

Hebrews Study Session 9 - Chapter 5:11-6:12

If you recall, in our last session, we covered an introduction to the Jesus Christ being the great high priest. It turns out that the largest section of the book, which will begin in the next section, deals with Jesus Christ and the depth of what it means to have Him as our great high priest. However, as is a fairly common and effective tactic to gain an audience's attention, the author of Hebrews gives this introduction to the main topic (Jesus being our great high priest) and then radically alters the sermon to another topic - in this case a dire warning. This has the effect of not only waking the audience up but also rendering them more active in listening to what comes after the warning. He wants the small church to be fully alert when he gets to the importance of what he's about to share with them. As mentioned, this section is a serious warning to the community the author is addressing. It's also one of the most hotly debated passages in the entire Bible. This is because how you interpret this passage sets the stage for one's doctrine of salvation.

There are two warnings I'm going to give you before we begin tonight's study. First, like I mentioned last week, we cannot know another person's salvation status. We may have our opinions of another's salvation but we are not omniscient. None of us knows this. **II Timothy 2:19** - "Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, *"The Lord knows those who are His,"* and "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness." You and I cannot see inside another person's heart. Only the Lord can do that. The author of Hebrews, again in this section, realizes his inability to judge fully the condition of another's heart. All he can do is witness their behavior over time and make speculations based upon his observations.

The other warning I'm giving you tonight is the limits of using one type of study to pull the full picture of the meaning of a passage together. In this case, like we saw in a previous session, word study will only get us so far in this passage. We have to use the context of the entire Word of God, especially the rest of the New Testament, as well as the context and general thrust of this author to get to the core of the interpretation of this passage. Like most of the rest of Hebrews, it is rich with the word choice and grammar choices of the author yet it will only take us so far when you try to put together the puzzle of interpreting this section accurately.

[Read Hebrews 5:11-14]

The audience wasn't truly spiritual babies. According to the author they had ingested enough spiritual truth that they had been mature and should be teachers by now. This was an irony intended to shame them. They had deviated (recently) from their earlier course of life in the faith by becoming sluggish in their understanding. They were desiring to sidestep their responsibilities in a world of growing persecution. The goal of this section is to preserve the community from this unnatural regression by reminding them what they had experienced and what they possessed through the gospel.

Q: In v.11 - the author says "Concerning Him, we have much to say..." Who is he referring to here? (Christ - remember the prior discussion of Jesus being our great high priest and that he will return in depth to that discussion after this rebuke and warning)

Notice the phrase “hard to explain” - this always refers to things which are intrinsically difficult to explain - not externally difficult. The subject matter of Christ being the great high priest is difficult to discuss. This difficulty is only magnified by the believers acting like babies.

“dull of hearing” - ears stopped up by laziness. It was often used of a slave who was slow to obey his master. In the world of athletics it was used to describe a competitor who was out of shape. In the culture, it was often used to mean negligent, lazy, dull or even a dimwit or stupid. These people should be teachers by now in their Christian walk but they aren’t. They are in need of repeating kindergarten at the age of 20. They are unresponsive to the demands of the gospel and unwilling to move any deeper in their Christian commitment.

Q: How long do you think it’s ok for a new believer to be a “babe” in Christ?

Q: How do we mature in our faith in Christ?

Q: What are some of the things which are acceptable in the early stages of our Christian walk that aren’t later in our walk of faith?

Q: What are some of the signs of becoming stagnant in one’s faith?

At the end of v.12 the NASB says, “you have come to need milk...” The literal translation is “you have become having need milk” (not good English but good Greek). The focus is that the verb is passive. They have become in need of milk again. It was a choice they made based on their dullness of hearing - their lack of response to the teachings of God. The “elementary principles...” refer to the ABC’s.

