

STUDY 16

Saved in Hope–1

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INTRODUCTION¹

The title of this study indicates that there is a sequel: ‘Saved in Hope–2’. The focus of that study will be the hope of the Bride, the wife of the Lamb, and the responsibility that he exercises towards her in the light of the future that the Father has planned. The hope of the people of God may be expressed in various ways, such as the full revelation of the sons of God; the resurrection of the body; the full glory of the Bride; the security of the people of God as the dwelling place of God—his City; and so on. The elements of hope in such pictures are very much related to the future that they, the people of God, have in and through Christ. In *this* study, the focus is on the hope for the whole creation, which is now being ruled over by the Last Adam, as the King–Priest over the whole of the cosmos, to bring it to its full glory. Then, in the last Great Day, the whole of his work will be revealed, as he will have brought all things to fullness in the Father’s purpose. As the true, eternal King–Priest, he will lead the whole of the cosmos in its worship of the Father, such being made possible by the work and witness of the Spirit. He is currently filling all things (bringing fullness to the emptiness of sin and the wasteland of evil) and shaping up all things that have lost their shape by virtue of human and angelic rebellion. In this way we could say that the action of bringing about the renewal of heaven and earth is akin to bringing about the original creation, where God brought form to the formlessness and filled the emptiness.

There is clearly no little overlap between the two aspects of hope (i.e. the hope that the people of God have for themselves and their destiny, and the hope that they have for the whole of the creation). The Church needs to live in the hope set before it, for the power of its life and message is profoundly affected by the reality of the hope that it holds. This surely is the burden of Paul’s prayers in Ephesians 1:18ff., and 3:14ff., where in effect he prays that the Church may understand what it is and what it has been given, and how these things will be its glory. Likewise, the hope for the whole of the creation affects the life of the Church now, and forms the context of its mission, as is made plain in the extended attention that Paul gives to the theme in places such as Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 15.

On the one hand the Church has to live in the reality that the age to come is just that—the age *to come*—but on the other hand it lives in the benefits of that age now,

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the English Standard Version.

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already being the resurrected community which has been seated with Christ (as in Col. 3:1–4). We run into deep problems, when either: (i) we do not realise that this age is passing away; or (ii) we try to make the age to come fully present now in this age. In the intersection of the ages (as in 1 Cor. 10:11) the Church lives by faith in all that the Father has revealed through the Son by the power of the Spirit. It is always saved ‘in hope’, both for itself and for the cosmos.

THE KING TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS CREATION

The Old Testament understanding of the Kingship of Yahweh is inseparable from the doctrine of creation. In Acts 17:22–25 Paul sets out the parameters of the Old Testament doctrine of creation and its relation to the sovereignty of God. In this passage Paul makes it clear that because God is the creator of all things, he has no need for human hands to serve him in any way. He is the originating Father of all men and women, and the nations have been ordered by his hand for his purposes. In setting forth such things he lays the foundation for his critique of idolatry, and places his earlier proclamation of Jesus as the resurrected Lord in its context. What is clear from Paul’s exposition is that there is never a time when God is not taking full responsibility for his creation. Even when God was not counting the world’s trespasses against it, or when he was overlooking the times of ignorance, he was working out his plan and purpose for the redemption of the cosmos.

Much of the burden of the New Testament epistles relates to the nature of the apostolic gospel. This is so, not simply when Paul or the others give a defence of the apostolic preaching of Christ as the *content* of the gospel (as in Galatians, for example), but also in the *mode* of its proclamation (as in 1 Cor. 1–3, for example, where the themes intersect so clearly). Moreover, the apostolic message is placed in the context of the unfolding plan of God. There is not simply a mystery of Christ to be revealed through the gospel, by a mystery of the administration of the gospel of Christ (as in Eph. 3). This means that things were revealed in a certain order and sequence so that the Cross would be truly at the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4 cf. Heb. 1:1–4; 1 Pet. 1:10–12; etc.). The proclamation of the apostolic gospel to the nation is part of the administration of the mystery of Christ, for the blessing of the nations and for the glory of God.

