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The Hope of Paul's Prison Epistles

by — Tom L. Ballinger

One of the great blunders of today is assuming that a doctrine or teaching is true just because it has been preached for so long and loud by so many. This is especially true about the hope of resurrection that Paul wrote about in his epistles. Most believers assume that Paul wrote about the same hope of resurrection in all of his epistles, because that's all they have heard for all of their lives.



Many assume that Paul ended up with the same hope of resurrection that he started out with, but this is just another doctrine and tradition of men. As a matter of fact, Paul did not end up with *many* of the things that he started out with, such as water baptism, the Lord's supper, going to the Jew first, circumcision, keeping the law, speaking in tongues, healing the sick, working miracles, sending offerings to Jerusalem, keeping ordinances, offering sacrifices, observing feast days, abstaining from meats and drinks, calling Abraham our father and New Jerusalem our mother, etc.

You will not find these things and many more at the end of Paul's ministry when he wrote his Prison Epistles as you will at the beginning when he wrote his Acts Epistles.

Paul's Prison Epistles written at the end of his ministry are strikingly different from his Acts Epistles because they were written under a different administration or dispensation. His Acts Epistles were written during the dispensation or administration of the New Covenant (Hebrews 9:14-17). Being a minister of the New Covenant (II Corinthians 3:6), what Paul preached and wrote pertained to the New Covenant.

However, at the close of the Acts period a new and different administration or dispensation began called the "Dispensation of the Mystery" (Ephesians 3:1-6). This administration or dispensation was a secret hidden in God, of which no one was aware prior to Acts 28. The doctrine

and truth concerning this secret administration was given to Paul by revelation (Colossians 1:23-27). It is revealed to us in his Prison Epistles written from Rome after the close of the Acts administration. In his Prison Epistles, many of the doctrines and practices of the Acts administration, such as those mentioned, are gone and vanished away.

One of the major doctrines absent in his Prison Epistles is the hope of resurrection that Paul preached and wrote about in his Acts Epistles; for God gave Paul a new and different hope after the close of the Acts period when he wrote his Prison Epistles.

In the Epistles that Paul wrote during the dispensation of the Mystery, God reveals a new, different and better hope than what he offered anyone in any book written in any prior dispensation. The purpose of this study is to show how different and superior that hope is by comparing it with the hope he had during the Acts period.

All we ask you to do is to approach this study with the prayer of Ephesians 1:17-18 – that God would give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, and that He would enlighten the eyes of your understanding that you might come to know what is "the hope of His calling."

Please consider the following facts concerning this hope in the Scriptures.

OUR HOPE IS THE APPEARING OF CHRIST, NOT THE COMING OF CHRIST

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing¹ of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

1. [Editor:] ἐπιφάνεια (*epiphaneia*), "an appearing, appearance" (*Thayer*), "a manifestation" (*Strong*), derived from ἐπιφανής (*epiphanēs*) "conspicuous, manifest, illustrious" (*Thayer*), which is from ἐπιφαίνω (*epiphainō*) "to show ... to bring to light, to appear, become visible ... to show one's self" (*Thayer*), used of

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at **His appearing¹** and His kingdom (II Timothy 4:1).

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love **His appearing¹** (II Timothy 4:8).

That thou keep this commandment without spot, un-rebukeable, until **the appearing¹ of our Lord Jesus Christ** (I Timothy 6:14).

When Christ who is our life, **shall appear²**, then shall you also **appear² with Him in Glory** (Colossians 3:4).

Please note that the hope of the Prison Epistles is the “*Appearing of Christ*,” not “*the Coming of Christ*.”

When Paul wrote his Acts Epistles, under the New Covenant administration, his hope was the Second Coming of Christ, a hope that could be found in the Old Testament Scriptures. He mentions the coming of Christ 10 times in his Acts epistles (I Corinthians 1:7; 4:5; 11:26; 15:23; I Thes-

the sun and stars, “and when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared” (Acts 27:20). Not to be confused with “*the brightness [epiphaneia] of His coming [parousia]*” (II Thessalonians 2:8) – i.e., “*the forthshining of His Presence*” (Rotherham).

