



ESSENTIAL

**THE HOPE OF LIFE
AFTER DEATH**

A Biblical Theology
of Resurrection

M. JEFF BRANNON



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creation account, it is clear that God created Adam and Eve, gave them a wonderful place to live, and provided the opportunity for them to receive eternal life. The creation account thus reveals another astounding purpose for humanity: God creates humanity to dwell with him in his presence.⁹

God creates humanity to glorify God by serving as his vice-regents (purpose in life). In 1 Corinthians 10:31 Paul writes, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” With this exhortation, Paul provides a fitting summary of humanity’s purpose—to glorify God in all things. As the Creator and Sustainer of all things, as the eternal and infinite one, as the only one who is holy, righteous, good, gracious, loving, and just, God is worthy of all praise and glory. Since God is all-glorious and worthy of all praise and honor, people are called to glorify, praise, and magnify God.

The Bible is replete with passages that serve as exhortations to glorify God. By considering just a few, we can see that the Lord’s name should be glorified (Ps 115:1), that all the nations will worship and glorify the Lord (Ps 86:9), that people are created and called for God’s glory (Is 43:5-7), that it is God’s plan for the earth to be filled with his glory (Hab 2:14), that the good works of believers should lead others to glorify God (Mt 5:16), and that God is worthy of all glory (Rev 4:11). In answer to the question “What is the chief end of man?” the Westminster Shorter Catechism reads, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”¹⁰ The small sample above demonstrates that the writers of the Westminster Standards were not without justification in identifying this as the purpose of humanity. Paul’s exhortation in 1 Corinthians 10:31 is a good description of God’s purpose for people—to glorify him in all that they do.

This purpose for humanity to glorify God is evident in the creation account. When God creates humanity he says, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness” (Gen 1:26). Let’s reflect for a moment on the importance of

⁹For excellent studies of temple and the notion of God dwelling with his people, see Beale and Kim, *God Dwells Among Us*, and G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004).

¹⁰Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 1.

images. The very essence of an image is to bring glory or honor to that which it represents. Commenting on the role of images in the ancient Near East, G. K. Beale notes that “to be in the image of a god meant that the king reflected the god’s glory.”¹¹ Although we are far removed from the culture of the ancient Near East, our modern culture still embraces the importance of images in different ways.

One of my favorite hobbies and pastimes is following Alabama football. In Tuscaloosa, outside Bryant-Denny Stadium, there are statues of Alabama football coaches who have won national championships. The statues of Wallace Wade, Frank Thomas, Paul “Bear” Bryant, Gene Stallings, and Nick Saban are memorials of these coaches and serve to bring them honor for their achievements in college football. Even in twenty-first-century Western culture, images are important. If this is true in modern culture and for statues of college football coaches, how much more is this true of the ancient Near East and biblical culture? As God’s image, people are created to glorify him—to reflect God’s glory back to him in all that we do.

The creation account also reveals that God created humanity in his image to glorify him by serving as his vice-regents.¹² In Genesis 1:26 God says, “Let us make mankind in our *image*, in our likeness, so that they may *rule*” (emphasis added). God is the great king of creation, and he creates humanity in his image to rule over creation. From the context of Genesis 1:26-30, creation in the image of God is connected with God’s purpose for humanity to reign and exercise dominion over creation. In Genesis 1:28 God’s words to Adam and Eve serve as a blessing and command: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” This command, sometimes referred to as the original commission, provides the biblical and theological foundation for the kingdom of God.¹³ To be specific, Genesis 1:28 communicates how

¹¹G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 31.

¹²John Frame describes the significance of humanity in the image of God in a similar way when he writes, “What Genesis 1:26-28 says is that God has made man like himself to equip him for his task as lord, a lord subordinate to God’s ultimate lordship. So the image of God consists of those qualities that equip man to be lord of the world, under God.” *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 785-86.

