

*Shalom* in the true and comprehensive sense is God's design for His creation. A thing is "shalomic" when it conforms perfectly and exhaustively to its divinely ordained design, nature and function. The triune God created a universe characterized by virtually limitless diversity of form and function, and yet all of the myriad created entities share one critically important thing in common: They are all defined and determined by the principle of *relatedness*. That is, every created thing has its identity, function and ultimate purpose, not in and of itself, but in relation to all other things. God didn't merely create things; He brought forth a created *order* – an order that reflects and gives expression to His own trinitarian nature, order and relationship.

*Thus shalom is preeminently a relational concept and reality*; it speaks to a thing's flourishing and blessedness as that thing finds itself in a relationship of perfect harmony with all other things in the delightful interdependence of mutual endowment and support. And because the created order's shalomic inter-relatedness is itself subsumed in the creation's relationship with God, shalom is ultimately a Creator-creature reality. This evident in the account of the first creation (Genesis 1-2), and it is evident in the portrayal of the new creation (Revelation 21-22).

In terms of Paul's present discussion of resurrection, shalom implicates the concepts of *life* and *death*. From the scriptural perspective, these concepts don't refer to the presence or cessation of animate existence (a thing being "alive" or "dead"), but to a thing's existence in conformity to the truth of what it is in itself. Thus God declared to Adam that death would instantaneously result from his disobedience respecting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:15-17). This act of disobedience amounted to man's insistence upon defining himself and determining his own existence independently of God. But because man is divine image-bearer and image-son, he cannot adopt this course without losing himself – without dying to the truth of who he is and therefore to authentic human existence. *God embodies the truth of man, so that human autonomy is death for man*. Stated differently, man cannot know and experience life except as he knows himself and orders his existence in terms of his essential relationship with the One whose image and likeness he bears. Any sort, manner, or degree of separation between man and God amounts to the separation of man from himself; it amounts to his death.

Thus the Scripture shows that death did indeed come upon Adam and Eve as the immediate, inherent outcome of their yielding to the seduction of independence (ref. Genesis 3:6-8). And God affirmed and sealed them in their death by expelling them from His garden-sanctuary, thereby cutting them off from the life that is their full, unblemished and unhindered communion with Him (Genesis 3:22-24). Estrangement from God meant man's estrangement from himself, and so also his estrangement from all other human beings and every other created thing. Thus the death of man was the death of the created order in that all things are related to God in and through man, the image-son and vice-regent (cf. Genesis 1:26-28 with 3:8-19). Adam and Eve's insistence upon autonomy had brought the curse of alienation – the curse of *death* – upon the whole creation (ref. Romans 8:18-22). God's created *order* was now defined by the *disorder* and *disintegration* of estrangement; His "very good" creation had been vandalized and shalom had been destroyed. Death had gained the victory and ruled over God's works.

- b. Death defines the outcome of the Edenic seduction, and man's identity and role as mediator between the Creator and His creation meant that death wasn't confined to Adam and Eve and their offspring; the whole creation was brought under its sway. Thus, beginning with the protoevangelium, God's promise to restore His creation was His promise to recover life out of death and do so invincibly. Eve was the instrument of death, but she would also be the source of restored life. By God's design, Eve was to be the "mother of all the living" (Genesis 3:15, 20).

God's primeval oath in Eden was the promise of life out of death and He never deviated from this message from that point forward. In a myriad of ways – from visionary disclosures and providential actions to direct pronouncements, God continued to insist throughout the long salvation history that He would most assuredly fulfill His oath to conquer and destroy death and restore all things to Himself, thereby recovering the creation's life and establishing it in its shalomic existence. *Indeed, this ever-present theme is a key aspect of the Christ-centeredness of the Old Testament scriptures.*

- The uniform witness of Jesus and His heralds is that all of the Scriptures (that is, the writings of the Old Testament) speak of Him and have found their fulfillment in Him (cf. Luke 24:13-48; John 5:39-47; etc. with the common fulfillment formula recurring throughout the gospel accounts: "This was to fulfill...").
- All of the Scriptures proclaimed the Messiah in that they all proclaimed that God would prove faithful in fulfilling His pledge to restore His creation to Himself in the Seed of Eve. The promise and expectation of the coming messianic Deliverer was the promise and expectation of the creation's liberation from the curse of death.

Paul understood this and recognized that *resurrection* – life out of death – constitutes the fulfillment of God's ancient oath. Thus he concluded his treatment of the resurrection of the body as he ought: by showing it to be the focal point in the consummation of the creational restoration God pledged He'd accomplish in Eve's offspring – the Second Man and Last Adam. Paul has throughout insisted upon the fact and necessity of the resurrection of the body (and, by implication, the accompanying renewal of the entire material creation – 15:24), and he here underscores the fact that it is more than a phenomenon experienced by Jesus and later by His saints; *the resurrection of the last day punctuates and consummates the faithfulness of the triune God in His accomplishment of His eternal design to sum up all things in the heavens and earth in the Son.*

The resurrection of the body indicates the day of the material creation's renewal and thus the fulfillment of God's word spoken through His prophets. All of the Scriptures attest that day, and therefore so do all of God's prophets. This means that Paul could have drawn from any of them in summing up his discussion, but he chose to cite from a particular pair: Isaiah and Hosea (15:54-55).

