

The Hope of Israel

A wide range of emotions, positive and negative, may be stirred in readers of this revision of Chapter 30 of *Free To Change*. It adds some exciting, startling concepts.

Because long nurtured expectations die hard, the road to Emmaus is crowded. Those who a few days earlier were shouting "*Hosanna!*" and spreading palm branches for their king soon would lament, "*But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel*" (Luke 24:21). Their hope for the restored throne of David over Israel died at Calvary.

Cleopas' unfounded anticipation of an earthly king and kingdom allowed him to disregard the greatest event of history which he had already heard about -- the resurrection of Jesus. After Jesus had revealed himself to them alive for forty days, the expectation of the disciples had revived so that they would ask Jesus, "*Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*" (Acts 1:6).

We are disappointed in the disciples. After having heard all of Jesus' teachings and parables about the spiritual nature of his kingdom and having heard him declare plainly, "*My kingdom is not of this world,*" they still expected that he would reign on earth. Surely, the resurrection had qualified him to be king. Was the restoration of the Jews and their kingdom the hope of Israel? If so, it was an unfounded hope. Is that the present hope of Israel? If so, it is an unfounded hope. Is that our hope? If so, it is unfounded.

On Pentecost, Peter declared that David foresaw Jesus as the one God raised from the dead to sit upon his throne and that Jesus had currently taken his place at the right hand of God as both Lord and Christ – not the confirmed king yet. He had gone into “a far country to receive kingly power” and then return as Jesus told in the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11f). Then Peter introduced people into the spiritual kingdom by the new birth. The earthly was being superseded by the spiritual.

In spite of all this, many Christians today are spreading the palm branches for Jesus, shouting hosannas to their proposed king, and excitedly proclaiming his imminent return to reign over a restored nation of Israel on a literal throne for one thousand years. They, too, are destined to walk the road to Emmaus with Cleopas. How sad!

What was the hope of Israel? We need not guess about this for Paul tells us plainly what the true hope of Israel was. When Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner, he called the Jews to him and explained, "*It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain*" (Acts 28:20). Was Paul imprisoned for promoting an earthly restoration of Israel? The Jews would not have imprisoned him for that. Before the Jewish council in Jerusalem, Paul had declared, "*With respect to the hope of the resurrection of the dead I am on trial*" (Acts 23:6). As his hearing continued before Felix and Ananias, Paul added, "*But this I admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets, having a*

hope in God which these themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:14f). In his defense before Agrippa with Festus present, Paul plainly identified the hope of Israel: "And now I stand here on trial for hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by the Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?" (Acts 26:6f). So as Paul finally addressed the unbelieving Jews in Rome, he could declare confidently, "For this reason therefore I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28:20). THE HOPE OF RESURRECTION WAS THE TRUE HOPE OF ISRAEL! They awaited atonement. None of the patriarchs or the righteous of Israel who had died had been brought to life because the way into heaven had not been opened. They still slept with their fathers in the hades world. If they entered heaven previously, it was without Christ's atonement.

Through Abraham God called out a people through whom the Christ would come. God gave earthly, national promises which he fulfilled until their forfeiture by the rejection of Christ. He also gave a spiritual promise to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham's descendent, Jesus. Because misunderstanding Jews looked for a restoration of the earthly kingdom, if Paul had accepted that as the hope of Israel, he would have had Jewish support instead of their persecution. But he met opposition while he declared such things as "*you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call..*" (Eph. 4:4). While we recognize that there are different facets to our hope, they are all reflective of the fact that Jesus arose from the dead and that only by his conquering of death that man has hope. If the Jew has a hope that the Gentile does not have, there is more than one hope. The true hope of Israel is not for a restoration of national Israel and an earthly reign of Christ through a millennium.

Although there are many references in the scriptures relating to the hope of Israel which cannot be included in this short discourse, we can see the matter dealt with convincingly in the third chapter of Philippians. Here Paul's understanding is made very clear. It should fit into today's "Easter sermons," but it seems never to make it. Let's look at it.

Paul warned about those who put confidence in the flesh -- fleshly Israel with the identifying mark of circumcision and the fleshly, earthly promises. While the Judaizer looked for earthly fulfillment, Paul declared that believers are the true Israel with a spiritual relationship with the Father. He had no more confidence in his fleshly relationship. Once he could, and did, boast of his Jewish pedigree and achievement. He had every commendation that any Jew could hope for. He was blameless in keeping their law and zealous in protecting Jewish claims against supposed enemies like Jesus. He had better fleshly claims to give him confidence than any others could boast of.

