

XIV. Anchor of the Soul

April 3/4/5, 2018

Hebrews 6:13-20

Aim: To put our hope and trust in the unchangeable promise and oath of God through Christ, who is the anchor of our soul.

Schreiner: Verses 11-12 conclude with an exhortation to be diligent so that the hope given to believers will be realized, so that they will inherit the promises through faith and patience. Verses 13-20 consider the nature of God's promise, the need for patience to obtain the promise, and the hope that belongs to believers by virtues of the promise. The main point of the section is found in verse 18. He wants the readers to be encouraged so they will seize the hope set before them, so they will not miss out on the promise pledged to them.

Phillips: Encouragement comes in many forms. Hebrews 6:13-20 brings two types of encouragement. The first is a heartening example that shows how perseverance led to hope and blessing. Seeing someone who walked before us and found success always encourages us to follow in those same footsteps. The second form of encouragement is perhaps the best kind: the assurance of ultimate success.

A. Abraham's Example (Hebrews 6:13-15)

1. Abraham's Situation

Bruce: To our author Abraham was a significant figure, not only because of his faith in the promise of God, but also because of the part he plays in the story of Melchizedek. God's faithfulness to His promise to Abraham is a token of His faithfulness in regard to another of His promises, that concerning the Melchizedek priesthood. These two promises hang together, and as Paul worked out the one in Galatians so our author will work out the other.

Phillips: The example is that of the patriarch Abraham, who lived roughly four thousand years ago. Abraham is a pivotal figure of the Old Testament, his story spanning fourteen chapters in the Book of Genesis, from chapters 12 to 25. It was with Abraham that God established His covenant, and it was to Abraham that God made the promises in which we Christians find our hope. This is why Abraham is called our father in the faith (Rom. 4:11); in both Romans and Galatians, the apostle Paul makes the strongest of connections between Abraham's experience and our salvation. It is no surprise, then, that the writer of Hebrews turns to the record of Abraham for the encouragement of his readers.

Phillips: The story of Abraham's life is that of perseverance leading to greater and greater faith. Early on he was barely able to follow, often doubtful and sometimes angry. Abraham doubted God's promise, and so he had an illegitimate child through his wife's maidservant Hagar. All through Abraham's life, despite the weakness of his faith, God encouraged him so that his faith persevered and grew. He learned to trust God, and finally he received the child of promise, Isaac. Verses 13-15 recall a specific episode late in Abraham's life. In Genesis 22 God commanded him to offer up his promised son Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham would have to offer this precious son's life, the child of the promise, as an expression of absolute confidence in God. Not knowing how God would deliver him, but trusting His Word completely and demonstrating the kind of faith long years of perseverance had produced, Abraham prepared to offer Isaac's life. Genesis 22:11-14 tells what happened. After this, God renewed the promise given so many

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times before. In response to Abraham's great faith the angel brought the message from heaven (Gen. 22:16-17)

Schreiner: Here the focus is on Gen. 22:17, where God swears to Abraham that he will bless him. The blessing comes after the most dramatic and terrifying test in Abraham's life, for the Lord summoned him to sacrifice the son of the promise, Isaac. Abraham's faith in God shines, for he takes the Lord at His word and is prepared to sacrifice his son, the son of the promise, if God so commands. The Lord, of course, spares Isaac and pronounces the words of promise that Hebrews reflects on.

2. God's Promise (6:13-14)

a) Promise (6:13a)

¹³*For when God made a promise to Abraham...*

Schreiner: The notion of promise links verse 13 to the previous section (cp. v. 12). Believers are encouraged in verse 12 to inherit the promises through faith and patience. Now the author wants them to contemplate the nature of the promise and the grandeur and faithfulness of the one who made it by reflecting on the promise made to Abraham. The promise made to Abraham is a central theme of Genesis. God promises Abraham land, offspring, and universal blessing (Gen. 12:1-3; 18:17-17; 22:17-18). Such promises drive the story line in the Pentateuch and indeed all of Scripture, for the promises made to Abraham are the vehicles by which the offspring of the woman will triumph over the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Blessing is promised for the whole world through the offspring of Abraham; and the NT, of course, proclaims that Jesus Christ is the one through whom the stunning blessings granted to Abraham become a reality.

