

CONSTRUCTING AN ECO-THEOLOGY THROUGH
THE FRAMEWORK OF ESCHATOLOGY

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Abstract:

The aim of this thesis is to develop and explore an eco-theology through the lens of eschatology that sees the good creation of God as redeemable and ultimately restored. Looking at current trends of eco-theology it is possible to see that it can be constructed using many different theological paradigms. This thesis will build an eco-theology through an eschatological model offering the reader a glimpse into the future hope of God's redeemed creation and how it applies to our current environmental views.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter	
1. WHERE ARE WE NOW?	3
1.1 A Balanced Approach	4
2. ECO-THEOLOGY MODELS WITHIN THE CHURCH	7
2.1 Christian Stewardship	11
2.2 Christian Spirituality	11
2.3 Eco-Justice	12
2.4 A Deeper Comparison	12
3. AN ESCHATOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	17
3.1 The Voice of N.T. Wright	18
3.2 The Voice of Jürgen Moltmann	24
3.3 Toward a Future Hope	32
4. APOCALYPTIC LANGUAGE	36
5. CONSIDERING THE BIBLICAL TEXT	46
5.1 The Human Factor: Genesis 1—2	49
5.1a “Let Us”	51
5.1b Humanity’s Blueprint	54
5.1c Humanity’s Role	57
5.1d Final thoughts on Genesis text	61
5.1e Genesis and Stewardship Some Concerns	62
5.2 Redemption for All Creation: Romans 8:18—25	65
5.3 Purification or Destruction?: 2 Peter 3:7—13	80
5.3a Summing up 2 Peter.....	92
6. FURTHER THOUGHTS	96
7. CONCLUSION	99
BIBLIOGRAPHY	101

A PERSONAL NOTE

“It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense.” Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

The journey leading to this thesis began over forty years ago. As an early adolescent the writings of Aldo Leopold, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson became familiar companions. With a love for the outdoors and a profound faith in God there was a constant desire to seek and understand how to steward God’s creation. Twenty seven years in the natural gas pipeline industry brought with it challenges and concerns as to what I truly believed about stewarding creation. It is with this background and a conviction that one of the over arching messages within scripture is the redemptive heart of God that has led to this attempt at answering what an eco-theology should look like.

INTRODUCTION

What is eco-theology? Within the theological discourse eco-theology is the discourse that focuses on all aspects of God’s creation. Eco-theology viewed through the framework of eschatology draws attention to the importance of seeing the good creation of God as both redeemable and ultimately restored. By exploring eco-theology through an eschatological model the reader will see the need for a balance between dominion and stewardship theology as well as grasp the importance of seeing the future hope of God’s creation in the light of redemption not judgment. The first section of the thesis will present a short overview of the current status of the

environmental situation as well as what some of the questions and concerns are surrounding these issues that highlight the ongoing need for a coherent eco-theology. Next will be a review of the current trends and debates of eco-theology within the church. The thesis then takes a look at an eschatology that envisions eternity on earth and not in a “disembodied” heaven. The works of N.T. Wright and Jürgen Moltmann are explored to look at a future hope of a redeemed creation. Moltmann brings the insight that all theology should be viewed through an eschatological lens as well as a deep understanding of the future hope of the new creation. Wright in turn brings insight into the first century Jewish and early Christian understanding of eschatology. A short section discusses the current understanding of the specific methods that need to be considered when looking at apocalyptic language that is common in eschatological writings. Specific texts will be explored that pertain to common environmental discussions in the light of eschatology with the hopes of clarifying the concepts of dominion, stewardship and the judgment of God including the return of Christ. Through Genesis 1.26—31 the concept of being made in the image of God as well as questions surrounding humanity’s dominion and stewardship of nature are discussed. Romans 8.18—25 assists us in understanding the connection of the natural creation with the fall of man. 2 Peter 3.7—13 looks at the apocalyptic language surrounding the final judgment of God to discuss the potential meaning of the destructive language being used. Finally an attempt will be made to consider what an eco-theology may look like when viewed through the framework of eschatology.

CHAPTER 1

Where are we now?

Is there really an environmental crisis? When looking at the state of the environment there are arguments on both sides of the spectrum. There are those who claim that things are getting better as well as those that say we are on the verge of global disaster. On a consistent basis it can be heard that world resources are running out and that pollution is at an all time high. The extinction of over 40,000 species a year is caused by humanity due to deforestation and land usage. Rich farm land is paved over making the ability to grow food a questionable enterprise.¹ The fine balance in nature is constantly being challenged due to the ever growing demand of consumerism. As the population increases, the stress on the current global environment is higher than it has ever been.² “Major areas of concern today include air and water pollution, global warming, the thinning of the ozone layer, massive extinction of plant and animal species, tropical deforestation, soil erosion and depletion, the extension of deserts, the release of toxic chemicals, and the creation of mountains of waste.”³ Is this truly an accurate analysis?

In contrast Bjorn Lomborg claims there is little evidence to substantiate the claims of world decimation. Many of the current statistics appear to show that things are getting better on a global scale. According to Lomborg even though the majority of the public fears are shown to be statistically inaccurate it does not negate the need to continue to make improvements along with trying to reverse the destructive things we are doing to our environment.⁴ Could there possibly be an exaggeration of the grim state of the current environment? If so, exaggeration tends to

¹ Bjorn Lomborg, *A Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3-4.

² Lambert N. Wenner, *The Environmental Dilemma Optimism or Despair?* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America Inc.), 1997.

³ Wenner, *Environmental*, 62.

⁴ Lomborg, *Skeptical*, 4-5.

promote harsh unrealistic alternatives. Conversely, there is well-assessed feedback on the rising issues that face humanity. Needless to say it is important to reach a place of consensus.⁵

A significant hurdle this discussion faces, as quoted by Lambert Wenner in *The Environmental Dilemma Optimism or Despair* is,

religious fundamentalists tend to support economic growth and related environmental trends. Many of them say that the earth was created by God for humans to use, that humans (according to Genesis) were given dominion over fish, birds, and every living thing, and that people should multiply and populate the earth. Some think that whatever happens is God's will and that God will protect the faithful. Both economic and religious conservatives are politically active and influential, and some people wear both hats.⁶

Wenner illustrates the perspective of those in favor of unrestrained growth and dominance. This thesis will argue that the idea of unrestrained growth and dominance is not necessarily the most redemptive understanding of God's will for all of creation.

The solution to finding a balanced approach is not an easy one especially since the world is made up of diverse religious and ethnic ideologies. There are vast extremes in income, natural resources, personal wealth as well as technological advances. Personal perceptions and experiences tend to dictate the importance and the effectiveness of possible solutions. Due to the influence of education, personal interests, family influences, along with ethnic and religious backgrounds the church, in many cases, is not the major influence in society when it comes down to dealing with environmental issues.⁷

1.1 A Balanced Approach:

The first step may not be to decide which statistics about population growth, human hunger or materialism are true or not; despite the social challenges there is a need for a more integrated approach when looking at the current status of the global environment. On the whole

⁵ Wenner, *Environmental*, 120.

⁶ Wenner, *Environmental*, 130.

⁷ Wenner, *Environmental*, 139-40.

the rate of world growth is slowing down; however on an individual country basis some countries are expecting to see a drastic increase over the next 30 or 40 years. When looking at population the concern is most likely not an issue of numbers but one of density and pattern. Human hunger is a sad fact; 1 in 8 people experience daily hunger.⁸ The question needs to be asked “How this population growth will affect both the economic structure as well as where will the needed natural resources come from to meet the demand of this growth?”⁹ According to Wendell Berry there need to be concerns raised at the unhealthy reliance on technology to fix the world’s problems without taking into consideration any unforeseeable side effects that may not be controllable. The question is not whether the earth can sustain humanity but what kind of technology will be used to sustain it and at what cost to the rest of creation?¹⁰

Another major issue that any eco-theology needs to face is that of consumerism. The material waste produced by consumerism should play a huge role in our concerns over the environment. The “municipal solid waste” generated by Americans alone could “extend around the planet 3.8 times.” In 2006 each American generated 1,645 lbs of waste per year which equates to 62 tons over the average human life.¹¹ Steven Bouma-Prediger explains it well “So the state of the planet, truth be told, is mixed. It is not all doom and gloom, and neither is it all sweetness and light. However, in contrast to those who think all is well concerning our earthly home, in my judgment the overarching conclusion is not pretty. To again use the language of St. Paul, creation is ‘groaning’.”¹²

⁸ Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian View for Creation Care*. 2nd (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 27.

⁹ Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, 27.

¹⁰ Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, 27.

¹¹ Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, 39.

¹² Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, 54.

A world view that praises a lifestyle of consumerism causes many to worship the idea of physical comfort and pleasure, leaving people to pursue their every desire seeking after the good life, allowing them to defining success through the accrual of material things and economical growth. In order to get to the root of environmental issues one must first understand the impact of a consumerist mindset. There is a tendency to see nature as nothing more than esthetically pleasing instead of habitat for all of creation. The tendency appears to be one of choosing wealth over nature showing how little it is valued. The environmental dilemma that is being faced is truly a value oriented issue of the modern world. It should call into question the values of western culture and the role of industry. If materialism is a major factor in the environmental dilemma then the ingrained belief that technology has the ability to trump all else may be the world's demise.¹³

If one's vision of the future shapes a response to environmental issues, the premise of this thesis cannot be overstated; that a fuller understanding of the value of creation is best achieved through Christian Eschatology where hope is based on the fulfilled promise of God, not human ingenuity and wisdom. Fearing the future leads to a focus on short term solutions for minor problems instead of long term solutions for vital problems. Both over-optimism and deep pessimism have their problems. "If we do not believe in the future we will become more apathetic, indifferent and scared hiding within ourselves."¹⁴

¹³ Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, 71-3.

¹⁴ Lomborg, *Skeptical*, 351.

CHAPTER 2

Eco-Theology within the Church:

When looking at world ecology few would disagree that the natural world today is experiencing some form of environmental crisis or at least a chronic illness. Though many see the environmental issues as real, few tend to respond based on a coherent theology, but instead become either emotionally driven to react or retreat deeper into an attitude of complacency. As concerns continue to rise it becomes apparent that there is a need for an eco-theology that both is willing to speak to present environmental concerns as well as protect the integrity and foundations of biblical faith.

So what is eco-theology and why is it so important? Eco-theology is a religious discourse that highlights God's entire creation, in relationship to religious world views and the concern over how creation is cared for.¹ It grew in response to the acknowledgement that an environmental crisis of huge proportions is threatening humanity's life on earth.² Historically, the religious community has not had a great track record when it comes to environmental issues. For much of the environmentalist community religion is the primary cause of the ecological crisis that we currently face. Undoubtedly one of the greatest influences on eco-theology is a lecture given by Lynn White Jr. in 1966. At the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science he stated "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible

¹ In many cases the term creation is used to depict all of God's creation including humanity. Nature on the other hand is often used to depict the non-human side of creation. There are some unavoidable cases within this thesis that the line is obscured and the terms are used interchangeably. When considering an eco-theology it is important for the reader to understand that humanity is part of the created order as well as part of nature. A balance eco-theology needs to be holistic in that it is concerned with how humanity cares for itself just as much as how it cares for the environment in which they live.

² H. Paul Santmire, *Eco-Theology, Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, Ed. Ray Abruzz & Michael J. McGantry, Macmillian-Thomson Gale, 2003. Online: <http://www.enoted.com/science-religion-encyclopedia/ecotheology>.

to exploit nature in a mood indifference to the feelings of natural objects.”³ Prior to the major Christian influence into many native cultures, superstitions prohibited the exploitation of nature due to the need to placate and appease specific spirits in charge of particular aspects of nature. The destruction of the belief that individual items in nature having living souls threw open the door for the exploitation of nature. Christianity is the “most anthropocentric religion” in the world according to White, which establishes the duality of humanity as a sharer of God’s transcendence making them distinct from the other representations of nature.

White points out that “Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about nature and destiny - that is, by religion.”⁴ The biblical story of creation, according to White, was designed to serve humanity and with the claim that man was created in the image of God and not just an aspect of nature, has led to an intentional exploitation of our natural resources. Since much of the world’s technology and scientific theory has been greatly influenced by Christianity, science and technology alone will not be able to provide the solution needed to overcome the current ecological issues. Only with the rejection of the Christian concept that nature’s primary purpose is to serve mankind, can the ecological state of the world be adequately addressed. According to White the only solution is finding a “new religion” or “rethinking the existing one.”⁵ White freely admits “Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious.”⁶

In 1970 the respected Christian writer and theologian Francis Schaeffer, in his book *Pollution and the Death of Man*, agrees with White’s assessment about ecology being conditioned by religion, “Here I believe he is completely right. Men do what they think.

³ Lynn White Jr. “The historical roots of our ecological crisis,” in *The Care of Creation: Focusing concern and action* (edited by R.J. Berry; Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), 38.

⁴ White, “Historical,” 37.

⁵ White, “Historical,” 40—42.

⁶ White, “Historical,” 42.

Whatever their worldview is, this is the thing which will spill over into the external world.”⁷

Schaeffer agrees with White’s belief that Christianity has historically viewed nature as something to be abused. He points out that this is the influence of Plato. Platonic thinking regards the material world as lowly compared to the spiritual abstract world. It is one thing to see nature as lowly and another to recognize that God created things in different orders. Platonic thinking would have one believe the nature has little value other than to prove the existence of God. Schaeffer believes that Christianity holds the answers to the ecological issues but not while embracing Platonic thinking. The natural world has intense value because God created it and saw that it was good; as a part of this created order it should be respected and honored. For Schaeffer, since there was going to be total redemption of both humanity and creation in the future, all those who believe in the Bible should treat nature the same way now as it will be after final redemption.⁸

In 1990 a group of thirty-four well respected and world renowned scientists, led by Carl Sagan, signed an “Open letter to the religious community” requesting and urging the religious community to join in the battle to save the environment. They recognized that due to the immense size of the ecological threat, disaster could not be avoided without help from the religious community. In 1994 an Evangelical delegation named Evangelical Environmental Network issued a declaration asserting that the earth belonged to God and that Christians were responsible to Him for it. The declaration voiced the importance of biblical faith in the solution to our ecological struggles. It contained a call for repentance of attitudes that devalue creation as

⁷ Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: the Christian View of Ecology*, Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1992 (originally published by Tyndale, 1970), 12.

⁸ Schaeffer, *Pollution*, 40—55.

well as to learn all that the Bible has to tell us about the creator, creation, and humanity's responsibilities towards creation.⁹

A common issue that arises in discussions surrounding eco-theology is the battle between the dominion mindset and a stewardship mindset. To have dominion over the earth may have implications of controlling and ruling over nature. It does not in any way imply that it is treated without moral or ethical concerns. The earth is not a purposeless machine but obviously a system of matter and energy created by God to accomplish His purposes.¹⁰ Since perception is reality in many aspects of society, it is important to identify and address common misunderstandings of humanity's role in creation. There are four common perceptions about Christianity when it comes to environmental concerns that, frankly, have some currency: (1) the idea that humanity is called to have dominion over the earth; (2) that Christianity tends to condone modern science and technology's exploitation of the earth; (3) that Christianity promotes a Platonic dualism that elevates the "spiritual" far above the "physical"; and, (4) Christian's belief in the soon second coming of Christ (end of the world) removes any need for concern over environmental issues.¹¹

Currently there are three dominate environmental perspectives that represent the majority of those who embrace environmental concerns within the church community: Christian Stewardship, Christian Spirituality, and Eco-Justice advocates. All three seem to be discontent with the secularization of modern society. Christian Stewardship advocates desire to return to an early modern world where biblical values were a more central focus. In contrast Eco-Justice advocates place emphasis on changing social structures and institutions. They spend the vast

⁹ R. J. Berry, "An Evangelical Declaration on the care of Creation," in *The Care of Creation: Focusing concern and action* (edited by R. J. Berry; Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), 18—21.

¹⁰ L. Rush Bush, III. "Humanistic and New Age Ideas and Ecological Issues," in *The Earth is the Lord's: Christians and the Environment* (edited by Richard D. Land and Louis A. Moore; Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 64.

¹¹ Millard Erickson, "Bible Theology of Ecology," in *The Earth is the Lord's: Christians and the Environment*, (edited by Richard D. Land & Louis A. Moore; Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 36.

portion of their energy and financial resources dealing with social injustices. Christian Spirituality advocates seek to operate with a post-modern design with the desire to overcome the dualism and rationalism of modernity.¹²

2.1 Christian Stewardship:

Both Christian Stewardship and Christian Spirituality advocates begin with the Genesis story and believe that the first command given to humanity is to be stewards of the earth. Christian Stewardship advocates believe that the sinfulness of man, along with wrong environmental thinking, has caused the ecological crisis. The crisis was not brought about by Christianity but by not being truly Christian and being Godly stewards. Their official motto would be “to be a Christian is to be an ecologist” along with “to be saved means saving creation.” Many Stewardship advocates counter conservative Christian emphasis on individual redemption and “other worldliness” with an emphasis on environmental stewardship. Churches should be “awareness centers” to learn about environmental issues. They believe one of the greatest hurdles that needs to be overcome in the church is the conservative bias against science.¹³

2.2 Christian Spirituality:

On the other hand, the Christian Spirituality advocates also begin with the Genesis accounts: however, for them it simply is an inspiring story of evolution. Genesis assists humanity in understanding its role in the universe. Science is truth and religion is a way to understand scientific truth. Christian Spirituality appeals to the non-churched as well as a portion of the

¹² Laurel Kearns, “Saving Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States,” *Sociology of Religion*, 57, no.1 (Spring 1996): 56—59.

¹³ Kearns, “Saving,” 58—9.

socially liberal and scientifically minded Protestant and Catholic sectors. Christian Spirituality advocates leave things up to the individual's personal interpretation of the issues.¹⁴

2.3 Eco-Justice:

Eco-Justice advocates tend to fall within mainline denominational churches. They adhere to a liberal theology mindset and place most of the emphasis for the ecological crisis on social science issues. The heart of the environmental crisis falls within the social injustices and the inequality of current economical systems. Since much of their focus is not on the environment itself and their theology is diverse it is enough to just mention that this group exists with the church.¹⁵

2.4 A Deeper Comparison:

Unlike the Christian Spirituality group, Christian Stewardship advocates adhere to much of conservative theology. They tend to be considered liberal by those Christians hostile to science but are far too conservative for the other two groups. Christ is still redeemer and Lord within the Christian Stewardship view but, for most Christian Spiritualists, he has become a cosmic savior of nature and an essential component of creation theology.¹⁶ The critical point to note is that all these groups are competing to gain followers. Their jockeying for position within Christian America is a sign of the uncertainty and cultural crisis brought on by ecological and environmental concerns.¹⁷

There are major players within each group and depending on the individual the lines defining each group are easily blurred. Within the Stewardship ranks the prominent voice that appears to stand out above the rest is Calvin Dewitt a professor of Environmental studies at the

¹⁴ Kearns, "Saving," 60—1.

¹⁵ Kearns, "Saving," 56, 64.

¹⁶ In an orthodox view this can be an affirmation of Colossians 1.13 or it can be taken to the extreme as found in some strains of pantheism found in creation.

¹⁷ Kearns, "Saving," 56.

University of Wisconsin - Madison and the director of the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies. Dewitt, as with all the voices within the stewardship model, believes in maintaining strong biblical approach. He states that “our ultimate purpose is to honor God as creator in such a way that Christian environmental stewardship is part and parcel of everything we do.”¹⁸

Within the creation spirituality group there are three prominent voices that tend to stand out. Matthew Fox, an ex-Dominican priest, could be considered the founder of the creation spirituality movement. He is outspoken in that people are not drawn to a God that is absent, leaving the work of ecology to be handled by those who are seen as servants or slaves. Thomas Berry another prominent voice is a Catholic priest who advocates setting aside the biblical text until the universe can be completely understood. Sean McDonagh, though a bit more conservative in his approach, is a follower of both Fox and Berry. Much of the creation spirituality theology could be considered pantheistic.¹⁹

Though not formally defined, there appears to be a fourth group that comprises a large majority that is not represented within the three groups previously discussed. For lack of a better term this group will be called the “escapists.” This group sees their hope in heaven and resists the involvement in earthly problems as they place their hope in the return of Christ and their life in heaven. There is no sense in worrying about the earth because ultimately all Christians will spend eternity in heaven. The mindset appears to be that it is all going to be destroyed in the end anyway so there is no need to be concerned about it.²⁰

¹⁸ Calvin B. Dewitt, “Creation’s environmental challenge to evangelical Christianity,” in *The Care of Creation: Focusing concern and action* (edited by R. J. Berry; Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 72.

¹⁹ Kearns, “Saving,” 61.

