

## Scripture as International Development Reflections Series

by Beth Snodderly

### Darkness, Light, and International Development

This is an excerpt from my WCIU Press book, *Chaos Is Not God's Will*.

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As for the earth,  
it was destroyed and desolate (*tohu wabohu*),  
with darkness on the face of the deep,  
but the Spirit of God stirring over the face of the waters  
Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light!  
And God saw that the light was good (Gen. 1:2, 3).

Even in darkness light dawns for the upright,  
for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous (Ps. 112:4).

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined (Isa. 9:2).

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble (1 John 2:9-10).

Chaos is not God's will. To combat the chaos in this world, God is deliberately overcoming darkness with light, evil with good, until, in the end, Jesus will reign in his Kingdom of *shalom*. But until God ushers in that final perfect new heaven and new earth, God's people need to demonstrate God's will for people, for societies, and for God's originally good creation.

Jesus' followers serve as God's display window, showing what Jesus' reign is meant to look like. There is a need in all societies for restoring order and relationships to reflect God's will for this world, overcoming evil with good, overcoming darkness with light.

## Genesis 1, The Land, and International Development

In my book, *Chaos Is Not God's Will*, chapter 6 is titled, "Developing the Land."

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Images of the land/earth (*erets*) include:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (erets). Now the earth (erets) was ... (Gen. 1:1, 2a)*

*And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land" (erets) and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. (Gen. 1: 9, 10)*

*To your descendants I give this land (erets), from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—  
(Gen. 15:18)*

*If the hill country of Ephraim is too small for you, go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves there in the land (erets) of the Perizzites and Rephaites.  
(Josh. 17:15)*

*"This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Tell this to your masters: With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth (erets), and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please.'" (Jer. 27:4, 5)*

The account in Genesis 1, of God's making the land, helped the people of Israel see themselves as a community of the people of God, about to inherit a land made for them by God. The author of the creation passage certainly knew how to get his readers' and listeners' attention. The grammar of Genesis 1:2 places a strong emphasis on "the land" by placing the noun before the verb, which is not usual in Hebrew: *we'ha'erets hayeta*, "now the earth was ...". Allen Ross asks, "Why did the new nation of Israel need to have this material and to have it written as it is?"

In this chapter I explore three main possibilities:

1. The people needed to know why the land they were going to enter could legitimately be considered theirs.
2. The process of God's making the uninhabitable "earth" or "land" into a place for people to live serves as metaphor for the creation of a society, the nation of Israel, out of the chaos of slavery.
3. The people could learn important lessons about God and their relationship to him from this creation account.

## Genesis 1: Overcoming Physical Chaos

This Reflection is also from my book, *Chaos Is Not God's Will*, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b3157f3b40b9d21a8096625/t/5d5c1716137a7b0001c0e807/1566316316247/Chaos+is+Not+God%27s+Will+6.4.14.pdf>

I have given a detailed rationale for the controversial claim that *tohu wabohu* (Gen. 1:2) describes the disastrous result, at some point following God's original good creation, when a created being used the gift of free will to rebel against God's will.

Intelligent evil was (and still is) at work, distorting God's original good purposes. The author of Genesis shows in the rest of the first chapter how God goes about restoring his intentions for the earth, which are the exact opposite of the chaotic conditions. The author does this by emphasizing a definite pattern in the creation story, showing that God has evil under control and patiently counteracts and replaces it with acts of creativity, including the creation of humans to join God in fighting back against forces that oppose God.

The condition of the earth prior to creation is described in Genesis 1:2 as "*tohu wabohu*," which can be translated "destroyed and desolate," or "topsy turvey," or, traditionally, "formless and void." In each of the other eighteen occurrences of the word "*tohu*," the broad context is judgment for rebellion against God. It seems logical that the first occurrence of the term would also have been in the context of judgment, setting the tone for the remaining usages of the term in the Hebrew Bible.

As a description of the consequences of opposition to God's ways, the figure of speech, *tohu wabohu*, also contains within itself the solution to addressing the root problem behind the chaos and desolation. Believers have the privilege of allowing God's Spirit to work through them to demonstrate God's glory, by bringing order out of chaos, and by overcoming evil with good (Hebrew, *tob*, a word play with the similar-sounding *tohu*). The rest of the Bible explains how to overcome and/or avoid *tohu* at various levels (physical, personal, family, social, political) or it shows what happens when *tohu* is not overcome. (The observable chaotic result can then be called *tohu wabohu*.) In Genesis 1, physical chaos is being overcome by God's good creation.

