in the cosmic order’ (1986:81. Emphasis original.).<sup>19</sup> Increasing knowledge appears to be integral to human life. Naming animals presumes knowing well enough to assign the right name for each.<sup>20</sup> Cultivating the ground in new environments presumes a growing knowledge of diverse agricultural realities. Multiplying presumes increasing insights into how humankind can best live together in communities. Migration to new and different contexts further presumes new

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<sup>18</sup> Such new forms of knowledge (albeit in the cursed world post Genesis 3) are explored by Nisbett (2005) and Diamond (2005) who give a broad brush-strokes summary of the impact of different environments on the evolution of culture, knowledge and technology. Opinions may vary as to the details and the conclusions but the point here is not to endorse all the Nisbett or Diamond have to say but to note that environment is a contributing factor in human development. One does not need to be an environmental determinist to recognize that the environment matters in shaping human experience.

<sup>19</sup> Such knowledge ‘must’ involve knowing from the unique vicegerent position humankind has with the created order (81-82). It ‘must’ be ‘*from within*’ (79-81. Emphasis original.) and it ‘must ... be knowledge of things *in their relations to the totality of things*’ (77-79. Emphasis original.). Such knowledge was not granted instantly (O’Donovan 1986).

<sup>20</sup> Unlike the modern Western habit in which the meanings of names have little descriptive value of the actual person. ‘Ideally, however, a name captures the essence of the person. The Creator, of course, has such discernment (Ps 147:4; Is 40:26). In Genesis 2:19 Adam has it concerning the animals and, with it, authority over them. Both discernment and authority are often implied in the changing of names. Formal renamings register a change in personality and signal a new phase of one’s life’ (Ryken et al 2000:583).

learning as contexts shape the ways in which societies function.<sup>21</sup> The Genesis text endorses high value for learning, both the right way (live and learn as God has instructed) or the wrong way (the short cut from the forbidden tree).<sup>22</sup>

To be fully human (without sin or curse) in Eden is to be active, productive, creative, engaged, participatory, effective, and free to make real choices. It is to participate in right and harmonious relationships with every facet of life in the created order and with the Creator Himself. Gorringer describes this as a ‘process’ of ‘cultivation’ of ‘fields’ (agriculture), of ‘minds’, and therefore of ‘culture’ as ‘Culture .... is concerned with the spiritual, ethical and intellectual significance of the material world’ (2004:3-4).<sup>23</sup> Edenic life is a life of cultivation, of enlargement and maturation, across the whole range of human experience for which responsible management of God’s earth is critical. Recognition of these realities is at the heart of exploring the possibilities of the life to come in the New Earth.

If such hands-on engagement is fundamental to being fully human in a sin-free world, then what exactly might God have in mind for us to do in the new earth? The

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<sup>21</sup> Middleton summarizes the same reality as: ‘Creation in the biblical tradition, however, includes human society and culture in all its complexity and fullness, along with our earthly environment—an idea that the Bible shares with its ancient Mesopotamian milieu. This fuller biblical conception of creation—which includes the entire human socio-cultural order—is ignored by many Christians in their reading of Scripture. The idea of the redemption of creation—if it is in view at all—is typically reduced to the (admirable) task of caring for the “environment.” Yet this is only one facet of the complex human relationship to the non-human world. On a biblical worldview, all human cultural activities and social institutions arise from our interaction with this “environment.” The reduction of creation to “nature” results in the absence of critical reflection on the defining human calling to develop culture and the redemptive calling to participate in its transformation’ (2006:74).

<sup>22</sup> Bauckham and Hart describe how the visibility of the face of God in Revelation 22:4 indicates a greater knowledge of God including God being ‘known and loved in his creation’ (1999:172). Their conclusion reflects another significance for the triangulation in that it is in the fullness of this three-fold relationship that knowledge in general and of God in particular is able to flourish.

<sup>23</sup> While Gorringer (2002 & 2004) acknowledges an eschatological dimension to responsible human participation in the created order in the journey from Eden to New Jerusalem, eschatology is not a strong ingredient in his material as his focus is on the immediate need for humankind to function responsibly. Nevertheless, his is a very useful contribution to an appreciation of how human responsibility in Eden, and therefore in the new heaven/earth, must be theologically well-grounded and holistic (‘the spiritual, ethical and intellectual significance of the material world.’) if it is to be true to the mandate given by God for life in His creation.

expectations for new heaven/earth focus on the total removal of all that is evil, unjust, violent, corrupt, sinful and the coming of the total presence of God. Great abundance comes from this presence. Questions arise here about how exactly God might approach the damage done to the environment (natural and human-caused), to industry, to culture, to the ordering of family and society. Will the coming of Christ and God, of new heaven/earth, of New Jerusalem, result in everything corrected and transformed at that time, or will God, with the removal of all evil and His people resurrected and purified, then involve humankind in the work? How much God will do on this day and how much He might set aside for humankind is difficult to discern. Yet good reason exists to suggest that He will not do it all independent of His people. To deny humankind the responsibility of work and decision-making would be forcibly to diminish what it means to be human and image bearers, vicegerents, for this earth.<sup>24</sup>

With regards to the new earth expectations of Isaiah 65, de Gruchy describes work in the new heaven/earth as free from the risks of exploitation, injustice, corruption, dislocation. ‘Labour, according to this vision, is not drudgery but a joy!’ (1999:70).<sup>25</sup>

God works through the work of humankind. This was His intent from the beginning. No evidence arises to suggest that God has rescinded the involvement of humankind as God’s work partner in the management of the earth. If humankind is to be renewed fully

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<sup>24</sup> If God values this work engagement of human kind with the created order, theological problems result from any eschatological construct that suggests that God will destroy the very work that He commissioned humankind to accomplish.

<sup>25</sup> ‘The vision holds out the promise that everyone will have adequate housing and shelter. Not only that, but that they will be able to live in the homes they have built without fear of losing them: no uprooting and dumping into refugee camps; no bulldozing of properties so that others can take them over; no apartheid legislation decreeing forced removals to distant alien land. But they will not only possess their own homes, they will also have the freedom and right to grow their own crops and to eat what they have produced: no slave labour that provides food for the rich, but robs the poor of what they have grown through the sweat of their brow. And, by extension within our present economic order, no rampant capitalist exploitation that widens the gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots". Labour, according to this vision, is not drudgery but a joy!’ (de Gruchy 1999:70).

as human, the restoration to God's intended relationship of humankind to the earth is fundamental – and this means work free from the curse of Genesis 3. Furthermore, both the original mandate to humankind to extend what God has started (Genesis 1-2) and the history of God's dealings with humankind throughout human history since the fall (Genesis 3 – Revelation 20) very much suggest that God values good process. While from time to time His work may involve a profound breakthrough, mostly He works steadily in and through everyday history.<sup>26</sup> Revelation presents a profound breakthrough in the coming of Christ who brings the New Jerusalem with Him to the earth. Thus heaven and earth will re-unite at last in new creation. However, as before so again, God who clearly values good process involving human work, most likely will continue to grant the privilege of vicegerency to the redeemed to work together with Him to restore the sin-caused damage and to build beyond that to whatever increases the new creation as the bearer of God's glory.

Thus, the hope of reigning on the earth (Revelation 5:10), together with imagery of Eden (Revelation 22:1-5,) continues the trajectory of human vicegerency from Genesis 1-2 and provides further endorsement for the continuity of the earth. In the new earth there will be far more than fruit trees, songs of praise, flower beds and sunny days at the beach. 'Here and elsewhere we glimpse, not a static picture of bliss, but a new creation bursting with new projects, new goals and new possibilities' (NT Wright 2003a:476).

### **Revelation 20:11**

Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them (Revelation 20:11).

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<sup>26</sup> See the exploration by Samuel and Sugden of God's continued engagement in human history (1999:166-207).

MacLeod claims that Revelation 20:11 provides the decisive argument in support of annihilation (2000:441, n.11. See also RL Thomas 1995.<sup>27</sup>). Walvoord states that this is the most ‘natural interpretation’ of the text without considering that the most natural to a first century listener might be metaphorical (1966:305).<sup>28</sup> However, the context is judgement not cosmology. Without good reason to conclude otherwise, the statement is more likely a metaphorical description of the judgement than the introduction of a new subject. As Heide notes, ‘It is extremely unlikely that John is making a metaphysical statement about the “non-eternity of matter”’ (1997:41). Similarly Beasley-Murray observes, ‘His subject at this point was not geophysical and astronomical changes in the universe, but the majesty of God in judgment’ (1978:300).

Revelation 20:11 says that ‘the earth and the heaven fled from his presence.’ They have not ceased to exist but rather in this particular terrifying moment they have taken flight. There are a number of interpretative possibilities.

- a. Heaven and earth no longer have a place in the consequences of God’s condemnation of sin because this final judgement does not bring grief but liberation for the creation (Romans 8:19-23). They are not the subject of the judgement nor any longer the means of judgement.

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas is typical in that his argument is based primarily not in the context but in assumed meanings in other texts. He refers to the same passages already reviewed in Chapters 3 and 7 (1995:430, 439) which we have already demonstrated do not justify such conclusions. His argument tends towards being somewhat circular. Having said that Revelation 20:11 could go either way, he promises ‘further discussion’ when considering Revelation 21:1. Yet when he does consider the latter passage, he concludes that Revelation 20:11 ‘is the decisive contextual feature that determines this to be a reference to an entirely new creation.’ (1995:440). The circularity, in which each of these passages is assumed to provide the certainty lacking in whichever is under consideration, is a consistent feature of this conclusion of annihilation. It is a house of cards; as each of the proof-texts fails to present the hoped for evidence (as examined in Chapters 3 and 7) the case for annihilation becomes vacuous.

<sup>28</sup> Caird states that heaven and earth must flee ‘because they were unfit for his continued presence, because they were contaminated beyond the possibility of cleaning’ (1966:258-259). See also RH Charles (1920:192) and the Dispensationalist literature (Chapter 1:30-34).

- b. An expression of the extent to which this final judgement will be so full of horror and anguish in its power and thoroughness. Even heaven and earth flee such is the terror of this judgement. Here perhaps is an allusion to some of the Old Testament warnings to flee from the coming devastation of God's visitation and its 'comprehensiveness' (Heide 1997:41). The overwhelming Sinai theophany of Exodus 33:20 requires Moses to avoid seeing the face and full glory of God. How much more might fleeing from the face of God appropriately express the massive weight of this final judgement? Aune states it is metaphorical and lists several texts which capture a theophany's magnitude in the language of dramatic effect on earth and heavens (1998:1100).
- c. Given the earlier comments on 2 Peter 3,<sup>29</sup> it could be a means of highlighting or symbolising the total exposure of all deserving of God's condemnation. There will be nowhere to hide, nothing to distract, nothing else on the agenda (Heide 1997:42). With no place to hide, earth and heaven on this occasion have no place as all the focus is on the dead, death and Hades in the judgement of God.
- d. The context (vv. 12-15) suggests that here heaven and earth have no place in so far as they are locations of death and the dead. They flee away and leave the dead behind; they give up the dead. Their removal expresses the completeness and thoroughness of this final judgement and cleansing. In as much as they contain death and the dead, they are needed no longer. The dead whose names are not in the book of life are removed to another place in that this lake of fire has no place in the new heaven/earth: McDonough calls it a 'No-Place' (2008:184). Death itself is also thrown out. With the death of death, so 'the abode of the dead', must be 'abolished'

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<sup>29</sup> Chapter 7:234-247.

(Ellul 1977:211). In different ways all four possibilities just listed develop the character of this judgement, though the first fits the context less than the others.

The dissolution argument for this verse tends not so much to justify the claim through analysing the context or weighing up the metaphorical possibilities, but rather by referring to other texts understood to be describing the absolute end of the heavens and earth.<sup>30</sup> As noted above, examination of these texts does not support such conclusions. Furthermore, fleeing does not indicate ceasing to exist in the other uses of *pheugō* in Revelation (9:6, 12:6, 16:20). In Revelation 16:20, great devastation does not mean ceasing to exist. Unless one wants to argue that islands and mountains ceased to exist while the rest of creation continues on (as the verses before and after indicate), then evidently this fleeing of islands and mountains is metaphorical.<sup>31</sup> If in Revelation 20 the point is ontological and the cosmos has ceased to exist, how can the sea give up its dead just a couple of verses later (v. 13. cf. Beasley-Murray 1978:300)?<sup>32</sup>

Appeals for an ontological meaning in Revelation 20:11 also refer to the cosmological language of Revelation 6:12-14 and 8:7-12 and the earthquakes of 6:12, 8:5, 11:13, 19,

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<sup>30</sup> Some commentators attempt to be somewhat non-committal while understanding that the point is about what happens to the heaven and the earth. No serious consideration of the metaphorical is included. See Mounce (1998:375-376). Osborne says it is 'total destruction' without further clarification (2002:720-721) but then suggests for Revelation 21:1 that 'It is best to affirm some type of continuity' (730). D Wilkinson has imposed what is not there when he writes that this is 'the end of the created order' (2002:195). On the other hand, Witherington says it is metaphorical and highlights that fleeing is pointless because it is impossible to hide from the inevitable judgement (2003:251). See also Boring (1989:126-127, 210-213).

<sup>31</sup> Mountains are places for hiding from God. Removal of mountains is a statement that there is simply nowhere to hide. Genesis 3:8, Judges 6:2, Isaiah 2:10, 19, 21, 29:15, Jeremiah 16:16, 23:24, 48:28, 49:8, 30, Hosea 10:8, Amos 9:3, Luke 23:30, Revelation 6:15-16.

<sup>32</sup> Beale could be said to be inconsistent in his approach to such language. He addresses the question of literal or figurative meaning for this 'stock-in-trade OT imagery' (1999:396). He argues for metaphorical meanings in Revelation 6:12-17 (1999:396-402) yet concludes that Revelation 20:11 'probably, but not necessarily, includes its material aspects' justifying this with reference to the stock-in-trade texts used in the annihilation argument (1999:1032).

16:18.<sup>33</sup> The fundamental question of Revelation's structure, whether it is sequential or a series of recapitulations, has great bearing on whether or not any particular scene follows or repeats a previous scene. If sequential, then all these texts are seriously problematic for those who argue for a cosmological reference because following all are references to the earth continuing on. If the sun has gone black (thereby extinguishing all life on earth) and all the mountains moved away (Revelation 6:12-14), then how can so many hide in the mountains in the next verse? If recapitulation, then unless one wants to argue that each one of each series of seven visions repeats the one before, then here too claiming an ontological impact in these cosmological descriptions is problematic. The earth continues on in the seventh seal after the massive cosmic devastation of the sixth; likewise in the fifth trumpet after the cosmic impact of the fourth. As consistently elsewhere in the Canon, cosmic devastation imagery expresses metaphorically what is really beyond description: the absolute and overwhelming weight of dread and grief when God comes in judgement against humankind and/or the massive and terrifying grandeur of God's visible glory. The devastation for humankind is extreme, and may involve serious destruction of the environment, but the imagery is not describing the cosmos but the terror.<sup>34</sup>

Revelation 20:11 most likely continues this standard use of the imagery and extends its severity. Not just islands and mountains flee but in this final judgement, earth and heaven, the whole cosmos: there will be nowhere at all to hide. This is not the introduction of a new subject (cosmology) but an extreme and graphic metaphor for the

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<sup>33</sup> See Bauckham (1993b:210-237) for a discussion of the earthquake material in Revelation. He concludes that earthquakes are a part of Revelation 20:11 because it covers the same event as Revelation 8:5, 11:13, 19, 16:18. He does state that God's future redemptive acts 'are portrayed on the model of his past acts.' (201) and that only the 'intensively literalistic' would preference any one image of the end over the many others. He does not provide as much as one might expect by way of serious consideration of the specific metaphorical possibilities for Revelation 20:11 and the ontological question.

<sup>34</sup> This may not be how twenty first century readers appreciate the imagery but first century listeners were familiar with the genre and knew how to interpret the imagery.



severity and thoroughness of God's judgement which is the theme of the whole passage (Revelation 20:7-15). This judgement removes even death itself, the ultimate consequence of sin. As the place of death, creation has no place before the final judgement throne as creation now gives up its dead for good.<sup>35</sup>

The final question for consideration of Revelation 20:11 is whether or not the cosmological argument is required by the coming of new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21:1: the old destroyed absolutely so that the new can come (Mounce 1998:375, Beale 1999:1032). A circular argument exists here, a cosmological focus of one to justify a cosmological focus for the other. But what exactly removes the old and precipitates the new? We will see below that Revelation 21 presents us with transformation of the old into the new rather than an ontological replacement. Revelation 20 states clearly what must come first; the judgement and removal of Satan and his forces, the judgement of all humankind even the dead, and the judgment and removal of death itself. Throughout the narrative from Genesis 3 these have been the primary causes of the corruption of heaven and earth and the curse from which creation longs for liberation. The extreme imagery of heaven and earth fleeing away is not to make a cosmological point (which would be out of context) but rather to capture the assurance that this judgement will be final and absolutely effective.

### **Revelation 21:1-5**

(1) Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. (2) And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; (4) he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

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<sup>35</sup> 'No place for them' (Revelation 20:11) alludes to Daniel 2:35 (where it refers to kingdoms in rebellion against God's Kingdom; cf. vv. 44-45), Revelation 12:6-8 (where the woman is provided a place but the dragon and his angels lose their place in heaven) and Revelation 6:14 (where islands and mountains are moved from their place to expose completely all deserving the wrath of the Lamb). Thus, heaven and earth have no place in so far as they represent rebellion against God or futile attempts to hide from God's inevitable judgement.

(5) And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true” (Revelation 21:1-5).

The argument that endorses the continuation of heaven and earth focuses on the overall thrust of the Biblical narrative, the literary genre, and the details in the context in Revelation 21:1. The alternative claim, that the new is a complete replacement of the old, builds upon particular meanings for the words used and a prosaic understanding of the nature of the text. However, words can be quite fluid and apocalyptic genre makes substantial use of symbol and metaphor. Context, therefore, is essential for interpreting meaning. As Mounce states, ‘Neither the language employed nor rabbinic commentary’ is sufficient to resolve the question, and further notes that ‘physical transformation’ is not the primary concern of the material (1998:380).

What actually happens to bring about the new order? Revelation presents a series of events that together bring the new heaven/earth into reality. They are (1) the removal of all evil, rebellion and death through judgement (Revelation 18-20), (2) the coming of God and the Lamb (Revelation 19:11-16, 21:3, 22-23, 22:12, 17, 20), (3) the descent of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2, 10, 22:1, 3), (4) the removal of all forms of suffering and sin (Revelation 21:4, 8, 27, 22:3, cf. 22:15), (5) the entry of the wealth and glory of the nations (Revelation 21:24-26) and (6) the impact of the river and the trees of life (Revelation 22:1-2). As a result, the former order passes away (Revelation 21:1, 4). New heaven/earth is the product of these somewhat different events rather than it being a separate and independent event that happens between judgement and the arrival of New Jerusalem. These are parallel visions, the first (new heaven/earth) made possible and explained by the second (new Jerusalem), rather than, as Osborne suggests, the New Jerusalem descending after new heaven/earth are in place (2002:731). That is, these two visions that John sees (*eidon* in both Revelation 21:1 and 2) are only

sequential in the seeing. The two visions are different perspectives on the same reality with the longer second (21:2-8) explaining the briefer first and both are followed by a third (21:9-22:5).<sup>36</sup> How does the transition happen and what is this new heaven/earth like? Revelation 21:2-8 and 21:9-22:5 explain and without reference to any replacement of the present cosmos through annihilation or dissolution. Contrary to Osborne, it is difficult to see how there could be new heaven/earth without the presence of all that New Jerusalem represents. Such a view would require a significant reduction in the nature of new heaven/earth that would not equate with the expectations of Isaiah 65:17-25.<sup>37</sup> Aune notes the chiasmic structure of Revelation 21:1-5a which emphasizes the presence of God coming in the New Jerusalem (vv. 3-4a) as the pivotal event that initiates the transition from old to new (1998:1113).<sup>38</sup>

The earthly character of Isaiah's expectations for new heavens and earth, particularly Isaiah 60-66 to which John refers without qualification or modification, carries much weight in determining what John thought of the nature of the transition from old to new. Isaiah's vision for new heaven and earth integrates well with the actual earth and city in which he lived and moved. Only considerable evidence would justify a shift away from Isaiah's vision of renewal such that John's expectation is for another earth, different from the transformation Isaiah expected. Yet none arises. Rather the imagery points away from mere process (as discussed in the previous paragraph) to the character and grandeur of what will be.

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<sup>36</sup> As evidenced by the two references to the descent of the holy city Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2, 21:9-10). It is most unlikely that John meant that Jerusalem would descend twice! The reference to coming of the angels in Revelation 21:9 signals the beginnings of a new vision.

<sup>37</sup> See Chapter 2:77-78.

<sup>38</sup> That is, it is the coming of God that results in the other causal events that produce the new heaven/earth.

## HEAVEN<sup>39</sup>

The expression ‘new heaven and new earth’ refers to the whole of creation in that Revelation follows the common Biblical portrayal of creation as ‘heaven and earth’.<sup>40</sup> ‘Heaven’ though used somewhat flexibly in Revelation, always refers in a general sense to all that is far above the earth.<sup>41</sup> There are references to various created realities in heaven, the place in which God dwells,<sup>42</sup> which are good in every way and which cannot pass away.<sup>43</sup> References to ‘heaven’ include, (1) simply the visible things of the sky (Revelation 6:13-14, 11:6); (2) seeing heaven or seeing things in heaven though it is not always clear whether this refers to the general heavens above or the more specific place of heaven;<sup>44</sup> (3) events that take place in heaven the place;<sup>45</sup> or (4) various phenomena coming down from heaven (which may or may not be a reference to the place of God).<sup>46</sup> However, more than half of the references to heaven focus on heaven as the place of God’s throne and all that surrounds the throne.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, it is difficult to conceive of how the idea of heaven passing away could mean anything ontological given all that heaven, the place, represents. Four times<sup>48</sup> John refers to heaven as part of the created order and inclusive of created things, and if these things pass away in the sense of cease to be, then there would be nothing of New Jerusalem

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<sup>39</sup> See also the discussion on heaven in Chapters 1:22, 7:222-223, 7:242-243, and Appendix A.5:392.

<sup>40</sup> Revelation 5:3, 5:13, 10:6, 14:7: though in these the expression is expanded to include the sea (as appropriate given the significance of the sea in Revelation), or beneath the earth, and to emphasize the created contents of each. That is, heaven is a created place and includes created things.

<sup>41</sup> As Revelation only uses the plural once (12:12), no help in the meaning comes from singular or plural use as in other New Testament authors. The exhortation in Revelation 12:12 for heaven (plural) to rejoice appears to have no change of meaning from the exhortation for heaven (singular) to rejoice in Revelation 18:20.

<sup>42</sup> In addition to the various visions of the incarnate Jesus, there are New Jerusalem (3:12, 21:2, 21:10), the throne of God (4:2) and the company of elders, angels and creatures that surrounds it (4-5, 13:6, 19:1, 19:14), voices and angels in heaven and which come from heaven (4:1, 10:1, 10:4-6, 10:8, 11:12, 11:15, 12:10, 14:2, 14:13, 14:17, 18:1, 18:4, 19:1, 20:1), and the temple of God (11:19, 13:6, 14:17, 15:5). Note also that God is ‘the God of heaven.’ (11:13, 16:11)

<sup>43</sup> See Appendix A.5:392.

<sup>44</sup> Revelation 4:1-2, 12:1, 12:3, 15:1, 19:11, 21:1-2, 21:10.

<sup>45</sup> Revelation 5:3, 5:13, 8:1, 11:15, 11:19, 12:7-8, 13:6, 14:17, 15:5, 19:1, 19:14.

<sup>46</sup> Revelation 3:12, 8:10, 9:1, 10:1, 10:4, 10:8, 11:12, 12:1, 12:10, 13:13, 14:2, 14:13, 16:21, 18:1, 18:4-5, 20:1, 20:9, 22:2, 21:10.

<sup>47</sup> See above Chapter 8:266n42.

<sup>48</sup> See above Chapter 8:266n40.

left to descend. It is reasonable to conclude that New Jerusalem<sup>49</sup> is synonymous with all that heaven represents given the heaven-like qualities of the new heaven/earth that result from New Jerusalem's arrival. This is affirmed by the extensive significance for the future Zion established in Isaiah and elsewhere.<sup>50</sup> The new order comes about because heaven, the place of God's presence, comes to earth.<sup>51</sup> John's flexibility of language<sup>52</sup> allows for the sense of heaven (content) coming down from heaven (former location) in the descent of the New Jerusalem and the coming of God and the Lamb.<sup>53</sup>

'PASSED AWAY'?

The language of heaven and earth 'passing away' (Revelation 21:1) raises many questions. What do the words mean and what exactly has passed away? Are heaven and earth first dissolved and then replaced? Or is it a particular form of heaven and earth as separated realities? Or the coming of a new order because the former order has gone (Revelation 21:4). That is, the earth as a place in which evil has prospered (the former) is now totally renewed to become a suitable place for the throne of God and of the Lamb (the new). Heaven relocates to the earth rather than remaining distinct from it above the 'heavens'.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See the discussion Zion and the Mountain City in Chapters 2:76-78, 8:274-291, Appendix A.7:393.

<sup>50</sup> See the discussion of the Jerusalem above from Galatians 4:22-31 in Lincoln (1981:9-32).

<sup>51</sup> This is made possible by the removal of all that is evil. Revelation 19:20-21, 20:9-10, 14-15, 21:8, 21:27, 22:15.

<sup>52</sup> While John appears to nuance the language of heaven a little differently to other uses as identified by Pennington (2007) and Lincoln (1981), conceptually there is coherence across these worldviews and in the expectation of the ending of the separation of heaven from earth.

<sup>53</sup> Beale notes that the transition from old to new in Revelation 21:1 will be like the transition from old to new in Jesus' resurrection, given the 'exegetical link' between new creation, resurrection and allusions to Isaiah 65:16-17 in various New Testament passages. 'The new cosmos will be an identifiable counterpart to the old cosmos and a renewal of it' (1999:1040). He regards the imagery in Revelation 21:1 as essentially figurative while nevertheless assuming that some degree of physical/cosmological devastation will be involved.

<sup>54</sup> 'The "first" heaven and earth now belong to the past, since they were determined by the antagonistic dualism between the reign of God and Christ in heaven and that of the dragon and his allies on earth and in the underworld. The "new heaven and earth" stand in continuity with the former heaven and earth, but they form a qualitatively new and unified world' (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991:109). See also Osborne (2002:730).

Witherington, quoting Boesak, notes that the description in Isaiah 65-66 of the new earth is ‘profoundly earthy’ and therefore renewal rather than ceasing to exist is the more likely meaning (2003:253). MacLeod disputes Beasley-Murray’s similar conclusion by claiming that he has failed to make the distinction between ‘millennial conditions ... and the eternal state’ in Isaiah 65 (2000: 440-441, n. 9). In addition to questioning the legitimacy of imposing Macleod’s distinction on what in Isaiah is an integrated vision, see also DL Turner (1992) who presents a reasonable case for a view of renovation and renewal of the existing creation within a pre-millennial interpretation of Revelation 20. Boring states that only metaphorical expression can represent these final events as such things are beyond the capacity of human language to express and beyond the capacity of human imagination to perceive (1989:213).

We have already considered the fluidity of the language of passing away in the discussion on Matthew 5:18, 24:35 and 2 Peter 3:10.<sup>55</sup> While the variant of the verb here, *aperchomai*, is not exactly the same, the essence of the idea in both variants is spatial movement, to come or go, to pass by or move aside. This remains the primary meaning rather than ontological destruction whether used descriptively or metaphorically (Mundle 1986:320-323, Heide 1997:43). Perhaps John is telling us simply that the old form of heaven and earth had simply passed out of sight which would be consistent with his frequent references to describing what he saw (Heide 1997:43). Aune neglects to consider this feature of the word when quoting the Louw-Nida Lexicon: he states, without discussion or consideration of options, that it means ‘to go out of existence, to cease’ (1998:1110).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Chapter 7:216-226, 234-247. See also Moo (2006:466n66).

<sup>56</sup> It is difficult to see how Aune so easily adopts this understanding having endorsed a metaphorical reading on Revelation 20:11 (1998:1100). He states Revelation 21:1b ‘taken together with that in 20:11b, makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the author has in view the *complete destruction*

It seems most difficult to conceive of how heaven could ‘pass away’.<sup>57</sup> ‘Heaven and earth’ is a term that embraces the whole created order (physical, social, spiritual), all that is external to God Himself. ‘Heaven’ includes the many good realities depicted in the scene in Revelation 4-5 and these hardly seem to be doomed to extinction. Heaven also includes the very things that other New Testament writings tell us are eternally secure in Christ.<sup>58</sup>

So the language of ‘passing away’ is fluid and in itself does not clarify how exactly the nature of the transition from old to new. As noted below when considering the sea, there are seven negations in the description of Revelation 21:1-22:5. These have all passed away.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, all impurity and all represented by the lists of those excluded (Revelation 21:8, 27, 22:15) have also passed away, no longer present.

#### EXTRA-BIBLICAL SECOND TEMPLE TEXTS

Appeals to extra-Biblical apocalyptic writings tend to claim that together they are ambiguous since some texts speak of renewal and others of total destruction of the cosmos. Consequently, these do not help much in interpreting Revelation 21:1 though commentators may selectively reference some to support their position. Witherington concludes they are ‘rather evenly divided’ (2003:253). These appeals, particularly to support total destruction, do not adequately consider the context especially the focus on

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of the physical universe’ while at the same time stating, ‘This verse is metaphorical, however, and does not describe the destruction of the cosmos’ (1998:1116 & 1100. Emphasis original.).

<sup>57</sup> The presence of evil in heaven is presented as already resolved in Revelation 12:7-8. With such evil removed, everything in heaven is good and not worthy of destruction.

<sup>58</sup> See Appendix A.5:392 and Matthew 6:20, 19:21, Luke 12:33, 18:22, Ephesians 1:3-14, Colossians 1:5, 1 Timothy 6:19, Hebrews 12:22-24, 1 Peter 1:4.

