



CREATION AND NEW
CREATION

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Creation & New Creation

Moving from Fundamentalism to Reconciliation

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This module traces themes from Genesis chapters 1 & 2, exploring what these themes would have meant to the Hebrew nation. As we look through the Old Testament, especially sections such as the Psalms, we see that the Hebrew people consistently spoke of two historical advents as the major paradigms of their identity. These were the Creation and the Exodus: the creation of the heavens and earth; and the creation of Israel as a people and nation with a mission to the world.

When we come to the New Testament, we see that the apostles understood the coming of Christ and the gospel in relation to this Old Testament Hebrew identity. They declared the gospel as the fulfilment of the Creation project and of the calling of Israel in the Exodus. Over the years, subsequent to the Hebrew apostles and the writing of the New Testament, new church leaders possessed a different background, a Greek background. Many of these leaders couldn't have understood Hebrew themes (which have been recently rediscovered in the *Dead Sea Scrolls*) and in some ways understood and communicated the gospel by their Greek culture.

This module traces some of the original Hebrew themes from the Creation and the Exodus, looking at how the narrative of scripture from Genesis to Revelation reveals a gospel message that is Hebrew in origin and fulfilled through the Hebrew Messiah, Jesus Christ, not only for Israel, but also for the whole world. The module pays particular attention to Paul, John and Peter. It shows the God of creation coming in the incarnation of Christ. It shows the call of mankind to rule over the nations, fulfilled through the inheritance of Christ. It shows the nature of this rule, and how we as the church are to live it out in the world. It shows God's plan to renew his creation, rather than destroy it, and the call of the church to partner with God in the transformation of our nations.

All the apostles express this message of the Hebrew gospel. For example, Matthew frequently employs the pairing of heaven and earth, as seen in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This pairing of heaven and earth is a consistent theme throughout the Old Testament (Ps 115:15, 146:6. Jer 32:17, 51:15, Jonah 1:9, examples are too numerous) and other Jewish literature. This pairing is the Jewish worldview of holism (shalom). It was the purpose of their temple, to bring heaven and earth together, and the final result of the gospel in Jewish thinking.

Whereas, in Genesis 1:1, the phrase shows the conjunction (union) of heaven/earth at creation, in much of Matthew's Gospel the pairing shows the dysfunction between heaven and earth, or between God's ways and man's (see the numerous distinctions Jesus makes between earthly practices and heaven's realm in the Sermon on the Mount, or the Lord's Prayer). Matthew's point is that Jesus' coming in Matthew's day is to repair this dysfunction between heaven and earth. Matthew was showing the continuity between Jewish expectation and the kingdom of God as seen in Christ. New Genesis/New Creation.

Foreword

God's Plan of Salvation

Over the years we have often seen God's salvation on a limited basis, that is, on an individualistic level. The gospel we have preached is about our personal salvation, our personal blessing, and our personal eternal life in heaven. But now we have come to understand that this isn't the gospel that God promised to the Hebrew people, and which Jesus came to fulfil.

God's plan of salvation involves the whole of his created order. When God made mankind, he put man over his creation. When man turned away from God, this whole creation was affected. God has come to restore mankind through the gospel, so the creation man is over may also be restored.

This means we now see the gospel on a much more holistic basis. It is "shalom" in the Hebrew, meaning wholeness to our whole communities and world. God is interested, not just in us as individuals, but in our communities. He knows that when our communities are healed, then individuals will have a better life. Communities look after people. When communities are dysfunctional, people suffer.

This brings us back to traditional African culture. Its roots are community orientated. In recent times with Western capitalism, "good news" has often been associated with our increase in personal wellbeing, and this wellbeing is viewed in terms of material opportunities, not in relationships.

God views wellness in terms of relationships, with our neighbour and with our enemy. He knows that when we reach out and build bridges with those different to us, and with those others do not like, then community has far better prospects for the future. Forgive and care for others, love and bless your enemies.

Be community builders. Realise that this is how we build a better tomorrow for our children. It isn't in withdrawing from the world in fundamentalism, or in building walls and trying to protect ourselves from others, that our children will inherit a better world. It is in loving our neighbour, taking this kind of risk, and in providing protection for others, that our children will rise up and call us blessed.

Build a better tomorrow for the wider community. The peace of our smaller community is in the wellbeing of our wider community. (Jeremiah 29:7) This is God's design for the church in renewing the world: the inner logic of God's actions in redemption: that peace comes to ourselves as we seek it for others.

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1. Trinity & Gospel as Understood by a First Century Jewish Messianic Believer: Paul

The concept of trinity in Paul’s thinking stemmed very naturally from his Jewish faith. The theme starts in Genesis 1, with creation itself being kicked off by light, spirit and word. These three were the presence of God within and for his creation. The light, spirit and word represent “God with us”, with his creation. Similarly, John’s Gospel (with an incarnational/“God with us” motif) starts with the same three ideas: light, glory (spirit) and word. John is writing a creational gospel, speaking of God moving from the first creation to the new or renewed creation through Christ. Here, God has come once again in Christ to renew his world.

The Genesis themes carry on through the Torah (the Law of Moses: first five books of the Old Testament.) The Torah is God’s presence with his creation, through his word, or wisdom. “The word is not in heaven that you must climb up and search for it there, nor under the world, but is near you, in your heart and mouth (for wisdom).” (Deut 30, Rom 10) The Torah was considered by the Hebrew people to be a representation of God with Israel. In this sense, in Jewish thinking, the word is the incarnational presence of God.

The word is the wisdom or presence of God speaking to us through his creation. See Psalm 19:1-4, which blends the word seen in creation with God’s word in Torah. The “let there be-s” in Genesis 1 are like the “thou shalt” of the Torah. He creates a new heart in us by the Torah (which in Christ becomes the living word), to love God and love neighbour, thereby creating a new world around us. This is the essence of Jesus’ teachings and of Paul’s gospel (2 Cor 4:6). It comes as no surprise, then, that John starts his Gospel with the incarnational word. This shows John is consciously speaking of ‘new creation’ through the gospel presence of God in Christ.

This presence of God in creation can also be seen in the Exodus. The Exodus represents the God of creation returned and come again, this time to create and be present among a new people and nation, to launch once again the royal Adamic project, to bring his sons into the world again through a new people, nation and royal priesthood.

Here, the Exodus is linked with the resurrection of Christ as its fulfilment (Heb 1:6). That is, the resurrection of Christ (who is the Israel of God) is the means by which God brings his new Torah-heart, gospel children into this world, fulfilling the Exodus and Genesis creation projects. (Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 36:26)

So in the Exodus, in that ‘new creation’ event, we see the same themes that are in Genesis 1. The pillar of fire (light), the Shekinah (spirit) within the tabernacle, his word of command to Pharaoh to “let my people go”, and his word speaking light and order in the Torah. This means that the Hebrew people, in Moses’ time and afterward, saw their Exodus as a new creation project. They saw their commission and identity in terms of Adam and Eve’s commission and identity, restored.

Proverbs 8 picks up the theme as well, showing how all creation is sustained by the presence of God's wisdom. Wisdom, Torah, Spirit and Light, even his image in Adam and Eve, were all seen as God himself being made manifest to his creation and with or among his people.

So for God to become manifest in creation through Messiah, as John reports in John 1 – that is, for God to put on flesh, and for his light, spirit and word to be fully visible to us through his full image in Christ – isn't a non-Hebrew theme. That is, incarnation is a Hebrew theme, which extends through creation in Genesis 1, to the Exodus and Torah, to the coming of God in flesh through Jesus Christ. The tabernacle also was an Old Testament incarnational theme. It was God with his people, through his Shekinah presence in the Holy of Holies. The incarnation of Christ is the same God, but with different clothing, in a different type of tent: a human body.

Paul too used only his Jewish Old Testament faith to announce the divinity of Christ. It follows exactly on from Old Testament faith and expectation. Christ is simply held as God come in the flesh, as his light, spirit and word in bodily form. And, being born as a man, Jesus had the covenant right to undertake our redemption and new creation project. The incarnation is the story of God's covenantal commitment to his creation project to redeem, reconcile and renew.

Thus, in Paul's letters, Christ is depicted as God's creational wisdom come in flesh, reconciling and restoring God's whole world. Why did 'word' need to come in the flesh? Because God is still acting to save flesh and this whole material creation/natural cosmos which he lovingly created. The same wisdom that brought forth creation is now present among us to save and heal creation (1 Cor 1:24). Part of comprehending the gospel is to understand it in this Hebrew creational sense. In the gospel, God isn't keen on taking us to heaven. That would be breaking his commitment with this world he created and loves.

In light of this, God wants us to work with him for the healing of our world – our neighbourhoods, our communities and our nations. He has called us to join in on his world-healing project. He doesn't want us to have an escapist/ uncaring/ "use and throw away" attitude towards this world and towards people. Instead, his desire is that we work with him in the new creation of our relationships with others and with our environment. When John said, "do not love the world", he was speaking about corruption, sin and greed, not of creation. God came in Christ because he loved the world. Indeed, we do not love the world in the sense of worshipping it, but we are instead to love the world in terms of loving our neighbour, building respectful communities of care for others, and being responsible in our use of the world God generously and abundantly gave to us.

When we see the apostles speaking of Christ as the second person of the trinity, they are speaking about re-creation. Christ was always spoken of in this way. He is God come in the flesh to save and restore God's people and the creation project. This comes about through his Kingdom teachings, through his life, death and resurrection and through his ongoing work at the Father's right hand in heaven. God continues this mediating work in Christ until his whole creation is renewed. The apostles saw Christ as God taking on flesh to fulfil man's part in the creation over which he gave man dominion.

Paul saw Christ as God come in the flesh because he saw that, in Jesus, God was bringing to fulfilment all that he had promised to do for Israel and the world. In Isaiah and the prophets, God promised that he himself (YHWH) would come to Israel, and that he would accomplish certain things. He promised that he would take away their sin and restore them to himself. He pledged to restore Israel to their saving mission to the nations. He would overcome their enemies. He would rebuild his temple. He would transform all the world through them. He would defeat death. God said

he was coming personally to do these things, so when Christ came and did all this, and built a new temple in his church, the apostles and early church understood Christ to be God come in the flesh.

For example, in Isaiah God said that he looked and found no man to help, so he would arm himself for battle and come to Israel himself to fulfil his promises. His armour was different to man's armour. He was armed with truth, with righteousness and with salvation. His battle would be fought on the cross. Paul, a Jew, was expectant of God's coming to Israel to fulfil these promises. So, when Paul's eyes were opened and he saw all these promises fulfilled through the coming of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the gospel message, he recognized that his Hebrew faith had come to fulfilment. Paul saw that Christ and the Holy Spirit were both God (YHWH of Isaiah), come into his creation to fulfil all his promises. Paul saw both Christ and the Holy Spirit as God come to bring about new creation. Both Christ and the Spirit are God with his creation.

So then why is Christ called the Son of God? From the perspective of the Jewish mind, there are two reasons. Firstly, 'son' means 'one born among men' and so 'Son of God' can be understood as 'one of God, born among men'. 'Son' means man; 'of God' means from heaven. 'Son of God' means man from heaven. There has only ever been one who is both from heaven and yet incarnate, born on earth. The first man, Adam, was made of dust, but this second man was God from heaven, the life-giving Spirit and Lord (1 Cor 15:45-47). The word in 1 Corinthians for 'spirit' is closer to the meaning 'breath'. The 'breath' that made Adam alive is Christ: YHWH (translated "Kurios" or Lord in the Greek Old Testament Septuagint.)

Secondly, 'Son of God' means 'the one appointed to rule'. Later, when we look at the Old Testament, we see that the reference to 'Sons of God' indicates those who rule the world with God. This title and privilege was once given to Adam and Eve, and it has now been restored to us through Christ. Christ is declared to be the Son of God, having dominion over all nations, by his resurrection, in order that he should rule (Rom 1:4-5). In Daniel 7, the 'Son Man', meaning one born from among men, is exalted to rule over creation from heaven. He is seen ascending on the clouds to heaven to rule. 'Son of God', in this sense, means the man who rules over creation, over the nations of the earth, from heaven. This is what Jesus meant when he said he would come (ascend on the clouds, come into his reign) in glory and be seated on his throne and judge the nations. He wasn't referring to his Second Coming, but to his ascension.

When we look through the Old Testament, and at the faith of the Hebrew people in the days of Jesus, there is little expectation about going to heaven. That wasn't foremost in their mind when they thought about the promises of God. They believed God's covenant with Israel concerning land, his promise to renew and heal the world through the people of Israel, and the resurrection of our body to inherit this liberated creation forever. This is why Christ came: not to launch a new gospel unrelated to this world, but to fulfil the Hebrew gospel promised to the fathers. This Hebrew gospel, therefore, is God's coming in Christ to bring his creation into new creation through his conquest of sin and death. It is simply an outworking of "your kingdom come, your will being done on earth as it is in heaven." Christ, on the behalf of God's covenant, rules in heaven until his enemies on earth are subdued, and heaven and earth are perfectly united in shalom.

The above would have been Paul's thinking and background. Paul's twofold theology was creational and covenantal. God was seen by the Hebrew people as both creator and covenant maker. These were the two main themes in the Hebrew understanding of their relationship with God. God creates the world, but creation goes wrong through the freewill of humanity. So God sets out to rectify this problem of sin through his own self-giving and, for those who desire it, to restore man to his initial

dominion. By so doing, he restores the world man was created to govern, thus delivering the world from its corruption. This is the summary of Paul's teaching in the book of Romans.

God's rectification of his creation is brought about by his covenant. He covenants with Abraham and with Israel to use them to set his creation right. Then, working through Israel, God fulfils this covenant himself by coming in Christ, the seed of Israel from heaven, coming as a man to perfectly fulfil the covenantal conditions. In defeating evil, sin and death, he brings about his new creation project.

It makes sense, then, that in the Hebrew faith God reveals himself as the creational and covenantal God. Both of these functions come together in Christ. In Christ, God keeps his covenant and brings about a new, restored creation. Since disobedience, death and the breaking of the covenant came through a man, the covenant must also be fulfilled through a man. However, only God could faithfully do this. Therefore, God came, in Christ, to be the fulfilment of his own promise.