## Genesis 1:1-2 and International Development

Destruction and desolation are inherent in a mind and/or society rebelling against God. Evil choices are the evidence of a mind in opposition to God, and that mind (or society) can be characterized by the physical metaphor of *tohu wabohu*—destroyed and desolate. It is destroyed because it isn't working the way God made it to work—it is twisted, turned to wrong purposes, therefore purposeless from God's perspective. It is desolate because the Spirit has withdrawn from that life or society, as in Ezekiel's vision of the Spirit in the wheels leaving the temple and the land. Evil choices result in the Spirit leaving ("my Spirit will not always strive with man") and the withdrawal of the Spirit of God leaves behind a desolate person/society that self-destructs.

However, this pessimistic picture isn't the end of the story. In Gen 1:2, the Spirit is hovering or stirring over the "deep" (*tehom*) in preparation for a new beginning that will overcome *tohu* with *tob*, or evil with good. Similarly, in the Gospel of John we see the tradition that healing would take place at the pool called Bethesda when an angel stirred up the waters, making them life-producing/healing. The only hope for Spirit-abandoned individuals or societies is for those who have the Spirit dwelling in them to bring the Spirit to the desolate person or society. The key to addressing the roots of human problems is for individuals and societies to make right choices to overcome evil with good (see Romans 12:21). Jesus demonstrated the ultimate good choice by giving up his life. All his followers are called to die to self.

## Servant Leaders as Change Agents

In a word study on the words used for "servant" in the New Testament, I found that one of those words is used only once in the New Testament, applied to Moses, *therapon*. But this word is used quite a few times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, also speaking of Moses.

Moses was called:

- a servant-therapist (Greek: *therapon*; Num. 12:7, 8; Heb. 3:5)
- a nursing father (see Num. 11:12; but Moses didn't like this role of being nurse to a new-born, fussy nation!)
- meek beyond anyone else (Num. 12:3)

Moses' life illustrates the Beatitude, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). Even as a meek servant, Moses became a political leader, guiding a new-born nation toward the land God promised to give them. In this leadership role he had to be a nursing father and a servant-therapist, dealing with a bunch of complaining, disorganized slaves to bring them up out of chaos and darkness. He was a change agent. He was faithful (Heb. 3:5). These are the qualities I would look for in a servant leader today.

## Psalm 15, Leadership and International Development

Psalm 15 has a serious warning for all societies. Societies and organizations with leaders who are corrupt, undependable, and untruthful, will demonstrate the opposite of the stability and righteous living described in Psalm 15.

This is one of the “Royal Psalms,” a ritual for installing a king, patterned after Ancient Near Eastern rituals. It serves as a template for leadership under the rule and reign of God. Those who demonstrate the conditions of godly leadership in Psalm 15 will lead societies and organizations that will flourish. The central climax of this Psalm shows that a godly leader recognizes evil and turns away from it. When this guideline is followed, those under that leader’s influence will be better able to experience transformation and development according to God’s will. Societies and organizations with leaders who are corrupt, undependable, untruthful, will demonstrate the opposite of the stability and righteous living described in Psalm 15.

### Question:

(vs 1) Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?  
Who may live on your holy mountain?

### Answer:

*Positive Conditions:*

(2) The one whose walk is blameless,  
who does what is righteous,  
who speaks the truth from their heart;

*Negative Conditions:*

(3) whose tongue utters no slander,  
who does no wrong to a neighbor,  
and casts no slur on others;

### Central Climax:

(4) in whose eyes a vile person is despised (ESV),

*Positive Conditions:*

but who honors those who fear the Lord;  
who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind;

*Negative Conditions:*

5a who does not put out his money at interest (ESV);  
who does not accept a bribe against the innocent.

