

Hope

Hope is the expectation of the future attainment of a desired object or outcome. It is often associated with trust, whether in God or others.

Concept Summary

In Hebrew, hope is expressed most commonly with the verbs **קָוָה** (*qāwâ*, “to wait”) and **יָחַל** (*yāḥal*, “to wait”) and nouns related to these. The verb *qāwâ* conveys a sense of waiting with expectation, while *yāḥal* may indicate waiting for a period of time with or without expectation. For example, Noah waited (*yāḥal*) seven days before sending the dove out from the ark the second and third times (Gen 8:10, 12), but the hired worker waits for (*qāwâ*) his wages with the expectation of receiving them (Job 7:2). The aspect of hopeful expectation is intensified for both verbs when they are directed toward an assured outcome or object. In the Psalms and Prophets, the two verbs are usually directed toward God and express the act of waiting expectantly for, or hoping in, God. As abstract nouns, both **תִּקְוָה** (*tiqwâ*, “hope”) and **תְּהִלָּה** (*tôḥelet*, “hope”) refer to the expectation of a desired outcome at the end of a period of waiting. Less frequently used is the verb **שָׁבַר** (*šābar*, “to hope”), which conveys more of a sense of expectancy rather than waiting. The noun **כֶּסֶל** (*kesel*, “confidence”) carries the primary semantic meaning of trust or confidence. The vocabulary of hope is found most frequently in the OT in the books of Job, Psalms, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

In Greek, the concept of hope is expressed most commonly with the noun **ἐλπίς** (*elpis*, “hope”) and the verb **ἐλπίζω** (*elpizō*, “to hope”). While Hebrew *qāwâ* and *yāḥal* carry the meanings of both waiting and expecting, in Greek “expectation” is a semantic property of **ἐλπίς** (*elpis*) and **ἐλπίζω** (*elpizō*), while “waiting” is a semantic property of words related to **δέχομαι** (*dechomai*, “to receive”). These include **ἀπεκδέχομαι** (*apekdechomai*, “to await eagerly”), **ἐκδέχομαι** (*ekdechomai*, “to await”), **ἐκδοχή** (*ekdochē*, “expectation”), **προσδέχομαι** (*prosdechomai*, “to wait”), **ἀποκαραδοκία** (*apokaradokia*, “eager expectation”), **προσδοκάω** (*prosdokaō*, “to expect”), and **προσδοκία** (*prosdokia*, “expectation”). These various words are used to express expectation, whether positively in the sense of waiting for something good, or negatively in the sense of fearing something bad. Although the vocabulary is found throughout the NT, *elpis* and *elpizō* are more common to the NT letters while *prosdechomai* is more characteristic of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts.¹

¹ Aaron C. Fenlason, [“Hope.”](#) ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

Theological Overview

In both Testaments, the nouns expressing concepts of hope can refer to the act of hope (Psa 39:7; תִּהְיֶה, *tôhelet*; Rom 15:13; ἔλπις, *elpis*), the hoped-for object (Prov 10:28; תִּהְיֶה and תִּקְוָה, *tiqwâ*; Col 1:5; *elpis*), or the basis for hope (Job 4:6; *tiqwâ*; Col 1:27; *elpis*). The object and basis of hope determine the strength and certainty of the act of hoping.

The OT concept of hope primarily involves waiting for some future state or event. Depending on the context, this may have either positive or negative connotations. Thus, the psalmist speaks of hope positively in terms of waiting (יָחַל, *qāwâ*) for God (Psa 25:5; 27:14), but also negatively, at least from the point of view of the psalmist, in terms of malevolent people who wait (*qāwâ*) to do harm (Pss 56:6; 119:95). Additionally, the nature of hope depends on the ground upon which it is based. When hope lacks a solid basis, it may be disappointed (Isa 59:9, 11; *qāwâ*; Ezek 19:5; יָחַל, *yāḥal* and *tiqwâ*). Hope is more certain and confident when its basis is more secure. The strongest hope is based on God's word (Pss 119:49; *yāḥal*; 130:5; *yāḥal* and *qāwâ*) and faithfulness to his covenant promises (Pss 33:18; *yāḥal*; 147:11; *yāḥal*; Jer 29:11; *tiqwâ*). When thus directed toward God, hope may be confident of receiving help from God (Psa 27:13–14; Isa 8:17; *qāwâ*). Such hope, securely based on God and his word, cannot be disappointed or put to shame (Psa 119:116; שָׁבַר, *śābar*; Isa 49:23; *qāwâ*).