²⁰ Some of the most common voices with the escapist mindset would be John Nelson Darby an influential figure within the Plymouth Brethren who could be considered the father of modern dispensationalism. Cyrus Scofield a theologian and writer of the *Scofield Study Bible* played a big role in the popularization of dispensational theology. Tim LaHaye an American evangelist and co-author with Jerry Jenkins of the *Left Behind* series, an apocalyptic fiction novel series oriented around the end times. He is also known for his movies of a similar genre, such as, *Left Behind; the Movie; Left Behind: World at War*. Hal Lindsey a Christian dispensationalist author known for books

One of the greatest fears many conservative Christians have is the influx of new age ideas into the church. In reality, infiltration can happen anytime but resistance is higher surrounding environmentalism which creates an even greater need for a biblically based eco-theology.²¹ From a Pentecostal perspective, some of the ignorance surrounding environmental stewardship is founded on an attitude of other-worldliness and pessimism. These attitudes may very well be caused by a pre-millennialism, pre-tribulation theology, along with a greater concern toward spiritual issues rather than social ones.²² Pentecostal members, like other conservative evangelicals, have a history of withdrawing from social concerns. This is partially a reaction to liberal theology and a desire to defend the faith. It was also a reaction against a “social gospel” that seeks to politicalize the kingdom of God. Since many Pentecostals believe the end is near, they are indifferent to social change and often resist the reformist methods of optimistic post-millennialists.²³ With this mindset comes a natural disconnection between the message of the kingdom of god and true life political concerns. The risk of this disconnect is that the influence of the kingdom message is often neutralized when Christians refuse to be involved in real life political issues. Much of the language surrounding the kingdom of god message is political in

such as, *The Late Great Planet Earth, Apocalypse Code, The Rapture, Vanish into Thin Air* as well as others. Lastly, Jack Van Impe a televangelist known for his weekly television series that presents eschatological commentary on current events. Their influence can be seen when looking at the escapist mindset. Much of what is taught distorts world events and promotes irresponsible environmental ethics. Escapists are obsessed with end time events and a future apocalypse to where heaven becomes their only hope. Ecological deterioration becomes a gauge to predict Christ’s return and the end of the current age. Since the end of the world is inevitable there is little need for environmental action or governmental policies. Therefore technological advancement, ecological demise and the stewardship of the environment is of little or no concern.

²¹ Augustinus Dermawan, “The Spirit in Creation and Environmental Stewardship: A preliminary Pentecostal Response Toward Ecological Theology.” *Asian Journal of Pentacostal Studies* (July 2003): 200—1.

²² Dermawan, “Spirit in Creation,” 202—207.

²³ Dermawan, “Spirit in Creation,” 203—206. Peter Althouse in his article “‘Left Behind’—Fact or Fiction: Ecumenical Dilemmas of the Fundamentalist Millenarian Tension within Pentacostalism.” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13.2 (2005): 182—207 expresses his concerns over the adoption of an eschatology of dispensational fundamentalism. He strategically shows that early Pentacostal eschatology was oriented around a “latter rain” of the Holy Spirit and the speaking of tongues. He exposes how a more fundamental literalistic view personified by the ‘*Left Behind*’ series contradicts early Pentacostal eschatological beliefs and promotes an escapist eschatology(see bibliography for a complete works cited).

nature. One of the intents of an eco-theology is to influence environmental stewardship through political changes as well as bring a balance between conservation and consumerism. The influence that is needed to steward God's good creation cannot be accomplished apart from a certain amount of political involvement; especially if one embraces the understanding that humanity is called to steward the earth as God's representatives within the created order.

A foundational component of biblical eco-theology would be an examination of key texts that reclaim the value of creation. The logical place to start is in Genesis. Genesis 1.25 presents the creation of the living creatures and beasts of the earth to which God looked and "saw it was good." God commands humanity in Genesis 1.28 to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it..." God's intent for mankind on this earth was to "cultivate and keep it." God takes joy in creatures with no apparent purpose (Job 39—41); that earth is His and "the fullness thereof" (Psalms 24.1). The New Testament as well explains that it was Jesus Christ who was linked to earth's creation (John 1 and Hebrews 1.1—3). "All things" were created through Christ and are to be reconciled unto Christ, whether things on this earth or in heaven (Colossians 1.15—20). All things in heaven and earth will be summed up under Christ (Ephesians 1.10). Romans 8.18—25 shows the intimate relationship between humanity and the rest of creation. It is clear that the Apostle Paul in his writings emphasizes redemption to be creation-wide, not limited to humanity. Ray Van Leeuwen when considering Peter Stuhlmacher's definition of Paul's doctrine of justification sees the Christian being reestablished back into Adam's position of steward of the creation on behalf of its creator which makes us responsible for the daily care of creation.²⁴ The author of 2 Peter 3.8—13 joins Paul by unfolding

²⁴ Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Christ's Resurrection and the Creation's Vindication," in *The Environment and the Christian: What can we learn from the New Testament* (edited by Calvin B. DeWitt; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 65. Note: Peter Stuhlmacher's definition of Paul's doctrine of justification "means an ontic

the ramifications of the joyous return of Jesus upon creation.²⁵ The obvious question that comes to mind is “How did the popular, evangelical concept of salvation shrink to be exclusive to humanity at the expense of the rest of creation?”²⁶

transformation; concretely it means being placed once again in the original situation of existing in the image of God, in harmony with the creation” as quoted by Van Leeuwen.

²⁵ This thesis deals with the 2 Peter 3 text that appears to devalue creation by offering a more redemptive re-reading of the text.

²⁶ Van Leeuwen, “Christ's Resurrection,” 65.

CHAPTER 3

An Eschatological Framework:

The present chapter will argue that a central component of a coherent eco-theology is an eschatological framework. A key component of an eschatology that has the ability to guide and support a strong eco-theology must be its ability to connect the biblical vision of creation from the past to the present as well as the future. It must also be able to show the value of what we do today when looking toward the future of God's eternal promises for this world. There are two voices in current discourse about eschatology that offer possibilities for re-integration of a coherent eco-theology within the larger context of Christian theology: N.T. Wright and Jürgen Moltmann.

N.T. Wright uses the term eschatology in a much broader meaning than simply study of the "last things." Eschatology is not just about the end times, the return of Jesus and God's judgment over evil; it also includes the belief that God is directing history toward His promised new world that eliminates evil and holds healing for all creation.¹ Wright does not believe that biblical eschatology anticipates the destruction of the earth but rather it tells of a transformation into a complete "new creation." This is in contrast to Faupel's much narrower belief that history ends in chaotic devastation.² Jürgen Moltmann grounds his eschatology in a "theology of Hope" that looks to the future and is transforming in nature. Moltmann believes that eschatology should focus on the "parousia" as well as a new heaven and new earth that provide the energy to change

¹ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper One Publishing, 2008), 122.

² Peter Althouse, *Spirit of the Last Days: Pentecostal Eschatology in Conversation with Jürgen Moltmann* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2003), 22. Note: Faupel's eschatological view represents the typical apocalyptic eschatology of many Pentacostals. It is founded on the belief that history as we know it will end in a sudden catastrophic event followed by the creation of a flawless perfect society.

the present, while looking forward to the coming kingdom of God, fulfilling all that God has promised.³ Here Peter Althouse is a valuable conversation partner due to his knowledge of Pentecostalism and his broadening of Moltmann's view to include Miroslav Volf's belief that an eschatology that embraces a "new creation" allows one to construct an ethic of human work.⁴ Volf constructs his theology of work from an understanding of pneumatology within the broader framework of eschatology.⁵

3.1 The voice of N.T. Wright:

N.T. Wright's eschatology is rooted in the desire to view theology through the historical back drop in which it was framed. Due to his historical mindset it would be irresponsible to look at eschatology apart from the historical understanding of the first century Jewish beliefs as well as their worldview. Wright points out the importance of understanding that Jewish beliefs were monotheistic not polytheistic, the one true god was their God. It was their God who created the universe and it was with this God that they were in covenant. This God with whom they were in covenant would bring an end to the dominance over Israel and free them from tyranny. It was this belief in one God and in the belief that they were chosen by God that led to Israel's eschatology which for Israel was covenant renewal.⁶ The crux of Jewish eschatology stems from their monotheistic beliefs. It was foundational for Jews to understand that they worshiped the one true God and all other gods were only human fabrications. First century Jewish monotheism reflected on three areas "creational", "providential" and "covenantal".⁷

³ Althouse, *Spirit*, 2.

⁴ Althouse, *Spirit*, 52.

⁵ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publisher, 1991), ix; Volf moves eschatological understanding to the place of raising the integrity of vocation giving eternal value to the work we do today.

⁶ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and The People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 247.

⁷ Wright, *New Testament*, 248—52.

“Creational Monotheism” rules out all aspects of pantheism, deism and Gnosticism. Israel’s God was the only true God; all other gods were idols. It was Israel’s God who made the universe and is still active within it. Though evil is considered real, their God is sovereign over it. To truly understand first century eschatology it is important to understand that the Jews of this period did not believe in an unapproachable, distant God but a God that was actively working in the affairs of humanity. Wright reinforces this thought by using Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, who in his writings attempts to show the “providential monotheism of Jewish beliefs that nothing happens on earth that is not a part of God’s divine will.”⁸ Though Josephus “downplays” the idea of “Covenantal Monotheism,” it is an important part of Jewish beliefs about evil. The belief that Israel was called to help remove evil from God’s creation reestablishing His justice and order to all creation, is a vital part of the Jewish beliefs. Therefore, the notion of YHWH’s covenant with Israel reinforces the call that is upon them to help restore the world to its original order.⁹ Wright states,

“As good creational monotheists, mainline Jews were not hoping to escape from the present universe into some Platonic realm of eternal bliss enjoyed by disembodied souls after the end of the space-time universe. If they died in the fight for the restoration of Israel, they hoped not to ‘go to heaven’, or at least not permanently, but to be raised to new bodies when the kingdom came, since they would of course need new bodies to enjoy the very much this-worldly shalom, peace and prosperity that was in store.”¹⁰

Since the basic hope of Israel was to be liberated from all aspects of oppression, they believed in the restoration of the land and the ultimate return from exile. This expectation could be expressed in the present age and the age to come. This present age depicts Israel’s suffering and the new age to come depicts their restoration.¹¹

⁸ Wright, *New Testament*, 251.

⁹ Wright, *New Testament*, 252.

¹⁰ Wright, *New Testament*, 286.

¹¹ Wright, *New Testament*, 299. By articulating this hope of Israel Wright underscores the importance of the eco-theological thought of seeing the earth as restorable as well as a restored earth as part of God’s future promises.

Wright points out that part of this worldview is Israel's understanding of salvation. Salvation does not consist in escaping the destruction of the world but experiencing the restoration of Israel as a nation as well as the rescuing of them from their enemies and the freedom to live in their land. The entire future hope of Israel is summed up in their concept of salvation.¹² The kingdom of God was not some abstract truth but a reality of Israel's exile and their restoration. It was the defeat and end of evil and the ruling of their God as King.¹³ To grasp the importance of Israel's expectation it must be understood that the true return from exile and the forgiveness of sins were not separate issues but one and the same issue, which was key to the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.¹⁴

In first century Judaism as well as in early Christianity there was the wide spread belief in a bodily resurrection from the dead. Resurrection refers to a bodily resurrection that is an aspect of new life after death.¹⁵ It was never intended to simply be "gone to heaven" or some other form of spiritual exaltation that excluded a new bodily form.¹⁶ Resurrection was a "future state" in which an individual would live again. It was the "defeat of death" and the resurrection of "some kind of bodily life" for those who experience death.¹⁷ This belief can be clearly understood and found in apocalyptic literature like *1 Enoch* and 4 Ezra as well as throughout the New Testament (1 *En.* 51.1—5; 90:33; 91.10, 4 Ezra 7:32; Luke 14.14; 1 Cor. 15.12—14; 42—45). The belief is clear that the righteous in God will rise in the age to come in order to be given their deserved reward. The basis for understanding the importance of resurrection in the Jewish worldview is in seeing it as an expectation of renewal and not of God abandoning His creation. The belief of a bodily

¹² Wright, *New Testament*, 300.

¹³ Wright, *New Testament*, 307.

¹⁴ Wright, *New Testament*, 320.

¹⁵ N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 314.

¹⁶ Wright, *Resurrection*, 694.

¹⁷ Wright, *Resurrection*, 201.

resurrection was tied hand in hand with that of a restored creation. Within resurrection is the confirmation of God's covenant with Israel as well as the confirmation of God's creation. In the establishment of a new heaven and earth, as well as a bodily resurrection, salvation and the promises of God for Israel come together.¹⁸

Early Christians did not abandon creational or covenantal monotheism. With the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ they radically reinterpreted it by bringing the worship of Jesus into the monotheistic structure. In essence, one of the major dividing lines from the Jewish spectrum compared to the early Christians was the belief that in Jesus' crucifixion Israel's hope for the resurrection, the return from exile as well as the forgiveness of sins was brought into fulfillment. Much of early Christianity was in a sense Jewish Christianity but, over time due to the Gentile influence early Christianity became notably different than Judaism especially in aspects of symbolism. Early Christianity's view of reality was discernibly a variation of the Jewish world view.¹⁹

In view of their conviction that Jesus was the fulfillment of Israel's hope, early Christians reframed the Jewish expectation and four elements began to take shape. (1) The vindication of Jesus' statement about the destruction of the temple. He would not be a true prophet until the temple was destroyed. Early Christians claimed that God dwelled within the hearts and minds of men, not in a building.²⁰ (2) The Kingdom of God was to be spread throughout the world. (3) In the Jewish tradition is that sometime in the future God would physically raise His people, this was not a spiritual resurrection but a new bodily resurrection from the grave. Paul, in light of Jesus' resurrection taught of a new bodily resurrection taking place in a new earth where all the

¹⁸ Wright, *New Testament*, 329—31. Here Wright brings a valuable insight critical to a redemptive eco-theology. The bodily resurrection and the restoration of creation as confirmation of God's commitment to His good creation provides a solid frame work to see the value and hope in being a good steward of creation.

¹⁹ Wright, *New Testament*, 448—52.

²⁰ Wright, *New Testament*, 459.

things of heaven and earth will become a physical reality. (4) The anticipation of Jesus returning. In early Christianity Jesus had took the place of Israel and the hope of the future was placed on him. Jesus, taking the future upon himself, is now raised to a place of power. His return, the renewal of creation and his judgment go hand in hand. The future is not one of escaping the world but being part of a renewed creation where evil will be uprooted and defeated.²¹

Wright expresses, that Christian hope should not be based on an escapist mindset where heaven is the end, but on a new heaven and a new earth; a hope that is found in the resurrection of Jesus. God's Kingdom is not a place, sought out in a post modern world but is the reality of God sovereignly ruling and reigning on this earth as He does in heaven.²² "Heaven, in the Bible, is not a future destiny but the other, hidden, dimension of our ordinary life- God's dimension, if you like. God made heaven and earth; at the last he will remake both and join them together forever."²³

Many ancient religions had a belief in life after death, but not in a bodily resurrection. This was mainly a Jewish and Christian view. According to ancient thought, resurrection was not something that happened instantly after death but something that happened after the death experience. Resurrection was not a spiritual out of body experience but was something that happened to the body after experiencing a period of being dead. Some Jews such as the Sadducees denied life after death, but much of Judaism believed that there would be a bodily

²¹ Wright, *New Testament*, 460—61.

²² N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. (New York: Harper One Publishing, 2008), 18. Though heaven is part of the redemption process and is depicted as a destination coveted for those Christians who experience death awaiting the final resurrection it is important to note that when considering a redemptive form of ecotheology it is necessary not to see heaven as the end but to focus on God's new heaven and new earth as the ultimate future consumation of salvation.

²³ Wright, *Surprised*, 19. Critical to a redemptive eco-theology is seeing creation as restored and whole. Wright provides a solid eschatological framework to a redemptive eco-theology by establishing that Christian hope should not be based on heaven and a desimated destroyed earth. Instead it focuses on the desire of God to rule and reign on a restored earth.

resurrection in the “last days” when God would raise up the dead, give them new bodies during the time of judgment and the earth would be restored.²⁴

In first century Christianity, belief in a bodily resurrection including a transformed body that was energized by God’s spirit. Though tangible in nature this body would be made of imperishable material. Wright points out that resurrection should never mean escaping the world and going to heaven. Using the transfiguration he explains that the disciples were instructed not to mention this experience until after his resurrection, or in other words, until after his body came to life after his physical death.²⁵

One of the important aspects of a belief in an aspect of resurrection is how it is associated with the belief in the messiah-ship of Jesus. It was incomprehensible that their Messiah was going to die let alone rise from the dead. The Messiah was supposed to liberate Israel from their enemies. Jesus truly was not what they were expecting.²⁶ When looking at the concept of resurrection through the lens of first century Judean Christian beliefs it is important to note that they were not talking about “life after death” but about something beyond life after death: “life after life after death.” Heaven was not so much a location as it was a condition of being in the presence of God after one dies while awaiting the future reality God promised to unfold.²⁷

A foundational belief in 1 Corinthians 15 is the hope in a bodily resurrection. Much of what Paul is saying is oriented around the new creation of Genesis 1—3, not a creation heading for total annihilation and abandonment. Paul contrasts the differences between a corrupted body bound to decay and our future incorruptible bodies that are never to experience decay again. The contrast is not between something material and immaterial but between corruptible and

²⁴ Wright, *Surprised*, 36—42.

²⁵ Wright, *Surprised*, 44—5.

²⁶ Wright, *Surprised*, 46—47.

²⁷ Wright, *Surprised*, 51.

incorruptible physical attributes of the human body. It is this belief in the bodily resurrection that leads one to believe that what is accomplished in our present physical state has more eternal value than we currently give it credit for. The importance of the new body to early Christianity was linked to the promise that they would be ruling over God's new creation. This contradicts the view that after death we will be in a constant state of worship in heaven. If we are given new bodies to rule and reign in a new creation then we will have responsibilities and work to accomplish. This also implies that all the skills and talents we accrue in this present age will be put to use in the age to come.²⁸

Though there are much broader definitions of eschatology it is important to realize that Wright views eschatology as “the climax of Israel’s history, involving events for which end-of-the world language is the only set of metaphors adequate to express the significance of what will happen, but resulting in a new and quite different phase within space-time history.” This stance does justice to the urgencies depicted in the teachings of Jesus and it takes seriously the apocalyptic language used by first century Jews.²⁹ When an apocalyptic view of the eschatological hope of Israel is not taken into consideration, the future expectation collapses completely into the present. It also promotes a false reading of apocalyptic literature which is not supported by historical studies.³⁰

²⁸ Wright, *Surprised*, 155—61. Wright points out that some popular translations translate 15.44 as Paul contrasting a physical body with a spiritual body. Paul’s use of the Greek adjective *psychikos* (ψυχικόν) isn’t dealing with the material makeup of something but the “energy that animates” the material.

²⁹ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 206—09.

³⁰ Wright, *Jesus*, 210. Naturally Wright’s eschatology raises questions among his peers. Clive Marsh in his article “Theological History? N.T. Wright’s Jesus and the Victory of God” believes that Wright’s Jesus is not placed in a solid social base. Marsh sees Wright’s historical approach to eschatology as more of a psychological approach than one based on actual fact. William Placher in his article “Heaven Explained” expresses concern over the idea that Wright seems assured of his conclusions regarding eschatology but is nonspecific and vague in details, openly admitting that the future is like looking into fog. Dale Allison in his chapter entitled “Jesus & the Victory of Apocalyptic,” in *Jesus & the Restoration of Israel*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), 126—141 thinks Wright’s lack of clarity may be an attempt at avoiding other eschatological alternatives. (For further research the complete cited information can be found in the bibliographical section of the thesis under Carey Newman editor)

3.2 The voice of Jürgen Moltmann:

According to Jürgen Moltmann eschatology is not merely a separate portion of Christian theology but the foundation of all Christian theology. It is summed up as the “doctrine of Christian hope.” It begins with faith in the resurrection of Jesus and looks forward to the future promises of the kingdom of God. It is hope in the future that has the ability to transform the present. To Moltmann the only true problem within the context of theology is “the problem of the future.”³¹ A true understanding of eschatology cannot come from a mindset based on Greek thought but must be understood through the idea of promise found in the Old and New Testaments. By looking at the faith of Israel on the promises of God eschatology can be understood properly.³²

Promise in the unrealized future is what allows an individual to hope for the future. It is in this aspect of promise that the human mind finds unrest in the present. Since expectations of Israel’s beliefs were based on promise it must be understood what the promise of God means. Promise proclaims a future that is not yet a reality, having the ability to poise men’s heart toward its fulfillment in the future. When it comes to the promises of God, the future lies not within the ability of man but in the power of the god who made the promise. Promise has the ability to link man to the future while at the same time giving him a sense of history. It has the ability to give specific meaning to the past and the future; giving rise to faith due to the tension created between reality and what is promised.³³

The value of looking at eschatology as a fulfillment of God’s promises is that the promise cannot be separated from God the maker of the promises. Fulfillment of these promises then does

³¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*. Translated by James W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row Publisher, 1967), 15.

³² Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 41.

³³ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 102—03.

not fall upon human effort but upon God's ability to fulfill them. Israel's experience did not eliminate the power of these promises; they just broadened the interpretations that were given to the promise. Moltmann points out that once an individual begins to understand the possibilities of God's promises they cannot help but become restless looking toward the future for their fulfillment. Expectation increases with each aspect of fulfillment that takes place in the present world.³⁴

“Our hope in the promises of God, however, is not hope in God himself or in God as such, but it hopes that his future faithfulness will bring it also the fullness of what has been promised.”³⁵ This hope is not just in the return of Jesus, but in the establishing of his kingdom on earth. It comes from the belief that God is faithful to His word and that His word will be fulfilled. Apart from this faith, looking into the future becomes nothing more than “speculation.” “It is not our experiences which make faith and hope, but it is faith and hope that make experiences and bring the human spirit to an ever new and restless transcending of itself.”³⁶

The center point of eschatology according to Moltmann is without a doubt the kingdom of God as well as his lordship. Woven in and out of this concept of lordship is the belief that all creation upon the return of God's kingdom will be as it was originally intended. Since Israel's nomadic history the concept of lordship held with it the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.³⁷

For Moltmann, eschatology encompasses more than an understanding of the end times. It includes everything from the resurrection of Jesus to his return as well as the formation of the new creation. The basis and focus of the Christian faith is grounded in eschatology as well is

³⁴ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 104—05.

³⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 119.

³⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 120.

³⁷ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 216. Seeing eschatology as the fulfillment of God's promises reinforces God's value placed on creation, thus enabling an eco-theology to be created that bases the value of God's creation on the integrity of God the creator instead of the creation's value based on economical resource potential.

every other aspect of Christianity. He does not see eschatology as the end of creation but a new beginning; it is the full appearance of God's Kingdom. Eschatology becomes the hope for God's future instead of a doomsday outlook awaiting the destruction of earth. Moltmann argues for an eschatology which becomes the metamorphosis of human history restoring all things back to God. He vocalizes the need for a "cosmic eschatology" which reinforces the restoration of all of nature back to God, along with humanity, making the new creation a better symbol for eschatology than the Kingdom of God. However in his discussion he appears to intermingle Kingdom of God and new creation language even when suggesting an interim period of a thousand year reign of God "between the eschatological kingdom and the new creation."³⁸ His eschatology helps open up the possibility that people's hearts will be awakened to being part of God's new creation through the hope that God will fulfill his promises. Christian hope is found in the possibilities of the new creation and not founded on the current injustices of today's world. The new creation is a creation where evil and death are overcome and no longer exist. Moltmann expects this hope in the new creation to unleash humanity's potential in the desire to serve the future and improve our present lives.³⁹

Peter Althouse applies a robust Pentecostal eschatology to Moltmann's views that enable one to see the active role the Holy Spirit will play in the return of Jesus. Eschatology consists of history drawing closer to the return of Jesus under the direction of the Spirit as well as God actively moving toward humanity from the future. It is through the activity of the Spirit that God's new creation will be brought forth, not the advancements of humanity. "For Moltmann, the transcendent future which transforms the present provides a better understanding of the dialectic between God's transcendence and immanence than the conception of an 'eternal now',

³⁸ Althouse, *Spirit*, 111.

³⁹ Althouse, *Spirit*, 109—11. Moltmann's eschatology underscores an eco-theology that values human involvement and stewardship established on a hope in God's promises not on a reaction to world problems and concerns.

which sees God's transcendence in the present." According to Moltmann this concept has the ability to convert the "god forsakenness" of history into something redeemable.⁴⁰

Moltmann insists that the promises of God can only be brought into reality by God breaking into the "world from the future." Humanity has a responsibility to participate in the coming kingdom as God reveals the potential for developing His kingdom. Each time these potential developments are acted upon more potential is revealed by God.⁴¹

Moltmann strategically encapsulates his transformation theology in the importance of the Sabbath and the presence of God within creation. This takes the focus off of humanity as the pinnacle of creation and onto the Sabbath as the crowning event in creation. This takes the emphasis off of ruling and reigning over the earth and puts it on God's peace with all creation reinforcing Moltmann's view of all of creation being transformed in the new earth. Sabbath rest becomes the very thing that holds the promised future pointing us to the truth that in the new creation the entire universe will be filled with the presence of God.⁴² Moltmann believes apocalyptic eschatology is dealing with the destruction of sin and death, not creation. The new creation then becomes the manifestation of the God's presence on earth. When looked at through the framework of eschatology the manifest presence of God in the new creation becomes the complete Sabbath for the whole of creation. By focusing on the Sabbath the emphasis can turn to humanity taking care of the earth in a responsible way, showing the value of proper stewardship. This Sabbath approach provides the insight that to maintain a fruitful earth there must be a commitment to allowing the land to replenish itself. Moltmann's eschatology does not

⁴⁰ Althouse, *Spirit*, 113.

⁴¹ Althouse, *Spirit*, 115.

⁴² Althouse, *Spirit*, 154.

leave room for an escapist mindset but one of engaging the world and actively promoting the kingdom of God.⁴³

Moltmann does not see the resurrection of Christ as mere historical occurrence but one with eschatological significance. His resurrection answers the questions surrounding the future of the dead by showing the process of resurrection began with Christ and is completed with the resurrection of those who belong to him. The resurrection of the dead becomes the foundation of a hope in the new creation as well as part of a “cosmic eschatology.”⁴⁴ Eschatology cannot single out one aspect of creation over another, but it must be universal in nature taking into consideration all of creation. Future hope must take into consideration all of God’s creation otherwise God is not truly seen as God.⁴⁵

For Moltmann, eschatology must be cosmic in order, otherwise it can become Gnostic in nature where redemption becomes a way to save the soul and abandon the body. An inability to see God not only as creator but as redeemer causes redemption and resurrection to become only a human experience instead of one for the entire universe. Moltmann insists that eternal life and a new heaven and new earth are tied together. It is inconceivable to have one without the other.⁴⁶ “Because there is no such thing as a soul separate from the body, and no humanity detached from nature – from life, the earth and the cosmos – there is no redemption for human beings either without the redemption of nature.”⁴⁷

⁴³ Althouse, *Spirit*, 156—57. By focusing on Sabbath peace and the new creation being filled with the presence of God the ground work is laid for an eco-theology focused on caring for creation as an act of worship that ushers in the return of Christ instead of focusing on the dominion over creation. An eschatology that focuses on the destruction of sin and death instead of the total destruction of creation frees us to be stewards of the redemption of creation instead of bystanders expecting its catastrophic ending to this present age.

⁴⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God Christian Eschatology*. Translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 68—70.

⁴⁵ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 132.

⁴⁶ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 259—60.

⁴⁷ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 260. Moltmann provides a great eco-theological frame work to see that the humanity and nature are eternally linked and both are reliant on the redemptive power of God.

Foundational to understanding eschatology is seeing how the promises in the old and new testaments establish hope.⁴⁸ Moltmann points out that a “not yet” theology propels our faith into the future which is oriented around promise. It is the very aspect of promise that leaves the future open; without this openness hope looks into a stagnant world and is Gnostic in nature with people looking for a way to escape the present.⁴⁹ Promise is not the fulfillment of a “coming history,” it is the announcement of the “not yet” aspect of God’s kingdom. It is this aspect that makes the future of God’s promises able to go beyond the predictable into the unfolding of God’s intent for His good creation. Therefore the concept of future is that which satisfies the promises of God. Promise does not bring to light existing reality but is designed to counteract reality and bring with it a future that God has designed for all of creation.⁵⁰

The eschatological promises in the resurrection of Christ define our sense of history. It shows the limited ability of man’s experience and the openness of God’s future. The aspect of linking history through the lens of promise is intended to show the fact that history is open to God’s promises. According to Moltmann, one of the things that theologians need to free themselves from is that all truth is scientific truth. This creates a world without options or possibilities, limiting the potential of the future.⁵¹

Within the heart of eschatology is the expectation of the kingdom of God. Early in the expectation of Israel resides the expectation that their God would fulfill His promise and establish himself as Lord over the world bringing everything into its created order. Israel’s

⁴⁸ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 41.

⁴⁹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 68—9.

⁵⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 85—6.

⁵¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 92—3. Moltmann’s eschatology underscores the eco-theological thought that faith and biblical truth play just as much a vital part of stewarding God’s creation as does solid scientific truth.

expectation was first God's assurance of passage into the Promised Land, then toward the expectation of his universal lordship ruling all nations.⁵²

With the resurrection of Jesus comes the expectation of God's Kingdom in a new way as well as the anticipated return of Jesus. God's Kingdom is not the transformation of this present evil age but a kingdom that calls things into being that yet do not exist, giving the Kingdom of God a much broader and comprehensive meaning. The kingdom of God takes on a Christological meaning through the bodily resurrection of Jesus which provides for a new hope when anticipating the coming Kingdom of God. The Kingdom message becomes more universal showing that the same God who created the universe is the same God who reconciled all things back to Himself. This requires us to construct an eschatology which encompasses all things, not just humanity. A kingdom mindset oriented around resurrection and new creation brings with it a hope in the promise that all things are to be made new. A universal eschatology becomes all inclusive not exclusive in nature, preventing an attitude of escapism and resignation to leave this world behind.⁵³

The whole basis for the Christian hope is the belief that Christ will return and with Him will come the fulfillment of all the promises of God, the resurrection of the dead, and the lordship of God over all of creation. The hope in the future is the expectation of something new.⁵⁴ For Moltmann, eschatology is based on the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, an eschatological hope that becomes hope through Christ to the rest of the world. Moltmann links creation and eschatology so that creation is not just a historical event, but an open system in

⁵² Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 216.

⁵³ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 220—24. Moltmann's universal eschatology underscores the importance for a redemptive eco-theology to see humanity as part of the created order. To recognize that God's desire is to restore all things back to himself enables humanity to see itself not only as part of the environmental problem but part of the solution as well.

⁵⁴ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 229.

which God interacts. Unless creation is viewed through the fall and redemption of humanity it becomes a closed system eliminating the hope for something new. Moltmann does not limit his eschatology to the future of humanity destined for heaven. In “cosmic eschatology” heaven and earth become the dwelling place of God. He is concerned with the future of the entire cosmos coming into the promise of a new creation. He is not satisfied with just a human eschatology due to the fact that without the universe there is no earth and without the earth there is no humanity. Creation, for Moltmann, is three-fold. He breaks it up into the beginning of creation, the continuance of creation, and the final transformation of creation into the new creation promised by God. So to Moltmann eschatology is transformational not ending in the total destruction of the earth but a changing of the existing earth into the new earth. It is the elimination of sin and death so that the cosmos can now be part of the new creation.⁵⁵

3.3 Toward a Future Hope:

Althouse builds on and broadens Moltmann’s eschatology by showing how Miroslav Volf, influenced by Moltmann, utilizes eschatology to look at “Christian social ethics.”⁵⁶ Volf expresses the impracticality in believing that heaven is the final resting place for all Christians. For him, existing creation must be part of the new creation thus allowing for what humanity does today to be “purified” and have eternal value, enabling humans in a small way, to be involved in the unfolding of the new creation as promised. Seeing the existing creation as part of the new creation enables Volf to develop a theology of work from two starting points: (1) From creation humanity was called to work in cooperation with God taking care and being good stewards of His creation. (2) Eschatology envisions humanity as having a role in cooperating with God in bringing forth His new creation. Volf argues that what humans do has eternal significance and is

⁵⁵ Peter Althouse, "In Appreciation of Jürgen Moltmann: A Discussion of His Transformational Eschatology." *PNEUMA: Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* Volume 28, no.1 (Spring 2006): 25—27.

⁵⁶ Althouse, *Spirit*, 73—75.

for more than simply personal human edification. He obviously rejects any form of an apocalyptic destruction of creation. Volf rightly states that sin limits our ability to cooperate with God in bringing in the new creation. He acknowledges that God's new kingdom will be a gift and not gained through human effort. But this acknowledgment does not negate the opportunity humans have in actively serving the Kingdom of God. To participate in bringing forth God's coming Kingdom is not a contradiction to the expectation of His divine promises coming to pass. Volf designs his theology of work around the work of the Holy Spirit making what we do as participation in building the kingdom and a way of service to others.⁵⁷

There is little doubt that Moltmann's eschatology points toward a political and environmental need for an Eco-theology. Any form of a universal eschatology will have political ramifications if one chooses to live in accordance to that eschatology.⁵⁸ Wright offers the explanation,

“Secularists often criticize Christians for contributing to ecological disaster, and there's more than a grain of truth in the charge. I have heard it seriously argued in North America that since God intends to destroy the present space-time universe, and moreover since he intends to do so quite soon now, it really doesn't matter whether we emit twice as many greenhouse gases as we do now, whether we destroy the rain forests and the arctic tundra, whether we fill our skies with acid rain”.⁵⁹

According to Wright this perspective is a result of the belief that heaven is the ending place of all Christians and a disregard for scriptures like Romans 8.18—25 and Revelation 21—22.⁶⁰ Today there is a leaning toward heaven being the final stopping place after death. Early Christians held a vastly different view, they believed that just as Jesus rose from the dead all of creation would

⁵⁷ Althouse, *Spirit*, 73—75. Althouse and Volf both underscore the value in an eco-theology that sees humanities current environmental choices as having eternal value as well as a participation in ushering in God's new creation.

⁵⁸ Althouse, *Spirit*, 179. In reality any aspect of living according to the biblical mandates of scripture will lead to the need for some form of political involvement.

⁵⁹ Wright, *Surprised*, 90.

⁶⁰ Wright, *Surprised*, 90.

arise and be redeemed.⁶¹ The true aspect of redemption isn't abandoning God's good creation and beginning again, but restoring what needs to be restored. It was humanity's destiny to become stewards of God's creation. Jesus makes all this possible. Redemption becomes the destruction of the evil that was hindering creation.⁶²

Due to the influence of J. N. Darby and the Plymouth Brethren there is an impression that we are living in the end times. There has been a huge effort to reconcile biblical prophecy with world events. Darby's influence is one of the reasons that many of today's Christians believe that the return of Jesus will bring with it the destruction of the world while his chosen escape to heaven.⁶³ According to Wright, an important aspect of a "future hope" is a better future for the needy and poor; for those who are hurting and downtrodden. This is not an afterthought, nor an addition to the gospel; it is central to the gospel message. God's great future enables what we do with our bodies to become part of building the Kingdom of God. What happens in the present is not just intended to make life less boring and more fulfilling; it has eternal value and purpose in God's kingdom.⁶⁴

If salvation is just a way to get to heaven, then kingdom work becomes just about saving souls, but if we look at salvation through the eyes of God's promises being fulfilled through a new heaven and new earth, our focus is much broader than saving souls for heaven. The consequences of our present actions take on an entirely new meaning. Salvation becomes the saving of an entire individual not for their sake but for the sake of what God plans to do through them in his future.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Wright, *Surprised*, 93.

⁶² Wright, *Surprised*, 97. The strength of a redemptive eco-theology is that it allows environmentally restorative choices to be an act of redemption instead of just another political mandate.

⁶³ Wright, *Surprised*, 118—20.

⁶⁴ Wright, *Surprised*, 191—93.

⁶⁵ Wright, *Surprised*, 197.

“When God saves people in this life, by working through his Spirit to bring them to faith and by leading them to follow Jesus in discipleship, prayer, holiness, hope, and love, such people are designed—it isn’t too strong a word—to be a sign and foretaste of what God wants to do for the entire cosmos. What’s more, such people are not just to be a sign and foretaste of that ultimate salvation; they are to be *part of the means by which* God makes this happen in both the present and the future. That is what Paul insists on when he says that the whole creation is waiting with eager longing not just for its own redemption, its liberation from corruption and decay, but for God’s children to be revealed: in other words, for the unveiling of those redeemed humans through whose stewardship creation will at last be brought back into that wise order for which it was made.”⁶⁶

Wright sums up the value of anticipating the future hope by acknowledging that it is God who will in his timing and power bring forth the new creation. He alone will sum all things up in Christ. Human effort will not assist in this process, for those being obedient and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, they will prepare for the Kingdom of God. The effort is not some futile attempt prior to the destruction of the earth. Every spirit-led act of love and service that brings glory to Christ is not wasted, but will enhance the new creation God will establish.⁶⁷ Every part of creation within time and space will be redeemed from its current state of decay and be changed into an incorruptible, unimaginable, glorious creation.⁶⁸ Wright explains “Despite the tendency in some parts of the emerging church to marginalize space, time, and matter, I remain convinced that the way forward is to rediscover a true eschatology, to rediscover a true mission rooted in anticipating that eschatology, and to rediscover forms of church that embody that anticipation.”⁶⁹ It is through the frame work of a “true eschatology” that enables the formation of a truly redemptive eco-theology.

The question needs to be asked how N. T. Wright and Jürgen Moltmann came to believe in a “this worldly” eschatological hope. The solution is due partially to their understanding and

⁶⁶ Wright, *Surprised*, 200.

⁶⁷ Wright, *Surprised*, 208. Wrights eschatology underscores the eco-theological belief that spirit-led acts of love and service are not limited just to humans but include all of creation, leading to the enhancement of the new creation that God will establish.

⁶⁸ Wright, *Surprised*, 211.

⁶⁹ Wright, *Surprised*, 264.

awareness of the detailed symbolism and imagery as well as the complex language surrounding apocalyptic discourse. Eschatology and apocalyptic language are common bed fellows. There is also a common belief in the redemptive heart of God to restore creation instead of destroy it.

CHAPTER 4

Apocalyptic Language:

A crucial component of developing a convincing eschatological perspective includes, engaging the prophetic and apocalyptic literature of the Bible, appreciating its complexity, trying to end up with an understanding of what the author is intending to convey. By starting with a working definition for both eschatology and apocalyptic it enables the reader to “recapturing the Christian imagination.”¹ Apocalyptic and prophetic literature employs artistic images that speak to the emotions and intellect. It is truly important to appreciate the artistic images behind the prophetic; to truly grasp the intent of the author, one must “stand in awe of the aesthetics of prophetic artistry and to catch a vision of what heaven will be like.” In other words the reader must step outside of the literal and see the heart of the author to grasp the magnitude of what is being said.²

While there is great debate in defining apocalyptic due to its complexity a good working definition given by John Collins is, “A genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”³ Isaac points out that eschatology is more than just the end of the cosmos, but can include a sort of “personal eschatology” such as death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Caution must be exercised so that is not placed it at the end

¹ Gordon L. Isaac, “Eschatology vs. Apocalyptic,” *Liturgical Ministry*, no.19, no.1 (2110): 23.

² D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2002), 31; Sandy points out when looking at Revelation 2—3 that the reader must step out of the literistic reading and stand in awe of prophetic artistry.

³ John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 5.

of systematic theology but letting it interact throughout the entire theological discussion.⁴

The apocalyptic genre is different from prophecy in that it is otherworldly in nature, yielding examples of good and evil in unfamiliar ways to the reader and often leaving the reader confused and perplexed.⁵ The intent is to push people into the future in a dramatic way into the presence of God, as well as, assure the reader that the promises of God will be accomplished on earth the same way as they are in heaven. The apocalyptic genre reveals to the reader that the suffering they are experiencing is part of God's conflict with Satan and that those who are victorious will have a place of honor in the "new heaven and earth."⁶

The parameters of the apocalyptic genre are not always clear due to the fact that they are not well defined as far as the number of apocalyptic characteristics that make it part of the genre. The apocalyptic genre was a common literary device in some early Jewish communities and later adapted by some Christian writers. Its function is to escort us into a place of imagination and to experience what is being described before moving past it. This genre tends to bring the reader face to face with their faith and raises questions as to why God allows suffering in the world, while at the same time proclaims that God has not abandoned his creation. In times of great crisis, apocalyptic literature and its performance became an appropriate way of expressing God's pending judgment of evil and intervention into his creation.⁷

With this in mind one must acknowledge the futility in pressing details of apocalyptic visions. This effort tends to divert the reader's focus away from the big picture and the significance of the vision. Apocalyptic is intended to be mysterious. The mind of the prophet is missed when the vision is reduced down into manageable pieces. It must be realized that

⁴ Isaac, "Eschatology," 23.

⁵ Sandy, *Plowshares*, 108.

