

“Things Written Aforetime”
by Joe Neil Clayton

The Oath of God

It is a difficult thing to exhaust the manifold lessons that can be learned from that portion of Scripture dealing with the life and deeds of Abraham. So many lessons crowd into view from these few chapters of the Bible that a teacher finds it hard to move on to other fields.

The legendary story of Abraham’s attempt to offer his son Isaac on the altar, according to God’s command, shows the culmination of Abraham’s developing faith, and we marvel at that faith. Yet, it is this sort of faith that is urged upon us by Paul. In that same incident, however, there is another lesson. It begins with the statement by God, after Abraham had been prevented from taking Isaac’s life. “By myself have I sworn, saith Jehovah, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou has obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:16-18).

From this statement, the writer of the book of Hebrews draws a lesson concerning our hope. He says, “For when God made promise to Abraham, since He could swear by none greater, He swore by Himself...” He reminds his readers that men swear by someone greater, but God cannot. However, “God, being minded to show more abundantly unto the heirs of the promise (that’s us) the immutability of His counsel, interposed with an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us: which we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and entering into that which is within the veil; whither as a forerunner Jesus entered for us” (Hebrews 6:13-20).

We need strong encouragement, it is to be admitted. For, we are surrounded by a world of doubt. The author of Hebrews tells us that God gives us that strong encouragement by making a promise (in which He cannot lie), and then confirming it with an oath by Himself (in which, also, it is impossible for Him to lie). Both the Old and New Testaments bear testimony of the quality of God’s Word. Balaam, the covetous prophet, was compelled by God to say, “God is not a man, that He should lie...hath He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19). In the New Testament, Paul writes that he was a “servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal” (Titus 1:1-2).

Why did God add an oath to His immutable, or unchangeable word, if He cannot lie? The Hebrew writer explains, again, "...in every dispute...the oath is *final* for confirmation." and "that...we may have a strong encouragement." It may, indeed, be an indisputable fact, in heavenly circles, that God cannot lie, but that truth can only be accepted by faith. Abraham becomes our example, "who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations" (Romans 4:18). The process is: God promises something — we see that it serves as a basis of hope — we believe (even against any rational skepticism of fulfillment) --- and we "anchor" our souls in hope! God says to us, "And we desire that each one of you may show the same diligence unto the fulness of hope even to the end; that ye be not sluggish, but imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:11-12). God has done all that He can to make His word good, but He adds something else to that effort. He will bring to us a measure of peace and the joy that will serve to confirm our faith. Ours will not be a faith that has no confidence. Paul says, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

Therefore, when God makes a promise, He can do nothing else but make it good, for He cannot lie. When we believe in response, that faith may waver. But, here again we have Abraham as an example. "And without being weakened in faith he considered his own body now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. Wherefore also it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was reckoned unto him; but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on Him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification. Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 4:19-5:2).

Our hope can be "lively," if our faith is, also. When weakness in faith assaults our hope, we are miserable. When faith conquers, we have "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Which is it to be for you and me?

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