



The lost Paradise

The great adventure of humanity

Once upon a time people lived in a peaceful little place in happiness and freedom. Unexpectedly, out of nowhere, evil appeared and brought destruction and disorder.

People had to flee from this peaceful land to a place where they lived in fear and trembling. Ever since they have tried to find this lost place of happiness and freedom again. Since then people live in a battle between good and evil. But is there any hope left? Will the people find it again? Please find out by yourself by reading the book in which the secret of the world is hidden.

Some thoughts about the Bible.

Part I: Paradise (Creation)

Part II: The enemy appears: (Fall)

Part III: Finding Paradise again (Redemption)

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1 Introduction

One day, the Creator prepared a wonderful place for the people where they could live in peace and freedom. But today the situation is different. People no longer believe in this wonderful world. War, hatred and misery cover the world and people can hardly imagine that the world was once a better place. But it was. There is a book that explains everything. The book reveals the secrets of the world. That's why we'll open the book together and find out for ourselves what is hidden in it. This book is the Bible and is well known in the whole world. But often people do not know about the original plan of God revealed in the book. Therefore, let's uncover the world's secrets and find out how people can find the lost Paradise again.

Please read the passages from the Bible mentioned in the lectures before reading the script. The script is just an aid to better understand the text of the Bible.

With these lectures we will not cover the entire Bible. We emphasise the beginning and the end and will cover some other stories in between. In order to get a full picture of the Gospel, students have to study the whole Bible. Therefore, these lectures will not replace a Bible study. Rather, they should encourage you to start studying the whole Bible and to find out more about God and his vision on your own.

The goal of these lectures is to find the thread that runs through the whole Bible. I hope it will inspire you and may help you to think about the hope of the world that the Bible teaches. Perhaps it may help you to become more confident in your faith and to gain certainty about what you believe and why you believe it. I wish that you may become more confident in finding your calling in life and gain more passion for Jesus.

How to handle this assignment

In this assignment we are going to look at the whole Bible to find out about the destiny of man and about all the big questions of humanity. Who are we, why are we here, where do we come from and where are we going? Therefore, we study the Bible to find out what it says about these questions.

During your Bible study please write your observations on the worksheet attached to this script. The worksheet helps you to go through the Bible and observe carefully. After reading the Bible and writing down your observations, read the script and write down your interpretations on the worksheet. Of course, you can add more things or have opinions that differ from those in the script. The most important thing is that you learn to interpret what you read on your own. This script should just help you do it.

2 Part I: Paradise (Creation)

Before we now start digging into the Bible, let us ask who the Creator was before the existence of the world. These are some rather philosophical thoughts about God and not just a Bible study. But it is very important to think about it before we start thinking about humanity.

2.1 Lecture I: Who is this Creator?

Genesis 1

The Bible says that God is Love. If God is and has always been Love, he could not have been on his own before creation. God cannot claim to love if he was alone. Love can only be expressed when two or more people come together. Most Church Fathers believed that God was not alone. He lived as a Trinity. All three – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – were not created. Love existed before creation. God could love and had fellowship because he was not alone.

The Hebrew word in Genesis 1:1 for God is "Elohim". "Elohim" is the God the Creator but always used in plural. Therefore, the Bible gives us different hints that God was not alone. Moreover, in Genesis 1:26 the Bible says "let us make man". The Bible itself shows us that God was not alone before creation.

The New Testament revealed that Jesus existed before creation. (Joh 1:1–10, Col 1:16). Jesus is God and he was not created. It was Jesus who created the world.

Also, the Bible tells us that the spirit already existed before creation. Genesis 1:2 tells us that the spirit of God was above the surface of the water.

The Bible itself only mentions the Trinity once: in Matthew 28:19¹. It is probably not a very strong scientific argument. But from a philosophical point of view, it makes sense to state that the Creator was not alone and to claim that he was three in one. Therefore, the Church Fathers were right. The Creator was not alone.

The Creator has always lived relationally within the Trinity. This relationship was already possible before God created man.

Islam vehemently contradicts Trinity. In the Muslim view, Allah has always existed. He was not created. But he was alone. He could not love and had no relationship, because he was alone. Therefore, the God of the Muslims cannot be a relational God. However, the biblical God is a loving, relational, personal God who stands in strong contrast to the God of the Muslims. He could love and communicate, he could have relationship and could live together with others in perfect harmony.

¹ Therefore, as you go, disciple people in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (Mat 28:19)

Practical application: People may have an identity crisis. They want to recover their identity by looking into themselves. But they cannot find it. Would it not be better to look to the Creator because he made us in his image? God is the Trinity. He has never been alone and his identity is in the Trinity. There is no identity in singularity. It does not exist. Identity is therefore also relational. Therefore, people will not find their identity if they look only within themselves. They can find it in relationship to God and in their community.

God is unity in diversity: Community and the individual are important. It is not just the individual that is important as Westerners often think. The secret of the world is unity in diversity and this is the foundation of personality.

God consists of three persons in one and they all have three different destinies. The Father commands and the Son obeys. The Son can do nothing by himself, but only what he sees his Father doing². He willingly went to the cross. The Father didn't force him. The Son gave his life for the people. He wept and was in fear. In the flesh, he didn't like doing it but he did it in the spirit. He overcame nature through the spirit. The Father commanded and the Son obeyed because of his character and his destiny. There was no difference in value between the one who commanded and the one who obeyed. They are both God. Thus, there has always been a hierarchy within the Trinity, even before creation. Therefore, order and hierarchy were not created: they have always been in God.

Position has nothing to do with value. A child is not less valuable than its parents; it simply has a different position. A man is not more important or more valuable because he is the boss. Often, when people have problems, they leave order because they think the hierarchy is the problem. But this does not solve the problem. Often, the main problem is not order but the lack of understanding as to how people can live in subordination to one another.

Communication only makes sense when at least two people are involved. God was not alone and therefore he was able to communicate. Thus, communication was possible before creation and before the creation of man. God spoke in order to bring everything into existence. He created by the power of his words. Scientists have found that everything is built on DNA. So, who wrote this code? God wrote the code of the world and of humans. Therefore, communication was not created: it existed before creation and has always been a part of God.

Man can create with words. Man can bless or curse. Words can destroy or build up. Man can give names to his children, and the child's name will be important throughout its entire life. He is a communicator because he is made in the image of the Creator.

² Jn 5.19

God created new things. Therefore, the idea to build new things is not just a demand made to humans; it existed before creation and is part of the Creator himself. Even before creation, the Creator was a Creator.

Was God male or female? Who is more divine? The Creator made men and women in his image (Gen 1:27). Therefore, he has no gender. He was both male and female. A man is not more divine or has more wisdom than a woman even though many cultures still believe that today. The Creator has no gender. Therefore, men and women are equally valuable. None of them is more divine than the other.

This concept became the foundation of the Judeo-Christian understanding of society. God is female and male and therefore both have the same value but not the same role.

God had to take a rest from work (Gen 2:2-3). This idea would be unimaginable to a Muslim: It would make God too human. The Bible says that work and rest are both from God and in God. None of them is more divine than the other. God worked and rested. God has created us in his own image. If he rested on the seventh day, we should do it too. This idea created Western society: that on some days society must rest as much as possible. On Sundays, the seventh day of the week, the shops are closed. Is it the same in India? No, because this idea comes from Christianity.