⁶ Sandy, *Plowshares*, 110—11.

⁷ Sandy, *Plowshares*, 109.

apocalyptic literature was never intended to be viewed through a microscope. “To hear apocalyptic, to feel its emotive language, to sense its mystery is to hear it aright.”⁸ In his book *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, John Collins unfolds that scholars tend to focus a great deal of concern when considering the facts and language references of a given text. This can become troublesome when studying mythological or poetic sections that are full of descriptive words that express feelings and ideas instead of objective facts. “The apocalyptic literature provides a rather clear example of language that is expressive rather than referential, symbolic rather than factual.”⁹

The apocalyptic worldview was part of the oral traditions prior to it being written down. Its history of being heard orally emphasizes the importance of understanding such vision in their holistic meaning and not through the intricate details. Brent Sandy convincingly conveys the importance of standing back and seeing the apocalyptic genre for what it was intended to be by correlating it to an artist painting a picture. The artist’s intent is to have the viewer stand back and appreciate the message the artist is conveying through the art, rather than to look so closely that each single stroke of the brush is all that is seen.¹⁰ Due to the distinctive imagery used to convey the emotion by the author, the message can be lost if the reader scrutinizes every individual aspect of a vision. Apocalyptic works tend to be more vague than detailed. The intent is not literal but rather to represent the overall impression of the author. Thus the overarching message is never fully understood until the final scene unfolds.¹¹

N.T. Wright lays a vital foundation of Israel’s belief in the one true God in order to explain why apocalyptic language was used. Use of apocalyptic language can only be understood

⁸ Sandy, *Plowshares*, 126—27.

⁹ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 17.

¹⁰ Sandy, *Plowshares*, 127.

¹¹ Sandy, *Plowshares*, 128.

with the realization that the God of Israel who chose to dwell on Mt. Zion was the same God who created the universe and made covenant with the chosen people of Israel. Appreciation of first century Jewish worldviews and experiences help to explain why apocalyptic seers chose to use metaphorical cosmic imagery to describe the age to come. These writers borrowed imagery from Israel's past events, such as the Exodus, in order to describe and bring an understanding to the full meaning of the drastic changes that were to come.¹²

Gordon Isaac, following N.T. Wright, points out the foundational Israelite hope that their God will release them from exile and bring order into a world filled with chaos. Their God would reign and rule throughout eternity. God's judgment would restore all that is wrong to right order and bring the entire world into alignment with his plans. Israel's hope was not a vague outcome for all mankind but one specifically for God's rule on behalf of his people. Incredibly the message of the New Testament writes can also be seen through Israel's expectations of God coming in power to enact his charge of this world.¹³

Stephen Cook Points out in his book *The Apocalyptic Literature* that unfortunately, it needs to be acknowledged that some scholars like Gerhard Von Rad see apocalyptic as something that does not belong in scripture nor fit into "Old Testament" theology. Marcus Borg sees Apocalyptic as contradictory to Jesus' role in the New Testament. Cook explains that this tends to push Apocalyptic to the outer fringe of the tradition biblical canons. Cook further points out that a much older but still popular view discharges it from Jewish history altogether explaining it as an unfortunate Persian influence. Individuals like Sidnie White Crawford and Paul Hanson place apocalyptic in the role of only being for the downtrodden and suffering.¹⁴

¹² Wright, *New Testament*, 283—84.

¹³ Isaac, "Eschatology," 24.

¹⁴ Stephen L. Cook, *The Apocalyptic Literature* (ed. M. Gene Tucker and Charles B. Cousar; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 31.

Needless to say, to make apocalyptic just for those on the fringe of society or an imported influence from Persia is a way to push it to the wayside and out of the mainstream of the Bible. There is no doubt many of the biblical texts were influenced by other traditions; life never happens in a vacuum so it's a mistake to discount the value of apocalyptic literature especially when considering a solid eschatology.¹⁵ Unfortunately, this common approach robs the apocalyptic text of its original intended meaning. It does not allow the reader to struggle with the future work of God in the new heaven and new earth.¹⁶

Though currently Apocalyptic thought has gained a level of prominence within Biblical theology John Collins points out in his book *The Apocalyptic Imagination* that a slogan by German scholar Klaus Koch "Ratlos von der Apokalypik," "perplexed" or "embarrassed" by apocalyptic" shows that there has been a tendency to give slight and sparse attention to apocalyptic texts even though they played a valuable role in the development of early Christianity. The realm of apocalyptic thought is often attached to those expecting the millennial reign of Jesus so there tends to be a hesitancy to emphasize the influences that apocalyptic literature had in early Christian beliefs.¹⁷ An Apocalyptic text is often expected to be neatly contained in a framework that is consistent to its distinctive genre. However, the apocalyptic genre is not a singular, clearly defined unit due to the fact that an idea of a coming judgment followed by a world of divine design can be found in other texts that are not normally thought to be apocalyptic.¹⁸

In D. Brent Sandy's book *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks* he clarifies as well as

¹⁵ Cook, *Apocalyptic*, 33.

¹⁶ Cook, *Apocalyptic*, 39.

¹⁷ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 1.

¹⁸ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 9.

summarizes the function of the apocalyptic within the New Testament.¹⁹ The first function is for “divine disclosure.” A foundational aspect of apocalyptic is the idea that God directly communicates to his people supernaturally. The second function is to provide an “otherworldly perspective.” Apocalyptic alerts the reader to the contrast between an earthy perspective and a heavenly (or other-worldly) perspective with the intent of countering worldly deception while trying to align the readers’ thoughts with God’s. The third function is to bring the reader into a “virtual reality” by descriptive language intended to allow the reader to experience secondhand the initial experience of the author’s insight into the world of the future under the rule of God. It is through this perspective that the reader’s current situation can be corrected. Worship is the fourth function of apocalyptic by showing God’s sovereign reign and victory over evil along with His faithfulness to those who are His people. The fifth function is devotion. Through apocalyptic revelation God’s plan for His people is unfolded along with a call to be devoted to Him. Along with a call to devotion is the function of correction. Apocalyptic shows God’s unhappiness with sin and assures the reader of pending judgment while calling for repentance. “Perseverance” is the final function showing the reader that evil and affliction are only temporary calling for the reader to endure despite the current conditions.²⁰

Apocalyptic literature employs symbolic and expressive language to convey emotions. It becomes an attempt to peer into the unknown imaginatively not with an expectation of discovering literal details. Though apocalyptic literature is fully expressive and symbolic this is not to say there is no real hope articulated. Readers need not guess as to the expectations of a given text. However, apocalyptic thought does not fit neatly into systematic theology that is

¹⁹ This paragraph is a brief synopsis of D. Brent Sandy’s summary of the function of New Testament apocalyptic found on pages 185—187 of his book.

²⁰ Sandy, *Plowshares*, 185—87.

concerned only with objective well-developed concepts.²¹ Interpreters inevitably face the temptation to try and control – even tame the text. This robs the power of the text from relating what is being conveyed on its own terms. For our purposes, this is especially true when an apocalyptic text challenges current thought regarding how God might “supernaturally” interact with His creation. An inability to reconcile God’s interaction with creation makes it difficult to interact with God’s new heaven and earth upon his return in the fullness of time. A common present-day strategy seems to be to avoid talk of the renewal of God’s creation and instead impose a “super spiritual” or disembodied meaning on the text; in essence, trying to tame the text. There are also the dual dangers of abandoning the text strictly to a historical understanding, or placing it into some sort of abstract futuristic context. This marginalizes the message of the apocalyptic as already realized in the past, or postpones it into an unreachable future. Either strategy tends to make the text irrelevant to the present, taming it in order to eliminate the need to take its perspective seriously.²²

Stephen Cook points out in his book *The Apocalyptic Literature* that many scholars try to tame the text by reducing the apocalyptic genre into a series of coded messages so that when the code is deciphered the text can be managed into a series of precisely predictable future events that will nicely unfold.²³ There is also danger in making apocalyptic exclusively applicable to present-day Christianity; this presumptuously leaves out historical pertinence by neglecting the fact that the text had meaning and was intended to be applied in the lives of the historical audience. The writers of apocalyptic did not write primarily for future readers but the audience at the origination of the vision.²⁴ Knowing that the original author was writing to a real audience

²¹ Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 28.

²² Isaac, “Eschatology,” 27.

²³ Cook, *Apocalyptic*, 45.

²⁴ Cook, *Apocalyptic*, 47—8.

does not negate the value that apocalyptic texts point the readers to God's intent for the final age. The communities that embraced these texts did so because they cherished the hope in the knowledge that God had a plan to redeem all creation.²⁵ It is important to realize that "apocalypse," as a genre, is a more formal modern division that has been given to many prophetic portions of the ancient texts. Though it is a useful category when studying ancient transcripts and their symbolic usage of language, the intent is not to force modern ideas onto ancient thoughts.²⁶

New Testament writers found that apocalyptic language and rhetoric was an ideal way of looking at the current issues from a perspective of ultimate hope. Christians, who were experiencing persecution and turmoil, would gain strength and encouragement to remain faithful. This radical "ultimate" perspective enabled readers to look forward to God's fully coming kingdom and understand their struggles from a cosmic other-worldly perspective. Apocalyptic thinking became the framework that built hope within Christian communities that were alienated and oppressed by the wider societies in which they lived. It represented the promise that evil would be vanquished, persecutors would be punished and faithful believers in Christ would be vindicated. With this hope, present day problems became bearable because of the promise of something better with the coming Kingdom of God. Apocalyptic became a form of thought that molded their anticipation toward the future.²⁷

Gordon Isaac points out in his article "Eschatology vs. Apocalyptic" that apocalyptic is at times misused, nonetheless it can be a positive and fruitful endeavor when looked at in the overall theme of God's redemptive interaction with His people. It can promote understanding of

²⁵ Cook, *Apocalyptic*, 50.

²⁶ Keith D. Dyer, "When Is the End Not the End?: The Fate of the Earth in Biblical Eschatology." in *The Earth Story of the New Testament*, edited by Norman C. Habel and Vicky Balabanski (Ohio, 2002), 48.

²⁷ Sandy, *Plowshares*, 168—69.

ones place in history as well as ones role in embracing everyday responsibilities. It has the ability to give life and energy to a disconnected community.²⁸ “The apocalypse is thus concerned to offer new hope and energy to the embattled people of God. The ambiguity of the mundane is clarified when put into relation to the heavenly perspective.”²⁹

Due to the ancient belief in the interconnectedness of the universe it was commonly thought in Antiquity that environmental and natural phenomena were part of divine announcements of change. It was the Stoics, not the Jews, who believed that the world would end in devastation. The Jewish worldview and their belief in the coming kingdom of God, as well as the restoration of Israel, show that they did not support the world (or creation) coming to an end. No doubt those interpreters who read apocalyptic language literally have had a popular influence on how people articulate eschatology today. To eliminate the vital apocalyptic worldview held by first century Jews as well as early Christians is to say that they were mistaken about a major component of their belief in God’s promises. Further, such anachronistic judgments eliminate the likelihood that current eschatological discussions should take these views seriously.³⁰ This study argues for a recovery and appreciation of the rhetorical power of apocalyptic hope.

Though many readers assume total world destruction is central to apocalyptic literature, Jürgen Moltmann believes this is not an option. In order for the world to be the summation of God’s creation, he argues, it must be transformed into the new creation. Apocalyptic scenarios of world destruction are not consistent with biblically eschatology; rather, they reflect a more secular pessimism. Moltmann’s view of apocalyptic is not of the destruction of the world but of the elimination and destruction of sin and evil. He claims “Anyone who talks here about ‘the

²⁸ Isaac, “Eschatology,” 22.

²⁹ Isaac, “Eschatology,” 25.

³⁰ Wright, *New Testament*, 285.

apocalypse' or battle of Armageddon, is providing a religious interpretation for mass human crime, and is trying to make God responsible for what human beings are doing. The true interpretation and theological intention of apocalyptic is to 'awaken the resistance of faith and the patience of hope'.³¹ The appropriate role of apocalyptic within eschatology is in the conviction that God will judge the world, making way for his kingdom and new creation, not in the idea that the world will be utterly destroyed.³² What now remains to be seen is whether the hope-filled eschatology of Wright and Moltmann, with their symbolic use of apocalyptic text and language, can be sustained in three key biblical texts: Genesis 1, Romans 8 and 2 Peter 3.

³¹ Althouse, *Spirit*, 117.

³² Althouse, *Spirit*, 116—118.

CHAPTER 5

Considering the Biblical Text:

In light of the frequent use of apocalyptic discourse within eschatological writing three biblical texts are often discussed in reference to a Christian eco-theology. The hope is to create a clearer understanding of three common topics of discussion within the eco-theological discourse. (1) Using Genesis 1.26—31; 2.7 and 2.15; the concepts of the image of God as well as dominion and stewardship will be considered. (2) Utilizing Romans 8.18—25 the connection between the natural creation, the fall of humanity, and the new creation will be explored. (3) Finally, the apocalyptic rhetoric and images of 2 Peter 3.7—13 will be evaluated to gain an understanding of the intent and potential effect of the destruction language being used.

5.1 The Human Factor (Genesis 1—2)

It is common knowledge that Genesis 1 is not the only narrative that recounts the creation of the world. Many similar stories have been discovered in Mesopotamian literature. So what can be said about the relationship between the Mesopotamian myths and Genesis 1? It may be that Genesis is an argument against the pagan views of creation. The main purpose of the creation story in Genesis is to teach Israel that the world was formed by the will of one God that acts without human restraints. Its purpose may be to form Israel's view and understanding of God as well as helping to explain their place in God's plans.¹ The author of Genesis shows his awareness of the other cosmologies and intentionally rejects each one in a strategic formula. The usage of the common Hebrew word for the sun and the moon seeks to prevent the reader from projecting them as divine entities as would be common in ancient cultures. The author also

¹ John C. Collins, *Genesis 1—4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2006), 239—43.

clearly points out that it was God who created the “greater and lesser light.” In Genesis the creation of man is the pinnacle of the creation process created in the image of God to rule over creation as God’s representative.²

When looking at the creation story in the sections that need to be closely considered for constructing an eco-theology are the creation of humans as well as the intended role they are to play are found in Genesis 1.26—31; 2.7 and 2.5.

^{1.26}Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, 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.”

²⁹ God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on 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.

^{2.7}then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

^{2.15} The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.³

When looking at the Genesis texts both in the original Hebrew as well as in the English translation, the reader cannot help but come up with a multitude of questions. The intent of this thesis is to explore the insights of this text for its implications on eco-theology. Through analysis of the key words and phrases in the original Hebrew it is hoped that better understanding will

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*; Word Biblical Commentary (ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker; Waco: Word Book Publishers, 1987), 9.

³ All scripture texts will be taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

emerge as to what the original author's intended message was for his audience. Though a word-for-word study would prove to be beneficial, due to the limited length of this thesis and its eco-theological focus, only the more debated phrases will be addressed.

The book of Genesis is concerned with origins; the creation of the earth as well as of humanity, the creation of cultural institutions, and the beginning of a chosen people. Interestingly, the reader is not given the "genesis" of God who is the primary actor in Genesis 1. The word Genesis comes from the Latin Vulgate (*genesis*), which in turn was adopted from the Septuagint (γένεσις). In English it would be translated to mean "origin." The Hebrew text uses the first word of Genesis 1.1, בראשית, meaning "Beginning."⁴ The Hebrew root ראש literally means "head," thus instead of "beginning" the text could be rendered "in the head or mind of God." This brings with it a deeper and more complex understanding of what may have been the intent and purpose of God in creation.⁵

5.1a "Let Us":

The author begins Genesis 1.26 with ויאמר אלהים נעשה אדם, meaning, and "Then God said "Let us make humankind..." This is the easiest place to begin only because the remainder of this phrase is quite complicated by the use of the word "make," a phrase that has been debated since the beginning of biblical criticism. It is a Qal first person imperfect plural verb meaning "to fashion or create an object, usually implying the use of existing materials."⁶ The author lets the reader know that the object being created is the human; and later in Genesis 2.7 that the human is

⁴ Victor P Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 1-17*, NICOT, (ed. Robert Hubbard Jr.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 1.

⁵ Francis Brown, D.D., D. Litt. *The New Brown – Driver – Briggs – Genesis Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 910.

⁶ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Prod. Electronic ed.: Logos Research Systems Inc., Oak Harbor, 1997)

constructed out of the dust of the ground and the breath of God. The rest of this phrase pertaining to “let us” is not as easily deciphered.

There are several explanations as to why the author of the text used the plural “let us make.” One explanation may be that the author was reproducing aspects of a similar ancient Near Eastern origin myth. It is only fair to assume that the plurality shown was intended by the author and not placed in the text by accident or as a left behind piece of an earlier myth.⁷ Another view, argued by Maimonides but no longer with much modern merit, is that God was addressing the earth to be a partner in the creation of man. This reading contradicts the rest of the text where God is depicted as the only creator. Cline points out another option: that the author was using a “plural of majesty” or “royal plural.” This is not very convincing due to the limited or almost non existence of any parallel texts using this particular verb to support this theory.⁸

Another view discussed by Cline, which has merit but is not without its difficulties, held by G. von Rad as the theory that God is addressing his heavenly court. This seems like a natural solution since the heavenly court is depicted in the book of Job 1 as well as Isaiah 6.18. The difficulty that surrounds this theory is that it implies that man is not just created in the image of God but also of the heavenly court. It also leads the reader to conclude that the heavenly court assisted God in the creation process. The other difficulty is that there is no mention of a heavenly court anywhere in the previous or subsequent text surrounding Genesis 1.26.⁹

Cline plausibly suggests that due to the fact that no other beings are mentioned in this text that, God may be addressing himself. Though the issue of self-address is not rare in the Old Testament, the use of the plural form is. What makes it seem plausible is not the lack of support

⁷ David J.A. Clines, “The Image of God in man,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 64.

⁸ Clines, “Image,” 65.

⁹ Clines, “Image,” 65.

but the limited number of disadvantages surrounding this theory. Therefore, due to the rarity of this form and the lack of parallels this view is highly unlikely. The final view would be a multiplicity within God's personhood. This view could be argued since the earlier verses present the presence of the Spirit of God in the creation process. This is also supported in Job 33.4 as well as in Psalms 104.30. Though this point is not pressed by many scholars, it is not rejected either.¹⁰

An interesting aspect surrounding the "let us" issue in 1.26 is that if God is speaking to other heavenly beings he has exclusively reserved the act of creation for himself. This can be seen in Genesis 3.22 as well. Since the heavenly beings are not clearly defined, the verse leaves room for speculation. Gerald Bray points out that Cline suggests the plural may be in reference to God addressing His spirit; this seems to have little evidence to support it. During the Second Temple period, early Jewish literature Judaism began to really look at the plural in Genesis 1.26. During this time the concepts of God "communing with himself" and God speaking to the heavenly hosts came into speculation.¹¹ W. Towner points out that most critical scholars would agree with the "plural of majesty" theory when looking at the use of "let us" by God. Also, the idea of the heavenly court is well supported throughout the Old Testament.¹²

In AD 351 the first Sirmium Council affirmed that the "let us" in Genesis 1.26 was God addressing his son Jesus. Modern Catholic scholars would readily admit that the Old Testament reader would find no trace of Trinitarian thought, explaining that the reader must remember that Genesis 1 is an Old Testament text and must be understood in the sense that the original author

¹⁰ Clines, "Image," 68—69.

¹¹ Gerald L. Bray, "The significance of God's image of man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42, no. 2 (N, 1991): 204—06.

¹² W. Sibley Towner, "Clones of God: Genesis 1:26—28 and the image of God in the Hebrew Bible." *Interpretation* 59, no. 4 (Oct., 2005), 341—356.

intended.¹³ Christianity today would lay claim to the plural “let us” as being the depiction of the triune God. Though doubtful that the original author had this in mind when writing to his intended audience it is valid to note that through the context of the New Testament, which includes the sayings of Christ, one could easily support the Trinitarian claim. When considering a redemptive eco-theology the “let us” of Genesis 1 referring to the trinity is the most relational especially when considered in the context of what it means for humanity to be made in the image of God.¹⁴

5.1b Humanity’s Blueprint

The book of Genesis refers to man being the image of God in three places, Genesis 1.26, 5.2 and 9.6. The phrase in Genesis 1.26 is בצלמנו כדמותנו, meaning “in our image after our likeness.” The word צלם “image” is defined as “likeness, i.e. that which is a pattern, model or example of something.” The word דמות "likeness" is defined “that which has similarity or comparison.”¹⁵

The question that needs to be considered when viewed through an eco-theological framework is: What does it mean to be made in the image and likeness of God as well as how does this relate to the identity and purpose of humanity within the created order? Although the meaning of this statement is not clear, it is evident that it depicts the human in some fashion as being like God. Even if it cannot be clearly defined out of all Creation the original author set

¹³ Clines, “Image,” 62.

