

Lent 2011

Creation



*Themed Biblical Study and Reflection Resource
Offered for use in the Church of Ireland*



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Ireland as depicted in
Hibernia regnum vulgo Ireland.
Published in Amsterdam, 1635.

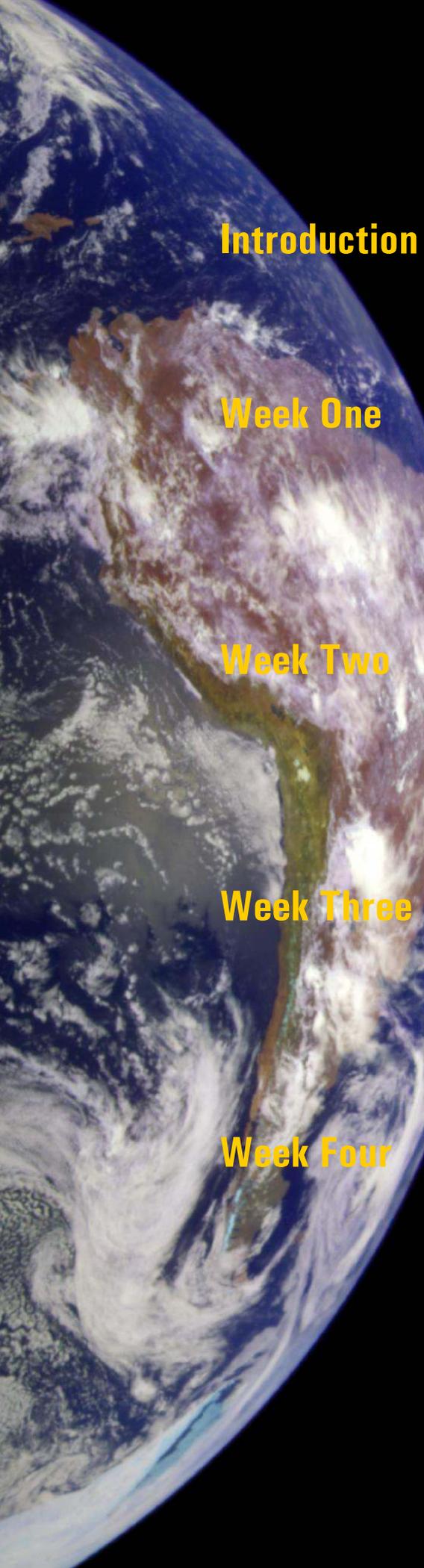


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Introduction

Ever since the books of the Bible were first composed, people have found them to be meaningful and inspiring expressions of their common faith. Today, several thousand years on, that is still the case. Yet, understandably, there is much in the Bible that may seem foreign to our world. The insights of biblical scholarship can help bridge this gap and open up a renewed appreciation of the literary genres, purposes and contents of the books of the Bible. Such insights are not the preserve of the academy, but should be of service to the whole Christian church in their faithful engagement with scripture.

One of the express aims of the proposed Biblical Association for the Church of Ireland (BACI) is to seek to bridge the gap between the lecture hall and the church hall. We passionately believe that an informed reading of scripture enhances the faith of the believing community. This is not a simple task but with care, discrimination and discernment the Holy Scriptures will continue to witness to the Word, the eternal wisdom of God, incarnate in Jesus Christ.

BACI's inaugural project is to encourage collective reflection on the theme of Creation during Lent 2011. This theme was chosen as it is also the subject of the first phase of the Anglican Communion's "Bible in the Life of the Church" initiative. That three-year programme has two specific aims: to discover how Anglicans worldwide read their Bibles and also to provide tools to enable a deeper engagement with scripture (For more information see www.anglicancommunion.org).

While groups using this BACI resource may wish to feed into the Anglican Communion programme, this material has also been designed for stand-alone use. Week by week, selected passages are given along with short commentaries, suggestions for further reading and questions for group discussion.

Our hope is that this Lenten resource will not only be the first step towards a deeper engagement between biblical scholars and local church communities but that it will also open us up to the transforming power of God's Spirit which sustains and renews all of creation.

Preface

Lenten Thoughts

For Christians, especially in Lent, the theme of Creation belongs within the greater biblical narrative, moving from Creation to fall, covenant to exile, Christ's birth to death, resurrection to New Creation. The great salvation narrative begins and ends in the Lord's creative acts and is throughout sustained by the Lord's continual creation. Our passages invoking Creation come from most of the biblical literary forms and from multiple eras. Given this wide biblical context, what do these passages tell us about why the Lord created? And how should we respond, specifically as we contemplate the death and resurrection of Christ, and our own deaths and resurrections? How does the collective mission of the Church interact with our call to bring renewal to all of Creation? How do the selected passages inform our understanding of other great biblical themes like worship, salvation, and witness?

As we prepare for Holy Week, let us consider how these coming five weeks of reflection on Creation impact our understanding of the Passion. What does it mean to say that the One through Whom all things were made was born into creation and died on behalf of his creatures? That the Creator's greatest self-manifestation was to be incarnate, like his own creation? Do the studies noting sin's effects on creation impact our understanding of the natural phenomena around Christ's death—earthquake and darkness? Or that we, the stewards of creation, killed its sustainer?

