

The biblical basis of hope

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Currently 'hope' is one of the most popular words in the theological world. Everywhere the thought is in the air. Numerous books and articles have appeared on the subject. Two features are typical of this trend, however. One is the scarcity, indeed almost complete lack, of biblical studies. The biblical teaching is all but totally ignored. The other is that 'hope' is generally understood in a very broad sense, virtually equivalent to 'eschatology'.

In this article I propose to confine myself to the actual word 'hope'. I realize that the concept of hope is broader than the word itself, but to study the concept of hope would involve examining practically the whole of eschatology, which is impossible in such a short space. In addition, an examination of the term 'hope' in the context of the passages in which it occurs is essential if one is to understand the biblical teaching on hope. In fact, this is the basis for an understanding of the

total concept. In addition, I shall confine myself to the Biblical text, with emphasis on the New Testament.

Old Testament

Hope is a characteristic of man. It belongs to his very nature. 'While there is life there is hope,' wrote the Roman poets. 'He who is joined with all the living has hope' said the Preacher (Eccles. 9: 4). So it characterizes the living. While man is alive he can hope. But the question arises: Is there any real basis for hope? Can hope be certain?

The Old Testament asserts boldly and plainly that hope is rooted in God. For the Israelites hope is neither indefinite nor uncertain. It is not wishful thinking. It is sure, because of Yahweh their God. Therefore it is a confident expectation.

God is the basis of hope because of his known character, his past deeds of salvation, and his covenant with Israel. It is in his chapter on the nation's hope that Wheeler Robinson deals with the concept of covenant, opening with the statement: 'The basis of Israel's hope is the peculiar

relation which exists between itself and Yahweh.¹ The God who brought his people out of slavery binds himself to them. He is faithful, and his promises cannot fail. Because the Israelites belong to him and because he is trustworthy, they can confidently hope in him.² The covenant is seen as the ground of hope in Zechariah 9:11–12. The prophet calls God's people 'prisoners of hope' (verse 12), since they are captives, as the previous verse also indicates. Yet God will set them free because of the blood of his covenant with them (verse 11). This covenant assures them of his care and salvation. Consequently, they can expect deliverance and redemption, knowing that captivity will not remain their lot permanently.

The Old Testament further reveals that God is the ground of hope by reason of his nature and attributes. His steadfast love, or covenant-love, is especially set forth as the solid ground of hope. The Lord's steadfast love never ceases, his mercies never come to an end, and his faithfulness is great (La. 3:22–23). On account of this the writer declares, 'The Lord is my portion, . . . therefore I will hope in him' (verse 24). Even in the midst of the misery and discouragement which dominate Lamentations there is room for hope. But it comes when the author turns his attention from the destruction of the city and land to his God, reminding himself of his character. The words which introduce this great affirmation are instructive:

But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope (verse 21).

The source of hope is the character of God.³

The author of Psalm 130 writes in similar vein. He waits for the Lord and hopes in his word,⁴ knowing that there is forgiveness with him (verses

4–5). Then he urges Israel to hope in the Lord, stating his reason:

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plenteous redemption (verse 7).

Israel can confidently hope in Yahweh. He is entirely dependable, as he is characterized by steadfast love and his gift of redemption.

The abundant redemption which distinguishes the God of Israel is before the psalmist's eyes in Psalm 65:5 also. 'The hope of all the ends of the earth' is the God of salvation, who delivers by mighty and dread deeds. This recalls the deliverance from Egypt, the saving act *par excellence*. Sasse remarks that hope, like faith, cannot exist without the recognition of historical facts.⁵ The exodus was the outstanding act in Israel's history to which the nation ever looked back, and which convinced it that Yahweh was One in whom it could confidently place its hope.⁶

God is therefore the basis of hope in the Old Testament. His reliability and consistent character are alluded to under the metaphor of a rock. This ascription is brought into close connection with hope on several occasions. According to Psalm 62:5–6 the writer's hope is from God, who alone is his rock, his salvation and his fortress. The same language is found in Psalm 71:3. From his birth the psalmist has leaned on the Lord, learning to rely upon him, so that, now an old man, he can declare with assurance, 'Thou, O Lord, art my hope' (verse 5).

