

HOPE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT*

By David A. Hubbard -

I INTRODUCTION

All the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterward, also proclaimed these days (Acts 3:24).

Those words of Peter (cf. also 1 Pet. 1:10-12) remind us that the first Christians understood the Old Testament as promise and the New Testament as fulfilment. That note of hope and promise, which guided the early believers, is the centre of the observations that follow.

A. *The Focus on the Prophets*

This study has deliberately skirted the fertile soil of apocalyptic literature in order to traverse more carefully the terrain of the prophets. An occasional sidetrip, however, has been taken into other parts of the Old Testament, since the whole thing is a book of hope, a set of writings tipped toward the future.

In tackling the great prophet themes, I must ignore the rich *vocabulary* of hope, though W. Zimmerli,¹ J. van der Ploeg,² and H. W. Wolff³ have treated it in ample measure and handy form.

Further, because my aim has been to summarize and to some extent schematize the prophetic teaching, I have here

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1. W. Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope in the Old Testament* (SBT, second series 20) (London: SCM, 1971; Nashville, Illinois: Allenson, 1971) 1-11.
2. J. van der Ploeg, 'L'espérance dans l'Ancien Testament', *RB* 61 (1954) 481-507.
3. H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, ET by M. Kohl (London: SCM, 1974; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 149-155.

deliberately avoided both detailed exegesis of the relevant passages and extended engagement with the literature which debates their meaning. Some oversimplification, therefore, is unavoidable.

B. *The Definition of Hope*

Since the subject is *hope*, we can gratefully bypass a technical discussion of what *eschatology* is - with its debate over narrower and broader definitions. I lean toward the broader form, despite van der Ploeg's caveat that eschatology should be restricted to the apocalyptic view of the end times.⁴ To be preferred is P. R. Davies' recent definition. Eschatology is a 'dimension of belief...that history moves in a direction, that this direction is set by God, and that God acts within history to insure this direction.'⁵ In this perspective, prophetic hope and eschatology mean about the same thing.

C. *The Approach of this Paper*

The two main sections give (1) a sketch of the *dominant themes* which contribute to Old Testament hope and (2) a summary of the *common emphases*. The look at the *themes* will highlight the variety of strands braided together in the fabric of hope. Further, it will suggest that hope is expressed through images and thematic models not through 'firm doctrines and fixed schemes'.⁶ The section on the *common emphases* speaks to the unity that works in and through the biblical diversity, while the conclusion looks at the implications of these two approaches for the New Testament and the Christian church.

II DOMINANT THEMES WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO OLD TESTAMENT HOPE

A. *Exodus and Conquest*

There may be some truth in J. Maag's thesis that nomadic life - life on the move - influenced Israel's march to the

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4. J. van der Ploeg, 'Eschatology in the Old Testament', *Oudtestamentische Studien* 17 (1972) 93.
 5. P. R. Davies, 'Eschatology in the Book of Daniel', *JSOT* 17 (1980) 38; cf. P. Hanson's definition cited by E. W. Nicholson in *Tradition and Interpretation*, ed. by G. W. Anderson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979) 203.
 6. R. E. Clements, *Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1978) 147; cf. his 'The Forms of Prophetic Hope', 144-147.

future.⁷ But it seems quite clear that it was Israel's *history* more than her social background that formed the basic foundation of her hope.

1. The *Exodus* was clearly the ground of Hosea's expectations, as it was the basis of so many of his accusations against his fellow northerners (e.g. 9:10; 11:1-4; 13:4-5; cf. Am. 2:9-12). His salvation promise takes Israel back to her beginnings:

Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her.

And there I will give her her vineyards,
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
And there she shall answer as in the days
of her youth,
as at the time when she came out of the
land of Egypt (Ho. 2:14-15).

The rescue beyond the judgment recaptures the fellowship of the desert and transforms the bitter experience of Achor, where Achan was judged for his sin (Jos. 7), into an opportunity of hope. In a few brief words the adventures of exodus, wilderness, and conquest are both rehearsed and surpassed.

Similarly, in chapter 11, where God's kindness is the ground of his divine complaint (11:1-4), Hosea looks to a time when,

They shall go after the Lord,
he will roar like a lion;
yea, he will roar,
and his sons shall come trembling
from the west;
they shall come trembling like birds
from Egypt,
and like doves from the land of Assyria;
and I will return them to their homes,
says the Lord (Ho. 11:10-11).

The motivation for the rescue is precisely the motivation for the Exodus: the unique holy love of God (11:8-9).

7. J. Maag, *Malkut Jhwh* (SVT, 7) (Leiden: Brill, 1960) 129-153.

The Exodus theme is repeated and expanded in the latter sections of Isaiah, especially chapters 40-55. The contrast between Isaiah 52:12 and Exodus 12:11 shows that the prophet does more than reminisce; he describes deliverance from exile as even more extraordinary than the initial hurried rescue:

For you shall not go out in haste,
and you shall not go in flight,
for the Lord will go before you,
and the God of Israel will be your
rear guard (Is. 52:12).

The new thing (Is. 43:16, 19) that God proposes to do in making 'a way in the sea' and 'a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert' is an example of what Zimmerli calls 'an audacious stroke which dares to press forward in contemporary history toward that which is unheard of.'⁸

2. The wilderness was not forgotten in the prophetic expectation. Ezekiel saw it as the site of a new purging, a repetition of what happened to their fathers (Ezk. 20:33-39). Yet God's new courtship will take place there (Ho. 2:14); his relationship with a once murmuring and recalcitrant people is transformed into a blossoming love affair. Even more, the wilderness itself is transformed with the exalting of the valleys, the levelling of the mountains and the smoothing of the rough places (Is. 40:3-6; cf. 48:20-21). What originally represented an ordeal for the people and a test of God's patience has become a centre of fellowship and blessing.

