

Hebrews 6:7-20
April 10, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

In our study of Hebrews, we have been following some very discouraged Hebrew Christians who were tempted to go back to their old sacrificial system. The readers of this letter were about to give up; their endurance was running out.

Hypothesis: I have a hypothesis. I bet all of us have had times of real discouragement in our faith journey, but I'm going to bet that most of us were not tempted to turn our backs on God and walk away from Christ. We probably never questioned our salvation in Christ in the process. BUT, I bet all of us have struggled with a perceived "lack of payoff" for following Christ.

Q: Have you ever become discouraged, like these Hebrew Christians, when life didn't appear to be better than the unbeliever? If yes, how did your discouragement play out? [Quit going to church for a time? Prayer life wane? Stop reading the Bible]

Q: How did you turn the corner? How did you regain hope in Christ? [Let people share]

Transition: You will recall that most of this letter so far has been an exhortation to spiritual maturity. He has warned them about drifting or about falling away. The difference between these Hebrew Christians and us is that they really questioned their eternal security. What we do have in common with them is that we are probably not making the spiritual progress we "should," but we need never fear that God will condemn us.

All of us CAN rest in the assurance of salvation BY embracing three ARGUMENTS the writer makes for God's promised salvation to true believers. Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.7:

- Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God.

V.8:

- But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

V.9:

- Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation.

V.10:

- God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

V.11:

- We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.

V.12:

- We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

V.13:

- When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself,

V.14:

- saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.”

V.15:

- And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

V.16:

- Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument.

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.

V.18:

- 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.

V.19:

- We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain,

V.20:

- where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: In order to appreciate the land illustration we read in v.7-8, let's review v.4-5. What were the spiritual privileges that these believers received? [Enlightened; tasted the heavenly gift; shared in the Holy Spirit; tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age]

Q v.7: The writer presents an illustration of “rain often falling” on land that can produce two different outcomes. What is the first outcome described for land that receives a lot of rain to those who farm it? [It produces a crop useful to the farmers. It is considered the blessing of God.]

Q v.8: What is the second outcome described for land that receives a lot of rain to those who farm it? [It produces “thorns and thistles that are worthless and will end up being burned.]

Q: Calling all farmers...how is it that lots of rain can fall on some land and produce a great crop, while other land produce thorns and thistles. What's the difference? [Those who cultivate their land produce a good crop while those who don't reap thorns and thistles.]

Q: When the author describes the land in danger of being burned, does he mean the land will be destroyed? [NO - The burning of a field to destroy the rank growth it had produced was a practice known in ancient times. Its aim was not the destruction of the field itself (which, of

course, the fire could not affect), but the destruction of the unwanted produce of the field. Thereafter the field might be serviceable for cultivation.]

Q: Let's make sure we understand the analogy the author is depicting. The writer compared the spiritual privileges he had just enumerated (vv. 4–5) to a heavenly rain descending on the life of a Christian. If we faithfully cultivate these spiritual gifts in our own lives, what should we expect the result to be? [We should bear much fruit just as we would expect cultivated land to produce a **crop that is useful**. Such productivity brings divine blessings on fruitful believers' lives.]

The idea is that a field proves its worth by bearing fruit; and a true believer, as he makes spiritual progress, bears fruit for God's glory.

Q: If God "rains on us" all of these spiritual privileges, but we do nothing with them, what is the resulting consequence? [Thorns and thistles]

Q: How does God deal with thorns and thistles? [The metaphor recalls God's original curse on the ground (Gen. 3:17–19) and suggests that an unproductive Christian life ultimately ("in the end") falls under the severe condemnation of God and is subject to His blazing wrath and judgment (cf. Heb. 10:27).]

Naturally the reference to "burned" has caused many to think of hell, but there is nothing in the text to suggest this. What the writer is suggesting is that God will chastise us and "burn" the unwanted growth in our lives. Notice that He will burn the thorns and thistles, not destroy the land itself.

Transition: The author knew that his words were both heavy and solemn, so now he felt that a word of encouragement was in order.

