

Notes on the Greek New Testament
Day 308 – November 4th – Hebrews 6:1-20

Works frequently referenced in these notes on Hebrews

Bruce, FF	<i>The Epistle to the Hebrews</i> , Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1964
Guthrie, Donald	<i>Hebrews</i> (Tyndale Commentary), IVP, Leicester, 1983
Hughes, Philip Edgcumbe	<i>A Commentary on The Epistle to the Hebrews</i> , Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1977
Westcott, BF	<i>The Epistle to the Hebrews</i> , Macmillan, London, 1889

Hebrews 6:1

Διὸ ἀφέντες τὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγον ἐπὶ τὴν τελειότητα φερώμεθα, μὴ πάλιν θεμέλιον καταβαλλόμενοι μετανοίας ἀπὸ νεκρῶν ἔργων, καὶ πίστεως ἐπὶ θεόν,

διο therefore, for this reason
ἀφημι leave, forsake

Here meaning not forget but move beyond.

ἀρχη, ης f beginning, first principle

Westcott understands 'the beginning of Christ' to mean "the fundamental explanation of the fulfilment of the Messianic promises in Jesus of Nazareth."

"The first simple presentation of the gospel message." Hughes.

τελειότης, ητος f completeness; maturity
φερω bring, lead

By using the first person plural the author identifies himself with his readers. The passive voice suggests "personal surrender to an active influence." Westcott. I.e. the desire to be carried forward by God. Owen writes, "If the holy gales of the Spirit of God do breathe on us ... we are in a blessed tendency towards perfection."

πάλιν again, once more

θεμέλιος, ου m (also θεμέλιον, ου n)
foundation

καταβαλλω midd lay (a foundation)

What is this foundation? Montefiore understands it to refer to basic *Christian* doctrine (as do Westcott and Hughes). Bruce understands it to be Jewish belief and practices which were used as a foundation on which Christian truth was then built. The six elements mentioned were, according to Bruce, characteristic both of Pharisaic and of non-conformist Judaism. The critical question focuses on the meaning of βαπτισμων.

μετανοια, ας f repentance
νεκρος, α, ον dead

From works that proceed from a dead (unregenerate) state and which lead to death. Westcott says "Dead works are not vaguely sins which lead to death, but works devoid of that element which makes them truly works.

They have the form but not the vital power of works... All acts of man in himself, separated from God, are 'dead works'."

"This is the first step on the road which leads the sinner back home to the Father. It is the moment when he 'comes to himself' (Lk 15:17), and in doing so turns away from the course he has pursued to this point. Thus our author speaks of *repentance from*, and specifies that from which the repentant man turns as 'dead works.'" Hughes.

πιστις, εως f faith, trust, belief

Repentance and faith are closely associated in the NT as 'negative' and positive aspects of a single quality in the believer – abandoning trust in oneself in order to place trust wholly in God.

Verse 2

βαπτισμῶν διδαχὴν ἐπιθέσεώς τε χειρῶν, ἀναστάσεώς τε νεκρῶν καὶ κρίματος αἰωνίου.

βαπτισμος, ου m ritual washing, baptism

This noun is not used elsewhere in the NT of baptism.

διδαχη, ης f teaching

Montefiore argues that the plural is a reference to the baptisms of John and of Jesus. Westcott says it implies teaching about Christian baptism in relation to other ceremonial washings. This interpretation is favoured by Hughes who writes, "We conclude, then, that our author is returning here to instruction regarding washings and baptisms, but, quite naturally, with particular respect to Christian baptism, by which all others are surpassed and replaced."

ἐπιθεσις, εως f laying on (of hands)
χειρ, χειρος f hand

Montifiore views this as a Christian rite (Acts 19:5). Westcott links it with the practice of Jesus in laying hands on many of those he healed and of the apostles in connection with the gift of the Spirit. Others think that the reference is to the laying on of hands which accompanied Jewish sacrifices or ordination. Bruce links these ideas, saying "The imposition of hands was an early Christian practice, associated especially with the impartation of the Holy Spirit, and this is most probably its significance here. But it too was inherited from the Old Testament, where it is used especially in commissioning someone for public office, or as part of the sacrificial ritual."

