YOU
ARE
HERE

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF REALITY

THE HUMAN RACE

Where are we? Who are we? What has gone wrong?
What is the solution? What happens to us after we die?

These basic questions about life have brought a wide range of responses throughout history. The way we see the world will shape our whole way of life.

A Christian worldview has a U-shape:
things have gone badly wrong, but they will eventually be put right.

YOU ARE HERE

is an overview of reality according to the Bible:
Creation, Fall and Redemption.

CREATION

In the first chapter of the Bible, the book of Genesis states very clearly that the world that God has made is absolutely fabulous. God is thrilled to bits with the work of His hands. God made the land and God saw that it was good. God made the oceans and saw how amazing and very deep they were. God made the stars, the planets, the sun, the moon and God saw that they were simply marvellous. God made whales, elephants, parrots, porcupines and God saw that they were exquisite creatures.

This repeated refrain sets the scene for the biblical way of understanding the world. We are reminded again and again of the immense value and beauty of God's good creation. It is not junk – the creation is precious to the Creator.

The book of Proverbs sees Wisdom working as God's assistant:

Then I was the craftsman at his side.
I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in his presence,
rejoicing in his whole world
and delighting in mankind.
Proverbs 8:30-31

God created men and women and placed them on the earth for a specific purpose. He gave them a task … a purpose … a commission. God blessed them and said to them:

> *'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'*
> Genesis 1:28

This was God's first word to Adam and Eve. It is sometimes referred to as the cultural or creation mandate and it is a very important part of the biblical story. It is often misunderstood.

Humans are creatures who exercise considerable power. We can build bridges over rivers teeming with crocodiles. We tunnel through the hardest rock in search of hidden diamonds and rubies. With impressive skill and imagination, humans fashion necklaces, crowns and buckles for belts. All this takes power and intelligence; an ability to rule, direct and unfold. No disrespect to our lovable pets, but cats and dogs cannot do this. God's world invites us, nay urges us, to explore and unfold its rich potential. It's a bobbydazzzler crying out for human craft, imagination and careful management.

Consider this passage in the Old Testament:

> *Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and revering him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land – a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig-trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.* Deuteronomy 8:6-9

Scripture revels in the richness and vast potential of creation. The Lord God invites people to dig copper and other minerals out of the hills. Notice how practical and down to earth this is. God wants us to discover new things about the earth. He urges us to unfold its rich potential. This task gives our lives meaning, direction and purpose. It always has done, and always will.

Humans discover that trees can become tables, cupboards and chairs. Snow becomes an igloo. A waterfall can be harnessed to yield electrical power. Iron ore can be heated, banged, whacked and a few hours later becomes a knife to cut a lemon-drizzle cake with. Just ponder how many cake recipes humans have unfolded! The mind boggles.

Words can become poems about cheeky magpies. Musical notes can bring forth elaborate and sophisticated symphonies. Bach unfolded mellifluous melodies to the glory of God. The painter Rembrandt moved us with his searingly honest self-portraits. C. S. Lewis crafted some stunning tales about wardrobes, lions and dwarves. Comedians crack jokes that can make us belly laugh as we pass round the Belgian chocs to our nearest and dearest.

And in all this vibrant activity we are building villages, towns, cities and culture. A library here. A park over there. A theatre by the river. A football pitch by the woods. What joy! What fun! So much to thank God for as we praise His holy name (Psalm 150).

Such is the capacity, the power and glory of humankind.

The Bible teaches that this power is given to us by God. And in using this power we are like God. We resemble God by ruling, unfolding and developing. We are the image of God reflecting His goodness and wisdom to the rest of creation. The world is filled with

secret treasures and hidden surprises waiting to be discovered and enjoyed. But this is only half the story. In Genesis chapter 2 we discover something new.

> *The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden to work it and take care of it.*
> Genesis 2:15

The Hebrew words *abad* (work it) and *shamar* (take care of it) focus on serving and caring for the animals and the earth. Both verbs (*abad* and *shamar*) sharply restrict the way the other two verbs – subdue and rule (see Gen 1:28 above) – are to be applied. Human ruling should serve the animals, the trees, the garden of Eden, the earth itself.