In the light of these comments, the great themes of Scripture (e.g. covenant, worship, kingship, the City of God, redemption, glory, etc.!) are all in their own way expressive of the fact that God the Creator never abandons his creation, and has secured its future by virtue of his own faithfulness. We should not miss the fact that God has always intended his purposes for the creation to be brought about *in Christ* (Eph. 1:9; cf. 1:5; 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9). All of the great themes of Scripture converge in him, and all are fulfilled through him, who is the Amen to the all the promises of God (2 Cor. 1:20).

RULERSHIP IN GENESIS 1 AND 2, AND IN PSALM 8

Genesis 1:26–27 associates the ideas of ‘image and likeness’ with rulership over the creation. The concepts of being made in God’s image and that of rulership appear

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consecutively in the text, and while it is not unreasonable to suggest that the latter is a comment on the former,² other scholars draw the concepts together on the basis of other considerations.³ Bruce Waltke helpfully draws attention to the differences between the Genesis account and the image/vice-regent theologies of other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) systems.⁴ Most notably, in other ANE systems the king alone was seen as the divine representative of the deity on earth, while in Genesis the dignity of being created as God's ruling representatives is accorded to human beings *per se* (and both male and female at that!). 'Just as images or statues represented deities and kings in the Ancient Near East, so much so that they were virtually interchangeable, so man as the image of God was created to represent God himself as the sovereign over all creation.'⁵

On balance, while it seems that we may say that the concept of the image of God is closely related to the concept of vice-regency (and thus the function of exercising dominion over the creation), we could never claim that the concept of vice-regency *exhausts* the dimensions of the image of God. Whatever the precise relationship of the concepts exegetically, it is very clear that God has placed human beings at the pinnacle of creation, both to represent his presence in the earth and to exercise devolved authority. This line of interpretation is not new. While the connection with kingship images in the ANE is more recent, the essential thought has a long history. The eighteenth century Scottish theologian, Thomas Boston, for example, expresses it this way, 'God made him [Adam] lord of the world, prince of the inferior creatures, universal lord and emperor of the whole earth . . . Thus man was God's deputy governor in the lower world, and thus his dominion was an image of God's sovereignty.'⁶

The context of the dominion statements clearly indicates, however, that this vice-regent authority was not to be exploitative. The ruling function is linked with the fruitfulness of the earth and is expressed in the priestly service of God through caring for the creation, as the language of Genesis 2:15 emphasises. The picture drawn for us in Genesis is of Adam as the co-worker with God, who was to tend, care for and protect the garden in which he had been placed.⁷ His was a high and noble calling, on

² This, for example, is the line which Wenham seems to have taken (G. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC, vol. 1, Word Books, Waco, 1987, p. 32).

³ For example, by drawing on parallels with ANE kingships, where rulers set up statues/images of themselves throughout their dominions in order to demonstrate sovereignty over their realm. This line was taken by von Rad (*Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, Harper and Row, New York, 1962, p. 146) and finds broad support today (e.g. in Motyer, Klein and Brueggemann).

⁴ B. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2001, p. 66.

⁵ E. H. Merrill, 'A Theology of the Pentateuch' in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament* (ed. R. B. Zuck, Moody Press, Chicago, 1991), p. 14.

⁶ T. Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, Banner of Truth, London, 1964, p. 50.

⁷ It is beyond the scope of this talk to develop, but the relationship between the vice-regency of Adam and the role of the kings in Israel is an area worthy of exploration. The Old Testament theology of kingship stood in contrast to the theories of kingship in the surrounding ANE nations. The prime role of the kings in Israel was to lead the nation in covenantal faithfulness to Yahweh, especially as seen in the rejection of idolatry, and the maintenance of true worship. The kings in Israel were to be subject to the Great King and to submit to his law. The Lord himself was to prosper the nation, and likewise be its defender. He alone was to be worshipped, and he alone was to demand the heart allegiance of the people. The kings in Israel, therefore, were never autonomous, and were only ever to rule under Yahweh's authority, and thus for the good of his (Yahweh's) people (so Psalm 72). Where the kings rejected this understanding of their kingship they were brought to judgement (e.g. Ezek. 34 and the comments recorded in the prophetic history of Israel in Judah about the good and bad kings). In the Genesis accounts Adam's kingship is strictly a non-autonomous vice-regency, exercised for the good of the creation. Christologically, these thoughts provide rich lines of study for the nature of the Lordship exercised by Jesus.

