

ter of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews,” this title was not a part of the original writing of the document. In reality, it was added several centuries after the writing of Hebrews in order to identify the document as it became a standard part of the New Testament documents. And it reflected a dominant viewpoint at that time. Yet, one should notice the location of Hebrews in the New Testament. The thirteen Pauline letters are listed in descending order of length beginning with the longest -- Romans -- down to the shortest -- Philemon. The exceptions to this are where two letters are written to the same church or individual. In those instances, the length of the first of these determined the position of both letters. The sevenfold General Letters section follows a similar pattern beginning with James and concluding with Jude. Hebrews is tucked between these two sections reflecting a partial association with Paul as his ‘fourteenth’ letter, but isn’t positioned lengthwise after Romans, where it should be as a full member of the Pauline corpus of letters.

To a large extent, in the early centuries of Christian interpretation, the authorship of Hebrews remained an open question. Since the time of the Protestant Reformation, the dominant view of NT scholars -- both Protestant and Roman Catholic -- is that Paul did not write it. Then who did? No one knows with certainty! As Werner Georg Kümmel puts it in his NT Introduction,

Since the author of Heb keeps his identity completely in the background — only the close connection with Timothy (13:23) points to the Pauline circle, if indeed the well-known companion of Paul is intended — the most diverse possibilities have been proposed, of which the following may be mentioned:

1. Paul. This proposal is represented nowadays even from the Catholic standpoint only very rarely⁶² and has proved to be untenable (§26.3).

2. Luke. Clement of Alexandria (see §26.2) on the basis of the kinship of style with Acts held that Luke was the translator of a letter written by Paul in Hebrew. But Heb is not a translation and varies so sharply in style and theological distinctiveness that the author of Acts as the author of Heb is not really to be considered.

3. Clement of Rome. The old hypothesis which was already known by Origen (see §26.2) founders on the impossibility of conceiving that Heb and I Clem are the work of the same man, as well as on the assumption of literary dependence of I Clem upon Heb.

4. Apollos. Considered by Luther and represented with vigor by Bleek, this hypothesis has found many

adherents.⁶³ This Jewish-Christian biblical scholar from Alexandria, who was also instructed in Greek rhetoric (Acts 18:24 ff) and who carried on a mission alongside Paul but independently of him (1 Cor 1:12; 3:4 ff; 16: 12), could be conceived of as the author of Heb. But we do not know whether Apollos was active as a writer, and it cannot be proved that he was the only one among the Christian διδασκαλοι of the apostolic times who could have written the letter to the Hebrews.

5. Barnabas. In accordance with the tradition attested by Tertullian, Barnabas has frequently been proposed as the author of Heb.⁶⁴ But could Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus (Acts 4:36) who later took up residence in Jerusalem and was a highly regarded member of the community there (Acts 9:27; 11:22) have so completely abandoned the position of the primitive community with regard to the law and the cultus? Could he have been so rhetorically trained and so Hellenistically oriented as to become the author of Heb?

It is in reality no longer possible to determine the identity of the author. This conclusion was reached by Origen and has been adopted from the time of Eichhorn and De Wette down to and including most more recent scholars.

Because of the limited information available, only a few images of the author of Hebrews can be understood from inside the document itself. This is summarized well by Fred Craddock in the *New Interpreter's Bible*,

The author was a Christian who lived and thought within the apostolic tradition (Heb 2:3). Timothy had been a companion in ministry and might be again (Heb 13:23). The writer was temporarily distanced from the readers but expects to return to them soon (Heb 13:19, 23). Their situation is known in great detail, either through their leaders (Heb 13:7, 17, 24) or by direct association. The writer joined strong pastoral concern with the authority of either person or office. Both the instructions and the exhortations of the letter reveal a person well educated in Greek rhetoric as well as in Judaism, especially Hellenistic Judaism formed in part by the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Greek translation and not the Hebrew text provides the major lines and the subtler nuances of the writer's argument and appeal.”

William Lane (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Logos Systems) contributes more to the internal profile understanding:

- * He possessed an architectural mind; he affirms a thesis and then develops it by way of analysis.
- * The writer's rhetorical skill is universally recognized.
- * The writer was evidently well educated by Hellenistic

standards.

- * The writer may be characterized as an intensely religious man.
- * The writer, finally, was a pastoral theologian who adapted early Christian traditions to fashion an urgent appeal to a community in crisis

When and to whom was this document written?

The ancient title “To the Hebrews” reflects an early tradition that the first readers were Jewish Christians. But this is not entirely certain. The contents of the document somewhat suggest this but other ways of explaining the content can also be made with persuasion. The more common time frame for the writing of this document is toward the end of the first Christian century, although many NT scholars find indications inside the letter suggesting it was written closer to the middle of the first century. Again, Craddock summarizes the issue well by saying,

If we broadly identify the readers as Hellenistic Jewish Christians, perhaps the best guess for their



location is Rome. When the writer says, “those from Italy send you greetings” (Heb 13:24 NRSV), it is not clear whether the expression locates the writer or the readers in Italy. Similarities to 1 Peter, a letter written from Rome (1 Pet 5:13), argue for a Roman origin. However, early knowledge of Hebrews by Clement of Rome indicates a Roman destination, and what we know of the house churches in Rome makes that city a likely candidate as the location of the addressees.

My reading of this material leads me to the conclusion that the dating of the writing seems to be during the 60s of the first century, as implied from a few historically oriented markers inside the document, particularly in regard to the anticipated near destruction of the temple. But even these indicators are not precise. The place of writing and the destination of the document are less clear. The later added title “To the Hebrews” most likely indicates at least a later belief that the document was written to Jewish Christians. The Conclusio section, 13:18-25, which is the only true letter aspect of the document, does strongly suggest a group of Christians in a specific location, rather than Jewish Christians everywhere like James 1:1 indicates. But no internal markers give clear indication of where that location might have been. The strong Hellenistic tones of the content of the document do suggest that these Christians were residing somewhere outside of Palestine.

Internal History. Inside 6:13-20, the time and place markers are focused on the Old Testament with Abraham and Melchizedek in Gen. 22. Jesus has symbolically entered behind the curtain of the temple in the Holy of Holies, perhaps implying that the temple in Jerusalem is still in existence. Almost no concrete reference to his readers with identifying markers is present in these verses. So the passage has a timeless quality built into it, rather than a sharply focused historical emphasis on the initial target group of the letter.

b. Literary

Genre. The issues relating to literary form arise at two levels. Although the document is labeled a letter, the only part of the entire document that follows an ancient letter format -- unlike all the letters of Paul -- is the last part, the Conclusio in 13:18-25. And it is very traditional in this. Interestingly, 13:22 calls the document a *παράκλησις* (*paraklesis*), that is, a sermon, as is reflected in the NRSV translation, “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, bear with my word of *exhortation*, for I have written to you briefly.” Most NT scholars will call Hebrews an ancient ser-

mon or homily, written somewhat along the lines of an ancient Greek epideictic oratory used to confirm certain values and/or to praise significant individuals.