Knowing the character of God and his faithfulness to the covenant, and having experienced his saving power once in an outstanding way at the exodus, the Israelites had solid grounds for basing their hope on him.⁷ Conversely, hope was also anchored in him because of their confidence in his capacity to do again what he had performed in the past.⁸

New Testament

In the New Testament the term 'hope' is found above all in the Pauline corpus. With less frequency it occurs in Acts, Hebrews, and 1 Peter, but elsewhere it is either entirely absent or almost so.

¹ H. W. Robinson, *The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament* (London, 1959), p. 186. Cf. C. F. D. Moule, *The Meaning of Hope* (FBBS 5; Philadelphia, 1963), p. 24.

² P. S. Minear, 'Hope', *IDB* 2 (1962) p. 640, suggests that actually 'hope links together the two parties of the covenant'. While this is no doubt true, the two parties are linked by much more besides.

³ This passage is an excellent example of the tension between hope and present reality which typifies so much of the biblical picture of hope and which is depicted strongly in the Old Testament in the word 'wait' (especially *qāwāh*).

⁴ 'Hope in' and 'wait for' are synonymous, as the parallelism shows. Cf., for the Old Testament vocabulary of hope, W. Zimmerli, *Man and His Hope in the Old Testament* (SBT 2/20; London, 1971) 7; C. Westermann, 'Das Hoffen im Alten Testament', *Forschung am Alten Testament* (Munich, 1964), pp. 221–226, 232–235; E. Hoffmann, 'Hoffnung', *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament* (2 vols.; Wuppertal, 1965), I, p. 722. To Zimmerli's evidence should be added F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), pp. 314, 404, 875, 960.

⁵ H. Sasse, 'Some Thoughts on Christian Hope', *RTR* 26 (1967), p. 48. In his treatment of hope in the Old Testament he stresses that hope is based on the sacred history through which God illuminated the promise (*ibid.*, p. 44).

⁶ Cf. Moule, *loc. cit.*

⁷ W. L. Knox, *St Paul and the Church of the Gentiles* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 24–25 considers that the essential difference between the hope of Israel and its neighbours lay in the different conceptions of the nature of God.

⁸ Cf. H. Bardtke, 'Hoffnung', *RGK* 3 (1959), pp. 415–416.

The approach will be to see first where the New Testament writers take over the Old Testament basis, and then to investigate developments which are peculiar to the New Testament.

a. God

We have seen that in the Old Testament the basis of hope is God himself—God who is utterly dependable and trustworthy. The New Testament repeats this truth.

In Romans 15: 9–12 Paul quotes from the Old Testament to indicate the place which Gentiles were to have as part of God's people. His final quotation is from Isaiah 11: 10 where the LXX closes with the statement: 'in him shall the Gentiles hope' (verse 12). The word 'hope' is taken up by the apostle in the next verse in a prayer that 'the God of hope' will fill the readers with joy and peace. Here is a new designation for God. He is the ground of hope, the One on whom hope ultimately depends. He is its sure foundation. This gives it certainty. The nature of God assures us that hope will be fulfilled. Barrett effectively brings out the connection with the previous verse, translating and commenting: 'May the God who is thus (that is, in the light of the passages just quoted) the ground of hope . . .'.⁹ Similarly, *ho Theos tēs elpidos* points to God as the source of hope.¹⁰ He is the author of hope; it is he who gives it. Consequently Paul can expect the Roman Christians to abound in hope more and more as a result of the activity of his Spirit in their midst (verse 13b).¹¹

The Old Testament is again reflected, but this time not in a quotation, in 1 Timothy 6: 17. Timothy is urged to charge the wealthy not 'to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God, who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy'. One recalls the teaching of the Old Testament: men are not to rely on wealth (Pr. 11: 28). Wealth is a foundation of sand which will not support genuine hope. God is the only solid foundation. This is the common experience of believers: 'we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe' (1 Tim. 4: 10).

Ultimately God is the ground of hope in 2 Corinthians 1: 10 also. Paul's expectation of God's

deliverance in the future is dependent on his past experience of such aid. In Asia he had faced such unbearable affliction that he despaired of life itself (verse 9). However, God rescued him from that deadly peril. This divine deliverance now inspires him with assurance for future service. It could be said then that his hope is based on previous experience. But that would be an inadequate explanation. It is the Deliverer who is the source of Paul's confidence, the God he serves, namely the one who can raise the dead.

