

# Cosmic temple and Garden – first creation versus new creation

By Jon Garvey, MA, MB, B Chir, Cert. Theol.

## Abstract

This article draws on several strands of recent Evangelical Biblical Theology and Old Testament Studies – compositional analysis of the Pentateuch, the typology of Adam to Israel, and the cosmic temple imagery of the creation story – to suggest that the overarching gospel themes of “old creation” *versus* “new creation” are explicit even in the first two chapters of Genesis. I argue that the creation narrative is intended to represent an uncompleted spiritual environment for an existing human race, which the garden of Eden was intended to perfect, through Adam, by means of divine covenant.

If the argument succeeds, it helps define a clear and unified “metanarrative” for the Hebrew *Torah* and *Tanakh*, and indeed for the entire Christian Bible. In doing so it illuminates a number of Christian teachings such as creation, the effects of the Fall, the distinction between law and gospel, and eschatology.

It also provides a better understanding of how the Bible writers viewed human origins, with the potential to bring a greater *rapprochement* between theology and secular history and science. This is discussed briefly in relation to one very recent development from the scientific side, the Genealogical Adam hypothesis.

## Sailhamer and the compositional strategy of the Pentateuch.

With the fragmentation of the old critical consensus on the literary disunity of the Old Testament, a good number of Evangelical scholars have sought to renew the quest for a truly biblical theology by approaching its books, and often the whole canonical *Tanakh*, as finished compositions. Richard Bauckham adapted the term “metanarrative” from postmodernism for this in 2003<sup>1</sup>.

This “compositional” approach was taken by the late John Sailhamer in his *magnum opus*, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*<sup>2</sup>. Though he traces many of his conclusions back as far as Justin Martyr, his post-critical approach, which he terms “non-critical”, reveals a largely unsuspected authorial strategy for the entire Pentateuch, and indeed for the Hebrew *Tanakh* overall. This strategy demonstrates a remarkably New Testament understanding on the part of the Old Testament authors. Truly, “*It is the theory which decides what can be observed*”<sup>3</sup>: concentrate on sources, and you will find doublets, contradictions and disparate traditions, but look for an author’s intention, and you will find a unity.

Sailhamer’s overview for the Pentateuch is my starting point, so I will summarise it:

1. Israel was called, according to the covenant God had made with Abraham, to a “face-to-face” faith relationship with God, to start on Mount Sinai (Ex 3:12).

2. This would make them into a “kingdom of priests” to bring blessing to the rest of mankind (Ex 19:6; cf 9:16; Gen 12:1-3; Deut 32:43; Isa 42:6).
3. They failed from the start by refusing to meet God up on the mountain, delegating Moses as their mediator instead and leaving themselves only with an inferior “covenant of law” (Deut 5:1-5), in which worship was mediated only by priests through a partitioned-off tabernacle.
4. Their inevitable failure to keep this covenant led to their eventual exile, and the abrogation of the covenant, being foretold and eventually fulfilled (Deut 4:25-31; 29:22-28; 31:15-22; 32:1-38; cf 2 Chr 36:15-23 – the close of Hebrew Bible or *Tanakh*).
5. Eventual restoration, and the fulfilment of their mission to the world, would come only by transformation of their hearts through a coming prophet/king (Deut 18:15-19; 17:14-20; 30:1-10) “in the last days”.

Sailhamer writes:

*Clearly, the Pentateuch is not a work that aims at playing to a self-satisfied, largely religious, audience, nor can it be construed as a defense of the religious status quo. It is in no respects an attempt at theological compromise. Taken together, these observations support the view of other key OT authors that in the Pentateuch we hear the voice of a prophet or someone sympathetic to viewpoints that later surface in prophetic communities and ultimately in the NT (cf. Ezra 9:10; Dan 9:10 LXX).<sup>4</sup>*

This makes sense of otherwise inexplicable oddities not specifically addressed by Sailhamer. For example, after the “historical prologue”<sup>5</sup> of Deut 1-4, largely critical of Israel’s stubbornness, Moses introduces the covenant itself by saying, “It was not with our fathers that Yahweh made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today.”<sup>6</sup> V.5 adds (as a parenthesis in both NIV and KJV) that Moses mediated for them “because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up on the mountain.” The initial impression is that nobody had had such a wonderful covenant before, and that Moses’ mediation was according to God’s original plan.

And yet, in the previous chapter, in which Israel is warned of (or virtually foretold) exile for disobedience, their eventual salvation is promised on the basis of a completely different, and older “covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath”<sup>7</sup>, which is therefore evidently superior to that being confirmed in ch.5. What ancient treaty ever mentioned a superior covenant in the prologue to an inferior one?