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which the true blessing of the whole of creation hinged. It is no coincidence, therefore, to see the links drawn between rebellion against Yahweh and various ecological catastrophes in a number of places in the Old Testament (e.g. Deut. 28:38–41; Hos. 4:3; cf. Isa. 24:4–12; 33:9; Joel 1:10–13; Amos 8:8–9; Zeph. 1:3; etc.).

In the light of these comments it is possible to understand the strong accent on human dominion over the creation in Psalm 8, and perhaps see the Psalm as a sort of exposition of the role of Man in Genesis 1:26–28. Psalm 8 gives the reader a succinct exposition of the status of human beings. We should not read the Psalm as indicating the *insignificance* of humanity in the light of the immensity and complexity of the rest of the creation, but in precisely the opposite way. When the Psalmist considers the heavens in all their glory he is prompted to ask the question in verse 4, ‘What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?’ This poetic synonymous parallelism emphasises the unique nature and place of human beings in God’s sight. He is mindful of them, in a distinctive way, in the midst of all the vast complexity of the creation. The description of Man in Psalm 8:5 is of him being made a little lower than *Elohim*,⁸ being crowned with glory and majesty. As such, he is the ruler over God’s creation, expressed in Psalm 8:6–8 in language that is very reminiscent of Genesis 1:26ff.

⁸ The translation of the word rendered *Elohim* is somewhat difficult. Brown, Driver and Briggs give the following range of meanings: ‘a. *rulers, judges*, either as divine representatives at sacred places or as reflecting divine majesty and power . . . b. *divine ones*, superhuman beings including God and angels . . . c. *angels* . . .’ (F. Brown, S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs, *The New Brown–Driver–Briggs–Gesenius Hebrew & English Lexicon*, Hendrickson, Peabody, 1979, p. 43).

In the New Testament the text of Psalm 8 is quoted in Hebrews 2. English versions express it differently, reflecting the range of use above. The ESV opts for, ‘Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor’. The marginal note refers to the Septuagint (LXX) using the word *angelos* (angels). The NASB chooses to translate the verse, ‘Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty!’, with their marginal note indicating that it could be translated as ‘angels’, but making no reference to the LXX. The KJV goes with ‘For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels’, while the NIV opts for ‘You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings’, with a marginal note indicating that it could be translated ‘God’.

While recognising that some early versions took *elohim* to mean angels, Craigie (in common with most modern commentators) argues that the word should be translated ‘God’, on the basis of the parallels with the creation accounts (P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, vol. 19 in Word Biblical Commentary series, Word, Waco, 1983, p. 108). This interpretation runs foul of Hebrews 2:7, 9, however, where the writer clearly means to express the term as ‘angels’. He is not simply following the LXX in this usage, but argues the case theologically, by reference to Christ in his state of humiliation (as it has come to be called). This relates to a wider question regarding the relationship between the powers of the Son in his incarnate state generally, compared with the time when he was made to be sin for us on the Cross. It is clear from Heb. 1:6 (and the angelic events there alluded to, but recorded in the birth narratives) that the angels worshipped the incarnate Son. We have indications (say from Matt. 26:53) that Jesus knew he had authority to petition the Father to send angelic helpers as he wished. It is also clear from Hebrews 1:1–4 (and the multiple references to his ascended state at the right hand of the Father in Hebrews and elsewhere in the NT) that the Son now rules over all things, angels and principalities and powers alike. Paul takes it as read that the redeemed and glorified humanity will rule over angelic powers (1 Cor. 6:3). Together with the unique status of human beings as bearing God’s ‘image and likeness’ and the associated status described in Psalm 8, I think it is clear that there can be no thought of the ontological inferiority of human beings to angels. The limitation thus seems to be linked with the act of sin-bearing itself. As the incarnate Son was made sin for us, he came to that state where fallen humanity is: where we do not see all things subject to him. He was subject to all things on the Cross, so that by removing the curse of sin he might reinstate humanity to its full glory, like unto his.