<sup>59</sup> ‘There are seven things for which John uses the formula οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι or οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι in Rev 21-22.’ They are Sea (Revelation 21:1), death, mourning, crying, pain (21:4), curse (22:3), night (22:5). (J Moo 2009:149). Beale makes a similar link between these seven and the passing away of the old order (1999:1042-1043).

judgement rather than cosmology,<sup>60</sup> neglect to give due attention to the possibilities of symbol, metaphor and hyperbole, and do not sufficiently allow for the extent to which the language is flexible in meaning. For these texts, the case for total destruction is much weaker than usually posited. Russell’s extensive work on these texts on the question of annihilation or transformation leads to the conclusion that these ‘apocalyptic writers did not renounce the created order’ (1996:132-133); consistently their vision is one of restoration and transformation.

Evidence of the limitations of this background for influencing our conclusions on Revelation 21 is the fact that different commentators list several texts on both sides. What one regards as a text demonstrating annihilation another lists as being a text favouring restoration as demonstrated in the following table.<sup>61</sup>

	Annihilation/Replacement	Transformation
1 Enoch 45:4-5		Aune, Mounce, Osborne, Beale
1 Enoch 72:1	Aune, Osborne, Beale	Mounce
1 Enoch 83:3ff	Witherington, Osborne, Beasley-Murray	
1 Enoch 91:16	Aune, Osborne, Beasley-Murray, Beale	Mounce
2 Bar 3:4	Beasley-Murray	Witherington
2 Bar 32:6		Aune, Mounce, Osborne, Beale
2 Bar 44:12	Osborne, Beale	Aune
2 Bar 57:2		Aune, Osborne, Beale
2 Esd 7:29ff	Witherington	Aune, Beasley-Murray
2 Esd 7:75		Aune, Mounce, Beale
Jub 1:29	Aune	Osborne, Beale
Jub 4:26	Beasley-Murray	Osborne, Beale
Jub 23:18	Beasley-Murray	Osborne
Tg Jer 23:23	Beale	Aune

<sup>60</sup> For example, 1 Enoch 83:3-4, a dream, is listed as speaking of annihilation yet the exhortation and prayer that explain and respond to the dream, vv. 83:8-84:6, emphasize the hope that God’s judgement would leave the earth intact for the remnant. The interpretation of the dream (83:7-10) provides reassurance that the judgement against sin depicted in the dream (83:1-6) will not destroy the earth!

<sup>61</sup> See Aune (1998:1116), Beasley-Murray (1978:306-307), Osborne (2002:730-733), Mounce (1998:380), Witherington (2003:253), Beale (1999:1043). The table does not include those texts listed by only one commentator.



As already noted, repeated use of particular imagery does not necessarily indicate an identical intention in the use of that imagery. The context of the text in question determines the impact of the imagery and not the claimed meanings developed by earlier uses of the imagery. Even if these texts did provide evidence of annihilation, which they do not, it would be unwise to presume that Revelation uses the imagery in the same way.

#### THE SEA

In his explanation of the phrase ‘there was no longer any sea.’ (Revelation 21:1), Walvoord expects that there will be no bodies of water in the new earth except for the river of Revelation 22:1-2 (1966:311). This conclusion neglects to explore the context (the whole of Revelation) in which the sea is given particular significance but mostly does not refer to bodies of water. In Revelation, ‘sea’ is a metonym for forces that worked against the reign of Christ and His saints. Revelation 21:1 presents the sea as a negative; as something that does not belong. Consistent with the entire Canon, nothing of creation in itself is negative. So the removal of the sea is a removal of what the sea represents of evil and opposition to Christ. Revelation 12:12 and 13:1 provide clear evidence of what must be removed that is associated with the sea; the dragon and the beast. Dumbrell refers to the sea as ‘the principle of opposition’ (2001b:344). It does not refer to water nor does its removal provide evidence of earth’s annihilation.

The absence of sea is the first of seven negations of negatives in the description of the new heaven/earth.<sup>62</sup> Each finds its origins in the consequences of humankind’s rebellion in Genesis 3, either as described in Genesis 3 or as the reversal of order back towards the uninhabitable world of Genesis 1:2 where water and darkness prevail. J Moo

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<sup>62</sup> See above Chapter 8:269n59.

explores the particular negative material in Revelation ('The Sea as Abyss and Origin of the Beast'), as well as the association of sea with death in Revelation 20:13, and expands on this through the Old Testament creation, flood and exodus material. He concludes that 'the absence of the sea is not a further judgement but rather the end of judgement itself' (J Moo 2009:165). Moo's presentation provides sufficient evidence to endorse the argument that 'sea' is a metonym rather than a reference to bodies of H<sub>2</sub>O. The sea is no more because what it represents is no longer needed or appropriate.<sup>63</sup>

#### ALL THINGS NEW

The processes described in Revelation 21:2-22:5 together form a single statement in Revelation 21:5, *idou kaina poiō panta*, 'See, I am making all things new.' 'All things new' is equivalent to the passing of the old heaven and earth and the coming of the new. Four times *kainos* is used for 'new'<sup>64</sup> and Dumbrell argues that, 'The word *kainos* suggests qualitative continuity with the expectations held for the old Jerusalem.' (2001b:344).

MacLeod, without discussing the possible nuances of the word, states that it means 'a completely new universe made of new materials and not merely the renovation of the present heavens and earth' (2000:441). He bases his claim on his reading of the

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<sup>63</sup> The sea will be no longer required as an instrument of God's judgement. 'Never again will creation be called upon to destroy the destroyers of the earth for all judgement will be past and salvation finally and definitively accomplished.' (J Moo 2009:167). While Moo's material is more extensive than most, a number of other commentators refer to the wealth of Biblical material that utilizes 'sea' as imagery for the consequences of sin though the focus and exact character of the metonym varies. See Aune (1998:1119-1120), Bauckham (1993a:53), Beale (1999:1041-1043, 1050-1051), Boring (1989:216-217), McDonough (2008:183-184), Morris (1987:237), Osborne (2002:730-731), RL Thomas (1995:440). Minear paraphrases, 'The sea had lost its power' (1968:358) and Hendriksen concludes, 'The sea, as we now know it, is no more' (1967:199). 'The emphasis is not geographic but moral and spiritual' (AF Johnson 1981:593). 'It is a world not only after the flood, like Noah's, but a world beyond any threat of flood' (McDonough 2008:184). 'It metaphorically represents so well those things that threaten the peace and safety of God's people' (Beale 1999:1051). See also Tsumura (2010:165-184).

<sup>64</sup> New heaven, new earth (Revelation 21:1), new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2), new everything (Revelation 21:5).

language of ‘passing away’. RL Thomas dismisses those facets of creation renewal that have already commenced as, for him, this weakens the force of the renewal yet to come when the New Jerusalem descends (1995:446-447). But he misconstrues the point. The many realities of new creation already present<sup>65</sup> in no way lessen the significance of the future renewal of Revelation 21:5 but rather give much weight to the argument that it is this creation in His mind when God declares, ‘I am making all things new.’ The idea that God begins a renewal of the created order only to destroy completely much of this renewal is problematic and implies an arbitrariness in the character of God.

Beale, in discussing Revelation 21:5, refers to those things that Isaiah anticipates as no longer present in the new creation: particularly Isaiah 25:8, 35:10, 51:10-11, 43:18, 65:17-25 (1999:1049-1050).<sup>66</sup> These are the former things about to pass away. With these absolutely eliminated, all things will be new. If the allusion is primarily to Isaiah 43:19, then the earthy realities of the renewal anticipated there reinforce the qualitative impact of *kaivos* and the figurative focus of the passing away of ‘heaven and earth’ in Revelation 21:1.

Earlier, the nuances of *kainos* and *neos* were discussed<sup>67</sup> with the conclusion that *kainos* more likely refers to qualitative change rather than a new ontological reality. This is consistent with passing of the former/old order things in the previous verse (Revelation 21:4).<sup>68</sup> God makes all things new through the removal of sin and all its consequences. It is not about the ontology of the cosmos but the removal of a series of negatives, all of

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<sup>65</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>66</sup> See also Aune 1998:1124-1125.

<sup>67</sup> Chapter 5:155-157.

<sup>68</sup> The passage, Revelation 21:1-22:5, lists out many things that will be present in the new heaven/earth as well as many things that will not. All of these are qualitative in nature.

which are the product of sin, and this opens up the way for the descent of God and New Jerusalem.

### **Revelation 21:2, 9-27**

#### NEW JERUSALEM<sup>69</sup>

How does the descent of the New Jerusalem contribute to the new heaven/earth; and what exactly does descend (Revelation 3:12, 21:2, 10, cf. 21:11-22:5)? Isaiah 62:1-5 anticipates a restored Jerusalem with a new name and a new marital-like relationship between God and Jerusalem (Beale 1999:1044).<sup>70</sup> In Isaiah 65:17-18, ‘new heavens and a new earth’ is paralleled with ‘Jerusalem’ and this is the same Jerusalem as the one where formerly there was ‘weeping’ (v. 19). That is, this Jerusalem to come fulfils the promises for future transformation of the Jerusalem of Isaiah’s day. It would be greater than ever before. In Revelation 21:1-2, John follows Isaiah’s parallel visions and virtually equates the renewed city with the renewed creation. In the context of Isaiah 60-66, ‘New heavens and a new earth’ conveys a transformation of the existing creation including Jerusalem. John sees in Isaiah’s visions what is mostly metaphorical and symbolic without loss of their earthy substance. What then does ‘New Jerusalem’ as descending from heaven represent?

With the coming of the Kingdom, Jesus and others indicate that something of this Kingdom is already present in heaven awaiting the consummation.<sup>71</sup> We explored above what Revelation portrays as already present in heaven.<sup>72</sup> The presence of God in heaven is clear before Revelation 21. With the descent of the New Jerusalem, God is now permanently present on earth (Revelation 21:3, 22-23, 22:1, 3, 5). His throne has come

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<sup>69</sup> See also Chapters 2:46-49, 74-78, 3:107-111, 4:113-115, Appendix A.7:393.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Isaiah 49:18, 61:10.

<sup>71</sup> See Matthew 6:20, 19:21, Luke 12:33, 18:22, Galatians 4:26, Ephesians 1:3-14, Philippians 3:20, Colossians 1:5, 1 Timothy 6:19, Hebrews 11:16, 12:22, 13:14, 1 Peter 1:4.

<sup>72</sup> Chapter 8:266-267.

down to earth and with it, by implication, has come all else that was there in God's presence in heaven. The city that descends is the whole community of heaven and, in addition to the throne of God, this is expressed by the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the gates and the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb on the foundation stones (Revelation 21:12-14, cf. 4:4).<sup>73</sup> The glory of the throne of God is expressed in the brilliance of light, and the gold, precious stones, jewels and pearls (Revelation 21:11, 18-23, cf. Exodus 28:17-21, Ezekiel 28:13, Isaiah 54:11-12).

This city is also 'the holy city' signifying that both the judgement of God and the holiness of God transform creation sufficiently to remove any cause for heaven, as the place of God's presence, and earth to be kept apart. This holiness will be perfectly well preserved as expressed by the solidity of foundations and walls, and the reassurance that even with gates always open, never will any form of evil be able to enter (Revelation 21:8, 27, 22:15).

As John draws on the Old Testament expectations for the New Jerusalem, we can conclude that the descended New Jerusalem brings holiness, the throne and presence of God with all its glory, the full multitude of God's people, and the inheritance and treasures of the Kingdom.<sup>74</sup> Osborne writes, 'Here is the fulfilment of a prophetic expectation with a rich history' (2002:732). It represents the coming of all needed from heaven to restore and renew Jerusalem, and the whole earth, to be all that the Old Testament anticipated it would be: all that is needed from heaven to transform and expand Jerusalem into New Jerusalem. Yet we should note that John says little of what

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<sup>73</sup> 'The city has "twelves" built into it throughout (21:15-17) – all its dimensions are multiples of the twelve that connotes the People of God: twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles of the church.' (Boring 1989:219)

<sup>74</sup> See Appendix A.5:392.

exactly descends.<sup>75</sup> His vision is relatively simple though rich with allusions to substantial expectations elsewhere; heaven descends, and so earth and heaven, city and garden, the glory of nations and the glory of God, become one even as each retains its own unique reality in a perfectly integrated harmony. Consistent with the narrative from Genesis, the symbiotic relationship between God, His people and the earth is fully now one of peace.

In the stark contrast between New Jerusalem and Babylon, New Jerusalem is everything that Babylon is not: a negation of the negations. The brief reference to the vision from the mountain (Revelation 21:10) reminds the listener of the mountain-like qualities associated with Eden (Alexander 2008:23. cf. Genesis 2:10, Ezekiel 28:13-14), the mountain of Zion and Jerusalem in general and in particular, and the exaltation of God's mountain from which the word of the LORD goes out to the nations even as the nations flood to the mountain (Isaiah 2:1-5).<sup>76</sup>

The new city of Revelation 21 is a synecdoche for a renewed earth. The city is representative of the whole, just as Zion for the prophets was often a synecdoche to refer not only to Israel but also to the full impact of God's blessing for the nations and on creation. Three areas of Biblical expectation establish this. (1) The global vision developed in Genesis of God's declared purpose to include all the nations of the earth as retold many times in the Psalms, Prophets and the New Testament visions for a liberated and reconciled creation integrated together in Christ. (2) The particular examples presented in the Old Testament which describe Zion in ways that include what

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<sup>75</sup> Hence commentators tend to leave the question open which inevitably leaves ambiguous the nature of the transition into the new creation.

<sup>76</sup> Each of these, from the many contexts in which they occur, is filled with creation and life-enhancing promises. See the examination of this comprehensive vision for Zion, Jerusalem and the mountain of God as presented in the Psalms and Prophets in Chapters 2:46-49, 74-78, 3:107-111, 4:111-115.

God will do throughout the nations. (3) The extensive character of the city in Revelation as reflected in its exaggerated dimensions and its capacity to encompass the wealth and glory of multiple nations.

The dimensions specified by John in Revelation 21:16 appear to describe a cube-like structure of enormous size. If read as a specific geographical reference, the area covered is sufficient to suggest it stretched across multiple countries<sup>77</sup> but the use of the number ‘twelve’ signals to us that this measurement is more about symbol than lines on a map. Inclusiveness is indicated (large enough for twelve tribes and twelve apostles; both Israel and the nations) as well as being large enough to embrace the full Old Testament vision of new creation. The cube-like shape fits with the recurring anticipation that eventually the whole earth will be as the temple’s holy-of-holies, a place suitable for the full presence of God.

Given the rich and sustained tradition of expectation for restored Zion and Jerusalem, it would be a most inappropriate reduction to see the bride of Christ as simply a reference to the people of God. In keeping with Isaiah 62:1-5, it is the city adorned as the bride and this city is both place and people. Revelation 19:1-9 contrasts the prostitute city of Babylon with the bride of Christ thereby reflecting the same synthesis of place and people.<sup>78</sup> Beale’s approach is typical of many anthropocentric perspectives which assume that the bride ‘is a metaphor for the saints’ (1999:1045) without a serious consideration of the extent to which a city is more than just a collection of people. Bauckham considers New Jerusalem as place, people, and divine presence (1993a:132-

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<sup>77</sup> Technically, it is large enough to encompass Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, and significant proportions of Libya and Saudi Arabia. It would also cover about a third of the Mediterranean Sea and reach so far up beyond the upper layers of the earth’s atmosphere that most of it would be uninhabitable.

<sup>78</sup> cf. Isaiah 49:18, 52:1ff, 61:10, See also Aune (1998:1120-1122).

143) and explores how Jerusalem in particular and creation in general is both restored and amplified.<sup>79</sup>

This synecdochal quality to the vision of a new city presents us with a much larger set of expectations than just some kind of contained urban lifestyle. The many allusions and references in Revelation 21-22 draw a wide range of expectations into the vision. All of the hope for Israel and the nations is embraced here. This vision draws in all of the created order proclaimed throughout the Canon as good. All of creation that declares the glory of God; all that brings Him pleasure; all embraced in the blessings of God that come forth from the earth; all the anticipated abundance and fertility of the earth as the prophets expected: all these many expressions of the created order feed into the substance of this global city.

New earth is not merely the old creation without the pollution and corruption of sin; ‘an ethically renovated old earth’ (Beale 1999:1045). The ultimate coming of God and the Lamb will be so much more than any of great upheavals of God’s previous visitations since Genesis 3. Perhaps there will be much devastation, particularly of those human works unworthy of redemption, but this does not seem to interest John that much. The movement from localized garden in Eden to global garden-city, as well as the expansion from the first Adam to all the nations of the earth, provide more than enough

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<sup>79</sup> ‘As a place, the New Jerusalem is at once paradise, holy city and temple. As paradise it is the natural world in its ideal state, rescued from the destroyers of the earth, reconciled with humanity, filled with the presence of God, and mediating the blessings of eschatological life to humanity. As holy city, it fulfils the ideal of the ancient city, as the place where heaven and earth meet at the centre of the earth, from which God rules his land and his people, to whose attraction the nations are drawn for enlightenment, and in which people live in ideal theocentric community. As temple, it is the place of God’s immediate presence, where his worshippers see his face.’ (Bauckham 1993a:132). Dumbrell endorses Bauckham: ‘Indeed, the New Jerusalem appears to encompass people (the redeemed), place (the New Creation), and presence (the immediate being of God) and thus to be identical with the kingdom of God. It is the renewed world, a paradise, a holy city, a temple, the cosmic mountain joining heaven and earth, the eschatological expectations of the whole Bible now realized’ (2001b:344). For Dumbrell, New Jerusalem is ‘New Eden’ (2001b:10, 345). Osborne likewise argues for both place and people (2002:733).



justification that the New Jerusalem will encompass much more than anything ever previously found in creation. The inclusion of the wealth and glory of the nations indicates that incorporated into the new reality will be the vast range of human achievement now liberated from the corruption of Babylon and offered continuously for the glory of God.

#### TEMPLE AND LIGHT

The city has no temple (Revelation 21:22) because there is simply no need. The temple represented the living presence of God but with God fully present in the new heaven/earth reality, any temple of any kind would be at least superfluous and at worst a profound contradiction. Yet, a temple-like quality is present, not anything localized but the whole of the new heaven/earth becomes the house of God. Eden began as temple-like (Beale 2005:5-31),<sup>80</sup> a microcosm of the eventual purpose of God in which Eden would eventually fill the earth (Dumbrell 2001b:11, cf. 24-25). Now the new heaven/earth is the dwelling place of God.

The relationships portrayed in the temple between heaven and earth, Eden and the cosmos, are more than simply illustrative. The temple represents and expresses the relationships of the triangulation of God, humankind and non-human creation throughout the Biblical narrative. The temple represents the integration of this triangulation: localized before the Parousia (Eden, tabernacle/temple, Jesus himself, and then wherever the Spirit dwells) but in the new heaven/earth, the whole of creation is entirely worthy of the full presence of God. His glory filled the temple but now His glory fills the new heaven/earth. No visible temple appears except in so far as the

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<sup>80</sup> See also Beale (2004a:66-80), Alexander (2008:20-31), Dumbrell (2001b:24-25).

presence of God fills the whole new heaven/earth and so all creation (heaven and earth) is by default the temple of God. The temple-like Eden now fills the earth.<sup>81</sup>

God's never ending presence is so perfectly brilliant that sun and moon will never be needed for light again (Revelation 21:23-25, 22:5). The point is not that there will be no sun or moon but to stress the extent of the radiance of light that is inevitable when God is entirely present. As with Psalm 102:25-27 and Isaiah 51:6,<sup>82</sup> the sufficiency of God Himself is expressed by contrasting Him with the most substantial reality known to all. It is not about sun or moon but a figurative way of leaving no doubt that God is present fully and absolutely. The recurring contrasts between light and darkness throughout the Bible similarly indicate that this is not about cosmology but about all that the light of God represents; truth, purity and whatever else is needed for the nations to live rightly (Revelation 21:24). In the essentials for the present earth's survival and flourishing, sun and moon provide far more than light. The new creation may well have a different physicality, but given the goodness of sun and moon in the created order, no reason exists for us to presume that sun and moon cease to play a significant part in the functioning of the new heaven/earth.

#### WALLS, GATES AND BOUNDARIES

In the Old Testament, Ezekiel's vision of new temple from which flows the river of life also includes details of boundaries for the land and gates for the city.<sup>83</sup> The walls provide security and safety in general and a clear separation from the unclean in particular. The gates control movement into the temple to ensure correct offerings to God. The boundaries are to ensure a just and fair distribution of the land, and more

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<sup>81</sup> See also Dumbrell (2001b:106), Alexander (2008:13-73) and Alexander and Gathercole (2004).

<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 3:94-105.

<sup>83</sup> Ezekiel 40:5-37, 45:1-8, 46:1-21, 47:13-48:35.

generally to ensure a just ordering of society. Undoubtedly Revelation 21-22 has this vision of Ezekiel in mind. The elaborate expectations of temple (Ezekiel 40-46) find fulfilment in an even greater measure in the presence of God Himself (Revelation 21:3, 22-24, 22:5). The life giving river of Ezekiel 47:1-12 finds fulfilment in Revelation 22:1-2. The twelve gates of the city in Ezekiel 48:30-35 are included in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12-13). The New Jerusalem is a strongly walled city (Revelation 21:12, 15-21).

Detailed measurement conveys a sense of all being as it should be. Detailed and precise measurement dominates the lengthy descriptions of Ezekiel 40-48. All that should be included is within these walls: and the walls are sufficient in strength and scope to ensure it is so. Beale concludes, 'Metaphors of measurement were used to express the inviolable security of this temple' (1999:1071) and the 'infallible promise of God's future presence' (1999:1072).

The significance of boundaries begins in Genesis. Adam is created outside the Garden and then placed in the Garden by God (Genesis 2:15). Death in Genesis 3 comes through the reverse movement: exclusion from the Garden and its tree of life.<sup>84</sup> Later 'landedness' followed by 'landlessness' (Brueggemann 2002) in exile mirrors the same: God's covenant blessing brings inclusion in the promised land and God's judgement excludes from this same land (Deuteronomy 28-30). This meaning for the blessing of inclusion and the curse of exclusion sets up the importance of the emphasis on measurement and walls in Revelation 21. Inclusion brings the full range of blessing, exclusion brings deprivation and death. The entry of the nations (Revelation 21:24, 26)

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<sup>84</sup> Judgement in Genesis 3 resulted in angelic beings, cherubim, being assigned to prevent entry to the Garden and its tree of life.

echoes this pattern and while John's reference may be brief, the impact of his words indicate that Genesis 3, and exile from the land, is being reversed.

Land boundaries are important<sup>85</sup> as are secure walls around the city and temple.<sup>86</sup> Micah's expectations of the day when God's light and mercy restores His people are expressed in secure walls and boundaries (Micah 7:11). Zechariah anticipates a day when the walls of Jerusalem will be unable to contain the full number of nations living before God in Zion (Zechariah 2:5). Whether material or metaphorical, these walls represent 'the inviolable nature of fellowship with God' (Beale 1999:1068. cf. Revelation 21:27, 22:14-15). These walls secure the whole of the new creation.

The gates of the New Jerusalem will likewise be guarded to keep out all that does not belong (Revelation 21:12, cf. 21:8, 27, 22:15) while ensuring entry to all that does (21:7, 24-27, 22:14). Isaiah 52:8 and 62:6 anticipate such a city. However, no doubt of far greater significance for the security of the city, the light of the presence of God and the Lamb is sufficient at all times for there to never be any need for the gates to be closed (Revelation 21:23-27). These permanently open gates face in all directions (21:13) ensuring access to the all nations and their glory (21:24, 26). The measurements of the walls that surround the city indicate enormous strength and trustworthy security. The walls represent security, safety, freedom (Isaiah 32:16-20), holiness and purity, with no risk at all of anything entering that does not belong.

### **Revelation 21:24-26**

(24) The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. (25) Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. (26) People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations (Revelation 21:24-26).

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<sup>85</sup> Numbers 34, Joshua 18-19, Psalm 16:5-6, 104:9, Proverbs 15:25, Isaiah 10:13.

<sup>86</sup> Nehemiah, Psalm 51:18, 122:7, 144:14, Isaiah 26:1-2, 56:5, 60:18, 62:6.

Revelation 21:24-26 anticipates the incorporation into the new heaven/earth of kings and nations with all ‘the glory and honour of the nations’ (v. 26). Several points need to be established to see how this expectation contributes to the questions of how exactly the new heaven/earth is brought into reality.<sup>87</sup>

Many commentators tend to minimize the point. They mostly discuss three particular issues; whether or not this passage suggests universalism, assumptions about how nations and kings might glorify God, and what it means to be in or out of the city. They briefly note the clear reference back to Isaiah 60-66, and to Isaiah 60 in particular, but without considering how John understands Isaiah to provide the substance for his brief reference.

Bauckham discusses extensively the place of the nations in God’s purposes in Revelation (1993b:238-337). The ‘Conversion of the Nations’ will see all groupings of humankind, ‘every tribe and language and people and nation’,<sup>88</sup> turned around from offering their all to Babylon to offering it all to God. Bauckham argues that this is a collective or representative universalism and not an individual one (1993a:138-40, 1993b:313 n.100<sup>89</sup>); a distinction which some commentators who focus on individual universalism<sup>90</sup> largely ignore (e.g. Boring 1989:226-231, RL Thomas 1995:476-478).<sup>91</sup>

Osborne (2002:763), following Beale (1999:1095-1101), states that John’s change in language from ‘wealth’ in Isaiah 60:5, 11, 61:6 to ‘glory’ in Revelation 21:24 & 26 is a

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<sup>87</sup> Note the discussion by Barton on ‘The Unity of Humankind’ and relevant literature (2004:233-258). His focus is on persons rather than nations but nevertheless, once the collective nature of human life is appreciated, provides a valuable endorsement of the place of nations within the vision of New Jerusalem.

<sup>88</sup> Revelation 5:9 and variants at 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, 17:15.

<sup>89</sup> ‘From 21:8, 27, 22:15, it is quite clear that unrepentant sinners have no place in the New Jerusalem.’

<sup>90</sup> That is, all individuals will be included regardless of faith or repentance.

<sup>91</sup> See McNichol (2011) for an extensive discussion on the significance of the nations in the thrust of the material in Revelation. For a challenge to Bauckham’s conclusion see Schnabel (2002:243-271).

shift from 'literal riches' to 'worship'. Mounce claims a shift in the imagery from literal to symbolic significance (1998:397). Such interpretations reflect a false dichotomy as if the glorifying of God cannot involve anything from the material realm but is only in some way spiritual or verbal. Given the substance of Isaiah 60-66, John's point seems far more comprehensive.<sup>92</sup> In these chapters, the wealth of the nations includes flocks and herds, silver and gold, forests and renewed cities. John's vision is that everything of a nation's wealth and glory is presented to God. This wealth no longer glorifies the nation and its king, nor Babylon and the beast, but rather is purified and brought into the new world so that it too might take its place in the honouring of God. In the new heaven/earth, all creation is the glory of God.

This is a new heaven/earth in which 'all that is human is taken up and transformed' (Boring 1989:220): a 'continuity' which 'redeems and makes worthwhile every effort in our little this-worldly lives to have a decent city' made possible by the coming down into human space of the New Jerusalem (Boring 1989:220-221). Here is 'a sanctification of the whole world order of this created world and its products' (Beasley-Murray 1978:329). For AF Johnson, 'John sees a vision of social life, bustling with activity' because 'Life in the age to come will certainly involve continuing activities and relationships that will contribute to the glory of the Holy City throughout eternity' (1981:598).

Mouw comprehensively explores the meaning of the inclusion of the glory of the nations and their kings in the new heaven/earth (2002). Building upon the descriptions given by Isaiah for the New Jerusalem, he notes in particular the extent to which a nation's life that was represented by the kings of ancient times and the wide ranging

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<sup>92</sup> Likewise Isaiah 2:2, 11:10-12, 42:1, 43:9, 49:6, 51:5, 52:10, 15, 55:5, 56:7. See Aune (1998:1170-1173) for a comprehensive survey of expectations for the place of the nations in Jewish hopes.

expressions of the wealth of a nation. Just as the weapons of war are redeemed into ploughs (Isaiah 2:4), so all that is redeemable will be made suitable for inclusion in the holy city (Mouw 2002:40-41). Isaiah's expectations are not for some other world but for the earth in which he lived to be radically reshaped and renewed. Kings and nations are cultural, political, social, economic and geographical realities. Their inclusion in the new heaven/earth will require considerable overhaul; their 'identities' and 'functions, transformed' (Mouw 2002:40-41). John speaks not of a whole new set of kings and nations but, like Isaiah, of those kings and nations that already exist, though previously lost in rebellion. Furthermore, confirmation of this transition is in the movement of kings and nations from outside to inside the city.<sup>93</sup> Isaiah's call for the gates of the earthly city to be opened for the righteous nation to enter (26:2) also integrates this earth with the expectations of Revelation 21:24-26.<sup>94</sup>

The argument for dissolution fails to attend to the substance of John's reference to the kings and nations by not incorporating the full vision of Isaiah into understanding John's vision. So the hope for the earth and its nations is missed. John rather picks up Isaiah's hope for a real transformation of the earth on which he lived in which the kings and nations are in every way transformed and sanctified so perfectly that they cannot but express the glory of God and so take their place within the city of God. So

Bauckham concludes:

Creation has thus a moral and religious goal – its dedication to God fulfilled in God's holy presence – and also an aesthetic goal – its beauty fulfilled in reflecting the divine glory. The latter is just as theocentric as the former. The new creation, like the old, will have its own God-given beauty, but will be even more beautiful through its evident reflection of God's own splendour. Similarly, the nations and the kings will enjoy their own glory - all the goods of human culture - the more through

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<sup>93</sup> People in nations and communities will continue to need to organize themselves. Order in social, economic and cultural life is integral to being human and there is every reason to conclude that renewed humanity in the new heaven/earth will be similar. However government in future shapes up under Christ – 'I will make peace your governor and righteousness your ruler.' (Isaiah 60:17) – like the weapons of war it will be transformed into whatever most serves the ongoing national life of the future global city (Revelation 22:2).

<sup>94</sup> See Isaiah 52:1 with regards to what must not be allowed to enter (Revelation 21:8, 27, 22:3, 15).

dedicating it to God's glory. He will be 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28), not through the negation of creation, but through the immediacy of his presence to all things (1993a:141).

### **Revelation 22:1-2**

(1) Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (2) through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:1-2).