As we commemorate the central story of the liturgical year, let us take seriously our embodied and created nature, our saviour's sacrifice in joining our condition, and the Lord's promise to restore all creation to perfection.

Launch of Lent 2011 Resource

The communal biblical reflection on creation will be launched on Sunday, 6 March, at Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin.

Schedule:

Following Evensong (3:30–4:30), in the Crypt

Talk on the Theme of Creation

Rev. Canon Kenneth Kearon, Secretary General of the Anglican Communion

Official Launch of Resources

A few CD-ROMs will be available

Coffee time, with materials by EcoCongregations

The event is coordinated with EcoCongregations Ireland.

Week One

Introduction

Quite possibly the adaptation of a very old, pre-Israelite hymn, Psalm 104 challenges our tendency to regard ourselves as independent of and superior to the natural world. This attitude has desensitized us to the damage we have been inflicting on the earth by regarding its natural resources merely as commodities for exploitation. The psalm puts animals and human beings together as creatures that depend on the vegetation that God causes the earth to produce. It grounds our normal rhythm of getting up in the morning, doing our day's work and then returning to rest within the natural daily cycle that also determines the lives of animals. Even the ships that human beings make are counted as "sea life." The human ingenuity that finds ways of using nature's provision of trees, hemp, coir, reeds, etc. in order to "go down to the sea in ships" is exercised in dependence on the Creator who sustains the earth in being. We need to rediscover the psalm's sense of joy and wonder in the Lord's creation.

While God continues to sustain the work of creation, humanity has the capacity to impact it negatively. St. Paul could not possibly have had our current ecological crisis in mind when he wrote to the Romans in the early decades of the Christian movement, but his words speak powerfully today of that interconnectedness of humankind and the natural world that we seem to have forgotten. In Paul's view, the hope that faith in Jesus brings is not just for people, but for the whole of creation. In our day, it is becoming clear that the more we are set free from our enthrallment with consumerism, the better it will be for the earth and all life in it; the more we allow our status as children of God to critique our lifestyle, the less creation will groan under our oppression.

Psalm 104

¹Bless the Lord, O my soul.
O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honour and majesty,
²wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
³you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,
⁴you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.

⁵You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.

⁶You cover it with the deep as with a garment;¹
the waters stood above the mountains.

⁷At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.

⁸They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
to the place that you appointed for them.

⁹You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.

¹⁰You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
¹¹giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.

¹²By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
they sing among the branches.

¹³From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

¹⁴You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,

¹⁵and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,²
and bread to strengthen the human heart.

¹⁶The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

¹⁷In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.

¹⁸The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coney.

¹⁹You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.
²⁰You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
²¹The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
²²When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.
²³People go out to their work
and to their labour until the evening.

²⁴O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
²⁵Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
²⁶There go the ships,
and Leviathan³ that you formed to sport⁴ in it.

²⁷These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
²⁸when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
²⁹When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
³⁰When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works—
³²who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.
³³I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
³⁴May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the Lord.
³⁵Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

Romans 8:12–27

¹²So then,⁵ brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh,⁶ to live according to the flesh—

¹³for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing⁷ for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility,⁸ not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it,⁹ in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Week One

Notes

1. (Psalm 104:6) Verses 6 through 9 understand the earth as sitting on top of a great abyss of salt water, which symbolised the forces of chaos. The language here recalls the story of a world flood as a failed attempt at defying the Lord's control.
2. (104:15) In hot, dry desert climates such as Judah, oil can be used to moisten and soothe chapped skin.
3. (104:26) Leviathan is an old mythic sea monster which sometimes symbolised chaos. Pointedly this psalm makes Leviathan merely a subordinate creature of the Lord's and not his adversary.
4. (104:26) Or, "to romp in it."
5. (Romans 8:12) "So then" refers to Paul's previous argument that Christians are filled with the same Spirit which raised Christ from the dead and therefore expect to be raised from the dead also (v. 11).
6. (8:12) "Flesh" is here being used in a particularly Pauline fashion, as a symbol of the corrupted aspects of humanity without the work of the Spirit.
7. (8:19) The word gives the image of someone straining their neck forward in expectation, as if awaiting the runners of a race.
8. (8:20) "Futility" is the same Greek word which was used to translate a key word in Ecclesiastes (e.g. Eccl 1:2), a strong contrast to the purpose which Paul here asserts.
9. (8:20) "One who subjected it" could refer either to God or to Adam.

Week One

Questions

What do the passages say about the relationship between Creator and creation?

To which set of images (the Psalmist's or Paul's) are you more naturally drawn? How should we respond to these images in the context of environmental crisis?

How is creation joyful?

How are we to understand suffering in nature? How does it reflect of God?

How does salvation impact on creation?

How is the Lord's glory displayed through creation?

If we are the first fruits of the Spirit, what will the Spirit bring forth afterwards? How will that affect creation?

In what ways does creation seem to groan?

What cultural issues are raised by these passages?

What ethical questions or challenges do these passages raise?

What is the Spirit saying to the Churches through these passages?

