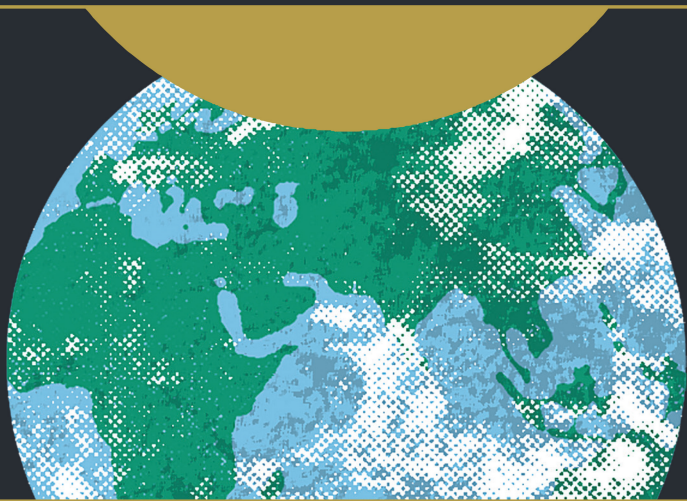


# NOT HOME YET

HOW THE RENEWAL OF THE EARTH  
FITS INTO GOD'S PLAN FOR THE WORLD



**IAN K. SMITH**

“Combining pastoral, missional, and scholarly insights, Ian Smith wonderfully explores the little understood connection between the resurrection all Christians affirm and the new creation all believers will enjoy. The result is *Not Home Yet*, a book with rich discussion of the interconnections of Scripture’s earliest and future themes and profound encouragement for all those who are still on their way to the home that Jesus Christ prepares for us.”

**Bryan Chapell**, Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church, Peoria, Illinois

“*Not Home Yet* is a compact and powerful exposition of the Bible’s teaching on earth and God’s mission to it. I have never seen such a clear articulation of the theme of creation and re-creation anywhere. Ian Smith also deftly speaks about the practical ramifications that such a teaching has on our thinking and our actions. I highly recommend this book for all who are serious about understanding this central theme of the Bible.”

**Tremper Longman III**, Distinguished Scholar and Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies, Westmont College; author, *Confronting Old Testament Controversies*

“When we are away from home, we long for home. But where is home for the Christian? In this insightful biblical theology of ‘home,’ Ian Smith helps us see that this world, and even heaven (as an intermediate state), is not our home—we’re just passing through, as we await our eternal home of the new heavens and the new earth. A great book to be read for the journey home.”

**Jonathan Gibson**, Assistant Professor of Old Testament, Westminster Theological Seminary

“*Home* must surely be one of the most emotion-filled words in the English language. It is where we belong. But where is home for the Christian? Are we living in a far country here on earth, just waiting for a better day when we can leave the earth and simply enjoy heaven? Think of Ian Smith as your friendly theological realtor. He knows about the home God has created for us. With theological skill and deft simplicity, he can explain its long history. He understands where we fit into its story. He is also sensitive to the responsibility Christians have to our ‘home,’ even though we have not yet seen its final reconstruction. Brief as *Not Home Yet* may be, you will find it instructive and challenging beyond its size.”

**Sinclair B. Ferguson**, Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary; Teaching Fellow, Ligonier Ministries

“Ian Smith’s book will give you new insight into old passages, let you ponder all that is packed into Jesus’s resurrection, and get you dreaming of the new heavens and the new earth.”

**Ed Welch**, Faculty and Counselor, Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

“*Not Home Yet* is theologically rich yet easily accessible for anyone. Smith paints a vivid picture of how this earth matters to God—our work, our communities, and the physical world—things that some have often said are passing away and don’t have eternal value. I highly recommend this insightful and much-needed book.”

