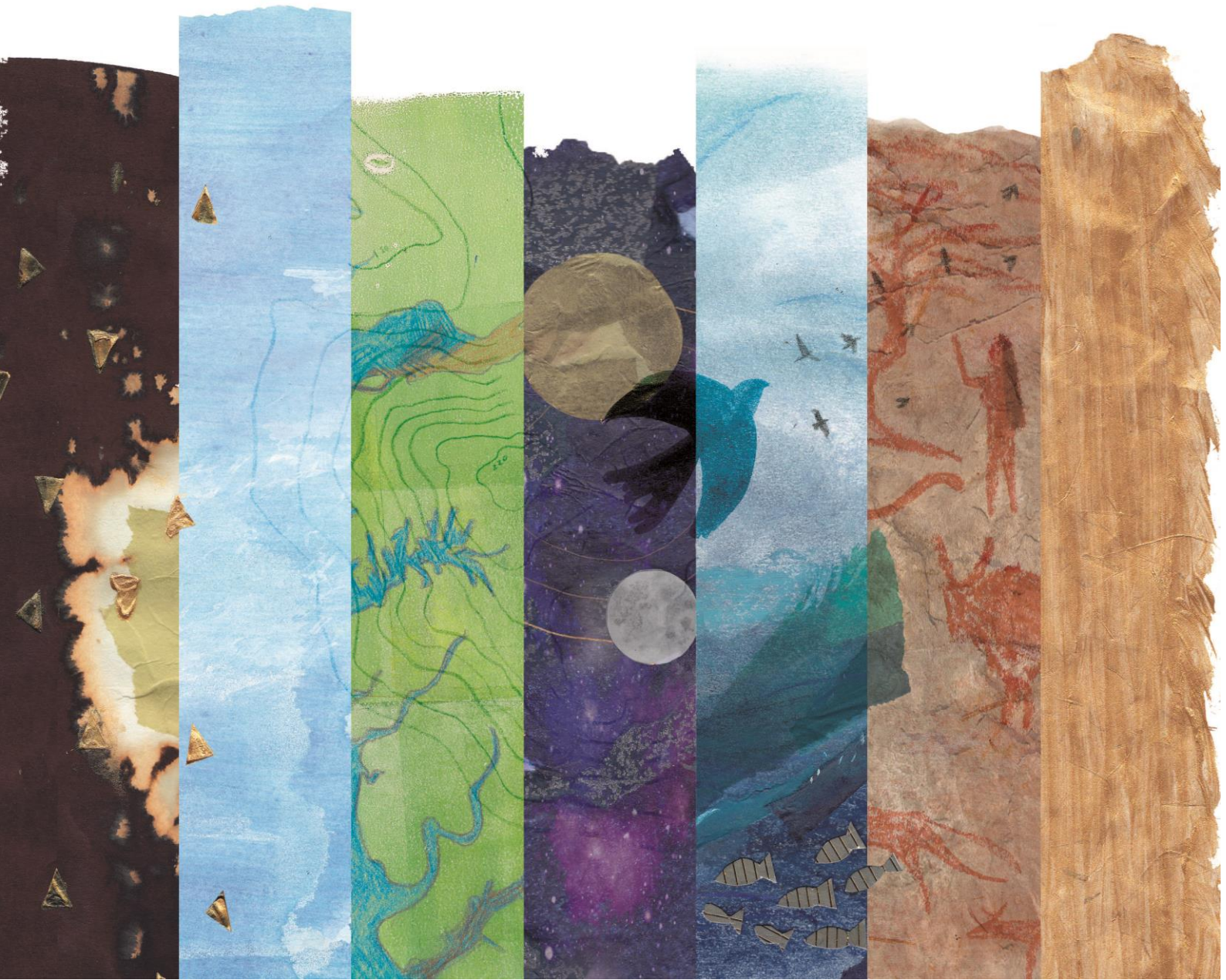


# CREATION

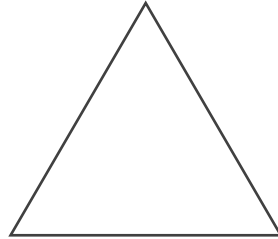
Theology Matters, Plymouth, November 2020

Andrew Sampson (Grace Church, Truro)



## SESSION 1: MAKING SENSE OF GENESIS 1

### PART 1: ALLOWING THE TEXT TO SPEAK TO US ON ITS OWN TERMS



#### i) Historical context: what were the conditions of the original audience?

Walter Brueggemann:

The text is likely ... addressed to exiles. It served as a refutation of Babylonian theological claims. The Babylonian gods seemed to control the future. They had, it appeared, defeated the dreams of the God of Israel. Against such claims, it is here asserted that Yahweh is still God, one who watches over his creation and will bring it to well-being. While our interpretation should not be limited to a situation of exile, that context should not be neglected because it enhances the force and vitality of the claims made for the God of Israel. To despairing exiles, it is declared that the God of Israel is the Lord of all of life.