2.2 Lecture II: Who is man?³

Genesis 1-2

In the beginning the Creator made man as male and female. He made them out of the dust and blew his spirit into them. He created them to live in a beautiful world in order to take care of this Paradise. There was no pain and no tears. The people didn't have to die and lived in peace without fear forever.

Men and women are both made in the image of God. They have the same value, but not the same role. The husband is the head of the family but he does not have more value than his wife. The wife is the helper. But both are obliged to rule and govern the world. The man can debate and argue with the woman. He doesn't have more wisdom. The man is the boss, but a boss like Jesus, who is ready to serve and to die for the wife.

Human beings are important in the world; otherwise the garden would be a jungle. Humans had to work and take care of the plants and the garden, but the Creator lets it grow. Both of them are needed. He wants man to create new things out of the resources that God gave him. Man will expand his creation and make it more beautiful.

³ Addition documents what is the source of everything and creation versus Evolution

God created the world but now man is called to civilize the world. Man can create new things. Man is not only a consumer; he is also a producer. Man can build new things because he is created in the image of God. God created human beings to work. Working and taking care of creation pleases God. People often think that work is a curse but that is not true. God created it in a good way. But why does it often seem to be the opposite? Work brings pain, suffering and oppression. Work was created and was good but something happened that cursed work. We will look into that in the next chapter.

Practical application: An Architect builds something new where there was nothing beforehand. He has an image in his head and then this image becomes visible in reality. He creates new things through his spirit.

Man should not only rule: he should also protect the whole creation. He should protect the weak ones from the strong ones. He should build houses to shelter people from rain and he should build protect a little baby.

God breathed life into man. People have a spirit and a body. The body makes the spirit human, but the foundation is the spirit. Man is human because he can do something that nature can't. He can change nature and act in opposition to nature. He is a person because he has a spirit. God blew his spirit into him and also into every embryo. The spirit is in the embryo from the very beginning, the fertilization of the egg in the mother's womb. To claim that God will give his spirit to the baby after birth or during the pregnancy is absurd. Nobody could determine an exact point in time. It only makes sense if we say that it is there the beginning. Man is first and foremost a human because of the spirit and not because of the body.

When I do not activate my SIM card I cannot use it. The SIM card is here physically but unusable. God activates the body through the spirit so that he could bring order into the world.

Man builds cities and increases society. Animals don't do that. Birds build nests, but always the same kind. Animals can love. But can they decide to love their enemy? Man can do that or should at least do that. He has the capacity to do that.

Animals seem to love according to their nature, feelings or instincts. But Jesus told humans to love (agape) their enemies. This is not a feeling. It is a decision against nature. Feelings hate enemies but man should overcome them and react differently. Thus, man is a created being who is above nature and who can change nature. He has a free will that cannot be found in animals. He can decide to react against nature. Therefore, man must be different than animals.

God didn't blow his spirit into animals like he did with man. Man, created in the image of God, is above creation. This is clearly what we can read in Genesis 1. This doesn't mean that man is allowed to misuse his position. But nowadays, in the West,

animals seem to have more rights than humans. Abortion and euthanasia are legal but people are shocked when animals are being killed.

Man can also decide between right or wrong actions. He has an obligation to the Creator. He has a free will, which seems to be a major difference between man and animals. Animals simply act according to their nature or their instincts but they do not decide according to a moral standard. Are animals guilty before God? I don't think so, because they do not have an obligation.

Animals are different: they do not build civilisations, they do not paint pictures or talk. They do not write poems or reports. Therefore, animals are different from man.

If one human were to live on an island, he or she would not need a lot of infrastructure. But when millions live in a city they need infrastructure otherwise they live in chaos. God ordered us to multiply, which means that we have to take care of civilization. In the text, "to multiply" means to increase both qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Therefore, humans are also responsible to increase in quality. Man has to take care of the sewage system of a city and of the traffic system in a country. Man has to be creative to find a solution to overcome the chaos. Humans are therefore called to build civilisations and to make it to a beautiful place where people and animals can live.

God created enough for everybody. He gave humans food and put them in a garden. Thomas Malthus⁴ said that the world has a certain amount of resources and that it is not enough for everyone. He also stated that it is a good thing when natural disaster kills people. He thought that Nature selects, and that otherwise there would not be enough for everyone. Did God forget that this could happen to his creation? Christians believe in an open system. God can give more. He is the Creator and he can add. There will always be enough for everybody. People don't live in a closed system, as the secular world believes. In a closed system, resources rule people. The amount of people, who can live on earth, depends on the amount of existing resources. Christians believe that resources are not the source of their provision but that God provides for everyone. Therefore, people are not limited by resources: they rule over them.

God created a place for them to live. Everyone has a place to live. There is enough space for everyone. God created an open system where he takes care of all people. It is not nature that creates a place for us. It is God. Overpopulation is therefore not a problem. The problem is how we treat each other. If people believe overpopulation is a problem, they have to believe that some people are superfluous or that some people should not be born. But who will decide who can live and who cannot? Can

⁴ Thomas Robert Malthus 1766– 1834

man be responsible or will there be a horror scenario similar to what we have seen in the past?

Why was there a tree? I assume it was a symbol of subordination. The one who creates, also creates limits to make it work. The train does not arrive or leave whenever you want it to. There is a schedule and you have to follow it or walk. You have to drive on the right side of the road otherwise you will end up in an accident. You have to follow the rules of the one who created the traffic system otherwise it doesn't work. If someone jumps out of the airplane, he will die. He cannot go against the law of gravity. Without gravity man, would be in outer space. Thus, gravity is essential for creation. You may not like this law but you cannot act in opposition to it.

"Do not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil or you must die." People must learn to submit themselves, just as God himself submits himself within the Trinity. Jesus submitted to the Father but he was not forced to do so. He submitted of his own free will. Thus, man cannot do everything. If we are not able to submit to others we do not express the image of God. We are not able to live in his creation. We are not able to live in freedom and order with one another.

Thus, the Creator also made laws showing people how to submit to one another. Therefore, the story tells us about a tree, a symbol that represents the question whether or not people are able to live in obedience to the Creator and to the law of humanities.

There was no living being suitable for Adam. God probably wanted Adam to realize this on his own. I am alone and this is not good. Man needs relationships. That doesn't mean that everybody has to get married. The main principle is, that everybody needs relationships. Man is made in God's image and God himself is relational. Therefore, man should not be alone otherwise he will not live according to God's image.

Man named the animals. He was creative. God didn't tell him how to name the animals; he could choose the names on his own. God wants us as partners not as slaves. He wants us to become like him- to create and name new things. Man should not just obey God's commandments. He should surprise God with his creativity. Often, people think Christianity is only about what you should not do, rather than what you should do. To be creative means to do things with excellence and to surprise others with it. Surprising God means that he may say it is very good. It is important to be creative in God's spirit and to do things that only you can do. If Rembrandt hadn't painted his paintings nobody else could have done it. His paintings are very famous and were a blessing for a lot of people throughout the last centuries. If Rembrandt hadn't painted it, the painting would not exist. Everybody is made in

God's image and has this kind of spirit, to do things that nobody else can do; things that animals cannot do.

God anesthetized man and woman was taken from him. It was the first surgery, a long time before people discovered anaesthesia. But I think this can also be read symbolically. It doesn't matter whether it was a rib or some other body part that God took from man but the woman was not formed from the earth. She was created out of man. Man and woman complement each other. Without woman, man is not complete and does not represent the whole image of God. The assistant was suited him exactly.