Q: What are some of the traits of a teacher of the Bible? (*one is that they can communicate the truth effectively to others, etc.*)

The author makes use of an extended metaphor between milk and solid food. There are only two stages of the Christian growth mentioned in this passage: infants and adults. It is not saying that there aren’t others in the line of progression between the two only that the author expects the hearers to be adults but their behavior is that of babes. The author is saying that these people are without skill or inexperienced in or unacquainted with the acceptance of their adult responsibilities.

Before we come down too hard on these believers, we need to understand the broader context of the passage. In v.13 there is the phrase “word of righteousness”. While this could have a wide range of meanings, it came to have a fairly specific meaning, a technical meaning, in the early church about this time through the 2nd century. It meant to suffer under persecution, even to the point of death for one’s faith. The author is chiding them for their moral failure to persevere under persecution. They neither understand the reason for their suffering nor do they understand the means of persevering through it. It is very possible that the church was avoiding contact with outsiders due to a fear of increased persecution or martyrdom. They were regressing by withdrawing from their Jewish friends and family and other lost in their community to avoid suffering.

[In the study, Billy T. brought out another thought concerning this phrase, “word of

*righteousness”. He contrasted it to the works of the law or flesh as mentioned by Paul in **Philippians 3:8-10**. As these people were contemplating a return to Judaism and thus the Law, the author is reminding them that righteousness does not come from the Law but by faith in Christ. “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness”. This community of faith was also acting like the Galatian church when it to trying to accommodate the teachings of the Judaizers with the teachings of grace. The two cannot co-exist. In this sense, the phrase “word of righteousness” can largely be equated to “grace”. The author is telling the believers there that only the mature are accustomed to grace while infants are used to the law, so grow up through putting your faith in God’s grace and thus live out the righteousness God put in them.]*

Q: Who does the text say partakes of solid food? *(v.14 - mature believers)*

Q: In the author’s thought, what makes a believer mature? *(v.14 - he practices his faith)*

Q: From what we’ve read in Hebrews thus far, what prepares and sustains believers through persecution and times of hardship? *(Christ and his priesthood - we can approach Him for mercy and grace in our time of need (4:16).)*

The correct translation of “practice” (v.14) is “state or condition”. The mature are mature because that is their state based upon continual use. They possess trained faculties that enable them to know the difference between good and evil. They know how to make right choices when confronted with critical decisions. They know to avoid evil which in this case is spiritual laziness and stupor. If a believer lacks this condition, their Christian service will always be immature and partial.

Q: What are some ways we can avoid regressing to an infantile state as believers? *(being willing to stay in contact with the lost, being willing to suffer for the name of Christ, remain committed to the teachings of the faith and growing in those teachings, etc.)*

The author, in chapter 6, moves forward to challenge the church to correct their present course and on towards maturity, where they belonged. Again the author doesn’t consider these believers spiritual babes or else he would have taken the time here to stop and give them the education due a babe in Christ. What came before and what’s about to be said, is given as motivational in nature. He wants them to see themselves as having become sluggish and desiring to move to where they should be in their faith. These are the words of a loving shepherd to a waffling flock. All the basics which will be mentioned in the first three verses are things that existed in the Jewish community and in some degree in early Christianity and so there was no real value in revisiting them.

Q: Why do you think the recipients of the book of Hebrews would want to focus their energies on things which were common to both Judaism and Christianity? *(to avoid persecution - to keep one foot in Judaism as to not incur as much opposition and wrath from the world)*

Q: Are there things we do in order to avoid persecution or opposition from the world? *(observe things of an old faith we used to be in - such as confirmation, lent, whatever depending upon the*

old faith of our family)

[Read Hebrews 6:1-3]

“Let us press on” - “let us be carried forward” - it is a call to a personal surrender to God’s active influence within the community. It is God who does the moving and mature believers are receptive and responsive to the activity of God in and around them.

Q: What are some factors which can lead us, in our modern world, to become unreceptive or unresponsive to God?

