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## **The Restoration of the Primordial World of Genesis 1–3 in Revelation 21–22**

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One of the key discussions in religious studies today revolves around the effect of post-modern thinking upon contemporary society. While modernity may be characterized as the age of empirical truth—what can be gained by the scientific method—post-modernity may be portrayed as an age in quest of renewed interpersonal relationships.<sup>1</sup> Some of the most vital questions raised in connection with the post-modern world view are those which have to do with origins and endings.<sup>2</sup>

The two biblical books which deal most directly with these questions are Genesis and Revelation.<sup>3</sup> When we compare their content, we find their respective messages are more related, and perhaps more relevant, to today's world than we might think at first. Both deal with the intimately connected themes of origins and endings, two vital matters among the concerns of the post-modern world.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this investigation is to explore the subject of origins as expressed in Genesis 1-3 and its relationship to the apocalyptic end of the world presented in Revelation 21-22. We especially wish to examine the reconstruction of the primal ecological relationships in four specific areas: our relationship with God, ourselves, others, and the world.<sup>5</sup> The reconstruction and renewal of the primordial world and its proper ecological relationships can, if properly understood, restore a sense of confidence in the future to the post-modern thinker.

In our study we will first examine the connection between the books of Genesis and Revelation. Secondly, we will investigate the loss/restoration motif by comparing what the entrance of sin did to the primordial world described in

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Genesis 1-3, and how that which was lost will be restored through the creative power of God as described in Revelation 21-22. We will then observe the implications of the loss/restoration motif for the post-modern world.

**Genesis and Revelation**

We can hardly fail to notice that the great themes of the Bible have their beginnings in the book of Genesis. These are continuously developed and enlarged upon throughout the remainder of Scripture. Finally, they come to their climactic consummation in the last book of God's Word, the book of Revelation.<sup>6</sup> If the book of Genesis were excised from the Bible (as many might prefer), the rest of the Bible would be incomprehensible.<sup>7</sup>

The book of Genesis reminds us of our exalted, primordial beginnings, whereas the book of Revelation emphasizes the proper orientation to and preparation for events yet to come on the earth.<sup>8</sup> But because the Revelation deals with future events, we cannot take it any less seriously than the book of Genesis. We can learn much about the primordial world by studying the two books together, just as we can learn much about the future of the human race by studying both.

Genesis, then, describes genuine primeval history, while the book of Revelation concentrates on actual future history. In the former, the characters and stories are factual. In the latter, the events are as authentic as the characters in Genesis. Both tell us that God will finish the work He began at creation, interrupted by the intrusion of sin. Well has Thomas Altizer written when he states, "apocalypse can finally have no meaning if it is divorced from genesis."<sup>9</sup>

Thus, in a very real sense, the book of Revelation can be considered the sequel to the Book of Genesis. The two books bind together with a thread of unity all of history as well as all of God's revelations to human beings. They are the alpha and omega of God's word, the book of beginnings and the book of endings. They comprise the foundation and capstone of God's inspired word to mankind. The two must be taken together in order to present a comprehensive, coherent, and compelling world view to post-modern society. More than ever before, modern Christians need to believe and understand these complementary books if they would truly live an effective life and be able to witness in today's confused and hurting world.<sup>10</sup>

**Loss and Restoration in Genesis and Revelation**

The loss/restoration motif, quite common in the Bible, has a strong attestation in the books of Genesis and Revelation. In the primordial scene of Genesis, the reader is introduced to a probational world that falls prey to sin.<sup>11</sup> The final world as described in Revelation depicts

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human beings who, while they have sinned, have also experienced redemption and renewal. In other words, the first three chapters of Genesis outline the entrance of sin into the primordial world and point up the need to have the curse of sin and death removed from it. The last chapters of Revelation outline the purgation of sin from God's world and its resultant renewal into the pristine form described in Genesis before sin changed it.

