



# GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ◇ Deo ◇ Gloria

## THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

### Sermon Notes

### *Strive to Enter Our Rest*

Hebrews 6:13-20

May 31, 2009

<sup>11</sup>And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup>so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. <sup>13</sup>For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup>saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." <sup>15</sup>And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup>For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. <sup>17</sup>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, <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup>where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

#### **I. God Made a Promise to Abraham**

#### **II. God Guaranteed His Promise with an Oath**

#### **III. We Now Have Hope in Christ**

##### **a. He is our Anchor**

##### **b. His is our Forerunner**

##### **c. His is our Melchizedekian High Priest**

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- We live in an age of great skepticism and doubt. Because of our technological advances and increase in communication and the dissemination of information, our culture seems to have very little use for God. In fact, we live in a world where we have deified ourselves and view the belief in God as a crutch.
  - Armand Nicholi Jr., professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and editor of *The Harvard Guide to Psychiatry*, highlights the incredible increase in depression today. In 1996, 11 million Americans were receiving treatment for

depression and in that same year 250,000 people attempted to take their own lives. Why is this the case?

- According to Nicholi, “Our culture has forsaken its spiritual roots, [and] we live in an overtly secular society without even the pretense of spiritual values. Many young people today feel that their cultures fail to provide the answers to questions of purpose and meaning and destiny. We fail, they feel, to provide some reason for hope. The consequence is that we are now in a cultural crisis and living in what is being called ‘The Age of Despair.’”
- A significant reason for this is due to the work of individuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century French, atheistic existentialist philosopher. Few figures of the past century had a greater influence on the post-modern worldview of our day than Sartre.
- According to Sartre, “truth” was completely objective. In other words, “what is right and true to *you* is right and true for you.” However, for another individual, what is right to them may be different, even contradictory to what is right to you. And this is completely acceptable, for truth is not objective. That is, according to Sartre, there are no universal truths.
- However, as sure as Sartre was in his belief system, when he was on his death bed, he made a profound statement.
  - A little over a month before he died, he reportedly would say to himself, “I know I shall die in hope.”
  - Yet, then, he was add, “But hope needs a foundation.”
  - Given all that Sartre wrote and said in his lifetime, this may be the truest.
- And this is the focus of the author Hebrews – to provide a foundation of hope for his readers...a foundation that is to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

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- Last, week, we looked at Hebrews 6:11, “And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”
  - There is a clear contrast, here, between practicing *earnestness* versus *sluggishness*.
    - But, the authors desire here is that his readers have **full assurance of hope until the end**.

- The verb in the phrase “to have the full assurance of hope” literally means to “fill up.”
- Consequently, the author desire that the assurance of hope that his readers possess be “**filled to the rim**”, so to speak.
- Yet, the manner in which they are going to have such assurance is through earnestness.

**That is, the author of Hebrews is stating that his readers will have assurance as they earnestly practice godliness (through Bible study, prayer, corporate worship, etc.), imitating “those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”**

- J.C. Ryle, the nineteenth century Anglican theologian wrote, “I bless God that our salvation in no way depends on our own works...But I never would have any believer for a moment forget that our *sense of salvation* depends much on the manner of our living.”
- Richard Phillips comments: “This is what diligence in the faith provides: an increasing awareness and possession of the riches that are ours in Jesus Christ, with ever-increasing joy in the Lord.”
- This sort of earnestness stands in contrast to *sluggishness*. The word, here, translated “sluggish” is the same word translated “dull” in **Hebrews 5:11**.
- That is, along with spiritual sluggishness and laziness comes a dullness of heart.

**Therefore, spiritual earnestness produces assurance and hope; whereas, sluggishness produces doubt.**

- And so, now, the author provides an example someone who had the full assurance of hope to the end – Abraham.

## **I. God Made a Promise to Abraham**

- The author of Hebrews focuses on Abraham for two reasons: (1) He is the “Father of faith”; and (2) He is a central figure in the story of Melchizedek.
- The author of Hebrews writes, in **Verses 13-15**, “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.’ And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.”

- The patriarch Abraham lived approximately four thousand years ago in Ur of the Chaldeans, in ancient Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq). Abraham's life of faith is recorded in Genesis 12-25.
- He was a descendant of Shem, one of Noah's three sons (consequently, the descendants of Shem are referred to as Shemites); and to be anti-Jewish is anti-Semitic. It is significant, however, that Abraham was raised a pagan in Ur, and God, for reasons known only to Him, called Abraham out of the land of Ur – out of a life of paganism – to become the “Father of many nations.”
- The LORD established a covenant with Abraham, giving circumcision as the sign of the covenant.
- Yet, as believers in the LORD Jesus Christ, we find ourselves as the true inheritors of this promise.
- According to the Apostle Paul, in Galatians 3:29, “If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.”
- Abraham is often referred to as “the Father of faith,” having received multiple promises from God, and believing Him.
- Such promises include those recorded in Genesis 12:1-3; 17:1-22; 22:16-18.

