

THE EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

HEBREWS 4:14-10:18, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

- A. Outline of Hebrews (to be finalized at completion of Hebrews study)
1. The superiority of the person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
 - a. Christ has the superior message (1:1-2a)
 - b. Christ is the superior person (1:2b-3)
 - c. Christ is superior to angels (1:4-2:18)
 - d. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)
 2. The superiority of the priesthood of Christ (4:14-7:28)
 - a. A superior confession (4:14-16)
 - b. Superior qualifications (5:1-10)
 - c. A warning to keep moving forward (5:11-6:20)
 - 1) A dangerous spiritual condition (5:11-14)
 - 2) A call to spiritual maturity (6:1-12)
 - a) An encouragement to become mature (6:1-3)
 - b) A warning concerning apostasy (6:4-8)
 - c) An encouraging prospect (6:9-12)
 - d) Encouragement from God's promises (6:13-20)
- B. Review of Hebrews 6:1-12
1. The writer calls the readers to move from the basics of the faith to spiritual maturity.
 2. There is a strong warning concerning apostasy.
 3. The writer does believe there are better things in store for the readers of the letter.
 4. He reminded them of their past service and encouraged them by faith and patience to imitate those who had inherited God's promises.
- C. Comments on Hebrews 6:13-20
1. Donald Hagner, *In the definitive high priest, Jesus, God is bringing to pass his promises to the fathers of Israel. This is an important point to affirm to Jewish Christians who are feeling the pressure of the arguments of nonbelieving Jews.*
 2. Douglas Mangum, *Picking up on the mention of assurance of hope in God's promises (6:11-12), here the author grounds this hope in the steadfast character of God, who made and kept a promise to Abraham, and in the priestly work of Jesus.*

HEBREWS 5:11-6:20, A WARNING TO KEEP MOVING FORWARD

HEBREWS 6:13-20, ENCOURAGEMENT FROM GOD'S PROMISES

- A. The life of Abraham confirms God's promises (13-15)
1. God swore by Himself (13-14), *For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."*
 - a. God can be trusted as evidenced in Abraham.
 - 1) God is sovereign and keeps His word as illustrated by God's dealing with Abraham.
 - 2) James Moffatt, *Taking Abraham as the first or as a typical instance of steadfast faith in God's promises, the writer now (vv. 13-19) lays stress not upon the human quality, but upon the divine basis for this undaunted reliance.*
 - 3) Warren Wiersbe, *In spite of Abraham's failures and sins, God kept His promise and Isaac was born. Many of God's promises do not depend on our character but on His faithfulness.*
 - 4) Charles Spurgeon, *As believers, we flee away from ourselves and the covenant of works to the sure covenant of unchanging grace. And our consolation is strong, because God is true.*

- b. God's faithfulness is based on His character.
 - 1) William L. Lane, *The notion that God swears by himself* (cf. Exod 32:13; Isa 45:23; Jer 22:5; 49:13) signifies that he is bound to his word by his character. The divine oath provides the guarantee that excludes doubt and affirms the abiding validity of the promise.
 - 2) Douglas Mangum, *The faith he is exhorting his readers to sustain is grounded in the faithfulness of God, who swore his oath to Abraham by himself because there is no one greater by whom to swear.*
 - 3) God's nature is truth, Numbers 23:19, *God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?*
- c. The content of God's promise to Abraham.
 - 1) God's unconditional promise to Abraham was blessing through offspring, cited from Genesis 22:16-17, and said, *"By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,*
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *The promise to which the writer referred was the one God gave Abraham after he had obeyed God by offering up Isaac* (cf. James 2:21). *Abraham trusted God to fulfill His former promise regarding his descendants by raising Isaac from the dead . . .*
 - 3) Charles Spurgeon, . . . *it is the blood of Christ that makes all things secure, for all the promises of God are indeed and amen in Christ Jesus. . .*

2. Abraham responded with patient faith and obtained what God promised (15), ***And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.***