**Scott B. Rae**, Dean of Faculty and Professor of Christian Ethics, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

“Ian Smith has written an eminently readable account of the biblical testimony to our eternal home—a home with resurrection bodies in a renewed heaven and earth. His careful analysis of common but ill-informed references to ‘going home’ as merely a departure from this earth, rather than a return to a renewed earth, are clear, cogent, and well argued. This concise biblical theology of death, afterlife, and resurrection should be an encouragement to every Christian reader as they grasp the fullness of the hope that awaits the people of God.”

**Glenn N. Davies**, Archbishop of Sydney; author, *Faith and Obedience in Romans*

“When will we arrive home? That’s an emotive question, often asked in the most vulnerable experiences of our lives—when we are children, separated from loved ones, or approaching death. Answering this theological question requires exegetical precision and pastoral sensitivity. Ian Smith is a careful reader of Scripture, a gifted preacher and communicator, and a compassionate pastor. In *Not Home Yet*, he guides us on a journey from Eden through a world that, in its fallen state, is not our home. But the central figure in this guide book is the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to bring about a new creation.”

**Gregory R. Perry**, Vice President of Strategic Projects, Third Millennium Ministries

“Christians have a particular understanding of the world we live in because we believe that it has been created by God. We must take care of it. Ian Smith provides a theological underpinning for the kinds of actions that are required if we are to fulfill our creation mandate. This book is an important contribution to a necessary debate, and I recommend it highly to all who have a serious interest in the subject.”

**Gerald Bray**, Research Professor of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School

Not Home Yet



# Not Home Yet

How the Renewal of the Earth Fits  
into God's Plan for the World

Ian K. Smith

 **CROSSWAY**<sup>®</sup>  
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Lovingly dedicated to Jenni

“According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens  
and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” (2 Pet. 3:13)





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# Introduction

Traveling is fun, but after a while we long for home. We enjoy exotic food and hotel rooms, but when homesickness takes hold, we hunger for a home-cooked meal, and we yearn to sleep in our own bed. Home is where we belong. It's a place of familiarity. In the light of this, the practice of many Christians calling heaven their home is curious. Heaven is not a place of familiarity. It's an unknown. Is it where we belong? There are heavenly creatures, angelic beings around the throne of God. But that's not us. We are earthly creatures. Yet at funerals we talk about the deceased having been called home. When going through difficult times, we remind each other that this world is not our home. But if heaven is our home, what does that say about the earth? Humans were given the task of filling the earth and having dominion over it (Gen. 1:28).

## **Where Is Home?**

There is an element of truth in the claim that heaven is home, and we will return to that later in this book. Christians are at home when we are with Christ, as we await Jesus's return to the earth. We will be "at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). But the Scriptures also talk about the renewal of all things (Matt. 19:28), a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1). How does

this home in heaven fit with the renewal of the earth? What is the home of Christians beyond the grave? What impact does an understanding of the resurrection of Jesus have on the way we see the earth? Where is home?

The resurrection of Jesus points to something far bigger than just access to heaven; the resurrection points to the renewal of God's creation. When we understand this scope of God's work of salvation, reductionistic and individualistic views are lacking in the grandeur of what God is going to do. Jesus's resurrection does not only guarantee my resurrection—important though that is. Jesus is going to raise the universe! He will usher in a new heaven and a new earth, and we will be part of that. On that day, we will know what it means to be home. This salvation is guaranteed through the resurrection. To talk about salvation without mention of the resurrection is a serious omission.

This connection between the resurrection and the renewal of creation is not as well understood as one might hope. I sit on several panels that assess people's suitability for various forms of Christian ministry. We interview people who are desiring to be ordained ministers, missionaries, evangelists, and similar roles. Within the interview, we always ask the interviewee for an explanation of the gospel. In nearly every answer, I notice two things—one good and one concerning. First, virtually without exception, the person mentions the cross as a place of forgiveness and substitution. This is encouraging. The second thing I notice over 90 percent of the time is that within the summary of the gospel, there is no mention of the resurrection. I normally ask, "Have you left anything out?" The candidate sits and ponders. Around half of those being interviewed say, "Ah—the resurrection." Others need more prompting. I then proceed to ask whether the resurrection is important. They all say yes. Most can cite: "And if Christ has not been raised,

then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). I then ask, “Why is it important?” Answers vary. Many make good theological observations, but very few link the resurrection with the renewal of all things. Normally an understanding of the gospel is individualistic; it’s about *my* salvation.