MacArthur: No one in the universe is greater than God. And the reason He cannot lie is that He invented truth. He is truth. By definition, whatever He says is true. By the very nature of His person, He cannot lie. He has no capacity to lie. His promises, then, are first of all secured by His Person. Whatever He does has to be right and whatever He says has to be true. If God makes a promise, therefore, He not only *will* keep it, He *must* keep it.

b) Swear (6:13b)

...since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself...

Schreiner: The purpose here is to underline the certainty of the promise. God took an oath to certify the promise to Abraham. But by what did God swear? On what basis did He affirm His truthfulness? God can't swear by anyone greater than Himself, for there is no being in heaven or on earth greater than God. God possesses all perfections and is infinitely perfect in all of them. Hence, since no being is greater than God, God swore by Himself. God is the definition of greatness, and since no one surpasses Him or can surpass Him, He couldn't swear by any higher entity.

Hughes: The significance of this from the perspective of the writer of Hebrews is that whereas God had repeatedly *promised* Abraham He would make a great nation from him, He here *swore* an oath to do so. God was so pleased with Abraham's supreme act of faith that He did something He had never done before—He swore that His promise would come to pass.

c) Bless (6:14)

...¹⁴saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."

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Schreiner: The oath God swore to Abraham is cited in Gen. 22:17, assuring him that He would bless him and multiply his offspring. The link between the ‘promise’ in verse 13 and ‘blessing’ in verse 14 shows that these two terms mutually interpret each other. What the writer particularly emphasizes is that God’s promise was accompanied by an oath. This is no ordinary promise, for God underscores it with an oath, and thus the promise and the blessing will certainly come to pass. There is no question about whether the blessing will come to pass since God swore that He would do so.

Bruce: The particular promise in view here is that made by God to Abraham after his offering up of Isaac (Gen. 22:16ff.). But this was a recapitulation and elaboration of God’s earlier promise to Abraham that He would bless him and make of him a great nation (Gen. 12:2ff.).

3. Abraham’s Receipt (6:15)

¹⁵ *And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.*

Schreiner: Verse 15 seems to interrupt the flow of the argument. Verses 13-14 emphasize the inviolability of God’s word, for He swore to Abraham that He would bless him. We expect the author to say, therefore, that the promise is guaranteed by virtue of the promise of God. Instead the text turns to the response of Abraham, affirming that he obtained the promise because he was patient. What strikes the writer is Abraham’s patience. He endured in faith as the years passed. Though there were ups and downs in his life, he persevered in believing. How often it seemed as if the promise would not be realized, for Isaac was a long time coming, and then after he arrived, God asked Abraham to sacrifice him.

Schreiner: The writer wants the readers to imitate (cp. v. 12) Abraham. The circumstances and sufferings of life suggest that God’s promises are a charade, that they are disconnected from reality. But Abraham faced the same temptation as the readers, for he too was tempted to think that God’s promise would not come true. Like Abraham they should continue to believe even when their situation suggests that God’s promises are false. The readers should be patient but their patience is founded on the promise of God, a promise that will not be broken. The summons to patience and perseverance is not a call ultimately to human virtue. Abraham was patient precisely because of the unbreakable promise of God. His faith was grounded and established in the word of God, and thus what God pledged to him fueled his patience.

Bruce: There was much in God’s promise to Abraham whose fulfillment lay in the distant future, but in the restoration to Abraham of the son upon whose survival the promise depended Abraham did, in a very substantial sense, ‘obtain the promise.’

Phillips: Abraham’s example should encourage us, for like Abraham our patient endurance will see the fruit of salvation. This is what the writer of Hebrews points out in verse 15: ‘Thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.’ The emphasis here is on the assurance of the promise. The point is that by persevering in the faith, despite great obstacles, and despite many causes for doubt and unbelief, Abraham received God’s promise. This is the encouragement the writer of Hebrews want us to hear, using the example of Abraham. We have many reasons to doubt, we are tired of trusting God for the things we do not have, and we are weary of looking to the future. Therefore the writer says, in effect, ‘Look to this example as encouragement to press onward in faith toward God.’

Hughes: This is an implicit call to the church for a faith that is so firm it enables steadfastness through the uneven seas of life. Abraham’s faith saw the unseen. He saw a living God who was

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sovereign in all of life—he saw his sacrificed son resurrected and living on—he saw himself fathering a sea of humanity—he saw blessing for the whole earth. And because he saw this, he was gloriously long-suffering through many years.