3. Sinai and the giving of the law framed the background for the new promise of Jeremiah 31:31-32, even though the emphasis there was on discontinuity - the new, different, covenant, not like the one which they broke. J. Levenson has shown how Sinai cast its shadow on Ezekiel's mount of the future where new offerings will be presented and new regulations celebrated (Ezk. 20:40-44). According to Levenson, this Sinaitic theme 'prescribes (as did the first mountain) the kind of society which Israel must build.'⁹

8. Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope* 126.

9. J. Levenson, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48* (Cambridge, Mass.: Published by Scholars Press for the Harvard Semitic Museum, 1976) 44.

4. Moses deserves special mention, because, as E. Jacob has noted, 'reflection on the exodus had more than once led the prophet (Second Isaiah) to meditate on the person of Moses.'¹⁰ He notes the following parallels between the description of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah and the premier servant of the Exodus: both are called servant (Ex. 4:10; Nu. 11:11; Dt. 3:24; cf. Is. 42:1); prophet (Dt. 18:18; cf. Is. 49:2); man of the spirit (Nu. 11:25-29; cf. Is. 42:1); intercessor (Ex. 32:11-14; Dt. 9:18-29; cf. Is. 53:12); giver of a covenant (Ex. 24:8; cf. Is. 42:6; 52:15); teacher (Dt. 4:10; 5:5; cf. Is. 42:4; 53:11).

5. The conquest furnished prophetic thought with the theme of rest: 'The Lord your God is providing you a place of rest, and will give you this land' (Jos. 1:13; cf. 11:23, where the promise is fulfilled: 'and the land had rest from war.') That theme is picked up in 2 Samuel 7:1 as the setting of the Davidic covenant. The note of rest in the land as the gift of God is echoed and transformed in the book of Isaiah (e.g. Is. 28:12; 30:15).

6. The settlement contributed to the concept of saviour in Israel's future expectation. Joshua's name and the appearance of the Judges were both part of this: 'Thou didst give them saviours who saved them from the hand of their enemies' (Ne. 9:27). Obadiah's new saviours who go up to Mount Zion to rule (Ob. 21) and the description in Isaiah of God as Saviour (e.g. 43:3,11) may also recall the tradition of the Judges, as well as the deliverance of the Exodus.

Israel's early history, then, shaped both the fact of her hope and the language which framed it: 'Thus we find promise and history in a process of transformation, in which the traditional accounts of the promises took place in the mastering of the new experiences of history, while the new experiences of history were understood as transformations and expositions of the promises.'¹¹

10. E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, ET by A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock (London: Hodder, 1958; New York: Harper, 1958) 339; cf. also Levenson, *Restoration* 38 ff.

11. J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM, 1967; New York: Harper, 1967) 111.

B. *David and the Monarchy*

1. *Divine kingship* is a theme almost uniformly recognized as a major motif in the so-called enthronement Psalms (47, 93, 96-99). The prolonged discussion about their use and meaning that began with H. Gunkel and proceeded with S. Mowinckel, A. Weiser, C. Westermann, and H.-J. Kraus has been reviewed recently by J. Gray¹² and J. H. Eaton.¹³

My interpretation lies on the side of those who, with Martin Buber, see God's kingship more as an expression of his sovereignty in history both past and future than as a reflection of a mythical ascent to the throne, patterned on Near Eastern royal ideology.¹⁴ The tie with the Exodus tradition in passages like Exodus 15, which ends with the majestic affirmation, 'the Lord will reign forever and ever,' encourages this interpretation. Th. C. Vriezen put it this way: 'Eschatology is the expression of the belief that God holds history in the hollow of his hand, and that He will make the history of the world end in complete communion between God and man so that He will come as King.'¹⁵ The theme of Divine kingship, rooted in history, celebrated in the cult, embodied (albeit imperfectly) in the monarchy, comes to bright flower in the latter part of Isaiah, where God is honoured as King (43:15, 44-6).

To the Chronicler, the idea of the real kingship of God was a cherished conviction. The theocracy was to be realized in the embodiment of Davidic ideals and the true worship in post-exilic Israel (1 Ch. 17:14; 28:5; 29:23).

The elusive figure of the 'one like a son of man' (Dn. 7:13) is probably best mentioned here. The lengthy history of

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12. J. Gray, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Reign of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979) 39-71.
 13. J. H. Eaton, 'The Psalms and Israelite Worship' in *Tradition and Interpretation* (ed. by G. W. Anderson) 242-248.
 14. M. Buber, *Kingship of God* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967³) 99-107.
 15. Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970²; Newton, Massachusetts: Branford, 1970²) 460.

interpretation is too tortuous a road for us to travel. Enough to say that the throne-room scene, replete with the accoutrements of royalty and the gift of a dominion not to pass away, of a kingdom not to be destroyed, suggests that this image does not derive from Isaiah's Servant songs but is an extension of the divine kingship motif.¹⁶ It captures in apocalyptic vision the true hope of Israel: 'renovation of the whole of this earth into the kingdom of God.'¹⁷ Far from being bound to mythic thinking, Israel through hope of God's kingdom, 'gained the victory over the myth of eternal repetition.'¹⁸

Divine kingship and its joyful expression in the Psalms may well have made another contribution to Old Testament eschatology: it encouraged the false optimism in regard to the Day of the Lord that Amos (5:18-20) and Zephaniah (1:7-18) had so roundly to decry.

2. *Davidic kingship* was a major source of Messianic hope, in the technical sense of the phrase. We can sketch only its basic contours here.

(a) The promises to Abraham were restated and, to some extent, overshadowed in the Davidic covenant. The parallels between the two covenants (Gn. 15 and 2 Sa. 7) are well-known: David is promised a name like the great ones of the earth, a place where the people will be planted in the land, and an offspring whose kingdom will be established - an example of a promise in one era being fulfilled in another and that fulfilment, in turn, becoming the basis of future promise.¹⁹ This, incidentally, is one of the relatively few places in which patriarchal events become a source of future hope for the prophets (cf. Is. 29:22; Mi. 7:20; and especially Is. 40-55).²⁰

16. Gray, *Reign of God* 311.

17. Vriezen, *Outline* 460.

18. *Ibid.* 461.