¹⁴ The triune aspect of the Godhead throughout scripture provides a much needed understanding of who God is thus providing a deeper insight as to what it may be to be the image of God. The relationship issue is important when considering the ramifications of the image of God in the context of eco-theology. As we will see when discussing the image of God that the idea behind image implies that it is intended to represent the one who created it. As the image of God humanity should in turn be like their creator, especially when considering the purpose and responsibility of humanity in relation to the rest of creation as well as in relation to their creator.

¹⁵ Swanson, *Dictionary*, 1952, 7512.

man apart from the rest. This elevates man and depicts value leading us to see the human as the highest developed creature.¹⁶

Israel's strict opposition to the use of images makes an adequate translation of "image" difficult. In the Ancient Near East the main purpose of an image was to be a place that held the spirit or "fluid" of the god the image represented. The important factor is not the form but the living essence or the spirit of what was being represented.¹⁷ In traditional Ancient Near Eastern thought as well as in the Old Testament times the body was never separated from the soul or the spirit of a man. Therefore the body as well as the spiritual capacity of man must be considered when trying to understand the meaning of being the image of God. It was not until the influence of Greek and Roman philosophy that body was depreciated and the rational aspects of the human were given precedence.¹⁸ Since the Hebrew mindset did not make the body, soul and mind as a divisible entity, the word "likeness" could be defining what kind of "image" man is; one that is not simply a representative but one who represents God in a recognizable manner.¹⁹

Over the centuries this open-ended aspect of "the Image of God," has been forced into multiple molds of every aspect of religious and philosophical thought. Ambrose believed it was the soul that depicted the image of God; for Athanasius it was humanity's capacity for relationship; and, for Augustine it was the human's soul, memory and intellect. The Reformers felt the image of God was destroyed at the fall and that it was found in the initial condition of righteousness only enjoyed by Adam. Enlightenment thought has depicted the image of God as residing in the soul. Barth admits that one can discuss which opinion sounds the best and which

¹⁶ Clines, "Image," 53.

¹⁷ Clines, "Image," 81—83.

¹⁸ Clines, "Image," 86.

¹⁹ Clines, "Image," 92. Cline points out that the Septuagint separates these two words by the usage of "and." This would lead the exegete to seek a different content and meaning of each term. This cannot be supported when looking at the Hebrew text; though carried over to the Vulgate, it may never have been intended to be a suggestion to designate different meanings between the words.

one seems the most plausible, but readily admits that one cannot tell which one is the correct interpretation of the text.²⁰

When considering the idea of the image of God, Henri Blocher points to some of the views that seem to be advocated throughout history. One interpretation is that the human shares in the spirituality of God. Another depicts the power of reason as the prominent characteristic that depicts the image of God. Beginning with Irenaus and Clement of Alexandria the image was thought to be the very thing that made humanity human. During this time a distinction was made between the image of God and his likeness. There is no current support for this interpretation but those like H. H. Rowley advocate the image of God being the human's sharing in the spirituality of God. Ancient Judaism depicted the image of God in the concept of dominion, an idea followed by E. Jacobs and H. Gross. The image would then be in reference to humanity being the chosen representative of God governing over the earth as he rules over the universe.²¹ Luther emphasized the impact of sin and that God's "original righteousness" was lost in the garden as well as that through the redemption of Christ this image of holiness and purity has been restored. Much of Protestant Christianity still holds to this view in one form or another. Barth proposed that the image of God is depicted in the gender designations within humanity: male and female sexuality. This face to face relationship is ultimately seen in the trinity as well as in Christ's relationship with his church.²² Though argued much earlier, it wasn't until the 1940s that the image of God having to do with the human's appearance became an acceptable concept.²³

²⁰ Clines, "Image," 54—55.

²¹ Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 1984), 80. When considering the image of God in reference to a redemptive eco-theology part of being created in the image of God is depicted in the role and responsibility humanity has toward the rest of the created order in context of how to steward it.

²² Blocher, *Beginning*, 81.

²³ Miller, J. Maxwell. "In the "image" and "likeness" of God." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91, no. 3 (Sept 1972): 293.

When speaking of the issue surrounding the word “image,” one must ask the question as to whether that author understood it as a physical form or intended it as metaphorically referring to a spiritual quality. The Old Testament often speaks about God as if he were human. Some of this anthropomorphism cannot be quickly rejected as simply metaphorical since there are multiple cases in the Ancient Near East where gods were literally like humans. It is hard to dismiss that Israel would use such terminology if the belief was that God was purely spirit. It must also be pointed out that when God was said to have appeared in a form, it was in human shape. When the idea of image was used throughout the Old Testament as well as in other Semitic languages, it referred to a literal object.²⁴

5.1c Humanity’s Role

The last set of words that should be looked at are in Genesis 1.26 רדה meaning “(qal) rule over, dominate, direct, lead, control, subdue, i.e., manage or govern an entity, people or government with considerable or forceful authority”²⁵ or, as translated in the New Revised Standard Version “dominion.” The second word is in 1.28 כבש meaning “(qal) subdue, overcome, enslave, i.e., conquer and control an environment or people.”²⁶ Since humanity is made in the image of God he is given the power to rule over creation in 1.26 and is told in 1.28 that they are to subdue the earth.

It is clear from the Hebrew word for “rule” or “dominion” that the human is given the responsibility to rule over creation. This is clarified when looking at the usage of “dominion” throughout the rest of the Old Testament. Though the usage of this does not define how one is to

²⁴ Clines, “Image,” 73. When looking at a redemptive eco-theology in consideration of what it means to be the image of God the key idea to grasp is not so much what part of humanity the image of God consists of but more what responsibilities are implied in being made in the image of God.

²⁵ Swanson, *Dictionary*, 8097.

²⁶ Swanson, *Dictionary*, 3899.

rule over creation, the book of Leviticus (Lev. 25.43, 46, 53) would lead the reader to understand that it should be done humanely. One could come to a similar conclusion in Genesis 1.28 with the Hebrew word being translated “subdue”. Again this depicts a hierarchy of position in relationship to the rest of creation. This word is often used in connection with a military conquest and is often depicting a conquering concept.²⁷

The concepts of “dominion” and “rule” need to be considered within the context of Genesis 2.7 and 2.15 as well as within the canonical and social settings of the text. When placed in the context of 2.7 and 2.15 as well as the rest scripture the aspect of “dominion” and “rule” in 1.28 one could come to the conclusion that this was to be done in a stewardship fashion or in a kind and benevolent way. The text does not lead one to believe that the rule of the human is absolute but that it needs to be done in conformity to the design given by the one who delegated the responsibility. Within the text the reader sees the value God placed on all of creation, “it was very good,” this value leads to the conclusion that ruling is not oriented around neglect and abuse but caring and compassion.²⁸

When considering Genesis 2.7 “the LORD formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life...” we see that “man” is formed from the dust of the ground. The word אדמה (ground) is thought to have come from אדם meaning “red”. Though אדמה appears to be a play on אדם depicting the color of the earth as well as the color of human skin Gordon Wenham see this as highly “improbable” and leans toward the obvious idea that this play on words is an attempt to emphasize the human’s relationship to the land that he was expected to till and work as seen in 2.15.²⁹

²⁷ Theodore Hiebert, “Rethinking Dominion Theology,” *Direction* 25, no.2 (Fall, 1996): 18.

²⁸ Hiebert, “Rethinking,” 19.

²⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 59.

We are told by the author that “man” was created from עפר (dust). With idea is well supported throughout the Old Testament in Job 10.9; Isaiah 29.16 and Psalms 90.3; 104.29.³⁰ According to Victor Hamilton a portion of the dust image that may have connections to 2.7 would be those texts that portray an “exaltation from dust” symbolizing a position of “pre-royalty” (1 Kings 16.2), of being raised out of poverty (1 Samuel. 2.8; Psalms 113.7) also being raised from dead to life (Isaiah 26.19; Daniel 12.2). If a connection does exist with these texts the idea of humanity being created from the dust to “till” and “keep” the land may support the concept of being raised from the dust to “rule” and “reign”.³¹

“Man” is יצר “formed”; “this present participle of this verb means potter”³² and is consistent with the Old Testament image of a potter forming clay in Jeremiah 18.2. Other forms of the word יצר do not have a potter in mind but depict a highly imaginative action of great thought and artistry (Isaiah 44.9—10). It is also used several times depicting God’s work in creation (Genesis 2.19; Psalms 104.26; 95.5; Amos 4.13; Jeremiah 33.2 and Isaiah 22.11). Ultimately the intimate artistic skill of God is obviously seen when creating the human.³³

The author next informs the reader that God “breathed” into mans nostrils “the breath of life”. Interestingly the common Hebrew word for breath, רוח is not used by the author. Instead he uses בשמה which is primarily used when discussing God and man, thus it could be stated that man alone received the divine breath of God.³⁴

It appears the author of Genesis knows the other creation myths depicting humanity being made from the earth and strategically departs from them to show the intimacy in which God makes man. The Gilgamesh Epic tells of Enkidu being created out of clay by the goddess Arurn.

³⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 59.

³¹ Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 158

³² Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 59.

³³ Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 59.

³⁴ Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 159

The Egyptian god Khyum is show making man from clay. Prometheus created the first human out of water and dirt. God creatively formed man and gave him life through breathing life into his nostrils. Though other creation myths show man being created out of clay and some form of divine interaction it is only in the Genesis account that God is shown intimately breathing life into his creation.³⁵

In Genesis 2.15 a further understanding of what it means to have “dominion” is provided. Once man is created he is placed in the garden to “till” (עבד) and “keep it” (שמר). עבד though translated till, depicting the cultivation of soil it also is used to depict service to God in a religious connotation (Deut. 4.19), as well as in priestly duties (Numbers 3.7—8; 4.23—24, 26). שמר is translated “keep” but can also be translated to guard. It is used in a legal sense when keeping religious commands and duties (Lev. 18.5). It also is used when discussing the responsibilities of the Levitical guards when protecting the tabernacle from unwanted intruders (Numbers 1.53; 3.7—8). “Tilling” and “keeping” then can be considered acts of stewardship. Man is placed in a role to serve and care for creation. Work is not forced on humanity; it is part of being human as well as part of the stewardship process. Unlike other creation epics where man was created to allow the god’s to live lives of leisure (*Enuma elsih* 6.33—36; Atrahasis 1.190—97) the writer if Genesis depicts work as a God given task as part of stewarding the earth.³⁶

It can be said that “the garden is something to be protected more than it is something to be possessed.”³⁷ It is obvious that God intended humanity to have purpose instead of being idle.

³⁵ Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 60. Other creation myths show that the need of their gods are vastly more important to mans, the author of the Genesis account goes out of his way to show God’s was concerned over meeting the needs of his creation. When considering a redemptive eco-theology the aspect of stewardship needs to be viewed in part through a deep understanding that God is intimately involved in his creation and has concerns that its needs are met. In turn as stewards we too should have the same concerns.

³⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 67.

³⁷ Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 171.

Physical labor is not a result of sin but part of the original plan god intended for humanities role on earth.³⁸ Nahum Sarna points out in Genesis “that the image simultaneously expresses both the glory and insignificance of man”. Man has a significant role in the “hierarchy of creation.” Being formed by the hands of God and made alive by His breath man has a “unique relationship” with God in comparison to the rest of creation. But, at the same time it is apparent that man is part of the created order; created from dust by the hands of his Creator.³⁹

One question that needs to be evaluated is whether we see the human’s call to have dominion over the earth is what it means to be the image of God or whether the dominion is a result of being the image bearer? To claim that dominion is the meaning of being the image of God would be far too narrow, it is more along the line of the human being was made in the image of God in order to serve and protect creation. This is also depicted in the Egyptian culture where Pharaoh was thought to be the image of god and his rulership was believed to be in that image. The power to rule then comes from being the image of his god. It could be concluded that since God is the sovereign creator of the universe, humanity has been made the image of God to rule in his place. The author of Genesis clearly places humanity as part of creation but above the rest of the created order. Since God is transcendent and has no distinct image the human is made to be God’s image. All of humanity is the representative of God in his entire image both in body and spirit. This image is not so much expressed in the nature of humanity but in their activity as well as their function. Since the dominion of the human cannot be excluded from the image of God, part of this function is to show God’s lordship over the lower aspects of nature.⁴⁰

³⁸ Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 171.

³⁹ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary, (ed. by Nahum M. Sarna. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 17.

⁴⁰ Clines, “Image,” 96—101.

John Walton approaches the entire image versus dominion discussion through the ancient meaning of the Hebrew word ברא meaning “create.” He believes the ancient Hebrew mindset was not one of material origins seeing the Genesis account as the physical creation of the earth but one of functionality. He fully accepts the fact that God created the universe out of nothing but points to Genesis 1 as being functional in context not physical.⁴¹ God’s revelation in Genesis was intended to reveal His role through the world Israel knew and understood. “His creative work focused on functions, and therefore he communicated that he was the one who set up the functions and who keeps the operations going, regardless of how we envision the material shape. This creation account did not concern the material shape of the cosmos, but rather its functions.”⁴²

Keeping this in mind Walton points out the multi-function calling of humankind in comparison to the rest of creation, in relation to the image of God, as well as, in the separation of the sexes into male and female. In relation to the rest of creation mankind serves as the “vice regent.” The ruling and reigning over creation becomes the primary function of being created in the image of God.⁴³ The major emphasis of Genesis 1.26—31 is the “image of God” concept, everything else within this text needs to be filtered through the author’s understanding of the image of God. With this in mind it is not hard to come to the conclusion that the concepts of dominion and rule are best understood through a stewardship mindset. Though the author does not explicitly state this in the original text, when reading alongside the rest of the Pentateuch one can come to the understanding that neglect and abuse were not intended by God. Sibley Towner says it well when explaining that God uses a strong third person imperative when designating the

⁴¹ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 2009), 42.

⁴² Walton, *Lost World*, 61. Walton’s approach underscores the responsibility and actions behind being created in the image of God critical to forming a truly redemptive eco-theology. His focus on purpose and function provides a much needed practical approach to specific areas of eco-theology.

⁴³ Walton, *Lost World*, 67. By

role of the human to the earth: “let them have dominion” over the earth. Both the concept of dominion and subduing have to do with it the idea that God is inviting humanity to rule over creation as his “viceroy.”⁴⁴

5.1d Final Thoughts on Genesis

In the Old Testament the conviction that the physical body was part of the image of God informs an eschatological understanding of how the future resurrection of the body was conceived.⁴⁵ It is of great importance to understand that when looking at resurrection from a Hebrew mindset that it meant that something happened to the physical body. Hope was held for the “eventual” resurrection of a literal new physical body – a restoration of the image.⁴⁶

The interpretive key for understanding the ideas of dominion and subduing needs to be found within the wider context of Genesis. Bauckham believes that the idea of being fruitful and multiplying for humanity is linked to the mandate by God in 1.22 for the creatures of the sea and the birds. It does not pertain to the dominion over creation. The concept of subduing has more to do with taking possession and occupying the land. In much of the Old Testament when the word subdue is used it is in context of taking the land by force away from an enemy. Since the land itself is not the enemy the idea of forcibly bringing it into subjection does not fit the context of Genesis.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Towner, “Clones,” 347. It must be stated that to be a viceroy does not depict sovereign rule but rulership under the direction and influence of God; not in place of God. The viceroy image is compatible with Walton's function aspect of the image of God especially when adopting a definition of service and protection for what it means to rule and reign over creation.

⁴⁵ Clines, “Image,” 87.

⁴⁶ Wright, *Surprised*, 36—41. The important focus needs to be on embodiment not physicality. Paul in 1 Cor 15 differentiates between a physical body and the resurrected spiritual body.

⁴⁷ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 16. Genesis 1 assumes that with creation comes God's right to rule; humanity is given the right and responsibility to rule only if it is done in a manner and consistency that reflects the moral character of God's own rulership.

Since, in the Genesis context, subduing and filling are connected, it seems that the concept of subduing is more in reference to farming and cultivation. Perhaps especially so, the fact is that the only way that humanity could fill the earth was to grow crops. The command to fill and subdue the earth can be equated to the concept of stewardship and its proper use since it is ultimately God's creation not humanity's. The notion of dominion is equated to the image of God which has to do with the reflection of God's reign over the rest of creation. Bauckham thus separates the power to rule over other non-human living creatures and the call to subdue the earth. Since Genesis is unclear as to whether dominion allows humanity to utilize animals in whatever way they like it would be wise to see dominion as matter of care and not indiscriminate use.⁴⁸

The significance of linking the image of God to the dominion of creatures and not the subduing of nature shows that the subduing of the environment is not imitating God but being part of the rest of the natural order. All of nature utilizes its environment to survive. What separates humanity from the rest of nature is that their usage of nature is linked to the mandate to rule over the creatures in participation with God's caring for his creation. Being created in the image of God does not make humanity "mini gods" separate from nature. Humans are created beings that are reliant on the other creatures for survival but mandated to rule over their fellow creatures as God's representatives. Genesis 1 seems clearly to separate the living creatures and the remainder of the created order. God's covenant with Noah later depicts this in that it was only living creatures that were protected on the ark.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 17—18. When considering a redemptive eco-theology the aspect of caring for creation while making responsible choices is a vital part of the dominion/ stewardship formula. The idea of the indiscriminate use of creation is not supported by scripture, nor does it align with the redemptive nature of God.

⁴⁹ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 19.

There has been much debate as to the meaning of being created in the image of God. Whatever the exact meaning, it must be noted that it is related to call of taking/having dominion. Part of its meaning needs to be related to whatever it is that gives humans the ability to responsibly rule and care for the rest of creation's creatures. It must also deal with the moral ability that enables humanity to exercise a role in godly governance of creation in a way that reflects the heart of God for his creation. It needs to be stated that this rule is in concert with God's rule not separate from, or instead of, it. By contrast abusive domination over nature by modern man has every appearance of aspiration to be gods instead of being representatives of a caring God. Humans are created in the image of God to govern on God's behalf not as gods themselves.⁵⁰ The role of caring for other living creatures is not to set humans above the rest of creation but to participate and play a role within God's care of creation.⁵¹

5.1e Genesis and Stewardship: Some Concerns

There are distinct limitations for constructing an eco-theology that arise from strictly a "stewardship model." These limitations lie within the fact that definitions and requirements spelled out in the concept of stewardship are extremely vague.⁵² One of the concerns about the modern idea of stewardship is that due to the limitations of "human knowledge and power" it could be considered presumptuous and a bit arrogant for humanity to see themselves as having control over the earth.⁵³ Much of the idea behind stewardship stems from misunderstanding the nature of human authority and dominion given by God to humanity in Genesis 1. Bauckham wisely points out that such interpretation says more than the text actually states. Though the idea

⁵⁰ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 30.

⁵¹ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 33.

⁵² Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 2.

⁵³ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 5.

of ruling is found in Genesis 1 he points out that dominion may not represent total, absolute control. In most common cases, “dominion” and “stewardship” tend to neglect God’s involvement in his creation. There is an extreme view that God has exclusively delegated the governing of earth to humanity. It would be presumptuous to think that upon the completion of creation that God absolved his responsibility to his creation to humanity and allowed us to assume his role in this world.⁵⁴

Rather it is crucial to realized that the term stewardship is broad and has multiple meanings and definitions. The spectrum can range from a hands-off approach when dealing with nature or an approach of preservation from damage caused by humanity. In any case, stewardship takes on the idea of preservation of nature not the changing of nature. The interesting thing is the concept of stewardship implies that creation needs our involvement. This is supported by the fact that many people who employ the stewardship model do so with the intent of protecting the environment from human damage or with the intent of repairing the damage that has already incurred. Since God placed us on earth creation now requires our protection from us.⁵⁵

Another concern is that the idea of stewardship only points to a vertical relationship between humanity and other expressions of creation without even considering that a horizontal relationship exists as well. An unhelpful hierarchy can result. This tends to remove humanity from the created order leaving them outside of and above the rest of creation not alongside it as part of God’s good creation. Such a view allows humanity to have a very passive relationship with the rest of creation making creation a recipient of the way mankind lives and not taking into

⁵⁴ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 6—7.