Phillips: This is how the passage fits into the flow of the writer's thought. His purpose is to exhort the Hebrew Christians to persevere in the faith despite their great hardship. In the preceding verses, he chastised them for their lack of maturity and growth (5:11-6:3), warned them of the danger of falling away (6:4-8), and encouraged them with good signs he had seen among them (6:9-12). Now, using the example of Abraham's perseverance, he informs them of a key principle, that growth in assurance comes through perseverance. Abraham, by waiting patiently, received certainty with regard to the promise, and the same will be true for us. It is noteworthy that the verb used here, *epitynchanō*, is not the ordinary verb for 'receive' or 'obtain'; it has the particular connotation of 'arriving at' or 'reaching.' The sense is that the promise had been there all along, but by persevering patiently amidst all sorts of doubts and obstacles, with great encouragement from God. Abraham finally 'got it.' This is what will happen for us if we press on in the faith as God works in ways seen and unseen, expected and unexpected, to bring us to confident assurance, and the firm receipt of His certain promise.

B. God's Oath (6:16-18)

1. Human Oaths Confirm Truthfulness (6:16)

¹⁶*For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.*

Schreiner: The significance of God taking an oath is taken up again in verses 16-18. First, the significance of oaths among human beings is considered. Why do human beings take oaths? What is their significance? When an oath is taken, one who is greater or superior is invoked. Swearing by someone greater underscores the truthfulness of what is said and seals the solemnity of the occasion. An oath confirms and ratifies what is uttered and thus resolves what is disputed. Those who take an oath swear that their words truly accord with what happened, bring to a conclusion a debated matter.

Bruce: When human beings swear an oath in order to underline the certainty and solemnity of their words, they swear by someone or something greater than themselves. 'As (surely as) Yahweh lives' was the supreme oath in Israel. Abraham himself swore by God and made others do the same (Gen. 14:22; 21:23ff., 24:3). But, says our author, God has none greater than Himself by whom to swear, so when He wishes to confirm His promise in this way, He swears by Himself.

MacArthur: It was common in New Testament times for a person to make an 'oath' on something or someone greater than himself—such as the altar, or the high priest, or even God. Once such an oath was made, argument was over, the dispute was ended. It was assumed that no one would make such an oath unless he was fully determined to keep it.

Hughes: Having introduced the subject of oaths, the writer proceeds to explain about human and divined oaths and what great encouragement the latter brings to us. The reason human oaths are used to end disputes is the unreliability of human speech due to sin—that is, people are naturally liars. In the context of ancient culture (when people generally feared God), swearing by a greater thing helped assure truth. And if one swore by God, it served to end an argument. This was

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especially true in Hebrew culture where lying while making an oath was a transgression of the Third Commandment against misusing the name of God and so deserved the punishment of God (cp. Dt. 5:11). Therefore, we see that human oaths were a powerful assurance of carrying out one's word.

Phillips: This tells us three things, the first of which is that by swearing by Himself God gave His promise an especially solemn character. To show this, the writer of Hebrews reminds us how men use oaths. Men swear by something greater than themselves, typically by God, thereby inviting the wrath of that greater power should they violate the oath. This, the writer says, 'is final for confirmation,' or as the NIV says, it 'puts an end to all argument,' ensuring the intent of the one who so swears. God, however, stands beneath no one and no thing; there is nothing greater than He, no higher name than His own, so if God is to swear an oath He must do so by His own name. In doing so, God placed His own dignity and character on the line when it came to the fulfillment of this promise to Abraham. That is the ultimate surety for a promise.

2. God's Oath Encouraged Abraham (6:17)

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,,,*

Schreiner: If human beings end disputes with oaths, it certainly doesn't follow that God needs to take one. It is all the more remarkable, then, that God swears an oath. The oaths of human beings, though they may resolve disputes, are not infallible, for one may be lying. But God's oaths are of a different character and nature. God doesn't need to take an oath since His word is truth and His promises never fail. Still He swore an oath to Abraham to underline his unchangeable purpose. His promise to bless and multiply Abraham would certainly come to pass. No doubt about its future fulfillment could be entertained. God's intention in making an oath was to grant assurance and bold confidence to those who are 'heirs of the promise.' Since God's unalterable promise was the foundation of Abraham's patient endurance, the same should be true for the readers of the letter. The verb 'guaranteed' (*εμεσίτευσεν, emesiteusen*) signifies that God as mediator pledges to fulfill His promise. God's oath is accompanied by an action that secures what He has promised.