Week Two

Introduction

The Fourth Gospel opens with, “In the beginning . . .” Clearly its author wants us to see the story of Jesus as somehow connected with the story of creation. Genesis I uses as an illustration the way we human beings express and reveal ourselves through speech. It depicts God as speaking a word that brings the world into being. To look at that world is to see something of its Creator; to marvel at its goodness is to learn about God.

The selection from Genesis includes two accounts of creation, which have been placed side by side. In the first, the orderliness and divine origins of creation are stressed, while in the second account humankind’s role as gardener and caretaker of the world is emphasised. In both accounts the importance of speech is highlighted: God speaking the world into existence in the first story, and Adam naming the animals in the second. They both strongly contrast with similar regional stories of creation: the Lord alone creates, and humanity is a co-creator rather than an after-thought.

The Fourth Evangelist is moving beyond the three previous Gospels and wants to show that Jesus is that “word,” that self-expression of God in human form. To do this, he draws on another insight that the ancient Israelites gained in their thinking about God as Creator: the idea that God made the world through wisdom. In their writings they developed a poetic way of portraying the divine wisdom—so evident in the intricate and delicately balanced design of the natural world—as a feminine figure, Lady Wisdom, who worked with God to create the world and who would eventually come to live among humankind, choosing Israel as the place where she would pitch her tent. In John’s Gospel, the coming of Jesus is explained as the coming to live among us of that creative word and wisdom of God. In Jesus, God comes, not only to live among humankind, but to be part of the natural world. This gospel has particular potential to inspire in us a reverence for God’s world because it so frequently draws on our everyday experience of creation to explain the significance of Jesus: light dawning, for example, or wind blowing, a seed germinating, water flowing, bread sustaining us, a woman giving birth, or a shepherd caring for sheep. John’s gospel must surely be good news for the earth.

Genesis 1–2

^{1:1}In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind¹ from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.²

⁶And God said, ‘Let there be a dome³ in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ ⁷So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, ‘Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.’ And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹Then God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.’ And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; ¹⁵and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so. ¹⁶God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰And God said, ‘Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.’ ²¹So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. ²⁵God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image,⁴ according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

²⁷So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' ²⁹God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. ³¹God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

^{2:1}Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ²And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

⁴These are the generations⁵ of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; ⁶but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— ⁷then the Lord God formed⁶ man⁷ from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. ⁸And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. ¹¹The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; ¹²and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

¹⁸Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.' ¹⁹So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman,⁸ for out of Man this one was taken.'

²⁴Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

John 1:1–14

¹In the beginning was the Word,⁹ and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing

came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome¹⁰ it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Week Two

Notes

1. (Gen. 1:2) Or “spirit.”
2. (1:5) In this first creation account, each of the days is described in parallel manner, giving the impression of precision and balanced order.
3. (1:6) “Dome:” the author here envisions the sky as a solid metal surface arched over the ground.
4. (1:26) Genesis’s claim that all humanity was in the image of God contrasts with the general Ancient Near Eastern concept that only kings were in the gods’ image. The primary concept is that an image is a representative or embodiment rather than visibly identical.
5. (2:4) “Generations” here means “origins” or “explanatory stories.”
6. (2:7) The word “Adam” means “human” and is very similar to the word for “ground.”
7. (2:7) “Formed” invokes the image of a potter forming clay.
8. (2:23) The word for “woman” and “wife” is very similar to the word for “man.”
9. (John 1:1) In both Hebrew and Greek “word” means both “speech” and “deed.” Here the author explains this primordial “Word” through several key terms of the book as a whole: light, life, glory, truth.
10. (1:5) Or “comprehend.”

Week Two

Questions

How do the two creation stories in Genesis compare and contrast? How do they compare with John's version? Which version do you prefer?

How the descriptions of God and divine creative activity compare between the three accounts?

What role in creation does the Word of God play?

Is the original human vegetarianism significant?

What do the passages say about the relationship between Creator and creation?

How do the passages understand the human relationship with the world?

What is the significance of the inclusion of a day of rest within creation?

What does Adam's naming of creatures say of our relationship with them?

What cultural issues are raised by these passages?

What ethical questions or challenges do these passages raise?

What is the Spirit saying to the Churches through these passages?

Week Three

Introduction

This week's readings come from the prophet Jeremiah and the Revelation to John, two very different texts which both utilise creation themes. Both prophet and apocalypse intend to reveal to their audiences the divine reality hidden in plain sight.

Jeremiah prophesied in the Kingdom of Judah before its conquest by Babylon in 597 BCE. The Kingdom of Israel had already been destroyed over a hundred years previously by Assyria. The “weeping prophet,” Jeremiah cried for the people's repentance in strong language, arguing that destruction by Babylon was coming as the Lord's punishment. The people were relying on earlier promises of security for Jerusalem and the temple, and on international political alliances. In this week's passage, Jeremiah turns each of these on its head in critique of his listeners. Using the language of divine power in warfare, Jeremiah declares that the Lord goes out to war against his own people, not their enemies. The situation is so serious that Judah's sins have undone the Lord's works of the creation and the covenant—not only Palestine but the entire world are undone. Jeremiah mocks Judah's dalliances with foreign powers and other divinities, using the common prophetic image of adultery. The Lord's people had grown too complacent—Jeremiah uses the then contemporary contrast between city/desert and civilisation/chaos to show how their pride in their civilisation would lead merely to chaos. Nevertheless, this message is a bitter one for both Jeremiah and his audience; he takes no pleasure in presenting this critique.