CHRISTOLOGY AND PSALM 8

The Psalm, of course, has been given great Christological significance in the New Testament, especially as it is applied to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 2:6–8). These Christological references highlight the nature and destiny of human beings in Christ. None of these passages is of mere academic interest for their New Testament authors. Each is used in connection with the Church, and Christ's reign and rule for her, in the context of deep pastoral concerns. Each, too, implies that redeemed humanity shares in that rule, by the gracious action of being raised up with Christ. In other words, the hope of the Church is linked with the redemption of Man in Christ, on which, in turn, the whole destiny of the creation hinges.

We should not miss the fact that the writer to the Hebrews' exposition of the Psalm is prefaced with the statement, 'Now it was not to angels that God subjected *the world to come*, of which we are speaking' (Heb. 2:5). In other words, the Psalm has an eschatological fulfilment, which becomes the focus of the pastoral method of the writer. He is always urging his readers to look up from and beyond their present circumstances to that which is to come. The whole of Hebrews is really a book of hope, without which the Church would languish in the midst of suffering. The writer argues that this theme of hope was the dominant note of the people of faith in the Old Testament, who were prepared to see the loss of temporal things for the gaining of eternal ones.

Throughout the book, this orientation to future hope is affirmed by the appearing of Jesus Christ, who assures us of this hope by virtue of both his person and work. This is no less so in the writer's treatment of Psalm 8. In Hebrews 2 he uses the Psalm to indicate the nature and destiny of human beings, but in 2:8 concludes the quotation from the Psalm with a comment and an observation. His *comment* on the Psalm is this, 'Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control'. In making this comment he reflects the totality of the dominion of the archetypal man, as seen in the Psalm's reflection of Genesis 1:26–28. His *observation* on the Psalm is this, 'At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him'. In fact, given the pastoral situation of his readers, they could be tempted to say, 'We see nothing subject to him', living as they were under the hammer of persecution, facing the loss not only of their property, but also of their very lives.

In the light of this 'non-fulfilment' the writer points to Christ. Doubtless the phrase 'son of man' as used in Hebrews 2:6b takes on a new significance because of Jesus' self-description as the 'son of man' in the Gospels. For the writer to the Hebrews, Christ is the fulfilment of Psalm 8. However, he is such not for himself alone, but for the people he represents as their great High Priest. The chapter goes on to illuminate the inseparability of Christ and his people, particularly through the gracious act of incarnation for the purpose of atonement, by which he destroys the work of the Devil who has been keeping men and women captive through the fear of death. We may say, then, that in Christ, redeemed humanity is restored to its rightful position, but this is not perceived with the eyes of sight. Indeed, to use Pauline language of Romans 8, the whole of the creation is anxiously longing for the revealing of the sons of God (i.e. those in the Son). Thus we do not yet see: (i) Christ as he will be seen in glory; or (ii) ourselves as we will be seen in him (cf. Col. 3:1–4). However, what has been accomplished in and through Christ has secured the whole of the creation, as the vice-regency of Man has been fully and completely settled in him.

THE CURRENT ACTION OF THE MAN, JESUS, IN RELATION TO THE CREATION

The New Testament understanding of the work of Christ does not stop with his Cross, nor even his resurrection. If we were to take the ascension and the promised *parousia* away from the New Testament, we would have lost the heart of its message of hope. The hope is in no way separate from the work of the Cross, and indeed it is the full consummation of the work there completed, so we are not arguing that we may go ‘beyond the Cross’ in any way. The Christian doctrine of hope for the creation is inseparable from the bearing of sin, for the creation itself will only be set free from its current limitations when the sons of God (cleansed and glorified) are fully revealed (Rom. 8:18–25). These sons are none other than those who in Romans 1:18–32 had exchanged the glory of God for a lie, and worshipped idols out of a darkened heart and foolish mind. Their adoption as sons is only possible by virtue of the sin and guilt bearing action of *the* Son, who by grace was made for us the ground of our justification, through the redemption in his blood and the propitiation that he accomplished on the Cross (Rom. 3:21–26).

