

## **W5: Renewal of Creation** (Christian hope in the future of our world)

Day a: *New Story*, Thomas Berry

Day b: Jeremiah 4

Day c: *Creation and Covenant*, N.T. Wright

Day d: Jonah 4

Day e: *God in Creation*, Moltmann

Day f: Revelation 22

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### **The New Story, Thomas Berry**

#### **Introduction**

*Thomas Berry advocates that mankind's relationship with nature can only be restored through adopting a 'new story'. It is through stories Berry claims, that humans make meaningful sense of how the world came to be and their place and purpose in the world. Berry argues that we need a new story because contemporary scientific and religious narratives are unable to locate humans in a meaningful relationship with the earth's ecosystems and their evolution over time.*

*Berry argues for a new story which provides a deeper understanding of the functioning of the universe, and which more strongly links humans to the universe and to nature itself. Berry argues that the stories we have used until now to tell ourselves about where we come from are removed from animals, plants and the grand story of the Cosmos, and have consequently encouraged alienation from the natural world.*

#### **Extract**

The pathos in our own situation is that our secular society does not see the numinous quality or the deeper psychic powers associated with its own story, while the religious society rejects the story because it is presented only in its physical aspect. The remedy for this is to establish a deeper understanding of the spiritual dynamics of the universe as revealed through our own empirical insight into the mysteries of its functioning.

In this late twentieth century that can now be done with a clarity never before available to us. Empirical enquiry into the universe reveals that from its beginning in the galactic system to its earthly expression in human consciousness the universe carries within itself a psychic-spiritual as well as physical material dimension. Otherwise human consciousness emerges out of nowhere. The human is seen as an addendum or an intrusion and thus finds no real place in the story of the universe. In reality the human activates the most profound dimension of the universe itself, its capacity to reflect on and celebrate itself in conscious self-awareness.

The story of the universe is the story of the emergence of a galactic system in which each new level of expression emerges through the urgency of self-transcendence. Hydrogen in the presence of some millions of degree of heat emerges into helium. After the stars take shape as oceans of fire in the heavens, they go through a sequence of transformations. Some eventually explode into the stardust out of which the solar system and the earth take shape. Earth gives unique expression of itself in its rock and crystalline structures, and in the variety and splendour of living forms, until humans appear as the moment in which the unfolding universe becomes conscious of itself. The human emerges not only as an earthling, but a worldling. We bear the universe in our being as the universe bears us in its being. The two have a total presence to each other and to that deeper mystery out of which both the universe and ourselves have emerged.

If this integral vision is something new both to the scientist and to the believer, both are gradually becoming aware of this view of the real and its human meaning. It might be considered a new revelatory experience. Because we are moving into a new mythic age, it is little wonder that a kind of mutation is taking place in the entire earth-human order. A new paradigm of what it is to be human emerges. This is what is so exciting, yet so painful and so disrupting. One aspect of this change involves the shift in earth-human relations, for we now in large measure determine the earth process that once determined us. In a more integral way we could say that the earth that controlled itself directly in the former period now to an extensive degree controls itself through us.

In this new context the question appears as to where the values are, how they are determined, how they are transmitted. Whereas formerly values consisted in the perfection of the earthly image reflecting an external Logos in a world of fixed natures, values are now determined by the human sensitivity in responding to the creative urgencies of a developing world. The scientist and in the depths of the unconscious is drawn by the mystical attraction of communion with the emerging creative process. This would not be possible unless it were a call of subject to subject, if it were not an effort at total self-realization on the part of the scientists. As scientists, their taste for the real is what gives to their work its admirable quality. Their wish is to experience the real in its tangible, opaque, material aspect and to respond to that by establishing an interaction with the world that will advance the total process. If the demand for objectivity and the quantitative aspect of the real has led scientists to neglect subjectivity and the qualitative aspect of the real, this has been until now a condition for fulfilling their historical task. The most notable single development within science in recent years, however, has been a growing awareness of the integral physical-psychic dimension of reality.

The believing redemption community is awakening only slowly to this new context of understanding. There is a fear, a distrust, even a profound aversion to the natural world and all its processes. It would be difficult to find a theological seminary in this country that has an adequate programme on creation as it is experienced in these times. The theological curriculum is dominated by a long list of courses on redemption and how it functions in aiding humans to transcend the world, all based on biblical texts. Such a situation cannot long endure however, since a new sense of the earth and its revelatory import is arising in the believing community. The earth will not be ignored, nor will it long endure being despised, neglected or mistreated. The dynamics of creation are demanding attention once more in a form unknown for centuries to the orthodox Christian.