Hughes: This is essentially why God chose to swear by an oath. God did not have to swear by an oath, but He did so as a condescension or accommodation to human weakness. Of course, in choosing to make an oath, He could only swear by Himself because there was nothing or no one higher to swear by. To swear by anything lesser would have the effect of making His oath less permanent. The language behind our text in verse 17—'when God desired'—indicates that God's decision to make an oath in reaffirming the Abrahamic Covenant was not a whim but a passionate sovereign choice, because the Greek word is stronger than 'desired'—indicating the purposeful, deliberate exercise of His will.

MacArthur: God, of course, did not need to make an oath. His word is every bit as good without an oath. But to accommodate the weak faith of men, God swore His promise on Himself. Since His promise already was unbreakable, His pledge did not make His promise any more secure. But He nonetheless gave it, as further assurance to those who are slow to believe. The bare word of God is guarantee enough, but God gave an oath just to show that He meant what He said.

Phillips: The second thing this passage tells us is why God would do such a thing. God did not swear an oath to Abraham to make His purpose unchanging, but to let Abraham know with

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absolute certainty that it was so. This is an astonishing condescension from God. God does not need to swear. God does not need oaths because He is infallibly trustworthy, and yet here He swore and oath to accommodate the weakness of our faith. He swore by Himself so that Abraham would not fall prey to doubt or unbelief ever again.

Bruce: The insistence on the divine oath in God's promise to Abraham prepares the readers for the significance of the fact that God's promise regarding the Melchizedekian priesthood was similarly confirmed by an oath: 'Yahweh has sworn, and will not change His mind' (Ps. 110:4). Who are 'the heirs of the promise'? Not so much Abraham and the other patriarchs, who for all their faith did not live to see it vindicated and in this sense 'did not receive what they had been promised' (11:39); but, those, like the writer and his readers, who experienced in the gospel the fulfillment of the oath which God swore to Abraham.

3. God's Oath Encourages Us (6:18)

a) *Unchangeable Truthfulness (6:18a)*

„¹⁸so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie...

Schreiner: The 'two unchangeable things' are God's word and His oath. God's word is irrevocable, but His oath will never be rescinded either. The consolation of the readers is the author's purpose, and so he goes further, affirming that 'it is impossible for God to lie.' God's word alone is sufficient for faith since He never deviates from the truth. Nevertheless, He adds to His word His oath. The oath isn't given to substantiate God's truthfulness since He can't lie. The oath was given, then, for the sake of human beings, to underscore God's faithfulness.

The 'two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie,' are His *word of promise* and His *oath*. His *promise* to Abraham, and to us, can do nothing other than come true because God's 'word is truth' (Jn. 17:17) and because God 'never lies' (Titus 1:2). He is the author of truth, the essence of truth. His *oath*, though unnecessary, is the double assurance that He cannot lie. Truth has sworn by itself that its truth shall truly be fulfilled. There is no more possibility of God's promises failing us than of God falling out of Heaven! His Word is eternally sealed with the double surety of promise and oath.

Bruce: The 'two unchangeable things' from which this encouragement is derived are (a) the promise of God (for 'it is impossible for God to lie') and (b) the oath by which His promise is confirmed.

MacArthur: The 'two unchangeable things' are God's promise and His oath. They are immutable, without any possibility of change or variance. The term (*ametathetos*) was used in relation to wills. Once properly made, a will was *ametathetos*, unchangeable by anyone but the maker. God has declared His promise and His oath to be *ametathetos*, even by Himself. They cannot be turned around or altered.

Phillips: God sealed His intent 'by two unchangeable things,' namely His promise and His oath to go along with it. The promise is therefore especially solemn, certain, and inviolable.

Schreiner: What separates God from human beings, according to this text, is His unchangeableness. He does not change course, nor does He lie. Human beings prevaricate and deviate from the truth. God is inherently good and defines what is good. God can't be God and deviate from His nature. He wouldn't be God if He could lie. Goodness is intrinsic and inherent to His being.

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b) Strong Encouragement (6:18b)

...we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

Schreiner: The inviolable promise of God is not an abstract truth unrelated to life. It is intended to give ‘strong encouragement’ (*ιοχυραν παρακλησιν, iochuran paraklēsīn*) for believers. They are assured that God will fulfill what He has promised. They turned to Jesus to find refuge by taking hold of the hope set before them. The encouragement furnished to the readers is that the hope they have staked their lives on will become a reality. They should persevere to the end with confidence and joy, knowing that God will fulfill His eschatological promises.

