

## *Lexical Data*

### Statistics

The noun ἐλπίς occurs fifty-three times in the New Testament. Including those in his sermons recorded in Acts, forty-one of those occurrences are in Paul's writings.<sup>1</sup> The cognate verb ἐλπίζω occurs thirty-one times in the New Testament, twenty times in Paul.<sup>2</sup> Ἐλπίς and ἐλπίζω are predominantly Pauline words (61/84 – 72.6%). In Paul's own writings, ἐλπίς and ἐλπίζω occur most often in Romans (20x) with the other forty-one references spread unremarkably through almost all of his other letters.<sup>3</sup> Ἐλπίς is translated *hope* at every New Testament occurrence in the ESV, NASB and NIV.<sup>4</sup> Translations of ἐλπίζω include *hope*, *set [one's] hope*, and *expect*.

### LXX Background

A survey of Septuagint occurrences of ἐλπίς and ἐλπίζω reveals some idioms and usage patterns. The phrase *upon hope* (ἐπ' ἐλπίδι / פּוֹבֵב) is adverbial and means

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<sup>1</sup> Of the non-Pauline twelve, three are in Acts (2.26; 16.19, 27.20), five are in Hebrews (3.6; 6.11, 18; 7.19; 10.23), three are in I Peter (1.3, 21; 3.15), and one is in I John (3.3).

<sup>2</sup> Of the non-Pauline eleven, one is in Matthew (12.21 – a quotation of a *very* loose LXX rendering of the verb לָחַץ ["to wait"]), four are in Luke-Acts (Lk. 6.34; 23.8; 24.21; Acts 24.26), three are in John's writings (Jn. 5.45; II Jn. 1.12; III Jn. 1.14), one is in Hebrews (11.1), and two are in I Peter (1.13; 3.5).

<sup>3</sup> Only II Timothy lacks mention of *hope*; no other book contains more than eight occurrences.

<sup>4</sup> The KJV misses Hebrews 10.23, translating ἐλπίς as "faith" for no apparent reason.

*securely* or *in security*.<sup>5</sup> Ἐν ἐλπίδι carries the same idea: *securely*.<sup>6</sup> The verb-object phrase ἔχω ἐλπίδα (*I have hope*) means *I trust* or *I set my confidence on* (similar to the verb ἐλπίζω).<sup>7</sup>

There are more glosses corresponding to ἐλπίς in the LXX than in the New Testament. Ἐλπίς translates the Hebrew words *refuge* (מִחָה),<sup>8</sup> *trust* (מִבְטָח),<sup>9</sup> *hope* (כֶּסֶל, שָׂרָה, בְּטָחוֹן),<sup>10</sup> *expectation* (תְּקוּהָה),<sup>11</sup> and *washbasin* (סִיר רְחִיצָה).<sup>12</sup>

### Collocates

Several noteworthy words occur contextually close to ἐλπίς and ἐλπίζω. Words like *peace* (εἰρήνη),<sup>13</sup> *faith/believe* (πίστις/πιστεύω),<sup>14</sup> *confidence* (παρρησία),<sup>15</sup> *endurance* (ὑπομονή),<sup>16</sup> *firm* (βέβαιος),<sup>17</sup> *promise* (ἐπαγγελία/ἐπανγγελεύομαι),<sup>18</sup> *deliver* (σώζω),<sup>19</sup> *boast* (καυχάομαι),<sup>20</sup> *hold fast*

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<sup>5</sup> Jdg. 18.7, 10, 27; Ps. 4.9; 15.9; Prov. 1.33; Isa. 28.10, 13; Hos. 2.20; Zeph. 2.15.

<sup>6</sup> Jdg. 18.7, 9; Ps. 77.53; Isa. 32.9; Ezek. 28.26; 34.27-28.

<sup>7</sup> Dt. 24.15; Jer. 17.5.

<sup>8</sup> Ps. 14.6; 61.4; 62.8; 73.28; 91.9; 94.22; 142.6; Isa. 28.15.

<sup>9</sup> Ps. 40.4; 65.6; 71.5; Prov. 14.26; 22.19; Jer. 2.37; 17.7; 48.13; Ezk. 29.16.

<sup>10</sup> Ps. 78.7; 146.5; Eccl. 9.4.

<sup>11</sup> Job 4.6; 5.16; 6.8; 7.6; 8.13; 11.18, 20; 14.7; 17.15; 19.10; 27.8; Prov. 10.28; 11.7, 23; 23.18; 24.14; 26.12; 29.20; Ezk. 37.11.

<sup>12</sup> Ps. 60.8; 107.10.

