

Creation *for* Redemption

Rest and Refreshment in Genesis 1

(actually Genesis 1:1 – 2:3, but denoted ‘Genesis 1’ in this paper)

Vernon G. Wilkins

The Dust of Snow

*The way a crow
shook down on me
the dust of snow
from a hemlock tree
has given my heart
a change of mood
and saved some part
of a day I had rued*

Robert Frost, 1923

*“Come to me,
all who labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest”*

Jesus of Nazareth in Matthew 11:28

The Essence of this Paper

The essence of this paper is not so much to note the entities created in days 1-3, as to note the separations between them and their counterparts in their respective pairs.

Day 1: Light is created as the counterpart to darkness,

Day 2: A separation is created between heaven and earth,

Day 3: Land is created and separated from the sea.

These three separations are biblically significant, are further demarcated in days 4-6, and are resolved by the 'rest' theme of day 7, and at the end of Revelation.

The Hermeneutical Method of this Paper

Employing a 'whole canon' biblical-theological approach, we seek to relate Genesis 1, the first chapter of the Bible, to the end of Revelation, thereby viewing these first and final chapters as marking the two ends of the trajectory of the entire redemption plan of God related throughout the Scriptures.

Abstract (Summary of the Paper)

- ▶ We notice that in 1:2, even before God first says in the text, “Let there be ...”, there isn’t nothing. There is something, three entities:
 - Darkness
 - The Earth, without form and void
 - The Deep – we take this to be the same as the WatersEven if darkness can’t really be termed ‘something’, the other two certainly can.
- ▶ Strangely, we observe that consistently in biblical theology there are negative connotations to these three entities. This doesn’t mean they are in any sense ‘bad’, for all of God’s creation is good, but they are consistently used in the Bible to denote the predicament of sinful man apart from God and to connote the dreadfulness of this separation.
- ▶ The first six days of the creation week occur in the text in two parallel triplets, whereby on the first three days three separations are created, and on the next three days these three separations are further emphasised by the things created then in their respective domains. We note that this observation was made by Augustine, Noordzij and others, but our thesis departs from theirs immediately.
- ▶ The separations of the first three days are brought about by God creating in each case a new entity, a counterpart to one of the three starting entities:
 - Light is created (‘let there be’) as the counterpart to Darkness
 - Heaven is ‘separated’, to be the counterpart to Earth
 - Land ‘appears’, to be the counterpart to the Seas (the waters on the earth, or the deep, which are ‘gathered together’)
- ▶ All the three newly created counterparts consistently have a positive connotation in biblical theology – light dispelling darkness, heaven the dwelling place of God, the promised land where God’s people dwell.
- ▶ On the second three days no new separations are created; the things created during days 4 to 6 to occupy their respective domains further demarcate (amongst other things) the separated pairs of entities in existence at the end of day 3.
- ▶ First conclusion: at the end of the creation week three negative-positive duos have been created, and emphasised, each consisting of one of the original three ‘negative’ entities together with its ‘positive’ counterpart, the three pairs each being marked by a distinct separation.
- ▶ The structure of the passage points to day 7 as being the culmination of the story; the recounting of God’s rest on the 7th day is an aetiology for OT Israel’s Sabbath, which in turn prefigures God’s eternal Rest in the New Creation.
- ▶ The Bible likens the OT Promised Land to Rest.
- ▶ The whole Bible thus takes the Exodus of Israel from Egypt and their entry into the Promised Land as a picture of God’s ultimate salvation of the world through Christ consummated in the New Creation at the return of Christ.
- ▶ The NT, and in particular the letter to the Hebrews, reinterprets the Sabbath Rest as being the final rest for the redeemed in the New Creation. The book of Revelation reflects this.
- ▶ At the end of Revelation the New Creation involves the removal of all three of the original separations between the ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ entities, explicitly stated: no more night, heaven comes down to earth, no more sea(s). All three separations of days 1 to 3 are dissolved; a ‘de-separation’ happens. God and redeemed mankind are no longer apart; the dwelling place of God is with man.
- ▶ Second conclusion: there’s a redemption theme in Genesis 1; a ‘proto-redemption’ theme at least, in the sense that there’s a ‘yearning for redemption’ inherent in the three pairs of separation metaphors.
- ▶ Final conclusion: in Genesis 1, the account of creation is written in such a way as to demonstrate that God made the cosmos with separation metaphors already built in – so that they would serve as visual aids for the separation of God and mankind in the world after the fall, and as strong hints, together with and epitomised by the ‘rest’ theme of day 7, of redemption to come.

Notes

- ▶ At its foundation the thesis of this paper gives prominence to the separations created in days 1-3, and observes that the pairs of entities in each day are not portrayed simply as *complementary* pairs, but as *antithetical* pairs, with 'separation' vocabulary used five times, and with alternative phraseology giving the same 'separation' effect elsewhere. We acknowledge that the negative connotations of 'the deep', 'darkness' and the earth out of touch with heaven are not spelled out as such in this passage; but it is the thesis of this paper that the creation narrative in Genesis 1 anticipates the employment of these negative connotations in biblical theology generally. Thus, on the thesis of this paper, it is the intention of Genesis 1 that the reader understands the passage in the light of the subsequent story of sin and redemption.
- ▶ In particular, the 'rest' motif as a picture of redemption is given full force in the seventh day narrative, albeit in the anticipatory manner mentioned above, and this, we believe, must be read in the light of the Bible's overarching story of God's redemption (and not only as part of the theology of the OT Sabbath). This paper gives due prominence to this rest and redemption motif. Indeed, the 'rest' of day 7 is the final resolution for the separations of days 1-6 in biblical theology, and the thesis of this paper offers due recognition to Genesis 1 as fundamentally anticipating, in the Bible's very first chapter, God's promise of redemption, the first suggestion of which is usually seen as being in Genesis 3:15 (against the argument of this paper that we can find the first intimation of redemption two chapters earlier).
- ▶ v.1-2 are commonly taken to be an introduction to the Genesis 1 narrative. The thesis of this paper concurs, although it's not particularly important. The Young Earth Creationism (YEC) view commonly takes v.1-2 to be part of day 1, despite this breaking the pattern in Genesis 1 whereby each day (or half-day in days 3,6) commences with "and God said ...". But the view of this paper and the view of YEC are not a threat to each other unless a YEC proponent holds (as some do) that a passage cannot have more than one level of meaning.
- ▶ v.1 can be taken to be a title for, or introduction to, or summary of, the entire creation narrative. Alternatively, or additionally, v.1 can be taken to be an initial creative act of God prior to the creative acts of days 1-6 (given that v.2 presumes the existence of 'the earth' and, unless it's only metaphorical, 'the deep'). These matters do not affect the thesis of this paper, so long as it is assumed that everything that exists in the natural world was created by God, and created good, and that every metaphor describes in biblical theology a reality which is part of God's truth which he wishes us to know.
- ▶ The observation of this paper, that at the commencement of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 there is not nothing, but three entities (the earth, darkness, the deep) with (subsequently in biblical theology) negative connotations, does not mean that these entities are, in themselves, bad in any sense. It could be argued that 'darkness' was and is not a created entity, and it could be argued that 'the deep', and likewise 'the waters', have a more metaphorical meaning in v.2 than elsewhere (some biblical references are noted in the paper). But anything that is part of the created order was created by God and created good.
- ▶ We fully acknowledge that the thesis of this paper far from exhausts the content and meaning of the passage. In particular, this chapter is of course most definitely a creation narrative, asserting that the entire natural order is the product of the creative intent and word of God. In no way does this paper seek to minimize or neglect the importance of such a fundamental truth, nor of many others, such as the role of the Spirit of God, the prominence in creation of mankind, made male and female in God's image, and given dominion over the earth, or the meaning of 'breath of life'.
- ▶ The second trio of days does not get prominent attention in this paper, save that we observe that the separations created in days 1-3 are further emphasised by the things created in days 3-6. So this paper does not offer an exhaustive treatment of the passage, far from it. But it does notice a notable feature of the passage which is usually given scant if any treatment.
- ▶ This paper (deliberately) does not enter discussions such as the vegetarian diet allotted to all beasts; or such as the 'double' days 3 and 6 (save that this device certainly ensures there are seven, not nine, days of the creation week!); or such as the meaning of 'kind(s)', or the failure to name the 'lights', or the literary genre of Genesis 1, or the command to be 'fruitful', or of the passage's authorship or provenance; or such as the differences between the two creation narratives. These may all be very interesting, but are not the concern of this paper.

Genesis 1:1 - 2:3 (ESV)

[with 'earth' ('āretz) replaced by 'land', except where 'earth' = the whole planet, as per the NIV's helpful distinction]

Genesis 1:1 *In the beginning, God created the heavens [hashamayim] and the earth [hā'āretz; 'heavens' and 'earth' together = the whole cosmos].*

² *The earth [hā'āretz, = the whole planet] was without form and void [tohū wābohū], and darkness was over the face of the deep [usually = the waters = the seas]. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

1

³ *And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

2

⁶ *And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters."*

⁷ *And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸ And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.*

3a

⁹ *And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land [the word 'land' is not present, it's just 'the dry'] appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land [ditto, = just 'the dry'] **Land** [hā'āretz, = the Land], and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.*

3b

¹¹ *And God said, "Let the **land** sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the **land**." And it was so. ¹² The **land** brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.*

4

¹⁴ *And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth [= the planet]." And it was so. ¹⁶ And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth [= the planet], ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.*

5

²⁰ *And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the **land** across the expanse of the heavens." ²¹ So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.*

²² *And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the **land**." ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.*

6a

²⁴ *And God said, "Let the **land** bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the **land** according to their kinds." And it was so. ²⁵ And God made the beasts of the **land** according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground ['adamah] according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.*

6b

²⁶ *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the **land** and over every creeping thing that creeps on the **land**." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the **land** 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 **land**."*

²⁹ *And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the **land**, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the **land** and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the **land**, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.*

³¹ *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

7

Genesis 2:1 *Thus the heavens and the earth [= the planet; with 'heavens' = the whole cosmos] were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.*

Genesis 1:1 - 2:3 – Creation *for* Redemption

Foreword

Creation and Redemption are both biblical concepts of immense importance. From beginning to end the Bible proclaims God to be Creator and Redeemer. I have no desire to make any challenge to that, of course. I do wonder, though, if perhaps in our modern western world the emphasis on God as Redeemer, and the consequent emphasis on sinful mankind's (that's your and my) need of salvation, has been displaced somewhat by the emphasis on God as Creator, and on one perceived consequence of this, namely the need to be good stewards of the earth. Whilst the latter is certainly a biblical theme ([Genesis 1:26-28](#); I mention it briefly below), I do think that a shift has taken place. Are certain creation issues, such as environmental concerns, now an 'evil', for some Christians, that matches the offence against God of our sin and wickedness? I think it is becoming so. It is not this consideration, but rather a biblical theological outlook (read on), that has driven the Bible exposition in this paper; but nonetheless, the thesis of this paper certainly does run counter to what I see as this modern shift away from 'redemption theology', in emphasis at least, and towards 'creation theology'. This paper suggests that redemption themes are written into the very text of the first creation narrative. I hope at least that it will provide food for thought, and a good feed for hungry souls.

Introduction

In my opinion it is of great regret that Genesis 1 has become such a bloody battlefield upon which every shade of opinion in the 'origins' debate stands its ground and fights tooth and nail for ascendancy. I often feel that we grass-roots Christians have been somewhat deprived of this opening chapter of God's Word for ordinary Bible-feeding purposes; it's increasingly difficult for pastors to teach it without receiving bouquets and brickbats galore, variously from assorted enthusiasts for their respective causes – not delivered by those keen devotees according to the pastors' handling of God's Word generally considered, proclaiming as they should, and hopefully do, the greatness of God and of his Son and of his grace as for any other Bible text – but rather according to their deference to, or opposition to, this or that 'origins' view, as perceived by the deliverer of said posy or projectile. Never mind that the Bible-teachers may have intended no such inferences to be drawn by their hearers; the missile firers so often seem to 'hear' what they want or expect to hear.

This is not to say that I think the 'origins' debate is unimportant – far from it. I have taken part in it myself, and no doubt shall do so again. It's a vital discussion (though not always a well-behaved one), and needs to continue in both the science and Bible-handling fields (and in both at the same time in so far as they interact with each other, or don't, according to one's point of view). I have my own views, of course, upon these deliberations, but they won't be detectable from this paper.

Equally, the Genesis 1 reading presented in this paper will not threaten anyone's cherished 'origins' viewpoint, so long as my readers accept the view that there can be multiple levels of meaning in a text. If, reader, you are a Young Earth Creationist, then the ensuing discussion won't in the least bit challenge what you call a 'literal' reading of the text, unless you think that a biblical narrative can never have any figurative level of meaning at all (in which case you'll disagree with, but I would be interested to know your response to, my analysis of parallel Matthew and Luke texts a little later). If you are an Old Earth Creationist (of the Theistic Evolution stripe, or other), please don't think that the figurative conclusions from Genesis 1 which I reach below necessarily back your case – I'm afraid they neither back it nor counter it, unless you think that a text can only

ever have one level of meaning and only one thing to say (in which case you and I disagree very strongly). If you are not a creationist at all, then probably you aren't able to accept the Christian faith at the moment; if so, then I hope the following reflections will be thought-provoking nonetheless.

I do wish that Genesis 1 could be recovered for us ordinary Christians to feed upon, and be encouraged and edified by, as by the rest of God's Word, without having always to refer to the 'origins' debate; I long to be able to read Genesis 1 without being continually distracted by questions such as "*How long was a day?*", or "*Where did light come from on day 1 before there was a sun?*", or "*What were 'kinds' – ready-made species or gradually evolving?*". We need to hear God speak to us from this chapter, without having to listen to all the clamouring for our vote for or against evolution/creation; or for or against a young/old earth; or for or against this or that literary form – poetry, prose, literal, figurative, historical narrative, or not so. This paper is an honest attempt to do some ordinary Bible-handling in the first chapter of God's Word without it intersecting the 'origins' debate at all; the following reflections neither contribute to the debate, nor are influenced by it at all, and deliberately don't address the questions (such as those above) which are continually on the lips of the warring factions. We shall detach ourselves from all that, and go in a different direction to find a good feed in Genesis 1.

I deliberately retain in the main text of this paper a number of discussions about Bible-handling method. I consider these to be an essential part of my intended message. *How* we approach a Bible text, and the ordinary Bible-handling tools we employ to read the text appropriately, are of fundamental importance not only to appointed Bible-teachers like me, but also to every ordinary Christian like me. I trust it will be clear to the reader at each stage *how* I am approaching the task of reading Genesis 1 in the context of the overarching theme of the whole of scripture, namely God's story of redemption.

A 'Whole-Bible' Approach

My basic approach is going to be to seek to fit the passage into the context of the Bible as a whole (though it won't exhaust the potential for that, and I acknowledge that other 'handling the Bible in context' principles could have been explored equally well), and in doing so I shall ask questions that I honestly don't generally hear being asked in relation to this passage, like, "What does 'separation' mean in the Bible?", and, "What does a 'whole Bible' approach to 'rest' bring to our understanding of Genesis 1?"