Family is the best representation of God here on earth. When a man and a woman commit to staying together until death will separate them, they express God's character in a wonderful way. They can trust one another to never leave the relationship. This certainty makes a strong community possible. Therefore, family became the best image representing who God is. This concept of family made Europe strong.

Can gays marry? Two men cannot replace this. It will be not in the image of God. In his law in the Bible, God showed us very clearly that same-sex intercourse is not what he wants. He wanted that a man and a woman build a family.

Unmarried people should cooperate in teams with men and women. But in every sphere, there need to be men and women. Such as in a family. When humanity misunderstands and misinterprets this, they destroy the idea of the Creator and creation.

Is it important that people leave their original families, get married and start a new family? It makes multiplication possible. When people don't build up a new home with a new family, they will always remain in a protected environment and cannot assume responsibility. Multiplication needs to set people free. Therefore, God wanted married couples to build a new family and leave their original family. This is part of his perfect creation and is therefore good to do.

There used to be no shame. Why is it different today? Let's see in the next chapter. Imagine you don't have to be ashamed anymore and can be just as you are. You don't have to please others. Wouldn't this be freedom? Perhaps this is possible.

3 Part II: The enemy appears (Fall)

3.1 Lecture III: Where does evil come from?

Genesis 3

Can snakes speak? Was it maybe just Eva's inner voice? It would not be a big challenge for Christians to interpret it like this. But somehow, it's funny. Did the snake have feet before? Can an animal sin? The snake was punished afterwards, even though it was an animal and not a human. It is probably best to not read this text literally. It is a symbolic story that shows us a certain principle and tells the readers where evil comes from. The principle seems to be that man listens to evil and not to God and that therefore evil came into the world. Let us have a closer look.

The snake doubted God's goodness. The snake cornered Eva so that she had to defend God. "Of course, you can eat from all the trees in the garden but not from this one specific tree. If you are allowed to eat from all the other trees, why not from this one too?" The snake brought insecurity by asking questions. It doubted the goodness of God without saying it explicitly. The question has a hidden motive: Are you sure that God wants the best for you?

The snake was lying. It said that they would not die; that humans would be like God and could decide on their own what is good and right. "Do you want to live a long life in darkness and not use your talents? Be free and become independent. You have to become an adult. It is your choice."

Adam and Eve were seduced by these sophisticated words from the snake or by this inner voice. It was not just the woman; the man stood next to her. At least he accepted it later and also ate from it. This means both are guilty.

By taking the fruit, something happened inside of them. It was a spiritual separation not just a wrong action. They broke the spiritual law of obedience. It is like someone jumping out of the airplane: he will die and cannot be restored to life. This spiritual law was broken and made humans unhuman. Man couldn't live in perfect harmony anymore and suddenly there were negative consequences.

How often are we seduced? "Here take this, it does not matter if it's drugs, alcohol or cigarettes." We take it and something happens inside of us. Something breaks inside of us. We know that we should not have done it but we did it and acted according to our own law. Something inside of us broke and we aren't the same person anymore.

Adam and Eve don't want to obey the law of the creator they want to build up their own moral. They want to decide by them self what is good and right but it was not possible. Like someone don't want to obey the law of nature and will jump over a

cliff. The gravitation is given. He will die because he cannot go against the law of nature, the law that God created.

Now, the consequences of their disobedience became visible. Shame came over them and turned their life upside down. "Who told you that? You don't have to be ashamed." Thus, they were ashamed of something that they did not need to be ashamed of. Their relationship to God was broken. Their identity was broken. Therefore, they looked into themselves instead of looking to God. They could only see the creation but no longer the Creator. Thus, they saw themselves but were no longer sure whether or not they were good. Their view turned from God to man and they were ashamed of their nakedness.

Also, fear came over them. Why were they afraid of God? God did not create this. And he wants to free man from it. "In the world, you are afraid, but behold I have overcome fear⁵." Something emerged in man, something that had not been there before. Disobedience produces fear. Often, we live in fear because we don't know whether the things we do are right or wrong. We live in fear because we live in disobedience.

Now, man has to live in the world and decide what is good or bad on his own. This produces fear and he lives in uncertainty and without direction. But is there a way out? Perhaps you can slowly start to guess what Jesus did for us on the cross.

Why did God first talk to Adam when it was the woman who took the fruit? God wants a person in charge. The boss is responsible. Jesus took the guilt of our sins, because he is the boss. He is not the one who brought sin into the world, but he is the only one who can take it away. Taking responsibility means that a person is responsible for looking for a solution even though they didn't create the problem. But in our society people don't want to take responsibility any more. It seems that they are not willing to solve things that were not their mistake. Therefore, people rather want to have a team where nobody is the boss and no one has to take responsibility. To be the boss does not mean to have more power; it means to be willing to solve the problem even if it's not your mistake. The leader is willing to look for a solution without blaming others. In the next verses, we will see what can happen, if no one is responsible or no one wants to be the leader.

Humans blame each other. Nobody is guilty, so nobody must solve the problem. Someone has to stop the blame game and start to look for a solution. But because of the Fall man had the tendency to blame others because he was ashamed of his guilt. He wants to become good out of himself and this made him blind for the community. His first interest is now to be good by himself. It makes him feel good when he can blame someone else. What would be happen if Adam would stand up

⁵ Jn 16:33; Love knows no fear (1 John 4:18)

and would ask God for forgiveness for his mistakes and would be willing to solve the problem?

Now, women and snakes became enemies. There was a rupture between humans and animals. They could no longer live together in freedom.

Women will now give birth with a lot of pain. A birth can be very painful for a woman. But it has not always been like this. It is also a consequence of the Fall. It means that giving birth to a child was also painful before the Fall, but after the Fall it increased. The work that women now have to do, is much more stressful and painful.

Women are also longing for men, but they now will oppress them. There was a rupture in the relationship between man and woman, between the stronger and the weaker, between the boss and the servant. Before the Fall, this relationship was good and the one in the higher position didn't misuse the other. The brokenness in relationships became a new reality. The powerful will use their position for their own sake and not for God's or the community's sake anymore.

Man, now has to work in pain. "You'll eat from it through pain-filled labor for the rest of your life." Work is something good but was corrupted by the Fall. Now, work is hard and stressful and people see it as a curse. A lot of religious people keep a distance from work and prefer to pray. They think that working is a curse and they want to flee from it. But this is a big misunderstanding: Work is a part of us and is our destiny. We cannot get rid of it otherwise man's destiny is lost. Man cannot follow God without work because it is his calling. Work is good, created by God, but corrupted through the Fall. Instead of fleeing from it, Christians should bring healing to it.

Death came into the world as a consequence of the Fall. Animals, humans and all of nature now die. But will it always be like this? However, man will not die all of a sudden but in the future and this was not before the Fall.

God sent the people away and put a guard in front of the garden so that they would not eat from the Tree of Life and would live in sin and shame forever. It is a protection for them and not a curse. He sent them away out of love.

In Revelation, the Tree of Life will come back and now the people can eat from it and live forever. Through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, he made it possible that we can eat from it.

