

# The Book of Hebrews

מֵאֲנִישׁ מִנֶּגֶד דָּא מִן תְּאֵקְלָא  
צִמְאָלִיל נִתְּאֲתַצְרַח דְּרִתְסֵנִי סָק  
אֵת פִּקְלָא תְּסֵנִי סִרְבָּאֵל  
רֵךְ תֵּא סֵךְ תֵּאקְסֵנִי דְּמִמֵּצ  
תֵּאֲתַפְלֵשׁ נִתְּרִדְנָה רִפְרֵי נִרְלֵךְ  
תֵּאֲנִשׁ רִלֵךְ מִלְלֵצ סֵס תֵּלֵשׁ



# Outline of Hebrews

## “Jesus is Better”

- I. Jesus Is Better Than the OT Prophets (1:1-4)
- II. Jesus Is Better Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)
- III. Jesus Is Better Than Moses (3:1-4:13)
- IV. Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)**

# Outline of Hebrews

## **IV. Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)**

- A. Jesus Is a Compassionate But Sinless High Priest (4:14–16)
- B. Jesus Was Appointed By God to Be Our High Priest (5:1-10)
- C. Jesus Is Better – Don't Apostatize (5:11-6:20)
- D. Jesus Is a Priest After the Order of Melchizedek (7:1-28)
- E. The New Covenant Mediated By Jesus Is Better than the Old Covenant (8:1-13)
- F. Jesus' Sacrifice Is Better Than the Temple Sacrifices (9:1-10:18)

# Outline of Hebrews

## **C. Jesus Is Better – Don't Apostatize (5:11-6:20)**

### **1. Warning (5:11-6:8)**

- a. The Present Problem With His Readers (5:11–6:3)
- b. The Danger of Falling Away from the Christian Faith (6:4–8)

### **2. Assurance (6:9-6:20)**

- a. The Author's Confidence In and Desire for His Readers (6:9–12)
- b. God's Promise Is Our Basis for Hope (6:13–20)

# God's Promise Is Our Basis for Hope (6:13–20)

<sup>13</sup> *For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself,* <sup>14</sup> *saying,*

*“Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” [Gen 22:17]*

<sup>15</sup> *And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.*

# God's Promise Is Our Basis for Hope (6:13–20)

<sup>16</sup> For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. <sup>17</sup> So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, <sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup> We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup> where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.



# God's Promise Is Our Basis for Hope (6:13–20)

- Starting in Heb 5:11, the author of Hebrews temporarily **set aside** the topic of Christ's appointment as high priest in order to **warn** his readers of their spiritual immaturity.
  - He gave an assessment of their condition. (5:11–6:3)
  - He gave them a **strong** warning. (6:4–8)
  - He then **mitigated** that warning with a word of **encouragement** where he expressed his **confidence** that they were, in fact, genuinely saved and would **ultimately** persevere. (6:9–12)
- In our **present** text (6:13–20) the author **builds** on the exhortation begun in Heb 5:11 while, **at the same time**, **moving back** toward his discussion of Christ's superior priestly ministry.
- So this section serves as a sort of “on-ramp” that transitions from the strategically placed exhortation of Heb 5:11–6:12 back to the exposition on Jesus' Melchizedekian appointment as high priest that he started earlier.

<sup>13</sup> **For** when God made a **promise** to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."

- The word "**for**" and the idea of "**promise**" **links** this verse to the **previous** verse at the end of the last section where believers were encouraged to be "**imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**"
- **Now** the author wants them to contemplate the **nature** of God's "**promise**" and the grandeur and faithfulness of the one who made it by reflecting on the promise that God made to **Abraham**.
- The promise to Abraham is a central theme in the book of Genesis. God promised Abraham land, offspring, and universal blessing (Gen 12:1-3; 18:17-18; 22:17-18).
- Blessing is promised for the **whole world** through the offspring of Abraham; and the NT proclaims that **Jesus Christ** is the one through whom the stunning blessings promised to Abraham become a reality. (Gal 3:16)



<sup>13</sup> *For when **God made a promise to Abraham**, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself,*  
<sup>14</sup> *saying, “**Surely I will bless you and multiply you.**” [Gen 22:17]*

- The focus here is on Gen 22:17, where God swears to Abraham that he will bless him.
- The blessing comes after what is perhaps the most dramatic and terrifying test in Abraham’s life, for the Lord had just summoned him to **sacrifice** Isaac, the son of promise.
- Abraham’s faith in God **shines**, for he takes the Lord at his word and is prepared to sacrifice his son, the son of promise, if God commands it.
- The Lord, of course, **spares** Isaac, and pronounces the words of “**promise to Abraham**” that our text now reflects on.