The new creation began with Christ's resurrection and then permeates the whole world like leaven in a lump of dough. To carry out this full transformation, Christ reigns at the Father's right hand until the last enemy – death – is put under his feet. Then, God's creational plan is complete, and God becomes "all in all" (1 Cor 15:24-28). This is Hebrew monotheism working out its plan in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It's the story of one God acting in, through and for humanity, and for his whole creation. God manifests in trinity for the sake of our redemption. He comes in his Son to redeem us and to make intercession for us through the covenant, to gather and set free his creation, and he comes in his Spirit to fill and transform us. In the covenant, not in eternity past, Christ proceeds from the Father, and the Spirit from Christ, but these are the one and same God.

This is how Paul understood the mystery of God in Christ.

"...great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (1 Tim 3:16)

The mystery of Christ, and how he fits into the Hebrew gospel, was, as Paul saw it, a matter of "God in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19). When we see Jesus letting go of his divine rights to do the will of his Father, we see God's own service and love in Christ, for the creation he loves (Phil 2:5-11). Paul said the actions of Christ in Philippians 2 were the actions of YHWH. (Isaiah 45:23) And yet Jesus does it in a human relationship with his Father, and God condescends in Christ, to walk out this human relationship of obedience and love, because of love for his creation, because this is what fulfils the covenant. Yet, it is still one God acting by his mysterious power and plan.

Such an example of a loving God who humbled himself, and who suffered himself in Christ, teaches us to give our own lives for others. The Bible tells us to know and follow God in this way: "Follow God as dear children... submitting yourselves to each other in love." (Ephesians 5) This humility of God sets the tone for our own relationships with others. Instead of our social relationships being shaped by a hierarchical view of God, we see a self-giving God, a God of love who gave himself for us. This means that authority is expressed through self-giving for others, even for our enemies. This makes a huge difference to our cultures and family relationships.

Just a note about the plural *Elohim* in creation, and on the "word was *with* God" in John 1:1-2. In Hebrew linguistics, the plural speaks of God's fullness of majesty, power and honour. And one more note below from James Dunn, on the Wisdom background to *Word* in John 1:1-2:

"It is very unlikely that pre-Christian Judaism ever understood Wisdom as a divine being in any sense independent of Yahweh. The language may be the language of the wider speculation of the time, but

within Jewish monotheism and Hebraic literary idiom, Wisdom never really becomes more than a personification – a personification not so much of divine attribute (I doubt whether the Hebrews thought much in terms of divine ‘attributes’ [which is more a Greek idea], a personification rather of a function of Yahweh [God revealed in Israel’s creational and covenantal history], a way of speaking about God himself, of expressing God’s active involvement with his world and his people, without compromising his transcendence.” J. D. G. Dunn, [] added.

This leaves us with many passages to consider from the perspective of Hebrew creational and covenant theology. Just one passage as an example: Jesus’ prayer in John 17. Here, Christ stands in as the new temple of God, through which God fills and heals his new creation. The glory Jesus spoke of is the Shekinah presence of God in Christ, which he gives to the church, and which the church shares with the world through the Spirit and through our same self-giving. God empties himself into Christ; Christ empties himself into his church; and his empties herself into the world. This was God’s incarnational plan for the world before its creation.

2. Hebrew Gospel – Circumcised Heart/Renewed Land

In discussing the themes in Genesis 1 & 2 we need to do so from the perspective of its recipients. These recipients were the Hebrew people who came out of Egypt with Moses. Moses handed them the first five books of the Bible, from Genesis to Deuteronomy, also called the Pentateuch. One question which should arise from this, then, is how the Hebrew people read Genesis 1 & 2 at that time. What did it mean to them? What themes did they see in those first two chapters of the scriptures?

This is a hard ask. We are separated from those early Hebrew people by some 3,500 years. We have little knowledge of those days, except from the scriptures, from archaeology, or from surviving writings of other civilizations of that era. We today come from cultures that are, in many ways, different. We may think in many different ways. Our literary traditions and styles of writing today are also often different. How can we put ourselves in the shoes of those early Hebrew people to see how they thought about the Genesis narrative?

Western culture views the scripture in a linear fashion. Our theology is in straight lines and scientific categories, whereas, contrary to this, God presents himself in history with mysteries, through a style of text that appeals to our imagination, talking of a new world, and of transforming us and our communities inwardly. This imagination is crucial to God’s purpose in us, enabling us to wake from our sleep and grasp a vision of a new, different kingdom and the possibilities for living it out in our present societies. Hebrew text wasn’t written in a linear way. It is telling a story from the past to the future, but it does so in a poetic style. It is this poetry that speaks, in the Hebrew mind, of themes which are often missed by our present day cultures.

A common factor in Hebrew poetic style is repetition. This can be seen in its simplest form in the Proverbs. A statement is made in one sentence and then repeated in different words in the next sentence for impact. There is a circular movement in the writing. This circular movement is seen in the broader scriptural message as well. God moves from creation in Genesis 1 & 2 to a creation of a new people/nation in Deuteronomy. That is, the Pentateuch ends as it started, with creation. And in Deut 30:6 God speaks of yet another new creation in the New Covenant. And the Bible as a whole, from Genesis to Revelation, starts as it ends, with a new world, with heaven and earth conjoined, with God fully present with his creation. The circular movement shows how God wants us to interpret his word and gospel message.

The poetic structure of Hebrew writing reveals much of God's underlying message. The whole Bible is written in this way, from Genesis, to the Gospels, to the New Testament epistles, to the book of Revelation. First, there is a background painting (setting), which is the story of creation and Exodus, the story of the call and history of Israel, from creation to new creation. This setting is in the minds of the authors and Hebrew people who receive the message from God. The message they receive from God is written over the top of this background painting in their minds. Often, in Western theology, we are only interested in the text as a series of propositional statements. We fail to see the poetic imagination in the text, because we are viewing it from a different cultural base. Discipleship then often becomes a call to sign on to a series of propositional statements to be "correct" or in line with God and with those of our group, rather than a call to new creation lifestyle. The result of seeing the narrative as intended is that we now build bridges rather than walls.

Over the years Western theology has thrown out this background setting to the text. New church fathers came from a Greek background. In the new empire context of the church, since Constantine's time, Jewish people were seen as the enemy. The letters of Paul took on a whole new dimension. Instead of Paul's letters being a critique of the division in the church, where he was calling circumcised and uncircumcised together at one table in Christ, they were read as an intolerance to the circumcised (Jewish people) as a whole, not just to the divisive "party of the circumcision". Theology became almost entirely Greek, or Western. Jesus was seen more as a new sudden revelation from heaven to start a whole new history and gospel, rather than as a direct fulfilment of Hebrew and Jewish hope. The Old Testament became merely a source of proof-texting for the divinity of Christ, while we applied an entirely new meaning to Jesus' coming and purpose. Our harsh treatment of the Jewish people since then has been a legacy of our new way of interpreting the scripture.

Genesis 1 & 2 speak symbolically of God bringing order out of chaos. Light is separated from darkness. This means, symbolically, that good is separated from evil. The land is also separated from the sea. Sea and foaming rivers, in the Old Testament, often symbolise the torrential character of human nature, and the nations' oppressive armies, as opposed to the still, peaceful waters of Siloam (Isaiah 7:18, 8:6-7). The circular motion of scripture is seen from cover to cover when, in Revelation 21 & 22, the scriptures end by saying there is no sea. This is symbolic for the healing of the world, of its cultures and of humanity in Christ.

Please note that, in observing this, we are not saying Genesis isn't historical text. It is. God reveals himself in actual and real history. The Bible is historically reliable. But the Bible is also more than that. In the Hebrew mind the scriptures record historical events revealed in redemptive narrative. Through God's acts in history, he is revealing his redemptive mind and plan for the creation he loves, nurtures and redeems. God's eternal plan shines through in rich Hebrew literary styles.

When Israel crossed over the Red Sea, God was speaking to them in every book of their Pentateuch. He was saying to them that he was separating them from their disorder and chaos, from the bondage in slavery. He was freeing them from their oppression under Pharaoh. He was also calling them to holiness, separating them from the idolatry of Egypt and of the other gentile nations. They were to be separate in their hearts and actions from idolatry, but not superior or distant from others. They were to be holy and to serve.

God made mankind in his image, male and female. And he put them in a Garden. He gave them a commission to the nations. They were to subdue the world and have dominion over it. Adam and Eve were God's priesthood. To be made in God's image meant they were to reflect that image into the world. They were like mirrors, called to reflect God's character and caring nature throughout his

creation, and, by doing so, keep creation in wholeness (shalom), rather than abusing it in greed. As a priesthood, they were also to reflect back to God the praises of creation, through the graces and goodness their communities were to experience daily. This was also the call to Israel. Israel was called a nation of priests. Their calling wasn't for themselves, but for others. They were called to serve and bless the nations.

As stated, God gave Adam and Eve dominion, but this dominion wasn't understood by our fallen human cultures until Christ came. We have taken it selfishly, just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden when tempted. However, in Christ, we see the true nature of this dominion. It is shown to us in Phil 2:5-11 in Paul's epistle. Christ humbled himself to serve the world. He became obedient. He gave up his rights in order to help others. Therefore, God gave Christ dominion over all, so that at his name – to this type of serving character and life – all things will be renewed and restored. This example is our commission today, and how the church is to go about its work in the world.

God also gave Israel a garden, called the Promised Land. In that land he placed his tabernacle and presence. As he walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden, God would now once again walk with his people. Once banished from the Garden, God's people were now returned from exile to their land and to the presence of God. Their land was a temple of the Lord, just as Adam and Eve's Garden in the first creation. And the purpose of these temples was to bless the earth.

After working for six days, it was said that God rested. In the language of that time, this means that God entered into his creation for communion and as a place to dwell with his people, to experience the joy of life and to work together. To rest means to take up residence and to reign, to spread your benevolent rule to all inhabitants (see Psalm 132:8, Isaiah 11:10). This is temple language in Genesis 1 & 2. We see God walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden. God's purpose was to dwell with them and, through their agency, bless the world. This temple message in Genesis 1 & 2 is one of the important themes in the creation narrative. It shows us God's purpose for the temple theme right through the scriptures: to fill the earth with his glory and blessing (see Isaiah 6:1-4). The temple is where heaven and earth join and through which God's kingdom comes to earth.

The temple theme is then duplicated with Israel in Canaan, but only finds its fulfilment in the body of Christ. The fullness of the godhead dwells (tabernacles) in Jesus and his coming to earth was the coming of God's reign and kingdom to this world. Today, God's temple on earth continues to be Christ's body, the church. We see here the purpose of the gospel, not to take us to heaven, but to unite heaven and earth for new creation and renewal, changing our homes, communities and nations. This temple fulfilment which transforms all nations on earth is the theme of the end of the book of Revelation. The purpose of the gospel is to join heaven and earth together, not discard the earth. Our eternal destiny is a united heaven and earth.

We see here what the opening of Genesis means. Ancient civilizations often depicted their gods taking rest in their temple after their god's enemies had been vanquished and they had brought order to the world. This is a corruption of the Genesis account, reflecting the violent lives of these kings, but it does reflect upon the temple narrative in Genesis. After God brings order to his creation, he settles into rest with Adam and Eve in a temple narrative. God's presence "walks up and down" in the garden, depicted by the same Hebrew word for his presence with Israel in their tabernacle. Adam and Eve are told to "serve and keep" the Garden. These two words used together in the Old Testament always refer to the priest's work in the temple. The next verse in Genesis 2 is the Torah, or commandment, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is the same order we see when God commands Israel. The priests are to "serve and keep" the temple, and then the commandments which they are to keep are given. The priests are to be gatekeepers, keeping the

unclean out of the temple area, and watching over the Torah. Adam was to keep the serpent out and watch over the commandment God gave him.

A river issued out of Eden, and a river also issued out of Ezekiel's temple and from the New Jerusalem in Revelation. Ezekiel describes Eden as a temple, and the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) says the fallen creature who served in the temple of Eden in Ezekiel 28 is Adam, who is compared to the fall of the men of Tyre. The precious stones represent the priest's tunic, showing Adam's call. Likewise, God's commission to Adam and Eve, to spread, to be fruitful and multiply, to reign, is repeated several times throughout Genesis, always in the context of a tabernacle which anticipates God's temple (e.g. the most significant ones being Moriah and Bethel: Gen 22:15-18, 28: 13-15), showing both that Eden was a temple, and that God's eschatological temple, by which his blessing fills the nations, is Christ's body, which fills the earth and so "fills all things" (Eph 1:23), the goal of creation thus being fulfilled.

Throughout the biblical narrative the temple is tied to the commission of Adam and Eve, and then Israel, to rule and to the extension of God's blessing through the world. The king/priest vocations were united in Adam and Eve, and are again in Christ and his church. The ancient pagan kings corrupted this biblical view, showing the purpose of their temples was to extend their oppressive, violent rule over others. The pagans carried on temple themes from the creation, the gods placing their image in their temples, like God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden to represent his rule.

How can such clear Old Testament views, which existed throughout the Hebrew and other civilizations, be aborted by a Greek view of the gospel that God's main interest is taking us to a spiritualised heaven, rather than the redeeming and reconciling of his whole creation?

There is much more to say about the view of Genesis from the perspective of ancient culture, within and outside Hebrew civilizations, but for our purposes here it shows us two things. The temple represents the cosmos, the heavens and earth which God is filling and blessing. It shows us the consistent view of God in the scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, on his purpose in the gospel: that his personal presence will fill the earth. This also shows us the purpose of the church, to be God's Adam in the world, reflecting his nature and blessing to the nations. The temple narrative in Genesis 1 & 2 shows what God is saying to us through the opening of our scripture.

The surprise for the Jewish people in Jesus's day, and for us today, is what it means to watch over the commission of faithful stewardship God has given us, what it means to keep the unclean out, and to keep God's Torah. It's keeping uncleanness out of our own hearts, not embracing the message of self, violence and greed spread by the serpent, and the Torah we keep is that of loving sinners rather than separating from them in judgement. This is what we see in the Priest who fulfilled God's commission: Jesus Christ.