Verses 1-2 contain six elements the author considers the ABC’s or rudiments of the faith. The first two given in v.1 are the basics of entering the faith and the next four are given in groups of two describing elements of different times of our faith. (I’m using the NASB.) Thus, the “foundation of repentance....and faith towards God” describe our entry into the community of faith and salvation. The next two: “instructions on washings... and laying on of hands” give introductory instructions in the faith. The last two: “resurrection from the dead ... eternal judgment” give the final consummation of our faith.

v.1- “dead works” - this can refer to the legalistic adherence to the Jewish ways and customs of their former life (things which cannot bring life). They can also mean, in a general manner, activities which bring death - such as sin. In either case, these things are to be repented from as they don’t deal with our new life in Christ.

v. 2 - “washings” - in some translations it gets put as baptisms. This is NOT the word for Christian baptism used elsewhere in the New Testament. Washings is a better translation as it dealt with the ritual washings of hands, utensils, plates and cups, etc. in the Jewish faith.

v. 2 - the laying on of hands was used extensively for a variety of purposes in both the Old Testament and the New. While the modern church has relegated this practice to pretty much the commissioning of a person for ministry, it was used in the early church for the same plus to signify the transmittal of the Holy Spirit to a new believer or a spiritual gift to another. It was part of the early life of a believer.

Notice that the author doesn’t say to throw these things out. He’s simply saying that it’s time to move past them to things fitting mature believers.

Q: What are some things in our life we need to leave behind in order to mature in Christ?

v.3 - The author shares his determination to move beyond these rudimentary matters but recognizes that it will take divine help to do so. The truth is that no one moves forward in his faith without God’s help.

The last section of this passage deals with a direct warning to the church. It has a harsh beginning but is softened at the end. Remember, this is a wake up call - to see their true spiritual condition and to be ready to listen to the rest of the message about Jesus being our great high priest.

[Read Hebrews 6:4-6]

Let me break down these verses into the main thought. *“It is impossible to renew them again to repentance...”* Everything else is modifying this one truth. What makes it hard to read in English is the five intervening clauses that go into describing those who have fallen away. We’re going to look at a few words and then ask a few questions.

“impossible” - this means something cannot happen or be done. This word is used three other times in Hebrews (6:12, 10:4, and 11:6).

“renew” is actually two words in the Greek - “again” and “renew” (the word “them” doesn’t exist in the Greek manuscripts)

“fallen away” - to fall aside or apostatize

v.4 - “enlighten” - aorist - once for all illumination. These people got the truth; they understood it.

v. 4 - “tasted” - common metaphor for experience something. It is both real and personal. Used of Jesus “tasting” death in Hebrews 2:9 - It cannot mean to put it in your mouth and then expel it. It’s often translated “eat”. They tasted the heavenly gift though we have no reference to what all that entails other than something from God.

v. 4 - “partakers” - to become business associates, in this case of the Holy Spirit.

v. 5 - “tasted the good word of God” - same word as in v.4. They have come to understand the Word of God in some capacity and the powers of the age to come (the power of the Holy Spirit at work).

Q: So based on the word study and grammar of verses 4-6 what do you conclude that these verses mean? (*give time for Randy to bang head on table*)

Q: Does the text say that someone who falls away cannot be forgiven? (*no*)

Q: Does the text say that someone who falls away cannot be restored? (*no*)

Q: What is impossible according to the text? (*someone who falls away cannot bring themselves to repentance*)

Q: Can anyone bring themselves to a place of repentance? (*no - it is the action of God working on the heart of a person - it is the Holy Spirit who convicts people of sin, righteousness and judgment. Repentance is our response to the Spirit’s work in our lives - see John 16:7-11*)

Notice the ending of v.6 - all of the sudden the verb tense shifts from aorist (in vv. 4-6a) to present tense (on-going action) at the end of 6. This is to say that those who fall away are doing so in a manner as to take their stand against Christ as did those who crucified Him at Calvary. As the original opponents of Christ put Him to open shame and crucified Him, so are these who fall away. So this is the \$64,000 question.