Now a new way of understanding values is required. We are returning to a more traditional context of story as our source of understanding and value. It is somewhat fascinating to realize that the final achievement of our scientific enquiry into the structure and functioning of the universe as evolutionary process is much closer to the narrative mode of explanation given in the bible than it is to the later, more philosophical mode of Christian explanation provided in our theologies.

It is of utmost importance that succeeding generations become aware of the larger story outlined here and the numinous, sacred values that have been resented in an expanding sequence over this entire time of the world's existence. Within this context all our human affairs – all professions, occupations, and activities – have their meaning precisely in so far as they enhance this emerging world of subjective intercommunion with the total range of reality. Within this context the scientific community and the religious community have a common basis. The limitations of the redemption rhetoric and the scientific rhetoric can be seen and a new, more integral language of being and value can emerge.

### **Questions for reflection**

- *How do you personally reconcile the stories told by the Christian community and scientific communities? Does there need to be alignment, as Berry suggests?*
- *Do you agree that contemporary Christian narratives about how the world came to be alienate humankind from nature?*
- *Do you agree with the importance Berry places upon stories as providing meaningful context for humans to function properly?*

### **Further reading**

Thomas Berry (1988) *The Dream of the Earth*

Thomas Berry (2009) *The Great Work*

Dieter Hessel and Rosemary Radford Reuther (2000) *Christianity and Ecology*

## **Jeremiah 4 19-28**

### **Introduction**

Biblical scholar Walter Bruggemann called his commentary on Jeremiah ‘Exile and Homecoming’ which neatly captures the essence of Jeremiah’s writing. What it doesn’t capture is the tone of the book of Jeremiah which is full of lament and challenge to God’s people. Jeremiah is often called the weeping prophet and in this reading from chapter 4 Jeremiah makes clear that all of creation is caught up in the failure of humanity to act according to God’s plan. Today’s reading appears, like much of Jeremiah, to be a cry of hopelessness and pain and this is a critical aspect of the book of Jeremiah. However the desolation and pain are not the final word. Jeremiah is compelled to write as he does not because he is without hope but because all of creation has hope because of the covenants which God has made with his creation. Our hope will be realized when we are no longer exiled from God but find ourselves reunited with him in our homecoming.

## **Jeremiah 4 19-28**

### **Sorrow for a Doomed Nation**

<sup>19</sup> My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain!

Oh, the walls of my heart!

My heart is beating wildly;

I cannot keep silent;

for I<sup>[d]</sup> hear the sound of the trumpet,  
the alarm of war.

<sup>20</sup> Disaster overtakes disaster,  
the whole land is laid waste.

Suddenly my tents are destroyed,  
my curtains in a moment.

<sup>21</sup> How long must I see the standard,  
and hear the sound of the trumpet?

<sup>22</sup> ‘For my people are foolish,  
they do not know me;

they are stupid children,  
they have no understanding.

They are skilled in doing evil,  
but do not know how to do good.’

<sup>23</sup> I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;  
and to the heavens, and they had no light.

<sup>24</sup> I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,  
and all the hills moved to and fro.

<sup>25</sup> I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,  
and all the birds of the air had fled.

<sup>26</sup> I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,  
and all its cities were laid in ruins  
before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

<sup>27</sup> For thus says the LORD: The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end.

<sup>28</sup> Because of this the earth shall mourn,  
and the heavens above grow black;  
for I have spoken, I have purposed;  
I have not relented nor will I turn back.

### **Questions for reflection**

- How does reading this text make you feel?
- Where do you find hope in times of trouble? How does your hope affect how you think about the natural world?

### **Further reading**

Walter Bruggemann (1998) *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*

Tom Wright (2007), *Surprised by Hope*

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### **Creation and Covenant, N T Wright**

#### **Introduction**

*Creation and Covenant is a chapter in N T Wright’s “Paul: a fresh perspective”. In the chapter Wright appeals to a number of passages from the Old Testament to demonstrate his understanding of Creation and Covenant, which he considered central to Paul’s thought. Psalms are used as an initial way into Paul, with those Psalms chosen considered to draw on a similar theology of Creation and Covenant. Wright sees the Psalms as divided into two parts; “the first celebrating Creation, and within that celebrating the Torah as the Covenant charter designed to enable each individual Israelite to become a whole, cleansed, integrated human being; the other half complaining that the pagans are laying Israel waste, and invoking the covenant God as also the creator God who has the power, the right and the responsibility to deal with evil”. Wright then gives three examples of passages where Paul uses the theology of Creation and Covenant consistently; as being renewed by God through Jesus Christ. Wright concludes by detailing a fundamental structure*