- a. *And thus*
 - 1) The writer looks back to verses 13-14.
 - 2) Zane Hodges, *If the readers were searching for models to "imitate," there was the case of Abraham who received an oath from God, the promise that assured the multiplication of his seed.*
 - 3) Abraham's waiting patiently was based on his faith in God and His promise.
 - a) Genesis 15:6, *And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*
 - b) Raymond Brown, *He was not idle or slothful in the practical outworking of his believing experience, but steadily maintained the full assurance of hope right through his difficult life, until in the end through faith and patience he inherited the promises. . . Abraham is chosen as a single example, though he is one amongst many* (note Hebrews 11).
 - c) Ray Stedman, *Abraham's faith flourished because it fastened upon two facets of God's dealings with him: God's promise and his oath* (verse 16).
- b. The centrality of faith evidenced by patiently waiting.
 - 1) William L. Lane, *The writer's exposition in vv 13-15 provides a biblical basis for the community to emulate the faith and endurance of Abraham in the certain expectation that they will receive what God has promised to them.*
 - 2) Douglas Mangum, *Reminding readers that God's faithfulness is meant here to be an encouragement to continue in a life of faith, the author points out that Abraham received the promise only after an extended time of waiting and persevering patiently.*
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *The writer was calling his readers to do what God called Abraham to do when He instructed him to go to Mt. Moriah. They too needed to continue to trust and obey as they had done in the past even though it looked as if perseverance would result in tragedy.*
 - 4) Warren Wiersbe, *"You will obtain and enjoy what God has promised if you diligently apply yourself to the development of your spiritual life," is what the writer stated.*
 - 5) William Newell, *It is remarkable that after Jehovah's oath to Abraham when he was about to offer up Isaac (Gen. 22:15-18), there are no more recorded testings of his faith. He was now in such a deep rest of faith that he walked steadily therein, the remainder of his days.*
- c. *obtained the promise*
 - 1) Donald Hagner, *The phrase received what was promised must refer only to the initial signs of fulfillment experienced by Abraham* (cf. Gen. 24:1) . . .
 - 2) Fulfillment is continuing to this day as his offspring continue to multiply.
 - 3) Ray Stedman, *That hope found its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, who said of Abraham, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (Jn 8:56).*

- B. The oath by God guarantees God's promises (16-18)
1. An oath is guaranteed by swearing by one greater than oneself (16), ***For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.***
 - a. *For*
 - 1) This looks back to verses 13-14 where God made a promise to Abraham which will be reinforced by an oath.
 - 2) People swear by *something greater than themselves* but God swore by Himself since there is no one greater,
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *When a person wants to end an argument, one way to do so is to appeal to a higher authority with an oath. For example, some people do this by saying, "I am telling the truth so help me God."*
 - b. An oath is final confirmation of a promise.
 - 1) R. Kent Hughes, *In the context of ancient culture (when people generally feared God), swearing by a greater thing helped assure truth. And if one swore by God, it served to end an argument. This was especially true in Hebrew culture where lying while making an oath was a transgression of the Third Commandment against misusing the name of God and so deserved the punishment of God (cf. Deuteronomy 5:11). Therefore, we see that human oaths were a powerful assurance of carrying out one's word.*
 - 2) The validity of an oath still depends on the nature of the person making the oath.
 - 3) Raymond Brown, *It is of no use whatever for a dishonest or unreliable person to make a promise or swear by anything. The words would be empty and valueless.*
 2. God's oath is guaranteed by swearing by Himself (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,***
 - a. God's making an oath was to emphasize the validity of His promise.
 - 1) Thomas Constable, *God swearing by Himself signifies that He binds His word to His character.*
 - 2) Raymond Brown, *The heirs of the promise looked to God for a fulfilment of his word and were not disappointed, simply because promise and oath were based on the secure foundation of God's holy and righteous character.*
 - 3) R. Kent Hughes, *Truth has sworn by itself that its truth shall truly be fulfilled. There is no more possibility of God's promises failing us than of God falling out of Heaven!*
 - 4) Charles Spurgeon, *God's oath, His solemn assertion, His swearing by Himself! Conceive the majesty, the awe, the certainty of this!*
 - b. *to the heirs of the promise*
 - 1) God's promise was not only for Abraham's physical seed but spiritual seed, as well.
 - 2) Charles Spurgeon, *Heirs, not according to the power of the flesh, but according to the energy of grace.*
 - 3) Raymond Brown, *Throughout the centuries God has done that for his people in order to encourage their fragile faith. He has given them his promise and then confirmed it by an oath. He obviously cannot swear by someone greater than himself, so he swears by himself.*
 - 4) Donald Hagner, *This strong statement, with its exceptional double affirmation, is meant to counter any Jewish suggestion that Christianity involves a departure from, rather than the fulfillment of, the promises upon which Israel based its hopes.*
 - c. Examples of God's using an oath to guarantee His promises.
 - 1) Isaiah 45:23, *By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'*
 - 2) Jeremiah 22:5, *But if you will not obey these words, I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation.*
 - 3) Jeremiah 49:13, *For I have sworn by myself, declares the LORD, that Bozrah shall become a horror, a taunt, a waste, and a curse, and all her cities shall be perpetual wastes.*

