



A Secret History of Hope

An Account of Futures, Forgotten

BY
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To Dan,
my dear friend.

When I sing,
I hear your voice too.

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I. The World that Was

The world has hung out its shingle. Like an empty hotel with a no vacancy sign, it promises to have little to offer and rarely disappoints. If we are to hope in a world as it is, we are going to need to ask some pointed questions. But who asks questions of an empty motel with a no vacancy sign? The history of hope is secret, in part because it is hidden, but also because we have failed to be curious. Curiosity leads us to ask the two questions that lead us to meaning. How did things get broken? Who can fix them? The history of hope is a story of identity, it is a trail of clues that lead us through a garden to a life-giver. The story begins with a world as it was.

When the King created the worlds with 10 words, 5 times He declared they were good. At the creation of humanity, He announced it was very good. But at the creation of solitary person, placed in the garden, when the seventh pronouncement of goodness should have completed the story of a perfect world, the King said instead, “it is not good.” What was not good? “That the human should be alone.” It was in human companionship and community that the goodness would be found, and lost, and found again. The community was meant to grow, along with the garden, until it filled the earth. Before it fully began, the world would be broken.

The first thing the King consecrated was a time, a day to know Him and enjoy Him. The second thing He consecrated was a place, a Garden in which to know Him and enjoy Him. The third

thing God consecrated was people, a couple to know Him and enjoy Him and represent Him throughout the whole new world.

The task of the couple was to serve and guard the garden. The garden was a refuge where humanity was safe with God and each other. It was the place for which we now long. It was a place of vulnerability without fear, exposure without shame. On the banks of these rivers, humans could lay down their swords and take off their armor.

Why were humans tasked with guarding a garden in a good world? Why would goodness need protecting? Why was there a tree with knowledge of good and evil if there had been no evil? Why make such a tree to grow in a garden of goodness? Evil was only to misuse the good. To misuse the tree made evil knowable. To know evil was to resent the good. To lose favor was to resent the King's goodness. The serpent, who had tasted this tree attacking the King the only way he could- by defaming the king through what the King treasured most- us.

If the humans were to guard the Garden, their failure was already underway. A serpent had entered the garden, and the humans were so new to the world, that a talking serpent was unsurprising. As the serpent spoke to the woman, the man did that which would be at the root of all future troubles, to see his companion misled, tricked, and swindled and do nothing.

The rouse of the serpent, then as now, was trick us into stealing for ourselves what God had already promised to give us. The serpent promised to make them "like God". God had created them "in His image." We were more like God before we obeyed

the words of the serpent. Afterwards, we were more like the serpent. The humans had sold their share of the garden sanctuary in exchange for an empty motel were the sign reads, “no vacancy.”

In the words of the King to the serpent, the woman, and the man, are curses, curses upon the serpent, curses upon the ground. The dawn of history went from beauty to brokenness as pain, frustration, and death were introduced to the world. This hardly seemed like a good beginning for the history of hope. But as evil is good misused, so despair is hope obscured. What will be is more like what was than what is. The history of hope is largely weighted toward the future. The future of hope is rooted and planted in history.



THE KING CREATED THE WORLDS WITH TEN WORDS

2. The Serpent Crusher

If you could carry hope with you, what container would you carry it in? If you could purchase hope in a store, how would it be packaged? What would be written on the label? The glittering sign calls to the weary traveler, “Shelter Here, No Vacancy.” It glistens with nothing to give. The sign of hope is by contrast bleak. It is a black sign with a skull on it. A broken skull.

The King spoke to the serpent in the Garden saying, “I will put enmity between your seed and the seed of the woman. He will crush your head. You will bruise his heal.” In this terse oracle the future of hope is dropped like a seed into the ground. It is a seed filled with mysteries. What is the “seed of a woman”? The seed, in every other case, is the seed of a man. Could the future hope of the world be, unlike all other descendants of the woman be born without the agency of a human father? This is also the one who would crush the head of the serpent. To step on the head of a poisonous snake is as dangerous to the person as it is the snake. Would the defeat of the deceiving one involve the death of our rescuer? In the closing words of the opening story of the chronicle of humanity we learn that we need one born of a virgin, who will lift the curse and restore the blessing by defeating the serpent at the cost of his own life.

