

Full Assurance

Devotional Reading: Psalm 23
Background Scripture: Hebrews 6:9-20

Hebrews 6:9-20

⁹ Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation. ¹⁰ God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. ¹¹ We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. ¹² We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

¹³ When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, ¹⁴ saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.” ¹⁵ And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

¹⁶ People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. ¹⁷ Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸ God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ²⁰ where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

Key Text

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. —Hebrews 6:19-20

Hope in the Lord

Unit I: Experiencing Hope

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List elements of the “diligence” Christians are to practice.
2. Explain the meaning and significance of Jesus as “forerunner” and “high priest forever.”
3. Write a prayer of thanks for God’s keeping of his promises.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Seal the Deal
- B. Lesson Context

I. Promise Made (Hebrews 6:9-12)

- A. Declaration (v. 9)
- B. Source (v. 10a)
- C. Basis (vv. 10b-12)

The Vital Element of Initiative

II. Promise Fulfilled (Hebrews 6:13-20)

- A. By God’s Greatness (vv. 13-15)
On Swearing to God
- B. By God’s Faithfulness (vv. 16-20)

Conclusion

- A. The Deal Is Sealed
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Seal the Deal

In early years of expansion on the North American continent, there were few written codes for pioneers to follow. In those days, a handshake was considered a person’s contract and signature. Rather than having lengthy documents with multiple signatures and notarized stamps, a person’s word was his or her bond. Not keeping one’s word risked social ostracism.

The Bible occasionally depicts the keeping of contracts or the honoring of promises in a similar way. In the Old Testament, people might seal a deal by making a vow to the Lord. A Bible dictionary defines a vow as “a voluntary promise to God to perform some service or do something pleasing to him in return for some hoped-for benefits” (examples: Genesis 28:20-22; Judges 11:30). A vow could be made to abstain from certain things (example: Numbers 6:1-8). The law demanded that those who uttered a vow were bound by it (Numbers 30; compare Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Ecclesiastes 5:4-5). That’s crystal clear regarding human obligations. But what about God’s promises? The answer is found in today’s lesson.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Hebrews is unique in the collection of New Testament letters in that the author’s name is never divulged. But *anonymous* doesn’t mean *completely unknown* since the original readers had a personal relationship with that person (Hebrews 13:22-24). Throughout the centuries, scholars have speculated that the writer could have been Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, Luke, Paul, or Priscilla. Even so, the book’s anonymity does not make it any less God’s truth; not stating the identity of the author was a common practice at that time, especially when the original audience had a connection with the author. Even though we don’t know the author’s name, the original audience did!

The absence of a title to this letter in the earliest existing Greek manuscripts makes it challenging to identify the original recipients. Some scholars think that the author lived in Rome. This assertion is based on the writings of Clement of Rome (lived

about AD 35–99), who cited numerous passages from Hebrews (see the many quotes from Hebrews 1 in the nonbiblical 1 Clement 36). In addition, there is a reference to Italy in Hebrews 13:24.

The lack of information regarding the recipients has resulted in no shortage of proposals! The passage of time alluded to in Hebrews 5:12 is thought to indicate that a second generation of believers is in view. The word *remember* in Hebrews 13:7 is taken to support this proposal, as this verse challenges the original audience to recall instructions from the leaders of the first generation of believers. This theory is viable as long as the word *remember* is intended to mean “recall information from memory.” But the Greek word translated *remember* can also mean “keep thinking about,” as it seems to intend in Hebrews 11:15. There, the same underlying Greek word is translated “thinking.” In any case, the many references to the priesthood and numerous Old Testament personalities (Hebrews 11) point to an audience of Jewish background.

There are various ways to outline the book. One way is in terms of five passages of warning. These five are Hebrews 2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:19–39; and 12:14–29. Each warning section includes a call to salvation and a vivid description of the consequences if God’s way is rejected.

Today’s lesson text includes part of the third warning. This passage consists of four sections split between negative and positive appeals. Hebrews 5:11–14 is negative, balanced by the positive 6:1–3. Hebrews 6:4–8 returns to a negative warning and is offset by the encouragement found in today’s lesson.