The Pentateuch ends the way it started. God's second creation, Israel, enters their land with God to reflect his image to the world. Israel is God's new creation, his second Adam with whom God dwells. This is why Christ is called the Second Adam. He comes from Israel and fulfils their call to serve and heal the world. All who are in Christ are in God's new-creation humanity/temple. Israel would have been very well aware of the parallels between Adam and Eve and their own calling when they read Genesis 1 & 2 and this would have given them enlightened understating of God's purpose for them in the world. So when we read Genesis 1 & 2 today we see the same parallels between it and God's call and purpose for us in the world through the gospel. This is the gospel message.

Note the gospel in these passages. God isn't forming Adam, or saving Israel to take them to heaven while he destroys his beloved creation. Rather, it is about a God who, through love, is committed to

his creation, who doesn't cast it off because it disappoints him, and who calls his children to work with him in renewing his whole creation. This was the call for both Adam and for Israel, and it is also our calling in the gospel. As well as this, we are called to reflect this nature in how we deal with other people, with the same patience, personal sacrifice and forgiveness that God shows us. How we see God is how we treat others. If we see God casting off a world that has disappointed him we will do that to others. But if we see him committed unto blood to love them, we will reflect that also.

All of this is the gospel message we see in Jesus' and Paul's teaching. It's the Hebrew Gospel of wholeness for his entire creation. This isn't universalism. It isn't saying everyone will be saved. It is saying that God is sticking with his original project until it comes to pass: until the whole earth is covered with the knowledge of the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea.

And so the poetic circle of the Pentateuch that reveals the gospel message begins in Genesis 1 & 2 and ends in Deut 30 with Israel in their "garden" reflecting God to heal the world. However, we see yet a second poetic fulfilment spoken of here. The Pentateuch ended in Deuteronomy by pointing Israel to their future, to yet another circular fulfilment when the gospel would come to Israel. This is the gospel we are living in today (Deut 30:6). Moses said God would bring Israel back from their captivity in Babylon and circumcise their heart and bless their land. After their return from Babylon Christ came to them as promised and initiated the beginning of God's final new creation. He did this through Christ's death and resurrection. On the cross Christ was banished from the land and presence, "outside the camp." He bore our exile. God, in Christ as a man, tasted our forsakenness and, taking on death, defeated it. In the resurrection, we are all returned to the favour of God. Therefore, from Deut 30 we see a clear poetic connection between Genesis 1 & 2, the Exodus of Israel, and the calling of the church. This connection is unmistakable to the Hebrew mind.

"And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." (Deut 30:5-6) God, in Christ, brings us back into a land with a temple, and, through his presence in our hearts by the New Covenant, he renews our world. This is both his final creation and the fulfilment of his plan. It includes all Israel who believe and all who are grafted in by faith, so that we too are Israel, and the land is the whole world (Rom 4:13, 8:19-26, Rev 21-22). God's promises are about his presence with his people in a good land. His promises are about land - this earth - not about going to heaven. These promises can only be fulfilled through a circumcised heart, which he brings about in us through the Messiah.

God's promises are not fulfilled through political or military coercion against other people, but through Torah in our hearts towards our neighbour. This is the content of Jesus' teachings. Jesus taught in the Gospels about how God's Promised Land comes to pass through the way our new heart is lived out in our communities and amongst our enemies. It is in this way that God's promises are fulfilled in the world through the gospel renewing our inner lives and then our neighbourhoods.

God's creation and people are healed in Christ, as it is at the end of the book of Revelation. The Pentateuch is a five volume book on the redemptive plan of God for the world, a plan fulfilled in his Messiah. The plan is described in history and in poetic form, moving us from Adam, to Israel, to Christ. As we begin this journey with Adam in Genesis 1 & 2, we see why God has come to us in the gospel. This shows us God's plan for his church today. It isn't simply individual salvation. It is service to our communities and to our world, partnering with God in his self-giving love to restore his people and the whole earth.

A note on postmillennialism: From my little understanding of postmillennialism (I have never studied it), it seems it is associated with triumphalism and the “cultural mandate.” Triumphalism is when we believe we have a commission from God to rule over others. This can be national, religious, or racial triumphalism. It can lead to “the end justifies the means” rationale, where people are excused from doing what is right, because of their special calling for the “greater good.”

As far as I understand the “cultural mandate” ideology, it considers that Adam and Eve’s mandate to rule the nations is fulfilled through enforcing principles from the Law of Moses upon society today: an enforcement of Christian views upon others. This was the practice of the Pharisees. If postmillennialism is understood this way, I believe it is completely detached from the kingdom that the Prophets spoke of and which Jesus portrayed in his own life. Today, it seems, that Conservatism tries to elect a president who will implement a “cultural mandate”, or in the case of dispensationalism (premillennialism), a president who will attack “God’s enemies” to usher in the Second Coming, the way the Zealots of Jesus’ day tried to usher in the Kingdom.

3. John’s Gospel of New Creation – Shekinah

The four Gospels speak of the coming of Christ from various perspectives. In Luke, there is a strong kingdom emphasis. Luke shows that Christ had come to set up a new type of kingdom on the earth through the gospel and church, and that this kingdom would renew the world and our communities as it renews us from within. The topic in John is the same. However, John expresses this same good news in creational language. Rather than speaking of a new kingdom, John speaks of a new creation. But the point John and Luke are making is still the same: the renewing of the world.

In his gospel message, John’s Gospel starts with the first creation. “In the beginning was the word.” John shows that, through the word, all things were made. Then he says this word is the light that lights every person who comes into the world. Thus the Logos (living Christ, who is the wisdom of God, the way, the truth and the life) in creation is also in the conscience and cultures of all humanity, and the darkness has not extinguished it. John continues that this word put on flesh to dwell among us, and we beheld his glory (shekinah, meaning spirit). John speaks of the three Old Testament themes which, in the Hebrew mind, mean the presence of the one true God: light, word and spirit. John says that all these are present in Christ.

John is making several points here. He is showing that, just as God rested on the seventh day and dwelled among his people, so he came again in Christ to dwell among us. The gospel of John is the coming of heaven to earth. It is about God making earth his dwelling place once again. This time he comes in Christ to set up a new temple on the earth, through the church, so that he can dwell amongst the nations. This joining of heaven and earth in one healed, new creation is the theme John shows in the end of Revelation. In John chapter one, John is quite intentionally speaking of Christ coming in the flesh to establish God’s new creation within the world.

By saying that the word put on flesh and “tabernacled” among us, John was saying that Jesus is the Spirit and he is YHWH of the Old Testament. He was saying Christ is the YHWH who inhabited the temple of the Old Testament by his Spirit, now present among us in a different kind of tent, a man’s body. John is simply showing Christ as the presence of the YHWH of Israel. This opening to John’s Gospel is reflecting the Hebrew faith of monotheism in Jesus more concretely and with less confusion than Greek trinitarianism did.

In John's opening chapter he shows that God is once again present among his people. Just as the word, light and Spirit of God brought forth the first creation, God has appeared once again in Christ to bring forth a new creation, a new heaven and new earth, through the gospel. He does this by bringing forth a new temple in the world through his death and resurrection. When John says, "The light shines in darkness and the darkness cannot prevent it", he is referring to Genesis chapter one: light sent darkness back. So Christ has come to extinguish darkness fully from God's creation through renewing all things. John turns the creational language of Genesis 1 into new creation language through the incarnation, the appearance of God in flesh.

The themes of light, word and spirit continue all the way through John's Gospel. He shows his glory (shekinah) at the wedding, where, by a creative act, Jesus turns the water into wine. He does the same with the feeding of the multitude, and by creating eyes in a man born blind, using the same dirt with which he made Adam. John compares Jesus to Moses who gave manna, the author of Genesis. In all these accounts John is showing that God is at work once again and has come, in Christ, to initiate a new creation, a new era. To a Jewish mind reading the Gospel of John in the first century, this creational view, of a new heaven and new earth, would have been unmistakably noticed and understood. The message of John is clear. His way of understanding and presenting the gospel as impacting and renewing the whole world we live in cannot be missed.

Traditionally, we have often read these accounts as John establishing the divinity of Christ. The accounts do show his divinity, but this is not the full extent of John's purpose. That is not where John stops. He is leading the Hebrew people into new creation, to join with God in the gospel, to follow Christ into the nations, to bring about the renewal of the world. This Gospel of John isn't just a calling to come to Christ, but a calling to join with God in his redemptive plan for our cultures and communities. John said that he wrote these things so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ (Jewish Messiah) and, in believing, would have eternal life. But we must understand this from the first century Jewish position. They believed that, when the Messiah came, he would renew all things and heal the natural world. Isaiah plainly foretold this and the Jews were eagerly expecting it. They didn't see eternal life as simply going to heaven, as if that was all it was, but as the coming of the kingdom of God to earth. Eternal life was new heaven and new earth. This is what the Prophets promised to them.

We can also see from this opening of John the meaning of sonship. "To as many as received him he gave the power to become the sons of God." This is given in the context of the Hebrew creational worldview from Genesis 1 & 2. Adam and Eve were given power (dominion) over God's creation. "Sonship" refers to Adam's and Eve's rulership over God's creation. Sonship means being made in the image of God, to rule with him over his works as joint heirs. This sonship shows again that John is declaring the gospel of Christ as a re-creational gospel about this world we live in. Our sonship is restored to renew our nations. This is how Paul speaks of sonship and image in Romans 8 and in 2 Cor 3-5. It comes to set the world free from its corruption.

All these themes of sonship, image and Torah mentioned throughout the New Testament always point to new creation. As the light of Christ shines in our heart, darkness is driven back, as in Genesis 1, and cannot prevent the light from renewing all things. (Gen 1:1-5, John 1:5) The reign of Torah through the Spirit comes to our hearts and renews our communities through the *shema*: love for God and for others. This gospel is very much Hebrew centred. Torah is not set aside, but becomes the very centre of our sonship and Adamic commission in the world. The Torah of Deut 6:4-5 becomes the Torah of a renewed/circumcised heart spoken of in Deut 30:6. Deut 30:6 says when God circumcises our heart and we keep Torah we live. This means renewed land and community, the promise to Israel fulfilled in the gospel. To the Pharisees, Torah meant washing hands; to Jesus,

Torah meant love the Lord your God with all of your being and your neighbour as yourself. Torah meant the cross.

In John chapter 13 we see the nature of this new creation. God is bringing us back to Adam and Eve's first call, to reflect God's nature and character to others. To do this, God desires his full image in the world as the basis for this reflecting and renewing of our cosmos. This is why his image dwelt with Adam and Eve, and again with Israel. This is why his image came fully in Christ and now shines through those who follow him. The gospel is plainly as much about reflecting God's image through Christ to renew the world's corruption (Rom 8:19-25), as it is about our personal justification. We are called to move from personal justification to become image bearers for the sake of the world God loves. Such is the outworking of God's new earth renewal plan.

This is often missed in Western theology. In Romans, for example, justification will normally be seen as the main point, along with sanctification and glorification. These three are seen as referring to the individual, who is at the centre of the gospel. But the justification Paul is speaking about is that which unites us as one family from otherwise different traditions. And the glorification part has been taken wrongly. It doesn't mean going to heaven, but being restored to full sonship and the Adamic commission in ruling the world. This is what Romans is dealing with: the restoration of the image of God in man to work with God in new creation. Justification is a stepping stone to transformation into his image. This is the goal. And both justification and glorification are community issues, not centred on promises just to an individual.

But what exactly is that image or character of God, in John 13, that the Spirit reflects through us? It is one of self-giving for others. God lays down his life in Christ in order that he might serve the world. He gives his blood, represented by the Last Supper in the upper room, and, by so doing, calls us to do the same for others. This is reflecting God's image to the world. He washed the feet of his students and friends and calls to us to follow his example with all others in the world. This is his new creation spreading through the church, imbibing the nature of our creator and redeemer. This is the salt and light that transforms our communities, relationships and creation. God just needs a people to walk in it.

In chapters 14 to 17 of John, we see Christ's temple language. Through the cross, God was coming once again to dwell among his people. We would become his temple. What did this mean to the Jews? It didn't mean going to heaven. The temple was always about God's plan to inhabit the world so that he might bring his image, blessing and healing to the nations. This was the reason for the temple in the Garden and in the Promised Land. This temple is the meeting place between heaven and earth, so God's merciful rule can spread throughout the world. Without the temple, all the world had was the curse. With a restored temple the earth now has his benevolent presence again.

When Israel was exiled to Babylon and the presence and glory left the temple, God promised in Ezekiel that his presence would return. After Israel returned from Babylon to their land and Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple, and Herod later built it again, the shekinah never did return to the new temple. Haggai promised the glory (shekinah) of the latter house shall be greater than the shekinah in the former temple (Solomon's temple), but that glory never returned. God said he was returning to his land and temple but, up till the time of Jesus, that had never happened. There is no account, after the return of Israel from Babylon till the days of Jesus roughly 400 years later, of the shekinah filling the second temple as it previously filled the tabernacle of Moses and the temple Solomon dedicated.

In chapters 14-17, John shows us that this returning to his people is what the coming of Christ means. He came to fulfil God's promise of his return to his Jewish people, and his return to his temple. These chapters in John are the shekinah chapters. Christ shares how, through his death and resurrection, and through our obedience in following him, he will fill his body/temple/church with his Spirit so we would become the dwelling place of God. "Through the Holy Spirit, I and the Father in you." (See also Acts 15:16, the return of God to Israel in the New Covenant) This is the direct fulfilment of the Old Testament prophets concerning the return of God to his temple. "Father, I have given them the shekinah you gave me." (John 17:22) This was fulfilled in the church on the Day of Pentecost.