Commentators recognize that the Garden of Eden features in the imagery of Revelation 22:1-2. Various other Old Testament passages provide further clarity as to what the imagery conveys.<sup>95</sup> The focus in this vision is the river that flows from God to the whole earth; that is, to the nations of the earth. It is not that each of these Old Testament images (water, rivers, trees, life) is independent of the others but rather a matter of strong traditions of overlapping imagery such that just a brief reference to one inevitably suggests the full breadth of the Edenic world. The frequency of the use of this imagery suggests that the Garden was an established and familiar feature for Old Testament people in their expectations of life when God's blessing flows in abundance. Dumbrell (2001a, 2001b) and Alexander (2008) describe at length the Edenic character of the new-creation narrative from Genesis to Revelation.<sup>96</sup> 'The garden of God, the sanctuary at the center, manifested the potential for the world as a whole. In this sense, the garden served as a witness to the full purposes of God for humankind and the world.' (Dumbrell 2001b:277) 'The basic direction of Old Testament eschatology is clear, having been set on course by the narrative in Genesis 2 of Adam's role in Eden' (Dumbrell 2001b:49).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Genesis 1-3, Isaiah 51:3, Ezekiel 28:12-14, 31:3-18, 36:35, 47:1-12, Joel 2:3, as well as Isaiah 11:6-9 and the many other descriptions of environmental renewal that Messiah will bring.

<sup>96</sup> See also Beale's extensive description of Eden as setting the scene for Revelation 22:1-2 (2004:66-80).

<sup>97</sup> Details of extra-biblical Judaic background material for the river or water of life, Eden, Paradise and the tree of life can be found in Aune (1175-1178), Beale (1999:1104-1111), Boring (1989:213-224), Osborne (2002:768-772).



Revelation's portrayal of the river bringing healing to the nations suggests a global perspective which echoes Eden in Genesis. The river fills Eden by separating into four to water the then-known world, suggestive of a river system which waters the whole earth (cf. Genesis 2:6). With allusions to the four corners of the earth, 'Four' suggests 'the idea of completeness and universality of the river' (Wenham 1987:64). These river waters make possible the abundance of the Garden, and the fullness of life in the new heaven/earth (Genesis 2:5, 15). Wilcock states, 'The miraculous river flows, in fact, through the length of Scripture' (1991:211). In those passages that provide background imagery to Revelation 22:1-2, the imagery captures the river in particular and the abundance of water in general.<sup>98</sup> Psalm 46:4 states, 'There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.' In fact, water has been a major and consistent theme throughout the narrative of Old and New Testaments. See Appendix A.8:394-395. for an overview of water and its use as an imagery for abundance.

Ezekiel 47:1-12 is an obvious primary source for the imagery of the river of life: in turn shaped by the Eden description in Genesis 2-3. The references to Eden in Ezekiel 28:12-14, 31:3-18, 36:35 indicate what Edenic restoration could be. Revelation 22:1-2 is much briefer, clearly referring back to Ezekiel to draw the whole of Ezekiel's vision forward into the vision of new heaven/earth. The abundance of fish and fruit is excessive and the restoration of fertility and health to the environment is clear.

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<sup>98</sup> See also Beale (1999:1105, 2004:196-198). Osborne's claim that Beale allegorizes the river as a reference to the Holy Spirit (2002:769) misrepresents him. Beale certainly recognizes the Holy Spirit; 'Though the Holy Spirit may be in mind, the water metaphor primarily represents the life of eternal fellowship with God....' (1999:1104) However, his full description of the Eden imagery in Revelation 22:1-2 is clearly inclusive of all that is included in new creation (1103-1111).

Yet, Revelation adds to Ezekiel's vision in five profound ways effectively drawing the reader back into the Old Testament. The first is in the source of the river: the temple in Ezekiel 47:1 and in Revelation 22:1 'the throne of God and of the Lamb.' Revelation 21 makes clear that the temple is redundant because God Himself is fully present. This fits well with various earlier instances which portray life flowing like water from God Himself.<sup>99</sup>

Secondly, the reference to the 'tree of life' has clear associations with the 'tree of life' that stood in the Garden of Eden to which access was blocked by the Cherubim once Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden (Genesis 2:9, 3:22-24). Death came from a denial of opportunity to eat of this tree but in Christ's resurrection death is defeated (1 Corinthians 15:54-55, Hebrews 2:14) and life is promised in great fullness (John 10:10, Colossians 2:9-13). In the Garden there seems to have been just one such tree. Ezekiel refers to a 'a great many trees' on both sides of the river (47:7) and 'all kinds of trees' that bear fruit monthly such is the effect of this river's water (47:12). Revelation 22:2 also indicates an abundance of such fruit trees<sup>100</sup> because they line both sides of the river of life, but adds they are trees 'of life'.<sup>101</sup> So these trees represent freedom from death and its sorrows (Revelation 21:4); their great number ensures that, no matter where one is in the new heaven/earth, life is readily accessible. The imagery serves a dual purpose; in general reference to the abundance and richness of life in the new

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<sup>99</sup> Psalm 36:8-9, 46:4, 63:1-2, 104:12-13, Isaiah 12:2-3, 33:21, Jeremiah 2:13, 17:13 Joel 3:18, Hosea 6:3.

<sup>100</sup> 'These trees will "produce καρπὸς δώδεκα (... *twelve* kinds of fruit), yielding its fruit every month." This goes beyond Ezek. 47: 12, where the fruit trees bear fruit every month but not twelve different kinds of fruit (see Aune 1998b: 1178). The mention of "twelve kinds" certainly alludes to a twelve-month calendar and especially to the seasons for growing crops. Normally, fruit appears at its proper season, but in the final Eden there will be no seasons, and abundant fruit will be available every month' (Osborne 2002:772).

<sup>101</sup> Beale concludes that while the singular is used in 22:2 for the 'tree of life' it should be understood as 'a collective reference' so that it fits with the image of both banks of the river lined with such trees (1999:1106). Likewise, AF Johnson (1981:599), Hendriksen (1967:206), Osborne (2002:771), Aune (1998:1177). The description in Revelation 22:2 is of many trees while the collective singular for tree alludes to the singular tree in Genesis 2:9, 3:22-24.

heaven/earth and in particular, to the way eternal life negates death. Water, life, fish (Ezekiel 47:9-10), fruit; ‘Together they represent the food and drink of eschatological life’ (Bauckham 1993a:133). Both explicitly and implicitly, the new heaven/earth will bring so much more beyond Eden’s excellent beginnings.<sup>102</sup>

Thirdly, the river is ‘as bright as crystal’ (Revelation 22:1). Following the previous statement (21:27) that nothing ‘impure’ can enter this city, and the allusion to the presence of God and the work of the Spirit in the phrase ‘living water’, Beale notes the ‘purifying’ quality of the water and concludes, ‘The water purifies away people’s sins so that they may enter into the intimate presence of God, as portrayed in 22:3-5 (so similarly 22:14, 17)’ (1999:1104).<sup>103</sup>

Fourthly, added to Ezekiel’s vision is the promise that the leaves for healing will be for ‘the nations’ (Revelation 22:2, cf. 2:7, 22:14). The presence of the nations in the new heaven/earth speaks of a global impact. The first Garden filled a corner of the earth; this new garden of healing for the nations fills the whole earth (Isaiah 49:6).<sup>104</sup>

Finally, the river in Revelation flows down the centre of the main street of the city.<sup>105</sup>

Implicit here is a complete integration of life: not city life and river/Edenic life as distinct and different experiences but everything of each incorporated into the other,

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<sup>102</sup> Proverbs refers to God’s ‘wisdom’ as a ‘tree of life’ by which the foundations of the earth are laid (Proverbs 3:18-19). ‘The fruit of righteousness’ (11:30), ‘a desire filled’ (13:12), and ‘a gentle tongue’ (15:4) are each said to be ‘a tree of life’. However, this seems to be less life-and-death in character than the tree in the Garden and more a practical wisdom listing some of those things which enhance life.

<sup>103</sup> Note Ezekiel 36:25-27. Beale describes the ‘living water’ as ‘pure’ (1999:1104) yet also acknowledges the fact that ‘καθαρον’ (22:1) is absent from nearly all manuscripts. Osborne states ‘that this water is “bright as crystal” parallels “the crystal-clear sea of glass” of 4:6, the “crystal-clear jasper” of 21:11, and the “goldlike pure glass” of 21:18, with the added image of “brightness” emphasizing the glory of the final Eden’ (2002:769).

<sup>104</sup> In contrast to Eden ‘the consummated garden will exist on an escalated scale in comparison to the first’ (Beale 1999:1103, cf. 2004:368).

<sup>105</sup> See Osborne (2002:770-771) and Beale (1999:1104) for discussion on possible layout configurations for the river, street and trees.

‘assimilated’ concludes Yarbro Collins (1996:131). Hendriksen similarly concludes that ‘the garden is inside the city’ (1967: 206). Beale notes the parallels with Isaiah 35:1-9 (and similarly 43:18-20 & 41:17-20) in which the desert is enriched with streams of water and through this desert stretches a highway that is safe and pure for the recipients of God’s healing and liberation to make their way to Zion (1999:1105). The blend of city and garden in the imagery generates a vision of a garden-city large enough to embrace all the nations.

### **Revelation 22:3**

Nothing accursed will be found there any more (Revelation 22:3).

It is fitting that such a statement comes as the concluding description of the new heaven/earth. It brings an *inclusio* to the narrative; ending what began in Genesis 3. ‘With the curse of the fall having been removed (v. 3), the divine intention of Genesis 1-2 is recaptured’ (Dumbrell 2001b:345). Dumbrell understands the curse in Revelation 22:3 as inclusive of the whole of Genesis 3:14-24. Bauckham (1993b:316-318) argues that this does not refer to particular consequences of the curse but the ending of the curse itself. The sufferings of humankind, not least of which is death, and the brokenness of the earth that resulted from human sin, were the product of this curse. The richness of life portrayed in Revelation 21-22 now realized simply because the curse is no more.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Aune dwells too much on the ‘curse of war’ as he understands Zechariah 4:11 and neglects to give adequate weight to the allusions to Genesis 3 and other passages, including the two preceding verses (Revelation 22:1-2). Consequently, his conclusions focus too much on war and insufficiently on the reason (the removal of God’s curse against sin) why war is no longer a risk (1998:1178-1179). While recognising that the language of ‘curse’ alludes to Zechariah 14:11, Bauckham demonstrates that Isaiah 34 and Jeremiah 50-51 are stronger backgrounds given the frequency with which these two passages are referenced in Revelation. ‘Thus Revelation 22:3a recalls the judgement of the nations that worshipped the beast and opposed God’s Kingdom, but declares that, with the coming of God’s Kingdom, the nations which have been converted to the worship of God and the acknowledgement of his rule never again fear his judgement.’ (1993b:318) Having spoken of the ‘healing of the nations’ in the context of Edenic imagery, this concept is explained by the statement that the horrors of war and judgement against the nations will no longer be applicable (Beale 1999:1112).

With the removal of all that necessitates the curse (Revelation 21:1, 8, 27, 22:14-15), the decree of condemnation (Genesis 3:14-24) no longer has a place. The ultimate result of the curse, death, is no more (21:4). The earth finally is liberated from the bondage to decay (Romans 8:21) and free to be the world God intended. In fact, even if this reference to the curse's ending were absent, we would assume it to be so. Everything throughout Revelation 21:1-22:3 is evidence of a curse-free new heaven/earth. The most telling evidence of the curse-free status of this renewed earth is the presence of heaven and the New Jerusalem (21:1-2, 10ff), and the presence of the throne of God and of the Lamb (21:3, 5, 22-23, 22:3).<sup>107</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The imagery of Revelation 21-22 has a rich history beginning in Genesis and enhanced in various ways throughout both Testaments. With each brief reference or allusion to earlier material, Revelation 21-22 draws into its vision a great wealth of detailed expectation including the substance of Zion and Eden as portrayed throughout the Old Testament. The effect is to produce a far grander vision of new heaven/earth than simply the particular details of these two chapters. The imagery captures the trajectory of the narrative and presents a full restoration of the triangle of relationships broken in Genesis 3, combined with a full appreciation of the created order. John has captured in just over one chapter what developed over centuries in the earlier books of the Bible. With understanding of this wealth of material, it becomes clear that John's vision is detailed and exhilarating; rich with both the familiarity of this earth and the visionary mysteries of heaven and so much more.

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<sup>107</sup> For further elaborations on these conclusions, see Beale (1999:1112-1113), Osborne (2002:772-773), Mounce (who features the privilege stated in v. 4, unlike Moses, of being free to see the face of God. 1998:400), Boring (1989:218), Alexander (who develops at length the ecological implications of the curse's removal. 2008:157-163).

So how big is this heaven and earth garden-city? Large enough to incorporate all the nations. The city dimensions are expansive enough to include the nations; nations which spread across all the earth and which are about land as much as people and culture. The imagery does not tell all but does point towards a vision of the whole earth filled with heaven, with new creation, with the presence of God, and with this global garden-city. In practical terms, the imagery suggests that the whole earth (with its diverse land masses separated by oceans) will be filled with a collective of garden cities and communities, large and small, networked and integrated together by the all-filling presence of God and by the living and life-giving river that flows throughout the nations.

Consistent with the Biblical narrative of the earth woven inextricably into the dealings of God with humankind, Revelation 20:11-22:5 presents a transition into new heaven/earth in which the New Jerusalem descends and fills the existing heavens and earth, thereby radically renewing everything. The relational triangulation that we have been tracing through the narrative remains intact: what was for a time fractured is now fully healed; what was for a time dis-integrated is now re-integrated. As Dumbrell states, 'The separation between heaven and earth and the binary disjunctions of the first creation are forever gone' (2001b:344). In Revelation 20-22 a series of events describe how this new reality comes into being and the imagery points beyond mere technical detail to the almost indescribable glory of the perfect integration of heaven and earth.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> This is an integration of city and garden, the temple-like presence of God in the global city of nations in which the riches of all creation give voice to the glory of God even as the people of God participate in this new creation free from the curse of the old order.

The seven items in Revelation 21-22 of what will not be present in the new heaven/earth enable us to see what is discontinuous,<sup>109</sup> while the entry of the wealth and glory of the nations point to a real and substantial continuity from this earth into the new. The images used by John flow from earthy expectations of new heaven/earth in Isaiah and other Old Testament hopes thereby reinforcing the argument for a substantial continuity of this earth into the new earth. Here is consistency with the significant level of continuity in the resurrection body of Jesus. In both, the heavenly enhances the earthly realities; these are not lost but given new and glorious qualities.<sup>110</sup>

The judgement in all its thoroughness and severity sets the scene for renewal, as all who align with the whore-like city and the powers that feed her are condemned and removed absolutely. Death itself is likewise removed as are all those realities that represent death. Into this cleaned up creation comes the fullness of heaven and all within it. The familiar and the mysterious in the mix of continuous and the discontinuous elements are all present in the vision even as, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever' (Revelation 11:15).

The extent to which this transition may or may not involve physical catastrophe does not appear to be John's concern. It is not that the imagery denies the possibility but rather that it is not the point. In the many visions of judgement in the chapters leading up to Revelation 21, the judgement is measured, constrained and focussed. The imagery at times is extreme but the impact is limited to all who oppose God. John's descriptions of judgement say little on what might happen beyond Babylon and those aligned with

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<sup>109</sup> See above Chapter8:269n59.

<sup>110</sup> See the discussion on I Corinthians 15:35-55 in Chapter 4:129-138.

her. The coming of God in judgement by whatever means<sup>111</sup> has often had real destructive impact upon the earth. But, in reverse manner, the coming of God to bless and restore has brought a rich abundance to the earth. Revelation 21-22 has a vision for new heaven/earth that features this rich abundance of God's blessing. Consistent with the well-established trajectory of the Biblical narrative, John presents us with a comprehensive restoration of the earth to become more than it has ever been before.

While various aspects of the new earth may be unknown, the better the understanding of the current created order, the better appreciated is the future earth. Simply by knowing that the future will be here on this good earth, and by understanding the extent of the goodness of the created order, much can be appreciated already of what is to come. Yet it is essential to remain open-minded because much also has yet to be seen. Wise anticipation of the future will hold these realities together in healthy tension without sacrificing one for the other.<sup>112</sup>

Revelation anticipates a global garden community, temple-like, city-like and garden-like, including all the best of every nation, from land to the breadth of human achievement, transformed perfectly into a fitting dwelling place for God and the Lamb. In everything is God's brilliant glorious holiness. The life to come, everything lived out in fellowship with God, will be a life of rich diversity and productivity: humankind restored to creative and responsible vicegerency in which all the broken relationships of Genesis 3 have been reconciled. The vision is one in which in the triangulation of God,

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<sup>111</sup> Theophanies, invading armies, earthquakes, plagues, and extreme weather conditions of storms, droughts and floods.

<sup>112</sup> Bauckham and Hart discuss this tension at length (1999:95-108). They explore the ways John has created an ambiguity by overlaying Isaiah's vision with transcendent realities particularly through the end of death. Perhaps they lean a little more towards an emphasis on the mysteries of discontinuity while still maintaining the value of the imagination to explore the earthly character of the vision.



humankind and non-human creation, each one is free from all constraints caused by sin and judgement. John has successfully stimulated our imaginations and stirred our hopes.



## Summary of Theological and Hermeneutical Findings

### Implications of the Alternative Conclusion

#### The Locus of Mission

Each chapter above asked whether or not the Biblical material addressed in the chapter confirmed or contradicted the proposal presented in Chapter One.<sup>1</sup> Before moving to the consequent missional implications, these chapter-by-chapter conclusions need integration in a summary of the earth's future in the theological schema of the Bible.

Chapter One claimed that throughout the Biblical narrative a substantial relational triangulation exists between God, humankind and the non-human creation that gives value, significance and hope for the earth itself. This was examined at length not only in exploring the sweep of the Biblical material in general but also through a close critique of those texts traditionally used to argue for the earth's eventual dissolution or annihilation. In the first chapter, the question was raised 'of whether or not there is an intrinsic pattern or configuration, a 'world view' (NT Wright 1992), 'logic' (Middleton, 2006), 'trajectory' (Sugden<sup>2</sup>), or 'continuum' (Turner 1992), that integrates, shapes and flavours the Biblical narrative throughout which has sufficient strength as to provide a hermeneutical lens for the reading of all the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 1:14-17.

<sup>2</sup> In conversation.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 1:16-17.

## SUMMARY OF THEOLOGICAL FINDINGS

Consistent, cohesive and strong evidence recurs throughout the narrative of this earth from creation to new creation demonstrating that this is not a separate story, nor merely just a prop for the real drama, but an integral feature of the salvation history that flows through the whole Biblical text. Creation matters. The earth is corrupted by human sin, the innocent victim of God's disciplining of humankind as well as the means by which God brings blessing and curse. The curse of Genesis 3 significantly affects all relationships in the triangle and the earth's wellbeing is allied inextricably to the salvation of God's people. If grace and blessing prevail then this earth has a real future beyond the final judgement because the earth features recurrently as integral to the ultimate purposes of God to bless His people and liberate all from the ravages of sin and evil. The goodness of creation and its joy in praising God is repeatedly affirmed. Many statements affirm the permanence of the earth. The earth mourns over its current state but rejoices in expectation of its emancipation and renewal. The ending of the ground's curse brings new growth and so mountains and trees celebrate (Isaiah 55:12-13). This has no suggestion of a doomed creation.

This earth has a strong presence in the expectations of the Kingdom in general and New Jerusalem in particular, in the nature of Christ's incarnation, in the already commenced new-creation, and in the anticipations of Paul for what is inevitable if Christ has truly been exalted to the right hand of God and is thereby Lord of heaven and earth. This earth is home to nations and human productivity (that despite its various imperfections reflects the value of the created order) and of these, all that is redeemable is expected to be included in the new heaven/earth. The earth's place in the eschatological thrust of the narrative strongly presents the reader with a 'trajectory' towards the earth's restoration,

a 'logic' that sets up a 'world view' that provides a valid theological framework for all reading of Scripture, and a 'continuum' in which consistency in the Biblical witness is demonstrated. This perspective on the whole Biblical narrative sees this earth as included in the ultimate purposes of God rather than denied a place and excluded.

Creation also inspires much metaphoric imagery, with the cosmos in particular employed to express figuratively the weight of God's more dramatic and heavy visitations. Whenever such imagery is used, the context consistently points away from a literalistic meaning towards metaphorical and apocalyptic expressions of the absolute thoroughness and inescapability of God's judgement. The recurring use of this cosmological language from one context to the next, including its use for events long past, further reinforces the figurative character of the descriptions.

The Biblical writers regard the creation as a given; they do not need to argue for its value or its integration into the teleological thrust of the narrative. The creation is present as a permanent player in the narrative, sometimes in the forefront and sometimes more assumed, but always essential for seeing the big picture of God's developing relationship with humankind. The triangulation as described in Chapter One is deeply embedded throughout the narrative. Perhaps not mentioned at every point but it appears to be very real in the conceptual world of the Biblical writers.<sup>4</sup>

In the triangulation of relationships presented through the Canon, liberation of the earth from the curse of human sin must accompany the liberation of God's people from sin and judgement. Salvation for Israel and the nations is both liberation from judgement's

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<sup>4</sup> Murray's search for a 'cosmic covenant', and commonly understood sense of cosmic order, is consistent with this conclusion. Murray's evidence also supports the idea of a conceptual world in which right ordering of the cosmos requires right ordering of the relationship between humankind and the creation (Murray 1992).

condemnation and liberation for the fullness of life in Christ in the renewed heaven/earth. Romans 8 captures this triangulation. Paul pulls together the recurring Old Testament theme of the ebb and flow of God's curse and blessing as both earth and people groan for the day of release from sin and its consequences. Paul declares that the coming glory will be shared by both the children of God and the creation. The future of one is the future of the other and both wait with hope for the freedom to come.

Genesis begins with an expectant vision in which an excellent creation develops further as humankind multiplies, spreads out and works towards Edenic qualities to the environment as they go. The rebellion of Satan and humankind threatens everything of what is and what could be. God persists in His vision for the earth in general and humankind in particular, therein is His glory most profoundly expressed. The Biblical narrative tells the story of God's patient work to restore and enhance 'all things', to be reconciled to 'all things' and to renew and transform 'all things' until heaven and earth are integrated as one in the new creation which is one and the same as the New Jerusalem and the new Eden of Revelation 21-22. God's people will be restored to full humanity and this requires an engagement with the earth as God's vicegerent image bearers who work in God's creation.

## **SUMMARY OF HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES**

The Biblical hermeneutics employed reveal the essential difference between the contradictory understandings of the earth's future. In the previous chapters is sufficient evidence for each of the following claims.

Theological readings of the text are right and valuable but should never cause neglect of the essential exegesis of literal interpretation.<sup>5</sup> While literal and theological readings must dialogue together, presuming too quickly how best to understand the text risks interpretation based on world view or theological position. This has been consistently the case for particular texts used to argue for the earth's extinction at the Parousia. Too often even the possibility of the earth's continuance is not mentioned, let alone allowed to be a serious possibility for the exegesis.

There is no justification for the claim, normative amongst classic Dispensationalists, that words have precise and fixed meanings that do not change from text to text as they are worked into phrases and sentences. MD Williams calls this claim the 'principle of terminological absolutism' (2003:90). No language is like this and certainly not between different authors in different contexts at different times. This is particularly true for the language of destruction, dissolution and passing away. Too often, a literalistic denial of figurative imagery is privileged over all evidence to the contrary. Claims that words in Biblical prophecy always mean the same and not used figuratively are based on an externally derived presumption and not on the evidence of the Biblical text.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the figurative is more likely to be utilised in such passages using imagery already familiar which developed out of past climactic events. Familiar metaphors and

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<sup>5</sup> As noted in Chapter 1:27-28, true 'literal' interpretation embraces all the best of exegetical practice including taking seriously the literary qualities and the context of each text. This contrasts with the popular understanding that has been shaped by Dispensationalism's redefinition of literal into what is best referred to as 'literalistic' or 'ultra-literal'. In this usage, literal means prosaic with words having fixed and non-figurative reference regardless of how much evidence there might be that this is contrary to the probable intention of the author.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'literalistic' is often used to distinguish genuine claims of literal interpretation from those claims for literal that in fact neglect much of the exegetical evidence in favour of an inflexible and non-figurative use of language. The latter is termed 'literalistic' or 'ultra-literal'. For example, for the use of 'literalistic' see Vanhoozer (1998); for the use of 'ultra-literalism' see Sizer (2007). In an annihilationist position a literalistic denial of figurative imagery is privileged over all evidence to the contrary. Yet, there is no evidence anywhere at all in the Canon to suggest that all language in prophetic material cannot be figurative nor any evidence in the Bible to suggest that all prophetic material provides us with a technical and prosaic description. Yet this claim is one of the lynchpins of the Dispensationalist hermeneutic.

imagery better describe the future and its unknowns. The apocalyptic background of much of the relevant imagery encourages such usage. Ample evidence from the context indicates that care is needed to discern how exactly an author is using the key words. Words are not uniform in use though consideration of how words serve the thrust of the whole passage usually brings adequate clarity. The context, immediate and wider, is an essential discipline in all literal interpretation including sorting through the possible nuances of word usage. Texts said to support annihilation are often used without considering the flow of ideas and rhetoric in a passage as if the author has changed the subject just for a verse or two simply by introducing cosmological language.

This conclusion is consistent with J Barr's criticism of the 'failure to get to grips with the semantic value of words in their contexts'; a failure to distinguish between word and the concept signified by the word in context (1961:207). Much language has a real variability in its usage such that context and genre are indispensable in determining meaning. In similar fashion, Becker writes of the 'catalytic' impact of language, particularly within an apocalyptic perspective, to stimulate thought beyond narrow wooden or bland meanings (1990:xiii). Quoting Steiner, and advocating an 'idiolectic' appreciation of language, Pennington notes that 'no two human beings ever use words and syntax in exactly the same way. Instead, "each living person draws, deliberately or in immediate habit, on two sources of linguistic supply: the current vulgate corresponding to his level of literacy, and a private thesaurus.... They form what linguists call an 'idiolect'.'" (2007:6-7).

Previous chapters presented many examples of the importance of context for interpreting cosmological imagery. Often the complete destruction argument treats one or two verses with cosmological language within a larger sequence of ideas as if they



are virtually stand-alone statements. The argument does not consider that such language in the prophets is used of past events, and therefore cannot be a technical description of what happened to sun or moon or stars on that occasion.<sup>7</sup> Context is essential for exploring the essential ideas of a passage, as variations in genre, rhetoric and figurative imagery change from one to the next. These cannot be ignored if a truly literal reading of the text is desired. The wider context of Biblical and extra-Biblical literature provides evidence of how particular genres typically work, especially prophetic and apocalyptic, and likewise how poetry and recurring figurative imagery are employed to convey ideas, stimulate the imagination and articulate the dramatic weight of events. This wider literary context is not usually a factor in exegesis favouring dissolution, except selectively to reference those texts presumed to support the same conclusion. The investigation of this research has shown repeatedly that this is a circular argument; the annihilationist (or dissolution) message of one used to justify the annihilationist interpretation of the other; and vice versa. When each of these texts is examined without such presumptions, context and imagery point away from technical cosmological descriptions and towards cosmological figurative imagery utilized to describe the inevitability, horror and inescapability of God's judgement.

Too often the figurative possibilities of texts are neglected. Hyperbole and metaphor are frequent in the descriptions of the end, particularly when apocalyptic in nature. Yet often the interpreter is so convinced already of the certainty of the dissolution of the earth that discounting the need for the standard disciplines of exegesis follows. Context, genre appreciation and the recognition of figurative language for what it is, are far more viable avenues for wise interpretation than rigid assumptions about word meanings combined with a denial of the figurative and rhetorical nature of the imagery presented.

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the fact that an annihilation interpretation of Psalm 102:26 is contrary to the thrust of the Psalm's hope for Zion is not considered. See Chapter 3:94-99.

The repetition and consistency of the findings for a literal interpretation that confirms transformation of this earth into the new earth, builds up a strong case for justifying a theological reading of the whole Bible through the lens or paradigm of the triangle of relationships.<sup>8</sup> In this triangulation an established Biblical world view provides a hermeneutical key for exegesis. It is a lens or world view that shapes interpretation towards understanding what the text contributes to how the earth has value and significance in the purposes of God. Consequently, if we wish to consider ‘spiritual interpretation’ then the triangle of relationships requires us to recognize a positive material dimension to all spiritual fulfilment as well as the reverse, a positive spiritual dimension to all material fulfilment.

Chapter One<sup>9</sup> noted the search in some ecotheology scholarship for an ecotheological hermeneutic. The prior question, as claimed there, is the matter of this earth’s value and whether or not it has a real future in the new heaven/earth. The ecotheological hermeneutic desired is much more difficult to sustain if God’s ultimate plan for the earth is its cessation. Since the explorations of the previous chapters conclude with real hope for this earth, the search for an ecotheological hermeneutic is on firm ground.

Most of commentaries examined for the previous chapters examine the text with either an excessively spiritualized perspective in which the creation is considered only if unavoidable (and then superficially), or within the pessimistic world view in which the creation is devalued and the earth doomed. Only a minority interpret in ways that give due regard to the textual material that addresses how the earth is actually a part of the narrative and, consequently, has theological significance. The theological conclusion of this research is that literal interpretation is greatly enhanced by giving proper attention

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<sup>8</sup> Chapter 1:14-17.

<sup>9</sup> Chapter 1:17, 36-37.

to the significance of the creation in all exegetical work and not presuming a negative stance or ignoring it in favour of other concerns. Likewise, theological interpretations of the Bible would benefit greatly by addressing the text through this lens of triangulation and thereby give due weight and value to the created order.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE ALTERNATIVE CONCLUSION**

What if the argument for the complete destruction of the earth is correct, that this earth as it is has no future? If true, then several major consequences are particularly challenging. Much unravels if this earth has no future in the purposes of God beyond the Parousia. The implications of the alternative perspective confirm and reinforce the importance for the continuance of this earth for the coming of the new heaven/earth.

**The Biblical narrative**, which strongly features the relationship of the earth with God and humankind, would take on a very different character and meaning if the final outcome was to destroy all relationships involving the earth. With the earth such a significant player in the drama, such a twist in the climax of the story would create an inconsistency in the plot. The narrative's hope for this earth is pivotal for much of what God promises for His people. An extinguished cosmos imposes a dissonance and incongruity upon the narrative thereby creating difficulties for theological consistency.

