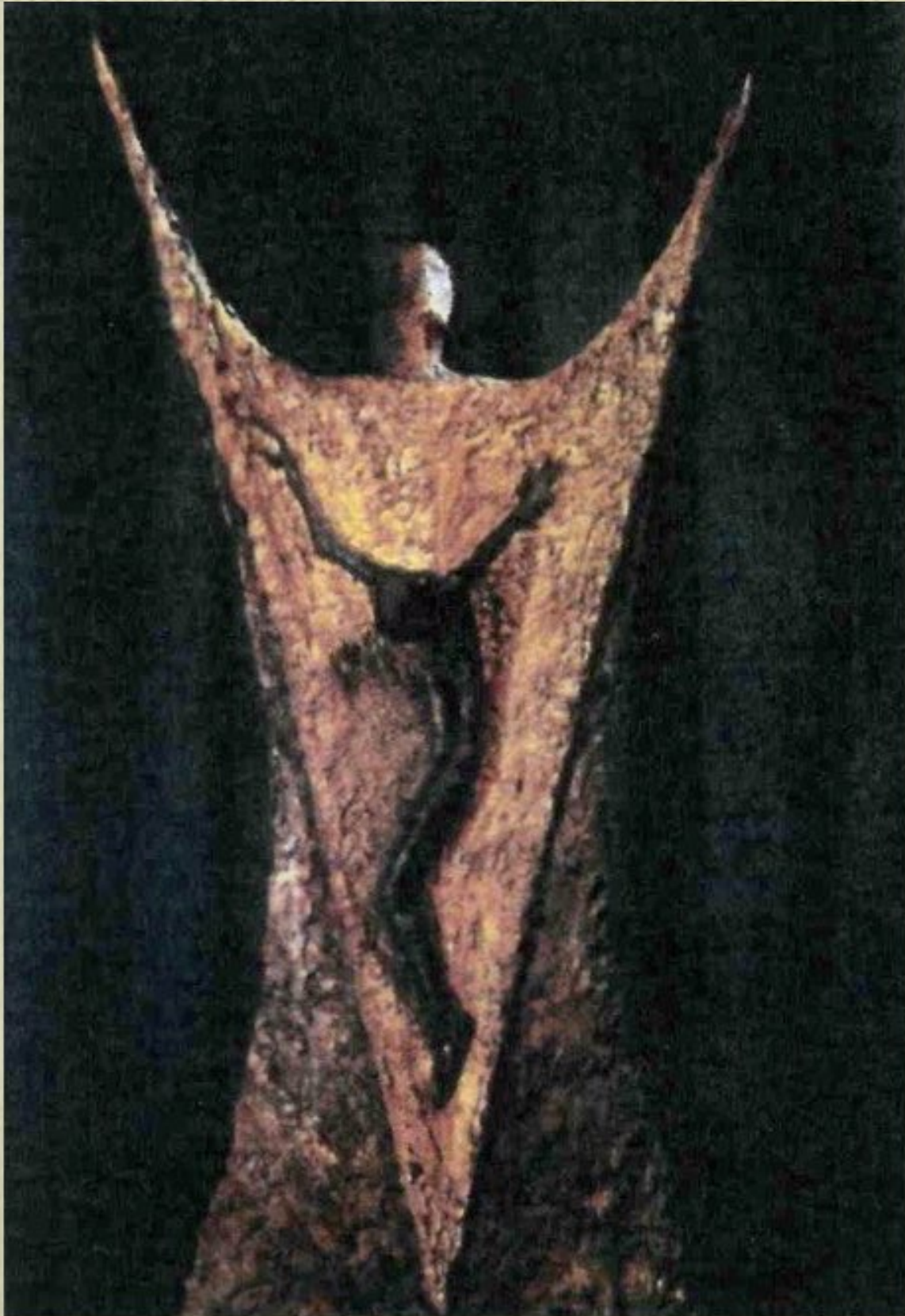


## 07. Hebrews 5:11 - 6:20





## Part Three (5:11 - 10:39)

We come now to the central Part of the oration in which the author presents Christ as the one who attained human **perfection** in eternal communion with God. Furthermore, as the perfect mediator, he and he alone is the one who can bring us to the same perfection by leading us to the same goal. Our author touched on this idea earlier when he wrote: ‘It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of **their salvation perfect through sufferings**’(2:10). He develops the theme in this section of his oration, as the following demonstrate:

Hebrews 5:9-10

[B] **and having been made perfect**

[C] **he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him**

[A] **having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.**



## Part Three A Appeal Hebrews 5:11 - 6:20

### Hebrews 5:11-14

About this we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have become dull in understanding. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

We recall his earlier statement: ‘we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it’ (2:1).