I. Promise Made

(Hebrews 6:9–12)

A. Declaration (v. 9)

9. Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation.

The opening *even though* indicates that what follows contrasts in some way with what has just been said. In the verse immediately before the one

at hand, the writer of Hebrews wrapped up his or her negative cautions (see Lesson Context) to switch to a discussion of *better things*. The writer does not define or give specifics about these better things, saying only that they are things to anticipate.

In making the transition, the writer does not deny the applicability of the warning just given in Hebrews 6:4–8. We know this because of similar warnings given later (see Hebrews 10:26–28). Noteworthy is the fact that the writer is self-inclusive in using the plural *we*. This is sometimes called an “editorial we,” as it is used when writers speak with the authority of their position.

One detail speaks to the connection between the writer and the original intended audience: the phrase *dear friends*. The use of this underlying Greek word in similar contexts indicates a close connection and personal acquaintance (example: Romans 16:8–9, 12).

B. Source (v. 10a)

10a. God is not unjust; he will not forget

Having declared the promise of better things, the writer transitions to speaking of the one who makes the promise: *God*. In using the description *not unjust*, the writer employs a form of rhetoric known as *litotes*. This device occurs when a writer or speaker creates an understatement by expressing an affirmative by means of a negative to the contrary. In other words, we might affirm that something is “good” by declaring it “not bad.” Therefore, the fact communicated here is that God is righteous. The premise of God’s justice is connected with his unwillingness to *forget*. What it is that God won’t forget is stated next.

How to Say It

Apollo	Uh- <i>pahl</i> -us.
Barnabas	<i>Bar</i> -nuh-bus.
Ecclesiastes	Ik- <i>leez</i> -ee-as-teez.
Ishmael	<i>Ish</i> -may-el.
litotes	<i>lie</i> -tuh-teez.
Melchizedek	Mel- <i>kiz</i> -eh-dek.
omnipotent	ahm- <i>nih</i> -poh-tent.
Silas	<i>Sigh</i> -luss.

C. Basis (vv. 10b-12)

10b. your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

The recipients of this letter had *helped* in ways that visibly witnessed to their salvation. We know that good works result *from* salvation; they don't result *in* salvation. Salvation is by grace through faith and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus had said that the world would know his followers by their *love* for one another (John 13:35). The love we demonstrate is (or should be) a result of the grace and forgiveness received in Christ.

The phrase *have shown him* harmonizes with the imperative that ministry is to be done as though doing it to Christ himself (see Matthew 25:40). The author uses past and present tense verbs (*have helped and continue to help*) to acknowledge the work of believers. From this, we can conclude that the recipients of this letter were consistent in living out their faith.

What Do You Think?

How will you show care and love to other believers in the upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

How will you show care and love to believers whom you may consider annoying or disagreeable?

11. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized.

The writer's concern for consistent pastoral care continues. This was not only for the benefit of the one receiving the care but also evidence of the recipients' *hope . . . fully realized*. So that they do not get discouraged, the author directs their attention to the finish line (compare Hebrews 3:14; 12:1).

Scholars disagree about whether *the very end* refers to the end of the lives of the original readers or the end of the age (compare and contrast Matthew 10:22; 13:39-40; 24:13; John 13:1). Either way, the imperative of uninterrupted faithfulness is paramount. The apostle Paul saw life as a race to be finished for the hope of reward (Acts 20:24; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:7-8).

12. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

The opposite of being diligent is to be *lazy*. The underlying Greek word occurs in only two places in the New Testament: here and in Hebrews 5:11. There, the translation is the phrase *no longer try*, found in a context that warns against failing to hear. We know that a failure to listen will sometimes result in a failure to act accordingly. The author hopes the readers will both hear and minister according to the truth (compare James 1:22).

The author of Hebrews realizes that the readers may need more than a pep talk in this regard. Thus, the readers are encouraged to follow the example of those who have been faithful in ministry (compare 1 Corinthians 4:6; 11:1; Ephesians 5:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14).

What Do You Think?