And what was the reason for the coming of God back to his temple? Ezekiel makes it plain. When the temple is rebuilt by the Messiah, it issues forth the blessing and renewal of God throughout the whole world. The whole world is brought to life by the presence of God in his church (Ezekiel 47). Ezekiel speaks of all nations coming to life. Then Ezekiel goes on to show the land divided up between the twelve tribes of Israel and being filled with God's glory. The twelve tribes are symbolic of the blessing of Israel going to the whole of humanity and the land is the whole of the earth, just as the twelve tribes carry the same symbolism in the book of Revelation. Israel fulfils its mission to the world through their Messiah and his shekinah-filled body/temple. This is the new heaven and new earth John is declaring in his shekinah chapters.

Moving on in John, we see the new creation being declared through John's account of the death and resurrection of Christ. It's a historical account, but it's also a poetic one, reflecting the creation narrative in Genesis. Its purpose is to show the Jewish people the work that God is doing in raising Christ from the dead. It is the beginning of a new creation era. John declared that Christ was crucified on the sixth day of the week. He was buried and rested in the grave the whole of the seventh day. Then John states, "On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb..." Here John announces the beginning of a new creation week. In Genesis we have the first creation week. Here, Jesus rises on Day One to start his new creation, his kingdom reign, the beginning of the era in which he subdues all his enemies on earth under him.

And in what form does Christ rise? He rises with his earthly body transformed. So, in this new creation, it is the flesh of this world that is renewed. It is our material creation that is transformed. This shows us an understanding of the faith of the Jewish people. For them, resurrection isn't merely spiritual. It involves our fleshly bodies, and the eventual transformation of the whole natural world we live in. Fleshly bodies are for living on this earth. A resurrected fleshly body is to live in God's new, transformed, united heaven and earth. Christ is the first fruits of this resurrection and of the transformation of our whole creation. The first body (Greek: *soma*) covers the mortal soul (*psychikon*), the second body (*soma*) covers the immortal spirit (*pneumatikon*). (1 Cor 15:44) The difference is immortality. (1 Cor 15:54)

Moreover, one of the most glaring things John mentioned is who it was that first came to the tomb and, subsequently, became the first apostle of Christ's resurrection and new creation. It was Mary Magdalene. Not only was she a woman, but a former prostitute, out of whom Jesus drove seven demons. In those days, women were not allowed to be witnesses in a court of law. However, here Jesus makes them the number one witnesses of his resurrection, the most important event in eternity. This was a very deliberate act of God in showing the nature of his new creation; that a renewing had begun that would transform all the values of our societies, turning covetous empires into caring communities. In the societies of that day, women were shunned. The Pharisees used to pray, "Thank you Lord that you didn't make me a gentile and you didn't make me a woman." It was a

completely patriarchal and self-centred society, just as we see right through the Old Testament cultures. But here in the gospel, God sows a new leaven into the world that will renew us all.

God makes the greatest announcement in eternity through a renewed sinner, someone despised by society. By worldly values, this looks like a great indignity for Christ - conceived out of wedlock, rejected by the religious people, welcomed by loathed shepherds, and now announced by a former prostitute. Most people like their arrival to be announced by important people. You would think God would want the president of the USA to announce the dawn of our new creation. Instead, Mary was God's choice. This is a demonstration of the new world God is making through his church.

This brings us back to John 13 and the nature of this new creation. It isn't based on the values of the old world, which is now passing away. In the new world, it is the meek who rise, it is the sick who are cared for, it is the sinner and loser who are sought out. This first example we see after Christ's resurrection begins to permeate all our societies. Slavery, racism, and the exploitation of others are eventually brought under Christ's reign as we wake up to God's purpose for the church in the world: "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength, and you shall love your neighbour (friend and enemy) as yourself."

"And Mary sat at Jesus's feet..." (Luke 19:38)

Here, we are shown the non-bigoted nature of the new kingdom. The above phrase is an idiom which meant that Mary was a disciple of a rabbi, able to learn and to expound the teachings of the kingdom. This would have been inconceivable in the patriarchal ages. No woman could be in a rabbinical college. This just shows how we are to treat others of difference in God's kingdom, in a new age, eventually abolishing slavery and all systems of exploitation.

Paul's writings are distinctly non-hierarchical. The cultures of his day were entirely hierarchical, with strict and unjust social orders between male and female, rich and poor, citizens and non-citizens, owners and slaves, within marriage, priests and laity, on and on. Paul taught all these social hierarchies are overthrown by agape in Christ. Because we were all sinners and have been freely forgiven and accepted, we are to accept and treat all others the same way. Care of those different to us replaces oppression.

Paul and Peter (see 1 Peter) both taught the way we infiltrate these selfish social institutions is to follow Christ. Whether government, marriage or economic relationships, we are to take Christ's path of respect. Paul and Peter weren't teaching hierarchy, but the Christ way of infiltrating and renewing the powers of our land. ("Follow God as his dear children... do as Christ did..." Eph 5:1-2)

In Ephesians 5, Paul likened marriage to the relationship of the church with Christ. As Eve came out of Adam's own flesh, so the church is the blood and body of the Lord, coming from his side on Calvary. In marriage there is a respect/love relationship from both parties. Paul is calling for respect for the social customs on marriage, without differentiating between the wife and husband on a hierarchical level. The word used for the wife "obeying" her husband, is the word used in the previous verse for us "submitting to one another in love." It isn't hierarchical, but in agape.

This doesn't mean the woman is lower than the man, nor is Paul teaching "gender roles" for believers, as Paul points out when quoting the error of the Corinthians (1 Cor 11), "every man also comes from a woman". In Genesis 1, both male and female are made in the image of God and are both given dominion. Woman wasn't "made in the image and glory of man." Paul's conclusion about "head-coverings" was that the churches had no custom to contend over, and that that which is deemed proper in culture should be followed. This is in line with Paul's usual point about our love

for others overruling our desire for personal freedom or self-centred revolution against customs. We transform powers through “washing feet”, as Christ did.

Following Christ's teachings and life, Paul and Peter make leaders within society, and all of God's people, servants. (Matt 20:25-26) Leadership within our social institutions, offices and customs takes on the form of a servant. This is God’s infiltrating, undermining plan, rather than taking up Satan’s methods of rebellion. God only has one plan for changing the world and that is the path Christ took. We are his followers and we are God’s plan of renewal.

Gordon Fee said, “The language and style of 1 Corinthians are especially rhetorical and combative. Paul is taking them on at every turn. There is little to suggest that he is informing or merely correcting; instead, he is attacking and challenging with all the weapons in his literary arsenal.” 1 Cor 6:12, 13, 7:1, 8:1, 4, 10:23, 15:12 are all accepted verses in which Paul is quoting the Corinthians, not using his own words. This is clear in Romans as well, in 3:1-7 for example, where he extensively quotes others, without saying he is doing so. In Corinthians, Paul is responding to reports from Cloe’s household church and also responding to an earlier letter written from the Corinthian church to Paul. Paul is answering their false claims. This is also the case in 1 Cor 11 and in 1 Cor 14, where men, following the cultural ideas of the day, were seeking to silence women.

This is the only way to reconcile these texts with Paul’s clear approval of and work with women gospel ministers and leaders. We know of Junia and Priscilla and the women who prophesied at Corinth, and Lydia who led a group in Philippi, and Chloe who led the group in her house in Rome, and Phoebe who carried Paul’s letter to the Roman church. In that day the carrier was also the one who read the letter in the churches and interpreted/commented/preached on the letter, to convey its proper meaning for Paul. Saying women should learn in silence (as in 1 Tim 2:11), just as men aren’t to be “contentious” in the church, since “Eve was deceived”, shows that Paul didn’t approve of the culture of the day which didn’t allow women to be taught. He turned it against them: “If women are deceived, as you say, then they better learn.”

This brings us back to Paul’s foundation and paradigmatic example in Jesus, who brought Mary into his rabbinical school, to learn and to share his word of life with others, and who used a woman delivered sinner (Mary Magdalene) as his first apostle of new creation.

4. Spiritual Warfare in Genesis

As Israel was being brought out of Egypt by God, they saw this act of deliverance reflected in the narrative of Genesis 1 & 2. As God brought order to chaos in successive days of creation, so God was bringing Israel out of their bondage into a good land. The sea, darkness and bareness of the world in the early days of creation came to represent Israel’s journey out of darkness, separated and delivered from the gentile powers, and their identity as God’s sons shining the light on a better world. They saw spiritual warfare simply as the act of being light-bearers, just as Jesus showed us in the Sermon on the Mount. Light-bearers of a new creation.

There are themes in the Genesis creation narrative that are also present in the creation narratives of other ancient civilizations of that time. Other accounts describe a violent war between gods, with the victorious god establishing his will in the creation. Such a narrative was a distortion that conveniently suited the violent nature of the kingdoms that promoted it. The emperors of these kingdoms followed the image of their false gods, inflicting violence on those who threatened their rule. This was the worldview of all ancient civilizations.

Spiritual warfare of a different kind is hinted at in the Genesis narrative. Here, we see the existence of darkness. Alternatively, when we go to the end of the book of Revelation, we find there is no darkness, no night. There isn't even the need for the sun to give light. God's presence is the light of his creation. These are symbols to show that, in the end, evil has been eradicated from creation. It is destroyed, symbolically, in the lake of fire, into which death itself is also thrown. These are symbols to show that evil and its fruits have been completely eradicated from all creation. It is the final victory of Christ's kingdom.

One way of looking at creation is to suggest that God is using this period to allow evil to have its expression, to allow the devil's advocate his voice, so that, in the trial of history, evil will reveal itself and be overcome by the gospel. We see in the book of Job that God doesn't forbid the voice of evil, but allows it and overcomes it justly, by mercy and by selflessness. We can see similarities here with the Sermon on the Mount. When we look at the circular movement of scripture, we see that evil is present in creation, symbolised by the sea and darkness. In contrast, in the book of Revelation, evil within God's whole creation has been finally banished, symbolised by the absence of sea and night.

This is, therefore, the message regarding spiritual warfare in Genesis. God doesn't exclude evil from his creation, but he holds it at bay, setting its parameters. He says to the sea, "You can come this far and no more." (Job 38:11) Here, evil is permitted in order that mankind might have a choice. The devil's advocate says that, without this choice, mankind would be a robot and creation wouldn't be free, thus making God illegitimate. So God gives the accuser this space within creation to allow man a choice, and we see this with the serpent being allowed access to the Garden. In light of this, the word of God in the Garden was the same as the word of God to Israel in their land: "Choose this day whom you will serve... I put before you life and death." (Deut 30, Josh 24)

This doesn't mean God is responsible for the "serpent's" evil. Evil exists in any creature because of freedom of choice. There is no darkness in God. (1 John 1:5) When God said in Isaiah that he makes light and darkness, good and evil, he was speaking of raising up one nation and bringing down another. (Isaiah 45:7) He was speaking metaphorically of his decrees of blessing and judgement through allowing circumstances in nations to run their course.

The choice we each have to make is between self and community. We choose God's self-giving way as seen in his Son, or our self-centred way that destroys other people, creation and ourselves. Putting ourselves first has the fruit of greed, which results in the destruction of creation. This is the way of evil. On the contrary, Genesis reveals God as the creator and community builder and he calls us to join him in this task.

God ultimately overcomes the accuser himself in a just manner - by the cross, by his own self-giving. He establishes this new, selfless kingdom life in the church as the way in which Satan is overcome. He destroys the powers by what seems foolish to the world: the opposite of worldly self-centredness, in his Spirit-filled people (1 Cor 1:27-28, Rev 12:11).

In Genesis God doesn't fight evil in a violent way, as happens in the creation narratives of other civilizations. Spiritual warfare is not a physical battle, nor is it, in any way, violent from God's part. He is sovereign and no one can fight against him. He simply speaks and it is done. In Genesis, spiritual warfare is purely a moral choice. The narrative calls us to say 'no' to evil, showing us that, in that choice, God will help us and evil will not overcome us. Even at night the stars and moon shine so we won't stumble in darkness. "The light shines in darkness and the darkness cannot put it out." (John 1:5)

In some other ancient creation stories, evil is represented by the Leviathan and the Dragon of the sea. This is similar to the image of the sea in Genesis, something which represents a power that will come against God's people. These themes are also mentioned in the book of Job, in Isaiah 27 and in some of the intertestamental literature of the Jews. In Isaiah, Leviathan and the Dragon (serpent) are simply the powers of evil that inspire Egypt and Assyria against Israel. Again, evil is represented symbolically by the sea or raging rivers. In the book of Revelation, the gentile beasts also rise out of the sea.

"You split the sea by your strength and smashed the heads of the sea monsters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan and let the desert animals (other nations) eat him. You caused the springs and streams to gush forth, and you dried up rivers that never run dry. Both day and night belong to you; you made the starlight and the sun." (Psalm 74:13-16) Here, the same symbols of darkness and sea are used to speak of the enemy nations. God restrains their power and rebukes the Red Sea to deliver his people from Egypt. He resides over all the affairs of the nations to bring forth his justice.

However, the destructive powers of the sea are not representative of the gentile kingdoms alone. In the Old Testament they also inspire Israel in many ways, and eventually bring them into judgement. Jesus, in speaking to the Jews, said that, if they didn't repent, they would be assigned to Gehenna; news which shocked the Jews. The word 'Gehenna' used here designates the final self-destruction of evil. This evil is symbolically called Gog and Magog, as was Assyria, whose army was thrown into Gehenna outside Jerusalem in Hezekiah's day. Jesus was saying that many in Israel could also be part of Gog and Magog.

When evil has its way, in Genesis, it comes in by sea, overcoming the earth and destroying all life. We read in Genesis of how, in those days, the "sons of God" destroyed the earth by taking all the women they wanted and building great empires of oppression, even destroying nature. The term "sons of God" refers to the men of renown, mighty warriors. These were great, oppressive rulers like Nimrod, the later king of Babylon, men who called themselves deities and God's sons, who took harems of thousands of women, even as Solomon did. They destroyed the earth with their armies and theft. In the parables of the Book of Enoch, these sons of God are depicted as spiritual beings who act through men's self-centred desires, leading them in their destructive paths. The princes in the book are Daniel and depicted in the same way. They are the rulers of nations, tempted and led by self-centred evil.