This biblical theme of serving creation becomes more explicit in the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus. Israel was called by God to rest the land one year in seven (Deuteronomy 15) and in the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25). So in every fifty year cycle, the land would enjoy eight years of Sabbath rest. Humans, animals and the land are called to enter into the healing balm of Sabbath, reminding us of God resting on the seventh day of creation. As humans unfold the rich potential of the earth, they must look after God's wonderful world. One of our tasks, among many others, is to protect the garden from destruction and ruin.

Why is it so important to understand the cultural mandate? Sometimes we get the impression from some Christians that the Bible is all about escaping from this world and heading 'home' to heaven, as a disembodied soul, as fast as possible. This mindset completely ignores the cultural mandate. This perspective does not come from the Bible. It comes from pagan thinking. The Greek philosopher Plato (429-347 BC) believed that the earth and the body are second-rate whereas heaven is our true home.

When we understand that this world is our home and that we have many work assignments to undertake, we become aware of the need to improvise faithfully in all kinds of contexts and situations. As we respond to the cultural mandate we must develop a baptised imagination. We have to use our imaginations to find fruitful solutions to life's many challenges. It's exciting and fun!

FALL

We are bright. We are alert. We know that things aren't how they should be. What went so badly wrong? Why is the world in such a mess?

The Old Testament reveals that early in human history, Adam and Eve rebelled against the Lord. Enter Satan, a scheming rebel spirit in the form of a snake, who incited Adam and Eve to reject God and his wise purposes for creation. The covenant or treaty between God and humankind was broken and a curse began to consume the earth. This is how the prophet Isaiah understood the fall into sin:

The earth dries up and withers,
The world languishes and withers,
The exalted of the earth languish.
The earth is defiled by its people;
They have disobeyed the laws,
violated the statues
and broken the everlasting covenant.
Therefore a curse consumes the earth;
Its people must bear their guilt.
Isaiah 24:4-6

We should notice the all-pervading and radical nature of this curse. Turning our backs on the Creator of all good things brought ruin to the entire created order. The ravages of sin and death are catastrophic. Humans still respond to God's creation mandate but now the joy has gone. The library books document wars, catastrophes and scandals. The parks are strewn with litter and frequented by drug-dealers whose dirty business deals fuel abductions and murders. The theatres broadcast entertainments that tell lies about the Creator. Football stadiums are filled with raucous fans swearing, mocking each other and funding exorbitant wages for decadent lifestyles. The good creation is now groaning in terrible pain (Romans 8:22-25).

Let's examine six crucial relationships that have become twisted and ruined by this deadly revolt against God (which is called sin in English Bibles).

1.
God's relationship to humans has become fraught with pain and peril. Before sin entered the world, the Lord God strolled in the splendid garden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). Adam and Eve could enjoy God, making merry with their Lord

in a stress-free environment. The channels of communication were open, cordial and relaxed. Tragically, after the mutiny, God withdrew from the earth. Humans, from their side, knew God as distant and remote. When humans turn away from God they do not cease to worship. They exchange the true God for false gods (Romans 1:25). There are two kinds of pagan believers (1 Thessalonians 4:5). Some heathens pray to their gods and call upon them to save them in difficult times. Worshippers of the ancient fertility god, Baal, would pray to him and thank him when harvests were plentiful. Modern western pagans are not like this. They worship the insidious gods of money, sex, and power. Prayer has vanished but idolatry remains.

2.

The relationship between humans can be consumed with hatred and envy. Cain murdered his brother Abel (Genesis 4). Consider for a few moments the appalling acts of torture that are practised in many places every year. Amnesty International has alerted us to the savage brutality that befouls this planet. We've heard of the dreadful concentration camps at Auschwitz, Treblinka and Ravensbrück where SS soldiers perpetrated unspeakable crimes against Jews, Gypsies and other undesirables.

3.