¹³For more thorough discussions of the kingdom of God, see M. Jeff Brannon, “The Kingdom of God,” *Biblical Perspectives* 17, no. 30 (2015), http://reformedperspectives.org/articles/jef_%20

humanity will serve as God’s vice-regents and reign over creation. As humanity is obedient to the original commission, God’s image increases in number (be fruitful and increase in number) and extends to the ends of the earth (fill the earth and subdue it). As God’s image increases and goes to the ends of the earth, so also God’s reign extends to the ends of the earth.¹⁴

The band Tears for Fears penned the song “Everybody Wants to Rule the World.” I am a big fan of this song for a couple of reasons. First, I simply like the music and the song. Second, the lyrics get at something quite profound. I really do believe that everybody wants to rule the world, and I think that all people want to rule the world because this is precisely what God created humanity to do! God created humanity in his image to bring glory to him and to represent his kingship. By fulfilling the original commission (Gen 1:28), humanity would bring glory to God by multiplying his image and therefore his reign throughout the earth. And this represents God’s wonderful purpose for humanity.

Table 1.1. Creation purposes (life)

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Basis for life | Right relationship with God |
| Locus of life | God’s presence in Eden / tree of life |
| Purpose in life | Reign over creation as God’s vice-regents |

SUMMARY OF CREATION THEMES

As we have seen, God’s life-giving purpose is intimately connected with other creation purposes and biblical themes: (1) God created humanity for a relationship with him, (2) God created humanity for life in his presence, and (3) God created humanity to glorify him by serving as his vice-regents. I have referred to these other purposes as the basis for life, the locus of life, and the purpose in life. To further illustrate the close relationship between these purposes, I will reference a phrase that Graeme Goldsworthy,¹⁵ and

brannon/jef_brannon.KingdomofGod.html, and Vaughan Roberts, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

¹⁴For this understanding of the kingdom of God, I am indebted to Richard Pratt’s teaching from his hermeneutics course, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Spring 2002.

¹⁵Graeme Goldsworthy defines the kingdom of God as “God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule.” *Gospel and Kingdom*, in *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* (Bletchley, UK: Paternoster, 2020), 54.

subsequently Vaughan Roberts, have employed. Roberts defines the kingdom of God as “God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule and blessing.”¹⁶ As he demonstrates in his book, these themes are closely related throughout Scripture and the history of redemption.

To connect Roberts’s definition with the discussion in this chapter, “God’s people” corresponds to a relationship with God (the basis for life), “God’s place” corresponds to life in God’s presence (the locus of life), and “God’s rule” corresponds to serving as his vice-regents (purpose in life). This leaves only the final part of the phrase, “and (enjoying God’s) blessing.” But we can see from Scripture that the greatest blessing that God gives his people is life. Not merely life in isolation, but life in relationship with him, life in his presence, and life with the privilege of serving as his vice-regents. While other books have traced the themes of God’s people,¹⁷ God’s place,¹⁸ and God’s reign,¹⁹ in this book I will primarily trace the theme of life, and specifically resurrection life after the fall, as the great blessing of God.

Table 1.2. Creation purposes restated

| | |
|----------------|---|
| God’s people | Relationship with God (basis for life) |
| God’s place | Life in God’s presence (locus of life) |
| God’s rule | Serving as God’s vice-regents (purpose in life) |
| God’s blessing | Life / resurrection life |

From the onset of creation, God’s purpose for humanity was life. But the life that God gave to Adam and Eve at creation did not represent the final fulfillment of God’s purposes. In light of the prohibition not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the original commission, God called Adam and Eve to submit to his word and to obey his command in order to experience the fullness of life that God intended. Specifically, the

¹⁶Roberts, *God’s Big Picture*, 22. Roberts adds “and blessing” to Goldsworthy’s phrase and sometimes supplements the idea with “enjoying” God’s blessing.

¹⁷See, e.g., Benjamin L. Gladd, *From Adam and Israel to the Church: A Biblical Theology of the People of God*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), and Robertson, *Covenants*. Robertson emphasizes, “‘I will be your God and you will be my people’ is the heartbeat of every divine covenant in the Bible” (5).

¹⁸See Beale and Kim, *God Dwells Among Us*.

¹⁹See again Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, and Roberts, *God’s Big Picture*.

fullness of life that God intended for humanity is closely tied to the creation themes in Genesis 1–2.

