

Hebrews 6:16-17 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

CLICK VERSE

To go directly to that verse

- Hebrews 6:1
- Hebrews 6:2
- Hebrews 6:3
- Hebrews 6:4
- Hebrews 6:5
- Hebrews 6:6
- Hebrews 6:7
- Hebrews 6:8
- Hebrews 6:9
- Hebrews 6:10
- Hebrews 6:11
- Hebrews 6:12
- Hebrews 6:13
- Hebrews 6:14
- Hebrews 6:15
- Hebrews 6:16
- Hebrews 6:17
- Hebrews 6:18
- Hebrews 6:19
- Hebrews 6:20

CONSIDER JESUS OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST
Click chart to enlarge
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[Swindoll's Chart](#), [Interesting Pictorial Chart of Hebrews](#), [Another Chart](#)

The Epistle to the Hebrews				
INSTRUCTION Hebrews 1-10:18				EXHORTATION Hebrews 10:19-13:25
Superior Person of Christ Hebrews 1:1-4:13	Superior Priest in Christ Hebrews 4:14-10:18			Superior Life In Christ Hebrews 10:19-13:25
BETTER THAN PERSON Hebrews 1:1-4:13	BETTER PRIESTHOOD Heb 4:14-7:28	BETTER COVENANT Heb 8:1-13	BETTER SACRIFICE Heb 9:1-10:18	BETTER LIFE
MAJESTY OF CHRIST	MINISTRY OF CHRIST			MINISTERS FOR CHRIST
DOCTRINE				DUTY
DATE WRITTEN: ca. 64-68AD				

See [ESV Study Bible "Introduction to Hebrews"](#)
(See also [MacArthur's Introduction to Hebrews](#))

Hebrews 6:16 For **men swear** by **one greater** than themselves, and with them an **oath** given as **confirmation** is an **end** of every dispute. (NASB: Lockman)

Greek: [anthropoi gar kata tou meizonos omnuousin](#). (3PPAI) [kai pases autois antilogias peras eis bebaiosin o horkos](#);

Amplified: Even though we speak this way, yet in your case, beloved, we are now firmly convinced of better things that are near to salvation and accompany it. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

NLT: When people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold them to it. And without any question that oath is binding. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Phillips: Among men it is customary to swear by something greater than themselves. And if a statement is confirmed by an oath, that is the end of all quibbling. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

Wuest: For men swear by the greater, and the oath which is for the purpose of confirmation is to them an end of every dispute.

Young's Literal: for men indeed do swear by the greater, and an end of all controversy to them for confirmation is the oath,

FOR MEN SWEAR BY ONE GREATER THEN THEMSELVES : anthropoi gar kata tou meizonos omnuousin (3PPAI);

- Heb 6:13. Ge 14:22. 21:23, 24. 24:3. 26:20, 26, 28, 31. Mt 23:20-22
- Hebrews 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

For (gar) - Always **pause** to **prayerfully ponder** and **peruse** this **poignant term of explanation**, and you often glean helpful insights from your Teacher the Holy Spirit. You can always ask at least one question "**What is the author explaining?**"

Wuest - The writer now illustrates the security of the divine promise by using the analogy of human practice. The word "oath" is preceded by the definite article in the Greek text. The oath, which is used with a view to confirming something, is the end of all disputes. Thus, the act of God in confirming His promise by an oath, is justified by human practice. The confident hope which God's oath warrants is justified by the fact that even a human oath puts an end to dispute. ([Hebrews Commentary online](#))

Swear (3660) (Omnuo) means to affirm the truth of a statement by calling on a divine being to execute sanctions against a person if the statement in question is not true (in the case of a deity taking an oath, his divine being is regarded as validating the statement). In this case God's Own Divine being is regarded as validating the statement.

Omnuo is repeated in this middle section of the epistle of Hebrews...