**The Bible.** A view of the Bible that regards the Canon as God-breathed, even in the idiosyncrasies of human authorship, raises the valid expectation of a reasonably unified perspective on major themes. Yet if the earth and the cosmos are dissolved, Scripture would appear to present us with competing and irreconcilable perspectives on the creation. Such a questioning of the unity and coherence of the Bible increases the

weight given to human authorship while lessening the weight and significance of the meaning of the Inspiration of Scripture. DG Peterson, referring to two different Biblical scholars with contradictory views on another matter, argues ‘from a canonical perspective the interpreter is bound to ask how the theology of .... and .... relate together. This question is especially necessary for evangelical commentators to ask, because we believe the same Spirit inspired both writers’ (1998:210).<sup>10</sup> It is reasonable to conclude that God would not leave us with contradictory teachings on such an important matter and therefore the capacity of God to inspire equally all the documents of the Canon becomes questionable. The alternative is to conclude that God intentionally presents us with two opposite world-views in the Bible, though one would then need to question why.<sup>11</sup>

**God.** The character of God is vitally important as is the expectation that God acts with consistent integrity. If God brings the earth to extinction then He becomes guilty of destroying that which He Himself declares to be good, which reveals His glory and gives Him pleasure, and which the Bible presents as the innocent victim of human sin and God’s curse. By implication God appears capricious and inconsistent, and His promises arbitrarily applied. If God has declared the creation to be good with great consistency throughout the Bible, and yet plans to destroy it, why would the new creation be safe in His hands? The assurances that give hope for the security of new creation are the same as those that assure us that the current earth is safe with him.

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<sup>10</sup> See also CJH Wright’s discussion on ‘a hermeneutic of coherence.’ (2004b:114-115)

<sup>11</sup> However, note Bauckham’s caution: ‘It is tempting to take the principle of a canonical hermeneutic, that the parts must be understood in the light of the whole, as a reason for simply suppressing the not readily assimilable parts. But these inescapable features of the actual narrative form of Scripture surely have a message in themselves: that the particular has its own integrity that should not be suppressed for the sake of a too readily comprehensible universal’ (2003:93).

**Creation.** Many statements in the Bible give great worth to the creation but this becomes questionable if it is only temporary. The earth is given intrinsic value, but if doomed to extinction from the beginning, how can confidence in these statements be sustained? And if these statements are unreliable, what about the other assurances that permeate the Biblical narrative? Here creation reflects God's glory. Yet God's glory within creation gives creation far more worth than would be implied if it were destined for total destruction. Creation has a voice, in fact multiple voices, that praises God. But this would be incoherent if creation praises the one who is going to obliterate it. This earth is both gift and inheritance for God's people. God is the one who follows through with and keeps His promises, but this becomes problematic if this earth has no future beyond the Parousia. The creation is promised its own freedom when God's people find theirs. Destruction negates this symbiotic relationship that recurs through the Bible and given precise definition in Romans 8. An annihilated creation is one intentionally deceived.

**Christology.** The *hypostatic union* has been celebrated over the centuries because this perfect integration of the divine and the human at the most profound level is formative for all Christian doctrine and practice. To be human is to be of the dust of the earth. If the earth is extinguished then Christ's incarnation appears Docetic or Adoptionist and His resurrection temporary. The perfect incorporation of full divinity and full humanity in Jesus cannot be maintained if the dust of the earth, the flesh integral to His personhood, has only temporal existence. If His resurrection lacks an enduring body how should we understand our hope for resurrection? If the incarnation is not truly human then no longer can Jesus truly represent humanity on the cross and in resurrection. 2,000 years of carefully developed Trinitarian soteriology becomes questionable if the flesh of the incarnation proves to be of insufficient value to be

preserved. Christology is at the heart of the matter and provides a hermeneutic for the reading of all Scripture. If a literal reading of the text cannot sustain such a Christology in which flesh/earth matters, then much of Christian doctrine becomes questionable.

**Anthropology.** As stated by Bauckham and Hart, physicality is an essential part of being human because in bodily resurrection there is an integrating reality for personhood, sociality and creation: ‘Not only is the body integral to human personal identity; it is also the medium of human sociality and of human solidarity with the rest of the material creation’ (1999:126-127). If the earth is devalued, as it must be if God plans to destroy it, then so is the physical dimension of being human. This changes and challenges understandings of the nature and essence of being human both for humankind in general and for Christ in particular. Furthermore, human restoration is incomplete without the earth restored because being fully human requires participation in the creation as God’s vicegerents. There is an earthiness in being human (a reality worthy of further research) but by devaluing the earth various facets of being human are devalued as a consequence.<sup>12</sup>

**Reconciliation and Liberation.** The vision of Colossians 1:15-20 is breath-taking in its scope. However, the reconciliation of all things, all of creation, in Colossians 1:15-20 becomes impossible alongside the earth’s destruction. If there is no liberation for which the creation longs (Romans 8:19-23) then the creation has been groaning for a hope that is not there. In turn, if Paul has been so off the mark, doubts follow for all his perspectives.

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<sup>12</sup> It is this writer’s observation through four decades of many Christians from multiple traditions and nationalities that many of the weaknesses being faced by the global church at present stem from an inadequate appreciation of what it means to be human. Much of this is founded in a kind of narrow focus on the spiritual to the neglect of a serious reflection on the full range of the dimensions of being human.

**Kingdom.** The promises of the Kingdom as developed throughout both Testaments include the sovereign rule of Christ over all of this earth and the fulfilment of His promises within every sphere of life and society including the environment in the new heaven/earth. This earth is the Kingdom inheritance of God's people. If the earth is doomed, then the Kingdom is denied much of its fulfilment.

**Discipleship.** The foundational truth for understanding discipleship is that now in Christ there is already a unity of heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). Verse 18 introduces the instruction to make disciples (vv. 19-20) by affirming that this unity provides shape and direction for discipleship. With a destroyed earth, this unity can no longer do so. The realm and nature of Christ's authority shapes the realm and character of discipleship.<sup>13</sup> If the earthly dimension is not worth including in the ultimate purposes of God in Christ, then discipleship's earthy significance greatly reduces and mission inevitably narrowed in scope. The various texts that speak of this same Lordship of Christ over heaven and earth become rather questionable for understanding discipleship if much of His realm in which we currently live, is only a temporary arrangement and not worth preserving.

**Hermeneutics.** We have already summarized the identified hermeneutical issues.<sup>14</sup> If the earth is annihilated, then for eschatological texts we must legitimize a hermeneutic in which all exegetical evidence for meaning is overridden by presumptions that devalue context, genre, and the wider theological narrative. Furthermore, this privileges figurative imagery interpreted non-figuratively over those texts with more propositional statements regarding the value of the earth and its security in God's hands. In turn, this

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<sup>13</sup> See the discussion in CJH Wright on the need for a whole Biblical theology to appreciate the significance of Jesus' authority in all of heaven and earth for an adequate understanding of discipleship (2004b:130-131).

<sup>14</sup> Chapter 9:300-305.

leads to hermeneutical ambiguity in that eschatological material is not easily distinguished from the rest as ultimately all of the Bible points forward to fulfilment in Christ. This denies context, immediate and canonical, its rightful place in shaping the meaning of texts. Consequently, any particular eschatological world-view is free to manipulate the text to suit the vested interests of a particular cosmology. In advocating the earth's dissolution hermeneutics becomes a more problematic and arbitrary exercise in that the disciplines of hermeneutics can be put aside whenever (1) the text is deemed to be prophetic and (2) the text poses a threat to an existing worldview.

**Dualism.** Expressions of holism recur within the holistic unity of the Trinity, in the holistic unity of the new heaven/earth, and in the integration of all things in Christ. The Spirit that Christ breathes into His disciples (John 20:22) is the same Spirit who 'renews the face of the earth' (Psalm 104:30). In Christ, holistic integration comes to all creation by breaking down the barriers caused by sin. Dualism, therefore, is the inevitable consequence of any position which dooms this earth.<sup>15</sup> When the physical realm is so undervalued that it is only worthy of destruction, then everything that involves the physical loses its importance and worth. This impacts, for example:

- a. What it means to be human in that the human body is an essential dimension of being a whole person.
- b. What it means to live in communities and nations as so much of life builds upon, is shaped by, and depends upon the material, everything from politics and economics through to psychology and family life.

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<sup>15</sup> Here there is circularity in that a dualistic world view devalues the earth and a devalued earth encourages dualism.



- c. What it means to be spiritual in that to be healthily human is to be an integrated whole including the body of flesh.<sup>16</sup>
- d. What it means to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of life and creation in that the physical world inspires so much of the best of creativity and beauty.
- e. What it means for marriage as sexual intimacy is one of its greatest expressions. If the physical has little value that God willingly dooms it to destruction then the physical act of marriage loses its value. The Gnostic response of either denial or indulgence is a logical consequence.
- f. What it means to serve in God's world in mission. If we are to be salt and light, to serve the poor and liberate the oppressed, to do good works and make known the Gospel, to witness to the world that hope in Christ is valid and good, then all our words and deeds are significantly diminished if all integral to the material realm has little value or hope.<sup>17</sup>

## **THE LOCUS FOR CHURCH AND MISSION**

The Biblical narrative expects the uniting of heaven and earth in new creation. What then is the locus of mission for God's people? What might be the primary, spatial reference point for mission, and in particular, is this locus earthly or heavenly, present or future?

Dyrness emphasizes that the future locus of heaven and earth has considerable significance, a necessary outcome, for mission practice now on earth:

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<sup>16</sup> For example, there is now enough known from brain research to appreciate that the human spirit, in its mental, emotional and behavioural expressions, does not function independently of the physical.

<sup>17</sup> The promise of forgiveness of sin depends on what is understood as included in the concept of sin. If most of human experience is earthy in nature, as it is, then a devalued earth lessens the weight of much that falls short of the glory of God.

The New Jerusalem represents finally a new and perfected created order, a "resurrection" of the earth that will match that of the body. But this creation - perfect in splendor and righteousness and radiant in beauty and life - will link heaven and earth in one reality. ... This home for God and man will be the ultimate source and *locus* of all creativity, the home for all the glory of the nations. ... This is the future that even now determines and shapes our present. For it is to this future order that we belong, and to which we are meant to point with every fibre of life and work. (Dyrness 1998:184. Emphasis added.)<sup>18</sup>

For some the present dominates the discussion of locus though not without some reference to eschatological considerations. Lincoln discusses Paul's argument in Galatians 4:26 in which the heavenly Jerusalem gives 'the church's life a transcendent point of reference as it is reflected in his depiction of the heavenly realm' (1981:29). Furthermore, 'Christ, the church's Lord, is in heaven and therefore the church is inextricably bound up with the heavenly order and cannot be dependent on any earthly city, whether it be Jerusalem, Antioch or Rome' (31). In practical terms, as Paul advocates in the next chapter (Galatians 5:1-26), the freedom from flesh for living in the Spirit, is the consequence of such a heavenly mindedness.

DG Peterson asks where the locus of the church might be but does not develop the implications of his position as much as he might. He argues for a heavenly locus because through the Spirit, those in Christ 'are bound into a new union with him as the heavenly Lord' (1998:206). He touches on the earthly and eschatological facets of this heavenly locus, but not strongly enough to remove a dualistic response from those who might be tempted to become a little too heavenly minded. The challenge in endorsing the heavenly locus as Peterson does is to not overstate it, and to recognize that all this changes when heaven and earth merge into one in New Jerusalem.

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<sup>18</sup> Mathewson (2003) also looks to the future stating that, 'Rev. 21.3 refers to the city-bride-people as the locus of God's presence' (56) and 'covenant dwelling' (95). His reference, not to mission as such but to the locus of God Himself, inevitably shapes how we understand *missio Dei* and the mission implications of the Kingdom of God. See also Harvey (1999).

In a similar way, though with a focus on land rather than church, Burge states that ‘the New Testament relocates the properties of the Holy Land and discovers them in Christ himself.’ ‘This explains why the New Testament applies to the person of Christ religious language formerly devoted to the Holy Land or the Temple. He is the new spatiality, the new locale where God may be met’ (2010:129-130). Unfortunately Burge does not develop what this means for the heaven and earth relationship now or in the future.

Spatially speaking, there are two realities. For now, the heavenly and the earthly are distant from each other. But Jesus, the ascended Lord of heaven and earth, now rules over both realms with a clear agenda to heal the breach. He is absent for now yet has a presence through His Word and Spirit, His name and His people. In future, this same Lord will bring heaven to earth and the binary nature of reality will cease. However, the locus, whether present or future, is Christ Himself rather than where He happens to be. In Christ, whether now or eschatologically speaking, there are practical responses for our earthly presence even while we are heavenly present in Him. He is the locus for both realms, now and forever, whether separate or unified. Christology, rather than geographical or temporal distinctions, is the central determinant for all mission.<sup>19</sup>

Although approached from a different perspective this is consistent with Hart’s conclusion on the locus of Christian life. Hart (1999) develops a different focus with the locus of ‘God’s transforming activity in human life’ being in the imagination that holds together ‘present and future, old and new creations, and the transitions between them’ (62). This imagination of the promise of hope is the ‘primary locus’ (76) and it is an imagination of the future new creation in Christ.

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<sup>19</sup> Bauckham, in discussing both centripetal and centrifugal movements in mission, likewise locates the reference point in Christ Himself rather than particular geography (2003:72-81).

Nevertheless, for the present, heaven and earth remain disassociated even as the heavenly Christ rules the earth *in absentia*. For missional thinking, there is much to be held together as a whole if we are to avoid sacrificing one reality for another: heaven or earth; the present or the future. When the whole is integrated then, as Bauckham and Hart state, ‘The more other-worldly the focus, it seems, the more this-worldly its relevance’ because eschatological perspectives most often grow out of real contexts of struggle (1999:193). To be truly heavenly minded is to be very earthy.

Sleeman’s work on the Ascension in Acts (2009), and the spatiality issues created by the absence of Christ, has much potential for further work on holistically conceptualizing mission engagement. He applies the spatial categories of Edward Soja to the Acts narrative. ‘Firstspace’ being what we perceive to be the actual geophysical spatial realities. ‘Secondspace’ is the range of ideas and descriptions by which we make sense of these firstspace relationships. ‘Thirdspace’ is how we think and live within the spatial realities of our lives. It is about praxis; how we hold it all together in the everyday of life, work and relationships. Firstspace and secondspace tend towards here or there whereas thirdspace gives greater freedom to think in terms of here and there without sacrificing one truth for another.

If the locus of mission is Christ Himself, and His purpose is to unite as one the present separate spatial realities of heaven and earth, then mission is enhanced by a conceptual framework which holds together as one the full range of realities in both. Thirdspace thinking may have the potential to provide such a framework: appreciating a matrix of meanings and spatial realities in the present while also being shaped by the future. In this way, the locus of mission in Christ Himself, together with the heavenly locus of His reign for now, can be rightly central to our earthly presence and mission even as being

heavenly minded effectively keeps ‘our feet firmly on the ground’ (Peterson 1998:209). With Christ as the primary locus, a thirdspace study on the *missio Dei* would be a very valuable piece of research.<sup>20</sup>

The practical expression of mission that holds these many facets together is the challenge of the final two chapters.

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<sup>20</sup> There seems to be a growing number of contributions to the discussion of thirdspace as well as an increasing use of ‘thirdspace’ within the name of various entities. While the fluid nature of the concept inevitably invites criticism, it is a concept which stimulates the kind of imaginative thinking that many find helpful.



## **Mission for the New Heaven/Earth:**

### **Hope, Imagination, Continuity, Contextualization.**

This is a transitional chapter following the construction of the theological shape of eschatology in the relational triangulation of God, humankind and non-human creation. In Chapter Eleven, we will explore the implications of this theology for mission that anticipates the future. However, mission application involves the challenge of translation from one context to another; from the Kingdom vision of new heaven/earth to the world in which we live: from the mix of certainties and uncertainties for the future to the specifics of time and place in our world of mission today. Four particular concerns are examined before addressing application.<sup>1</sup>

Many missiologists urge that mission practice should anticipate this future.<sup>2</sup> But how exactly might the future be known well enough without slipping into dubious speculation and fantasy? How might we translate a partial vision for the future into concrete mission practice in diverse contexts? For Hays, the key question here is how to stimulate ‘*an integrative act of the imagination*’ (1996:298. Emphasis original.). The value of Hays’ third task is that it highlights the importance of imagination for envisioning the future in and through mission. Appropriate imagination is one of the concerns of this chapter and essential in the practice of the next.

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<sup>1</sup> These concerns are integral to the ‘The Hermeneutical Task’ of Hays’ methodology. In this the translation of Biblical material to real but very different contexts involves imaginative metaphor-making to facilitate the kind of reflection necessary to produce best practice in mission.<sup>1</sup> Task 3 is a necessary phase of exploration between the Theological Tasks 1 and 2<sup>1</sup> and the everyday practice across diverse contexts in the Task 4 application.<sup>1</sup> Hays’ explores the hermeneutics of translating forward from the New Testament to diverse contemporary contexts; here the primary task is one of working back from the future. His emphasis may be different but he affirms the importance of ‘the eschatological people of God, prefiguring God’s healing transformation of the world’ (1996:469). The challenges of a partial vision of the fulfilment to come make this Task a particularly essential one.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 1:37-41.

The four primary areas of concern addressed in this chapter are the place of hope for both motivating and shaping Christian mission, the significance of imagination for this hope, continuity and discontinuity, and some facets of contextualization.

## **HOPE**

### **The Motivation of Hope**

Motivation and direction for mission are not just from what the created order reveals as good; not just because of the desire to be consistent with the character of God; not just because of the instructions, values and exhortations of the Bible; not just because love and compassion drive a practical response; not just because it is good for God's people to participate in the Gospel and Kingdom work of God in the present; but also because if hope is real then the hoped-for future will impact on the why, what and how of mission.

However, SN Williams (1989, 1990) and Chester (2006) have challenged the notion that hope is a primary factor in shaping mission, particularly those facets of mission involving social action. Their concerns centre on these four points:

1. The extent to which the future new heaven/earth can be known in advance is minimal and insufficient for guiding social action. However, the previous chapters argue that this is not the case. Volf argues, in response to Williams, that sufficient is known and expands the application from social to 'cultural, social and ecological engagement' (1990:31).



2. Those who advocate hope-based social action fail to distinguish between temporal hope and eschatological hope. While this may be the case, it simply highlights the need for clear expectations and a good understanding of the need for God's eschatological coming for change to be complete. In the already partially realized Kingdom, the distinction between temporal hope and eschatological hope is not precise. However, needed as such clarity might be, this does not invalidate the role of eschatological hope in motivation and practice.<sup>3</sup>
  
3. The advocates for eschatologically driven social action are unclear on how the achievements of mission and all other work in the social realm will be included in the new heaven/earth. The Bible is limited in what it says about this so it is not possible to explain in full. But the fact of this hope is not dependent on clear explanations of the process. Furthermore, the perspective of Williams and Chester is focussed more on the achievements of individuals rather than, as Volf argues, a more collective and multi-generational understanding of achievement (1990:31).<sup>4</sup>

Discussions in Williams and Chester about which books and music, which human achievements, will make it into the new earth are ultimately of little value. Even if one wanted to resolve such questions, hope is in the transforming work of God in Christ at the Parousia rather than how well we can speculate on such things. Furthermore this misses the point. Consistent with Paul's perspective (1 Corinthians 3:11-15), the point is not to generate speculation about what of human achievement

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<sup>3</sup> Bosch: 'We do distinguish between hope for the ultimate and perfect on the one hand, and hope for the penultimate and approximate, on the other. We make this distinction under protest, with pain, and at the same time with realism.' (1991:510)

<sup>4</sup> 'When we think about eschatological continuity, we should not think only in terms of the work of isolated individuals, but also of the cumulative work of the whole human race. The work of each individual contributes to the "project" in which the human race is involved. As one generation stands on the shoulders of another, so the accomplishments of each generation build upon those of the previous one' (Volf 1990:31). See also the discussion on the inclusion of the wealth and glory of the nations in the New Jerusalem (Chapter 8:282-286).

will be included or not<sup>5</sup> but to encourage people to strive for contributions worthy of being included.<sup>6</sup>

4. Hope is over-emphasized to the neglect of love (Williams), faith (Chester) and the sacrificial way of the cross (Chester). However, both writers have driven too much of a wedge between these as if the truth of one cancels out or at least weakens the other. The following brief survey of the Biblical material establishes a strong relationship between hope and love.

Love, both for God and for others, needs insight<sup>7</sup> otherwise it is merely zeal without knowledge (Romans 10:2). Knowledge of God's ultimate purposes, as He acts in love, should have a significant place in shaping the practice of love. Out of perfect love God is working towards the absolute best for all His people and this means the best of new heaven/earth for all nations. God's love is never without eschatological hope. To love is to love towards this same consummation.

Hope does have practical consequences.<sup>8</sup> Colossians 3:1-4:6 specifies many instructions that follow from being heavenly minded. Paul may have written in Colossians with a more realized eschatology but the hope of a united heaven and earth makes these instructions even more appropriate for people who live with such hope. It is clear that for Jesus, hope was a significant factor in His motivation and in His understanding of

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<sup>5</sup> Revelation is clear in broad terms what will not be included (Revelation 21:1, 21:4, 21:8, 21:27, 22:3, 22:15).

<sup>6</sup> It is not just what will be taken through into the New Jerusalem but how God's people will see with new freedom from sin, with new eyes, and so see everything from very different perspectives. CS Lewis again reflects something of this freedom to see differently in the contrast between the perspectives of the greeters and the recently arrived in The Great Divorce (1946).

<sup>7</sup> John 15:13, 1 Corinthians 13, Ephesians 5:1-2, 15-28, Philippians 1:9-11, 2:1-11, Colossians 2:2-3, 3:14, 1 John 3:16-18, 5:3.

<sup>8</sup> Romans 4:18, 2 Corinthians 3:12, Philippians 3:14, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, 1 Timothy 4:10, Hebrews 12:2, 1 Peter 3:15, 2 Peter 3:11, 14, 1 John 3:3.

His mission (Hebrews 12:1-2).<sup>9</sup> Chester is right that many times hope is associated with encouragements to persevere and endure, but in what? Hope and endurance do not function in a vacuum but draw God's people into the character and work of God in Christ. Here love abounds and eschatological purpose is a constant presence.<sup>10</sup>

Love is 'because of the hope laid up for you in heaven' (Colossians 1:4-5, cf. Romans 5:5). The faith, hope and love trilogy utilized by Paul intertwines these three implying that one without the other two is to misunderstand all three (1 Corinthians 13:13, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 5:8). These concepts are not narrow and precise independent factors, but three equally essential and integrated consequences of a Spirit-filled and Christ-oriented discipleship.

Knowledge brings responsibility to act accordingly (1 John 2:3-6, 5:2). Living contrary to one's knowledge, including the knowledge of informed hope, is to invalidate that hope and knowledge. He who knows, yet lives as if it were not true, lives in contradiction of the very thing he claims to know. Such knowledge is untrustworthy if it fails to make a difference in the lives of those who proclaim it. Jeremiah states this fundamental link most profoundly. 'He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the LORD' (Jeremiah 22:16). The knowledge of God's purposes for new creation cannot be merely to generate warm feelings in bad times. Hope, if it is real, is knowledge that calls God's people to work towards the same ends as Christ in the *missio Dei*.

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<sup>9</sup> Note the extensive references of Jesus to the Kingdom of God.

<sup>10</sup> Note NT Wright. Love 'is a foretaste of the ultimate reality. Love is not merely the Christian duty; it is the Christian destiny' (2003a:296).

This brief synopsis on the character of love, hope and knowledge highlights the extent to which they are inseparable even as each has its own particulars that intersect with each of the others. Love that does not embrace the eschatological hope to be found in Christ is love that falls short of the love Christ models for all. The most significant unifying of love and hope is in Christ Himself: He is not divided and in Him 'are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Colossians 2:3). Williams and Chester have effectively questioned some of the more apparent oversimplifications of hope for mission but both imply a compartmentalized view of the different facets of Christian faith. It is valuable to examine each in its own right but until woven into the whole of the narrative of God's earthly work then the job is incomplete.

Schuurman (1991:149-174), Volf (1990, 1995) and O'Donovan (1994:31-52, 53-75, 245-264) challenge the same weaknesses. God's person and work are not divided into distinct categories or phases of history. Each manifestation of God emerges out of and carries with it whatever has been before. The creation was always eschatological; it always had a teleological direction and the redemptive work of God in Christ's death and resurrection was, and is, an essential and pivotal moment in history that makes eschatological hope real. Every providential act of God in sustaining the creation is also redemptive and eschatological. Love (cf. Williams) and the way of the cross (cf. Chester) in the Biblical narrative are deeply embedded in hope, and vice-versa, even if some scholars have been selective in their comments. Consequently, all mission engagement facilitated by eschatological hope, inextricably requires love and sacrifice in action informed by the wealth of knowledge that comes from creation and new

creation, and from the Kingdom promised and the Kingdom fulfilled in the New Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Necessity of Hope**

Hope is fundamental to being human. Quoting Lynch, Bauckham and Hart affirm, *'Hope comes close to being the very heart and centre of a human being'* (2000:60. Emphasis original).<sup>12</sup> Hope is at the heart of human motivation for constructive engagement. With the rise over the past century of an appreciation for the eschatological character of the New Testament,<sup>13</sup> hope has become a more pronounced theme and inspired several scholars.<sup>14</sup> For others, hope permeates their work (Dumbrell 2001b, NT Wright e.g. 1996 & 2003a, and O'Donovan 1994). In all, to varying degrees, hope as a human experience and hope as eschatological reality, are woven together and applied to human engagement and its future orientation.

Kelly (2006) represents many as he explores hope. He features Jesus as functioning with a 'subversive imagination' in that 'He imagined the world otherwise' (2006:182). The Gospels portray Jesus as embodying and practising a vision for the future. Hope, as Kelly describes it, is far more than mere optimism. 'Hope operates in a world of meaning and values. It has a conscience and an intelligence that mere optimism lacks'

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<sup>11</sup> If the whole of the New Testament narrative is eschatologically driven, both realized and in anticipation of the Parousia, then hope must be a major factor in the shaping of life, church and mission. Hope is an integral factor in all of the practical expressions described or prescribed in the New Testament with the church itself being a serious expression in its everyday practice of the already-but-not-yet Kingdom.

<sup>12</sup> See also Bauckham and Hart (1999:72, 126-127). Their extensive discussion on the place of hope in human experience also builds upon contributions from Bloch, Steiner and Moltmann. In other words, there is a considerable literature that explores the essential nature of hope for human flourishing that we are not able to indulge in at this time.

However, much of this exploration comes out of Western contexts. If hope truly is so much at the heart of being human, how does it manifest in isolated mono-cultural communities where nothing changes generation by generation, in cyclical rather than linear cultures, or in cultures that are fatalistic such as those that believe the present cannot change due to Karma?

<sup>13</sup> See Moltmann (1967:37-38), Bosch (1991:501-504), O'Callaghan (2011:46ff), Schwobel (2000).

<sup>14</sup> See for example, Moltmann (1967), Bauckham and Hart (2000), Fergusson and Sarot (2000), O'Callaghan (2011), and NT Wright (2007).

(2006:5). Hope ‘focuses on what is truly important’ and ‘is not mere *wishing* for something more. It is a conduct of life’ (2006:6. Emphasis original.).<sup>15</sup>

With hope having such a strong motivating effect as Kelly states, it is not surprising that those with a well-developed hope regard it as a key factor in the design of Christian mission.<sup>16</sup> For each of these, as for Kelly, the impact is not determined by a selective reading of Scripture but by an expanded vision that embraces all from the created order to Christology and redemption, to the Kingdom of God, and to the fulfilment of the Kingdom in new heaven/earth.

### **IMAGINATION: From Eschatology to Mission Practice**

Imagination is vital for translation from text to practice,<sup>17</sup> in the appreciation of apocalyptic imagery,<sup>18</sup> and for hope to be tangible.<sup>19</sup> This section will discuss the place of imagination in determining mission practice. It will not attempt to address all the many facets of imagination but to establish its legitimacy and value in identifying contextualised mission activities. Imagination is not the only ingredient but it has great value in bringing together the many theological realities integral to mission as they are experienced in particular contexts. Imagination has the power ‘to bridge the gap between immanence and transcendence’ (Guite 2012:243), ‘to transcend the concrete, to create new images or ideas that can open up new possibilities’ (Levy 2008:3), and ‘to

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Hope inspires action. It gives vigor and buoyancy to intelligence. It engenders a deep moral sense and points in the direction of a more passionate self-involvement in the making of the world. Hope’s imagination and deepest feelings resist all forms of cultural depression. It enables one to risk even life itself for the greater good of oneself or others. It is capable of taking a stand with the hopeless. Hope anticipates a future fulfilment that is yet to be given’ (Kelly 2006:6).

<sup>16</sup> See the examples of this in Chapter 1:39-42. One of Bosch’s mission elements is ‘Mission as Action in Hope’ as he argues for an eschatological dimension for mission (1991:498-510).

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 1:25.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapters 1:27, 3:85-91, 5:174-176, 7:211-215, 239.

<sup>19</sup> Chapter 11:323-324.

deal with the paradoxes and contradictions that surround us' (Levy 2008:3). 'Imagination integrates: reason analyses' (Hein and Henderson 2011:2) and as such, imagination is that capacity needed to assimilate the heavenly and the earthly, the present and the future, the already and the not yet.<sup>20</sup> Imagination enables mission practitioners to conceptualize what does not yet exist, 'the otherwise absent' (Hart 1999:54), so as to plan and work towards such a future.

Imagination happens whenever people hope for a better future in that the future is never known completely, particularly when hope involves change. Whether in prayer, mission, social action or development, each conceptualizes, imagines, how things might be different. The desire here is to authenticate imagination as valid and important for future oriented mission. In this way, we give permission to mission practitioners to dream the dreams of what new heaven/earth might look like in their particular context. It is not that imagination is not happening: imagining possibilities for the future is a common human experience and imagination is a characteristic of mission practice. The point is to validate it within mission practice, to give it value, and to identify how best it might be fashioned.<sup>21</sup>

## **Value**

Wilder makes a strong plea for imaginative thinking as integral to Christian faith:

Religious communication generally must overcome a long addiction to the discursive, the rationalistic, and the prosaic. ... Christian imagination must go halfway to meet the new dreams, mystiques, and mythologies that are gestating in our time. (1976:1) Imagination is a necessary component of all profound knowing and celebration; all remembering; realizing and anticipating; all

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<sup>20</sup> Perhaps one of the best examples of the integrative power of imagination is seen in the impact of CS Lewis. His appeal seems to be not just that he has great skills of analysis but that with well-developed imaginative capacity, he presents his readers and listeners with ways of making sense of the world. See Hein & Henderson (2011), CS Lewis (1955), Lindsley (2001). With reference to CS Lewis, Schakel writes; 'Imagination is the natural organ of meaning' (2011:23).