Q V.9: What is the general confidence this author has in these Hebrew Christians? [better things are coming – things that accompany salvation]

Q v.10: Then the author goes into more detail to encourage these believers. What does he want them to understand? [God is not unjust; The writer listed some of the fruit that he knew had been produced in their lives (Heb. 6:10): because of their love, they had worked and labored for the Lord; they had ministered to other saints; and they were still ministering (see 1 Thes. 1:3–10; Rev. 2:2). These are some of the "things that accompany salvation."]

Q v.11-12: What is the admonition of the writer given that they have shown their love for God and ministered to others? [The believer must do his part. We must not be lazy ("slothful," the same word as "dull" in Heb. 5:11) but apply ourselves to the spiritual resources God has given us. Their real goal should be the inheritance that is set before them. ***They were to be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit God's promises.***]

Transition: The writer is getting ready to give the believers three arguments for the promised salvation of true believers. Let's look at the first one in v.13-15.

Q v.13-15: What is the first ARGUMENT to help these believers trust in their salvation? [**God's promise** to Abraham.]

Q: What did God promise Abraham? ["I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." God also promised him a son.]

Q: What did Abraham exercise before he received what was promised? [PATIENCE!] Do you recall an example of what he "waited for?" [A son at age 100!]

Q v.16-18: What is the writer's next ARGUMENT? [**God's oath.**]

Q: What is the "added value" of an oath compared to a promise? [When a witness takes an oath in court, he is confronted with the words "so help me God." We call on the greater to witness for the lesser. None is greater than God, so He swore by Himself! It's like God doubled down on His promise to Abraham.]

Observation: But God did not do this only for Abraham. He has also given His promise and oath to "the heirs of promise." (Heb. 6:17). Abraham and his descendants are the first of these heirs (see Heb. 11:9), but all believers are included as "Abraham's [spiritual] seed" (Gal. 3:29). So our assurance of salvation is guaranteed by God's promise and God's oath, "two immutable [unchangeable] things" (Heb. 6:18). We have "strong consolation" (or "great encouragement") concerning the hope set before us!

Q v.18: The author gives us a word picture. He says, "God did this (referring to His promise and oath) so... *we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.*" What do you think the phrase "fled for refuge" suggests? [The Old Testament described "cities of refuge" (Numbers 35:9ff and Joshua 20). God appointed six cities, three on each side of the Jordan, into which a man could flee if he had accidentally killed someone.]

Parallel: 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.

Q v.19-20: What is the final ARGUMENT offered to these Hebrew Christians? [God not only gave us His Promise and His Oath, but **God gave us His Son**].

Q: The writer gives us another beautiful word picture. He suggests the thought of a harbor where **the soul** may securely drop **anchor**. What is the "anchor" for our soul and where does the "anchor" get dropped? [HOPE is our anchor, and it carries our soul to the safest point of all—**the inner sanctuary behind the curtain**—by **Jesus, who went before us**.]

Note: He functions as a **High Priest forever** and gives us hope as an anchor from which it cannot be shaken loose.

LOOK:

Q: We Christians today have more of God's promises than did Abraham! *What is keeping us from making spiritual progress?* *We do not apply ourselves by faith.* To return to the illustration of the farm, the farmer does not reap a harvest by sitting on the porch looking at the seed. He must get busy and plow, plant, weed, cultivate, and perhaps water the soil. The believer who neglects church fellowship, ignores his Bible, and forgets to pray is not going to reap much of a harvest.

Q: Asked another way – How do we “imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised to us?”

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 297–299). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

This progress results in fruitfulness (vv. 7–10). This illustration of a field reminds us of our Lord's Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23), as well as Paul's teaching about the fire testing our works (1 Cor. 3:6–23). A field proves its worth by bearing fruit; and a true believer, as he makes spiritual progress, bears fruit for God's glory. Note that the "thorns and briars" are burned, not the field. God never curses His own!

The crop of God's blessing pictured in Hebrews 6:7 is called "things that accompany salvation" in Hebrews 6:9. Not every believer bears the same *amount* of fruit ("some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty," Matt. 13:23); but every believer bears the same *kind* of fruit as proof that he is a child of God (Matt. 7:15–20). This is the fruit of Christian character and conduct (Gal. 5:22–26) produced by the Spirit as we mature in Christ.