2. [Editor:] φανερώω (*phanerōō*), “to make manifest, visible or known what has been hidden or unknown” (*Thayer*), “to render apparent” (*Strong*). Derived from G5318 φανερός, *phaneros*, “shining, that is, apparent” (*Strong*), “apparent, manifest, evident, known” (*Thayer*), which is from φαίνω (*phainō*), “appear exposed to view” (*Thayer*).

salonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; II Thessalonians 1:10; 2:1.)³

However, when the dispensation changed at the close of the Acts period, the hope also changed from the Coming to the Appearing of Christ. As a matter of fact, the word “*coming*” referring to the Second Coming of Christ does not appear one time in the 7 Prison Epistles of Paul, whereas, it appears 10 times in the 6 Acts Epistles of Paul. Also, the word “*appearing*” referring to Christ’s Appearing to the ecclesia⁴ is not mentioned once in the Acts Epistles, but is mentioned 6 times in the Prison Epistles.

Throughout the Acts period, Paul looked for the Second Coming of Christ and encouraged all believers to be ready for it; but then suddenly, after Acts 28, he never mentions it again in his Prison Epistles. This alone ought to convince any fair-minded believer that a change took place in Paul’s hope.

3. [Editor:] The Greek words for “coming” are as follows:

I Corinthians 1:7 – ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalupsis*), i.e., “unveiling” (*Concordant*).

I Corinthians 4:5; 11:26; II Thessalonians 1:10 – ἔρχομαι (*erchomai*).

I Corinthians 15:23; I Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; II Thessalonians 2:1 – παρουσία (*parousia*), “presence” (*Concordant*).

Not one of these three Greek words (*apokalupsis*, *erchomai*, *parousia*) are ever used in the Prison Epistles as a reference to the Second Coming of Christ.

4. [Editor:] The author originally used the word “church” here, and throughout the study. The Greek word often translated as “church” in most English versions is ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*, or ecclesia). The word is a compound word meaning “called-out” (*ek* = “out”; *kaleō* = “called”). The ecclesia is God’s “called-out” ones. The ecclesia is not a building or denomination; not a meeting, or doctrinal creed; it is not somewhere we go, or something we do: it is who we as believers are. We have replaced the word “church” with the word “ecclesia” throughout this study.

The Deity of God

by – John Henry Essex (1907-1991)

Nottingham, England

Creation cannot help itself that all of its achievements are futile because of the slavery of corruption, but we take immense comfort from the fact that, in spite of all of its present “groaning and travailing,” it was subjected to vanity in expectation of the eventual realization of that glorious freedom which is now already being enjoyed by the children of God.

It is in the prison epistle of Paul to the Ephesians that we find the most absolute expression of the Deity of God in relation to the points we have been considering. Here we find the phrase which puts all other Scriptures into their perspective:

According to the purpose of the One Who is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will (1:11).

God is the captain of the ship of the universe; all of His creatures are its passengers. He is guiding the vessel across the ocean of time from the port that is called “*All in God*” to the haven that is termed “*God in all*.”



84 pp., PB

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If the Coming of Christ is our hope today, why doesn't Paul mention it at least once in his post-Acts epistles? If the hope of the Acts believers was the Appearing of Christ, why doesn't he mention it once in the Acts epistles?

I believe the answer is simple: the Appearing and the Coming are *not* the same event, or hope; and Paul did indeed write about and preach two *different* hopes.

There is a world of difference between Christ's Appearing and His Coming; and if our hope is His Appearing, we ought to know what those differences are.

OUR HOPE IS THE APPEARING OF CHRIST ABOVE THE HEAVENS, NOT HIS COMING IN THE CLOUDS OF THE AIR

When describing the Coming of Christ in His Acts Epistles, Paul said that Christ would descend from Heaven and come down into the clouds of the air.