There is a thin line in scripture between the devil outside and the nature of fallen mankind who follow his bidding. Man seeks his own glory and steals and kills to obtain it, all the while being the accuser of others. It is the nature of the Pharisees, men who accused the woman caught in adultery before then accusing Jesus. They had come to steal, kill and destroy, while Jesus, in contrast, came to love the sheep with his own life. They find scapegoats to blame and call society against others as the evil doers, all the while hiding the Satan in themselves. This becomes the rule of our human culture, not caring for foreigners but saving ourselves instead: "It is good that one man perish that we be saved." We are called to be delivered from this scapegoating nature within us by following Jesus. The kingdom of God comes in total contrast to this satanic nature within our lives and cultures.

In Genesis we see the nature of evil, both in symbols and in history. Evil is the disordered sea that brings chaos. This doesn't mean that Genesis 1:1-2 depicts a real battle between God and Satan at the dawn of creation. The sea in creation is good, it is only used symbolically because of its natural ability to harm. In Revelation, evil is called Abaddon (Destroyer). Evil is symbolised by darkness,

indicating self-centeredness. Evil is also revealed in the Garden as the accuser. This evil constantly accuses God and God's people. This is why Jesus died and, in doing so, defeated evil.

How do we defeat evil in the world? By doing the opposite of what evil does. Instead of destroying life and creation, we seek the good of others. Instead of violence, we enact care and restorative mercy. Instead of darkness, we come into the light through forgiveness and kindness. Instead of accusing others, we seek to heal those who err. In short, we resign from evil's agenda of destroying and accusing and join God's agenda as creator and justifier through giving ourselves to build up others, our communities and our world.

Evil itself, though, is often a mystery. We could say evil comes from choice; from choosing self. We might say it is the opposite of love. Love gives freedom for us to choose. If we choose to serve ourselves, this creates evil through its impact on others around us. Evil is what happens when God gives us freedom to live for ourselves instead of living for his good purpose and instead of serving. All evil on the earth comes from this wrong choice by humanity. It produces a sea of destruction in the world, which God either holds back and, by grace, restrains, or, in judgement, he takes away his restraint and allows evil to go on and destroy itself and those involved with it.

Scripture tells us that evil in the world will come to an end. Those who side with it shall perish by their own fruit. This way, evil will be banished from the world. Isaiah speaks of the reign of Christ on the earth where the whole world is a land full of goodness, a place where the oppressor and evil doer are gone forever.

"Your eyes will see the king in all his splendour, and you will see a land that stretches into the distance (literally: full of goodness). You will think back to this time of terror, asking, "Where are the Assyrian officers who counted our towers? Where are the bookkeepers who recorded the plunder taken from our fallen city?" You will no longer see these fierce, violent people with their strange, unknown language." (Isaiah 33:17-19)

This is the vision shown to us in the last chapters of the book of Revelation, fulfilled through the gospel extending to the nations and becoming its healing leaves. In the vision, God had moved his creation from Genesis to Revelation, from mortality to immortality through the promise of the gospel, and all those who tried to stop it had defeated themselves and perished.

Other ancient cultures held to a combative creational view. For example, in the ancient Canaanite tradition Baal conquered the sea god and brought order to the cosmos. So the wisdom of society was that we likewise pass from chaos to cosmos (ordered civilization) through combat, through demonising other groups and conquering them. This has become traditional human culture throughout the world, often even among Christian societies today. We face the same choice in creating "cosmos": caring for the needs of others, building through kingdom of God principles, or perpetuating non-redemptive responses towards those we perceive as wrong.

In the Old Testament we see God using this dominant combative view to reveal his own counter values. The sea and the river and the monsters in them portray the nations which are enemies of Israel, and at times the spiritual powers behind them. God conquers them by allowing their violence to come upon themselves. And in Christ we see God transforming the dominant cultural cosmos into a new culture and cosmos that renews our lives. He speaks in the language of the fallen cultures, but reveals who he is through that language.

Through his King and Son, "God will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers... I will make him the firstborn and the highest of the kings." (Psalm 89:25-27) Christ conquers the earth, in

which he brings order from chaos. This follows traditional pagan culture, where a king conquers all others to create order. But here is the transformation. First, God fights through reconciling and redemption. His armour and weapons are truth, mercy, righteousness, self-giving and the cross. His warfare is moral. Order doesn't come by separating one people against another, but by separating right from wrong behaviour towards others. Second, his King doesn't conquer for himself, or for a particular nation, but to restore sonship and the image of God to all tongues and peoples in his new creation.

God uses pagan cultural language to subvert and transform its values in Christ, making a new kingdom and new creation out of his church. Its common "contextual" ministry: he speaks to us in the language we understand, to implant within us a new kingdom value. When David says, "He teaches my hands to war and my fingers to battle", we now see this through the gospel, by the actions of God coming in flesh, and this renews our world. It is wonderful how God consistently transforms this Old Testament era pagan warfare language into reconciliation and redemption through Christ. The warfare God teaches us is overcoming the enemy in our relationships with each other, as he builds a body that heals. This is God's new cosmos. As Christ said to Israel, evil isn't the other, but it can be Israel itself. It is the choices we each make.

In Genesis 1 & 2 the children of Israel, when coming out of Egypt, saw a God who brings cosmos from chaos, or from disorder. The six days of creation represented God bringing order to his world, until everything he made was "very good." So Israel reflected on this and saw that God was doing the same for Israel in their Exodus from Egypt. God was bringing them out of slavery, out of the idolatry of the gentile sea, and he was bringing them into a good land. It was the Torah that made everything "very good", renewing their hearts towards their neighbour. All this points us to the gospel, in which Torah becomes written on our hearts by his Spirit, and from that God brings us out of darkness and chaos into a new cosmos of community and healed creation.

5. *Imago Dei*

Imago Dei: Latin for image of God. Genesis 1 & 2 sets the context in which our sonship is understood. Adam and Eve were sons of God, meaning the heirs of God's creation. They were given rule over God's creation, to reflect God's image into the world. All creation would thus live in shalom, meaning wholeness, as God intended. So, when we see "sonship" mentioned in regard to Israel, or in regard to us as part of Christ, the term or calling means the same thing: It means God is bringing about new creation through his redeemed people in the world. This, for example, is how "sonship" is used in Rom 8:14-23.

In Genesis 1 we are told that God made man in his image, both male and female. Just as Genesis sets paradigms for God's actions, so it establishes themes as the foundation for our understanding of the scripture, themes which find ultimate fulfilment in the kingdom of God as seen in Revelation 21-22. It is important to understand Genesis 1-2 as these chapters relate to the gospel message today.

What does it mean that God made mankind, male and female, in his image? We can answer this question by the context within which the statement is made. In Genesis 1, God is seen as the royal majesty who forms creation by his word, each part for its purpose. This majesty is clearly depicted by the poetic structure of Genesis 1, as well as by his sovereign acts. This royal majesty is the image of God we see in the Genesis 1 text. Then, he makes mankind in his image. The next statement shows the meaning of this: he gives mankind dominion over his creation. This means that mankind is to enter into God's rule over his earth, managing creation's resources and creatures.

It is this image, or this joint rulership with God, which is seen in Hebrew scripture as the meaning of the term “sons of God”. God’s sons (a non-gender specific term) indicates those who exercise joint rule with him over his creation on earth. They are God’s sons because they join him in his rule in the world. They are God’s sons because they exhibit royal rule as God does. God, in creation, bestows this dignity upon all mankind.

Comment on the image of God in man has often been along the lines of the attributes or characteristics of God, like our moral, rational, artistic or self-conscious qualities. Recently, comment has noted the purpose of fellowship. A triune God has been assumed in the Genesis 1 text, and, it was said, God made man to enjoy this extended fellowship. The Genesis context however speaks of the image of God in man in a functional sense. It is man’s function to rule over the creation. This is the meaning. That is, the concept of the image of God is tied directly to the gospel message fulfilled in Christ. In the Hebrew intention, image of God means man, as a community, in fellowship with God and with each other, reflects God’s nature, as seen in the cross, into his creation, creating and ruling over new earth. This is the meaning of “image of God” in all texts throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Thus in ancient times, stone images of rulers were set up throughout their empire. Wherever these images were, this is where the king or emperor ruled. “Image” denotes rulership over land. In the same way, Christ rules over the nations through his image and likeness within his people/temple. A different type of kingdom, but it is the kingdom that exercises true rulership on earth, God's way.

When we read other ancient creation narratives, we see the difference between those narratives and Genesis. At the time Genesis was compiled, civilization mirrored the concepts that came out of Sumerian culture before and after the Flood. In the creation narratives of Sumer, it was claimed that the gods established the rule of one king over the common people. This king was the image of god and everyone else was subject to his unequal rule. The gods also were said to have provided humanity with culture, agriculture and fertility, in return for humanity’s ritual service and gifts. The gods thus provided images of themselves to subject the people. In this, the image of God in mankind had been usurped both by the kings and by the idols and gods they worshipped. This left humanity with violent and self-enriching rulers, evident throughout the history of Genesis.

We see that pagan creation stories corrupted creational truth to suit the leaders. The creation narrative of Genesis is subversive to human empire and oppression over any group of people. Genesis subverts kingly and priestly rule of the masses. (By the way, these two - the kingly and priestly oppressive rulers - are also the two beasts of Revelation, then Rome and Jerusalem respectively.) Instead, Genesis bestows the gifts of creation freely on all humankind: no distinction between gender and people, whether kingly, priestly or common. All mankind, as noted in Gen 1:27, 5:1 and 9:6, are made in God’s image. There is no place for a hierarchical subjection of classes, gender or race. Furthermore, God bestows the gifts of creation, food and fertility upon his creatures without any demand for gifts or ritual service in return. Man is simply to enjoy them, by giving thanks in loving his neighbour. And finally, Genesis provides no image of God for man to serve, because man himself and herself is the image of God in his creation.

The Genesis text paves the way for the priesthood of all believers, not to be lived out in individualism, but in community; not being subjected to some ruler, but subjecting ourselves to one another in love. The subversion scripture points to isn’t one of violence, nor is it political or revolutionary, but it is of faith, an opposite life style of service from God’s people, “overcoming evil with good.”

Getting back to the concept of *imago Dei* (the image of God), we see that man lost this image in his fall near the beginning of Genesis. Instead of reflecting God's character, he reflected the image of his idols. The idols, in turn, reflected the desires of man's self-will. This was a demonic incursion into God's creation that started in Genesis 3 and continued throughout the development of human cultures. Man reached out for self-designed freedom and became a slave, mimicking the greed, pride, prejudice and violence of those around him. God's sons - mankind created to rule - used their God-given opportunities to destroy others and their environment. The "sons of God" in Genesis 6 had become the image of other false gods.

The gospel plan of God is about restoring this sonship to its proper place, where, once again, humanity becomes God's partner in building creation and loving community upon earth. This is the final vision we see in Revelation 21-22.

First, as part of this plan, Israel was brought forth out of the gentile world. Jacob's name was changed to *Isra-el*, meaning 'power with God', son of God. This points to Christ, who became Israel through the seed of David, in order to fulfil Israel's calling. The nation of Israel was a "royal priesthood"; royalty denoting sonship with God. They were called the sons of God, when God divided up their land, according to the number of each of the twelve tribes. (Deut 32:8)

God's new corruption-subverting culture began here. Israel was to love their neighbour and help their enemy, release slaves, obliterate corruption and care for the foreigner. They were not to have a standing army or a king, but if they did have a king, in rejection of God and rejection of his new community life, that king wasn't to enrich himself. Israel was not to make images of God, but they themselves were the priests, reflecting God's image into the world. The outcome was to be a completely different cultural imprint in the nations: love of God, rather than serving him for favours; love for neighbour, rather than for self.

Another mention of the Son of God in scripture is in the book of Daniel. Here, taken from among men, the Son of Man is exalted to heaven to rule over the nations of the earth. He is chosen from among men, the only begotten (the only one born among men) who is from heaven. "The first man was of the earth, the second man was YHWH from heaven." (1 Cor 15:47, Kurios [Lord] in the Greek Septuagint translates from the Old Testament "YHWH".) Christ, here, is heaven and earth joined in humanity. Daniel 7 speaks of Christ and his saints ruling with him over the nations. Here is mankind restored to his place of rule. This, then, restores us as "sons of God", made in the image of God through Christ, restored to our inheritance, to rule over the nations.

When we look at the Hebrew gospel from the Old Testament, it is about the restoration of the sons of God. This was the expectation of the Jews during the period before Christ's coming. They believed that, when Messiah came, he would restore Israel to their place of sonship in the world, ruling over the nations. But their view of ruling was to dominate the gentiles. This was a distortion of Genesis, because in Genesis God didn't give man rule over other men or women. Men and women, in Genesis, are given rule over all other aspects of creation under heaven, but not over each other. But Israel, especially the Pharisees, supposed that their rule was over the adulterer and other sinners through the Torah. They didn't understand that their rule was to be expressed through service. They mistakenly took "dominion" the wrong way. Christ shows through the cross the way in which we are to rule.

The Sermon on the Mount was the big shock for the Jews of that generation, regarding how the rule of God in earth is achieved. Instead of binding the Roman occupiers, in the Sermon on the Mount Christ said we overcome them by going the second mile, and by rejoicing in persecution. It's entirely

the opposite action from what we expect when we think of ruling. Jesus said we rule in his kingdom by being servant of the least.

The concept of “inheritance” in the gospel refers to our rulership in this world, as it was given to man in Genesis. Psalm 2 is about this inheritance given to Christ, to reign over the utmost parts of the earth. This Psalm depicts this rule in the cultural way of David’s time: Christ will break the nations like a clay jar. He will rule them with a rod of iron. This language shows the comprehensive nature of Christ’s victory; his kingdom renews all things and triumphs over evil in all nations. This poetic language (seen throughout the Old Testament) is fulfilled by the coming of Christ. Instead of crushing others, King Jesus is crushed by his enemies. Instead of destroying his enemies he reconciles them into his kingdom. This was Israel’s biggest shock when Messiah came. It’s the world’s biggest shock also; that God would behave in a self-humiliating manner, totally opposite to our depraved cultures. This behaviour is the nature of God’s rule; the image of God seen in Christ.