Literary Context. The contents of Hebrews is oriented to achieving the objective of explaining and defending the thesis set forth in the prologue in 1:1-4, that is, the superiority of Jesus to both Moses and the Law as a means of salvation.

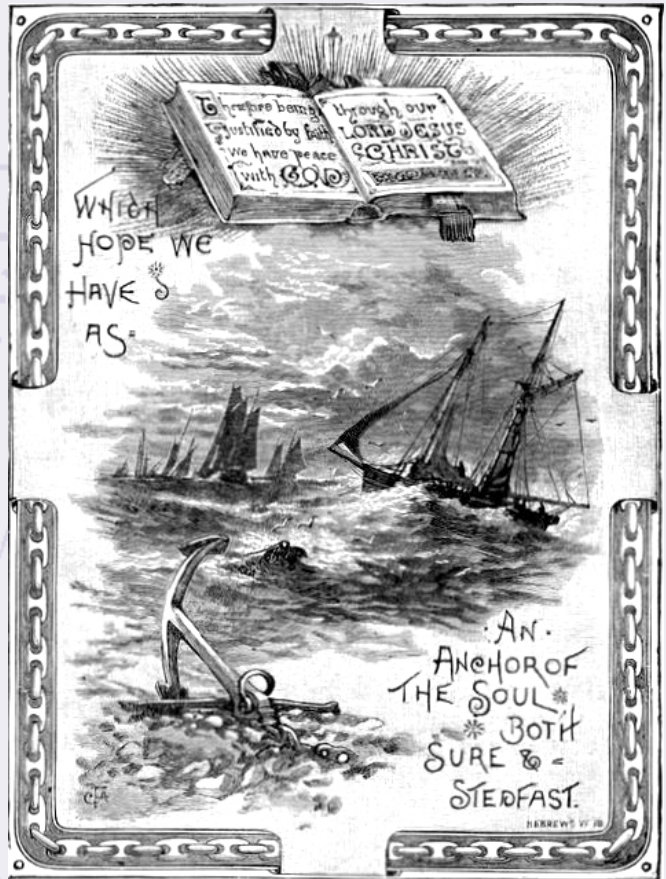
The thematic emphases in the book stress Jesus' relation to angels (chaps. 1-2), to Moses and the Law

(chaps. 3-4), to the priesthood and covenant (chaps. 5-12a), and finally paraenetical admonitions (chaps. 12b-13a). The only traditionally letter aspect comes in the Conclusio in the second part of chapter 13.

Our passage therefore comes in the section emphasizing the superiority of Jesus to the priesthood and the covenant found in chapters 5 through 12a. William Lane (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Logos Systems), following the proposal of a doctoral student of mine years ago in his PhD dissertation, George Guthrie, proposes a more detailed analysis of these chapters, as follows:

- | | | |
|-----------|--|--|
| 5:1–7:28 | A. The Son Taken from among Mere and Appointed High Priest | |
| 5:1–10 | 1. Introduction: The Son Taken from among Men and Appointed according to the Order of Melchizedek | |
| 5:11–6:20 | ε. Hortatory Digression
(1) Need for Maturity
(2) Warning: regarding falling away
(3) You will endure
(4) Example of Abraham's endurance and God's oath | |
| 7:1–10 | 2. The Superiority of Melchizedek | |
| 7:11–28 | 3. Our Eternal, Melchizedekan High Priest Superior to the Levitical Priests | |

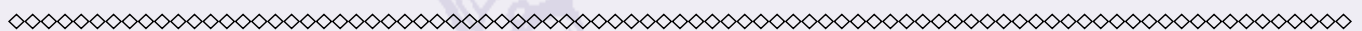
Chapters five through seven comprise a literary unit with a focus on Jesus as high priest. Because He is identified with the mystical Melchizedek in Genesis, his priesthood stands superior to that of the Levitical priesthood who functioned in the temple. An “interruption” in 5:11-6:20 diverts away from the focus on



the priesthood for a stern exhortation of the initial readers to get serious about growing in Christ. 6:1-8 contains a severe warning about the impossibility of restoring repentance after “falling away,” but 6:9-12 expresses confidence in the readers’ commitment to Christ. Then 6:13-20 reaches out to the example of Abraham’s faithfulness as an inspirational model for these believers to follow. Thus, 6:13-20 is especially close to 6:9-12, and 6:20 serves to transition back into the lengthy discussion of Melchizedek begun in 5:1-10. The exegesis of 6:13-20 will keep this important context in mind.

II. Message

Literary Structure. As visually presented in the [Block Diagram](#) of the Greek text in the larger internet version of this study, the internal thought flow of the passage is relatively simple to trace. A twofold division of the two Greek sentences in vv. 13-20 is rather obvious. As explained in greater, more technical detail in the [Summary of the Rhetorical Structure](#) section of this study, the first unit is found in vv. 13-15 with an emphasis upon Abraham and human covenants. The second unit, vv. 16-20, introduced by the causal conjunction γάρ, sets forth a rationale for the first unit.



a. Abraham and the covenant, vv. 13-15

Greek NT	NASB	NRSV	NLT
¹³ Τῷ γὰρ Ἀβραὰμ ἐπαγγειλάμενος ὁ θεός,	¹³ When God made the promise to Abraham, since he had no	¹³ When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no	¹³ For example, there was God’s promise to Abraham. Since

ἐπεὶ κατ' οὐδενὸς εἶχεν
μείζονος ὁμόσαι, ὥμοσεν
καθ' ἑαυτοῦ ¹⁴λέγων, Εἰ
μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω
σε καὶ πληθύνων πλ
ηθυνῶ σε· ¹⁵καὶ οὕτως
μακροθυμήσας ἐπέτυχεν
τῆς ἐπαγγελίας.

one greater by whom
to swear, "he swore by
himself," ¹⁴and said, "I
will indeed bless you
and multiply" you. ¹⁵And
so, after patient waiting,
he obtained the prom-
ise.

one greater by whom
to swear, he swore by
himself, ¹⁴saying, "I will
surely bless you and
multiply you." ¹⁵And
thus Abraham, having
patiently endured, ob-
tained the promise.

there was no one great-
er to swear by, God
took an oath in his own
name, saying: ¹⁴"I will
certainly bless you, and
I will multiply your de-
scendants beyond num-
ber." ¹⁵Then Abraham
waited patiently, and he
received what God had
promised.