⁵⁵ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 8—9.

consideration that humanity is essentially dependant on many aspects of the non-human creation including the many benefits that are received from it.⁵⁶

Bauckham wisely points out that it is this vertical relationship to creation that has played a significant role in how modern society dominates nature. By neglecting the understanding that mankind is a created being and that they have an interdependent need with the rest of creation leads to the mindset that both men and women are “mini gods” in relation to the rest of creation. Though the idea of stewardship should not be abandoned, there is a need to realize that it is a single sided model that tends to avoid the complex relationship that exists between humanity and the rest of God’s creation. The idea of dominion and stewardship needs to be brought into a broader biblical context showing the place humanity needs to play in the rest of the created order.⁵⁷

In ancient near eastern thought creation was made to benefit the gods. In the modern world of materialism survival becomes the primary function of humanity. In Genesis 1 God assigns a responsibility to humanity as well as gives them the ability to fulfill this mandate to rule and reign over the rest of creation. The world was custom tailored for the needs of the creation not the needs of the creator. It becomes obvious mankind has been invited to take a privileged role within creation.⁵⁸ The concern that arises when considering humanity’s role within creation is how this relationship changed as a result of the Fall; Romans 8 is a good place to begin.

⁵⁶ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 10-11.

⁵⁷ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 11-12.

⁵⁸ Walton, *Lost World*, 148.

5.2 Redemption for All of Creation: Romans 8.18—25

The second biblical text that is commonly discussed within the circle of eco-theology is Romans 8.18—25. This text becomes important since Genesis 1 depicts mankind as the epitome of God's good creation. The significance of considering the Genesis account of creation against the subsequent narrative of the rebellion and fall of humanity into sin in Genesis 3 cannot be overstated. Romans 8.18—25 becomes the needed springboard to discuss the intricate interconnection needed in a redemptive eco-theology of humanity with all of creation.

¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;

²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

²¹ that 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.

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now;

²³ and not only creation but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

²⁴ For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?

²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Paul, with a great deal of conviction, begins Romans 8.18 with the verb λογίζομαι, “I reckon”; literally it means “to hold a view about something.”⁵⁹ It is not a mild opinion but a conclusion brought on by a thought process that leads to a solid conclusion.⁶⁰ James Dunn points out that this beginning is more than intellectual and rational conviction; it is a product of “the

⁵⁹ Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd (Chicago: Chicago Press, 2000), 598.

⁶⁰ Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 222.

experience of the Spirit.”⁶¹ In contrast, Robert Jewett describes more of a classical rational Greek approach to Paul’s thought process that is tempered by his faith.⁶² This was not just a passing notion to Paul, whether a product of deep reasoning or one of deep contemplation and reason; what he is about to unfold is a strong conviction.

In Romans 8.18 Paul is making a statement of value. He contrasts the present suffering of his Roman readers to the coming glory of God. He uses the word ἄξιός, “worth,” when drawing this comparison which means “that which balances the scales.”⁶³ The future glory that is going to be experienced outweighs - more than compensates for - all aspects of current suffering. Paul admonished his readers to see suffering in the context of eternity instead of the present moment. Glory quickly becomes the eschatological lens for the remainder of this text.⁶⁴ Therefore, to truly understand the place that suffering holds one must use an eschatological lens weighing it against the glory to come.⁶⁵ This event of the coming glory is nothing less than the unfolding of a “divine strategy” that is temporally blurred by the sufferings experienced in the present.⁶⁶

When discussing the revealing aspect of this coming glory in the later part of 8.18, there is some question as to what Paul is actually saying. The usage of the words εἰς ἡμᾶς, “in (to) us,” can be understood in different ways. It could be seen as something Christians will be exposed to, something they participate in, or, as Witherington suggests, the translation should be “in us” leading us to believe that the primary glory Paul is talking about is the coming physical

⁶¹ James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1—8*, Word Biblical Commentary (ed. David a. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, Vol. 38a; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 467.

⁶² Robert Jewett, *Romans, Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (ed. Eldon Jay Epp; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 508.

⁶³ Fritz Reinecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (ed. Cleon L. Rogers; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing house, 1980), 366.

⁶⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle of Romans*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (ed. Gordon D. Fee; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 508.

⁶⁵ Moo, *Romans*, 510.

⁶⁶ Dunn, *Romans 1—8*, 467.

resurrection of the body bringing with it both internal and external restoration.⁶⁷ Douglas Moo takes exception with the concept of both translations “to be revealed to us” and “to be revealed in us.” He believes that the NEB reflects the mind of Paul most accurately by translating the phrase “which is in store for us.” This enables the reader to see the idea that glory extends out and we are included in the range of its actions.⁶⁸

The comparison of a coming glory with present day suffering is a common Jewish theme seen in some earlier writings (Daniel 7.17-27, *1 Enoch* 102-4). Jewish documentation before A.D. 135 is rare when trying to support the model that suffering will be a fact of life before the kingdom of God comes. Dunn explains that any parallels to the idea of present day suffering prior to A.D. 135 were most likely influenced by the “destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D.” It is most likely according to Dunn that Paul is drawing from the idea that the entire created order would deal with tribulation prior to the coming age, which was already a well established part of early Jewish eschatological thinking.⁶⁹

Though many commentators acknowledge the eschatological link of suffering in this text, few others point out the fact that the Roman readers would easily relate to Paul’s text due to the disruption and “harassment” of the life of Christians in Rome. Paul may very well be exposing the fallacy of the “golden age” of Caesar who was expected to restore the glory back to creation. He points them to the fact that their present suffering doesn’t compare to the coming glory that will be revealed upon Christ’s return. Paul assures his readers that they will participate and experience this glory that God has promised, all to be accomplished by God, not Caesar.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Witherington, *Paul’s*, 222.

⁶⁸ Moo, *Romans*, 512.

⁶⁹ Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 469.

⁷⁰ Jewett, *Romans*, 508–11. It is important to state that a redemptive eco-theology does not circumvent the fact that it will ultimately be God who restores all of creation. Stewards can expect participate in this preparation and eventually experience all that God has promised.

Paul continues to expand his theme of the coming glory of God by expressing the longing that creation has to see the “revealing of the children of God.” He opens this portion of the text with the idea that “creation waits with eager longing.” Schreiner states most scholars agree that the term creation (κτίσεως) is discussing all non-human and non-angelic aspects of creation. This is supported when looking at Romans 8.19, 21, and 23 which clearly seem to separate believers from the rest of creation.⁷¹ Mills broadens Schreiner by explaining that it is important to see “creation” as animate and inanimate things that were affected by original sin. This leads us to see that the damages of sin go far beyond humanity and affects nature as well.⁷²

The Greek word ἀποκαρδοκία, “eager longing,” is only found one other place in the New Testament in Philippians 1.20. Though not easily translated, it gives the idea of creation’s gaze being away from itself in a sense of great anticipation toward the ἀποκάλυψις, “revealing” or “unveiling” of God’s children. It really pertains to “the disclosure of secrets belonging to the last days.”⁷³ “Creation waits with eager longing” depicts the idea “of readiness and preparedness;” in the present tense this implies a continual action until it happens.⁷⁴ Moo explains the focus of this text is “the longing anticipation of future transformation” so the idea of “eager longing” depicts “a person craning his or her neck to see what is coming.”⁷⁵ The usage indicates an intense concentration on one thing while disregarding everything else around it. It conveys the idea of someone standing on tiptoe straining to see what is coming.⁷⁶ It “denotes a

⁷¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (ed. Moises Silva; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 435.

⁷² Mills, *Hebrew*, 263. Mills provides a much needed back drop to a redemptive eco-theology in that humanity needs to understand that the ramifications of our choices go well beyond humanity and have serious consequences for the rest of creation as well. When considering the affect of sin on all of creation it boggles the mind when realizing that with all of our scientific capabilities the reality remains that all we know about creation is filtered by the affects of sin and not seen in God’s original state of perfection.

⁷³ Bauer, et al., *Greek-English*, 112.

⁷⁴ Reinecker, *Linguistic*, 336.

⁷⁵ Moo, *Romans*, 513.

⁷⁶ Mills, *Hebrew*, 263.

diversion from all other things and concentration on a single object.”⁷⁷ The idea of “eager longing” should bring us to the understanding of Paul’s eschatological view of the restoration of all creation to a new heaven and new earth, not some “disembodied life in heaven.” Every aspect of creation strains to look forward to God’s complete physical redemptive act toward all of creation.⁷⁸ Paul appears to be aware of the prevalent Greco-Roman mother earth concept that was popular in Rome. His choice of the word creation (κτίσις) refers to the purposeful creation of the natural order, most likely having the non-human aspects of creation in mind as well as intending to directly contend with the mother earth concept.⁷⁹

Paul now explains in 8.20 why creation eagerly awaits “the revealing of the children of God.” It is due to creation being “subjected to futility.” The term ματαιότης, translated “futility,” really means “aimless, the inability to reach a goal or achieve results.”⁸⁰ Paul appears to intentionally choose the idea of futility to draw his reader back to the first part of his letter (1.21) to help in emphasizing the importance of the final work of Christ. Part of the futility described may be man’s lack of comprehension that he is part of the created order, not the creator of that order.⁸¹ Paul could very well be depicting creation as being drained of meaning through decay and destruction. Since the root of futility means empty, it is possible that he is being influenced by Jeremiah’s vision of the world as a voided wasteland (Jeremiah 4.19—31). Bauckham brings out a valid point that if this is the case Paul could very well be saying that apart from the redemption of Christ, creation will return to the empty nothing that it was before God spoke it into being.⁸² Though this view is not supported by the text, it does bring an

⁷⁷ Reinecker, *Linguistic*, 366.

⁷⁸ Witherington, *Paul’s*, 223.

⁷⁹ Jewett, *Romans*, 511.

⁸⁰ Reinecker, *Linguistic*, 366.

⁸¹ Dunn, *Romans 1—8*, 470. Though already stated a key to eco-theology that must be emphasized is that man is not the creator but part of creation and the created order.

⁸² Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 97.

interesting understanding to Old Testament passages such as Joel 1.10—12 and 17—20 where the devastation of nature is mourned.⁸³

There is a great deal of discussion by scholars regarding the phrase “not on its own will but, by the will of the one who subjected it.” Schreiner explains that there is some belief that this text is discussing nature’s desire to be released from the will of Adam and the sin he brought upon humanity at the fall. A problem arises when the word ὑποτάξαντα, “having subjected,” implies some aspect of authority. Some scholars would argue that Adam’s authority was lost after the fall. If this is that case, then it is referring to God especially when you look at the word διὰ which doesn’t refer to cause but to agency.⁸⁴ Yet, others would tie διὰ to the accusative case indicating what the cause or the fault of the subjection was, not who did the subjecting, thus tying it to Adam’s sin.⁸⁵ Schreiner points out that the word ὑποτάσσω, “it was subjected,” is a divine passive verb. When linked to the passive verb ἐλευθερωθήσεται, “will be set free,” the idea that this section of the text is talking about God is easily supported, leaving the reader to see that God who subjected creation will also free it upon Christ’s return.⁸⁶ Moo joins the majority of scholars pointing out that Adam did not have the power to subject nature and that Paul most certainly must be talking about God who alone has the power to hold things in subjection, due to Adam’s sin. This subjection was not without hope because with the curse came a promise of a savior that would crush the head of the serpent. Though nature is in a state of futility, within this

⁸³ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 98. One of the foundational beliefs of great value within a redemptive theology is seeing the earth as renewable especially through good stewardship thus preventing its total devastation.

⁸⁴ Schreiner, *Exegetical*, 434.

⁸⁵ Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, Sacra Pagina (ed. Daniel J. Harrington; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 260.

⁸⁶ Schreiner, *Exegetical*, 435.

state there is a built in hope of being released from decay and the freedom of experiencing the eschatological glory to come.⁸⁷

Regarding creation's subjection to futility, most scholars believe Paul was influenced by Genesis 3, but this may be insufficient to explain Paul's description of creation being in bondage to decay or corruption. In light of biblical traditions like Isaiah 24.1—7, Jeremiah 4.23—25 and Hosea 4.3 it can be seen that creation is bound to a cycle of destruction and decay due to human sin.⁸⁸ It is believed that Paul may reflect Jewish apocalyptic influence; in any case it is easy to see the Genesis 3.17—19 influences. Due to God's subjecting the earth under the curse of sin, it has not been able to fulfill its intended purpose. If the link to Old Testament prophets is correct, then it is possible Paul had this in mind when articulating an expectant hope; especially when it is clear that the prophets believed in a reversal of the demise of creation through divine intervention.⁸⁹

The advantage of translating this verse through the intertextual lens of Genesis 3 enables the reader to see that due to no fault of the earth, it resides in a place of frustration and futility awaiting the return of Christ.⁹⁰ The difficulty in giving a definitive answer to the reason behind the subjection of creation may be due to the fact that Paul is using a brief statement to introduce a complex idea that God's subjection of all of creation is sharing in the fall of humanity through the sin of Adam, as well as linking creation's redemption to man. Paul concisely explains that all

⁸⁷ Moo, *Romans*, 516. Moo's perspective enables a redemptive eco-theology to focus on the power of God in the restoration process, moving our stewardship of creation away from a tool needed to fix the problem into an act of worship and obedience that anticipates the eschatological glory to come.

⁸⁸ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 96.

⁸⁹ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 99.

⁹⁰ Schreiner, *Exegetical*, 436.

of creation is to be redeemed; just as a redeemed human body is part of the coming glory so is a redeemed life for creation.⁹¹

Jewett wisely suggests that Paul may be using a powerful contrast for his Roman readers in that humanity's effort of trying to play god is what brought creation under bondage and decay. This would be so since the typical Roman mindset was that Caesar as a god would, through military power, restore the world to order and glory.⁹² Paul strategically points out that it will not be political power that frees the involuntary suffering of creation but the redemptive power of God that is linked to a future hope.⁹³ Paul clearly draws a link between humanity and nature showing that humanity's responsibility is not only for self but for all of creation. "Overcoming ecological disorder is depicted here as a divine gift enacted as a result of God's restoration of humanity to its position of rightful dominion, reflecting God's intended glory."⁹⁴

Not only does Paul link the subjection of creation to the sin of humanity, in 8.21 he also links the redemption of creation to the redemption of humanity. Paul uses the Greek term ἐλευθερωθήσεται, "will be set free." This term, in its basic form, is suggestive of someone or something being set free from domination.⁹⁵ Upon the glorious return of Christ, humanity will be set free and creation will be delivered from its state of decay.⁹⁶ Paul equates the freedom of creation to the glory associated with "the children of God." Moo suggests that this idea of the freeing of creation suggests that creation's ultimate outcome is one of transformation and not of total annihilation as some scholars would suggest.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Dunn, *Romans 1—8*, 471. Dunn's approach lays a foundation for eco-theology to unfold the interconnectedness of humanity to the rest of creation as well as the rest of creations connectedness to humanity.

⁹² Jewett, *Romans*, 513.

⁹³ Jewett, *Romans*, 514.

⁹⁴ Jewett, *Romans*, 515.

⁹⁵ Bauer, et al., *Greek-English*, 317.

⁹⁶ Mills, *Hebrew*, 267.

⁹⁷ Moo, *Romans*, 517.

By linking the freedom of creation to the freedom of humanity the eschatological tension is maintained showing that the purpose of God is not complete until the coming of his glory.⁹⁸ We see an insight into the broad scope of Paul's theology of salvation leading us to see the cosmic significance of Christ. In Christ, God's plans for humanity and for all of creation are made complete.⁹⁹ The liberation theme of creation may be intentional to draw the reader back to Paul's explanation of the believer's freedom from sin and the law. By tying the bondage and decay of creation into the mix, Paul drives home the immense negative aspects of Adam's sin.¹⁰⁰

Richard Bauckham explains that though Paul's primary concern in this passage is the redemption of humanity, implications for creation cannot be avoided; if human sin is the reason for ecological decline then participation in repairing it as much as possible should follow. Though human effort cannot reverse creation's bondage to sin, it can anticipate creation's redemption through avoiding further damage.¹⁰¹ Jewett interestingly links the redemption of the "children of God" to the renewing of their minds in Romans 12, in that they will now have the discerning ability to do the will of the creator in reference to how they treat the rest of creation.¹⁰² Part of the "freedom of the glory of the children of God" may be the regained ability to properly care for the rest of creation; being responsible co-workers with God whose focus is all of creation.¹⁰³

N. T. Wright challenges readers to think of 8.18—25 like a mountain overlooking a large valley. From this perspective things become amazingly clear, the entire plan of salvation for all

⁹⁸ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 472.

⁹⁹ Witherington, *Paul's*, 221.

¹⁰⁰ Dunn, *Romans*, 471. Dunn's comments assist in establishing the realization that humanity's choices can and do at times affect the rest of creation in a negative way.

¹⁰¹ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 100.

¹⁰² Jewett, *Romans*, 512.

¹⁰³ Jewett, *Romans*, 515. Both Jewett and Bauckham provide solid thought that enables a redemptive eco-theology to realize that though God is ultimately in control and humanity has responsibility to work in concert with the creator to bring wholeness and restoration to all of creation.

of creation begins to unfold. Readers do not expect the descriptive language depicting creation standing on “tiptoe” anticipating its restoration. Rather they tend to avoid seeing creation as being in subjection to the sins of humanity.¹⁰⁴

“The plan had called for human beings to take place under God and over the world, worshipping the creator and exercising glorious stewardship over the world. The creation isn’t waiting to *share* the freedom of God’s children as some translators imply. It is waiting to benefit wonderfully when God’s children are glorified. It is waiting – on tiptoe with expectation, in fact – for the particular freedom it will enjoy when God gives to his children the glory, that wise rule and stewardship of creation which was always intended for those who bear God’s glorious image.”¹⁰⁵

This view expressed by Wright tends to anger those looking forward to what he calls a “disembodied heaven.” With the promise of a resurrected body comes an entirely new earth. Just as believers await their resurrected body, the earth awaits its own transformation.¹⁰⁶ According to Wright the entire labor language depicted in Romans 8 shows creation’s deep desire for “God’s new creation to be born.”¹⁰⁷

The word *συστενάζει*, “groans together,” is in the present indicative as well as the word *συνωδίνω*, “travails in pain together,” which is also in the present tense representing a continual action taking place.¹⁰⁸ Paul is not depicting the earth’s groaning as a onetime action but an ongoing action. Modern translations like the NRSV combine *συστενάζω*, “groans together” and *συνωδίνω*, “travails in pain together” into one phrase “the whole of creation is groaning in labor pains.” These terms can also be understood separately or cumulatively in concert with the Old Testament prophetic passages that announces and declares the mourning of the earth.¹⁰⁹ Though the verbs used to describe the groaning of the whole of creation are not used anywhere else in the

¹⁰⁴ N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans: Part One* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 150.

¹⁰⁵ Wright, *Paul*, 152.

¹⁰⁶ Wright, *Paul*, 152.

¹⁰⁷ Wright, *Paul*, 153.

¹⁰⁸ Reinecker, *Linguistic*, 336.

¹⁰⁹ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 96.

NT, the gospel of Mark does use a noun form of this particular verb which is portraying the stress-filled time just prior to the end.¹¹⁰ Paul's opening statement, "We know that," may be referring to the fact that the concept of creation groaning in labor pains was common Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic understanding. Birth pains are a common and natural metaphor seen throughout the Old Testament when illustrating an end of one order and the beginning of something new.¹¹¹

What does Paul wish to convey when talking about non-human creation groaning and travailing together? Schreiner explains that though Paul's metaphor of a woman in labor does not depict nature and humanity suffering in unison, all of non-human nature is groaning and laboring "in harmony with one another." Harmoniously, all of the created order awaits a new heaven and new earth bringing with it nature's redemption and ability to fulfill its potential. This idea is supported throughout much of Jewish literature (*1 Enoch* 45.4—5; *2 Bar* 31.5—32; *4 Ezra* 4.11, 30—32, 75; cf. *Isaiah* 65:17; 66:22).¹¹²

Nature's ability to fulfill its purpose is linked to the redemption of humanity. Therefore, redemption is not solely for humanity but it is for all of creation.¹¹³ Moo explains "Humanity's fall into sin marred the "goodness" of God's creation, and creation has ever since been in a state of "frustration"."¹¹⁴ All of creation suffers the ramifications of sin; when looking at the degradation of creation the effects are obvious. Creation outwardly groans because of its captivity by the futility of the fall of humanity.¹¹⁵ "Paul personifies the subhuman creation in order to convey to his readers a sense of the cosmic significance of both humanity's fall into sin

¹¹⁰ Moo, *Romans*, 518.

¹¹¹ Dunn, *Romans 1—8*, 472; Note: Common OT references to earth 's "labor pains" include *Isa.* 18.8; 21.3; 24—27; 66.7—8; *Jer.* 4.31; 22.23; *Ho.* 13.13; *Mic.* 4.9—10.

¹¹² Schreiner, *Exegetical*, 437.

¹¹³ Schreiner, *Exegetical*, 437.

¹¹⁴ Moo, *Romans*, 515.