This aspect has its place in Hebrews too. 'Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,' the author exhorts his readers, adding, by way of assurance, 'for he who promised is faithful' (10: 23). The content of this exhortation is one that recurs in the epistle (3: 6, 14; 4: 14; 6: 11) and the call to endure dominates the hortatory sections. Given the situation of the readers, the need for this is obvious. Our text sums up the writer's message, for not only does it summarize his urgent demand, but also he turns his readers' attention to the source of their strength. God's faithfulness should encourage perseverance in their confession of the things hoped for.

The Johannine writings have but a single reference to hope with any theological significance.¹² It is 1 John 3: 3, which is relevant at this point.¹³ The RSV reads: 'And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.'¹⁴ 'Thus' looks back to the verse before, which also explains the thought of purity, for John has just declared that when Christ appears 'we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is'. That hope of a future conformity to Christ's likeness redounds on our present life.

The importance of this passage for our topic centres on the phrase 'hopes in him'. The Greek text runs: *pas ho echōn tēn elpida tautēn ep'autō* . . . Given that the preposition *epi*, followed as it is by the dative case, has its primary significance of '(hope) resting on (him)',¹⁵ the verse is very much

¹² The only other verses (2 John 12; 3 John 14) merely record a hope to see the readers soon.

¹³ This is in the belief that 'him' means the Father rather than the Son. Cf. the introductory verses and see A. Plummer, *The Epistles of S John (CBSC; Cambridge, 1954)*, p. 122. If the allusion is to the Son, my basic argument is not altered, but the verse would be more accurately discussed under c. below.

¹⁴ *Contra* NEB: 'everyone who has this hope before him . . . where 'him' is apparently 'himself'.

¹⁵ As B. F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St John* (London, 1883), p. 98; I. H. Marshall, *The Epistles of John (NICNT; Grand Rapids, 1978)*, p. 173; Plummer, *loc. cit.* See the explanation of F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (Chicago, 1961), p. 123.

⁹ C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Black's New Testament Commentaries; London, 1962), p. 272.

¹⁰ Moule, *op. cit.*, p. 37; Minear, *op. cit.*, p. 641.

¹¹ V. P. Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville, 1968), p. 132 thinks that in this passage 'Paul specifically identifies the Spirit as the ground of hope'. Rather, the Spirit is the agent who conveys the hope from God to men.

to the point.¹⁶ The object toward which our hope is directed is the return of Christ and the believer's consequent Christlikeness. How can we be so confident of the reality of this? Because our hope is resting on God. That assures us of the certainty of these still future events.

Finally, in our consideration of hope based on God, two verses from Acts are pertinent.¹⁷ Neither is explicit. Both are concerned with the hope of resurrection for which Paul claims to be on trial. But it is implicit on each occasion that this hope is grounded in God. 'I stand here on trial for hope in the promise¹⁸ made by God to our fathers' (26: 6). The content of this divinely given expectation is the apostle's concern, but the qualifying phrase 'made by God' expresses the grounds of assurance. Such a promise cannot fail. The defence before Felix is similar. Paul admits to 'a hope in God'¹⁹ . . . that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust' (24: 15). But this is based upon God's written Word recorded in the law and prophets (verse 14). Thus his hope is again founded on God, and the veracity of his Word.

Common to the New Testament understanding of hope, therefore, is the belief that it is rooted and anchored in God—his faithfulness, his previous deliverance, and his word. Hence the confidence and assurance which the concept embodies in its biblical sense.

b. The promises of God

Closely related is a second basis of hope. Since hope relies on God and looks to the future, it has a natural affinity with the promises of God. It depends on them. What God promises is certain, yet is still to come.

Abraham discovered this—a point that Paul seizes upon and uses with considerable force (Rom. 4: 13–25). The promise was made to Abraham that he would be father of a great people. To this he responded in faith, as the apostle emphasizes, but with this is linked hope: 'in hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations' (verse 18). Abraham hoped against

hope,²⁰ because God, who is totally reliable, had given a specific promise. 'Though the circumstances were such that hope seemed utterly impossible, he nevertheless held to his hope; and he could do this because it was only on God's promise that he based it.'²¹ Since that basis was certain and secure, hope founded on it was sure also, irrespective of, indeed in defiance of, human calculations.

The divine promise to Abraham is the starting-point again in Hebrews 6: 13–20. He is used as an illustration to believers of a later age, to whom also promises have been given. This is the author's way of urging his readers to realise the full assurance of their hope until the end (verse 11), which is his aim. God's promise was made doubly sure by the addition of an oath. On account of these two, God's promise and God's oath, we therefore have 'strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us' (verse 18). God's promise is the foundation of hope then.