Though childbirth would now be painful, hope makes pain bearable. So, the mother of all living cried the first cry of faith with the birth of her firstborn, “I have begotten a manchild, the

lord.” Was she expecting the birth of her firstborn to be the coming of her deliverer? Hoping leaves us open to heartbreak. Life in a broken world can break even our hopes. Her firstborn would not be a serpent crusher but a brother slayer. When the King was pleased with Abel’s sacrifice but not with Cain’s sacrifice, Cain’s response was not to bring a better sacrifice, but to get rid of his brother. Humanity had learned a new skill. First, we learned to look away from the trouble of others. Then we learned to blame others for wrongs we had committed. Next, we learned to get rid of those who did good. Even behind these subterfuges were attempts to make ourselves pleasing to the king. Though the king loved us, we had now learned to steal what had been already promised us. At our core, we had lost the ability to trust the intentions of everyone else. We did this to become safe. Instead, we became alone and the aloneness was “not good.” Though God created us as persons, we became “individuals.” Through alternating efforts to be admired or be intimidating we sought to wrest love from each other, and in vain sought to manipulate love from God. Trouble multiplied and death reigned, and it seem like the Serpent Crusher would never come.

When Eve gave birth to Seth, she said “the Lord has given me a seed to replace Abel for Cain killed him. She named him Seth. In seeking an “appointed seed” and naming her son “appointed” Eve shows, once again the strength of her hope in the King’s promises. An admirable human trait is our ability to continue to hope when conditions appear hopeless. One of the great confirmations of God’s faithfulness is that some continue to hope in him when the promises seem far off. Hope has a way of spreading to others as well. After the birth of Seth, we are told, “then people began to call upon the name of the LORD.”

When an Angel came to announce the Serpent Crusher's birth, it is spoken to a man who cannot fathom that his betrothed, though soon to give birth, is a virgin. The Coming King would be the seed of a woman without the agency of a man. Joseph is further told how to "call upon" his name. "He will be called 'Jesus' because he will save his people from their sins." The name, a derivative of Joshua, is YaShua, or the LORD is Salvation. That salvation would not be given by one brother killing the other to steal God's favor, but by one who died for his brothers and sisters to give them God's favor. The Serpent would be crushed by a single act of self-sacrificial kindness. The victory over the serpent is repeated in every act of self-sacrificial kindness. The serpent sought to defame the King through a member of humanity. Instead, through a member of humanity, the King would defeat the Serpent.



AN ANGEL GUARDS THE GARDEN

3. The Rest-Giver

The effects of the listening to the serpent included the move from intimacy to alienation- alienation from the King, the natural world and from each other. The Garden we were meant to guard was now guarded against our return. An angel with a flaming sword was given the task we failed to do. We had lost that sanctuary where we had once walked with the King. We had lost the safety we once felt in each other. When we lived in the safety of the King, we were safe with each other. When we were apart from the King, we became alone with each other. Each of us now lived to meet our own needs, at the cost of each other.

The world also frustrated our efforts. We were separated by work. The frustrated efforts made the days long and tiring. Though we were made of dust, we would work the dust until the dust won. Our hearts became those motels, empty with no vacancy signs. We learned to live with an emptiness that had no room for others. We were created for community, we recreated ourselves as individuals. We were created in the image of God. We were born in the image of Adam. Only if there were one who could break the cycles of work and frustration would we be able to see, know, and love each other.

The first thing the King sanctified was a time. The time he made holy was a day. The day was made holy for rest. The rest was made holy for knowing and enjoying him and each other. Time is the place where we meet. To be known and loved, someone needed to destroy death. Someone needed to give us back our

futures, and our present. To give us back our future we needed a serpent crusher. To give us back our present, we needed a rest giver. The one who regained what we had lost would need to succeed where we had failed. He would walk with the King as we once did. He would obey the King as we once should have.