Such a judgment means that this text is not an abstract statement about the origin of the universe. Rather, it is a theological and pastoral statement addressed to a real historical problem. ... Its affirmation is: this God can be trusted, even against contemporary data.' (*Genesis* (Interpretation series), p. 25)

#### ii) Literary genre: what kind of literature are we dealing with here?

Andrew Wilson:

- Historical or Poetic, figurative literature?

#### iii) Authorial intent: what does the author intend to say?

Different questions:

- Theological
- Pastoral
- Scientific
- Philosophical

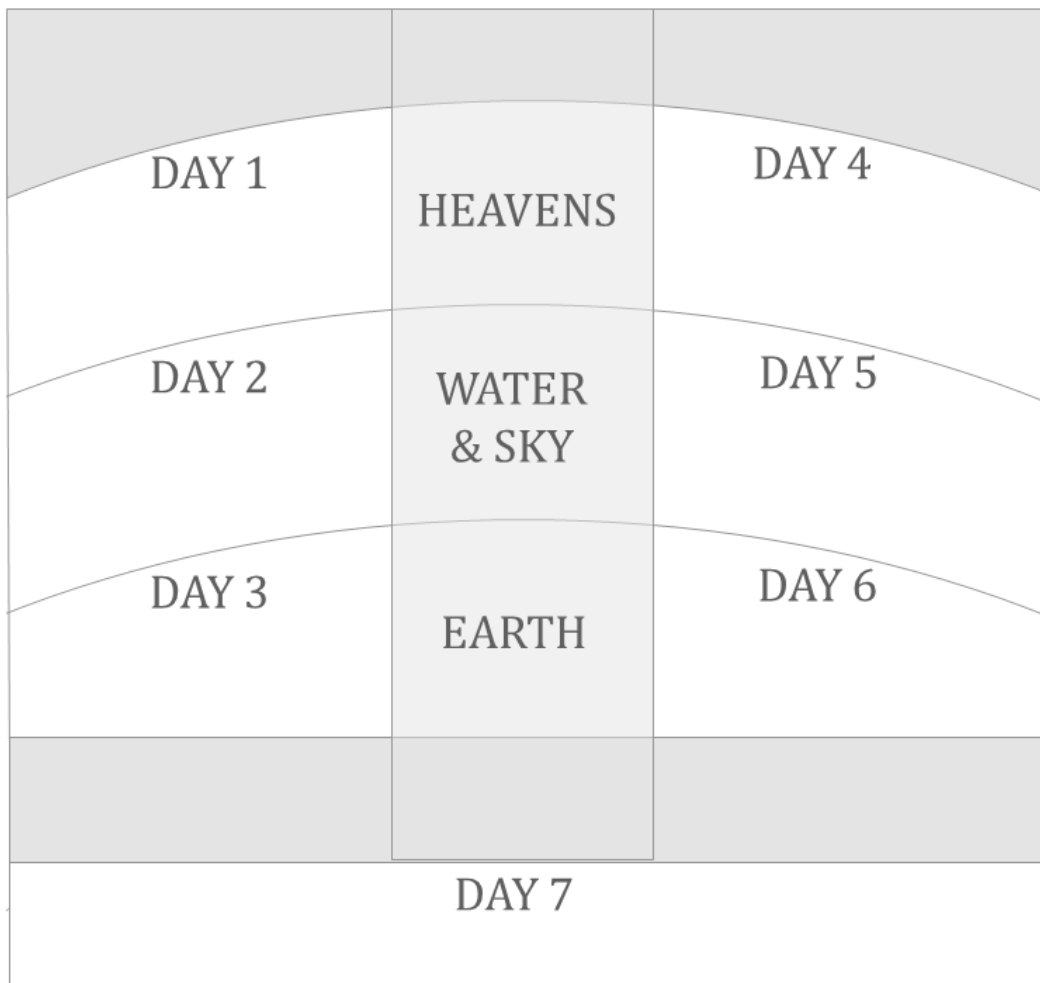
Not *How?* and *When?* but *Who?* and *Why?*

**Watch video: John Walton, *Genesis Through Ancient Eyes*.**

- **How would you respond to someone who says, 'If God didn't mean what he said, then why didn't he say what he meant?'**

## PART 2: PAYING CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE TEXT

*Tohu and bohu*



i) What do we learn about God?

