

# The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 16      November 12, 2017  
 Hebrews 6:13 - 20

## Our Anchor of Hope

### Abraham and the Promises of God

v.13a

Abraham is of critical importance in the Bible. His initial story spans 14 chapters in Genesis (chs. 12-25), and he is referred to in a positive light dozens of times throughout the rest of the Bible. He is called ‘the father of our faith’ in Romans 4:11, where the event of his salvation by grace is used to support Paul’s most important point re: justification by faith alone (Romans 3:21-26). In Galatians and Romans, Paul draws important connections between our salvation and Abraham’s experience – cf. Gal. 3: 29).

The Author of Hebrews turns to Abraham here to encourage his readers (or hearers, if, as many scholars are now saying, Hebrews is more of a sermon than a letter). He is a great example of God’s grace – perhaps the primary example in Scripture, so this passage is a source of immense encouragement.

Abram’s call to follow God came to one who, like us, was completely undeserving, was an idolater, (moon-worshipper), was not seeking the true God in any sense we are ever made aware of, lived in the midst of a pagan culture, and yet, God in His grace called him “out of Ur of the Chaldees”, when his given name was ‘Abram’ meaning ‘father of many’, yet, at 75 years old, when God called him, he had no children because his wife Sara was barren (cf. Gen. 11:27-30) and past the age that made it physically possible for her to have children. Read Gen. 12:1-9.

In Genesis 13, we are told of the separation of Lot and Abraham, and we are given a second inkling of Abraham’s importance in God’s future plans for His world – cf. Gen. 13:1-3, 14-18. In chapter 14, Abraham goes to war against 5 kings who had captured Lot in Sodom along with all his possessions. Abraham prevails and rescues Lot – Gen. 14:12-16. Also in chapter 14, Abraham meets a mysterious “King of Salem” who is also said to be a “priest of God” – Melchizedek – who is mentioned in the OT only here (vv. 17-24), and in Psalm 110:4. The brevity of Melchizedek’s mention in the OT belies his incredible importance which Hebrews is going to unpack for us, as it relates to Jesus Christ and His kingship and High Priesthood. [ Heb. 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:1,10,11,15,17,21 ] where he is used as the model for Christ’s High Priesthood in heaven.

In Genesis 15, we have the record of the Abrahamic Covenant, in which God blesses Abram with the promise of the land (later to be called Israel), and with an abundance of descendants that will be as numerous “*as the stars*” – cf. Gen. 15:5-6; and by the way, Romans 4:3 & 9 quote Gen. 15:6 to highlight salvation by grace through faith. Where faith enters the picture is when this covenant is given, Abraham and Sara have no children (15:1-3), and later, Abraham at 86 fathers a child

(Ishmael) by Sara's servant, Hagar, however, God tells Abraham that this is not the heir He had promised ( Gen. 17:18-19 ).

Notice the time jump between Gen. 17:1 from Gen. 16:16. By Gen. 17:1, Abraham is now 99, and according to 17:17, Sara is 90. Abram's name is changed by God here ( 17:4,5 ) to Abraham ( *father of many nations* ), and Sara's name is changed to Sarah, ( 'princess' ). Note the interplay of Gen. 17:15-21. Genesis 18 is the intercession of Abraham for Sodom, and the rescue of Lot as God's wrath is poured out on Sodom and Gomorrah is found in Genesis 19.

Isaac is born to Abraham ( 100 ) and Sarah ( 91 ) in chapter 21; Hagar and Ishmael are protected by God, and by chapter 22, the sacrifice of Isaac – the supreme test of faith for Abraham is recorded, and it is v. 14 that Hebrews 6:14 cites, so it is from this particular account of Abraham's life that the author of Hebrews is drawing encouragement for Jewish converts to Christ who are ready to renounce Christ and go back to Judaism. He will bring this account up again in Heb. 11:17-19.

The example of Abraham's life shows us that, despite his lapses of faith [ Gen. 12:10-20; Gen. 16 - Hagar, Gen. 20 ], God continually encouraged him, so that his faith persevered and grew. Like him, our patient endurance will see the fruit of salvation – cf. Heb. 6:15, *“Thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.”*

Back to Heb. 6:13 – notice that the first word of v. 13 is “For”, and this directs us to look back at the preceding verses , in this case, vv. 11-12, the last 2 of the prior warning passage. These two verses flow directly into the author's argument in vv. 13-15 as he brings our attention to Abraham and God's promises to him.