The desire to take biblical theology seriously underlies this paper. In particular, we place a high value on the unity of scripture, especially with regard to the central Bible message of redemption in Christ, and we wish especially to commend the principle, coined in the sixteenth century European/British Reformation, of 'Christ in all the Scriptures'; all scripture points to Christ, and in the intention and purpose of the divine author, every part of OT scripture has its place in the overarching story, or 'trajectory', of God's plan to redeem the world in Christ, who is the ultimate goal of it all. Genesis 1 is no exception. Indeed, although Christ himself does not feature explicitly in person in the narrative account in Genesis 1 (we tend to see the plural 'us' and 'our' of 1:26 as a so-called 'majestic plural' rather than as a specific Trinitarian reference – I argue for this later), the NT writers are adamant that Christ was active in, and the ultimate goal of, creation:

John 1:3, 'All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made'

Colossians 1:16, 'For by [or: in] him all things were created, in heaven and on earth ... all things were created through him and for him'

Hebrews 1:2-3, *'... in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high'*

Whilst we fully concur that in terms of its human authors the Bible is a collection of individual works, and that the individual purposes and intentions of these authors must be respected, we nonetheless aver that the divine author ensured by his Spirit's inspiration and guidance that every contribution from his anointed writers fitted perfectly into the grand scheme. And that grand scheme is redemption. Our biblical theological outlook entails our seeing one plan in the Bible, God's plan of redemption, and seeing the entire Bible as being the trajectory leading towards its fulfilment in Christ and the gospel. It may surprise us at first sight to find that even in a creation narrative there are strong hints of redemption, but on reflection it should not surprise us. Throughout the Bible we find that in texts that speak of the wonder of creation, the theme of redemption is close at hand. An example, amongst many, is Psalm 65, a psalm acclaiming both redemption and creation, which we quote from later.

Consider, for another instance, **Colossians 1:15-20** (it is reproduced in full towards the end of this paper, where we shall examine it in more depth). This Pauline summary of the wonder of Christ is divided into two equal halves, the first celebrating Christ in creation, and the second Christ in redemption. The very symmetry of this passage indicates the need to keep creation and redemption tightly together, as if creation is *for* redemption – God purposed creation *because* he purposed redemption; and he purposed both in Christ, the firstborn in creation and the firstborn in redemption. This indeed is the conclusion of this paper in respect to Genesis 1; in designing his creation, God built into it, ready-made, a number of redemption categories which would later (but very quickly – the fall was not far off) serve as visual aids so that fallen mankind would see the horror of sin and the wonder of Christ. These redemption categories are, in Genesis 1, conveyed in three 'separations' or 'distinctions', between light and darkness, between heaven and earth, between land and sea; and it is these separations that this paper explores.

Consider now Psalm 19, also in two halves, the first celebrating God's glory in creation, and the second his glory in redemption (here seen in terms of God's OT covenant, which becomes, in biblical theology, the 'type' of Christ).

Consider thirdly Psalm 24, which clearly has echoes at the beginning of Genesis 1. The text below is from the NIV, because the ESV has obscured the allusion to the creation narrative by translating the last word of v.2, not as 'waters' or 'floods' as other translations, but as 'rivers'. This is admittedly a valid alternative where the context indicates that it's appropriate, but it can't be right here in the light of **Genesis 1:2**, *'... over the face of the deep ... over the face of the waters'*. We shall see later why rivers are often a benign entity in the Bible, and why the seas or the deep or the floods are decidedly not so. 'Rivers' can't be in mind in **Genesis 1:2**, and so aren't in mind in **Psalm 24:2**.

Psalm 24:1 *'The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
2 for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters'* (NIV)

Having commenced on an unequivocal Genesis 1 creation theme, Psalm 24 soon becomes a salvation psalm:

Psalm 24:3 *'Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?*

And who shall stand in his holy place?

⁴ *He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.*

⁵ *He will receive blessing from the Lord
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.*

⁶ *Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob'*

Consider next the beginning of the letter to the Hebrews, quoted above, where the pre-eminence of Christ in creation (and in glory) is again proclaimed, along with his sin-bearing sacrifice – creation and redemption are again held together.

Many other examples could be given, such as, in the fourth commandment, the creation-redemption contrast between **Exodus 20:10-11** and **Deuteronomy 6:14-15**, which we shall consider later; but consider finally the beginning of John's gospel, which is just as striking as Colossians 1. John's dependence on Genesis 1 is unmissable. This also will be considered in detail much later, where it is reproduced. For now, we note that the first few verses of **John 1** concern Christ in creation, *'in the beginning' (v.1,2), '[a]ll things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made' (v.3), reiterated in v.10, 'the world was made through him'. But the passage is equally clearly a salvation text: 'to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God' (v.12-13); "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (v.29).*

An important observation may be made here: if Paul in Colossians 1 and John in John 1 are clearly alluding to Genesis 1 (and they surely are), and if in using Genesis 1 they clearly incorporate both salvation and creation themes into their text, then it's not unreasonable to suppose that they actually see a salvation theme in Genesis 1. At least we can suppose they see what we might call a proto-salvation theme there. That is, certain aspects of the creation narrative, such as 'life' and 'light' may in Genesis 1 be creation terms, but in John 1 they serve as both creation and redemption terms, fulfilled in Christ; John is quick to see their potential. In the case of Colossians 1 the apostle Paul does the same with terms such as 'image' and 'beginning'. All this will be explored in this paper, and the John 1 and Colossians 1 passages will be examined in some detail later. All in all, John and Paul and the NT generally see Christ as being the fulfilment of *all* the OT, most certainly including Genesis 1, where in particular Christ fulfils the 'light', 'life', 'image', 'beginning', 'word', and other key concepts.

If John and Paul see yearnings for salvation inherent in the terms 'light' and 'life', etc., in Genesis 1, are we to suppose that the author of Genesis 1 deliberately put them there as such? It's the tentative yet enthusiastic view of this paper that, Yes, the author was well aware of what he was doing in emphasising the separations created in the creation week. After all, he must have been writing after the fall, perhaps long after [we won't here enter the vexed debate as to dating and authorship of the Pentateuch, save to insist that the whole carries the full authority of Moses himself as God's greatest prophet until John]. Thus the category of darkness as a graphic symbol of evil, with the yearning for light to dispel the darkness, would already have been common currency amongst the godly, amongst whom was our author. And likewise also the other two separations of the creation week that we are shortly going to discover in the following analysis.

But we are now jumping ahead of ourselves, because it's in the pages ahead that we turn our attention to Genesis 1 and to the surprises we find there – three separations that each beg a salvation referent.

A 'Look for the Surprise' Approach

Let me start my analysis of Genesis 1 by observing a surprise in the text. In **v.2**, before the creation week commences, there is already 'stuff'. There isn't nothing. There is something, even before God first says in **Genesis 1:3**, "*Let there be ...*". The text indicates there are three entities already in existence:

- Darkness
- The Earth, 'without form and void'
- The Deep – we take this to be the same as the Waters (and later, the Sea), as is usual

This 'surprise' is often observed and remarked upon, but I have never seen it dealt with satisfactorily. That there is substance to the universe before the creation account begins in **v.3** is an unexplained anomaly (except for 'Gap Theory'/'Multiple Creation' advocates), especially given that the creative acts of God are all introduced with the formula "*God said, let ...*" on days 1-6. Even if darkness can't really be termed 'stuff', the other two entities certainly can. All three entities become very significant in the Bible ahead, as I shall show in this paper.

A second surprise is that all three of these initial entities have in some sense a negative connotation – it's only during creation week, days 1-6, in **v.3ff**, that positive counterparts are brought into being. Even in **v.2** itself negative connotations brood over the phraseology used there. The 'negativity' of darkness – a figure for evil and ignorance of God – will be self-explanatory to any Bible-steeped Christian, as will be noted below. The negativity of the Deep (or the Waters, or the Seas, or the flood) is also reasonably obvious, as long as one understands the fear in which the 'raging seas', the 'restless deep', were held by the ancients; this will be explored below. As for why the earth, '*without form and void*' (**v.2**), might be held to have negative connotations, I ask the reader to keep reading – we'll get there.

A Few Assumptions

In this paper I shall make the assumption, not very controversial, that the phrase '*the heavens and the earth*' (**1:1, 2:1**) is simply a label for the whole cosmos (universe), reflected elsewhere in the Bible, e.g. **2 Kings 19:15**, '*you have made heaven* [it's plural in the Hebrew text] *and earth*'; and likewise, that in Revelation the phrase '*a new heaven and a new earth*' (**21:1**) is simply a label for the New Creation similarly. We do need to note, therefore, that it should *not* be concluded that in the New Creation heaven and earth are distinct entities – Revelation insists that the reuniting of heaven and earth means they are not two, but one entity; the phrase 'new heaven and new earth' simply means 'new creation'. Exactly what the New Creation will be like once it is in place, and we are there, remains a mystery until then; save only to note that the Bible seems to suggest it will be a physical existence in some sense, and God and man will be reunited 'visibly' as well as 'spiritually'. However, note that this paper will make a lot of the distinction between heaven and earth in the Bible as it relates to our fallen world now prior to the New Creation.

Secondly, for the record, I make the common assumption that **1:1** is an introductory summary statement, or a heading, for the whole creation account of Genesis 1, saying essentially: "What follows is an account of creation – by God, and (by implication) out of nothing". On this view the events of days 1-6 are not subsequent to a creation described in **v.1**, but are what **v.1** is speaking

of (but 'Gap Theory' advocates will disagree). Young Earthers also tend to disagree, typically taking v.1-2 to belong to day 1; one way or the other, it's immaterial – it doesn't affect my principal thesis.

Thirdly, I make the assumption that the Hebrew word *'āretz*, which means either 'earth' or 'land', serves *either* to denominate the earth as a whole planetary entity (though the ancients wouldn't have used the term 'planet' of the earth – it wasn't one of their seven), as distinguished from 'the heavens' or 'heaven'; *or* to denominate the land mankind inhabits, as distinguished from the 'sea'. In the annotated ESV text of Genesis 1 above I have interpolated a fairly safe opinion as to which usage is which – the planet or non-sea land – and this is justified in the pages ahead (NIV agrees; it renders the word as 'earth' where we think it means the whole planet, and as 'land' otherwise). To put it another way, the term 'the Earth' serves *either* as the planetary counterpart to 'Heaven' (on day 2), *or* as the counterpart to 'the Seas' (on day 3). We note also that the land, *hā'āretz*, in the sense of mankind's habitat, later takes on a very particular focus as the Promised Land of the Israelites, which in turn in the Bible is the 'prototype' of the 'city', or 'New Jerusalem', of Revelation, which is the final habitat of God's redeemed people; but here in Genesis 1 it is 'earth/land' as opposed to the seas. Read on.

Fourthly, I'm taking it for granted that a Bible passage can have more than one main point. Indeed; one can pursue a theme, even a principal theme, in a passage to the max and still not exhaust all that the passage has to say, though I think it's worth mentioning that the various different themes will usually be intricately tied up with one another in any text – rarely, perhaps never, will a passage have two completely different, disconnected things to say. We recall the old saying about John's gospel – that it's shallow enough at the edges for toddlers to paddle in, but deep enough further out for grown-ups to swim and dive in. Yes, there are often multiple levels of meaning in a text, and Genesis 1 is no exception. There will always be some meaning in a text which is immediately obvious to even the least experienced Bible reader – otherwise it would imply the Bible, or much of it, is only for 'experts'; perish the thought. We believe wholeheartedly that the Bible is for every person and accessible to every person – there is no mystique to Bible reading that is the 'secret' preserve only of an 'initiated few'; perish that thought even more. But that doesn't mean there aren't sometimes further, deeper levels of meaning which a well-seasoned Bible reader (the swimmers and divers above) may observe and benefit from, noticed usually on account of a more thorough knowledge of 'the Bible as a whole' – and that is the basis of the observations and reflections of this paper, which as stated above will take a 'Whole Bible' approach.

Before we're done you'll see I'll have tied up the two great themes of creation and rest with one another very tightly indeed. But there'll be many other details of the text, such as the vegetables of day 3 and the animals of day 6, that will remain unexplored in this study; I am satisfied that a decent treatment of all such wouldn't materially affect the conclusions of this study, but there are limits to the capacity of this paper to accommodate such worthy material, and we'll omit it.

Fifthly, I make the assumption that a narrative passage (which many Christians think Genesis 1 is), or a passage with at least some appearance of narrative (which surely no Christian can deny is true of Genesis 1), can also have figurative levels of meaning, where certain details are meant to convey something metaphorically. If we can't accept this then we will have major problems with, e.g., the synoptic gospels: did Jesus heal two demoniacs (Matthew) or one (Luke)? Did Jesus heal two blind men on the Jericho road (Matthew) or one (Luke)? Did one angel appear at the resurrection (Matthew) or two (Luke)? This infrequently observed difference in detail is a conundrum; presumably Matthew and Luke had some reason for reversing one another's numbers. They can't both be 'literally' true (in the sense of 'literal', i.e. 'not figurative', that most

people seem to use nowadays). Thus one of them at least is doing something figurative with the detail; it doesn't make the detail untrue at all – it simply means we have to read the text 'in context', i.e. in line with the literature type that the author intended. But these passages in Matthew and Luke are narrative history recounting the real-life events of the real life of Christ, and as Christians we believe them to be utterly 'true'. That's just one example to illustrate a general principle: even in narrative, or in what looks like narrative in at least some respects, there can be figurative aspects deliberately written as such into the text. If some readers can't accept this, then proceed with caution – the remainder of the paper may drive you up the wall! In short, I'm going to be finding figurative levels to the meaning of Genesis 1!

Sixthly, I assume, or at least I hope, that the interpretation of Genesis 1 offered in this paper is not in itself controversial (at least in terms of its rehearsal of the gospel of salvation), and doesn't intersect, or at least it doesn't counter, any of the cherished viewpoints in the origins debate. As noted above, these various interpretations are often held very dearly by their proponents. But I trust that any Bible-loving, Christ-honouring, gospel-hearted Christian will have no problem whatsoever with the notions, for example, of 'darkness' and 'separation' depicting the horror and catastrophe of mankind's sin, or with 'light' and 'rest' representing the wonder of Christ and his salvation. I grant the possibility that some may wonder if what I see in Genesis 1 is really there to be seen, but I do hope that my angle on this opening passage of scripture will not offend or threaten.

Rest

The chief of all the main points of Genesis 1, over and above it being a creation account, with God himself the chief player as always, creating all that exists, is, I suggest, 'rest'; God's 'rest'. The structure of the whole passage points to these final verses being definitively important, and carrying at least *a*, and I would say *the*, principal point of the passage:

Genesis 2:1-3, 'Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation'

Yes, of course it's a creation text – it would be stupid and quite pointless to try to downplay it or obscure it. We could go straight to that theme very profitably, noting the great themes of it being God's creation, the power of God's word, the goodness of God's creation, mankind as the epitome of God's creation, etc. But even if we were to do so, it wouldn't exhaust the passage, because there are other points to be gleaned. We shall pursue the theme of 'rest' by preference here, and in doing so it will be the thesis of this paper that 'rest' is certainly to be understood as one aspect of an underlying redemption motif, and we shall discover that there are other very significant hints of redemption in Genesis 1.

Whatever else it is, then, apart from being obviously a creation text, and indeed we shall return to that in due course, our passage, *Genesis 1:1-2:3*, is certainly a substantiation and validation of the notion of 'rest'. In its original form, as part of God's Word for God's OT people, the Hebrews, it's undoubtedly a passage that enjoined respect within God's nation for the weekly Sabbath which they were to observe in the OT era. Compare, for example:

Exodus 20:8-11, 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work ... For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all

*that is in them, and **rested** the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy'*

That this text, and **Genesis 2:1-3**, are utterly dependent on one another is abundantly obvious, not least in the reference to God making the seventh day 'holy' in each text. Now, Genesis 1 is part of God's Word (and, incidentally, at the beginning, so it must have some definitive role), so God expects us to ask as similarly with any text, not only, "What was the immediate application of the text?" (which here is for God's OT people, national Israel), but also, and just as importantly, "How does it fit in to the entire Bible theme of Sabbath rest? Where is it, and what part does it play, on the great trajectory of God's redemption plan?" (Theologians call this 'doing biblical theology'). Consequently, and even more importantly, we must ask, "How does this apply to me as a Christian today?"