*Promise:*

5b Whoever does these  
will never be shaken.  
(NIV and ESV)

## Psalm 8 and International Development

As the title of one of the books in WCIU's International Development series says, the goal of international development is God's will on earth as it is in heaven. Psalm 8 gives a visual picture of the role of humankind in humbly working toward that goal. God has given dignity and honor to humans by making them the stewards of all his creation. God's enemies are silenced by the weakest humans when God gives them strength. The Psalmist provides our response to God's greatness and glory: "*How excellent is Your name in all the earth!*"

### Psalm 8: The Lord's Glory and Man's Dignity (NKJV)

*O Lord, our Lord,  
 How excellent is Your name in all the earth,  
 Who have set Your glory above the heavens!  
 Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants  
 You have ordained strength,  
 Because of Your enemies,  
 That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.  
 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,  
 The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,  
 What is man that You are mindful of him,  
 And the son of man that You visit him?  
 For You have made him a little lower than the angels,  
 And You have crowned him with glory and honor.  
 You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;  
 You have put all things under his feet,  
 All sheep and oxen—  
 Even the beasts of the field,  
 The birds of the air,  
 And the fish of the sea  
 That pass through the paths of the seas.  
 O Lord, our Lord,  
 How excellent is Your name in all the earth!*

## **Psalm 1, Ezekiel 47, and Revelation 22: “Leaves for Healing”**

October 27, 2014; Updated Nov. 23, 2020

The word pictures of leaves that do not wither and that give healing are one of the ways the Old and New Testaments describe God’s will for all people. The presence of God in a society or individual life makes a crucial difference in their level of development. The Ebola crisis and many plagues throughout history have at their root a lack of good sanitation\* something that will be present in any society following the principles of God’s Word. The Old Testament is full of instructions to Israel for national development—personal, societal, health, sanitation, spiritual, etc. The principles from God’s instructions to Israel can help any society figure out how to start getting things right—international development. Being right with God is at the root of the solution in every case, including fighting disease.

Before the first coming of Jesus, the Temple represented the presence of God. In Ezekiel chapters 46–47, a river flows out eastward from the presence of the Lord. “Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing” (Ezek. 47:12).

As Israel was returning to their land and receiving instructions for developing it into a fruitful and peaceful place to live, Ezekiel’s prophecy would have given comfort and encouragement to the people. Ezekiel’s word picture would have reminded them of the psalmist’s similar promise that the person “whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on [God’s] law day and night ... is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers” (Psalm 1:2, 3)—international development!

After the second coming of Jesus, there will be no need for a Temple, “because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev. 21:22). In addition, the glory of God will give the new City its light and the nations will walk according to this light. “The kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ... The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful” (Rev. 21:23-27).

This is a picture of a fully “developed” world. In this world, as in Ezekiel’s prophetic foretaste, a river flows out from the presence of God and “on each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2).

*\* Update: In the current pandemic, the lack of sanitation in Chinese “wet markets” likely allowed a virus to jump from animals to humans. But the pandemic that followed, with exponential infections and death, has been due to an ongoing disregard for the guidance of knowledgeable health authorities who have tried to persuade people of sanitary practices such as wearing a mask, washing hands frequently, and social distancing.*

## Isaiah 32 as International Development

Violent symptoms of societies that are not experiencing God's Spirit among them include:

- A Congolese rebel army rapes its way across the rural African landscape, victimizing 90 percent of the female population in some villages.
- Young boys are recruited as "boy soldiers" in Uganda.
- The inhumanity of child prostitution that feeds a global lust is rampant and growing.

Isaiah 32 describes the consequences for societies whose people practice ungodliness, using wicked schemes to leave the hungry empty, and destroying the poor with their lies.

But when Spirit-filled believers bring the light of Christ into a society and enough people respond to the outpouring of the Spirit, then we see real development in that society: "the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest. The Lord's justice will dwell in the desert, his righteousness live in the fertile field. The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest" (Isa. 32:15-18). Isaiah is describing *shalom*, the goal of international development.

These verses give an attractive description of the results of the Spirit's outpouring: flourishing, peace, and safety. What might Isaiah have had in mind that would bring about the outpouring of the Spirit on a chaotic and desolate society? In the first verses of the chapter, the prophet seems to be saying that leaders' deliberate choices to follow God's ways, the opposite of the ungodly ways being practiced, will bring the presence of the Spirit. The description at the beginning of Isaiah 32, of a group of rulers collaborating to do what is right, harmonizes with Jesus' saying, "where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" [through the Spirit] (Matt. 18:20). "See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. Each one will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert.... No longer will the fool be called noble nor the scoundrel be highly respected" (Isa. 32:1, 2, 5).