Older commentators are reduced to explaining away the Hebrew of 5:3 as a “relative negation” meaning, “not *only* our fathers, but...”<sup>8</sup> But Sailhamer’s analysis enables us to see that the sentence placed in brackets is, in fact, the explanation of why the Sinai covenant will fail, and why its historical prologue is so negative towards its recipients.

### **Postell and Adam as Israel’s archetype**

Seth Postell, in his book *Adam as Israel*<sup>9</sup>, builds on Sailhamer’s thesis and applies it to the early chapters of Genesis, and especially to the Eden narrative. He argues that, given the compositional strategy outlined above, the story of Adam is intended to emphasize typological links with Israel and her failed covenant. Adam, like Israel, is taken from his place of origin into a sacred space where Yahweh may be encountered. But like them, through disobedience and rebellion, he fails and is exiled back to a place where, though Yahweh may still be worshipped, the intimate relationship of grace is lost, together with the hope of eternal life. Many other, subordinate, parallels are drawn by

Postell, not only in the Pentateuch, but elsewhere in Scripture, demonstrating that it is considered foundational by the biblical authors.

Once one is alerted to the typology, and receptive to Sailhamer's understanding, the links between Adam and Israel are hard to miss, and reinforce the overall message of the Pentateuch by expressing that message both at the beginning, in Genesis 2-3, and at the end, in the later chapters of Deuteronomy, especially in the poetic "compositional seams", as Sailhamer describes them, of chs. 33 and 34.

Postell sees Adam as an historical figure, albeit that his story is treated typologically and with "mythic" features. Less conservative scholars have also made the Adam/Israel connection, but have concluded that Adam is a fictional character read back into Israel's history after the Babylonian Exile<sup>10</sup>. But for all the complexity of the figure of Adam as an individual who bears the name of the whole human race (*adam*), and also as an archetype of one particular race within it, this sceptical conclusion has its own problems. Apart from the difficulty always experienced in getting round Paul's (and Christ's) apparent treatment of Adam as a real person, archetypes in the ancient world either were, or were believed to be, real individuals, and especially so in the Bible<sup>11</sup>. Psychologically, it makes more sense for an author to take known events from Israel's ancestral tradition as both an object lesson and an explanation for the present, than to invent from whole cloth a legend of the distant past in the aftermath of a national catastrophe like the Exile.

It is only because their first ancestor set an inevitable hereditary pattern that exiled Israel's hope must depend on a promised supernatural Messiah, and not simply a second chance. That is the reason why many scholars now believe that later Bible writers, and second temple Jews up to time of Jesus, considered that they were still in Exile, despite the return from Babylon<sup>12</sup>.

Postell also follows Sailhamer in seeing Genesis 1 as similarly typological of both the Mosaic tabernacle and Solomon's temple, and of the promised land of Israel itself as sacred space. This conclusion incorporates another increasing trend in OT scholarship: that of recognising the Genesis creation as representing a "cosmic<sup>13</sup> temple", and of the seven-day creation as a temple inauguration text. This is not a new idea, and was in fact proposed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by the Alexandrian monk Cosmas Indicopleustes<sup>14</sup>. Additionally a possibly fifth century Jewish midrash, *Tanhuma Yelammedenu Exodus 11:2*, says "The Temple is equal to the creation of the world" and goes on to compare the various furnishings with the creation account<sup>15</sup>.

But amongst its current proponents are Greg Beale<sup>16</sup>, Richard Middleton<sup>17</sup> and John Walton<sup>18</sup>, who writes:

*As in a temple inauguration which in its core elements is the initiating of sacred space and its commensurate ritual functions, the creation account at its core is a narrative of the initiation of the functioning of the cosmos by recounting the primary purposes for which the elements have been put in place and by officially installing the appropriate functionaries in their place. The entire cosmos is viewed as a temple designed to function on behalf of humanity; and when God takes up his rest in this cosmic temple, it "comes into functional existence" (real existence in ancient thinking) by virtue of his presence...*

*Many of these points were already made by M Weinfeld three decades ago [in “Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord”], so they are not new, though they have only gradually been making their way into the mainstream of biblical scholarship.<sup>19</sup>*

### **The cosmic temple and the universalism of the *Torah***

Both Sailhamer and Postell prefer to see the Genesis 1 “temple creation” as not only typological, but descriptive, of the land of Canaan and the tabernacle/temple. In other words, if Adam is “Israel the people”, the cosmos is actually “Israel the land”, and quite probably the original garden of Eden was literally situated at the site of Jerusalem. This has the advantage of placing Genesis 1 beyond the reach of the criticisms of science: it was never about the creation of the universe anyway. But in my view, this neglects one of the important features of Sailhamer’s own compositional analysis – the winsome, and rather surprising, Pentateuchal emphasis on the intended role of Israel as a blessing to all nations.