In the NT, hope may be a desire or expectation regarding future life events in general, as when Herod hoped (ἐλπίζω, *elpizō*) that Jesus would perform miracles (Luke 23:8) or when Paul hoped (*elpizō*) to see the Roman Christians on his way to Spain (Rom 15:24). In the Gospels, the theological concept of hope is expressed in terms of waiting (προσδέχομαι, *prosdechomai*) for the kingdom of God (Mark 15:43). In the Letters, hope is directly related to and grows out of faith in God. While faith takes God at his word, believing that he will do as he has promised, hope is the anticipation of the fulfillment of God's promises (Rom 4:18–21; Heb 6:11–18). Hope originates with God (Rom 15:13), is based on his calling (Eph 1:18; 4:4), and is facilitated by Scripture (Rom 15:4). Specific objects of hope include the future resurrection (Acts 23:6; Rom 8:20–24); the Parousia (Titus 2:13; 1 John 3:2–3); and eternal life (Titus 1:2; 3:7). Hope's opposite is expressed in terms of unbelief (Heb 3:6–12), grief or despair (1 Thess 4:13), and shame or disappointment (Rom 5:5; Phil 1:20).²

Lexical Information

Old Testament

² Aaron C. Fenlason, "[Hope](#)" ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

הָנִיחַ (*qāwâ*). vb. **to wait, hope.** *In its basic sense, the term describes the act of waiting. It may indicate the act of expectation when a particular outcome is anticipated (often rendered “look for”) or the act of hoping when the expected outcome is desirable or beneficial.*

This verb is likely derived from the noun הָנִיחַ (*qāw*, “stretched string”) and used metaphorically for the tension felt while anticipating a future event. It is possible to hope (*qāwâ*) for both persons and things. God is the most common personal object. Other objects of *qāwâ* include God’s salvation (Gen 49:18), God’s name (Ps 52:9), and God’s awesome works (Isa 64:2). When something or someone other than God is stated as the object, the situation is usually negative: either someone waits (*qāwâ*) for an outcome that fails to materialize (e.g., Isa 5:2; Jer 8:15), or malicious individuals wait (*qāwâ*) intently to do harm (Pss 56:6; 119:95). The ways in which the verb is used demonstrates the OT’s distinction between hope that is secure because it is directed toward God and hope that is fleeting because it is based on something else.

תִּקְוָה (*tīqwâ*). n. fem. **hope, expectation.** *Indicates the hope which a person exercises, the object for which one hopes, or the basis on which one hopes.*

This term is related to the verb הָנִיחַ (*qāwâ*, “to wait”) and is used in the OT to express the expected outcome at the end of a period of waiting. In its abstract sense, *tīqwâ* refers to the hope which a person exercises with regard to future possibilities (Job 5:16; Psa 62:6) or the basis on which this hope is exercised (Job 4:6). Concretely, *tīqwâ* may refer to the object for which one hopes (Job 6:8; Ezek 37:11). Both individuals (Job 6:8; Psa 71:5) and groups (Jer 31:17; Ezek 37:11) may possess hope.

יָחַל (*yāḥal*). vb. **to wait, hope.** *The verb indicates the act of waiting for a period of time or awaiting a particular event.*

The verb *yāḥal* is nearly synonymous with הָנִיחַ (*qāwâ*, “to wait”), and the two are used several times in parallelism (Job 30:26; Psa 130:5). While *qāwâ* generally conveys a sense of expectation, *yāḥal* may indicate only the act of waiting for a period of time with no particular emphasis on expectation. This seems to be the primary usage of the term in the Pentateuch and Historical Books (Gen 8:10; Judg 3:25; 1 Sam 10:8). In the Poetic and Prophetic Books, *yāḥal* most often takes God as its object (Psa 42:6; Isa 51:5) and indicates that the subject waits in expectation of receiving help or blessing from God. The verb may also be directed toward God’s law (Isa 42:4), steadfast love (Psa 33:18), word (Psa 119:74), and other attributes. In these constructions, the term indicates not only the object, but the basis on which one waits. God’s character and promises provide the reason and confidence for waiting.³