When God made the promise to Abraham, in this case, based on the citation of Gen. 22:17 here in v. 14, this is the specific promise being referred to, although God's promises to Abraham are many in Genesis. The oath mentioned here that God *‘swore to Abraham’* emphasizes the certainty of the promise. We all understand what it means to swear an oath – eg. ) of allegiance to our country or flag; to promise to tell the truth in court; to promise one another in marriage to love and cherish and remain faithful; or to swear an oath to end a dispute over the truthfulness of something we are saying – ie. ) “I swear on my mother's life”, or “I swear on a stack of Bibles”, or “I swear to God”, etc.

We are human and that's all we have to attempt to appease a skeptic, to appeal to someone or something higher. But what does God do, who is already at the highest position in the universe, when He wants to verify His truth? God is the very definition of ultimate greatness, and since no one surpasses Him or ever can surpass Him, He cannot swear by any higher entity, ( Schreiner ) because none exist.

Some might object to this self-exaltation of God – this absolute highness over everything and everyone else. This sometimes gives people a problem because they see self-promotion and egotism as ugly arrogance in people, but this cannot be so with

God. he can't place someone or something on a higher plain than He is to worship or appeal to, as he would then cease to be God. John Piper has written what I consider to be the best argument I have heard to explain this situation, and although His point is not about God's oath, I find it extremely helpful;

"It is a great sadness that this theme of God's self-exaltation – his doing all things to communicate his own glory – has driven many people away from the Scriptures...

People see God's exaltation and communication of his own glory as a problem. They don't like it. They think such self-exaltation is immoral and loveless, even pathological. But there is another way to look at it.

Suppose your heart is a template made for its counterpart, the glory of God. Suppose you were created to know and love and be satisfied by the majesty and beauty of God. Suppose the glory of God was the most beautiful reality in the universe to you and therefore the most satisfying to your soul. Suppose you hungered for the presence of the greatness of God more than for anything in the world. And suppose this God, in spite of all your sin, had made a way for the glory of his holiness and righteousness to be maintained and exalted, while still giving himself in friendship to you for your enjoyment forever.

If that were true, then God's unwavering commitment to uphold and display his glory would not be a mark of selfish pride but a mark of self-giving love. He would be upholding and communicating the very thing for which your soul longs. This would not be the pattern of an old woman wanting compliments, or an egomaniac, or a needy tyrant, or an insecure, jealous lover. Rather, it would be the pattern of the true and loving and gracious God. You would see that there is no other God like this and no other book like the Bible, which presents him so faithfully. You would see a self-authenticating divine glory. No other person, no other god, no other book bears these marks of holy, divine self-exaltation echoing in the everlasting, God-centered joy of his people."<sup>1</sup>

What did God swear? ( v. 14 ) *"Surely I will bless you and multiply you."* A citation from Genesis 22:17. See Genesis 22:16-18. These verses are relevant to understand God's statement made through the "Angel of the Lord". Paul, in Romans 3:1-4, provides an undergirding statement of God's pure trustworthiness.

The purpose of the author of Hebrews here is also to underline the certainty of God's promise. Since no one is greater than God, "He swore by himself", because there was no one who surpasses Him in greatness or glory, and this idea of swearing an oath is a proof of that.

Tom Schreiner comments;

"The link between the "promise" in v. 13 and "blessing" in v. 14 shows that these two terms mutually interpret each other. What the writer particularly emphasizes is that God's promise is accompanied with an oath. This is no ordinary promise, for God underscores it with an oath, and thus the promise and the blessing will certainly come to pass. There is no question about whether the blessing will come to pass since God swore that he would do so. The oath differs from the promise in that the oath is accompanied by an action that secures what is promised. Hence, God's oath in Genesis 22 is joined with the deliverance of

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, A Peculiar Glory, Crossway, 2016, pp. 215-26

Isaac, which certifies that God will bless Abraham and multiply his offspring through Isaac.”<sup>2</sup>

Abraham patiently endured years of the unfulfilled promise of Gen. 12:1-3; and even once the fruition of the key element of the promise, and heir, a son by miraculous means had come to pass – without which none of God’s promises to Abraham could ever come to pass – we anticipate that v. 15 would say that the promise is guaranteed by virtue of God’s promise, but that is not what is written here.

The incredible point the Author is making here is this: Abraham faced the same temptations the recipients of this letter or sermon faced, so that the promises seem disingenuous, a charade, disconnected from reality, because the recipients of the promises of the gospel here are under severe persecution, so that, it seems that God cannot be trusted to ‘come through’ for them. This summons to patience and trust in God ( thus – in Christ ), is not on its face a call to be humanly righteous, even though Abraham seems to be being held up as that.