After the original human couple made a choice to follow Satan's deception, God pronounced a series of curses that would come upon His creation as a result of the Fall.<sup>12</sup> Hence, the ground was cursed (3:17), sorrow would come upon the human family (3:17), and hard toil would be the lot of humanity in the struggle to survive and grow food in the midst of thistles and thorns (3:18-19). Furthermore, humans would now die and return to the ground from which they were created (3:19). The couple were given coats of skin to clothe themselves (3:21). They were told Satan would continually attempt to harass and destroy them and their descendants (3:15). Finally, the primordial pair were barred access to the tree of life and even to the Garden of Eden itself (3:23-24). This destruction of the primordial world described in Genesis 3 is a bleak picture of human life which must now somehow survive rather than flourish spontaneously.

However, if we carefully study the last few chapters of Revelation, we observe that what was lost by human transgression will be restored by God, who will renew this world to its pristine purity. There will be no more curse (22:3) and no more sorrow (21:4) in the new cosmos. The exacting labor and struggle in pain to survive will be replaced by a world in which there will be no pain or tears (21:4), and one which will now produce abundantly as it was designed to do.

While in Genesis death occurs because of sin, in Revelation death is banished in the renewed world (21:4). Animal coats are now replaced by clothes of fine linen (19:14). There is no more ecological deconstruction or exploitation of the world in order to satisfy human wants and needs.

In the primordial world under the curse of sin, Satan continued to harass humanity, whereas in the renewed world Satan is not present, having been destroyed prior to the recreation of the earth (20:10). Finally, the redeemed of the human race will have free access to both the city and the presence of God (22:4, 14) and to the tree of life (22:14) because they will reflect the *imago dei* as their forebears did when originally created.

The losses suffered when sin was introduced into the perfect cosmos described in Genesis (the devastating effects upon our ecological relationships with God, ourselves, others, and the world) are now

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restored in full in the book of Revelation. In one sense, the primordial world becomes better than it was originally because sin will not make inroads into it ever again.

Knowing that this world is to be restored to its primordial pristine state has several significant implications for the post-modern mind. The promise tells us God has a purpose for the world, a plan for it, and He will renew it.

**Implications of Loss and Restoration**

**God Has a Purpose for the World.** The existence of earth with its inhabitants, created by the hands of an omnipotent, holy, loving God as affirmed in the book of Genesis, necessarily indicates a divine purpose. It implies that the omniscient, omnipotent God had a great and eternal purpose for His creation in His heart before He began to create. The temporary intrusion of sin and death can never permanently thwart or deter His design. The time will come for God to fulfill that purpose, and He will remove the great curse imposed upon the creation. The kingdom of God is soon to be established, and His saints will inherit it as He promised.<sup>13</sup>

The book of Revelation describes in detail the shape the fulfillment of God's purposes will take.<sup>14</sup> Its message, as it describes the reconstruction of the universe, tells us God is not daunted by the storms of history. The end is assured, because it has already begun through God's action in Christ; it is now present, and will be concluded in God's time.<sup>15</sup> God's purpose in creation involves a glorious future for His creatures, and that purpose must and will be fulfilled.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Revelation presents a sovereign God whose purposes must be victorious over evil and all associated with it.<sup>17</sup>

The assurance of the triumph of God's purpose for this world is the supreme contribution of the book of Revelation to the Church as well as to contemporary society.<sup>18</sup> Revelation, therefore, above all else, in its presentation of the restoration of what was lost in Genesis, is designed to assure us that what God has said is true. What He promised, He will do.<sup>19</sup> And if God's interest in the human being is real, and if His purpose is sure, then there is a reason for us to maintain a struggle against evil. This is so because our sacrifice will be rewarded, and hope will find freedom to hope for a better future. The message that God has a purpose for this world, that it is not headed for chaos, then, is most certainly a timely message for our contemporary world.