He speaks of righteousness (δικαιοσύνη). There is a divine order (δικη) established by God. Their salvation depends upon their grasping it and acting in accordance with it. They should be mature Christians by now, and so be able to exercise spiritual discernment.



## Hebrews 6:1-3

Therefore let us be carried forward toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And we will do this, if God permits.

The first verb is passive. Going on to perfection is not something which we can initiate or bring to fruition. It is the work of God. Our author is asking us to put ourselves into God's hands and let God, through Christ, carry us to the goal to which he is attracting us by grace. This is the divine order (δι'αυτην) which we must not resist. As he said earlier: 'how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?' (2:3).



‘Solid food is for the **perfect**, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil’ (Hebrews 5:14).

‘Let us go on toward **perfection**, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation’ (Hebrews 6:1).

‘If **perfection** had been attainable through the levitical priesthood — for the people received the law under this priesthood — what further need would there have been to speak of another priest arising according to the order of Melchizedek, rather than one according to the order of Aaron? (Hebrews 7:1)

The law made nothing **perfect**; there is, on the other hand, the introduction of a better hope, through which we approach God. (Hebrews 7:19).



‘The law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made **perfect** forever’ (Hebrews 7:28).

‘Gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot **perfect** the conscience of the worshipper’ (Hebrews 9:9).

‘Through the greater and **perfect** tent, Christ entered once for all into the Holy Place’ (Hebrews 9:11-12).

‘The law can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make **perfect** those who approach’ (Hebrews 10:1).

‘By a single offering Christ has **perfected** for all time those who are sanctified’ (Hebrews 10:14).



‘The holiness of the Church is constantly shown forth in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful. And so it must be. It is expressed in many ways by those who, each in his or her own state of life, tend to the perfection of love’(Vatican II LG 39).



leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation

They know the basics of their faith. As Jews they knew the importance of turning away ‘from **dead works** to worship the living God’ (9:14). This became even more important to them as Christians when they learned that ‘the living God’ is the Father of Jesus. It was their ‘faith’ in Jesus that faced them ‘toward God’, and opened them to their new life as Christians.

As Jews they practised various washings (see 9:10) as a sign of their acknowledgment of their need for purification. They may even have known of the baptism of John. When they joined the Christian community through baptism, they knew the importance of approaching God ‘with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water’ (10:22).



## Hebrews 6:1-3

Therefore let us be carried forward toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, instruction about baptisms, **laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.** And we will do this, if God permits.

As Jews they experienced the ‘**laying on of hands**’ as a recognition of communion in the blessing of God. When they were baptised and hands were laid upon them, they received Jesus’ Spirit in a powerful and memorable way.



## Hebrews 6:1-3

Therefore let us be carried forward toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith toward God, instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And we will do this, if God permits.

They knew of the ‘resurrection of the dead’. As Christians they learned how God has raised Jesus and will raise all those united to him. They knew, too, of ‘eternal judgment’, that is to say, of the judgment of God which transcends our categories of time and space. This was reinforced by the instruction which they received when they were first welcomed into the Christian community, for Jesus stressed the importance of the decisions which we make.



Relying on God's blessing, our author declares his intention to move on to further truths that will support them on their way to full maturity as Christians.



## Hebrews 6:4

For it is impossible to go on restoring to repentance those who have once been enlightened [baptism], and have tasted the heavenly gift [eucharist], and have shared in the Holy Spirit [confirmation]

The Christians whom he is addressing have been graced with what later theology will call the three sacraments of initiation into the Church. They have been ‘enlightened’ in baptism.

Paul speaks of this enlightenment: ‘It is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness”, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ (2Corinthians 4:6). He prays for enlightenment for ‘the eyes of your heart’ (Ephesians 1:18).

In baptism we are ‘called out of darkness into God’s marvellous light’ (1 Peter 1:10).



They have ‘tasted the heavenly gift’ in the Eucharist.

They have ‘shared in the Holy Spirit’ in confirmation.

They have “tasted the ‘goodness’(καλὸς, ‘beauty’) of the word of God’ through the gift of the sacred Scriptures, and they have experienced in their lives the powerful fruit of the Spirit of the exalted Christ: ‘the powers of the age to come’ (see 2:4).



## Hebrews 6:5-6

and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, since on their own they go on crucifying [present participle] the Son of God and continue to hold him up to contempt [present participle].

