

The Bible has a beautiful and sophisticated account of the Creation and the role of human beings, but this is not set out in a single text. Both in the Biblical stories of Creation and in the design of the Jerusalem temple, there is a single vision of the relationship between time and eternity; between God and Creation; and between the visible world and the invisible world of God and the angels. To understand what the Bible says about the Creation, we too must glimpse the vision that informed the worship of the Temple, the poetry of the Hebrew prophets, the sayings of the sages and the images of the storytellers. All express and honour the same truth about the Creation. Since the New Testament shares this view of the Creation, it is the basis of Christian belief about the environment.

1. The temple in Jerusalem represented the Creation. The Genesis story of the six days of Creation also described the ceremonial building of the temple, which was in two parts, divided by the great curtain. The outer area represented the visible material world [the Garden of Eden] and the inner part was the holy of holies, the invisible world of the Glory of God and the angels [heaven]. The curtain represented matter concealing the Glory of God from human eyes, but the holy of holies in the heart of the temple showed that God was at the heart of Creation. All temple worship concerned the relationship of the Creation to God - praise, thanksgiving, asking for forgiveness - and the whole of the visible world was thought to be a temple where human beings were the priests. 'Adam' [the name simply means a human] was put into Eden to 'serve' it and to 'preserve' it, two Hebrew words which also mean worship in the temple and preserving the teachings. After six days, God rested on the seventh, the Sabbath, showing that when the Creation was complete and 'very good', nothing more was made. The goal of Creation was not more and more, but sufficiency, completion and rest.

2. The whole Creation - earth and heaven - was bound in a network of bonds, known as The Eternal Covenant* and The Covenant of Peace**. Everything - the visible natural world, human society and the invisible world of the angels - was part of one system created by God. The bonds held everything together and joined the visible world to God at its centre. Any action which broke the bonds was called 'sin', and so human conduct could and did destroy the system. Sin could be deliberate or through ignorance; the effect was the same. Thus one of the key roles of the priests and the angels was to teach about right conduct. Breaking away from God was not seen as liberation but as deprivation, losing touch with the source of life and renewal. The mystics described the holy of holies as 'the mystery of existence' and 'the mystery of becoming'. When the bonds of the covenant had been broken, the whole system collapsed; because of human sin, the stars fell from the sky, the sun lost its light - the familiar pictures of the apocalypse.

**'Eternal' means the timeless but constant presence of God. The Eternal Covenant joins all things to this timeless state.*

***'Peace' is the usual translation of the Hebrew word shalom which means wholeness, integrity, everything as God intended it to be. The Covenant of Peace describes this state.*

The eternal covenant was repaired by 'atonement', when the temple/Creation was purified from the effects of sin [described as pollution], and recreated. Atonement involved repentance and self sacrifice to renew and restore everything that had been damaged - the Creation, and the person's relationship with God.

3. The Holy of Holies, the invisible eternal presence, is a Unity because God is One. This Unity underlies and binds together in one system everything in the visible Creation. The prophets glimpsed this in their visions, and the sages warned that when people lost sight of it, everything

disintegrated. People on earth were able to learn something about God from the angels [meaning 'messengers'], who were themselves part of the Glory and Unity of God. The song of the angels symbolised the harmony of all Creation centred on God, and when people on earth praised the Creator, they joined with the angels in their music and became part of the great pattern of the Creation. The harmony and *shalom* of Creation were maintained by the obedience of the angels, and humans had to be obedient to God if they were to preserve the Creation.

4. The pattern of Creation is determined by God, and described as the statutes, the 'engraved things'. When earth is in harmony with these divine statutes, the natural world and human society enjoy 'justice' and 'righteousness', words describing the state of peace [*shalom*]. The exact measurements, proportions and roles of everything are planned by God, and these are known as the 'mysteries' of the Creation. They are not simply cosmic dimensions, but even include fair dealing in weights and measures. 'Progress' is not part of the picture; the aim is to keep everything in harmony with the plan of the Ruler of the Creation. And so we say in the Lord's Prayer: 'Thy Kingdom come', which means 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

5. Humans were created as the Image of God on earth, and so there was no statue in the temple in Jerusalem. People worshipped God by their treatment of other human beings and by their care for the Creation. Humans as the Image also meant that people had to care for the Creation in the way that God cares. Genesis says that Adam was created from dust, but began his real life when God breathed into him. He was put into the Garden of Eden to serve God and to serve the Garden, but was forbidden to take the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil - secular knowledge. All the other trees, including the tree of life/the tree of Wisdom, were permitted. Satan, described as 'the deceiver' because he makes false knowledge look attractive, persuaded Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, and they discovered the consequences of secular knowledge. Materialism and reductionism. They became no more than the dust from which they had been made and could not live in the presence of God. They left the Garden of Eden.

6. The tree of life was the symbol of Wisdom, that God given-knowledge which binds all Creation in harmony to the Creator. Some angels - known as the sons of God - rebelled against God and brought their heavenly knowledge to earth, but without the law of God. They corrupted the Creation by teaching secular knowledge, which fragmented and destroyed. There was a deceptive, false covenant, offering a 'freedom', that led only to death and decay. St Paul taught that Christians were the [new] sons of God who were to free the Creation from these bonds of decay and restore the covenant of *shalom*, and in the Book of Revelation, St John learned that faithful Christians would again eat from the tree of life and be restored to Eden.

7. There is only One God, and to worship anything else is idolatry. An idol is anything man-made - not just a statue. It can be an economic or political system. Idolatry gives a false centre to the Creation, which warps and distorts the whole system. The second of the ten commandments warns that idolatry results in iniquity [a word meaning 'distortion'], which affects several generations.

In his great vision of the day of Judgement in the Book of Revelation, St John heard heavenly voices proclaiming the Kingdom of God on earth, 'the time for destroying the destroyers of the earth'. Then he saw St Michael and his angels fighting Satan, 'the deceiver of the whole world'
. *The battle against those who destroyed the earth was a battle against those who deceived with false knowledge.*