

**Testamentum Imperium**  
An International Theological Journal

www.PreciousHeart.net/ti

Volume 1 – 2005-2007

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**An Anchor for the Soul - Hebrews 6:13-20**

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*"To ground hope on a false supposition,"  
says Socrates, "is like trusting to a weak anchor."*

**Hebrews 6:12b-30 (NASU)**

but [be] imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.<sup>13</sup> For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,<sup>14</sup> saying,

"I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU

AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU."

<sup>15</sup> And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup> For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. <sup>17</sup> In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath,<sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup> This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,<sup>20</sup> where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

**Hebrews 6:12b – From Exhortation to Exposition**

Our author has just completed in the strongest terms the exhortative portion of what turns out to be a digressive excursion from his main thrust, the digression having begun in chapter 5, verse 10 and returning to his main theme at the end of chapter 6. It is a stern warning to his readers against unfruitfulness by remaining in a

persistent state of infantile faith. He now switches modes within his digression from his urgent hortatory appeal over to an exposition of what a life of patience and faith entail, using Abraham and others as examples.

The need for this exposition is obvious, as his exhortation has included biting rebukes and warnings and the author now moves to encourage them by reminding them of their participation, fellowship and continuity in a deep stream of faithful lives reaching its crescendo in the “hall of faith” in chapter 11. He uses the flog to drive them from the danger of laziness, but he takes no pleasure in its use, instead he now rejoices to bring the healing balm of hope, and that hope is in reception of certain promises.

*but [be] imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Hebrews 6:12b*

The readers are urged to imitate or mime those others who have entered into the promises made to them by God, *dia pistewj kai makroqumia, via faith and patience* (or forbearance). This is a critical point, as he is urging them away from what the flesh desires in both its goal and method of “spirituality,” namely, strenuous and rigorous effort and feedback results that are tangible, timely and proportional to the effort expended. He at once warns them in v12a against laziness, yet paradoxically the place to which he urges them is that very place where all self-effort must cease. Faith and patience imply attentive rest, not strenuous effort. William MacDonald rightly elucidates,

*In one sense, the Christian may seem to be at a disadvantage. He has given up all for Christ, and has nothing material to show for it. Everything is in the future. How then can he be sure that his hope is not in vain?<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, Thomas Nelson, p2176

### Abraham – The Prime Example of Faith and Patience

*For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU." And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. Hebrews 6:13-15*

The writer of Hebrews appeals for his prime example of faith and patience to one of his favorite figures. Abraham is obviously held in fond regard by the writer, as he refers to him no less than ten times, a number exceeded only by Luke (fifteen) and John (eleven).<sup>2</sup> Abraham was both a natural and wise choice by the writer because of the background of his readers who would have registered an “of course” at the mere mention of him.<sup>3</sup>

### Key Points to Ponder

There are several points of particular note in this pericope:

1. The author shifts the emphasis immediately away *from* what we would think ought to be his emphasis (those faithful who are to be imitated) and *to* the initiative and the faithfulness of God. The locus of dynamic becomes God’s initiative, plan, promise and oath. Abraham is shown to be the passive recipient of Divine providence and blessing. This is not to imply quietism<sup>4</sup> on the part of Abraham or that he did nothing in response to God but that it was God who would bring about all blessing.
2. Verse 13 begins, “*When God made his promise to Abraham,*” but there are compressed into that brief stub of a sentence decades and multiple interactions between God and the man who would become Abraham. (*Genesis 12:1-4; Gen 13:14-1; Gen 15; Gen*

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<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *The Expositors Bible Commentary* – Hebrews/James, Zondervan, p59

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> **Quietism:** a heretical form of religious mysticism founded by Miguel de Molinos, 17th-century Spanish priest. Molinism, or quietism, developed within the Roman Catholic Church in Spain and spread especially to France, where its most influential exponent was Madame Guyon. She preached her doctrines to members of the French aristocracy, winning a convert and friend in Madame de Maintenon, Louis XIV’s wife, and an ally in Archbishop Fénelon. Another quietist was Antoinette Bourignon. The essence of quietism is that perfection lies in the complete passivity of the soul before God and the absorption of the individual in the divine love to the point of annihilation not only of will but of all effort or desire for effort. Molinos talked about an entire cessation of self-consciousness, and Madame Guyon maintained that she could not sin, for sin was self, and she had rid herself of self.