MacArthur: In the Septuagint, the Greek word here translated ‘refuge’ is used for the cities of refuge God provided for those who sought protection from avengers for an accidental killing (see Num. 35; Dt. 19; Jos. 20). We will never know whether God can hold us until in desperation we run to Him for refuge. ‘The hope set before us’ is Jesus Himself, and the gospel He has brought.

Hughes: Because of this, ‘the hope’ we have fled to and take hold of is sure. We must understand that it is an *objective* hope, and not the *subjective*, sentimental optimism the world so readily embraces. The hope spoken of here does not originate within us but comes from the outside. Here our hope centers on the objective promises of God, which are fleshed out for us in the ultimate blessing of the world through Jesus Christ. ‘The hope set before us’ comes from the fact that we are *in* Christ, the Son who fulfilled Abraham’s covenant, and that at the last we will be *with* Christ and *like* Christ (cp. Jn. 14:3; 1 Jn. 3:2). Jesus is the foundation and substance of our hope.

Phillips: The third thing we learn about from God’s oath to Abraham is that God gave this promise not merely for Abraham’s sake but also for ours. This inviolable promise, secured by an oath, ‘two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie,’ is the foundation of our own assurance and hope. How can this be, when the promise and oath were not given to us but to Abraham so long ago? The answer is that while Abraham was the recipient of this great promise, we are its objects. It has reference to us. When God took Abraham out beneath the dark sky and pointed to the countless specks of light, He was pointing to us. God promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and in Christ Jesus we are those descendants, we are those of the nations blessed through Him (cp. Gal. 3:16, 26, 29).

Phillips: Through faith in Christ—who is the promised offspring of grace, in whom all the promises are received, obtained, and fulfilled—we like Abraham become God’s children and heirs with him of all the blessings of salvation. This means that when you put your faith in Jesus Christ for salvation—for forgiveness of sin and adoption into God’s family—you can be certain of that salvation. You can be sure because God promised a vast starry host of spiritual descendants to Abraham through His one special descendant, Jesus Christ. In receiving you through faith, God is honoring His promise not merely to you but also to His own Son, Jesus, and fulfilling the inviolable promise sworn by an oath upon Himself, given to Abraham so long ago. The result of this is hope for us.

C. Our Hope (Hebrews 6:19-20)

1. Our Anchor (6:19)

¹⁹*We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain...*

Schreiner: The author continues to elaborate on the certainty of the hope belonging to believers. This hope is an anchor for their lives, and it is ‘firm and secure’ (NIV). Nothing can dislodge their hope, for hope is an objective reality. As the author has indicated, the hope is stable and solid because it is founded on God’s promise and oath. Since there is no doubt that God will keep His promises, the hope is a sure and stable anchor.

Phillips: People have always needed hope to persevere. This is why the writer of Hebrews so emphasizes the Christian’s hope. God wanted us to have a sure hope, so He gave His oath to His promise of a great salvation. Just as an anchor holds a ship secure despite great storms and tossing seas, so this hope, tethered to us by God’s unchangeable, oath-bound promise, holds our hearts fast to Jesus Christ and the salvation that is ours in Him.

Phillips: There is something special about this anchor in Hebrews 6:19. Every other anchor goes down into the sea, beneath the waves to a place unseen to hold us secure, but this anchor of our hope goes up to a place where by faith we can see ‘into the inner place behind the curtain.’ What a powerful portrayal of Christian hope, which is like no other hope in this world. For others, hope is mere wishing; it is wanting but not having. And the failure of mere wishful thinking leads so many people into the despair of depression. Christians, too, want many things. We want blessing, we want peace, we want security, and we want heaven. But unlike the hope of the world, which goes nowhere and has no anchor, our hope in Christ goes before us into heaven, where it is anchored in the unchanging character of God and the oath He has sworn. Our hope goes where we cannot yet go ourselves. It goes into heaven, where Christ is now. And there He sets the anchor of our hope with His own pierced hand, so that our hope of salvation is attached by the finished work of Christ to the secure foundation of the unchangeable character of God. Jesus came to earth to live and die for us, and when He returned to heaven, it also was for our sake, to affix the anchor of our hope ‘sure and steadfast’ in the inner sanctum of heaven itself. In the great promises of God, secured in Christ, we therefore have a cable of salvation that nothing can break or destroy, so that we can be certain of arriving safe in the harbor of heaven.