But, to this, further assurance is added. First, the simile of the anchor is used to express the certainty of hope. Hope is like an anchor of the soul—to keep us steadfast.²² Nor is this all, for now the author takes a new turn by indicating that this hope 'enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek' (verses 19b–20). The Saviour is already there, where at present we can only enter in hope. Thus a new dimension is added to hope, a specifically New Testament element, centred on Jesus. And we, like the recipients of this epistle, have even stronger grounds for hope than Abraham had. Jesus, our forerunner, is in the presence of the Father as high priest for ever. 'His presence there is a powerful corroboration of our hope.'²³

The most succinct record of this aspect of hope is found in Tit. 1: 2: 'in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago'.²⁴ Eternal

²⁰ See the discussion of this phrase in C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh, 1975-78), I, pp. 245-246.

²¹ A. Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (London, 1952), p. 80.

²² One cannot help but contrast with this the lines of Pindar (01. 12. 1): 'To and fro toss the hopes of man, cleaving the waste foam-drift of the perfidious sea.'

²³ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; London, 1964), p. 131.

²⁴ J. N. D. Kelly (*A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, Black's New Testament Commentaries* (London, 1963), p. 227 translates *pro chronōn aiōniōn*, 'from all eternity', which is preferable in view of the presence and meaning of the same phrase in 2 Timothy 1: 9. This translation has the effect of putting God's promise into the indefinite past, before the foundation of the world. Likewise H. J. A. Bouman, 'The Christian Hope', *Concordia Theological Monthly* 26 (1955), p. 245.

¹⁶ Sometimes 'him' is regarded as the object of hope, e.g. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (London, 1970), p. 88. This could be the case if the dative after *epi* is considered an example of the fluidity of usage of the *koinē* period. In support of the meaning 'resting on' are: a. grammatically, it is more strictly correct, and b. the object of the hope is found in verse 2, whereas verse 3 provides its basis.

¹⁷ 'Hope' occurs ten times in Acts, but only these two touch on its basis. Mostly the writer uses it for the object toward which hope is directed.

¹⁸ *Ep'elpidi tēs . . . epaggelias*—objective genitive, as W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge and Chicago, 1957), p. 252.

¹⁹ *Eis ton Theon*, i.e. directed toward God.

life is depicted as a future possession, currently an object of hope. How can we know we shall enter into this inheritance and that it is not a hollow mockery?²⁵ What assurance is there of this hope? God promised it from all eternity. And he does not lie. Therefore this hope is a confident expectation. What more solid basis can there be for hope than the dependable promise of God who cannot lie?²⁶

c. God's saving work in Christ

In the New Testament, as in the Old, God is the ground of hope. Likewise, just as the psalmist sees the salvation of God as a further basis, so do several of the epistles. There is this difference: God's salvation is now seen in a new light on account of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This new event in salvation history affords an additional foundation for hope. 'Because of the new situation the hope of the New Testament is reshaped as regards both content and basis.'²⁷ Therefore, more precisely, hope is grounded in God's saving work in Christ,²⁸ in the atoning death and resurrection of him who took human form. In particular it is 'St Paul who develops the positive Christian idea of hope as that centres in and derives from God's redemptive acts in Christ.'²⁹ He emphasizes this uniquely important event, drawing out its meaning and expounding its consequences. Christ's death is the foundation of the new exodus and it establishes the new covenant. It is therefore appropriate that it is the basis of Christian hope, just as the Israelites' hope was based on the God of the covenant and the exodus. In the New Testament, also, hope is firmly anchored in history.

Before examining the passages where the New Testament brings hope into connection with the resurrection or specific aspects of the atonement, we shall observe a more general announcement of its relation to Christ.

Christ himself is the ground of hope. The first epistle to Timothy opens with the words: 'Paul, an

apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Saviour and of Jesus Christ our hope.' While this appellation doubtless looks to the future, when at Christ's return the divine saving work will be brought to a head, at the same time it grounds hope in him.³⁰ He made hope possible and actual. The Christian's hope, like that of the Israelite, is based on God. But, in addition, it is rooted in him who came from God to make salvation a reality. Hope is not determined by man's own being, as in Greek thought.³¹ Nor is it a product of his imagination. It is not based on man at all, whether his past achievements or his potential for the future, but on Jesus Christ. Just as his second coming is the central object of hope, so his first coming is the motive of Christian hope.³² He is its author, its foundation, and its guarantee.

