Hope in Hopelessness
Hebrews 6:17-20
Dr. Paul Cannings

Cannings

A. The Promise to Trust (vs. 17-18):

1. In the same way – This refers back to verses 13-16. This passage is stating that someone greater blessed Abraham. This someone is in the order of Melchizedek, so He must be greater than Abraham.

   a) The writer commended God's justice (6:10) in remembering the diligence of believers (6:10–12). This is because they were struggling to be faithful:

   - If we start to *drift from the Word* (Heb. 2:1–4).[1] Not paying careful attention (2:1–4).[2]
   - The best way to keep from drifting is—*to lay hold of the anchor!*[3]
   - Then we will also start to *doubt the Word* (Heb. 3:7–4:13).[4]
   - Hardening of the heart (3:7–4:13).[5]
   - Before long, we will get *dull toward the Word* (Heb. 5:11–6:20) and become lazy believers.[6]
   - The subject of becoming "dull and indifferent" (6:12)
   - Shows the continuation of the same thoughts and problems of being slow to learn (5:11), and Then follows an example of faith, patience, and divine justice (6:13–20).[7]

   b) The writer quoted God's promise to Abraham (6:14; cf. Gen. 22:16–18), which is a promise for all who believe. In view of the faithfulness of God to Abraham, believers in Christ may have confidence that God will fulfill all he has promised.[8]

   c) As an oath ends all arguments in human affairs, so too can no one argue against this expectation, since God confirmed it with an oath. Hodges, Z. C. (1985). Hebrews. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, p. 797). Victor Books.

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[1] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 299). Victor Books.
[2] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 668). Tyndale House Publishers.
[3] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 299). Victor Books.
[4] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 299). Victor Books.
[5] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 668). Tyndale House Publishers.
[6] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 299). Victor Books.
[7] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 668). Tyndale House Publishers.
[8] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 668). Tyndale House Publishers.

2. God desiring even more – God will deliberately and purposefully accomplish, in an even more abundant manner, what He promised to the descendants of Abraham.

   a) 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 *en*couragement, not *dis*couragement![9]
   b) What is recorded in Scripture is intended to strengthen them in their conviction that God's purpose for them is also unalterable. The sworn assurance of God is extended to them (cf. Michel, 252; Spicq, 2:165; Foerster, *TDNT* 3:785). The relevance to Christians of the oath sworn to Abraham lies in the proof that God is absolutely trustworthy in the act of promising (Köster, "Die Auslegung," 106). The unchanging purpose of God provides a strong reason for emulating the trust and steadfastness of Abraham.[10]

3. Show to the heirs of the promise – Once and for all, God is going to display to those who possess His covenant that what He stated is true.
4. Unchangeableness – immutable of His purpose – God's will, what He plans and has the power to execute, are deliberate acts that reflect His determination to fulfill what He has promised.

   a) The word "immutability" is the translation of *ametatheton* (ἀμεταθετον). The word is from *metatithemi* (μετατιθεμι). *Tithemi* (Τιθεμι) means "to place," and *meta* (μετα) prefixed refers to a change. Thus, the compound word means "to change place," thus "to transpose" two things, one of which is put in place of the other. The derived noun *metathemenos* (μεταθεμενος) means "a turncoat." The Greek letter Alpha prefixed to the word makes it mean the opposite to what it meant originally. That is, God will not change His position as to His promise. Having made the promise, He will stand by it. He is not a turncoat. He will not change His position as to His promise, because that promise rests upon His counsel, and that is *ametatheton* (ἀμεταθετον) also, immutable. The word "counsel" is the translation of *boule* (βουλε), which word is allied to *boulomai* (βουλομαι) "to desire, which desire comes from one's reason." The Triune God in council convened brought forth this counsel to the effect that the soul might find a sure refuge in the Lord Jesus. This counsel is immutable.[11]

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[9] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 298). Victor Books.
[10] Lane, W. L. (1991). *Hebrews 1–8* (Vol. 47A, p. 152). Word, Incorporated.
[11] Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 10, pp. 122–123). Eerdmans.

