

The Plan of God: the Equation of Hope; Potential & Hope Defined: Kittel: The Problem of Assurance of Salvation: Lack of Hope among Jewish Rabbis

1. We now turn our attention to the second category of security that links confidence and courage, but first a review of the first category just completed:
Knowledge of divine essence *produces* confidence in God. Knowledge of eternal security sustains confidence in God.
2. The second principle is this:
Knowledge of the plan of God *produces* courage toward life. Knowledge of logistical grace support *sustains* courage toward life.
3. The plan of God may be summarized by the seven imputations that are available to every person that enters into human life.
4. To fully appreciate the impact each of these imputations have in the life of an individual three concepts must be defined: (1) potential, (2) hope, and (3) reality.
5. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “potential” as follows: possible as opposed to actual; existing in a latent or undeveloped state, capable of coming into being or action.
6. In the plan of God certain combinations of imputations result in creating potentialities for each person so that if he chooses to respond to pertinent biblical guidance he can take this potential and convert it into a hope.
7. The concept of what hope means to various groups throughout the millennia is to be considered. First of all the classical view:

Kittel, Gerhard (ed.). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 2: 517-18:

Plato in his *Philebus* (Φιλήβος, *Philēbos*) shows how human existence is determined not merely by discernment which accepts the present but also the remembrance of the past and the expectation of the future, and indeed in such a way that, like recollection of the past, expectation of the future is not an objective assessment but a subjective expectation in fear and hope, whose content arises from what man considers to be his own possibilities.

2. In other words, the Greeks viewed recall of the past and hope for the future to be an inexact exercise. Another view was held by the Jewish rabbis:

Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2:527-28:

The Problem of Assurance of Salvation. Along with the people's expectation of the Messiah is the expectation of the individual. It concerns his personal share in the coming world as this will be decided by God when He separates the righteous from the wicked, assigning the wicked to Gehinnom גֵּהֶנְנוֹם *ge-hinnom*; γέεννα, *geenna*) and the righteous to the joys of the eschatological Garden of Eden. God declares who can be accepted as righteous and who cannot be accepted. Thus the thought of attainment determines the life of the righteous in his age and determines his eternal destiny in the next.

This introduces the uncertainty which has emerged as the most distinctive mark of its Messianic expectation. It belongs to a religion of works that its adherents cannot have assurance. They cannot know whether they have made the grade, since they do not know the rule to which they are subject. This is strikingly apparent in Judaism as perhaps the classical religion of works. Alongside the assurance that God will give the righteous all conceivable joys is the uncertainty whether one's own attainment is enough to qualify for the blessings of salvation with the righteous, whether the righteous demands of God will finally be met. This lack of personal assurance of salvation cast deep shadows on the last moments of more than one Jewish teacher. Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai, the contemporary of the apostles, wept when his pupils came to his death-bed to receive a final blessing from their dying master. When asked why he wept, he answered: "There are two ways before me, the one to the Garden of Eden, the other to Gehinnom, and I do not know on which they (G-d) lead me—how can I help weeping?" This is said by the very man whom his disciples described as the "lamp of Israel" and the "strong hammer." It was the same with Rabbi Jochanan (bar Nappacha, who died c. 290 A.D.), the Palestinian Amoraean from whose school came the Jerusalem Talmud.

NOTE:

Ben-Asher, Naomi and Haim Leaf (eds.). *The Junior Jewish Encyclopedia*. 14th ed. (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1996), 23:

AMORA. (From the Hebrew, meaning "speaker or interpreter.") The title "Amora" was given to all teachers of Jewish law in Palestine from about 200 to 500 AD. The Amoraim continued the work of the Tannaim [the teachers of the Oral Tradition of the first two centuries], the creators of the Mishnah. After the Mishnah was edited, many new problems requiring clarification arose in Jewish law. To help solve these problems, the Amoraim explained the Mishnah, discussing its ruling and reinterpreting its decisions. Their work was eventually incorporated into what is today known as the Gemara, which, together with the Mishnah, forms the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmud.

[Kittle continued] When (Rabbi bar Nappacha) died, he asked to be buried neither in white clothes nor black, but in neutral shades, so that he would not be ashamed if he were given a place among the righteous or among sinners. In both cases there is the same final uncertainty. "Confidence based on works cannot be assurance, and fear triumphs over faith" [A. Schlatter, *Jochanan Ben Zakkai, der Zeitgenosse der Apostel*, 1899]]. This fact is not altered by the confidence of some Rabbis in their last hours. The basic mood of the Rabbis in face of judgment was pessimistic. (p. 527)

That there is no universal hope possible under nomism [from νόμος, *nomos*: "law," thus those who adhere to the Mosaic Law] is nowhere more clearly stated than by the Johannine Jesus in John 5:45: ἐστὶν ὁ κατηγορῶν ὑμῶν Μωϋσῆς, εἰς ὃ ὑμεῖς ἠλπίκατε, "The one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope." Here the folly of hope in the sphere of legal religion is declared. He who entrusts his eternal future to man will always be accused by God.

If anyone thinks he can justify himself by the Law, no less a figure than Moses himself will condemn him, because he has not understood that for Moses God alone can bring man to his goal and give him the honour which keeps him from perishing. (p. 528)