In particular, it is on his resurrection and on his atoning death that it is based, and to these we now turn in more detail. Here is the unique contribution of the New Testament to our subject.

d. Hope based on the atonement

This truth seems to be peculiarly Pauline, which fits the vital role that the atonement plays in the apostle's teaching, with its profundity and originality. Several facets of Jesus' atoning death are depicted as basic to hope in the epistles: justification, reconciliation, and redemption. Each of these will be investigated in turn.

(i) *Justification*. Romans is the stronghold of the Pauline teaching on justification. In addition however, this is the book where the word 'hope' appears most often in the whole New Testament.³³ Moreover, though some of these occurrences are in the practical exhortations in the last five chapters of the epistle, two-thirds are in chapters 1-8, where Paul clearly sets forth what the gospel is.³⁴ These references to hope follow his exposition of the atoning significance of Christ's death. They flow from that teaching, thereby enabling us to see how hope is grounded in the atonement.

After relentlessly pressing home his argument that all, Jews and Gentiles alike, have sinned and are under the just condemnation of God (1: 18—

²⁵ Like hope in Greek literature, concerning which S. H. Butcher, *Some Aspects of the Greek Genius* (London, 1893) writes: 'It is . . . an illusion born of an uncertain future. It is a mocking goddess who tempts man to forget the limits of the possible.'

²⁶ 'God's personal pledge is the most certain foundation of our hope' according to C. Spicq, *Saint Paul: les Epîtres pastorales* (2 vols.; Paris, 1969), II, p. 593.

²⁷ Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, p. 724 (ET: *NIDNTT*, II, p. 242).

²⁸ Cf. A. Barr, '“Hope” (*ELPIS*, *ELPIZO*) in the New Testament', *SJT* 3 (1950), p. 72; T. S. Liefeld, 'The Christian Hope in the New Testament', *The Lutheran Quarterly* 6 (1954), p. 35; W. Grossouw, 'L'espérance dans le Nouveau Testament', *RB* 61 (1954), p. 526.

²⁹ Liefeld, *op. cit.*, p. 34; cf. R. Bultmann, '*elpis*', *TDNT* 2 (1964), p. 532.

³⁰ Jesus is depicted as both ground and object of hope. The former alone interests me in this article.

³¹ Bultmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 518, 521. A good man will follow after good hope (Arist. *De Virtutibus et Vitiis* 8. 1251B, pp. 33-34), whereas the wicked live with bad hopes (Pl. *Resp.* 1. 331A). A man's hopes are his own projections of the future.

³² Spicq, *op. cit.*, 1. 285.

³³ A total of 17 times out of 84. The noun alone occurs 13 times.

³⁴ In fact, to be more precise, from 4: 18 to the end of chapter 8.

3: 20), Paul proclaims justification by faith 3: 21—4: 25) on the basis of Christ's saving work (3: 24; 4: 24f.). This is elucidated in detail. Then, after laying this foundation, the apostle states several of the effects or fruits of justification in 5: 1–5. First, we have peace with God (verse 1). As a further boon we have the hope of sharing God's glory in the future, which is cause for rejoicing (verse 2).³⁵ In fact, apart from the reference to Abraham's hope in chapter 4, this is the first occurrence of the word in the epistle, and certainly the first time the Christian's expectation is referred to. The logic of Paul's argument demonstrates that hope is an outcome of justification. That peace with God is an effect of justification is commonly proclaimed, but Paul equally declares that hope, accompanied by joy, is a direct result of it.

His argument then proceeds from justification through sanctification (chapters 6–7) and the life of the Spirit (8: 1–17) to future glory (8: 18–30). Thus he shows the progress of the Christian life and the major truths which depend upon justification. In his treatment of the glory to come the concept of hope is introduced both in relation to the believer (verse 23–25) and the whole creation (verse 19, 20). Creation, along with the children of God, is keenly awaiting the future, when redemption will be completed. Thus the hope of a glorious consummation stems directly from the atonement. Moreover, the whole of chapter 8 (in which 'hope' is more prominent than any other chapter of the epistle)³⁶ develops from the opening words, which declare that the person in Christ is justified and will never face God's sentence of condemnation. In this chapter 'the gift of home is inseparable from the act by which God frees his people from condemnation (8: 1), from the law of sin and death (verse 2), from life tyrannized by the flesh (verse 12), and from fear (verse 15)'.³⁷

Further evidence to support my contention that hope is sometimes based on justification is forthcoming from Titus. God saved us, writes Paul, 'so that, justified by his grace, we might become heirs in hope of eternal life' (3: 7).³⁸ This clause displays

³⁵ The intervening clause 'through whom . . . we stand' is subordinate to the main line of his thought and is an expansion of 'through our Lord Jesus Christ'. Cf. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, p. 259, and J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, 1968), p. 161.

