

Your One True Source of Enduring Hope

If there's one thing in short supply these days, it's *hope*. Politicians promise, but fail to deliver on their promises. Family members make commitments, but disappoint us. Terrorists strike with seeming impunity. Jobs are scarce, money is tight, and the more we wish for positive change, the less probable it appears to be. Good things seem more and more like a function of luck than anything else.

Sort of like what the nation of Israel must have been feeling 2,000 years ago. The glory days of King David and King Solomon had passed 1,000 years earlier. The Israelites—God's chosen people—didn't feel very special anymore. They lived as a conquered people for more than 700 years, first under the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, the Medes-Persians, the Greeks and finally the Romans. Four hundred years had passed since any prophet spoke the words, "Thus says the Lord." The peoples' hope had been sapped, little by little and year by year.

Still, Israel hoped for freedom from their oppressors. They hoped to hear from their God once again. Yet when God did speak, most of them did not recognize his voice. When God sent them the Savior they needed, they were too busy looking for the military leader they wanted.

Fast-forward 2,000 years. Some of us are holding on by our fingernails, clinging to hope because there's nothing else to cling to. And along comes the Christmas season. Four weeks of stress added to already stressful lives. Decorate, write cards (personalized), cook (like the banquets pictured in the magazines), bake (perfectly shaped cut-out cookies), wrap presents (with color-coordinated bows) ... and for what?

The “for what” is *Emmanuel*—God with us. Christmas is coming, a day when we celebrate the birth of the One who has saved us from sin and from ourselves. A day when God became man.

Jesus came to earth the first time in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. His coming proved that hope in God’s Word was not misplaced. His first coming proves something else. It proves that when God’s Word speaks of His second coming, we can rely on this yet-to-happen event as much as if it has already occurred. It’s not a question of *if* it will happen, just *when* it will happen.

That’s biblical *hope*—so different from how we usually use the word hope today. Today we say things such as, “I hope it won’t rain,” but we have no idea whether it will or it won’t. Biblical hope is a certain anticipation, a knowledge that the only uncertainty is in the timing, not in the promise. God leaves nothing to chance.

It’s the hope Israel had 2,000 years ago as they waited for the Messiah to come. It’s the hope we have today as we wait for the Messiah—our Savior—to come again.

As we wrap the presents (or not), and bake the cookies (or not), let’s rejoice that the hope for a coming Savior is already fulfilled. And He’ll be back—because He promised.

That’s a hope you can count on.

How has hope encouraged you this year?

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