Q: Who are those people who have fallen away? (*give time for answer but don’t answer yet. If you say these are Christians, then you are saying a Christian can lose their salvation. If you say*

this is a hypothetical issue then you are rendering the warning moot and could be ignored. If you say these are lost people, then you have to explain all the phrases the modify these who have potentially fallen away.)

Here's where I was referring to that language and grammar cannot fully interpret this passage of Scripture. It takes history and correct theology based on the whole Word of God to get an accurate picture of any passage but especially one this difficult and important. Before we go further, let's take a step back and look at the broader context of this passage.

Back in 6:1 the author has identified "repentance" as foundational in Christian teaching. In the book of Hebrews, true repentance can only be explained in the shadow of Christ's sacrifice of Himself on the cross, since there exists no other valid sacrifice for sin. In the Jewish literature of the day and the early Christian church, repentance was seen as a gift from God, and the author of Hebrews has taken that thought as specifically incarnated in the person and work of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Repentance in 6:4-6 is "impossible" because there is nowhere else to go for repentance once one rejects Christ, who is the sole source of repentance. The one who has fallen away in effect has turned his back on Christ, the only means available for the forgiveness before God. That's why it becomes impossible to repent. Without Christ, repentance is meaningless.

Nowhere does the author claim that anyone in this community of faith is lost. However, he cares deeply for them and his great love for them is evident throughout the book. He wants them to examine themselves (again). The recent behavior of some seems to indicate that there could be those in the midst who are not truly converted. Their appearance is puzzling to him as it reminds him of people who showed no faith in the Old Testament even though these people had shown it earlier in their walk. Yet, he doesn't make this accusation. He puts the truth before them and allows them to be the judge of their own spiritual status. This warning is to remind those he loves that those who are Christ's persevere in the faith and accept the responsibilities of maturity because of who they truly are - Christ's.

[Read Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43]

Q: In this parable, what does the field represent? (*the world*)

Q: What are the two types of seed planted in the field? (*good - crop, bad - weeds*)

Q: Why did the owner of the field prevent the weeds from being uprooted as soon as it became evident that weeds had been sown by an enemy? (*he didn't want to uproot the good plants as well*)

Q: What does this teach us about how God deals with believer's contact with unbelievers? (*He allows us to stay together during this age*)

[Read Matthew 7:21-23]

[Read Acts 8:9-23]

Simon believed the message and was even baptized and participated in the early church but in the end, Peter told him he was still in bondage to sin. He had not been freed from his sins yet. This is an example of the sort of situation that the author of Hebrews is discussing in 6:4-6.

Jesus taught us that there are those people who will resemble believers in many ways and they will even be in close association with believers - in our churches - yet they will not be truly saved. This is what the Hebrews passage is describing. The author was warning the church that there are those who are in the church and appear to be believers but are not. They came close and have experienced the conviction of the Holy Spirit and seen the power of God at work, yet instead of choosing Christ for salvation, they are choosing the easy and worldly way of life. Yet, in reality, they are not doing themselves any favors as they are still lost. This is a word of warning to those who may not have actually had a genuine conversion experience yet are in the church body hearing the message.

This interpretation has both the grammar and wording on its side but also the solid theology. This about it. If it were truly impossible for a person to lose their salvation permanently, why would the author waste his time discussing the topic. *“Some are lost due to falling away and losing their salvation so we don’t need to waste time talking about it.”* This would be the thought. The other often overlooked issue is that if this were discussing Christians losing their salvation, it would set the author of Hebrews against all the other New Testament authors. All the clear passages which discuss salvation show it as a once and done forever experience. The rebirth that God brings to a person at salvation is His work and cannot be undone by human will or effort. Also, it cannot be talking about Christians as the perseverance of the saints comes from God, not human effort. God will never be unfaithful to us (II Timothy 2:13).

[Read Hebrews 6:7-8]

This is an agricultural illustration to discuss the previous point about coming close to salvation and then falling away. The field that brings forth the desired vegetation is blessed while the field that brings forth thorns is cursed.