<sup>13</sup> Ps. 4.9; 40.10; Job 11.18; Mic. 2.8; Ezek. 34.27; Rom. 15.13.

<sup>14</sup> Ps. 77.22; Rom. 4.18; 5.2; 15.13; I Co. 13.7, 13; II Co. 10.15; Gal. 5.5; Col. 1.23; I Thess. 1.3; 5.8; I Tim. 4.10; Heb. 10.23; 11.1; I Pet. 1.21.

<sup>15</sup> II Cor. 3.12; Phil. 1.20; Heb. 3.6.

<sup>16</sup> Ps. 70.5; Rom. 5.4; 8.25; 15.4; I Thess. 1.3.

<sup>17</sup> II Cor. 1.7.

<sup>18</sup> Prov. 13.12; Acts 26.6; Eph. 2.12; Tit. 1.2; Heb. 10.23.

<sup>19</sup> Ps. 7.2; 16.7; 21.6, 9; 36.40; 43.7; 85.2; Job 27.8; Jer. 51.14; Dan. 3.95; Acts 27.20; Rom. 8.24.

(προσδέχομαι),<sup>21</sup> and *love* (ἀγάπη/ἀγαπάω)<sup>22</sup> confirm the ideas of peace, security, and confidence. Antonyms include *shame* (αἰσχυνή/αἰσχύνω/κατααἰσχύνω),<sup>23</sup> and *moved away* (μετακινέω).<sup>24</sup>

### Usage-Determined Meaning

Ἐλπίς is used to refer to something secure, something to be confident in, something worthy of believing. Specific senses include (1) confidence in the consequences of actions, (2) certainty about personal or universal eschatology, and (3) secure belief in God and His promises.

Ἐλπίς looks to the future; it is not necessarily visible (Rom. 8.34). Ἐλπίς also looks to what is good. It does not belong with judgment, destruction, or doom. It is a confidence that breeds security and peace (Jdg. 18.7).

### ***Distinction from English Translation “Hope”***

The English word “hope” is often used as a much weaker word than ἐλπίς. A child *hopes* for a Christmas gift from Santa; an unemployed father *hopes* for a good interview; a student *hopes* for a good grade. People can hope for all these things and never see them come to pass. Biblical hope is not merely a strongly optimistic wish; it is a certainty. Optimism alone is not a sufficient response to the promises of God or the Christian’s knowledge of his future with God. Rather, real *hope* is security,

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<sup>20</sup> Ps. 5.12; Prov. 11.7; Rom. 5.2; II Co. 10.15; I Thess. 2.19; Heb. 3.6.

<sup>21</sup> Job 2.9; Isa. 28.10; Acts 24.15; Tit. 2.13.

<sup>22</sup> Ps. 5.12; Rom. 5.5; I Co. 13.13; I Thess. 1.3; 5.8; II Thess. 2.16.

<sup>23</sup> Jdg. 18.7; Ps. 13.6; 21.6; 24.20; 30.2; 70.1; Isa. 47.10; Jer. 31.13; Rom. 5.5; Phil. 1.20.

<sup>24</sup> Col. 1.23.

like a walled city. Real *hope* is active, as one deliberately appropriates God's promise as his source of confidence and peace.

### ***Application for Exegesis: ἐλπίς in Paul***

#### Certainty

The major application for understanding Paul's theology is recognizing the certainty of his expectations. Paul's confidence in the resurrection (Acts 23.6) was not a tentative but optimistic inclination; he was secure in his belief. In the Gospel, Christians have a permanent glory. This is not wishful thinking about glory; it is a certainty that provides boldness (II Cor. 3.11-12). The hope of eternal life (Tit. 3.7) is a solid security that provides peace and salvation.

#### Idioms

Some idiomatic phrases involving ἐλπίς were noted earlier. Some of Paul's statements come into clearer focus when read with those idioms in mind. Ἐπ' ἐλπίδι, for example, means *securely*.<sup>25</sup> Believers stand in grace and rejoice securely in the glory of God (Rom. 5.2). The plowman and the thresher work in peace and confidence of receiving their labor's reward (I Cor. 9.10).

Ἐχω ἐλπίδα means *believing or setting [one's] confidence*, and carries more of the active idea than merely "knowing something to be confident about." Paul's defense before Felix thus includes a statement of setting his confidence on God (Acts 24.15). Paul responds to the permanent glory of the Gospel by inviting the Corinthians to continue setting their confidence on that glory (I Cor. 3.12).

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<sup>25</sup> This idiom does not always hold when ἐλπίδι is part of a genitive relationship.