<sup>21</sup> I am grateful to Vinay Samuel for the conversation we had on aspects of imagination at OCMS on 2-4-2013.

faith, hope, and love. When imagination fails, doctrines become ossified, witness and proclamation wooden, doxologies and litanies empty, consolations hollow, and ethics legalistic (1976:2).

Since then, ‘A fresh appreciation of the role of imagination in Christian eschatology is dawning’ (Bauckham 2008:658) and the value of imagination endorsed in several publications.<sup>22</sup> Brueggemann reviews five publications on imagination for his purpose of advocating an imaginative response to the current state of the world (1993:13-18). ‘The task’, he writes, ‘is to *fund* – to provide the pieces, materials, and resources out of which a new world can be imagined.’ He claims a great need for a ‘*counterimagination of the world*’ (1993:20. Emphases original.). His challenge is to ‘*Imagine a self*’ (49-51), ‘*Imagine a world*’ (51) and ‘*Imagine a community of faith*’ (52-53) free from the enslaving qualities now so prevalent in the world. The lived-out hope for the future is not imagined in a vacuum but funded by a vision that flows out of the created order, Scripture and Kingdom, and the eschatological liberation of the creation.<sup>23</sup>

This is not a new phenomenon for the people of God. The Bible has numerous examples of language designed to stimulate thinking and imagine possibilities beyond the mere words used. Poetry, apocalyptic, figurative imagery, parable, cryptic comments, and symbolic actions all point the reader towards new possibilities. Several scholars argue strongly for the role of imagination in Biblical studies and the application thereof.<sup>24</sup> As JJ Collins explored, apocalyptic, the very genre utilized so often when the future dramatic intervention of God is anticipated, is a genre which specializes in imaginative appreciation of what has yet to be seen (1998).<sup>25</sup> The Bible is abundant with hope for

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<sup>22</sup> Bauckham lists several such publications (2008:665) and Hart examines imagination as an inevitable consequence of hope by building up the work on hope and imagination in Ernst Bloch, George Steiner and Jürgen Moltmann (1999).

<sup>23</sup> See also his application of ‘prophetic imagination’ to contemporary USA (2011) and the Catholic expressions of such imagination in Rosenberg (2007) and Stephenson (2011).

<sup>24</sup> Brueggemann 2003:25-51, Hart 1999:63, Hays 2005:xiv, Horrell 2010:25, NT Wright 2005b. See Hulster (2010) for a review of Brueggemann’s work on imagination.

<sup>25</sup> See the more extensive description of the imaginative function of apocalyptic in Chapter 7:211-213.



the yet to be seen and as Bauckham and Hart describe at length, hope by its very nature engages the imagination (1999 & 2000). Hope without imagining of things improved is not hope at all. 'Christianity is a faith which is essentially forward looking and forward moving, oriented towards and living now ever in the light cast backwards by God's promised future' (1999:82). To hope is to imagine what this future might be.<sup>26</sup>

Thiel (2006) addresses the tendency to shy away from practices of imaginative thought by challenging the fears of uncertainty in post-Enlightenment rationality and the fears of arrogance, idolatry and 'fantastic speculation' (523) that generate reluctance to consider what might be beyond the empirically certain.<sup>27</sup> Having claimed that Paul at times tends to hold back from describing such hopes (1 Corinthians 2:9,<sup>28</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:2-4), he turns his attention to the resurrection; 'The doctrine of the Incarnation consummates the doctrine of creation in the belief that creaturely reality is so good and redeemable that the divine nature could embrace it in the humanity of the Savior, and in the saving participation of that humanity in the resurrection of Jesus' (2006:526). From this core reality, he proceeds to consider the resurrection life by asking what Jesus might now be

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<sup>26</sup> This summation of the Book of Revelation from Bauckham and Hart resonates with both Collins and Brueggemann: 'What we have here, then, is an imaginative vision in which the dominant way of seeing things (both present and future) is fundamentally challenged and an alternative picture painted of the potentialities and possibilities inherent in God's future. Rome is not the ultimate authority, and will not have the final victory. God is not absent, and his kingdom is coming. Whatever experience may suggest, and whatever the voices of power may insist, these are the realities of the readers' situation. The challenge to the Christian church in the midst of the all too real discomfort and danger of actuality is, as always, to live in the light of this alternative vision rather than submitting to the dominant ideology, even when the latter is backed up with military and political force. *Revelation*, like deuterio-Isaiah, offers God's people a subversive vision, furnishing the resources to wage what theological Amos Wilder calls a campaign of 'guerilla theatre', a battle for people's hearts and wills, and rooted firmly in a bid to capture their imaginations' (Bauckham and Hart 1999:197-198).

<sup>27</sup> Such fears are especially prevalent in some of the more conservative expressions of the Christian faith. Guite provides an overview of how appreciation of poetry has been weakened by the devaluing of imagination in post-Enlightenment rationalism (2012:1-30). With poetry playing such a major role in the Biblical imagery of the Kingdom fulfilled, it is not surprising that appreciation of eschatological texts often misses the point. See Chapters Three, Seven and Eight.

<sup>28</sup> However, Paul here is not claiming to hold back. Rather he is stating that what was hidden previously is now revealed through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:1-16).

doing because ‘The resurrected Jesus was a paradigm for .... religious imaginings’ (529).<sup>29</sup>

Quite rightly, the strongest questioning of a call to an imaginative vision is in the risk of naïve fantasy and speculation that is more about our current predispositions than God’s future realities of new heaven/earth. ‘Mere fantasizing ... is a matter only of projecting our desires on to the blank screen of what may lie beyond’ (Bauckham and Hart 1999:63). Utopian dreams and sci-fi fantasies are a long way from grounded hope shaped by a wealth of material from general and special revelation.<sup>30</sup> As Moltmann stated, Christian hope ‘is neither trend analysis nor fortune-telling’ (2007b:578). Creation and Scripture provide the substance from which imagination flourishes. And these same sources hold imagination in check. For each one of those referenced in this chapter for their endorsement of imagination, they advocate a serious exploration of the ways Christian imagination is not like some kind of fantasy or speculative free-for-all.<sup>31</sup> ‘Christian hope is *imaginative* but not *imaginary*’ (Bauckham 2008:659. Emphases original.).<sup>32</sup>

For Bauckham and Hart (1999), hope can only function imaginatively. There are frameworks within which imagination must remain if it is to be Christian rather than fanciful. Imagination, if true to the unique nature of God, must always be transformed by transcendence, by a strong orientation and submission to the true source of hope: that

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<sup>29</sup> ‘The logic of eschatology is not of inference but of imagination’ (Brett 2001:172).

<sup>30</sup> See SM Lewis (2010) and Gribben & Sweetnam (2011) for examples of imagination that is the consequence of neglecting to weigh up the whole of the evidence from creation and Scripture and allowing a particular ‘apocalyptic’ cultural perspective to have priority.

<sup>31</sup> See Bauckham and Hart 1999 & 2000, Brueggemann 1993, G Green 2000, Thiel 2006. ‘Our imagining of the future ... operates in a carefully regulated manner, moving within certain given limits and in accordance with known patterns. It does not invent in any random or capricious manner, but extends the conditions and range of possibilities of the present moment backwards and forwards in accordance with a body of known evidence’ (Bauckham and Hart 1999:87).

<sup>32</sup> On utopianism, see the many references in Bauckham and Hart (1999) and also on the different character of utopianism compared with Christian hope, see Jenkins (2007).

is, hope in the sovereign Creator of new-creation to bring to fruition what humankind can never achieve and certainly not hope in human effort and progress or in the capacity of human imagination. This is a vision of a ‘meaningful and hopeful future ... which could never be had by extrapolating the circumstances of the tragic drama of history itself’ (1999:51). Eschatological imagination is to be transcendent in character trusting that God will complete what He began in incarnation and demonstrated in resurrection.

Working from the limits of language to describe what no one has ever seen, Bauckham and Hart question how much the descriptions of what is to come can provide actual knowledge of what it will be like. They argue that all eschatological language utilizes what is known and familiar because this is the only reality available to people as they attempt to imagine the ultimate future. Eschatological language is to stimulate imagination but they are strongly cautious of presuming that this language tells us of what is beyond our experience (1999:72-108).

A consequence of this focus on the limitations of language is that they do not develop the evidence of the new earth to the extent they could be. Ten ‘Images of Hope’ are summarized by Bauckham and Hart (1999:109-173)<sup>33</sup> which might provide some insight into seeing something of the new heaven/earth, though they are less developed than their potential. We may see through a glass dimly but we do see. This is not a matter of having to choose between a kind of eschatological agnosticism<sup>34</sup> or an almost prescriptive literalism but rather holding together the known with what must be appreciated with caution and open-mindedness. Envisioning the new heaven/earth is not

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<sup>33</sup> They are; (1) Antichrist, (2) The Parousia, (3) Resurrection, (4) New Creation, (5) The Millennium, (6) The Last Judgement, (7) The Garden of God and the City of God, (8) Sabbath Rest and Marriage Feast, (9) The Kingdom of God, (10) The Vision of God.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Agnosticism with respect to the final destiny of the world in God’s future is a non-Christian option’ (Bauckham and Hart 1999:83).

just a matter of specifically eschatological texts as the whole Biblical Canon is eschatological in nature.

Bauckham and Hart refer to this integration of the known and the imagined but their focus is elsewhere: the challenges of eschatological language and the priority of transcendence in hope, rather than other ingredients that inform hope. Yet their argument is within the perspective of this earth becoming the new earth and this future feeding into how Christians live in the present with hope.<sup>35</sup> Bauckham and Hart bring valuable challenges to the imagination of the future but there is more to imagining the future than they allow. Because this earth continues, this creation, and the imagery that develops out of it, has a significant role in stimulating how we imagine this future.

### **Creation Evidence of the Future**

Because this earth will be an indispensable part of new creation, the earth has a valuable voice in informing us of the new order to come. The multiple expressions throughout the Bible of the value, goodness and God-glorifying qualities of the creation caution against those assertions of the future that overstate the unknowns at the expense of what the Bible assures will continue. The more the created order is appreciated in its various dimensions, the more each part is seen as integral to all the others, the more the possibilities for what might be in the future can be imagined legitimately when all evil and curse is removed and when resurrection impacts the whole created order. Bauckham and Hart are right to feature the substantial qualitative newness of the new creation (1999:77-80) but this does not mean that nothing of the future can be seen or known.

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<sup>35</sup> 'God's future reaches back into the present and bathes it in a quite distinctive light, transfiguring it and generating alternative ways of being in it' (Bauckham and Hart 1999:83).

The insights that come from the earth are not from isolated reflections but rather emerge out of a dialogue between creation and Scripture. Each deepens and broadens insights into the other. Creation brings earthiness and substance, humanity and aesthetics, to the reading of Scripture. The Bible stimulates vision and enables readers to see in creation what otherwise might be hidden. The Biblical writers were aware of this relationship and spoke often of it, sometimes quite directly<sup>36</sup> but at other times through the use of imagery based on dramatic storms, fertile valleys, drought and the behaviour of animals. Likewise, much of the Wisdom Literature grows out of the observations of life lived on the ground. The enlightenment of the Scriptures enables us to discern between the goodness of the earth, its corruption caused by sin, and its capacity to inform us about new creation.

The inherent value given to learning from and knowledge of the earth, as noted above and below,<sup>37</sup> indicates (1) that commitment to such learning is a significant part of all mission work including all the possibilities outlined in Chapter Eleven, and (2) that knowledge of the earth is a real part of equipping ourselves for the fulfilment of all God's purposes in new heaven/earth. The coming of New Jerusalem does not make this irrelevant.

### **Biblical Evidence of the Future**

This voice from creation itself, the voice that groans for liberation from the curse of decay with expectation of cleansing from all that morally pollutes it, is not a lone voice. Throughout the Bible several comprehensive themes also bring insight. These include:

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<sup>36</sup> For example: Psalms 8, 19, 104, 147, Romans 1:19-20, 8:19-23.

<sup>37</sup> Chapters 8:253-258, 11:358-362.

1. The societal, personal and environmental values as expressed throughout the Law of Moses that reflect God's holiness and righteousness. These same values continue to be found throughout the Old Testament and into the New even as they find shifting expression from context to context. The expectations of Kingdom and new creation flesh out these values.<sup>38</sup>
2. The extensive promises for what the Kingdom of God, the reign of Messiah, will bring to the earth. Much of this material is laid out in the Old Testament in such promises as the blessing of God to all nations, the fullness of justice and peace, the renewal of all relationships and the renewal of the environment, the provision of plenty for all, the freedom from all threat, the fullness of the Spirit, communities in which all are loved fully and equally, the enduring presence of God, the moral purity of all.<sup>39</sup>
3. The removal of all that is wrong in the negation of the negatives. All that the prophets condemn brings insights as to what will be when God puts all to right. As noted in Chapters Eight, the vision of new heaven/earth in Revelation includes the positive imagery of what will be, but also seven statements of what will be no more.<sup>40</sup>
4. The implications of what already can be seen of new creation as it commences in the incarnation of Jesus, is demonstrated in Jesus' personhood and ministry, and finds further expression in His resurrection and in the church. Revealed in Jesus is life in

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<sup>38</sup> For example, note Moltmann's reflection on the future based on the Sabbath and Jubilee laws (1999). Moltmann states that in the covenant, law and promise, obedience and hope, are simply two different sides of the same reality (1967:120-134).

<sup>39</sup> See the more extensive description of the Kingdom of God in Chapter 4:113-115. See also the material on Zion and New Jerusalem in Chapters 2:46-49, 76-78, 8:274-289 Appendix A.7:393.

<sup>40</sup> As noted in Chapter 8:269n59.

all its fullness. His interactions with others and His stance against the unjust status quo, the views He expresses on money and power, and especially His valuing of those most readily dismissed by society, all express the kind of society that will be found in the new heaven/earth. Jesus calms and heals the physical realm and causes it to bring forth in abundance. This is a new creation that enhances creation, enriching and healing the old such that the new embraces the old and transforms it with new kinds of possibilities.<sup>41</sup> Resurrection has a particular quality for stimulating the imagination of a resurrected earth. Several scholars advocate the resurrection as a paradigm shift for the church for world-view, mission and hope.<sup>42</sup>

The New Testament church in particular, in both instructions and practice, expresses the future. Lincoln's exploration of Paul's ecclesiastical instructions reveals a strong realised eschatology in ideal church practice (1981). Paul's focus on relationships in Colossians 3:1-16 for what it means to be heavenly minded, demonstrates a significant degree of social continuity in that these practices are appropriate for living in the presence of Christ. The eschatological character of the New Testament, including its realized expressions, flavours the community life of the church in its love for one another. Consequently, the church brings insights into new earth life in the Spirit as the more the church is compliant with Word and Spirit, the more many aspects of the life to come become visible.

4. Several New Testament passages speak more directly of the new heaven/earth, Revelation 21:1-22:5 in particular. As noted in Chapter Eight, the imagery of this collection of visions is intentionally simple. The detail is left to the imagination as

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<sup>41</sup> See Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>42</sup> See for example (Bridger 1990:294-295), G Green (2000:76-80), Hart (1999:71-75), Moltmann (1999, 2007a&b), Santmire (1984:412-420), Thiel (2006:529).

the echoes and references to other texts, in which far greater detail is provided, are drawn into an informed reading of the passage.<sup>43</sup> When the multiple allusions to other material are recognized and included in the description, Revelation 21-22 provides quite a comprehensive portrayal: grounded and earthy and yet with a certain mysterious and transcendent quality that suggests a new kind of reality which is both familiar and not.

5. The people of God are never alone in this enterprise. The Spirit who indwells and enlightens today, who is integral to all facets of mission, is the same Spirit of the future new heaven/earth. The enduring and indwelling Spirit of God empowers and corrects. This is stressed by, for example, Bauckham and Hart (1999:198-210) and O'Callaghan (2011:33-36). Hart writes: 'The power of the future to transform the present lies in the capacity of God's Spirit to capture our imaginations' (1999:75). The Spirit links us to the future. The Spirit already brings experience of every spiritual blessing of the heavenly realm (Ephesians 1:3) because the Spirit guarantees our future inheritance by granting a down payment on what is to come (Ephesians 1:14, cf. 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5). Through the Spirit, God continues to reveal (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). The Spirit facilitates insights even as we reflect on the evidences of creation and Scripture for what is good. He mediates between heaven and earth, between past, present and future.<sup>44</sup> The Spirit is the means by which 'God's future reaches back into the present and bathes it in a quite distinctive light, transfiguring it and generating alternative ways of being in it' (Bauckham and Hart 1999:83).

Related closely to the Spirit's presence and work is the degree to which the eschatological future is already realized in our present experience of Christ's rule. In

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<sup>43</sup> Like this, and this, and this, .... but different: the same yet so much more.

<sup>44</sup> The Spirit is the go-between who integrates the matrix of thirdspace. See Chapter 10:314-315.



so far as the body of Christ experiences the realized promises of the Kingdom, a foretaste of what is to come through the Holy Spirit occurs. We gain further insight into these evidences of the future new heaven/earth as we consider together what we already have in common of the fulfilled promises of God. Individually we are at risk in presuming that a personal experience reveals such things. However, as we discover that across cultures and contexts are experiences which are common across much of the body of Christ, we legitimately can deduce a little more of the life to come.

Examining each item of the six-point list above through the lens of the relationship triangle adds further dimensions.<sup>45</sup> If consistently applied, each is enhanced by considering how each relationship of the triangle might be enriched in the application of all six. This is dialogical in character: the three-fold relationship feeds into a deepening understanding of each of the six and each of the six expands our appreciation of these three primary forms of relationship. New creation, perfected in new heaven/earth, completes the reconciliation already begun in the cross for all creation (Colossians 1:19-20). In this comprehensive reconciliation, each relationship of the triangle is perfected and in each relationship, the characteristics of all six items will be fulfilled. Within the constraints of this vision and expectation, imaginative possibilities for mission are greatly enriched.<sup>46</sup>

## **Resurrection**

The New Testament observations hold together both the familiar and the unfamiliar in Jesus' resurrection body and person. Chapter Four explored these in detail; scars,

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<sup>45</sup> Chapter 1:14-17.

<sup>46</sup> See also Schuurmann's consideration of these relationships as he examines the extent of continuity between creation and new creation (1991:Chap 6).

visibility, able to cook, eat and talk, a body that could be recognised (exceptions not withstanding) and be firmly held, and yet able to come and go through walls and closed doors.<sup>47</sup> Thiel strongly emphasizes the resurrection of Jesus for an enlightened appreciation of the future. He claims that the early generations of Christians regarded the resurrection as ‘a paradigm’ for their imaginings of the future (2006:529). Bauckham and Hart advocate similarly for the resurrection<sup>48</sup> that ‘our hope is not invested in a re-creation of or a set of adjustments to the here-and-now, but in a complete overhaul from the foundations up ... which will result in a decisively new and different order of existence’ (1999:79-80). Resurrection points beyond the current realities of physicality and anticipates some kind of re-structuring into what Wright referred to as ‘transphysicality’ (Wright 2003:477-478). Bauckham and Hart state that Jesus ‘no longer fits the spatial and temporal conditions of this world’ (1999:104).

Yet, because the resurrection body of Jesus does suggest possibilities of what this new earth will be, the question of future physicality should not cause either a retreat into overstating the unknowns or a presumption to know more than the evidence allows. The new creation has already begun to intrude into the present creation as demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>49</sup> In His body we see both continuity and discontinuity; the earthly qualities of body continue while yet being different. It is as if the ‘overhaul’ has happened at the most basic level leaving the essentials of personhood (including the body) intact while generating a new kind of physicality for that same body. The ‘spatial and temporal’ qualities of His body are transformed but it is still a body which also

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<sup>47</sup> Chapter 4:126-138.

<sup>48</sup> ‘The resurrection of Jesus is the paradigm case for Christian hope ... mirrored in many other scriptural accounts and features of Christian experience. ... As Moltmann suggests, the relationship between the crucified Jesus and the risen Lord must therefore furnish the gestalt for imagining the relationship between the tragic limits of this world and the surprising, cosmic dimensions of God’s new creation. The latter image speaks of the rupture-in-the-midst-of-continuity between the old and the new’ (1999:69).

<sup>49</sup> See Chapter Five.

displays the human qualities of this present earth. Perhaps CS Lewis' allegory, The Great Divorce (1946), might capture something of the mix of the familiar and the new. As Lewis portrays it, grass and water take on new qualities of greater reality and substance, as experienced in the initial hardness of all things, with greater vastness of distance and greater brilliance of light. Here, 'the senses' learn to receive what 'would normally be beyond their capacity' (35). This is an 'overhaul', a reconfiguring, that holds together as one the knowns of creation with the mysteries of resurrected creation.

If the resurrection of Jesus serves as a paradigm for our imagination then the created order rightly plays a real part in our understanding of the future. Some knowledge of new heaven/earth is possible; imagination of the future new creation is possible, even if at the same time this imagined future is somewhat incomplete.

### **Imaginative Community**

Imagination for mission is not merely an individual practice. The body of Christ brings not only collaboration in discernment but also checks and balances to ensure grounded imagination rather than erratic fantasy. The history of the people of God both before and after the first advent provides a wealth of insight as to how distortions can intrude into theology and practice. Furthermore, increasingly the global community of the body of Christ is able to critique one another with particular benefit coming from the growing multicultural character of the body. When there is seen to be bias from culture or evidence of unhealthy self-interest, or neglect of adequate study of the evidence to produce questionable imaginations, or excessive presumption, the body of Christ is self-correcting. God is at work utilising our mistakes to increase maturity of understanding generation by generation.

Those who are risk averse and troubled by lack of certitude will find imagination of the future a difficult factor for the shaping of mission practice. Fears of baseless speculation, or presumptions that somehow we need a higher level of certainty for such an approach, may distract some from the wealth of other evidence that also informs mission practice. However, risk of imperfection and failure is prevalent in all Christian practice and discipleship. Hope is not in getting it right but in God who works through even the worst of mistakes and failures because He has declared His determination to finish what He has started.<sup>50</sup>

A further particular role for the body of Christ is to tell the stories of imaginative, future directed mission from context to context. These stories have metaphorical potential to stimulate imagination in other places, certainly not as replication but as provocation to see more of new heaven/earth possibilities for particular contexts.

## **Conclusion**

To summarize, ‘Imagination fuels the engines of our movement into the future.’ (Bauckham and Hart 2000:67). It has ‘Transformative Power’ (Hart 1999) for bringing a provocative critique to the present status quo<sup>51</sup> and inspiring a vision for how the world could be otherwise. Imagination stimulates creativity and focus for mission; not in isolation but in a Spirit enabled vision birthed in earth and Scripture and which reaches for what can be seen of the future however dimly. The risks of groundless fantasy and speculation are lessened when the disciplines of imagination are

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<sup>50</sup> See Hart for a similar summary of the need for a shift of focus from human fear, anxiety and failure to ‘the promise of the God of the resurrection’ who alone ensures the imagined and longed for future (Hart 1999:70-71).

<sup>51</sup> A critique not just spoken in words but also expressed in being and practice: ‘The challenge to the Christian church in the midst of the all-too-real discomfort and danger of actuality is, as always, to live in the light of this alternative vision rather than submitting to the dominant ideology, even when the latter is backed up with military and political force’ (Hart 1999:54).

implemented even as it is recognized that ‘Eschatological imagination must be ambiguous, must disturb the construals of the real and the possible which otherwise we take for granted’ (Bauckham and Hart 1999:107). Deeply embedded in all mission fuelled by the imagination of God’s future for the earth is the resolve to be hopeful, not because of any capacity of human effort to make it so but because the transcendent sovereign Creator assures us He will do it.

In particular, taking the future seriously, and allowing it to shape mission practice, reduces the risk of mistakes and unwise practice even as it imaginatively enlarges the possibilities by pushing mission beyond the constraints of the present. Mission practice is the product of various considerations: creation, Biblical, theological, contextual, and evaluation of past practice. Future-shaped mission practice does not replace these but further informs and challenges the why and how of Christian engagement with the world.

### **CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY, KNOWN AND UNKNOWN.**

The argument presented above concludes that the fourth option noted in Chapter One<sup>52</sup> best expresses the eschatological perspective of the Canon. The cosmological descriptions of judgement are metaphorical and do not refer to the impact of judgement on the created order. While a degree of destruction is possible, this is not the point of the imagery. This is neither a message of massive environmental devastation nor the destruction of all human achievement. Restoration and transformation of the earth is the consistent message and expectation.

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<sup>52</sup> See Chapter 1:4-5.

The consistent argument of Scripture is that God is neither capricious nor arbitrary in His judgement. He will not destroy what He declares to be good and much of the created order is just that. The Biblical expectations for the final judgement focus on the wicked and rebellious not the material world.<sup>53</sup> The earth in itself is not the problem, nor the target of God's judgement, but rather receives continuous endorsement throughout Scripture. The problem is the sin and evil of the rebellious, both human and demonic. Expressions of discontinuity are quite focussed, the perpetrators of rebellion against God and His ways as well as all practices, entities, systems, structures and attitudes offensive to Him and beyond redemption. All these will perish: the discontinuous is clear and consistently stated. All sin, evil and corruption and their expressions and consequences will cease and all who align with these ungodly realities, demonic or human. Their removal may have consequences for the rest of the created order which the Bible does not attempt to describe. The judgement imagery involving the cosmos describes the impact on the targets of God's judgement not the rest of the created order.

The continuous may be somewhat mysterious, not because what continues is unknown but because we have yet to see the full impact of the transformation to come. But the consistent expectation in the narrative is that the earth with all its multiple God-pleasing features continues. Nothing good will be wasted or lost, only enhanced. The imperfections in otherwise good human achievement will not cause their destruction but will be perfected by God. These same features will be present in the new heaven/earth with everything good about them intact, yet with new glory and spiritual refurbishment, no longer perishable but reordered in ways that we can only imagine.

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<sup>53</sup> See above on the focussed nature of judgement in Revelation. Chapter 8:293-294.

The substance of the earth continues with its goodness, topography, ecosystems, beauty, and potential. Yet, there will be changes and in each there is a degree of mystery.

1. The judgement may well impact on the wider physical and social order but we do not know the extent or what will be permanent. The focus of judgement is clear but collateral damage cannot be ruled out.
2. Those human qualities that limit humankind will not continue because resurrection brings transformation, from perishability to imperishable and mortality to immortal, from weakness to power and from dishonourable to glorious. As the same body of Jesus in resurrection took on new qualities without any sense of it not being the same body, so Paul expresses qualitative continuity and discontinuity for the resurrection body of God's people.
3. Jesus' resurrection body reflects the earth's future. In addition, we have identified a wealth of expectation for the continuity of this earth when transformed by the arrival of God, the Lamb and the New Jerusalem. The earth healed, liberated and transformed involves a new kind of reconfigured physicality. Jesus' resurrection body is the only Scriptural evidence for future physicality though the already inaugurated new creation gives us clues.<sup>54</sup> There will be considerable continuity but with a range of qualitative changes. It will be the familiar land of our everyday lives liberated from the curse and corruption of sin together with new characteristics of glory, spirituality and imperishability.

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<sup>54</sup> See Chapter 5.

4. We do not know what radical new things God might introduce into the new heaven/earth when He comes, nor what the earth will be like when made suitable for the glorious full presence of God.
5. We do not know what God will do with natural disasters, the loss of non-renewable resources, atrophy and decay, and the long term limits for the life of the sun.
6. As implied in Isaiah 11:6-9, liberation will come for the discord in relationships imposed in Genesis 3:14-10. Yet, the exact nature of these future relationships for animals is unknown. However, at the very least, just and humane treatment of animals is a minimal and legitimate anticipation of the new earth.
7. John's assertion that we do not know some of the future (1 John 3:2), and Jesus' statement about the lack of marriage in the resurrection,<sup>55</sup> indicate limits to our knowledge. Some facets of life will not continue in their present form. Yet even as John cautions his readers, he states that 'we will be like him' and descriptions of Jesus in incarnation and resurrection do provide some insights here. Marriage may not be what is familiar but there is a wealth of material relevant to all relationships from the created order and the Bible, and these are qualities that will continue. The lack of marriage does not devalue working towards all relationships today reflecting the relationships to come. Paul's summation is, 'For now we see in a mirror, dimly,

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<sup>55</sup> Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25, Luke 20:34-36. With regards to the marriage statement, clearly something will be different but what exactly? There is a range of possible meanings; marriage simply as a procreating relationship through to all benefits of marriage being found elsewhere (with marriage presented from the beginning as a good thing, and masculinity and femininity together as representing God in some way, it is reasonable to expect something equivalent yet better) . The former fits the explanation provided by Jesus, limited though it is, for there will be no need for any more multiplying. Those in the resurrection 'cannot die' (Luke 20:36) and in general terms, the return of Christ is timed for when the full number has been met for the population of the new heaven/earth (Romans 11:25). Jesus' words are somewhat cryptic; designed to provoke thought about resurrection rather than marriage.



but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully' (1 Corinthians 13:12).

8. We do not know how much God might leave His people to restore and transform following the arrival of the New Jerusalem

However, not one of these weakens the wealth of input from creation and the Bible as noted above. These unknowns do not undermine the many potential mission expressions which anticipate life and society before God in the new earth. In so far as these align with the Kingdom of God, God will transform much human achievement into the perfection appropriate for the new heaven/earth so that the renewed wealth and glory of the nations may be forever in the presence of God. The unknowns just listed indicate expansion rather than discontinuity of the many good facets of the created order. God does not destroy what is good and the earth is good. It is the object of His love and He loves all He has made. As the earth continues, God will add to its breadth of good qualities such that He utilizes human effort, missional or otherwise, in the transformation to come. Nothing is wasted.<sup>56</sup>

The questions of continuity and discontinuity are critical for imaginative hope. As this earth continues with all that is valuable and pleasing to God, the created order, as well as the Bible, provides significant material for how we might appreciate, and hope for, what will continue. The goodness of earth, enlightened further by the Bible and the Spirit, enables us to see much of what a sin free world might be.