ἀναστασις, εως f resurrection, raising up
νεκρος, α, ον see v.1

Bruce says that while the resurrection of Christ gave special significance to this doctrine among Christians, it too has its foundation in the Old Testament.

κριμα, τος n judgement, condemnation
αιωνιος, ον eternal, everlasting

Hughes draws attention to the fact that these eschatological elements of the faith are foundational for Christianity since, "the end is already present in the beginning, and the beginning is the window through which the end is viewed. Thus baptism, which is the first event, is the symbol of the judgment of the unregenerate life and of resurrection to new life in Christ, which, in its fullness, is the ultimate event; and the laying on of hands is the symbol of the eternal blessing which replaces the curse of man's fallenness borne by Christ on the cross."

Verse 3

καὶ τοῦτο ποιήσομεν ἂν ἄνθρωπος ἐπιτρέπη ὁ θεός.
εἰν if

The reading ποιήσομεν 'we will do' is preferable to ποιήσωμεν 'let us do.'
The phrase 'this we will do' is "an expression of confidence on the part of the author in the reality of his readers' experience of grace and therefore in their capacity for instruction and spiritual progress." Hughes.

ἐπιτρέπω let, allow, permit

Verse 4

Ἀδύνατον γὰρ τοὺς ἅπαξ φωτισθέντας
γευμαίνοντας τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου
καὶ μετόχους γεννηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου

He returns to the theme of apostasy touched on in 3:12ff.

ἀδυνατος, ον impossible

Much discussion surrounds the nature of this impossibility. The words of Bruce are helpful here, "In these verses he is not questioning the perseverance of the saints; we might say that rather he is insisting that those who persevere are the true saints. But in fact he is stating a practical truth that has verified itself repeatedly in the experience of the visible church. Those who have shared the covenant privileges of the people of God, and then deliberately renounce them, are the most difficult persons to reclaim to the faith. It is indeed impossible to reclaim them, says our author. We know of course, that nothing of this sort is ultimately impossible for the grace of God, but as a matter of human experience the reclamation of such people is, practically speaking, impossible."

ἅπαξ once, once for all time

φωτισθέντας Verb, aor pass ptc, m acc pl
φωτιζω give light to, enlighten

Cf. 10:32 also 2 Cor 4:4,6; Eph 5:8,11.

γευμαίνω taste, eat, experience

Cf. 1 Peter 2:3; Ps 34:8.

δωρεα, ας f gift

ἐπουρανιος, ον heavenly

Hughes rejects the attempt of some to link these words with the Eucharist.

μετοχος, ον m one who shares in, partner
γεννηθέντας Verb, aor pass dep ptc, m acc pl
γίνομαι

Refers to experience of all the blessings of belonging to the community of God's people – an experience of the life of the age to come. Hughes links the last phrase with 2:4 and the charismatic gifts mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor 12:4ff.

Verse 5

καὶ καλὸν γευμαίνοντας θεοῦ ῥήματα δυνάμεις τε
μέλλοντος αἰῶνος,

καλος, η, ον good, right, proper, fine,
beautiful, precious

ῥημα, ατος n word, thing, matter

Westcott thinks this refers to some general utterance such as "the confession of faith apprehended in its true character as an utterance of God." Hughes says the meaning is "the recipients of this letter had entered into the experience of the blessings that belong to the gospel."

μέλλω (ptc. without infin) coming, future
αἰων, αἰωνος m age, world order, eternity

Bruce cites the example of Simon Magus in Acts 8:9ff, 18ff.

These expressions can only be understood of the church as the community of the age to come (see Acts 4:32-35). "The new creation is even now taking place in the lives and communities of Christian believers." Hughes.

Verse 6

καὶ παραπεσόντας, πάλιν ἀνακαινίζεις εἰς μετάνοιαν, ἀνασταυροῦντας ἑαυτοῖς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ παραδειγματίζοντας.