This universalism appears in the call of Abraham, through whom “*all peoples on earth will be blessed.*”<sup>20</sup> It is reiterated in the first announcement of the covenant on Mount Sinai, before it all goes so badly wrong. Here Israel is to become, out of all nations, “*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*”<sup>21</sup>, which can only mean some kind of mediating role between God and those nations. It is a theme later developed in the prophets, especially Isaiah, and as pointed out by both Postell and Sailhamer, is even shown typologically in the person of Cyrus, as a kind of proto-messiah to whom Yahweh has given “*all the kingdoms of the earth*”<sup>22</sup>, in the final verses of 2 Chronicles, the last book of the Hebrew *Tanakh*. Sailhamer writes:

*In the version of the Tanak that ends with Chronicles, the next biblical events are to be the coming of the Messiah (Dan 9:25), the death of the Messiah (Dan 9:26) and the destruction of the temple (Dan 9:26b). These events, all taken from Daniel 9, are projected on to the screen of the future by 2 Chronicles 36 at the close of the Tanak. Those events take us directly into the first century.<sup>23</sup>*

In the New Testament this gentile hope is seen as a finally-revealed mystery, not known to former generations, by Paul in Eph 3:6, and it is reiterated in Rev 21:3, where people in the new order of things are said to be his “*peoples*” (pl. λαοί).

It would therefore be utterly appropriate for that universalism to be introduced at the start of the Pentateuch, along with the other “Deuteronomistic” themes already noted in the Adam narrative. What more appropriate place could this have than in the creation account, describing Israel typologically perhaps, but literally, as seems the more obvious reading, the whole world?

In Gen 1:26-28 the creation of mankind is described generically, and there is nothing in that passage to indicate that it refers to Adam and Eve, though clearly the well-known shifting between Adam as a proper name and *adam* as a common noun show that there is some significant connection. Yet even when the two accounts of “the beginning” are brought together by the author in Gen 5:1-3, the distinction between the generic “*he called them adam*” and the particular “*Adam had a son in his own likeness*” is if anything even more obvious.

Nothing, then, in the text precludes Gen 1 referring to the creation of the entire human race across the world (without any specification of how or when – its genre of temple inauguration account

removes the need for such an historical or scientific correlation). Furthermore, as I have suggested, it would be entirely appropriate for the author to draw the same parallel between Israel and the nations to whom they were called to minister as priests, and an archetypal Adam called out from the world in the same way, for the same purpose of ministry to the generality of mankind.

If that be the case, then the *toledot* statement of Gen 2:4 introducing “*the generations of the heavens and the earth*” would be about a new work of Yahweh, not a restatement of man’s creation. N T Wright proposes:

*This pair (call them Adam and Eve if you like) were to be the representatives of the whole human race, the ones in whom God’s purposes to make the whole world a place of delight and joy and order, eventually colonizing the whole creation, were to be taken forward... If they failed, they would bring the whole purpose for the wider creation, including all those other nonchosen hominids, down with them... Not that death, the decay and dissolution of plants, animals and hominids, wasn’t a reality already; but you, Adam and Eve, are chosen to be the people through whom God’s life-giving reflection will be imaged into the world...<sup>24</sup>*

Wright seems to conceive of his “Adam and Eve” as living in deep time, amongst what he calls “hominids”. But if the author of the Pentateuch was thinking in terms of Adam as an earlier, historically remembered, recipient of Yahweh’s mission to the nations through Israel, then he certainly wasn’t thinking of the Palaeolithic, about which he knew nothing, but about the agricultural and pastoral society we see described in Genesis 2-11, which of course is known to reflect not only the culture of the Neolithic, or Chalcolithic, Near East, but its literature too.

In such a literary context, there would seem no reason to suppose the author to be unaware of other people living at the time of Adam, nor to be denying there were any. Rather, he would have *intended* Genesis 1 to be understood as referring to the nations, as the ultimate target of God’s love, through Adam, set apart like Israel for that purpose.

The strongest argument against that conclusion would seem to be the apparent absence of other people from the Eden narrative. But the whole point of the garden was that it was a private, and sacred, precinct, where Adam and Eve were set apart for God. In terms of the Pentateuch, that parallels exactly the covenantal encounters that the Patriarchs had, in private, with Yahweh<sup>25</sup>, and indeed the absence of all but the people of Israel in the account of the covenant-making of Sinai.<sup>26</sup>

The writer’s interest is solely focused on the protagonists, and villain, of his story. Still there are, quite apart from the proverbial problem of Cain’s wife, a number of hints, at least, in the text, that these events took place in an already inhabited world. My own review includes these:

1. Abel is said to be a keeper of flocks. A *clan* may shepherd flocks for its own uses, and to sell for wealth. But a *family* of two sons, mum and dad and, maybe, a few daughters, needs only a couple of sheep or cows. In fact, it was only population pressures that are believed to have led to pastoralism and agriculture in the first place. Otherwise, hunting the odd wild goat was more cost-effective.
2. Cain feared that, being exiled from the land of Eden, he would be killed by anyone he met. But if he should meet other children of Adam, not only would they recognise him, but we would need to account for their exile from the land of Eden too.