Q: What does this teach us about the expectations of the Christian life? (*it is to be fruitful, full of godly works, not useless for the kingdom*)

We don’t know and can’t know the heart of an individual whether they are saved or not. The author doesn’t pretend to be omniscient. However, genuine believers will produce the good vegetation consistently over the long haul. Notice the reference to burning. While this could possibly be a reference to hell, considering the pastoral heart of the writer and his desire in this warning, it is probably best taken as burning the field in order to get rid of the weeds and preparing it for a harvest of good crops next planting cycle. God doesn’t give up on people. He may burn the thorns in order to bring the person to repentance in Christ - to see the folly and uselessness of their ways in light of Christ and turn to Him for real life transformation.

[Read Hebrews 6:9-12]

Q: What does the author call the church members in v.9? (*beloved - it's the only place in the book where he refers to them in this way.*)

Q: Why do you think the author refers to them as beloved at this point? (*He had just issued a stern warning to them and wanted to remind them of his motives and loving relationship to them*)

“Convinced” - expresses a strong and absolute conviction that something is a certain way. The author is convinced that this description is not true of those in the church. (Similar to the warnings in chapters 3 & 4 - “*certainly you don't have anything in common with the wilderness generation?*”) This author likes the word “better”. He is convinced that they are better than those who fall away from Christ.

Q: Why is the source of the author's confidence? (*v. 10 - His confidence rests on God's constancy. His is just and will not forget their former works which demonstrated their salvation was real. He's not describing a works based salvation here but is rather indicating that their changed lives are evidenced these former works for faith.*)

v.11 - “desire” - a strong passionate desire or longing - a concern for his friends that is genuine and deeply felt.

Q: What does the author desire? (*v.11 - to be diligent as they were in the beginning*)

Q: How was the church to realize the full assurance of hope? (*by remaining diligent*)

Q: How do we, as believers, maintain our hope today? (*by remaining diligent to what we have learned, and other answers*)

v.12 - “imitators” means to mimic. (*We've seen this word in our Sunday School lately as it pops up in I Thessalonians 1:6 and 2:14*) Imitate those who are mature and growing in the faith - putting it into practice.

Do you see the importance of fellow believers in the Christian life? It's a main theme in the book of Hebrews. A right relationship to God always expresses itself in substantive ministry to the saints in love. Commitment to the local church body is essential to anyone growing to maturity but also maintaining their level of maturity as God uses us to build up one another and uses us as examples for the faith of others. The author is concerned about the Christian community which appears to be inauthentic due to its lack of perseverance. Based on what we saw in vv. 4-6, we cannot equate participation in the local church with spiritual transformation but we can know that to not participate in the local church will greatly hinder one's spiritual growth to maturity.

v. 12 - “inherit” - means to have a sure possession. It doesn't matter how the possession was gained in this sense but just that the person has full rights and possession of whatever is

being discussed. In this case believers have full rights and possession of God's promises to His children.

Q: Who are those who inherit the promises of God according this verse? *(those people of God who continue to live in faith and patience.)*

The word "patience" is a compound word in the Greek which means "big or long" and "suffering or forbearance". So when you put it together, patience is big suffering. (The KJV translates it with long suffering.) The word appears 17 times in the New Testament (in this form). Of those 17 times, 8 of the occurrences refer to the patience of God towards us. That's almost half of the uses describing God as patient in His loving dealings with us.

Q: Why do you think the New Testament puts such emphasis upon revealing to us God's patience? *(It is because it is a function of His unconditional love for us and He becomes a model of what we should expect to display as love to those around us. If God is patient with us, then we certainly can be patient with those around us.)*

Patience is mentioned as one of the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit. When God is active in our lives, we will show patience because that is who we are in Christ. The author of Hebrews is discussing the need for patience in connection with inheriting the promises of God. Let's look at what the patience looked like for Paul as he sought to minister the gospel.