Notes:

The connecting link of vv. 13-15 back to vv. 9-12 is γὰρ, the causal coordinate conjunction. The importance of this is clear. The example of Abraham stands as the fountain head of τῶν διὰ πίστεως καὶ μακροθυμίας κληρονομούντων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας ("of those inheriting the promises through faith and endurance") in v. 12. He models faith and endurance, and his spiritual descendants become recipients of the blessing given to him. Harold Attridge (*Hermeneia*, Logos Systems) describes the connection this way:

Hebrews has just expressed confidence that the addressees are headed for salvation and hope that they will do all in their power to attain what they have been promised. That encouragement is now bolstered by a brief reflection on the certainty of God's promises, which uses as an example the case of God's word to Abraham in Gen 22:17¹. For Hebrews that promise is seen to be absolutely certain because it was confirmed by an oath.

The legal language present in the Greek text of vv. 13-15 reaches back to the [Genesis 22](#) narrative of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac, and of God's reaffirmation of the covenant once Abraham had affirmed his unflinching faith in God. The writer stresses the nature of God's oath based pledge to Abraham in Gen. 22:16-18.²

¹I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, Genesis 22:17 (NRSV)

²NRSV. ¹⁵ The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, ¹⁶and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, ¹⁸ and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice."

LXX. ¹⁵καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ἄγγελος κυρίου τὸν Ἀβραὰμ δεύτερον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ¹⁶λέγων κατ' ἑμαυτοῦ ὡμοσα λέγει κύριος οὐ εἶνεκεν ἐποίησας τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο καὶ οὐκ ἐφείσω τοῦ υἱοῦ σου τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ δι' ἐμέ ¹⁷ἢ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω



The twofold core emphasis here is on God validating His promise with an oath, and Abraham through patient endurance receiving what God had promised him.

God's promise: ¹³When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, ¹⁴saying, "I will surely bless you and multiply you" (¹³Τῷ γὰρ Ἀβραὰμ ἐπαγγειλάμενος ὁ θεός, ἐπεὶ κατ' οὐδενὸς εἶχεν μείζονος ὁμόσαι, ὥμοσεν καθ' ἑαυτοῦ ¹⁴λέγων, Εἰ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω σε καὶ πληθύνων πληθυνῶ σε·). The writer thus summarizes Gen. 22:16-17 using the language of the Septuagint translation of the original Hebrew text: ¹⁶λέγων κατ' ἑμαυτοῦ ὡμοσα λέγει κύριος οὐ εἶνεκεν ἐποίησας τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο καὶ οὐκ ἐφείσω τοῦ υἱοῦ σου τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ δι' ἐμέ ¹⁷ἢ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω σε καὶ πληθύνων πληθυνῶ τὸ σπέρμα σου.

Several elements merit examination.

"When God made a promise to Abraham." The Genesis 22 text is a reaffirmation of the promise

σε καὶ πληθύνων πληθυνῶ τὸ σπέρμα σου ὡς τοὺς ἀστέρας τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ὡς τὴν ἄμμον τὴν παρὰ τὸ χεῖλος τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ κληρονομήσει τὸ σπέρμα σου τὰς πόλεις τῶν ὑπειναντίων ¹⁸καὶ ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν τῷ σπέρματί σου πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς ἀνθ' ὧν ὑπήκουσας τῆς ἐμῆς φωνῆς

made to Abraham over half a century earlier and is first recorded in Genesis 15:18-20.³ William Lane (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Logos Systems) notes:

There is in Hebrews a sustained interest in Abraham (2:16; 6:13-15; 7:4-5; 11:8-19). The appeal to Abraham as the prototype of faithful endurance in vv 13-15 gives specific content to the exhortation in v 12. The occasion for the repetition and elaboration of God's earlier promise to Abraham (Gen 12:2-3; 15:5) and its confirmation with an oath was the obedience of the patriarch to the divine command to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen 22:1-12). In response God reaffirmed his pledge to bless Abraham, reinforced by a promissory oath in which he named himself as the guarantor of his word (Gen 22:16; cf. White, *JBL* 92 [1973] 173). The account of the *Āqē'dā*, the offering of Isaac, had a firm place in the liturgy both of the synagogue and the Church and would have been thoroughly familiar to the congregation (Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, 79, 87-88, 123; cf. Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac*, 23-75).

“Because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying...” (ὁ θεός, ἐπεὶ κατ’ οὐδενὸς εἶχεν μείζονος ὁμόσαι, ὥμοσεν καθ’ ἑαυτοῦ λέγων). The writer here paraphrases the LXX of Gen. 22:16a, κατ’ ἑμαυτοῦ ὥμοσα λέγει κύριος (By myself I have sworn, says the LORD). In ancient Jewish oath making, the person making a promise typically based the certainty of his promise on something or someone greater -- and thus more reliable -- than himself. The writer understands that for God nothing or no one greater than Himself was possible as a guarantor of His promise. So God simply swore by His own name, that is His integrity and power, that what was promised would be realized. On this William Lane (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Logos System) notes:

The declaration that God swore by himself (καθ’ ἑαυτοῦ) because there was no one greater by whom he could swear (v 13) is made by Philo as well (*Allegorical Interpretation* 3.203). This is simply a logical deduction from the statement of the text “I swear by myself” (κατ’ ἑαυτοῦ, Gen 22:16 LXX). When the two writers comment on the purpose of the divine oath, however, they diverge. Philo concludes that God swore an oath to Abraham “to assist faith” (*Allegorical Interpretation* 3.204, 207), whereas the writer of Hebrews explains that the purpose of the oath was to prove how irrevocable

³NRSV. 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, 19 the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gergashites, and the Jebusites.”

was the resolve expressed in the divine promise (v 17). The notion that God swears by himself (cf. Exod 32:13; Isa 45:23; Jer 22:5; 49:13) signifies that he is bound to his word by his character. The divine oath provides the guarantee that excludes doubt and affirms the abiding validity of the promise.

“I will surely bless you and multiply you” (Εἰ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω σε καὶ πληθύνων πλῆθυνῶ σε). The writer’s ‘quote’ of Gen. 22:17-18⁴ is considerably different from either the LXX text⁵ or the original Hebrew text.⁶ Again, Lane (*WBC*) observes:



The quotation of Gen 22:17 in v 14 differs both from the LXX and the MT. The result of the alteration of the LXX text, πληθυνῶ τὸ σπέρμα σου, “I will multiply your seed,” to πληθυνῶ σε, “I will multiply you,” is a promise consisting of two clauses with identical endings (“I will bless you and I will multiply you”). With this modification the promise of blessing is sharply focused upon Abraham (Schröger, *Verfasser*, 128). According to Gen 22:17, the divine oath extended both to the promise of numerous descendants and to possession of the land. In specifying only the promise of numerous descendants, the writer of Hebrews prepares his hearers for his emphasis in 11:17-19, when he again refers to the *Āqē'dā*, and focuses on Abraham’s concern for the posterity promised to him through Isaac (cf. Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac*, 185).