**God Has a Plan for the World.** Closely related to God's purpose is His plan for this world. Both the books of Genesis and Revelation have been definite sources of spiritual strength for the church in all

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ages precisely for this reason. In fact, these two biblical books are wholly given to the consideration of God's plan for His people's future.

Revelation predicts a new world order founded upon the redemptive work of Christ when He restores the pristine perfection of the primordial cosmos described in Genesis. The equality and justice of His rule will eliminate the miseries and injustices that continually disfigure society because of the presence of sin. In Revelation the present world can see both its doom and its hope for a better future.<sup>20</sup>

The fact that God has a plan for this world calls His church and others to take seriously what He is teaching about the establishment of His kingdom in history.<sup>21</sup> John's frequent use of eschatological language in the Revelation is actually an assertion that history is moving towards an end and therefore has meaning.<sup>22</sup> If history has meaning, then human beings can find a sense of identity, as our lives do mean something, a much needed emphasis in today's identity-confused world.

**God Will Renew the World.** The existence of sin in the world, as described in Genesis, reminds us God's victory is not as complete as He intends it to be, and what He designed the world to be has not yet been fully implemented.<sup>23</sup> Revelation, on the other hand, presents a time when this world will be completely free from the power of sin as God takes up His eternal abode with the redeemed. According to the restoration motif in Revelation 21-22, the debilitating effects of sin are to be abolished forever.<sup>24</sup> This removal of sin is, of course, set within the context of God's two great acts emphasized in Revelation: creation (4:11) and redemption (1:5; 5:9).<sup>25</sup>

In the final world, the redeemed will experience the final aspects of redemption and renewal.<sup>26</sup> The last two chapters of Revelation (21-22) depict the consummation of the plan of redemption. The covenant promise of Genesis 3:15 is now fulfilled. The blessings of the first paradise created perfect by the Creator as pictured in Genesis 1-2 are now restored in Revelation 21-22, including the tree of life itself.<sup>27</sup> Paradise lost in Genesis becomes Paradise regained in Revelation.<sup>28</sup> Just as the work of creation was finished by God through Christ (Gen 2:1-3; Heb 1:1-2), and the work of redemption was finished by God through Christ (John 19:30; 2 Cor 5:18), so now the restoration of the creation by God through Christ is finished (Rev 21-22).

The vision in Revelation 21-22, therefore, can be viewed as the climax not only of the book of Revelation but of the whole story of salvation.<sup>29</sup> In spite of the long interruption occasioned by sin, we can be sure everything good in the first creation will be restored in the new creation, or it will be replaced by something better. The earth and its heaven will once again be "very good" in every way. The age-long curse is gone. There is no more death and sin. The earth and its inhabitants,

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and indeed the entire creation, are henceforth to thrive in fullest vigor.<sup>30</sup> The ecological problems in our relationship with God, ourselves, others, and the world are now resolved in such a way as to bring unity to the universe and the much needed renewal and primal restoration of the pristine creation. It is this alone which can give hope to the individual.

All humans who live in a hopeless world, who survive in the midst of uncertainty, need to hear the message of the book of Revelation and its emphasis on the restoration of this world to its primal beauty and perfection. The hope offered in the book of Revelation is grounded in the God who made and will remake the cosmos. God's will cannot be finally frustrated by any creaturely power in heaven or on earth. In restoring and renewing the earth through what Christ has done, God is telling us He does indeed have the power to bring about a new world order and thereby provide the conditions suitable for redeemed humanity to develop its full potential.

The restoration portrayed in the Revelation, which reverses the losses incurred by the human race so succinctly detailed in the book of Genesis, should lead us to conclude that only within the framework of the God-human relationship we can find our true identity, our sickness and its cure, our values, our mission in life and the fullest development of character.