5. Unchangeableness – immutable of His purpose – What the Lord promised to do, He is determined to get it done, and no one or circumstance can prohibit Him, especially since His Word *"is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword….. able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* (Hebrews 4:12)

   a) The word "things" is the translation of *pragma* (πραγμα), which comes from *prasso* (πρασσο), "to do, practice, accomplish, perform." *Pragma* (Πραγμα), therefore, means more than "thing." It speaks of an accomplished fact, of that which has been done. The two accomplished facts, the two things which were done, are the act of God making a promise and the act of God taking an oath. And these are not subject to change. They are immutable.[12]

6. Interposed with an oath – Along with God's unchangeable nature, He guaranteed what He committed to do with the final confirmation of an oath.

   a) But God wanted to prove His promise to believers even more than he did to Abraham (6:17). So he gave Christians both a promise and an oath (6:17–18). "Promised" (6:15) and "oath" (6:16) are the keys to this section. By God's granting both the oath and the promise, believers have the strongest encouragement for trusting God's promises (6:18).[13]
   b) The word "oath" is preceded by the definite article in the Greek text. The oath, which is used with a view to confirming something, is the end of all disputes. Thus, the act of God in confirming His promise by an oath, is justified by human practice. The confident hope which God's oath warrants is justified by the fact that even a human oath puts an end to dispute.[14]

7. It is impossible for God to lie – God is incapable (lacks the ability) of deceiving anyone (Tit. 1:2) by purposefully misrepresenting the truth.
8. We who have taken refuge - The writer reminds this congregation that we who have taken refuge are those who, under intense duress, fled in an attempt to find safety (Hebr. 10:32-29). The Lord God, whose promises never fail and whose Word is enduring (1 Peter 1:22-25) and unchangeable, is confirmed by an oath.

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[12] Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 10, p. 123). Eerdmans.
[13] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 668). Tyndale House Publishers.
[14] Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 10, p. 122). Eerdmans.

a) Generally speaking, God is the believer's refuge, to whom the believer can go in times of trouble (e. g. Ps. 144:2), and those who take refuge in God will inherit the land (Isa. 57:13). The "cities of refuge" were for those who had accidentally killed someone; such cities provided a safe place from revenge taken by the victim's family. [15]

b) In other words, a person who gives in to passions is no more stable than an anchor in sand. Philo uses the image of an anchor when speaking of virtue as a stabilizer in life. To have virtue is like being anchored in a safe place. [16]

c) The writer says that this encouragement is for those of his readers who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them. The Greek word meaning "to flee for refuge" *katapheugo* (καταφευγο) is used in the LXX (Deut. 4:42) of the slayer who killed his neighbor unawares, and who, to escape the avenger, flees for refuge to one of the cities of refuge. Here it speaks of the sinner fleeing for refuge from the penalty of sin, to the High Priest who has offered atonement for him and his sin. His only hope is in his High Priest, the Messiah.[17]

9. Would have strong encouragement – Because an oath binds His promises; God is incapable of deceiving anyone, and He is determined and able to execute what He has promised; we can find strength to overcome evil influences.

   a) The word "consolation" is the translation of *parakaleo, kaleo* (παρακαλεο, καλεο) meaning "to call," *para* (παρα) prefixed being perfective in its function, thus making the compound word mean "to call earnestly," thus "to exhort, to encourage." "Strong" in the Greek text is *ischuros* (ἰσχυρος) which speaks of indwelling strength embodied or put forth either aggressively or as an obstacle to resistance, as an army or a fortress. Thus the encouragement which God's promise and God's oath afford is a strong army or a fortress against doubt and discouragement. God's promise and God's oath should keep these Jews from apostatizing through the encouragement they give.[18]

10. Would have strong encouragement – With all that is taking place in and around us (Hebr. 10:32-34), finding strength in the Lord and knowing God is faithful to execute what He has promised, which is unchangeable, is comforting.

B. The Anchor in Hopelessness (vs. 19-20):

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[15] Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*. (Vol. 4, p. 41). Zondervan.
[16] Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*. (Vol. 4, pp. 41–42). Zondervan.
[17] Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 10, p. 124). Eerdmans.
[18] Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 10, pp. 123–124). Eerdmans.