3. Cain was exiled to “the land of Nod”. Nod means “wandering” in Hebrew, but “Land (*erets*) + Name” in Genesis always refers to an inhabited territory. It was clearly “Nodites” that Cain feared, and why? Because it is strangers who are murdered if they stray into foreign territory. “Nod” is not mentioned in the table of nations in Gen 10, which suggests that it was not a territory peopled by Noah’s sons: it was a tribal territory existing before the flood.
4. The most famous problem of all is Cain’s wife, which even Augustine attempted to solve. Apparently Cain was exiled alone (would God have been just to exile Cain’s sister-wife too?) He produced all his family in his exile. The writer seems simply to assume that Cain married a woman from outside his family in his new abode.
5. Cain builds a city. That word always implies not simply a homestead, but a crowded, enclosed place. Granted, that might be on a smaller scale than today, but the templates are cities like Eridu, Uruk or Shuruppak in Mesopotamia, or at least the 10th century BC walled town of Jericho. Cain had become an urban leader, not just the father of a nuclear family wandering east of Eden.
6. The fact that “*men began to call on the name of Yahweh*” in Gen 4:26 makes little sense in the context of Adam’s nuclear Yahwist family, but much in the context of the knowledge of Yahweh spreading abroad *through* Adam’s line, in keeping with the author’s missiological interest.
7. The “sons of God, daughters of men” passage of ch.6 was interpreted by some (not all) second temple Jews to be about semi-divine beings seducing women to produce the demons of the world<sup>27</sup>. But apart from the problematic idea that immaterial angels are able to interbreed with flesh and blood, the passage talks about “marriage”. Noah would have had neighbours in the form of fallen angels building houses, and raising crops to feed a growing family of... predatory demons. It seems implausible. The alternative, also ancient, is some kind of mixing of human populations, such as the breakdown of the Adamic tribal integrity, exactly like the Israelites in Canaan, and with similarly corrupting results resulting in divine judgement.
8. The *Nephilim* of 6:4 are not, actually, described as the product of these mixed marriages. They exist at the same time, and “afterwards”, but they are “*heroes, men (enosh = mortals) of renown.*” No mutation in Adam’s line is described – just the existence of a mighty race, which is also described as existing *after* the flood, in Numbers 13. There they are said to descend from Anak, who was a Hittite. All this suggests some particularly strong or tall group independent of Adam’s line, but probably related by genealogical diffusion via the Hittites.

Now, if Genesis 1:26-28 is, indeed, taken to mean an entire, extensive, human race, it follows that “non-adamic man” was nevertheless created in God’s image, in order to rule over the earth and subdue it, and not Adam uniquely, with whom the “image” is not specifically linked in the text. We would have every reason, then, to assume that mankind had all the aspects of human speech, culture, and even religious sensibility for which we find archaeological evidence in ancient peoples across the world. But they would also have been created for involvement in God’s own spiritual purpose for the world, especially given our recent understanding of the word “image”.

### **Richard Middleton and the empty temple**

N T Wright mentions<sup>28</sup> (with approbation) three scholars already cited (Walton<sup>29</sup>, Middleton<sup>30</sup> and Beale<sup>31</sup>) whose treatment of Genesis 1 as a temple-text leads them to understand the “image of God” in terms of both the sacred image of a temple and images placed in distant provinces by ancient kings to represent them. This stops us concentrating on particular human endowments like rationality, eternal souls, moral perfection and so on in order to understand the image, in favour of a functional understanding:

*The image is a vocation, a calling.*<sup>32</sup>

This means that Adam, as an individual, is not distinguished from the rest of creation by being created in the image of God, for the whole of mankind is so, but by a special, additional, calling of some sort. The typological parallel with Israel as a “*kingdom of priests*” suggests that this calling was to be the *forerunner* of the fulfilling of this role of humanity,

Richard Middleton suggests that this special calling may be represented in Gen 2:7 by the breathing of God’s breath into Adam’s nostrils, regarding which he cites a number of recent scholars who compare this to the Mesopotamian *mis pî* or *pîit pî* ritual, by which a cultic statue was “empowered” by the deity as an authorised image. Whether this pagan analogy is valid or not, Middleton in the same passage makes a highly significant observation in relation to the creation account, when comparing the “cosmic temple” to the tabernacle or the Jerusalem temple.

