

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

HOPE

The hope of Israel

Zechariah wrote: "As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee" (9:11,12). We are all born as prisoners of sin and death. Yet, through the blood of Christ, the blood of the new covenant, we can have hope of being released from this prison.

The Hebrew in Zechariah 9:12 is literally, "the hope". There is only "one hope" (Eph. 4:4). It is "the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:23). Paul called it "the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20). For this hope, he says, he was bound by a chain. He truly was a prisoner of the hope. Paul said to Agrippa, "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers" (26:6). The promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob formed the basis for his hope. Abraham provides a prime example of a man who hoped for that time when the promises would be fulfilled: "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be" (Rom. 4:18).

Unlike the blessings of the Law, these promises are based on justification by faith and not perfect obedience to the works of the Law. Also, they will last for ever. They are therefore "better promises" (Heb. 8:6). The "hope of the promise" is therefore a "better hope" (7:19).

Hope of eternal life

The "one hope" is described in various other ways:

- the hope of righteousness (Gal. 5:5)
- the hope of glory (Col. 1:27)
- the hope of salvation (1 Thess. 5:8)
- the hope of eternal life (Tit. 3:7; cf. 1:2).

All these different descriptions relate to the time when the Kingdom will be restored to Israel. The hope of true believers is that they will one day share in that time when the earth will be full of righteousness and the glory of God, and when they will have salvation from sin and death through the gift of eternal life. Hope is therefore vital for salvation. As Paul says: "For we are saved by hope" (Rom. 8:24). The hope is a living hope made possible by the resurrection of Christ: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3).

David wrote, "my flesh also shall rest in hope" (Ps. 16:9). Peter quoted this and showed that it applied to Christ: "moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope" (Acts 2:26). In the psalm the Hebrew for "hope" has the sense of 'confidently' (see AV margin) or 'safely'. Christ's hope was based on the confidence that God would resurrect him from the dead. He had this hope and trust in God even as a child: "But Thou art He That took me out of the womb: Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts" (Ps. 22:9).

The God of hope

The importance of hope is shown by Paul when he says that God is "the God of hope" (Rom. 15:13). We should "have hope toward God" (Acts 24:15) and our "hope" should be "in God" (1 Pet. 1:21).

How we can have hope

By definition, hope involves things we cannot yet see: "but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:24,25). We therefore need patience, or endurance, if hope is to develop. This endurance of hope must continue at all times, and requires effort on our part: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). And so hope will come with experience: "patience [worketh] experience; and experience, hope" (Rom. 5:4).

Proverbs 13:12 sums up what it is like for believers as they wait for the hope of eternal life to come to pass: "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life".

Yet hope comes not just from experience. Our hope is based on the Word of God: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). The hope is from heaven, and we can only find out about it from God's revealed Word: "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel" (Col. 1:5). When we hear the Word of God we should have faith (Rom. 10:17). This faith provides a firm underlying basis for hope: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

The effect of hope

The hope of Israel should cause us to rejoice:

- "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2)
- "rejoicing in hope" (12:12)
- "the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3:6).

The hope has a purifying effect upon the believer: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 Jno. 3:2,3).

We should preach the hope of Israel to others and we should be prepared to explain to others the reasons why we have this hope: "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15).

Hope is an important part of the love of God, for love "hopeth all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). That is, all the things that God has promised, we should hope for. Yet, although hope is vital, it is not as important as love: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity [love], these three; but the greatest of these is charity [love]" (v. 13).

Israel and their hope

When the invasion of Israel by Gog takes place, the nation of Israel will think all hope is lost: "Then He [God] said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts" (Ezek. 37:11). Yet, in the mercy of God, the Lord Jesus Christ will deliver them, and then, with Paul, they will say that God and the Lord Jesus Christ are "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1).

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