

The Immutable Truth Heb. 6:13–20

Larry R. Oats
Dean of the Seminary

God's truth is immutable. It does not change. Both covenant hermeneutics and progressive dispensational hermeneutics seek to change the content of God's promises and prophecies. The book of Hebrews, however, declares that God's promises and prophecies are immutable.

The context of the passage before us indicates that the Hebrew Christians were troubled, to the point of abandoning Christianity and returning to their former Judaism.

The writer of Hebrews is encouraging these Jewish believers to hold steadfast to the truth that Jesus is the Messiah and that He alone can save them. The writer has just finished a strong exhortation to spiritual maturity and ends this section of Hebrews with a strong argument for the assurance of salvation. None of us are making the spiritual progress we should, but none of us need ever fear that God will condemn us.

This passage identifies three arguments that can assure for us, in the immediate context, the certainty of our salvation – the confidence that we are ***Anchored to the Truth***.

I would suggest also that these arguments, because they are based on an Old Testament promise, demonstrate that the writer of Hebrews took this promise literally and that these arguments assure for us the validity of a dispensational – or literal or plain or normal – approach to prophecy.

I. ***The first argument is the immutability of God's promise (vv. 13–15).***

- A. We understand that God made more than one promise to Abraham.
 - 1. Genesis 12:7 tells us of the promise that God would give to his children, a promise made just a few verses after the great promise of the Abrahamic Covenant in verses 1-3.
 - 2. Genesis 17:5-6 is the promise of many descendants, including multiple nations.
 - 3. Genesis 17:8 argues that the land promise is an everlasting one.
 - 4. Genesis 18:18 is a repetition of the promise of blessing.
 - 5. However, the promise which God swore with an oath is found in Genesis 22:16–18.
 - a) This promise reiterates what God had already promised – his descendants would be numerous; in his seed the world would be blessed.

- b) God adds a new promise here – Abraham’s children would be victorious over the cities of Canaan.
 - c) What the author of Hebrews is arguing based on this promise is that God made many promises to Abraham, but in the end he only made one which he confirmed with an oath.
 - d) That promise was doubly binding. It was God’s word which in itself made it sure, but in addition it was confirmed by an oath.
- B. The content of that promise was that Abraham would be blessed and in his descendant(s) the world would be blessed.
1. The common Covenant interpretation argues that this promise is for the Christian Church, for it is the true Israel and the true seed of Abraham.
 - a) Understand the difficulty of such an interpretation. Here is a covenant interpretation of Gen 22:16-18.

Here is the promise, (1.) Of the great blessing of the Spirit: *In blessing, I will bless thee*, namely, with that best of blessings the Gift of the Holy Ghost; the promise of the Spirit which was to come upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ. (2.) Of the increase of the church, that believers should be numerous as the stars of heaven. (3.) Of spiritual victories. Believers, by their faith, overcome the world, and triumph over all the powers of darkness, and are more than conquerors.

- b) Imagine the confusion in arguing for an **unchangeable** promise – which is **changed** to make it refer to the church.
2. We understand that the ultimate blessing came in Jesus Christ, who is the Savior of both Jews and Gentiles alike. But even here, we take the concept of “seed” literally, since Jesus is the offspring of Abraham.
 3. We also understand that Paul refers to New Testament believers as “Abraham’s seed ” in Gal 3:29.
 - a) Keep that in the context of Gal 3:28 . Salvation did not set slaves free nor cause the free to become slaves; salvation does not change one’s gender; nor does salvation mean I am no longer a Gentile.
 - b) What Paul said is that there is a spiritual aspect which transcends the physical. If you are Christ’s, who is the ultimate offspring of Abraham, the one seed in whom the world would ultimately be blessed, then you are part of Christ, Abraham’s offspring, and you partake spiritually in some aspects of the promise.
 - c) Unless you are willing to argue that v. 28 must be taken physically, you cannot argue that Paul meant that the physical, national, earthly aspects of the promise to Abraham were abrogated in the New Testament.
 - d) And certainly the writer of Hebrews is arguing that the promise is **immutable, unchangeable!**

II. ***The second argument is the immutable person of God (vv. 16–18).***

When a witness takes an oath in court, he is confronted with the words “so help me God.” We call on the greater to witness for the lesser. None is greater than God, so He swore by Himself! God gave Abraham a promise, but he also confirmed that promise with an oath based on the immutability of his being.

- A. At this point the focus is no longer on Abraham, but on the oath which strengthened the promise. That the promise of Genesis 22:18 had messianic aspects is clear for it was through the “seed” that all nations on earth would be blessed.
 - a) God swore this “by himself” (Gen 22:16; Ex 32:13), just like the promise to the one who would be high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4).
 - b) This oath is one of several by God in the Old Testament.
 - (1) God swore an oath to David (Ps 89:35, 49; 132:11), which Jewish people expected to be fulfilled in the Messiah.
 - (2) He swore to judge Israel for their sins, and he did so (Ps 106:26).
 - (3) In Psalm 110:4, God swore by himself and would not change his mind that everyone would have to acknowledge him in the day of judgment (Is 45:23).
 - (4) He swore by himself judgment on the royal house of Judah (Jer 22:5), on the Jewish refugees in Egypt (Jer 44:26), on Israel (Amos 4:2; 6:8), on Edom (Jer 49:13) and on Babylon (Jer 51:14).
- B. The phrase “fled for refuge” (Heb. 6:18) suggests the Old Testament “cities of refuge” described in Numbers 35 and Joshua 20.
- C. We have fled to Jesus Christ, and He is our eternal refuge in whom we have eternal salvation. No avenger can touch us, because Jesus has already died and risen from the dead.

III. ***The third argument is the immutable provision of God (vv. 19–20).***

The anchor was a popular symbol in the early church. At least sixty-six pictures of anchors have been found in the catacombs.

- A. The “anchor” was a frequent metaphor in Greco-Roman literature, especially for the secure hold on hope which moral qualities produced.
 - 1. The Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus wrote: “One must not tie a ship to a single anchor, nor life to a single hope.”
 - 2. Christians, however, have but one anchor – Jesus Christ our hope (Col. 1:5, 1 Tim. 1:1).
- B. Why is this anchor so sure?
 - 1. Jesus, God’s provision, is our “forerunner” who has gone ahead to heaven so that we may one day follow (Heb. 6:20).

2. That “hope,” Hebrews says, is the One who enters into the inner court beyond the veil.
 - a) In the Temple the most sacred of all places was the Holy of Holies. The veil was what covered it.
 - b) The Jews held that the very presence of God was within the Holy of Holies.
 - c) Into this place only one man in the entire world, the High Priest, could go, and he could only enter that Holy Place on one day of the year, the Day of Atonement.
 - d) What the writer to the Hebrews says is this: Under the old Jewish religion no one could enter into the presence of God but the High Priest and he only on one day of the year; but now Jesus Christ has opened the way for every man at every time.
 - e) The Old Testament high priest was *not* a “forerunner” because nobody could follow him into the holy of holies.
3. Jesus Christ is “within the veil” as our High Priest.
 - a) We can therefore come boldly to His throne and receive all the help that we need.
 - b) The Lord Jesus, by entering into the heavenly sanctuary where He functions as a High Priest for us, has given to the believer a hope, an anchorage from which the believer cannot be shaken.