"Let everyone listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To everyone who conquers I will give the privilege of eating from the Tree of Life that is in God's Paradise." "To the messenger of the church in Smyrna, write: The first and the last, who was dead and became alive, says this." (Rev 2:7-8)

A lot of religions have an answer as to where evil comes from but the secular world doesn't have an answer. They see many evil things in the world and ask where they come from. They may say Pandora's Box had been opened and evil came out of it. However, if everything comes from nature then evil is also from nature. Many philosophers tried to fix this problem. But it didn't work. Somehow evil seems to have a spiritual dimension that only can be solved spiritually. But secular people think that this is ridiculous. But is there another reasonable solution?

The solution that Christianity proposes is the cross, as we will see later. Without the cross the world will go on its way and man is hopelessly alone in this fallen world. We need something that is outside of nature so that it can change nature.

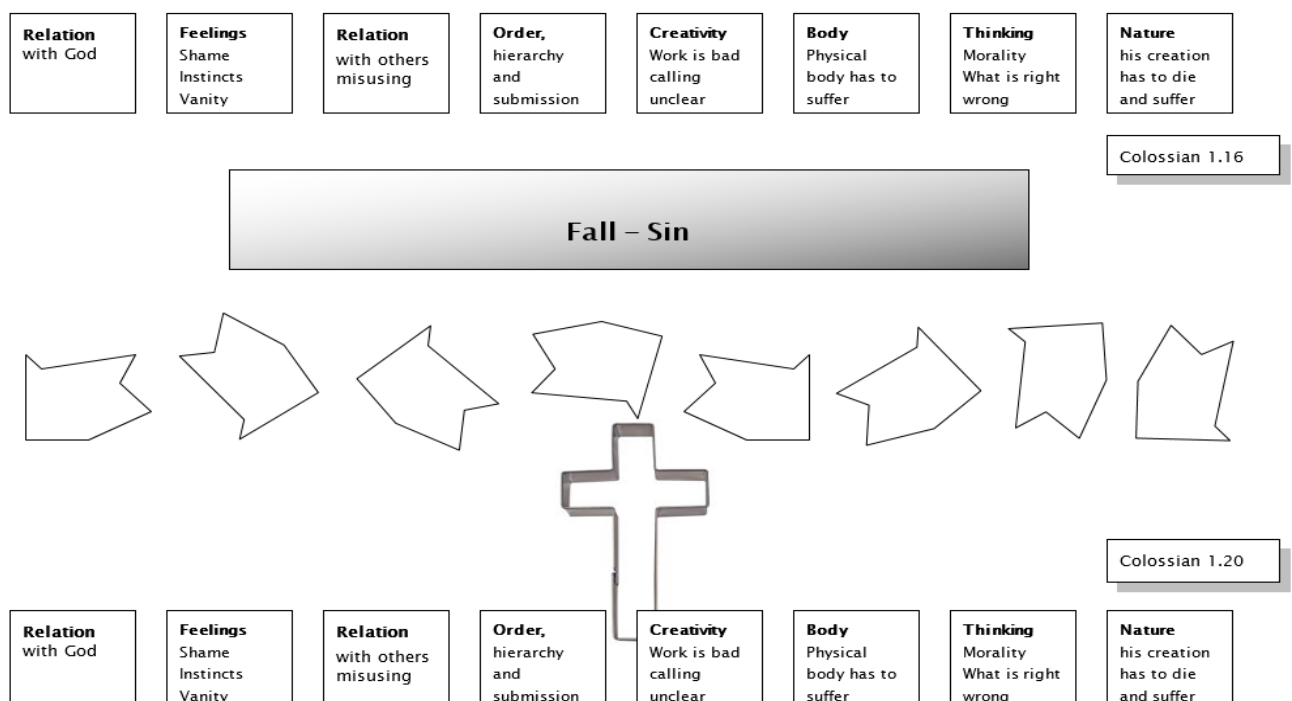
What has been lost in the Fall?

In sum, the Fall has caused four relationships to break and this will already give us a hint as to what Jesus will heal in future⁶.

1. Relationship with God (They were afraid and went into hiding)
2. Relationship with oneself (bad feelings, shame, anxiety and stress)
3. Relationships with other people (frustration, anger and oppression)
4. Relationship to nature (enmity between humans and animals, death)

The next graphic also illustrates what we have lost through the Fall:

All the squares were created by God. But through the Fall they became imperfect. The squares were still there but they were not complete anymore. But through Jesus Christ everything has been restored. Through him everything was created and through him everything will be restored. The visible and the invisible, the whole creation.⁷



4 Part III: Finding Paradise (Redemption)

4.1 Lecture IV: Why were God's people not successful?

People were not able to reach the promised land again. (Old Testament)

4.1.1 Nearly everything was lost

Genesis 6:12–13/7:1/9:1–17

People became so violent and bad: killing each other, sacrificing children to idols, exploiting the poor, stealing and lying. Hell was on earth and God could not stand it any more. Life wasn't anymore possible under these circumstances. He wanted to save Noah so that he would not end up in hell. If God hadn't intervened and stopped evil, the whole world would probably have ended in hell. Therefore, God saved Noah so that he could live. Noah was probably not perfect but the least evil. Everyone else was so far gone that they could not possibly change their habits again. Thus, God didn't punish; he saved the world. He intervened so that life could go on. He didn't allow the devil to conquer his creation.

The Fall almost destroyed God's creation completely. Now, God made a fresh start with Noah and his family. But the Fall didn't change the original plan of God. The destiny for humanity remains. People should take dominion over his creation and take care of it. They should increase and multiply.

But now something changed. Everything that moves is now human food. Now man can eat meat; but not all meat. Meat with that still has blood in it shall not be eaten. Later, God explained this in his law: "Don't eat bloody meat, because blood is the symbol of life⁸."

Because of the Fall, God introduced laws because the people couldn't live without them anymore. God established the first civil law in order to protect his creation. People who kill others have to pay with their own life. They are not allowed to kill and if they do it, they have to face the consequences.

If people live in freedom and order without the force of law, it means that the fear of God is in them. Thus, the amount of laws correlates to how far a nation veered away from God.

God promised to never destroy the world through a flood again. It can be relaxing to know that God is above all things. At that time, it was the flood that frightened people but I think it can also be seen as a symbol of disaster in general. God is above all disasters and earthquakes. The fallen world brought these catastrophes along with it but God will not let the devil defeat his creation. He has a different plan. Even the

⁸ Lev 17.11–13

flood could not overcome his creation. Jesus told us that we should not be shocked when such things happen and that they will not overcome the world⁹.

God gave the people a covenant they can see all the time so that they would be reassured. It is the rainbow that we see when it's raining, to remember that God will not destroy the world ever again.

We can see that with the new beginning through Noah, God's original plans didn't change. But it seems that it will take him a bit longer to restore his original plans.

4.1.2 Plan B

Genesis 12:1–3/35:9–12

As a next step to restore his original plan God choose Abraham. We can assume that Abraham was not perfect but at least he was not as evil as the other people around him. God called him out of a pagan culture and promised him a great nation that would become a blessing to all the nations; to him and all his descendants. The original plan to give them the creation to take care of is now given to Abraham.

Now, the promise of Paradise, that had been lost through the Fall, was given to the next generations. God gave Abraham, Isaac and Jacob the same promise he gave to Adam: "Be fruitful and multiply and build a nation where my people can live in freedom." The devil could not overcome God's creation.