The writer listed some of the fruit that he knew had been produced in their lives (Heb. 6:10): because of their love, they had worked and labored for the Lord; they had ministered to other saints; and they were still ministering (see 1 Thes. 1:3–10; Rev. 2:2). These are some of the "things that accompany salvation."

But he was concerned lest they rest on their achievements and not press on to full maturity and the enjoyment of God's rich inheritance.

This progress demands diligent effort (vv. 11–12). While it is true that it is God who "carries us along" to maturity (Heb. 6:1, 3), it is also true that the believer must do his part. We must not be lazy ("slothful," the same word as "dull" in Heb. 5:11) but apply ourselves to the spiritual resources God has given us. We have the promises from God. We should exercise faith and patience and claim these promises for ourselves! Like Caleb and Joshua, we must believe God's promise and want to go in and claim the land! The illustration of the farm (Heb. 6:7–8), and the admonition to be diligent, always remind me of Solomon's warning (Prov. 24:30–34). Read it—*and heed it!*

The Basis for Spiritual Security (Heb. 6:13–20)

Lest anyone should misinterpret his exhortation to spiritual maturity, the writer ended this section with a tremendous argument for the assurance of salvation. All of us Christians are not making the spiritual progress we should, but we need never fear that God will condemn us. The writer gave three arguments for the certain salvation of true believers.

God's promise (vv. 13–15). God's main promise to Abraham is recorded in Genesis 22:16–17. 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. The phrase "patiently endured" (Heb. 6:15) is the exact opposite of "slothful" (Heb. 6:12). The readers of this letter were about to give up; their endurance was running out (see Heb. 12:1–2). "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.

We Christians today have more of God's promises than did Abraham! What is keeping us from making spiritual progress? *We do not apply ourselves by faith.* To return to the illustration of the farm, the farmer does not reap a harvest by sitting on the porch looking at the seed. He must get busy and plow, plant, weed, cultivate, and perhaps water the soil. The believer who

neglects church fellowship, ignores his Bible, and forgets to pray is not going to reap much of a harvest.

God's oath (vv. 16–18). God not only gave Abraham a promise, but He also confirmed that promise with an oath. When a witness takes an oath in court, he is confronted with the words “so help me God.” We call on the greater to witness for the lesser. None is greater than God, so He swore by Himself!

But God did not do this only for Abraham. He has also given His promise and oath to “the heirs of promise” (Heb. 6:17). Abraham and his descendants are the first of these heirs (see Heb. 11:9), but all believers are included as “Abraham’s [spiritual] seed” (Gal. 3:29). So our assurance of salvation is guaranteed by God’s promise and God’s oath, “two immutable [unchangeable] things” (Heb. 6:18). We have “strong consolation” (or “great encouragement”) concerning the hope set before us! Hebrews is a book of *encouragement*, not *discouragement*!

The phrase “fled for refuge” (Heb. 6:18) suggests the Old Testament “cities of refuge” described in Numbers 35:9ff and Joshua 20. God appointed six cities, three on each side of the Jordan, into which a man could flee if he had accidentally killed someone. The elders of the city would investigate the case. If they determined that it was indeed manslaughter and not murder, they would permit the man to live in the city until the death of the high priest. Then he could return to his home. The members of the slain man’s family could not avenge themselves so long as the man remained in the city.

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.

God's Son (vv. 19–20). Our hope in Christ is like an anchor for the soul. The anchor was a popular symbol in the early church. At least sixty-six pictures of anchors have been found in the catacombs. The Greek stoic philosopher Epictetus wrote: “One must not tie a ship to a single anchor, nor life to a single hope.” Christians have but one anchor—Jesus Christ our hope (Col. 1:5, 1 Tim. 1:1).

However, this spiritual anchor is different from material anchors on ships. For one thing, we are anchored *upward*—to heaven—not downward. We are anchored, not to stand still, but to *move ahead*! Our anchor is “sure”—it cannot break—and “steadfast”—it cannot slip. No earthly anchor can give that kind of security!

The writer then clinches the argument: this Saviour is our “forerunner” who has gone ahead to heaven so that we may one day follow! (Heb. 6:20) 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.