Hughes: How, having God’s word for it, He gives us His ‘anchor’—a metaphor which suggests deepest security. To appreciate what is said here, we must remember that the curtain was a thickly woven piece of tapestry hung between the inner and outer chambers of the tabernacle. No one could see through the curtain, and the Holy of Holies was inaccessible to all but the high priest, who passed within only once a year. Outside the curtain was the Holy Place with the altar of incense, the golden candlestick, and the table of showbread—all devoted to the people’s worship. It was between these two compartments of the tabernacle—the Holy Place representing the earthly worship of God’s people, and the Holy of Holies representing God’s presence—that the curtain hung. Together these two sides of the curtain symbolize living spiritual realities—God’s presence in Heaven and the storm-tossed church worshipping below (cp. Heb. 9).

Hughes: But then an anchor is hurled from the Church. But instead of falling to the depths, it rises through the blue skies and on up through deep heaven where it passes unhindered through the curtain and anchors on the throne of God in the heavenly holy of holies where Jesus is seated

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‘at the right hand of the Majesty on high’ (1:3). Our lives are accessed and anchored in heaven! The significance of this was immediate in the ancient world because an anchor was everything to those at sea. A firm anchorage meant security. Well-anchored, the winds could blow, but the ship would not be awash or headed for the rocks. We are anchored in the Father’s presence for eternity—and Jesus at His right hand perpetually intercedes for His Church. His continual priestly prayer for us is the medium for our survival.

Bruce: We are refugees from the sinking ship of this present world-order, so soon to disappear; our hope is fixed on the eternal order, where the promises of God are made good to His people in perpetuity. Our hope, based upon His promises, is our spiritual anchor. The figure of the anchor is not pressed; all that is meant is that ‘we are moored to an immovable object’—and that immovable object is the throne of God Himself, established (as is made clear in ch. 9) in the heavenly holy of holies, the counterpart in the eternal order to the inner sanctuary of the wilderness tabernacle, shut off from the outer sanctuary by the heavy curtain behind which dwelt the invisible presence of the God of Israel.

Schreiner: The inner sanctuary in the temple, the holy of holies, represents the presence of God. Indeed, the only other place where the words ‘inside behind the curtain’ occur is in Lev. 16:2. Leviticus 16 speaks of the Day of Atonement, which is the only day in the year that the high priest entered the holy of holies. For the writer, the holy of holies represents the presence of God. The hope of believers is like an anchor that reaches within the veil, i.e., it brings believers into contact with God Himself. Here is a far better hope than what we find in the old covenant where access to God was limited to one day a year by the high priest (cp. 9:6-8). Now believers have ‘boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus’ (10:19).

Bruce: Our hope is fixed there because Jesus is there, seated, as we have already been told, at ‘the right hand of the Majesty on high’ (1:3). His presence there is a powerful corroboration of our hope. Abraham rested his hope in the promise and oath of God; but we have more than that to rest our hope upon: we have the fulfillment of His promise in the exaltation of Christ. No wonder that our hope is secure and stable.

2. Our Forerunner (6:20a)

...²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf...

Schreiner: Jesus is their ‘forerunner’ (*προδρομος*, *prodromos*) or ‘precursor.’ We think of the claim made elsewhere that Jesus is the ‘pioneer’ of salvation (2:10; 12:2). The hope of believers, then, depends on the atoning work of the cross.

Bruce: Jesus has entered into the eternal world not only on His own behalf but on His people’s too. He is there as our ‘forerunner,’ a word in which the conception of precedence prevails over that of speed. As applied to the Savior, it recalls His own care-quelling utterance: ‘I go to prepare a place for you.’ But the errand of this Fore-runner embraces far wider ends than that of preparation. It proclaims an accomplished work of redemption and signals the first fruits of a mighty aftercrop. *Precursor* is a relative term implying a sequence.

Phillips: Our anchor of hope is secure because ‘Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf’ into heaven. Jesus came into the world to become our Savior to blaze a trail through the barrier of sin by His perfect life and atoning death. ‘Forerunner’ is yet another of the nautical terms used in Hebrews. The particular word here, *prodromos*, is one that appears nowhere else in Scripture, but has to do with a familiar scene in the ancient world. Louis Talbot explains: ‘The

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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.