## Jeremiah and International Development

*This blog is an excerpt from my book, [Chaos Is Not God's Will: The Origin of International Development](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b3157f3b40b9d21a8096625/t/5d5c1716137a7b0001c0e807/1566316316247/Chaos+is+Not+God%27s+Will+6.4.14.pdf).*

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The prophet Jeremiah called desperately for rebellious Israel to return to God. But God's people foolishly refused to know and obey God. Their moral values were completely reversed: "They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good" (Jer. 4:22). As a result of their disobedience and the resulting absence of God's Spirit, the land became empty, shaken, ruined, shattered. "I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty (*tohu wabohu*); and at the heavens, and their light was gone" (Jer. 4:23). Creation was being undone in a sense. The earth will mourn and the heavens will be dark because of this judgment on God's people.

Holistic international development engages opposition to God's purposes at all levels of existence: personal, spiritual, societal, physical, and across cultures. Chaos—wherever it is found—is not God's will. Medical missionary Robert Hughes, in Shillong, India from 1939–69, wrote in his journal, "This kingdom of disease, death, ignorance, prejudice, fear, malnutrition, and abject poverty [is] most surely a kingdom which ought to be overthrown by the kingdom of our God." Demonstration of God's love, God's will, and God's glory is the responsibility of the body of Christ, so that all peoples can come to know and obey him.

## Ezekiel 28 and International Development

The visual image of the fiery stones adorning the guardian cherub in Ezekiel 28:11-15 correspond one-for-one with the stones of the high priest's decision-making breastplate in Exodus 28:17-20. This hints strongly at the decision-making authority granted to a high level angelic being, a guardian cherub, before he rebelled against God.

But the high priest's adornment is more glorious, having three additional precious stones, perhaps indicating that humans living in line with God's purposes have more ability to reflect God's glory than the guardian angel who eventually turned his authority toward wrong purposes.

There is also a post-creational significance to these stones. In Revelation 21:18-20 the twelve stones in the foundations of the gold city include seven of the original nine (those adorning the guardian cherub), retaining all three of the stones added for the high priest, with two new stones to replace those that were omitted. The precious stones are a visual image of the glory of God, showing that the Ruler of the heavenly city, Christ the King, has even greater authority than the angels and humans with whom he has shared decision-making authority.

What went wrong? From being adorned with these precious fiery stones, the angelic being became the prince of darkness. By creating humans and putting them in charge of a local part of the world, God was setting up a counter Kingdom and throwing out a challenge to Satan. The serpent's insinuation to Eve was Satan's initially successful response to that challenge. But God struck back with a long-term plan, first mentioned in Genesis 3:15, to defeat the dark prince of this world and restore the world to what it was originally intended to be, under the rule of the Creator-King. The cosmic war, a battle for God's creation, is reflected in the image at the center of First John: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8). From Genesis to Revelation, the theme of Scripture is God's purpose to win a people for himself back from the rulership of Satan.

What is the responsibility of the body of Christ to those in harm's way? What should be the role of Kingdom-minded international development workers in addressing the roots of human problems around the world? Jesus has shared his decision-making authority with his people. He has made us to be "a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father" (Rev. 1:6). We can engage the powers of darkness through international development in order to demonstrate that chaos is not God's will. Just as the precious stones in the foundation of the heavenly city show the splendor of God's glory, Christ's followers serve as God's display window, showing what Christ's kingdom is meant to look like.

## Development and the Old Testament

This is an excerpt from *The Goal of International Development: God's Will on Earth as It Is in Heaven*, pages 162-63.

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What are the essential conditions for a society to experience wholeness, peace, and safety? When a society repents and turns to God, Scripture shows, He is willing to restore and bless the people with *shalom* (see Ps. 30:11; Jer. 33: 6, 9). A concordance study shows there seem to be two conditions for a society or person to experience *shalom*. One is the intention to follow God's laws and principles. The other is acceptance of God's provision of a substitute punishment for not following God's laws and principles. In both cases opposition should be expected from the enemy whose goal is the opposite of God's will.

1. The principle of keeping God's requirements as a condition for blessing and *shalom* was specifically stated to Isaac shortly before he encountered Abimelech, king of the Philistines (Gen. 26:1-5). It is through following God's guidelines that a society can function well. In fact, all nations on earth willing to function according to the will of God as revealed through his chosen people, will end up being blessed materially and spiritually (*shalom*). This is seen in Genesis 26:4 where God repeated the promise to Isaac that was originally given to Abraham: "through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions." Immediately following this promise is an illustration of one of the nations, the Philistines, being blessed by the presence of Isaac's family, in spite of various problems, and sending him away in peace/*shalom* (Gen. 26:29, 30), without further quarreling or fighting.