Dr. H.A. Ironside has suggested that the two phrases “within the veil” (Heb. 6:19) and “without the camp” (Heb. 13:13) summarize the Epistle to the Hebrews. Jesus Christ is “within the veil” as our High Priest. We can therefore come boldly to His throne and receive all the help that we need. But we must not be “secret saints.” We must be willing to identify with Christ in His rejection and go “without the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:13). The Hebrew believers who received this letter were tempted to compromise to avoid that reproach. However, if we live “within the veil,” we shall have no trouble going “without the camp.”

Regardless of what approach you take to the exhortation in this section, 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. If we start to *drift from the Word* (Heb. 2:1–4), then we will also start to *doubt the Word* (Heb.

3:7–4:13). Before long, we will get *dull toward the Word* (Heb. 5:11–6:20) and become lazy believers. The best way to keep from drifting is—to *lay hold of the anchor!*

Anchored heavenward! How much more secure can you be?

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 795-797). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

6:7–8. An illustration from nature now drives home the writer’s point. Whenever **rain-soaked** ground is properly productive, it **receives the blessing of God**. Here the writer compared the spiritual privileges he had just enumerated (vv. 4–5) to a heavenly rain descending on the life of a Christian. Their effect should be a **crop useful to those for whom it is farmed**—a reference perhaps to the way other Christians benefit from the lives of fruitful believers (cf. v. 10). Such productivity brings divine blessings on fruitful believers’ lives.

But suppose the land that has received this “rain” is unproductive? Though the NIV introduces the word **land** for a second time in verse 8, the original text seems to relate the statement directly to the “land” mentioned in verse 7. A clearer rendering would be: “But when (or, if) it produces thorns and thistles...” The point is that when a plot of ground that has been rained on is productive, God blesses it. But if it only **produces thorns and thistles**, it is **worthless** (*adokimos*, “disapproved”; cf. 1 Cor. 9:27) **and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned**. The metaphor recalls God’s original curse on the ground (Gen. 3:17–19) and suggests that an unproductive Christian life ultimately (“in the end”) falls under the severe condemnation of God and is subject to His blazing wrath and judgment (cf. Heb. 10:27).

Naturally the reference to “burned” has caused many to think of hell, but there is nothing in the text to suggest this. God’s anger against His failing people in the Old Testament is often likened to the burning of fire (cf., e.g., Isa. 9:18–19; 10:17). Even this writer could say, with intense metaphorical effect, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29). In fact, to think of hell here is to betray inattention to the imagery employed by the author. The burning of a field to destroy the rank growth it had produced was a practice known in ancient times. Its aim was not the destruction of the field itself (which, of course, the fire could not affect), but the destruction of the unwanted produce of the field. Thereafter the field might be serviceable for cultivation.

By choosing this kind of metaphor, the author showed that he did not totally despair of those who took the backward step he was warning against. To be sure, at least prior to severe divine judgment, all efforts to recall such people to Christian faith are futile (6:4–6), but it cannot be said that the impossibility applies in an absolute sense to God Himself. What the author probably meant is that nothing can deter apostates from the fiery retribution toward which they are headed, but once their “land” has been burned it is another matter. Paul believed that those who “have shipwrecked their faith” could profit by the retributive experiences to which they were exposed as a result (1 Tim. 1:19–20). But of course the writer of Hebrews was reticent about the issue of subsequent restoration. That some might not respond to the chastisement was perhaps in mind, but he was mainly concerned about warning against the course of action which leads to such calamitous divine judgment. Nevertheless his deft choice of this agricultural image serves to disclose that the “burning” is both temporary and essentially hopeful.

4. THE CONCLUDING ENCOURAGEMENT (6:9–20)

The author knew that his words were both heavy and solemn, though not to the same degree that subsequent exposition has often made them. He felt that a word of encouragement was then in order. This pattern—stern warning followed by warm encouragement—has already appeared in the previous warning section (3:1–4:16) which concluded in a distinctly positive manner (4:14–16). Similarly the writer drew his warning section here to a conclusion that is alive with hope.