παραπεσόντας Verb, aor act ptc, m acc pl
 παραπιπῶ fall away, commit apostasy
 πάλιν again, once more
 ἀνακαινίζεις Verb, pres act infin ἀνακαινίζω
 restore
 μετάνοια, ας f see v.1
 ἀνασταυροῦντας Verb, pres act ptc, m acc pl
 ἀνασταυρῶ crucify; crucify again

By apostasy and return to Judaism, they align themselves again with those who crucified the Lord (or who were instrumental in his crucifixion), and so, in effect, crucify him again. "It is the sin which brought the direst judgment upon the Israelites of old, and also the sin by which in the first days of the gospel their descendants proved themselves unworthy of eternal life (Acts 13:46). To enter into the light and then to reject the light in favour of the darkness of unbelief incurs the judgment of being broken off from the tree of life (cf. Rom 11:17ff.)." Hughes.

ἑαυτος, ἑαυτη, ἑαυτον him/her/itself

I.e. to their own loss.

παραδειγματίζοντας Verb, pres act ptc, m acc pl
 παραδειγματίζω expose to public ridicule

Cf. the variant form in Matt 1:19.

Verses 7,8

In verses 7 and 8 there is an allusion to the opening chapters of Genesis. Verse 7 refers back to the world under God's blessing (Gen 2:3) and verse 8 to the world under God's curse. Note that in the Genesis account it is the blessing of God which is *productive* of the fruit and the curse of God which is *productive* of the thorns and thistles. But, by that very token, the fruit of the land is *evidence* of God's blessing and, more than that, may even be said to constitute that blessing. In the same way the thorns and thistles are *evidence* of God's judgement and even constitute a vital element of that judgement.

There may be an element of that here too, but the 'parable' is used here to reinforce the admonition given: to taste and drink in the showers of God's provision in the gospel but then to respond with only thorns and thistles is to invite the consuming fire of God's judgment.

Verse 7

γῆ γὰρ ἡ πιοῦσα τὸν ἐπ' αὐτῆς ἐρχόμενον πολλάκις ὑετόν, καὶ τίκτουσα βοτάνην εὐθετον ἐκεῖνοις δι' οὓς καὶ γεωργεῖται, μεταλαμβάνει εὐλογίας ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ·

γῆ, γῆς f earth, land
 πιοῦσα Verb, aor act ptc, f nom s πιῶ
 drink
 πολλακίς often
 ὑετος, ου m rain
 τικῶ bear, produce
 βοτανῆ, ης f vegetation, crop
 εὐθετος, ον fit, suitable, useful
 ἐκεῖνος, η, ο demonstrative adj. that, he, she, it
 γεωργεῶ cultivate (of land)
 μεταλαμβάνω receive, share in
 εὐλογία, ας f blessing, praise

Verse 8

ἐκφέρουσα δὲ ἀκάνθας καὶ τριβόλους ἀδόκιμος καὶ κατάρας ἐγγύς, ἧς τὸ τέλος εἰς καῦσιν.

ἐκφέρω bring out; produce
 ἀκανθα, ης f thorn-plant
 τριβολος, ου m briar, thistle

Hughes interprets the 'thorns and thistles' as "hostility to the Son of God and conduct incompatible with his profession."

ἀδοκιμος, ον failing to meet the test, worthless
 καταρα, ας f curse, something accursed
 ἐγγυς adv near
 τέλος, ους n end, conclusion, termination
 καυσις, εως f burning

See John 15:6; 1 Cor 3:15 and 2 Peter 3:12,13.

Verse 9

Πεπείσμεθα δὲ περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀγαπητοί, τὰ κρείσσονα καὶ ἐχόμενα σωτηρίας, εἰ καὶ οὕτως λαλοῦμεν·

πεπείσμεθα Verb, perf pass indic, 1 pl πειθῶ
 persuade; perf act & pass trust, rely on, have confidence, be confident

Cf. 2 Cor 7:4. "The great principle which gives rise to this confidence is the absolute sovereignty of the God of grace and the indefectibility of his work in the lives of men." Hughes.

ἀγαπητος, η, ον beloved

The only occurrence of this word in this epistle.