[Read II Corinthians 6:1-10]

Q: What were some of the hardships Paul mentioned he endured for the sake of the ministry in this passage? *(vv.3-10)*

Q: What are the qualities of the Lord Paul expressed or lived out in order to see his ministry bear fruit? *(vv.6-10 - notice that patience is listed in v.6)*

These believers in Hebrews were trying to take a short-cut around godliness. Their hardships had led them to be impatient with God and His promises. The author is reminding them that faith in Christ goes hand in hand with patience.

There are a few issues within a church body that this passage teaches us today.

1) Loving confrontation will need to take place from time to time. The author of Hebrews was a master of this. He confronted the church honestly but also with an overarching love for them and desire for their best. The church needs to be a place for dangerous vulnerability where more than surface peace exists. We are able to speak truthfully to each other because of the commitment we hold to each other and the overarching love we have for one another. Acceptance is a given so honesty and transparency can happen readily. Here are a few pointers for loving confrontation we see in this passage.

a) confrontation must come from the right motive.

b) confrontation needs to be well thought out and well timed, write it down, pray over it,

etc.

c) the person offering the rebuke needs to also offer specific suggestions for action when appropriate.

2) Discipleship. This is a mandate for the church from our Lord in the Great Commission. Shallow theology shows itself in superficial reactions to the strong challenges of our lives and our commitment to Christ. Theology is not what happens in white ivory towers but rather when happens in the nitty-gritty of life, where the rubber hits the road. In this, we must be active in our efforts to disciple one another and be disciplined by others. It is a mutual give and take through the action of the Spirit with the Word of God in the lives of those in a church body. Depth comes from responding to the will of God as it is revealed to the body - through individuals and as a body. It's more than Bible study and prayer but it will be undergirded with Bible study and prayer. Our discipleship needs to be able to meet the challenges given to us by the culture of the world we live in so that we make Christ known and available to them.

Q: What sorts of things do you think would be helpful in our further discipleship?

Q: Are there any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?

Session 9B

Hebrews 6:13-20

As you recall, Hebrews 5:12-6:12 was a section of Scripture employs a preacher's tactic of introducing a subject and then rapidly switch topics before building on the original topic. This ensures that the audience is fully listening. The topic introduced in Hebrews 5 was the high priestly nature of Jesus Christ. This will be the "magnum opus" of this book as it takes up three later chapters of Hebrews (7-10). However, before launching into the meat of his arguments about Jesus being our great high priest, he delivers a warning about being spiritually sluggish and for the listeners to examine their hearts to see if they are truly saved or not based upon their apparent lack of behavior as of late pointing to their lack of spiritual maturity. This grabs their attention. Now that the preacher has his audience's full attention in 6:13-20, the preacher begins to build the back to his main discussion of Christ's high priesthood that he started back in chapter 5.

This section moves quickly from the human responsibility the author focused on in 5:11-6:12 to a consideration of the divine promises for believers. Remember, this preacher loves this battered and waffling congregation of believers. After hearing the rebuke and warning from 5:11-6:12, the response would be that this whole life of faith in Christ is ALL ON US. We have to drum up the strength and hope to make this happen. This section not only builds the bridge back to the big discussion on Christ being the great high priest but also lets the audience know that this life of faith is NOT on them. While they bear their section of responsibility, it is the Lord who makes this life possible and for those who follow Him, it is the expectation because of all He has done for us already.

The example of Abraham [Read Hebrews 6:13-15]

Abraham was a fantastic model of a man who had God's promise and yet he had to live through years in patient expectation to receive the first part of the promises. Abraham is the perfect example of the faithful perseverance for all those with a knowledge of Jewish Scripture.

The backdrop of this passage, to what our author is referring to is the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. Abraham is being used as a hero figure to encourage the community struggling with perseverance under great trials. The following passage is God's response to Abraham after Abraham chose to follow God's leadership as opposed to sparing Isaac.