4.1.3 Let's go the right way

Genesis 13:5–13

In the Promised Land, Lot and Abraham had a dispute and they decided to separate. Abraham trusted the Creator and therefore he let Lot make the decision, even though Abraham was the boss and Lot was his nephew. Lot chose the fertile land and had Abraham take the desert. Abraham went to live in the desert but he became rich. Lot chose the fertile land and the cities and the cities of Sodom and Gomorra burned down. Abraham trusted the Creator to provide for him – even though the land was not fertile – and he became the richest man in the country. Why did that happen? Merely having a lot of resources is not the foundation for becoming rich. It is the Creator and the creative spirit that he gave to everyone. Abraham understood that and was not tempted by the things, which were already there: the fertile land and the civilization in the city. In contrast, Lot saw all the good things and just wanted to consume them. He became a consumer instead of becoming a producer like Abraham. But Abraham saw with his spiritual eyes and understood the Creator. Abraham walked in the calling of the Creator and multiplied and took care of the land. Lot enjoyed civilization and lost everything in the end.

⁹ Mk 13:7–13

The Creator is the source of everything, the provider and giver. Abraham acted according to his will and the Creator gave him everything he needed. Later we will see how he became rich.

4.1.4 The Creator revealed himself

Genesis 22:1–13

Why was Abraham asked sacrifice his son? At that time, people sacrificed their own children to their gods. Abraham's relatives, perhaps even his father, had done this. Abraham had grown up in a pagan culture in Ur where they did horrible things to please their gods. But the Creator wanted to make sure that Abraham understood that sacrificing children was not something God he wanted people to do. He taught Abraham a practical lesson. The Creator held Abraham back from sacrificing his son and provided him with a ram. This happened in the land of Moria, on a mountain where later the temple would be built. In the temple, the Priests sacrificed animals to the Creator. But Jesus took these sacrifices away and replaced them again with a human sacrifice.

Abraham received a new revelation from the Creator, a revelation showing who he really is. He tore him out of the wrong thinking of his pagan culture and gave him a new mind.

There is another story to illustrate this: In the 5th century, Saint Patrick reported that many Irish Celts offered children to their Gods, especially around the time of Christmas where the days get shorter and the nights get longer. The Celtic animists believed that the god of the sun was angry and that they had to satisfy him to make him happy again. The purest offering was a young child. Whenever they were in a really serious, dire situation, they offered a child. They did this from generation to generation and the sun always came back. This centuries–old tradition made them believe that the offering as necessary even though they didn't like to do it. It was like a natural law for them. Saint Patrick came to Ireland and told them that they don't have to do it; that the Creator will bring the sun back anyway. The Celts believed it and the sun came back even after they had stopped with these evil offerings. Their culture told them something wrong and the Christians missionaries changed that. This new revelation enabled their civilization to grow. People were no longer living under the law of nature or depending on cruel gods. They were superior to creation and ruled it with the certainty that God will bring the sun back again.

Nowadays, this festival is known as Christmas. The Christians took this event from the Celts and used it to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The Son of God replaced the sun god.

4.1.5 The followers trusted the Creator

Genesis 26:12–18

Abraham and Isaac became very wealthy, even though Abraham had chosen the desert. Why is that? Abraham has dug wells. The Creator gave him the idea. "If you don't have any water, I'll give it to you. You just have to trust me." God gave him the spirit to create something out of nothing. Man is God's partner in taking care of his creation and fixing whatever is not in good order. Thus, he started digging wells.

The Philistines behaved like Lot: Whenever there was no water left in a certain area, they left. But Abraham had a different view of the world. He said to himself: "If God brings me here, he will take care of me." But he did not wait around until his God sent water from the sky. He began to use his mind, to look for water. Abraham acted in faith. Faith is something that man cannot see, but he knows that the Creator will do it. He was able to create something out of nothing. He had the Spirit of the Creator, unlike Lot or the Philistines.

The Philistines envied Abraham and Isaac and blocked their wells again. Why? Fatalists do not believe that humans can change their circumstances or can contribute to their environment. The Philistines were fatalists and thought that when the gods did not bring any water, the people couldn't do anything about it.

In fact, they even thought that humans were not allowed to try to change something. This would have gone against the will of their gods and would therefore be evil. Therefore, they blocked the wells again. They were predictable; slaves and victims of the natural process. They lost the spirit of the Creator that he had given to every human being in the beginning. As a consequence, their civilization did not grow but Abraham's culture grew. Why didn't the Philistines learn from Abraham and Isaac and also dig wells as? Because they had a fatalistic view of the world and sacrificed to the rain god, which made them blind. They didn't know the Creator and were blind to the possibilities they had in building up civilisations.

Another example: The animists sacrificed to their god of water, so that the god no longer flooded the city, but they did not build a dam. But the Christians built dams. They took responsibility and stopped the floods and people were protected. Today's statistics shows that the Christianized part of the world is more developed than the rest.

4.1.6 God wants to bring them back to the promise land

This idea is mentioned in the Old Testament over 300 times: God will bring the people back to the Promised Land. But they have to follow him and his law. We will only look at a few passages in this lecture but I encourage you to go through the whole Old Testament to find all the other passages.

What was the promise for the people of Israel?¹⁰ Now, the Creator liberated Israel from slavery and promised them a land where milk and honey flow. But they could only reach it on the following condition: They would have to abide by the laws he gave them, so that they could live together in freedom.

The Creator wanted his children to regain the lost Paradise. They were to possess the land forever; but they needed to keep his commandments. The promise was the same as in the beginning. God's original plan hadn't changed. God wants to bring the people back to the lost Paradise. This is the heart of the Old Testament and of the Gospel. But how can people recover it? It seems to be impossible to try to recover it by one's own strength. Throughout history people have failed again and again.

The promise of the prophets?¹¹ Would you want to live in such a world? A place where you can eat whatever you want, where you can live in freedom and peace. Such a world was promised to Israel by the prophets. Presently we see that our world is very different. We are not there yet, but God gave us a promise, a promise that every child wants. God didn't change his original plan but it seems that it will take longer to regain it. The promise is eternal life in a wonderful land. There will be a king who takes care of us. Who is this king? The promise has been made to all the nations who follow this king. Not just the Jews, but everyone who follows this king. Are you curious to see how it is going to happen?

4.2 Lecture V: Help from the outside (New Testament)

4.2.1 The Saviour appears again

Luke 24:36–43

It was a shock for the disciples to see Jesus alive. But this was the promise that God had made. The promise had always been the same since the beginning of the world. People would live forever in a wonderful land. But the Fall destroyed everything and people became cruel and had to die. This promise had not been fulfilled yet. But now Jesus overcame death and was resurrected from the dead to gain everlasting life in this Promised Land. This is not fully real yet, but we have God's promise and the proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was not hungry when he asked for a fish but he wanted to show the disciples how a resurrected body would look like. A resurrected body will be hungry and will not be completely different from our present bodies. The difference is not on the outside; it is on the inside. The mortal body has been transformed into an eternal body. It was not a spirit or a ghost; it was a real body in a real world. This was the promise of the Creator.

¹⁰ Dt 4:39–40/11:8–9

¹¹ Hs 37:24–28/Is 65:17–25

The disciples doubted it. Perhaps they were influenced by Greek thinking and not by the Bible. In Greek thought – mainly in Plato – the world is nothing but an illusion full of suffering. Real life is in an immaterial world without suffering. This platonic idea can be very attractive. Sometimes people live in a horrible world and just want to flee from it. It often seems that evil will win. But God has a different plan. He will not let the devil overcome his creation. He wants to redeem it. He does not want to destroy the body; he wants to redeem it. Evil will not overcome God's creation. Even death cannot overcome it.