But when we know Abraham’s full story, we must come to recognize that his ‘patience’ and ‘perseverance’ was precisely because of the unbreakable promise of God. ( Schreiner ); and his full trust in that. What God had pledged to Abraham fueled his obedience and his faith. For example, with the Genesis 22 experience of Abraham and Isaac in our minds, consider the NT insight recorded for us in Heb.11:17-19. This is valuable insight for believers to have, and yet, it doesn’t come to us until this late in the Bible. Verse 19 is the key to Abraham’s radical obedience, against the logic and rationale of God’s test.

The promise of a son took decades to come to fruition, and now, in Genesis 22, when Isaac is still an only child, and probably, at least a teenager ( he carries the wood, and in Genesis 23, a servant is sent to seek a wife for him ); and Abraham is ready to sacrifice him on Mt. Moriah at God’s command. But, if Isaac is dead before he has a family, then God’s promise to Abraham can never be fulfilled, because Abraham was told by God that Isaac was the son of promise! Abraham knows this, but now, in Hebrews 11, we know how he was thinking. Resurrection! Although, as of Genesis 22, no verse or passage had even suggested such a thing, with Genesis 3:15 as a possible veiled exception, but since the Pentateuch was not written until Moses’ time, there’s no way Abraham could have ever seen that verse, let alone interpreted it correctly! The upshot of the example? God can be trusted!

## It is Impossible for God to Lie

vv. 16-18

We’ve already touched on human oath-taking, and seen that people swear by things like God, loved ones, loved items, etc. to support their contentions or promises to one another. Oaths are generally accepted as validation of one’s trustworthiness, unless one’s reputation is that of a profligate liar whose word can never be trusted.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Schreiner, Commentary on Hebrews, Holman Reference, 2015, pp. 199-200

The oath of God here was not made because God's Word was in any need of support, but because of man's fallen condition, so the author says here ( v. 17 ), "*So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath...*". The oath is focused on "*the unchangeable character of his purpose...*". This is given as the reason for His oath, which is originally to Abraham, but ultimately for all of Abraham's descendants – physical and spiritual.

In v. 18, two unchangeable things mentioned here are His Word, and His oath. His Word is irrevocable and of course, so is His oath. In v. 17, His Word is the "*unchangeable character of his purpose*"; His oath – "*it is impossible for God to lie.*" The oath was not given to substantiate God's truthfulness ( cf. JN 17:17 ) since he can't lie anyway. The oath was given for the sake of humans, to underscore God's faithfulness. ( Schreiner, p. 202 )

God's unalterable promise was the basis for Abraham's perseverance, and so the same should be true for the recipients and readers of Hebrews. Since he has "guaranteed" the "unchangeable character of his purpose", then this oath will be accompanied by an action to secure what He has promised. Note Isaiah 46:11 – "*I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.*" In Abraham's case, in particular, in Gen. 22:10-14, God provides a substitutionary sacrifice, and Abraham's words in v. 14 are very important. In case you were not aware, Mt. Moriah is the mount that Jerusalem is built on – hence, "the Mount of the Lord" where Jesus was crucified.

One last item here before we move on to v. 18ff. Schreiner makes an excellent comment here;

When we speak of God's omnipotence, the meaning of his almightiness should be defined by the entirety of Scripture. There are some things God cannot do, for to do such things would be a denial of his divinity. We read in Numbers 23:19, "God is not a man who lies or a son of man who changes his mind. Does he speak and not act, or promise and not fulfill?" What separates God from human beings, according to this text, is his unchangeableness. He does not change course, nor does he lie. Human beings prevaricate and deviate from the truth. God is inherently good and defines what is good. God can't be God and deviate from his nature. He wouldn't be God if he could lie. It is not as if there is a law above God that dictates his nature. Instead, the inability to do evil constitutes God's nature; goodness is intrinsic to and inherent in his being."<sup>3</sup>

Philip Hughes adds here;

"The hope set before us" is the assurance that at last we shall be with Christ and be like Christ ( JN 14:3; I JN 3:2 ), that ours will be the ultimate joy of witnessing and sharing in his eternal glory ( JN 17:24 ), the experience, in short, of that imperishable inheritance which is ours in Christ ( I Cor. 2:9; I Pet. 1:3ff ). This is indeed a hope worth seizing, and while it is appropriated by faith, it is far removed from all the uncertainties and disappointments that

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<sup>3</sup> Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 202-203

attend merely human hopes, for it is founded on the infallible and irrevocable verities of God's promise and God's oath."<sup>4</sup>

## God's Planned Fulfillment of His Unchangeable Purpose vv. 19-20

Paul Helm, comments on verse 18;