The focus by the writer to the Hebrews is upon the descendants of Abraham, not upon the land to be possessed.

Abraham’s realizing that promise: “And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained

⁴NRSV ¹⁷I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, ¹⁸ and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.

⁵LXX ¹⁷ ἢ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω σε καὶ πληθύνων πληθυνῶ τὸ σπέρμα σου ὡς τοὺς ἀστέρας τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ὡς τὴν ἄμμον τὴν παρὰ τὸ χεῖλος τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ κληρονομήσει τὸ σπέρμα σου τὰς πόλεις τῶν ὑπειναντιῶν ¹⁸ καὶ ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν τῷ σπέρματί σου πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς ἀνθ’ ὧν ὑπήκουσας τῆς ἐμῆς φωνῆς

⁶הַדְּבַר הַזֶּה וְלֹא הִשְׁכַּח אֶת-בְּנֵי אֱתֵי-יְחִידָךְ אֲבָרְכְךָ וְהָרַבָּה אֲרַבְּהָ אֶת-זַרְעֲךָ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶת-עַל-שֵׁפֶת הַיָּם וְיִרְשׁ זַרְעֲךָ אֶת שְׁעַר אֵיבֵי ¹⁷ כִּי-בִרְכָךְ כָּל-גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ עֲקֵב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקִלְי וְכַחֲוֹל אֲשֶׁר וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּזַרְעֲךָ ¹⁸



the promise“ (καὶ οὕτως μακροθυμήσας ἐπέτυχεν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας). The key for Abraham is that he patiently endured difficulties in faithfulness to God and thus realized the blessing of God. Attridge (*Hermeneia*) notes on this:

In words that recall the exhortation of vs. 12⁷, Hebrews affirms

that Abraham “persevered” (μακροθυμήσας) and “received the promise” (ἐπέτυχεν⁸ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας). The scriptural episode in view here and again in 11:17–19⁹ indicates the significance of the recommended perseverance. Like Abraham, the addressees are called to have trust in God’s promises and courage to sacrifice what is most precious in order to receive them.¹⁰

From the time of God’s calling of Abraham to leave Ur and journey westward (Gen. 15) to the testing of Abraham’s faith with Isaac (Gen. 22), Abraham

⁷ ¹²so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Hebrews 6:12 (NRSV)

⁸The same verb is used at 11:33* of the unnamed heroes of the OT who obtained promises. In the NT, the term appears only at Rom 11:7 and Jas 4:2 outside of Hebrews. It is common in Ignatius for attaining God. Cf. *Eph.* 12.2; *Magn.* 14; *Trall.* 12.2; 13.3; *Rom.* 1.2. Hebrews also uses κομίζειν for the reception of promises, perhaps with a slight distinction in nuance, since Christians do (10:36) and the OT heroes do not (11:39*) “obtain” (κομίζειν) the promises. Cf. also 11:13, 19.

⁹NRSV ¹⁷By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, ¹⁸of whom he had been told, “It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.”

¹⁹ He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. Hebrews 11:17–19 (NRSV)

¹⁰Cf. Jas 2:21–22*, where a somewhat different implication is drawn from the same episode, namely, that faith must be completed in action. Both cases exploit a Jewish paraenetic commonplace. See Koester, “Auslegung,” 96.

sought faithfully to follow the path that God laid out for him over this half-century plus experience. He was far from perfect in his obedience to God, but he was consistently seeking to follow God. The ultimate test that brought dramatic validation by God was the offering up of Isaac. Isaac was the line through whom the divine blessing would flow to all Abraham’s descendents, and yet Abraham did not hesitate to sacrifice this son, if this was what God wanted him to do. God’s test was to see how strong Abraham’s faith was and once demonstrated God provided the alternative sacrifice, thus sparing the life of Isaac. Thus through Isaac the promised blessing from God was realized by Abraham.

What connection does this have to us today?

Theologically it has a lot to do with us. Repeatedly in the New Testament, [Abraham](#) and his covenant with God looms large as the foundational motif explaining the mission of Jesus as God’s sacrificial Lamb. The idea of [covenant](#)¹¹ is central to the salvific work of Christ. Agreement based on promise is the heart of the idea. In the [new covenant](#) established by Jesus with all humanity, all those who become believers become spiritual sons of Abraham and the recipient of the blessing promised by God to Abraham.

For the writer of Hebrews, Abraham stands additionally as the model of biblical faith and commitment. In the appeal to Abraham here the faithful perseverance of Abraham stands as an inspirational challenge to believers to imitate as they walk with Christ in covenant relationship with God. The example of Abraham still challenges us as contemporary believers to faithfulness to God through Christ. We need to stand fast in our commitment as we journey through life with all its temptations and bad experiences, as the writer put it in [6:11-12](#):

11 And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end, **12** so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

¹¹The biblical words most often translated “covenant” are *berit* [בְּרִית] in the Old Testament (appearing about 280 times) and *diatheke* [διαθήκη] in the New Testament (at least 33 times).

b. God’s faithfulness, vv. 16-20

Greek NT

¹⁶ἄνθρωποι γὰρ κατὰ τοῦ μείζονος ὀμνύουσιν, καὶ πάσης αὐτοῖς ἀντιλογίας πέρασ

NASB

¹⁶Human beings swear by someone greater than themselves; for them an oath

NRSV

¹⁶Human beings, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath giv-

NLT

¹⁶Now when people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold

εἰς βεβαίωσιν ὁ ὄρκος·
¹⁷ἐν ᾧ περισσότερον
 βουλόμενος ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ
 δεῖξαι τοῖς κληρονόμοις
 τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τὸ
 ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς
 αὐτοῦ ἐμεσίτευσεν ὄρκῳ,
¹⁸ἵνα διὰ δύο πραγμάτων
 ἀμεταθέτων, ἐν οἷς
 ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι
 [τὸν] θεόν, ἰσχυρὰν
 παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν οἱ
 καταφυγόντες κρατῆ
 σαι τῆς προκειμένης
 ἐλπίδος· ¹⁹ἣν ὡς ἄγκυραν
 ἔχομεν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀσ
 φαλῆ τε καὶ βεβαίαν
 καὶ εἰσερχομένην
 εἰς τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ
 καταπετάσματος, ²⁰ὅπου
 πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν
 εἰσηλθεν Ἰησοῦς, κατὰ
 τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ
 ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος εἰς
 τὸν αἰῶνα.

serves as a guarantee and puts an end to all argument. ¹⁷So when God wanted to give the heirs of his promise an even clearer demonstration of the immutability of his purpose, he intervened with an oath, ¹⁸so that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to hold fast to the hope that lies before us. ¹⁹This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm, which reaches into the interior behind the veil, ²⁰where Jesus has entered on our behalf as forerunner, becoming high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

en as confirmation puts an end to all dispute. ¹⁷In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath, ¹⁸so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. ¹⁹We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, ²⁰where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

them to it. And without any question that oath is binding. ¹⁷God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. ¹⁸So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. ¹⁹This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. ²⁰Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Notes:

Just as γὰρ ('for') linked vv. 13-20 back to vv. 9-12 as a foundational concept, so does it link vv. 16-20 back to vv. 13-15 as the explanatory defense of the example of Abraham. The writer is still focused on the reliability of oaths, but extends the focus now to the descendants of Abraham whose hope is centered on Jesus as the realization of the blessing promised to Abraham and his descendants.