17:1-22; Gen 18; Gen 22: *culminating in vv16-18*). In each case we see God approaching Abraham to instigate an advance or development in the relationship.

3. When one reads the Genesis accounts of Abram/Abraham's life one is not particularly impressed with the morality, bravery or constancy of the man. After all he sold his wife out to the Egyptians and tried to do God's work by taking Hagar to bed. Yet William Newell points out the following astounding fact,

*He failed in the matter of Egypt (Gen 12); and in the matter of Hagar and in the matter of Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 16); but did you ever observe this fact: NOT ONE SIN of an Old Testament saint is recorded in the New Testament?*<sup>5</sup>

This overwhelming grace, that the errors and sins, even murders (2 Samuel 11) of the OT saints should be utterly ignored in the NT, is an argument from silence, but it is a silence that rumbles through history and commands profound respect in this dispensation. Is not this utter silence regarding sin part of the point of our author as he commends the faith of Abraham? Abraham was not the recipient of Divine blessing because he was good, rather because he believed (Romans 4:3), and he believed because of the initiative of God.

4. Although our text says, "*he [Abraham] received the promise,*" the fact of the matter is that Abraham did not receive in his earthly life the entirety of the fulfillment of the package of what was promised. An entire nation is not born in one generation. Furthermore, Jesus tells the Pharisees in John 8:56, "*Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.*" And our own author asserts regarding Abraham and other saints in Hebrews 11:13,

*"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth."*

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<sup>5</sup> William R. Newell, *Hebrews Verse-by-Verse A classical Evangelical Commentary*, Kregel, p204

So the question must be raised as to what, in fact, did Abraham receive for our author to be able to make the above confident assertion? Commentators variously suggest he has in mind:

1. The birth of Isaac as a deposit in earnest.
2. More, including Abraham being able to see the fruits in the distant future per John 8:56<sup>6</sup> and Hebrews 11:13.
3. By placing Abraham in the ideal, the author might be saying from the perspective of his readers, that as of their own time, Abraham (from paradise), and they as his descendants had certainly seen the nation established and the savior born.

A key pivot is this: Did Abraham receive *those things* which were promised, or did he receive the *promise itself*? A literal rendering points toward Abraham having received the *promise itself*<sup>7</sup>. This is supported by v15, kai {outws – “and in this manner” and then the parenthetical (“having waited patiently”) “he obtained the promise”. These two are not attracting to one another and the kai {outws seems to point back at the previous sentence, not to the “having waited patiently.” Thus, we would have God in v14-15, “saying, ‘I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.’ kai {outws - *And in this manner*, [ie, God making the promise] - *(having waited patiently) he obtained the promise.*” Quite simply then we have God promising and Abraham receiving that promise itself. The “having waited patiently” would then refer to Abraham’s trust in God leading up to the event of God promising, not being subsequent to the promise and prior to its fulfillment.

Another support for this view is v17 where the author speaks of “*God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath*”. This indicates that the heirs are not yet in reception of the objects contained in the will or estate, rather they are in possession of the legal writ of the will made and ratified by the testator Himself, sworn with an oath. It is the legal equivalent of possession, but not yet actual or realized. This seems to fit better with what the author is trying to get across, that God is faithful, so patiently wait in blessed hope and

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<sup>6</sup> Morris, pp59-60

<sup>7</sup> Zane Hodges, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – NT*, Chariot Victor, p797

certainty for the future execution of the will. Whichever way one solves this puzzle, the important point is that God promised, and that is sufficient reason for trust.