The resurrection is central to how we see salvation. We are not saved just for a purely spiritual experience in heaven. Jesus was raised to earth, not to heaven. We should not confuse the resurrection and the ascension. The Gospels all agree that on the third day, Jesus was raised to earth where he continued to appear for forty days before his ascension to heaven. This resurrection of Jesus is the firstfruits of our resurrection. A physical body was placed in the grave of Joseph of Arimathea and was raised back to life. The grave was empty. The very same body was raised. This is the firstfruits of the general resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). We too will be raised—our very same body. The earth will be raised—the very same earth. In each case there will be transformation, but there will also be continuation.

Yet when I find myself in conversations with Christians talking about the renewal of the earth, they look at me quizzically and wonder what Bible I’ve been reading. So ingrained is the idea of living in heaven forever that questions arise. The most frequent is addressed by this book: Is this idea of a renewed earth biblical? In this book we will work our way through Scripture and show that the resounding answer is yes. We will note repeatedly that the Bible is more concerned with God coming down to earth than with humans going up to heaven. This downward movement is seen in Eden, in the tabernacle, in the temple, in the incarnation, in the crucifixion, in the resurrection, and in the second coming. Jesus’s return to this earth is the focus of the Christian’s hope, and this return will not just be for a visit, to pick us up and take us home to heaven. He is

coming to stay. The new Jerusalem will descend to earth (Revelation 21), and we will be at home, with Jesus, on earth.

## **The Future of the Earth**

An understanding of the future of the earth has significant implications for how we see it now. When we understand that the end of all things is the renewal of all things, then all things become important. No longer will we see the spiritual as more important than the physical; such a dualism is more indebted to Greek philosophy than to the Bible. God is committed to his creation. It's all important, whether Bible study, employment, church, hobbies, family, the arts, or community involvement. When we understand that the impact of the resurrection is much bigger than we ever imagined, our worldview will be changed. No longer will our sermons be just about what happens after death (important though that is), the gospel will also resound with relevance to this life, to the earth, to the places we inhabit and call home. The knowledge that our home will be renewed will give relevance to life.

The aim of this book is to reawaken (resurrect even), a biblical understanding of the earth and God's mission to it. Such an understanding was common in former generations, but it has waned over the decades. The evolution of Christian music is but one example of this. Isaac Watts's hymn "Joy to the World" was written in 1719, and it celebrates God's commitment to this earth as heaven and nature sing the blessings of Jesus's incarnation as far as the curse is found. The cry of Watts's hymn is, "Let earth receive her King."<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, such songs are rare today, as Christians often celebrate the earth's destruction and an eternal home in heaven (I refrain from citing examples,

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1. Isaac Watts, *The Psalms and Hymns of Isaac Watts: With All the Additional Hymns and Complete Indexes*, Great Awakening Writings (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 173.

but there are many—just listen to what you are singing next Sunday). If our understanding of Christian mission has been reduced to “getting people into heaven,” what does that say about people’s physical needs? What is the purpose of Christian schooling? What is the relationship between education and evangelism? Why do we have Christian hospitals, especially on the mission field in developing countries? If the main purpose of a Christian hospital is to get people into heaven, we have a bit of a problem! One could argue that the job of a hospital is to delay entry to heaven! Is there a place for the physical in our understanding of salvation?

