

Camp Barakel Staff Development

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The Grand Narrative of Redemption: An Overview

Introduction: Why does the earth exist? What is the purpose of human life? These two perplexing questions have been asked in every generation. Believe it or not I hope to answer both of them in this one brief sermon. It is clear from Revelation 21-22 that in the consummation the new earth will be the Temple/City/Garden where God dwells with man after the removal of sin and its consequences. The entire narrative of the Bible leads to this climactic understanding: the earth is God's dwelling place where he dwells with his image, man. Seeing the end allows us to understand the inception of the narrative as well as the long story that culminates in the New Heaven and New Earth.

Temple/Garden/Eden: It is clear from Genesis 1-3 that this garden in Eden was the abode of God and the earth had the potential for man to develop it so that God would dwell in the whole earth with his image. You do not read very far in the narrative before you encounter man's rebellion which brings his exclusion from God's presence and the garden/presence protected by Cherubim and the Flaming Sword. The temple/garden of God's presence on earth is removed in the flood which is both a judgment for violence and a cleansing of the earth from the corruption man brought to everything.

Patriarchal Presence of God: With the removal of God's presence from the earth the emphasis of the biblical text is now on the presence of God in heaven. Noah builds an altar and performs the role of a priest in that great thank offering he offers to God for his grace in being saved through the flood. God's presence breaks into the life of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all of whom build altars and seem to have both kingly and priestly function.

Tabernacle/Garden/Presence: God is present in the midst of his people after the exodus and the Sinai meeting in this portable abode, the Tabernacle. Earth and heaven are now linked with God present in both. The tent itself and the dividing curtains have many arboreal features that remind us of garden. The curtain that divides the Holy of Holies from the Holy place has Cherubim embroidered on it. Entrance into the inner sanctuary is limited to a special group among the people, i.e. the priests. All around the tent was the encampment of the redeemed people of God as a kind of portable city where God dwells in the midst of his people.

Temple/Garden/City/Presence: After the victories of battle the Israelites settled into the land of promise. The Tabernacle was placed in Shiloh in the tribal area of Ephraim. The invading Philistines captured the Ark at Shiloh and retained it for seven months. David captured the city Jerusalem and the Ark of the Covenant was brought to the city. Now the city of Jerusalem is the city of God and Solomon builds a permanent abode for God's presence in the temple. The splendor of the Temple reflects its association with the garden and the tabernacle. Now God has a permanent house within the City of God.

Removal of Presence/Temple/City/Garden (Ichabod): In 586 BC the Babylonians destroyed the Temple and took all of the furnishings including the Ark of the Covenant. Under Persian rule the exiles were allowed to return to the land and the Second Temple was built and the city and its walls were rebuilt. There is no evidence that the presence of God returned to that temple devoid of the Ark and many other original items of the Temple.

Incarnation/Temple/Presence: The word became flesh and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth. Worship and presence was coming that would not be geographically limited to the City or the Second Temple. Jesus affirmed that he was the temple of God and if they destroyed his temple he would rebuild it in three days. By his death and resurrection he conquered death and ascended to heaven and was crowned and invested with the scroll. He and the Father sent the Spirit to complete his ministry on earth and form the church, his body on earth.

Pentecost/Temple/Presence: With all the attendant phenomena that accompanied the theophany at Sinai, the Spirit comes and forms the body of Christ, the new people of God, the spiritual house where God dwells by his Spirit. This body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and thus the presence of God with his people. God's presence is no longer limited to a particular temple in a particular city. His temple is now scattered among every kindred, tribe, tongue and nation. The globe is dotted with the presence of God in every body of Christ that exists in every hemisphere. People come to the temple/presence of the church through the work of the Spirit who grants the grace of salvation to the people of God. Temple/Presence in the church is to be extended redemptively to the globe. The Spirit is accomplishing this today through the church.

Judgment/Fire/Renewal: The redemptive victory of the Last Adam includes the removal of sin from the created heavens and earth through the agency of fire. Just as judgment for the sin of the First Adam brought corruption and defilement to the created heavens and earth so the judgment brought by the Last Adam will bring a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness.

Temple/City/Garden/Presence: The whole earth now becomes the dwelling of God which was his intent at the beginning. The garden is present on the main street of the city the magnitude and beauty of which defies imagination. The throne of God and the Lamb is in the garden and the river of life and the trees of life are present as well. The Lamb is still the Temple and thus the triune God presences himself on the whole earth and dwells with man through the work of the Last Adam.

Conclusion: The grand narrative (an anthology written by many writers over many years and in many different genre) answers the question; why does the earth exist? It answers the second question as well; what is the purpose of human life? This narrative is a word/deed revelation from God that has amazing coherence given its origin and the fact that it was assembled in stages over many years. The work itself abounds with inter-textual references and contexts in which it can be understood. Interpreting Scripture by Scripture makes considerable sense given the nature of the book. Indeed, it is a God breathed revelation.

The Overarching Chiasmus of the Bible

Creation/Perfection: Genesis 1-2

Fall/Judgment: Genesis 3-4

Old Covenant Redemptive Event

New Covenant Redemptive Event

Judgment/Removal of Sin: Revelation 18-20

Consummation/Perfection: Revelation 21-22

**The Bookends of the Bible
Genesis 1-4 & Revelation 18-22**