Psalm 8 also speaks of Adam’s rule over the earth, restored to humanity in Christ. Christ is seen as coming for this purpose. God has crowned him with glory and honour and made him to rule over the works of his hands, over the world. This encapsulates the notion of sonship in the scriptures. This sonship isn’t speaking of Christ’s eternal sonship, though he is God come in the flesh. It isn’t saying Christ is a second God. It isn’t saying Christ was born from God in heaven before creation, as a child is born from a father and mother. It is saying that Christ is heir of the world. He is God come in the flesh to pick up Adam’s mandate and fulfil it. A son of God is one who rules the world.

God came in the flesh, as man, to fulfil man’s call to dominion, so that he could share it once again with redeemed humanity. Notice that, in the above Psalm, *glory* is linked with being crowned to rule. When Paul said in Romans that all men have sinned and have fallen short of the *glory* of God, he was speaking of his sonship in ruling over creation. (Rom 3:23) This sonship is what Christ has restored.

We can see the book of Romans in this light. Here, Paul speaks of man’s fall in relation to creation. Instead of reflecting God’s image in the world, and instead of ruling over creation, man now worships images of creation, like birds and beasts. (Rom 1:23) Today, this idolatry can be expressed in terms of covetousness. Man worships the material objects that he desires, and he strives for a power over others that doesn’t originate from God’s image. This is a great fall: from being over, to being subject to and under. Man’s desire for things supplants his mandate of caring love towards his neighbour. It defiles our communities and fills the world with war, self-centredness, mass poverty and illnesses. Paul summarises the plight of mankind thus: “All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God”. This relates back to Psalm 8: in turning to self, man becomes unfit to rule on earth in the image of God. Creation is turned over to bondage.

Paul continues by showing God’s plan of redemption. In this plan, man is not justified with God in order that he might live individualistic lives, but to be grafted into community with one another, to receive each other and to eat at one table, despite our different background, races, genders and social status; to consider each other in love. This is how the new life of grace is expressed, how we are to “reign in life through Jesus the Messiah.” (Rom 5:17) It is mimicking a new culture and new image as seen in Christ, who put the other person ahead of himself by taking up his cross.

Paul drafts his gospel in Romans according to his Jewish view of the faith. He depicts the new Israel - the sons of God - in Exodus themes. The new people of God pass through the waters of baptism, coming through the Red Sea into new life in Romans 6. In Romans 7 Israel comes to Mount Sinai, but find they can’t keep the law, because they are part of the fallen world God has called them to heal.

As we call out to God, we find it is by his Spirit, through the redemption of Christ, that we are able to walk in our inheritance as sons of God and enter the Promised Land (Romans 8). And what is this land or inheritance? It is the manifestation of the sons of God, the community that heals one another in the love for God that is shed abroad in our hearts, bringing the creation itself into newness and fullness. (Deut 30:6, Rom 5:5, Rom 8:21) Creation is set free from its bondage to corruption. Sonship is restored; the creation which the sons rule over is thus healed as a consequence. Thus, Abraham's promised inheritance of the whole world is achieved (Rom 4:13).

Traditionally, we have seen the book of Romans as God's plan to justify us, to restore us to his favour. We say that we have broken the commandments, so God is forgiving us in Christ through faith. And that, we say, is the gospel. However, that isn't the whole gospel Paul is sharing. Its only part of it. We have lost God's image to rule over his creation. Paul is speaking about this, and how God rectifies this in Christ. The gospel is Jesus' lordship over his creation, through which we are joint heirs and restored to sonship with God.

The book of Romans is actually about God's plan to restore man to dominion for the healing of his nations and of creation. It is through God's people that Christ is subjecting all his enemies under him and taking his rule over the nations. This dominion is, first of all, within us. It isn't a worldly dominion over others. Christ's kingdom is worked out through his people by way of the cross working in our lives. This is what the Sermon on the Mount is about. His kingdom doesn't work out on the earth by force. It is expressed through dominion in our character, over the things that rule us, things like fear and self. It is release from this bondage to ourselves, released to reflect God's glory and image, instead of our own, into the nations. This image of God is the cross. It shows a God who humbled himself to serve. This is the image we reflect. Dominion is service.

By now we can see two things about the Genesis narrative. First, it shows us what it means to be made in the image of God. It means rulership over the world. Second, we can see what the nature of this image, or rulership, is. We can see what God means by man having dominion. Because Christ is the express image of God, we see how God expresses his rule through what Christ did. It is through Christ-like love that community is built; community which heals others, societies and nations. This is God's redemption plan for his creation. Dominion isn't expressed through an enforcement of the will of God upon society or upon other people. It isn't expressed through cultural or nationalist conflicts, whatever the justification. It isn't expressed through our prosecution of sinners. It is expressed through the taking up of our cross in order to serve others. It is expressed through care for the nations.

In this section we see what the Hebrew gospel is. It isn't God's plan to take individuals to heaven. It is God's plan to heal the earth, to join heaven's rule with this world through God's sons, to form us into community that reflects his image to the world. This community is the church, God's new image bearers.

We can also see what the term "sons of God" means. The sons of God are the ones through whom God acts in his benevolent healing and just/merciful rule in the nations. The result? Revelations 21-22. The term "sons of God" in scripture represents those who are given heirship over God's creation. This is what the term meant in Hebrew text, beginning from Genesis 1. They rule with God as his vice-regents in this world. In Daniel 7 this is centred in the ministry of Jesus, who is exalted to rule over the nations. His saints rule with him. The purpose of redemption is to restore us as a body and community, to sonship over the world. It is a world-focused gospel. This "rule" is the image of God. Thus, those who exercise such rule, his way, are his sons.

The nature of this rule was exhibited by Christ on the cross. (Phil 2:5-11) Worldly rule reflects the image of the self-god. Worldly dominion functions like the Pharisees, accusing and destroying. God's rule functions through peacemaking and self-giving. He reconciles his enemies rather than destroys them. (Matt 20:25-28) The only destruction God is involved in is when he hands people over to their own self-destruction. This is often depicted in scripture in apocalyptic language, but it always means the people bring destruction upon themselves because they refuse to repent.

God made man - male and female - in his image. 'Image' means to be the missional representation of God in the world. The Hebrew for image is "selem", also used for an idol or statue representing a god or ruler in the land. In Genesis, God made the world by royal decrees and set man over the creation. Adam and Eve were to mediate divine blessings to the world. Israel were the same in their calling to be a royal priesthood, God's representatives and agents in the world, sharing in God's administration of creation's resources and creatures. Christ is the full image of God and also the temple through which God's blessings come to his creation, through Christ's body. This again shows the purpose of our calling: not to go to heaven, but to mediate the union of heaven and earth. This is the Hebrew gospel.

6. Paul and New Creation

Paul adopts the same Jewish background in announcing the gospel of Christ as John does. To start with, Paul's trinity theology is the same as John's. "The Lord (YHWH) is that Spirit." (2 Cor 3:17) Paul was referring to Jesus and calls him both YHWH and the Spirit. This is Jesus placed concretely into Jewish monotheism, again different from Greek trinitarian expressions. This is exactly what John did in John 1:14.

We can see that Deut 6:4-6 is at the centre of Jewish identity and also at the centre of Paul's gospel. That passage was recited by Jews many times every day. Paul prayed it as a Pharisee every morning when he awoke and then throughout the day: "Here O Israel. The Lord our God is one Lord. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength..." All Paul's writings are about how the one God has fulfilled this prayer through the gospel. At first, Paul thought this prayer was to be taken in the sense of a struggle against heretics. Many people today still take their faith that way. But then Paul found in astonishment that God meant we love him by serving our enemies, as God did. Our "struggle", or contention for the faith, is to keep ourselves in the love of God as seen in Christ. (Jude 3, 21)

Paul presents the gospel in creational terms. In 2 Cor chapters 3 - 5, the light of Christ shines on our hearts. This refers to his light dispelling darkness in the first creation. So the gospel of Christ dispels self-centeredness from our hearts and replaces it with living Torah (love: Deut 30:6). This happens through the Spirit, who was present in creation. The same God of creation comes to us through the same word, giving glory (shekinah) and forming us in his image to be his sons, ruling in grace over a new creation. In 2 Co 5:17, anyone in Christ is forming new creation: lit. "If any man be in Christ: new creation", where the theme is reconciliation, bringing all creation under Christ. (See Eph 1:10, Psalm 110:1, 1 Cor 15:25-27, Heb 2:8-9) This is Hebrew creational faith, with Spirit, word, light and image all present in the gospel message, just as they were in Genesis 1. The purpose of Paul is not to present the gospel in Greek terms, of the gospel being merely for our inner man, or our spirit only. That was the Greek error in the Corinthian church. Rather, it is a gospel that confronts the whole of creation and transforms it, including our material world and domestic cultures. But this subjection of Christ's enemies happens through service – reconciliation – as the cross shows us.

Ephesians

Paul's Hebrew creational gospel is seen throughout his letters. Take Ephesians, for example. In Eph 1:10, God's purpose, in acting through the kingdom of Christ in our present gospel age, is to bring unity to all things in heaven and earth. He is bringing heaven and earth together, just as we see in Revelation 21-22. Another translation says he is gathering together all things in Christ. The clear purpose of this is the healing of creation, of our world. It's a gospel about our creation, not just our individual spirits going to heaven. This calls us to a dynamic discipleship that is transformative in our lives so that we become community people. We know that Christ's lordship calls us out of our own lives to act in the whole world, a world he is reconciling through his body. Lordship calls us to the Lord's purpose.

The church is Christ's body, "the fullness of him that fills all in all." (Eph 1:23) This statement shows that God and Christ are one; that through Christ, God himself fills his whole body, and through his body as his temple in the world, God fills and renews his whole creation. This shows the purpose of the church in the world.

In Ephesians 2 we see Paul's temple faith. God has returned to his creation through his 'shekinah' and is building a new temple composed of all who believe, both Jew and gentile. What does Paul mean by this? In Hebrew faith, the temple could mean only one thing: that God was once again present with his creation to transform it, to bring heaven and earth together through his own body among us. We often look at this chapter as meaning that we go to church and that is all. But, to Paul, it is much more than just about our church life together. Just as it was with Adam and with Israel, the purpose of the temple is to renew the life of the world. The temple is the place from which God acts to make all things new on earth. Such an idea went without saying in Paul's Jewish world at the time of his writing.

In chapter three, Paul repeats the mysterious plan of God. He shows that God, the creator of all things, is now renewing his creation by uniting all people into one body of love. The purpose is to bring all people and all things under his covenantal, caring promises for transformation. Paul is declaring that Christ is now Lord and that he reigns over all nations, just as Daniel 7 said would happen. God is revealing his wisdom to the principalities and powers in high places. (Eph 3:10-11) This applies to both rulers on earth and the spiritual powers, who both challenge Christ's rule by dividing people. God overcomes them through his wisdom in the church: the wisdom by which Christ defeated them on the cross, overcoming our self-centred natures, to share and care for those different to ourselves. This cuts off the powers' ability to wreak destruction by acting through our self-centredness. Paul is clearly announcing the Hebrew gospel of world renewal: the purpose of Christ's coming.

An example of how the powers work, and how we create disharmony in our communities, is the way elections are conducted. The way to win an election is to divide public opinion, to present fears of a clear and present danger, and to offer yourself as the saviour. This whole process involves demonising and scapegoating others, which further erodes relationships, understanding, reconciliation and true hope in our societies and nations. It involves propaganda and mistruths about other people. Paul, in Ephesians, calls us to infiltrate worldly powers through Christ's self-giving, reconciling gospel and living. This is the Lordship of Christ in our lives and nations.

Paul continues in Ephesians 3 and 4, calling us to unity in the depths of love, not forcing uniformity. Christ descended into the grave and then ascended to heaven, "that he might fill all things"; that he might destroy the power of sin and death and unite heaven and earth together in his new healing

creation. Our growth in knowledge, love and unity thwarts the powers that lie in wait to deceive and divide. (Eph 3:18-19, 4:1-6, 10, 11-16)

Disunity between denominations serves the enemy by testifying against the love and lordship of Christ in the world. When we side with nations, political groups, or with any group, against others, even against sinners, we give allegiance to these powers that seek to divide and conquer Christ's gathering rule and healing of the world. These powers hotly contest the reconciling/transforming purpose of the church. We are to stand against them, not giving place to the devil (the opposer) in our flesh and relationships. (Eph 5-6) We aren't to confront worldly powers with worldly strength, but we are to witness to them through the community love of the gospel, which is even shown towards our enemies, laying down our lives rather than taking life. This is how God's wisdom is revealed and how it transforms his creation. It renews by heavenly wisdom, revealed to us in Christ.

- God is bringing all things in his creation together in Christ to heal and to fill. (1:10)
- He has broken the wall of hostility between groups of people within the world. (Eph 2)
- He is building his temple to heal the nations. (Eph 2)
- He is revealing the wisdom of the cross, as opposed to the worldly wisdom of hostility and division, to the worldly powers that divide us, through the church. (Eph 3:10)
- He is uniting his whole body in the world, with diversity. (Eph 4:1-7)
- He has ascended to renew the world, to fill his whole creation. (Eph 4:10)
- He is calling us to a unity of love, rather than to be divided by the powers who deceive us for their own ends. (Eph 4:13-15)
- He has called us to transform the powers through submission and service, rather than through hostility and fundamentalism. (Eph 5)
- He is calling us to withstand the powers of darkness that divide us, who rule the world by hostility and scapegoating, to instead rule as sons of God as peacemakers. (Eph 6)

Instead of the "gospel" that seeks to put up walls and barriers to the world, in hostility, bringing division and destruction to our enemies, we see a gospel that demonstrates reconciliation, bridge building and healing through a Christlike church that takes up its cross to serve. A very different way of reading Paul.