Before we leave the theme of rest, here in Genesis 1, let me observe that not many chapters pass in Genesis before we meet 'rest' again. Noah, the prototype of all those saved by grace, is the man of rest – his name is related to a Hebrew word for rest, and he is destined to be the one who (for a time) brings rest to a wicked and cursed world:

***Genesis 5:28-29**, 'When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son and called his name **Noah**, saying, "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us **relief** from our work and from the painful toil of our hands"'*

The word translated 'relief' here is the 'Noah' word meaning 'rest', and is the word used in the Exodus version of the fourth commandment above. Interestingly, it's the same word used twice for 'comfort' in **Isaiah 40:1; 52:9; 61:2** – and we shall make a great deal of this later. That **Genesis 2:1** uses the alternative 'sabbath' word for rest does not trouble us. The Bible writers have both words at their disposal, and each has its own nuance: 'sabbath' is related to 'seventh', with its nuance of 'completion-perfection' (very prominent in Genesis 1!) – the 'finishing' and 'resting' vocabulary of Genesis 1 conveys the idea of *completing* a task having done *everything*, not just of ceasing toil after a period of hard work (Almighty God does not need to rest for this reason!); the 'Noah' word in turn has its nuance of 'comfort' or 'relief', as will be shown prominently below. The Noah narrative, with its un-cursing, or comforting, (**Genesis 5:29**, '*... shall bring us relief*', quoted above) of a God-cursed earth, portrays a prototype of the very redemption that was intimated in **Genesis 3:15**, in that very passage there where God curses the world he has made.

***Genesis 3:14-15**, 'The Lord God said to the serpent, "... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel"'*

Bible Handling

Doing 'biblical theology' means 'reading one bit of the Bible in the context of the whole Bible'; and 'seeing how a theme mentioned in one place fits into the overall flow and development of that theme through the Bible from start to finish'; and therefore 'showing how the portion of scripture in question fits into the overall plan and purpose (and timeline) of redemption'. It's the only way to read the Bible appropriately, and we should do so constantly. Forgive the theologians for their long words; one meets many, but they all have simple meanings, and it's important to know that there is no arcane secret to understanding the Bible. For example, theologians use the terms 'hermeneutics' (meaning 'interpretation') and 'exegesis' (meaning 'getting out what went in') where we shall usually say, simply, 'reading the Bible in context'. That's the only Bible reading/Bible handling method there is – it's what we should be doing all the time; just reading the Bible in context – in its literary context, its cultural context, its linguistic/idiomatic context, its historical

context, its context as part of the wider whole around the passage we're studying (words in sentences, sentences in paragraphs, paragraphs in whole books, etc.), and every other context that's relevant; and above all, reading the Bible in the context of the story-line of the whole Bible – that's biblical theology.

All very simple in principle. And the story-line of the Bible, let's remember, is simply and only God's history (His Story) of his redemption brought to a fallen humanity in Christ his Son. So 'biblical theology' and 'biblical hermeneutics' and 'exegesis' are, all of them, simply and only ordinary, straightforward Bible-handling – reading the Bible in context. Everyone can do it! And the more Bible-saturated we are, and the maturer and wiser we are as a Christian, the better we shall do it.

What's to be avoided at all costs is our coming to the Bible with preconceived ideas that simply underscore our own prejudices. We are all prone to this, without exception. It's very easy to make the Bible say what we want it to say, particularly if we entertain pet theories or quirky views that we treasure – but this is pride. The humble approach to scripture is to seek to read *from* the Bible what the author (I should say authors, plural – both the human and the divine) wrote into the text, not to read *into* the text our own assumptions about what it ought, in our opinion, to mean. Worthy Bible-commentators sometimes call this dishonourable habit *eisegesis* (= 'inserting', the opposite of *exegesis*, = 'extracting').

Eternal Rest

So what's the theme of Sabbath rest in the Bible (the Hebrew words for 'Sabbath' and 'rest' are closely related) as we track it from beginning to end? Well, we could of course have a long discussion about the OT Sabbath, and the contentious issue of whether Christians in the gospel era should observe it; we're not going to, because this is not germane to the thesis of this paper. Rather, our aim is to see what the ultimate fulfilment is of these matters. Whatever we think about Sundays and taking a day off each week (and amongst us we'll differ markedly on this), what is utterly certain is that the Sabbath has an ultimate fulfilment: 'Sabbath rest' is one way the Bible denotes what the entire story of redemption is heading towards, and reaches in the final book of Revelation, where, prophetically (it hasn't happened yet), God brings on his New Creation and banishes the fallen-ness and the curse of the old for ever; see for example:

Revelation 14:13, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord ... that they may rest from their labours ... !'

The 'labours' here are what has just been referred to as '*the endurance of the saints*' (14:12) as they, the '*redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb*' who '*are blameless*' (14:4,5) have stood for Christ in the face of persecution by a world hostile to God, in contrast to the '*worshippers of the beast*' who '*for ever and ever ... have no rest*' (14:11). Revelation speaks often of the saints' 'labours', which, when they are the works of the faithful saints, are described in these terms:

Revelation 2:19, 'I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance'

Revelation 3:8, 'I know your works ... you have kept my word and have not denied my name'

It's important to note, therefore, that these are not 'salvation-earning' deeds (as in the unbiblical notion of salvation-by-works), but rather the 'salvation-ensuing' deeds of the redeemed (the

faithful lifelong standing-for-Christ which characterises the faithful saints). For the letter to the Hebrews on this same theme, see shortly.

Let's remember, we're seeking to fit Genesis 1, culminating as it does in a clear emphasis on 'rest', into the overall theme of 'rest' in the whole Bible. The theme commences in Genesis 1, and comes to final fulfilment in Revelation, where, proleptically (it's still future, though securely prophesied), everything that stands against Christ in the fallen world is banished for eternity, and thus wears down God's redeemed no longer – they have their promised rest. We recall that Christ himself reiterated the promise in terms which *must* be understood redemptively, especially in light of the following passage about '*the Son of Man*' being '*lord of the Sabbath*' (Matthew 12:8):

Matthew 11:28, 'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls'

We can be sure that this theme of the 'rest' that awaits God's redeemed people really is a fulfilment of God's 'Sabbath' rest of Genesis 1 and of the ten commandments. For instance, the final rest for God's saints, prophesied in Revelation, is called in Hebrews 4:9, '*a Sabbath rest for the people of God*'. Here too in Hebrews 'rest' is the culmination of God's redemptive purposes. The OT Hebrew Sabbath is of course, not an end in itself, but is an anticipation of, and points towards, a far greater fulfilment in God's final 'Sabbath rest' for his redeemed people in the New Creation. We say that the OT Hebrew Sabbath is an example of a 'type' (or, we might say, 'prototype', or prefiguring), by which we mean that it's a temporary and partial fulfilment of an OT promise, a sort of 'down payment' on the ultimate promise (of which more below), given as an encouragement to believe that the real promise was on its way and would be fulfilled one day – the 'type' lasts for a time on earth, but only until there is the greater fulfilment. So, by way of another example, King David in the OT is a 'type' or 'prototype' of Jesus Christ in that he is, for the time being, the anointed king; and the Exodus from Egypt is a 'type' of the salvation we have in Christ. Likewise the temple is a type of Christ (and also a type of the Christian Church); Melchizedek is a type of Christ; the Israelites' security in the Promised Land is a type of the security we have in Christ; and so on.

So the NT sees 'rest' as fulfilled in the final consummation of all things, of God's long plan of redemption; but it's also how the OT saw 'rest'. Certainly the NT thinks the OT saw it that way. Back in Hebrews we read:

Hebrews 4:3-7, 'For we who have believed enter that rest ... For he has somewhere [Genesis 2:2 – our very passage] spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." And again in this passage [it's Psalm 95:11 this time – the author of Hebrews has quoted the psalm a few times already] he said, "They shall not enter my rest." Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David [Psalm 95:7,8] so long afterwards ... "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts"'

Now, the 'good news' referred to there is the good news of God's redemption of his people from slavery in Egypt, and in the immediate context back then the 'rest' promised to them if they would only obey their redeemer was the 'rest' of entering the Promised Land – see what actually happened when they didn't obey:

Deuteronomy 1:34-35, *'And the LORD heard your words and was angered, and he swore, "Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers"'*

But this rest itself was then, in the mind of God, and thenceforth in the Bible, an emblem of, or (proto)type of, the final rest that Revelation and Hebrews are speaking of, and which God is promising to give to his people redeemed through the gospel of Christ. David, for example, in Psalm 95, warns God's people not to disobey as did the people in the desert after the exodus, and Hebrews warns us still, in exactly the same terms. Hebrews 4 continues:

Hebrews 4:8-10, *'For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his', for 'his works were finished from the foundation of the world' (4:3)*

It's impressive how it all fits together! Of course! Did the Bible ever do otherwise?! There are of course many other respects in which the promises to Israel weren't, or weren't fully, fulfilled within the OT timeline, but were only fully and finally fulfilled in Christ. For example, the return from exile is only fully fulfilled in Christ. The new and magnificent temple of Haggai is only fully fulfilled in Christ. The promise of a new Davidic king is, after the exile, only fulfilled in Christ. And so on.

We've far from exhausted the good things this 'rest' approach has to offer. Notice this (and it's seminally important for our take on Genesis 1): *'rested from his works' (Hebrews 4:10)* here refers, in context, to Christians for whom the *'good news came to us just as to them (the OT unbelievers)' (4:2)* and *'who have believed' (4:3)*, having lived as sinners (but redeemed sinners, i.e. saints!) during their lifetime on earth; in the new creation they *'enter that rest' (4:3)* – rest from their 'works' of living and standing and witnessing for Christ, and fighting temptation, and suffering persecution, in a hostile, godless world; if there isn't within them *'an evil, unbelieving heart' (3:12)*, if they don't *'fall away from the living God' (3:12)*, if their heart isn't *'hardened by the deceitfulness of sin' (3:13)*, if they hold their *'confidence firm to the end' (3:14)*, then they *'enter that rest'*. So the 'works' of faithful Christians are *redemption* works – they're the works ensuing from being God's redeemed people, consequent upon their redemption (for Revelation on the works of the saints, see earlier). But God's works, from which he is said in Genesis 1 to have rested on day 7, were *creation* works. Now there's food for thought. God's 'creation rest' parallels his people's 'redemption rest'. We'll come to that later. Revelation also speaks of the New Creation as 'rest' for the faithful saints after their life of 'deeds', just like Hebrews, and we shall note this later too.

Redemption, Comfort and Consolation

I shall be suggesting, then, that Genesis 1 is in some way a *Redemption* text, a *Salvation* text, as well as a *Creation* text, and in a very real sense. Ultimately I'll suggest we have in Genesis 1 a 'Creation for Redemption' text. But for now, note that Psalm 95, quoted-from just above, starts as a redemption song, continues as a creation song (the redeemer God is the creator God), then moves to the 'rest for the faithful' theme, inviting God's people to:

Psalm 95:6-7, *'worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today if you hear his voice ...'*

Now that is a veritable mixture of *creation* language and *redemption* language (in the Bible, God leading his people in his pasture is God leading his redeemed people). It's also, of course, *worship* language, and we can't help noting that eternal *worship* is the context of the eternal Sabbath rest as depicted in Revelation!

There is a further reason to link redemption and rest, accruing from the 'comfort' motif of [Isaiah 40:1](#) (and see [61:1-2](#) and [35:1-10](#)), introducing the thoroughgoing redemption/gospel-of-salvation/delivery-from-oppression motif of the Isaiah 40ff 'servant' section (and elsewhere in Isaiah), reflected in the 'consolation' motif in the Simeon and Anna narratives of Luke 2:

[Isaiah 40:1](#), '**Comfort, comfort** my people, says your God'

[Isaiah 52:7,9-10](#), '*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings **good news**, who publishes peace, who brings **good news** of happiness, who publishes **salvation** ... Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has **comforted** his people; he has **redeemed** Jerusalem ... and all the ends of the earth shall see the **salvation** of our God'*

[Isaiah 35:4-6](#), "'... Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and **save** you.'" Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy'

[Isaiah 42:1,7](#), '*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; ... to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness'*

[Isaiah 61:1,2](#), '*The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to **comfort** all who mourn'*

These last two passages are of course quoted by Jesus in the [Luke 4:14-21](#) Nazareth narrative, where Jesus in the synagogue reads these verses from the Isaiah scroll, and claims to be the fulfilment of all the Isaiah promises ([Luke 4:21](#), '*he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"*'), and thus proves to be the very redeemer-consoler welcomed in the temple by Anna and Simeon:

[Luke 2:25-38](#), '*Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the **consolation** of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ... he took him [Jesus] up in his arms and blessed God and said, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your **salvation** that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" ...*

*And there was a prophetess, Anna ... at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him [Jesus] to all who were waiting for the **redemption** of Jerusalem'*

There are many connections and dependencies between Isaiah and Luke – too many to recount here. It is surely self-evident that throughout scripture, 'rest' and 'relief' and 'refreshment' and 'comfort' and 'consolation' are all figures for God's redemption, God's salvation in Christ. Indeed, the 'Noah' word for 'rest' that we met earlier is the same word translated 'comfort' in the Isaiah passages quoted here. An exhaustive analysis of these themes throughout scripture could usefully detain us for many worthwhile pages. We suggest, then, that to find the first such reference (to 'rest') in the very first narrative of the Bible is of utmost significance.

Back now to Genesis 1. Apart from in the notion of *rest*, is there a *redemption* motif elsewhere in Genesis 1? All over it, I believe, as long as we look at it through our ‘whole Bible’ lens; that is, as long as we keep asking, “How does this and that and the other in Genesis 1 fit into the way the whole Bible tackles it?”. For now, and this will occupy the succeeding paragraphs, we note there’s a clear intimation of the *need* for redemption, not least in the idea of *separation*; let’s now give ‘separation’ the ‘whole Bible’ treatment, having done so for ‘rest’.

Separation

The verb ‘separate’ is present a few times in Genesis 1, but the *concept* of separation is present throughout. I shall seek to show that the *theme* of separation is in fact highly significant; not, of course, simply because the word is present, which is neither here nor there, but because of the following observation – namely, that on each of the first three days of the creation account a very distinctive separation is brought about between two entities by the command of God, so that the opposites within each separated pair really are complete opposites. On day 1 there’s a separation between darkness and light (2 Corinthians 6:14, ‘*what fellowship has light with darkness?*’), and thus between night and day. On day 2, there’s a separation between the ‘waters’ below and the ‘waters’ above, and thus between the earth below and heaven above (Psalm 103:11a, ‘*For as high as the heavens are above the earth ...*’). On day 3 sea and land separate, each a distinct domain (Proverbs 8:29, ‘*... he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out ... the earth*’). We shall show that this is far more significant than may at first appear.