The thought flow is reflected in the [Block Diagram](#) of the Greek text. These verses are comprised of a single sentence in the original Greek text. The core ideas can be charted out as follows:¹²

¹²The lengthy Greek relative clause introduced by ἐν ᾧ in verse 17 and continuing through verse 20 poses a translational nightmare and is commonly mislabeled in its syntactical function, e.g., William Lane (*Word Biblical Commentary*). Of the above translations, the NRSV comes the closest to capturing the sense of the relative pronoun with its "in the same way." As the [Block Diagram](#) illustrates, the most natural way to understand the relative clause is as an adjective modifier of the noun ὁ ὄρκος (oath) at the end of verse 16. Or, perhaps as an inclusio boundary marker with ὄρκῳ, thus ἐν ᾧ...ὄρκῳ. ("with such an



1) People make oaths

2) Properly made oaths settles any doubt

God only makes proper oaths which then leaves no uncertainty about His keeping His promises. The strategy of the writer is to use human oath making as the backdrop to God's oath to Abraham and how it is then realized in his descendants.

Ellingworth (*New International Greek Testament Commentary*, Logos Systems) has charted out the way the analogy (v. 16) furnishes the backdrop for the application (vv. 17-19a).

This verse introduces the lesser, human part of a comparison which extends to v. 19a (βεβαίαν), the rest of the sentence (vv. 19b-20) forming the transition to chap. 7. Similar comparisons are found, for example, in 9:16f., 27f. In the present passage, the second, divine part of the comparison is naturally more developed:

v. 16	vv. 17-19a
(1) ἄνθρωποι	ὁ θεός
(2) κατὰ τοῦ μείζονος	[καθ' ἑαυτοῦ, v. 13]
(3) ὀμνύουσιν	ἔμεσίτευσεν ὄρκῳ, v. 17
(4) καὶ πάσης αὐτοῖς ἀντιλογίας πέρας	ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι [τὸν] θεόν, v. 18
(5) εἰς βεβαίωσιν ὁ ὄρκος	βεβαίαν, v. 19 διὰ δύο πραγμάτων ἀμεταθέτων.

The elements of the human analogy have parallels in the application to God. But the heart of the comparison is how much more reliable is God over against people. Ellington and Nida (*Translator's Handbook*, Logos Systems) call attention to the function of this analogy in patterns of ancient argumentation. It was called Light to Heavy:

Verses 16-17 illustrate a method of argument often used in Jewish writings as well as in other cultures: If "B" is greater than "A," then anything said about "A" must be even more true of "B" (compare 10.25; 12.25; Matt 6.30; Rom 5.7-9). In particular, anything good said about human beings must be even more true of God.

Human oaths. "Human beings, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all dispute" (ἄνθρωποι γὰρ κατὰ τοῦ μείζονος ὀμνύουσιν, καὶ πάσης αὐτοῖς ἀντιλογίας πέρας εἰς βεβαίωσιν ὁ ὄρκος). Regarding the practice of oath making in the ancient world, Lane (*WBC*) observes:

The fact that God swore an oath to Abraham is compared to the universal human practice of regarding an oath as final for confirmation (cf. Cicero, *Topica*

oath, God swore...") In either instance the meaning remains the same; it extends the second assertion of reliability to God's oath-making. In the second affirmation of the impact of a properly made oath, the writer then extends this idea into the oath that God made with Abraham and his descendants. As such this oath stands as the ultimate example of a properly made oath. And as such it becomes the epitome of reliability and trustworthiness.

20.77; Philo, *On Noah's Work as a Planter* 82). By common definition, an oath is a definitive and binding confirmation of the spoken word and invalidates any contradiction of the statement made. In the OT it was prescribed that oaths should be taken in Yahweh's name (Deut 6:13; 10:20), and lying under oath was condemned as a violation of the Third Commandment (Exod 20:7; Deut 5:11; Zech 5:3-4; Wis 14:29-31; cf. Trites, *Witness*, 28-29, 219; Horst, "Der Eid im Alten Testament," *EvT* 17 [1957] 366-71). In practice, an oath involved the solemn calling upon God to ratify the unequivocal truthfulness of what was asserted or promised. Philo declares, "an oath is nothing else than to call God to bear witness in a disputed matter" (*On the Special Laws* 2.10). The writer may have had in mind the fact that Abraham himself swore by God and required others to do so (Gen 14:22; 21:23-24; 24:3).

Stable interaction between individuals depends upon reliability and trustworthiness. Human oaths serve as a guarantee of reliability. In ancient Jewish practice, the bringing of God into an oath meant obligating oneself by God's Laws which demanded trustworthiness. Thus failure to keep one's sworn promise involved an act of transgression of divine Law, not just the breaking of one's promise.

God's oath. "In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath,¹⁸ so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us" (ἵεν ᾧ περισσώτερον βουλόμενος ὁ θεὸς ἐπιδειξάι τοῖς κληρονόμοις τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τὸ ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ ἔμεσίτευσεν ὄρκῳ, ἵνα διὰ δύο πραγμάτων ἀμεταθέτων, ἐν οἷς ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι [τὸν] θεόν, ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν οἱ καταφυγόντες κρατῆσαι τῆς προκειμένης ἐλπίδος). In the Light to Heavy nature of the analogy, God's oath become all the more trustworthy than human oaths.

The writer applies his analogy to God's promise to the heirs of Abraham, thus indicating that he still has the covenant with Abraham in view. God's oath with His making the promise gives it even greater reliability.



The intention is the “**unchangeable character of his purpose**” (τὸ ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ). The adding of an oath to the promise underscores that God fully intends to carry out what He promised.