³⁶ The synonymous *apekdechomai* and *apokaradokia* are also employed four times in this chapter.

³⁷ P. S. Minear, *Christian Hope and the Second Coming* (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 45.

³⁸ As NEB, Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 253; contra RSV: 'so that we might be justified'. The Greek word so translated is the aorist participle *dikaiōthentes*. This is best understood as an alternative way of expressing the thought 'he saved us'.

the purpose of our salvation (verse 5). We were saved and justified so as to gain the hope of everlasting life.³⁹ The description of eternal life as a future reality does not negate or exclude its present possession, but the apostle's interest here is on its full realization at the time of consummation. Thus it is described as our hope, and it will remain an object of hope until that time. But those who enjoy this confident expectation are those who have been justified by grace. Only this experience gives grounds for such an expectation.

(ii) *Reconciliation*. In the epistle to the Colossians Paul gives a magnificent description of the person and work of Christ. This is placed right at the beginning as the basis for the apostle's argument against the 'philosophy' which was current at Colosse. Christ is set forth as the sole mediator between God and man. The reconciliation he thus achieved has cosmic proportions (verse 20). It has also reached the Colossians. Whereas once they were estranged and hostile toward God, now Christ has reconciled them by his death (verse 22). But from here the flow of Paul's thought carries him on to the future as he declares the purpose of their reconciliation—to be presented blameless and holy before God. At this juncture the concept of hope is introduced, for it is necessary that the Colossians continue steadfast in the faith, 'not shifting from the hope of the gospel' (verse 23). This is the hope which the gospel holds out and has produced in them, a hope which arises from the gospel.⁴⁰ The message of reconciliation which they have accepted brings with it this Christian virtue.⁴¹ The apostle therefore sets this teaching on hope in the context of reconciliation. It springs from this soil, and without it hope is without foundation.

(iii) *Redemption*. The future aspect of hope is clearly to the fore in the words 'awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (Tit. 2: 13). The explanatory phrase after 'hope' proclaims its

³⁹ It is not easy to decide whether 'eternal life' is to be taken with 'heirs' or 'hope'. In support of the latter is the earlier use of 'hope of eternal life' in Titus 1: 2, and the fact that it is not Paul's habit to follow *klēronomos* with a genitive (only once out of six occurrences of the word, viz. Rom. 4: 13). So also RSV; Minear, *op. cit.*, p. 92; D. Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (TNTC; London, 1957), p. 207. Contra NEB; Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 253; Spicq, *op. cit.*, II, p. 657.

⁴⁰ Subjective genitive; cf. A. Pott, *Das Hoffen im Neuen Testament* (Leipzig, 1915), p. 75; J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids and London, n.d.), p. 163. Arndt and Gingrich (*op. cit.*, p. 252) hold that the genitive gives the basis for the hope.

⁴¹ Indeed the very expression 'hope of the gospel' focuses attention on the cross, for the gospel is the good news of what God has done in Christ.

content, for the clause is appositional.⁴² Our expectation consists in the manifestation of Christ's glory. At his return he will irradiate the divine splendour—a truly joyous and blessed prospect. We are therefore urged, while living an upright life in the present age (verse 12), to look forward to his coming.

This glorious epiphany of Jesus Christ will mean the consummation of the ministry he came to perform at his first appearing, when he 'gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own' (verse 14). And it is precisely on these grounds that his return is called our blessed hope and that we await it so eagerly and confidently. Our hope of his return is based on the deliverance he has achieved. He whom we await with such a sense of expectation is the one who, in the past, released us from our sins at such cost. So our redemption and hope belong together, the latter dependent on the former.

e. Christ's resurrection

The ostensible basis for Christian hope in the New Testament is the resurrection of Christ.⁴³ The clearest example of this is 1 Peter 1:3, where the author blesses God that 'we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'. 'Born anew' signifies the decisive new stage in life, as we enter into the life of Christ, the life of the new age. This new life contains future elements and in the context it is the eschatological goal of the rebirth which has priority. The end in view is hope.⁴⁴