[Read Genesis 22:15-18]

There are two features to God's response.

- 1) The Lord's declaration of "I swear by Myself" refers back to Psalm 110:4 (*"The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."*) Remember, the author is moving the audience back to this discussion.
- 2) God's pledge to Abraham. Genesis 22:17 - *"I will surely bless you..."* This is a Hebrews infinitive absolute. It emphasizes the certainty that this blessing will indeed happen. There should be no doubt about it. After this Abraham patiently waited and then received what was promised (at least the first part of it).

Q: Why do you think Abraham makes a fitting model or example for the original audience? (*They were sluggish in their behavior of things pertaining to the faith. This refocuses their attention on the promised rewards God has for them. Other answers are possible.*)

Abraham was content to wait on God's timing to fulfill the promises made to him. Isaac came 25 years after the promise was originally made to Abraham when he was 100 years old and his wife, Sarah, was 90 years old. It was 60 years before Abraham saw any grandchildren. At this point, Abraham only lived another 15 years. So while Abraham didn't see his descendants multiplied like the stars in the sky or sand on the shore, he did see the beginning of what was promised - enough to understand God was completely reliable and would continue fulfilling the promise long after he had died.

Q: What is your general mood when you are told you must wait for something?

Q: What does the act of waiting show about our faith in God? (*We believe He will be true to His Word. encourage other answers as there are more*)

Q: If Abraham is being used as an example of how part of God's promise to him was going to happen after his death, what can we learn from this example? (*Some of God's promises to us come after our death - such as heaven.*)

The finality of oaths [Read Hebrews 6:16-18]

This section deals with oaths, particularly the legal oaths taken in the ancient world used to settle legal disputes. When considering human oaths, there are two characteristics to be

mindful of:

1) They require an appeal to one who is of higher status than the one making the oath. This gives credibility to the words of the oath.

2) The second feature of an ancient oath is that it brings a confirmation or provides a legal guarantee of truthfulness. (In our court system today, this would be similar to making an affidavit. It is swearing that evidence given is true.)

This if this is true in human courts, then how much more assured is the fact when God Himself swears an oath to it's truthfulness? Both human and divine oaths point to a confirmation of the truth.

Q: What was the oath God took? *(that of the promises to Abraham being real and valid)*

Q: Why do you think it would be important for these believers to understand that God made an oath to keep His promises? *(Their situation led them to be waffling in their belief about God and His ability or willingness to keep His promises to them.)*

Q: According to vv.17-8, what were God's reasons for giving the oath? *(It gives proof this is His will is unchangeable. This leads those awaiting God's promises, the heirs of the promise, to find strong encouragement from the oath that grants them hope that God will ultimately fulfill His promises to them. Other answers possible.)*

The word "make clear" or "show" (v.17) means to show as in to "give proof or evidence". God was giving proof through the oath that His purpose was unchangeable. This word "unchangeable" was used extensively in ancient wills and contracts to indicate terms and conditions that could NOT be annulled or modified once ratified.

God's purpose, which cannot be annulled, is to grant His heirs their promised inheritance.

The word "interposed" or "confirmed" means to "stand between". It is the stand of a guarantor. God takes the place of two people, so to speak, in this passage. God is the giver of the promise and then He is also the guarantor of the promise (like a co-signer to a loan). This word is in the aorist tense meaning that God made this oath once in the past but it's power is still in force in the present - for those of us who are heirs.

Notice that the word "heirs" is used in v.17. This is talking about promises God made were not confined to Abraham. Not every promise dealt directly with Abraham.

Q: What are some points to the promise God made to Abraham which refer to things beyond Abraham? *(descendants greatly multiplied, blessing to the whole world - through Messiah, etc.)*

[Read Galatians 3:1-11, 26-29]

Q: Who are the sons of Abraham? *(3:7 - those who are of faith in Christ - not the law)*

Q: According to Galatians, who is blessed along with Abraham? *(v.9 - those who are of the same faith as Abraham)*

Q: What is our inheritance? *(salvation, righteousness, adoption into God's family, forgiveness of*

sin, eternal life in heaven with God, etc.)