When God's principles are followed, peace results. This is also seen in the encounter between Moses and his father-in-law. Jethro showed Moses how to satisfy the peoples' need for justice, without wearing himself out, by delegating some of the work to others. Jethro specifically stated that if "God so commands" that the principles of delegation be followed, and if Moses did follow them, then Moses would be able to stand the strain of leadership and the people would go home satisfied (*shalom*/"in peace"). (See Exod. 18:7-23.)

2. But *shalom* does not come easily. A spiritual enemy has it as his goal to prevent *shalom*; to prevent God's will from being done. Broken relationships among people and with God characterize the activities of people and nations throughout the Old Testament. A pattern seen throughout the Major and Minor Prophets is the repeated description of God allowing one nation to punish another for their evil ways, with the focus on the people of Israel and Judah who had the most opportunity to know God's expectations, yet failed to follow God. As God would withdraw his presence and hand of protection, the evil one, the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31) would step in and create havoc. The Old Testament prophets recognized that God was somehow using or allowing one evil nation to punish another. Then the instrument of punishment of one group of people would in turn experience punishment for their own evil ways, in a seemingly never-ending cycle. (See, for example, Hosea 8:3-8; Joel 3:1-7.)

But a climactic statement by the prophet Isaiah points toward the possibility of a break in this vicious cycle. Speaking of the coming Messiah, Isaiah prophesied: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace [*shalom*] was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isa. 53:5). Jesus brought the possibility of an end to the cycle of one society punishing another for the evils it commits in its rebellion against God. Jesus took the final punishment on behalf of any person or society that will accept his peace offering. This was the defeat of the evil one’s schemes against humanity (1 John 3:8: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work”). By accepting this substitute punishment, people and societies can break out of a vicious cycle and experience healing of broken relationships with God, people, and nature.

## Luke 1:68-79 as International Development

In Luke 1:68-79 Zechariah sang about salvation from human enemies, about serving God without fear in holiness and righteousness, forgiveness, mercy, peace—the *shalom* spoken of throughout the Old Testament, that is the goal of international development.

(See the [book by this title](#) from WCIU Press.

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In the context of similar justice, righteousness, and faithfulness, Isaiah described “salvation” from feared enemies in the realm of nature (which can also represent disease micro-organisms that were unknown at that time): “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, ... and a little child will lead them. ... They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord” (Isa. 11:6, 9).

In the holistic nature of *shalom*, there is no dichotomy between physical and spiritual health and well-being. *Shalom* is the description of God’s will for the earth and everything living in it. *Shalom* is the goal of God’s Kingdom: “Our Father in heaven ... your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). God’s people need to be ready for serious opposition in the spiritual battle for the rulership of this world. Jesus came and “made peace” by his death on the cross. Believers should expect no less opposition than Jesus faced when they join him as “sons of God” in making (waging) peace in a broken and war-torn world.

*“Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).*

## Reflection: The Beatitudes and Social Justice

The Beatitudes in Matthew 5 give us Jesus' inaugural address about the Kingdom of God and show us what international development and justice should look like.

One way to hear the Beatitudes through the perspective of first century oppressed people is to read them in "chiastic" order, a common rhetorical and memory device in the Old and New Testaments. In this reading, the first four Beatitudes represent the condition of the oppressed. The second four represent the powerful or influential people of society who are the means by which God intends to bring blessing and justice to the oppressed. Those who are the means of blessing others, in turn, receive the same or similar blessing. For example:

**Oppressed:** Blessed are the poor in spirit

*For theirs is the kingdom of heaven*

**Powerful:** Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness/justice [because they championed the poor; In the past the prophets were persecuted because they championed righteousness]

*For theirs is the kingdom of heaven*

**Oppressed:** Blessed are those who mourn (because of oppressive circumstances)

*For they will be comforted*

**Powerful:** Blessed are the peacemakers (who do what they can to comfort the mourners and correct their adverse circumstances)

*For they will be called children of God*

**Oppressed:** Blessed are the meek

*For they will inherit the earth*

**Powerful:** Blessed are the pure in heart

*For they will see God*

**Oppressed:** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [and justice]

*For they will be filled {with righteousness and justice—compare Amos 5:24: "Let justice roll on like a river" and Psalm 36:10: "Continue your ... righteousness to the upright in heart."}*

**Powerful:** Blessed are the merciful

*For they will be shown mercy (Compare Psalm 36:5–6: "Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep [NKJV])*

The people of Jesus' day were hungering and thirsting for political justice. Jesus showed how their felt need for social justice would be met by the righteousness and *shalom* of God.