κρειττων and κρεισσων, ον γεν ονος
better

σωτηρια, ας f salvation

ἐχομενα σωτηριας 'Things that belong to salvation'. 'The presence of those things in the readers' lives was a token of the presence of salvation too, since they were so clearly and inevitably bound up with salvation.' Bruce

οὕτως thus, in this way

λαλεω speak, talk

Verse 10

οὐ γὰρ ἄδικος ὁ θεὸς ἐπιλαθέσθαι τοῦ ἔργου ὑμῶν καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης ἧς ἐνεδείξασθε εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, διακονήσαντες τοῖς ἁγίοις καὶ διακονοῦντες.

ἄδικος, ον unjust

ἐπιλαθέσθαι Verb, aor midd dep infin

ἐπιλανθανομαι forget, neglect, overlook

Does not suggest meritorious works that demand divine recompense but a life that demonstrates the genuineness of the work of God's grace and will therefore be owned by God.

ἐνεδείξασθε Verb, aor midd indic, 2 pl

ἐνδεικνυμαι show

ὄνομα, τος n name

"The love shown to their fellow Christians ... is *for his sake*, or, more literally, it is love shown 'to his name.' This implies that their coming to the assistance of their brethren is evidence of their willingness to identify themselves with the stigma attaching to the name of Jesus, and thus of the genuineness of their love for him." Hughes.

διακονήσαντες Verb, aor act ptc, m nom pl

διακονεω serve, care for

οἱ ἅγιοι God's people

The present participle is added to underline that this is not just past conduct but is continuing.

Cf. also 10:32ff for things which the readers had suffered for the 'name'

Verse 11

ἐπιθυμοῦμεν δὲ ἕκαστον ὑμῶν τὴν αὐτὴν ἐνδείκνυσθαι σπουδὴν πρὸς τὴν πληροφορίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος ἄχρι τέλους,

ἐπιθυμεω long for, desire, lust after

A strong verb expressing passionate longing or an 'earnest wish' Phillips.

ἕκαστος, η, ον each, every

He is not happy for any of them to bein to fall away – the expression of a pastor's heart.

σπουδη, ης f earnestness, eagerness, zeal

πληροφορια, ας f full assurance, conviction

Westcott says that πληροφορια means fullness and "it seems better to understand it here of the full development of hope rather than the full assurance of hope (1 Thess. 1:5)."

ἐλπις, ιδος f hope, ground of hope

"The invitation to faith is not an invitation to inactivity but to the perseverance of pilgrimage, for Christ is not only the source but also the goal of our salvation, the end as well as the beginning. Faith indeed rests upon the alpha, but it also displays itself as hope directed towards the omega (cf. Rev 22:13)." Hughes.

ἄχρι prep with gen until, as far as

τελος, ους n end, conclusion

Verse 12

ἵνα μὴ νοθροὶ γένησθε, μιμηταὶ δὲ τῶν διὰ πίστεως καὶ μακροθυμίας κληρονομοῦντων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας.

νοθρος, α, ον lazy, sluggish

γένησθε Verb, aor midd depo subj, 2 pl

γινομαι

μιμητης, ου m imitator

πιστις, εως f faith, trust, belief

μακροθυμια, ας f longsuffering, patience

"Faith' is the essential principle through which the blessing is gained and 'long-suffering' marks the circumstance under which faith has to be maintained." Westcott.

Westcott says that μακροθυμια is to be distinguished from ὑπομονη in that ὑπομονη is patience in the face of trial while μακροθυμια "expresses the trial of unfulfilled desire."

κληρονομεω receive, gain possession of, inherit

"The participle is a strict present. Believers even now enter on their inheritance (4:3), and with them the saints of old time enjoy the fulfilment of that for which they looked (12:22ff)." Westcott

ἐπαγγελια, ας f promise

Verse 13

Τῷ γὰρ Ἀβραάμ ἐπαγγειλάμενος ὁ θεός, ἐπεὶ κατ' οὐδενὸς εἶχεν μείζονος ὁμόσαι, ὥμοσεν καθ' ἑαυτοῦ,

"The example of Abraham establishes two things, the certainty of the hope which rests on a promise of God, and the need for patience in order to receive its fulfilment." Westcott. Abraham is the great example of faith in the promises of God (see Matt 3:9; Lk 3:8; Gal 3:6; Rom 4:3,18,20f.; James 2:21f.).

