

ISRAEL Teaching Letter

FAITH HOPE LOVE

From Genesis to Paul



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ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL Bible passages is found in 1 Corinthians 13. Commonly called the love chapter, it has been incorporated into countless Christian weddings. The apostle Paul concludes the chapter with these words, “*But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love*” (1 Cor. 13:13).

What did these concepts mean to Paul in the first century? Although we often think of Paul as a Christian, he would most likely be amazed, considering how he described himself in Philippians 3:5 saying, “*circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee.*” We also know from Scripture that he studied under one of the great Jewish sages of his time: Gamaliel, the grandson of one of the most famous rabbis, Hillel (Acts 5:34, 22:3). In Jewish history, Gamaliel was known as a sage, a legal expert and a leading member of the Sanhedrin (Jewish judges who constituted the supreme court and legislative body of ancient Israel). Paul, as a Jewish scholar of his time, would have had a deep knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.). I sometimes have the opportunity to study the Bible with rabbis and Hebrew scholars. One thing they do when studying a concept is to look for its first mention in Scripture. Then they will proceed to look at other instances where the same phraseology is used. It is not hard to imagine Paul doing the same thing. Let’s take a look into the Bible Paul read as we consider faith, hope and love.



Faith

The Hebrew word for faith is *emunah*. It comes from the Hebrew root word *amun* or *emun* (אמון). We find it used first in the Bible in the story of Abraham. “*Then he believed (amun) in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness*” (Gen. 15:6). Often translated believe, belief or faith, the word means so much more than a mental assent. It includes the meanings “to build up or support; to foster as a parent or nurse; to be firm or faithful, to trust or believe, to be true or certain.” It includes the idea of assurance, belief, establishment and being faithful.

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TIMNA VALLEY IN SOUTHERN ISRAEL

Abraham left his home to go to the place God called him, not just because of a theological belief. He had an encounter with God that deeply impacted him. Nearly 40 years ago, my husband and I received a similar call from God. We knew that He was calling us to the Land of Israel. We couldn't have done it without that deep knowing in our soul that God is absolutely trustworthy, faithful and true. He is our support and our nourishment. I believe Abraham had a similar experience. He left home, family, customs and everything he knew, putting his trust, faith and belief in the one true God who would never fail. We, like Abraham, gave allegiance to Him—the King, Creator, Redeemer—the one God.

Even though Abraham didn't always understand and sometimes got impatient, he never stopped having *emun* (faith, faithfulness and trust) in God. Hebrews 11:6 says, *"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."* Just two verses later we read, *"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going... for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God"* (Heb. 11:8,10).

In the natural way of looking at things, Tom and I made a bold, perhaps foolhardy decision when we left everything to follow the call of God. Today, more than 30 years later, I can say with absolute confidence that it was the best thing we ever did. There is no greater life than one spent in allegiance, trust and faith in God.

To please God with our faith is much more than agreeing with a doctrine or a creed. It means we trust Him totally. We rely on Him in every circumstance. Our belief in Him and His character is total. This is life-changing faith.

תקווה

Hope

The Hebrew word for hope is *tikvah* (תקווה). We often sing a song called "HaTikvah" ("The Hope") that speaks of the yearning of Jewish souls to live as free people in their own homeland. Its lyrics are adapted from a poem written in 1877 by Naftali Herz Imber, a Jewish poet. Much later it was adopted as the national anthem of Israel. My heart is always stirred as I sing the words of hope.

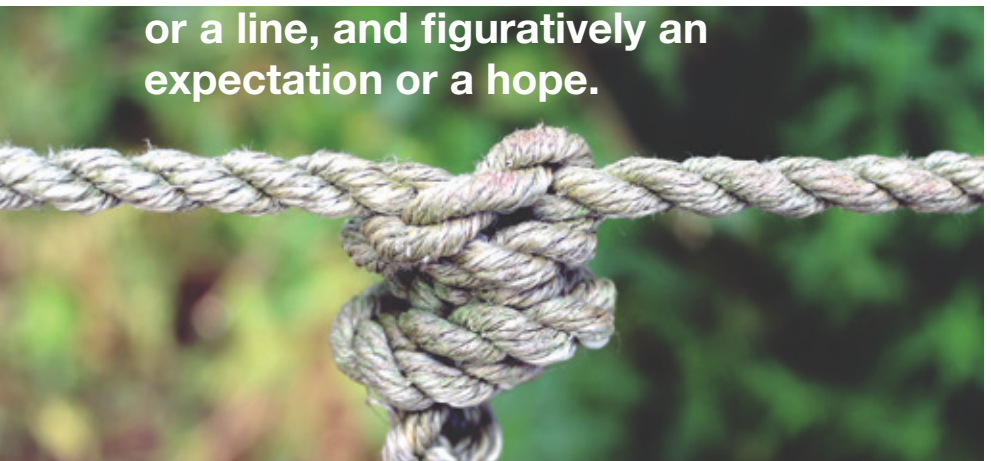
In 1878 a town was established called Petah Tikvah ("the doorway of hope"). The name comes from Hosea 2:15 in the midst of a prophecy concerning the restoration of Israel. Seventy years of hope later, and the State of Israel was born.