Q: How do we know that God will deliver on His promises to us? *(The oath He made.)*

Q: What are the “two things” which the author is referring to in v.18? *(the promise and the oath)*

Q: Why do you think the author brings out that it is impossible for God to lie? *(These believers were doubting God and their own faith in Christ. By bringing out that God doesn't lie, it would give the hearers hope that what God had promised would come to pass in God's time.)*

Notice in v.18 the author discussed “we have fled for refuge”. Here he is including himself, like all believers, as those who have fled the Jewish religion for the refuge that is found in the promises to Abraham and his heirs, which is ultimately Christ, the Messiah and Savior.

Q: What are some of the opposites of hope? *(despair, hopelessness, giving up, etc.)*

This hope is “set before us”. This literally means this hope is “lying in front of us or offered to us”. It is an inviting prospect and these believers are encouraged to take hold of it. Those who have fled for refuge are “laying hold” of the hope set before us. “Laying hold of” is a weak translation. It would be better translated “laid hold of” - past tense signifying a one-time event. If it were in the present tense, which it isn't, it would be a good translation. But the author has in mind the one time event of laying hold of Christ for salvation and thus obtaining the hope by becoming and heir to the promises of God.

The encouragement of a firm hope [Read Hebrews 6:19-20]

The author expands upon the stability of Christian hope calling it an anchor for the soul, both sure and steadfast.

Q: What are the things an anchor does for a ship? *(keeps it from drifting, gives stability in a storm, etc.)*

Hope is stabilizing for the Christian. It keeps us from drifting away from the promises of God and keeps us where we need to be in relation to Christ. While the author uses the word “soul” here, it is probable that this is one of the rare instances in the New Testament that the word has a more broad meaning - probably meaning the entire person. Our hope is in more than just spiritual issues but in every issue of life.

The word “sure” - secure, certain, safe

The word “steadfast” - stable, firm, sure

Both of these together describe the anchor - or hope - we have as believers. Our hope is both sure and steadfast.

Q: According to v. 19, where has our hope entered? *(within the veil)*

Q: What veil is the author referring to here? *(the veil of the Temple between the holy place and*

the holy of holies)

Q: When the high priest went behind the veil, whose presence did he find himself directly in?
(*God's*)

So when we put this together, we see that Christian hope enters the sanctuary and it takes us directly into God's presence. While the average person or even priest could never see what was behind the veil, we can now see it as believers. Our hope is not exhausted by what we can see in this world. It is not limited to sight but rather by faith in God.

Jesus is called our forerunner here in v.20. "Forerunner" was originally a word that meant "spy". He entered and spied out God's presence for us and so now we are following Him into God's presence. He did this on our behalf - for us. But the forerunner also came to have the meaning that one went first paving the way for the success of others. This is the way the New Testament describes John the Baptist. He paved the way for Jesus and the success of His ministry in the sense that he prepared the people's hearts for God's Messiah's arrival. He not only showed us the way into God's presence but He also atoned for our sins so we could enter into God's presence as those who are heirs to God's promises. Jesus paved the way for our successful entry into the direct presence of God through the sacrifice of Himself. You and I don't have direct access to our human elected officials yet we have complete, unfettered, full access to the Creator of the Universe and Judge of All through Jesus Christ, our forerunner.

Q: According to v.20, what has Jesus become for us? (*a high priest*)

Unlike the high priesthood of Aaron and the Law of the Old Testament, that allowed only one man, the high priest to enter into God's direct presence once per year, this new high priest, in the order of Melchizedek, allows entry into God's presence at all times. Once one has laid hold of the hope (which is Jesus Christ), one now has access to God directly. Now the author has moved the community of faith back to his main point, Jesus is our great high priest and it will take us weeks to cover this following three chapters.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?