6:9. The author did not want his readers to believe that he had despaired of them. Instead he was convinced of **better things in your case**. The words are like those of a pastor who, after warning his congregation of a dangerous course of action, might say: “But I am sure you people would never do that!” The words are not a theological proposition, as they are sometimes wrongly taken, but an expression of hope. The “better things” about which he had confidence were the **things that accompany salvation**. The “salvation” referred to should be understood in congruity with its meaning in 1:14. It is that experience of victory and glory which the persevering companions of the King inherit. It is also the inheritance-rest which the persevering are allowed to enter. The writer insisted here that he had every expectation that the readers would persevere to the end and acquire these blessings, even though he felt constrained to warn them against a contrary course.

6:10. The author knew that **God is not unjust**. His readers would not be forsaken. God would remember their **work and the love** they had **shown Him** in their helping other believers. The author’s words were a skilled touch on the hearts of his fellow Christians. In speaking of them, he reminded his readers of what they had done for their fellow Christians and were still doing. He thus encouraged them to keep it up while assuring them that God was conscious of all their aid and available to help them in any needed way.

6:11–12. If they would only diligently hold onto the good course they already were pursuing—and of which God was fully mindful—they would thus guarantee the **hope** which is duly awarded to those who so persevere. He added, **We do not want you to become lazy**. The word “lazy” (*nōthroi*) is the same word rendered “slow” in 5:11 in the phrase “slow to learn.” The sluggishness which marked their immaturity was to be shrugged off. (The Gr. of this verse can mean, “We do not want you to *be* lazy” rather than “*become* lazy.”) Their real goal should be the inheritance that is set before them. They were to be imitators of **those who through faith and patience inherit** God’s promises.

6:13–15. 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. In due time his patience was rewarded in that he (lit.) “received the promise.” Since the reference is to the promise given in Genesis 22:17 after the offering of Isaac, the author may have been thinking of the reception of the promise itself as the reward. In that case the idea is that after Abraham had patiently endured (the test involving Isaac), he obtained the promise. **Waiting patiently** translates the participle *makrothymēsas*, related to the noun “patience,” *makrothymias* in Hebrews 6:12. This word, common in the New Testament, refers to the ability to hold one’s feelings in restraint without retaliation against others (cf., e.g., Col. 1:11; 3:12; James 5:7–8, 10). A synonym, *hypomonē*, “endurance, perseverance,” means the ability to remain steadfast in the face of undesirable circumstances; cf. Col. 1:11; Heb. 12:1–3, 7; James 5:11).

6:16–18. At this point Abraham is left behind as a model and **the oath** made to him is treated as for the benefit of Christians generally. That the promise of Genesis 22:18 had messianic aspects is clear from these words: “Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.”

Then the author of Hebrews affirmed that the messianic hope which the promise entailed was sure, not only to Abraham, but also to the Christian **heirs of what was promised**. As in human affairs an oath **puts an end to all arguments**, so too there can be no argument about this expectation since God **confirmed it with an oath**. If anyone, such as a sectarian, denied this eschatological anticipation, he was flying in the face of the strongest possible divine guarantee. 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**.

6:19–20. The image suggested in verse 18 by the words “fled to take hold” of hope was that of a fortified refuge. By a swift change in his figure, the writer then suggested the thought of a harbor where **the soul** may securely drop **anchor**. That anchor has been carried to the safest point of all—**the inner sanctuary behind the curtain**—by **Jesus, who went before us**. The Greek *prodromos* (“who went before us”) suggests a “forerunner,” and if the harbor imagery is still in mind it recalls the role of sailors who leave their ship in a smaller craft in order to carry the anchor forward to a place where it can be firmly lodged. So too the Lord Jesus, by His entrance into the heavenly sanctuary where He functions as **a High Priest forever**, has given to a Christian’s hope an anchorage from which it cannot be shaken loose. Since, therefore, the readers’ hope was sure, they could cling to it tenaciously right to the very end.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pg. 1828). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

6:18 Some skeptics see a contradiction in this verse, which says that it is impossible for God to lie, because Jr 32:27 and Mt 19:26 say that nothing is impossible for God. This objection is similar to the well-worn question “Is God so powerful that He can make a rock so big He cannot move it?” Such objections, however, confuse God’s character with His power to do things. God cannot lie because it is against His nature to do so—He is infinitely holy and all good.