Revelation is a document of the early church, responding to persecutions in the Roman Empire, probably under either Emperor Nero or Domitian (64–70, 95 CE). The text takes up Jewish apocalyptic speculations to address the Christian communities scattered in Asia Minor. The author was well acquainted with the Hebrew prophets, frequently alluding to and reworking them. In our passage, a wholly new act of creation is proclaimed: the New Jerusalem, painted with temple language borrowed from Exodus, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. The description combines elements from the high priest's robes, Ezekiel's vision of a new temple, and Isaiah's vision of a new heaven and earth. Unlike most Jewish apocalyptic visions of a new creation, Revelation describes this city as *descending* to this world and lacking a temple. The New Jerusalem is explicitly contrasted with “Babylon,” a term for Rome and its imperial system which emphasises its cruelty and pride. The author also takes up the prophetic image of Israel as a bride, using it for the New Jerusalem: only this time it is a faithful bride.

Jeremiah 4:11–31

¹¹At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem: A hot wind comes from me out of the bare heights in the

desert towards my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse— ¹²a wind too strong for that. Now it is I who speak in judgement against them.

¹³Look! He comes up like clouds,¹
his chariots like the whirlwind;
his horses are swifter than eagles—
woe to us, for we are ruined!

¹⁴O Jerusalem, wash your heart clean of wickedness
so that you may be saved.
How long shall your evil schemes
lodge within you?

¹⁵For a voice declares from Dan
and proclaims disaster from Mount Ephraim.²

¹⁶Tell the nations, 'Here they are!'
Proclaim against Jerusalem,
'Besiegers come from a distant land;
they shout against the cities of Judah.

¹⁷They have closed in around her like watchers of a field,
because she has rebelled against me,
says the Lord.

¹⁸Your ways and your doings
have brought this upon you.
This is your doom;³ how bitter it is!
It has reached your very heart.'

¹⁹My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain!⁴
Oh, the walls of my heart!
My heart is beating wildly;
I cannot keep silent;
for I hear the sound of the trumpet,
the alarm of war.

²⁰Disaster overtakes disaster,
the whole land is laid waste.
Suddenly my tents are destroyed,
my curtains in a moment.⁵

²¹How long must I see the standard,
and hear the sound of the trumpet?

²²For my people are foolish,
they do not know me;
they are stupid children,
they have no understanding.
They are skilled in doing evil,
but do not know how to do good.'

²³I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;⁶
and to the heavens, and they had no light.

²⁴I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,
and all the hills moved to and fro.⁷

²⁵I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,
and all the birds of the air had fled.

²⁶I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,
and all its cities were laid in ruins
before the Lord, before his fierce anger.

²⁷For thus says the Lord: The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.

²⁸Because of this the earth shall mourn,
and the heavens above grow black;
for I have spoken, I have purposed;
I have not relented nor will I turn back.

²⁹At the noise of horseman and archer
every town takes to flight;
they enter thickets; they climb among rocks;
all the towns are forsaken,
and no one lives in them.

³⁰And you, O desolate one,
what do you mean that you dress in crimson,
that you deck yourself with ornaments of gold,
that you enlarge your eyes with paint?⁸
In vain you beautify yourself.
Your lovers⁹ despise you;
they seek your life.

³¹For I heard a cry as of a woman in labour,
anguish as of one bringing forth her first child,
the cry of daughter Zion gasping for breath,
stretching out her hands,
'Woe is me! I am fainting before killers!'

Revelation 21:1–22:5

^{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 sea¹⁰ was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.¹¹

³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
'See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;

⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.'

⁵And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' ⁶Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.'¹² To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. ⁷Those who conquer¹³ will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. ⁸But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.'

⁹Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues¹⁴ came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.'¹⁰ And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. ¹²It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels,¹⁵ and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; ¹³on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. ¹⁶The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. ¹⁷He also measured its wall, one hundred and forty-four cubits by human measurement, which the angel was using.¹⁶ ¹⁸The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. ¹⁹The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰the fifth onyx, the sixth cornelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. ²¹And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.

²²I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶People will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. ²⁷But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practises abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

^{22:1}Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

³Nothing accursed will be found there any more.
But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it,
and his servants will worship him;

⁴they will see his face,
and his name will be on their foreheads.¹⁷

⁵And there will be no more night;
they need no light of lamp or sun,
for the Lord God will be their light,
and they will reign for ever and ever.