3. God's oath is guaranteed by His oath and His purpose (18), *so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.*
 - a. *two unchangeable things*
 - 1) God's promise which is sufficient since it is impossible for Him to lie as noted in Numbers 23:19.
 - 2) God's oath which gives assurance from our holy God.
 - 3) Zane Hodges, *Not only was it impossible for God to lie, but His ever truthful Word was supported in this case by His oath. These are the two unchangeable things, which encourage those who take hold of the hope.*
 - 4) R. Kent Hughes, *His Word is eternally sealed with the double surety of promise and oath.*
 - 5) William L. Lane, *The relevance to Christians of the oath sworn to Abraham lies in the proof that God is absolutely trustworthy in the act of promising. . . The unchanging purpose of God provides a strong reason for emulating the trust and steadfastness of Abraham.*
 - b. *we who have fled for refuge*
 - 1) Donald Hagner, . . . *refers metaphorically to the security believers have in Christ in contrast to the insecurity and uncertainty of the world.*
 - 2) Charles Spurgeon, *The strong consolation mentioned in the text belongs to those who have fled to Christ for refuge, and surely this is the very beginning of the divine life.*
 - 3) Warren Wiersbe, *We have fled to Jesus Christ, and He is our eternal refuge. As our High Priest, He will never die (Heb. 7:23–25); and we have eternal salvation. No avenger can touch us, because He has already died and arisen from the dead.*
 - c. Abraham's faith in God's promise and oath applies to Christians.
 - 1) *hold fast*
 - a) We are to trust God implicitly.
 - b) Ray Stedman, *Since God cannot lie to us, and actually confirmed his promise with an oath, let us, as the writer says, be greatly encouraged.*
 - 2) *the hope set before us*
 - a) Charles Spurgeon, *There is the hope, but we are bound to grasp it and hold it fast.*
 - b) R. Kent Hughes, *The "hope offered to us" comes from the fact that we are in Christ, the Son who fulfilled Abraham's covenant—and that at the last we will be with Christ and like Christ (cf. John 14:3; 1 John 3:2). Jesus is the foundation and substance of our hope. . . Our hope is doubly sure! God has promised it and sworn it. Everything promised comes to us through Christ. We have God's word for it. He wants us to take hold of it!*
- C. The high priesthood of Jesus gives hope to God's promises (19-20)
1. Our hope is in Jesus' function (19-20a), *We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf,*
 - a. *We have this*
 - 1) It refers to the basis of a Christian's hope in the promises of God.
 - 2) *This* may be reduced to a single word, *Jesus*.
 - 3) Raymond Brown, *Our hope is in what Christ has done. By his life, death, resurrection and ascension Jesus has achieved a momentous and eternal victory. He has gone into the holy presence of God as the forerunner.*
 - 4) William Newell, *It is not our holding fast, but His holding us fast.*
 - b. *as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul*
 - 1) Warren Wiersbe, *The anchor was a popular symbol in the early church. At least sixty-six pictures of anchors have been found in the catacombs. . . Christians have but one anchor—Jesus Christ our hope (Col. 1:5, 1 Tim. 1:1). . . Anchored heavenward! How much more secure can you be?*
 - 2) Donald Hagner, . . . *hope serves as an anchor for the soul, and therefore as that which can counteract the tendency of "drifting away" mentioned in 2:1. Our hope depends entirely on the priestly work of Jesus. This firm and secure hope is said metaphorically to enter the inner sanctuary, by which is meant that such hope involves our free access into the very presence of God.*
 - 3) William L. Lane, *As a ship is held fast when at anchor, the life of the Christian is secured by hope that binds that life to Christ, who has entered the heavenly sanctuary. . . His presence behind the curtain is the firm pledge that we also shall pass through the curtain and enter within the inner sanctuary. . .*