¹¹⁵ Mills, *Hebrew*, 265.

and believers' restoration to glory."¹¹⁶ By including all of creation, Paul shows the immensity of the glory to come.¹¹⁷

In contrast to all of nature groaning, Paul explains in 8.23 that all believers groan awaiting their adoption. Paul clearly shows salvation as beginning in the present, in 8.23 the concept of sonship reinforces his "already and not yet eschatology." Schreiner explains that seeing the adoption motif through an eschatological framework shows that though the many blessings of God's redemption through Christ are available today it will not be fully attained until his return. Paul points his reader to the future hope for the fulfillment of all of God's promises.¹¹⁸ "Waiting for adoption" brings with it the concept of expectant anticipation of one's inheritance. With this adoption into "sonship" comes the redemption of the body, "the liberation from prison."¹¹⁹ According to Jewett the "sonship" process is completed with the redemption of the body. The "redemption and "adoption" motif is part of Paul's "already-not yet" theology because redemption is seen as "both past and as future."¹²⁰

Paul's double use of $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\iota$ in 8.23 emphasizes the importance of humanity's groaning awaiting their physical redemption. He also lets the reader know that, as a "first fruits" the experience of the Holy Spirit is just a foretaste of what redemption will bring.¹²¹ The Holy Spirit is a down payment of what is to come, connecting us to reality and the hope in a coming glory.¹²² When Paul discussed the groaning of humanity it could be suggested that these are not audible sounds but more an inward resignation or attitude. Not an attitude of hopelessness but a

¹¹⁶ Moo, *Romans*, 514.

¹¹⁷ Schreiner, *Exegetical*, 438. Both Schreiner and Moo continue to broaden a valuable understanding key to a redemptive eco-theology in that humanity and the rest of creation are inseparable. The coming restoration of God can not be accomplished in one without being accomplished in the other .

¹¹⁸ Schreiner, *Exegetical*, 439.

¹¹⁹ Mills, *Hebrew*, 270.

¹²⁰ Jewett, *Romans*, 519.

¹²¹ Witherington, *Paul's*, 224.

¹²² Moo, *Romans*, 509.

resignation until the coming glory. The Holy Spirit provides the guarantee that God's redemption has begun and will be brought to its ultimate conclusion.¹²³

Interestingly, Moo asks the question “does Paul want to say that Christians groan because we possess the Spirit as “first fruit” or that we groan even though we have the Spirit as ‘first fruits’?” Though they both fit the context of what Paul is saying, it is preferable to apply the context of Paul's “already and not yet” eschatology and see that the Spirit is the thing that brings the present and the future together; a down payment or pledge of something more to come. Paul does not wish to relieve the eschatological tension created by our incomplete sonship that only reaches its completion when we receive our redeemed bodies. Much of Paul's theology preserves this tension between the present and the glorious future of God. It is this tension that gives rise for hope.¹²⁴

There is a tendency by some commentators to translate the text ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν, “we also ourselves in ourselves groan,” as more of a community action instead of an individual sense of frustration. Though the eschatological tension between this age and the age to come is common among all believers, the inward frustration of individual believers is most likely the focus instead of a sense of corporate distress. In actuality, Paul's emphasis on the down payment of the Spirit doesn't free one from the eschatological tension but tends to emphasize the drastic difference between the present and God's divine future to come. Dunn points out that the factor that balances the tension between Paul's eschatological theology of “already and not yet” is the presence of the Spirit. It is the Spirit that allows the believer to grasp the importance of hope.¹²⁵

¹²³ Moo, *Romans*, 519.

¹²⁴ Moo, *Romans*, 520-21.

¹²⁵ Dunn, *Romans 1—8*, 474—75.

One of the aspects of the future hope of sonship is pointed out by Jewett and may very well include the “full and undistorted dominion of God’s children.” It is clear that the future hope includes the new earth which is reinforced by 8.19 “where the disclosure of rightful, future dominion is announced. The sons and daughters of God demonstrate their status by exercising the kind of dominion that heals rather than destroys.”¹²⁶ Of course this will not fully be achieved until the coming glory of God. The encouragement of Paul is for the reader to begin taking their adoption seriously by not conforming to the present age, which includes correctly dealing with creation.¹²⁷ Paul commonly shows that the fullness of sonship doesn’t come until the final act of God’s glory reaches forward and embraces all of creation. This becomes apparent as Paul unfolds the fact that creation is not what it was intended to be and resides in a perpetual state of frustration awaiting the ability to become all that God intended.¹²⁸ Paul may have in mind, as in 1.21, that the futility of men’s thinking leads to the abuse of creation. It may be that the divine purpose of creation was emptied due to the “unlimited dominion over the garden” by the futility of humanity’s presumptions resulting “thorns and thistles.” Paul’s readers could easily see the contrast to the destructive nature of Roman rule on the Mediterranean environment due to its many military campaigns and economic ambitions.¹²⁹

Paul ends this section with a short statement on the theme of hope. He starts with the obvious in that hope is in the assurance of something not yet seen, rather than in something that can be seen. By reinforcing hope in “what we do not see,” he links the reader back to the coming glory of God and away from this present suffering. Hope isn’t hope if it is based on what can be seen. Moo links this final statement of Paul to 2 Corinthians 4:18b which states “for what can be

¹²⁶ Jewett, *Romans*, 519.

¹²⁷ Jewett, *Romans*, 519.

¹²⁸ Moo, *Romans*, 515.

¹²⁹ Jewett, *Romans*, 513.

seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.” Paul bolsters the readers’ hope by encouraging them to stand up under the many frustrations of this life knowing that all of creation awaits a hope of glory.¹³⁰ Paul’s call for patiently hoping in things not yet seen reinforces his hope in a new physical body like that of Christ upon his resurrection.¹³¹

Paul’s final encouragement is for believers to maintain eager expectation of God’s future in the same way the rest of creation does by holding on to the unseen promises of God. The term ὑπομονή needs to be translated in a much stronger way than “patience.”¹³² It means “the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty.”¹³³ Paul isn’t talking about a quiet patience but an active perseverance. “Paul appeals to the understanding of hope shared by Roman believers in order to render more plausible his contention that current sufferings are part of the longing of the creation for the “revelation of the sons of God” in a proper form of dominion over a new creation.”¹³⁴

As is often the case, the ones who suffer the most are not usually the responsible parties.

It is important to note it is not being stated

“that Paul or the Prophets understood the connection between human behavior and ecological degradation in the way that we are now able to do, but what modern scientific knowledge makes possible is mainly a fuller understanding of how human physical behavior (burning fossil fuels, over-fishing the oceans and so forth) has extensive and destructive consequences for the ecosystems of the planet. For the ethical and spiritual dimensions that pervade such human behavior it is we who can learn from the biblical writers.”¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Moo, *Romans*, 522.

¹³¹ Witherington, *Paul’s*, 225. I believe the “now and not yet” aspect of Paul’s theology and its ability to establish hope needs to play a major role within a redemptive eco-theological mindset. Believers are empowered to correctly steward creation while anticipating the fulness of God’s plan upon the return of Christ. This makes stewardship an act of worship and appreciation ignited by the hope in the coming glory and restoration of all of creation.

¹³² Jewett, *Romans*, 521.

¹³³ Bauer, et al., *Greek-English*, 1039.

¹³⁴ Jewett, *Romans*, 521. Jewett provides for an understanding that with the eco-theological discourse a proactive approach to stewarding creation is a better approach than one of quiet resignation and non-action.

¹³⁵ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 100.

Looking at Romans 8 through the covenantal perspective of the Old Testament prophets it can be seen that the non-human side of creation is victimized by the actions of humanity. God leaves the rest of creation to the outcome of human actions. Thus, hope in the coming glory takes on more meaning when one realizes that all of creation will be liberated; transformed to reflect God's glory. Therefore, the biblical view of an eschatological hope of God destroying evil and transforming the entire creation to reflect his glory is a crucial theological building block for constructing a convincing redemptive eco-theology.¹³⁶

5.3 Purification or Destruction: 2 Peter 3.7—13

One of the common misconceptions that hinders one's ability to truly embrace a responsible redemptive eco-theology is the belief that God has given humanity dominion over all the earth so that they have the power and right to do whatever they need to in order to flourish on this earth. Another popular Christian misconception identified earlier is the notion that the redemptive power of Christ is only for humanity. Now the final misconception that will be addressed is the assumption that since the world is ultimately going to be destroyed and all believers will be in a distant heaven, the church need not be concerned with how this present world is treated.¹³⁷

When considering the eschatological destruction of the earth it is essential to consider 2 Peter 3.7—13 (focusing mostly on the later portion starting at 3.10)

⁷ But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless.

⁸ But 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.

⁹ The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

¹³⁶ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 101.

¹³⁷ Key to a redemptive eco-theology is the belief that God's ultimate plan is a restored heaven and earth where he will rule and reign in the presence of his people as depicted in Revelation 21.3—4. If the world is ultimately destroyed and believers are transported to a distant heaven there is no room for an eco-theology.

¹⁰ But 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.

¹¹ Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness,

¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of that day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt like fire?

¹³ But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

Though the main segment of this text that will be considered will be 3.10—13, it is important to consider 3.7—9 as well in order to establish a clearer understanding of what is actually being conveyed by the author of 2 Peter. In 3.7 the text states that “heaven and earth have been reserved for fire.” It is commonly believed that the author is referring to the fact that this worldly inferno he is describing was revealed in prophecy announcing God’s decree. His source, though part of a common Jewish apocalypse, was the traditional Jewish anticipation of God’s day of judgment as expressed in the Old Testament in texts like Isaiah 34 (LXX), Isaiah 66, Zephaniah 1 and Malachi 4. This inferno is reserved for the “day of judgment and destruction of the godless.” Clearly the author’s primary concern is not the state of the world but the judgment of the wicked which he sees as a great fire that will purify the earth.¹³⁸

In 3.8 the description of the coming day of the Lord makes it clear that God does not process time as humanity does. Therefore, the issue of the delay of Jesus’ promised return is of no consequence. The delay of God’s promise is due to His patience in wanting all people to have the opportunity to repent. The author issues a caution that when the Lord returns it will be suddenly and without warning. This proclamation of “a day is like a thousand years, and a

¹³⁸ Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (ed. David A. Hubbard and Glen W. Barker; Waco: Word Books, 1983), 301. By focusing on the judgement of the wicked Bauckham allows a redemptive eco-theology to establish that creation is not the enemy of God; He desires to judge the wickedness of humanity not the goodness of his creation. It is a common tendency to couple all of creation into the wickedness of humanity thus expecting judgement to be against all of creation instead of the sins of men..

thousand years are like a day” makes reference to Psalm 90.4 “For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past. . . .” The Psalmist draws a comparison between the frailty of human existence and the permanence of God. Since God is not affected or bound by time 2 Peter encourages readers not to be dismayed by the delay of Christ’s return. They are urged not to allow impatience to abandon hope in the fulfillment of God’s promise. The author in no way is downplaying the importance of Christ’s return but, like the other writers of the New Testament he refused to place temporally predictive expectations upon God. The author’s intent is not to eliminate but rather to protect the tension between Christ’s return and the unpredictability of when the return will occur.¹³⁹ This text is not intended to be a “chronological calculator” counting down to the end, but to educate the reader that God’s eternity does not operate according to human standards of time. This usage of Psalms 90.4 is not thought to be chronological but is intended to reinforce that a long period according to human standards is inconsequential to God. The reversal of the order is likely to drive home the obvious contrast showing God’s patience in giving time for repentance.¹⁴⁰

Even from a human perspective the idea of being late must fit into the sovereign plan of God’s purpose for human history. Therefore the author’s second argument in 3.9 is that the delay of Christ’s return contributes to God’s desire to give all people a chance to repent, not wanting anyone to perish. In this view the idea of being late should in no way be a complaint but viewed as a divine opportunity. For the author God’s delay is only temporary and his judgment will

¹³⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (ed. E. Ray Clendenen; Vol. 37, Nashville: P&H Publishing Group, 2003), 379.

¹⁴⁰ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 308.

come when one least expects it. Since God is not limited by time or space and he transcends all human limitations, it is unfair to hold him to the human concept of being late.¹⁴¹

2 Peter 3.10 opens with the assurance that the day of the Lord “will come.” Not only will it come but it will come like a “thief,” when it is least expected. In actuality, the choice of the word *ἔξει* - “come” shows an emphasis on the fact of its certainty come. The day that God will judge the cosmos and uphold the righteous will come when least expected. Here the author shows a familiarity with ideas also found in Paul’s writings (see 1 Thessalonians 5.2, 3 as well as 1 Corinthians 1.8; 2 Corinthians 1.14 and Philippians 1.6) by emphasizing that his readers needed to be ready because that day will come like a thief. It may be inferred that Paul appropriated his image of the thief from his knowledge of Jesus traditions, since Jesus warned his listeners that his return would come like a thief in the night (Matthew 24.42—44).¹⁴² Humans cannot calculate the coming Day of the Lord. The author of 2 Peter appears to be intentionally keeping the return of Christ as a possibility, holding true to Jewish and Christian apocalyptic thought which preserves the tension between the Messiahs expected return and the “eschatological delay.” Since the only fully informed perspective is God’s, he alone has the knowledge of when the exact day of Christ’s return will be.¹⁴³

Once the author assures the reader, he lays out three things that will happen on the day of Christ’s return. (1) The “heavens will pass away with a loud noise,” (2) “the elements will be destroyed with intense heat”,(3) “the earth and its works will be burned up.” The Greek word *ῥοιζῆδὸν* “loud noise” depicts a “whirring sound made by an object going swiftly through the

¹⁴¹ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 321. The aspect of God being late as depicting His patience allow more of humanity to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus though of value is very limited. Since Christ died for all of creation it is possible that the divine delay is not only an opportunity to spread the gospel but also to restore and bring redemption to the rest of creation as well through godly stewardship of the environment.

¹⁴² Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 383.

¹⁴³ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 310.

air.”¹⁴⁴ This could depict the sound of an arrow, the swift movement of wings or the hissing sound of a snake. In the context of 2 Peter, it refers to the sound of a destructive fire moving quickly through the earth.¹⁴⁵

The idea of the heavens passing away is not new to the New Testament. In the gospels, Jesus claims his words will last forever; long after heaven and earth passes away (Mark 13.31; Matthew 24.35; Luke 21.33). It is also well attested in other Jewish writings such as *1 Enoch* 91.6, “The first heaven shall depart and pass away; a new heaven shall appear; and all the powers of heaven shall shine forever sevenfold.”¹⁴⁶ The cosmology held by many of the early philosophers of the day was that the universe is comprised of earth, water, fire and air. The Stoic belief was that fire was the supreme element which dissolved all other elements. It is further possible to read 2 Peter 3.12 alongside the comments of Jesus pertaining to the passing away of heaven and earth (Mt. 5.18; 24.35). This could account for the author’s usage in 3.13 for waiting for “a new heaven and a new earth.” With this understanding given to the passage it is easy to lean toward a conveyance of the author toward total destruction of creation.¹⁴⁷

Bauckham, while unfolding the meaning of “the heavens will pass away with a loud noise,” argues what he believes is the most common view in that it refers to the burning of the heavens. He does bring forth an additional view that can be attached to the idea that the heavens will be destroyed. Due to multiple OT references as well as other Jewish literature (Psalms 18:13-15 [LXX 17:14-16]; 77:18 [LXX 76:19]; 104:7 [LXX 103:7]; Amos 1:2; Joel 4:16 [EVV 3:16]; d. 4 Ezra 13.4; 1 Thessalonians 4.16) it could be referring to the “thunderous voice” of God that will announce His return. If this is the case, the “loud noise” may not be focusing on the

¹⁴⁴ Bauer, et al., *Greek-English*, 906.

¹⁴⁵ Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 383.

¹⁴⁶ Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 283.

¹⁴⁷ Davids, *2 Peter*, 284.

destruction of the heavens but the announcement of the coming judge and His pending judgment.¹⁴⁸

The second item Peter states will happen in 3.10 is “the elements will be dissolved with fire”. “Elements” (στοιχεῖου) refers to the foundational components of which things are made. This could consist of the foundations components such as earth, wind, fire, and water or the basics elements of celestial bodies or even the basics of fundamental learning.¹⁴⁹ Many link this portion of 2 Peter 3 with Isaiah 34.4 (LXX), “And all the powers of the heavens shall melt, and the sky shall be rolled up like a scroll: and all the stars shall fall like leaves from a vine.” Though the concept of elements may very well mean the foundational building materials of nature it is Keating’s opinion that the author is likely alluding “to “celestial bodies”, like the stars.”¹⁵⁰ The term also later came to be correlated with spiritual beings. There is some question as to whether this is what Paul was referring to in Galatians 4 and Colossians 2. There are three basic interpretations of what 2 Peter 3 was actually intends with στοιχεῖου: (1) it refers to angels and spiritual beings that rule over the world, (this interpretation lacks of inner textual support; (2) it refers to the celestial bodies such as the sun, moon and stars. This explanation does fit in the text and may be possible; and (3) the text is talking about the foundational components of nature. This final view is also plausible, especially when considering the *Sibylline Oracles*.¹⁵¹

Reading 2 Peter as referring to the heavenly bodies was well supported in the second century.¹⁵² An argument can be made that the author of 2 Peter was influenced by perspectives such as the one found in Isaiah 34.4 where the Hebrew text separates the hosts of heaven from

¹⁴⁸ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 315.

¹⁴⁹ Bauer, et al. *Greek - English*, 946.

¹⁵⁰ Daniel Keating, *First and Second Peter, Jude*, Catholic Commentary of Sacred Scripture (ed. Peter S. Williamson and Mary Healy; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 381.

¹⁵¹ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 384; (*Sibylline Oracles* 3:80 – 81; cf. 2:206 – 7; 8:337 – 39).

¹⁵² Davids, *2 Peter*, 284-285.

the heavens themselves; in other words, the sky is distinct from the celestial bodies such as sun, moon and stars. Davids points out that the verb for “melt” (τήκω) used by the author of 2 Peter can also be found in the earlier Septuagint translation of Isaiah 34.4.¹⁵³ Perhaps more to the point, this text may envision the defeat and destruction of angelic hosts.¹⁵⁴ Both in pagan and Jewish cultures the “celestial bodies” were associated with, or considered to be under the control of “spiritual beings.”¹⁵⁵ Both Isaiah 24.21—23 and 34.4 seem to support this meaning. Commentators pointing to the possibility that 2 Peter 3 refers to the destruction of angelic powers that presently rule nature point out that Paul’s writings support a similar view. Paul’s use of the Greek term στοιχεῖα in Galatians 4.3 and Colossians 2.8, 20 is used to describe evil angelical beings that control non-believing people.¹⁵⁶ It can be argued that since the author 2 Peter clearly believed in fallen angels (2 Peter 2.4), he may very well be discussing the destruction of evil angelic powers.¹⁵⁷

Davids points out that since “elements is referred to separately from the heavens” it is most likely that the second interpretation is the best. It is also slightly possible that the third view could be included since the judgment the author is talking about is not referring to material things but to those in humanity, as well as to powers that utilize and often abuse the material aspects of creation. It is most likely that 2 Peter is expressing God’s need to remove all that stands between the earth and his judgment both physical and spiritual in order to completely expose the works of humanity.¹⁵⁸ Many scholars believe that 2 *Clement* 16.3 may be an early

¹⁵³ Interestingly, this term is also used in the early Christian document 2 *Clement*.

¹⁵⁴ Davids, *2 Peter*, 285.

¹⁵⁵ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 316.

¹⁵⁶ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 316.

¹⁵⁷ Davids, *2 Peter*, 285.

¹⁵⁸ Davids, *2 Peter*, 286. The most redemptive interpretation of this text seems to fall between options 2 and 3. Peter’s challenge and plea to live holy and godly lives in 3.11 suggests he is warning his readers that God is prepared to deal with all spiritual obstacles both celestial and earthly as well as any human obstacles in order to expose all that is to be judged. This does not require a massive devastation of the natural world or the heavens.

reference to 2 Peter, “But you know that the day of judgment is already coming as a blazing furnace, and some of the heavens will dissolve, and the whole earth will be like lead melting in a fire, and then the works of men, the secret and the public will appear.” If this is the case then 2 Peter was understood to be referring to the judgment of God.¹⁵⁹

If one tries to harmonize 2 *Clement* 16.3 with 2 Peter, then the most natural reading would imply destruction of earth, not just the heavens. If we take into consideration the promised future the author is describing, “all things” could easily be the celestial bodies. Their destruction enables the exposure of all of humanity’s deeds for judgment. Though this most certainly may have adverse effects on the earth, the author focuses his attention not on the destruction motif but on what it means to his current audience in the present.¹⁶⁰ For most commentators “the elements” mean the sun, moon, and stars, not the earth.¹⁶¹

The final event that 2 Peter 3.10 states will happen is that “the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.” The literal translation of the Greek word εὑρεθῆσεται is “will be found out.” This text is difficult for the reason that there are variants of the text that must be noted; further, there is no conclusive evidence for what the author was trying to convey. Though the evidence for “will be found out” is the most popular, it must be noted that the Sahidic version adds a negative to the word εὑρεθῆσεται, thus the reading would be “will not be found.” An early papyrus uses the word for destroyed (λούμενα) so that the meaning would be “the earth and its works will be destroyed.” The Majority text uses “will be burned” which is found in many of the modern English versions of the Bible. There is some speculation as to whether this translation is the original and if so, how did the translation “will be found out” come to replace it. Another variant which is more than likely added by a later scribe reads “will vanish.” There are

¹⁵⁹ Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 386.

