

Romans 8:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

Analysis

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope (tē mataiôtēti hē ktisis hupetágē, ouch hekoúsa allá diá ton hupotáxanta)—Mataiotēs ("vanity") means futility, frustration, inability to achieve intended purpose. Creation was hupetágē ("subjected," aorist passive), pointing to Genesis 3:17-19—God's curse following Adam's sin. Ouch hekoúsa ("not willingly") indicates creation didn't choose rebellion; it suffered consequences of human sin.

Diá ton hupotáxanta ("by him who subjected it")—God cursed creation. But the subjection was ep' elpídi ("in/upon hope"), with redemptive intent. The curse wasn't final verdict but disciplinary measure with hope of restoration. God subjected creation to futility with the promise of liberation—death's decay serves resurrection hope. The Fall introduced death; the resurrection guarantees renewal.

Historical Context

Ecclesiastes develops the theme of mataiotēs ("vanity") extensively—under the curse, all creation labors without ultimate satisfaction. Paul sees this as temporary, awaiting new creation. Unlike Greek cyclical time (eternal recurrence), biblical eschatology is linear: creation, fall, redemption, consummation—history moves toward God-appointed goal.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How do you see creation's "subjection to vanity" in the natural world—decay, death, frustration?
2. How does understanding the curse as temporary rather than ultimate affect your view of suffering and death?
3. What does God's subjection of creation "in hope" reveal about His redemptive purposes?

Interlinear Text

τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἡ κτίσις ὑποτάξαντα οὐχ
G3588 **For** **to vanity** G3588 **the creature** **of him who hath subjected** **not**
G1063 G3153 G2937 G5293 G3756

ἐκούσῃ ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα ἐπ'
willingly **but** **by reason** G3588 **of him who hath subjected** **the same in**
G1635 G235 G1223 G5293 G1909

ἐλπίδι
hope
G1680

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 5:29 (Parallel theme): And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed.

Jeremiah 12:4 (Parallel theme): How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? the beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end.

Romans 8:22 (Creation): For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

Ecclesiastes 1:2 (Parallel theme): Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

Hosea 4:3 (Parallel theme): Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.

Jeremiah 12:11 (Creation): They have made it desolate, and being desolate it mourneth unto me; the whole land is made desolate, because no man layeth it to heart.

Genesis 6:13 (Parallel theme): And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

Joel 1:18 (Creation): How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.