Because of the vice-regency of Man, there could be no redemption of creation without dealing with the sin of its designated king-priests. But the sin of Man could only be dealt with in *the* King-Priest, who stood in no need of redemption himself. Creation’s purpose is to be secured and established in him alone, as only *in him* is our king-priestly status restored. The creation is not under the current state of ‘curse’ because it is itself inherently deficient in any way (it is still ‘very good’!). The presence of evil and human sin occasions the restraint of the creation by God through futility. Such limitations are placed on the creation now, so that humanity (in its fallen state being incurably idolatrous) does not find its fulfilment from the creation. From the very beginning we have been formed to find our fullness and glory in the Father. Thus, the imposition of futility is a subjection in *hope* of the restoration of true human freedom and dignity, and thus of the creation’s true glory.

While the creation is not subject to fallen humanity now (as in Psalm 8), what must not be lost is that the creation is not out of control of the True Man. The man Jesus is currently Lord of heaven and earth and ruling over all things from his ascended throne (as in Eph. 1:20ff.). The Last Adam is exercising his dominion, under which the Church may rest by faith, living in the assurance of his love until the end of the age. The goal of God in this current age is that the whole created order, not least the rebellious nations of the earth, will be brought to submission under the Lordship of the Son (as for example in Phil. 2:1–11).

When we turn our attention to the book of the Revelation, we find that that all things proceed from the throne room of God and the Lamb, the dynamic picture of which we are given in Revelation 4–5. The Church, in all the manifold diversity of its earthly conditions seen so clearly in Revelation 2–3, must take note of the vision of the throne. It (the Church) and the whole cosmos is secured by the eternal presence and divine activity that we see there, and thus we see the unfolding chapters of the book being the expression of the reign and rule of the Lamb and the One who sits on the throne. The scroll of all history is in the hands of the Lamb, as the seven seals on the scroll lead to the opening up of the successive views of history (via the trumpets, bowls and visions that are closely related). The Lord of the cosmos is the head of the Church. He stands in the midst of the candlesticks, and speaks to his people, bringing

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encouragement, chastisement, and exhortation as needed. However, he is not simply the Lord of the Church. He is the Lamb who rules over all history and all elements of the creation (even the evil, rebellious elements), to bring about the purposes that the Father is revealing through the scrolls and its seals. In short, the goal is the purification of the whole creation in order that it might be a fit home for the Son and his Bride. In the end, the whole of the cosmos will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God, and every element of evil will have been played out to the last degree.

Thus we can see that in this current age, which is passing away, the Son is deeply at work. He is bringing together the full complement of his people, calling the elect through his gospel by the power of the Spirit. He is bringing his Church to maturity, equipping every member of his body for the works which have been prepared beforehand for us to walk in. As the Elder Brother of the family, he is bringing many sons to share in the glory that he himself has in the Father. As the great High Priest, he is equipping a whole community of king–priests united to himself, to lead the creation in its fruitful worship of the Father. As the Bridegroom, he is glorifying the Bride with his own holiness, so that she may be able to bear the full weight of the destiny he has prepared for her, and along the way he is nourishing and protecting her until the day of the great wedding feast. At the same time, he is bringing light to all the dark lairs of evil, exposing the deeds of the evil one and his cohorts, to show the triumph of the Cross over their vaunted greatness. He is bringing his enemies to judgement, emptying the City of Man of its power and releasing its captives. He is unseating the spiritual Pharaoh by the power of his own Passover sacrifice applied through the preaching of his Cross among the nations. He is bringing the finally impenitent to their goal, and at the same time he is himself sustaining his people with his own being: true bread and true wine for the life of the world. He is establishing the worship of the true Temple and filling it with the Father’s glory. He is securing the outcome of the new covenant, sealed in his own blood, so that no man will again teach his neighbour to know the Lord, for all will know him, from the least to the greatest, for they will know their sins forgiven and their iniquities will be remembered no more. These elements (as doubtless many more) are descriptive of the current action of God in Christ towards the whole of the creation.

We must, then, see the sufferings of this current creation as linked to the great plan and purpose of God in Christ. Having the great and eternal promises of God, and having Christ as the great High Priest over the household of God, we do not lose heart. We have been taught to pray ‘Thy kingdom come’—it has, and it is, and it will!

In all things, the Son is at work to bring all glory to Father, whose kingdom it is. His joy (and ours) will be inexpressible, as in the Son we all cry, ‘Abba!’—and the Father is seen to be all in all. This is the great hope of the cosmos, and of us as God’s image bearers and king–priests.