The need to be reminded of our earthly as well as our heavenly focus has never been as urgent. In the West the Christian church has moved, in one generation, from being the most powerful voice in society to being a superseded voice at the fringes. Christendom is over. For many the church has become irrelevant. I often ask myself, *Which happened first? Did the world forsake the church or did the church forsake the world?* No wonder the world sees Christians as irrelevant, if everything on earth is transient.

Of course, questions abound. Didn’t Jesus say, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36)? Didn’t Paul say, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21)? Isn’t the earth going to pass away? As we trace the flow of the biblical story, we will look at broad themes, and we will stop along the way to take a closer look at some difficult passages. In all of this we will be reminded of God’s commitment to our home. After all, he made it.

It has taken me some time to get my head around how holistic God’s mission is to this world (and I certainly do not claim to have it all sorted out). Like many Western Christians, I grew up in a world of physical affluence and spiritual poverty.



Everyone at my school ate three meals a day, wore shoes, and could read and write, but very few went to church. We were physically rich and spiritually poor. In a very real sense, the proclamation of the gospel addressed a spiritual need. But not all the world is like that. This truth came home to me after teaching for several years in a theological seminary in the small Pacific Island nation of Vanuatu. Most people in Vanuatu are subsistence farmers. The church is strong and influential, but the country is financially poor. After my family had lived there for about five years, one of our graduates, Johnny, invited us to visit him. He was pastoring in an extremely remote part of the country, on the west coast of the island of Santo in the village of Sulesai. We had always enjoyed spending time with Johnny and his family, so we accepted with pleasure. It would be a great adventure to take the whole family to a part of the world that is very inaccessible and by and large unchanged by Western influences.

We set out early in the morning before the sun had risen. We bounced along a rough dirt road in the back of a truck for two hours, traversing fast-flowing rivers, until we reached the west coast of the island, where we boarded a small aluminum dinghy with an outboard motor and set off for a ten-hour trip up the coast in the open sea. From the boat it is easy to see why this part of the world is so isolated. Soaring mountains drop through sheer cliffs to the ocean floor, making the coast absolutely impassable. There are only two ways in and out. For those who have money, there is the boat, but for most people who are subsistence farmers in a cashless economy, the only way in and out is across steep, mountainous terrain, a walk that takes three or four days. It's no surprise that many people are born, live, and die in this part of the world without ever leaving, and that visitors seldom come.

At the end of a long day, we arrived at Sulesai village, picturesque in its tropical beauty. A freshwater river wends its way through the village before disgorging into the ocean; the green of the jungle contrasts with the blue of the ocean, each separated by the pebbles of the seashore. Children ran to the beach to greet us, and in my romanticized naivety I thought: “Who would ever want to leave this place?” How naive I was!

As we came ashore, I noticed that most of the children had distended bellies, a telltale sign of malnutrition. This made no sense in a tropical paradise, but the availability of food does not always lead to good nutrition. Several of these children’s parents and grandparents were amputees through the complications of untreated diabetes. Medical facilities are all but nonexistent in a place that is plagued with malaria. Mosquito repellent cannot be purchased. The rate of infant mortality is high. Childbirth is precarious. There is no school in the village; parents face the decision of whether to send their six-year-olds to boarding school, from which they will return annually. It is not surprising that many people in the village are illiterate. The place looked like paradise, but there was a sting in its tail.

As we came ashore, Johnny led us to the simple church building in the middle of the village. The church in Sulesai is different from any church I have visited (and I am talking about the people, not the building). Every person in the village belonged to it. Yes—everyone! Not only did it have a 100 percent attendance rate, but they met daily. Due to high levels of illiteracy, the people of Sulesai gathered every morning to have the Bible read to them and to pray together before beginning their day’s work. *Everyone* attended *every* day. As far as the human eye can see, everyone professed to be a Christian. No need for a program on church growth in Sulesai! Yet as I stood, amidst them, with their medical, nutritional, and educational needs,

I asked myself, *Is there still Christian ministry to be performed here? Do they need missionaries?* This place was in absolute juxtaposition to where I grew up. In Sulesai everyone went to church, but very few ate three meals a day, wore shoes, or could read and write. What was more urgently needed here—a nutritionist or an evangelist? Questions flooded my mind. Is not the Christian mission holistic? Was not the resurrection of Jesus physical? Is caring for people a vehicle to enhance the proclamation of the gospel, or do we proclaim God’s love by our actions as well as our words? The answers to my questions came home with astounding clarity.