1. To take hold of the hope – We must decide once and for all to cling with confidence that the Lord fulfills what He has promised. Because these promises are unchangeable, we can find joy in the midst of our pain.
2. This hope we have – We can live with the expectation that God's Word will be executed as promised and will be favorable to us because of the inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14) He has provided us. This should keep our spirits lifted no matter what we may be experiencing.

    a) The qualification of *hope* as something placed in front of the community (προκειμένης ἐλπίδος) defines hope as the objective gift that God extends to his people through Christ. In Hebrews, the word "hope" never describes a subjective attitude (i.e., "our hope," or "hopefulness") but always denotes the objective content of hope, consisting of present and future salvation (so Michel, 253; Grässer, *Glaube*, 32–33; Mora, *La Carta*, 205–6). In vv 18–20 the community is led to consider the character of hope as "promise" and "realization" (cf. v 11), as announcement and fulfillment (cf. 7:19). The writer declares that the eschatological redemptive hope of the Christian community has attained a double certainty through God's irrevocable promise and through the realization already achieved in Christ (Schierse, *Verheissung*, 200). The encouragement and consolation this offers to the congregation are powerful for resisting all assaults and temptations to waver in confidence (Schmitz, *TDNT* 5:797).[19]

3. Anchor for our souls – Even though we may experience deep feelings of intense distress, we can stand firm and be immovable in the midst of our trials (Hebr. 4:14-16) because His promises are unchangeable. This mindset prevents us from being overwhelmed by our troubles and from being depressed, experiencing His joy as our strength (Neh. 8:10; Rom. 15:13).

[19] Lane, W. L. (1991). *Hebrews 1–8* (Vol. 47A, p. 153). Word, Incorporated.

a) An anchor (6:19) in a secure spot would keep a ship from drifting. Christ, the believer's anchor, is in the safest place possible. The anchor, a symbol for Christ, has been found engraved in early Christian tombs.[20]
b) The "anchor" was a frequent metaphor in Greco-Roman literature, especially for the secure hold on hope which moral qualities produced. "Inside the veil" means that believers have a secure hope in the "holy of holies" (cf. Lev 16:2), which only the high priest could enter once a year. [21]
c) The soul is seen as storm-tossed on the troubled sea of life. The soul of the believer, as a tempest-tossed ship, is held by the anchor within the veil, fastened by faith to the blessed reality within the veil.[22]

4. Steadfast and one who enters with the veil – When we do not fail to trust in His unchangeable promises, we continuously mature in the Spirit (Hebr. 5:14), which in turn allows us to experience intimacy with God (Hebr. 10:19-23). This is the rest the writer of Hebrews discusses in 3:7 - 4:11.

   a) 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."[23]
   b) "Steadfast" is the translation of *bebaian* (βεβαιαν) which means "sustaining one's steps in going." Thus it speaks of something which does not break down under the weight of something that steps on it. This hope which the believing soul has in the Lord Jesus is an anchor of the soul which cannot be made to totter nor break down when put under stress and strain.[24]

5. Having become the high priest forever – Jesus, who was a "forerunner for us," provided us the privilege of being in the presence of God (Col. 3:1-4).

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[20] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 668). Tyndale House Publishers.
[21] Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Heb 6:19). InterVarsity Press.
[22] Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 10, p. 125). Eerdmans.
[23] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 298–299). Victor Books.
[24] Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 10, p. 124). Eerdmans.

a) Jesus appears as forerunner often in the book (compare the idea in 2:10; 5:9); the term could be applied to a military vanguard, to first fruits, to the first-place runner and so forth. It always signifies that the rest of the company is coming afterward.[25]

b) The "two unchangeable things" of 6:18 are the two parts of Psalm 110:4, to which the author alludes: "You are a priest forever" and "in the order of Melchizedek." The allusion as used here begins a transition back to a discussion of Melchizedek in chapter 7. In that chapter the author expounds the two parts of Psalm 110:4 in inverse order: "You are a priest forever" (Heb. 7:15–28). "In the order of Melchizedek" (Heb. 7:11–14)." Why are these two proclamations by God "unchangeable"? In the words of Psalm 110:4, "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind." God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18).[26]

[25] Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Heb 6:20). InterVarsity Press.
[26] Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*. (Vol. 4, p. 41). Zondervan.