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<sup>56</sup> See also the summary at the end of the discussion on Revelation 21-22. Chapter 8:291-294.

It is in this more mysterious space of the unknowns, both the continuous and the discontinuous, where informed, Spirit-filled and hope-filled imagination facilitates legitimate missional practice that anticipates, symbolizes and proclaims the vision of what is to come.

## **CONTEXTUALIZATION**

Mission practice, inspired by future-driven imagination, is not a one-size-fits-all model. Context matters. Imagination is not just the possibilities of the future but also its expression in mission in particular contexts that vary considerably in all aspects: political, social, economic, cultural, geographical and spiritual. Context also stimulates the imagining of the future since imagination happens within particular contexts. However much imagination feeds off the vast tapestry of the future found in creation in general and the Bible in particular, each one imagines from within a particular location and experience of the created order. The context serves as a more particular stimulus for imagining and has the potential to raise the question, ‘What if it all happened here?’

The well-known challenges of contextualization rightly restrain every attempt to apply knowledge of the Kingdom and the new heaven/earth. In addition to the need for wise and Spirit-filled discernment for perceptions of the new heaven/earth, there are two particular vulnerabilities.

The first is the potential to over-identify with the context and consequently to include facets of culture that are incongruent with Biblical perspectives and values. Every culture, every context in every generation needs theological analysis and prophetic

critique or else the *stoicheia*, elementary principles,<sup>57</sup> of the day will prevail. There are many examples of such failings: the Constantinian re-design of the church, the many times when church and state have become too close and mutually dependent, the ways in which mission has often become aligned too closely with colonization by foreign powers, the use of Christian doctrine to endorse apartheid in South Africa, the re-invention of Christianity by some to support the anti-Semitic and Aryan agenda of Nazism, the relationship of mutual benefit between the Christian right and the Republican Party in the USA, the consumerism of Western culture as a way of life that undermines appreciation of discipleship and church life, in many places the intrusions of caste and class, the impact of Confucian values frequent in East Asia Christianity, and the uncritical acceptance of either modernist or postmodernist epistemologies for processing the questions of faith and practice.

The second vulnerability is also from a neglect of serious analysis and understanding of culture but with an opposite emphasis. This is the imposition of values and particular ways of doing things previously developed in different contexts and presumed to be applicable elsewhere. The formulaic one-size-fits-all approach to mission results inevitably from failing to explore beneath the surface of a culture to see what cannot be seen without serious attentiveness. No culture is what it seems at first. Many contexts can seem familiar and herein lies the trap because they so rarely are. Such a neglect of context and culture may be true of both those within the culture (though presumably less frequent) and those from outside. Cultures may be flat or hierarchical, individualistic or collective, shame/honour or cleanliness or guilt based (or something else entirely), and have varying approaches to how truth is established, how

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<sup>57</sup> The basic principles, beliefs and values of a culture that shape and give direction to peoples' lives (Galatians 4:3, 4:9, Colossians 2:8, 2:20). The probability of spiritual powers exploiting the *stoicheia* does not diminish their cultural character.

relationships work, the ethics of money and power, the origins of evil, and the character of human rights. World views may be secularist, compartmentalized, spirit-world dominated, monistic, cyclical, or linear; and world views affect what is heard and observed. Identifying the historic and present causes as to why things are as they are usually takes much time. Yet without understanding these, presumptions follow and context and mission practice become disconnected.

The Christian faith is always to be counter-cultural (because no culture is free of sin and corruption). At the same time it recognizes that God's order of creation and His common grace will have generated in every culture what is good and worthy of endorsement. Identifying what of the context should shape mission practice and what should be resisted requires discernment.

The contextualization of the future new heaven/earth in particular mission contexts will need the wealth of understanding that builds up out of the created order and Scripture as well as a deep understanding of the mission context. In appreciating these well, Spirit-filled imaginative work enables practitioners to see the possibilities for mission engagement that proclaims something of the hope of new creation.

Intentional expressions of the future new earth can serve as metaphors for others; not by copying models regardless of context but each expression providing a stimulus for imagination in other contexts. The point is to be creative and grounded, and to be suspicious of replication and cloning of what works in other contexts. The examples of others are not programmes for all but metaphors for imagination. All the usual practices of creative thinking would apply so long as at all times imaginative possibilities remain grounded in creation and Scripture. The success or otherwise of these examples is not

really the point. Their value is in stretching the imaginations of others as they explore their own contexts and asking the basic questions around the potentials of the Kingdom fulfilled in the here-and-now. Nothing of this denies the necessity of God's sovereign engagement in the immediate or the eschatological future.<sup>58</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Imagination that motivates and shapes mission practice finds a most fertile field in the realm of new heaven/earth. Here is a creative tension between the known and the still mysterious, between the temporal mission work of God's people (the present) and the necessity for the coming of God in Christ to put all to right (the future), and between heavenly mindedness and earthly implementation.

Mission that anticipates the future is mission that strives for the best in each relationship of the triangulation of God, humankind and non-human creation. Mission that anticipates the new heaven/earth is an inevitable consequence of the richness of vision portrayed in God's earth and God's Word. Just as Jesus 'imagined the world otherwise' and acted accordingly, and as the people of God take the time to explore the evidence, and then to imagine the possibilities in their own context, so mission becomes a living expression of hope. In word and deed, mission proclaims hope, if not an actual representation then at least a symbolic declaration of the substance of this hope, an anticipation of a future worth living and dying for.

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<sup>58</sup> Conversations of possibility can be well supplemented by both the stories from other contexts and the publications that explore new heaven/earth such as those by Alcorn (2004), McGrath (2003), or CS Lewis (1946). See also CS Lewis' *The Narnia Chronicles* and the Trilogy of *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, *That Hideous Strength*. Many of the hymns of the Christian faith utilize imaginative poetry to express something of the hopes of new creation as can be found as well in poetic expressions of the beauty and joy of God's creation.



## Mission and Gospel in the Context of a Real Future for This Earth

How might mission in content and approach reflect the future hope of new heaven/earth? In the practice and direction of mission engagement, is there a consistent fit with the narrative from creation to new creation in which God in Christ reconciles and transforms all things into the new heaven/earth? How does the holistic and eschatological triangulation in the new heaven/earth shape the practice of Gospel/word and deed/action in mission?

This future orientation does not replace the mission practice which grows out of Gospel or Kingdom, or which expresses compassion, grace and justice, but introduces a particular flavouring and direction for all mission. The mission opportunities briefly discussed here are both practical possibilities and as metaphors to inspire further possibilities.

### MISSION

For the purposes of this chapter, mission is understood as follows.<sup>1</sup>

The heart of mission is the commission from God to the disciples of Jesus to be His servants or agents in His world in working with His agenda towards His ultimate goals.

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<sup>1</sup> In general terms, this summary of mission is consistent with, for example, Arias (2001), Bakke (1997), Bauckham (2003), Bauckham & Hart (1999), Bosch (1991, 1995), Bradshaw (1993, 2002), Christian (1999), Costas (1984, 1989), Dempster (1991, 1993), Dyrness (1998), Engel & Dyrness (2000), Fee (1991), Gnanakan (1989), Gutierrez (1974), BA Harvey (1999), Kanagaraj (1998), Kraus (1979), Lord (1997), Ma & Ma (2003), Padilla (1985), Peskett & Ramachandra (2003), Ramachandra (1996), Samuel & Sugden (1983, 1987, 1991, 1992, 1999), W Scott (1980), Senior & Stuhlmueller (1983), Shenk (1993), Snyder (2011), Swanson & Williams (2010), Thampu (1995), Van Engen et al (1993), Wright CJH (2006, 2010).

This is the *missio Dei* in which Jesus demonstrates complete self-sacrifice in faithfulness to God. To be sent as He was sent<sup>2</sup> is to take up the agenda of the Kingdom and to follow Jesus in self-sacrifice. In keeping with the purposes of God for His creation and Kingdom, this *missio Dei* addresses without exception the totality of all He has made. This is the essence of holistic mission and so the full range of personal, social, spiritual and material realities is on the agenda for God's mission work.

Authentic holistic mission never neglects the Gospel call to personal faith in Christ while engaging socially, politically or environmentally, nor the reverse. True holism is as broad and deep as the whole of the created order for which the Kingdom promises complete transformation. Holistic mission works with the purifying work of Christ that makes the earth a holy and fitting place for God's eternal dwelling. The judgement of God exiles from this new heaven/earth all who have preferred to live against Him. Contrary to many expressions found across the church, God is not rescuing us from the world<sup>3</sup> but transforming the world so that we might live in it with Him.

Mission then involves word and deed without minimising the role of one for the sake of the other; Gospel proclaimed and Gospel enacted in holistic engagement from context to context. If neglecting either word or deed, mission ceases to be holistic and to express the fullness of Gospel and Kingdom, to say nothing of ceasing to reflect the character and purposes of God Himself.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John 17:18, 20:21.

<sup>3</sup> Here the word 'world' is used in its inclusive sense rather than the narrow sense of the world of sin and evil.

<sup>4</sup> Mission also involves God's people in being the signs of the Kingdom, and signs of the future, as God's work unfolds in us and through us. Personal faith, individual lives, corporate life, and mission engagement are all to be signs of God's work. Furthermore, mission is not our work but God's. Such God-orientation for our hope is perhaps most seen in how the people of God humble themselves before Him in prayer. Mission necessitates intercession for this world as a primary work.



When Christians minimize the Gospel to little more than a message about how God forgives the individual, it is not surprising to see the general perplexity for many in the church on how to integrate word and deed in all the ways we serve God in mission. Yet the Gospel is far more than individual spiritual benefits. The Gospel declares God's purposes in Christ, God's already-completed work in Christ and God's work in Christ that will reach fruition when Christ returns. The Gospel proclaims that Jesus is exalted to the right hand of God to rule such that at the end, all the earth will be conformed to God's creation-wide purposes. He is Lord of heaven and earth and this changes everything. When persons yield in faith to Christ, life and forgiveness flow through the cross and the Spirit. However the Gospel is also a prophetic word to nations and their leaders, to industries and cultures, to all the earth. It calls for submission to Christ in all things, it is a word of certain hope that God will prevail in His purposes, and a word that warns of the perils in dismissing or being indifferent to this Lord.<sup>5</sup>

The Bible presents us with a God who values working through humankind. God's creation purposes had more to come when He set aside Adam and Eve to work with Him in the process. From the fall of Genesis 3 through to the coming of Christ in incarnation, God worked patiently in and through humankind. This patient work before the first advent continues through history to the second. Being human and being Christian privileges us as fellow-workers with Christ in all the purposes of God.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Some may be tempted to argue that if God will complete this world transformation anyway then we are somehow excused from involvement. If the earth is safe in His hands then we need only continue to make the Gospel known to individuals that they might come to faith. This is simply another version of the same argument that Paul dismisses so strongly in Romans 6. God's grace in all its breadth is never an excuse for neglect or rebellion. Rather God's grace in Christ draws us into the new life that is in Christ and this new life is the life of the Kingdom, the life of God's mission and the life to come in the new heaven/earth.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 8:253-258 and Chapter 11:364-367 for the extension of this pattern into human activity in new heaven/earth.

The challenge for God's people is to be wise in discerning the integration of word, deed, sign and prayer from context to context. The proclamation of the Gospel must never be divorced from the works of the Gospel. One without the other undermines the credibility and effectiveness of both. At the very least, every participation in the good deeds of the Kingdom brings opportunity to explain of our Gospel of hope (1 Peter 3:15). In turn, such possibilities raise the challenges of how we might live and serve with a decent flavouring of hope.

Mission that reflects the hope of life in the new earth produces a real dedication to work towards grace, justice, peace, holiness, reconciliation and righteousness. Love, compassion, truth, relationship with God, and a renewed environment in the new heaven/earth to come, provide us with direction and substance as to how we serve God in His world today. The best of mission expresses the coming freedom from corruption and poverty, from injustice and oppression, from immorality and cruelty. As is frequent in holistic mission literature,<sup>7</sup> mission is best when in its content and method it anticipates what is to come when Christ returns. It enables people to see and taste the future. The fact that we have limited knowledge of what these will look like should not dissuade us because we may be limited somewhat but we are not ignorant.<sup>8</sup>

The following practically oriented items are each worthy of further research in both theology and practice. The primary conclusion of the chapters above provides a substantial theological and Biblical foundation for such research. These possibilities provide some imaginative stimulus as to what future shaped mission might look like.

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 1:39-41.

<sup>8</sup> Such future-shaped mission bears witness to the truth of history and the trajectory of God's Kingdom work. Mission whether word or deed is testimony and the question is then one of bearing witness to what? To which world view, to which vision, to which hope? See Bauckham (2003:98-103).

## SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS TO MISSION AS ANTICIPATION

Three scholars with different perspectives write of future oriented mission possibilities. None argues in any way that might exclude the others. Together with the rest of this chapter, it becomes quite clear that there are multiple contextual possibilities for future anticipating mission. For all, the discussion of life in the new heaven/earth is limited.<sup>9</sup>

Lord (1997:119) lists seven characteristics of the future Kingdom and the local and global mission activities that express these hopes. In writing from a Pentecostal perspective, Lord stresses the necessity of the Spirit's work in each one.<sup>10</sup> However, much more integration exists than such a list allows between the items in the Future Kingdom list, and more breadth and depth to the new heaven/earth than these seven items. Consequently, the list of Mission Activities is also an over-simplification. At least however, more than most, Lord attempts to give some substance to the concept of mission that anticipates the future.

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<sup>9</sup> More limited than the three contributions being considered here, Thiel (2006:529-541) gives emphasis to the current resurrection activities of Jesus as a 'paradigm' (529) for how God's people might approach life and mission. Jesus in embodied resurrection is active in keeping His promises, bearing the pain of His life without reproach, reconciling failure, and showing Himself to be who He is (531). For him, the practicalities for God's people in this present life should flow out of the expectation of the activities of resurrection life. So God's people should be faithful in the keeping of promises, forgiving to one another, reconciling when failure overwhelms, and living in communion together while recognising that resurrection will heal and purify but will not change the essence of our individualized personhood as shaped by being sinners who have been sinned against.

<sup>10</sup> *Future Kingdom*                      *Mission Activities*  
Jesus is Lord                              Evangelism  
Healing                                      Healing, Spiritual Gifts  
Justice and Peace                        Social Action  
Unity in Diversity                        Ecumenical Action  
Creation Set Free                        Ecological Action  
Praise and Worship                      Spirituality  
Love and Fellowship                      Christian Character

Sugden (2003:74) is much more expansive and allows for greater integration between the various possible responses to the future in mission practice.<sup>11</sup> However, his list is less future oriented than the opening statement leads us to expect. Several of the practices he advocates do not necessitate a future vision to be authentic as they grow out of the breadth of life in the already partially realized Kingdom of God. The list, valuable as it is, would benefit from a stronger statement as to what the future new heaven/earth will be like to fully appreciate future shaped transformational mission.

Moltmann (1999:265-289) has two parts to his discussion on anticipation. The first (267-279) calls God's people to be free from the 'syndromes' that enslave history, to open history to God's future. An alternative future emerges to the prescriptions of 'the conservative syndrome' and 'the progressive syndrome', 'the conservative *blockade* of the future and the progressive *occupation* of the future' (278. Emphases original.). Christians are to live history as God's history as it travels towards the future God has promised.

The second (279-289) is a series of responses built around the concept of Sabbath because Sabbath (including Jubilee) both reminds us of God's past faithfulness and expects the consequences of God's faithfulness in the coming redeemed world. In Sabbath all are equal in the messianic community as reflected in Acts 4:31-35. Sabbath brings liberation for prisoners, captives and debtors. The poor particularly benefit from Sabbath practice. It brings rest for the land that the land might be renewed. Sabbath shapes the Christian ethic which is 'an ethic of lived hope and is hence related to the

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<sup>11</sup> 'Transformation is about a vision of society; it is forward looking; it is about the action of God in bringing change. We start with the future to develop a vision for the present. .... These components are [abbreviated]: (a) A new creation ...; (b) The centrality of the cross ...; (c) The cross and suffering ... to bring positive change; (d) The cross makes possible a new, reconciled humanity ...; (e) An integral relation between evangelism and social action ...; (f) Mission as witness and journey ...; (g) Stewardship ...; (h) Shalom ...; (i) Freedom ....'

horizon of historical change which is open to the future.’ (285). Moltmann is more expansive than the other contributors but more by stimulating imaginative possibilities than by ensuring that first the new heaven/earth is appreciated in all its diversity and richness.

All three papers have great potential to stimulate the imagination as to how word and deed in mission might portray the expectations of new creation. But they are best read together to express well the many ways mission might point towards new heaven/earth.

### **A GOSPEL THAT ANTICIPATES**

It is customary in missiological discussions to distinguish between shame and guilt based cultures and how mission might fit with such cultures. However, because many pluralistic contexts regard guilt and shame as essentially psychological and emotional realities, and the traditional Christian message of salvation from hell is seen as bordering on the bizarre,<sup>12</sup> it is quite a challenge to get a hearing when the focus of the message is forgiveness from sin or freedom from shame. But these are not the only cultural structures. Bauckham and Hart (1999 and 2000) explore the malaise of Western cultures and the increasing nihilism that postmodernity seems to facilitate.<sup>13</sup> The flip-side to this nihilism is hopelessness, a fear that there is no future worth living and dying for.

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<sup>12</sup> That is, hell as commonly perceived. Eternally burning in a lake of fire not only makes no sense at all to post-modern ears but is regarded as morally offensive and unjust when considered through the world view of pluralism and tolerance.

<sup>13</sup> Bauckham and Hart here represent a large range of materials on the impact of culture, postmodernity and postmodernism on the beliefs and practices of the Christian church. The emerging and missional church literature is one part of this. The particular value of Bauckham and Hart is the integration of the many observations of Western culture under the heading of nihilism. That is, identifying what is at the heart of the culture today. One of the consequences of globalization is the exporting of Western culture to the non-Western world.

If hell is too bizarre for many to consider seriously, what about heaven as the alternative to hell? Too often our future hope is presented as a ‘cloudy, ethereal, night-dress-wearing view of eternity’ (Leany 2007:63) that hardly inspires any desire to know more or to take seriously the need for salvation.<sup>14</sup> Such observations are not to say that guilt and shame are no longer serious issues but that in many contexts people are not listening because the main issue is whether or not there is a hope and a future.<sup>15</sup> In these contexts, when the Christian faith is primarily a matter of individual and private benefit, there are two consequences. First, it results in a limited understanding of hope in the supremacy and capacity of Christ as sufficient to resolve the substantial global challenges now dominating the media. This is the inevitable consequence of a gospel that is all about what Christ does for us individualistically rather than a Gospel about the reality of Christ as Lord of Heaven and Earth. Secondly, many regard Christian faith as ethically deficient in that all it has to offer is escapism from these threats.

The hope of the Kingdom fulfilled is not disembodied hymn singing but a life in which every one of the good things of the earth is enjoyed even as each is also transformed into something even better than before. This is good news of a hope and future that has potential to resonate well with many in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world of fear.<sup>16</sup>

Leany’s challenge is similar (2007). Our message is deficient because we offer so little hope worth hoping for. We need a Gospel that points forward to the full measure of the Kingdom fulfilled as well as to the trustworthiness and capacity of the One

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<sup>14</sup> Similar observations of this future stripped bare of all earthly associations have been made by Alcorn (2004), Snyder (2011) and NT Wright (2007).

<sup>15</sup> Political partisanship and ineptitude, overwhelming global challenges in economics, violence and migration, a real sense that the ecological and climate issues have placed all of our futures at risk, and the powerlessness of nation states and individuals to change things in a globalized world, have all contributed to a profound uncertainty.

<sup>16</sup> See also Bauckham (2003) and Bosch (1995).

commissioned to make it so. Leany states that this message of new creation in Christ 'is the Gospel' (65).

The narrative researched in this study substantiates the earthly reality built into Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom of God. It is no wonder that blessing comes in the Kingdom for all with their various longings (Matthew 5:3-10). The Gospel is one of hope for a new order of reality, a new order of life on earth in which heaven is present because God is present. Such a Gospel has great potential to challenge the nihilism of our age. It addresses the issues already on the minds of people that significantly influence what they live for and by. A call to repentance and faith in this context with this Gospel makes sense. The flow of God's grace through the cross for the forgiveness of sins now has context.

The earthiness of the Gospel brings substance to hope for radical renewal in all of the areas that dominate the social, media and political agendas. The Gospel for this age and context needs to express as priority the message of this research. That for this earth, and for all the dimensions of life that seem to be so much without hope, arises a Gospel and Kingdom in which new creation is coming. Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth and to all who put their hope/faith in Him, there is a hope and a future in a transformed earth in all its many facets of life: not despair but hope in the One who will put all to right in a work which has already begun and which will reach its conclusion when He returns to earth bringing heaven with Him.

BA Harvey (1999) also engages the nihilism of much contemporary culture. He traces the inevitable consequences of a lack of an eschatological trajectory for both the church and its witness and for the cultures in which the church lives. He also argues that

eschatology without good appreciation of creation beginnings is inevitably going to be askew. For the church to proclaim this hope the church needs to take up the call again to be an *altera civitas*, another city, which expresses the anticipated community values and practices of the New Jerusalem. The church is to look ‘for the city that is to come’ (Hebrews 13:14) not merely as some kind of piety of thought but as a practical expression throughout the body of Christ, a society within the wider society, which functions and lives as best it can in imitation of the city to come. This is a message of both word and deed, full of a hope that has earthy substance transformed by divine presence.

## **EDEN-SHAPED MISSION AS ANTICIPATION**

The Eden-like qualities of the New Jerusalem vision in Revelation 21-22 give us insight about life in the new heaven/earth. Human activity in Genesis 1-2 included learning, social participation, and work. These are fundamental to being human and therefore enable us to appreciate more of what we can anticipate in the new heaven/earth. How then might mission express these three?

### **Learning**

Chapter Eight,<sup>17</sup> noted the significance of learning and knowledge for the implementation of human participation in the creation. O’Donovan summarizes this well, ‘Knowledge is the characteristically *human* way of participating in the cosmic order’ (1994:81. Emphasis original.). Every facet of human responsibility requires a commitment to learning because without knowledge of the true creation, humankind would live in illusion. Learning is intrinsic to being human and humankind without

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<sup>17</sup> Chapter 8:253-258.



learning is thereby dehumanized. No suggestion appears that God somehow instantly and miraculously provides the knowledge needed. Rather, as is typical in God's work, He works through the usual processes of human engagement. God teaches as humankind sets out to learn.

This high value for learning and knowledge appears recurringly throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, instructions abound for learning: binding the word of God to oneself, remembering the great works of God in creation and history, teaching, meditating, and listening to the prophets.<sup>18</sup> Both creation and Scripture are sources of learning and insight.<sup>19</sup> Hosea 4:6<sup>20</sup> captures well the consequences of neglect. The New Testament likewise values learning and knowledge. At the heart of the concept of repentance is the changing of one's mind. A disciple is a learner or student or apprentice. The mind matters greatly to Jesus and Paul.<sup>21</sup> Paul's exhortation to the Philippians expresses the breadth of learning across creation and scripture (Philippians 4:8).

The high value given to knowledge is demonstrated in the person of Christ (Colossians 2:3) who is the image of God (Colossians 1:15). Paul's desires that the Colossians 'have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself' (2:2). Whatever the mysteries of all that is ours already in Christ, we

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<sup>18</sup> Knight explores the eschatological work of God to bring humankind to full humanity. The proper response to this formation work of God is to place ourselves as children who are dedicated to learning as part of a learning community. He summarizes, 'Learning accounts for the relationship between Israel's elect being and holy becoming.' (Knight 2006:xvi-xvii) What we learn now equips us for our full participation in the new heaven/earth and the mission that anticipates it. God's eschatological hospitality towards us requires that we position ourselves as learners before Him.

<sup>19</sup> As noted in Chapter 10:330-335.

<sup>20</sup> 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.' (Hosea 4:6)

<sup>21</sup> For example: Jesus says to love God with all one's mind (Matthew 22:37) and Paul instructs that we should 'Be transformed by the renewal of your mind.' (Romans 12:2). He also instructs that Christians should be 'perfectly united in mind and thought.' (1 Corinthians 1:10, cf. Philippians 1:27-2:18). Paul's prayers for the churches feature knowledge, wisdom, understanding, insight and discernment.

are already in union with the one who is full of wisdom and knowledge and this generates an intentional seeking after understanding.

The image of God, both for humankind in general in Genesis 1-2 or Christ in particular in Colossians 1-2, includes knowledge. In Christ this is already complete; for humankind the appropriate response is to value highly this knowledge and commit to a life of learning. Consequently, if learning is intrinsic to being human, then full restoration in the new heaven/earth will engage God's people in a life of learning. Only God is omniscient and while it is true that, 'then I will know fully' (1 Corinthians 13:12), it is unlikely that God will enable us to learn everything in the moment of transition into resurrection life.

Life in the new heaven/earth will not be static but will develop and change as humankind engages in the work inherent in human life in God's created order. This work, as well as the joys of God's presence with God's people in God's creation, will bring multiple opportunities for learning. Anticipating this new creation will include valuing practices of learning for wisdom and knowledge. All the mission possibilities in this chapter for mission as anticipation of the new heaven/earth require knowledge and wisdom.<sup>22</sup>

#### LEARNING IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Everist (2002) weaves together the themes of lifelong learning, the church as a learning community and culture, and the place of learning for effective mission. Although not

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<sup>22</sup> There is potential for retirement to be seen as an increased opportunity for learning that prepares and equips for active participation in the new heaven/earth. With as much as we do know of the life and work to come, what new skills or new understandings or other capacities might become desirable in retirement as retirees dream of what's next. Again, such learning would bring opportunity for the application of 1 Peter 3:15.

particularly developed in this mostly practical book, she states that for education, 'planning in theological terms, is "doing" eschatology ... as a way of living into God's promised future that shapes not only our dreams but the ways we envision and plan.' Everist (2002:249) An eschatologically shaped integration of learning for mission and lifelong learning for all in the life of the church is imperative.

The church then is to be a learning centre with a learning culture equipping God's people for God's mission, deepening their theological appreciation of the narrative from creation to new creation, and facilitating the transformation of individuals-in-community into the image of Christ so as to be cadres in His mission. A church that functions with such a culture will be exploring multiple ways for facilitating learning for all age groups, whether new or old to the faith. Such a church, to the limits of its resources, welcomes formal and serious academic studies through to the practicalities of the creative arts. But above all it unashamedly values learning and reflects this in the way it prays and sings, in preaching, and in its exhortations. The church needs to help its people both learn and critique from sources both within and without the church. It is not afraid to leave people with unanswered questions.<sup>23</sup>

In offering learning opportunities to all, both within and beyond the church, hopefully questions will be inspired as to why hope so strongly shapes the learning agenda. True learning embraces the whole creation of God and the whole engagement of God in human history. From gardening to international politics, music to Christology, psychology to aeronautics, and the story of creation to new creation.

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<sup>23</sup> See also Campbell (2000), Foster (1994), Freire (2001), Plantinga (2002). For a wider application of learning culture throughout any business or organization see Senge (2006).

The mission possibilities in the world of learning are many. In the vast range of career and volunteer opportunities throughout the spectrum of educational programmes and institutions, Christian salt, light and hope would be most valuable. For those with the skills and vision, research across the spectrum of life in God's creation and Kingdom can enhance learning and increase the knowledge and wisdom of humankind. Where opportunities for learning are scarce, the church's mission may result in setting up schools.

The church has a strong advocacy role in education and learning. Such mission speaks prophetically for the value of lifelong learning in enabling humankind to live well in God's creation. This advocacy would challenge the reductionist voices who suggest that learning is only valuable for employment purposes. It would also argue strongly for equal opportunity not just in one's own community but for all nations and all peoples. Learning always takes place within contexts of beliefs and values thereby bringing opportunity for advocacy for those beliefs and values expressed in the Kingdom of God and the real hope of its fulfilment in the earth to come.

## **Social**

The Gospel of the Kingdom embraces a new social order as is reflected throughout the narrative from the Eden to the new creation. In Christ, all will be transformed including a new way of living together in community. Earthly life, whether this earth or in its renewed state to come, is thoroughly relational and the character of this community life is expressed in the created order, the promises of the Kingdom, and the descriptions of the new heaven/earth which is a city, a community, not a collection of isolated homesteads. The vision of new heaven/earth includes a community of God's people

who fill the earth. Both now and in the future, the church, the community of God's people, is vital.<sup>24</sup>

If the church is to live in the light of this hope, and to make this hope known in its mission, then the church needs to be intentional in its witness to the social reality and character of the fulfilled Kingdom. Evidence of the quality and character of this community life is captured in such key words as grace, mutuality, acceptance, love, peace, justice, unity, fellowship, and honour. Here will be serving of one another, enjoying the creation together, and praising God as He shares with us in this life: a community life that is a living and breathing manifestation of the realities of new heaven/earth.

In such a church community life is evidence of the Gospel as authentic, visible for all to see. This visibility invites attention and raises questions in the minds of the observers.<sup>25</sup> To be visible, the life of the church needs both opportunity for those outside the church to be free and comfortable to come into the church to taste and see, and the church as a body needs to be visibly and actively present in the wider society. The latter is not simply about being actively involved in the issues of the day<sup>26</sup> but also in social activities of celebration, recreation, sport and the gatherings with no other purpose than simply to enjoy each other's company.

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<sup>24</sup> Schwarz refers to 'The Church as Reminder of God's Future', as 'The Symbol of the Future', as 'The Anticipation of the Heavenly City' and explores some of the practical expressions of this anticipation (2000:370-380).

<sup>25</sup> cf. Isaiah 2:2-3, Zechariah 8:23, Acts 2:46-47, 1 Corinthians 14:24-25.

<sup>26</sup> Here again the challenge is to participate in word and deed with perspectives shaped by Gospel, Kingdom and the new heaven/earth to come. Too easily Christians simplistically adopt the politically correct agendas of the cultural or political groups with whom they most identify.