The mention of *separation* should certainly spark off in a Bible-steeped Christian mind an awareness of how sin *separates*, as in the likes of:

Isaiah 59:1-2, ‘*Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a **separation** between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear*’
Ephesians 2:12, ‘*remember that you were at that time **separated** from Christ*’

Or Bible verses that don’t use the word, but certainly have the idea, such as:

Romans 3:23, ‘*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*’

Now the reader may well ask, “Separation? Surely sin hasn’t entered the world already in Genesis 1, has it?” “No” to the latter, certainly; not in the *storyline* of Genesis 1, at least; in the narrative flow sin enters the world in Genesis 3. But remember sin *has* come by the time Genesis 1 was *written* – its human writer, and assuredly the divine author, will be all too familiar with the ravages of sin in the world, and assuming (safely) the former is a godly man, his heart will be yearning for God’s promised redemption (promised by an obvious initial hint in 3:15). The unfathomable gulf between God and man created by human sin is an indelible ‘given’ in the Bible – everywhere it’s assumed; it’s a calamity of epic proportions which is the starting point of God’s salvation plan. It’s unbridgeable by human will or effort, but bridgeable by God’s love in Christ: ‘*... so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him*’ (Psalm 103:11b).

But now we might ask, “Help! We’re suddenly in the gloomy world of sin! Where’s the *rest* and *refreshment* that we thought is there in Genesis 1?!” Well, for a start it’s definitely in Isaiah 59:1, and in the other Isaiah references quoted above. Is there not an assurance there of the power of God to *save*? And is not this the theme of the entire Bible? I’m not suggesting in this paper that the theme of salvation is explicitly and heavily written into Genesis 1, but rather that the Bible-

soaked Christian will see indications there (and there'll be more – read on), especially in the terminology used, of a *yearning* for the salvation from sin that is the entire Bible theme.

A number of people inhabiting the Christian world are downplaying sin these days – its seriousness, its extent, the wrecking of humanity that it has caused, the depth to which it's taken root in our hearts, even sometimes the very reality of it; and above all the utter offence of sin against a holy God. And by doing so, they think they're improving the Christian gospel. Not so. If we downgrade sin then we downgrade the gospel – if sin isn't serious, then forgiveness isn't terrific. Grace and mercy are neither here nor there if sin is just 'failure to achieve human potential' or just a series of minor peccadilloes that aren't so very awful; sin treated as 'naughty but nice'. The absolute magnificence of our redemption in Christ, the awesomeness of forgiveness and salvation, the stunning wonder of the New Creation for which we hope, and of the 'rest' to which we are heading, all these things hang upon the *reality* of sin, and on the truth of God's own verdict on it (*'the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked'* (Jeremiah 17:9, KJV), and Romans 6:23, *'the wages of sin is death'*). If we want to magnify the gospel of Christ, then the Bible bids us acknowledge the reality of sin and the *separation* it causes between us and our God. The gospel of salvation from sin is indeed *refreshment*, simply because sin is indeed unutterably awful – and God's love and grace and mercy correspondingly 'awe-full'. The vast gulf between us and our God is great; but not so great as to be unbridgeable by the vaster mercy of God in Christ.

Psalm 103:11, 'For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him'

Days 1 and 4 – First Separation

Let's have a look, then, at the *separation* theme in Genesis 1, to check we can be sure that separation there is playing to the same redemption tune. First, a small point, but worth noting in passing: the word 'separation' (the Hebrew word, that is) is the same in both Isaiah 59:2 and Genesis 1; then secondly we notice in Genesis 1 that there's a separation theme in each of the accounts of days 1, 2 and 3, and then each one is re-emphasised on days 4, 5 and 6 respectively; the word itself is there on days 1 and 2 (and 4), but it's the *theme* that matters. Before I proceed, I should perhaps point out that the observation that the first six days of Genesis 1 form a neat pattern of two triplets is very old – made originally, it seems, by the renowned Augustine of Hippo; he took this observation and did some obscure Platonic philosophy with it, and that's not to be our domain! In the 19th century a one Arie Noordzij rediscovered the idea, and he did some liberal theology with it – and we won't go there either. In the 20th century a one Meredith Kline and a later devotee Mark Futato and others have championed the idea again, and the resultant 'Framework Hypothesis' is much favoured by some Theistic Evolutionists and others today. We won't discuss this. May I emphasise that the thesis of this paper does not intersect the Framework Hypothesis, and goes in a very different direction. What this paper does do is to start with Augustine's observation of a millennium and a half ago about the two triplets of days, but then we immediately depart elsewhere.

On day 1 a notable separation is brought about between light and darkness. Darkness is already *'over the face of the deep'* (v.2), and as a counterpart to it God creates and names light, as always by the power of his spoken word (see much later for a comment on God calling these and the other entities by their names):

Genesis 1:3-5, 'And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night'

On day 4 the moon and sun are created to distinguish the one from the other – to demarcate night and day. In this paper we shan't be analysing days 4-6 more than just briefly (nor the vegetation appearing at the end of day 3). That text is certainly worthy of the same careful attention, but it's for another day. What we shall do with this second triplet of days, though, is to note that in some very real sense the respective separations created on days 1-3 are underscored, emphasised, demarcated by what is created then to occupy their respective domains. One can tell which side of the separation is which according to whether one finds the moon or the sun, the fish or the birds or the animals there. Thus, on day 4:

*Genesis 1:14-18, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night ... " And it was so. And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night ... to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, **and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good'***

We note that the word 'rule' there in v.16,18 isn't kingly rule like 'have dominion' is (v.26), said to 'man in our image, after our likeness' on day 6 (it's a different Hebrew word for one thing – the word 'dominion' does convey the idea of kingly rule on day 6). The word 'rule' does appear in the text on day 4 (though on no other day); but we don't make too much of it; rather, 'rule' is just another way of saying 'demarcate' – the clue is the 2nd 'and' in v.18 (emphasised above), which can be read as 'indeed', or as 'yes, let's say that again'; it's very frequently (but by no means always) the case that the word 'and' in Hebrew connects two things which are exactly the same thing said twice for emphasis, and I believe this to be the case here, so that the text thus reads in this sense: '*... to rule over the day and over the night, **yes indeed, to separate the light from the darkness'***'. The reason this is worth emphasising is this: the main point is that light and darkness are *different* from each other to the extent that they are complete opposites. We have an idiomatic expression, 'X is as different from Y as night is from day'. That's the point: there's a significant separation between night and day. We sometimes use the idea of 'rule' to denote 'what determines this as opposed to that' ourselves, as in statements like "whether I carry an umbrella or not is ruled (governed) by the weather forecast". So if there's a moon, it's night! If it's sunny, it's day! Night and Day, Darkness and Light are *different* or *separate*:

Job 26:10, 'He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters at the boundary between light and darkness'

Days 2 and 5 – Second Separation

On day 2 a second separation is created, between 'below' or '*under*', and '*above*' (v.7) – between earth down here and 'heaven' up there in/above the skies.

Genesis 1:6-8, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven'

Then on day 5 'above' is marked out by the birds multiplying and flying 'up there', and 'below' is marked out by the sea creatures multiplying 'down here':

Genesis 1:20-21, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according

to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good'

Note that the word for sky or heaven in Hebrew, *shāmayim*, is a sort of plural word (Hebrew scholars term it a 'dual' form), and it's always the same plural word. So in the translation I'm looking at, in v.8 'Heaven' gets a capital H and is singular, but everywhere else its 'heavens' – that's just a translation quirk; the Hebrew word is always *shāmayim*. This Hebrew plural word, sometimes called a 'majestic plural' on account of the enormousness, magnificence or exaltedness of the thing (the sky is rather big!), reflects in our English usage, where sky and skies, and heaven and heavens, are synonymous; any one is correct as a translation of the Hebrew word – they mean exactly the same, as for instance when we say, "Look at the red sky tonight", or, "Look at the red skies tonight"; when we say after a storm, "The skies opened", or, "The heavens opened". The majestic plural is used elsewhere in Hebrew – for example, one of the usual words for God, singular – there's only one God! – is actually a plural word, *'elohīm*; God is big! God is majestic! Likewise, in our [Genesis 1:26](#), '*God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ..."*', the plural may well be simply a majestic plural, though one or two commentators doubt it. A number think it's an early subtle reference to the Trinity, but I rather doubt this myself, and on balance I tend to accept it as a 'majestic plural' (rather like the British idiom, the 'royal we').

Certainly 'heaven(s)' is a majestic Hebrew plural. But then note that there's possibly just a smidgeon of confusion (in our minds, of course; not in the Bible!) between two ways in which the word 'heavens' is used. *On the one hand* the word 'heaven(s)' is used to describe the actual 'dividing interface' or 'divide' ('*expanse*' in the text, rendered in other translations as 'firmament', 'canopy', 'dome' or 'space') between 'below' and 'above', such as in our text (with emphasis added):

*Genesis 1:6-8, 'God said, "Let there be **an expanse in the midst of the waters**, and let it **separate** the waters from the waters." And God made the expanse and **separated** the waters that were **under the expanse** from the waters that were **above the expanse**. And it was so. And **God called the expanse Heaven** [same plural word, *shāmayim*, as skies/heavens – see below]'*

Here the divide or, as the Bible calls it, the 'expanse' or 'canopy' or 'firmament' (depending on translation) is called 'Heaven'. But *on the other hand* it seems sometimes *everything* 'up there' is in mind when the word 'heavens' occurs, not only the canopy itself, but also those '*waters that were above the expanse*' (v.7), such as in [1:1](#), '*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*' and [2:1](#), '*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.*' A pedant might bother about this distinction – is 'heaven' just the canopy/expanse only? or is it the expanse *and* everything above it? We won't let this trouble us; the point is that as we here on earth look up, what we see is everything 'up there' – and up there is heaven (as the ancients used the term), and indeed it's up there and not down here; *we're* 'down here' – and down here it's earth and not heaven; what's important in the biblical narrative is that there's a *separation*, between up there and down here, between heaven and earth, and the device the Bible uses to emphasise it is the notion of the 'canopy' or 'expanse' or 'firmament'. This is important in Genesis 1, as indeed everywhere, because 'heaven up there' is going to be throughout the Bible a figurative symbol of the dwelling place of God, and the vast gulf between 'heaven' and 'earth' (see [Psalm 103:11](#), '*as high as the heavens are above the earth*') is going to be a figurative symbol of the separation of sin. The separation is then underscored on day 5 by the obvious fact that the birds are not fish and the fish are not birds – each belongs in their own half of the division. The separation is important.

Of course, it's from here that we get the idea of heaven being 'up there', as we now tend to use the term 'heaven' as the final destination of the saints – where Christians 'go' when they die. We all know that the arena in which God has his existence isn't physically 'up there', or indeed anywhere; it isn't even a place in any conventional earthly sense, and there's plenty in the Bible to demonstrate that – God isn't part of his own creation; he doesn't dwell up in the sky or among the stars. We shouldn't be worried, therefore, that in [Genesis 1:2](#), before creation week commences, there is an 'earth' but no heaven! We shouldn't suppose God didn't then have a dwelling place! There was no concept of heaven at all in the mind of man until he had been created by God, and stood on earth looking up in awe and wonder at what he saw there – the sun by day and the moon and stars by night. Generations down the line the Hebrews had their word for what they saw – *shāmayim* – and in English we have two synonymous words, sky/skies and heaven/heavens. Only after the first man looked up and saw the *shāmayim*, the skies, the heavens, did the idea develop – and as we have seen it was a God-given idea – that 'up there' would be *symbolic* of the dwelling place of God. And only subsequently to that did the idea develop of 'heaven' being where we Christians go when we die, because that is where 'God is'.

The Bible isn't slow to capitalise on this obvious symbolic sense in which God and his heavenly entourage are held to be 'up there' in 'heaven'. And we'll come to how this works in Genesis 1 shortly. For now, let's re-emphasise that 'up there' is not 'down here'; God is (symbolically) 'up there' and we are (really) 'down here' – we're separated; we're separated by sin (we shall note this prominently later). Heaven is distant and unreachable. That all too oft-quoted piece from some medieval mystic comes to mind: *'Pierce that darkness above thee, and strike upon that dark cloud of unknowing with a sharp dart of longing'*. The author knew nothing of God's grace (because of his clear 'works-salvation' theology – we've got to do the piercing and the striking! – which is why the piece shouldn't be quoted with approval!), but he did at least realise that there is a sharp divide between mankind 'down here' and God 'up there' – we're out of touch with God, and the metaphor, deriving from the separation of day 2, most certainly works to demonstrate this. We shall come to this shortly.

Days 3 and 6 – Third Separation

On day 3 a third separation is created, between the sea and the land. The 'waters' (such as are that portion thereof under the canopy – more on 'waters' later) are 'gathered together' to become the sea or 'seas' (another majestic plural, as is 'waters') as we now know them, and 'dry land' appears, to be called '*Earth*'.

[Genesis 1:9-10](#), *“Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas'*

The word Earth doesn't here mean the whole planet. Rather, the word, *'āretz*, here means land – land we live on (elsewhere it sometimes means the whole planet earth, as in expressions like *'the heavens and the earth'* ([Genesis 1:1; 2:1](#)) and *'earth'* ([Genesis 1:2](#)); there's also a separate Hebrew word, *'adamah*, which means land as in the soil and the dust of the ground, a word from which Adam got his name, and which appears in our passage at [1:25](#), *'ground'*. Later, and principally, in the Bible the word *'āretz* is used for the land, let's say 'the Land' with a capital L to emphasise its importance, that God pledged to Abraham for his descendants to live in – the Promised Land which God's people took occupation of 40 years after the exodus from Egypt. This is not unimportant, because God's rescue of national Israel from slavery and their entry into the Promised Land becomes in the Bible emblematic of God's salvation from sin of his redeemed

people in Christ and their possession of their eternal rest in heaven; so the Promised Land is a 'type' or 'analogue' of heaven.

Here in Genesis 1, though, *'āretz* is land as opposed to sea. With the creation of (or separation of, to be precise) the dry land, lots of seed-bearing vegetation appears (v.11-12 – day 3 is a sort of 'two-stage' day). The appearance of the dry land on day 3 is the first time any physical material appears which isn't in the category of 'waters'. It just comes to be, as usual in this creation narrative, on the verbal command of God. We note in passing that it subsequently all disappears again, at the command of God, when God judges the world with the flood; but sadly we cannot step over into that territory in this paper – we must stick to Genesis 1! The significance of the waters being waters we'll come to in a moment.

Then on day 6 (a second 'two-stage' day, like day 3) the land is marked out by its own creatures (v.24-25), including man as the high point of it all (v.26ff):

Genesis 1:26-27, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them'

We'll hold back from thinking about the 'image of God' in man, and man's dominion role, and the male/female distinction, though it's tempting, in order to keep concentrating on the separation theme. The salient point at this stage in our study is that sea is not land and land is not sea – the waters are 'gathered' away from the land as it appears; they're distinct, they're separate.

Separation = Sin ?

Now, the reader may well be asking, "Aren't we stretching a point here in noticing these separations? How sure are we that the *separations* in Genesis 1 are meant to connote *sin*?" This after all is where we're meant to be heading in this paper. In particular we may be asking how the separation between sea and land is meant to connote the barrier of sin. Darkness/light maybe; earth and heaven, maybe. But isn't this fanciful? Sure, in Isaiah 59, which we considered earlier, separation denotes sin; but Genesis 1 is a *creation* text, isn't it? Are we yet convinced it's also a *redemption* text?

The answer is, "No, we're not convinced just yet (not, at least, on the strength of where this discussion has got so far), not fully" – but we're getting there – read on! Remember how we're driving this study forward. We're looking at it through our 'whole Bible' spectacles. I.e., we're asking questions about how the passage and its themes fit into the Bible as a whole, and we have a whole load more questions along these lines to ask yet. So far we've done this with *rest* and with *separation* (though we've more work to do on the latter).