Although differencing opinions exist regarding the “**two unchangeable actions**”, Lane (*WBC*) is on better grounds when he concludes:

On δύο πραγμάτων ἀμεταθέτων, “two irrevocable facts,” rests the assurance of receiving the blessings that are the content of Christian hope and that are already prepared for the people of God (v 18a). Although the two items remain unspecified in the text, the reference is almost certainly to the promise of God and his oath (vv 13, 17; cf. Michel, 253; Kuss, 84; Köster, “Die Auslegung,” 100; Hofius, *ZNW* 64 [1973] 135–36). F. Schröger, however, prefers to think of the declarative utterances of God in Ps 2:7 and Ps 110:4, which were brought together and applied to the Son of God in 5:5–6 (*Verfasser*, 128–29); E. Reisner (122) thinks of the two divine oaths that figure prominently in Hebrews, Gen 22:16 and Ps 110:4. In view of the context and the focus on the Christian community in vv 17–18, it would appear to be proper to regard the promise given to Abraham and confirmed with an oath as the type that is given to the community of the new covenant in Christ. B. Klappert has recognized the parallel in formulation between 6:13–20 and 7:19–21, which indicates that the promise of 6:16–20 is identical with the high priesthood introduced with an oath (*Eschatologie*, 27–28, 32; cf. Köster, “Die Auslegung,” 105–8; Hofius, *Vorhang*, 85, n. 207). Christ is himself the eschatological word of promise (1:2), and his redemptive achievement has been confirmed with an unalterable oath (Ps 110:4; cf. Heb 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:17, 21, 28).

On the basis of these two irrevocable deeds it then is “**impossible for God to lie**” (ἐν οἷς ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι [τὸν] θεόν). Under no conceivable circumstance would God make a promise and then break it. Such just can’t happen!

Thus God guaranteed by oath His promise so that “**we might possess a powerful encouragement to seize the hope that is set before us**” (ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν οἱ καταφυγόντες κρατῆσαι τῆς προκειμένης ἐλπίδος). And who is “we”? “**The refugees**” (οἱ καταφυγόντες). Now the writer begins to apply his analogy directly to his readers, Jewish believers who have fled to Christ for hope of life and salvation. On this Lane

(*WBC*) comments:

The definition of Christians as fugitives (οἱ καταφυγόντες, “those who had fled for refuge”) is suggestive, but remains undeveloped. In the LXX the compound verb καταφεύγειν is used for fleeing from the avenger to the asylum of the cities of refuge (Deut 4:42; 19:5; Josh 20:9), but in the papyri the word is almost technical for suppliants fleeing or resorting to anyone for help (MM 334). Christians are fugitives who have sought asylum and ultimate deliverance from God.

For those fleeing to God for deliverance and rescue from sin God has set a hope before them. They need to grab hold of it and appropriate it into their lives.

The relevancy of this discussion to the original readers now emerges. Hope is the expectancy of experiencing the blessing promised to Abraham and his descendants.

The Greek relative clause in verses 19 - 20 defines the particulars of this hope. The core verbal

expression is simply: ἦν . . . ἔχομεν (“**which we have**”). Hope is something believers possess. The richness of that hope is found in the expansion elements detailed by the writer.

1) **The anchor of our life:**

ὡς ἄγκυραν ἔχομεν τῆς ψυχῆς. This most well known phrase is usually translated as ‘the anchor of our soul,’ but ψυχή is more the idea of the core of existence. The symbol of an anchor is that of stability and consistency. The point of the imagery is that hope

provides a source of stability and defining direction to our lives down to the very core of our being. This metaphor was common in the literature of the ancient world, as Lane (*WBC*) notes:

The literary use of the anchor as a nautical metaphor was widespread in the ancient world (cf. Wettstein, *H KAINH ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ*, 406–7; Hilgert, *The Ship*, 22, 135; Eitrem, *ConNT* 4 [1940] 6; Spicq, *ST* 3 [1949] 185–86). The source of the metaphor was the common experience of the maritime peoples of the Mediterranean basin that “the firm grip of the anchor’s teeth holds the ships fast” (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6, ll. 3–5). In Greek literature the metaphor was used constantly to evoke the notion of stability provided by adherence to virtue, and especially to hope. The basis of the comparison is the security which firm anchorage provided for a ship (e.g., Epictetus, *Fragment* 30: “we ought neither to fasten our ship to one small anchor, nor our life to a single hope”; cf. Philo, *On Dreams* 1.277; Acts 27:29, 40).



2) Steady and firm hope: ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ βεβαίαν. With meanings similar to the image of an anchor, these two adjectives define hope as providing stability and a firmness in life that makes one unshakeable. The adjectives can be taken to qualify either hope via the relative pronoun (ἣν) or anchor (ἄγκυραν). If taken with the metaphor they still come back to the reference to hope through the metaphor of the anchor. Lane (WBC) comments on these:

The nearly synonymous terms ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ βεβαίαν, “firm and secure,” were used to describe anything that had sufficient stability and firmness not to be moved (e.g., Wis 7:23; 3 Macc 5:3; 4 Macc 17:4). In Hebrews, βέβαιος is a favorite term for that which is assured (2:2; 3:6, 14; 6:19; 9:17). The pair of terms is appropriate to the metaphor (cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians* 2.374; Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 74.24) and here qualifies the antecedent “hope.” As a ship is held fast when at anchor, the life of the Christian is secured by hope that binds that life to Christ, who has entered the heavenly sanctuary (Hofius, *Vorhang*, 85–87).

3) Enters behind the curtain: εἰσερχομένην εἰς τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος. This third qualifier of hope plays off the sacrificial system in the Jerusalem temple. Lane’s comments (WBC) are quite helpful:

The further qualification of hope as “having entered behind the curtain” where Christ has entered as high priest gives to the concept of hope a precise eschatological nuance. The notion that the participle εἰσερχομένην, “entering,” qualifies ἄγκυραν, “anchor,” so that it is the anchor that “has entered behind the curtain,” accounts for so many commentators identifying the anchor with Jesus (Windisch, 59; Käsemann, *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*, 147, n. 3; Grässer, *Glaube*, 116, n. 302; Köster, “Die Auslegung,” 106; Schröger, *Verfasser*, 151, 211; et al.). It seems preferable to recognize that the antecedent is the relative pronoun ἣν, which is itself the complement of the immediately preceding word ἐλπίδος, “hope” (so Kuss, 85; Michel, 253–54; Spicq, 2:165). That it is hope which penetrates behind the curtain is confirmed when the writer subsequently refers to “a new hope by which we draw near to God” (7:19). The objective content of the promised hope is the assurance that with the consummation of redemption the community may draw near to God in priestly service (so Hofius, *Vorhang*, 86; cf. Michel, 273). They have already been encouraged to “draw near” through prayer (4:16).

The curtain before the Throne of God is described

in terms borrowed from the LXX, where τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος, “the inner sanctuary,” signifies the inner curtain that separated the sanctuary of God from the holy place in the tabernacle (Lev 16:2, 12, 15; cf. Exod 26:31–35; Lev 21:23; 24:3; Philo, *Moses* 2.86.101; Jos., *Ant.* 8.75; Heb 9:3). This area could be entered by the high priest alone and then only on the occasion of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:2). The representation of Jesus as having entered the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf (v 20) presupposes this cultic background.