This rebirth has taken place because of Jesus' resurrection,⁴⁵ which has demonstrated the reality and nature of life after death. His resurrection has inaugurated the new age, opening up a new order of life. It is this that we have entered through regeneration. But this new life is accompanied by a living, vibrant hope, further defined as an inheritance in verse 4. This, too, stems from the resurrection of Jesus. Thus the living Lord gives a living hope.⁴⁶

Paul would concur with this, for while he does

not depict the dependence of hope on the resurrection of Christ in such concise terms, he does express the truth in two passages.⁴⁷

One is 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. The apostle has cause to address himself to a problem which is confronting the Thessalonians: would their fellow Christians who died before the parousia have a part in it? He begins his comforting reply by urging the believers not to grieve as do pagans who have no hope (verse 13), and who can therefore be expected to be distressed when their friends die. He speedily adds the positive grounds for the Christians' hope in contrast to the hopelessness of unbelievers. Believing that Jesus died and rose again, we are thus confident that those who have fallen asleep through Jesus, God will bring with him (verse 14).⁴⁸ The death and resurrection of Jesus form the basis of assurance concerning the future. The dead are with Christ and will return with him at the parousia. There need be no anxiety concerning them. The Christian's hope for the future life is traceable to 'the victory over death wrought in the death-resurrection of Jesus Christ.'⁴⁹ Nevertheless, in view of the context which focuses on life, resurrection, and the second coming, the emphasis tends to be on Jesus' resurrection.⁵⁰

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul is again expounding the resurrection. At Corinth there were those who denied that the dead would be raised, but this was intolerable to the apostle. If true, it would mean that Christ himself had not been raised (verse 13), and hence no salvation was possible. Faith is then vain (verse 14), our sins remain unforgiven (verse 13), and Christians who have previously died have perished (verse 18). 'If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied' (verse 19).

By thus laying bare the consequences of such a denial, Paul proves that the belief that was being aired was impossible for a Christian. Indeed, to claim the name of Christ and at the same time to entertain the possibility of no resurrection was the

⁴² E. K. Simpson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London, 1954), p. 108.

⁴³ G. B. Caird, 'The Christological Basis of Christian Hope', *The Christian Hope* (Theological Collection 13; London, 1970), p. 9. Similarly Liefeld, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁴⁴ In fact, the new birth has a threefold purpose: *eis elpida* (verse 3), *eis kléronomian* (verse 4), *eis sōtērian* (verse 5).

⁴⁵ As J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (Black's New Testament Commentaries; London, 1969), p. 48, recognizes, this final phrase is attached first to 'living hope' but also to the whole clause.

⁴⁶ Cf. 1 Peter 1:21 where hope is brought into connection with the life-giving God.

⁴⁷ Liefeld (*op. cit.*, p. 34) holds that it is 'above all, the resurrection' in which Paul centres the Christian idea of hope, but this is inaccurate, for the resurrection does not hold the place of prime importance in Paul's concept.

⁴⁸ Linking *dia tou Iēsou* with *koimēthentas*, against the rsv. So, most commentaries, e.g., E. Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Black's New Testament Commentaries; London, 1972), p. 189; L. Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (NICNT; London, 1959), p. 140.

⁴⁹ Minear, 'Hope', *IDB II*, p. 642. Similarly G. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, 1961), p. 176.

⁵⁰ Compare Morris' comment on this verse: 'The resurrection is the guarantee of the Christian hope' (*op. cit.*, p. 139).

utmost folly, and made a farce of Christianity.⁵¹ Those who promoted such a view exhibited a shallow understanding, and revealed that they had not followed their position through to its logical conclusion. Truly, the Christian has set his hope on Christ, but if there really is no future life with him the situation is tragic indeed. 'In that case, Christians would be toiling and suffering here under a great delusion, a hope that has no foundation and will never be fulfilled—and such a glorious hope!'⁵²

But this is not true. It is based on a false premise. We shall be raised in the future (verses 21, 23); therefore the denial of a future eschatology is defective. And this coming resurrection is certain because Jesus has risen from the dead (verse 20a). Therefore Christian hope is securely founded. The certainty of the believer's resurrection is enhanced by the further statement that the risen Christ is 'the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep' (verse 20b). 'First fruits' is derived from the idea of the first fruits of the harvest (e.g., Ex. 34: 22, 26). This was the first part of the crop and the assurance that the rest of the harvest would follow. Just as the first fruits are the promise of the full harvest, so Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of the resurrection of believers.⁵³ Moreover, as the beginning of the harvest, the first fruits were offered to God, representing the whole crop. The hallowing and acceptance of the first fruits is the hallowing and acceptance of the crop. The unity between Christ and believers is similar and thus our future resurrection is guaranteed.⁵⁴ Here is additional support for our hope.