*It is not clear from Scripture that God intended his presence to fill creation automatically. Genesis 1:2 tells us that at the beginning the Spirit of God was hovering over Creation, as if God was ready to breathe his presence into the world. Yet by the end of the Genesis creation account, God has not filled the world with his Spirit or presence, even though there is no sin at that point.*<sup>33</sup>

This is, indeed, a striking contrast with the way the *shekinah* filled the earthly sanctuaries of Israel upon their dedication<sup>34</sup>, and Middleton suggests that it was always God’s intention that his glory would fill the earth only through mankind. Several passages show this as an eschatological hope either explicitly<sup>35</sup> or analogically, and it is finally achieved only in Christ<sup>36</sup>.

*It was God’s purpose, from the beginning, to bring the cosmic temple to its intended destiny by human agency, in cooperation with God. So humans (as image of God) were to fill the earth with descendants (Genesis 1:28) who would represent God’s rule in their cultural pursuits and flourish in accordance with God’s wisdom. The human race was created to extend the presence of God from heaven (the cosmic holy of holies) to earth (the holy place) until the earth is filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.*<sup>37</sup>

I agree with most of this, but wish to add some further observations, in the light of the previous discussion on Adam as Israel. There is, in fact, one significant difference between the garden of Eden, together with its typological counterparts – the non-temple worship of the Patriarchs, the intended face-to-face meeting of Israel with Yahweh on Sinai, and, finally, the relationship of believers with God in Christ – and the tabernacle/temple of Old Testament worship.

The important difference is that the garden and its spiritual successors all lack any internal barriers between the worshipper and God. In the archetype – the garden of Eden – Adam and Eve are allowed to work freely, probably involving ritual tasks, in the same sacred space in which God walks “*in the midst of the garden*”<sup>38</sup>, and they even have access to the tree of life (being forbidden only the fruit of tree of knowledge). After their sin, they have to hide from God among the trees, in the absence of any other partitions. And when the cherubim are sent to guard the entrance to the garden, it is the *whole* garden they restrict, and not just some sacred space within it, unlike the guardian cherubim of the tabernacle, which are within the inner sanctuary. The garden of Eden, in other words, is not represented as a temple, but as a holy of holies – for Adam and Eve before the

Fall, it is all about open access. The same would have been true of Sinai, had Israel gone up on the mountain, and the same is true of Christ, who gives us direct access to the Father.

The tabernacle, by contrast, was all about *restriction* of access: only Jews could worship in the temple courts<sup>39</sup>, only priests enter the sanctuary<sup>40</sup>, and only the high priest, once a year, could go behind the curtain into the holy place of Yahweh’s presence<sup>41</sup>.

**Genesis 1 to Genesis 2 – from non-covenant to covenant**

Consider now the architecture of the “cosmic temple” of God’s “very good” creation, in Genesis 1 – which I have suggested represents the creation as a world occupied by many peoples as well as Adam, and specifically *before the Fall*. The regions of creation are brought into being mainly by a series of *separations*. First, heaven (God’s dwelling) is separated from the lower waters by the firmament. Then the waters are pushed aside to make the dry land for mankind. The result, compared with its Old Testament typological parallels, may be summarised thus:

GENESIS “COSMIC TEMPLE”	HEBREW TEMPLE	LAND OF ISRAEL
Heavens	Holy of Holies	Jerusalem Temple
Firmament	Curtain of the Temple	Wall of the Temple
Sky (and mountains)	Sanctuary of Priests	Jerusalem
Land	Court of Worshippers	Land of Israel
Sea	Outside World	Lands of the Gentiles

We can see from this that the completed state of the Genesis 1:1-2:4 creation is more like the partitioned tabernacle of the “weak” covenant of Moses, with its impenetrable curtain that was torn in two at the death of Jesus, than the unrestricted sacred space of the garden. In fact, creation has not at Gen 2:3 reached the final end God intends for it. As Middleton has said, the creation was still incomplete (he points out that there was no evening to end the seventh day). God intended that, through Adam, the glory of heaven would begin to break through on earth. The garden was the bridgehead for that process (literally a heaven on earth), but because of rebellion was soon closed off from humanity, just as was the sacred mountain of Horeb after Israel failed to go up on it<sup>42</sup>.

The temple imagery of Gen 1, then, actually demonstrates that the writer of the Pentateuch – who stresses the failure of Israel to achieve a face-to-face relationship with Yahweh as a major theme – was aware of *two* phases of God’s creation. The first was that of the initial creation, which culminated in mankind’s being related to God only as Creator in the remote and unreachable glory of the heavens<sup>43</sup>. The second stage, for which Adam was chosen but failed, was intimate relationship with God as Father leading to transformation of the world to divine glory. This may be summed up in terms of the institution of covenant relationship – in the garden, in Abraham’s faith relationship, in the (soon downgraded) covenant of Sinai, and in the new covenant promised by the prophets and fulfilled in Christ.