## Romans 8 and International Development

“For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:19-21).

### Why Did God Subject Creation to Frustration, “in Hope”?

1. After Satan used his free will to rebel against God, and because Satan was already the ruler of the earth, God put a long-term plan in place.

2. N. T. Wright explains it on pages 22-23 of his article, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” ([http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_Romans\\_Theology\\_Paul.pdf](http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_Romans_Theology_Paul.pdf)):

(c) The divine intention was, always, to deal with the evil of the world (“sin,” personified as in chap. 7) by heaping it up into one place and there passing and executing sentence of judgment upon it.

(d) This “place” was always intended to be the Messiah himself.

(e) The necessary precondition for this judging of sin in the person of the Messiah was that Israel, the people of the Messiah, should itself become the place where sin was gathered together, in order that this burden might then be passed on to the Messiah alone.

(f) Israel was thus, as part of its covenant vocation, called to be the “vessels of wrath,” the place where the wrath of the creator against the wickedness of the whole creation would be gathered together in order that it be dealt with.

(g) This was never intended to be a permanent condition. Israel was like a bomb disposal squad called to take the devastating device to a safe place to be detonated...

3. After the Messiah came, and dealt with the heaped up sin of the world, there was still the creation left groaning under the burden and frustration of what Satan has done to it. Just as God subjected the people of Israel to the frustration of having to know what is right (through the Law) and not being able to fulfill it, in order to show what sin really is, so creation has been subjected to the frustration of “knowing” what it is meant to be and not able to be that.

4. But now, instead of a Messiah to take the burden of the heaped up guilt and pay the price for Satan’s and peoples’ free choices, it is the children of God who have a responsibility for creation, and for those outside the covenant. God’s children have to freely choose to set things right insofar as they can, in the hope that others will also choose to do the right thing.

5. God has let a lot of time go by. God’s children need to keep using that time to do what they were originally created to do: be stewards of the earth and reclaim it from Satan’s dominion (Gen. 1:26).

## **Making *Shalom*: Reading Romans 12 from an International Development Perspective**

Societies experience well-being, safety, health, and peace to the extent that God's people are influencing (for the good) the way people relate to each other within that society.

Romans 12 lists seven gifts God has given the body of Christ for creating *shalom*. After listing the gifts and how to use them, Paul gives examples of practical applications of each gift. To notice the correlation of the examples with the gifts, the reader needs to know about the memory aid of chiasm, commonly used in the oral world of the Ancient Near Eastern. A chiastic structure is a form of ancient poetry of "rhyming" similar thoughts, for example, A B C B' A'. The center of the chiasm is the climax or main point. In Romans 12 the center or hinge verse comes after the list of seven gifts, followed in reverse order with examples of how each gift can be implemented.

Reading Romans 12:5-21 with this literary device in mind helps us see more clearly what a society and inter-personal relationships should look like when God's people are actively using the gifts God has given them.

### **CENTER OF CHIASM/HINGE VERSE (verse 9):**

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

### **PREFACE (Romans 12:5-6)**

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them:

#### **A. Gift of Prophecy (verse 6):**

let us prophesy in proportion to our faith.

#### **A' Example of Prophecy ("Forthtelling") (verses 19-20):**

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

#### **B. Gift of Ministry (verse 7):**

let us use it in our ministering;

#### **B' Example of How to Minister to Others (verses 17-18):**

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

#### **C. Gift of Teaching (verse 7):**

[let us use it] in teaching;

#### **C' Example of How to be a Good Teacher (verse 16):**

Be of the same mind toward one another.

Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble.

Do not be wise in your own opinion.



**D. Gift of Exhorting (verse 8):**

[let us use it] in exhortation;

**D' Example of an Exhortation (verses 14-15):**

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

[Compare this to the last Beatitude, Matthew 5:11-12.]

**E. Gift of Giving (verse 8):**

he who gives, with liberality;

**E' Examples of Giving (verse 13):**

distributing to the needs of the saints,

given to hospitality.

**F. Gift of Leadership (verse 8):**

he who leads, with diligence;

**F' Qualities Needed in a Leader (verses 11-13):**

not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer

**G. Gift of Mercy (verse 8)**

he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

**G' Description of a Merciful Person (verse 10)**

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love,

in honor giving preference to one another

**SUMMARY (Rephrases the Hinge Verse) (verse 21):**

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

## Colossians 3 as International Development

At first you might think Colossians 3 is encouraging people to forget about developing good societies on earth and just concentrate on the future reality of heaven: “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (vs. 2); “when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (vs. 4).

