
Words of Truth

Hebrews 6:16-18

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In our previous study we considered that God swore an oath to Abraham by Himself (Hebrews 6:13). We considered how that God kept His oath and how that Abraham patiently endured to obtain what God conditionally promised to him (Hebrews 6:14-15). Now we are going to consider more about God swearing by Himself. Here are the inspired words we are going to study in this article: *“For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us”* (Hebrews 6:16-18).

The first point raised in this part of our study is that men verily swear by the greater. For example, notice what Abimelech requested from Abraham: *“And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest: Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. And Abraham said, I will swear”* (Genesis 21:22-24). Abraham was not under the Law of Moses. Yet, we can see that when the Law of Moses did come into effect man lawfully continued to be able to swear by the name of the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:13 and Deuteronomy 10:20). Swearing by the name of God was, in principle, a way to end any argument as to whether or not one would keep his or her word. They knew God would hold them accountable if they lied by His name (Leviticus 19:12). That doesn't mean much though. Men did swear by the name of the Lord and still didn't keep their word (II Chronicles 36:11-13).

Before we continue into the text we are studying, we need to be clear on something. As Christians, we are commanded to speak the truth to others (Ephesians 4:25). Under the Law of Christ (cf. Galatians 6:2), we are specifically instructed not to swear or take oaths. Notice: *“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil... But above all things, my brethren, swear not,*

neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation” (Matthew 5:33-37 and James 5:12).

Back to the text we are studying, we find an explanation as to why God swore by His great name. We read the wording “more abundantly” in this text. Consider, in part, what that means: “a more superabundant way... something further, more, much more than all, more plainly... superior, extraordinary, surpassing, uncommon...” (Strong’s # 4054). So, we can see that God was reaching to give the most assurance possible to Abraham that He would keep His promise. Then the word translated “immutability” adds some more to this study. The Greek word “ἀμετάθετος” speaks clearly to the fact that God’s promise was fixed, unchangeable (Strong’s # 276). For us, we have thousands of years of history to study to see that God’s counsel stands (II Kings 13:23, II Chronicles 6:15, II Chronicles 21:1-7, Psalms 105:1-45, and Jeremiah 33:20-26). We can show Scriptures to give people assurance (Proverbs 19:21, Isaiah 55:11, Malachi 3:6, and James 1:17). Abraham did not have that. So, God took the greatest measure He could to give Abraham assurance.

So, there are two fixed factors here that God provided Abraham with as confirmation for His promise. They tie together. God took an oath and He cannot lie. For us, this is simple. We know God cannot lie because His word says so (Numbers 23:19, I Samuel 15:29, Psalms 89:35, and Titus 1:1-3). God’s past actions prove He cannot lie. As we can know man by his fruit (Matthew 7:15-20), we can also know God by the same. He has done various great things to show His integrity to mankind. For example, consider that God has for thousands of years set things in motion so that there are seasons on the earth (Genesis 8:20-22 and Acts 14:17). Take, for another example, the reason we see rainbows in the sky at times when it rains (Genesis 9:1-17). Our God is the God of truth (Exodus 34:6, Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalms 100:5, and Isaiah 25:1).

God’s truth in this text is just about Abraham. The writer of this letter points out that God’s inability to lie provided strong comfort to them as well. All of humanity has one hope (Ephesians 4:4). In the letter to the saints in Colosse Paul and Timothy wrote this: *“For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth”* (Colossians 1:5-6). You could phrase this hope in various ways that all mean or point to the same thing. You could say our hope is in the resurrection (Acts 24:15), righteousness (Galatians 5:5), grace (II Thessalonians 2:16), etc. Any way you word it, hope comes down to what is awaiting the faithful in eternity with our Lord (I Peter 1:3-9).

We can see that God’s covenant with Abraham was kept (Acts 3:11-16). We are the beneficiaries of that promise (Galatians 3:8-29). Therefore, we can have comfort that God kept His word and we see that even to this day (Romans 15:4)!