ἐπαγγειλάμενος Verb, aor midd dep ptc, m
nom s ἐπαγγελλομαι promise
ἐπεὶ since, because
οὐδεις, οὐδεμια, οὐδεν no one, nothing
εἶχεν Verb, imperf act indic, 3 s ἔχω
μειζων, ον and μειζοτερος, α, ον (comp of
μεγας) greater
ὁμόσαι Verb, aor act infin ὀμνω and
ὀμνωμι swear, vow, make an oath

Westcott suggests that the promise was first given and then later confirmed with an oath (see Gen 12:3,7; 13:14; 15:5ff; 17:5ff compared with Gen 22:16ff). He adds that the oath indicated that there would be delay in fulfilment but that also fulfilment was certain.

ὥμοσεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s ὀμνω
ἑαυτος, ἑαυτη, ἑαυτον him/her/itself

Verse 14

λέγων· Εἰ μὴν εὐλογῶν εὐλογήσω σε καὶ πληθύνων πληθυνῶ σε·

The reference is to Gen 22:17 which is preceded by God's swearing by himself in v.16.

μην intensive particle indeed, surely
εὐλογεω bless

This construction reflects the Hebrew infinitive absolute with the finite verb which expresses certainty "I will most certainly bless you."

σε Pronoun, acc s συ
πληθυνω increase, multiply

"It is of particular interest that the occasion was the offering up by Abraham of Isaac, the son of the promise, in obedience to the command of God. The patriarch's trust in the integrity of God and his promise could not have been put to a more severe test, for the fulfilment of the covenant which God had made with him depended on the life and the line of Isaac, and the instruction to slay his son had the appearance of the failure of the divine word (cf. Gen 12:2f.; 13:15f.; 15:5f., 18; 17:7, 9, 15, 19, 21; 18:18f.; 21:12). Abraham's confidence in that word and its fulfilment was so firm, however, that he obeyed without question the command to offer up his son Isaac, convinced, as our author points out in 11:19 below, that God would, if need be, raise him up from the dead and thus vindicate the trustworthiness of the promise." Hughes. The oath let Abraham know that just as his son had been spared, so surely would God fulfil all of the promises he had made to him.

Verse 15

καὶ οὕτως μακροθυμήσας ἐπέτυχεν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας.

οὕτως and οὕτω thus, in this way
μακροθυμεω be patient, wait patiently
ἐπέτυχεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s ἐπιτυχανω
obtain, receive
ἐπαγγελια, ας f promise, what is promised

Abraham received the immediate promise of a son but did not see the full promise of 'the seed' in whom all the nations of the world are blessed.

Concerning the *obtaining* of the promise, Hughes writes, "This the majority of the people of Israel, the nation descended from Abraham through Isaac, failed to do because of the hardness of their hearts; and this the Hebrew Christians to whom this latter is addressed are also in danger of failing to do, unless they imitate the faith and persistence of Abraham."

Verse 16

ἄνθρωποι γὰρ κατὰ τοῦ μείζονος ὀμνύουσιν, καὶ πάσης αὐτοῖς ἀντιλογίας πέρας εἰς βεβαίωσιν ὁ ὄρκος·

μειζων, ον see v.13
ἀντιλογια, ας f argument, dispute
περας, ατος n end, boundary, conclusion
βεβαιωσις, εως f confirmation, establishing
firmly
ὄρκος, ου m oath, vow

περας εις βεβαιωσιν ο ορκος 'the oath is final for confirmation'. Montifiore comments "An oath has a double function. Positively it adds moral and legal force to a statement (for who would dare to call God as a false witness?). Negatively, it ends controversy among men by introducing the testimony of God."

Verse 17

ἐν ᾧ περισσότερον βουλόμενος ὁ θεὸς ἐπιδειξάτω τοῖς κληρονόμοις τῆς ἐπαγγελίας τὸ ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ ἐμεσίτευσεν ὄρκω,

περισσοτερον adv. more, more clearly
βουλομαι want, desire, wish

Westcott says that βουλομαι is to be distinguished from θελω in that the first indicates purpose with respect to something while the latter "the feeling in respect of the person himself."