1 Corinthians

Paul speaks of this wisdom in Corinthians. This links in with our Eph 3:10 reference, where God's wisdom is manifested to renew the world powers. God's wisdom is at first foolishness to the world, which trusts in self-strength. But it is by God's wisdom, as shown on the cross, that God is bringing to nought (infiltrating and transforming from within, through the service - light - of the church) the ruling powers of the world. (1 Cor 1:18-31) The powers come under the influence of new image-of-God people, remoulding them inwardly by grace.

Again, in 1 Corinthians we see Paul's new creation gospel. The Hebrew theme of wisdom takes centre stage. (1 Cor 1:21-30) God's wisdom is foolishness to the world, as it transforms creation. This is the wisdom in Proverbs 8. Opposite to the world, that sees riches in power and wealth, wisdom sees true riches as caring community; not in caring for self, but for others. It is upon the pillars of selfless community that creation and new creation are securely established in peace and justice. The pillars that spring from God's wisdom in Torah, and are revealed through Christ's love, set God's new creation in order. (1 Sam 2:8, Luke 1:46-55) The self-centred powers in the world are being displaced by Christ through his church. The world is being transformed by the church, which bears witness

through its weakness and suffering. This suffering translates into resurrection power through God's just vindication. By our non-retaliatory suffering, and by, instead, rejoicing and showing care for those who persecute us, the Spirit bears witness to the world of Christ's new community and self-giving rule. This is what changed the Roman Empire from within: transforming the greatest world power of the day.

In Corinthians, Paul highlights the nature of these worldly powers that Christ is bringing to nought. He shows that the powers of the world have their seat and operation within the hearts of men. Chapter by chapter, Paul highlights them within the church, so they may be brought to nought in us first. This is the church's *modus operandi* for changing the world: allowing the Spirit to change us, rather than us accusing the world. The dominion God gives to Adam and to his church in Christ, isn't dominion over others, but dominion within our own character and nature. God gives us dominion over our own desires and temper: self-control, the fruits of the Spirit. Dominion within our own natures changes us into servants. This is dominion over the serpent in the Garden, who took away our rule by turning us to our self. This dominion over our self translates into justice and peace, which gives us rule over darkness in our societies. Worldly forms of dominion bring destruction and misery.

The powers God is bringing to nought are those in our own character and our own behaviour. This is where the powers are seated and from where they work. Paul lists these powers in Corinthians. Starting from 1 Corinthians 1 and continuing through to chapter 14, Paul describes the powers one by one, which operated within the carnal natures of the Corinthian people. These were a divided party spirit, disunity, immorality, greed in taking others to court rather than suffer wrong, neglecting the poor, showing spiritual superiority, not accommodating the traditions and views of others; basically, anything against the kingdom of love. Overcoming these within ourselves is what enables new-Adamic reign in renewing the earth. "See, a King will reign in righteousness and rulers (sons) will rule with justice. Each one will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land." (Isaiah 32:1-2)

God overcomes the powers in the world, by overcoming them in our hearts by the work of his Spirit. This is how God brings peace and justice to the world through his church. We spread it to others in grace, once we have it established within us.

All these powers are self-centred, community-destroying powers. When communities are destroyed, then individuals suffer. God, through his new reign in our hearts, is opposed to this suffering. God does not overcome these powers violently, but through our renewed hearts. If God overcame with violence and not with mercy, we also would be destroyed. These are the powers God is bringing down through his church, as he renews our own lives (those within the church) towards each other, and then sends the church, as a new body, to be witnesses into the world. God is implanting us with his reconciling powers of the fruit of the Spirit.

The message of Paul that we see in 1 Corinthians is one where God's wisdom comes to us through the Spirit of Christ, by the creative word of the gospel. "Christ is made unto us wisdom", which is the light and word of God forming creation. (1 Cor 1:30) These are the same themes we see in Genesis 1 in the first creation. These bring about love in our lives, the fulfilment of Torah, forming us into the image of his "mature sons." (1 Cor 13) Paul's gospel is that God is bringing about new creation through his church. This new creation starts within our own lives and community and from there spreads to renew the powers of the world, bringing their self-centred cultures to nought. This is world renewal.

Colossians

In Colossians, Paul places sonship within creational themes to proclaim a new world. Christ is the exact *imago Dei*, image of God. (Col 1:15) Traditionally, we may think that means Christ is divinity, or that Christ shows the nature of God perfectly, from whom we draw all our knowledge of the Father. That is true, but this is a creational passage: God brings us out of darkness into light, and gives us an inheritance of sonship (Genesis 1 themes). (Col 1:12-13)

When Paul says Christ is the exact *imago Dei*, he is declaring new creation. He means that God is present in Christ to form a new world in his likeness. That is what “image of God” meant in Adam. Adam was to rule over God’s creation, by reflecting God’s image into the world. Christ has come from heaven to be given rule over God’s renewed earth.

This is a main theme in the book of Hebrews also. The author says God has put all things under the feet of Christ. (Heb 2:8-9) We don’t yet see all things under him, but we see Christ has been exalted to God’s right hand, in fulfilment of Daniel 7. In Daniel 7 his exaltation is for the purpose of ruling over the nations, to subdue all things under him, as also in the Psalms. (Psalms 110:1) Hebrews continues, by saying that he makes intercession at the Father’s right hand. This means that not only did Christ die to carry the curse of the law, but he continues as a man to represent Israel’s covenant of world renewal from heaven, until it is fully accomplished through the church. Then he hands the complete kingdom, with all enemies reconciled, to the Father, so that God may “be all in all.” Once again, this is Hebrew monotheism. (Eph 4:10, 1 Cor 15:28)

Back to Colossians, Christ is called the “firstborn” over all creation. (Col 1:15) “Firstborn” means he is the heir, from men, who inherits the earth, in fulfilment of Daniel 7. In this way, the world is brought under God’s sovereign grace and put right. Paul, here, is declaring the Hebrew gospel of new creation. Christ is heir of creation, because God has a plan to heal creation through himself.

Moreover, “firstborn” has a double meaning in Hebrew text. It relates to Proverbs 8, where poetically, wisdom is the firstborn over God’s creation, to supervise his creation work. Wisdom, in Hebrew tradition, was the presence of God in and over his creative acts. So, as firstborn, meaning the wisdom of God, Christ is not only heir of creation, but also the creator himself come in the flesh. This is Paul’s Hebrew incarnational view. Simply said, God put on flesh in Christ, just as he came in his wisdom at creation. As God’s wisdom, Paul says that by him all things were created and he is before, or head over, all things, and through him all things exist.

The wisdom reference has another meaning, however. This other meaning was known by Paul and all Jews of his time. It was a normal theme in most Jewish literature of Paul’s day. It is what Jews expected the Messiah to do when he came. He would bring all things on earth under his power. The Jews took this in a nationalist way. They expected to have political rule over all gentiles. They didn’t expect Jesus to reconcile their enemies and join them in one new body. In Proverbs 8, wisdom is the way in which benevolent rule succeeds over the earth. It brings justice, righteousness and peace, and restores the pillars of creation, bringing order to the world. The role of wisdom, which Paul is speaking of in Colossians, is that of new creation, whereby “he reconciles all things to himself.” (Col 1:20)

In Proverbs 8, wisdom cries out in the streets. Through the gospel, Christ, the wisdom of God, now renews our hearts. Wisdom not only forms creation, but also fills our hearts to love our neighbour. Wisdom leads us to order our communities on goodness, just as, by it, God ordered his creation. This was also the purpose of Torah. It was God’s wisdom, given to Israel to bless their land. Paul’s reference to wisdom shows he is speaking of the gospel in Hebrew terms: wisdom that fashions our

current world and communities the way God intended before the fall. Paul says that Christ gives wisdom in the heart by his Spirit. (Col 1:9)

Looking through Colossians 1, we see all the same terms John used in his Gospel. Paul speaks of Christ coming as Spirit, light and wisdom. He created all things in the first creation, but, in the gospel, he returns to reconcile his entire creation. All things in heaven and in earth that he created, he has also reconciled. (Col 1:20) This isn't speaking of universal salvation, but it's showing that, in the cross, God united heaven and earth with the purpose of bringing the whole of his creation under this covenantal blessing and renewal.

But this isn't just a nice piece of theology. The point is about our calling. Paul is describing the nature of our call to the church at Colossae. God has called us to partner with him in his new creation, to display the values of his new kingdom now in our lives and fellowship, even in this present, dark-age. Just as he called Adam to partner with him in his rule over the first creation, he calls us to partner with him in the spread of resurrection life in his new creation. This is clearly Paul's point. We are receiving a commission, just as Adam did in the Garden.

Our call is to live prophetically, showing the nature of God's coming eternal kingdom, when death, sin, hatred, competition, violence and cheating are all gone. The church is the herald of this new world by showing it now. It is the window for the world to see into God's new kingdom. By the Spirit's power, the world sees this new coming kingdom already begun in us. It has dawned by the resurrection of Christ both bodily and in our hearts. We live this new love in fellowship and amongst our enemies in a celebration of joy today, while we await its full revelation in the final resurrection at Christ's coming. Our renewed lives and new communities of love are prophetic of his final reign over all things and a renewed world.

However, Colossians had yet another impact upon the church in Paul's time. In declaring the sonship of Christ, Paul is also refuting the sonship of Caesar. Caesar claimed to be ruler of the world. Rome also used terms like "gospel" and "faith", and passages like Daniel 7, to speak of the Caesars' heavenly call to build a new world community, to renew the earth in a different way - by its Roman force and its false justice. Rome passed a law in the senate claiming that Emperor Claudius was the divine Son of Man who ascended to heaven to rule the nations. Here, Paul is refuting such claims.

Paul's letters are subversive. Subversive means his gospel transforms our corrupt powers. In showing Christ's self-giving, redeeming act, he subverts the self-interested nature inherent within our hearts and cultures. In showing Christ as the builder of a new creation, Paul subverts our lack of concern for this world, for other people within it and for our enemies. In showing Christ as the true Caesar of the new world, Paul subverts the claims of human empire which lead to oppression and prejudice against other people. Since Christ is Lord, he calls us not to rebel against government, but to fulfil it by loving and respecting all people. This is what Paul goes on to describe in the rest of his letter to the Colossians.

Just as with Ephesians, Colossians tells us that God's fullness, the fullness of his deity, dwells in Christ, and this fullness dwells by Christ in his body, the church. The purpose here is the same as in Ephesians: that God may fill and renew his creation by the gospel. (Col 1:19, 2:9-10)

Israel's Hope

Paul's letters reveal the hope of Israel in the Old Testament, fulfilled in the Messiah: the hope of righteousness. In Galatians 5:5 Paul said we, by the Spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness. What was this Jewish hope, which Paul, as a Jewish fulfilled believer, was speaking about? We will start

with Hannah, and show that the creation/justice-on-earth (righteousness) themes Hannah expressed are the basis of the gospel of Jesus and Paul.

“The bow of the mighty is now broken, and those who stumbled are now strong. Those who were well fed are now starving, and those who were starving are now full. The childless woman now has seven children, and the woman with many children wastes away... He lifts the poor from the dust and the needy from the garbage dump. He sets them among princes, placing them in seats of honour. For all the earth is the Lord’s, and he has set the world in order.” (1 Sam 2:4-8)

God sets his world in order! This was Hanna’s prayer of thanksgiving when the Lord gave her a child, Samuel. Samuel would judge Israel and bring order to an unjust land. Hannah’s situation mirrors the miraculous conception of Mary. It is from this prayer that Mary’s Magnificat is taken. Jesus would bring salvation to the oppressed and turn the world upside down, reversing injustice and bringing mercy.

“But he saves the needy from the sword of their mouth and from the hand of the mighty. So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts her mouth.” (Job 5:15-16) God sets the world in order.

“The Lord has made himself known; he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands... For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever.” (Psalm 9:15-18) God sets the word in order.

In Psalm 74:8, Christ will reign from sea to sea, and to the ends of the earth. He sets the world in order. What does this worldly order look like? What is the Jewish hope of righteousness? It’s a new earth. “He will rescue the poor when they cry to him; he will help the oppressed, who have no one to defend them. He feels pity for the weak and the needy, and he will rescue them. He will redeem them from oppression and violence, for their lives are precious to him.” (Psalm 74:12-14)

“Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their highways. The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked; no one who treads on them knows peace. Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us; we hope for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head.” (Isaiah 59:7-9, 15-17) God will come to set the world in order.

“He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.” (Luke 1:51-53) Jesus comes to set the world in order.

The Magnificat shows what God is like. It shows what happens to the world when God comes. It shows his care for the downtrodden and the oppressed. It says when his kingdom comes he will fix this, and bring judgement (meaning justice, righteousness and mercy) to the world. Mary said the birth of Christ was to fulfil this promise to Israel.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were

fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:18-20)

Jesus proclaims his kingdom. It is for the poor and for those in captivity in this world. It is the kingdom he announced in the Beatitudes: his kingdom is for those who are persecuted, the poor and oppressed. Jesus has come to turn things around; to bring justice and judgment into the world, to set it in order, to bring the world into righteousness. He said "This day is this promise fulfilled in your hearing." This justice of God began that day in the synagogue in Nazareth.

Paul speaks of this hope in Romans 8:18-30, as he compares suffering today with the suffering of Israel in Egypt. Israel's journey through Rom 6-8 becomes the world's journey, liberated in Christ. The hope in Romans 8 is creation put in order, the righteousness and justice of the sons of God healing communities, nature and the world. (Isaiah 32:1-2) For this we have the Spirit, who helps us, leading us to this goal. The day is coming, in the resurrection, when all things in heaven and earth shall be made righteous, but now the church is already walking to that tune, showing mercy and care to those who have no justice, to the downtrodden.

"For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness." (Gal 5:5)

The hope of righteousness! One of our pastors said, "We have passed through centuries of biblical interpretation where everything is individualised." He was speaking about African community culture, as seen in the church in Acts 4:32. We have also individualised Galatians 5:5, in fact the whole message of Paul in Galatians and Romans. Our Western cultures have done this since the Reformation. So we read Gal 5:5 as if Paul is talking about going to heaven. We see our hope of righteousness as our personal, individual salvation in heaven.