God's purpose and plan for the world provides hope for the human family. It tells us God can bring about permanent change both in individuals (so they may live an ethical life) as well as in the cosmos (so life may flourish spontaneously rather than simply survive in an increasingly untenable environment). While some aspects of God's plan and purpose may be experienced now in today's situation, Revelation inspires hope for "a better tomorrow." This is the fundamental message of the book of Revelation and becomes that which is most relevant for post-modern society.<sup>31</sup>

**Conclusion**

The first three chapters of Genesis outline the entrance of sin into God's perfect creation. The last chapters of the book of Revelation outline the purgation of sin from God's redeemed creation.<sup>32</sup> Sin and the curse are removed, and there is no more death. God has the power to accomplish His purposes and renew the creation. The visions recorded in Revelation are, then, a genesis, a genesis not of an old world being destroyed by sin but of a new creation, an absolutely new creation brought about by an apocalyptic ending of an old world order and an old reality.<sup>33</sup>

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It is small wonder that the great enemy of God's truth has directed his most intense attacks against Genesis and Revelation, denying the historicity of the former and the truthfulness of the latter. With neither creation nor consummation, beginning nor ending, we would have only an existential present with no hope of learning from the past or guidance to face the future, a situation finding almost universal attestation in our modern philosophical and religious world.

But, the book of Revelation, written by the last of the apostles at the end of the Apostolic Age, has provided guidance for God's people throughout the Christian era. It particularly focuses on the great climactic events that will bring God's work begun at creation to completion and fullness in apocalyptic fashion.<sup>34</sup> There is progressive movement in John's prophecy, a movement towards the completion of God's plan for the world, and not simply the ticking off of the minutes of time on some huge, celestial clock.

The book of Revelation, which emphasizes restoration after loss, reminds us that the answers to the problems of life do not lie in man's ability to create a better world. Rather, the hope for this world lies in the return of One whose sovereign power controls the course of human affairs.<sup>35</sup> As the Alpha and Omega, the Lord God Almighty is the initiator of His creation (Genesis); and in His hands lies the whole intermediary process of the restoration of the world, which He Himself guides to His desired conclusion (Revelation).<sup>36</sup> This world is not out of control, speeding towards chaos. Rather, God is overruling all things to work out His purposes, especially in regard to earth's recreation and renewal. This is the significance of the restoration of the primordial world of Genesis 1-3 in Revelation 21-22. This message gives us the hope and the security of knowing for sure that there is a better world coming, a much needed assurance for the post-modern age.

### **Notes**

1 See, for example, Thomas Oden, *After Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 195-199, and Stanley Grenz, *Revisiting Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), and Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology, Vol 1, Prolegomena* (unpublished manuscript), pp. 237-304. See also Norman Geisler, *The Apologetic Importance of John's Gospel*, James Sire, *Worldviews in Sociological Perspective*, and Norman Gulley, *The Challenge of Postmodernity to Evangelical Theology*, (these papers are unpublished manuscripts presented at ETS 1996 Southeastern Regional Meetings, March 15-16, University of Mobile, Mobile, Alabama).

Especially since the publication of Darwin's book, *The Origin of the Species*, the understanding of the creation narrative as recorded in Genesis 1-3 has come under intense scrutiny by scientists and theologians alike. Many questions have been raised and are still being raised in connection with the viability of holding a creationist position in regard to human origins. But there is more to the issue than simply determining what the origin of humanity is. Calling into question creationism has resulted in the production of a certain amount of tension regarding other theological doctrines, such as salvation and eschatology, not to mention the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture (epistemology/hermeneutics) and particularly anthropology.

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2 This thinking has raised a number of significant questions along the lines of existence, meaning, purpose, and spirituality of human life. These include such queries as, "Is there anything I can believe in?" "Who am I?" "Does it matter who I am?" "If I die, would anybody really miss me or even care?" "Is everyday work and making money to spend on things that cannot help me identify my true self all there is to life?" "What is the meaning and purpose of life?" "What is its goal?"