Paul's first citation is from the twenty-fifth chapter of Isaiah (25:8), which is a hugely important passage in the flow of Isaiah's overall prophecy.

- The first thing to note is that this chapter forms the transition between two larger sections. These two sections, in turn, comprise the first of two prophetic sets (13:1-27:13, 28:1-34:17), both of which emphasize the twin themes of *judgment/punishment* and subsequent *restoration*. Thus in each of the two sets, the first section focuses on impending judgment (ref. 13:1-24:23 and 28:1-34:17) while the second focuses on the restoration to follow (ref. 25:1-27:13 and 35:1-10). Also, the first set has its primary concern in the Gentile nations while the second emphasizes the two Israelite kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

Thus chapter 25 forms the hinge between the judgment/restoration sections of the first prophetic set. More precisely, it is a doxology – a song of praise and thanksgiving – which serves to introduce in triumphal fashion the second section spotlighting the theme of restoration. In context, this restoration amounts to Yahweh's establishing of His eschatological kingdom which he will accomplish by destroying the imperial city and its desolating dominion. (The absence of a clear referent for this "city" suggests the notion of the "city of man" as raised up against Yahweh and His kingdom and rule; ref. 24:1-25:3, esp. 24:10).

- In this way this passage serves at least three critical roles in its own wider context: First, it highlights the truth that God's judgment/condemnation is not the last word, but has its goal in restoration. Secondly, as the immediate context focuses broadly on the world of men outside Israel, this passage also emphasizes the universal nature of God's restorative work. This work has its object in the whole world and not merely the Israelite people (ref. 25:6-7). Finally, it shows that this restorative work speaks to Yahweh's establishment of His everlasting kingdom. Paul certainly recognized this, and John's Apocalypse shows that this was indeed God's meaning in the prophecy (cf. 25:8; Revelation 7:9-17, 21:1-4).
- And serving this function within the larger context, it's not at all surprising that chapter 25 highlights Yahweh's pledge to destroy *death*, situating this pronouncement as the centerpiece of the chapter (v. 8). The destruction of death is the very marrow of the divine saving work, for death is the great antithesis to God Himself and His creation as He intended it. Victory over death means victory over the curse; it means liberation of the exiled and captive creation and restoration to the Creator.

Paul's citing of this passage in support of his summary observations concerning resurrection, then, indicates two things. First of all, it shows that he recognized, as Isaiah did, that God's restoration of Adam's race (and so the whole creation) has its great and determinative work in the final destruction of death.

But it also shows that Paul understood Isaiah's prophetic promise to have been fulfilled in Jesus' resurrection and the creation's deliverance from death in Him. A few further things about Paul's use of this passage are worth noting:

- First, Paul drew upon the Hebrew text of Isaiah 25:8 rather than the Greek Septuagint. At the same time, he adopted a reading which has death swallowed up in complete *victory* rather than *forever*. (The difference in meaning results from the way the vowel sounds are articulated in Hebrew. Hebrew has no vowel letters, so that oral tradition, not written form, determines meaning.) The two ideas are not mutually exclusive and both fit the context well. Nevertheless, Paul chose to adopt the reading, *victory*.
- It is possible that Paul made this decision because the idea of victory better suited his intention in using this citation. This reading *does* better suit Paul's intent (ref. 15:56-57), but he wouldn't have employed it if it didn't accord with the Isaianic text and its meaning. Thus it's also likely that this reading of Isaiah reflected the rabbinical interpretation that Paul was familiar with. (Interestingly, most English versions have chosen to adopt the alternate reading: He has swallowed up death *forever*.) In the end, what's clear is that Paul wanted to emphasize the great truth that the resurrection of the last day consummates God's absolute triumph over death – the triumph that was secured in Jesus' resurrection as the first fruits from the dead.
- Critically important in Paul's use of this passage is the way it expresses Yahweh's victory over death. That is, it doesn't merely promise death's destruction, but also implies the reversal of its disastrous effects. For God to go no further than abolishing death would be for Him to leave His creation in ruins. Death must indeed be destroyed, but unless its work and effects are undone, it may fairly be argued that death continues to have its way; though abolished, death would yet hold the creation under its sway.

Thus the prophet insisted that Yahweh's swallowing up of death would see the reversal of its consequences. All tears will be wiped away from all faces as the reproach of Yahweh's people is removed. In the place of sorrow, alienation and blindness there will be the lifting of the veil which is draped over all people together with great joy and rejoicing (25:6-8).

- And finally, Paul's use of Isaiah's prophecy shows that he saw its fulfillment in relation to Jesus Christ and resurrection. Set in the context of Yahweh's judgment of the whole world (24:1-23), Isaiah's promise looked to a coming day when He was going to swallow up death in victory: when He would restore the desolate heritages – not just Israel's desolation, but that of the whole earth and all its peoples. Paul observed that He has now done so in *substance* in Jesus' resurrection and will have done so *comprehensively* in the resurrection and renewal at the last day (15:54).