He knows that Christians can sin, and that repentance is possible, but he warns them that they cannot play with sin or treat it lightly. If by deliberate, calculated rejection of God they ‘fall away’, further repentance is impossible. He is speaking of apostasy which he describes by using two present participles. The nuance of the present form of the participles encourages us to translate: ‘they go on crucifying again the Son of God’ and ‘they continue to hold him up to contempt’. He is describing an obstinate rejection.



There is no other repentance than that provided by God through his Son, and there is no other way to salvation than the ‘purification from sins’ (1:3) effected for us by Christ our high priest. If we go on crucifying the Son of God and continue obstinately to hold Jesus up to contempt; if we keep falling away from grace, and keep on trivialising what Christ has done for us, we will find that we will lose all propensity towards good and will find ourselves incapable of genuine conversion.



## Hebrews 6:7-8

Ground that drinks up the rain falling on it repeatedly, and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and on the verge of being cursed; its end is to be burned [Matthew 7:9; John 15:6]

By mentioning blessing and curse, he reminds us that he is speaking in the context of the covenant (see Deuteronomy 11:26-28). To receive God's blessing we must welcome God's grace and allow it to bear fruit in our lives.



His warning echoes that given by Jesus himself: 'Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire' (Matthew 7:19).

'Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned' (John 15:6)

However, having warned them, he goes on to express his confidence that such a terrible fate does not await them.



## Hebrews 6:9-12

Even though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident of better things in your case, things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the **love** (ἀγάπη) that you showed for his sake in serving [διακονεω] the saints, as you still do. And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realise the full assurance of **hope** (ἐλπίς) to the very end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through **faith** (πίστις) and **patience** [μακροθυμία] inherit the promises.

‘We remember before our God and Father your work of **faith** and labour of **love** and steadfastness of **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

‘**Faith**, **hope**, and **love** abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love’ (1 Corinthians 13:13).



## Hebrews 6:10

‘the love (ἀγάπη) that you showed for his sake in serving [διακονεω] the saints.’

The community is the beneficiary of the service, but it is God whose will is being done. They are acting as servants of the Lord, mediating God’s love and God’s grace to others (see 10:32-34; 13:1-3). They will certainly have their reward, sharing in the inheritance enjoyed by the risen Jesus.

imitators of those who through faith (πίστις) and patience (μακροθυμία) inherit the promises.

The author speaks of their ‘patience’ (μακροθυμία). This is not the kind of patience shown by bearing up under pressure and hardship (ὑπομονή). Rather it refers to our sharing in the magnanimous love of God (see Exodus 34:6) by persisting in love in spite of discouragement. It is the first quality mentioned in Paul’s famous hymn to love (1 Corinthians 13:4).



## Hebrews 6:13-15

When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and multiply you.' And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise.

The author concludes his exhortation by asserting that the promises are secure, because they are based on God's word, in which God's will is clearly revealed. To demonstrate this he turns to Abraham and to the most difficult situation. God had promised Abraham: 'I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing' (Genesis 12:2). 'God brought Abraham outside and said, 'Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them ... So shall your descendants be' (Genesis 15:5).



Yet all this seemed to be put in jeopardy by God seeming to require of Abraham that he sacrifice Isaac, the one through whom the promise was to be realised. It was Abraham's willingness to do this that demonstrated his complete trust in God and that led to the words upon which our author is here commenting; 'By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore' (Genesis 22:16-17).

God proved true to his promise against all appearances, and 'Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise', thus demonstrating the truth of the conviction that is constantly affirmed in the Scriptures.



‘God is not human, that he should lie, or mortal, that he should change his mind. Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it?’ (Numbers 23:19).

‘The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds’ (Psalm 145:13).

‘The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever’ (Isaiah 40:8).

‘I have spoken, I have purposed; I have not relented nor will I turn back’ (Jeremiah 4:28).



## Hebrews 6:16-18

Human beings, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all dispute. In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us.

In especially solemn matters God guarantees his promises with an oath. 'Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David' (Psalm 89:35).

'By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return' (Isaiah 45:23).



Our author, of course, is referring again in a special way to the other oath sworn by God: ‘The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’ (Psalm 110:4).

For us, says our author, there are ‘**two unchangeable things**’: there is the promise ‘which he has spoken to us through a Son whom he has appointed heir of all things’ (1:2); and there is the oath which God has sworn in appointing Christ ‘priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’ (5:6).

