

## PROLEPSIS OF THE BIBLE

“Prolepsis” is a word seldom used by teachers and expositors of the Bible and is little known as a feature of Biblical faith. The word is defined by Webster as “the describing of an event as taking place before it could have happened, the treating of a future event as if it had already been accomplished.” God said to Abraham “To your descendants I *have given* this land” (Gen. 15:18). At this time Abraham had no descendants and it was over four hundred years later that this was realized, yet God said He had done it. In referring to the promise made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-6; 18:18) Romans 4:17 states: “as it is written, ‘A father of many nations I *made* you’ in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and *calls into being that which does not exist.*” The KJV and NIV translate the last phrase as: “*and calls things that are not as though they were.*” God calls those things which have not yet taken place as though they already where. God “giving life to the dead” refers to the future resurrection when He will “call into being that which does not exist.” This is why “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to Him” (Luke 20:38). Matthew’s version reads: “You (the Sadducees) are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God. For *in the resurrection* they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven. But *regarding the resurrection of the dead*, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead but of the living’” (Matt. 22:29-32). Luke adds “for all live to Him”. The context of that statement is the resurrection, not that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were actually living. Jesus is answering the Sadducees’ question concerning the much married woman (in the resurrection whose wife shall she be?). If the patriarchs were alive with God already his argument for the resurrection would be meaningless. Robert Hach in his book *Possession And Persuasion* shows how Jesus is using prolepsis in this passage by saying: “Jesus links the resurrection of the dead with the age to come, and finds reference to resurrection in the words of Moses regarding God’s continuing relationship with the patriarchs of Israel. Jesus’ assertion concerning the patriarchs, that to God all of them ‘are alive’ can only mean that though they are dead, are alive in terms of God’s promise to raise his people from death to life in the age to come. They are spoken of as ‘alive’ in view of the promise of God. If God has promised it, it’s as done.”

Everything the Scriptures states have been done, yet are not experienced in reality, is based upon the promises of God and becomes a matter of faith to the believer. The Bible’s only definition of faith is given in Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the substance (reality) of things hoped for, the evidence (proof) of things not seen.” Any time God declares anything done already, but not seen or experienced, is a prophecy that it will be done. Faith in the promises of God, then, is reality and gives us proof they are true. The “things hoped for” are the future events that have not yet occurred and the “things not seen” are seen by faith. Both are said to be a reality and done by God and we are to accept them by faith as stated in Scripture.

The Scriptural principle here is that many of God’s promises that are yet in the future are referred to as having already happened. We, by faith, can accept the promises of God as though they have already come to pass.

In Romans 8:30 the Apostle Paul states: “Whom He predestined these He also called; and whom He called He also justified; and whom He justified these He also *glorified.*” Although Christians have been “called” and “justified” they have not yet been “glorified” although this is spoken as something that has already happened. Glorification means full and entire deliverance from sin and evil. In verse 17 of this chapter the Apostle said since we are children of God we are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ if indeed we suffer with him in order that we may be *glorified with him.*” Christ is already glorified and we shall be glorified because we are in Christ and for this reason God looks upon us as having already been glorified even though we have not yet experienced it. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones in his *Exposition of Romans* quotes Dr. James Denney as saying, “the tense of the word glorified in this passage is amazing. It is the most daring anticipation of faith that the New Testament contains” Lloyd-Jones then goes on to say, “In a sense there is nothing at all daring about it. The Apostle has been given a revelation concerning this, so no daring was involved. But looking at it from the human standpoint, it is indeed a most daring assertion and affirmation; nothing goes beyond it in the whole range and realm of Scripture.” The word “glorified” in this passage is the end result of “those whom He also “predestined”. The predestination in this verse is explained in verse 29: “Predestined to become *conformed to the image of His son.*” Being “conformed into the image of His son” has already begun in the life of the Christian: “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (II Cor. 3:18). Further: “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6). It is no surprise, then, that the Apostle speaks as if our glorification has already happened.

N.T. Wright in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* states: “Justification flows from the death and resurrection of Jesus; those who are justified already share his glory in the proleptic sense indicated in Ephesians, and will share it fully when their present bodies are transformed.” Philippians 3:20-21 is the explanation of final glorification: “Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly await for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory, by the exertion of the power that he has even to subject all things to himself.” We can conclude that being “glorified” simply means our resurrection, which is true, but our being glorified means much more. Resurrection does not mean going to heaven or escaping death, rather we will by being “transformed into conformity with his body of glory” be prepared to share as fellow heirs in his glory (Rom. 8:17). This is why the redemption of the whole creation is shared with the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:18-23). We will have a new status in God’s redeemed creation.

As noted above (Hebrews 11:1) one aspect of faith is “the evidence (proof) of things not seen.” In speaking of God subjecting “the inhabited world to come” to man and not angels, it is stated that God has (past tense) “put all things in subjection under his (man’s) feet. For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But *now we do not yet see all things subjected to him*” (Heb. 2:8). This shows that although we do not see it and it is yet in the future, God has declared it already done. This is a prolepsis example of describing an event as taking place before it could have happened, the treating of a future event as if it had already been accomplished.