5. Verse 15 asserts that Abraham waited “patiently” - makroqumhsas. Differentiating this word, Zane Hodges explains, *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, {upomonh, “endurance, perseverance,” means the ability to remain steadfast in the face of undesirable circumstances.*<sup>8</sup>

The implications should not be lost as to the attribute the author assigns to Abraham: He waited for God’s promise without retaliating or lashing out while it may have seemed God took overlong. The readers of his letters were being commended to the same attitude of restrained trust.

Newell illustrates this increasing state of resting faith – this makroqumhsas,

*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. Indeed he had said to his servants when on the way to offer up Isaac, “Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, and come again to you.” And to Isaac he said, “God will provide Himself the lamb!” Read Gen 22 often!<sup>9</sup> (emphasis mine).*

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Newell, p204

### God the Great Promisekeeper

*For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. <sup>17</sup> In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, <sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, **Hebrews 6:16-18a***

The fallible and deceptive nature of mankind, fallen in Adam, is here contrasted with the infallible and upright nature of the Deity. The word *anropoi* is used for “men” here, a reference to humanity – *homo sapiens*, in contrast to God or angelic beings. We are prone to forget just why swearing by a higher authority to tell the truth is even necessary, as taking oaths is so common in the human experience. Witnesses in court do it, brides and bridegrooms at the altar do it, and parents make promises to their children. But sadly, the only reason why we need swear is because we as a species in the first Adam, are so given to lying and deception.

Religious devotion, whether pagan or Jewish was such in the time of the writing of Hebrews that anyone swearing an oath by his god, a high place, an idol, or in the case of the readers, Jehovah, was considered to be in utter earnest. It was a tacit understanding that the one greater would strike or bring ill on the swearer if the oath were violated. Thus because of such respect and fear, such an oath would be the “end of every dispute.”

In v17, “*In the same way God... interposed with an oath,*” the Hebrew readers have to endure the embarrassing experience of Jehovah stooping low and graciously taking up oath-swearing to make His point with fallen creatures. Word keeping and faithfulness at all costs was such a foreign experience to the intended parties of the covenants made between men that God took the extraordinary step of taking an oath in order to affirm His own earnestness in the eyes of the recipients of promise. Humans tend to view oath taking as a solemn event, but the necessity of oath taking should make us red-

faced with shame before our Creator, much as carrying a set of keys is a constant reminder that we are a thieving race, not to be trusted.<sup>10</sup>

Given the immutable and holy nature of God it should have been obvious that God's simple word, His promise, is infinitely sufficient and trustworthy. In observing the various passages where a human is brought to the heavenly throne room (e.g., Isaiah 6; Revelation, etc) one does not get the sense that ignoring or distrusting God's word was even considered, much less a particularly wise course of action.

The Lord, as recorded in Numbers 23:19 puts the following words into the mouth of the pagan prophet Balaam,

*“God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (NIV)*

Regarding God's reason for making the promise whilst confirming it with an oath, MacDonald says,

*God wanted his believing people to be absolutely assured that what He promised would come to pass. Actually His bare promise would have been enough,<sup>11</sup>*

### **Who is being promised to by God?**

*v17, “desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose”*

The Holy Spirit here makes it clear through our author that God's intent in making the promise was not for the benefit of Abraham alone, but that the effect of making the promise, and under oath, was to impact the heirs (plural) as well. One gets the sense that at once God is both graciously making a unilateral and wonderful promise and He is attempting to gain the attention and trust of the objects of His love, a spiritually deaf, distrustful and trollish people, and that He

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<sup>10</sup> To illustrate this point I have found it helpful to ask people why they carry keys. They uniformly answer, “So I can start my car and get into my house.” I answer, “No, you carry keys to keep other people from starting your car and to keep other people from getting into your house! Ownership of keys is a tacit acknowledgement on your part to the depravity of man, and it is no good for you to say man is inherently good.” The same principle applies to oath-taking.

<sup>11</sup> MacDonald, p2176



must turn the volume up to eardrum vibrating levels to do so. How amazing is grace, how sweet the sound.