However, church life seems to have become more typically invisible to the world beyond. Quite apart from the church's weaknesses in actually being a New Jerusalem community, it neglects the missional nature of being the church. Kraus (1979) presents the challenge that the church of 'individuals-in-community' is to be the authentic witness that authenticates the Gospel. For this to happen, the church needs to be porous such that those not yet a part of the community can come and go to taste and see what this Kingdom is all about.<sup>27</sup>

See Appendix B:397-399 for two particular expressions of community life with potential to express and anticipate the sociality of the new heaven/earth.

## **Work**

We have already noted Middleton's conclusion<sup>28</sup> that work is integral to the *imago Dei* (2005), and is functional, missional and 'grounded in the nature of God' (2005:297). Cosden (2004) is not satisfied with any understanding of work or *imago Dei* that fails to appreciate the ontological character of work. Work does have its 'instrumental' and 'relational' functions, the *imago Dei* may include substantive qualities, but the essence of being human is intrinsically, ontologically, inclusive of work. Cosden's exploration of the ontological, instrumental and relational facets of work enables him to explore the ethical issues and challenges of work within a vision for human flourishing as the image bearers of God.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Much discussion is happening across the global church on the cultural divide between church and society. This is not the subject of this study but a real challenge to be addressed if the church is to be an authenticating witness in its community life. There is much discussion, some better than others, in the missional and emerging church literature on the issues of culture.

<sup>28</sup> Chapter 8:253-258.

<sup>29</sup> While the focus of this discussion is on the ontological nature of work, it would be a misrepresentation of this argument to conclude that being human is merely work. There are clearly spiritual, personal and interpersonal facets of being human but these are not the subject of this discussion at this point. The social and learning realities for humanity being fully human are also considered in this chapter.

Furthermore, Cosden argues that work is only theologically appreciated if explored within the trajectory of a teleology that includes the protology of creation, Christology and the work of Christ, and eschatology with its consummation in new creation. With such a perspective, Cosden argues that the ontological nature of work reinforces the place of work in new heaven/earth. Cosden also essentially endorses the contribution of Volf (1991) who argues for a pneumatological understanding of work with the anticipation of new creation. Both are critical of a merely vocational understanding of work.<sup>30</sup>

Work is built into the vicegerent role bestowed on humankind in Genesis 1-2 and work within creation is one of those relationships which sin corrupted in Genesis 3. To be human is to work because as image bearers of the God who works, humankind becomes less than human when work is denied or corrupted. As the image of God, Christ works in creation and reconciliation (Colossians 1:15-20) and in Him full image-bearing humanity is restored to His people.

Life in the new heaven/earth will not be static but a living and breathing reality involving work as a partnership between God and humankind. It will evolve and change continually through the productivity of humankind. Given the earthy nature of this new creation, work will involve the range of activities that sustain and enhance human life and human engagement with God. Work will have a certain familiarity in that work will reflect engagement with this earth. Yet in the unknowns of new creation there may be new expressions of work; different from but consistent with the work-at-its-best that we know. It will, of course, be work free from the many corruptions of work that have brought heavy burdens since the time of Genesis 3. It will be work that inspires and

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<sup>30</sup> Various others have offered theologies of work. Cosden reviews the contributions of Gunton, Moltmann and Cairns. See also Cosden (2006), Hardy (1990), Stevens (1999).

satisfies, that only produces what is good, and that always brings contentment and pleasure. Cultivation of gardens, creative expressions of God's glory reflected in new creation, facilitating and enhancing community life, building places to live and places to gather; these are just some of the many ways in which humankind will be productive. All work will be Spirit filled and all work a comprehensive fellowship with Father and Son through which God will be praised and enjoyed.

How might mission express such a vision of work? <sup>31</sup>

Churches have a substantial role in ensuring their members develop a high view of work, consistent with the best of theological perspectives on work now and work in the new heaven/earth, so that they might implement these understandings and values in across all occupations they have. Christian institutions of all kinds need to ensure all their employment practices reflect the best of work theology and ethics so as to ensure human flourishing in accordance with being image bearers of the Creator Himself. The same applies to Christians in senior positions in any entity where they might have responsibility for the work experience of others. Ignorance or neglect of such theological grounding is to dismiss the great significance of God's image and to work effectively against the very purposes for which God is working.

All societies have multiple issues involving work and a real place for mission that advocates for the best of work understanding and practice. Well informed Christian participation in business and employer organizations, workers' unions, government regulation developments, as well as the International Labour Organization, is a valuable

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<sup>31</sup> To use Cosden's threefold construct of work (ontological, instrumental and relational), how might mission in the realm of work embrace all three of these features?



mission engagement. Human Resource policy and practice in any context is worthy of serious attention.

Perhaps one of the more difficult questions is whether or not our work fits with God's work towards the new heaven/earth. A wide range of occupations have potential to work with God towards this future. Each could be twisted into something destructive but at their best, they have real place in working towards what is to come. Other occupations work only in areas that have no place in the new heaven/earth. The challenge is to persuade Christians that their own work, their place of mission engagement, is a contributor to new creation. If not, time to change jobs – except that sometimes this a luxury many do not have and sometimes Christians stay in ungodly contexts that they might be salt and light in the service of others. The answers may be hard to come by but the asking of the questions is a worthy expression of hope.

Work is a most worthy Christian activity because it expresses the nature of our God who works. Work is worthy of being valued and intentionally shaped by the *imago Dei* and the nature of work in the new creation. Work is always missional in that by word and deed we are to be instruments in the hands of God in His Kingdom work both now and in the new creation.<sup>32</sup> Work brings great opportunity for accounting 'for the hope that is in you' (2 Peter 3:15).

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<sup>32</sup> That is, understanding mission as commission from God whether in the Garden of Eden, in the world from Fall to the return of Christ, or in the new heaven /earth where humankind will continue to be assigned to productive activity.

## FOUR PARTICULARLY RELEVANT EXPRESSIONS OF MISSION AS ANTICIPATION

### 1. Environmental

The findings of this research into a theology of the earth's future provide a significant shift in perspective. An eschatological perspective brings hope for this earth radically changing the nature of Christian engagement in ecology. This research shifts the conversation away from more alarmist and pessimistic rhetoric facing these serious challenges with hope and confidence. It shifts the focus of hope away from anthropocentric activism to a theocentric world view in which God has promised to prevail and renew, yet without lessening human responsibility to act. This research shifts the over-reliance on the order of creation to include a much stronger Christological, pneumatological and eschatological dimension to the Christian perspective.

Furthermore, this research strengthens the needed foundation in the search for an environmental hermeneutic for reading the Bible ecologically.<sup>33</sup> Before an ecological hermeneutic can be established, an eschatological foundation needs to clarify the ultimate purposes of God for this earth.

An ecological engagement in mission has the advantage of providing a visible and concrete expression of hope in a world already tuned in to the ecological threats of our age. This visibility has great symbolic value and much potential to express the hope of new heaven/earth in the readiness of the wider community to engage in environmental renewal activity and discussion. The fact of hope, even as so many are pessimistic,

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<sup>33</sup> See the discussion of this in Chapter 1:17, 35-37.

gives opportunity for Christian witness to express this hope in word (Gospel), deed (ecological work and advocacy), and sign (symbolic expressions of hope).

The city-like nature of the new heaven/earth brings another perspective to the environmental realities of mission that anticipates. Explorations of this particular realm of mission are in Bakke (1997), Swanson and Williams (2010), and BA Harvey (1999).

Creation and new creation involve hierarchical order. The pattern of triangulation evident in the narrative of the earth strongly endorses humankind's unique position. Humankind is vicegerent, not to exploit and harm, not to neglect the well-being of the whole created order, but to ensure within the capacities of humankind good order, relationships, care and consideration so as to facilitate Eden like qualities as much as possible. That is, to cultivate and enhance all that all might flourish.

## **2. Peace**

Does the church witness to the hope of peace?<sup>34</sup> How might the body of Christ take seriously the expectation of a violence-free new heaven/earth and make it known to the wider world? Greater weight should be given to the need to live now consistently with how we will live in the new heaven/earth. The history of the issues of peace and war is long and complex.<sup>35</sup> The point here is not to simplistically resolve the difficulties. If the church's word and deed of the Kingdom are to be more credible than the church and its people need more intentionally to step out of the cultural and political perspectives that too often have had precedence over Scripture, failing to take seriously the direction in which God is taking His creation.

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Psalms 46:9-10, 76:3, 122:6-7, Isaiah 2:4, 9:5-7, 11:6-9, 32:17-18, 52:7, 55:12, 66:12, Ezekiel 39:7-10, Hosea 2:18, Micah 4:3-4, Zechariah 9:10.

<sup>35</sup> For a history of peace movements see Cortright (2008). For a history of the just war theory, see O'Donovan (2003). For an apocalyptic perspective see Yoder (1988).

### **3. The celebration of creation and beauty**

The many dimensions of beauty in creation have great potential to open our eyes to the even greater beauty of the new creation. Creation in itself is a celebration of creativity and so anticipation of new earth finds expression in the creativity of the many visual arts, gardening and landscaping, architecture and city-scaping, music and writing. Working even now for a future filled with beauty is an appropriate mission engagement.<sup>36</sup>

Participation in the many creative arts, with word and deed, has much potential for expressing our hope. Our vision is new heaven/earth filled with beauty. Creation, the character of God and the promises of the Kingdom for new heaven/earth provide considerable inspiration. In all human work and creativity is great opportunity to point forward to the vision of the new heaven/earth. The creative arts potentially stimulate the imagination to see beyond the more mechanical expressions of hope. God's creativity is life-giving and so creative expressions of the new creation have missional potential in that they are life-revealing and therefore hopeful.

### **4. Reconciliation**

The social space between peoples, nations, and cultures is lessening year by year and with increasing numbers of people migrating for all sorts of reasons, there will be much that brings us all even closer together. Globalization in economics, culture, politics, media and climate change continues to increase. The people of the future will be those who can navigate through this labyrinth that includes cultures of every colour, multiple socio-political perspectives, religious/spiritual diversity, and rich and poor living as neighbours. All this on a planet at risk and in which fear-driven, reactionary extremists

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<sup>36</sup> Art has a noticeable absence from many Protestant churches which contrasts with the art that is common in most other places of worship.

promote nationalism, or religious or ethnic purity, or xenophobia rather than face the challenge of learning to live alongside of those who are different. Many are reacting against these developments as we see in various nationalism movements, jihadis, anti-immigration stances, and preferences for people with differences to go elsewhere. Within our churches are people who would rather not associate with one another.

A spirit of reconciliation will mark out those of the future and those withdrawing into an imaginary past. Those with capacities in reconciliation, and who give it the passion that it already has in the heart of God, will be the cadres who will win the future. Reconciliation between competing interests, between factions of all kinds with long histories of conflict, between broken persons who have hurt each other, between humankind and the earth God has given us; these are just some of the substantial challenges that are accumulating and human society will only be able to live in peace if collectively we can reconcile with one another across this range.

In the light of Colossians 1:19-20, it would be inappropriate to be selective on which areas of relational disintegration with which to engage. If God in Christ desires to reconcile all creation to Himself, then all expressions of enmity are to be on our Kingdom agenda. A reconciling mind-set should characterize the Christian community expressed in relationships within the Christian community, relationships across the range of Christian communities and the wider society, and in the mission engagements of the church. Each one is dependent on the authenticity of the others because inconsistency always undermines credibility. Even the most closed church is more visible to the wider world than they usually realize and in such isolation it sends a message to others.

Both Volf (1999) and Constantineanu (2010) argue that for reconciliation to be genuine and true to the Gospel, in practice it must be vertically and horizontally understood and integrated.<sup>37</sup> Volf expands on reconciliation at some length (1996) but more specifically for our purposes here, he reflects on the implementation of God's reconciling work for God's people in the new heaven/earth (2000). Whatever God in Christ might complete in Christ's return in the transformation of God's people, each one needs to appropriate God's reconciling work in their relationships with others in the new heaven/earth. Pursuing reconciliation with hope anticipates and moves towards the completion of reconciliation as relationships are restored one-by-one after the Parousia.

Further work is needed to build upon what Volf and Constantineanu have advocated. Both take up several of the larger factors of enmity such as gender, ethnicity, culture, and nationality. However they tend more towards these as factors affecting individuals. If nations are to enter side by side into the New Jerusalem then reconciliation must be between nations (Isaiah 2:4) and between other groupings of people where the tensions are collective in nature.

A church that fully appreciates what is to come is a church passionate about pursuing reconciliation across the spectrum of fractured relationships in every sphere of life.<sup>38</sup> Such a church will regard reconciliation within its own community as having high priority in its own right, but also because the church, in its witness and in its mission work towards reconciliation, must demonstrate a real consistency to be authentic and

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<sup>37</sup> Vertical refers to relationship with God and horizontal to relationships across human society. Strangely both Volf and Constantineanu have almost nothing that explores Colossians 1:19-20 even though it is a passage with considerably relevance to their positions. Presumably this is due to questions about the Pauline authorship of Colossians. However, a canonical approach would be more useful in persuading the church to take up the full implications of reconciliation.

<sup>38</sup> That is, agents, facilitators or mediators of reconciliation: standing in the place between those in conflict, establishing trustful relationships with all sides so as to enable the dialogue that moves towards peaceful resolution.

credible. Such a church will seek for the ‘peace of the city’ – and beyond – with hope and determination knowing that Christ’s work on the cross has already made such reconciliation possible; if not now, certainly in the consummation.<sup>39</sup>

## **CAMBODIAN EXAMPLES OF MISSION AS ANTICIPATION**

Over the two decades I have worked in Cambodia, I experienced and observed a wide range of mission engagement.<sup>40</sup> I observed in multiple ways how an earthly hope in a Kingdom-shaped new heaven/earth significantly facilitates integrated thinking and holistic practice across a wide spectrum of activities such as business, education, community development, church planting and growth, and other sectors. For the purposes of this chapter, I asked around 20 people to describe in a paragraph how such a hope transforms their mission conceptually and practically around the question, ‘What difference does it make?’ These people are well known to me as mission leaders with a holistic and eschatological perspective of hope for this earth. Each is committed to a holistic understanding of the Kingdom: each strongly appreciates the necessity of this earth’s presence in the completed Kingdom for the Kingdom to be all that the Scriptures promise. Eschatology provides a conceptual and practical structure for mission practice. The following is a selection of their responses.

Raju Bhagwat, from India, for several years mentored, trained and supported the most senior leaders of the Cambodian church in the Timothys All Project.<sup>41</sup> He continues in Cambodia as a consultant and trainer in peace, justice, reconciliation and non-violence.

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<sup>39</sup> See Schreiter and Jørgensen (2013) for an extensive exploration of mission and reconciliation.

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 1:8-10.

<sup>41</sup> Senior leaders includes heads of denominations and others with seniority and influence over several provinces.

Reconciliation and unity among Christian leaders, training activists to seek justice in non violence ways, conservation of biodiversity - none of these are a romantic ideal or a pointless task, but an anticipatory sign of the Kingdom of God being established here on earth.<sup>42</sup>

Five years ago, Raju facilitated a workshop of senior leaders from the Cambodian church on the theme of 'Multi-dimensional Reconciliation'. The leaders concluded that holistic reconciliation included:

1. Me with God
2. Me with Myself
3. Me with We (those who are like me)
4. Me with Others (those who are different to me)
5. Me with Structures and Systems
6. Me with Creation

Warwick Browne, an Australian, is a former country director of OXFAM in Cambodia. Here the Lordship of Christ, and His Kingdom agenda, provides a reference point for determining not just present practice but present practice driven by an eschatological anticipation of the Kingdom fulfilled in the nations of this earth.

In Cambodia I have started a small-group tour business, RareFind Journeys, a name inspired by the parable of the pearl of great price in Matt 13. This is significant for me as it is a Kingdom parable about the unimaginable value of being part of God's Kingdom. But not only that, I have designed some tours to allow 'education' of the tour client about Christian mission and work that it is not just band-aid stuff for a failing world but a construction of faith and hope in a nation, a world, that is being renewed as God draws all things to himself under the lordship of the King. Hopefully the challenge will change perspective and help some clients approach their work and lives with new effectiveness and purpose.<sup>43</sup>

Jojo Pastores, a Filipino, has served for many years in Cambodia in several roles involving capacity building and child rights and protection. Currently he is Country Director of EDUCO in Cambodia. Eschatological expectations for this earth bring an added dimension and hope to other mission imperatives.

My understanding that earth is the location for completed Kingdom of God gives me a deeper appreciation of how my ministry's impact directly links to what God wants his people and children to experience not only in terms of spiritual salvation as an "after life consequence" but also including all the physical, environmental, quality of life experiences on earth. This helps me define standards of a just, humane and equal society as written in the Bible.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Raju Bhagwat, email correspondence, 23-5-2015.

<sup>43</sup> Warwick Browne, email correspondence, 9-6-2015.

<sup>44</sup> Jojo Pastores, email correspondence, 29-5-2015.



Brian Maher is a missionary from the United States of America:

Transformed my ministry from didactic teaching/training about personal morality/ethics to leading young people into experiential and participatory encounters (orthopraxy) with people in resettlement villages, eviction sites, involvement in advocacy, mercy ministry, and environmental activity reclamation, following experiences up with dynamic reflection and processing, which has proven to open hearts more effectively to the big picture of God's Kingdom purposes.<sup>45</sup>

Maher comes out of a Dispensationalist background and for more than two decades has primarily been involved in youth leadership training for the Cambodian church. The vision of God's Kingdom fulfilled in particular contexts on this earth transforms mission practice

Betty Langelier, from The Netherlands, is now serving as pastor of an international church in Gouda. While in Cambodia for nearly two decades, she was involved in community development, and programme development, monitoring and evaluation. Her journey in mission highlights the value of an eschatological meta-story that engages with and brings hope to the communities on this earth in which she worked.

As a regular topic: many conversations and discussions have me remark on the 'New Earth' and that brings a perspective to the conversations that changes the dynamic. It has freed me up to live more relaxed AND more engaged. Before I found things of faith confusing and missing a meta-story that would take me beyond myself and my personal standing before God. It has also provided me a foundation for Community Development. When I was studying I sometimes wished I was a Marxist because then I would know how to move into development with a community. Kingdom perspective is the meta-story and paints the goal picture that gives principles for action. Combines head, heart and hands. Wholistic. Able to hold paradox.<sup>46</sup>

Mark Wilson is a former Country Director of Food for the Hungry and now a missionary focussing on Theological Education for Cambodian church leaders. Here Kingdom completion is deeply embedded in the continuity of this earth transformed by the arrival of the New Jerusalem.

I wondered how God might use my life, saving souls for the life to come, or, saving lives in this life? Were not both important and somehow connected? Thankfully, God provided the answer through an organization whose call realized the truth that Jesus is making all things new (Rev 21). He taught His

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<sup>45</sup> Brian Maher, email correspondence, 11-6-2015.

<sup>46</sup> Betty Langelier, email correspondence, 23-5-2015.

disciples to pray that the Kingdom would come and His will be done, here and now, and completed when He returns, not to destroy, but to complete the restoration. So I completed my seminary education that I might work closely with the growing and maturing Cambodia church in being His agents of restoration of all that was broken, and more! While God's story began in a garden, it will end in a city, and we can be sure that it will not just be "good," but indeed "very good" (cf Gen 1.31).<sup>47</sup>

Wilson was the prime mover in setting up a training programme for local church leaders in the theology and practice of holistic engagement by the local church in their local community without relying on external funding and personnel.<sup>48</sup> Loving their neighbours in small-scale practical ways integrates with expressions of the Gospel in conversation and other presentations.

In these examples, and in many other observations, the conceptual framework of Kingdom fulfilment, inclusive of this earth, facilitates an integrated and holistic insight into how mission work might participate well in the *Missio Dei*. A more grounded and integrated mission theology facilitates a stronger unity between different emphases in mission, stimulates greater creativity in appropriate contextualization, and liberates workers from unhelpfully narrow vision.

## **OTHER EXAMPLES OF MISSION AS ANTICIPATION**

### **1. Rossing reports on an East Boston example and other expressions of New Jerusalem as 'imagining' that 'empowers' action (1998) .**

New Jerusalem is a vision for the future. It is a vision we can glimpse even now: in the river flowing from the heart of God through the heart of Boston; in a tree nursery tended by low-income gardeners in the heart of Baltimore; in the tree-planting eucharistic liturgies of Christian churches in Zimbabwe; here in Chicago in the work of the LSTC Green Zone and the Interreligious Sustainability Project of Metropolitan Chicago; in the work of community-building, justice-seeking, bread-breaking, nation-healing. In every tree, every river, every city, we can glimpse God's holy city and life-giving rivers and trees, dawning in our midst (1998:499).

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<sup>47</sup> Mark Wilson, email correspondence, 5-6-2015.

<sup>48</sup> Having merged with a similar group in Cambodia, it is now known as the Wholistic Development Organization.

She focuses on environmental concerns but it is not hard to see how the envisioning of the future could have much broader application. She reports on the question raised by a group following exploration of the description of New Jerusalem, ““What might the new East Boston look like?”” and the response from the group.

We saw the holy city, the new East Boston, coming down out of heaven from God.... It has clean streets in which people can walk in safety and with peace at any time. There are no drugs, no fire, no fighting; no one is hungry; everyone has a place to live. People are planting flowers and trees... and God is there (1998:499).

Although she does not report what follows, the next question for mission is, ‘What could we do today that might move East Boston towards this vision?’ Imagination within a particular context brings clarity for engagement in word and deed.

2. Daneel (1996 & 2011) describes the vision of the African Independent Churches (AIC) in Zimbabwe; a vision in which integration of creation and redemption is seminal both in terms of appreciating the created order as presented in Genesis and in a high Christology in which Christ is lord of all and in Him all things hold together (Colossians 1:17 being a key perspective for both ecclesiastical and missional practice). Deforestation was identified as most destructive of both land and people, and that the healing work of Christ should not be understood as merely applicable to human bodily needs but extended to the whole material realm. Land, trees and people can only be well when all three come under the healing work of Christ and His healing purpose for the creation. Consequently, in addition to other mission engagements, tree-planting became a major activity.

In this circumstance the classic mission command of Matthew 28:19 was assumed rather than featured as a central theme of proclamation. Not that ecological endeavor in any way superseded the call for repentance, conversion, human salvation, and church formation, which was the essential missionary dynamic of all prophetic AICs. But the mission mandate here was derived from the healing ministry of Christ, related to the believer’s stewardship in service to all creation as required by God in the creation story of Genesis, and highlighted repeatedly with reference to Colossians 1:17—in Christ all things hold together. Christ emerged in these sermons as the healer of all creation, and his disciples, as fellow earth-healers. .... Focal in it was the healing ministry of Christ extended through grace to the entire cosmos (2011:132).

In particular, the following points highlight the integration of eschatology and mission, theology and context, and human and environmental perspectives.

First, for the AIC eschatological hope facilitated motivation and shaped mission practice. Attention to land, trees and people is because God in Christ is reconciling the whole cosmos to Himself and that “the final hope of Christians is not heaven, but participation in God's restoration of all things. This is the ultimate vision that informs the present task of Christians in this world” (Daneel 1996:155. Quoting Zerbe.).

Secondly, celebration of the Eucharist typically accompanies tree planting occasions to which the whole community is invited (tree seedlings are placed on the communion table) to express the integration of all things in Christ without any lessening of the realities of atonement, confession and repentance.

Thirdly, there is evidence of genuine contextualization.

The AICs concerned have had little or no exposure to eco-theological literature and can therefore be said to have developed earth-care concerns as an indigenous response to nature-related biblical injunctions, relatively free from Western influence. ... the engagement of peasant families who were directly affected by environmental deterioration contributed to the development of a spontaneous grassroots theology, born of existential need rather than based on abstract reflection (Daneel 2011:135).

While the level of theological sophistication may be limited in the AIC, Daneel is impressed by the extent to which mission practice has developed out of an integrated appreciation of the basics of a Christian world view.

3. The work of EFICOR (The Evangelical Fellowship of India Commission on Relief) is described by CB Samuel during his time as Director (1985-2001) as development

work driven by hope. He concludes that hope is crucial if people in difficult circumstances and with limited capacities are to make serious efforts to overcome. In a real sense when everything is bad, hope is all the poor have. Hope has the capacity to drive their history. So within the constraints of staff capacity and opportunity, the poor were helped to see the hope of a renewed world in the coming Kingdom of God as reflected in the character of God. As this hope developed substance and detail so people were encouraged to imagine what their own context might be like if such a hope was fulfilled in the near future. By fleshing out how everything would be different in such a renewal, people were then able to identify particular mission and development practices that would move the community in the direction of that hope. God's work towards the future He has planned utilizes the church as His primary instrument of change. Mission in EFICOR of word and deed was fashioned eschatologically wherever possible even as the range of more standard development factors in theology and the created order also informed mission.<sup>49</sup>

4. Peter Newman, the Professor of Sustainability at Curtin University, Western Australia, has been involved for many years in urban landscape and city planning that developed out of his environmental science background. His perspectives on the best that cities can be are envisioned out of his understandings of New Jerusalem as well as the best of research into quality of life in city contexts: 'Most of what I do in cities around the world is influenced by the need to work for Zion/New Jerusalem as opposed to Babylon, or as I say the City of Hope and the City of Fear and Despair.'<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with C.B. Samuel, 20 April 2012.

<sup>50</sup> E-mail correspondence. See <http://humanities.curtin.edu.au/about/staff/index.cfm/p.newman> for relevant publications.

## CONCLUSION

While we have been selective in the various mission expressions in this chapter, the values and standards of the new heaven/earth can apply in many ways across the spectrum of life in each context.

Lack of theological depth in understanding the new heaven/earth will always weaken mission that anticipates the future of this earth. Neglecting any one of the many factors that feed into this understanding will generate flaws in mission practice. Perhaps most typical is the neglect of the creation in general and the earth in particular for shaping mission thought and practice. With a strong endorsement of this earth's future in the trajectory and logic of the triangulation narrative, the earth must be given its proper place in any theological development. Theologically the earth's future embraces the creation as the narrative moves from Garden to Garden City.

Every expression of mission that anticipates the new heaven/earth, relies on wisdom and knowledge. Learning as a way of life is essential for mission. The narrative we have tracked through the Canon assigns a high value to God's creation. Only with a strong commitment to learning can mission express creation's worth that we might 'live well within creation's limits.'<sup>51</sup>

As noted earlier, this chapter does not fully develop each possibility. Further research on each is desirable. Nevertheless they can sow the seeds of ideas that will generate workable and contextualized mission engagements. The limits of our knowledge of continuity and discontinuity need not discourage the church from working with the

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<sup>51</sup> Hilary Marlow, email of 23 October 2014.

wealth of what is known with a degree of confidence and hope. The point is not getting it right so much as refusing to stop imagining the future of the Kingdom fulfilled in new heaven/earth and allowing this to shape how we engage in all our mission practices - hopefully.





## CONCLUSION

This research has demonstrated several significant conclusions.

First, the Biblical narrative confirms a symbiotic, triangular relationship of God, humankind and non-human creation, woven into the whole narrative. Each has its own unique part to play. In this triangulation, humankind is the hope of the non-human creation. This triangulation projects forward to continue into the new heaven/earth. In Genesis 3 a real break begins in this symbiosis resulting from human sin and God's consequent judgement. Here the triangulation becomes dysfunctional as human sin corrupts the otherwise good earth and as the earth so often becomes the means of God's judgement against humankind. However, the breakdown in the symbiosis is not total and permanent. The subsequent work of God throughout human history, and through both advents of Christ, is towards a fulfilled Kingdom of God in which both earth and humankind are restored to right relationship with God and with each other. Then, as is normal in the ways God blesses His people, the earth will be the source of considerable blessing. In this triangulation a theological structure to the Biblical narrative shapes all perspectives across the range of Biblical teaching.

At the heart of the triangulation is the person of Christ: each feature of the triangle is integral in incarnation, resurrection and ascension such that Christology determines cosmology.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, consistently, the Biblical narrative recognizes the high value of the earth, that it is pleasing to God, and that it participates in the narrative as a player and not just as a

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<sup>1</sup> As explored in Chapter Four.

backdrop. Dualistic interpretations of the Bible or of the practice of mission are counter to the holistic embrace of the Gospel and the Kingdom. The creation may be caught up in the ebb and flow of the relationship between God and humankind but in and of itself it is not the problem. It is not intrinsically evil but rather the victim of human sin. The earth matters to God.

Thirdly, the vision for new heaven/earth includes the existing earth and all redeemable in all the nations of the earth. This earth has a future because:

- a. It is a theological necessity given the strength of the triangulation we have investigated.
- b. Multiple Biblical statements expect the earth to be blessed richly by the coming of God's future Kingdom.
- c. The claimed negative texts in the Canon are not at all negative. Consistently, when language, imagery and context are taken seriously, no message of doom follows for the earth.
- d. The alternative view that sees the earth as doomed unravels much of Christian faith particularly the essentials of Christology in incarnation, resurrection and ascension.

Fourthly, at the heart of the difference of opinion on the question of the earth's future are two very different understandings of hermeneutics. The research here has demonstrated that language does not have a fixed and narrow meaning. Figurative imagery must be allowed to be what it is, not reduced to some kind of technical prediction on the basis of an externally derived presumption that most prophetic language in the Bible is not figurative. Furthermore, context must be given its due weight in determining the meaning and significance of the imagery used to describe

God's judgement. Cosmological imagery is used consistently to describe judgement against sin and not to describe the future of the creation.

Fifthly, the triangulation established in this research justifies a serious theological reading of the Bible recognizing non-human creation as present in whatever may be happening or said in the drama between God and humankind. In particular, this research provides an essential foundation in the search for a legitimate ecological hermeneutic for reading the Biblical text.

Sixthly, the Bible does not have some material which speaks of dissolution or annihilation and some of transformation. The Bible does not leave us with two different scenarios for the future. Coherence characterizes the vision.

Seventhly, while the language of the future is rich with imagery that only allows us to see the future creation in limited ways, the fact that it is this earth should cause us to understand that much familiar to us will continue into the new heaven/earth. The realities of continuity and discontinuity can be described to a point. The mystery of the unknowns need not distract us from what is known of continuity and discontinuity. The knowns of the new heaven/earth give us more than enough insight to develop future-oriented mission.

Eighthly, earth renewed in new heaven/earth is earth which restores humankind to full humanity as humankind takes its rightful place as vicegerents. The earth is essential for humankind to be fully human in knowledge and learning, in work and creativity, and in the social life experiences of individuals-in-community. This humanity will experience

the fullness of life as portrayed in Genesis even as this life is enhanced in ways that are not yet fully known but hinted at in the many promises and visions of the new creation.