**Genesis 12:1-3:**

<sup>1</sup>Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

**Genesis 15:4-7**

<sup>4</sup>And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup>And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>6</sup>And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. <sup>7</sup>And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess."

**Genesis 22:16-18**

<sup>16</sup>and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup>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,<sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

- The “**promise**” that the author speaks of here in Hebrews 6:13 is made by God after Abraham demonstrates his faith in his willingness to offer up Isaac on Mount Moriah in Genesis 22 (see Genesis 22:16-18).
- However, this promise is simply a reiteration of His promise recorded in Genesis 12:2 that He would make Abraham a great nation.
- What is significant is that when God promised Abraham, in **Genesis 12:2**, that He would make Him a great nation, the patriarch was without a child.
- In fact, it seemed impossible – according to virtually every human manner of thinking – that Abraham and Sarah would be able to have children. In fact, we read in **Genesis 12:4** that Abraham was **seventy-five (75) years old** at this time.
- In fact, in **Genesis 16:2**, Sarah (Sarai at the time) said, to Abram, “Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. God in to my servant; it may be the I shall obtain children by her. And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.”
  - It had been **eleven years** since God had called Abram, for **Genesis 16:16** states, “Abram was **eighty-six years (86) old** when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.”
  - Consequently, Abraham was not *perfectly* obedient.
- However, in **Genesis 17**, the LORD appeared to Abram again.

**Genesis 17:1-22:**

<sup>1</sup>When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, <sup>2</sup>that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." <sup>3</sup>Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, <sup>4</sup>"Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup>No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup>I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup>And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. <sup>8</sup>And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." <sup>9</sup>And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup>This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup>You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup>He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, <sup>13</sup>both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup>Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." <sup>15</sup>And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. <sup>16</sup>I will

bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." <sup>17</sup>Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" <sup>18</sup>And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" <sup>19</sup>God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. <sup>20</sup>As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. <sup>21</sup>But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year." <sup>22</sup>When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

- So, in **Genesis 21**, God's promise, originally stated in **Genesis 12**, is fulfilled, as Isaac is born to Abraham and Sarah.
- It had been **twenty-five (25) years** since God had made His original promise to Abraham, yet God was faithful.
- Then, in **Genesis 22**, God asks Abraham to do that which was unthinkable – sacrifice Isaac.
- However, by this time, Abraham obeyed God, for He had learned that God's word is true. And so Abraham obeyed God (knowing that God would fulfill His promise to him that he [Abraham] would be the father of many nations, for God had said, in **Genesis 17:19**, "Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.")
  - God had proven Himself to Abraham by giving him a son through the barren womb of Sarah.
  - Consequently, Abraham knew that God would need to act in an equally miraculous manner – and possibly even resurrect Isaac if necessary. Yet, Abraham knew at least two truths: (1) God promised that Isaac would be the child of the covenant; and (2) God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.
  - So, Abraham simply obeyed the LORD at this point, trusting that God would take care of fulfilling His promise.
  - And God did take care of fulfilling His promise – providing a sacrifice as a substitute for Isaac – a ram, caught in a thicket. Therefore, God provided for Himself a sacrifice – a beautiful picture of Christ.

**Genesis 22:11-14:**

<sup>11</sup>But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." <sup>12</sup>He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." <sup>13</sup>And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and

offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup>So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

- Thus, it was through the obedience of Abraham that we see a picture of Christ, nearly two thousand years before His birth.

“God gave the child of promise through a barren womb to demonstrate that salvation is by grace alone, by God’s saving power and not by the will or ability of man.”

Richard Phillips

- Therefore, after Abraham obeyed God, in Genesis 12, the LORD said to him, in **Genesis 22:16-17**, “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.”
- In **Verse 15**, the author of Hebrews writes, “And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.”
  - It had been twenty-five (25) years since the original promise of Genesis 12.
  - Abraham’s faith was, by no means, perfect. However, in these 25 years, Abraham learned that God’s word was true and trustworthy.

## II. God Guaranteed His Promise with an Oath

- The author of Hebrews states that when God reiterated His promise to Abraham, in Genesis 22, He confirmed it with an oath, **saying, “By myself I have sworn...”**
- The fact that God confirmed His words to Abraham with an oath is greatly significant.
  - First of all, He was not obligated to do so. God’s word is true by the very nature of who God is – for He **is** True/Truth.
  - Secondly, it demonstrates the willingness of God to condescend and communicate to His people.
  - Finally, it underscored the certainty and gravity of God’s words and promise.

- The author of Hebrews states, “**For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation...**” Yet, he had already said, “... [there is] **no one greater by whom to swear.**”
  - Oaths were “common legal devices in ancient times” (in fact, the word “disputes” evokes legal overtones).
- In fact, in Israel, “As sure as Yahweh lives” was the ultimate oath.
  - When an oath was taken, it was typically in the form of an appeal to a higher authority – such as a deity.
  - The point was that the one making the promise was calling on the wrath or punishment of the authority if he did not fulfill his promise.
  - Yet, as the author of Hebrews states – **there is not a greater authority to whom God could appeal to other than Himself.**

### III. We Now Have Hope in Christ

- Finally, the author of Hebrews relates the story of God’s faithfulness to Abraham to his contemporary readers (and us today!). For he writes, in beginning in **Verse 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, 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.”
  - First of all, it is clear that **we are the heirs of the Abrahamic promise.**
    - For it is through Christ that we are true sons of Abraham

#### **Galatians 3:16, 26, 29:**

“<sup>16</sup>Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ...<sup>26</sup>for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith...<sup>29</sup>And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

- Yet, most importantly, God was **providing us was “strong encouragement” to hold fast to the hope set before us**, demonstrating the “unchangeable character of his purpose...by two unchangeable things...”
  - Those “two things” are: (1) God’s promise/purpose; and (2) God’s oath.