19. Cf. R. E. Clements, *Abraham and David: Genesis XV and Its Meaning for Israelite Tradition* (SBT, second series 5) (London: SCM, 1967; Naperville, Illinois: Allenson, 1967).

20. For a discussion of this re-application of patriarchal traditions, see J. Goldingay in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. by A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman (Nottingham: InterVarsity, 1981) 33-35.

(b) The covenant with David (2 Sa. 7) is an anchor in the Deuteronomistic history: it presupposes the rest promised to Joshua and only partially and intermittently realized; it assures a stability not found in Judges (*cf.* 21:25); it speaks to the promise of Deuteronomy 28:13 that Israel will be the head, not the tail of the nations of the world; it accounts for the release of Jehoiachin at the end (2 Ki. 25:27-30).

The question as to whether the 'Deuteronomistic history' intends to convey hope has been answered 'no' by Martin Noth,²¹ and 'yes' by Gerhard von Rad who sees in the release of Jehoiachin an intimation 'that the line of David has not come to an irrevocable end.'²² W. Zimmerli reads the hope not as open promise, but as a *perhaps*, like the hope of Lamentations 3, which arises from the inner certainty of God's steadfast love, while H. W. Wolff discerns in the history a pattern of divine judgment and forgiveness which offers the people under judgment a renewed promise of grace, if they follow the biblical mandate to repent.²³

The royal Psalms (e.g. 2, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 110, 132) demonstrate how the devout of Israel believed in the Davidic promise. The editors must have concluded that such Psalms would be needed again, though the kingship had temporarily ceased, and placed them in the collection as a testimony to hope.²⁴

(c) In the prophets the Davidic hope is painted in brightest colours. The oracle with which the book of Amos closes looked forward to the restoration of the falling booth of David (Am. 9:11). Micah, whose sensitivities lay with the peasantry, spoke of a leader coming from the old Davidic

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21. M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, 1 Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten Gesellschaft, Kl. XVIII.2 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1943). A translation of pp. 1-110 of the second edition appeared as *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOT Supplements 15) (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981).
 22. G. von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (ET by E. W. Trueman Dicken) (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1965; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 220.
 23. Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope* 84; H. W. Wolff, 'Das Kerygma des deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerks', *ZAW* 73 (1961) 171-186. Cf. B. S. Childs, *An Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 230-238, for an evaluation of these views.
 24. Cf. Clements, *OT Theology* 151.

town of Bethlehem (5:2-4). Isaiah, who had seen the King in his glory (6:5) - a key instance of the impact of divine kingship on the prophets - looked forward to the coming of a king who would stand in contrast with the weak and vacillating Ahaz (Is. 7-9, 11). Jeremiah longed for the righteous (or legitimate) branch of David to execute justice and righteousness in the land (Je. 23:5-6). Ezekiel called the king not *Melek* but *Nasi'*, suggesting that imperial trappings will not be his key characteristic, but rather a shepherd-like leadership (Ezk. 34:24; 37:25; 44:3). The king in Ezekiel is actually a priest-king, as Levenson has noted - a good example of the tendency of later prophets to combine traditional motifs.²⁵

(d) The Chronicler quietly awaited the restoration of the Davidic line. His joy in seeing the restored Levitical order only sharpened that hope.²⁶

(e) The post-exilic prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, retain this Messianic expectation, though in Zechariah 4:14, two anointed figures stand by the Lord, as if Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel the governor were considered to be the pattern of leadership for the new age. Though Haggai puts some emphasis on both priest and governor, Zerubbabel, the Lord's signet ring, holds his final hope (Hg. 2:23). Zechariah pictures the triumphant yet humble king, riding to Jerusalem on an ass (9:9) - a coronation scene reminiscent of Solomon's (1 Ki. 1).

In these post-exilic expectations Zimmerli has found a restoration beyond the restoration and a great 'unrealized "excess" that insisted once more on expectation of a future of abundant fulfilment.'²⁷ This note of 'excess' is a reminder that Israel looked forward to God's deliverance as keenly after the return as she did before.

(f) The Servant in the latter part of Isaiah is described in language redolent with the regal themes of Psalm 72 and

25. Levenson, *Restoration* 143.

26. Cf. W. Zimmerli, *An Old Testament Theology in Outline*, ET by D. E. Green (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978; Atlanta: John Knox, 1978) 240; F. F. Bruce, 'The Theology and Interpretation of the Old Testament' in *Tradition and Interpretation* (ed. G. W. Anderson) 402.

27. Zimmerli, *Theology* 239.

Isaiah 11: he is anointed with the Spirit to bring justice to the nations. And his call (42:1-4) echoes the thought of Psalm 2:7, where the king is adopted by Yahweh at his coronation. The Davidic kingship contributed to this amazing figure, as did the life of Moses. New in the Servant is the redemptive nature of his vicarious suffering. Engnell's theory that the Servant's suffering reflects a royal ritual of humiliation and exaltation is highly suspect.²⁸

3. *Jerusalem and Zion* provide recurring themes for the prophets.

(a) As the centre of Judah's cult, Jerusalem had great influence on the shape of Judah's hopes. We do not have to agree with S. Mowinckel's theory of the cultic origins of eschatology or with A. Weiser's and J. Gray's emphasis on the Autumn Festival when the Day of the Lord was celebrated, to recognize the fact that the Holy City, elevated on the mountain of the Lord, was a dominant theme in prophetic expectation.²⁹

The commemoration of the Exodus, the Davidic kingship, and the presence of the Kingdom of God in the Jerusalem Temple grew more intense after the pain of exile. W. McKane notes the emphasis of the post-exilic prophets: 'Their concern with the right cult is not merely punctiliousness but is related to their conviction that the eschatological glory portrayed by Deutero-Isaiah will radiate from Zion and that it will not eventuate until the Temple has been purged of all impurity (Hg. 1:7 ff; Zc. 2:14-16; 8:3; Mal. 1:6 ff; 2:1 ff; 3:1 ff).'³⁰

(b) In the mention of Melchizedek the royal Psalm (110) not only reaches back to the story of Abraham but also links Jerusalem with its historic past in the person of the mysterious priest-king. Much contemporary study speculates on the impact of Old Jerusalem traditions - Jebusite customs and myths - on the Davidic-Zion motifs of the Old Testament.