The author further magnifies his statement by pointing out that the determined counsel – *boulhs autou*, or plan, of the Almighty is immutable – “*unchangeable*”. What God decrees will certainly come to pass, and in this case his decree encompasses the full execution of the will or promise on behalf of the heirs thereto. MacDonald states it compactly,

*God’s will does not change. He has his purpose and he works it out. This was what the oath said.*<sup>12</sup>

### **Two Immutables, No Three!**

*v18, so that by two **unchangeable** things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.*

The word translated *unchangeable* here is *ametaqetos*, and is a repeat of that used in v17 where it is used to refer to God’s plan or purpose. The two unchangeable or immutables in this verse, namely the promised word of God and the oath on His own Name, link steely hands with God’s plan in the previous verse to stand in stark contrast to the “flexibility” of human promises. So in fact we find here the absolute resilience and stiffness of the resolve of God, thrice stated. Just as Isaiah’s seraphim cry out about the Lord, “*Holy, Holy, Holy!*” indicating the absolute untainted holiness of the Divine Being, so here the very Holy Spirit Himself moves the human author to declare the blazing intent of that same Eternal Being to bring about His thrice declared blessing in the life and future of the believer:

- God’s *plan*:           Immutable!
- God’s *promises*:    Immutable!
- God’s *oath*:           Immutable!

The reader must pause to ask, “*In all human experience or knowledge, or in all the universe, is there anything more certain than the future of the believer? If seraphim – mere creatures - declare the*

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<sup>12</sup> Morris, p60

*Lord thrice holy and are considered reliable in their report, what must it mean if the Holy Spirit Himself causes God's intent to bring about blessing to be written thrice immutable?"*

**Flee to Safety! Run!**

*v18, ... we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.*

Here the writer refers to the “cities of refuge” to which a manslayer (not a murderer but someone who has caused the death of another “unwittingly” or “unawares”) was instructed to flee for safety, “until the death of the High Priest.” (See Ex 21:13; Num 35; Deut 19; Josh 20)

Unfortunately the NASU, although technically proper, fails to adequately convey the emotion of the word, *katafeugw* as it is used here, and it places perhaps too much emphasis on having arrived at the place of refuge and not enough on the act of fleeing. Here the NJKV is better, “fled for refuge” (see also Acts 14:6).

In the Law, the person guilty of bloodguilt had to stay within the official bounds of the city of refuge until the death of the high priest, or risk being killed by the “avenger of blood.” In the case of our illustration, the High Priest (v20) dies, but then he lives “forever!” Furthermore, we discover that this same Person who is the High Priest is also the “avenger of blood” (John 5:22, Rev 19; 20; 21). This means that the person who has run to the city of refuge is forever safe because a) the High Priest dies, then lives forever thus the refuge is replaced with an expanded and permanent one, b) the person is identified with the side of the avenger in any case (John 5:24-27; Gal 2:19-20), c) God Himself is the refuge (Psalm 46:1).

What is being fled from is not directly articulated, but considering the use of the “city of refuge” metaphor the fleeing is away from the punishment of bloodguilt and more specifically the vengeance to be wreaked by the “avenger of blood.” Newell explains,

*What a picture, both of Hebrew sinners, to whom [the author] was writing; yea, and of us all who have believed...For they slew Him “unwittingly,” “unawares”! So the Lord Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. ... But note that there was no ransom to be taken for the murderer (distinct in all the Law from the ‘manslayer’), just as no refuge from coming wrath is provided for the rejecter of Christ (Num 35:31).”<sup>13</sup>*

Our author in vv 18-20 includes himself in the number of those who have fled for refuge, which is a continuation of the “we desire that each of you” in v11. The “city of refuge” illustration also needs to be seen in the greater light of Hebrews 11:15-16 in which the great “hall of faith” ones rejected their native country to flee towards a heavenly country and the city God has prepared for them. The “city of refuge” of the Law implied temporary physical safety only, but the heavenly city sets aside all possibility of physical and spiritual danger forever and is a place of bliss and blessing of the highest degree.