Week Three

Notes

1. (Jer. 4:13) Divine Warrior imagery.
2. (4:15) Dan is the northernmost point of Israel; at this time, the old Northern Kingdom (Ephraim) was destroyed.
3. (4:18) The Hebrew puns “your doom” and “your wickedness.”
4. (4:19) Better, “my entrails are twisted.”
5. (4:20) A reference to the temple.
6. (4:23) “waste and void” is the same phrase used to describe the world before the Lord’s creative activity in Gen 1:2.
7. (4:24) Heaven and earth, hills and mountains are covenant witnesses (Mic 6:1–2).
8. (4:30) Literally, “rip out your eyes with paint.”
9. (4:39) “Lovers” was likely a more obscene word than the translation suggests.
10. (Rev. 21:1) The sea is an old symbol of chaos.
11. (21:2) “Bride” directly contrasts the prostitute city of Babylon previously in the book.
12. (21:6) “Alpha and Omega” are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; “the Beginning and the End” is a Hellenistic, cosmological title for the highest god.
13. (21:7) “Those who conquer”: a reference to the letters to the churches earlier in the book (Rev. 2–3).
14. (21:9) A reference to earlier set of visions in the book (Rev. 15–16).
15. (21:12) Cherubim guarded the entrance to Eden in Genesis, and were depicted in the temple of Solomon.
16. (21:17) The note on “human measurement” highlights the “otherness” of angels in Jewish tradition.
17. (22:4) Slaves would be tattooed on the forehead or hand with their owners’ name.

Week Three

Questions

Jeremiah shows that the world was being destroyed by the things which Judah took for granted; what is the church taking for granted today—and are they destroying our world?

What does Jeremiah's distress mean for the church's prophetic mission?

Is it significant that Revelation recreates the Garden of Eden as a city? And a temple?

Is a new heaven and earth an indictment of humanity or a promise for it?

What do the passages say about the relationship between Creator and creation?

What does the uncreation and new creation in these passages say about why the Lord created?

How do the Lord's acts of creation/ uncreation function as acts of judgement and/or salvation?

What cultural issues are raised by these passages?

What ethical questions or challenges do these passages raise?

What is the Spirit saying to the Churches through these passages?

Week Four

Introduction

This week's reading is from two biblical passages that make excellent use of dramatic language and imagery to illustrate their view of God and divine power.

The first written gospel, the Gospel of Mark depicts for the reader a world that is full of suspense and conflict, with reversals and ironies, revealed to us in a text that is full of riddles, word plays and hidden meanings. Even though the biblical text deals with the burning issues of humanity such as life and death, and good and evil, it is far from a gathering of moral tales and easy solutions. Rather the Gospel offers us hard-hitting assertions intertwined with irony and contradiction; for example, to be the most important, one must take up the position of the least, and whoever wishes to save their life must lose it. The text chosen for this week's reading contains these literary devices in a parable, or a short story that uses everyday occurrences to convey a truth or a moral lesson to the audience.

Reading the gospel text in parallel with the Book of Isaiah, we can see how both texts, though composed years apart and by people of different perspectives, work together to portray a view of God that is one of power and protection for those who follow him. The Book of Isaiah, arguably the most quoted book from the Old Testament, especially in the Gospels, deals with the attempts of the prophet, chosen by God, to bring his message to the people of Israel who have abandoned the covenant that was so lovingly established and have returned to the worship of idols, a practice that rankles with the prophet. The biblical text we examine this week comes from the section of Isaiah that is known as "Second" Isaiah (Chapters 40–55). Second Isaiah prophesies the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Babylonians—a group who had exiled the leaders of Israel's society and cut them off from their homeland—and their restoration in the land promised to them by God. The prophet uses creation as proof of the Lord's goodness and ability to save, affirming that the Jews are indeed the chosen people of God—who is their God *and* the God of the universe. The text for this week is usually dated at around 550 BCE, though the dating of the Book of Isaiah is normally a contentious issue.

Mark 4:26–41

²⁶He also said, ‘The kingdom of God¹ is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does

not know how. ²⁸The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle,² because the harvest has come.’

³⁰He also said, ‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹It is like a mustard seed,³ which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³²yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.’

³³With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; ³⁴he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

³⁵On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side.’

³⁶And leaving the crowd behind,⁴ they took him with them in the boat, just as he was.

Other boats were with him. ³⁷A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and

they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ ³⁹He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased,

and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?’

⁴¹And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’

Isaiah 40:12–31

¹²Who has measured⁵ the
waters in the hollow of his
hand
and marked off the heavens
with a span,

enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure,
and weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?

¹³Who has directed the spirit of the Lord,
or as his counsellor has instructed him?

¹⁴Whom did he consult for his enlightenment,
and who taught him the path of justice?

Who taught him knowledge,
and showed him the way of understanding?

¹⁵Even the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
and are accounted as dust on the scales;
see, he takes up the isles like fine dust.

¹⁶Lebanon⁶ would not provide fuel enough,
nor are its animals enough for a burnt-offering.

¹⁷All the nations are as nothing before him;
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

¹⁸To whom then will you liken God,
or what likeness compare with him?

¹⁹An idol?⁷ —A workman casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold,
and casts for it silver chains.

²⁰As a gift one chooses mulberry wood
—wood that will not rot—
then seeks out a skilled artisan
to set up an image that will not topple.

²¹Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

²²It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;⁸
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,

and spreads them like a tent to live in;
²³who brings princes to naught,
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

²⁴Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows upon them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

²⁵To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

²⁶Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?
He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,
not one is missing.