In the Jewish understanding – derived from the Old Testament – the Messiah would come and restore Jerusalem again. He would kill the conquerors and all the enemies and establish his everlasting Kingdom. However, the Jews misunderstood something: Jesus came, but he didn't kill their enemies. He died on the cross so that evil people could be transformed and live in the Promised Land forever. He didn't come to establish the kingdom of the Jews. He came to build up his creation. He overcame evil, even death. The last enemy was death, the last thing that had been brought into the world by the Fall. With his resurrection, Jesus exposed it and made it visible for all to see. He overcame the enemy and his kingdom started right at that moment. The promise that had been echoed by the law and the prophets was fulfilled. Jesus presented a new model of humanity to the world.

But he disappeared after 40 days and left the people alone. People still die and evil is still amongst them. So, where is this kingdom? Did the disciples misunderstand something? When will the promise be fulfilled?

4.2.2 What did Croatians believe?

1 Corinthians 15:12–32

The Corinthians wanted to be holier and more spiritual than others. During the services, everyone wanted to talk and speak in tongues. There had been many discussions on sacrificial meat, marriage, Holy Communion and so on. But they had forgotten the most important thing: Loving one another. Therefore, Paul wrote a letter with this command: do everything out of love.

But at the end of his letter (in Chapter 15) he talks about a deep-seated problem; and this was a theological problem.

People wanted to be spiritual and they thought that the practical, day-to-day aspects of life were less important. They probably also had this platonic worldview, which states that the material world has no value: it is merely an illusion and the immaterial world is what is really important. Therefore, the Corinthians put a lot more emphasis on the so-called spiritual gifts and neglected the practical aspects. The soul was seen as the most important thing and the body was only secondary.

In Paul's view, the real problem was that they no longer believed in the bodily resurrection. They started to believe that life in this world is not that important since it would pass anyway. Why should they put effort into a functioning structure or good relationships? Why should they take care of the poor when this material world was not important? Why should they control their body and emotions when there would be no hope for this earthly body? At the end of first Corinthians, Paul addresses this problem. In verse 32 he says: "If we do not believe in the resurrection, then let's drink and eat, for in the morning we die."

Many Christians think Corinthians teaches us just about morality. But in that case people misunderstand Paul. The Corinthians had a deep theological problem and this hindered them from loving one another.

This can also be a problem in today's society: Why should people take care of their own body, of others or of nature when – in the end – death will be their only wage? A lot of young people escape to an immaterial world: games, films, music or the Internet. They have been hurt by the material world and do not believe in change anymore. They embrace Plato's philosophy because it shows them salvation and sets them free from pain and from this horrible world.

Paul here explains his understanding of body and spirit, something that is really important to understand. There is one body and one spirit. After the understanding of the Jews both will die because of the fall. There is no separation of body and spirit. The understanding that by death the souls will leave the body is not from the Jewish. They belong together and therefore they will arise by the resurrection both together.

When Jesus comes back, everything will be transformed into immortality. Paul was very clear on that: what you do today will have an impact on your life for eternity. Nothing is in vain and everything has an eternal impact.

Revelation 20:6 tells us that if you are part of the first resurrection (spiritual resurrection) then you have already overcome spiritual death by accepting Jesus. You don't have to fear the second death (physical death) any longer. You will live.

And Paul reminded us: Nothing you do for God is in vain. Everything that is in line with his original calling has eternal value. This view enabled the West to look into the future, to build cathedrals that were built over hundreds of years and are still not finished today. The builders didn't give up even though they would never see the finished building. They didn't give up because they believed in the resurrection. People do not just build up things for themselves but for eternity, for God and for the next generation. People believed that they would see it after the resurrection and that they would be able to enjoy their work even though they will not see it in their present life.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ made the West strong. The West was able to overcome evil through their faith in Jesus Christ. There is nothing in this world that could overcome the power of Jesus Christ. Thus, Christians rose above their circumstances and were able to turn them into something good. They knew that even if they die, everything they do is done for the lost Paradise. Nothing they did was in vain.

4.2.3 Restoration of the whole creation

Romans 8:19–23

God's creation was made for eternity. Through the Fall, death has come into the world and now everything must die. Nature must die, not because of a fault of its own but because of humans. But it has been given the same promise as humanity. God will not let the devil overcome his creation. When we look around us, we can see that nature is in bad circumstances. People already predict the collapse of the world. But Jesus has conquered death through the cross. And now we are waiting for the resurrection, together with the entire creation. Jesus did not just save our souls. He saved our whole body, all the animals and the whole creation.

But humans are not passive in this situation. They are working on the restoration of God's creation. Christians are called to protect and restore nature, to clean the water and decrease pollution. Everything that people do to protect his creation is a spiritual act, even picking up the trash from the sidewalk or separating waste in order to recycle it. Everything people do for the restoration of his creation is not in vain. Right now, people are working to regain the lost Paradise. Slowly, Paradise becomes visible.

4.2.4 The saviour comes back

1. Th 4:13–17

Some Christians quarrel about this text: They interpret it in a way that contradicts the promise of the Creator. Therefore, it is important to dig deeper into this passage and read about the hope that Paul had for the world on your own.

Obviously, some people didn't have any hope anymore because people died and Jesus hadn't come back. Perhaps, they wondered whether it was really true that Jesus Christ would come back and fulfil the promise. Therefore, Paul wanted to inform them that they should not live like people without hope.

At the beginning of the letter he tells them to keep going and to live a morally upright life. In the end he summarises the message in 1 Th 5:16–24: "Be joyful in everything and remain blameless when our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, appears."

Some people had already died a long time ago and their bodies had decayed. Jesus rising from the dead after three days probably seemed more plausible than resurrecting people after a long time when their bodies were almost gone. They quarrelled whether or not the living would have an advantage over the dead. Thus, Paul corrected this view that made them hopeless. He said that the people who would be alive when Jesus appears would not have any advantage over the people who already died.

Paul mainly said that the living has no advantage over the dead. The dead will rise with the living at (almost) the same moment in time. First, the dead will rise, but almost at the same time as the ones who are still alive.

In Greek, the word "descend" means "parousia". At that time, this word was used to say that a king or emperor had arrived. It can also be used to say that the bride will meet the bridegroom. It is used seven times in 1. Thessalonian. "Parousia" was also used for the return of Paul or Stephanus¹².

Also, this word is used in the present tense and not the future tenses. This means that something does not just happen in the future but in the present, again and again. Jesus will therefore not come back only once. He is in our midst, represented by the Holy Spirit and becomes visible more and more through the Christians. God's Kingdom will become visible more and more.

But here, Paul obviously meant that some day Jesus will fully appear and the dead will be resurrected. The dead are not being resurrected continuously. It will only happen when Jesus becomes fully visible and when evil will be destroyed.

The Greek word for "sky" is "ouranos" It does not necessarily denote the visible sky above us. In the Old Testament, the cloud was in the desert, the cloud filled the temple and the tabernacle. The temple had been destroyed and then the cloud came over Jesus. The word "cloud" should be understood figuratively. Both the "sky" and the "cloud" are symbols for God's dwelling. Certainly, Jesus can come back in a real cloud. However, it is not about the cloud, but about God's presence and all Jews would have understood that.