*of Paul’s thought, showing how the twin themes of creation and covenant offer a context, an implicit narrative, within which Paul’s understanding of what has gone wrong in the world and how it*

*is put right can be grasped. For Paul creation goes on to new creation and covenant to new covenant; covenant renewal must result in new creation.*

### **Extract**

There you have it: the creator God is the covenant God, and vice versa; and his word, particularly through his prophet and/or servant, will rescue and deliver his people from the enemy. This combination constituted the deep implicit narrative within which the multiple other narratives of second-Temple Judaism find their coherence and meaning. We could put it like this, in a double statement which might seem paradoxical but which carried deep meaning through ancient Judaism.

First, the covenant is there to solve the problems within creation. God called Abraham to solve the problem of evil, the problem of Adam, the problem of the world. (That, incidentally, is why accounts of the problem of evil which fail to incorporate covenant theology are doomed before they start; but that is another story.) Israel's calling is to hold fast by the covenant. Through Israel, God will address and solve the problems of the world, bringing justice and salvation to the ends of the earth – though quite how this will happen remains, even in Isaiah, more than a little mysterious.

But, second, creation is invoked to solve the problems within the covenant. When Israel is in trouble, and the covenant promises themselves seem to have come crashing to the ground, the people cry to the covenant God precisely as the creator. Israel goes back to Genesis 1, and to the story of the Exodus, in order to pray and trust that YHWH will do again what, as creator, he has the power and the right to do, and what as the covenant God he has the responsibility to do, namely, to establish justice in the world and, more especially, to vindicate his people when they cry to him for help. In both cases, we should note carefully, it is assumed that something has gone badly wrong. Something is deeply amiss with creation, and within that with humankind itself, something to which the covenant with Israel is the answer. Something is deeply amiss with the covenant, whether Israel's sins on the one hand or Gentile oppression on the other, or perhaps both – and to this the answer is a re-invoking of creation, or rather of God as creator.

So far I have concentrated on the Old Testament itself, partly because these themes are so clear there and partly because Paul constantly goes back to the Old Testament, not least to Genesis, Deuteronomy, the Psalms and Isaiah, not to find proof-texts for abstract ideas but in order to reground the controlling narrative, the historical story, of God, the world, humankind, and Israel. But it is of course important that we also contextualize Paul in his own day by noticing these same themes in second-Temple literature. There is no space to expound this in detail. I merely note that in very different writings, such as The Wisdom of Solomon, the Qumran literature, and the apocalyptic writings such as 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, we find exactly these themes, albeit deployed in very different ways. We find, not least, these themes invoked as the reason why Israel's God, the creator, must eventually engage in a final show-down with the forces of evil, a dramatic event which will be like the Exodus in some respects and like a great court scene, a trial in which the powers of evil are judged, condemned and overthrown, on the other. We think, most obviously, of Daniel 7 and the re-use of that passage in various later texts. Though Paul appeals over the heads of the later texts to the Bible itself, his own re-use of the biblical themes possesses an easily recognisable family likeness to the other re-uses of his day.

One of the great slogans in which all this theology of creation and covenant is summed up, one with of course enormous significance at the heart of Paul's thought, is *tsedaqah elohim*, the 'righteousness' or 'justice' or 'covenant faithfulness' of God. The problem of how to translate this phrase is acute already in Isaiah and elsewhere, as it is in Paul. Somehow we need a word which will

pull together this entire complex of thought, which will evoke for us what the Hebrew phrase, and then its Greek equivalent (*dikaio syne theou*), evoked in Paul's day as it had done for a long time before: the fact that the creator and covenant god can be relied upon to act in accordance with his creating power and his covenant fidelity, to put the world to rights. How can all this be summed up in a word?

There is no such word in English. One might say 'faithfulness', but it hardly carries the sense of 'justice', of putting things to rights. One might say 'righteousness', but people inevitably hear it today either in the sense of 'ethical uprightness' or in the (to my mind mistaken) familiar Reformed understandings of it as the status which God imputes to the faithful, about which I shall say more later on. The word 'justice' itself evokes that element of what Paul, and the texts on which he drew, were talking about which is all too often forgotten today, namely that because God is the creator he has the obligation to put the world to rights once and for all, but unless we constantly remind ourselves that in the Jewish context, and in Paul himself, this 'justice' springs not from some abstract ideal but from the creator's obligation to the creation and from the covenant God's obligation to be faithful to his promises, it will lose its flavour and force. This multiple obligation is what Psalm 74 appeals to, and it is what makes sense of the actual flow of Paul's own thought in passage after passage. The word 'justice' has one advantage, though, namely that it is cognate with 'justification', the moment in the present time when one part of the creation is put to rights in advance of the final renewal.