This is our gnostic gospel. Gnosticism was a Greek form of religion, in which everything was spiritualized, so people could ignore the suffering in the world. The gospel is about God coming to do something about this suffering. The hope of righteousness, Paul referred to in Gal 5:5, is this hope. He is talking about God's promises to renew the world. The hope of righteousness is the hope of a new world in which righteousness is done. (2 Pet 3:13) This is not the hope of individualistic salvation, but the salvation of our world, our future hope, which we live out today in our sharing with one another.

"We by the Spirit eagerly await this hope of righteousness." That is, the Spirit enlivens our heart and our community, to love and serve one another, transforming our own lives and the lives of those around us. This is the gospel and this is what began in the synagogue of Nazareth 2,000 years ago. God has come to bring righteousness and justice to the world, to put things in order, through the lives of his transformed people, who show mercy and care to the suffering, reversing the effects of the Pharaonic systems of selfishness in our world. This is what Hannah and Mary sang about: the work of the Spirit of God in our hearts and the transformative power in our fallen world. All Jesus' teachings were about this new caring-for-neighbour community. This is the community in Acts.

In all Paul's letters, whether the title he used for Jesus is word, spirit, light, image, firstborn, wisdom or Messiah, each title points to the fulfilment of the Jewish hope and the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel: God has returned to his new temple in the gospel, to fill his earth and whole creation with his glory. All the titles of the Lord Jesus Christ are new creation titles. They all point to the creator and covenant keeping God come in the flesh to take his creation into an eternal union with his perfect love and righteousness.

7. Peter and the Temple

The temple theme of Genesis 1 & 2 is foremost in Peter's two letters. From this, Peter paints the picture of who the church is in the world, why we are here and what our methodology should be for transforming our nations. Peter begins his epistles "to the strangers scattered abroad." Peter was the apostle to the circumcision, to the Jewish believers. Jews were scattered in diaspora throughout the Roman Empire, especially in the Mediterranean area and in the region of Babylon (modern day Iraq).

This concept of "strangers" carries significance throughout Peter's two letters. It refers to a foreigner in a strange land. It could be referring to an ambassador who resides in a foreign land in order to represent his home nation. In this case, seeing as we are God's ambassadors here, our home nation is heaven, as Paul says, "our citizenship is in heaven." This means we are of heaven in the sense of being born of God, with his values and life. We are not led by worldly fashions and values.

This needs to be understood in the Jewish sense in which Peter meant it. In many English commentaries we get the idea that heaven is our ultimate destination and we are just passing through this earth. Earth isn't seen as important, but is just to be cast off like an old cloth. The Bible speaks metaphorically this way about the old sinful world, but, instead of the common misconception, this more accurately refers to a renewing of the world in righteousness through the gospel. A common view in the Western world comes from the Puritan book *Pilgrim's Progress*, where Pilgrim is passing through the world on his way to his eternal home in heaven. Over time, this has contributed to a self-interested gospel, not really related to our communities and our natural world, which God also loves and gave to us to nurture.

Throughout First and Second Peter, Peter is building a temple theme. He sees our pilgrim call in this sense. As citizens from heaven, we are God's strangers, or God's ambassadors in a foreign land. It isn't foreign in the sense of not being owned by God. It was created and has been redeemed by God. It is foreign in the sense that it still contains old, fallen cultures. These are now being renewed by the church. Paul also uses this theme, calling us ambassadors, drawing others into God's new creation, which is reconciling and transforming the world (2 Cor 5). Just as in Eph 1:10, Paul said the church shows God's wisdom to the powers (cultures, governments, faiths), so Peter shows the same.

As strangers and pilgrims, we are God's new temple in the world. We are sent out into the world, as strangers to the ways of sinful cultures, to be God's new, transforming temple within the nations. It is the language of Christ in the Great Commission: "Go and make disciples of all nations." Nations are being renewed. The new temple is that place which God inhabits in a strange land, so that his image and likeness may impact and renew that land. The temple is the place where heaven and earth join for the purpose of earth's transformation. This was Adam's call and it was Israel's call. Peter is writing to the Jews about their ongoing call in Christ. Such a call means that we are God's temple in our nations.

What did the Jews think of the term "pilgrim" or "stranger"? This term stems from the Jewish exile and captivity in Babylon in the Old Testament period. Paul calls it "the casting away of Israel" and says it was a "blessing to the world." When the exile of many Jews continued throughout the Greek and Roman Empires, the whole world was impacted by their presence. The presence of synagogues were like transforming temples in the nations, bringing the knowledge of God through the Torah. This greatly impacted the world's religions and philosophies, from India and Asia through to Greece. Also, many gentile people accepted the God of the Jews and joined the Jewish faith. So when Peter uses the term "pilgrim" as a Jewish believer, he has in mind the blessing of the world.

Our call to pilgrimage is one of the most central parts to the Christian message. Jesus was a pilgrim, or stranger, cut off from his people, rejected and crucified. In so doing - in being cast away - he also became a blessing to the whole world. And this is the identity, the central identity, that Peter assigns to the church in this world. We are not to live as landlords, as occupiers, furnishing ourselves comfortably in this world, settled and content with our possessions, but we are to follow Christ's example. We are not to follow the examples of violence, corruption, greed and immorality we see around us. Because of this, the world will treat us as strangers. They will cast us off, as Israel and Jesus were cast away, but we are beloved of God and accepted by him. Through being cast away, by entering into our identity as the new Israel, and by partaking of their sufferings and also of Christ's, we are a transforming blessing to the nations.

In his suffering, Christ opened not his mouth, but instead forgave those who persecuted him. This is how he became a blessing to the world. So, Peter says, following Christ's example is how the church is called to renew the nations.

"For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps... He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly." (1 Pet 2:21, 23)

"Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid of their threats. Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong! Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit." (1 Pet 3:13-18)

"So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you have suffered physically for Christ, you have finished with sin. You won't spend the rest of your lives chasing your own desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God." (1 Pet 4:1-2)

We can see here Peter's world-evangelism strategy. He didn't say, "Arrange a program and get in a well-known evangelist to win everyone to the Lord." Why didn't he say that? Because, in the end, that won't transform us or the world. The strategy that Peter very clearly laid out was about our life style of love and respect for others. He said that, when people see us living that way (instead of for self as people in the Roman world did), and when they ask us why we live like this and what our hope is if it isn't in the same things other people go after, then we share our hope with them in respect and love. He said preaching the gospel is secondary action: it comes as an explanation for the way we live. If it doesn't come out of how we live, then we have no gospel to preach. If we all lived this way today, we wouldn't have the divisions we have, and we would have shown Christ to the whole world by now. Our call to evangelism is our call to follow Christ in the world as his new community and temple, showing his glory.

The world isn't changed by landlords putting sinners on the cross, like they did to Jesus, but by strangers and pilgrims taking up their cross.

Peter is showing us that the way we impact the world, as God's temple, is to live out the life of Christ in our communities. He is saying that we live out an opposite way of life to the self-centeredness around us. The most basic ways he expresses this is by our non-retaliation for evil and our counter-respect for all people, even for those who harm us. It's the compassion of Christ who forgave and prayed for those who crucified him. We understand that those people are captives to the real enemy and that they need help. This is the way the light of Christ shines in our world. "Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, and honour the emperor." (1 Pet 2:17)

The temple theme serves as two bookends in Peter's two letters. His letters open with the establishment of the new temple in Christ, and close with the then soon coming destruction of the old temple in Jerusalem. This theme was prevalent in most of the New Testament books, from the Gospels, to Acts, Paul, Hebrews, James, Peter and Revelation. The new temple has come to bring about new creation, by the coming of God's kingdom to the whole world in Christ; and the old temple is defunct and is passing away. Taking Peter's two letters as a whole, this is his theme.

"You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honour. And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God." (1 Pet 2:4-5)

"But you are not like that (not like the old world) for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Pet 2:9)

God's purpose in making us his temple is that he might inhabit the world through us. His glory, shekinah, is shown to the world through the Spirit and the lives of the believers. Grace operates in his temple, and, as our praises go to God, his blessing comes down through our lives, into the nations. The grace comes through Christ and his reign at God's right hand. Again, we see the same themes in Genesis 1 & 2 and the first temple, wherein Adam and Eve were the priesthood, reflecting God's image into the world. Now it's the church. Peter speaks of the living word, the Spirit and the light overcoming darkness - all creational themes - now all returned through the church, bringing the world into new creation. We are born again - brought into new creation - by the living word, and by God's first new creation act, the resurrection of Christ from the dead. (1 Pet 1:3, 23) Peter's letters are, from start to finish, Hebrew themed letters.

Peter then speaks of God's judgement in this present world. This comprises much of the theme in 2 Peter. Sinners perish, but God's judgment doesn't consist of destroying the world, but renewing it. This has almost immediate application in Peter's own day: the coming judgement of Jerusalem, its ruin and the destruction of the temple. These events had been foretold by the prophets since long before Jesus came. Jesus also spoke clearly about this coming to pass in that very generation. This was to be fulfilled near Peter's own time, but it also speaks to the whole world which God is transforming.

The Jerusalem temple represents this present age, which is passing away. Those who cling to the ways of this present age perish with it. But those who follow Christ have his promise of eternal life and inclusion in the new heavens and new earth. But, before Jerusalem was to be destroyed, God was waiting till the gospel had gone out to that generation, especially all the diaspora in the Roman world.

“But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.” (2 Pet 3:10)

This verse needs to be read in its Hebrew sense. In Greek culture, the idea became prevalent that the world and material things were evil and could not be redeemed. This, even today, has become a position that is completely opposite to the Hebrew faith. Greek beliefs speak of the coming entire destruction of the earth and the whole material cosmos (the natural heavens, or stars). This notion holds that eternity is only for spirits in heaven. When the Greek fathers became leaders in the church, and when the church began to persecute the Jews, the Hebrew background to scripture either became unknown or was rejected due to hatred of the Jews. For many years, certain sections of the church have laboured under many interpretations of scripture that don't have a genuine basis in scripture itself. Much of the present end-times teaching today, even in much of the church, is Greek in its origin.

So, how do we read this text in Second Peter from its Hebrew base? The Old Testament shows how Jewish believers like Peter thought, and how they understood metaphors and scripture. Here is an example from Isaiah:

“The heavens above will melt away and disappear like a rolled-up scroll. The stars will fall from the sky...” (Isaiah 34:4)

This is the exact language Peter used in our reference above. In Hebrew text, this is well known as metaphor. It isn't literal. So, when Peter uses texts like this, he is not speaking literally. To say that he is speaking literally is to take Peter out of his own context, to deny his Jewish roots and put words in his mouth about which he knows nothing. The passage from Isaiah 34 is speaking of the judgment and destruction of Edom. It is God's judgement on a city and region. The heavens represent the leaders, being above the people like stars. Their destruction means the utter destruction of the Edomite nation. This was fulfilled after Isaiah spoke it.

Those in Peter's time who understood the scriptures, as Hebrew believers in Christ, knew about the coming judgment on Jerusalem. It had been foretold since Isaiah's time. All the prophets said it was coming. Jesus spoke of it in detail. Peter is just reiterating what Jesus had earlier told the disciples. Jerusalem will be destroyed, including its leaders, its priests, and its temple. This was fulfilled soon after Peter spoke it, in AD 70. Peter was not speaking about the end of the world.

“But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness.” (2 Pet 3:13)

In scripture, the fall of Jerusalem represents the fall of all nations. The Old Testament links rebellious Israel with Edom and the gentile nations. The old temple came to represent those in the world who cling to the lusts of the current world, not serving others, but serving only themselves. This is what the Pharisees represented. The fall of Jerusalem is also the fall of this type of world. It is all coming under judgment and passing away.

While this is happening, we are leaving that world, we are coming out of those types of lifestyles, and looking for the new world which God is creating through his kingdom and church and, finally, by the resurrection. In the resurrection, all corruption shall be put off and there will be no more curse on the earth. We are to live in that expectation now, spreading this new way of life through the nations as God's new temple. We are God's prophetic people, rejoicing today in new heavens and new earth, showing them by our faith and love for each other and our cross-shaped, self-giving love

for our enemies. This is the display of our faith and the evidence of the coming resurrection that will renew all things.

So here we have it: Peter's two letters. The gospel is presented as God's new temple through which God is present in all nations, bringing forth new life. We are witnesses to the renewing of the world. The old ways are perishing and new ways have already come through God's new Jesus-following community. We shall participate in eternal life, which has already started, and which culminates in fully renewed heavens and earth. It's the Revelation 21-22 vision come to pass through the church.

In Genesis 1 & 2 we see God's coupling theme. Heaven and earth are coupled. Light and darkness, land and sea, the waters above and below, male and female. Male and female represent God and his bride, his covenant commitment to redeem humanity through Christ, and this marriage represents the final coupling of heaven and earth in the new creation. And so Revelation finishes with the bride, the New Jerusalem, the habitation on earth, prepared by God in heaven.

Conclusion

God's initial purpose in creation was for his vice-regents, humanity, to partner with him as his special presence extended from Eden to fill the earth. This was carried over to Israel, though Israel failed to take God's Jubilee to all flesh. Isaiah claimed God's glory will cover the earth, through Israel's Messiah: "stretch forth your tent pegs and expand your tabernacle." This is Eden's temple, bequeathed to Israel, filling the whole earth through Christ and the church. In scripture we see one plan of God, concluding in Revelation 21-22: the earth filled with God's special presence and people living in shalom. God has no plan B.

The Jewish ear easily heard this in Jesus' teaching. The Sermon on the Mount is this plan of God. Jesus said the church is the light of the world. The Jewish person immediately sees this as a reference to Genesis 1, the light of God, through which all things were made. Jesus was pronouncing New Creation: his light, his temple presence, in his people.

This is why Jesus brings sonship into the sermon. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God." These are the sons Paul mentioned in Romans 8, through whom creation is renewed. These are the ones who inherit Adam and Eve's commission to rule God's creation, equipped with his glory. These are the meek, whom Jesus said shall inherit the earth. And this is how his new creation comes about: sons and daughters bearing Christ's image, reflecting Christ. The Sermon on the Mount: the constitution of the Kingdom, the herald of a New Creation.