

What “Adam as Israel” reveals about the state of our world.

Posted on [25/10/2017](#) by [Jon Garvey](#)

In my [last post](#) I wrote about Seth Postell’s work on the clear typological role of Adam, in relation to the over-arching message of the Pentateuch and, indeed, the whole Hebrew Bible. This message turns out to be the failure of Israel to keep the Covenant, their subsequent exile, and the promise of restoration through the coming prophet/king who would become known as Messiah. Adam’s history is closely parallel to this. I hinted that this makes Paul’s teaching on the parallelism of *Jesus* with Adam, as the one who succeeded where both Israel and Adam failed, a continuation of a mainstream biblical theme, and not just a convenient illustration of the apostle’s own invention.

I also raised, but didn’t fully answer, one potential problem with the view that Adam is the archetype of his descendant, Israel: that it doesn’t appear to explain how the gospel applies beyond Israel, and in particular how Adam relates to the rest of mankind, in Scripture (and also, of course, by extension, in the actual history of the world). Paul’s treatment of Adam shows this to be an essential step.

To me it seems that one place to start in resolving this question is by diverging from Postell, and his predecessor John Sailhamer, in regarding chapter 1 of Genesis, the creation story, as being both typologically and *literally* about the creation of the land of Israel, rather than the whole cosmos – or perhaps better, the whole world of men, since the creation of mankind under God is the target of the Genesis 1 creation account. Postell makes several arguments for applying it to the land of Israel, of which just one is the ambiguity of the Hebrew word *eretz*, which means both “the world” and “the land as the nation” *and* “the land as opposed to the sea”. He takes it, in Genesis 1, to mean “nation”.

In fact, as I pointed out in an [old post](#) the distinctions are not quite what we understand today in English, for to the ancients, the world *was* their land both for cultural reasons, and because there was as yet no concept of “world” as a cosmic totality. Nevertheless, they were well aware of “lands” beyond their own, and perhaps their mental concept had something in common with our phrase “on land and sea”, in which the two natural elements in some non-specific way mean “all over the world”.

Now one way in which the very “Adam as Israel” hypothesis itself persuades me that Genesis 1 has a wider context than the land of Canaan is that it encourages us to think in thematic terms of both Israel and Adam being created in a place *away* from God’s land, and placed respectively in Canaan (where God would dwell with Israel in his tabernacle) and in the sacred garden of Eden (where God walked “in the cool of the day”). In both cases the sacred space is represented as a kind of “heaven on earth” – a special place on earth where God will dwell with men and bless them in unique ways.

However, I notice that this is not so in Genesis 1, especially when one also considers the temple imagery of the creation story, as spelt out in detail by scholars like John Walton and Greg Beale. In Genesis 1, the first stages of creation occur largely by differentiation, of which one of the principle acts is the separation of heaven, God’s holy dwelling, and earth, man’s

domain. In temple imagery these represent Yahweh's holy of holies and the temple-court where his worshippers gather. Other main elements include the sky, representing the sanctuary where priests may approach God – very many Scriptures allude to mountains and clouds as this kind of “numinous zone” between heaven and earth – and the sea, which I'll return to, represents the profane area outside the temple precincts. Since I don't disagree with Postell that there are at least *typological* links between Genesis 1 and Israel, a second “layer” of imagery would make heaven/the holy of holies represent the temple, the sky/sanctuary Jerusalem, the earth/court of worshippers the holy land of Israel and the sea/profane outside the gentile nations.

But the point is that, though the earthly creation is “very good”, and indeed though the “male and female humans” created may be intended to be Adam and Eve as individuals, in Genesis 1 mankind is on earth, and God is far above in heaven. In Genesis 2, however, God has created a kind of outpost outpost of heaven on earth – the garden – where, until sin intervenes, God and man can dwell in fellowship, even to the extent that man has access to eternal life. In the same way, Israel and the tabernacle/temple are represented as in some way little bits of heaven on earth, where God may be encountered (where “his Name” may dwell, in Solomon's phrase) in a way that cannot happen in Egypt or Babylon. But note that, although the garden is a sacred space, it lacks the divisions of both the earthly tabernacle and the creation of Genesis 1. It seems Adam and Eve are given direct access to God in a unique way.

One of John Sailhamer's more controversial arguments is that Israel essentially lost the covenant at the very outset at Mount Sinai, because they were intended, at the blast of the trumpet, to go up the mountain to meet God face to face and establish a true relationship with him by faith, presumably modelled on that of Adam and Eve. In Sailhamer's estimation, fear and rebellion outweighed faith, and because they “stood afar off” and insisted that Moses do the talking, they were condemned to a relationship mediated only through Moses, priests and the Law. I'm more than half-convinced of that understanding, which would suggest the failure of Israel at Sinai may have delayed a true “gospel ministry” to the world in the same way that Adam's might have millennia earlier.

