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Mini Study

The Reality of Hope

"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" (I Peter 1:3).

In modern speech the term *hope* usually has a negative edge. "I hope so" you exclaim, thereby signifying some doubt about the outcome. Not so in the Christian Scriptures. *Hope* in the Scriptures is one of the most positive of virtues.

It's often said that we are "a world without hope," that mankind is doomed to destruction, by his own hand or by the anger of nature. Individuals, too, often fail to cope with what life throws at them: "it's hopeless" they say when the black cloud of depression settles around them.

Hope (Gk *elpis*) in the Bible, however, has a positive ring, assurance, confidence. It is one of the three great and enduring and uplifting virtues named by the apostle Paul: "...and now abides faith, hope, charity, these three..." (I Corinthians 13:13). And like the other two, hope can be nourished, strengthened. It's not a vague aspiration, but a reality, a matter of substance. It's a "living hope" (I Peter 1:3).

It is closely linked with the symbolism of the *Feast of Weeks*, the Biblical seven week period of the spring harvest, which culminates in the *Day of Pentecost* [Request the mini-study: **Spring Harvest**]. These seven weeks were initiated by the harvesting, by the priests, of a sheaf of barley on the Sabbath evening associated with the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* in Israel. This was prepared and "waved" before the LORD in the Temple the following morning (Sunday). It signified the nation's gratitude for the fruits of the earth, their hope of an abundant harvest. None of the new grain harvest was to be eaten before this annual ceremony.

There is, however, a deeper meaning. For that wavesheaf offering was but a type of the resurrection of Jesus Christ on that Sabbath evening after three days and three nights in the grave, and His presentation to the Father on Sunday morning, the first of the firstfruits spiritual harvest: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, [and] become the firstfruits of them that slept" (I Corinthians 15:20). Jesus is the first one ever to have been raised from the dead in a spirit body [Request the article: **The Empty Tomb**].

Man is a material being energized by the human spirit. When we die we are "dead as a door-nail." No life after death, *except by means of a resurrection*. This is the great and uniquely Christian hope of those who "...follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb" (Revelation 14:4). They are themselves "...a kind of firstfruits" (James 1:18). But *everyone who has lived* will come out of their grave. Jesus tells us that "...the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation [judgment]" (John 5:28-29).

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For Christians especially, hope lies in resurrection. It is a certainty. No matter how long dead, no matter how they died, all in whom is the Holy Spirit will, at Christ's coming, burst from the chains of death to unending life in a perfect spirit body. Paul informs: "... [I] have hope toward God... that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15). Indeed if this were not so Christianity itself is no more than a lie (I Corinthians 15:12-22).

In Christ we become "*sons, heirs of God*" (Galatians 4:7). As we are "... *children, then [we are] heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together*" (Romans 8:17). That's the "*glory of God*" for which we live in certain hope (Romans 5:2). We may suffer for the faith - but: "...*the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*" (8:18). The people of God throughout the ages have often suffered extreme privation - but they remained faithful and are assured "...*a better resurrection*" (Hebrews 11:35).

Hope, however, is not limited to Christians, for as Jesus said, *all* will be called from the grave. That means hope for every man, woman and child who has ever lived, however dire their circumstances. After the millennial reign of Jesus and the resurrected saints they will be resurrected for a term of being "weighed in the balance," and being faced, with utmost clarity, with the opportunity to embrace the Gospel of Christ. They, too, may then experience the hope of the glory of God, to be part of the divine Family.

(All Scripture references are KJV unless otherwise noted.)

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