"By his promises God binds himself and therefore ( in providential terms ) limits himself to the performance of certain actions in the future. Before the promises are made, there are no constraints; once they are made, God is bound by what he has said, and his providential activity has to be ordered accordingly. God is not bound by some external force, of course, but he binds himself. The necessity by which God is bound to keep his promises is not absolute necessity, the sort which makes 2 and 2 add up to 4; but a conditional necessity that arises out of the holy and all-powerful God having promised some particular thing. Having promised it, he is immutably committed to it, because he himself is immutable ( Heb. 6:18, AV )."<sup>5</sup>

God is omnipotent ( all-powerful ), but there are things He cannot do, because they are contrary to His nature, and would result in a denial of His Godhood. Note Numbers 23:19; I Sam. 15:29 for example. The inability to commit evil is the vital framework of God's nature, and is intrinsic to who He is – cf. Ex. 33:18-19.

Matt Waymeyer point out:

"If the words of Scripture are the words of God – and if it is impossible for God to lie – it is therefore impossible for Scripture to communicate anything but truth. Put another way, if the words of biblical revelation originated with God rather than man, and if God always speaks the truth, how can these words possibly contain falsehood? The voice of Scripture and the voice of God are one and the same, and therefore the Bible must be entirely true and reliable in every respect. For this reason, in contrast to those who are "foolish" and "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" ( Luke 24:25 ), those who defend the inerrancy of Scripture must boldly insist that the Bible is just as trustworthy as the One who ultimately wrote it."<sup>6</sup>

Verse 18 ends by building on the foundational truth about God stated here in v. 17-18a; ""...we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us." We flee to God for refuge because we know He keeps His promises. It is His promises in the Gospel which have set this hope before us. God is stated to be a refuge in numerous OT passages ( especially in the Psalms ) – cf. Pss. 2:12; 46:1; 91:2; Joel 3:16, etc. The anonymous hymn writer of "How Firm a Foundation", has captured the essence of this verse in the first stanza of the hymn;

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!

<sup>4</sup> Philip Hughes, Hebrews, p. 234

<sup>5</sup> Paul Helm, The Providence of God, IVP 1993, p. 103

<sup>6</sup> Matt Waymeyer, cited in John MacArthur ( ed ), The Inerrant Word, Crossway, 2016, p. 303

What more can He say than to you He hath said,  
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?"<sup>7</sup>

## Our Sure and Steadfast Hope

vv. 19-20

This hope we've been given does not come to fruition until we are glorified. Notice Paul's position on hope in Romans 8:18-25, and then our author's in Heb. 11:1-3. Biblical hope is not like temporal hope. In temporal hope, much like a wish, we are hopeful, but cannot control or be certain of the ultimate outcome we hope for... "I hope Dad comes through surgery OK", or "I hope I get an 'A' on my exam.", or "I hope I catch a fish.", or "I hope I can afford a new car." Here are a few Bible verses that express (in part) our hope – Job 19:25-26; Ps. 23:4; Isa. 26:3; 32:17. With biblical hope, there is a settled satisfaction because of the object of our faith, Jesus Christ, and the promises that are attached to belief in Him and in His substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf, and in His intercession for us, and on His bodily return to take us to Paradise to be with Him forever and to see His glory (JN 17:24). This is exactly the trust we can have, as the Author has been laying out for us. God cannot lie and has even guaranteed His promises with an oath.

Richard Phillips, quoting Samuel Rutherford says,

"Our hope is not hung upon such a twisted thread as, 'I imagine so', or 'It is likely'; but the cable, the strong rope of our fastened anchor, is the oath and promise of Him who is eternal verity. Our salvation is fastened with God's own hand, and Christ's own strength, to the strong stake of God's unchangeable nature."<sup>8</sup>

The image that the Holy Spirit through the Author has selected to transmit this truth is an excellent one, because it not only gives us a vivid image we can comprehend and relate to; but vv. 19-20 offer a segue into the next topic of high importance – Jesus as our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

*"We have a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul..."*. As I mentioned, this is a very comforting image for believers. The author intends to soothe our souls, to provide us with comfort. An anchor in a nautical sense, is cast down into the depths to hold the ship fast on the surface, to keep it from drifting, to make it stable in a storm from being tossed about by the waves and wind which could force the boat onto the reef or into a cliff. So this metaphor of an anchor is a portrayal of fixity, of being provided with security in the face of changing tides and rising storms (Hughes, p. 235). The anchor of Christ is unfailing – it will hold, and not slip, and it will not break. Jesus Himself is our anchor, and He has gone behind the veil, into the inner place, behind the curtain. Not then one in the Temple or Tabernacle on earth, but in the Holy of Holies in heaven itself, into God's very presence (cf. Heb. 1:3-4). It is in God's presence that Jesus "ever lives to make intercession for us" – cf. Heb. 7:23-27; and cf. Rom. 5:10,17.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous, from "Hymns of Grace", # 364, Master's seminary Press, 2015