We which are alive and remain unto the Coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout ... and we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (I Thessalonians 4:15-17).

However, in Paul's Prison Epistles, when Christ appears to the ecclesia, He does not descend from Heaven and come

down into the air. Instead, He appears to the ecclesia, and then the ecclesia appears with Him in glory where He is now seated at the right hand of God far above all heavens.

Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God ... When Christ Who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in Glory (Colossians 3:1-4).

After His resurrection, Ephesians 4:10 says that Christ ascended up "far above all heavens." The place He ascended up into is where the throne of God is located according to Colossians 3:1. That place is called "Heavenly Places" in Ephesians 1:20 and 2:6. It is also called "Glory" in Psalm 8:1.

O Lord, our Lord, How excellent is Thy name in all the Earth! Who hast set Thy Glory above the heavens.

God set His Glory and Throne above the Heavens and when Christ ascended up "far above all Heavens" He ascended up into Glory, the dwelling place of God. When Christ Appears to the ecclesia He will appear to us in Glory above the Heavens and in the same instant we will be received up into Glory with Him according to I Timothy 3:16.

When the Appearing of Christ to the ecclesia takes place, He will not descend from Heaven down into the air. ►

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He will appear to us in Glory above the Heavens where the ecclesia will be “*received up into Glory*” (I Timothy 3:16) and changed (Philippians 3:21). Praise God for such a hope as this! We have a hope of being received up into a place where only one other person has ever gone – Glory, the dwelling place of God far above all Heavens.

Our hope is not for Christ to descend from Heaven down into the air, our hope is for Christ to appear in Glory far above the Heavens.

CHRIST’S APPEARING IN GLORY IS THE “BLESSED HOPE,” NOT “ISRAEL’S HOPE”

That which we want to stress here is that the hope of Christ’s Appearing to the ecclesia is not based on Israel’s hope, promises or covenants.

The hope that Paul preached and wrote about in his Acts epistles was based on Israel’s promises and covenants. It was the hope that God promised to Israel in the New Covenant. Paul was a minister of the New Covenant (II Corinthians 3:6), and the New Covenant was made with Israel (Hebrews 8:8). Therefore, the hope of the New Covenant was “*the hope of Israel*.” This hope can be found in the Old Testament Scriptures.

At least 4 times in the Book of Acts Luke makes it clear that Paul proclaimed the “*the hope of Israel*.”

*For this cause therefore have I called for you to see you, and to speak with you: because that **for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain** (Acts 28:20).*

Much has been said, denied and ignored about this verse, but one thing no one can deny is the fact that Paul preached “*the hope of Israel*” and suffered for doing so. When Paul did proclaim it, Luke makes it clear that the hope was the resurrection that *God promised Israel* in the Law and the prophets.

In Acts 23 Paul stood before the council in Jerusalem and declared,

*I am a Pharisee: of the **hope and resurrection of the dead** I am called in question (:6).*

In Acts 24 Paul again stood before Felix in Caesarea and said,

*But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, **believing all things which are written in the law***

*and the prophets: and have **hope toward God**, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a **resurrection of the dead**, both of the just and unjust (:14-15).*

In Acts 26 Paul again stood before Agrippa and declared to him,

*And now I stand and am judged **for the hope of the promise made of God to our fathers: unto which promise our Twelve Tribes**, instantly serving God day and night, **hope to come**. For which **hope’s sake**, King Agrippa I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? (:6-8).*

The hope Paul preached was the one that God promised the fathers of Israel. This hope is found in the law and the prophets. When Paul wrote his Acts Epistles he gave the specifics of that resurrection in I Corinthians 15:50-55 and I Thessalonians 4:14-18. As you read these two chapters, you can see all of the details of what Paul said when he preached “*the hope of Israel*” in the Acts period. Paul also wrote that he suffered for the hope that he preached in I Corinthians 15:29-32 as Luke said he did in Acts 28:20 and Luke calls the hope he suffered for “*the hope of Israel*.”