<sup>13</sup> *For when God made a promise to Abraham, **since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself,***  
<sup>14</sup> *saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."*

- The purpose here is to emphasize the ***certainty*** of God's promise.
- God took an oath to certify the promise to Abraham. But by ***what*** did God swear?
- God can't swear by anyone greater than himself, for there is no being in heaven or on earth greater than God.
- Hence, God swore "***by himself***", since he couldn't swear by any higher entity.

<sup>13</sup> For when God made a **promise** to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, “**Surely I will bless you and multiply you.**” [Gen 22:17]

- The oath God swore to Abraham is cited here from Gen 22:17, where God assured Abraham that he would “**bless**” him and “**multiply**” his offspring.
- This is no ordinary “**promise**”, because God underscores it with an **oath**, and therefore the promise and the blessing will **certainly** come to pass.
- God’s oath in Genesis 22 is **accompanied by** his deliverance of Isaac, which certifies that God will **indeed** bless Abraham and multiply his offspring through Isaac.

<sup>15</sup> *And thus Abraham, having **patiently waited**, obtained the **promise**.*

- Verse 15 **seems** to interrupt the flow of the argument. Verses 13-14 emphasize the **certainty** of God's promise, because he **swore** to Abraham he would bless him.
- So 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 "*patiently waited*".
- What is the author up to here?
- Abraham received a "*promise*" of land, offspring, and blessing in Gen 12:1-3, but **many years** passed before **even one** aspect of that "*promise*" was fulfilled: that is, the **birth of Isaac**.

<sup>15</sup> *And thus Abraham, **having patiently waited, obtained the promise.***

- What the author emphasizes here is Abraham's ***patience*** – how he ***endured in faith*** as the years passed.
- How often it must have 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!
- The author wants his readers to ***imitate*** Abraham (cf. verse 12 where he exhorts them to be ***“imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”***).

<sup>15</sup> *And thus Abraham, **having patiently waited, obtained the promise.***

- The circumstances and sufferings of life can sometimes make it seem as if 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 makes it seem as though God's promise will **not** come true.



<sup>15</sup> *And thus Abraham, **having patiently waited, obtained the promise.***

- So here we see the connection between verses 13-14 and verse 15: the readers should be patient, but their patience should be **founded** on the **promise of God**, a promise that will **not** be broken.<sup>1</sup>
- But the summons to patience and perseverance is not **ultimately** a call to human virtue.<sup>1</sup>
- Abraham's faith was grounded and established in the unbreakable promise of **God** – it's what **God pledged** to him fueled his patience.<sup>1</sup>
- Abraham, "*having patiently waited, obtained the promise*" made him a **fitting model** for "*sluggish*" Christ-followers who were in need of refocusing attention on the promised rewards that come to those who **persevere**. (cf. Heb. 6:12)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Schreiner, Thomas R. – *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary - Hebrews*; pp. 200-201

<sup>2</sup> Guthrie, George H. – *The NIV Application Commentary - Hebrews*;

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

- The significance of God taking an oath is taken up again in verse 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.
- Those who take an oath swear that their words truly accord with happened, bringing to a conclusion a debated matter.
- Ordinarily, a word under oath is trusted and becomes the basis on which controversies are decided.

<sup>17</sup> *So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath...*

- While **human beings** sometimes end disputes with oaths, it **certainly** doesn't follow that **God** needs to take one – which makes it all the more remarkable, then, that God swears an oath!
- The oaths of human beings, though they may resolve disputes, are **not infallible**, for human beings often lie.
- But **God's** oaths are of a different character and nature. God doesn't **need** to take an oath since his word is **always true** and his promises **never fail**.
- And yet God still swore an oath to Abraham in order to make clear his unchangeable purpose.
- Since God's unalterable promise was the foundation of **Abraham's** endurance, the same should be true for the readers of this letter.

<sup>18</sup> ...so that by two unchangeable things, in which **it is impossible for God to lie**, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

- The oath is given to confirm the certainty of the promise, which is designed to encourage the readers to persevere in faith and hope.
- 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 author’s purpose here is to console his readers, and so he goes further, affirming “*it is impossible for God to lie.*”
- God’s word alone is sufficient for faith. Nevertheless, he adds his oath.
- The oath is given for the sake of human beings, to reassure them of God’s faithfulness.