28. Cf. Gray, *Reign of God* 283.

29. S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, ET by G. W. Anderson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956) 138-143; A. Weiser, *The Psalms*, ET by H. Hartwell (London: SCM, 1962) 23-52; Gray, *Reign of God* 2, 14.

30. W. McKane, 'Prophecy and the Prophetic Literature' in *Tradition and Interpretation* (ed. G. W. Anderson) 178.

Perhaps some of Ezekiel's emphasis on the future Davidic priest-king has been influenced by the Melchizedek-Salem story. Whether Zimmerli is right in proposing the Davidic priest, Zadok the Jebusite, as a link between Genesis 14 and the Davidic kingship, we cannot be sure.³¹

(c) What is sure is Jerusalem's central role in the bright future which God's initiative will inaugurate. In an oracle which Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 preserve, the nations are pictured as flowing to Jerusalem. Both Ezekiel and Zechariah saw a time when Jerusalem, enriched with the presence of God in the form of living waters (Ezk. 47:8; Zc. 14:8), will dwell in security (Zc. 14:11; cf. Is. 60). The picture of a protected, elevated, glorified, open city reaches back to the tradition of Zion's inviolability, which had to be disproved before it could be reaffirmed: In the future, Jerusalem will not only be secure but attractive - her gates open to the pilgrims from the nations. Not her architecture but her holiness is the attraction - the Lord is there (Ezk. 48:35; Zc. 14:20-21).

A note of caution should be sounded about positing mythological motifs as part of the background of the Zion tradition. It is probably safer to see mythic language both as a poetic expression of Jerusalem's grandeur and as a hyperbolic way of reaching into a future so bright with glory that ordinary language fails to grasp it.

C. *Creation and Re-creation*

1. There are *cosmic motifs* in the picture of the new covenant even where the language is drawn predominantly from the Exodus tradition:

And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety (Ho. 2:18)

The emphasis on the new creation with its new relationship

31. W. Zimmerli, 'The History of Israelite Religion' in *Tradition and Interpretation* (ed. G. W. Anderson) 367.

to all of God's creatures is a theme especially appropriate to Hosea because part of what he was combatting was a baalistic view of creation that had to be eradicated:

And in that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband,' and no longer will you call me, 'My Ba'al.' For I will remove the names of the Ba'als from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more (Ho. 2:16,17)

2. Ezekiel (47:1-12) seems to picture God's mountain in terms reminiscent of the *Garden of Eden*. Levenson's discussion of the account of the new Paradise, with its trees, rivers, and fertile glory makes further comment here unnecessary.³²

3. The emphasis on the *creative Word* and the call of God in Isaiah 40-45 is another instance of new creation theology. The Word which spoke the universe into being (Gn. 1) and called Abraham to be servant and believer (Gn. 12) again sounds forth over creation and history. Cyrus is part of that new creation, answering God's call as faithfully and effectively as did Abraham (Is. 45:12-13; 44:24-28; cf. 51:2; 45:1-3). What can it be but new creation power that sparks a new spirit and a new heart in the people of Israel according to Ezekiel's vision (36:26-27)?

4. The pictures of *resurrection* in Ezekiel 37 and Daniel 12 are the culmination of an emphasis on the new creation. The dried-up bones are one of the strongest biblical symbols of lost hope. No human initiative, no cooperation with divine power, can accomplish resurrection. God does it in and of himself and for only one reason: the honour of the divine name.³³ The God who, for his own glory, breathed into dust at the beginning (Gn. 2:7) will again spark into life a new humanity.

This doctrine of the new creation is not just a recapitulation of an *Urzeit-Endzeit* mythological pattern. In each case something new is added which builds on the old but surpasses it.

32. Levenson, *Restoration* 25-36.

33. Cf. Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope* 117.

D. Personal and National Experience

The prophets had no corner on hope in the Old Testament. Hope was a reality in the daily life and worship of Israel. That hope, expressed in piety both individual and corporate, must have nurtured the confidence that God had a future which included salvation on the far side of judgment.

1. The Psalms of Complaint, with their note of trust, utterance of a vow, and affirmation of hope, may illustrate the point. In them hope springs from history ('In thee our fathers trusted,' 22:4) and covenant ('Deliver us for the sake of your steadfast love,' 44:26). The rescue which that hope anticipates has sweeping - eschatological-like - implications for a wide audience and future generations (Ps. 22). A bridge between the piety of the Psalms and the prophetic hope is found in the heart of Lamentations, a work which seems to reflect a prophetic perspective on Jerusalem's fall, when the text departs from the *Qinah* (lament, funeral dirge) form and switches to an individual complaint. The change of form provides for the confession of trust and the note of hope (3:22-24) which the standard dirge or *Qinah* form would not permit.

2. When hope plays a role in wisdom literature, it usually emphasizes not the unexpected blessing of God but the benefits of living within the divine order.³⁴ In Job, however, the nuances of the individual complaint are used, helping (as in Psalms and Lamentations) to account for his intimations of hope in the midst of his poignant and voluminous complaining (e.g. 19:25-27). Indeed, in the restoring of Job's fortunes (42:10) after his personal disaster, one might find a parallel to a major theme in Old Testament eschatology - hope that follows suffering.