Hughes: Jesus is there as the one who ‘has gone as a forerunner.’ Just as forerunners were sent to explore the way for those who would follow, Christ, our *prodromos*, has gone ahead of us to prepare the way (cp. Jn. 14:2-4). There is no doubt that we can and will follow.

Phillips: Can unforeseen circumstances break the line to this great anchor? Can the work of men, the temptations of the devil, or the hostility of the world sever a cord forged and emplaced by God Himself? Can you sin break the line to this great anchor? The answer to all of these is No. God is greater than them all, and His oath shall overrule every opposition. Believers are saved and we are safe because of God’s oath-bound promise, secured and made fast by the finished work of Jesus Christ.

3. Our High Priest (6:20b)

...having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Schreiner: Believers had no warrant to obtain access to God’s presence. Such access is given to them because Jesus is their Melchizedekian high priest. And as high priest He entered God’s presence, offering His own blood to secure access to God for believers. The hope of believers is anchored in the work of Jesus as high priest. Their hope is secure, for Jesus as the Melchizedekian priest has atoned for their sin so that they can enter God’s presence joyfully and boldly.

Hughes: God also swore in another place, insuring Jesus’ eternal priesthood, ‘The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek”’ (Ps. 110:4; cp. Heb. 5:6). Jesus is the thing hoped for and the ground for eternal optimism. Our hope is doubly sure! God has *promised* it and *sworn* it. Everything promised comes to us through Christ. We have God’s word for it. He wants us to take hold of it!

Phillips: He then went up into heaven to reign as our high priest—not a temporary priest like the Levites in Israel, but ‘a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’ We will examine Melchizedek more thoroughly in our next study, but for now the point is that Christ will never be replaced in His heavenly mission for us. He will never fail, and never die.

Bruce: He is there as His people’s forerunner, the surety of their admission to the dwelling-place of God; He is there, too, as their perpetual high priest, ‘after the order of Melchizedek.’ With these words our author comes back to the point from which he digressed in 5:11; now he will go on and say what he has to say about the Melchizedekian priesthood, ‘hard of interpretation’ though it may be, in order that his readers may be educated to maturity of faith and life.

MacArthur: Our anchored soul is, in God’s mind, already secure within the veil, secure within His eternal sanctuary, where Jesus also is. Jesus remains in heaven forever as Guardian of our

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souls. Such absolute security is almost incomprehensible. Not only are our souls anchored within the impregnable, inviolable heavenly sanctuary, but our Savior, Jesus Christ, stands guard over them as well! How can the Christian's security be described as anything but eternal? Truly we can trust God and His Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, with our souls. That is good cause to come all the way to salvation and to enjoy its security.

4. Summary

Hughes: We have a hope—a hope outside ourselves. 1) It is anchored in Heaven. We have continual access to God's presence, not just once a year through a fallible man, but always—at every moment—through our high priest, Jesus Christ. 2) It is anchored in Christ, our *prodromos* who has gone to prepare a place for us. 3) It is anchored in Christ, our Melchizedekian priest who ministers perpetually and eternally. 4) It is sure, for it is doubly impossible for God to lie. So we have reason to be optimistic—we have an anchor for the soul.

Schreiner: God promises eschatological blessings for those who belong to Him, but we need patience like Abraham to obtain the promise. We need encouragement to continue along the pathway God has marked out for us. Such encouragement comes from God's promises. Just as God promised and swore an oath to Abraham, so too believers in Jesus Christ are the offspring of Abraham. The promises made to Abraham belong to them as well. Believers should be full of boldness and confidence, for not only did God promise blessing and multiplication to Abraham; He swore that He would fulfill the promise. An oath is superfluous for the one true God who always keeps His word. The oath was for the benefit of human beings, underscoring the fidelity of His promises, so that we would put our hope and confidence in God. The hope believers possess is an anchor for their lives, for it is based on Jesus' priestly work inasmuch as He brings believers into God's presence based on His sacrificial work.

I can feel the anchor fast
As I meet each sudden blast
And the cable, though unseen,
Bears the heavenly strain between;
Through the storm I safely ride,
Till the turning of the tide.
And it holds, my anchor holds;
Blow your wildest, then O gale,
On my bark so small and frail;
By His grace I shall not fail,
For my anchor holds, my anchor holds.

— Daniel B. Towner, 1902

For next time: Read Hebrews 7:1-10.