For seven generations we read the list of names, the list of offspring and the refrain, “and then he died.” The case for holding on to hope became thin and stretched. But people began to cry out in the name of the King. That is another thing about hope. A promise is only as sure as the person who made it. We can believe the unbelievable, but only when it is dependent upon the dependable. How we hope is made visible by who we call for when things are at their worst.

A man named Enoch walked with the King and then was no more. When we saw the King had taken him, our hope continued to regrow. Calling upon the king and walking with the King are signs of an approaching change, a change in our present and in our future. When people begin to hope, they begin to speak the language of hope and develop a vocabulary of hope. In difficult days people have spoken of “crossing the Jordan” and of “looking for a city.” They looked for the approach of the flaming chariot. They laid down the sword and shield.

In the days before the Serpent Crusher’s birth there was a proliferation of baby girls named “Miriam” or “Mary.” The people were looking for Miriam and her brothers Moses and Aaron to be the generation of their deliverance. These are vocabularies of hope arising in troubled times. Sometimes to survive, hope must be hidden. The language of hope is often in

code. The name the daughters Mary, was to give a Romanized expression to an anti-Roman revolution. If hope is to reach captives, it must be smuggled into enemy territory. People we meet along the way motion with their fingers or draw a symbol with their staff so that even the dust from which we sprang speaks of hope. Signals and symbols make invisible hope visible. When Lamech's son was born, he said, "this one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed." Since the birth of Seth, no other child had been born with an oracle. Each child born was put to work, but none was announced as giving rest. No other was attributed with alleviating the effects of the curse.



THE ORACLE OF LAMECH

Oracles, to be understood across generations. Words that are spoken as mysteries need time to unfold. If the train of hope has moved across time slowly, one reason why was so that you could get onboard. The words of Lamech, like the words of Eve have

immediate and distant significance in the history of hope. Lamech's words are part of a new vocabulary. Vocabularies are developed when we connect old ideas in new ways. Lamech named his son "Noah" saying, "he will give us rest." "Nacham" means rest. "Noah" means "comfort." Lamech develops our vocabulary of rest but connecting the rest his son will give us by the way his son will give it, by being a comfort to us. Looking into the life of Noah, we learn that Noah found favor in the eyes of God, Noah was blameless in his time, and Noah walked with God. At last we have someone who walked with God as we once did and obey God as we should have. While the wickedness of humanity grew worse and worse, the King would give the world rest by means of a flood and a renewal of creation. A rest that was wide but not deep enough. It was a short reprieve that speaks of a better rest, and a better rest giver.

When the Seed of the Woman arrived, He declared Himself to be the Rest Giver, calling to the crowd,

²⁸ "Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. ³⁰ For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light."

We have all worked to achieve rest. We have never succeeded. At times some of us have worked to please God. At times we have worked to try to please others. At other times, we have worked to please ourselves. Each of these efforts has become a study in dissatisfaction and exhaustion. Our manipulations to try and get love or power or wealth became our way of life. The Rest-giver teaches us a new way of living by joining Him in His

yoke and walking beside Him. He leads us in the path of being gentle and humble in heart.

We have lived to quench our inner thirsts by our work or by theft. He sees the thirsts we have and offers us a gift of living water:

³⁷ Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹ But this He said in reference to the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified. John 7:37-38

Instead of laboring with sweat and thirst, we would find ourselves refreshed by Him. If the effects of the curse were in part to work without ample results, and to see our attempts at intimacy thwarted at every turn, Jesus declares that He has come to relieve our deepest thirst and satisfy our misplaced and mis-pursued longings. When He calls to us, “If anyone thirst” we know He speak to us because we all thirst. Our deepest longings have not only not been met, we have mis-identified them. Our frustrated efforts to relieve them have only made them worse.

The great day of the feast was the commemoration of the day that Moses struck the rock so that water flowed out to quench a nation dying of thirst in the wilderness. That nation is now us and our comfort and rest is unreachable without a servant. But we see in the Rest Giver that when He was struck, water flowed from His side to save us who struck Him.