That day at Sulesai demonstrated the three main truths I want to address in this book: (1) the earth is stunningly beautiful; (2) the earth is marred by the effects of sin; (3) God is concerned for the renewal of the earth. None of these truths deny the centrality of the call of the gospel for people to repent and to put their trust in Jesus. That is always foundational. But once we’ve done that, it’s not the end of the story. A spiritual gospel that is concerned only for spiritual realities ends up being a gospel that falls far short of what the Bible teaches. Real spirituality is holistic. The story of the Bible is concerned with God’s commitment to fix up earth, a place called “home.” We turn our attention to tracing that story.

# The Creation of Home

The first chapter of the Bible is Genesis 1. That seems such a bland statement, but its ramifications are enormous. Starting our Bible with creation, rather than with the fall in Genesis 3 or with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12, will make a world of difference (sorry about the pun). A true appreciation of the beginning of the biblical narrative will help to prevent a false dichotomy between the spiritual and the physical. It will correct many misconceptions about heaven, about the earth, and about the relationship between them. The opening chapters of Genesis teach us that earth is our home.

## **In the Beginning**

The opening words of Scripture, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1), remind us that God is the Creator and not part of his creation. This distinction makes us reject any notion of pantheism, with creation having its own internal force. We do not venerate “Mother Earth” or the power of nature. Our world is created and sustained by the hand of God, who is separate from it yet committed to it.

The words “the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1) need definition. In the worldview of the ancient Near East, all that existed was categorized as “the heavens” that are above, “the earth” that is below the heavens, and “the waters” that are around and beneath the earth. This division can be seen in the Ten Commandments given to Moses. In the second commandment Moses was told, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Ex. 20:4). A paraphrase of the first verse of the Bible could be, “In the beginning, God created everything.”<sup>1</sup>

The Hebrew for “the heavens” is *hashamayim*. Its meaning should not be restricted to that other-worldly dimension where God and his angels reside. It includes all that is above the earth. It is the place where birds live (Ps. 8:8), from where the dew (Gen. 27:28), the wind, and the rain (Jer. 10:13) come. We could translate these references as “sky,” as long as we recognize that this is not the extent of “the heavens.” The heavens also include what we would call “space.” The sun, the moon, and the stars are in the heavens. Abraham is promised descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven (Gen. 15:5). All that is above, in short, can be included in the heavens.

All this raises a question about what we often call “heaven,” that is, where God lives surrounded by his angels. Is that included in the heavens? The short answer is yes, although the ancient reader of Genesis would not have divided what we call “sky” from what we call “space” from what we call “heaven.” Indeed, it is hard to quantify the biblical idea of heaven as God’s

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1. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 15.

abode. It is where God lives, yet it is unable to contain him (1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chron. 2:6; 6:18). It is a “place” to which one ascends (Ps. 139:8; Prov. 30:4) and from which God descends (Gen. 11:5; 2 Sam. 22:10; Pss. 18:10; 144:5), yet it cannot be reached either by plane or by rocket. In short, the heavens are all that is above. We should be careful not to import our own questions or categories onto the text if those questions are not addressed by the text. One thing we do know about the heavens: they are God’s creation!