- The author even emphasizes the truth that “it is impossible for God to lie.”
- The author of Hebrews refers to his audience as those “who have fled for refuge...”
  - The Hebrews author is likely making a reference here to the cities of refuge that God provided for those who sought protection from avengers for an accidental killing (Deuteronomy 4:42; 19:5; Joshua 20:9).
  - The Hebrew word for salvation denotes “deliverance” or “rescue” from one’s enemies.
  - And this is precisely what salvation ultimately is – it is being save **by God...from God.**
  - **In other words, if we received what we deserved, we would endure the eternal wrath of a holy God. Yet, God the Father sent God the Son – the Lord Jesus Christ – to bear His wrath on our behalf.**

**Psalm 61:1-3:**

<sup>1</sup>Hear my cry, O God,  
 listen to my prayer;  
<sup>2</sup>from the end of the earth I call to you  
 when my heart is faint.  
 Lead me to the rock  
 that is higher than I,  
<sup>3</sup>for you have been my refuge,  
 a strong tower against the enemy.

**Proverbs 18:10:**

<sup>10</sup> The name of the LORD is a strong tower;  
 the righteous man runs into it and is safe.

- Indeed, the greatest enemy of sinful man is God Himself, who is Holy and righteous.
- **Clearly, though, it is Jesus Christ who is the object of our hope.**
- Phillip Hughes writes, “For every Christian...to flee for refuge is to turn to Christ and in him to find salvation and security.”

### a. He is our Anchor

- **Verse 19** states, “We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain...”
  - The job of an anchor is to hold a ship secure regardless of the conditions of the sea. For, the anchor is fixed to the immovable ocean floor.
  - In the same manner, we are fixed to the immovable and unchangeable object – the Person – of the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - Puritan Samuel Rutherford stated, “Our hope is not hung upon such an untwisted 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.”

### b. He is our Forerunner

- Next, we look to Jesus Christ as our anchor and our forerunner. [Note: this is the only time in all of the New Testament that the term *forerunner* is used.] He has entered “into the inner place behind the curtain...”
- Christ has opened up the Holy of Holies to all believers in Him. For, He is seated on the Mercy Seat. This is why when He died on the cross, the veil was torn from top to bottom – for it was an act of Almighty God. Furthermore, it was through the tearing of His flesh that the veil itself was torn, becoming our forerunner and giving us full access to God within the inner sanctuary.
- Interestingly, the author’s use of the concept of forerunner, like anchor, is a nautical term.
- Louis Talbot, in *Studies in the Epistle to Hebrews*, writes:

The Greek harbors were often cut off from the sea by sandbars, over which the larger ships dared not pass till the full tide came in. Therefore, a lighter vessel, a ‘forerunner,’ took the anchor and dropped it in the harbor. From that moment the ship was safe from the storm, although it had to wait for the tide, before it could enter the harbor... The entrance of the small vessel into the harbor, the forerunner carrying the ship’s anchor, was the pledge that the ship would safely enter the harbor when the tide was full. And because Christ, our ‘forerunner,’ has entered heaven itself, having torn asunder everything that separates the redeemed sinner from the very presence of God, He Himself is the Pledge that we, too, shall one day enter the harbor of our souls and the very presence of God, in the New Jerusalem.”

### c. He is our Melchizedekian High Priest

- Finally, Jesus Christ is our “high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”
- This is a theme that the author has already emphasized, and will do so again in the next Chapter.
- Jesus Christ is indeed, our anchor, our hope, our forerunner, and our intercessor.
- Therefore, we, like Abraham, should live lives of faith and hope in the One who has come before us and has made a way where there was no way.

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- I recently read a very interesting story about a town in Maine – Flagstaff, Maine. In 1950, the town was complexly abandoned because it was flooded that year as part of a large lake for which a dam was being built. In the months before it was to be flooded, all improvements and repairs in the whole town were stopped. What was the use of painting a house if it were to be covered with water in six months? Why repair anything when the whole village was to be wiped out? So, week by week, the whole town became more and more run-down and empty. One of the resident, after it had been flooded, commented concerning the events leading up to the flooding: “Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present.”
  - So it is with the Lord Jesus Christ. Since we have faith in Him, who holds the future in His hands, we can live with power in the present, anchored to Him alone.
  - As the great hymn states:

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame  
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.  
On Christ the solid rock I stand  
All other ground is sinking sand...  
All other ground is sinking sand.