<sup>8</sup> Richard Phillips, Hebrews, pg. 215

Jesus has ascended ( Acts 1; LK 50:51 ) to His place at God's right hand as our fully qualified, perfect, great High Priest – so our hope is in His exaltation, His glory in heaven as a result of His perfect life, His substitutionary death, and absorption of God's wrath meant for us, His ascension and intercession. His High Priesthood is vastly different from any earthly High Priest in the OT of Aaron, Levi etc. None of them were "*forerunners*". In fact, He alone ( the OT High Priest ) could enter the Holy of Holies one time per year, only on the day of Atonement. There the OT priest made atonement for his people, but no one could follow him into that sanctuary; but Jesus has opened up the way for us – cf. JN 14:1-6; LK 23:43 – as a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. Cf. Heb. 4:14-16.

Philip Hughes makes sense here;

"Notice that it is Jesus who is our forerunner into the heavenly sanctuary. The New Testament knows nothing of the distinction, fashionable in our day, between "the historic Jesus" and the "risen Christ" with its implication that the cross marked the end of the former and that Easter and the ascension relate only to the latter. It is a distinction which leaves us with a docetic Christ. The apostles, however, consistently proclaim, and without embarrassment, that it was Jesus who was raised from the dead ( Acts 2:32 ), who ascended into heaven ( Acts 1:9 ), who has been exalted and glorified ( Phil. 2:9 ), and who is coming again ( Acts 1:11 ); and this teaching is amply confirmed in our epistle, in which it is Jesus who after the humiliation of incarnation and death has been crowned with glory and honor ( 2:9 ), who as our great high priest has passed through the heavens ( 4:14 ), to whom as our victorious and exalted Savior we, the runners of the Christian race, are urged to look ( 12:1f; cf. 3:1 ), to whom as the living mediator of the new covenant we have come ( 13:24 ), who as the risen shepherd of the sheep continues to tend his flock ( 13:20f ), and who, in short, is the same yesterday and today and forever ( 13:8 ), If it were not one and the same Jesus, then all that is said and written about resurrection, ascension, glorification, and return is no more than empty words. Here, then, it is Jesus who has gone before us into the glory of the divine presence as our pioneer, our fellow, and our merciful and faithful high priest ( 2:10-17 )."<sup>9</sup>

We will end this lesson with this lengthy comment by Thomas Schreiner,

"Jesus' one sacrifice opened up access to God, for as God's Son and high priest he "passed through the heavens ( 4:14 ), which means he entered the presence of God. Jesus entered the true "inner sanctuary behind the curtain" ( 6:9 ), signifying again the presence of God. He entered God's presence as the "forerunner" and he is the forerunner by virtue of his sacrifice. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, believers are enabled to "draw near to God" ( 7:19 ), The ritual on the Day of Atonement reveals that the way into God's presence wasn't secured through the old covenant ( 9:7-8 ). Jesus won "eternal redemption" with his own blood and thereby entered into the "perfect tabernacle" ( 9:11-12 ). This tabernacle isn't part of created reality, signifying that it represents God's presence. The author isn't suggesting that there is a real tabernacle in heaven. The language related to the tabernacle is analogical and not literal. The earthly points to the heavenly, but the heavenly stands for

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<sup>9</sup> Hughes, pp. 236-237



the presence of God, so it is not as if there is a literal tabernacle in heaven with distinct compartments.

The significance of Jesus' blood and the shedding of blood in sacrifices have often been discussed. Jesus' shed blood doesn't include the notion of the release of his life, as if his life is mystically found in his blood. Instead his blood signifies life that has been given up in death. The spilling of Jesus' blood indicates that he has given up his life, that he has died. We should not separate in Jesus' case the shedding of blood from the application of the blood in the sanctuary. The blood shed by Jesus has been applied to the heavenly sanctuary, just as the blood of animals was applied in the tabernacle / temple. The author is not suggesting that Jesus' blood was literally brought into a literal heavenly sanctuary. He appropriates the language of the cult to denote what Jesus has accomplished, and thus we have analogical rather than univocal or literal language here. The author uses the symbolism of what took place in the earthly tabernacle to convey the truth that Jesus' death brings believers into God's presence."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 464-465