

Hebrews 6

V1. Having castigated his audience for being a bit thick in chapter 5, here the Hebrews writer encourages them onwards into more advanced stuff. Move on from laying foundations like not doing dead works and instead having faith in God, to -

V2. Advanced stuff like baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

V3. Let's do this if God permits.

V 4 -6. Look at V6, 'if they fall away'. Where is that threshold? How far do you have to sink before you're given that dubious title, 'fallen away'? What are the consequences? Some say, there are no consequences, once saved, always saved, there's no such thing as an ex-Christian. They say you can become an atheist, convert to Hindu or Islam, your place in Heaven is still guaranteed. Well, there are plenty of passages in the Bible that contradict that and confirm that that's wrong, not least of which are the parables of the sower, Mark 4:1-20 and the foolish virgins, Matthew 25:1-13, and 2 Peter 2:20-22. So let's carefully replace the lid on that bin.

So, either these 3 verses tell us that the backslidden Christian can still repent, be restored and come back into the love and care of God, or another interpretation is that sadly there's no way back for them, that's it, Hell awaits. These are the two contradicting theories.

Before that, read Hebrews 6:4-6 and decide which camp do you prefer. Clarification, we're not talking about those who hear a hard hitting and enlightening sermon which changes their lives for a few days and then they revert back to type; ie: those described in Mark 4:1-20, parable of the sower. Hebrews 6:4-5 is not talking about such as these. no, we're talking about born again believers who've experienced all the benefits and blessings described in verses 4-5, and then at some point, they've fallen away.

So the question arising in verse 6, if such a believer should fall away. Fall away doesn't just mean letting standards slip, a bit of compromise, like you've not read your Bible 3 days on the run. It means, totally turned your back on God, adopted and embraced the sinful lifestyle you had before you met Jesus. You know what God wants and likes, you constantly and deliberately do the opposite, AKA rebellion. Are there examples of such in the Bible that spring to mind? Balaam, king Saul, possibly King Solomon, Judas Iscariot. It should be noted that the Bible does not record that any sign of repentance, so these aren't relevant to this debate.

If you look at the wider context of the preceding chapters in Hebrews, the writer warns about the example of the children of Israel's refusal to invade Canaan and warns against following their example. They were led to the border of Canaan but refused God's order to invade. In military terms, it's called mutiny. So what happened to them? Did God abandon them and say, right you lot, that's it, you're on your own! No, God continued to look after them, however instead of living in a land flowing with milk and honey, instead they saw their lives out, traipsing through the desert over the next 40 years. A similar message is given in 1 Corinthians 3:10-17.

This is a repetition of Hebrews 3:16-19. If you push your luck with God, you risk Hell if you die without repentance but even if you do repent, your relationship with God could resemble a 40 year walk in the desert. In the end, the Children of Israel didn't follow

through with their threat to return to Egyptian slavery, but life thereafter was far from a walk in a park, full of milk and honey.

Our God by nature is a God of forgiveness -

Hosea and Gomer, Hosea 3:1-5
The parables of the lost, Luke 15:
sheep, 4-6.
coin, 8-9
son, 11-24

James 5:19-20 doesn't say, "don't waste your breath, there's no hope."

V7-8. We're back to the unrepentant apostate who continues to produce thorns and briars. The warning in 2 Peter 2:20-22 is even starker.

V9. The writer seems to be slightly thawing his attitude towards his audience. They have been upgraded from 'the excluded' to the D class. He's almost apologising for telling them off. So what things accompany salvation? So pleased and relieved to have escaped death and Hell, you can praise God and Jesus for the work on the cross that gave you eternal life, the Holy Spirit, plan, provision and protection.

V10. The audience have risen a class grade again and they get actual praise for supporting the saints; doesn't say which saints or where.

V11. An exhortation to perseverance. This is important to God, Hebrews 10:36. Matthew 24:13. Confirmation that 'once saved, always saved' is a fallacy.

V12. Define sluggish in this context. V20, Jesus is described as a forerunner. Imagine running a marathon, one of the runners is Kelvin Kiptum. He ran the Chicago marathon in 2023 in 2 hours 35, an average speed of 15.5 miles per hour. You're never going to keep up with him, but you have got to keep running, not a gentle stroll. Where this illustration falls over, 5 months later, Kelvin died in a car crash. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, 2 Timothy 4:7.

V13. When God makes a promise, it's as good as already happened, ie: it's bankable, the only uncertainty is timing. When I make a promise, it's more a statement of intention, a bit like a politician. I promise my wife, I'm going to decorate the hall this weekend, is subject to no surprise visitors, not coming down with flu, being too tired etc.

V14-15. The example of a promise of God is Abraham receiving a promise that he will be a father, and a father of a nation. Abraham waited 25 years before Isaac was born.

V15-18. V18 is the crux of this passage. God knows in intricate detail everything that's happened in the past, the present and the future, so if a promise weren't fulfilled, the promise would be a lie, and God can't lie. So that's why God's promise is bankable. If a man's promise isn't good enough, there's something that's even firmer, an oath. So if your wife is dubious about your promise to decorate the hall, swear an oath in front of a magistrate or a solicitor, that should convince her.

Though He didn't need to, God upgraded His promise to an immutable oath, immutable means, it can't be changed. So,, why did He? To give you reassurance, confidence and comfort, or as the Amplified Version puts it -

[17] In the same way God, in His desire to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable nature of His purpose, intervened and guaranteed it with an oath,

What is His oath? This chapter is about the salvation of the believer and the flip side of the coin, the destruction of the unbeliever. So now you have double reassurance, God's promise, God's oath. That's what gives you the muscles and lungs in your race towards God.

V19-20. In addition to God's oath, you have an anchor of the soul. An anchor keeps a boat in one place notwithstanding currents and tides. This anchor is described as a presence behind the veil. A reference to the Jewish festival, the Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16:2-3. But instead of going into the Holy of Holies once a year, Jesus is present within that place. He is with you as pace setter, as you run that marathon. He is the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, as opposed to Aaron. Can you remember what the differences were between Aaron and Melchizedek?