Thus our hope as believers has penetrated the barriers to the presence of God and enables us to come before the throne of God in awareness of being in the very presence of God Himself.

How is this possible? It is because Jesus has already entered the heavenly Holy of Holies making atonement for our sins:

ὅπου πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εἰσῆλθεν Ἰησοῦς, κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. He has entered into the very presence of God as our high priest. But he belongs to a different order of priests than that of the high priest in the temple in Jerusalem. This priest had to be a descendant of Aaron and be a part of the Levitical priesthood. But Jesus claimed no Levitical priesthood in his heritage. Instead, he belonged to the order of Melchizedek, the priest - king of ancient Salem whom Abraham revered centuries before (cf. Gen. 14). Once again, Lane’s

comments (WBC) are very helpful:

Jesus is the πρόδρομος in that he has entered behind the curtain as our precursor in his office as high priest like Melchizedek. The assured character of God’s promise is confirmed in the life, death, entry, and high priestly investiture of Jesus (cf. Bauernfeind, *TDNT* 8:235).

According to 5:7–10 Jesus was confirmed in his high priestly office after an earthly career of suffering and obedience. His ascension and priesthood go together. This same understanding is reflected in v 20, which indicates that Jesus entered the heavenly sanctuary through his death, which secures for the people of God the purification that enables them to draw near to God (cf. 10:14). The phrase “a high priest like Melchizedek” is thus joined to the saving work of Jesus in v 20, as in 5:10. This is striking precisely because in chap. 7 the phrase will be attached to Jesus’ office but not his activity (Hay, *Glory*, 145–46). The concluding phrase also functions as a fresh announcement of the subject of 5:10, which



prepares the hearer for the exposition of Jesus' high priestly office in 7:1-28.

Thus we have confidence to come into God's presence directly through Jesus, something covenantal Jews could never dream of doing. They could only be represented in the presence of God by the high priest and he only one time a year on the Day of Atonement. Thus Jesus has established a far superior access to God than was ever possible through the temple and the Levitical priesthood.

The writer has taken his readers from the inspiring example of Abraham whom God promised to bless to believers as spiritual descendants of Abraham whose blessing through Jesus is direct access to God Himself. This is the heart of Christian hope: we can come before God and in eternity we will spend our days continuously in the presence of God. God has solemnly sworn by the highest of oaths that this is His blessing to the spiritual descendants of Abraham who come to Him through Jesus Christ.

Thus we are admonished to be faithful and to endure in our commitment without flinching. Once we realize all of this, surely we can stand firm in faithful service to God through Christ.

Lane's summary comments (*WBC*) merit consideration:

After he had exposed the peril of spiritual immaturity in 5:11-6:12, the writer felt constrained to affirm the utter reliability of God's word of promise to the congregation. The emphasis in 6:13-20 falls on the continuity of the new people of God with Abraham as heirs to the divine promise. The writer's optimism concerning the congregation is shown to be established upon the word of God as promise and oath. The new element that is introduced with the reference to the divine oath is the intensity of God's speaking. God's oath is his most holy and solemn declaration of the absolute truthfulness of his word and is given in order that the people of God may know that he will fulfill his promise. The word of promise confirmed with an oath reveals the irrevocable character of God's will and provides his people with strong encouragement to obey him with unwavering confidence.

God's unchanging purpose for his people does not exclude a history of human experience of his

word. The writer's choice of Gen 22:16-17 as the text upon which he would comment is significant. The command to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22:1) placed God's earlier promise to Abraham in jeopardy (Gen 12:2; 15:5). Abraham's obedience required firm trust and steadfastness. But in response the promise was reaffirmed and solemnized with the confirming oath. The history of the word of God proves that God cannot lie in what he has said he will do. Abraham's experience indicates that at certain moments in redemptive history God gave his word the form of



an oath in order that the irrevocable character of his resolve might be recognized by those who have received his promise.

In 6:13-20 the writer depicts Abraham as a paradigm of trust and steadfast endurance. But he wanted to do more. He wished to describe God's promise and oath to Abraham as a type of the way in which God has acted with the Christian community. The promise to bless Abraham is a prefiguration of the salvation that God has given to the new people in Jesus. Abraham's experience with God was first and foremost a demonstration that God is faithful, that his words are reliable, and that he stands behind his promise. The promised salvation secured through the high priestly ministry of Jesus is certain because it is guaranteed by God. The present time is the time of sure and steadfast hope precisely because through his sacrificial death Jesus has entered the presence of God on behalf of his people and has made it possible for them to approach God in priestly service. As a unit, 6:13-20 serves to place the ensuing exposition of 7:1-10:18 under the aspect of an event of promise that is confirmed with an oath.

N-A 27th

¹³ Τ ὦ ἄνθρωπε, γὰρ ἡ ἀβραάμ ἐπαγγελία μένος ὁ θεός, ἐπεὶ κατ' οὐδενὸς εἶχεν μείζονος ὁμοίαι, ὥμοσεν καθ' ἑαυτοῦ λέγων· εἰ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω σε καὶ πληθύνων πληθυνῶ σε. ¹⁵καὶ οὕτως μακροθυμήσας ἐπέτυχεν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας. ¹⁶ἄνθρωποι γὰρ κατὰ τοῦ μείζονος ὁμνύουσιν, καὶ πάσης αὐτοῖς ἀντιλογίας πέρας εἰς βεβαίωσιν ὁ ὄρκος. ¹⁷ἐν ᾧ περισσώτερον βουλόμενος ὁ θεός ἐπιδείξει τοῖς κληρονόμοις τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τὸ ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ ἐμεσίτευσεν ὄρκῳ, ¹⁸ἵνα διὰ δύο πραγμάτων ἀμεταθέτων, ἐν οἷς ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι [τὸν] θεόν, ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν οἱ καταφυγόντες κρατῆσαι τῆς προκειμένης ἐλπίδος. ¹⁹ἦν ὡς ἄγκυραν ἔχομεν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ βεβαίαν καὶ εἰσερχομένην εἰς τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος, ²⁰ὅπου πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εἰσῆλθεν Ἰησοῦς, κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