What precautions do you take to be not only a *hearer* of God's Word but a *doer* of its commands as well?

Digging Deeper

Who will be an accountability partner so that you might "never tire of doing what is good" (2 Thessalonians 3:13)?

The Vital Element of Initiative

Jim and Zach had been friends since middle school. They decided to attend the same Bible college, planning to become youth ministers. At college, they met Mike, a student who was a year older. Mike offered to mentor the two in a discipleship group. The three became inseparable.

Things changed, however, after they left college. Mike got married and spent less time with Jim and Zach. Jim and Mike both found ministry positions, while Zach struggled with his calling. He eventually took a non-ministry job to support himself.

The spiritual lives of all three began to suffer under changing realities. Mike began to feel his ministry was more of a job than a calling. Jim became increasingly disillusioned with his faith, and Zach started to describe himself as agnostic.

A cursory glance at their lives would not detect

laziness or lack of diligence. They had started with deep devotion, completed their education, and found ways to serve God. Yet, over time, their commitment to God wavered. They needed to “imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.” (Hebrews 6:12). For that to have happened, who should have taken the initiative? How can you avoid the regret of not doing so regarding a struggling believer you know right now? —A. W.

II. Promise Fulfilled

(Hebrews 6:13-20)

A. By God’s Greatness (vv. 13-15)

13. When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself,

The patriarch *Abraham* is mentioned by name 10 times in the book of Hebrews. Clearly, he is a pivotal figure to this writer. Even so, the emphasis here is on God, who *made* a certain *promise* to that man.

The promise in view is found in Genesis 22:15-18. Before we delve into the nature of that promise, we note that making a vow or swearing an oath is virtually the same thing. Psalm 132:2 depicts the two actions in parallel lines (compare Numbers 30:2, 10). It was permissible in the Old Testament era to swear by the name of Israel’s God because he was the only true God (Deuteronomy 6:13; Isaiah 65:16). Thus, when God himself makes a promise or swears an oath, he must *swear . . . by himself* because *no one greater* in the universe exists by which to swear (45:23). The original readers would have been encouraged by this reminder that God’s promises are assured since his unsurpassed greatness confirms them.

The fact that vows are not necessarily sinful in and of themselves in the New Testament era is established in Acts 18:18, which records Paul’s taking of a vow. But the taking of vows and swearing of oaths were widely misused in the first century, as human tradition displaced God’s Word. The result was self-serving oaths and vows; Jesus condemned such a practice in no uncertain words (Matthew 5:33-37; 15:4-6; 23:16-22; Mark 7:6-13).

On Swearing to God

There is one thing about the television show *Cops* that never seems to change: when suspects realize that their explanations and denials aren’t being accepted at face value, they will escalate their claims by saying, “I swear to God.” In one show, the arresting officer who heard this oath responded, “Well, you’re lying to God!” In another episode, an experienced police officer noted that when suspects double down by saying, “I swear to God,” that’s the point when he’s *certain* they are lying!

A review of particular Scripture passages would be invaluable to some, were they to understand those passages as God’s warning to them. On oath-taking in general, Matthew 5:33-37 is a good start. On the forgivability of lying while swearing an oath, Mark 14:71 and John 21:15-19 provide insight. Concerning various sins, including lying, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Revelation 21:8; 22:15 are brutally cautionary. But before we take these warnings to others, do we heed them ourselves?

—R. L. N.

14-15. saying, “I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.” And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

The quotation from Genesis 22:15-18 continues. *What was promised* from God was that through Abraham’s vast number of descendants, all the nations of the world would be blessed (Genesis 18:18; 22:17-18). While Abraham (Abram) was at Harran, God had promised him *many descendants* (12:1-4; stressed anew in 15:5). God began fulfilling that promise 25 years later when the 100-year-old Abraham had a son named Isaac (21:5). The staggering result some 620 years later is seen in Numbers 1:1-46.

Abraham’s main task during those 25 years was to wait *patiently*, as such would demonstrate his trust in God. That man’s patience wore thin after 11 years of waiting when he tried to help push God’s plan along by the conception and birth of Ishmael (Genesis 16). But, in God’s timing, the promise was indeed fulfilled as Abraham learned patience over the course of an additional 14 years until the birth of Isaac.