### **Questions for reflection**

- *Could a belief in the ability and duty of God to set things right detract from the imperative to protect the earth now?*

### **Further reading**

N.T. Wright (2005) *Paul: A Fresh Perspective*

Samuel Wells (2015) *A Nazareth Manifesto*

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## **Jonah 4**

### **Introduction**

*The story of Jonah is well known to Sunday school children everywhere but as a book it can often be overlooked by adults with its incredible tale of men swallowing fish. Like all books of the Bible there is no single 'correct' way to read Jonah and many truths can be found within the narrative of the story.*

*Two things that emerge from the book of Jonah are the very human characteristics Jonah displays and the central role of nature in the book. Jonah's actions in the course of his story display both disobedience and obedience; weakness and strength. He is a very human Biblical character. Having warned the people of Nineveh about God's wrath he is then angry that having repented God does not punish the Ninevites anyway. Jonah chapter four picks up the story when he is angry with God for failing to punish the Ninevites. Just as stormy seas and a great fish played a role in God's engagement with Jonah once again God speaks to Jonah through the natural world.*

## **Jonah 4**

Jonah's Anger

But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. 3 And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4 And the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" 5 Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

6 The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. 7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." 10 Then the Lord said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

### **Questions for reflection**

- *Jonah welcomes the bush which God creates to give him shelter and is then angry when God causes it to die. What does this say about our complex relationship with nature?*
- *Have you ever experienced God's presence or voice through nature?*

### **Further reading**

Iain Provan (2012) 'Should I not be concerned about that great city?' available <http://www.sph.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?speaker=Iain%20Provan>

Sinclair Fergusson (2008), *Man Overboard*

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## **God in Creation, Moltmann**

### **Introduction**

*Moltmann's book, God in Creation, seeks to encourage Christians to bring reverence for the life of every living thing into the adoration of God and thus guard against the tendency to make a distinction between God and the world. In a chapter entitled 'The Feast of Creation' Moltmann argues that there is a need to return to the doctrine of the sabbath. This is ultimately because, he argues, it is through the peace of the sabbath that Christians can find the peace with nature many seek. Christian theology has tended to put less emphasis on the doctrine of the sabbath in favour of the doctrine of creation. The concept of a 'Creative' God has become dominant, whilst the notion of a God who rests on the sabbath, who delights in his creation, has receded. Moltmann argues however that the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of the sabbath belong together, and that this is supported by biblical tradition. Ultimately it is the sabbath which reveals the world's identity as creation, sanctifies and blesses it. It is on and through the sabbath that God completed creation,*

*men/women perceive creation as a reality and the redemption of the world is celebrated in anticipation. One of Moltmann's central points is that the sabbath should be understood as both the feast of creation and of creation's redemption.*

### **Extract**

The goal and completion of every Jewish and every Christian doctrine of creation must be the doctrine of the sabbath; for on the sabbath and through the sabbath God 'completed' his creation, and on the sabbath and through it, men and women perceive as God's creation the reality in which they live and which they themselves are. The Sabbath opens creation for its true future. On the sabbath the redemption of the world is celebrated in anticipation. The Sabbath is itself the presence of eternity in time, and a foretaste of the world to come. The observance of the sabbath became the identifying mark of Jews in exile; and in the same way, the doctrine of the sabbath of creation becomes the identifying mark of the biblical doctrine of creation, distinguishing it from the interpretation of the world as nature. It is the sabbath which manifests the world's identity as creation, sanctifies it and blesses it.

Curiously enough, in the Christian traditions, and especially the traditions of the western church, creation is generally only presented as the 'six days' work'. The 'completion' of creation through 'the seventh day' is much neglected, or even overlooked altogether. It would seem as if Christian theology considered that both the sabbath and commandment to Israel and the sabbath of creation were repealed and discarded when Jesus set aside the Sabbath commandment by healing the sick on that day. As a result, God is viewed as the one who in his essential being is solely 'the creative God', as Paul Tillich says; and it follows from this that men and women too can only see themselves as this God's image if they become 'creative human beings'. The God who 'rests' on the sabbath, the blessing and rejoicing God, the God who delights in his creation, and in his exultation sanctifies it, receded behind this different concept. So for men and women too, the meaning of their lives is identified with work and busy activity; and rest, the feast, and their joy in existence are pushed away, relegated to insignificance because they are non-utilitarian.