Seth Postell lists a number of recent scholars who affirm the covenantal relationship of the garden. Reformed covenant theology, too, has long supported it<sup>44</sup>, only perhaps what we have seen so far shows that Adam’s was not a “covenant of works”, but of grace, faith and intimacy: the admonition not to eat the tree was a covenant stipulation, and a Fatherly warning, more than it was law. The



contrast between the *kind* of sacred space in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 also shows this difference, as does the clear transition from the term *Elohim* for God in ch.1, to the covenant name of *Yahweh* in ch.2.

The point is that this significant transition has nothing whatsoever to do with the results of sin, but with God's original purpose for creation itself. The primordial earth was never a paradise – only Paradise itself was. And that was only at some time *subsequent* to creation.

Now, it is logically possible that this first creation was created for Adam alone, who was immediately translated to the garden (in agreement with those ancient theologians who estimated that the Fall occurred at the end of the seventh literal day of creation). In that way, it would be Adam alone who first, briefly, experienced only a distant relationship with God, before the transforming experience of the garden. But the text itself implies that Adam was created *for* the garden (however metaphorically or literally his creation from dust may be taken). If the partitioned cosmic temple was ever a space for human worship, it is more likely to have been there for centuries or millennia before Adam, and if a temple for irrational nature itself<sup>45</sup>, perhaps for the billions of years current science suggests.

Genesis 1, then, describes mankind worshipping God “afar off”. Adam's role in Genesis 2 was to bring the world, through and for mankind, to a completion which, we may suppose, would have been at least akin, if not identical, to the cosmic results of Christ's work. Jesus has achieved not a return to the original state of a creation now ruined by sin, but the removal of the interruption or obstacle of sin to the inauguration of the new creation, in which God would dwell, no longer high above in heaven, but as all in all amongst the people created in his image.

### **The old and new creations**

The first creation, then, like the temple, was always intended to be provisional – *and was perceived by the author of Genesis to be so*. This is further demonstrated by two more specifics of the creation account: the darkness, and the deep (Heb. *tehom*; Gk. *abyss*). It is wonderful how these two major constituents, representing the primordial “empty and functionless” state, *tohu wabohu*, are first pushed aside by God, and then incorporated as useful, if ambiguous, elements of the *good* creation. The darkness is alternated with light to become the night, and the deep is first separated by the firmament to make the upper waters (from which come both the blessing of rain and, on Day 4, birds), and then separated from the dry land to become the seas.

Throughout Scripture, these two elements remain emblematic of *tohu wabohu* in their danger to mankind, though they are always under God's ultimate control. They are not products of sin, but necessary constituents of God's good creation. And yet when the final kingdom is consummated in Revelation 21, we read that “*there was no longer any sea*” (v.1) and “*there will be no night there*” (v.25). These words do not necessarily say anything literal about the new creation lacking a diurnal cycle or oceans. Rather it is all about the conscious resolution of the Genesis symbolism of a residual primordial lack of human utility.

In fact that whole chapter of Revelation, closing the witness of Scripture just as Genesis opens it, seems to be more about the transformation of old creation to new than it does about the ending of sin's interruption to that transformation. I have already mentioned the allusion to the *Torah's* universalism in the plural “peoples” of v3. But that same verse twice speaks of God “tabernacling”

amongst men – the divisions of the Genesis cosmic temple having been abolished (as indeed v.1 had indicated in terms of the New Jerusalem’s descent from heaven). V.4 literally says not simply that the old order has passed away (as the 1984 NIV says), but that the “*first things*” (πρωτα) passed away.

That same contrast between first and second creations, rather than between sin and redemption, appears, but is often unnoticed, in 1 Cor 15:42ff, on the resurrection. There the contrast is not between the fallen and the redeemed body as such, but between the “natural” (ψυχικός) and the “spiritual” (πνευματικός), the “living soul” of Gen 2:7 and the “life giving spirit”, the first man from the dust of the earth and the second man from heaven, the perishable and the imperishable.

It is a theme that also makes more sense of a tricky passage like Romans 8:18-22, showing the good, but corruptible, creation longing to put on incorruption through the stalled “Adam project” rather than its being a creation rendered evil by the Fall – something that Scripture never asserts.

### **Implications for biblical interpretation**

The case being made here is not simply that it is possible to interpret Genesis 1 and 2 as the difference between the old and new creation, between man worshipping God at a distance and man in intimate covenant relationship with Yahweh, or between the doomed covenant Israel actually achieved at Sinai and the ideal one they lost. It is that the writer of Genesis, in its final form at least, was fully *aware* of these distinctions, as well as of the other matters already described in John Sailhamer’s work. Let us see how it clarifies a few doctrinal matters.

