

"Hope" in Hebrew Thought



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English speakers often use the word “hope” to express speculative desires: “I hope that I get the job,” or “I hope we win this game.” In these contexts, we invoke “hope” as we close our eyes, cross our fingers, and wait for the best possible conclusion to an unsure situation, but this is not what the Bible means when it speaks of hope. In Hebrew, “hope” (תקוה/מקוה) is associated with God, so that the term expresses *confidence*, not in a future outcome, but in a present divine strength.

According to the Psalms, hope is decisive because it comes from God: “Only for God does my life [wait] silently, for from him comes my hope (תקותי; *tiqvati*). He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken” (Ps 62:5-6). The psalmist is already certain of his deliverance since God is the one in whom he puts his “hope.”

The Hebrew word for “hope” is the same as the word for a “pooling” or “gathering together” of waters (מקוה; *miqveh*). The Bible uses *mikveh* when God gathers together the waters at creation: “God called the dry ground ‘Land,’ and the gathering (מקוה; *miqveh*) of waters (מים; *mayim*) he called ‘Seas’” (Gen 1:10). Jeremiah connects this gathering of waters with his hope in God: “Lord, the hope (מקוה; *miqveh*) of Israel, all who forsake you shall be put to shame... for they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters (מים; *mayim*)” (Jer 17:13). The hope that Jeremiah has in God recalls God’s strength as the Creator: just as surely as God gathered the waters in the past, Jeremiah describes God as his present hope and living water. In biblical parlance, “hope” is not an abstract wish, but rather a complete assurance in God’s strength to sustain all things.