Day 1 – the Darkness/Light Separation

Now we ask, "How do light and darkness, night and day, fit into the Bible as a whole?". In the Bible, what do these connote time and time again? Clearly light is generally used in a good sense in the Bible, and darkness in a bad sense. Not that darkness and night are bad things in and of themselves, of course. But throughout the Bible they connote, not surprisingly, insecurity and danger, threat and fear, even death, and by extension, the dreadfulness of sin against God and ignorance of God. One doesn't have to look far for an indication of this, as mentions of darkness

and night with a symbolic sense are many. Of course, John's symbolic and evocative use of these themes is well known as in:

John 3:2, 'This man [Nicodemus] came to Jesus by night'

John 19:39, 'Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night'

John 11:10, 'But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him'

John 13:30, 'So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night'

And here's a selection of other references that indicate darkness/night as danger and evil, and the contrast with light:

Genesis 15:12, '... behold, dreadful and great darkness'

Psalms 30:5, 'Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning'

Psalms 91:5, 'You will not fear the terror of the night'

1 Samuel 2:9, '... the wicked shall be cut off in darkness'

Psalms 82:5, 'They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness'

Proverbs 4:19, 'The way of the wicked is like deep darkness'

Ecclesiastes 2:13,14, 'Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness'

Isaiah 5:20, 'Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness'

Isaiah 45:7, 'I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things'

We note the parallels between light and wisdom/good/well-being/joy, and between darkness and folly/evil/calamity/terror. Throughout the Bible God is he who inhabits the realm of light and who indeed is light:

1 John 1:5, 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all'

2 Samuel 22:29, 'For you are my lamp, O LORD, and my God lightens my darkness'

Micah 7:8, 'when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me'

Isaiah 60:1,19, 'Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you ... The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory'

Psalms 112:4, 'Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous'

and exactly likewise his Son Jesus Christ who comes to dispel the darkness:

John 1:5, 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it'

John 3:19, 'And this is the judgement: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil'

John 8:12, 'Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"'

John 12:46, 'I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness'

1 Timothy 6:14-16, 'our Lord Jesus Christ ... he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light'

And Matthew and Luke explicitly parallel darkness and death in the way they quote Isaiah, subtly emending the text in order to make the point:

*Isaiah 9:2, 'The people who walked in **darkness** have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of **deep darkness**, on them has light shined'*

*Matthew 4:16, 'the people dwelling in **darkness** have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of **death**, on them a light has dawned'*

*Luke 1:79; 2:32, 'to give light to those who sit in **darkness** and in the shadow of **death** ... a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel'*

And as sinners redeemed by his grace, so we too: thus, e.g.:

1 Thessalonians 5:5, 'For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness'

1 Peter 2:9, 'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'

1 John 1:6,7, 'If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin'

Light is a metaphor continually used for the pure and unsullied relationship with God we now have through Christ; e.g.:

Ephesians 5:8, 'for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light'

2 Corinthians 4:6, 'For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'

This last text refers directly to our own *Genesis 1:3-4*, albeit not quite quoting it verbatim. Fascinating it is, then, that the apostle Paul gives it a decisive gospel twist! An OT creation text becomes a NT salvation text. But we note that Paul must have been fully aware of what he was doing – his choice of the early Genesis text could not have been fanciful, as if he had been searching for any old text involving both light and dark, in order to use it as a largely random, out-of-context cross-reference; rather, he must have believed that the Genesis 1 text provides a thoroughly apt illustration – God calling light out of darkness in Genesis 1 is a thoroughly appropriate *type* of (to use the usual Bible-interpretation term), or precursor to, and thus in the same character as, God calling light (knowledge of God in Christ) out of darkness (unredeemed evil) through the gospel of Christ. To put it another way, Paul himself believed, I suggest, as per the principal thesis of this paper, that there's a redemptive allusion intended in Genesis 1, and he, Paul, quoted it exactly to that effect.

The gospel of Christ itself is very often described in terms of light, so, e.g.:

2 Corinthians 4:4, 'the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God'

2 Timothy 1:8, 'God, who saved us ... of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel'

This is a diverse assortment of references illustrating the metaphor of light/darkness and day/night used throughout the Bible, but I don't apologise for there being so many. To summarise: if we are in Christ, then we belong to the day; we dwell in the light of the glory of Christ – this is refreshment indeed!

Day 1 – the Darkness/Light Separation in Revelation

But we have more work to do on the theme of night and day, at the end of the Bible; having seen the light/dark, day/night themes everywhere *throughout* the Bible, let's see where the metaphor heads *in the end*. In other words, let's track the theme not only through the Bible, but with a particular eye to seeing where it ends, as we should, and as we did with 'rest'. We find there's mention of both night and light right at the very end of the Bible – or rather, there's an absence of night and an abundance of light!

*Revelation 21:23-25, 'And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it **light**, and its lamp is the Lamb ... there will be no **night** there'*

*Revelation 22:5, 'And **night** will be no more. They will need no **light** of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their **light**, and they will reign forever and ever'*

No more night in the new creation. Only the light of the glory of God. We can't help but wonder if this is a deliberate contrast between the old creation, recounted in the first chapters of the Bible, and the new creation, recounted in the last. Yes, indeed it is; the very separation between night and day, between darkness and light, that was built into creation on day 1, and subsequently demarcated by the moon and the sun on day 4, is emphatically *undone* on the last day! Eternally undone.

At the end of the Bible there's light everywhere and night nowhere, whereas in the beginning there was darkness everywhere and light nowhere, before day 1. We can represent it thus:

Beginning of the Bible
(before Creation week)

Only Darkness
(no Light)



During the Bible
(during all history)

Darkness and Light



End of the Bible
(in the New Creation)

Only Light
(no Night)

Note that right now I merely observe this interesting feature – we'll draw out its implications in due course.

Day 2 – the Earth/Heaven Separation

We can give the same treatment to day 2, when God creates a separation between the earth and sky. The contrast between the idea of 'up there', or 'heaven above', and 'down here', or 'earth below', is very much used throughout the Bible to emphasise the separation between God and man, and the inability of man to do anything about it of his own accord. We don't need any persuading that down here the fallen, cursed world with its thorns and thistles (*Genesis 3:18*), with its 'Nature, red in tooth and claw' (Tennyson), with its disaster and disease, above all with its wickedness and injustice, connotes the negative, like the darkness does. What a contrast with the perfect domain of God's dwelling place in heaven! We note the following references:

Psalms 108:5, 'Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!'

Colossians 3:1, 'If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God'

Ephesians 1:20-21, 'Christ ... raised ... from the dead and seated ... at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion'

These references to the 'up there'-ness of God contrast with this sad lament over proud Babylon:

Isaiah 14:11-15, 'Your pomp is brought down to Sheol ... How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high ... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit'

Here are a few more verses that emphasise the huge divide between heaven and earth:

Revelation 12:4, 'His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth'

Revelation 18:1, 'After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory'

Genesis 28:12, 'And he [Jacob] dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!'

Day 2 – the Earth/Heaven Separation in Revelation

So we now have a second 'negative' and a second 'positive' to contrast with each other. 'Down here', or 'Earth below' parallels Darkness/Night; 'Up there', or 'Heaven above', parallels Light/Day. You'll remember that at the end of Revelation the negative half of the night/day contrast is removed in the final consummation – there's to be no more night. Well, the negative half of the down-here/up-there contrast is removed at the end too – all the ghastly fallen-ness of the world down here is going to be finally removed, and for all eternity, and 'heaven' will come 'down' to earth so that man's dwelling place and God's dwelling place will be the same – the separation is eliminated; God will dwell with those he has redeemed by his Son. Life, given originally 'in the beginning' at creation replaces death, that came with the Fall. Let's luxuriate for a moment in that purple prose at the end of Revelation:

Revelation 21:2-6,10-11, 'And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new" ... "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment" ... the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God'

Compare the earlier:

Revelation 3:12, '... the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven'

And compare this OT text, originally referring to the Promised Land of the Hebrews, but which is clearly in mind in the Revelation texts as applying to the final fulfilment:

Leviticus 26:11-12, 'I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out ... of Egypt'

At the conclusion of our assessment of the separation of day 1, between light and darkness, we noted that in the end the darkness is banished and there is only the light of the glory of God. Now we see that, similarly, earth and heaven aren't separate any longer on the last day; they have been 'de-separated' and re-united – heaven has come down from above to be the dwelling place of both God and redeemed mankind. The saints dwell in a cursed earth no longer, and instead share heaven with God as their dwelling place. Earth and heaven symbolically amalgamate, but in such a sense as to rid the earth of its negative connotations ('without form and void', at the beginning), now no longer cursed, but purified and perfected so that it's a fit dwelling place for both God and the exalted saints. We can now portray this state of affairs thus:

Beginning of the Bible (before Creation week)		During the Bible (during all history)		End of the Bible (in the New Creation)
Only Darkness (no Light)	➔	Darkness and Light	➔	Only Light (no Night)
Only Earth (no 'separate' Heaven)	➔	Earth and Heaven	➔	only Heaven (no 'separate' Earth)

There is a possible confusion to avoid. The picture of new Jerusalem coming down from heaven is of course figurative language. It's a symbol of the 'de-separation' of heaven and earth, so that God is no longer 'distant'. We should not conclude, though, that this picture language reveals any physical information about the New Creation, in terms of what it will look like to us once we are there (any more than its cubic shape does, and other details given – these are figurative, too). The coming down of God to earth in John's vision should not be taken to lend support for the view that the 'new earth' is a renewal of the old earth rather than it being an entirely new creation (with the old earth passing away). It's merely a figurative device to emphasise the de-separation of God and redeemed mankind. Close to the text in [Revelation 21:2](#) about new Jerusalem coming down is the text in [Revelation 21:1](#) describing the New Creation in terms of 'a new heaven and a new earth' – this is also picture language. "Are there going to be two separate entities (earth and heaven), or is there going to be just one?" we might ask. To avoid getting confused we need to realise that the figures work differently. As stated much earlier, the term 'heaven and earth' is a label for 'creation'; 'a new heaven and a new earth' is thus a label for 'new creation'. It will be one entity, not two – just one 'New Creation', whatever it will turn out to be like at the physical level, and the important reality is that no longer, and for all eternity, will God be considered to be 'up there'; rather, his dwelling place then will be with redeemed mankind. No, the one entity, the New Creation, won't be an actual amalgam of the old two entities coming together, for they, in John's vision, 'had passed away'. This is further indicated in the earlier verse at [20:11](#):

Revelation 21:1, 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away'

Revelation 20:11, *'Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky ['sky' = 'heaven' in Greek as well as in Hebrew] fled away, and no place was found for them'*

In the presence of the exalted, enthroned Christ, there is no place for the old two entities. They have passed away; the one new entity, the New Creation, has come in their place.

Our picture now covers the first two separations established on the first two days of creation.

Day 3 – the Sea/Land Separation

The Seas

But day 3 seems a bit more unlikely – can it be the case that sea as opposed to dry land has the same negative connotations in the Bible as night as against day, or 'down here' as against 'up there'?! Does sea represent 'bad stuff' in the same way as night? Indeed it does. Is it not the case that in fact the sea is consistently the wretched enemy of man in the Bible? Remember, as we noted in passing earlier, the flood that killed all of mankind, *'the flood came and destroyed them all'* (Luke 17:27), bar only Noah and his kin who were 'saved'?

Hebrews 11:7, *'By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household'*

1 Peter 3:20, *'... God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely [the Greek word is cognate with 'save'] through water'*

Remember all the storms (Jonah, Paul, Galilee)? Remember Job and Leviathan (I'll comment on this in a minute)? Remember the Red Sea, consuming Pharaoh? And is it not the same with references to 'the deep' also, this being synonymous, or virtually so, with 'the sea(s)', and perhaps carrying a slightly darker tone? This word, 'deep', is also used in Genesis 1. Likewise is it not so also with references to the 'waters', frequently an alternative designation for sea where context doesn't suggest otherwise, a word used several times in Genesis 1 (though the earlier occurrences of 'waters' in Genesis 1 may be figurative uses, denoting 'stuff' with its then negative connotations)? Consider, for example, Habakkuk 3:8ff, *'raging waters'*, or Isaiah 5:30, *'the growling of the sea'*, or Isaiah 17:12, *'Ah, ... the thundering of the sea! Ah, ... the roaring of mighty waters!'*, or:

Psalms 65:7, *'[God] who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples'*

Psalms 89:9, *'You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them'*

Psalms 93:4, *'Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the LORD on high is mighty!'*

It's instructive that in Psalm 65 the turbulent seas are an analogue of dysfunctional humanity. Note that the seas, the waters and the depths ('the deep') are all the same in the texts we are studying. Clearly in other contexts 'water(s)' may mean something different (e.g., 'water to drink', or 'streams'), and in these contexts the word is of course benign, and may even connote a pleasant ambience, as in Psalm 23:2, *'He leads me beside still waters'*; likewise the word 'deep' will have other meanings, but 'the deep' and 'waters' can both serve to mean 'the sea', and frequently do. The words 'seas', 'depths' (or 'the deep'), and 'waters' are different Hebrew words ('seas' and 'waters' are similar, though). Where they clearly denote the sea they usually connote the same thing – danger, fear, insecurity, disaster, evil, even death. See, for example:

Revelation 20:13, 'And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them'

That's interesting; a parallel is drawn here between the sea and Hades as the place of the dead! This is not uncommon in scripture; sometimes it is said that the Hebrews had a threefold division of the cosmos in mind, in setting God above in the heavens, man down here on earth, and the dead down below in the depths of the earth, in Sheol (Hebrew *she'ol*) or Hades (it's a Greek word). That's fine, but equally, as we have seen, the cruel seas are a place that represent danger and death, and *in a sense* the sea/the deep carries the same connotations as the place of the dead, Sheol or Hades. So that this suggestion of a parallel between *Sheol* and the sea doesn't appear too fanciful, compare these two verses at the beginning and end of the passage where the Lamb who was *'slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation'* (Revelation 5:9), is deemed worthy to open the scroll:

Revelation 5:3, 'And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it'

*Revelation 5:13, 'And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and **under the earth and in the sea**, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!"'*

Is not the sea the *cruel sea*, then, in scripture? The idea of gentle waves lapping on the shore as toddlers paddle with bucket and spade to hand, or of a sea cruise being (for some) the ideal holiday, is modern western sentiment, surely. The ancients were terrified of the sea, and the suggestion in this verse that the destructive power of the sea will one day be undone would have been extremely encouraging; see later for how Revelation brings that note of hope to fulfilment.

