



"An atheist is one who hopes the Lord will do nothing to disturb his disbelief."

—Franklin P. Jones

15-Sep-17

Hope and Refuge (Part One)

How many times have we said something like, "I [hope](#) you're feeling better" or "I certainly hope you've had a good week"? We have probably also said something similar to, "I sure hope I pass this test [get this job, win this prize, etc.]." When we use the word "hope," do we not really mean "wish" most of the time?

In our everyday vernacular, the word *hope* has come to mean "the *possibility* of good things happening to us." *Webster's Dictionary* comments that *hope* implies little certainty but suggests confidence or assurance in the *possibility* that what one desires or longs for will happen. Another definition of *hope*, this one from *The American Heritage Dictionary*, is "to entertain a wish for something with some expectation." The second meaning given is "to look forward to with confidence of fulfillment."

Because of our common understanding of the word and definitions like these, we frequently use "hope" in place of "wish": "I sure hope I win the lottery." But in times past, it carried a different meaning, that a person had *confidence* in a future result coming to fruition: "I hope Christ returns soon!" A Christian saying this does not mean that he or she "hopes" it happens—the

individual *knows* it will happen, and he or she anticipates that it will happen soon! We should be careful, then, that when we read about hope in the Bible, we do not subconsciously interpret it as "wish."

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states that, while the Old Testament has fifteen Hebrew words that can be translated as "hope," none of them has the exact force of "an expectation of some good thing." In the New Testament, one Greek word, *elpis*, and its various forms stand for these fifteen Hebrew words and encompass hope in its diverse uses.

The New Testament Greek Lexicon asserts that *elpizo* (the verb form of *elpis*) means, in a religious sense, "to wait for salvation with [joy](#) and full confidence." While in the Old Testament, this kind of hope is certainly present, the Hebrew words by themselves just do not carry the same force as *elpis* or *elpizo*. In the New Testament, hope is more focused, especially on our hope in the [return of Christ](#) and the establishment of God's Kingdom on this earth. Those with *elpis* are confident of these things happening.

A good example of this is found in the [book of Hebrews](#). The people of the church to which this letter is addressed were experiencing tough times. We do not know exactly what the problem was—it may have been just the difficulties that all Christians face in a hostile world—but we do know that they were in danger of [falling away](#).

The author of this epistle is encouraging them to "get a move on," we might say, to remember the hope that once drove them forward. In [Hebrews 6:11-12](#), he writes, "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope [*elpis*, "confident expectancy"] until the end, that you do not become sluggish. . . ." He continues in verses 17-18:

Thus [God](#), determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope [*elpis*] set before us.

Like the Hebrews, we are also at risk. Danger is all around us. Life is a minefield, as it were, and we walk a narrow path between the hidden mines.

Those mines could be crime, pollution, poisons in our food and water, or temptations [Satan](#) has attractively packaged and positioned right off the path. Veer off course and we risk stepping on a mine that will blow our lives to shreds. As the author of Hebrews emphasizes, we have to stay focused on our hope. To this end, hope is a motivator, keeping us looking ahead, keeping us moving. What happens to us when there is no hope? We give up!

We would do well to look a bit closer at verse 18: "That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us." The New King James Version tells us that there are "two immutable things," but it fails to make clear to the reader what those two things are. Returning to verse 17, we glean that these two things are 1) God's promise, which He has confirmed with 2) an oath.

The Contemporary English Version renders this verse as:

God cannot tell lies! And so His promises and vows are two things that can never be changed. We have run to God for safety. Now his promises should greatly encourage us to take hold of the hope that is right in front of us.

The New Testament in Modern English by J.B. Phillips reads:

So that by two utterly immutable things, the word of God and the oath of God, who cannot lie, we who are refugees from this dying world might have a powerful source of strength, and might grasp the hope that he holds out to us.

These translations use the phrases "lay [or take] hold of the hope" and "grasp the hope He holds out to us." In the Greek, the sense of this "laying hold" means that we must seize it, cling to it, and hold it firmly in our hands. It is as if God has set it on the ground before us, and we must reach down and pick it up; or as if He is holding it out to us, and we must reach out and seize it, grasp it, and never let it go.

As we are learning, this hope is many things. It is "the expectation of some good thing." It is also what motivates us to obedience and faithfulness. We also realize that our hope is from God and it is in God.

Next time, we will consider another facet of [Hebrews 6:18](#), the author's mention that we are like those "who have fled for refuge."

- Mike Ford (1955-2021)

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Trumpets and Hope](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Just as it took one swimmer to go through the submerged vessel with a rope giving his life for his fellow passengers in The Poseidon Adventure, Christ gave his life serving as our forerunner through life's trials. Paul encourages the Thessalonians by giving them the details of Christ's return including a shout and a trumpet blast. The saints then and now will be with Christ forevermore. Our hope is based on the fact that Jesus Christ arose from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul reveals that our hope is Christ's resurrection, witnessed by over 500 witnesses including Paul. If there is no resurrection, our faith is worthless. If Christ did not rise, we are still under condemnation. Paul believed that to put his own life in jeopardy for the sake of the gospel was stupid and useless if there were no resurrection. Death will be overcome when Christ appears on the Day of Trumpets.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Elements of Motivation \(Part Three\): Hope](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Hope conveys the idea of absolute certainty of future good, and that is exactly what the Bible tells us we have upon our calling and acceptance of

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God's way. John Ritenbaugh shows that, because the Father and Son are alive and active in their creation, our hope is sure!

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