But according to the biblical traditions creation and the sabbath belong together. It is impossible to understand the world properly as creation without a proper discernment of the sabbath. In the sabbath stillness men and women no longer intervene in the environment through their labour. They let it be entirely God's creation. They recognise that as God's property creation is inviolable, as they sanctify the day through their joy in existence as God's creatures within the fellowship of creation.

The peace of the sabbath is peace with God first of all. But this divine peace encompasses not merely the soul but the body too; not merely individuals but family and people; not only human beings but animals as well; not living things alone, but also, as the creation story tells us the whole creation of heaven and earth. That is why the sabbath peace is also the beginning of that peace with nature which many people are seeking today, in the face of the growing destruction of the environment. But there will never be peace without the experience and celebration of God's sabbath.

If we look at the biblical traditions that have to do with the belief in creation, we discover that the sabbath is not a day of rest following six working days. On the contrary: the whole work of creation was performed *for the sake of the sabbath*. The Sabbath is the 'feast of creation', as Franz Rosenzweig says. It was for the sake of this feast day of the eternal God that heaven and earth were created, with everything that exists in them and lives. So although the creation story tells us that

each day was followed by a night, God's sabbath knows no night but becomes the 'feast without end'.

The feast of creation is the feast of completion or consummation – the consummation of creation which is realized through this feast. Because this consummation of creation in the Sabbath also represents Creation's redemption – the redemption enabling it to participate in God's manifested, eternal presence – it will also be permissible for us to understand the Sabbath as the feast of redemption. But if, as the feast of creation, it is also already the feast of creation's redemption, it is understandable that the whole of creation should have been brought into being for the sake of that redemption. 'The sabbath is the feast of creation' writes Franz Rosenzweig, 'but a creation which took place for the sake of the redemption. It is manifested at the end of creation, and manifested as creation's meaning and destination.'

### **Questions for reflection**

- *Moltmann puts emphasis on taking time to appreciate Creation, and the Sabbath as a means to achieve this. Do you think our modern society gives enough the time to appreciate nature?*
- *When was the last time you paused to appreciate Creation? Can you think of a time you were in nature when you sensed God's presence or felt especially close to God?*
- *When we read the opening of Genesis, did you take time to consider the importance of the seventh day of creation? Do you think differently about it now?*
- *Do you agree with Moltmann's premise that the goal of the Christian doctrine of creation must be the doctrine of the sabbath?*

### **Further reading**

Jurgen Moltmann (1993) *The Trinity and The Kingdom*

Jurgen Moltmann (1974) *The Crucified God*

Jurgen Moltmann (2000) *God in Creation*

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## **Revelation 21:9-27-22:1-7**

### **Introduction**

*Revelation is the prime example of a genre of biblical writing called apocalyptic literature. Other examples in the Bible include the second half of the book of Daniel and sections of books of the prophets. As a particular genre it needs to be read in a different way from say the Gospels or historical books of the Old Testament. A notable feature of Revelation is the frequent and intentional use of symbols. Some of the symbols are hard for a modern audience to grasp but in the passage quoted below are two symbols which are easily recognisable: a renewed Jerusalem God's Holy City and a tree which mirrors the tree from Genesis.*

*Revelation 22 is the last chapter of the Bible and at the heart of this final passage is a river alongside which sits a tree the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations. In this vision of a future world where God has restored all of creation there is a new city but there is also the full richness of creation and humanity is blessed and healed through God's provision. The writer of Revelation envisages a*

*world not simply of God and humanity but all a new earth that is filled with the goodness of all creation.*

### **Extract**

#### Vision of the New Jerusalem

9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. 11 It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. 12 It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; 13 on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. 14 And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 The angel[g] who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. 16 The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. 17 He also measured its wall, one hundred forty-four cubits by human measurement, which the angel was using. 18 The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. 21 And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.

#### The River of Life

1 I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. 25 Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. 26 People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. 27 But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; 4 they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

6 And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

7 "See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

### **Questions for reflection**

- *Have you ever experienced the healing power of nature?*
- *How can we help ensure that nature and cities are able to both thrive?*
- *Where else in the Bible do trees play an important role?*

**Further reading**

Christopher Rowland (2002), *The Open Heaven*

J.P.M. Sweet (1979), *Revelation*