So the sea was an object of great fear; but it was also in some way representative of *evil*, in the sense that the danger of the seas is marked by it being the habitat of the great and malign sea monsters who clearly represent evil in the contexts in which they are used: Leviathan, Rahab (which is probably the same as Leviathan, by another name), both mentioned several times in scripture, and others such as those described as 'the great sea creatures (*hattanninim*)' in **Genesis 1:21** (our passage) and (same word) in **Psalm 148:7** where KJV has 'dragons'! But something else is to be noted – that as always in the Bible, the tussle between good and evil is never dualistic; God always wins! The raging of the seas is no match for the God who made it, and who *owns* it (**Psalm 95:5**, *'The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land'*). This is evident in several of the texts just cited, declaring God to be more powerful than the raging sea:

Psalm 77:16, 'When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled'

Psalm 89:9-10, 'You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them. You crushed Rahab like a carcass; you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm'

Job 26:12, 'By his power he stilled the sea; by his understanding he shattered Rahab'

Did God not keep Jonah safe, and Paul safe, and the disciples safe in their respective storms, albeit not shielding them from the sense of danger? And not only so, but indeed the very power of God over the destructive waves is at its peak in the various biblical accounts of the annihilation of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea during the exodus of God's people out of Egypt. Thus the reference from Psalm 77 above is in this context:

Psalm 77:15-16,19-20, 'You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph ... When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled ... Your way was through the sea, your path through

the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron'

Nehemiah 9:11, 'And you divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and you cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into mighty waters'

Exodus 15:10, 'You blew with your wind; the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters'

The Land, the Earth, *hā'āretz*

We've seen that the sea in its connotations of danger, evil and death is analogous to the darkness in this respect. What about the opposite to the seas, namely the 'earth' in [Genesis 1:10](#)? Is that the 'positive' counterpart to the 'negative' seas, just as light is the 'positive' counterpart to the 'negative' darkness? The sea has 'bad' connotations; does the land have 'good' connotations?

Let's look at two verses:

Genesis 1:1, 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth'

This, as mentioned above, is most likely meant to serve as a title, or heading, for the whole chapter. Here the word 'earth' means the whole planet (as we know it to be – the ancients didn't; their seven 'planets', as they held them to be, didn't include Earth); often in the Bible the word 'earth' means the whole planet, or everything on the planet. The phrase 'heaven and earth', or 'the heavens and the earth' is simply a label for 'all creation' – the whole cosmos. So it is too in the phrase 'new heavens and a new earth' – this is simply a label for 'the New Creation', as mentioned earlier. Now consider:

Genesis 1:9,10, 'And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry [land] appear." And it was so. God called the dry [land] Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good'

In the phrase 'dry land' (twice here, in ESV and other versions) the usual Hebrew word for 'land' in fact is not there (hence the brackets above) – the phrase translates a single word meaning 'the dry', or 'the dry stuff'. So 'the dry' appears, and God calls it the Earth (it's the usual Hebrew word, *'āretz*, which also translates as *land*). The translation I'm looking at right now gives it a capital E there in [v.10](#), but that's just a translation quirk designed presumably to emphasise this new aspect of creation. But it's just the ordinary word for 'land' or 'earth' (but earth in the sense of land!)

But this is not actually 'just an ordinary word' in the Bible. It's the Hebrew word for 'the land' or 'the earth' as it appears here in Genesis 1 and all over the OT; or should I say, 'the Land' with a capital L, because 'the Land' is extremely important to the OT Israelites – it's the Promised Land that God swore to give to the blood-descendants of Abraham. It's where God's redeemed people, having been rescued from Egypt, were to dwell. The importance of the Land to the OT Jews cannot be over-emphasised – to them, at the time, it was the final goal of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. And its over-arching significance in the Bible is that, in God's intention, it serves as a symbol of the final goal of his redemption of the world in Christ. It's a symbol, an emblem, a figure, for the ultimate destination of God's Christian people, the New Creation, or 'heaven' as these days we sometimes call it.

Day 3 – the Sea/Land Separation in Revelation

Further to the reference noted earlier to the sea giving up her dead ([Revelation 20:13](#)), we find there's a rather remarkable verse soon after, declaring that there'll be no sea in heaven:

[Revelation 21:1](#), *'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more'*

This comes as a disappointment to some people, because to them the sea is nice to be by, or to have a view across, or to swim in, or to sunbathe by, or to sit in deck chairs in front of. But this is the rather western sentiment that the ancients would have had no patience with, and we remind ourselves that the sea used to be held to be a dangerous place – it signalled disaster and death. The suggestion that in the new creation the sea will 'be no more' would have been very comforting – danger and death are to be banished, and the sea will swallow up the dead no longer.

So just as darkness and night will be no more, but will be displaced by the light of the glory of God, so the sea will vanish, and all that's left will be the Land. But 'the Land', which I'm deliberately spelling with a capital L, evokes in us, with our 'Whole Bible' spectacles on, the theme we started with – namely 'rest'. Redemption, salvation rest. The rescue of God's people from slavery in Egypt and their delivery into the Promised Land was God's redemption, and provides picture language throughout the Bible for the ultimate salvation, from sin, which God has provided through Christ. All this is bread and butter stuff to a Bible-soaked Christian.

So the salvation motif in the Exodus story is clear; but we need also to notice, not only that God saved his people *from* Pharaoh and his army by drowning the latter in the Red Sea, beneath the raging waters, but also what God saved his people *for*. God rescued his people *for* their possession of the Promised Land. That's why the Bible refers to the occupation of the Land in terms of 'entering God's rest'. In the NT this is dealt with principally in the letter to the Hebrews, as we noted earlier; the writer consistently notes that because of their disobedience the vast majority of the rescued people (Joshua and Caleb alone excepted) did *not* enter the Land, or, in his terms (picking up the language of Psalm 95):

[Hebrews 3:11,18](#), *"As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest'" ... And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?*

[Psalm 95:11](#), *'Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest"'*

Now we gave this a good outing earlier on, so forgive me revisiting it – but really, this is so important. The OT notion of the Promised Land being Rest, the consummation of God's redemption of his people from Egypt, is itself there in the Christian Bible as a sort of *prototype* of the real and final one that will come through Christ. Rest in the Promised Land is emblematic of, symbolic of, a foreshadowing of, a type of, a metaphor for, a prefiguring of the ultimate Rest of the New Creation for all those who are redeemed in Christ.

[Hebrews 4:11](#), *'Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience'*

[Hebrews 4:1,3](#), *'Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For we who have believed enter that rest'*

So to answer our earlier question, Yes! Yes, the 'Earth' of [Genesis 1:10](#), or, more precisely, the Land (as against the Seas) is on day 3 the equivalent of the light (as against the darkness) on day 1,

and the equivalent of Heaven (as against earth ‘without form and void’) on day 2. The Darkness, and the Seas/Deep/Waters, and Earth ‘without form and void’, all have the negative connotations of danger, disaster, evil and death; the Light and the Land and Heaven have the positive connotations of God’s domain and his Salvation! We now have the following picture:

Beginning of the Bible (before Creation week)		During the Bible (during all history)		End of the Bible (in the New Creation)
Only Darkness (no Light)	➔	Darkness and Light	➔	Only Light (no Night)
Only Earth (no ‘separate’ Heaven)	➔	Earth and Heaven	➔	only Heaven (no ‘separate’ Earth)
Only Waters (later, Sea) (no Land)	➔	Sea and Land	➔	only the Land/City (no Sea)

Once again we have salvation language! God is redeeming his people! Here we have further indication that Genesis 1 is going to turn out to be a *salvation* text, a *redemption* text, because the negative side of each contrasted pair in Genesis 1 represents the world, and thus mankind, under the power of evil. Whereas the positive side of each contrasted pair represents redeemed mankind on his way to heaven to their eternal rest.

Redemption

It’s one more piece, neatly put in place, of the redemption picture that we’re in the process of discovering in Genesis 1. Just before we go on, though, a brief word about the tension in the Bible between the now and the not yet. The new creation that we’re heading for if we trust in Christ is in the future – still yet to be realised in its final consummation; that’s for the day of the return of Christ, of course. But every Christian knows, I trust, that in a very real sense we are in possession of many anticipations of this even now whilst we are alive on this godless world. We have many foretastes of heaven already in our experience, mediated to us by the Holy Spirit, as per:

Ephesians 1:3, ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places’

A sort of down payment, if you like. Thus it’s quite often that bits of the Bible will on the one hand emphasise the very real separation that exists in the world between the things of God and the fallen world of sin and evil, depicting God in his heaven, but man, including God’s saints, down here in a fallen world; we Christians will have nothing to do with the second half of the view of the poet (Robert Browning) who held that “God’s in his heaven, all’s right with the world”. But on the other hand sometimes the language of the Bible depicts God’s redeemed people as in some sense already *‘raised ... up with him and seated ... with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus’* (Ephesians 2:6). In this study that we’re doing together I’m constantly acknowledging in my own mind this ‘partly-realised eschatology’, as theologians call it (eschatology is the study of the last things; ‘partly-realised’ means that Christians have *now*, in this fallen world, a very real foretaste of the blessings of heaven), but I don’t want us to get confused; so if, for simplicity, some statements here look forward to final fulfilment at the return of Christ and the dawn of the new creation, and might seem to imply it’s *all* future, may we bear in mind that I do know that much has a partial fulfilment here and now as a ‘down payment’ or ‘first instalment’. There’s a sense in which we are already partakers of heaven, as in Ephesians 1:3 above, with many blessings now,

such as the forgiveness we have in Christ, the gift of his Holy Spirit to indwell us, the hope of eternal life and so much more. But I can't keep on reminding us of this at every turn. The blessings in Christ that the Holy Spirit gives us now are an earnest of the certain fulfilment to come:

Ephesians 1:13-14, '... you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in [Christ], were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory'

The role of Christ, of course, is central and paramount, and I shall give attention later to his incarnation, whereby 'heaven' came down to earth long *before* the last day, bringing this foretaste of the end (and of course without his first coming and his sacrificial death there is no hope for the final consummation). For now we note gladly that it's because of Christ's *first* coming, in advance of his *second* coming, that by repentance and faith Christians *now* can 'enter that rest' of which we spoke earlier. Jesus said, "*Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). A Christian believer has already entered her or his rest in Christ, albeit the believer has to remain now a sinful person in a sinful world – we are not yet in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Note that in Revelation 21:2 the OT term 'the land', meaning the Promised Land, has now been replaced by the term 'the city', but this is not a threat to our principal thesis – the city is the New Jerusalem; the 'old' Jerusalem was in the heart of the Promised Land, and therein was the temple where God, in a figurative sense, made his presence available to the people, though only by atoning sacrifice. And so here in Revelation these themes are picked up: everywhere the exalted Christ is the Lamb, '*the Lamb who was slain*' (5:12), and those who occupy the city are those whose sins have been atoned for by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God – Christ:

'They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (7:14)

'the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes' (7:17)

'It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb' (14:4)

'But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life' (21:27)

'Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates' (22:14)

'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' (7:10)

The Beginning and the End

Isn't it interesting that the exalted Christ is '*the beginning and the end*' (21:6, repeated 22:13)? This insight isn't unique to Revelation – the way John's gospel (as also John's first letter) begins is well-known, and will be considered later. We mentioned earlier the Apostle Paul's paean of praise to Christ in Colossians 1:15-20, with its two halves – a celebration of the pre-eminence of Christ in creation, in v.15-17, and a celebration of the pre-eminence of Christ in redemption in v.18-20, that draws upon Genesis 1 very clearly, and emphatically ties together creation and redemption:

Colossians 1:15-20, 'He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was

pleased to dwell,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross'

It can hardly be coincidence that this Colossians passage draws upon Genesis 1 themes, such as the 'image' of God ([Colossians 1:15/Genesis 1:26](#)), where we see Christ as the perfect fulfilment of that image; and such as the 'beginning' ([Colossians 1:18/Genesis 1:1](#)), which of course has here multiple levels of meaning – 'beginning' not only in the sense of the commencement, but also in the sense of 'source/head/authority', or 'priority', or 'fulfilment/totality', or 'firstborn (used twice)/firstfruits'. That the apostle Paul has Genesis 1 in mind would seem undeniable; and that he sees Christ as the full and final fulfilment of Genesis 1 is self-evident. Clearly, then, Paul sees an intention in Genesis 1 that it will be fulfilled in Christ. Or to put it another way, Christ is the appointed goal or destiny or 'end' to which Genesis 1 points. That *'Christ is the end of the Law'* ([Romans 10:4](#)) is most certainly a Pauline thought, with the word 'end' used in exactly this way. Of course, the 'final end' is yet to come, when Christ returns in glory, and effects then the consummation of all things – and we have been exploring those things as they are depicted in Revelation 20-22. And we have argued that the final end is anticipated as far back as Genesis 1.

But before that final end God broke into history in Christ; and in the incarnate, crucified, risen and exalted Christ we have the absolute guarantee that it will all be exactly as the Bible has portrayed it, and God's redeemed people have the complete security of knowing their destiny in Christ in the new creation, and experiencing now, before the end, some of that destiny now as a 'deposit', or 'first instalment', or 'down payment' in the person of God's Holy Spirit and his assurance of sins forgiven now and final salvation to come.

Let me pay some more attention briefly to the 'now' as opposed to the 'not yet'. It is true that in this study we have been concentrating on the very beginning and the very end. We started in Genesis 1, and soon found ourselves considering the end of Revelation. The main point has been to capture the essence of the entire Bible plot-line, the over-arching story of God's redemption of the world in Christ. But we mustn't forget Christ himself. Jesus Christ – incarnate, crucified, risen, ascended – is the pivotal key to the entire plan of salvation. In Christ, God broke into history in the person of his Son. I ask the reader to join me in acknowledging that without the incarnate Christ of history, appearing and living and dying in the middle of history, the beginning and the end have no meaning, no purpose, no fulfilment. At the very end of this study my final depiction in chart form of the truths we have been gleaning from God's Word show Christ's breaking into history in this manner.

But the death and resurrection of Christ has even more to offer; for the finished work of Christ not only ensures the eternal destiny of the redeemed, but it – I should say he – brings the blessings of eternity, in part, into the present for all who repent and believe in their Lord and Saviour. Thus it is that the people of Christ don't have to wait until heaven to find real rest, true forgiveness, the indwelling divine Holy Spirit mediating the real presence of God to them, and the gift of life, eternal life, *now* not just at the end. It's not as good now as it will be in eternity, for our lives now are somewhat spoilt by sin (ours and others'), and by the cursed world we inhabit. Then, in eternity, all that will be gone for ever; now we live with it. But nonetheless these blessings of heaven are *real* now. The Christ of history brings them into history, so that we can live our lives now in communion with our God, and in the peace, joy and hope of the gospel.

But it's the beginning and end of things that we have been studying; indeed, we've found that in studying the Bible in the context of the whole, we cannot study the very beginning without also and at the same time studying the very end. But then, does not God know the end from the beginning?

In the beginning, in Genesis 1, there is no 'heaven' (no 'up there'); no light; no 'land'. Assuming, as most commentators do, and as is entirely reasonable, that **Genesis 1:1** is a heading or title for the whole piece, and that the narrative proper thus starts at **v.2**, we are told there that:

Genesis 1:2, *'The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters'*

We have the three 'negatives' – the deep or the waters (in contrast to the land, which is only created on day 3); the earth without form and void (in contrast to heaven, which is only separated off from the earth on day 2); and darkness, later denoted also as the night (in contrast to the light, or day, which is only created on day 1). Before days 1, 2 and 3 commence we have only the three negatives. The positive counterparts are created and demarcated during the six days of creation. And at the end of days, the negatives are removed, and removed finally and for ever. This is the Bible's picture of final salvation.