3 These have received a great deal of theological attention in this century. While the historicity of Genesis has been to a large extent denied, the truthfulness, relevancy, and interpretation of Revelation is repeatedly called into question. See Henry Morris, *The Revelation Record* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), p. 21. The Pope's recent statement on evolution is typical of the debate which surrounds the book of Genesis. Since the Roman Catholic Church seems to espouse the idea that evolution is acceptable, it calls into question the traditional understanding of the book of Genesis. See Jeffrey L. Sheler, "The Pope and Darwin," *U.S. News and World Report*, 4 November 1996, p. 12. The number of commentaries and methods used to interpret the book of Revelation is proof enough of the intense battle over it.

4 For example, the creation of the world is mentioned at least four times in Revelation (4:11; 10:6; 13:8; 14:7). Revelation stresses the battle with the serpent (Rev 12:1-17) which is foretold and which is said to end in the victory of God (Gen 3:15). In Revelation 5:5, Christ is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah, a possible reference to Genesis 49:9. Again, both Babylon and Sodom are mentioned in Revelation (17-18 for the former and 11:8 for the latter), both of which are referred to in Genesis (11:1-9 and 18-19 respectively). It appears then that Revelation and Genesis are very much connected. For further information, see Morris, *Revelation*, pp. 21-24.

5 Hence, the ecological crisis in the world cannot be solved from the perspective of ecospirituality, nor by ecofeminism, but by the direct apocalyptic intervention of God. Thus, the solution for ecological problems is theocentric rather than anthropocentric and theological and not from the perspective of a philosophy of religion. An understanding of the apocalyptic end of our world as well as an appreciation of the value of our primordial creation are the starting grounds for dealing with the ecological dilemma of relationships and the world we face. For more information on ecospirituality, see Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988) and Matthew Fox, *Creation Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). For ecofeminism, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God, An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), Sallie McFague, *Models of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), Sallie McFague, *The Body of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) and Carol Adams, ed, *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (New York: Continuum, 1993).

6 Morris, *Revelation*, pp. 21-23.

7 Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979, 1990), pp. 32, 17.

8 Morris, *Revelation*, pp. 21, 31.

9 Thomas Altizer, *Genesis and Apocalypse* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), p. 11.

10 Morris, *Revelation*, pp. 14-15.

11 Morris, *Genesis*, p. 33.

12 For further information about the comparisons between the books of Genesis and Revelation, see Morris, *Genesis*, pp. 33-34 and Morris, *Revelation*, pp. 21-24. This study assumes the historicity of the Genesis account in its description of primordial events. This is not, in the opinion of this study, a theological interpretation of events but events which are real historical happenings which have and do affect our world today.

13 Morris, *Revelation*, p. 463.

14 Morris, *Genesis*, p. 18.

15 G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, in the *New Century Bible*, ed by Matthew Black (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974), pp. 25, 46.

16 Morris, *Revelation*, p. 435. Merrill Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 198.

17 Merrill Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 198.

18 Beasley-Murray, p. 45.

19 Morris, *Revelation*, p. 31.

20 Tenney, pp. 197-199.

21 Beasley-Murray, p. 38.

22 G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 292. Caird goes on to remind us that at every point, however, we must remember that only the earthly life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ provides the key to the divine purpose and plan (ibid.).

23 Caird, p. 262.



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24 Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 372.

25 Beatrice Neall, *The Concept of Character in the Apocalypse with Implications for Character Education* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983), p. 203.

26 Morris, *Genesis*, p. 33.

27 Revelation 22:1-2.

28 Morris, *Genesis*, p. 32.

29 Beasley-Murray, p. 305.

30 Morris, *Revelation*, pp. 436, 467.

31 Neall, p. 206.

32 Morris, *Revelation*, p. 22.

33 Altizer, p. 10.

34 Morris, *Revelation*, pp. 21, 31.

35 Mounce, p. 396.

36 Beasley-Murray, p. 312.