ἐπιδειξάτω Verb, aor act infin ἐπιδεικνυμι
show, point out
κληρονομος, ου m heir, one who receives
what is promised (by God)

The promise was not for Abraham alone but for him and his heirs – including Christians (11:39) – heirs with him of the promise.

ἀμεταθετος, ον unchangeable; το α.
unchangeableness
βουλη, ης f purpose, plan, decision
μεσιτεω interpose; confirm, guarantee

The only occurrence of this verb in the NT.

Verse 18

ἵνα διὰ δύο πραγμάτων ἀμεταθέτων, ἐν οἷς ἀδύνατον ψεύσασθαι θεόν, ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν οἱ καταφυγόντες κρατήσαι τῆς προκειμένης ἐλπίδος·

δουο gen & acc δουο dat δυοισιν two
πραγμα, τοσ n matter, thing

The two things are:
i) the promise itself which, being a promise from "God who cannot lie," is certain in itself;
ii) the oath by which the promise is confirmed.

ἀμεταθετος, ον v.17
ἀδυνατος, ον impossible
ψεύσασθαι Verb, aor midd dep infin
ψευδομαι lie, speak untruth, deceive

The anarthrous use of θεος here shows that the reference is to the divine nature rather than person (so Westcott, Montifiore).

ἰσχυρος, α, ον strong, powerful
παρακλησις, εως f encouragement

The oath was added not to make the promise more certain but to strengthen faith in the certainty of the promise.

καταφυγόντες Verb, aor act ptc, m nom pl
καταφευγω flee, flee for safety

May be an allusion to the 'cities of refuge' in the Old Testament. Montifiore says, "The city of God is the one true city of refuge."

κρατεω hold, hold fast, seize
προκειμαι be set before, lie before
ἐλπις, ιδος f hope

Hope rests in the promises and the promises have their focus in Christ – as the following verses make plain. So it is to Christ that Christian believers have fled for refuge.

Verse 19

ἦν ὡς ἄγκυραν ἔχομεν τῆς ψυχῆς, ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ βεβαίαν καὶ εἰσερχομένην εἰς τὸ ἐσώτερον τοῦ καταπετάσματος,

ἄγκυρα, ας f anchor
ψυχη, ης f self, inmost being, life, 'soul'
ἀσφαλῆς, ες safe, sure
βεβαιος, α, ον reliable, firm, effective

"The stability of hope is twofold. It is undisturbed by outward influences (ἀσφαλῆς), and it is firm in its inherent character (βεβαία)." Westcott

εἰσερχομαι enter, go in, come in
ἐσώτερος, α, ον i) adj inner; ii) prep with
gen behind, inside
καταπετασμα, τοσ n curtain

Our hope is Christ (cf. 1 Tim 1:1), whose present state is our certain destiny – the force of 'forerunner', v.20. He is 'the hope of glory' (Col 1:27).

Hughes quotes Herveus who says, "In the case of sailors, the sands in which the anchor is fixed and holds are hidden and invisible, and yet the sailors are secure, although they cannot see how the arms of the anchor are held. So also we, placed as we are amid the waves of this world, do not see the heavenly realities, and yet we are so joined to them through hope that we cannot be moved by any onset of fear."

Verse 20

ὅπου πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν εἰσηλθεν Ἰησοῦς, κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ ἀρχιερεὺς γενόμενος εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

ὅπου adv. where
προδρομος, ου m forerunner

ὑπερ ἡμῶν 'on our behalf'. Cf Jn 14:2.

Westcott highlights the new aspect of Christ's work, "The High-priest entered the Holy of Holies on behalf of the people, but they never followed him. Christ enters heaven as the forerunner of believers."

The word προσδρομος was used of the men or troops which were sent out to explore before the advance of an army.

εἰσῆλθεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s εἰσερχομαι
ταξίς, εὐς f order, division
ἀρχιερεὺς, εὐς m high priest
γενόμενος Verb, aor ptc, m nom s γίνομαι
αἰῶν, αἰῶνος m eternity