(תִּהְיֶה). n. fem. **hope, expectation.** *Indicates the hope which a person exercises, the object for which one hopes, or the basis on which one hopes.*

³ Aaron C. Fenlason, “[Hope](#)” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

The noun *tôhelet* is related to the verb יָחַל (*yāḥal*, “to wait”) and is roughly synonymous with the more frequent תִּקְוָה (*tiqwâ*, “hope”). The two nouns are used twice in parallelism (Prov 10:28; 11:7) and *tôhelet* is used in parallelism with the verb קָוָה (*qāwâ*, “to wait”) once (Psa 39:8). The word may refer to a person’s hope (Prov 13:12), the object of a person’s hope (Prov 11:7), or the basis of a person’s hope (Psa 39:8).

שָׁבַר (śābar). vb. **to inspect; to wait, hope.** *The Qal forms mean “to test or inspect,” while the Piel forms mean “to hope.” Both forms convey the idea of expectation that something will prove true or reliable.*

Nehemiah uses the Qal stem twice to refer to inspecting (*śābar*) Jerusalem’s walls (Neh 2:13, 15). The other six occurrences are in the Piel stem and convey a sense of expectation. While English glosses for the term are often the same as for קָוָה (*qāwâ*, “to wait”) and יָחַל (*yāḥal*, “to wait”), *śābar* carries the primary sense of expectation rather than waiting. For example, the eyes of men and creatures expect (*śābar*) to receive their sustenance from God (Pss 104:27; 145:15) and the enemies of the Jews expected (*śābar*) to gain mastery over them (Esth 9:1).

שֵׁבֶר (śēber). n. masc. **hope.** *Expresses strong expectation.*

The noun *śēber* is related to the verb שָׁבַר (*śābar*, “to hope”). In both its occurrences in the OT, it refers to hope directed toward God (Psa 146:5) and based on his promise (Psa 119:116). Judging by these two occurrences, it conveys an expectation of receiving help from God and would result in shame if that help failed to materialize.

כֶּסֶל (kesel). n. masc. **confidence.** *Conveys the idea of confidence with regard to future events.*

The noun *kesel* is related to the verb כָּסַל (*kāsal*, “to be foolish”) and the adjective כְּסִיל (*kēsîl*, “foolish”) and may indicate foolish confidence or folly (Psa 49:14; Eccl 7:25). It may, however, be used to express confident expectation in a positive sense, especially when directed toward God (Psa 78:7; Prov 3:26). The feminine form of the word, כִּסְלָה (*kislâ*, “confidence”), is used once in synonymous parallelism with תִּקְוָה (*tiqwâ*, “hope”; Job 4:6).⁴

New Testament

ἐλπίς (*elpis*). n. fem. **hope, expectation; that which is hoped for; the basis of hope.** *Indicates the expectation which one exercises, the outcome or object expected, or the basis of one’s expectations.*

The noun *elpis* is used in the Septuagint to translate the majority of instances of Hebrew תִּקְוָה (*tiqwâ*, “hope”). In the NT, it may be used in a general sense of expectation (1 Cor 9:10; 2 Cor 1:7)

⁴ Aaron C. Fenlason, “[Hope](#)” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

or possibility (Acts 16:19; 27:20). In its theological sense, *elpis* is based on God's promises (Acts 26:6; Titus 1:2; Heb 10:23) and expresses the sense of anticipation of their fulfillment. The term may be used to refer either to that for which one hopes (Col 1:5; Titus 2:13), or to the basis of hope (Col 1:27; 1 Thess 2:19).