Greek NT

¹³ Τ ὦ ἄνθρωπε, γὰρ ἡ ἀβραάμ ἐπαγγελία μένος ὁ θεός, ἐπεὶ κατ' οὐδενὸς εἶχεν μείζονος ὁμοίαι, ὥμοσεν καθ' ἑαυτοῦ λέγων, Εἰ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω σε καὶ πληθύνων πληθυνῶ σε. ¹⁵καὶ οὕτως μακροθυμήσας ἐπέτυχεν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας. ¹⁶ἄνθρωποι γὰρ κατὰ τοῦ μείζονος ὁμνύουσιν, καὶ πάσης αὐτοῖς ἀντιλογίας πέρας εἰς βεβαίωσιν ὁ ὄρκος. ¹⁷ἐν ᾧ περισσώτερον βουλόμενος ὁ θεός ἐπιδείξει τοῖς κληρονόμοις τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τὸ ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ ἐμεσίτευσεν ὄρκῳ, ¹⁸ἵνα διὰ δύο πραγμάτων ἀμεταθέτων, ἐν οἷς ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι [τὸν] θεόν, ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν οἱ καταφυγόντες κρατῆσαι τῆς προκειμένης ἐλπίδος. ¹⁹ἦν ὡς ἄγκυραν ἔχομεν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ βεβαίαν καὶ εἰσερχομένην εἰς τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος, ²⁰ὅπου πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εἰσῆλθεν Ἰησοῦς, κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

NASB

¹³When God made the promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, "he swore by himself," ¹⁴and said, "I will indeed bless you and multiply" you. ¹⁵And so, after patient waiting, he obtained the promise. ¹⁶Human beings swear by someone greater than themselves; for them an oath serves as a guarantee and puts an end to all argument. ¹⁷So when God wanted to give the heirs of his promise an even clearer demonstration of the immutability of his purpose, he intervened with an oath, ¹⁸so that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to hold fast to the hope that lies before us. ¹⁹This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm, which reaches into the interior behind the veil, ²⁰where Jesus has entered on our behalf as forerunner, becoming high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

NRSV

¹³When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, ¹⁴saying, "I will surely bless you and multiply you." ¹⁵And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise. ¹⁶Human beings, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all dispute. ¹⁷In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath, ¹⁸so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. ¹⁹We have this steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, ²⁰where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high

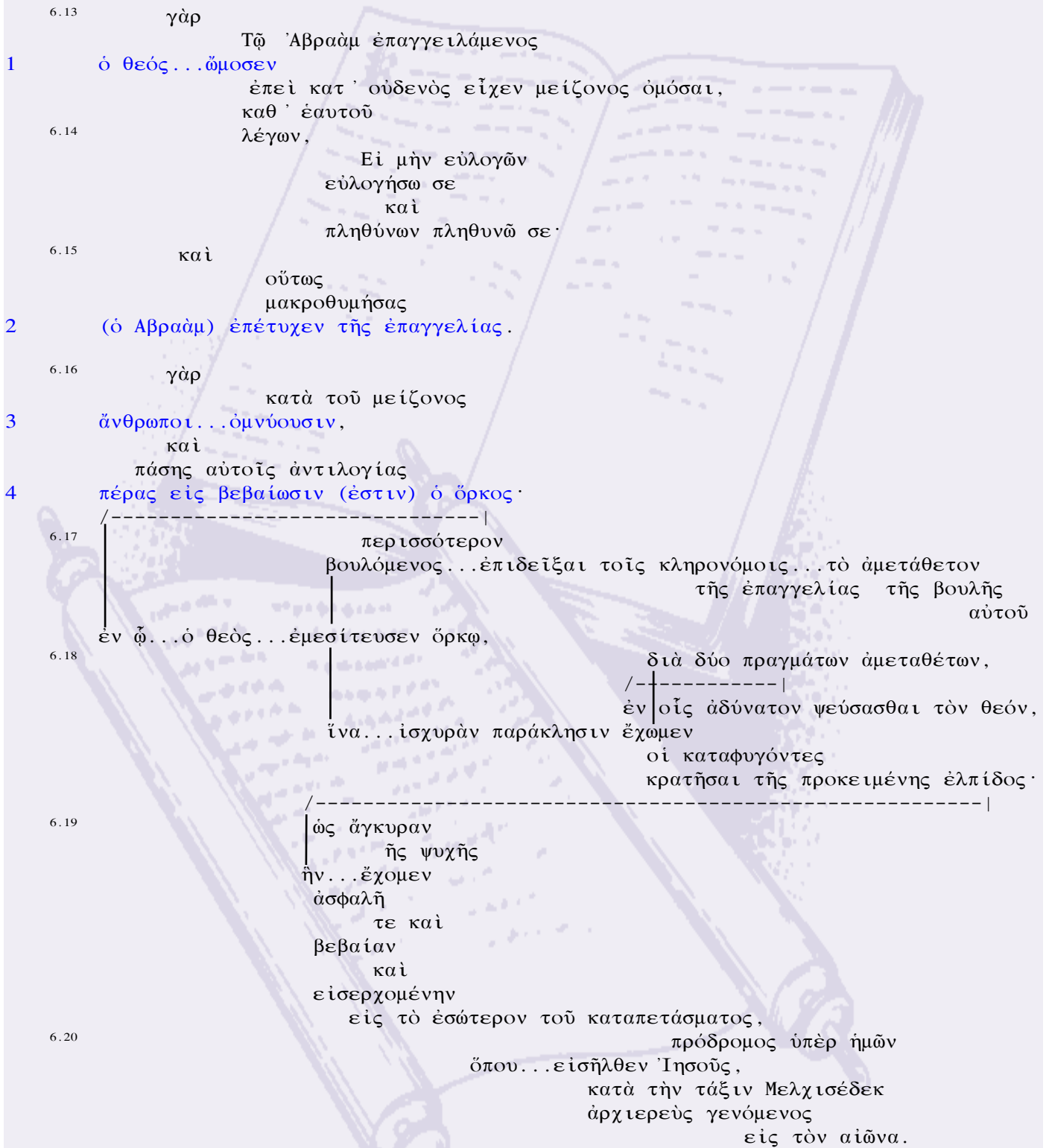
priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

NLT

¹³For example, there was God's promise to Abraham. Since there was no one greater to swear by, God took an oath in his own name, saying: ¹⁴"I will certainly bless you, and I will multiply your descendants beyond number." ¹⁵Then Abraham waited patiently, and he received what God had promised. ¹⁶Now when people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold them to it. And without any question that oath is binding. ¹⁷God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. ¹⁸So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. ¹⁹This hope is a strong

and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. ²⁰Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Greek NT Diagram



Summary of Rhetorical Structure

This pericope is comprised of only two sentences in the Greek text: vv. 13-15 and 16-20. The connection between them is defined by the coordinate conjunction γάρ, indicating that vv. 16-20 provide a justifying rationale for vv. 13-15.

The core expressions in vv. 13-15 revolve around two simple interconnected ideas: God made a promise to Abraham and he realized the promise. Everything else represents expansion off these two foundational declarations.

In the rationale, vv. 16-20, two foundational ideas are presented: human oaths are made by swearing by something greater than themselves which provides a guarantee of their intentions, and so God made an unbreakable oath to the heirs of the promise given to Abraham. Through a series of complex expansion elements this second assertion is amplified and explained.

