



Advent: Hope

Script References

Introduction

So let's say you want to describe the feeling of anticipating a future that's better than the present. You might be giddy or excited or maybe unsure, but most of us know that experience. We call it hope. It's a state of anticipation, and it's crucial for healthy human existence, and it's a really important concept in the Bible. In fact, there are many words for hope in the ancient languages of the Bible, and they're all fascinating.

In the Old Testament, there are two main Hebrew words translated as hope. The first is *yakhal*, which means simply "to wait for." Like in the story of Noah and the ark, as the flood waters recede, Noah had to *yakhal* for weeks.¹

The other Hebrew word is *qavah*, which also means to wait. It's related to the Hebrew word *qav*, which means cord. When you pull a *qav* tight, you produce a state of tension until there's release. That's *qavah*, the feeling of tension and expectation while you wait for something to happen. The prophet Isaiah depicts God as a farmer who plants vines and *qavahs* for good grapes.² Or the prophet Micah talks about farmers who both *qavah* and *yakhal* for morning dew to give moisture to the land.³

Hope in the Old Testament

So in biblical Hebrew, hope is about waiting or expectation, but waiting for what? In the period of Israel's prophets, as the nation was sinking into self-destruction, Isaiah said, "At this moment, the Lord's hiding his face from Israel, so I will *qavah* for him."⁴ The only hope Isaiah had in those dark days was the hope for God himself.

You find this same notion of hope all over the book of Psalms where these words appear over forty times. In almost every case, what people are waiting for is God. Like in Psalm 130, the poet cries out from a pit of despair, "I *qavah* for the Lord ... Let Israel *yakhal* for the Lord, because he's loyal and will redeem Israel from its sins."⁵

00:00–01:05

1. Genesis 8:6-12

2. Isaiah 28:24-29

3. Micah 5:7

01:06–01:46

4. Isaiah 8:17

5. Psalm 130:5-8

Biblical Hope

01:47–02:42

Biblical hope is based on a person, which makes it different from optimism. Optimism is about choosing to see, in any situation, how circumstances could work out for the best. But biblical hope isn't focused on circumstances. In fact, hopeful people in the Bible often recognize there's no evidence things will get better, but you choose hope anyway.

Like the prophet Hosea, he lived in a dark time when Israel was being oppressed by foreign empires. And he chose hope when he said God could turn this "valley of trouble into a door of hope," like the day when Israel came up from the land of Egypt.⁶ God had surprised his people with redemption back in the days of the Exodus, and he could do so again.

6. Hosea 2:15

So it's God's past faithfulness that motivates hope for the future. You look forward by looking backward, trusting in nothing other than God's character. It's like the poet of Psalm 39 who says, "And now O Lord, what else can I *qavah* for? You are my *yakhal*."⁷

7. Psalm 39:7

Jesus as Living Hope

02:43–03:38

In the New Testament, the earliest followers of Jesus cultivated this similar habit of hope. They believed that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection was God's surprising response to our slavery to evil and death. The empty tomb opened up a new door of hope, and they used the Greek word *elpis* to describe this anticipation.

The apostle Peter said that Jesus' resurrection opened up a "living hope" that people can be reborn to become new and different kinds of humans.⁸ More than once, the apostle Paul says the good news about Jesus announces "the *elpis* of glory."⁹ In both cases, this *elpis* is based on a person, the risen Jesus, who has overcome death.

8. 1 Peter 1:3

9. Romans 5:2;
Colossians 1:27

And this hope wasn't just for humans. The apostles believed that what happened to Jesus in the resurrection was a foretaste of what God had planned for the whole universe. In Paul's words, it's a "hope that creation itself will be liberated from slavery to corruption into freedom when God's children are glorified."¹⁰

10. Romans 8:21

Conclusion

03:39–04:10

So Christian hope is bold, waiting for humanity and the whole universe to be rescued from evil and death. And some would say it's crazy, and maybe it is. But biblical hope isn't optimism based on the odds. It's a choice to wait for God to bring about a future that's as surprising as a crucified man rising from the dead. Christian hope looks back to the risen Jesus in order to look forward, and so we wait. And that's what the biblical words for hope are all about.