- c. *a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain*
 - 1) The curtain separated the outer sanctuary from the inner sanctuary (the Holy of Holies). Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies and then only once per year on the Day of Atonement. When Jesus, died on the cross, that curtain was torn in two from top to bottom, Matthew 27:51.
 - 2) Marvin Vincent, *The Levitical high priest did not enter the sanctuary as a forerunner, but only as the people's representative. He entered a place into which none might follow him, in the people's stead, and not as their pioneer. The peculiarity of the new economy is that Christ as High Priest goes nowhere that His people cannot follow Him. He introduces man into full fellowship with God.*
 - 3) William Newell, *Notice that 'within the veil' (behind the curtain) indicates Heaven itself, the very presence of God.*
 - d. *Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf*
 - 1) Hebrews 4:14, *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*
 - 2) John 14:3, *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*
 - 3) William Barclay, (*Forerunner*) means a scout who goes ahead to see that it is safe for the rest of the troops to follow. Jesus went into the presence of God to make it safe for all to follow.
 - 4) Donald Hagner, *Our unrestricted entrance into God's presence is made possible only by the one who on our behalf has gone before us to prepare the way.*
 - 5) Warren Wiersbe, *The Old Testament high priest was not a "forerunner" because nobody could follow him into the holy of holies. But Jesus Christ has gone to heaven so that one day we may follow.*
2. Our hope is in Jesus' order (20b), ***having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.***
- a. *after the order of Melchizedek*
 - 1) The writer cites Psalm 110:4 which he first cited in Hebrews 5:6 but broke off the argument in Hebrews 5:10 and to be continued in chapter 7.
 - 2) One might understand *order* as *class* or *type*. The order was qualitative in that the uniqueness of Melchizedek was comparable to that of Jesus which is eternal and not in the line of Aaronic priests.
 - 3) William L. Lane, *The concluding phrase also functions as a fresh announcement of the subject of 5:10, which prepares the hearer for the exposition of Jesus' high priestly office in 7:1–28.*
 - b. R. Kent Hughes, *We are anchored in the Father's presence for eternity—and Jesus at his right hand perpetually intercedes for his Church. His continual priestly prayer for us is the medium for our survival.*
 - c. Donald Hagner, *Because of his work as high priest, we all can now go where only the high priest was privileged to go, only once a year.*
 - d. Ray Stedman, *Like an anchor which holds a boat steady in the midst of a storm, he can sustain and steady us when we are battered and beaten by life. He can do this forever since he is not an Aaronic priest who can only minister for one lifetime, but a priest after the order of Melchizedek, who ministers in the power of an endless life!*
 - e. David Brown, *As John Baptist was Christ's forerunner on earth, so Christ is ours in heaven.*
 - f. Charles Spurgeon, *Has He gone as a forerunner of those who may after all perish on the road? God forbid. Where our Head is, there must the members be before long.*

CONCLUSION

- Warren Wiersbe, . . . *be sure to lay hold of the main lesson: believers must go on to maturity, and God has made it possible for us to do so.*
- Douglas Mangum, *The encouragement of hope he has been seeking to instill in his readers anchors their souls, through the priestly work of Jesus, in God's own presence.*
- R. Kent Hughes, . . . *we have reason to be optimistic—we have an anchor for the soul.*
- This section prepares the readers to move on to the *spiritual meat* of Jesus' high priestly ministry.