<sup>18</sup> ...so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have **strong encouragement** to hold fast to the hope set before us.

- Though God is **omnipotent**, there **are** things God **cannot** do, such as things that would be a denial of his divinity.
- Here we see it is “**impossible for God to lie.**” He wouldn’t be God if he could lie.
- The inviolable promise of God is not an abstract truth unrelated to life.
- It is intended to give “**strong encouragement**” to believers.
- They are assured that God will fulfill what he has promised.
- Believers should persevere to the end with confidence and joy, knowing that God **will fulfill** his eschatological promises.

<sup>19</sup> *We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a **hope** that enters into the inner place **behind the curtain**,* <sup>20</sup> *where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*

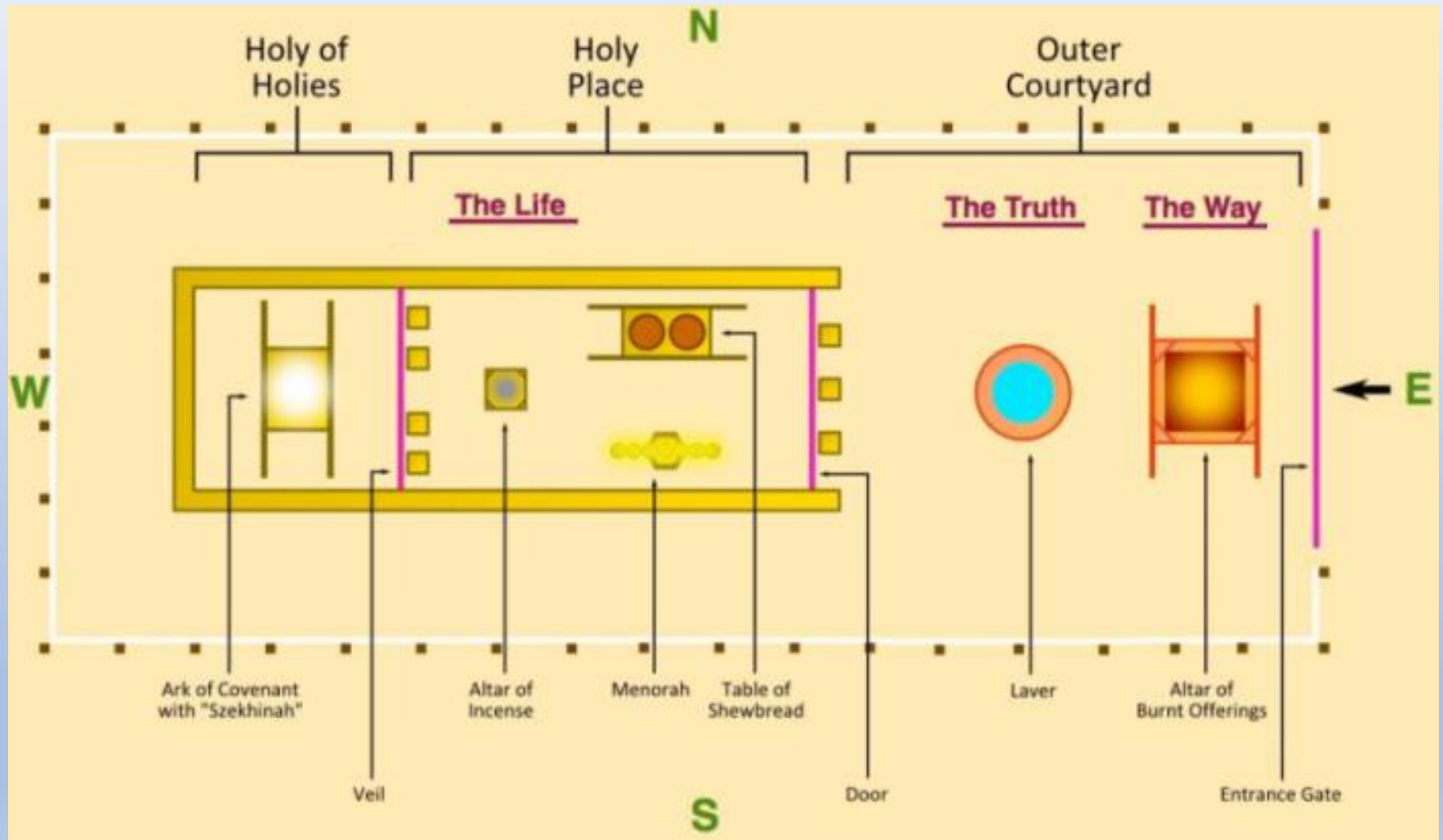
- Because of the nature of the Christian “*hope*” as confident expectation, hope serves as an “*anchor of the soul*”, and therefore it can counteract the tendency to “*drift away*” that the author warns about in Heb 2:1.
- Our hope depends entirely on the priestly work of Jesus.
- This firm and secure hope is said metaphorically to enter the “*inner place behind the curtain*”.