The road to Emmaus was one of disappointment because of the (supposedly) dead Jesus. The road to Damascus brought shock of blinding light because of the risen Christ. Paul, as one born out of season, saw the living Savior!

Because of this experience, Paul trashed all his former claims and confidence. "*Whatever gain I had, I counted loss for the sake of Christ.*" He could not claim Christ through his Jewishness. He had to junk it. Law keeping was an effort of achieving righteousness, but the Law offered no hope of a resurrection. God had promised to bless all nations through Abraham's seed, the Christ, who was to be received by faith, not by law or fleshly relationships. Paul gladly divested himself of all national hopes "*that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*"

Realizing that his glorification with Christ had not yet been attained, he pressed on toward that prize. It was an upward, heavenly call, not one to be fulfilled on earth. Forgetting national hopes which were in the past (not future), "*one thing I do*" --_claim the prize of life in the One who triumphed over death. That was the one hope; that was the hope of Israel which, when proclaimed to his earthly minded, nationalistic Jewish people, brought him chains.

"*Let those of us who are mature be thus minded*" rather than developing fantastic theories about fleshly Israel being restored. We are the true circumcision, those distinguished as God's chosen people. "*Our commonwealth (or citizenship) is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.*" Are Paul and those addressed still awaiting the Savior? In the lifetime of some to whom Jesus gave the promise, after taking his sacrifice into the Holy of Holies, his coming (parousia) was demonstrated in the events transpiring in 67-70 AD at which time the way into heaven and immortality was opened and they were delivered up to God. The hope of Israel was fulfilled! If that is not true, is heaven still vacant?

To secure the hope of Israel, Paul cast upon the garbage heap all fleshly benefits, claims due to Jewish identity, confidence in righteousness by keeping the law, and all hope of earthly fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. How foolish it is for those who have begun in the spirit to seek a culmination in the flesh -- to stand upon Paul's garbage heap and proclaim a restoration, or recycling, of that trash which would necessarily be restored with Israel.

Paul divested himself "*that I may know him and the power of his resurrection.*" By that power Jesus was declared to be the son of God (Rom. 1:4). Jesus might claim to atone for us but only his victory over death had the power to prove it. It was the dynamic to demonstrate the grace of God to all men regardless of nationality. God's raising him up enabled him to come in glory to raise those who slept with their fathers also.

What is the blessed hope? The conversion of the Jews as a nation? A restored earthly kingdom? A reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years? Jesus leading a literal army in bloody combat? Paul speaks of "*awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*" (Titus 2:13). Is he still awaiting? The risen Savior fulfilled his promise. The hope of Israel has been realized!

Is a resurrection the hope of present-day believers also? No! Because you and I will not be confined in hades upon our physical death, a release from hades to heaven is not in the plan! When we put off the earthly, we are clothed in immortality in immediate change from the physical realm into the spiritual presence of God. We do not await an atonement to open the way into the Holy of Holies as Israel did. When we individually hear the trumpet call for assembly (our physical death), we will be caught up to meet those who went on before. May that be the “rapture” that we hear so much speculation about?

Please read Hebrews 9 studiously. Note that “*..the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened as long as the outer tent/tabernacle is still standing..*” (v.8). Though the old system had been phasing out since Pentecost, it was not wiped out until Jesus’ return (presence-parousia-coming) in the obliterating of their entire system. At the same time Jesus’ atonement redeemed those righteous under the first covenant and they were delivered up. At the time of the writing, Jesus had gone “*into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with the blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him*” (v. 24-28). That was the hope for which they waited and which was fulfilled within a decade.

Jesus took our appointment in death and judgment; so we will neither die nor be judged! That is a fulfilled, realized transaction that we can depend upon. There is no detainment for us in hades or judgment when our time of transition comes individually!

Let’s read this again: “*Jesus said to her (Martha), ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day (at the “parousia” –coming)’. Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die (Lazarus), yet shall he live (be raised), and whoever lives and believes in me (that’s us today), shall never die.’*” (John 11:17-27). If we do not die, we do not need resurrection! It will only be a time of transformation. Astounding!

Like Jesus pled with Martha, “*DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?*” []

(Cecil Hook: April 2005)

A reminder: If you have useful study helps, Bibles, and books that you no longer use, they will be received gratefully by the ELMA LEA MEMORIAL LIBRARY in Jaggampeta, India. Inquire of me for further information. Thank you.

Talkin’ Texas: From Rath City, a “hide town” 14 miles south of Aspermont (across the Brazos from where I grew up), buffalo hides were shipped out by the thousands in the 1870s. More than a million hides were shipped in 1877, marking Rath City’s heyday.