What are the implications of the various themes that we have traced? (1) The *Exodus* speaks of God's power to rescue from exile, the renewal of the gracious relationship with him (e.g. Hosea's wife and son), and the conquest of all enemies that would unsettle the land; (2) the *Sinai* tradition features the absolute responsibility of Israel to be God's people in faith and obedience, together with a reminder of the possibility of

34. Cf. Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope* 12-25.

destruction that goes with the failure to trust and obey (Ex. 32:30-35);³⁵ (3) *Moses* stands for the servant leader, the prototype of the prophets, the initial and outstanding remnant; (4) the rest in the conquest and settlement recalls the inextricable tie between the people and the land and the inviolable terms on which the land could be retained; (5) the *divine kingship* - as unifying a theme as there is in the Old Testament picture of hope - comprises, as W. Eichrodt has reminded us, 'the core of salvation hope: - *the coming of Yahweh to set up His dominion over the world*';³⁶ (6) the *Davidic kingship* expresses the way in which the divine kingship can be embodied in an earthly regent - a reminder that Old Testament Messianism is not a belief in a 'supernatural saviour-figure' but in 'the return of a Davidic prince';³⁷ (7) the *new creation* language reaches the highest ranges of a hyperbolic future - a transformation that outruns the present creation almost as far as the present creation surpassed the chaos of the beginning; the language leans toward the apocalyptic and paves the way for it, in the description of the divine initiative that performs the transformation. The new creation teaches us that, though salvation is historical, it also transcends historical reality and must be seen in a supra-historical light.³⁸

III SOME COMMON EMPHASES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT PICTURE OF HOPE

The diversity in the expressions of hope is clear. Here we look for their unity.

A. *Continuity and Discontinuity with the Past*

1. *Covenants old and new.* Covenants play as central a role in the picture of the future as in the account of the past. They symbolize history that is renewed and enriched by God's pledge of love and loyalty to his people and his demand of their love and loyalty in return. A partial list of them reads like this:

35. Cf. Levenson, *Restoration* 44.

36. W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, ET by J. Baker (London: SCM Press, 1961) I, 499.

37. Gray, *Reign of God* 280.

38. Vriezen, *Outline* 449.

- (a) a covenant reaching back to the creation account of the birds and the animals (Ho. 2:18; Gn. 1);
- (b) the covenant of Abraham alluded to in Hosea's picture (1:10) of Israel's promised numerical growth;
- (c) Jeremiah's new covenant (chapter 31) with its ties to and contrast with Sinai;
- (d) the Davidic covenant restored and expanded in Isaiah 55 (cf. Is. 42:6; 49:8; cf. Ezk. 34:23; 37:24);
- (e) the combination of the covenant with David and one with Levi (Je. 33), whose surety is fixed like the seasons of Gn. 1;
- (f) the covenant messenger announced by Malachi (3:1).

Scarcely anything more firmly underscores the historical nature of Israel's eschatology than this emphasis on the covenants. Whether the covenantal form is that of suzerainty or of grant, the covenant concept dominates Israel's hope, uniting its past and future.³⁹ And the climax of that future is expressed more than once in the simplest covenant formula: 'I will be their God; they will be my people' (cf. Ho. 1:10; 2:23; Zc. 8:8).

2. A tendency to move from *nearer hope* to *farther hope* is discernible in the course of prophetic history - without a diminution of certainty. As hope is deferred the various themes that shaped that hope seem to converge. This is especially true in the latter part of Isaiah, where a great many of the earlier traditions of the Exodus, Moses, David, Zion and the new creation are combined. In Daniel we see both the deferring of hope and the combining of its many themes - including the theme of wisdom (12:3).⁴⁰ That combining of themes and deferring of hope while maintaining its intensity in history's bleak hours is part of the very genius of apocalyptic.

39. Cf. Levenson, *Restoration* 145-146, for a discussion of Weinfeld's view of the covenantal form as that of grant in perpetuity based on grace to ancestors.

40. This is not to accept von Rad's theory that wisdom is the mother of apocalyptic; cf. his *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM, 1972; New York: Abingdon, 1972) 263-283.

There is considerable evidence that the return from exile had for a time, at least, a dampening effect on Israel's hope. The superlative descriptions of the return were not immediately fulfilled. The circumstances in Judah and Jerusalem stood in drab contrast to the pre-exilic period, let alone to the promised future glory of Isaiah 40-55 and Ezekiel 40-48 (cf. Hg. 1:4-11; 2:3; Zc. 8:11).

Parts of Isaiah 56-66 (e.g. 62) appear to try to rekindle those hopes by reassuring the people that the fullness of salvation is yet on the way. C. Westermann goes so far as to suggest that chapters 60-62 are salvation oracles in response to Judah's prayers of complaint about the delay in the fulfilment of prophecy.⁴¹ Haggai's triumphant prophecy of Zerubbabel's pending victories aims at lifting that post-exilic gloom (2:2 ff; 2:20 ff).

Yet the attempts to spark fresh hope did not themselves find immediate fulfilment and may have sharpened the pathos during the centuries of prophetic silence after the exile. What is amazing is not that hope may have occasionally been taxed but that it stayed alive at all - and not only stayed alive but grew stronger, as its apocalyptic expressions show us.

Faith in the sovereignty of the covenant God, obedience to the restored law of Moses, patience to wait for a vision postponed, confidence in the ultimate vindication of their purposes in history, and expectation of the expansion of God's Kingdom despite all signs to the contrary - these were the responses of Israel's finest sons and daughters in circumstances that tried them almost to breaking-point. We do not have to agree with all the facets of R. P. Carroll's approach to 'cognitive dissonance' or his more naturalistic explanations of prophetic response to delayed promises to sense the part which deferred hope played in the kindling of brighter hope.⁴² In the end, the sovereign Lord of the Word and of the people used the entire

41. C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, ET by D. M. G. Stalker (London: SCM, 1969; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 296-300.

42. R. P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions* (London: SCM, 1979; New York: Seabury, 1979).

experience of hope fulfilled and delayed to prepare the way for the fullness of hope. So rich does the New Testament believe that fullness to be that it did not boggle at all at the superlative language of the prophecies. The lofty pictures of a glorious future that seemed to puzzle the post-exilic community served as language entirely appropriate for the kingdom come in Christ and yet coming.

