

God's oath of mercy

(i) A blessing to Abraham

(ii) And to his seed (us)

(iii) We are secure

Abraham experienced not an oath of God's anger but God's oath of mercy. (i) It was of course a great blessing to Abraham himself. (ii) But it is also very significant for us too, for we are the 'seed of Abraham'. The reason why our salvation is unshakeably secure is that God's oath to Abraham cannot be changed. God promised to give Abraham a seed and we Christians are the fulfilment of the promise. We are God's elect. We cannot cease to be Abraham's seed. (iii) But there is a third reason why all of this is of vital interest to us. We are secure because we are Abraham's seed. We are Abraham's reward and God will not take Abraham's reward away from him. But then there is something else. We know from Hebrews 3 that God wants to give an oath to us as well. Abraham entered into rest. But we are Abraham's seed and this has the further implication that God wants us to enter into rest also. We are to have God's promise in an oath-bound manner, just as Abraham did. Abraham has received his promise in a way that cannot be lost. But we are also to receive our smaller promises in a way that cannot be lost, and that is what happens when God gives an oath to us.

¹⁷In this oath God planned to prove convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose. That is why he put in an oath. ¹⁸His purpose was that by two unchangeable things in both of which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have run for safety to take hold of the hope set before us might have strong encouragement.

Secure salvation? Four possibilities

• *Once saved, maybe lost*

• *Once saved, always saved – reward infallibly secure*

• *Once saved, always saved – reward open*

• *Once saved, always saved – reward infallibly secure now oath taken*

God uses an oath to make us certain of what we already have and to help us strive after making our inheritance certain also. There are four possibilities in this connection. Some Christians believe the Christian can lose his salvation. I can label this:

- Once saved, maybe lost

Then there are Christians who believe that this cannot happen and that our salvation is always secure. They also tend to say that salvation and reward are the same thing. So I call this:

- Once saved, always saved – and reward always infallibly secure

Then there are Christians who believe that our salvation is always secure, but that reward has to be sought by faith and patience, and (if God does not take an oath) it might possibly be lost¹. I can label this:

- Once saved, always saved – but reward open and able-to-be-lost

Then there is the position of those believers who have been given an oath. Once an oath is given about something, that thing cannot be lost. This gives us yet a fourth position:

- Once saved, always saved – and reward infallibly secure now that an oath has been taken.

¹ as 6:3-6 says

Which is correct?

• *The first two are mistaken*

• *The third is true before the Christian has experienced an oath*

• *The fourth is true after an oath*

The question is: what is it that we find in the letter to the Hebrews? Regarding the four positions I believe our author would make the following comments:

- The first is entirely mistaken – he would say. Every believer has eternal redemption. He is sanctified – set apart – forever by the blood of Christ.

- I believe he would say the second is entirely mistaken also. The reward of the Christian is not infallibly secure from the point of conversion onwards. It has to be inherited by faith and patience. Our eternal redemption cannot be lost, but the reward might be. Inheritance requires persistence and could possibly be lost. Esau lost inheritance; he never lost sonship in Isaac's family.

- The third is the position of the Christian before he has experienced the oath of God.

- The fourth position is the one that the Christian enjoys after God has sworn 'I will indeed bless you' and the promises become secure. Our writer is arguing it all out using the case of Abraham. He has in mind the oath of Genesis 22 (not the time when he was justified in Genesis 15:6 or maybe earlier).

Secure salvation

• *Because if we are part of Abraham's reward*

• *Jesus is our anchor*

• *We cannot totally drift away*

The initial point is that we are ourselves secure in salvation because of the oath to Abraham. We are 'heirs' – saved people who are on their way to an inheritance. 'Heir' does not mean someone who has an inheritance; it means someone who **expects to have** an inheritance. But we cannot lose our position in salvation because we are part of Abraham's reward and he cannot lose his reward! For Abraham the oath has already been given. He has his 'seed', his people. He will lose none of them. We look at the oath given to Abraham and we say to ourselves, 'I cannot be lost because Abraham cannot lose his reward.' God gave an oath to show 'the unchangeable character of his purpose'. My salvation is at this point unchangeable. I have run to Jesus for safety, and God gave an oath to Abraham so that by two unchangeable things in both of which it is impossible for God to lie, I might have total and absolute assurance of my everlasting safety. Jesus is like an anchor. ¹⁹*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, an anchor which is firm and secure. It enters into the innermost room behind the curtain, ²⁰where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has already entered. He has become a high priest for ever in the order of Melchizedek.* When an anchor is thrown into the sea it becomes invisible. Yet it is fixed to the bottom of the sea. Those on the boat know it is there although they cannot see it. Jesus is our anchor. He has gone out of sight, not down into the sea but 'up' into heaven, or 'through' into the heavenly holy-of-holies. We cannot see him but we know he is there. He is fixed in heaven. He cannot lose his position in heaven. We are tied to him. Just as a boat is tied to the anchor we are tied by God's faithfulness to Jesus who is in heaven. So we cannot totally drift away because we are anchored to heaven by our Lord Jesus Christ who is already there.

But there is more!

• *Our reward*

But there is more! Jesus is our forerunner. He is in heaven and we are tied to him. He has got to his reward and so we are safe. But there are yet further promises to be 'obtained' in a way that cannot be lost. Jesus now wants to draw us in after him so that we get to our reward also! He is the forerunner and he wants us to be brought to the glory of **our** reward. Our being tied to Jesus is fixed. We do

• *Tasted before we get there*

• *Good works prepared by God beforehand*

• *Following Abraham to receive God's oath to us*

• *Our ministry connected to the Church and the Kingdom*

not have to worry about that! But we must persist in faith, knowing that Jesus is interceding for us as our great high priest, until God says 'Well done' to us, and we reach heavenly glory. We can have a taste of it even before we get there, when we 'enter into rest' – that is, when we reach the assurance that our reward is as good as given to us already.

We are relying on an oath to Abraham, and that is the way in which we can have total assurance of eternal and indestructible salvation. But we may experience God's giving an oath to us and so reach total assurance of our inheritance. We have promises upon our lives. Every Christian has 'good works which God has prepared beforehand' for him or her to walk in them^{□1}. We have something to do for God, as did each of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. We have Jesus as 'an anchor for the soul, an anchor which is firm and secure'. But we are also wanting to reach 'the full assurance of hope' – the full and deep conviction that we have already laid up treasure in heaven, that it has been sworn to us, and that it now cannot be lost. Jesus is our 'forerunner'. That implies that we are following after him on the way to the same glory and honour that he has reached. He has become a high priest for ever in the order of Melchizedek^{□2}. He is bringing many sons to glory. This all implies that we may be 'children of Abraham' in receiving an oath just as Abraham did. Our writer has already said this. For he has told us that God wants us to enter into rest. Entering into rest is what happens to us when God says, 'Now I know...' and takes an oath of blessing, an oath that confirms that the promises of ministry and usefulness will indeed be fulfilled. We are to have God's promises about our own lives, in an oath-bound manner, just as Abraham did. This is related to the kingdom of God. Our ministry will involve the same promises that God gave to Abraham. Our ministry will be connected to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ; it will be connected to the coming into the kingdom of God of a multitude like the sand on the seashore. But God's oath **to us** will make us our reward secure.

□1 Ephesians 2:10

□2 6:20



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