Similarly, the Hebrew for “the earth” in Gen 1:1 (*ha’arets*) has more than one meaning. As with the English word *earth*, it can mean not only the planet upon which we live but also the soil in which things grow (Gen. 1:26). It is from the dust that Adam was made (Gen. 2:7), and the earth continues to feed and nourish us. But *ha’arets* has a more particular meaning than just the earth: it is a reference to the land which God promised to the patriarchs, whose family would become the nation of Israel (Deut. 1:8), a good land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:8). Again, to ask questions of subcategories between the earth and the land may not always do justice to the text. Although Genesis is clearly the story of the creation of the earth, it is also the creation of the land. Similarly, we will notice that by the end of the story of the Bible, when we talk about the “Holy Land,” we are also talking about the “Holy Earth,” as God’s blessings will flow to the ends of the earth (Acts 13:47).

In short, the opening verse of the Bible is breathtaking: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” From this all-encompassing canvas, the focus of Genesis narrows: “The earth . . .” (Gen. 1:2). This begins what will become a recurrent pattern of the earthward direction in Scripture. The earth appears to be at the center of God’s creation. Even the

sun and the moon exist for the benefit of dividing time on the earth between day and night. It is an anti-Copernican revolution; everything revolves around the earth.

### **Commitment to Creation**

The astute reader cannot help but grasp the pleasure that God takes in the earth. The world is not just a functional, monochrome, utilitarian machine. It is full of beauty, color, and creativity. God delights in the trees, the fish, the animals, the oceans, and the mountains. At the end of each day of creation, the Lord looks at what he has made and declares it to be “good” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). The Hebrew word used here for “good” (*tob*) can also be rendered “beautiful.” On the sixth day of creation, God’s looking at all he has made and declaring it to be “very good” could equally be rendered “very beautiful” (Gen. 1:31). The very same Hebrew expression is found in 1 Samuel 9:2 to describe how handsome Saul was, and in Genesis 24:16 to describe the beauty of Rebekah, who came to a well to collect water before becoming Isaac’s wife. Similarly, God looks at the world he has made and says, “It’s stunningly beautiful.” Not everything needs to be useful; beauty is an end in itself. God takes great delight in it, as should we. Earth is our home, and except for the all-pervasive effects of sin, it is hard to imagine anywhere better. God did not hold back when he created this world by keeping the best for heaven. The biblical narrative tells us that he is not going to allow Satan to have the final victory as far as this beautiful world is concerned. Earth will not be discarded. Creation is more valuable than that; it will be renewed.

Of course, the world is not all that we would want it to be. Suffering pervades every part of our lives, and for most people the heartache is palpable. We will deal with the effects

of the fall in the next chapter. The question we face now is: In terms of God's beautiful creation, what is the solution to the problem of evil? Will God fix up our home (the earth), or will we need to flee to a new home (heaven)? It is a similar issue that many people in the twenty-first century encounter, as they are faced with terrible atrocities in some of the war-torn countries of the world. Should they stay, or should they flee from their homes? With growing numbers of refugees around the world, we must remember that fleeing one's homeland is normally a last resort. People have lived in their homelands for generations. They have developed a culture, a language, and a heritage, and such traditions are not easily abandoned. Indeed, even if people flee and start a new life in another country, they still think about home and try to keep alive its language and traditions. After all, there is nothing physically wrong with their homeland. Many of the trouble spots in the world are places of great beauty and fertility. But due to the effects of evil, the people who live there are faced with a difficult choice: stay and fix it up or flee and start a new life somewhere that is not home. The preferred solution is to stay, but that is not always possible.

This question also faces us as we think about God's creation. Is the world so broken that God will abandon it, and we will need to find a home elsewhere? Is heaven a place for eternal refugees, that we might live in a home that was not made for us (unless we are angels)? The recurring answer of both Testaments of Scripture is that the world is not so broken that God cannot fix it. It will be renewed and transformed. God is not going to give up on it, and neither should we. It's good to remember that the New Testament's image of salvation is often given in creational terms. Language such as "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) is supplemented with a



picture of creation being subjected to the pains of childbirth as it awaits something better (Rom. 8:22).