3. The *chain of promise and fulfilment* is part of the continuity and discontinuity which mark prophetic hope.⁴³ Eschatological hope in Israel's thought is not an afterthought but part of a historical pattern of hope. God's promise of the land to Abraham is fulfilled in the settlement under Joshua; that fulfilment becomes the ground of a new promise to be realized in the return from exile. The promise to Abraham of a son and a name is transferred to David and fulfilled in him; that fulfilment becomes the seed of a new promise, not only of a dynasty but of a Messianic king.

4. Part of prophetic discontinuity with the past is the tendency to *widen the sweep of its concern*, until it finally embraces the nations and the whole world (e.g. Is. 42:4; 45:22-25; 51:5). Hope of such magnitude cannot be prompted by human endeavour but 'lives only in dependence upon the act of God announced in the Word which goes out from Him through His messenger.'⁴⁴ This cosmic hope, characteristic of Isaiah 40-66, is shared even by those prophets such as Haggai and Zechariah who are thought of as more nationalistic (Hg. 2:6-9; Zc. 2:6-12 [MT 2:10-16]; 8:20 ff).

This mention of the nations stands in continuity with the promise to Abraham and with 'Amos' announcements of judgment upon Israel's neighbours (chapters 1-2) and his reminder that Yahweh was responsible for the exoduses even of enemies like the Syrians and Philistines (9:7). And above all, Israel's fall to Assyria and Judah's to Babylon taught afresh the basic lesson of the Exodus: God was sovereign of the nations, using them to do his will even toward Israel. Moreover, the prophets looked to a day when 'even

43. G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, ET by D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965; New York: Harper, 1965) II, 357-387.

44. Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope* 135.

the enemies of Israel on earth share in the knowledge of God and in the communion with Him!'⁴⁵

B. *Judgment and Renewal*

The prophets 'placed the whole of the hope of salvation in a new light, the light of the judgment, the cleavage of the community, the sin of the people and the holiness of God.'⁴⁶ For the best souls of Israel, judgment and hope were inextricably tied together. Judgment was essential to renewal - judgment on the common people, of course, but especially on prophet, priest, king, wise man, as the indictments by the prophets indicate.⁴⁷ The tie between judgment and hope was surely the holy love of God (Am. 3:2; Ho. 11:8-9); because judgment itself was an expression of divine compassion, the men and women of Israel could hold to hope beyond judgment.

1. This pattern of judgment and renewal was established in the early life of God's people. Noah's story illustrated it; so did the logical connection between the narrative of the tower of Babel and the account of the call of Abraham, along with the recurring pattern of the Judges. We must not, however, think of this pattern as mechanical: 'It is not a law of history that is seen at work, but the great acts of God who leads and who in these acts purposes to be honoured.'⁴⁸

2. This pattern is crystallized in the fall of the two kingdoms, particularly in the sack of Jerusalem. However the prophets may stress different aspects of the tradition, they are agreed in this: 'the election existing hitherto must be annulled, but then renewed and fulfilled.'⁴⁹ Because of the intricate relationship between judgment and hope, we can view even the doom sayings of the prophets as carrying eschatological meaning: 'the dissolution of the old no less than the despoiling of the new is part of eschatology.'⁵⁰

45. Vriezen, *Outline* 437.

46. *Ibid.* 447.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope* 58.

49. E. Rohland, cited by W. Zimmerli in *Tradition and Interpretation* (ed. by G. W. Anderson) 365.

50. W. McKane, in *Tradition and Interpretation* (ed. by G. W. Anderson) 177.

3. The judgment itself may be part of hope, when its purpose is grace. True hope can come only when false hope is crushed.⁵¹

Judgment on the nations may be seen as hope for Israel. This is certainly part of the intent of the first two chapters of Amos and is expressly stated in Nahum (cf. 1:15-2:2; MT 2:1-3) where the living God is seen at work in the salvation of Judah through the judgment on Assyria (cf. also the major role that oracles against the nations play in Is. 13-23; Je. 46-51; Ezk. 25-32). More important, judgment upon Israel may be a gracious warning, as Amos repeatedly reminded his hearers in that doleful tolling of the alarm of judgment which the people refused to heed, thereby encountering fiercer judgment (Am. 4:6-11).

Finally, the suffering of the Servant - though not judgment for himself - is the bearing of judgment for the people and thus the ground of their hope. The sufferer becomes not just the saved remnant but the saving remnant (cf. Zc. 12:10 ff).⁵²

The profundity of the hope beyond suffering is directly related to the despair of suffering experienced by the people in judgment. 'By an understandable human reaction, the very frustrations and disappointments of the post-exilic age appear to have intensified the strength and firmness of the conviction that the final goal of God's purpose - the eschatological age of salvation - would certainly come.'⁵³

C. *The One and the Many*

Two themes form a counterpoint in the prophetic literature:

- (1) the prophet embodies the future as a personal remnant;
- (2) the authority and blessing associated with an individual office-holder are extended to the people.

This oscillation between the one and the many not only is a unifying theme in Old Testament prophecy but anticipates the way in which the fulfilment of the Old Testament promise is expressed in the New.

51. Vriezen, *Outline* 445-446.

52. Cf. Vriezen, *Outline* 451; Clements, *OT Theology* 143.

53. Clements, *OT Theology* 147.

1. *The prophet embodies the future.* There is no doubt that the call-visions of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel contribute to this way of expressing prophetic hope. Isaiah himself is clearly the beginning of the remnant which he describes. The connection between his vision in the Temple (chapter 6), where he, not his people, is purged of unclean lips by the seraph's coal, is of a piece with his description of the remnant and the naming of his son in chapters 7 and 8.