In the end of the Noah story, the King promises humankind he will not flood the earth again. The sign that the King has called a truce with his people is a new covenant and a rainbow. But the word used here is also the word for a battle bow. Once the king had pointed that bow with its arrow down toward humanity. Now the sign of the peace was that the bow was pointed up toward the heavens. We will know the rest has come, and the rest-giver who will bring it when we see he is a heavenly king who himself takes the arrow meant for us. All of that is hidden in the history of hope.



THE WATERS COVER THE EARTH

4. The Nation Blessor

“Joy to the world” sounds like an impossibility. The world may promise happiness, but it rarely delivers, and when it does, it is short lived. Joy is a happiness that stays with us when times are tough. Joy is a fruit of hope and blessed are those who taste it. But in Joy to the World, the joy is not the only problem. The world means everyone is invited or perhaps even included. Religion and nationality, and beliefs seem to divide. When the King called Abraham it seemed like a special blessing to a special person.

“Go from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father’s house,
To the land which I will show you;
² And I will make you into a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And *you shall* be a blessing;
³ And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse. (Genesis 12:1-3a)

This might sound exclusive. The idea of a chosen people does not suggest joy to the world, but joy to a few, perhaps joy to the special ones. But the scope of the hope is expressed in the last piece of this promise: “And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

Hope is hidden in mysteries. Mysteries are hidden things that are becoming known. The mystery here is that there are a few who are chosen to suffer so that all might know joy. The mystery here is that the selection of one was the means to the inclusion of all. The King would repeat the idea more specifically in this way:

“By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand, which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸ And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (Genesis 22:16-18)

The selection of Abraham and Isaac and their trials which follow are the King’s means of restoring the blessing upon the world. The blessing through Abraham comes from the LORD to the world through a singular “seed” of Abraham. The seed of the Woman will not only be born to humanity. He will be born a descendant of Abraham’s family. The hope of the world would not only be a Serpent Crusher and a Rest Giver, He would also be a World Blessor. He would not only break the curse; He would not only lift the effects of the curse. He would come to restore the blessings of the King to the planet and to humanity upon the planet.

It is one thing remove our punishment. We call that “mercy.” It is another thing to restore the blessing. We call that “grace.” It is the difference between being “off the hook” and “in the family.” The Joy given to the world is not simply that we might be

released from the curse, but that we would be made part of the King's family.

Matthew's Gospel shows how this works progressively. In Matthew 1:18-21 we read:

“behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a Son; and you shall name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.’”

Here the joy seems reserved for the chosen people, the Jewish people, the descendants of Abraham through Isaac. That is true. But it is not the whole story. Matthew 4:12-16 expands this idea to those places where Jews and non-Jews are intermingled:

¹² Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; ¹³ and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴ *This happened* so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled:

¹⁵ “THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI,
BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE JORDAN,
GALILEE OF THE GENTILES—

¹⁶ THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT,
AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH,
UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED.”

In Matthew 12 it is specifically declared that the scope of the blessing would be wider still:

Many followed Him, and He healed them all, ¹⁶ and warned them not to tell who He was. ¹⁷ *This happened* so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled:

¹⁸ “BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN;

MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL DELIGHTS;

I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM,

AND HE WILL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES.

¹⁹ HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT;

NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS.

²⁰ A BENT REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF,

AND A DIMLY BURNING WICK HE WILL NOT EXTINGUISH,

UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY.

²¹ AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE.”

Isaiah shows us the coming one, the Seed of the Woman, would be justice and hope for the Nations of the world. He would specifically help the “bent reed” and the “flickering wick.” The Nation Blesser, it turns out does have a “special people.” That people consists of “whoever needs Him most.”

By the end of the Gospel of Matthew, often thought of as the “Gospel to the Jews” we find the most explicit expression of the global scope of the work of the World Blesser, to declare the King’s good news to “all the world.”

Paul speaks of this mystery in this way,

“...when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which in other generations was not made known to mankind, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; ⁶ *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow

heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” Ephesians 3:4-6

The mystery that was hidden was that a family was selected so that everyone could be included. The future of the world was for the whole world to enjoy. Since that blessing is Eternal Life, it is a blessing both for people of every place and for people of every time. We speak of the coming of the King as though it split time in two. More accurately, the coming of the King made fragmented time whole.