²⁷Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
'My way is hidden from the Lord,
and my right is disregarded by my God'?

²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

²⁹He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.

³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;

³¹but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Week Four

Notes

1. (Mark 4:26) This parable emphasises the contrast between the smallness of the seed and the greatness of the final harvest. God guides the growth of his kingdom towards its future fullness.
2. (4:29) A sickle is a hand-held agricultural tool with a curved blade typically used for harvesting grain crop or cutting grass for hay.
3. (4:31) A mustard seed is very small and round. A mustard plant (there are many varieties) usually grows to a height of only a foot or two, quite short in comparison to large crops of grain for example. The plant “rapeseed” often grown in Ireland (with yellow flowers) is related to the mustard plant.
4. (4:36) The setting of this miracle of Jesus is the banks of a lake where Jesus had been preaching and teaching to a crowd of people. “Going to the other side” is the other side of the lake, the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The sea is known for its violent, sudden storms.
5. (Isa. 40:12) God’s voice is heard in a series of questions and the divine speech has a sense of irony—naturally the answer to every question is a negative (e.g. no one) but he demands an answer nonetheless.
6. (40:16) Lebanon—the massive cedar trees of Lebanon. These are mostly gone today.
7. (40:19) Idol—the prophet never tires of ridiculing the pseudo-deities of other nations who have been a temptation for those who see that God has been defeated by these gods when their own nation collapsed. The image of futile human idol-creation is contrasted with the Lord’s vibrant works of creation.
8. (40:22) Some scholars suggest this is actually a term of endearment!

Week Four

Questions

Which text do you prefer and why? Do you think your choice has anything to do with the imagery used in the text?

Try and find as many images of God as creator as you can in both passages—which image appeals to you the most?

What do these passage say about the relationship between Creator and creation?

In the Gospel story, the kingdom of God is likened to the growth of a mustard seed—do you think that this helps you in your understanding of the idea of the kingdom of heaven or does it complicate matters? Why do you think this is?

In the passage from the Book of Isaiah, why do you think the prophet includes so many questions from God? How do you think the prophet's audience would react to such a barrage of questions? How would you react?

Many people think that the Old Testament paints a rather harsh picture of God—do the descriptions of God's creative works in this week's text add to or contradict this view?

What cultural issues are raised by these passages?

What ethical questions or challenges do these passages raise?

What is the Spirit saying to the Churches through these passages?

Week Five

Introduction

Our last pair of readings come from very different kinds of texts. The first, Ecclesiastes, is a long musing on the problem of human meaning in the context of suffering. It draws on and critiques the Wisdom tradition which we have seen used previously, and probably dates to around 400 BCE. 2 Peter was written to defend expectation of God's judgement, in the form of a letter to various Christian communities and is one of the last books of the canon to have been written. Although both texts on first glance appear to be pessimistic and in complete contrast, on closer inspection, both emphasise the transcendent control of God over all aspects of existence.

In the passage from Ecclesiastes, we see a sense of the rhythmic timeliness of life: all things from birth to death fit in their own way into this cycle. All of creation is the awe-inspiring and enduring work of God, with past and future held together by God's action. For this author, all living creatures stand in continuity with one another; humans and animals together are mortal and finite - a striking contrast with the God who is sovereign over all time and knowledge.

By contrast with the emphasis on life as a continuing cycle, grounded in God's providence which we encounter in Ecclesiastes, 2 Peter gives a picture of the fiery destruction of the present world. In this passage, the author contradicts a complacent sense of security in viewing life as cyclical and essentially unchanging, presenting instead a more linear sense of time, not just with a sense of past and future, but with a definite view of creation having a beginning and an end. The shadow of impending destruction hangs over present life. The idea of fire as an agent both of destruction and of purification is present both in ancient Jewish texts and in the writings of some Greek and Roman philosophers.

At first glance, this passage might seem to offer a very negative view of the created environment, as ultimately destined to be "dissolved with fire." But as the author alludes to the creation story in Genesis I in 2 Peter 3:5, we can assume that he shares the view of Genesis I that creation is fundamentally and unreservedly good. Further, dissolution with fire is not simply the end of the earth, but a moment of judgement and revelation paving the way for a "new heavens and a new earth," characterised by righteousness.

2 Peter 3:1–13

¹This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you; in them I am trying to arouse your sincere intention

by reminding you ²that you should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour spoken through your apostles. ³First of all you must understand this, that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts ⁴and saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' ¹ For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!' ⁵They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, ⁶through which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished. ⁷But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, ^{2,3} being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the godless.

⁸But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow about his promise, ⁴ as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

¹¹Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, ¹²waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? ⁵ ¹³But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, ⁶ where righteousness is at home.

Ecclesiastes 3

¹For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
²a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

³a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
⁴a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
⁵a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
⁶a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
⁷a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
⁸a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

⁹What gain have the workers from their toil? ¹⁰I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. ¹¹He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future⁸ into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. ¹²I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; ¹³moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. ¹⁴I know that whatever God does endures for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. ¹⁵That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

¹⁶Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there as well. ¹⁷I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work. ¹⁸I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals. ¹⁹For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity.⁹ ²⁰All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. ²¹Who knows whether the human spirit goes upwards and the spirit of animals goes downwards to the earth?¹⁰ ²²So I saw that there is nothing better than that all should enjoy their work, for that is their lot; who can bring them to see what will be after them?