¹⁶⁰ Davids, *2 Peter*, 288.

¹⁶¹ Bauckham, *Jude, 1,2 Peter*, 316.

other possibilities that could be discussed but few have consistent support. Ultimately the difficult phrase used in 3.10 remains ambiguous. Is the author envisioning a purification of the world or its total destruction?¹⁶²

Though there are some readings of 3.10 oriented around God's natural creation including heaven and earth, the one with the strongest support is that humanity will be exposed before God when facing the judgment. More than likely this is the intent of the NRSV and NIV translations "will be disclosed." In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for "found" (אצמ) had with it a sense of judgment and can be seen in texts like Exodus 22.8 and Deuteronomy 22.28. Even the Greek word for "found" (εὑρέθη) is commonly used to show our relationship before God. (1 Corinthians 4.2, Galatians 2.17, 1 Peter 1.7 and Revelation 5.4) Thomas Schreiner points out that Richard Bauckham argues that the verb "found" could easily be correlated to the common phrase "will be made manifest." In 3.7 the author announces that the judgment being spoken of is to come to the ungodly. Though there is little doubt that Peter is discussing a physical earth, Bauckham suggests that it can be about the physical earth in the context of human history; in other words, the earth as the seat or home of humanity. This translation does bring a measure of clarity to this otherwise difficult Greek text.¹⁶³ The picture portrayed here shows all that obscures God's vision will be stripped away, laying it totally exposed and open to judgment. When all is cleared away, God's gaze can fall upon all that humanity thought was hidden. The text seems to maintain that this process of exposing the earth will create a certain amount of necessary damage needed to purify and transform the earth so righteous men can dwell there.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 384. Obviously a redemptive eco-theology would embrace the purification process over earth's total devastation, especially when considering that God's judgement is toward the wickedness of men not the rest creation.

¹⁶³ Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 386.

¹⁶⁴ Davids, *2 Peter*, 286.

Though this section of 2 Peter is quite difficult to translate due to the many possibilities among textual variants, a clear understanding of God’s focus on human wickedness and evil deeds is offered by Bauckham:

“The apocalyptic imagery which follows depicts not simply the dissolution of the cosmos but, more importantly, the eschatological coming of the divine Judge. When the wrathful voice of God thunders out of heaven and the fire of his judgment sets the sky ablaze, the firmament and the heavenly bodies will be destroyed, and the earth, the scene of human wickedness, will be exposed to his wrath. Then it will be impossible for the wicked to hide from God’s judicial scrutiny. They and their evil deeds will be discovered by him and condemned.”¹⁶⁵

In 3.11—12 the author of 2 Peter sums up this process with the idea that since all things (referring to the elements and heavenly bodies, not the earth) will be “dissolved in this way,” one should live a holy and godly life knowing that all that is done will be exposed to the all-seeing eye of God at the return of Christ.¹⁶⁶ Along with this exhortation, the author reinforces the idea in 3.7 that the heaven and earth are reserved for fire. In 3.12 the concept is extended by stating “the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire.” The Septuagint rendering of Isaiah 63.19—64.1 proclaims that the mountains will melt when the Lord returns. Isaiah 43.4 states that the “powers of the heavens” are going to melt. It is clear that 2 Peter 3 urges readers to grasp the enormous fact that living a holy life is critical and that the false teachers will get their just reward when they least expect it.¹⁶⁷

It seems highly unlikely that if the author was proposing the complete destruction of the world he would go out of his way to refocus on the importance of each person’s actions in the present, especially when the opening section of his letter exhorts toward specific character

¹⁶⁵ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 321.

¹⁶⁶ Davids, *2 Peter*, 287.

¹⁶⁷ Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 391.

qualities of faith, culminating in holy and godly living.¹⁶⁸ Relatedly, there appears to be a link between godly living and speeding the return of Christ. This is not a perspective foreign to the NT since the author of Acts appears to connect the importance of repentance with Christ's return (Acts 3.19—20). This perspective can also be seen in 2 Clement 2.16. Thus, 2 Peter's call to live godly lives in order to speed up the return of Jesus and bring about the Day of the Lord serves the author's agenda of urging moral purity in this text.¹⁶⁹

The concept of the new heaven and new earth that the author introduces in 3.13 can be seen throughout Jewish and Christian traditions. Isaiah 65.17 and 66.22 both address creation's future and the permanence of the new heaven and new earth. Revelation 21 utilizes the same terminology to describe the final destiny of the faithful as a new heaven and new earth.¹⁷⁰ It is important to realize that the author of 2 Peter 3 is not telling his readers that all is lost and that total destruction of the world is imminent. He separates himself from the Stoic view of total destruction and articulates hope for a new heaven and new earth.

The return of Christ not only brings judgment to the created order but salvation for his people. The salvation the author unfolds is not just spiritual but physical in the promise of a transformed new world for the righteous to inhabit. He lets his readers know that one cannot separate the return of Christ, the Day of Judgment, and the new heaven and new earth. How this purification and transformation will take place is not explained.¹⁷¹ It is this very promise that 2 Peter uses to motivate his readers to live holy and godly lives. One cannot separate eschatology from living lives that please God; it is this eschatological view that the author uses to motivate

¹⁶⁸ Davids, *2 Peter*, 288. Davids provides a launch pad for a redemptive eco-theology to equate environmental stewardship as part of daily godly living. It also gives room to expand the concept of godly stewardship assisting in speeding up the return of Christ thus strengthening our hope and anticipation in His future glory.

¹⁶⁹ Davids, *2 Peter*, 291.

¹⁷⁰ Keating, *First*, 184.

¹⁷¹ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 391.

his readers to lay aside the lies of the false teachers and press on toward the promise of Christ's return.¹⁷²

It was pointed out that the author of 2 Peter draws from Isaiah 65 when discussing the new heaven and the new earth. As discussed in the previous section Paul operated with this mindset in Romans 8 claiming that the earth anticipates the return of Christ, awaiting its release from bondage. Revelation utilizes the same terminology of 2 Peter depicting destruction of evil and the renewal of the earth through the judgment of God, thus completing the original plan in Genesis to have humanity live and dwell in total harmony with God on earth (Revelation 12; 21.1). It cannot be assumed that the author of 2 Peter is familiar with John's Revelation, but what is sure is that there are some elements of the visions that are clearly employing common traditions. The renewal of the earth will be a home for God's people to live in righteousness under the rule of God. This supports the author's thoughts that the false teachers who are tormenting his readers will have no place in the future, only those who have lives of holiness and godliness.¹⁷³

Terrance Callan observes that the apocalyptic discourse in 2 Peter is culturally influenced by Stoic description of the fiery destruction that was to destroy the world. Where there is a divergence is that much of 2 Peter aligns with Paul's view of judgment of God shown in 1 Corinthians 3.12—15 where all works will be tested by fire; there those works deemed to have eternal value will survive and those that do not will be destroyed by fire. The author of 2 Peter, in similar fashion, shows that it is the wicked or false teachers and their followers that will be destroyed and the faithful people of God will be saved. The author's depiction of eschatological

¹⁷² Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 393. A redemptive eco-theology focuses on the redemption of God not on His judgement. Though both have their place, the redemption of God is a vital overarching theme within scripture and is critical to a well thought out eco-theology.

¹⁷³ Davids, *2 Peter*, 292.

judgment is thoroughly Jewish in nature, especially so in his references to the judgment in the time of the Noahic flood. Knowing that Noah and his family escaped judgment, the author insists that it will also be so with the faithful people of God.¹⁷⁴

5.3a Summing Up 2 Peter

2 Peter's opposing skeptics obviously taught that the promise of the "parousia" was false since it did not happen during the time of the Apostles. God may seem to be late by human standards but, according to the author, God is not confined to humanity's understanding of time. The author doesn't attempt to deal with the perception that the prophetic framework had a time limitation, but rather takes aim at dispelling the idea that the delay in some way means the prophecy would never come to fruition.¹⁷⁵

The depiction of divine judgment by fire is common in the Old Testament traditions; further there is little doubt that it continued to have root in early Jewish traditions. There are further a number of texts that show it was both a "Palestinian and Hellenistic" concept. For some scholars, 2 Peter's influences can be traced to Stoic and Persian influences. Much of what is written in 2 Peter 3.7—13 is not found anywhere else in the New Testament, but in the early second century it becomes fairly common in other Christian writings. Judgment by fire was a common concept, it needs to be noted that the author of 2 Peter is staying true to his Jewish influences in that he stays emphatically with the idea that the wicked are the ones being judged by God's divine fire. This differs from the other aspects of judgment by fire found outside Jewish traditions.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Terrance Callan, "Rhetography and Rhetology of the Apocalyptic Discourse in Second Peter." In *Reading Second Peter With New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of Second Peter* (ed. Robert L. Webb and Duane F. Watson; New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 85.

¹⁷⁵ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 311.

¹⁷⁶ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 300. The key mindset needed in understanding this section of 2 Peter that aids the development of a redemptive eco-theology is seeing the judgement of God as a desire to restore creation back to Himself, not destroying it as a vindictive action against the wickedness of humanity.

Richard Bauckham brings out a powerful truth in that “the eschatological conflagration to which 2 Peter alludes to is an apocalyptic image; it is an image which remains powerful today, evoking both the threat of nuclear holocaust and the eventual re-absorption of our planet into the expanding sun.” He points out that though humanity cannot be assured against total devastation of the earth, we are not at the mercy of humanity but of the God who created the heavens and the earth out of total “chaos.” The threat of punishment or extinction in 2 Peter is from God’s good judgment not human activity.¹⁷⁷

Early Christianity owes a great deal to Jewish apocalyptic as it was concerned with the theme of eschatological judgment as well as the problems surrounding its appointed delay. The hope placed in Jesus as God’s Messiah in Christian concepts of the coming judgment of God, is what separates 2 Peter from the Jewish apocalyptic sources that influenced it.¹⁷⁸ When studying 2 Peter 3, it becomes clear that the author was reliant on the ideas found in Jewish apocalyptic literature. A little later on 1 Clement 23 and 2 Clement 11 both appear to be using similar unknown apocalyptic sources.¹⁷⁹ Since 2 Peter appears to have used portions of Jude in chapter 2 of this letter, it is completely reasonable to assume that he could similarly follow existing Jewish apocalyptic traditions.¹⁸⁰ The author seems to be following such sources when discussing world history by dividing it into three primary eras. These three ages are separated by the destruction of the earth by the flood and then later by a great fire that consumes the earth. This concept can be seen in *1 Enoch* as well as in the Jewish *Sibylline Oracles*.¹⁸¹

When it comes down to the aspects of whether Peter was expecting total world destruction and the creation of an entirely new earth or a purifying of the present creation where

¹⁷⁷ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 302.

¹⁷⁸ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 32.

¹⁷⁹ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 283.

¹⁸⁰ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 284.

¹⁸¹ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 299.

the faithful people of God can flourish, an absolute conclusion cannot be reached. Due to the precedence of the transformation not total destruction of the body of Jesus during the resurrection the purification view is preferred. Therefore it is probable that God, the creator, can transform the world without destroying it.¹⁸² The thought of transformation can be seen in some of the subsequent early Christian writings. Eusebius of Emesa, a fourth century writer, proclaims the heavens will be changed into something better without destruction. He then correlates this to the fact that our bodies will not be destroyed but transformed into a state of renewal.¹⁸³ Bede the Venerable also claims the world is made up of four elements, “earth, air, fire and water”; the fire in 2 Peter will only devour fire and water because there will be a new heaven and new earth once the fire is over.¹⁸⁴

“The new creation, that is to say, has not yet occurred, and when it does it will involve a radical refashioning of the very foundations of the cosmos as we know it, an event the implications of which we can only begin to imagine.”¹⁸⁵ Eschatological hope has the ability to bring meaning to the present and radically alter how the people of God currently live and work. Christians hope looks forward in thought and deeds, realizing that today brings with it opportunities to act on the expectations of tomorrow.¹⁸⁶ Bauckham and Hart affirm the findings of this study that the

“new creation is – paradoxical as this may at first sound, the new creation of this present creation, its renewal, not its replacement. New creation is precisely the future of the present world, of all created reality, which does not emerge from the history of this world but will be given to it by God. It requires an originating act of God, just as creation in the

¹⁸² Keating, *First*, 185.

¹⁸³ Gerald Bray, ed., *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (general ed. Thomas C. Oden, New Testament XI ; Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), 159.

¹⁸⁴ Bray, *James*, 159.

¹⁸⁵ Richard Bauckham, and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 69.

¹⁸⁶ Bauckham and Hart, *Hope*, 69.

beginning did, but in this case it will be an act which preserves the identity of the first creation while creatively transforming it.”¹⁸⁷

The ongoing challenge is to see the new creation described in 2 Peter not as a replacement but as “the eschatological future of this world.” The implications here are absolutely paramount for rethinking and construction an eco-theology through the framework of eschatology. This in effect enables the idea of being “this-worldly and other worldly” to be compatible with care for this world, as well as both ideas being part of the same eschatology.¹⁸⁸ This present creation finds its wholeness in its wholesale future renewal, enabling a continuity to exist between how faithful people steward the present creation in anticipation of its full renewal in the future.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Bauckham and Hart, *Hope*, 128.

¹⁸⁸ Bauckham and Hart, *Hope*, 137.

¹⁸⁹ Bauckham and Hart, *Hope*, 138.

CHAPTER 6

Further Thoughts

Once the value of a coherent eco-theology has been rethought through the framework of eschatology, what should be the next step? Students of Christian training have a fair grip on basic theological concepts and are well aware of ecological issues that demand to be addressed. The problem for many however, is a major disconnect between the two worlds. Why can it be obvious to the Christian community that the “degradation of the natural world is a serious economic, ecological, and ethical issue” and yet an inability to attribute “any theological relevance to their views of nature?”¹ In other words why does there appear to be little connection between theology and a need to protect our environment?

“When we turn the attention of the church to a definition of the Christian relationship with natural world, we are not stepping away from grave and proper theological ideas; we are stepping right into the middle of them. There is a deeply rooted, genuinely Christian motivation for attention to God’s creation, despite the fact that many church people consider ecology to be a secular concern.”²

In the introduction of Steve Bouma-Prediger’s book *For the Beauty of the Earth* he quotes Wendell Berry, “Our destruction of nature is not just bad stewardship, or stupid economics, or a betrayal of family responsibility; it is the most horrid blasphemy.”³ So where does this leave the church? It must first come to the realization that Christianity is highly influenced by, and has influenced, western culture. One must not buy into the idea that God is not involved in his natural world leaving humanity to subject creation to power without restraint. God as the creator must again be acknowledged as involved in the created order. Further, acknowledgment must be made that his creation is more than a container of raw resources to be

¹ Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, xii.

² Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, xvi.

³ Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, xi.

exploited. The church needs to break the bonds of modernity and stop bowing down to the all consuming demands of materialism. The church must not be part of the problem or even stand by silently while God's good creation is being abused. The majority of the church needs to see beyond salvation as an escape into an abstract heaven and realize that God's ultimate desire is to walk among his people upon the return of Christ on a redeemed creation⁴

The church can no longer buy into the idea that humanity is the center of the universe leaving God as a bystander as we take center stage. Humanity is not the "measure of all things," God is. The earth is more than some place for humanity to act on its own behalf. Though human life is of great value to God, it is not the only life that needs to be considered in creation. Further, the idea that technology is God's answer to everything also must be resisted. Modern humans blindly follow technology as if it were god. The church cannot sit silently by allowing technology to be the solution to every cultural dilemma we face. The power to shape and mold culture is given to the church. Though the influence of technology is an inevitable part of culture; there needs to be questions raised by the church as to what kinds, how much and at what cost will this technology be utilized? The gift of technology does not come without its cost both to the environment and to souls of humanity. Good science should inform responsible technology! With it often comes double edged sword; growth and wealth bring with it no moral structure or social conscious of the potential devaluing of non-human creation.⁵

The church needs to return to a theology of creation. The Apostles' Creed affirms God as the maker of heaven and earth. The bible begins with creation, redemption follows and is consummated in Revelation with the ultimate display of God's redeeming power being the new heaven and new earth. There is a need to see the scope of redemption as not only for humanity

⁴ Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, 77.

⁵ Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, 77.

but all of God's creation. The full extent of God's grace is not confined to the individual but the whole of creation.⁶

The church would do well to take its script from the book of Job and realize God is the center of all that exists, not humanity. Though humanity holds a vital place in God's created order it needs to be acknowledged that the rest of God's creation has an important role in this order as well.⁷ The book of Revelation shows that God's ultimate redemptive plan is earthly. "A new heaven and new earth;" new is a quality statement in comparison to old. "Not all new things, all things new... New means renewed, renovated, reclaimed."⁸ It needs to be taken to heart that God's desire is to dwell with his creation. It is God who assures that "creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Romans 8.21) The whole concept of the New Jerusalem is the idea of God bringing heaven to earth. This is not due to any human achievement but by the redemptive power of God. God will no longer be hidden but will be directly communing with his creation face to face. Evil will be vanquished, chaos will be gone, all tears and sorrows will be eliminated. John's vision is of a perfect life on earth.⁹

⁶ Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, 79.

⁷ Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, 98.

⁸ Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, 108.

⁹ Bouma-Prediger, *Beauty*, 108.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

So the obvious question is, where do we go from here? Based on the study of a redemptive eco-theology to this point the following items may be fruitful to explore. (1) Reconsideration of what it means for all of creation to be under the redemptive act of Christ not just humanity seems a crucial place to begin. Within the eco-theological framework salvation should show God's redemptive plan for all of creation, not just limiting it to an individual human experience. (2) An examination of the Levitical laws through an eco-theological framework may prove to be beneficial especially when considering the fact that God intended Israel to steward creation as well as the poor in their communities in an honorable fashion. (3) It would be interesting to bring aspects of systematic theology into conversation with an eco-theological framework in order to explore how the church may interact with political and ecological concerns. (4) A reexamination of the role the church should play within the political arena and what it means to steward creation could then be possible. There is no doubt that a strong robust redemptive eco-theology will have political implications as far as church involvement within governmental policy making. Stewardship of creation, much like evangelism cannot be a spectator sport. Personal involvement and interaction is required. (5) Further development of a redemptive eco-theology could build on John Walton's framework of seeing the creation accounts in Genesis as one of functional instead of mechanistic. This opens a vast range of possibilities for a much needed practical attempt for a redemptive eco-theology.

A redemptive eco-theology viewed through an eschatological framework coheres with biblical theology. It is high time for humanity to realize that the concept of dominion and rule

does not leave creation subject to human whims without restraint. With the right of dominion comes the responsibility to act under the direction of God not independent of it. As shown above, the implications of dominion are to serve and protect creation as God's representatives not to rape and pillage it. It is time to look at the moral responsibility behind the economic and ecological decisions we are making. Just because we "can" does not mean we "should." The church needs to be the first to show that God is the center of the universe not humanity. It is important to always remember as humans we are participants in the created order.

Paul was right, "for in hope we were saved" (Romans 8.24a); this is the power of using an eschatological eco-theology model - it focuses on the hope in God's promised future while living today. It forces the escapist mindset to see that the fullness of God's promises is earth-oriented. It allows the act of stewarding creation to become an act of worship instead of a tool needed to fix a problem. It has the power to focus and energize human efforts through the understanding that God's good creation is restorable through appropriate stewardship. It focuses on our cooperation with God and His desire to redeem all of creation removing the tendency to jump from crisis to crisis. A redemptive eco-theology has the power to build hope and expectation for the coming Kingdom of God. Peter Althouse rightly suggests "an escapist mentality in the face of apocalyptic destruction will not lead to the new kingdom, but is an apocalypse without hope."¹ A redemptive eco-theology viewed through the framework of eschatology empowers the church to take a proactive approach to waiting for a "new heaven and new earth, where righteousness is at home (2 Peter 3.13b).

¹ Peter Althouse, "'Left Behind'—Fact or Fiction: Ecumenical Dilemmas of the Fundamentalist Millenarian Tensions within Pentecostalism," *JPT* 13.2 (2005):193.

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