As with other cases in the Bible, God’s intent

was eventually distorted by self-serving human tradition and pride. By the first century AD, a widely held belief was that physical descent from Abraham was the ticket to being right with God (see Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8; etc.). But the more important issue was (and is) to be a spiritual descendant of Abraham (see Romans 4:9-17; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:7-9).

What Do You Think?

How will you demonstrate patience in following God's plan, even if you don't fully understand it?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to strengthen your patience as the world grows increasingly impatient and hurried?

B. By God's Faithfulness (vv. 16-20)

16. People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument.

This verse reflects Exodus 22:10-11. A person swearing an *oath* in that context was inviting God to witness the truth of the testimony. Ideally, this served to put *an end to all argument* of the case at hand (compare Genesis 21:23). The compelling idea here is that people take oaths in light of something or someone who is *greater*. And there is nothing or no one greater than God.

17. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.

In taking the oath, *God* communicated on the level of humanity's understanding at the time. He did so in order that there would be no doubt regarding his intention and commitment to implement his plan. This resolve is reflected in the phrase *the unchanging nature of his purpose*. The underlying Greek word occurs in the New Testament only in this verse and the next.

18. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged.

A trick question sometimes asked of Christians is, "Do you believe that God can do anything?" The trap is that if the response is *no*, then the Christian has admitted to following a deity who is less than omnipotent (meaning "all-powerful"). But if the answer is *yes*, then the Christian can be asked a follow-up question such as, "So, you believe that God can make two plus two equal seven?"

The correct response to the first question is to state that God cannot do anything that would violate his own nature. God is the one who created all the rules that order the universe. This fact reveals him to be a God of order, not disorder. Regarding the second question, to violate a rule that requires two plus two always to equal four would be for God to violate his own orderly nature. This is not a sign of weakness—in fact, quite the opposite! In the verse at hand, we see an affirmation of all this in the fact that *it is impossible for God to lie* (compare Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Titus 1:2; see lesson 12). That is one of the *two unchangeable things* in view in the verse at hand.

The second of those two things is that God sealed the promise with an oath, as already discussed. We should not lose sight of the fact that an important goal of the writer is to prevent the readers from falling away from Christ (Hebrews 6:4-6). The stress on the absolute reliability of God's promises serves to achieve this goal. How foolish to abandon this *hope*!

What Do You Think?

How does knowledge of God's omnipotence strengthen your faith?

Digging Deeper

What other attributes of God have encouraged and strengthened your faith?

19-20. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

The focus on *hope* continues as the author weaves metaphors together to illustrate the mes-

sage. Anchors bring to mind thoughts of stability (compare and contrast Acts 27:13-17). This verse is the only instance in the New Testament where *an anchor* is used to illustrate Christian hope.

The second metaphor involves the temple *curtain*. The curtain in the temple in Jerusalem served to divide areas. As the writer later notes, “behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place” (Hebrews 9:3; compare Exodus 26:33). Rules for going behind that curtain to enter the Most Holy Place were highly restrictive (see Leviticus 16; Hebrews 9:7). The Gospels record that the temple’s curtain was torn from the top to the bottom when *Jesus* died on the cross (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). Thus Jesus was in some sense *our forerunner . . . on our behalf*. The writer of Hebrews explains this further in Hebrews 10:19-25.

The primary reference in the Old Testament to the mysterious *Melchizedek* is Genesis 14:18, with another one found in Psalm 110:4. The writer closes this section of the book of Hebrews by reflecting on the imagery of this psalm, as he did earlier in Hebrews 5:6, 10. Reference to this ancient person invites further explanation—an explanation that follows immediately in Hebrews 7:1-17.

What Do You Think?

How would you explain Christian hope to an unbeliever by using the metaphor of an anchor?

Digging Deeper

What other metaphors can you use to communicate Christian hope?