In the beginning it was God’s purpose that man “*rule ...over all the earth*” (Gen. 1:26). When man sinned he lost his position as “ruler” (Gen. 3:17-24) and the whole creation was placed under a curse (Rom. 8:20-22). Satan became the ruler of the earth (John 12:31), for, (Satan speaking to Jesus): “all this domain and its glory has been *handed over to me* (by Adam), and I give it to whomever I wish” (Luke 4:6). When Jesus was crucified, raised and ascended “the ruler of this world was judged” (John 16:11), and Jesus was given “all authority both in heaven and earth” (Mt. 28:18) for God had “highly exalted him” (Phil. 2:9) “above all rule, and authority and power and dominion not only in this age but also in the age to come. And He put all thing in subjection under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:21-22). So the Hebrew writer could say “But *now* we do not *yet* see all things subjected to him (man), but we see him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, Jesus, because of suffering and death, crowned with glory and honor that by the grace of God he might taste death for every man” (Heb.2:8,9). It is through Christ we, by faith, can see that which *now* we do not yet see, because God has already declared it a reality. So we see the prolepsis truth of “Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.”

When man was created all things were in subjection to him. He was to “rule over all the earth” (Gen. 1:26). Man, then, was created to rule the earth. When he sinned he lost his standing before God and lost his dominion over the earth. The words of the Hebrew writer: “Now we do not yet see all things subjected to him (man) but we do see Jesus” takes on significance because Jesus being “the Last Adam” (I Cor. 15:45), restored man’s position that Adam lost. If man’s original position and purpose was to “rule over all the earth” (Gen. 1:26) then Jesus as “the last Adam” (I Cor. 15:45) will do what the first Adam failed to do. This means there is a future reign of Christ upon the earth when he returns and “the kingdoms of this world (will become) the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ and he will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). There is a popular hymn that says “we shall reign with him on high.” The opposite is true: “...thou didst purchase for God with thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and *they shall reign upon the earth*” (Rev. 5:9, 10). The Apostle Paul writes: “If we endure we shall also reign with him” (II Tim. 2:12). Romans 8:17 states: that we are “heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ.” A joint heir shares everything the heir inherits. If Christ rules the nations of the earth, then we rule with him. “He who overcomes and he who keeps my deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of

Iron as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as also I have received authority from my Father” (Rev. 2:26, 27). Erich Sauer in *The King Of The Earth* expressed this truth when he wrote: “Christ accomplished down here the work which the Father gave him to do as the *Son of Man*. As *man* he once wore the crown of thorns, which the soil, unredeemed and under a curse, yielded him, and as *man* he will on the day of cosmic regeneration (Matt. 19:28), as the head of his body, reign with all his saints over the same soil—now redeemed and free from the curse. The *Divine* redeemer became *man* and as such redeemed mankind, ruler of the earth, and bound him to himself in an eternal inseparable oneness.” It is then we will see the prolepsis “Thou hast put all things in subjection under his (mans) feet” become a reality, because it is already done in God’s sight.

The Kingly rule of Christ and his saints is an unfamiliar theme in the modern church. As we have shown in the above prolepsis even if the church does not see it and it is never preached from our pulpits, God has declared it a done deal. The religious world has been so absorbed with walking the streets of gold with Christ in heaven, they have never considered ruling with him on earth. Romans 8:16, 17 states: “...we are the children of God, and if children, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” A joint heir shares everything the heir inherits. This is a prolepsis saying that God declares us as heirs, but our inheritance has not yet occurred. Just what is our inheritance? “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen to gladly give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). “The Lord will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom (II Tim. 4:18). “For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you” (II Pet. 1:11). Jesus said “Come you who are blessed of my Father, Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt 25:34). The biblical texts refer to the presence of the kingdom (Matt. 12:28, 13:38 ,41; Col. 1:13) as well as those that refer to the future of the kingdom (Matt:13:43; I Cor. 6:9; 15:24). Christians can speak of the kingdom of God as present and of themselves as having entered it because God’s promise makes this hope a reality of faith. Our having the Holy Spirit “is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view of the redemption of God’s own possession” (Eph. 1:14). God says we have obtained an inheritance (Eph. 1:11)

The kingdom began with Christ, was confirmed by his resurrection and ascension (Eph. 2:20-23) and will continue until “he delivers up the kingdom to God and Father; when he has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (I Cor. 15:24, 25). Abolishing “all authority and power” is referring to both the authorities and powers in the earth as well as those in the spiritual world. Jesus himself will be the final ruler and judge, but this is shared with his people. Daniel 7:27 states: “the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One.” Paul echoes this when he asks: “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world...that we shall judge angels?” (I Cor. 6:2, 3). In this passage he is drawing conclusions about the present from what will be true in the future. This is how things will be, so this is how they must be now.