Week Five

Notes

1. (2 Pet. 3:4) As time went on, the expectation of early Christians that Jesus would return quickly in triumph began to be questioned. We can see concerns about this in several passages in Paul's letters also, for example, I Thessalonians 5:1–4.
2. (3:7) The idea of the heavens and the earth passing away occurs a number of times in other biblical texts, for example, Psalm 102: 25–27, Isaiah 51:6; Matthew 5:18.
3. (3:7, 10, 12) Fire as an image of God's judgement on the wicked occurs in, for example, Isaiah 30:27, and Zephaniah 1:18 and 3:8. The dissolving of creation in fire here is more far-reaching, and may also be influenced by the ideas of certain Greek and Roman Stoic philosophers who believed in a purifying cycle of the burning up and restoration of the world.
4. (3:9) The idea of infinite delay was a common Greek philosophical argument against divine retribution or a final judgement.
5. (3:12) Some scholars suggest the image is one of refining, like molten metal; others, destruction.
6. (3:13) A vision of a "new heavens and a new earth" is first encountered in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22; this idea is also taken up by the author of Revelation in Rev. 21:1.
7. (Eccl. 3:10) The author was living in a time of great turmoil in Jewish thought, in which old answers to the problem of suffering were breaking down. He responds by seeking wisdom, but finds human wisdom lacking, although he affirms the Lord's transcendent control.
8. (3:11) "past and future" is usually translated "eternity." It is an old euphemism for the human state after death.
9. (3:19) "Vanity" is a key word for Ecclesiastes; it has been variously understood as "vanity," "absurdity," "meaninglessness," "incomprehensibility," and "flatulence." We saw a translation of this word in Romans in week I.
10. (3:21) In contrast to other contemporary authors, this author does not appeal to an afterlife or resurrection to justify humanity's place within God's creation or their duty towards their Creator.

Week Five

Questions

What is the mood of the Ecclesiastes passage? Is it one of resignation to one's fate or of joy in the diversity of life's experiences?

Both passages reflect on human action in the world (Eccl. 3:12-13, 22; 2 Pet. 3:11-12). What are the motivations for appropriate human action in each case?

Are there parallels between the imagery of the destruction of the earth by fire and the present global environmental crisis with the threat of global warming?

How different do you find the perceptions of time and of the created world in these passages? Which do you prefer?

What kind of connection between humankind and the rest of the created order is presupposed in these passages? How should this affect our attitudes to our world?

What do the passages say about the relationship between Creator and creation?

What cultural issues are raised by these passages?

What ethical questions or challenges do these passages raise?

What is the Spirit saying to the Churches through these passages?

Further Biblical Passages

Creation

Deuteronomy 4:15–40

Psalms 8

Psalms 19

Proverbs 8:22–36

Job 38–42

Isaiah 43:15–19

Isaiah 65:17–66:2

Amos 4

Song of the Three Young Men 23–68 (Additions to Daniel)

Matthew 25:14–30

Luke 8:22–25

Acts 17:22–34

2 Corinthians 5:14–20

Psalms 107:23–32.	On learning from the sea how dependent we are on nature
Wisdom 1:12–14	On God's life-enhancing design for the whole of creation
Matthew 5:8	A beatitude to ponder from an ecological perspective
Luke 12:13–21	What barns have we been building?

Psalms 33:6–9	On God's creative word
Romans 1: 19–24	On how creation reveals God
Proverbs 8:22–31	Wisdom's role in Creation
Sirach 24:1–22	Wisdom comes to live among God's people

Recommended Readings

For Further Study

Creation

- Bowe, Barbara, Carol Dempsey, Mary Pazdan. *Earth, Wind and Fire: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Creation*. Liturgical Press, 2004.
- Echlin, Edward P. *Climate and Christ: A Prophetic Alternative*. Columba Press, 2010.
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- Horrell, David G., et al, eds. *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*. Continuum, 2010.
- Loening, Karl; Erich Zenger. *To Begin With, God Created: Biblical Theologies of Creation*. Liturgical Press, 2000.
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- Toly, Noah J. and Daniel I. Block, eds. *Keeping God's Earth: The Global Environment in Biblical Perspective*. Apollos, 2010.

Specific Passages

- Borg, Marcus J. *The Gospel of Mark*. Conversations with Scripture: Anglican Association of Biblical Scholars Study Series. Morehouse, 2009.
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- Brueggemann, Walter. *Like Fire in the Bones: Listening for the Prophetic Word in Jeremiah*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006.
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- Daly-Denton, Margaret. *Psalm-Shaped Prayerfulness: A Guide to the Christian Reception of the Psalms*. Dublin: Columba Press, 2010.
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- Kass, Leon R. *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis*. New York: Free Press, 2003.
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- Rhoads, David M., and Donald Michie. *Mark As Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.
- Schmidt, Frederick W. *Revelation*. Conversations with Scripture: Anglican Association of Biblical Scholars Study Series. Morehouse, 2005.
- Von Rad, Gerhard. *Wisdom in Israel*. Trans. J. D. Martin. London: SCM, 1975.