First, with God’s command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the implication is that Adam and Eve were to undergo a time of testing and probation. At some point, if they had been obedient, this time of testing would have ended, and the ability to sin by breaking God’s command would have been removed. On the one hand, it is unclear whether Adam and Eve were to eat from the tree of life once or continually. On the other hand, Scripture does not explicitly reveal when and how Adam and Eve would have completed their time of testing. In light of God’s expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden and God’s protection of the tree of life (Gen 3:24), it is possible that the time of testing and probation would have been over and the reward of eternal life would have been bestowed if Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of life.²⁰ Regardless, what should be evident is God’s intention for humanity: obedience and eternal life.

Second, in light of the Bible’s depiction of the Garden of Eden as the place of God’s presence and God’s commission for Adam and Eve to increase in number and fill the earth, God’s purpose was for his people to make the entire earth his temple-garden and the place of his presence.²¹ As humanity was faithful to the original commission, multiplying God’s image and subduing the earth, the garden (which no doubt would have become a populated temple-garden) would extend to the ends of the earth. In this way, the entire earth would become God’s temple, the place where God dwells with humanity.

Third, as Adam and Eve and their descendants were faithful to God’s original commission, they would also extend God’s reign to the ends of the earth. Since God’s image represents his domain and his kingdom, humanity would extend his kingdom to the ends of the earth. On faithful completion of the original commission, heaven, as the place of God’s reign, would come to earth, and heaven and earth would be one.

²⁰This inference is supported by God’s expulsion of Adam from the garden after the fall, when God says, “He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever” (Gen 3:22).

²¹See Beale and Kim, *God Dwells Among Us*, 17–26.

Finally, although not explicit in the Genesis account, if Adam and Eve had been obedient, they would have likely received a heightened experience of life—what we could perhaps term a “glorified life.” Upon obedience and at the end of their time of testing, in addition to the removal of the ability to sin, Adam and Eve would have perhaps been rewarded with new and glorified bodies. In 1 Corinthians 15:44-47 Paul contrasts the pre-fall body of Adam with the post-resurrection body of Jesus. Adam’s pre-fall body was “natural” and Adam “became a living being,” while Jesus’ resurrection body is “spiritual” and Jesus has become “a life-giving spirit.” That Jesus’ resurrection body is greater than the pre-fall body of Adam is clear from 1 Corinthians 15:44-47, but the passage also perhaps implies that Adam would have needed a new body even if he had not fallen in sin.²² Thus, Adam in his pre-fall state, with a “natural body” (1 Cor 15:44) and “of the dust of the earth” (1 Cor 15:47), was likely not fit to enjoy and experience the fullness of God’s presence. If this is the case, then upon passing God’s test, Adam would have been blessed with a glorified body, a body fit to experience God’s presence, a body fit for a glorified creation, and a body that was no longer susceptible to sin and death.

God’s purpose for humanity entails life, and this life is expressed through a right relationship with God, access to God’s presence, and service as God’s vice-regents. God’s goal for humanity is nothing less than a perfect relationship with God, the entire earth as the dwelling place of God, the entire earth as God’s kingdom, and an eternal life where his people are no longer subject to sin and death and are fit to dwell in his presence. These purposes are closely connected throughout all of Scripture—in creation, in the fall, and throughout God’s long and unfolding plan of redemption. Understanding the close relationship between these purposes is essential for a biblical theology of resurrection.

CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

When we reflect on God’s purposes for humanity, we are reminded of God’s goodness. God is the author of creation and the giver of life. He creates

²²See Beale’s discussion in *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 41-45, 262.

humanity for relationship with him. He provides a wonderful place for his people, and he intends to dwell with his people in the place of his presence. Finally, God gives humanity the wonderful privilege of serving as his vice-regents and reigning over creation. All of this emphasizes God's good purposes for his people. In the midst of the sin, suffering, turmoil, and death that comes after the fall, we should reflect on the life that God gave to his people in creation and the life that God promises in redemption. As wonderful as the life that God gave Adam and Eve in creation was, it will pale in comparison to the life that God bestows on his people in glorification.

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