Keep in mind also that you cannot separate what he preached from what he wrote, or what he wrote from what he preached. Paul wrote to the same people he preached to and vice-versa.

The resurrection that Paul wrote about in I Corinthians 15 and I Thessalonians 4 is “*the Hope of Israel*” that Luke said Paul preached in Acts 23, 24, 26, 28. It was the hope



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by — E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913)

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that God promised to Israel in the New Covenant; and Jesus Christ, a minister of the New Covenant, like Paul (Hebrews 8:6), also preached that same hope in Matthew 24:29-31. By comparing Matthew 24 with I Corinthians 15 and I Thessalonians 4 we have seen that they are one and the same hope.

God promised this hope to all of the seed of Abraham with whom He made the New Covenant. Because all believers in the Acts period were accounted as Abraham's seed (Galatians 3:29) and New Covenant saints (Galatians 4:22-31), they partook of this hope as well as "the promises" that God made to Abraham (Galatians 3:16) and "the promise" made to him (Galatians 3:29). They also partook of "the fatness" of the good olive tree (Romans 11:17) and Israel's "spiritual things" (Romans 15:27).

However, when Paul wrote his Prison Epistles under the dispensation of the Mystery, which began after the Acts period, all of this changed. We are not grafted into Israel the good Olive Tree and partake of her fatness, for the tree has been cut down!

We do not partake of Israel's spiritual blessings. Instead, we have something superior, which is *all spiritual blessings in Heavenly Places in Christ* (Ephesians 1:3).

We do not partake of the promises made to Abraham, but of the promise of eonian life that God made to us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 3:6; Titus 1:1-2).

We do not partake of the promises of Abraham, but of the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8).

We do not call Abraham our father, neither are we his

seed, for we have one Father who is God (Ephesians 4:6).

We are not New Covenant saints, but saints of another administration, and that of the grace and mystery, not of promise (Ephesians 3:1-2).

Our hope is not "the hope of Israel," but the superior "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13).

"The hope of Israel" preached by Paul in the Acts period was the Hope of the New Covenant administration made to the seed of Abraham. It is not the hope of this current administration of grace.

When God committed the Dispensation or Administration of the Mystery to Paul and to us Gentiles, He revealed a new and different hope than [that] under the New Covenant administration.

It is called:

That Blessed Hope (Titus 2:13)

The Hope of Glory (Colossians 1:27)

The Hope of His Calling (Ephesians 1:18)

His Appearing (II Timothy 4:1, 8)

However, under no circumstances is it ever called "the hope of Israel"!

— *Plainer Words*
(edited & abridged)



88 pp., PB,

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by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

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This free electronic publication is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret in ages past" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 1:1-3);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
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 - union in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6);
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ABBREVIATION KEY

Scripture Version

(Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Bible Student's Version*).

CV: Concordant Literal Version

DAR: Darby Translation

DT: Dabhar Translation

FF: Ferrar Fenton Bible

KJV: King James Version

RE: Rotterdam's Emphasized Bible

WT: Weymouth Translation

YLT: Young's Literal Translation

Reference Sources

AA: Analytical Analysis (Welch)

BDB: Brown-Driver-Briggs

Hebrew Lexicon

CB: Companion Bible Notes & Appendixes (Bullinger)

CC: Concordant Commentary (Knoch)

CKC: Concordant Keyword

Concordance (Knoch)

CL: A Critical Lexicon and

Concordance (Bullinger)

CWS: Complete Word Study Dictionary (Zodhiates)

FoS: Figures of Speech (Bullinger)

SEC: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance

TGL: Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon

UR: Unsearchable Riches

VED: Vine's Expository Dictionary

YAC: Young's Analytical Concordance

Reference Notations

cf. – compare

e.g. – for example

et al. – and others

etc. – et cetera (and so on)

ff. – and the following

i.e., – that is

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