On *creation*, the author was certainly aware that God’s intentions were left incomplete on the seventh day, and that Adam had been intended to complete it through his open covenant relationship with Yahweh in the garden. The writer was probably also aware of other humans in Adam’s world, relating to the distant God of heaven in only a very limited form of religion. He knew that creation was good, and had no reason to believe that had changed because of the Fall. But the garden had offered so much more, including eternal life, and that had been lost, and lost again in the failure at Sinai. The hope for the new creation must, like the hope for Israel’s return from exile and new covenant, rest in the Prophet who was to come, probably (as tradition agrees) alluded to in Gen 3:15.

As for the results of the *Fall*, the role of death in the original creation of Gen ch.1 was never in doubt if the garden was something new. Adam had had the opportunity to abolish death for himself, and for the rest of humanity (and, conceivably, for the irrational creation too) only because of his place in the garden. In this sense he represented a new kind of humanity whilst remaining human, just as believers in Christ are truly a new creation, yet unarguably fully human. Chosen as the fountainhead of the new-creation humanity, he instead brought increasing sin and death to the race (remember that a rebel is a dangerous man – Antichrist will be an apostate, not a pagan<sup>46</sup>).

The New Testament distinction between *law and gospel* is seen to have its roots not only in the failure of Israel to seize its opportunity to know God, but in the distinction between the earthly mankind of Genesis 1, whose cosmos, like the tabernacle, set them apart from God, and the intended new creation of the garden. The natural man, legal religion and death belong together – even apart from sin – just as the spiritual man, gospel and eternal life belong together. And the

transformative principle between the two is always the covenant of faith in Christ, actual or, as with the Patriarchs, anticipated<sup>47</sup>.

In *eschatology* we learn to distinguish between, and understand better, redemption from the curse of sin, and the transformation of the cosmos that comes not from the restoration of an original, perfect, creation but from Christ bringing about the consummation of all things in which Adam failed.

### **Implications for science-faith dialogue**

The limited scope of this article has precluded much discussion of the undoubted importance of the ongoing effects of Adam's Fall on the human race. Genesis speaks not only of the failure of Adam in his appointed role, but of the escalation of sin and its effects across the world and down the generations. "*Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.*"<sup>48</sup> Those who take Adam as an historical figure, and who regard Paul as writing inspired truth, find it hard to avoid the theological importance of our being descended from Adam. Genesis itself, of course, takes a great deal of trouble tracing his lineage not only down to the covenant-bearer Abraham, but to the disparate peoples named in the Table of Nations in Gen ch.10. Adam's role as an archetype for Israel's failure only makes sense because they are his descendants, which is why the Book of Chronicles begins its overview of Israel's covenant history with a genealogy back to Adam. Luke does the same for Christ in his gospel to demonstrate his physical linkage to Adam not as a human being *simpliciter*, but as a son of God<sup>49</sup>.

But if, as I have argued, Scripture itself (rather than secular knowledge) indicates, even if it does not strictly entail, that Adam was a man amongst a large world population of men, then Scripture also must contain an understanding of how that works with the narrative, if he is not the sole human progenitor. In other words, the questions on human origins posed by science and ancient history turn out to be the same as those posed by reading the Bible itself according to its authorial intent. The period before Adam needs no biblical explanation because the genre of Genesis 1 simply states mankind's creation as a fact (though it may need a *theological* and *philosophical* explanation in relation to biology – it is by no means clear that nature alone can produce a rational and spiritual being, even in principle).

One recent proposal from the scientific side suggests a possible model for Adam which sits more comfortably with the biblical worldview than, on the one hand, treating Genesis as ahistorical, or on the other hand trying to understand its message by the tools of evolutionary science or genetics – of which the inspired authors were, of course, completely ignorant. This is the "Genealogical Adam" hypothesis recently put forward in most detail by computational biologist Dr Joshua Swamidass<sup>50</sup>.

This demonstrates how the present human population can, and indeed must, descend from common ancestors only a few thousand years ago, even if the population throughout that time has numbered millions, as current science and history maintain. It is, in effect, a rigorous re-working of the old party conversation piece that "everyone in Europe is descended from King Charlemagne".

Not only is this new approach compatible with traditional theological concepts such as Adam's federal headship, and even his special creation, but it is congruent with the Bible's own pervasive, nuanced and complex interest in genealogy (as opposed to genetics). Something like it would appear

to be almost a mandatory understanding if the interpretation of Scripture I have proposed in this article is correct.