What would this world look like if the King’s blessing were returned to it? An oracle from 600 BCE describes it this way:

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch from his roots will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him,
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and strength,
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
And He will delight in the fear of the Lord,
And He will not judge by what His eyes see,
Nor make decisions by what His ears hear;
But with righteousness He will judge the poor,
And decide with fairness for the humble of the earth;
And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.
Also righteousness will be the belt around His hips,
And faithfulness the belt around His waist.

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb,
And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,

And the calf and the young lion and the fattened steer will be together;
And a little boy will lead them.
Also the cow and the bear will graze,
Their young will lie down together,
And the lion will eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.
They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea.

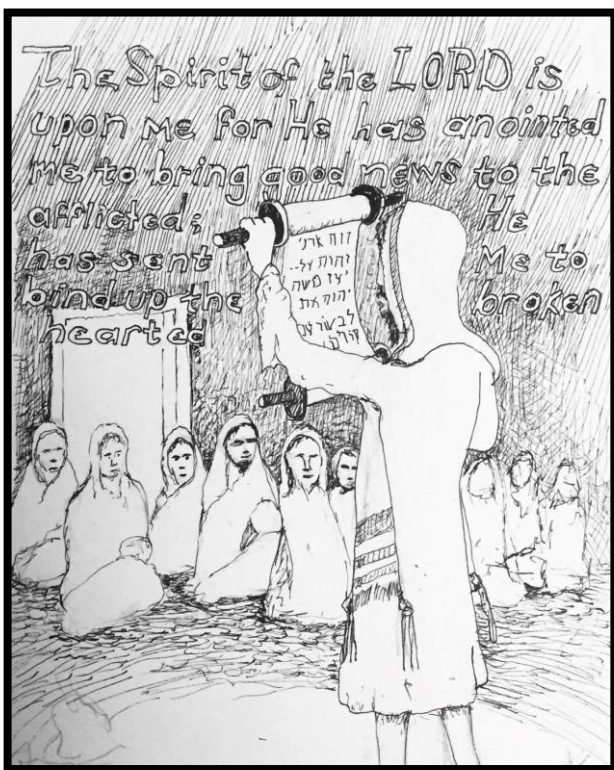
Then on that day
The nations will resort to the root of Jesse,
Who will stand as a signal flag for the peoples;
And His resting place will be glorious.

The Prophet Isaiah 11:1-10

He is called the shoot from the stump because He would rise when the house of David was cut down. He is called the rod of Jesse because he would not arise from the palace of David's fame but from the pasture of Jesse's obscurity.

Within humanity the descendant of Judah, the rod of Jesse will remove injustice and oppression, while establishing justice, equity, and security. The Blesser who establishes this goodness will provide most for those who can afford it least. The restored blessing means a restoration of value and dignity to those who were most degraded and victimized. When He comes, there will be no powerless and no voiceless because the King will be our advocate. His standard, His delight will be that we live together knowing that all are valued by and under the protection of the King. We are apt to be skeptical of this, because we have so

rarely seen power in the service of kindness. This difference demonstrates that what is coming is a change in the very nature of things. We see a world where bullies and tyrants have their way, leaving us divided between the have-nots and the have-it-alls. Here the privileged are protected and the vulnerable are victimized and have been taught, “that is just the nature of things.” In the world of the Nation Blessor, this upside-down world will be turned right side up and our imbalanced societies will know peace and harmony.



MESSIAH'S MESSAGE

But the blessing goes even deeper. The curse upon the ground and upon the serpent affected the nature of life itself. Sickness, threat, violence, deterioration, decay, and death had become so normalized that they are the system in which everything now functions. We cannot image a world in which none will hurt or destroy, so the goodness of the world to come is unimaginable. Part of hope is giving image to the unimaginable. If hope is the ability to see an unseeable future, then faith is the determination to live as though the future is now. Love is the decision to invite others to experience it. There is coming a day when death is no more. This reversal was inaugurated by a King of Kindness who rose from the dead. He invites us to follow Him on this path from death into life. When we are His, death is not the end, but the beginning.

