**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (18): The Book Of Better Things**

**“The Certainty Of God’s Promise”**

**Hebrews 6:13-20**

**May 5, 2024**

Imagine that the letter to the Hebrews was written to us. The author reminds us that we are his “*dear friends*.” More than anything else he wants us to gain a “*full assurance*” of our hope in God. But he knows that this does not come automatically. So he tells us that we must be diligent in our pursuit of it. How? By continuing to believe God’s promises, and to trust His Word, and to serve His people because of our love for His name.

He also tells us that if we are so motivated, we are going to feel better. We won’t have to worry about living in a spiritual fog for the rest of our lives, overwhelmed by “sluggishness.” In fact, with an infusion of greater hope into our spiritual bloodstream, we will be *energized* to become imitators of “*those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*.” If you were here last week and were listening carefully, then you know those were the words of encouragement that our author wrote to each and every one of us (Heb. 6:9-12).

But of all the examples of “*faith and patience*” that we could be imitating, our author proceeds to single out Abraham. Why? What’s the significance of the promise that God gave to him? Why the emphasis on God confirming that promise with an oath? And how does the fulfillment of that promise help us to understand that our hope is both “*firm and secure*”? These are just some of the questions we’ll be considering as we turn to today’s text (Heb. 6:13-20).

**A. The Certainty of God’s Promise to Abraham (6:13-15):** “*When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, ‘I will surely bless you and give you many descendants. And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised*.”

Abraham is, of course, the supreme example of “*faith and patience*.” More than any other Old Testament saint, he continued to trust in God’s promises even though his circumstances were often adverse and gave little support to his faith. But in this context, our author’s point is that faith can endure patiently because God’s oath secures His word of promise to all believers, as it did to Abraham.

God made this promise to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3, and then repeated it at various stages of his life (Gen. 15:5; 17:5-8; and 22:15-18). It was the promise that God would bless him by multiplying his descendants, making them into a great nation, establishing them in their own land, so that they might become a source of blessing to all nations. Here in Hebrews our author is citing the promise that was repeated to Abraham years after Isaac was born (Gen. 21:5), when Abraham displayed his *unfaltering faith* in God by his willingness to offer him up as a sacrifice (Gen. 22:1-14).

That’s the context of the verse which our author is quoting in Genesis: “*I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore*” (22:16-17).

The significant feature of this verse, from our author’s vantage point, is that on this occasion God’s promise was introduced by His oath and given special emphasis: “*I will surely bless you and give you many descendants*” (Heb.6:14). The importance of this oath will be emphasized in verses 16-18; but for now the author only says that God confirmed His promise with an oath, since there was no one greater than Himself to swear by.

This testing of Abraham’s faith marked the *high point* of his many years of patient endurance. Hence our author says that Abraham, after waiting patiently, received what was promised (v. 15). As we may know, Isaac was not born until twenty-five years after the promise was first given (Gen. 12:4; 21:5). Abraham’s grandchildren were not born for another sixty years (Gen. 25:26), only fifteen years before his death (Gen. 25:7). The complete fulfillment of the promise, of course, could not take place within his lifetime. But enough had happened for the author to say, “*Abraham received what was promised*.”

**B. The Certainty of God’s Promise to Us (6:16-18):** “*Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged*.”

As we all know, says our author, the point of an oath is to confirm the truthfulness of what we have said or what we have promised. Typically, we appeal “under oath” to a higher power; the greater the power, the surer the promise. Once that is done, as we read in verse 16b, the dispute is settled and the oath we’ve taken is final confirmation that the person can trust our word.

But as we’ve already seen, God has a problem! There is no one to whom He can appeal to confirm the certainty of His promise, since there is no one greater than Himself. Therefore, He can only swear by Himself; thus, His character is the final court of appeal. **Q.** Is there *any* likelihood that God would ever do anything that would dishonor Himself? **A.** No.Then there is *no* likelihood that He would ever break His word of promise to anyone, including you and me. That’s the reason God made His assurance “double sure” for Abraham.

However, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, our author says that this oath-bound promise has been extended to Abraham’s heirs (v. 17): “*Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath*.”

**Q.** So, who are “*the heirs of the promise*?” **A.** The line starts with Abraham and continues on through Isaac and Jacob, and through Judah and David, with Christ as the focal point of its fulfillment. For in Galatians 3:16 we read: “*Now the promises were made to Abraham and his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings, referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring, who is Christ*.” But all who are united to Christ by faith are also heirs of the Abrahamic promise. For in Galatians 3:28-29 we read; “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise*.”

When the author of Hebrews refers to “the heirs of the promise,” therefore, he means *everyone* who has faith in Christ. Gender doesn’t matter; nor does economic status or ethnicity. What matters *isn’t* whether or not Abraham’s blood flows through our veins; but whether or not Abraham’s faith lives in our hearts.

**Q.** What, then, is God’s desire for *us*? **A.** His desire is for us to know “*more convincingly*” that the nature of His purpose for us is “unchangeable.” And what is this unchanging purpose of God? It’s to bless the world through the seed of Abraham (Gen. 22:17-18). The ultimate fulfillment of this purpose is now revealed in the gospel of Christ. Once again, Galatians 3 sheds light on this: “*Understand then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of the faith*” (vv. 7-9). Thus, God’s oath-bound promise was not only for Abraham but also for the sake of his *spiritual descendants*, *heirs of the promise*, including you and me.

But if God’s purpose is unchangeable, and His Word is infinitely reliable and trustworthy, then why must He confirm it with an oath? The answer to that question is found in verse 18; “*God did this, 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*.”

In the Old Testament, there were six cities of refuge, where someone who accidentally killed another person could flee and find safety until his case could come before the people for judgment. Just as they sought physical protection from the immediate vengeance of the victim’s family, so we have sought spiritual protection in Jesus Christ. He is our City of Refuge. We are safe and secure in Him until we spend all of eternity with Him. That’s the ever-increasing, always expanding, “full assurance” of hope that God wants us to experience and to take hold of (Cf. 6:11).

**C. The Hope Set Before Us (6:19-20):** “*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek*.”

As Christians, our hope is placed in the person and saving work of Christ. It’s like an anchor for our souls. It is “firm” because it cannot break; and it is “secure” because it cannot slip. It’s different from the physical anchors on ships because we are not anchored downward, but upward – to heaven. For this anchor is secured to the inner sanctuary of the heavenly tabernacle, which is the spiritual counterpart to the earthly tabernacle (Heb. 8:2; 9:11-12, 24-25; 10:19-20).

This is the Heavenly Holy of Holies where Jesus has entered on our behalf. As our great High Priest, He has atoned for our sins; as our “forerunner,” He guarantees that when we depart this life we shall join Him there, in the very presence of God Himself.

So, how do we gain full assurance of hope? How do we gain strong encouragement? The answer is *not* by looking within. The answer is by looking to Christ, and by trusting in His promises, and by living for His Kingdom. It’s only by knowing who He is, and what He has done, and where He now reigns, and what He will always continue to do on our behalf, that we will gain a full assurance of our hope in God.

With this spiritual infusion of greater hope into our spiritual bloodstream, we won’t be overwhelmed with “sluggishness;” and we will be energized to become imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Abraham would be an excellent example for us to imitate – for starters!

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