To end on an optimistic note, perhaps the interpretations suggested here, and genealogical science, are mutually supportive and may be found, by further research, to reduce the longstanding divisions between the approaches of the natural science and biblical studies. Biblical theology would, in that case, be simply part of the coherent body of human knowledge within a Christian worldview, until the time that our worldview is necessarily transformed by the transformation of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Bauckham, "Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen Davis and Richard Hays (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003) 38-53. The fact that he redefines the term in the process of appropriating it is appropriately postmodern!

<sup>2</sup> John H Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Albert Einstein, 1926, quoted in Abdus Salam, *Unification of Fundamental Forces* (Cambridge, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 286.

<sup>5</sup> This presupposes the covenant form of Deuteronomy discussed for over half a century. See detailed discussions in K A Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006) 283-294; John H Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989) 95-109.

<sup>6</sup> Deut 5:3.

<sup>7</sup> Deut 4:30-31.

<sup>8</sup> eg Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy – New International Bible Commentary* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1996) 62, though he relates it only to the preceding generation, not the Patriarchs, so the inferiority of the Sinai covenant remains to be explained.

<sup>9</sup> Seth D Postell, *Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> eg Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> "An archetype in the Bible can well be an individual and usually is. I am quite prepared to affirm the idea that Adam is an individual – a real person in a real past." John H Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015) 74-75.

<sup>12</sup> Ezra 9:8-9; Neh 9:36-37. See the extensive case made by N T Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London, SPCK, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> I personally dislike the description "cosmic", for the simple reason that the whole concept of a "cosmos" arose in Greek thought centuries after Genesis was written, and gives a misleading impression of the Hebrew worldview.

<sup>14</sup> His own rather eccentric, and *illustrated*, book, *The Christian Topography*, is worth examining and is available online [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/cosmas\\_01\\_book1.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/cosmas_01_book1.htm). His work is also summarised in a blog post of 2014 (Jon Garvey, *The cosmos of Cosmas*, The Hump of the Camel 22/08/2014): <http://potiphar.jongarvey.co.uk/2014/08/22/the-cosmos-of-cosmas/>.

<sup>15</sup> G K Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: a Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Leicester, Apollos, 2004) 61 (footnote).

<sup>16</sup> G K Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*.

<sup>17</sup> J Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> John H Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* 190-191.

<sup>20</sup> Gen 12:3

<sup>21</sup> Ex 19:4-6).

<sup>22</sup> 2 Chr 36:22-23.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>24</sup> N T Wright in Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve* 177.

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<sup>25</sup> Abraham at Mamre(?) in Gen 15, Isaac at Beer-sheba in Gen 26 and Jacob at Bethel in Gen 28. Perhaps it is significant that such covenant-encounters are not restricted to one sacred location, unlike the developing stress on one special site for the tabernacle in the promised land.

<sup>26</sup> The departure home of Moses's Midianite father-in-law Jethro in Gen 18:27 introduces the Sinai narrative.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Enoch 6-7.

<sup>28</sup> N T Wright, *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>29</sup> John H Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*.

<sup>30</sup> J Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2005)

<sup>31</sup> G K Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*.

<sup>32</sup> N T Wright, *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> J Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 48.

<sup>34</sup> Ex 40:34-35; 1 Ki 8:10-11; 2 Chr 7:1-3.

<sup>35</sup> Nu 14:21, Hab 2:14.

<sup>36</sup> 2 Pet 1:16-18.

<sup>37</sup> J Richard Middleton, *Further Thoughts on the Imago Dei: After The Liberating Image*,

<https://jrichardmiddleton.wordpress.com/2014/08/05/further-thoughts-on-the-imago-dei-after-the-liberating-image/> .

<sup>38</sup> Gen 3:8.

<sup>39</sup> Lam 1:10.

<sup>40</sup> Num 18:1-7.

<sup>41</sup> Lev 16:1-25.

<sup>42</sup> Ex 19:20-24 – contrast 13b; Deut 5:5.

<sup>43</sup> Ps 19:1; Rom 1:20.

<sup>44</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, ch.7, in Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Fearn, Christian Focus Publications 1992) 84. It is interesting that the Confession also says that apart from this covenant relationship, the distance between God and creature is so great that only a relationship of obedience to the Creator is possible, whereas the covenant of Adam brings for man “*the fruition of him as their blessedness and reward.*”

<sup>45</sup> Ps 148.

<sup>46</sup> 1 Jn 2:18-19.

<sup>47</sup> Heb 11:39-40.

<sup>48</sup> Rom 5:12-13.

<sup>49</sup> Lk 3:23-38.

<sup>50</sup> S Joshua Swamidass, *The Overlooked Science of Genealogical Ancestry*, Peaceful Science (27/04/2017): <http://peacefulscience.org/genealogical-science/> and *A Genealogical Adam and Eve in Evolution*, Sapientia (26/06/2017): <http://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2017/06/a-genealogical-adam-and-eve-in-evolution/> .