- Compare and contrast Genesis 1:1-2:3 with the Babylonian creation myth (Enuma Elish)
- Read extract: Michael Reeves, *The Meaning of Creation from The Good God*

John Mark Comer:

'Nothing about creation says that God is a tightfisted, utilitarian, bean-counting pragmatist; God is a lavish, opulent, extravagant *artist*, and creation is his beauty on display.' (*Garden City*, p. 123)

Annie Dillard:

'Why so many forms [of life]? Why not just that one hydrogen atom? The creator goes off on one wild, specific tangent after another, or millions simultaneously, with an exuberance that would seem to be unwarranted, and with an abandoned energy sprung from an unfathomable font. What is going on here? The point of the dragonfly's terrible lip, the giant water bug, birdsong, or the beautiful dazzle and flash of sunlighted minnows, is not that it all fits together like clockwork – for it doesn't, particularly, not even inside the goldfish bowl – but that it all flows so freely wild, like the creek, that it all surges in a free, fringed tangle. Freedom is the world's water and weather, the world's nourishment freely given, its soil and sap: and the creator loves pizzazz.' (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, pp. 138-9)

Matter matters.

A protest against gnosticism which is 'spirituality without the inconvenience of creation' (Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, p. 62).

God loves this world so much that he's going to save it – all of it (see Rom 8:19-21; Eph 1:9-10; Col 1:19-20; Rev 21:1-5).

*'When Christ shall come with acclamation...'*

## ii) What do we learn about humanity?

Gen 1:27-28

- **Subdue (rule):**
- **Fill (multiply):**

**Tom Wright illustration** (*Surprised by Scripture; The Day the Revolution Began*):

Andrew Wilson on the meaning of life (talk on *Origin of Humanity*, 28 July 2015):

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## SESSION 2: CAN GENESIS BE HARMONISED WITH A SCIENTIFIC ACCOUNT OF ORIGINS?

### 1. PRELIMINARY POINTS

- 'All Christians are, by definition, creationists' (Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* p. 15)
- I wouldn't use the pulpit to say, "This is what you *should* believe."

### 2. THREE QUESTIONS

Reference: Tim Keller, Six-part series on *Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople* (Biologos, Feb-Mar 2012)

Keller's conclusion:

... Christians who are seeking to correlate Scripture and science must be a "bigger tent" than either the anti-scientific religionists or the anti-religious scientists. Even though in this paper I argue for the importance of belief in a literal Adam and Eve, I have shown here that there are several ways to hold that and still believe in God using [evolutionary biological processes].

When Derek Kidner concluded his account of human origins, he said that his view was an "exploratory suggestion...only tentative, and it is a personal view. It invites correction and a better synthesis." That is the right attitude for all of us working in this area.

**QUESTION ONE:** If God used evolution to create, then we can't take Genesis 1 literally, and if we can't do that, why take any other part of the Bible literally?

**Answer:** The way to respect the authority of the Biblical writers is to take them as they want to be taken. Sometimes they want to be taken literally, sometimes they don't. We must listen to them, not impose our thinking and agenda on them.

Walter Brueggemann on Genesis 3:

The Bible is not an answer book to all of the curious questions we may ask. ... It is, rather, the summons of this calling God for us to be his creatures, to live in his world on his terms.' (*Genesis* [Interpretation series], p. 44)

**QUESTION TWO:** If biological evolution is true—does that mean that we are just animals driven by our genes, and everything about us can be explained by natural selection?

**Answer:** No. Belief in evolution as a biological process is not the same as belief in evolution as a world-view.

**QUESTION THREE:** If biological evolution is true and there was no historical Adam and Eve how can we know where sin and suffering came from?