The solidarity of Christ and believers is reiterated, in different language, in the following two verses. As death came by man, so the resurrection of the dead came by man (verse 21). 'For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive' (verse 22). To be 'in Christ' is to belong to him and the

community of which he is head. Hand in hand with this go the benefits achieved by his act of obedience. As union with Adam brings death to humanity, so union with the last Adam will bring life to the new humanity.⁵⁵ The context, the parallelism with the previous verse, and the future tense (*zōopoīthēsontai*) combine to confirm that the verb refers to bodily resurrection. All, therefore, who are in Christ can be sure of attaining the resurrection.

Thus it is evident that these verses expand the claim that Christ is the first fruits of the dead, and consequently add further weight to our hope of resurrection. Truly it is a sure hope, for it is guaranteed by Christ's own resurrection.

The resurrection of the Lord is therefore a solid basis for hope. To fall asleep in him is not to perish; death is not the end. That we shall one day be raised from the dead is certain, for our Lord has preceded us. As Moltmann asserts, 'the Christian hope for the future comes of observing a specific unique event—that of the resurrection . . . of Jesus Christ.'⁵⁶

Conclusion

Hope does not spring from a person's mind; it is not snatched out of mid-air. It results from the promises of God. It is grounded in God. These Old Testament truths are repeated in the New Testament. In fact, in both Acts and Hebrews these are the chief emphases, as in the Old Testament. These two books are very much like the Old Testament in their orientation as regards hope.⁵⁷ On the other hand, with Paul in particular a new factor has to be taken into account. For in Christ the supreme revelation of God has occurred, especially in his death and resurrection. Hence it is on the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus that Paul founds hope. Aspects of his teaching about hope follow upon, and develop out of, the doctrines of justification, redemption and reconciliation. His understanding of hope is thus of a piece with his overall theological presentation.

Likewise, on occasion, hope is rooted in the resurrection of the Saviour. Death, Satan, and the evils of this age have been dealt with and overcome. Truly, 'the kingdom of evil has come—and has met

⁵¹ 'What else would this be than perfect nonsense, the most terrible and double self-deception?' K. Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead* (London, 1933, p. 170).

⁵² A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh, 1950), p. 351.

⁵³ John Knox, *Christ and the Hope of Glory* (Nashville, 1960), p. 45 denies that we can argue: 'We know from God's raising of Jesus that he will raise us.' But this is precisely what Paul does, both here and elsewhere. Knox further claims that 'rarely, if ever, does the New Testament make use of an argument of this kind'. This is refuted by an array of passages listed by G. Dellling ('The Significance of the Resurrection of Jesus for Faith in Jesus Christ,' *The Significance of the Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ*, ed. C. F. D. Moule; SBT 2/8; London, 1968, p. 95) to show that for Paul 'the raising of Christians follows necessarily from the raising of Christ'.

⁵⁴ E. Best, *One Body in Christ* (London, 1955), p. 38; R. B. Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, 1978), pp. 33-41; Dellling, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁵⁵ Concerning the meaning of 'in Christ' and these implications see F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Exeter, 1977), p. 138; G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1975), p. 482; H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1975), pp. 60-61.

⁵⁶ J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London, 1969), p. 194.

⁵⁷ As for Acts this comes out also in hope's object, where stress is laid on the hope of Israel, e.g. 28: 20.

its match'.⁵⁸ But Jesus' resurrection has also opened up the new age and so hope looks forward to its blessings. Peter shares this outlook with Paul.

While hope is eager anticipation, it is therefore securely anchored and firmly grounded in the

⁵⁸ Moule, *The Meaning of Hope*, p. 30.

saving deeds of the Son of God. This is the foundation of the hope to which the believer has been called. He surely is in a position to fulfil Peter's admonition: 'Be always ready with your defence whenever you are called to account for the hope that is in you' (1 Pet. 3: 15 NEB).