The Greek word for "air" is "ah-ayr" and is an expression for God's breath or his presence. It doesn't necessarily mean actual air.

The word "cought up" or "rapture" ("harpazo" in Greek) means "to tear something out". For example, to tear people out of the water before they drown. In this context, it could mean that the Creator will tear people out of death and give them eternal life. The Creator tears his people out of the place of mortality into the place of immortality.

¹² 1. Cor 16:17

In this passage, Paul says that some day Jesus will appear fully and that he will tear the people out of death and give them eternal life. They will then be in the presence of God for all eternity. This passage doesn't say anything about Christians going to Heaven. Instead, Heaven will come down to us, which is what we find in Revelation and which had always been the view of the Jews.

Nowadays, many people take this passage to be a proof of dispensationalism or the end of the world. They think the world will collapse and Christians will go to heaven. But does this interpretation not make Christians lose all hope for the world? Does this view not come from Hollywood rather than from the Bible? The Anglican Bishop N. T. Wright vehemently criticized this theory. He said that it spreads a one-sided pessimistic worldview amongst Christians. "They would no longer have hope that God is renewing and transforming the world through his salvation, which is already taking place in a fragmented manner"¹³.

It seems to me that in this passage Paul emphasises that the dead will not have any disadvantage and that they too will rise to the Glory of God, in his kingdom, where there is no distress and no pain. Therefore, we should not read something into the text that isn't there.

4.2.5 Evil will not win over his Creation

2. Pet 3:1–13

Many people think that in this passage Peter says that heaven and earth will disappear and the souls will go to Heaven. But does Peter actually say that? What does this text really say?

In chapter three of the second letter of Peter, he specifically wrote that people should remember the predictions of the Holy Prophets and the commandment of the Lord. But what are those?

What do the scoffer say? "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." They didn't believe that Jesus would come back and that the promise of the prophets and promise of the Lord would be fulfilled. They didn't have hope for the future and started to live according to their own desires. Why should they go through the suffering that Peter addressed in his first letter? Why should they live a holy life when the promise would not be fulfilled?

Also, they started to ask whether or not the Lord was really going to judge evil. Jesus had disappeared and the first Christians believed that he would come back within their own generation. But at that point, a lot of them had already died and

¹³ N.T. Wright, *surprised by hope*, 2009

Jesus hadn't come back. Why should they still believe in this promise? This question is also relevant to us, 2000 years later. Thus, this letter is also very important for our generation.

Peter states, that the scoffer deliberately ignores the fact that the Creator had always judged evil throughout history. Sometimes it may have taken a little longer but it always happened at some point. Therefore, he will also come to judge evil nowadays.

Peter already started his argument in chapter two: The Creator will not be delayed and he didn't spare the fallen angels. He didn't spare the ancient world. He punished the people in Sodom and Gomorrah. These are examples showing the ungodly people what is going to happen to them. But the Creator rescued the righteous people such as Noah or Lot. Thus, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people and not to punish them together with the unrighteous people. He will specifically destroy those who despise authority and those who look for satisfaction in their flesh by indulging in their passions. They walk on the path of Balaam but a donkey rebukes them.

It seems that Peter here addresses the people who despise authority, who look for satisfaction in their flesh, acting according to their own passions. This would obviously be those wrong teachers, who try to deceive the church.

Peter also mentions that – at the time of Noah – the world was flooded with water. But the present heaven and earth have been reserved for fire and are being kept whole for the day when ungodly people will be judged and destroyed. There will also be judgement, as in Noah's days, but not by way of water: This time it will be fire.

The judgement will be suspended until the day when ungodly people will be judged and destroyed. The people in Noah's day thought that God will not judge them, but then judgement came like a thief in the night. But after the punishment, heaven and earth were still there. Thus, God cleansed the world from evil. He purified it and the same thing will happen again.

The Greek word "ghay", meaning "earth", can also mean a part of the world or a region but not necessarily the whole world. Thus, it doesn't say that the whole world will be punished. It could only be a part of the world. We can assume that it will be the evil part. This fire will purify the world and will destroy evil. But the good things will survive. Thus, Peter doesn't say that the whole world will come to an end and collapse. Instead, he says (in a symbolic way) that the world will be judged, that judgement will come as it has come before and will destroy evil.

Perhaps the most important thing that Jesus preached was the Kingdom of God. In the Gospels, it is mentioned more than 220 times. Nothing else is emphasized that much. This seems to be in line with what the Israelites believed: That the Messi-

ah will come back to restore Israel, the lost Paradise and the whole creation. This was the prophet's prediction and the commandments that they should remember in this letter. God will keep his promise and he will restore the lost Paradise. He will put an end to evil. Therefore, keep going and live your life in holiness.

"But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief."

God doesn't want anyone to be lost. Everyone should hear the good news. Therefore, he doesn't deliver judgement right now. Also, those one thousand years seem to be symbolic and cannot be read as actually one thousand years. Peter simply uses this to express that we do not have the same timeframe as the Creator. Often, people only look to the present and don't have a long-term perspective. Christians have to rethink that and prepare for a longer period.

The first Christians thought that Jesus would come back within their generation but he didn't. Now, after 2000 years we are still in the same situation. We probably wonder at what point evil will come to an end. But God is not delayed. Our perspective of what God wants is not God's perspective. He gave us his revelation in the last book of the Bible: we are now the ones who should rule as kings and priests in the world. Christians should be prepared. In Mark¹⁴, Jesus mentions that nobody knows when Jesus will come back. Perhaps, it would not be good for us to know. Thus, we should always remember that the day will come and that God will judge evil. But we must be aware that it might take a long time.

... and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies (elements in KJV) will be burned up and dissolved...

Some people read this in a literal manner and think that this passage describes the collapse of the world. First, we have to read it in context and be open to read it symbolically.

The original Greek word for "heaven" is "ouranos". It doesn't necessarily refer to the physical heaven. "Ouranos" is rather denotes a spiritual realm. Also, "to pass away"¹⁵ could be translated to "come near" or "take aside". The word "stoicheion" is used for "heavenly bodies" (or "elements"). This word is also used in Galatians 4,3 and 4,9 where it translates to "basics" or "elementary principles of the world". It represents the weak and miserable things in the world. It is also mentioned in Colossians 2,8

¹⁴ Mark. 13.32–37

¹⁵ The Greek word *parerchomai*

and 2,20, which refers to the deceptive philosophy of the human tradition. Also, "elements" cannot be translated to "physical elements" or "the creation that will collapse". It seems to represent the evil things in the world that will be destroyed.

Thus, we must read this verse symbolically. It tells us that evil, the things that are done against the promise of the Creator and his commandment will come to an end. They will be burned up and dissolved.

Since all these things be dissolved, why should you live in holiness and godliness waiting for the coming of the day of God, of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!

Obviously, Peter made it clear in his letter that people didn't live a godly life anymore. Why should they live a holy and godly life when the promise will not be fulfilled? Why should we today live a godly life when everything will disappear and be destroyed? Peter was called the apostle of hope. Here, he makes a philosophical argument: in order to take care of the world and of others and to live a holy and godly life people need hope. At that time, the people had lost hope because they didn't believe in God's promise anymore. Nowadays, Christians sometimes don't have any hope for the world either. They think that everything will disappear. Why should they take care of society, politics, the environment or their bodies, when all of this doesn't have a future? Why they should follow and obey his commandments?