Jeremiah's purchase of the field in Anathoth (chapter 32), after his letter to the exiles which was calculated to give them 'a future and a hope' (29:11), marks him as the symbol of all those who will return. Similarly, Ezekiel embodies the new priestly role. Though the office of high priest is not mentioned, it seems clear that the accounts of Ezekiel's responsibility to instruct the priests in the redesign of the Temple, in the reorganization of its staff and in the re-establishment of its services point to a role beyond his prophetic one.⁵⁴

Malachi's name may give us a clue. Does the obvious tie between the prophet's pseudonym and his announcement of a messenger (*mal'āk*; 3:1) to prepare the way before the Lord contain a hint of a remnant role?

Daniel's life illustrates the final deliverance which he prophesied. Davies' recent comment on the intimate relationship between the stories and the visions in the book of Daniel points this out.⁵⁵

This remnant role indicates that, though the prophets were messengers - as the messenger formulae of judgment speeches suggest - they were not just conduits of the word; they were living illustrations of its pathos and hope.

2. *The authority and blessing traditionally given to an individual office-holder are extended to the people in Israel's bright future.* 'Democratization' is the less than winsome word used for this phenomenon.

54. Levenson, *Restoration* 140.

55. P. R. Davies, *JSOT* 17 (1980) 33-53.

Jeremiah implies that all of God's people will be priests, knowing the law - the duty of the priests (31:33). The Servant in Isaiah 40-55 embodies a mission that belongs ultimately to the whole people; as light to his people, he represents the very light which they will bring to the nations.⁵⁶ Ezekiel's future plays down the role of the high priest and opens to all Zadokites functions which only the high priest performed before.⁵⁷

Joel's prophecy of the Spirit (2:28-29) sees all Israelites, regardless of age, station, or sex, engaged in prophetic activity. In Isaiah 55:1-5 the sure mercies originally promised to David are extended to all the survivors of Israel.⁵⁸

Israel's future, then, was always viewed in corporate terms. That picture of corporate renewal became part of the preparation for the Christian church.

Messianism in the technical sense of the expectation of an anointed king from David's house, consequently, is *not* the controlling motif of Old Testament hope. The notion of the remnant of God's people - renewed in judgment, faithful in dispersion or oppression, loyal to God's kingly demands, and waiting for God's mighty salvation - probably is. Hope is more for the group than for any individual in it. The major theme of that hope is not the Messiah, 'but the *parousia*, the coming of Yahweh in the near future.'⁵⁹

D. Faith and the Future

When the last words of the Old Testament had been written, it remained 'a book with an open message in that it looks forward to further guidance by the "Shepherd of Israel"...'.⁶⁰

56. Gray, *Reign of God* 282.

57. Cf. Levenson, *Restoration* 141.

58. Cf. O. Eissfeldt in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in honor of James Muilenberg*, ed. by B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (London: SCM, 1962; New York: Harper, 1962) 196 ff; Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* 283-285.

59. Vriezen, *Outline* 459.

60. Zimmerli, *Theology* 239.

1. The prophets are full of surprises and arresting terms as they describe the work of God. One thinks of Hosea 2:14 where the grace of a wilderness courtship is extended just at the point where a judgment threat was expected. Then there is Amos 5:18, where the day of Yahweh is announced as judgment just when Israel felt they had every reason to presume on God's grace.
 2. This confidence in God's freedom to surprise was learned from history, e.g. the Exodus and the rescue of Jerusalem from Sennacherib. Nowhere is God's freedom to do the unexpected clearer than in the announcement that Cyrus will be his servant, even his anointed (Is. 45:1-7).⁶¹ While much of Israel's conventional wisdom seemed to ignore this divine trait, the prophets called for an openness to any form that God wanted her future to take.
 3. This openness was based on God's own character. The prophets celebrated God's freedom as though they had really grasped the message of Job: the wisdom and power and compassion of God are such that he can be trusted with full freedom, whether in circumstances of suffering or of deliverance.
- His character is the ultimate source of biblical hope, as Ezekiel's picture of Yahweh as Shepherd emphasized (Ezk. 34). Biblical eschatology arose in the midst of divinely ordered judgment, when 'it was confessed that the Holy God remained unshakeable in His fidelity and love to Israel.'⁶²
4. Openness to the future was the only appropriate response to God's openness. It implied the rejection of all other hopes: 'Hope and the future rest with God's faithful action...before which he must give up all of the other securities of this world.'⁶³

61. Cf. Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope* 128.

62. Vriezen, *Outline* 459; cf. J. Bright, *Covenant and Promise: The Prophetic Understanding of the Future in Pre-exilic Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976; London: SCM, 1977) 23-24, for a discussion of the way in which Israel's hope of the future was rooted in her view of God.

63. Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope* 105.

This abandonment to God's future Hosea described in his final call to repentance:

Take with you words
and return to the Lord;
say to him,

'Take away all iniquity;
accept that which is good
and we will render
the fruit of our lips.

Assyria shall not save us,
we will not ride upon horses;
and we will say no more, "Our God,"
to the work of our hands.
In thee the orphan finds mercy.'
(Ho. 14:2,3; cf. Hab. 2:4; Zp. 3:12-13).

IV CONCLUSION

A. *The Impact of Old Testament Hope on the New Testament*

The tie between the Testaments must be viewed from both ends. Not only does Old Testament prophecy lead into the New, but the New Testament appropriates Old Testament promises and reads them as preparation for God's new beginning. Clements' warning against the gulf which biblical criticism has sometimes placed between the Old Testament and the New is salutary.⁶⁴

1. *The various strands of Old Testament hope combine in Jesus*

Eichrodt's verdict needs recalling, when he pictures the Old Testament hope striving to reach and 'grasp the unchanging truth hidden under its bewildering diversity...unifying its struggling contradictions, its resting in a timeless present and its tense waiting for a consummation of history. But these needs are fully met in the New Testament confession of Jesus as the Messiah.'⁶⁵ In Jesus, his followers saw the embodiment of every major prospect to which the prophets looked forward. The pattern of combining themes into new forms of hope, which the later prophets employed, reached its consummation in the New Testament depiction of Jesus.