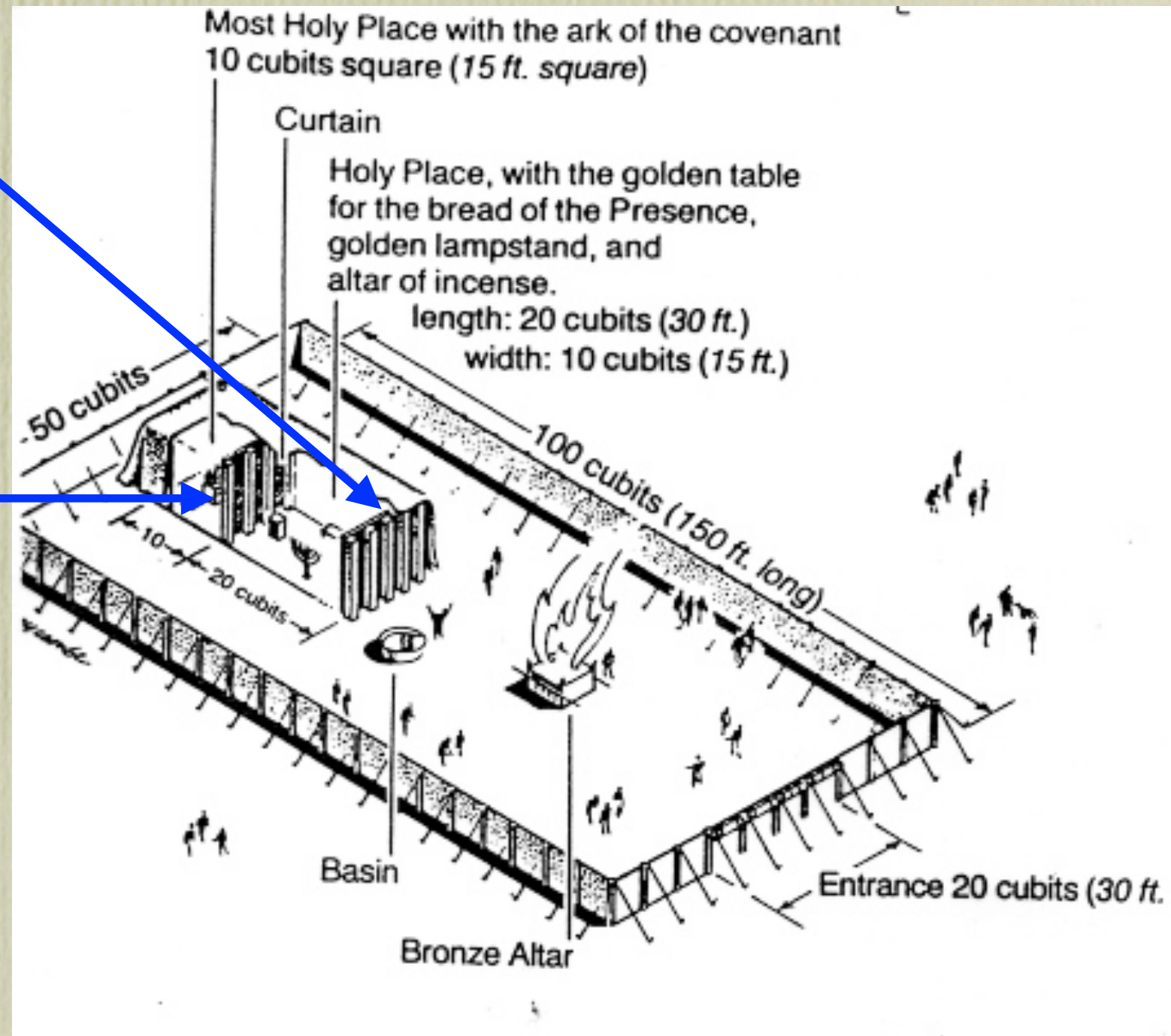
There are times when it seems to us, as it seemed to Abraham, that the very means by which the promises are to be realised are being taken from us. At such times, like Abraham, we must renew our trust and seek ‘refuge’ in God. God will be true to his word. This is our hope. Let us seize it and hold fast to it.



## Hebrews 6:19-20

We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The Tabernacle had two curtains: the **outer curtain** at the western entrance (see Exodus 26:36; 36:37; 40:8,28); and the **inner curtain** leading into the inner sanctuary (see Exodus 26:31; 36:35; 40:3; also Matthew 27:51). Only the high priest was permitted to enter past the inner veil (Leviticus 16:2).





It is our hope that we will, indeed, pass through this inner veil into the presence of God. The anchor is secure, for Jesus has fixed it there. We are simply to cling to our hope in Jesus and we will enjoy this communion with him. Christ has run on ahead, and has reached the goal and entered into the very presence of God himself in an eternal communion. This gives secure grounds for hope to all 'who have taken refuge': who have abandoned every other security in order to cling to God.