The focus of the creation account in Genesis continues to narrow as the narrative zooms in to a particular garden called “Eden.” This garden is where God dwells with his people on earth. It has all that we would expect to find within a temple in the ancient Near East. A temple was the earthly dwelling place of a god where humans met with their god, and within which were found images of the god. But Eden is a temple with a difference. It is not a static, lifeless building. It is a dynamic, growing garden. God is not a lifeless statue within this temple, but he walks and talks within the garden (Gen. 3:8). The same is also true of his images within the temple. Unlike lifeless statues in other ancient temples, God’s image bearers are living. They are not made of wood or stone but of flesh and blood. Their names are Adam and Eve. They are made in their God’s image, and they are to rule over all that God has made (Gen. 1:26–27). It is a temple *par excellence*.

All later tabernacles and temples within the history of the people of Israel will be but a reflection of Eden. The garden of Eden is the exemplar of what it looks like when heaven and earth meet. Within this temple, God has bestowed purpose to his image bearers: to have vice-regal authority as they manage development in God’s world. Adam and Eve were created to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28). This is why humans were created. It goes to the core of our reason for existence. We were not created to preach the gospel, important though that is. Such a conclusion assumes that the Bible begins with the fall in Genesis 3. The Bible begins at Genesis 1. We are image bearers whose function is to act on

behalf of the king with vice-regal authority as we care for his creation.

I am an Australian, and vice-regal authority is reflected in our political system. Although not an absolute monarch, as is the case with God, Australia's head of state lives in London, and so a governor-general represents her (or him, as the case may be) within Australia. This vice-regal system goes back to the time of European settlement in 1788 when a colony consisting mainly of convicts was established in Sydney. At that time King George III was the king in London. His image was on money, and his insignia was engraved on public buildings. But engraved images are unable to rule a colony of convicts on the other side of the globe. King George therefore sent a living image, Governor Arthur Philip, vested with the authority of the crown to have dominion over the emerging colony. Such vice-regal appointments bear great privilege and responsibility. The vice-regent is to act on behalf of the king in caring for the dominion of the king in all the complexities of the affairs of the colony.

Image bearing on behalf of the king is at the center of God's purposes for humanity. It is hard to imagine a world in which God delights in his people without also delighting in the place where they live. Commitment to one involves commitment to the other. Indeed, God's commitment to creation is seen throughout Scripture in covenantal terms. Jeremiah proclaims the coming of the new covenant in creational terms. He states:

Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers. (Jer. 33:20–21)

Similarly, Jeremiah reminds us of God's covenant with creation as he says: "Thus says the LORD: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth, then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David my servant" (Jer. 33:25–26). Similar language that talks of a covenant with creation can be found in Hosea 2:18: "And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety."

In the light of this, it is surprising that so many Christians view the earth as transient at best and something to be forsaken at worst. The opening chapters of Genesis explode this misconception. God's creation is vast, encompassing the expanses of space and the microscopic intricacies of living cells. God's commitment to creation is sure. He will not allow it to be thwarted. Satan will not bring about ultimate destruction through his schemes. God, not Satan, will have the victory over what he has made.

Creation is foundational, but it is not the end of the story; it is the beginning. Within creation God's image bearers reflect the creativity of their Creator. Earth never has been and never will be a static place. It bristles with creativity and development. Animals are named, children are born, poetry is written, and gardens are planted. It is the vibrant home in which we live. And as the Bible spans its story from a garden in Eden to a garden in the new Jerusalem in Revelation 22, we are reminded that God's commitment to his creation does not wane.

The Bible is the story of God's plan to rescue. The scope of that which is fallen is that which will be rescued, restored, and renewed. It is not surprising, therefore, that throughout

Scripture we are told of the fulfillment of this rescue in the words “new heavens and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17; see also 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). The teaching about creation is foundational to our understanding of Scripture. The story of the Bible begins at Genesis 1.

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