#### **Powerful Encouragement to Take Hold of Hope**

*v18 ...we who have taken refuge would have **strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.***

The author of Hebrews switches metaphors more often than Imelda Marcos changed shoes. He now switches from the OT metaphor of fleeing to the city of refuge to a nautical term as well as a gastronomic one. Not only that, he does it all in one breath!

In fact, there are at least seven figures of speech used to make his points in a mere three verses:

1. *The City of Refuge* and *fleeing* to it for safety.
2. *Taking hold of hope*, a nautical term.
3. *Hope set before us* as a banquet, gastronomic spread or a visual feast (12:2).
4. *Hope as an anchor*, a nautical term.

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<sup>13</sup> Newell, p206

5. *Jesus the forerunner*, a nautical term.
6. *Jesus the high priest*.
7. *The order of Melchizedek*, both kingly and non-Aaronic priestly.

The use of nautical terms by our author should not be missed as they denote an intimate familiarity with the sea and seamanship. Other nautical references occur in 2:1; 3:6, 14; 10:23, 38.

In our passage now the readers are offered hope, spread out as a magnificent banquet before them - *prokeimai*, and are urged in the strongest possible terms to join those who *take hold* - *krathsai* (aorist active infinitive, a completed, one time “hold fast” event as opposed to an ongoing work of clinging) of it. All of this hinges on the {ina or purpose clause that starts this verse. God purposed, promised and took an oath *in order that* – {ina – the readers and author would together be *iscuran paraklhsin* – *mightily encouraged* to lay hold of the hope offered. *Paraklhsin* is the cognate of *paraklhtos* – *the Comforter*, the title given the Holy Spirit by Jesus.

Two notes about Biblical hope:

- a) Hope is a vital function of that which makes us human. Hope is the fundamental principle that drives every person forward toward some desired goal, experience, improvement, or state of being, whether holy or profane. Loss of hope is fatal to joy and pleasure in our present state. “*But hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?*” Romans 8:24b-c
- b) Biblical hope is Spirit sanctified desire and its object, although yet unseen, is absolutely certain. Biblical hope is grounded firmly in the nature, plan, word and oath of God. So for the believer, the experience of Biblical hope involves intense emotion and anticipation, but the fulfillment is certain. For this reason Biblical hope can be called “future certainty,” but this should not imply any diminishing of the sense of excited anticipation in the here and now. Positionally speaking Biblical hope is certain, as it is rooted in God’s character. Existentially it feels highly risky, especially in light of all that a Christian might give

up to obtain the object by faith. This is the purpose of our pericope and that of chapter 11 as well.

Here is the application: We all operate on the basis of hope. The questions are, “*For what do we hope? Is the object of our hope Biblical or not? Is what we hope for sanctified or merely fallen wishful thinking? What is the certainty of attaining the object of our hope? Am I using a non-sanctified means (good works or self-discipline for example) to obtain the Biblical goal, or am I relying on God’s provision of grace?*” In our text we are not commanded to *do any righteous act*, rather we are encouraged to *grasp with faith* the object proffered, namely, “*the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope*” and “*the Father...caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*” With God the road may be bumpy, thrilling, bewildering and precipitous, but the arrival at the object is as certain as God’s own Person as expressed in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Living One.

#### **The Anchor for the Soul**

*v19, This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil,*

We now come to the satisfaction of the existential need that is in every human. The author clearly states that “we,” that is, those who have fled to take refuge, presently have hope as an anchor of the soul. First, let us determine what the author intends by his use of the word *soul* – *psuch*.

Is he using the word in the strictly technical sense referring to the immaterial aspect or spirit of a person, or is he using it to refer to something more? Morris states,

*“‘Soul’ may be the way to understand it, but the term is often used of the life of man and this seems to be the meaning here. The author is not simply saying that hope secures the ‘spiritual’ aspect of man. He is affirming that hope forms and anchor for the whole life. The person with a living hope has a steadying anchor in all he does.”<sup>14</sup>*

This view of the word meaning “life” seems to fit best with v18 that speaks of fleeing to the place of refuge as a positional, objective place of security, and the hope that is set before them and which is grasped functioning (v19) as the existential, stabilizing anchor for the entire present life as a whole: spiritual, moral, emotional, relational and intellectual.