Weblinks

[Http://www.ecocongregationireland.org/](http://www.ecocongregationireland.org/)

<http://www.ecen.org/cms/uploads/creationtime06.pdf>

<http://www.webofcreation.org/FinishedCompleteGC.pdf>

<http://campus.houghton.edu/orgs/rel-phil/schultzweb/Creation%20Plus.htm>

<http://jandyongenesis.blogspot.com/2011/02/anglicanism-on-doctrine-of-creation.html>

Study on Scriptural Authority

The Authority of Scripture: a Report of the Church of Ireland's Bishops' Advisory Commission on Doctrine. Dublin: Church of Ireland Publishing, 2006.

Collects

For group prayer

Almighty God,
you have broken the tyranny of sin
and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts
whereby we call you Father:
Give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service,
that we and all creation may be brought
to the glorious liberty of the children of God;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Father of light,
in whom is no change or shadow of turning,
you give us every good and perfect gift
and have brought us to birth by your word of truth.
May we be a living sign of that kingdom,
where your whole creation will be made perfect
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord of the harvest,
with joy we have offered thanksgiving for your love in creation
and have shared in the bread and wine of the kingdom.
By your grace plant within us such reverence
for all that you give us
that will make us wise stewards of the good things we enjoy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God, we give you thanks
for the order of created things, the resources of the earth,
And the gift of human life,
For the continuing work of creation,
Our share in it,
And for creative vision and inventive skill
For your faithfulness to us in patience and in love
And for every human response of obedience and humble achievement

Almighty God,
You have created the heavens and the earth
And made us in your own image;
Teach us to discern your hand in all our works
And your likeness in all your children;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Who with you and the Holy Spirit
Reigns supreme over all things, now and forever.

Eternal Father,
Whose Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven
That he might rule over all things as Lord and King;
Keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit
And in the bond of peace,
And bring the whole created order to worship at his feet,
Who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and for ever.

Almighty and everlasting God,
Who, of thy tender love towards mankind,
Hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ,
To take upon him our flesh,
And to suffer death upon the cross,
That all mankind should follow the example of his great humility;
Mercifully grant,
That we may both follow the example of his patience,
And also be made partakers of his resurrection;
Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

About

This Lenten resource is offered not only to participate in the ACC's project and to enrich the Church, but to draw attention to a desire to form an organisation which could offer similar services to the Church of Ireland on a longer term basis. BACI (The Biblical Association for the Church of Ireland) is proposed in order to enrich and deepen the use of the Bible in the Church of Ireland by encouraging rigorous and faith-based biblical study. Although Anglican in focus it is ecumenical in mindset. A working group is currently engaged in establishing a permanent organisation, to form a bridge between academic study of the Bible and devotional use within the Church of Ireland and its faith-partners. BACI will seek to maintain a balance in its proceedings between critical grounding and parish needs, as well as to maintain participation by clergy and laity, scholars, religious education teachers, and interested parishioners. The working group strongly intends that the organisation would represent the whole of the Church of Ireland, both geographically and theologically. Practical reasons have made the working group to be Dublin based, but all are encouraged to participate. The organisation intends to be independent of the Synod, but is seeking the honorary patronage of the +Archbishop of Armagh and the +Archbishop of Dublin. Nominations and volunteers for the working group and eventual committee are welcomed. A temporary website can be explored at: <http://bibliahibernica.wordpress.com>.

This Lenten resource has been developed through the gracious efforts of several volunteer scholars as an inaugural BACI project. The thanks are due to:

Dr. Máire Byrne
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Rev. Darren McCallig
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Dr. Jason M. Silverman

Feedback

Observations/ ACC

As part of the Anglican Consultative Council's project "The Bible in the Life of the Church," BACI is seeking and encouraging feedback from parishes and diocese who use these materials. If possible, consider designating a member of your group as a recorder, to write down observations and to answer the kinds of questions found on the next page. Additionally, individuals should feel free to answer the questions on their own. These records and answers can then be forwarded to BACI at baci.anglican@gmail.com. BACI would like to collate the answers and send them on to the ACC. Further, any feedback provided will help with the planning and improving of future Lenten and biblical projects.

An overview of the broader Anglican project can be found at <http://anglicanbible.blogspot.com/>.

The Feedback questions are adapted from the ACC.

BACI Lent 2011 Feedback

What was the group? (Parish, diocesan, ad hoc)_____

Was this a new or established group?_____

How many of the passages were studied?_____

Who was present? Was there an 'expert'?_____

Did the group discuss equally, or was there a speaker?_____

How involved were the members?_____

Were other biblical passages mentioned or discussed? If so, which?_____

How similarly or differently did people interpret the passages?_____

Were links made with people's lives?_____

What energised the group?_____

What were the group going to do with what they learned?_____

Did they find the selection and notes helpful?_____

Any critiques of the material? _____

What would your group have liked to make the study more relevant or interesting? _____