When we sing “Joy to the World” we sing, “He comes to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found.” The joy is not only that the curse is broken. It is that the blessing is restored. Blessings are a thing that we all need but rarely think of. A blessing is a status of special favor that preserves you into the future.” Blessings were often given from parents to children. The giving of a blessing from parent to child signals value, acceptance, love, and invests the child with their future hope and purpose. When our parents withhold their blessing from us we can feel rejected, unvaluable and alienated. When parents leave their children without a blessing, it can feel like both a loss of our past and a loss of our future. This makes having blessing of God feel even more vital. Perhaps we have wondered whether or how we can be “okay with God.” God’s blessing means that God is more than okay with us. The Nation Blessor can also be the You-Blessor if we simply receive Him. That is the sole requirement of

every gift. We don't have to earn it. We don't have to steal it. We do have to receive it. This gift is yours because of the faithfulness of the Nation Blessor. It is also yours because of the faith of Abraham of whom it was said:

“By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand, which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸ And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

The Blessings of God are so certain that God swore on His own life to give them to you. This is a cause for hope and joy. The King did the very thing he would not allow Abraham to do, give his only son. The Seed of the Woman then, must also be the Son of God. Being both fully God and fully human, the one who swore on his own life to keep His promise of blessings, could also then give His own life so those blessings could be surely ours.

The Gift of the King's Blessing, while we cannot make it, earn it, or steal it, we can share it. Hope may seem hidden, but it need not stay hidden. It may be by “invitation only.” But everyone gets at least one invitation. The invitation has open arms. But it also has pierced hands. The blessing of God is not an abstraction, but a committed love, love for the world, love for you.

5. The Scepter Keeper

Are the forces that run the universe friendly? This was the serpent's question in the garden, and it continues to be the question of our lives. Many assert that the King is great, but who is assured that the King is good? The continued presence of suffering, injustice, deterioration, and death can easily lead us to believe that if God is Great, He must not be good. Our assumption is that we have seen all there is to see. But what if we haven't seen it all? What if we have not seen the full expression of the King's goodness because He has not yet manifested His complete greatness? What if the world as we know it is not an expression of His Kingship, but our own? If what we have is the result of the best that human kingship can offer, we need a king from somewhere else. We need someone who is not only great but someone who is also good. If the King of Kindness came, what sort of kindness would we show Him? Even about to be born, we welcomed Him with a sign that said, "no vacancy." If there was no room in the inn, there was less room in our hearts. He loved us. We killed Him. How can we hope if even God is not safe in the hands of humanity? Though the King was unsafe in our hands, our only hope is that we will someday be safe in His. In the rule of this King the world will be what is meant to be. In the care of this King, we will become what we were meant to be.

In Genesis 49, Jacob gives oracles to his sons. One of them will be chosen to be the lineage for the Coming One, the Serpent

Crusher, the Rest Giver, the Nation Blessor. The character of the Coming One need to be reflected in the heart of His fore-parent. The choice depended upon much. Would it be the child of Jacobs favored wife, Rachel? Would it be the child of his first wife, Leah? Certainly, it would be the first-born of the favored wife. Instead, Jacob reviews the lives of the sons of Leah. Reuben, for is pursuit of illegitimate dominance, is passed over. Simeon and Levi, because of their anger and vengefulness are also passed over. Finally, Judah is chosen, and the oracle of his choosing is strange to our ears:

As for you, Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father's sons shall bow down to you.
Judah is a lion's cub;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He crouches, he lies down as a lion,
And as a lion, who dares to stir him up?
The scepter will not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,
And to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples.
He ties *his* foal to the vine,
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine;
He washes his garments in wine,
And his robes in the blood of grapes.
His eyes are dull from wine,
And his teeth white from milk.

The oracle begins by presenting Judah as one who would keep the wickedness of his brothers in check. When the brothers

might have left Benjamin in Egypt, it is Judah who cried, “no take me in his place.” Judah would keep his brothers from doing more harm by restraining them, but also by self-sacrificial love. Thus, he could be entrusted with the scepter “until Shiloh comes.” The phrase here more literally is, “Until He-to-whom-it-belongs comes.” Judah could safeguard the scepter, but a better king is coming.