Ninthly, the mission of this Gospel and Kingdom which promises so much can only be consistent if the hope of what is to come seriously shapes all mission practice in word and deed. Mission can only consistently demonstrate the love of God if it points forward to the fulfilment of love in the new life and new heaven/earth. Mission that anticipates the eschaton is mission which works within the same vision of the *missio Dei*. Consistency with the truth is essential in mission. Mission that contradicts or lacks a vision of the future fails to demonstrate the hope of the eschatological trajectory in the relational triangulation.

Tenthly, imaginative envisioning of the new heaven/earth from context to context is a valid and helpful practice in identifying mission practice which captures the vision and hope of the Kingdom and its fulfilment in new heaven/earth.

Finally, several items were identified in which further research would be most valuable. In general terms, much exegesis in commentaries neglects the theological context of the relational triangle integral to the Biblical writers. Exegetical research needs to give proper weight to eschatological figurative language and to the place of context in sorting through what the meanings might be.<sup>2</sup> We have noted potential research in, (1) the engagement between theology and science on the far future viability of the earth,<sup>3</sup> (2) the possibilities for ‘thirdspace’ as a motif for exploring, within the relational triangulation, the locus that shapes mission;<sup>4</sup> (3) how the earthy nature of being human

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter 9:3000-305.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 1:20n47.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 9:314-315.

for a Christian anthropology gives due weight to human physicality both now and in new creation;<sup>5</sup> (4) a valid ecological hermeneutic as the result of establishing an eschatological foundation to legitimate such research;<sup>6</sup> (5) each of the mission possibilities touched on in Chapter Eleven.

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter 10:308.

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 1:17, 36-37, Chapter 11:368-369.



## APPENDIX A

### Biblical Background Material

#### 1. Storm Imagery.

So, for example, lightening is both the arrows of God's judgement (Psalm 18:14 (2 Samuel 22:15), Psalm 144:6, Habakkuk 3:11, Zechariah 9:14) as well as evidence of the presence of the glory of God as seen around his throne (Ezekiel 1:13-14). In Psalm 97:1-6, God's presence and rule in righteousness and justice have the weight and power of an earthshaking thunderstorm. Psalm 29, most likely a polemic against Canaanite notions of their gods, envisions the voice of God likened to the power of thunder to shake the ground and shatter the trees. The description fits the imagery of a great storm coming off the Mediterranean Sea and travelling East. Earth-quaking thunderstorm imagery is used to describe the theophanic judgement of God with reference to one or two aspects of the storm indicating that all the others are present as well. There is no need to list out all the characteristics of a massive storm every time (Joshua 10:11, Job 38:22-23, Psalm 147:15-18, 148:8, Isaiah 24:17-20, 28:2, 30:30, 32:19, Ezekiel 13:11-13, 38:22, Haggai 2:17). In Psalm 18 (2 Samuel 22), the same earth shattering storm imagery is used of two quite different scenarios, 'A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD, who addressed the words of this song to the LORD on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.' (Psalm 18:1).

#### 2. Darkness Imagery.

##### DARKNESS AND HARDSHIP

A frequent Biblical practice uses images of darkness to express great hardship or despair or judgement (for example the recurring reference to darkness in Job) that looks back to:

- a. The primordial darkness of Genesis 1:2-5, 14-19 when the earth was uninhabitable before God's order brought light and the separation of light from darkness – judgement is often described as a return to such darkness (Psalm 105:28).
- b. The theophanic darkness of the thunderous presence of God in the gloom of thick storm clouds that blot out the sun in the thunderstorm imagery of the coming of God (Exodus 14:20, 19:9, 16-19, 20:18-20, Deuteronomy 4:11, 5:22-23, 2 Samuel 22:8-16, Psalm 18:7-17, 28, 97:2).
- c. The darkness and despair of past judgement or suffering or sin or the absence of the light and glory of God as His judgement comes without which all things are bleak and threatening (Exodus 10:20-23, Joshua 24:7, 1 Samuel 2:9, Psalm 35:6, 44:19, 82:5, 88:6-7, 12, 18, 91:6, 105:28, 107:10-14, 143:3, Proverbs 4:19, 20:20, Ecclesiastes 2:13-14, 5:17, 6:4, 11:8, Isaiah 5:30, 8:22, 9:2, 29:15, 18, 42:7, 16, 45:7, 19, 47:5, 49:9, 50:3, 58:10, 59:9, 60:2, 61:1, Jeremiah 2:6, 31, 13:16, 15:9, 23:12, Lamentations 3:2, 6, Ezekiel 8:12, 30:3, 18, 32:7-8, 34:12, Joel 2:2, 31, Amos 4:13, 5:18, 20, Micah 3:6, 7:8, Zephaniah 1:15.)
- d. The darkness that is the consequence of human sin (Psalm 74:20, 82:5, 91:6, 139:11-12, 143:3).

#### DARKNESS FROM LOSS OF SUN AND MOON

Darkness imagery is effectively conveyed by references to the covering over of sun and moon and this image of darkness, not cosmological destruction, is the way such imagery conveys meaning (Isaiah 50:3, Ezekiel 32:7-8, Joel 2:30-31). The coming of God on the clouds may be imagery of darkness as the light above is blocked (Exodus 19:9, 20:21, 34:5, 2 Samuel 22:10, 12, 2 Chronicles 6:1, Psalm 18:9-12, 68:32-34, 97:2, 99:7, 104:3, Isaiah 19:1, Nahum 1:3, Zechariah 9:14. To be covered with clouds: Isaiah 50:3, Ezekiel 30:3, 18, Joel 2:2, Zephaniah 1:15). Or to turn it around, the darkness as sun and moon are blocked suggests the awesome coming of God to speak and to act (Amos 5:18, 20). The point is not cosmological but anthropological (judgement against the socio-political order) and theological (God's power and the thoroughness of His judgement).

- a. Darkness then, including the imagery of sun and moon ceasing to bring light, is a metaphor for the full range of withdrawal of favour and blessing, and the destructiveness and despair that the judgment of God brings.
- b. The parallels in Joel 2:30-31 illustrate the significance of darkness. Wonders in the heavens (v. 30) means the sun has no light (v. 31). The appearance of a blood-red moon (v. 31) is the product of bloodshed, with fire and billows of smoke filling the view as people look up (v. 30).
- c. Alternatively, God's restoration and blessing brings great light, the total opposite of the darkness of judgement: 'The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days, when the LORD binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted.' (Isaiah 30:26, cf. Isaiah 60:19-20, Zechariah 14:6).

In other words, the imagery of sun, moon and stars ceasing to function is about darkness, and all that darkness represents, rather than an attempt to comment on the physical state of celestial bodies. See, for example, Wildberger's comments on Isaiah 13:9ff:

'Darkness' had been included as a backdrop for a theophany of Yahweh since ancient times (Psalm 97:2, Deuteronomy 4:11, cf also Habakkuk 3:11, among other passages). However, none of these pre-apocalyptic passages is yet at the point of describing a cosmic catastrophe, the complete destruction of the whole world; basically images that have been developed in past times are used once again in order to describe Babylon's demise as if it were an event that brought about the return of a chaotic situation. What happened once upon a time to Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 19) is now going to happen to Babylon, which does not mean that order and the basic functioning of the entire world would grind to a complete halt (1997:25).

#### DARKNESS THE CONSEQUENCE OF INVADING ARMIES

Armies cannot impact sun and moon except through filling the skies with the smoke and dust of massive destruction. Consequently darkness comes upon the land in blotting out sun, moon and stars by the conflagration of the land and city by a conquering army. In Isaiah 13:4-5, 50:9-10, Jeremiah 51:27-28, an invading army is the means by which God causes the blackening out of light from sun and moon as Babylon is destroyed. In many of the passages listed above which utilize cosmic language, either directly or indirectly, military invasion is the means by which God acts. This reinforces the argument that cosmological statements are not being presented.



### MINEAR'S SUMMARY ON DARKNESS AND APOCALYPTIC<sup>1</sup>

Various images of darkness and light are portrayed in apocalyptic writings, often utilising those visible causes known to all; sun, moon and clouds, day and night. Various expressions portray the contrasts between light and darkness, between the light and life of creation and the darkness and death of sin (1981:49-61, 1995:88-90). These contrasts point us to 'Imagine the past; remember the future' (1994:19). The imagery of darkness, light and darkness (light and life followed by darkness and death) of Genesis 1-4 directs us forward to the ultimate light and light of God's presence in the new heaven/earth. The visible is utilized in descriptive, poetic imagery to reveal the invisible.

### 3. Earthquake Imagery.

Earthquake-like imagery (without conveying any sense of destruction for the earth itself) is used when:

- a. There are earthquakes of thunder, particularly when a theophany, to capture the dramatic weight of God's presence and actions (Exodus 19:18, Judges 5:4, 2 Samuel 22:8-16, Psalm 18:6-17, 68:8, 77:16-19, 82:5, 97:4-5, 99:1, Nahum 1:5, Habakkuk 3:6).
- b. The earth shakes at the power of God's voice in Psalm 29:8
- c. The earth will shake when God brings judgement down upon Judah and Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:19-21), upon Babylon (Isaiah 13:13), upon Zion (Isaiah 24:1, 3-5, 18-20), upon the nations (Isaiah 30:28), when the invading army comes upon Zion (Joel 2:10-11). All these are descriptions of past events which should bring caution when considering the possible significance of these passages for anticipations of the Parousia.
- d. Past earth shaking will be repeated in future judgements against nations (Haggai 2:6-7, 21-22. Note here the clear parallel: earth shaking (v.21) refers to severe socio-political upheaval (v.22.)).
- e. Even foreign Kings can cause the earth to shake: Isaiah 14:16-17 where the King of Babylon is said to shake the earth. Clearly about the seriousness and power of the Kings destructive influence.
- f. Note in Haggai 2:6-7, 21-22 the clear parallel: earth shaking (v.21) refers to severe socio-political upheaval (v.22.)).

### 4. Already 'New' because Jesus has come.

New wine, new wineskins and new cloth (Matthew 9:17, Mark 2:21-22, Luke 5:36-39), new treasures (Matthew 13:52), new teaching with authority (Mark 1:27, Acts 17:19), new covenant (Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25, 2 Corinthians 3:6, Hebrews 8:8, 13, 9:15, 12:24), new command (John 13:34, 1 John 2:7-8, 2 John 1:5), new tomb (Matthew 27:60, John 19:41), new creation/creature ( 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15), new mixture ( 1 Corinthians 5:7), one new man (Ephesians 2:15), new man (Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10), new heaven and new earth (2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1), new name (Revelation 2:17, Revelation 3:12), new Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12, 21:2), new song (Revelation 5:9, 14:3), new everything ( Revelation 21:5), newness of life (Romans 6:4) and newness of Spirit (Romans 7:6), renewal of minds (Romans 12:2), renewal in the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), renewal of

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<sup>1</sup> See the discussion on Minear's arguments for New Creation in Chapter 5:174-183

the inner person (2 Corinthians 4:16), and renewal of the new person in knowledge (Colossians 3:10).

## 5. In Heaven.

In heaven can be found the Father, 'Lord of heaven and earth' (Matthew 11:25, Luke 10:21, Acts 4:24, 14:15, 17:24, Ephesians 3:15, Revelation 10:6, 14:7) is in heaven (Matthew 5:16, 34, 45, 48, 6:1, 9, 26, 7:11, 21, 10:32, 33, 12:50, 14:19, 16:17, 18:10, 14, 19, 23:9, 22, Mark 6:41, 7:34, 11:25, Luke 9:16, 11:13, 15:7, 18, 21, 18:13, John 17:1, Acts 7:49, 55, Ephesians 6:9, Revelation 11:13). From heaven come the angels (John 1:51) who announced to the shepherds (Luke 2:15), the Spirit and the voice at Jesus' baptism and on the mountain (Matthew 3:16-17, Mark 1:10-11, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:32, 3:27, 2 Peter 1:18), the angel who supports Jesus as He prays (Luke 22:43) and the angel who rolls back the stone (Matthew 28:2) and the angels with a scroll and judgement (Revelation 10:1-2, 14:7, 15:1, 5-6, 18:1, 20:1). The reward (Matthew 5:12, Luke 6:23), the treasures (Matthew 6:10, 19:21, Mark 10:21, Luke 12:33, 18:22), the names (Luke 10:20, Hebrews 12 :23), house (2 Corinthians 5:1-2), citizenship (Philippians 3:20), hope (Colossians 1:5), and inheritance (1 Peter 1:4) of the faithful are kept in heaven. Heaven models the will of God (Matthew 6:10). Jesus creates all things in heaven and earth (Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:10), comes from heaven (John 3:31, 6:38, 42, 1 Corinthians 15:47), receives the voice of God from heaven (John 12:28), is granted total authority throughout heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18), reconciles all things in heaven (Colossians 1:20), returns to heaven (Luke 24:51, John 3:13, Acts 1:11, 2:33-34, 3:21, Acts 7:56, Romans 10:6, Colossians 4:1, Hebrews 8:1, 9:23-25, 12:25-26, 1 Peter 3:22) and so Satan is thrown out of heaven (Luke 10:18, Revelation 12:7-8). From heaven comes the bread of life (John 6:31-33, 6:41, 50-51, 58). In heaven there should be peace (Luke 19:38). The wind of the Spirit comes from heaven (Acts 2:2, 1 Peter 1:12) as does the vision of the sheet of all that is clean (Acts 10:11, 16, 11:5, 9, 10). Paul sees a great light from heaven (Acts 22:6). God's wrath comes from heaven (Romans 1:18, Revelation 20:9) but God's purposes in Christ *include* heaven (Ephesians 1:10) and from heaven He will return (1 Thessalonians 1:10, 4:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:7). There will be new 'heavens' (2 Peter 3:13) and new 'heaven' (Revelation 21:1). John sees through the door of heaven to see the throne of heaven and many of the events to come (Revelation 4:1-2, 11:19, 12:1, 3). Only the Lamb of God is worthy to open the scroll in all of heaven, earth and under the earth (Revelation 5:3, 13). The voices from heaven are instrumental in the unfolding of God's purposes (Revelation 10:4, 8, 11:12, 15, 12:10, 14:2, 13, 16:17, 18:4, 20). The New Jerusalem comes down from heaven (Revelation 3:12, 21:2, 10).

## 6. Fire Imagery in 2 Peter 3:10.

Peter has already made several references to incidents in the Old Testament thereby demonstrating a degree of familiarity the imagery of the Old Testament and its frequent use of fire. This background is a far more likely context for Peter's use of fire imagery than the Stoic worldview of final conflagration.

In addition to the mundane and everyday figurative uses of the language, fire ...

- a. symbolizes the presence and work of God (Genesis 15:17, Exodus 3:2, 13:21-22, 14:24, 19:18, 24:17, 40:38, Numbers 9:15-16, 14:14, Deuteronomy 1:33,

4:11-15, 24, 33, 36, 5:4-5, 22-26, 9:3, 10, 15, Judges 6:21, 1 Kings 18:24, 38, 19:12, 2 Kings 2:11, 6:17, 1 Chronicles 21:26, 2 Chronicles 7:1, 3, Nehemiah 9:12, 19, Psalm 18:8, 50:3, 78:14, 79:5, 104:4, 105:39, Isaiah 4:5, 29:6, 30:27, 30, 33, 31:9, 64:2, Jeremiah 4:4, 20:9, 23:29, Lamentations 1:13, Ezekiel 1:4-5, 13, 27, 8:2, 10:6-7, Daniel 7:9-11, Joel 2:30, Micah 1:3-4, Zechariah 2:5, Acts 2:3, 19, 1 Corinthians 5:19, 2 Thessalonians 1:7, Hebrews 1:7, 12:29, Revelation 1:14-15, 2:18, 9:17, 19:12),

- b. symbolizes the purifying work of God to test and make holy (Numbers 11:1-3, 31:23, Deuteronomy 4:20, 1 Kings 8:51, Psalm 12:6, 46:9, Proverbs 17:3, 27:21, Isaiah 1:25, 4:4, 43:2, 48:10, Jeremiah 6:29, 11:4, Daniel 3, Zechariah 13:9, Malachi 3:2-3, 4:1, Matthew 3:11, Mark 9:49, Luke 3:16, 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, 1 Peter 1:7, Revelation 3:18),
- c. plays a significant part in the offerings prescribed throughout Leviticus and Numbers,
- d. illustrates the severity of the judgement of God (Genesis 19, Numbers 21:28, 26:10, Deuteronomy 32:22, Joshua 7:15, 2 Samuel 22:9, 2 Kings 1:10-14, Job 1:16, Psalm 22:9, 68:2, 78:21, 80:16, 83:14-16, 89:46, 97:3, 106:18, 140:10, Isaiah 1:7, 31, 9:19, 10:16-17, 26:11, 30:33, 31:8-9, 33:10-14, 47:14, 64:11, 66:15-16, 24, Jeremiah 4:4, 11:16, 15:14, 17:27, 21:10-14, 22:7, 32:29, 39:8, 43:12-13, 48:45, 49:27, 50:32, Lamentations 2:3-4, 4:11, Ezekiel 5:2-5, 15:4-8, 20:47-48, 21:32, 22:18-22, 23:25, 24:9-14, 28:18, 30:8, 14, 16, 39:6, Hosea 8:14, Joel 1:19-20, 2:3-5, Amos 1:4, 7, 10, 14, 2:2, 5, 4:11, 5:6, 7:4, Obadiah 1:18, Micah 1:3-4, 7, Nahum 1:6, 3:13-15, Habakkuk 2:13, Zephaniah 1:18, 3:8, Zechariah 9:4, 11:1, Matthew 3:10-12, 5:22, 7:19, 13:40-42, 50, 18:8-9, 25:41, Mark 9:43-48, Luke 3:9, 16-17, 9:54, 12:49, 16:24, 17:29, John 15:9, Hebrews 10:27, 2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12, Jude 7, 23, Revelation 8:5-7, 9:2, 18, 11:5, 14, 18, 16:8, 17:16, 18:8, 19:20, 20:9-10, 14-15).

Various theological and biblical dictionaries have similar categorizations of the uses of this language. The point being that various figurative uses are common and Peter need not be referring to an actual conflagration.

## **7. Bauckham's contrast between Babylon and the New Jerusalem.**

Bauckham's summary of this contrast provides useful background. '(1) The chaste bride, the wife of the Lamb (21:2,9) v. the harlot with whom the kings of the earth fornicate (17:2). (2) Her splendour is the glory of God (21:11-21) v. Babylon's splendour from exploiting her empire (17:4; 18:12- 13, 16). (3) The nations walk by her light, which is the glory of God (21:24) v. Babylon's corruption and deception of the nations (17:2; 18:3,23; 19:2). (4) The kings of the earth bring their glory into her (i.e. their worship and submission to God: 21:24) v. Babylon rules over the kings of the earth (17:18). (5) They bring the glory and honour of the nations into her (i.e. glory to God: 21:26) v. Babylon's luxurious wealth extorted from all the world (18: 1 2-17). (6) Uncleanness, abomination and falsehood are excluded (21:27) v. Babylon's abominations, impurities, deceptions (17:4,5; 18:23) (7) The water of life and the tree of life for the healing of the nations (21:6; 22: 1-2) v. Babylon's wine which makes nations drunk (14:8; 17:2; 18:3). (8) Life and healing (22:1-2) v. the blood of slaughter (17:6; 18:24). (9) God's people are called to enter the New Jerusalem (22: 14) v. God's people are called to come out of Babylon (18:4).' (1993:131-132)

## 8. Water.

In the exodus through the waters of the sea God controls the waters of the earth to bless His people. The flood likewise establishes God as one who brings blessing out of the waters. What began as judgement ended as covenant assurance for God's people that the earth would never cease to be free to bring life and blessing (Genesis 8:21-22, 9:9-17). God has made polluted water drinkable and caused water to flow out of a rock such is His capacity to water the earth.( Exodus 15:22-27, 17:1-7, Numbers 20:1-13, Deuteronomy 8:15, Psalm 78:16, 20, 105:41, 114:8.) Probably the references to God who brings streams in the desert also have these incidents in mind. Similarly the metaphor that God is a rock with its imagery of great strength also alludes to the same life giving capacity of God to cause the water of life to flow (cf. Exodus 17:6).

Other Psalms make good use of water imagery(Psalm 1:3, 36:8-9, 42:1-2, 4-5, 63:1-2, 65:9-10, 72:6, 104:12-13, 107:4-9, 35-38, 114:8, 143:6). Such imagery in Isaiah includes new growth in the desert, a rich diversity of trees and other plants, healing, abundance, and peace (Isaiah 12:3, 32:2, 15-20, 33:16, 21, 35:5-7, 41:17-19, 43:19-20, 44:3-4, 48:21, 49:10, 51:3, 55:1-5, 12-13, 66:12). Water is plentiful for the thirsty whether physical or spiritual and at times metaphorical for all that God's salvation might include (Isaiah 12:3). The Garden of Eden imagery is identified readily in Isaiah's descriptions (cf. Isaiah 51:3). In particular, Isaiah 49:10 is alluded to in Revelation 7:16-17 as a promise of 'living water' and this draws the Isaiah imagery of water and new life into the foreground of Revelation 22:1-2.

### SPIRIT AND WATER.

Water is often associated with the Spirit's life bringing power for healing and cleansing. The many Old Testament references to this water and Spirit connection never suggest that one cancels out the other. Water serves as a powerful metaphor for the Spirit's work but does not lessen the material vision for a real environmental abundance and fertility. This interchange presents a package deal for the Edenic new heaven/earth; holistic integration of the s/Spiritual and the material, heaven and earth, humankind and the environmental context. Similar expectations of life-bringing water and Eden-like environmental abundance can be found in Jeremiah 17:7-8, Joel 3:16-18, Zechariah 8:12, 14:8, and Amos 9:13-15. Dumbrell summarizes the Joel 3 statement, 'As the world center, Jerusalem dispenses fertility in the New Eden' (Dumbrell 2001b:110).

See in particular:

- a. The Spirit moves across the surface of the waters (Genesis 1:2).
- b. There is and will be cleansing from sin through water and Spirit (Psalm 51:2, 7, Ezekiel 36:25-27, Zechariah 13:1, cf. 14:8. Note that the river of life follows immediately the reassurance that nothing impure will enter the new heaven/earth; Revelation 21:27.)
- c. Both water and Spirit bring what usually is associated with the other. The Spirit is 'poured out' like water. (Isaiah 32:15-16, 35:1-7, 44:3, Joel 2:28-29, Ezekiel 39:29, Zechariah 12:10.)
- d. John's Gospel presents this association quite strongly: Baptism in water and Spirit (John 1:26-33); water changed into wine (John 2:7-10); water birth and Spirit birth (John 3:5); living water (John 4:7-14, 6:35, 7:37-39).
- e. Revelation sets the scene for 22:1-2 with promises of the water of life (Revelation 7:17, 14:7, 21:6, 22:17).

## APPENDIX B

Resurrection life will be social in character. In addition to the discussion in Chapter Eleven on the community life of the church as anticipation of the new heaven/earth, the following two expressions of social relationships integrate well with the earthy quality of future life.

### COMMUNION

At one time in the early church the Lord's Supper was grounded in the social experience of a communal meal with the earth's produce of bread, wine and cup utilized for the elements of the Eucharist. Here, redemption and creation come together and each gives greater depth to the other; as we have seen already in incarnation and resurrection. Furthermore, Jesus' words point forward to the eschatological celebration of the fulfilled Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> Paul adds that in participating in such a communal communion meal, 'you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Corinthians 11:26). The death of Christ is fundamental in the unifying of creation (earth and community), redemption and new creation. Edwards (2008) develops this integration at length arguing for the place of an ecological dimension, alongside the realities of Christ's sufferings for our salvation, in our remembrance of Christ's death. He explores several examples in the liturgies of the early church in which prayer features both creation and redemption in the remembrance of the cross.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, the church now rarely practises communion in such a way. Token elements without a real communal meal now dominate together with a pietistic and individualized spirituality. Communion in many liturgies has become a private and personal devotional experience with rarely any serious association with creation or new creation, the community of which one is a part, or the earthiness of all.

Long overdue is a return to communion as a communal meal with real food and drink for the remembrance of Christ and with real reference to the significance of Christ for both our personal salvation and the transition from creation to new creation. A proper earthiness in communion would bring hope and joy into the celebration as the anticipation of eating and drinking again with Christ is given due attention.<sup>4</sup> The full-of-hope remembrance of Christ's death, that draws in all of earth and community, and points forward to new heaven/earth, really then would be a proclamation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 26:29, Mark 14:25, Luke 22:16, 18.

<sup>3</sup> He notes that the Orthodox tradition has maintained something of this combination of creation, cross, resurrection and Parousia in its services, together with a stronger awareness of the mission intention of the remembrance.

<sup>4</sup> The whole meal can easily be experienced as sacramental by simply beginning the meal with the sharing of the broken bread in thanksgiving and concluding the meal with the sharing of the cup which points forward to when we will share such meals with Christ in the completed Kingdom. With such a holistic approach to communion, the joys of friendships, conversation, good food and wine (the blessings of creation), are integrated with confession, thanksgiving, remembrance, and the receiving of grace (the blessings of redemption) together with the exhortations to look with hope to the future.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:26, cf. Paul's use of the same verb in Romans 1:8, 1 Corinthians 2:1, 9:14, Philippians 1:17, 1:18, Colossians 1:28. All of these look to the impact of such proclamation on those outside of the church. Also, see the example in Daneel (1996, 2011) in which remembrance of the death of Christ, community, earth and proclamation/mission are integrated.

Communion when appreciated in its wholeness is filled with missional possibilities. It could be done badly, of course, but this is no reason to not strive for the best that it can be to proclaim all that Christ's death makes possible until He comes.

#### PERSONHOOD

Several scholars have reflected on what individual identity means and what of this identity we will retain as our essential personhood in the resurrection.<sup>6</sup> Individuality continues and if it did not then we in effect become replaced by another human being with different personality, history, and characteristics. We bring with us into the new heaven/earth the consequences for our personhood which come from the totality of life's experience. Speaking of the dead in Christ, Thiel claims, 'To be themselves ... they must continue to be persons shaped by the history of sin' (2006:541) because 'Like the wounds on Jesus' resurrection body, the effects of sin – both responsibility for it and its victimizing consequences – continue to inform personal identity in resurrected life' (2006:540). Prusak also highlights how in resurrection our life-story is integral to who we are (2000:105).<sup>7</sup>

The resurrection body of Jesus bears the scars (Sugden 1998:28, Thiel 2006:540) which symbolize His life experience and demonstrate something of the continuance of individuality in resurrection. Even with the personal purification, healing and transformation in resurrection, we will not cease to be who we are. We will be holy versions of our individuality yet fully healed.<sup>8</sup> Bauckham and Hart consider the implications of this mix of continuity and discontinuity for those who die with Alzheimer's disease (1999:126). Volf considers the need for our history of relationships to require further reconciling engagement in the new heaven/earth (2000). Sugden summarizes the views of disabled persons on disability and resurrection (1998:28-29). 'Nothing will be lost' of a person's life experience in their individuality and personhood (Bauckham & Hart 1999:132).<sup>9</sup>

In the life of the church and in the mission engagement of God's people, all persons therefore are to be taken seriously, as they are, and not treated as some kind of

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<sup>6</sup> Bauckham & Hart 1999:124-127, Cosden 2004:147-157, Prusak 2000:104-105, 131-132, Sugden 1998:28-29, Thiel 2006:539-541.

<sup>7</sup> 'But each person's whole "story" is inextricably intertwined with the whole story of human history and the world, and will be fully complete only in the final consummation. To expand Schillebeeckx's metaphor, what is resurrected beyond death, and taken into union with God, is "the melody" of an individual person's life. But the refrain of that melody will likewise still resonate within the new beginnings or new movements within human history, taking on new tonalities. All the notes which form "the melody" of an individual person's life, echoing through the movements of an unfinished symphony within history, will, in the resurrection of all the dead, become fully integrated within the once unfinished but now once and for all completed symphony of history and creation. In the final consummation, we will all together experience the entire symphony of all our histories—after the final note has been written and played. All the *notes* of our individual melodies will have been composed within an embodied history, like molecules of ink on a material score, but in the completed cosmic symphony echoing in eternity in union with God each individual, personal melody will resonate, together with all the others, the whole identity of our embodied history with a deeper reality than the molecules of the body in which the identity of our life was originally composed' (Prusak 2000:105).

<sup>8</sup> The healing miracles of Jesus indicate the extent to which the complete healing to come will overcome all physical and psychological disabilities. Bodies restored is not mutually exclusive with the continuance of personal individuality. Similarly, the full spectrum of healing – including psychological, mental, emotional – will not result in the loss of personal history or the unique identity of each individual.

<sup>9</sup> Individuality includes gender, ethnicity, culture, nationality. There is no suggestion that Jesus' skin colour changed in resurrection.

temporary identity that will be replaced. Whatever the physical, psychological or intellectual brokenness may be, extreme or minor, these realities are integral to the whole person and his/her identity. God will bring these realities in our identity 'to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ' (Ephesians 4:13). Our serving of one another in church life and in mission always keeps in mind the transforming work of God in resurrection that takes the whole person forward. We are not the same now and we will not be the same in resurrection, each one is unique. In addition, the active participation of each one in all the life of new heaven/earth implies that further development of our personhood will follow. The areas of work and learning, as discussed in the previous chapter, reinforce such probabilities.<sup>10</sup>

Too often in church life and in mission, people are treated as caricatures or idealized or in some other stereotypical way. The many reasons why such relating is unacceptable are all strengthened by a greater appreciation of the individuality with which each one will continue into the new creation. The more our serving of others facilitates the growth into Christ-likeness of the whole person with all his/her idiosyncrasies, the more we might see a little of the person God has in mind for us to be in the resurrection.

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<sup>10</sup> The concept of personhood as 'emerging' as argued by Christian Smith (2010:25-89) suggests that such furtherance of personhood in the new heaven/earth will continue with growing capacities and complexities as each gain in personhood sets up the possibilities for further maturation. 'By person I mean a conscious, reflexive, embodied, self-transcending center of subjective experience, durable identity, moral commitment, and social communication who – as the efficient cause of his or her own responsible actions and interactions – exercises complex capacities for agency and intersubjectivity in order to develop and sustain his or her own incommunicable self in loving relationships with other personal selves and with the nonpersonal world' (61).





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