Salvation or Judgement

There is a reality we can't ignore, though. The Bible speaks also of judgement. It's not a judgement that should terrify God's redeemed people, for they are secure in God's promises; but it's real for those who will not bow their knee to the crucified and exalted Christ and will not receive him as their Saviour. It's not the intention of this paper to explore this theme – we sought to bring refreshment to those who hope for heaven. But in passing, briefly, let's note that the Bible, just as it portrays salvation as rescue *from* desolation, very frequently portrays God's final judgement as a return *to* desolation. Here's just one example to illustrate this, from Ezekiel's lament over Tyre:

Ezekiel 27:3; 28:6-8,19, *'O Tyre, you have said, "I am perfect in beauty." ... Because you make your heart like the heart of a god, therefore ... you shall die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas ... Your heart was proud because of your beauty ... I turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all who saw you ... All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have come to a dreadful end. I cast you to the ground'*

See also some quotations from Jeremiah 4 and Isaiah 34 later. Noah's flood is a prime example, too, where Noah's salvation was from a dreadful judgement. The appalling nature of final judgement on the proud is not to be watered down, for if we do then God's salvation becomes insipid too. Judgement isn't just a failure to obtain redemption; it's the very opposite of redemption – *salvation* is the total removal of everything negative and bad; *judgement* is the total removal of everything positive and good. Judgement returns creation to desolation; redemption rescues from it utterly. Here's our chart again to illustrate this:

Beginning of the Bible (before Creation week)	During the Bible (during all history)	End of the Bible (in the New Creation)	
Only Darkness (no Light)	→ Darkness and Light	→ Only Light (no Night)	
Only Earth (no 'separate' Heaven)	→ Earth and Heaven	→ only Heaven (no 'separate' Earth)	
Only Waters (later, Sea) (no Land)	→ Sea and Land	→ only the Land/City (no Sea)	
Return to Desolation	←←← Judgement	→→→ Redemption	Rescue from Desolation

The City of God, the New Jerusalem

In Revelation 21 there's a vivid description of the city of God, the New Jerusalem:

Revelation 21:10-11,22-25, 'the holy city coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God ... And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there'

This final great dénouement is in fulfilment of all that the Bible has been heading towards – the reconciliation of God with redeemed mankind.

So when reading Genesis 1 at the beginning of the Bible, the Bible-steeped reader needs also to recall the end of the Bible! And the end of the Bible is the culmination of the redemption/salvation plan of the whole Bible. But Genesis 1 recounts the creation of the earth *pre-Fall*! Yes, indeed, but Genesis 1 was *written post-Fall* – at least we presume it was! I think that's a safe assumption! It was written in the light and knowledge of the *need* for salvation, and as I said just now, assuming the human writer was a godly man, it was written from the perspective of a *craving* for salvation. "Bring it on, God" was surely on every saint's heart! "Bring on the serpent-crusher ([Genesis 3:15](#)) whom you promised – restore, save, redeem!" We can't be sure, but it's not impossible that one or more or all of the three dichotomies (contrasts) we have noted in Genesis 1 were already thought forms in common currency at the time of writing as metaphors for the contrast between 'good' and 'bad', between that which is of God, and that which is of evil. In any case, God is the ultimate author of this text, and surely he already had his plan of redemption all worked out, and it's no surprise therefore that we find intimations of it with our 'eye on the whole Bible' approach.

Creation for Redemption

So [Genesis 3:15](#) isn't the first intimation of salvation in the Bible, although many have suggested that to be the case. No indeed; not, at least, if we read this part of it, the first chapter of the Bible, as we should every part, in the light of the whole. Yes, indeed, we find a salvation theme in Genesis 1; at the very least we find a 'crying out for salvation' theme, on account of so many of its terms and sub-themes being, even at this very early stage, typical of biblical categories that connote exactly that – the need for salvation.

Once sin enters the world and mankind falls, the world is cursed, by God, and the world rages against God and against his grace. Thence onwards God's redeemed people wait:

Romans 8:18-24, 'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved'

Isn't it interesting, intriguing, fascinating, mind-blowing even, that when God creates the cosmos he does so in such a way that categories are already in place, put there by God himself, for picturing the need for salvation in a world that inevitably, and God knows it, will fall. The darkness of night, the raging seas, the 'down here' purposelessness and emptiness of the earth, in contrast to their opposites, the skies (the heavens, God's abode) 'up above', the security of land, God's land, and the light of day, all picture separation of fallen man from his pure and holy God, even before it has happened, so that when it does happen, when mankind does fall and God does curse the perfect world he made, the pictures are all in place, ready to help fallen man see his need of rescue, ready for the prophets to use in calling for repentance, ready to help mankind cry out for mercy and redemption! The Apostle Paul realised this:

Acts 17:24-27, 'The God who made the world and everything in it, ... made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him'

Let's be clear that we're not saying Genesis 1 isn't a creation text. That's *not* what we've said! It's not 'either/or', but 'both/and'. It certainly is a creation text – but I'm arguing that it's also a redemption text, in the sense of a yearning written into the text by the use of these three contrasts, and not least in the light of the overall 'rest' theme of the passage. It's God's yearning, of course, as well as that of the human writer, and echoes:

Ezekiel 33:11, 'turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?'

Ezekiel 18:32, 'I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD [Adonāi Yahweh]; so turn, and live'

But we notice this too: at the beginning of creation, in the creation account commencing at **Genesis 1:2**, there isn't nothing – there's a picture of desolation; there's an earth, a formless and empty one, vacant of purpose, but no named 'heaven'; there are the 'waters', but no named land; there's darkness, but no light. This presence of these entities can't be dismissed, ignored or explained away; though many commentators try. What we have discovered in our study is that the creation of the first six days of the 'week' is more narrowly focussed than being simply on everything there is. The focus is on the creation, by God, of three distinct entities, all with a positive connotation, which each stand in contrast to one of the three pre-existing, 'negative' entities (by 'pre-existing' I mean, of course, in the creation account as it's presented to us in Genesis 1). Or to put it another way, the focus is on the creation of three *separations*. If all was empty of purpose before, it certainly isn't at the end of day 6, for then the cosmos has in place three visual aids used time and time again in the Bible to denote the need for salvation; to denote

the need for sinful mankind radically to shift – from darkness to light, from earth to heaven, from the cruel ‘sea’ of danger and death to the safety and security of the Promised Land.

Creation and Redemption

The ideas we have discussed so far haven’t exhausted the text of what it has to offer – we could dig far more good things from it, and, still from a ‘whole Bible’ point of view (never otherwise, remember), we could dig into its emphasis on God the chief player in initiating and creating all things by the power of his Word, and giving life, and doing everything well; or on him setting his image in mankind, the supreme high-point of his handiwork, made male and female; or on him blessing all he had made; we could dig into the charge God gave mankind, namely husbandry of (dominion over) all things, and into the theme of fruitfulness and productivity, and so on; we could even have a look at the seed-bearing vegetables and the beasts of air, sea and land (and their vegetarianism!); all this would be a profitable exercise, and as stated earlier, there’s no pretence here that the current study exhausts the good things God has spoken into this part of his Word – we haven’t gleaned it all; with our ‘whole Bible’ spectacles on we could take ourselves to many more places in the Bible that enjoin on humankind a sense of wonder and awe at what God has done (e.g., the Psalms), and to Romans 1 where we are told we are ‘without excuse’ if we fall not at God’s feet in worship and beg for mercy – getting close to salvation again at this point, though! And thus it should be.

So creation and salvation generally belong together in the Bible, as we observed earlier. This is a stunning conclusion, and one I believe we miss continually. There is an abundance of examples of this. We mentioned John 1 earlier, and give it further treatment here. Archotypically it’s a creation and a redemption text, clearly alluding to Genesis 1. Christ is the beginning and the end, remember! We read:

John 1:1-18,29-31, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made [Creation!]. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him [Creation!], yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God [Salvation!].

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶ And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ [Salvation!]. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.’ ...

²⁹ “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! [Salvation!] ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before

me.’³¹ *I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptising with water, that he might be revealed to Israel*”

Of course we cannot here do full justice to this text; it suffices that we note some of the respects in which it reflects Genesis 1. First, in Genesis 1 God creates by his spoken word, which alone has the power to bring the created entities into being. And in John 1 the spoken word of God is identified with the person of Jesus Christ himself. No wonder, then, that John writes, *‘the world was made through him’* (v.10, cf. v.3). Christ, the Word of God, is the fulfilment of God’s spoken word in Genesis one and everywhere in the OT, where God speaks either directly, as in Genesis 1, or through his prophets. In the NT we are told, *“This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him”* (Luke 9:35d), and, *‘Long ago ... God spoke ... by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son’* (Hebrews 1:1,2) (quoted earlier).

Secondly, we note again the use of *‘in the beginning’* twice (v.1,2) in relation to Jesus Christ, and we refer the reader to our earlier discussion of this, where we observed that John plays on the word ‘beginning’, using it to denote the *priority* of Jesus Christ, in both time and authority (cf. v.30, *‘before’*). So even this term, ‘beginning’, is fulfilled in Christ.

Thirdly, we notice John’s play on the word ‘darkness’ in v.5, clearly recollecting its use in Genesis 1:2,4,18 for the darkness that preceded the creation week, but equally clearly using it to denote the darkness of sin and evil in mankind, as he does throughout his gospel and letters. Likewise, fourthly, the counterpart of darkness, ‘light’, in v.4,5,9 clearly recollects the light spoken into being on days 1 and 4 of creation week in Genesis 1. Incidentally, John’s first letter, whilst not having a specifically mentioned creation theme, also takes the vocabulary of *‘the word’*, *‘the beginning’*, *‘life’*, *‘light’* and its foil, *‘darkness’*, all in what is very much a salvation context (1 John 1:1-10). And fifthly, ‘life’ in v.4 clearly recollects the ‘living’ things of creation week, and specifically the *‘breath of life’* of Genesis 1:30, reflected in the second creation narrative at Genesis 2:7. But it stretches credulity to suggest that in John 1:1-3 John simply has creation in mind, and is making some statement about the eternal nature of the Son, but then suddenly switches to an independent redemption theme in v.4,5. And in light of John’s use throughout his writings of ‘life’ and ‘light’ categories, constantly employed by him as *salvation* terms, it’s unthinkable to view his use of them in 1:4,5 as *merely* creation terms.

A much more plausible explanation of the transition from v.3 to v.4 is that John is all along deliberately mining Genesis 1 for all its symbolism, such as we have been arguing for in this paper. The vocabulary of darkness, light and life are all in Genesis 1, but in the hands of John these words belong to the vocabulary of redemption. In this paper we have averred that the writer of Genesis 1 thought so too, the difference being that whereas the Genesis writer was wistfully longing for the salvation that God would bring in his Christ, the apostle John had seen that salvation appear in the flesh. John 1:4,5 amount to a pithy gospel statement, summarising the person and work of Christ. In John 1 darkness is dispersed by the light of God’s grace in Christ (and we recall from earlier that Jesus is *‘the light of the world’* (8:5, cf. 1:9)) – so Jesus Christ is the complete and final fulfilment of the biblical theme of ‘light’ too.

Correspondingly death (implied in v.4) is dispelled by the life of Christ (Jesus is *‘the resurrection and the life’* (11:25, cf. 10:10)) – so Jesus Christ is the utter fulfilment of the biblical theme of ‘life’, just as for ‘light’, ‘word’ and ‘beginning’. That ‘life’ in v.4 is a redemption term is surely confirmed even more by v.13, *‘born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God’*, referring, of course, to the new birth and new life in Christ given by the Holy Spirit to people repenting and believing in Christ; this in turn anticipates the new birth narrative at John 3:1-8, which in turn reflects both John 1:33b, *‘he ... baptises with the Holy Spirit’*, and the cleansing and life-breathing work of the Holy Spirit in Ezekiel 36-37. John 1 is creation and redemption in the

same breath; they're not separate in the Bible, but belong together, as I trust we have amply shown.

And in Genesis 1 they're not two separate, concurrent themes either, but they belong together there too; salvation and creation. Consider this: from what we've said already; from one aspect of the passage that we mentioned earlier on, but haven't yet revisited since, what other highly significant connection is there here in Genesis 1 between creation and redemption?

Created *for*, Redeemed *for* ... Rest

The answer is Rest, of course, Rest. I say it again, Rest! The theme of *Rest*. Rest in the Bible (we're using the 'eye on the whole Bible' approach, remember), is both *creation* rest, and *redemption* rest. We mentioned earlier that whatever else Genesis 1 is, it's an aetiology for the Sabbath, enjoined upon God's OT people. Let's pay a brief visit, then, to the ten commandments, and number 4 in particular. Is it not a much remarked upon feature of the two different versions of the ten commandments that they're different in number 4, the Sabbath commandment? [Exodus 20:8-11](#) (quoted earlier) recounts a *creation* reason for the Sabbath; but [Deuteronomy 5:12-15](#) offers a *redemption* reason for the Sabbath:

Deuteronomy 5:12-15, 'Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work ... You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day'

Often observed, this, but rarely explained satisfactorily. In my view all these texts in Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy recount one Sabbath, a creation-redemption Sabbath, a unity. It's simply the case that the Bible as a whole wants us to keep creation and redemption together. Let's put it this way: at the end of days, to which it's all pointing, even Genesis 1, there is waiting for us a *'Sabbath rest for the people of God'*. It's both New Creation, and Final Redemption!

We remember too, that salvation is a from-to process: it's from blindness to sight, from death to life, from slave to free; or, to use the categories we've been exploring, it's from darkness to light, from night to day, from the dangerous watery deep, figuratively understood, to the security of dwelling with God in his land, his city; it's from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of God's Son; *from* the old creation, *for* the new. So when the Bible begins (after, that is, the very first introductory and summary verse 1 of chapter 1) with a picture of desolation, with terms that seem negative, and ends in perfection, in the most glowing, the most positive terms possible, we're not surprised. The negativity of the concepts of emptiness and purposelessness (v.2), and of darkness (v.2), and of the watery depths (v.2), and of the earth (v.2 – clearly there in v.2 it's desolate earth 'down here' as distinct from heaven 'up there' – both were mentioned separately in v.1) doesn't bother us at all – just so long as we read the passage, as we should read every passage, through 'whole Bible' spectacles. The person through whose veins and arteries runs 'Bible-saturated' blood knows the end from the beginning, and just as salvation is *from* the negative *to* the positive, so is the course of the story of God's redemption in the Bible – it commences with earth 'down here' characterised by darkness and emptiness and watery depths, and ends with the city of God coming down from heaven, lit totally by the glory of God, so that the dwelling place of God is with man, and for all eternity.

The Spirit of God, Hovering, Beckoning 'Come!'

Genesis 1:2, *'The earth was without form and void [tohū wābohū], and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters'*

We notice an interesting parallelism there. 'Deep' parallel to 'waters'; 'the face of', same expression exactly, repeated. There's darkness over the face of the deep, but (and here's the rub) there's the Spirit, ready and waiting, ready to bring, in response to the Word of God (Christ!), a purpose to the meaninglessness, hope to the hopelessness. And the darkness is no match for the Spirit! Any more than the raging Sea is a match for the power of the Almighty!