<sup>19</sup> *We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a **hope** that enters into the **inner place behind the curtain**,* <sup>20</sup> *where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*

- When the author tells us that our “*hope*” enters the “*inner place behind the curtain*”, he is referring to the Most Holy Place (or “Holy of Holies”), that most sacred of space in the Hebrew tabernacle, which was identified as the place of God’s presence.
- Under the old covenant only the high priest could go behind the curtain separating the outer part of the Holy Place from the inner, and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement.

# The Jewish Tabernacle



# The Jewish Tabernacle



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<sup>19</sup> *We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a **hope** that enters into the **inner place behind the curtain**,* <sup>20</sup> *where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*

- This barrier that once kept the broader people of God from entering into the presence of God has been torn away in the new covenant— so that we **all** now may enter into the presence of God by following Jesus.
- The security of our souls rests firmly in the eternal, high-priestly work of Christ, by which he has entered into God's presence on our behalf and made a way for us to follow.
- Therefore the stability of our soul comes from all the power and provisions to be found as we stand before the face of God.



<sup>19</sup> *We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,* <sup>20</sup> *where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever **after the order of Melchizedek.***

- “*After the order of Melchizedek*” is another brief allusion to Psalm 110:4, which was first quoted in Heb 5:6 and will developed further in the verses that follow.
- Having again mentioned Melchizedek and Jesus’ high priesthood, the author has now come back to the argument he began in Heb 5:1-10 and is ready to begin an in depth discussion of Jesus’ Melchizedekian high priesthood.

# Class Discussion Time





## **\*Class Discussion Time**

- We observed in today's material that the circumstances and sufferings of life can sometimes make it seem as if God's promises are a charade – that they are disconnected from reality. The readers of Hebrews were suffering persecution from their culture for their Christian beliefs and were therefore tempted to give in and go along with the culture.
- Our culture is becoming more and more hostile to Christianity. Can you envision a time when we might be tempted to go along with the culture to avoid persecution? What might that look like and how do you see yourself handling it?

# \*Class Discussion Time

- In our text today, Abraham is commended for having patience in waiting for God to provide something that he strongly desired.
- C. H. Spurgeon once wrote:
  - *[Waiting] is one of the postures which a Christian soldier learns not without years of teaching. Marching and quick-marching are much easier to God's warriors than standing still. There are hours of perplexity when the most willing spirit, anxiously desirous to serve the Lord, knows not what part to take. Then what shall it do? Vex itself by despair? Fly back in cowardice, turn to the right hand in fear, or rush forward in presumption? No, but simply wait. Wait in prayer, however. Call upon God, and spread the case before Him; tell Him your difficulty, and plead His promise of aid.... But wait in faith. Express your unstaggering confidence in Him; for unfaithful, untrusting waiting, is but an insult to the Lord. Believe that if He keep you tarrying even till midnight, yet He will come at the right time; the vision shall come and shall not tarry. Wait in quiet patience, not rebelling because you are under the affliction, but blessing your God for it. Never murmur against the second cause, as the children of Israel did against Moses; never wish you could go back to the world again, but accept the case as it is, and put it as it stands, simply and with your whole heart, without any self-will, into the hand of your covenant God, saying, "Now, Lord, not my will, but Thine be done. I know not what to do; I am brought to extremities, but I will wait until Thou shalt cleave the floods, or drive back my foes. I will wait, if Thou keep me many a day, for my heart is fixed upon Thee alone, O God, and my spirit waiteth for Thee in the full conviction that Thou wilt yet be my joy and my salvation, my refuge and my strong tower.*

## **\*Class Discussion Time**

- Can you think of a time when you were earnestly praying for something you strongly desired and answers to that prayer were slow in coming? How did you handle the wait? What was the final outcome? Would you be willing to share the details of your example with the class?