At Bridges for Peace we have a program called Project Tikvah, which reaches out to elderly Jewish people in Ukraine who can't come to Israel because of ill health or lack of support. We provide food, heaters and medicine to bring hope into their bleak lives.

In the book of Proverbs we read, “*Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life*” (13:12). The psalmist speaks of hope in God, saying, “*My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken*” (Psalm 62:5–6). For nearly 2,000 years, the Jewish people were exiled from their home. Every year on Passover they said with yearning, “Next year in Jerusalem,” yet their hope was deferred for centuries. They endured many tragedies, including the Holocaust, when six million were slaughtered by the Nazis. Still, they continued to hope for their own homeland. In 1948 there was dancing in the streets as their hope was realized. Suddenly the world realized that the God of the Bible was fulfilling ancient promises to the Jewish people.

In our English Bibles, the earliest reference to hope is found in the book of Ruth. But the Hebrew word *tikvah* first appears in Joshua 2 in the story of Rahab. In biblical Hebrew the word means literally a cord or a line, and figuratively an expectation or a hope. In the story of Rahab, the line she hung out of her window was called a *tikvah*. What a beautiful picture of hope. Her life and the lives of her family depended on the hope that the Israeli spies would keep their promise to save their lives. The cord was a symbol of that hope.

In biblical Hebrew the word *tikvah* means literally a cord or a line, and figuratively an expectation or a hope.



When we have absolute faith (trust, confidence, *emun*) in God, we will be able to continue hoping even when we do not see the answer immediately. Will you put out your line, your hope, like Rahab and trust that God will save you?

אהבה

Love

The Hebrew word for love is *ahava* (אהבה). When Paul talks about love in 1 Corinthians 13, the Greek word he uses is *agape*. I checked with the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew text completed in 132 BC), and the 70 rabbis who did that translation almost exclusively translated *ahava* as *agape*.

When the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) says, “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*” (Deut. 6:5), the word for love is *ahav* (verb; the noun is *ahava*). When Jesus (Yeshua) quotes this Scripture in Mark 12:30, the Greek word used is *agapao* (more commonly referenced as *agape*).

The first use of this word in the Bible is found in Genesis 22:2. This is the shocking and difficult story of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, saying, “*He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.’*” How can this be? How can a good God even think of asking a man to sacrifice his son?

While on a spiritual retreat the year before I became CEO (I was the Chief Operating Officer, COO) in the hills of northern Israel, I was reading this passage, and suddenly it wasn’t just another Bible story. I wept as I realized the enormity of the decision Abraham made—how much he loved God to be willing to take the life of his beloved son. The Lord showed me Abraham’s deep pain and anguish, and I cried for both Abraham and Isaac. Suddenly He showed me the devastating pain of the Father when Jesus was crucified for our sins. It was a powerful revelation of how much the Father loves us.

Abraham submitted to the will of God, and when God saw his heart was 100% committed to following Him, He gave Abraham another option. Then the Lord asked me if I would give up

Bridges for Peace, the ministry I loved. I struggled for a couple of hours before saying yes. Once He realized that I was willing to lay down everything for Him, He gave it back to me. I now realize that this was important preparation for the leadership role that was soon to be entrusted to me. I couldn't love this ministry more than the God who called me to the ministry. This is the kind of love God wants from His followers, that we are willing to submit everything that is important to us, everything that we love to obediently follow His lead.

When Paul talks about love in 1 Corinthians 13, the description is one of self-sacrificing behavior: "...does not seek its own..." (v. 5). Paul doesn't describe an emotional feeling; he describes how we should love.

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When the Bible says both in the *Torah* and in the words of Jesus, "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength*" (Deut. 6:5), what does it mean for you; for me?

This one simple Scripture written by the apostle Paul has a wealth of meaning: "*But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love*" (1 Cor. 13:13).

I think Paul was saying to us: have faith, absolute trust and confidence in a totally trustworthy God; have hope even when it

looks hopeless, even when the answer to your prayers are delayed or deferred; and love sacrificially (both God and others). In order to truly walk in faith, hope and love, we must involve our whole life, our essence, our actions, everything we are. Are you ready to give our Father in heaven total allegiance? That is what He is yearning for.

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Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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