**Answer:** Belief in evolution can be compatible with a belief in an historical fall and a literal Adam and Eve. There are many unanswered questions around this issue and so Christians who believe God used evolution must be open to one another's views.

### 3. HUMAN ORIGINS AND THE ORIGIN OF SIN

Reference: Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?*, pp. 234-43, 254-56

	<b>MODEL A</b>	<b>MODEL B</b>	<b>MODEL C</b>	<b>MODEL D</b>	<b>MODEL E</b>
<b>Relationship with modern science</b>	Consistent	Consistent	Consistent	Inconsistent in parts	Inconsistent
<b>Main features</b>	Genesis 1-3 has no connection with history.	Evolutionary creationism. Theological literature that corresponds with historical events. Speaks of humanity's growing awareness of God and understanding of moral responsibility	Evolutionary creationism. Theological literature that corresponds with historical events. Speaks of God choosing to reveal himself to a particular couple of Neolithic farmers in the ancient Near East.	Old-earth creationism. Adam created directly by God, <i>not</i> by an evolutionary process.	Young-earth creationism. Adam created directly by God on the sixth day.
<b>Who was Adam?</b>	Adam is everyman and everywoman.	Represents the first humans to turn to their creator. Not a particular individual.	Historical figure who lived perhaps 6,000-8,000 years ago. A product of an evolutionary process, like all other humans.	Historical figure who lived perhaps 6,000-8,000 years ago. A special creation of God.	Historical figure who lived perhaps 6,000-8,000 years ago. A special creation of God.
<b>What about the Fall?</b>	Not a particular event in history. The timeless story of everyman and everywoman.	Not rooted in a particular event, but does describe a historical reality. As humanity grew in its awareness of God, it also began to consciously reject God, resulting in alienation from him.	A particular event in history.  General view: While there was death before the fall, Adam and Eve's sin introduces spiritual death of humans into the world.	A particular event in history.  General view: Adam and Eve's sin introduces death – both spiritual <i>and</i> physical – of humans into the world.	A particular event in history.  General view: Adam and Eve's sin introduces spiritual and physical death of all humans, and physical death of other living creatures.
<b>Outstanding issues/questions</b>					

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS?

Written in **pencil**:

Written in **ink**:

Written in **blood**:

## SESSION 3: THE CREATION GIFT OF TIME

### i) Rhythm

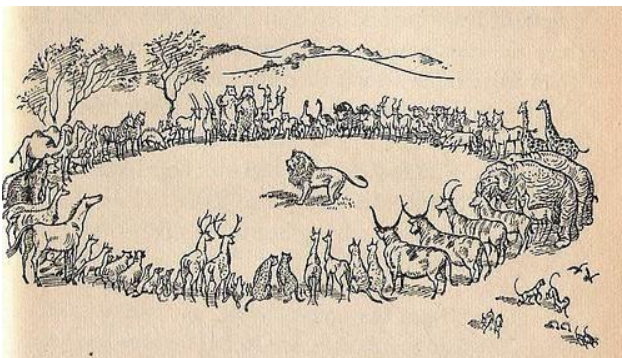
‘There was evening and there was morning...’

FORMLESS	EMPTY
DAY 1 Light and Dark	DAY 4 Sun, moon and stars
DAY 2 Sky and sea	DAY 5 Birds and sea creatures
DAY 3 Sea and land Land plants	DAY 6 Land animals Human beings
FORMED	FILLED
DAY 7 Rest	

When we get to Day 7 there is a break in the rhythm. This day is treated very differently. It is given special emphasis and attention.

2:2-3

Read C.S. Lewis’s story of the creation of Narnia from *The Magician’s Nephew*.



Some personal musings: I think C.S. Lewis has appreciated something very deep and significant about the creation account in Genesis 1. Scholars have argued for centuries about what kind of literature we are dealing with here. Is it history or poetry? Perhaps its closest kinship is with melody, with music.

Why does God rest?

Rhythm written into the fabric of creation



## ii) Bringing life

### 2:3 – “God blessed...”

Bless (*barak*) – pronounced like the president.

John Mark Comer:

A *barak*, or a blessing, in the creation story is a life-giving ability to procreate – to make *more life*. ... The Sabbath has a life-giving ability to procreate – to fill the world up with life.