ἐλπίζω (*elpizō*). vb. **to hope, expect.** *Indicates the act of looking forward with confidence to some future event or object.*

The verb *elpizō* is related to the noun ἔλπις (*elpis*), "hope." In the NT, the verb *elpizō* is always used in a positive sense of hoping or expecting, although in wider Greek literature, it may carry the negative sense of fearing future misfortunes. The NT uses the term in a generic way to indicate the expectation of a certain result of a course of events, as when one lends money expecting (*elpizō*) to be repaid (Luke 6:34) or when Paul hopes (*elpizō*) to spend time with the Corinthian church (1 Cor 16:7). This word is also used in a theological sense to express confidence in God's promised future. When used in this manner, the verb is often expressed with its object or its basis, whether a person or thing. The objects of the verb include the future resurrection (Acts 26:7; Rom 8:24) and the grace that believers will receive at the Parousia (1 Pet 1:13). Theological hope is directed toward God (2 Cor 1:10; 1 Tim 4:10) or Christ (1 Cor 15:19; 1 Thess 1:3), meaning that one aspect of hope is placing one's confidence in God for future events. Alternatively, one may place hope or confidence in other things, such as riches (1 Tim 6:17), but these are uncertain and liable to leave the individual disappointed.

προσδέχομαι (*prosdechomai*). vb. **to receive; to wait for.** *Conveys the sense of receiving something in a welcoming manner. It may also indicate the posture of waiting to receive.*

The verb *prosdechomai* is used in the NT to describe the act of receiving something, whether facts (Acts 24:15), events (Heb 10:34), or people (Luke 15:2; Rom 16:2; Phil 2:29). When used with reference to people, the verb carries the connotation of welcoming approval. It also describes the person who waits to receive (Luke 12:36; Acts 23:21). In this latter sense, *prosdechomai* often reflects a hopeful expectation of eschatological events. The Gospels of Mark and Luke use the verb to describe those who are waiting (*prosdechomai*) for the kingdom of God (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:51), the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25), and the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38). In the Letters, it is used to describe the hopeful expectation of the Parousia (Titus 2:13; Jude 21).

ἐκδέχομαι (*ekdechomai*). vb. **to wait, expect.** *Expresses the act of waiting for a person or event.*

In the NT, *ekdechomai* may indicate the act of waiting for persons or things (Acts 17:16; James 5:7) or the more active sense of expecting the arrival of someone (1 Cor 16:11). When directed toward positive future events, the term may denote hopeful expectation (Heb 10:13; 11:10).⁵

ἀπεκδέχομαι (*apekdechomai*). vb. **to await or expect eagerly.** *Indicates a posture of confident anticipation of future events.*

⁵ Aaron C. Fenlason, "[Hope](#)," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

The NT uses the verb *apekdechomai* once in the general sense of waiting (1 Pet 3:20), but otherwise to express the concept of hopeful expectation. Three times it is used to express the expectation of the Parousia (1 Cor 1:7; Phil 3:20; Heb 9:28). The remaining four occurrences are found in context with ἐλπίζω (*elpizō*, “to hope”) and ἔλπις (*elpis*, “hope”; Rom 8:19–25; Gal 5:5).

προσδοκάω (*prosdokaō*). vb. **to wait for, expect.** *Describes the act of waiting for a person or thing, usually with a sense of expectation.*

The verb *prosdokaō* occurs primarily in Luke and Acts. It may convey a general sense of waiting for a person or event (Luke 1:21; Acts 28:6) or the more hopeful posture of expectation (Luke 7:19; Acts 3:5). Second Peter uses the verb to express the hopeful expectation of eschatological events (2 Pet 3:12, 13, 14).

ἀποκαραδοκία (*apokaradokia*). n. fem. **earnest expectation.** *Describes an eager, desirous expectation of future events.*

The noun *apokaradokia* is used only twice in the NT. It is used alongside ἔλπις (*elpis*, “hope”) in Phil 1:20 in a way that makes the two nearly synonymous. It is also found in context with ἀπεκδέχομαι (*apekdechomai*, “to await eagerly”) in Rom 8:19–25 to describe the eager longing of the creation for the revelation of the sons of God. In the broader context of this passage, the words ἐλπίζω (*elpizō*, “to hope”), *elpis*, and *apekdechomai* appear multiple times. In both of its occurrences, *apokaradokia* is used to reinforce the concept of hope with an aspect of desire.

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See Also

- **Related Concepts:** Belief; Faith; Grace; Love; Mercy and Compassion; Redemption; Salvation
- **Bible Sense Lexicon:** [hope](#), [hope \(grounds\)](#), [hope \(object\)](#)⁶

⁶ Aaron C. Fenlason, “[Hope](#)” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

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