One notices immediately that the possession of “this hope” as an anchor for the soul is a present tense experience, while the “have taken refuge” of v18 is a past tense event. Thus, the current experience of ongoing stability – having the soul anchored - depends on the antecedent action of having taken refuge. This is at abrupt odds with the view of salvation that hinges salvation of the soul in a future evaluation of present performance of acts of righteousness, works, discipline or religious devotion, sacraments, etc. In other words the views are, “be good to get into heaven” as opposed to “be good because you are already a citizen of heaven, an immutable fact.” So present assurance is anchored (pun intended) in the past act of seeking refuge.

**Application: Putting it all Together**

*vv19-20a, This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us,*

Our author switches metaphors, hot-potato like, to the nautical terms “anchor” and “sure and steadfast.”

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<sup>14</sup> Morris, p61

Adam Clark handles this so admirably that it is best simply to let him speak. It should be noted that he *de facto* agrees with Morris as to the understanding of psuch,

*The apostle here changes the allusion; he represents the state of the followers of God in this lower world as resembling that of a vessel striving to perform her voyage through a troublesome, tempestuous, dangerous sea. At last she gets near the port; but the tempest continues, the water is shallow, broken, and dangerous, and she cannot get in:*

*In order to prevent her being driven to sea again she heaves out her sheet **anchor**, which she has been able to get within the pier head by means of her **boat**, though she could not herself get in; then, swinging at the length of her cable, she rides out the **storm** in confidence, knowing that her **anchor** is sound, the ground good in which it is fastened, and the cable **strong**. Though agitated, she is **safe**; though buffeted by **wind** and **tide**, she does not drive; by and by the **storm** ceases, the tide flows in, her **sailors** take to the capstan, wear the **ship** against the **anchor**, which still keeps its **bite** or hold, and she gets safely into port.<sup>15</sup>*

Like the ancient freighter crewmember in the Mediterranean, the believer is in a storm tossed sea of life. The believer is not presently in port, but he knows it is there and is near its safety and comfort. Christ, the “forerunner” in fact is within the confines of that safe harbor already, *within the veil*, calling back and counseling hope and comfort, for tomorrow will certainly bring entry into that veil of safety.

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<sup>15</sup> Adam Clark, [www.studyLight.org/com/acc/view.cgi?book=heb&chapter=006](http://www.studyLight.org/com/acc/view.cgi?book=heb&chapter=006), Hebrews Chapter 6

It is of critical importance to grasp these two concepts of *forerunner* and *within the veil* and hold them close. As D. Anderson-Berry puts it,

*The word translated “forerunner” is found nowhere else in the NT. This expresses an idea never contemplated in the Levitical economy, for the high priest entered the holiest only as a representative. He entered where none could follow. But our Forerunner is a pledge that where He is, we also shall be. As Forerunner He (1) announced our future arrival there; (2) took possession of heaven’s glories on our behalf; and (3) has gone to be able to bid His people welcome when they come, and to present them before the Majesty of heaven.*<sup>16</sup>

Believers are so radically identified with Christ, the Last Adam (1 Cor 15:45), and so utterly dead to and cut off from the First Adam, indeed cut off from him in crucifixion (Gal 2:20) that wherever Christ is, there believers are as well. It should be remembered that a *forerunner* is a member of the crew, one with them, and just because he rows ahead in the dingy to drop the anchor in the safe harbor, his is no less a member of the crew, of the same blood and identity. In this metaphor Christ is not only a member of the crew, He is also Captain of the ship. Where he goes, the crew indeed follows.

It is neither sacrilegious nor disrespectful to adamantly affirm, “*Wherever the glorified Christ is now, I am already there.*” Indeed Paul says this very thing, “*But God... made us alive together with Christ... and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*” (Eph 2:4-6) What greater security can there be for the child of God?