No matter how much you love your job or fine-tune your work/life balance, by the end of the week, you’re tired. Your fuel cells are on empty. But rest *refills* us – with energy, creativity, vision, strength, optimism, buoyancy, clarity, and hope. Rest is life-giving. (*Garden City*, pp. 188-9)

## iii) Sacred time

### 2:3 – “God ... made it holy ...”

Holy (*qadosh*): ‘set apart’. Usually a word used for God.

John Mark Comer (again):

...this God doesn’t have a holy *space*; he has a holy *time* – the Sabbath. This God isn’t found in the world of space – in a temple, on top of a mountain, at a spring, around a statue or a monument. He’s found in the world of time. ...

There is a hierarchy to time. Not all moments are created equal. Some moments are much, much better than others. For six days we wrestle with the world of space – the hard work of building civilisation. But on the Sabbath, we savour the world of time. We slow down, take a deep breath, and drink it all in. We push the Slow-Mo button. ... It’s a day where your goal is to savour every second. Because it’s holy. (pp. 190-1)

And again!

Sabbath is a way to say *yes* to [Yahweh]..., the rest-God. It’s a way to *remember* and never forget that what we’re craving, and even coveting, isn’t found in the world of space, but in the world of time – in God himself. This isn’t to devalue the world of space. No, this world is good. It’s just to put it in its proper place. The world and all the stuff in it are gifts to enjoy, not gods to worship.’ (p. 217)

## Sabbath commanded

Here, that pattern is modelled for us. Later, it’s commanded:

### Exodus 20:8-11

- *Sabbath*: Quit, or stop. ‘Down tools’.
- ‘*Keeping it holy*’: Echoes ‘made it holy’ from Genesis.
- ‘*A Sabbath to the LORD your God*’: Rest is essential to our wellbeing, but Sabbath is not *primarily* about us, or how it benefits us. It is not given us so that we can be more productive. It’s about *God* and it’s for *God*. (*Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, Eugene Peterson, p. 116)

Key point: Sabbath is not just a ‘day off’. It’s a day for adoring and attending to God. Sabbath is a weekly housekeeping, a deliberate, regular interference with my schedule: to stop, attend to God and adore him, so that he becomes the source out of which I work.

Eugene Peterson:

'If there is no Sabbath – no regular and commanded no-working, not-talking – we soon become totally absorbed in what we are doing and saying, and God's work is either forgotten or marginalized. When we work we are most god-like, which means that it is in our work that it is easiest to develop god-pretensions. Un-sabbathed, our work becomes the entire context in which we define our lives. We lose God-consciousness, God-awareness, sightings of resurrection. We lose the capacity to sing "This is my Father's world" and end up chirping little self-centred ditties about what we are doing and feeling.

This is a most difficult command to keep, a most difficult practice to cultivate. It is one of the most abused and distorted practices of the Christian life. ... But I don't see any way out of it: if we are going to live appropriately in the creation we must keep the Sabbath. We must stop running around long enough to see what he has done and is doing. We must shut up long enough to hear what he has said and is saying. All our ancestors agree that without silence and stillness there is no spirituality, no God-attentive, God-responsive life.' (*Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, pp. 117-8)

Seven 'Sabbath words'

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## LIVING GENESIS

What is your rhythm of work and rest? Do you need to review the way you're doing life?

## SESSION FOUR: THE CREATION GIFT OF PLACE

Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*:

- The first creation account is about God's gift of *time*;
- The second creation account is about God's gift of *place*.

GENESIS 1	GENESIS 2
Creation of the cosmos	Creation of a garden
Creation of humanity	Creation of one man and one woman
'God'	'LORD God'

Adam is the representative man, the representative of humankind.

- i) **All the action happens in a specific location on earth, a garden (2:8)**
- ii) **This garden is defined by geography (2:10-14)**
- iii) **The creation of the man is strongly connected with place (2:7)**
- iv) **The vocation of the *adam* is connected with his place (2:15)**

A world pregnant with potential.

John Mark Comer:

Put another way, creation was a project, not a product. The Garden was designed to go somewhere. ... When you think of Eden, don't think of a public park with a lawn, a play set, and a flowerbed or two, where God hands Adam a lawnmower and says, Keep it tidy, will ya?

Think of a violent, untamed wilderness teeming with beauty, but no infrastructure, no roads, no bridges, no cities, and no civilization, and God says, *Go make a world*.