The relationship between men and women can be violent and abusive (starting from Genesis 3:12,16). There is rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence and adultery. There are stories of brothers who kill their sisters because they have flirted with unsuitable bachelors. Men can sometimes bully women and women, in their turn, can become passive and manipulative. Prostitution is another part of this broken relationship. In Thailand there are awful stories of fathers who sell their daughters to brothels for as little as the price of a fridge.

4.

Sin has also affected our relationship with ourselves (see Genesis 3:10). It is all too easy in a consumerist society to dislike or even hate oneself. As we admire the supreme good looks of gorgeous film stars we can become deflated by our own physical imperfections and flaws. This insecurity has led to the enrichment of hundreds of cosmetic surgeons as they reshape and remodel cheeks, buttocks, noses and breasts. Numerous neuroses and diseases dog our lives. Despite the fact that celebrities appear to have everything going for them, we still hear stories of alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling fever and other forms of self-destructive behaviour.

5.

The relationship between humans and animals has been spoiled by the Fall (Genesis 3:15 and 9:2-5). Humans were supposed to look after the animals, birds and bees. We catch glimpses of this even now as we watch a film like Free Willy which depicts the friendly relationship between a young boy and a whale. But that film also exposes the sheer greed that can captivate the human heart and the ruthless destruction of many sea creatures as humans sniff the smell of hard currency. At the same time crocodiles and sharks are prone to attacking unsuspecting humans who are swimming in the wrong places. Animals may not sin, but they have been affected by the Fall.

6.

Finally, the relationship between humans and the earth has been ravaged by sin (Genesis 3:17-18). Humans were supposed to lovingly cultivate the earth and enhance the superb garden that God had made. We were commanded to be stewards and friends of the earth but in our rebellion we have become violent and greedy polluters of the planet. Pollution and climate catastrophes threaten us on a daily basis.

Scripture reveals that this curse has ravaged the good creation. The world is groaning and moaning in pain. Nations invade their neighbours' lands. Families are torn apart. Widows mourn the loss of their husbands. Friendships can disintegrate into bitter, brooding feuds. Marriages crumble. Communities are dogged by crime and spiteful behaviour.

Why is the world filled with so much pain and misery? We do not listen to God's word. We still unfold God's creation but we do it in selfish, destructive and foolish ways. Is there any hope for the human race and God's world? We will now turn to God's rescue plan.

REDEMPTION

Imagine a king cobra has just bitten you and you are understandably upset. What do you desperately need? The obvious answer is a doctor who has the right antivenom serum. Otherwise you will die a slow, painful death.

Sin is like a poison that has ruined the entire created order. What the world urgently needs is the supreme doctor, a Saviour who will remove the poison and restore us and the good creation to good health. In biblical terms the snake and its poison need to be overcome. Not just the hissing cobra but the Snake who incited rebellion in the garden of Eden.

After the fall into sin God had a plan to heal and fix the world. God sees many good things going on in our broken but still beautiful world. Mums and dads loving their children. Fab. Friends looking after each other in hard times. Love it. Faithful, loving, happy marriages. Yes please. Just and merciful businesses. Sweet as a nut! Newspapers telling the truth about evil and injustice. Spot on. Governments making wise and just laws. Happy days.

However, God does notice the evil we humans engage in on a daily basis. Millions of western people feverishly shopping while ignoring God. Scientists telling us that we are just computers made of meat. Technocrats urging us to trust in technological progress rather than the Creator of all things. We went over many more grim failings of humanity in the previous section.

The Bible is frank. God is not happy with this ugly rebellion in His kingdom. In fact He is angry with this treachery and villainy. This world belongs to God, the Creator, and we have ruined it with our many noxious poisons. This is why God sent His Son Jesus into the world. To reclaim it. To restore it. To destroy death. To offer men and women forgiveness and mercy.

When Jesus arrived 2000 years ago he proclaimed the kingdom of God. He taught us this prayer:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one. Matthew 6:9-13

And within a few years of teaching this prayer, he was arrested on charges of blasphemy, accused of disturbing the peace in the Roman province of Judaea and crucified as a common criminal. In this sinful age, the kingdom of darkness is active and often very nasty. The devil still holds many captive to do his will (2 Timothy 2:26). Satan's deepest longing is to destroy God's good creation.

