

What does it mean when a Believer hopes? A Series on Understanding Assurance: Part 4

Throughout history, “hope” meant a wishful, wanted or desired anticipation of some future event with a good outcome. If the anticipation was for some bad outcome, then the term “fear” was typically used. Amidst culture’s definition of “hope,” the hope of a Believer is often confused and misunderstood. And as a personal and subjective attitude, its meaning may be seemingly abstract. An example of this can be seen in the following verse that mentions a “living hope,” which is difficult to understand within the secular definition of “hope.”

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet 1:3-5)

Contributing to this confusion is that the Bible also uses the term or describes “hope” with the secular meaning.

Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have **hope**, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me.” (Ruth 1:12-13)

While the hope of a Believer resembles the secular meaning of hope, its basis, content, and effects are very different.

For the Old Testament Believer, the basis of hope is in God, which includes His character and lovingkindness (see the article: What does "lovingkindness" mean? at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/1God/CovenantLovingkindness.aspx), and His work (see the article: Divine Covenants... the basis for a plan of salvation at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/1God/CovenantAbrahamic.aspx).

For the Old Testament Believer, the content of hope is set in the benefits of being of God’s people. The Old Testament Believer’s hope placed a trust in God’s unilateral and unconditional promise to Abraham, confidence in God’s fidelity to His covenant and comfort as God’s own people and possession (Ex 19:4-5; Deut 7:6). Thus, despite failing in their commitment to the Mosaic Law, Old Testament Believers could continue to hope for God’s gracious relationship with them.

For the Old Testament Believer, the effects of hope can be seen in the contrast to that of a non-Believer. One has a view of eternity, the other with a finite view that ends with one’s life. Secular hope has only one certainty: death.

When a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish,
And the hope of strong men perishes. (Prov 11:7)

Throughout the Old Testament, there are many examples where Yahweh was the object, embodiment and guarantor of His people’s hope.

For You are my hope;
O Lord God, You are my confidence from my youth. (Ps 71:5)

O Lord, the hope of Israel,
All who forsake You will be put to shame.
Those who turn away on earth will be written down,
Because they have forsaken the fountain of living water, even the Lord. (Jer 17:13)

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Prominent after prophecies of a New Covenant (see the article: Divine Covenants... the New Covenant at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/1God/CovenantNew.aspx), the content of the Old Testament Believer's hope included the coming Messiah and restoration of the kingdom of Israel; hope took a view beyond that of one's individual personal life. In this next example, hope is the subject of the passage even though the term for hope isn't there; Simeon hopes to see the Messiah, the Savior of God's people (including Gentiles), before he passes away.

And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,

"Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace,
According to Your word;
For my eyes have seen Your salvation,
Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
A Light of revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Your people Israel." (Luke 2:25-32)

With the arrival of Jesus, some of what was previously prophesized for the future is now present in the Messiah. The New Testament reveals that justification is by faith in Jesus Christ instead of the Law, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of a Believer's inheritance and adoption as God's child (see the article: How does the Holy Spirit sanctify human beings? at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/9Salvation/SanctifyHowDoesHolySpirit.aspx), and salvation is available to all. In this context, the hope of the New Testament Believer is the same as that of the Old Testament Believer but with a different emphasis.

Like the Old Testament Believer, the basis of the New Testament Believer's hope is in God; however, the basis is no longer just the author of salvation, but it includes the mediator of salvation Jesus Christ.

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." (John 6:29)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our **hope**, (1 Tim 1:1)

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed **hope** and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Tit 2:11-14)

Like the Old Testament Believer, the content of the New Testament Believer's hope is set on the benefits of being of God's people and fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant; however, the content places an emphasis on the benefits of salvation.

But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; having a **hope** in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. (Acts 24:14-15)

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For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the **hope** of righteousness. (Gal 5:5)

if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the **hope** of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. (Col 1:23)

that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the **hope** of glory. (Col 1:26-27)

But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the **hope** of salvation. (1 Thess 5:8)

Like the Old Testament Believer, the effects of the New Testament Believer's hope are eternal; however, there is an emphasis on the effects as being alive and active in Jesus Christ whose work of atonement continues in its effects today.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet 1:3-5)

Hope is the confident and sure expectation of God fulfilling His covenant promises. The hope of a Christian is not possible without faith. Because faith is both the belief that God is in reality true and a trust in that fact, a Christian's hope is directly proportional to his faith. The greater the faith, the greater the expectation and certainty one will have that God will fulfill His promises.

Faith and hope have in common the fact that their object is invisible and unprovable.

For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (Rom 8:24-25)

With a genuine faith, a Christian's hope is the confident certainty in God, His character and fulfillment of His covenant promises and a Christian's perseverance recognizes that the time and manner of covenant fulfillment is up to God.

References:

1. Brand C, Draper C, England A, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, (2003).
2. Brown C, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1979).