The phrase 'without form and void' is much debated and talked about. It's a memorably rhyming expression, *tohū wābohū*, in the Hebrew. The experts don't agree very much, though, on what it means exactly, not least because, they say, it's an odd and rare expression. Perhaps, though, we can make some headway with the expression, and without needing to know any Hebrew, because we have Jeremiah and Isaiah, the other Bible writers to use the very same words *tohū* and *bohū*:

Isaiah 34:11, *'He shall stretch the line of confusion [tohū] over it [Edom, under God's judgement], and the plumb line of emptiness [bohū]'*
Jeremiah 4:23, *'I looked on the earth, and behold, it was without form and void [tohū wābohū]; and to the heavens, and they had no light'*

It's no surprise to learn that the context there in Jeremiah is a call from God to repentance and obedience! And salvation – oh, Yes! If God's disobedient people refuse to repent then judgement lies ahead:

Jeremiah 4:7, *'a destroyer of nations has set out; he has gone out from his place to make your land a waste'*

Later on there is further talk of desolation:

Jeremiah 4:20,25-28, *'Crash follows hard on crash; the whole land is laid waste ... I looked, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and behold, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger. For thus says the LORD, "The whole land shall be a desolation ... For this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above be dark; for I have spoken; I have purposed"'*

How interesting that Jeremiah uses language reminiscent of (and in the case of our strange expression, *tohū wābohū*, a direct quotation from) Genesis 1 at a point in the story, Genesis 1:2, before God's creation week of Genesis 1:3ff. He's warning that instead of heading towards a glorious fulfilment, the earth God's people dwell upon will revert to its earliest form (as it is portrayed symbolically, figuratively in all its negativity) in the biblical account of creation in Genesis 1, before the Word of God caused the light and the land to come into being; a land of desolation and waste, an empty land devoid of purpose. There are many other such examples in the Bible of how *desolation precedes salvation* – e.g. the locusts of Joel, *'I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten'* (Joel 2:25), the dry bones of Ezekiel, *'And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live'* (Ezekiel 37:14), and so on; and how on the other hand judgement is the reverse process – a return to desolation. But desolation needn't be final; there is

a plea from the aching heart of God, yearning for the redemption of mankind just as through his prophet Ezekiel quoted above:

Jeremiah 4:14, 'O Jerusalem, wash your heart from evil, that you may be saved'

Jeremiah knows what *tohū wābohū* means, and he knows that Genesis 1 has a salvation motif running through it. The heart of Genesis 1 is that as redemption, the redemption plan of God, runs its course from the very earliest beginnings of the biblical narrative to the very end, the grace and mercy of God, brought down to the world in Christ, turns desolation, purposelessness and emptiness (Genesis 1:2) into light and life (Revelation 22:1-5, John 1:4-5), with the 'tree of life' bringing 'healing of the nations' (22:2) (Note: it goes without saying that all these passages in Revelation hark back not only to Genesis 1, but also to Genesis 2 and 3 and a plethora of other Bible places, and in particular the 'tree of life' and the 'water of life', and whilst these would be eminently explorable, we won't in this paper, save to note that the 'water of life' is water to drink, to quench the thirst of the thirsty, and not our furious seas!). Doesn't Jeremiah's call for repentance mirror that of the Bible's closing words? Here are some of them:

Revelation 22:12-14,16-17, "Behold, I am coming soon ... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. "... I am the root and the descendant of David [= the promised Saviour = the new Davidic King = the Son of God], the bright morning star." The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price'

Good for Purpose

One final awkward question may come to mind. In the new creation there'll be no more sea, no more night, no more 'God up there, man down here out of relationship with God'. The new creation is going to be even better than the old, cursed one; far, far better – God dwelling with man, in pure and perfect unbroken light, and not a storm on the horizon, no tears, not an ache, no sin, not even a minor peccadillo. Does that mean that in some sense the old creation wasn't after all so very good?

No, it doesn't mean that! What God did at the first creation was *good! Good for purpose! All was exactly as he had intended it.* And we believe this. "The world is charged with the grandeur of God" (Gerard Manley Hopkins!). There was nothing wrong with it after God's creative work was done. Deep darkness and turbulent seas – nothing wrong with them at all, in and of themselves. And God created the whole cosmos for man – for man to be the pinnacle of his creation. All that's without dispute. But let's think on – in a very strange way God created his universe with one special purpose in mind (yes, he had it in mind, even before he began). God, in designing his world, knew in advance that man would fall; and God knew already his plan of redemption. I know all this is a mystery, and takes us to the problem of evil – where it came from and how and why – and we're not going there in this paper – we don't need that old conundrum to debate at this point! And I have no answer anyway, any more than has anyone else, for the problem of evil. Likewise we shall not touch the question of whether there was any suffering and death pre-fall: we don't need to, because the thesis of this paper doesn't need these issues to be resolved, difficult though they are; the thesis of this paper is unaffected by them.

A remark at this point about God's *naming* in Genesis 1:5-10 of the five entities: Night, Day, Heavens, Earth, Seas. We expect six, perhaps, given that these are the three pairs of opposites, but we recall that 'Earth' stands both as 'Earth, the planet', the negative counterpart to the Heavens,

and as 'Earth, the Land', the positive counterpart to the Seas; so, counting earth twice, once in each of its senses, we do have six entities. Is there significance in God naming, or 'calling', these things by these names? Yes. To name a thing is significant in at least two respects. It signifies the meaning of a thing, and it signifies the authority of the namer to define and control a thing – what it's for, what it's to be like, its purpose and character, how it behaves, what it does, what it means in practice. And let's remember that to the ancients of the Near East, the 'is'-ness of a thing is far less important than the 'does'-ness of a thing; they were far more interested in *activity* than in *passivity*. It's only modern western theologians who dream up many-syllabled concepts like *ontological* and *existential*, which are to do with what a thing *is*. If we apply this understanding to God's naming of day, night, heavens, earth/land and seas we conclude that these entities were intended to exist for a purpose – God's purpose – and in this paper we have seen what that purpose is, what their meaning is: God intended that these five entities in their three respective contrasting pairs should illustrate and symbolise separation – the unbridgeable gulf between God and man caused by man's sin. Three are figures for evil, danger, disaster, death, destruction, purposelessness, futility, terror, emptiness, captivity; the other three are figures for a place of rest, safety, security, life and salvation in Christ. That's what they *mean*; that's what they're *for*.

So God created a universe with three pairs of dichotomous categories already in place – picture-language ready and waiting to be visual aids for humans to visualise and grasp, to help them see the reality of separation from God, and the catastrophic consequences thereof. And God saw to it that the account of creation in the very first chapter of his Word would commence with a pictorial scene of desolation, so that from that picture of desolation, from the deep darkness and from the watery depths, from the earth 'without form and void', God by his Word and by his Spirit, 'hovering/brooding/moving over the face of the waters', would first bring forth light to lighten the darkness; then secure a place for himself which was distant from man on earth, unreachable for the time being until his grace was to spring into action in Christ; then bring forth land as a secure dwelling place, safe from the raging seas; and all this ready, as a picture of salvation-waiting-to-happen, to banish the darkness and the remote heaven and the sea for ever, leaving God dwelling with mankind, redeemed mankind, for all eternity.

In summary, God created a world in which certain categories – darkness and the terror of night, sea and the danger of tempest, a cursed and broken world with heaven out of reach – would help broken and sinful man to cry out for redemption and mercy; a world *fit for purpose*; *God's purpose of redemption*. Good; very good.

Rest! Refreshment! A Dust of Snow!

Much earlier in this paper I asked a question: "How does this apply to me as a Christian today?" We need to answer it, or we haven't after all properly and appropriately read the Bible. We don't need much space to answer it, but we do need humility, sufficient to be on our knees before him, craving the redemption he offers in Christ. In the darkness of our sin, do we crave the light that God created in Christ? Did not God say on the first day, "Let there be light"? And is not the message of the Christian gospel essentially God saying again, "Let there be light – the 'Light of the World' – Christ himself"? Living on a cursed earth, do we crave unreachable heaven? Unreachable, that is, save for the grace of God in Christ that reaches down through the 'cloud of unknowing' and reaches even sinful us? As if lost in a storm at sea, in danger of death, drowning in the restless deep (these are the Bible's images), do we crave the safety of dry land, God's Land, the New Creation, God's city the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven and, again, reaches and encompasses even sinful us; sinful, yet redeemed, and so safe and secure in Christ? This surely is

Genesis 1 as it applies to us. The message to me is, “Do you crave Christ and worship him? Do you crave your Saviour, and bow your knee to Him?” How about you, dear reader?

We’ve got there! God’s *creation* is good, very good, for *salvation*, for *redemption*! Refreshment indeed from Genesis 1; if the twentieth century poet, Robert Frost, could write eloquently of some momentary refreshment occasioned by a crow shaking down upon him a ‘dust of snow from a hemlock tree’, how much more should I reflect upon God’s grace in Christ – a ‘Dust of Snow’ shaken down on me, and on you I trust, on the ‘rue-full’ day of sin and death in a fallen world, a rueful day, though, that transforms into the Day of our Lord as the Bright Morning Star dawns on the Day of our Salvation. Does that not save some part of, I mean, the *whole* part of, the ‘day’ of disaster and death that we had rued?

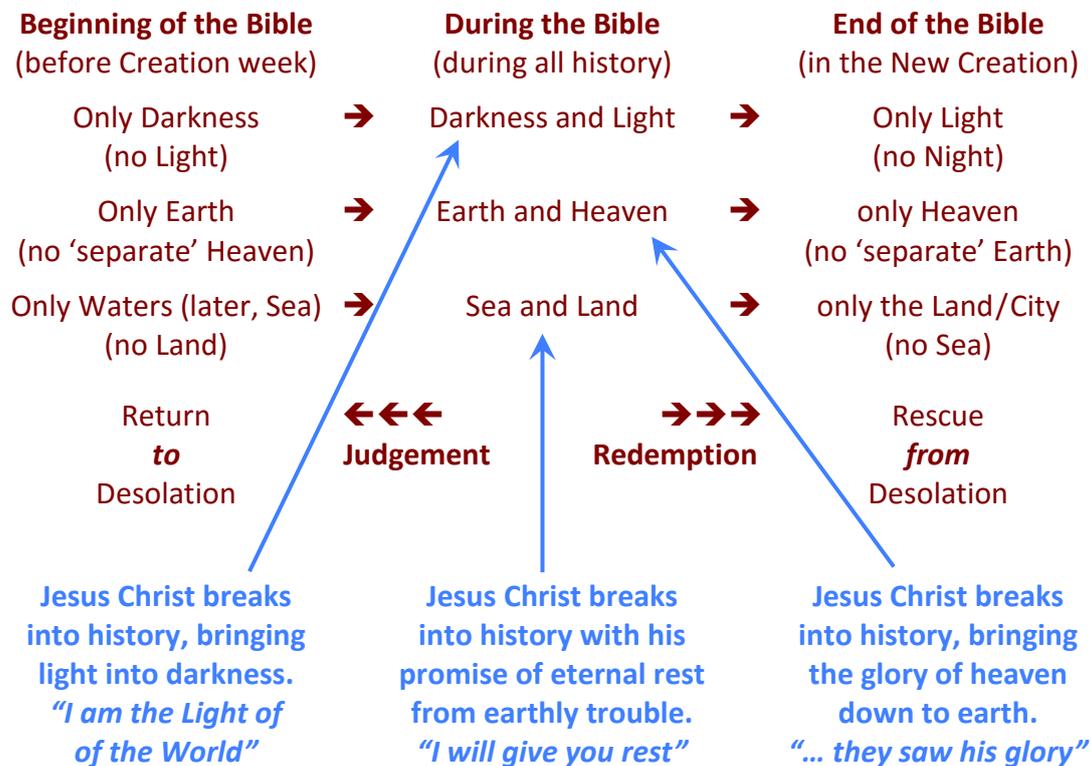
The Dust of Snow

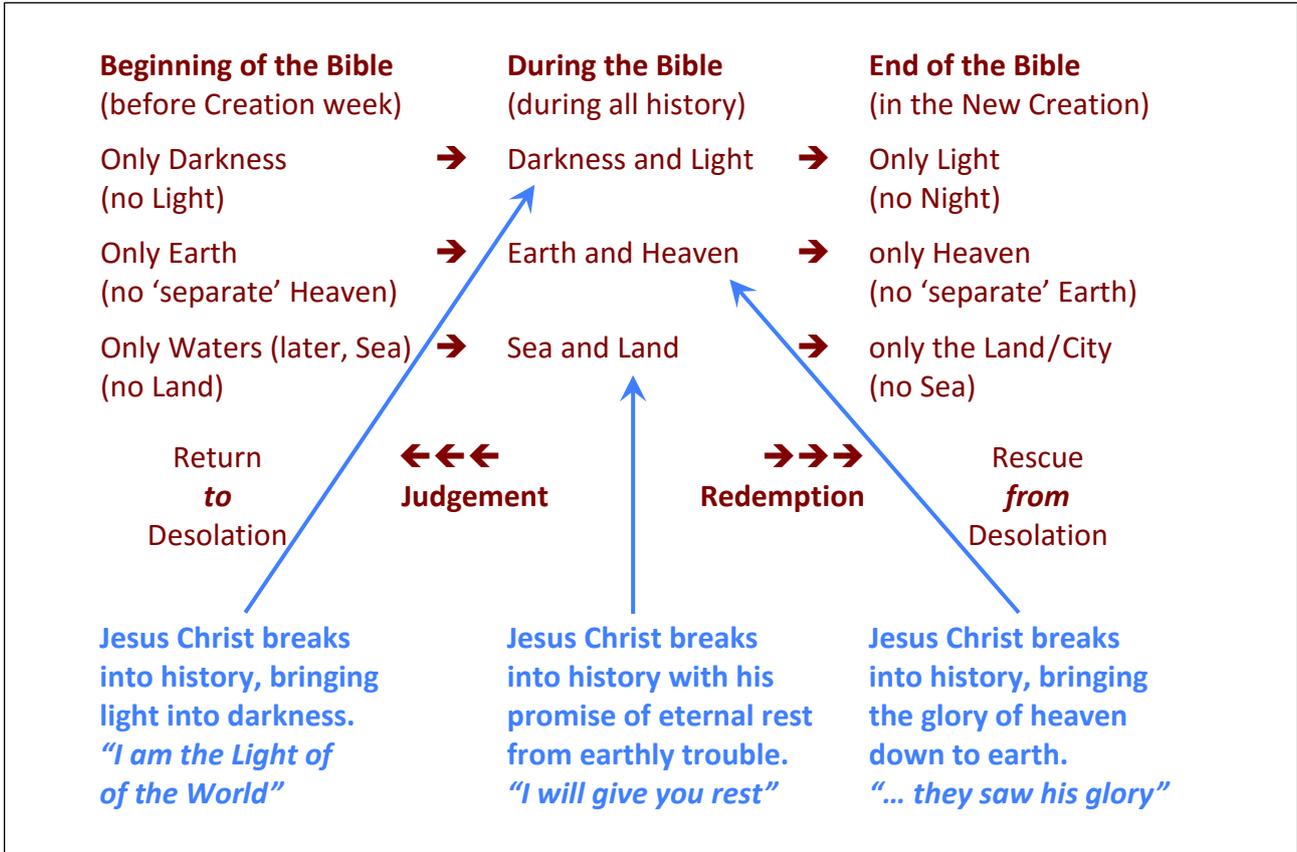
*The way a crow
shook down on me
the dust of snow
from a hemlock tree
has given my heart
a change of mood
and saved some part
of a day I had rued*

Robert Frost, 1923

*“Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest”*

Jesus of Nazareth





Abbreviations

ESV = English Standard Version
NIV = New International Version
KJV = King James Version
OT = Old Testament
NT = New Testament

The Author

The author, Vernon G. Wilkins, MA (Hons) Cantab (Mathematics), MA (Hons) Oxon (Theology), is British, lives and works in Amman, Jordan, for an evangelical theological seminary, and is trained in mathematics and theology; he's had a career both as a mathematics teacher and as a Bible teacher/church minister.

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Latest Version

This is version dated 19 January 2016, and contains minor updates and some additions. Previous versions were dated 22 September 2010, and 14 July 2014. The latest version of this paper (if any) can be found at vernonwilkins.org.

Apology

Apologies for the remainder of this panel and its verbiage – the site it was downloaded from requires it, I'm afraid, for usual safeguarding reasons.

Disclaimer

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