Conclusion

A. The Deal Is Sealed

The state of Alaska covers some 586,000 square miles of land, which is more than 375 million acres. In 1867, the United States purchased Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million in one of the largest land deals in history. Adjusted for inflation, the purchasing power of that sum of money was about \$122.2 million in 2018. That was the year that Amazon purchased the home security company Ring for an undisclosed amount that many experts estimate to be approximately \$1 billion.



Visual for Lessons 4 & 5. Have this visual on display as you discuss the commentary and discussion questions associated with Hebrews 6:19-20.

Therefore, Amazon’s purchase was about 90 times what was paid for Alaska! There are many differences between these two transactions. But they had one thing in common: money needed to change hands to seal the deal.

When God promised Abraham that his offspring would bless all nations, that was the beginning of the Abrahamic covenant. It was a promise that reached beyond Abraham’s immediate descendants to encompass the entire world. The fulfillment of the promise lay in the work of Jesus on the cross. Once humanity’s debt of sin was paid, no further payment was required.

That means that we are invited to be heirs to the promise, not to be the purchaser of the promise. The question is whether or not we can live out this life-changing truth. To live this truth means that we rest in the work of Christ and cease trying to redeem that which we have already inherited through faith. Do you?

B. Prayer

Father, we thank you for the certainty of your promises—promises based on your Son’s work on the cross. May this ever be a reminder to us that you will do the things you promised, even as we anticipate the return of Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Be assured that our future is ensured.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Have the phrase *Elements of a contract* written on the board as learners arrive. Invite learners to name examples of contracts that they have signed. Then ask volunteers to name common elements of those contracts; write responses on the board.

After about five minutes of discussion, ask: “What are legitimate reasons to breach a contract?” If no one mentions it, say that the contract itself may have “escape clauses” built in. Another legitimate reason to breach a contract is if one or more of its provisions are unconscionable.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Let’s Make a Deal” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask pairs to complete the exercise as indicated.

Lead into the lesson by saying, “People make deals, but God makes promises!” Note that some of his contractual promises include escape clauses (example: Jeremiah 39:18), and some do not (example: Ezekiel 17:18). And God’s covenantal promises are never unconscionable. God will not break his covenant with humanity, nor will he impose impossible conditions to meet.

Make a transition by saying, “Let’s see how the writer of Hebrews draws on these ideas.”

Into the Word

In advance, reproduce the 12 verses of the lesson text, along with their verse numbers, on 12 slips of paper, one verse per slip. Have learners draw slips blindly from a container, with slips distributed evenly in proportion to class size. Have learners read their drawn verse(s) aloud in numeric order.

Then divide the class into three teams: **God Researchers**, **Audience of Hebrews Researchers**, and **Abraham Researchers**. Have each team list the many characteristics of the individual(s) assigned to them by looking in and beyond the

lesson text. Provide aids for the research as the nature of your class and your advance study dictate. Allow several minutes for teams to work.

Reread Hebrews 6:9-20 aloud, stopping at the end of each verse. Allow time for the individual groups to share any attributes found in that verse. Lead a discussion as to why the author of Hebrews chose to describe specific characteristics of God by stating what God is not.

Discuss why the author of Hebrews described the various attributes of God, the letter’s original readers, and Abraham. *Option.* For further discussion, ask, “What advantage do the characteristics of individuals bring to the story, and how does this help readers today in terms of diligence to be exercised?” (*Expect responses to mention their faithfulness as enduring models to emulate.*)

Dig deeper by asking how the mention of the Melchizedek priesthood, an anchor, and the temple relate to these attributes. Be prepared to explain these yourself. Make a transition to the Into Life section by discussing the significance of Jesus as a “forerunner” and a “high priest forever” (Hebrews 6:20).

Into Life

Distribute index cards that have *THANKS* written vertically (you prepare). Challenge learners to take no more than one minute to write a thank you note to God using the word on the card as an acrostic. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less.

Option. Time allowing, have learners write on the back of their index cards some life situations that have caused them to doubt the promises of God (*examples: sickness, job loss*). Then have them write a promise or declaration from the lesson text that encourages them about that situation. Invite learners to take the cards home and consult them throughout the week when discouragement and doubt arise.