If David, the son of Judah, is the best that human kings could produce, our only hope is that we would have a King who comes from somewhere else. The promise of Jacob is in part the Kingship of Judah, but further is it a Kingship from elsewhere. The House of Judah would provide kings for Israel. The King from Elsewhere would command the obedience of the peoples, or the “goyim.” In the day of this King, there would be such plenty that even “the foal of a donkey” would feast on the finest grapes.” This King would have power “wash his garments in the blood of grapes,” that is make war, but because it would not be necessary, he would feast on wine and milk. He is a King as Great as He is good, and His goal is to lay out a table and have you at it.

The world ruler would not only remove the curse, He would also restore the blessing. He would not only bless the world. He would keep the world in that Blessing. This is a crucial matter. It does us little good for the King rescue our present without preserving our future. We have well proven that we can hardly be trusted to live on this planet, much less run it. If the future is to stay fixed, we need more than a change of order. We need a change of Kings. It was a day that the Prophet Daniel could see in the distance:

¹³“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” Daniel 7:13-14

The created world itself knows this day is coming and longs for it. Longing is hope that leans in to reach forward. The Apostle writes, “creation itself groans in anxious longing for the revealing of the children of God...and we in ourselves groan similarly.” When we hear the promises, sometimes we feel them too. We constantly feel that things are not as they ought to be- though at times we try to deny that feeling. Sometimes, especially when we hear the words of promise, we can believe that things are not as they will be. In those moments, we find ourselves taken into the secret history of hope. Those promises from the past become, inside us, echoes of the future.

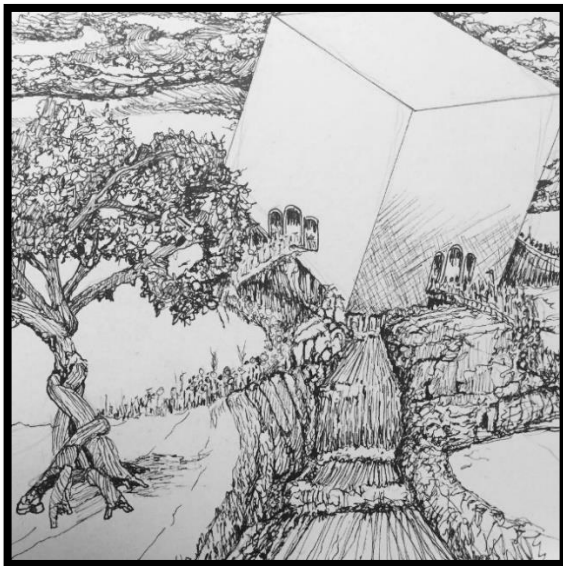
The Serpent Crusher, the Rest Giver, the Nation Blessor, the Scepter holder has come. He does not offer us the Midnight Motel, with its light that beckon the lonely into its greater loneliness. No, He has prepared for us a Heavenly city into which the nation stream from the North and South and East and West. He calls us by name and invites us to come.

“Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out

of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

⁶ He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. .”Revelation 21:1-7



THE ETERNAL CITY

The victory referred to here is an idea that is developed over the course of John's Revelation. It is not the doing great things. Nor does it entail making or willing things to be better. It is a title conferred upon those who continue to believe the promises of the King when life seems hopeless. Victory means simply holding to the hope of the King's promises.

If the love of the King is a gift you cannot earn; if the promises of the King are a future that is coming; if the work of pleasing the King is something He has already done for you, all that is left is for you to trust Him. But the trust that is needed is the one thing He will never coerce, that we allow ourselves to be loved by Him. For all the titles we have for Him, He offers us the name, "Beloved." To gain that title we must give ourselves to being loved. In a world that has often showed it has no room for us, Eternal life is ours when we determine to make room for Him. Dying for us, He has given us life. Living for us, He has given us rest. Blessing us, He has given us favor. Reigning over us He has given us security. The History of Hope is weighted toward the future, and the Eternal King has made His future ours as well.