But actually this chapter is full of principles for living well in a thriving, developed society. First it describes negative moral characteristics that belong to the “earthly nature”: immorality, greed, anger, lying (vs. 5-10). When people relate to each other in these ways, they can’t trust each other, can’t work well together, can’t agree on goals and ways to accomplish those goals, etc. A society dominated by these characteristics is also a society that is likely to be underdeveloped in terms of meeting peoples’ basic needs.

Next comes a list of the positive characteristics of the kind of people needed in order for a society to thrive: “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiving one another, love” (vs. 12-14). When people demonstrate Christ’s life in these ways, the result is peace and thankfulness (vs. 15).

Then Colossians 3 gives examples of relationships in which different spheres of society honor each other and think of how to benefit each other (vs. 11, 18-22). The result is a society in which people are working wholeheartedly, giving their best efforts, in Jesus’ name (vs. 17, 23).

A society with a tipping point of enough people demonstrating the principles of Colossians 3 will be an example to the world of international development.

A society without these positive qualities will remain under-developed, chaotic, and even dangerous.

## International Development as Cosmic Battle

*This Reflection is an excerpt from my book, Chaos Is Not God's Will: The Origin of International Development.*

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b3157f3b40b9d21a8096625/t/5d5c1716137a7b0001c0e807/1566316316247/Chaos+is+Not+God%27s+Will+6.4.14.pdf>

In a cosmic battle for the rulership of this planet, God is deliberately overcoming evil with good until, in the end, Jesus will reign in his Kingdom of shalom. But until God ushers in that final perfect new heaven and new earth, there is a need for believers to engage intentionally in international development efforts to demonstrate God's will for people, for societies, and for God's originally good creation. Jesus' followers serve as God's display window, (1) showing what Jesus' reign is meant to look like. As pastor-theologian, Gregory Boyd, says,

*As Christ gave his all for us, so we are called and empowered to give our all for others. As we abide in Christ and participate in the love of the self-sacrificial God, our lives are to manifest the self-sacrificial love of God to others.(2)*

Love eliminates chaos, which is not God's will. We see this in the opening verses of Genesis and in the First Epistle of John, where those causing confusion are ultimately labeled as "children of the devil" (1 John 3:10). We see examples of this theme throughout Israel's history, in the messages of the prophets, in Jesus' demonstrations of authority over the powers of darkness, in the Epistles where we find principles for living loving, godly, and non-chaotic lives, and finally in the Book of Revelation where, in the end, Jesus victoriously reigns over all.

The images in the first few verses of Genesis set the tone and theme for the entire Bible as we see the Spirit of God hovering over the feared unknown of the darkness and deep, ready to stir it to life-giving status. Similarly, in the Gospel of John we see the tradition of an angel stirring up the waters of Bethesda, making them life-producing and healing. These images illustrate the origin of international development: setting right what is not right, something destroyed and desolate, something that is not compatible with life—*tohu wabohu*. There is a need in all societies for restoring order and relationships to reflect God's will for this world, overcoming evil with good.

(1). Ed Stetzer, *Subversive Kingdom: Living as Agents of Gospel Transformation* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 189.

(2). Gregory Boyd, "Living In, and Looking Like, Christ," in *Servant God: The Cosmic Conflict Over God's Trustworthiness* (Loma Linda: Loma Linda University Press, 2013), 407.

## **The Psalmist and the Apostle Paul: Soul Development and Transformational Development**

*“They that lay wait for my soul take counsel together ... O God, be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help. Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul; ... But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more” (Psalm 71:10, 12-14, KJV).*

*“No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work” (1 Cor. 3:11-13, NIV).*

*As he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7, NKJV).*

Our soul becomes what we pour into our minds and hearts. It is what we think about, what we value, what God lays on our hearts to strive for. Adversaries are those people and conditions that try to keep us from being, doing, and accomplishing what we know God wants us to be, to do, and to accomplish. What we do that does not positively develop our souls, and those for whom we have responsibility, will be tried by fire and consumed. But when we build into our soul the truths and values of God’s Word, our soul develops more and more into the image of Christ. And when people like this gather together in Jesus’ name, societies can be transformed into examples of what God’s will is meant to look like on this earth.