Peter said that it would be not in vain to live a godly life because Jesus will come back and evil will be destroyed.

But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The Greek word for "new" is "kainos". The best translation for it would be "refreshing" or "redeeming". Also, it doesn't mean "completely new". Rather, it means the reforming of something in the present. This passage is not necessarily about the collapse or disappearance of the world, as a lot of people might think. It is about the restoration of his whole creation and this idea is in line with the Old Testament and the other parts of the Bible. He restores the lost Paradise through the death of Jesus Christ, where people can live in freedom and peace. Therefore, we should not see it as something totally new but rather something that will be renewed.

Furthermore, Peter says that we believe in a new heaven and a new world. It is a strong argument against the platonic worldview of these days. It seems that Peter reacted to the people who were influenced by this Greek philosophy. We can assume that Peter might say the same thing to our generation.

Peter showed that everything will be restored, that our body will be resurrected. Therefore, we should live a godly and holy life. Then, he talks about the core of the

Gospel: The resurrection of Jesus does not just entail the forgiveness of our sins but also the overcoming of death. Jesus rose again and therefore, we will rise again and as well as the whole creation. Here, Peter makes a reference to Paul, who made the same argument in his letter to the Corinthians^{16 17}.

Now, because the people had this hope, they understood that evil will not win, that there will be an end to it so that they could live a peaceful life. Nothing we do here in this world will be in vain. Everything is useful for the restoration of the whole creation. Also, Paul wrote in Romans¹⁸ that the whole creation is waiting for salvation. That is the promise of the prophets and the commandment of the Lord, the teaching of Paul. Remember that God will keep his promise, that his Son will redeem the whole creation. He will overcome death, the last enemy.

This letter helped the people understand the difference between the Greek philosophy and Christianity and motivated them to live a moral life and to follow God's commandments. The letter doesn't just teach us about punishment or morality. It teaches us to align our thinking to the promise of the Creator and to be hopeful. It is a hope that enables people to live a holy and godly life.

4.2.6 The kings will win the Kingdom back

Rev 1:1–8¹⁹

The prophets from the Old Testament often wrote in a symbolic language to explain God's way. Therefore, we should not assume that Revelation is written in literal prose. It is most probably symbolic with a lot of imagery, just like the prophecies in the Old Testament. Perhaps, it is sometimes difficult to say things exactly the way they happened; but it is possible to paint a picture with words that expresses someone's pain and needs. In Revelation, God shows us things that he could not express merely with words. Thus, he used images to do so just as Jesus did, when he told parables. John wrote down a science fiction story with a lot of imagery. Therefore, let us be open to reading Revelation symbolically so that we can find its underlying meaning.

Not all the books of the Bible are written chronologically. For example, the psalms and proverbs are a varied selection of verses. Furthermore, the Gospel of John is not written chronologically and therefore chances are that Revelation is not chronological either. It seems that in Revelation the same story is told again and again. The series with the seals shows that evil wants to destroy the world. But with the last

¹⁶ 1 Cor 15.12–58

¹⁷ 2Pe 3:14–15

¹⁸ Romans 8:19–23

¹⁹ Please read Apocalypses the secret of the world

seal evil has been overcome. The same happens with the seven trumpets and so on. It seems that there are several series showing the same thing again and again.

"Revelation" means that something becomes clear. Something that was not known before is now revealed by Jesus Christ.

The Greek word for "revelation" is "apocalypses". It refers to the present and not to the future. John was asked to write down what would happen soon, meaning in the near future. The word "soon" is used eight times in Revelation. Thus, readers would be misled to think that Revelation is about things happening 2000 years later.

This means that Revelation was not written to show the events of the remote future. It must be a message that the seven churches had not yet known, a message that would make sense in their situation and that was easy to grasp. So, what is this message?

Christians are kings and priests. Jesus is the king who rules over the Christians. The Christians are his representatives in the world and rule as kings and priests. This is the secret. Jesus disappeared after his resurrection and the Jewish people were disappointed, because they had heard the promise that the Messiah will re-establish the lost Paradise. But then Jesus sent his spirit to rule within the Christians and they became the kings, who should build up his Kingdom. He made them kings through his blood. He gave them the spirit and ordained them as kings. Under their rule, the Kingdom of God now becomes more and more visible.

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." (Rev 5:9-10)

The rulers are not the kings of the world; the rulers are the Christians who follow Jesus.

What "he is coming in the cloud" mean? In the original "coming" is used in the present tense. Therefore, this is not about the future. It is something that happens right now, continuously or something that happens again and again. It does not say that Jesus will come back just one time.

What does "cloud" mean? The cloud in the Old Testament is a symbol for God: the cloud in the desert that leads Israel. The cloud used to fill the temple and the tabernacle. Now, the temple is destroyed and the cloud has come over Jesus. It is not a visible cloud in the sky. It is a symbol of God's presence, which all the Jews would have understood as such at that time. Therefore, this means that through our kingship, God's presence will become more and more visible in the world.

4.2.7 The Kingdom is in the midst of us

Rev 21:1–6

The word "coming" is originally used in presence and not for a future event. Thus, the New Jerusalem is continuously coming down or is actually already here.

Also, the New Jerusalem is not 1373 miles in width and height and length as it is written in the Bible: the New Jerusalem is a symbol for the restored creation.

What John saw was not the collapse of the old world and the coming of a new one from Heaven; or (if it were a science fiction novel) the world collapsing and humans escaping to planet Mordo. What John saw was that God's Kingdom was continuously revealed over time through the kingship of the believers. That through his death the Kingdom of God is in the midst of us.

The New Jerusalem will not come down sometime in the distant future. It is already in our midst, but not fully because evil is still amongst us. But some day God will destroy evil. Therefore, we should not wait around in our churches for Jesus to come back. We should go out of the churches and be involved in politics, business, education and in all the spheres of society. We are actually on our way to recover the lost Paradise. The Fall cannot overcome God's creation.

That is the secret, the hidden thing revealed in this book. Revelation shows us that the world is not yet perfect and that there are a lot of challenges: persecution, war or natural disaster. But in the end, God will win. Nothing is in vain because everything is useful for the recovery of the lost Paradise.

The reformers understood that and made the world their kingdom. The great musician Friedrich Händel ended the Messiah with the Hallelujah. The main verse is taken from Revelation and gives a good description of the reformer's belief:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." (Rev 11:15)

The West became a dominant world power because Western people applied this principle in their lives. The Christian worldview enabled them to overcome evil and to bring about reformation. Vishal Mangalwadi once stated that Revelation is not about the question of when Jesus is coming back. Rather, it is about when the bride will stand up and take her position. The bride is the church who gets ready for the wedding. The wedding will be the final destruction of evil. Now is the time for Christians to take on their role as kings and priests and start to renew and refresh God's kingdom. Even when there are still evil forces to hinder them, they have the authority to overcome them.

Redemption is possible in our every day lives even though it might not be perfect. The view of redemption as something attainable, gives us the power to heal what is broken, to always believe in change and not to run away when something is not perfect. This view enables people to live in a fallen world and to always have hope for redemption.

This is the message, the hidden secret of the last book of the Bible, which has now been revealed and has the capacity to change the world.