But in any case, both the garden and Sinai suggest a breaking through of the realm of God on to the earth that is not hinted at in Genesis 1. The story of Adam, then, seems to start where Genesis 1 leaves off – with a human being born or created from the “good earth” being placed in the “better” garden in order to inaugurate something *beyond* the original creation: that is, to dwell in communion with God on earth. Adam was a human, then, *before* he was dwelling in the grace of the garden. By implication, after that his priestly role ought to have been to spread that blessing through the world to transform it.

A good number of scholars have appreciated that “provisionality” in the Genesis 1 creation (Richard Middleton comes to mind as one who has contributed here at *The Hump*). God had always intended to take mankind beyond even the primordial pristine state of creation, to a new and vital life in which the original barrier between heaven and earth was abolished.

Note that this is not at all the same as the common idea that the new creation remedies a fallen cosmos. It remedies sin and human death, yes; and it transforms the cosmos from the “natural” (*psuchikos*) to the spiritual (*pneumatikos*), yes. But that “natural” creation was how God planned it in Genesis 1 – Genesis 2 and Eden were intended as the first phase in something better, quite apart from the interruption of sin.

Let me give some more evidence of this from Genesis 1. Apart from the creation of God's heavens separated off from man's earth, we see (as many have pointed out) the residual elements of the "*tohu wabohu*" (formless and empty) situation of Genesis 1.2. John Walton stresses that they have the character of wildness, but not of evil as such, which makes the term "chaos" a little misleading, and "evil" positively mistaken.

These unruly elements are retained during the process of creation, but are transformed to some good purpose. And so we find that created light displaces darkness, but yet the latter is retained as "night" and becomes of use. Likewise "the waters" are pushed aside to make the land, yet become populated and useful as the seas. Nevertheless, both night and sea (and the "desert") remain symbols of wildness throughout the Bible: Paul contrasts the night our former life with the light of Christ; Jonah flees from God to the sea; a land that is cursed becomes, in the prophets, as "formless and empty" as the desert. Yet they are all still components of God's original "very good" creation – to him the wild sea-monsters are his frolicking pets (Ps 104.24-26), and the wind and waves do his bidding as servants (Ps 104.4-9). The night creatures don't share their realm with man, but depend on God (Ps 104.19-22). Even desert places bring benefit (Ps 104.18). Perhaps the way to see them is as those parts of creation that are not fully conformed to the needs of man, yet serve the good purposes of God.

Next, I note that these three *created* (not fallen) elements (the separation between heaven and earth, the darkness, and the oceans) are all three specifically said to be abolished in the age to come, according to the final prophecy of the book of Revelation. The holy city (which represents the Church) is described as coming down from heaven to earth, as it were abolishing the distinction between them, just as the temple veil was torn in two when Jesus died (Rev 21.2). God (with Christ) now dwells with man as their temple (21.22). There is no night (21.26), and there is no sea (21.1). As I taught my recent group on Revelation, these are not necessarily literal physical predictions in a book whose watchword is "imagery" – the point is that whatever in creation posed a risk to people will no longer pose a risk. Bear in mind that a change in *us* might achieve that as just well as a change in the creation: bats have no problems with night, nor fish with the sea.

Yet mark this again: they were all elements of the first, good, creation, described in Genesis 1, and *not* results of the fall in Genesis 3, a fall whose primary result for man was exile from sacred space and back to the world, just as Israel's fall was a passport back to Abraham's birthplace in Mesopotamia. The implications of this regarding any model we adopt for integrating the truths of Scripture with the physical reality of the world are interesting. We do not need to be looking for a time then the world was a paradise, because according to Genesis it never was – rather it was *Paradise* that was a paradise, and that was a place limited in geographical extent, very limited in population, and very limited in duration.

At the same time, we *do* need to be seeking an understanding of Adam and Eve, and their story, as historical events, because their role in Scripture is as the archetype of Israel in its apostasy, and of Christ (by contrast) in his obedience. We need to understand mankind as originating (whether in a single primordial couple or not) *outside* the direct presence of God, and yet not tainted by sin – but as now being totally implicated in Adam's guilt, as Paul teaches and as Genesis at least hints, in the sin and curse of death which Adam introduced to the world *when he was placed into, and then exiled from, an environment in which God was especially present.*

That leaves a good number of avenues of enquiry, many of which retain all the fundamentals of historical Christian doctrine, and cause no inevitable conflicts with our knowledge of the physical world. I suspect that much light will be gained in future years by following up the intentional parallels between Adam and Israel in more detail.

<http://potiphar.jongarvey.co.uk/2017/10/25/what-adam-as-israel-reveals-about-the-state-of-our-world/>