Finally, it should be pointed out that the sense of assurance of security that our author is conveying at the end of chapter six is so clear that it indeed makes it absurd to suggest that the first portion of chapter six (the infamous 6:4-6) can be about loss of salvation.

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<sup>16</sup> D. Anderson-Berry, *Pictures in Acts*, p 36ff



**Pastoral Application Notes: The Existential Need**

As a pastor my greatest concern is always to bring the truths of the Word of God to bear on the lives of those in the sphere of influence of the pulpit ministry. The following is offered as food for thought for those who will be teaching Hebrews 6:13-20 from the pulpit. Please use this material in any way you wish, either to stir your own thinking or to quote directly. If you do quote directly please of course attribute works to the proper author. *Blessings in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, E.P.*

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The author of the epistle to the Hebrews is neither bashful nor subtle in his apprehension of, sensitivity to, and personal identification with the essential need of the human soul.

The need burrows through arms length mental assent to propositional, objective claims about God and salvation. It brushes aside the temporary and transient peace that accompanies well intended spiritual self-discipline, sincere religious devotion and moral performance as the basis for appeasing or relating to the Deity, a puzzling disappointment painfully familiar to the Hebrew readers of the epistle. In the end it transcends all attempts to discipline, philosophize, ignore, entertain, outlive, drug or to assuage it.

That need is for palpable and personal assurance of one's purpose, union, safety, reconciliation and position of favor with a terrifyingly holy Almighty God in the midst of the turmoil, distraction, frailty, sin, failure and doubt that accompany the human condition. It is visceral, akin to fear or hunger, and of its very nature prompts a search for satisfaction larger than, and outside of oneself. In fallen man all attempts to satisfy its craving result in the worst abuses of the human faculties. In the effectually called it drives one to the foot of the Cross. In regenerate man, in Christ, the Spirit uses it to drive us to life in, and identification with, the Living One<sup>17</sup>. In fact, it cries out for action and intervention by the Person of God Himself.

It is the existential need of the human soul.

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<sup>17</sup> Miles Stanford, *The Green Letters*, Clarion Classics, Zondervan 1975, p43.

### **God both Instigates and Answers the Need**

Oddly, in the course of Biblical and church history we discover that God at times both instigates and answers this need, as both antagonist and protagonist.

Toward the unsaved, the apostle Paul acknowledges that the Creator actively sets up man to experience the need. In other words, God antagonizes. In the same breath Paul then penetrates that thin shield of self-assurance thrown up by the Areopagite philosophers so as to expose the soft underbelly of their existential human need hidden by their disparate philosophies:

*"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;" Acts 17:24-27*

As an example of the effectually called we find God providentially disturbing and herding the Philippian jailer to the Cross. From the purely human perspective one might even be tempted to accuse God of brinksmanship,

*“And suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!’ And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’”* **Acts 16:26-30**

Indeed, regarding the Spirit’s active precipitating of this raw sensation in the very child of God, Miles Stanford in *The Green Letters* quotes J.N. Darby to this effect,

*“The Holy Spirit always reasons down from what God is, and this produces a total change in my soul. It is not that I abhor my sins: indeed I may have been walking very well: it is ‘I abhor myself.’ This is how the Holy Spirit reasons; He shows us what we are, and that is one reason why He often seems to be very hard and does not give peace to the soul, as we are not relieved until we experientially, from our hearts, acknowledge what we are.*

*“Until the soul comes to that point He does not give it peace – He could not; it would be healing the wound slightly. The soul has to go on until it finds there is nothing to rest on but the abstract goodness of God; and then, ‘If God be for us, who can be against us?’”*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Miles Stanford, *The Green Letters*, p20.

Augustine of Hippo happily admits this wonderful discovery after abandoning himself to Christ when he confesses, “*You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they rest in thee.*”<sup>19</sup>

***Had He sworn by Heaven and earth, I  
might have feared,  
lest, as they shall pass away, so His  
word might.***

***But when the Most High swears by  
Himself Who abides forever,  
my fears are gone.”***

*- 19<sup>th</sup> century English divine Robert  
Govett*

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<sup>19</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, Book I.