Yet Jesus proclaimed forgiveness with his dying breaths – and three days later, was seen alive again by his followers. The kingdom of God is still not fully here, but it is advancing.

This is good news, and it presents each of us with a choice. Will we accept that, despite our best efforts, we ourselves are part of the problem, in need of help? Will we let our inner selves die so that God can give us a new life, making us fully human? If we repent, Jesus proclaims our sins forgiven and God adopts us as His children. Once again we can represent God on earth as faithful ambassadors. We are set free from the power of sin and the devil. This allows us to obey God in all areas of life, shunning all forms of pagan and secular idolatry.

In this kingdom our relationships with each other can also be healed. Instead of loathing each other, we can love and serve our neighbours. Instead of idle gossip and bickering we can encourage and build up our friends and work colleagues.

In this kingdom men and women are called to cherish each other. We can say no to lust, bullying and manipulation.

In this kingdom our relationship with ourselves can be fixed. Despair, self-hatred and suicidal thoughts can be defeated through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

In this kingdom our relationship with animals is repaired. YouTube is filled with short films of humans loving and caring for lions, wolves, birds and squirrels.

In this kingdom our relationship with the earth can be restored. We can obey the creation mandate as God intended, looking after and managing God's creation project.

Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) put it like this: "God the Father has reconciled His created but fallen world through the death of His Son, and renews it into a Kingdom of God by His Spirit."

Now we can build bridges and swimming pools to the glory of God. We can compose music that honours the Creator. We can establish businesses that are good news for employees. We can set up charities that welcome refugees. We can get involved in just political activity. We can work hard to bless widows and orphans. We can tell funny stories that make Jesus smile. We can struggle to unfold science that honours God's complex and

multifaceted world. We can write poems that evoke awe and wonder in our Father God.

The Bible proclaims that one day, Jesus Christ, the King of kings, will return to judge the world and to liberate the whole creation from every hostile power that enslaves it.

This is made clear in Romans–

> *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its slavery to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.* Romans 8:18-21

Some religions teach that after death we are reincarnated as birds, donkeys, hyenas and porcupines as a just punishment for our sins. Atheists believe that after death we rot and our corpses are nibbled by rats and worms. The Bible rejects these two views emphatically. Those who trust and obey Jesus will enjoy peace with God when they die, but heaven is not our final destination. When Jesus Christ returns at his Second Coming, forgiven, faithful people will be raised from the dead to enjoy life in a renewed heaven and earth, the future home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:13).

Here is a prayer that you can use to turn away from sin and commit yourself to the life of God's kingdom.

Dear God, I recognize that you are the Creator of this incredible world.
Thank you so much for all the wonderful creatures you have made.
I confess that I have not been a good steward of your creation.
I have sinned against you in thought, word and deed.
I acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord.
He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood
and has set me free from the power of the devil.
Thank you that one day you will raise me from the dead.
Bodily resurrection is my future bliss.
I will live with you in your restored and purified creation.
A new heaven and a new earth.
Please fill me with your Holy Spirit today. Amen

Enter your name here and today's date

If you would like to know more about a creation affirming understanding of the Bible we would encourage you to read:

The 30-Minute Bible
by Craig Bartholomew and Paige Vanosky

Bible text is reproduced from the Good News Bible © American Bible Society, New York, 1966, 1971 and 4th edition 1976, published by The Bible Societies / Harper Collins with permission.

Title and Concept
Paul Alkazraji

Writer
Mark Roques

Editor
Richard Gunton

Designer
Peter Wilson

Photography
Front – *Yannis Bontempi, Pete Alexopoulos, Jan Willem (Unsplash)*
Creation – *Sime-Basioli (Unsplash)*
Fall – *Ospan Ali (Unsplash)*
Redemption – *Lovelyday12 (iStock)*
Back – *Lee Scott (Unsplash)*

To obtain this PDF as an A6 printed booklet please go to https://thinkfaith.net/bookstore/
You Are Here ©Thinking Faith Network, 2026

ISBN 978-099575721-9

9 780995 757219

ThinkingFaithNetwork

www.thinkfaith.net