

THE HOPE OF THE AGES—Part 7

by Mike Stallard

This article is the seventh in a multi-part series outlining the Bible's message of prophetic hope as it pertains to the future of this age, the Church, the nation of Israel, the Gentile nations of the world, and the created universe. Previous articles have addressed the wonderful prospect of hope for the separate institutions of the nation Israel, the Church, and the Gentile nations. This article will focus on God's specific plan and deliverance for the created order itself.

It is clear that God's original creation plan included a beautiful earth with men and women reflecting God on earth as His image in several ways. Among those was mankind's exercise of dominion over the planet and its various creatures (Gen. 1:26-28). God directed this plan with more detail when Adam is given a place to live (Eden), a job to perform in tending the garden, a command to keep, and a companion to assist him (Gen. 2:15-25). It is also highly significant that God gave Adam responsibility to name the animals (Gen. 2:19).

However, God also gave Adam and Eve free will. It was possible for them to disobey God's commands. The temptation of Eve by the serpent and the ultimate fall of Adam into rebellion against God led to judgments from God that mar the very created order that God had given to them (Gen. 3:14-19). Especially significant for our discussion is the curse that comes upon the world because of Adam's sin. The ground itself is cursed (3:17). This means a couple of things for humankind. First, new elements will exist in the created order, which are unpleasant. Specifically, thorns and thistles are mentioned. It is no surprise that three of the Gospels mention the crown of thorns that Jesus was forced to wear at His crucifixion. They represent His own identification with the curse brought about by Adam's transgression. His death on the cross was meant to provide the basis for eliminating that curse. Men and women can have His work on the cross applied to their own lives by simple faith, that is, trusting what He did on the cross to take away their own sin and guilt brought on by the curse. The second relevant application of the ground being cursed is the fact that hard work will now be required on Adam's part. The land will yield its plant food only with much difficulty.

Of course, the most terrible aspect of the curse brought into the created order by Adam's sin is the fact of death itself. The New Testament affirms that death entered into the entire cosmos by Adam's sin (Rom. 5:13). The entire creation "waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:19-21). Thus, the universe, not just planet earth, appears to have been made subject to the curse of death due to Adam's rebellion. Furthermore, this passage pictures the created order as longing for its own deliverance from this devastating predicament.

Therefore, it is not surprising to find that God's plan of the ages includes the hope and promise of the complete restoration of nature itself. This is expressed in several places in both Old and New Testaments. Representative of Old Testament teaching would be passages such as Amos 9, Isaiah 11, Zechariah 14, and Ezekiel 40-48. All of these passages speak of the ultimate and final restoration of the Messianic Davidic kingdom of Israel. Simultaneous with this restoration, however, will be the renewal of the earth itself. The kingdom will be a time "when the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; when the mountains will drip sweet wine, and all the hills will be dissolved" (Amos 9:13).

4BPStallard0401