64. Clements, *OT Theology* 133.

65. Eichrodt, *Theology* I, 490.

The Exodus themes are used to describe (a) Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, (b) his superiority to Moses in his teaching in Matthew (e.g. 5-7) and John (e.g. 1:17; 6:32-35), (c) the rest which he, in contrast to Joshua, is said to furnish in Hebrews (4:8-10), and (d) the description of both his exit from Egypt (Mt. 2:13-15) and his death as an exodus (Lk. 9:31).

His continuity with the great Davidic themes is found (a) in his announcements of the presence of the divine kingship (e.g. Mk. 1:14-15) and his own demonstration of that divine kingship (Mt. 12:28), (b) in the allusions to the Davidic covenant in Gabriel's annunciation (Lk. 1:32-33), and (c) in Jesus' concern for the purification and renewal of Jerusalem and its Temple. Both the Servant and Son of Man themes find their ultimate reality in him. So does the new creation whose presence is attested both by his miracles, especially the creation miracles in the Fourth Gospel, and by his establishment of the patterns of righteousness and justice prophesied in the book of Isaiah (cf. Lk. 4:18-19; Is. 61:1).⁶⁶

2. *The various common emphases of the Old Testament themes of hope also combine in Jesus.* The New Covenant in his blood captures both the continuity and discontinuity of the Old Testament promise. He himself is the remnant as God's Servant, the new Israel in whom God is pleased; yet he extends that remnant role first to his disciples and then to the entire church of God, which, in fulfilment of the promise of democratization, becomes 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' (1 Pet. 2:9, an echo of Ex. 19:5-6). And what are his death and resurrection but expressions of the great theme of hope beyond judgment, even hope through judgment?⁶⁷

The way in which the strands of hope have been combined in Jesus has never been put better than in the affirmation of

66. For more background on this entire section, see R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1971; Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 1971).

67. See J. A. Sanders, *The Old Testament in the Cross* (New York: Harper, 1961) 67-109.

F. F. Bruce:

In Jesus the promise is confirmed,
 the covenant is renewed,
 the prophecies are fulfilled,
 the law is vindicated,
 salvation is brought near,
 sacred history has reached its climax,
 the perfect sacrifice
 has been offered and accepted,
 the great priest over the household of God
 has taken his seat at God's right hand,
 the Prophet like Moses has been raised up,
 the Son of David reigns,
 the kingdom of God has been inaugurated,
 the Son of Man has received dominion
 from the Ancient of Days,
 the Servant of the Lord,
 having been smitten to death
 for his people's transgression
 and borne the sin of many,
 has accomplished the divine purpose,
 has seen light after the travail of his soul
 and is now exalted and extolled
 and made very high.⁶⁸

B. Lessons from Old Testament Hope for the Christian Church

Here the mood should turn interrogative. In a field so complex, dealing with a God so surprising, questions may be more fitting than declarations.

1. *How, from an eschatological standpoint, should we view the existence of the state of Israel?* Old Testament hope centres in this world and redounds with political implications. Yet are not its forms too varied and too transcendent to be attached to any present political structure? Dare we read the eschatological hope for Israel in Romans 11 as a political promise? Furthermore, do not the righteousness and equity which are marks of the new Davidic kingdom need to occupy our concern as Christian people as much as the existence of any given political state?

68. F. F. Bruce, *This is That: The New Testament Development of Some Old Testament Themes* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1968) 21.

2. *Ought we to wean ourselves from any narrow preoccupation with chart or schedule of the shape of the future?* Do not both the varied themes and the freedom of God tell us that the pictures are for our hope, discipleship and mission more than for our scheduling or information? Will we learn from Israel's sad lessons that those who thought they had the divine future most tightly pinned down were those whom the prophets most sternly rebuked?

3. *Do we see waiting for that hope as a central Christian duty?* Luke's Gospel begins with accounts of those who were waiting; John's Revelation ends with the prayer of those who yet wait. And think of the early credal summary with its key verbs of Christian commitment: 'You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait (*anamenein*) for his Son from heaven' (1 Thes. 1:9-10). At a later time, 2 Peter 3:11-13 viewed the final judgment of the heavens and earth as an incentive to holiness, describing our present office as 'waiting for (*prosdokontes*) and hastening the coming of the day of God' (3:12).

This waiting is the period of missionary endeavour for us, an endeavour spurred on by the expectations that the new thing is near. We may respect the scholarly debate as to whether Isaiah 42, 45, 49 are a missionary mandate for Israel;⁶⁹ we may not back away from the missionary obligation which they and the Lord's Great Commission lay on us. While we wait, we hasten. The two go hand in hand. As in Israel, such waiting is the perspective not of the many, but of the remnant.

4. *Can true biblical hope serve as a warning against false hope?* In a society filled by immanent hope of social engineering, of human potential, of political revolution, we need to hear the great themes of Old Testament hope. Our hope is in the Lord, who is also our salvation; all other hope is hopeless.

Does not the Old Testament remind us that it is not enough to sing of such hope - Jeremiah's countrymen did that (Je. 14:7-8) and still received his rebuke - but we must also repent of all of our failure, including our failure to hope as God would have us.

69. Carroll, *Prophecy* 118-120.

5. *Can we continue to use the Old Testament as a way of nourishing our Christian hope?* We stand at the point where the hopes of the prophets have been fulfilled in the revelation of the Son of God (Heb. 1:1). But does that final Word render the penultimate words empty? Can not we, who, though blessed with fulfilment, are yet waiting, learn much about hope from those who waited before us?

Finally, can we yet pray Sirach's prayer (49:10)? 'May the bones of the twelve prophets also send forth new life from the ground where they lie! For they put new heart into Jacob and rescued the people by their confident hope' (NEB).

'All the prophets...proclaimed these days' (Acts 3:24) and this Redeemer. It was because the Apostle Paul was so steeped in that prophetic proclamation that he was able to make this announcement: 'Jesus Christ, whom we preached among you...was not Yes and No; but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God' (2 Cor. 1:19-20).