Adam wasn't a landscape-maintenance employee. He was an explorer, a cartographer, a gardener, a designer, an architect, a builder, an urban planner, a city-maker. (*Garden City*, p. 62)

### THE THEOLOGY OF WORK

- i) **The dignity of work**

Tim Keller:

'[Work] is part of the blessedness of the garden of God. Work is as much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality; it is not simply medicine but food for our soul. Without meaningful work we sense significant inner loss and emptiness.' (*Every Good Endeavour*, p. 37)

- ii) **The nature of work**

We are cultivators of creation. We 'make something of the world' (Andy Crouch).

### LIVING GENESIS

**Do you have a biblical vision for the work that you do?**

## POSTSCRIPT: GENESIS AND CREATION CARE

i) What are the implications of each of the following elements for how we respond to the current 'climate emergency'?

- **The doctrine of creation**
- **Our future hope**
- **Ruling and subduing**
- **Filling and multiplying**
- **Obedience to God's command**

ii) How do you respond to the following quotes?

Richard Chartres, Bishop of London:

'There is now an overriding imperative to walk more lightly upon the earth and we need to make our lifestyle decisions in that light. Making selfish choices such as flying on holiday or buying a large car are a symptom of sin.' (*The Sunday Times*, 23 Jul 2006, p. 1).

James Glover:

'I was deeply disturbed to read about the growing support among many church groups for the latest fashionable phenomenon known as "global warming" ... this is nothing but a weapon of mass distraction.' (Letter in the *Christian Herald*, 4 Sep 2004, p. 8)

David Attenborough:

'The moral attitude of the Old Testament, which was that the world was there for us to plunder and we could take what we liked from it, has governed our thinking until now.' (*The Sunday Times News Review*, 21 May 2006, p. 8)

Christopher Wright:

'A biblical theology of mission that flows from the mission of God himself ... must include the ecological sphere within its scope and see practical environmental action as a legitimate part of Christian mission.' (*The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, p. 413)

Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert:

'God will make all things new, but our job in the world is to help all peoples find a new relationship with God. We are not called to bring a broken planet back to its created glory. But we are to call broken people back to their Creator.' (*What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, p. 248)

### Questions:

- **What constitutes 'sin'?**
- **What is included in our mission?**
- **Are we called to fix a broken world?**

## SOME RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### Allowing Genesis to speak on its own terms

John Walton, *Genesis through ancient eyes*. Available on Youtube.

You've seen it, so you know already how helpful it is, not just for interpreting Genesis, but any biblical text.

### Genesis and Science: getting started

Andrew Sampson, *Creating a Culture of Dialogue in the Church* (paper). A personal plea to engage with contentious issues with an attitude of generosity and grace. Very applicable to issues of science!  
[andrewsampsontoughts.wordpress.com/papers/](http://andrewsampsontoughts.wordpress.com/papers/)

Andrew Sampson, *Has Science Killed God?* Illustrated lecture I delivered at Truro School outlining my personal journey as a scientist and theologian. Available on Youtube.

### Genesis and Science: more detail

Biologos website – [biologos.org](http://biologos.org). Tim Keller's series of articles (and much else besides) can be found here.

Conor Cunningham, *Did Darwin Kill God?* One-hour documentary made for the BBC several years ago. Now available on Youtube. Cunningham covers a huge amount of ground: young-earth creationism; scientific atheism; how Genesis has been interpreted through church history; intelligent design; evolutionary creationism, etc.

Nick Spencer, *Rescuing Darwin* – report commissioned by the Theos thinktank. Available for £5.00 from <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/research/2009/01/16/rescuing-darwin>

### Creation, salvation and our future hope

Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope*. SPCK, 2011.

An accessible read that many credit with helping them experience a 'paradigm shift'. Wright's most important book by far.

### Theology of work

Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavour: Connecting Your Work to God's Plan for the World*. Hodder & Stoughton, 2012.

One of the best resources out there to help you view the whole of life in a biblical way.

### Creation, human vocation and Sabbath

John Mark Comer, *Garden City: Work, Rest, and the Art of Being Human*. Zondervan, 2015.

A thoroughly enjoyable and enriching read. (Actually, anything by John Mark Comer is highly recommended.)

### Sabbath

Teaching series by John Mark Comer

<https://bridgetown.church/series/sabbath/>

Comer's teaching on Sabbath is superb: biblically grounded; theologically robust and culturally applied. It is extremely challenging but presented in an atmosphere of grace. Be warned: it could very well change your life.