- Hebrews 3:11 (note) As I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest."
- Hebrews 3:18 (note) And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?
- Hebrews 4:3 (note) For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.
- Hebrews 6:13 (note) For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,
- Hebrews 6:16 (note) For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.
- Hebrews 7:21 (note) (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, "The Lord has sworn And will not change His mind, 'Thou art a priest forever' ")

Omnuo is used in the Septuagint (LXX) in reference to God swearing to keep His covenant to bring Israel into the land (Dt 1:8, 35, 2:14, 4:21, 31, 6:10, 18, 23, 7:8, 12, 13, 8:1, 18, etc > 30x in Deut.)

A recognition of the numerous forensic meanings in Heb 6:16-18, adds considerably to the force of the encouragement extended to the congregation.

The confident hope which God's oath warrants is justified by the fact that even a human oath puts an end to dispute.

This is a glorious truth. When men are involved in strife and they want to make peace and guarantee the peace, they do it by doing two things. They keep the peace and then they swear or take an oath that they will fulfill their promise. And note: they always swear by someone or something greater than themselves. When they make such an oath, it settles the dispute. They do what they say.

AND WITH THEM AN OATH GIVEN AS CONFIRMATION IS AN END OF EVERY DISPUTE: kai pases autois antilogias peras eis bebaiosin ho horkos kai pases autois antilogias peras:

- Dt 32:42. Ge 21:30, 31. Ge 31:53. Ex 22:11. Josh 9:15-20. 2Sa 21:2. Ezek 17:16-20) (Dt 10:20. Ne 5:12. Ps 15:1, 4. Eccl 8:2. Mt 26:63, 64. 2Co 1:23. Phil 1:7. Ex 9:6. Heb 7:7. 12:3. Jude 11
- Hebrews 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

An oath - The definite article (*ho* = the) is present so more accurately it reads "the oath". The invoking of the Lord's name in the oath meant that one was bound under obligation before God to fulfill that word.

Oath ([3727](#)) (**horkos** from **herkos** = a fence, an enclosure, that which restrains a person) (See more in depth dictionary discussion of **Oath**) in simple terms is a solemn statement or claim used to validate a promise. In other words an oath represents a solemn attestation of the truth or inviolability of one's words. An oath is a solemn pledge to affirm something said as absolutely true. An **oath** is a definitive and binding confirmation of the spoken word and invalidates any contradiction of the statement made.

In the OT it was prescribed that oaths should be taken in Yahweh's name (Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20), and lying under oath was condemned as a violation of the Third Commandment (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11; Zechariah 5:3,4)

Oath refers to "the confirmation of a compact among men, guaranteeing the discharge of liabilities; in their disputes "the oath is final for confirmation." This is referred to in order to illustrate the greater subject of God's "oath" to Abraham, confirming His promise." ([Vine](#))

Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary defines **oath** as "A solemn affirmation or declaration, made with an appeal to God for the truth of what is affirmed. The appeal to God in an oath, implies that the person imprecates his vengeance and renounces his favor if the declaration is false, or if the declaration is a promise, the person invokes the vengeance of God if he should fail to fulfill it. A false oath is called perjury.

The formula *eis bebaiosin* = one that persisted for centuries as a technical expression for a legal guarantee in a transaction. The idea is to cause something to be known as certain, to prove to be true and certain = confirmation, verification.

One might translate "a legal guarantee to every lawsuit".

Vine comments that "that God confirmed His promise by an oath is only what is done in human custom; for men appeal to God, when taking an oath, as a witness of their sincerity. Further, since a human oath puts an end to debate, God's oath can remove all doubt in the heart as to the fulfillment of what He has promised. ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

Guzik has a comment regarding practical application of these truths...

During this time of patient endurance, many Christians get attacked. They wonder if they too will obtain the promise. They often wonder "*Will God really come through?*" After he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise: God came through for Abraham, even sealing His promise with an oath. In fact, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself. This oath showed that God's promises (like His character) are unchanging.

Dispute ([485](#)) (**Peras**) was a technical term for a legal guarantee = confirmation, legal guarantee

The God of Abraham Praise

1The God of Abraham praise,

Who reigns enthroned above;

Ancient of everlasting days,

And God of love.

Jehovah, great I AM,
By earth and heav'n confessed;
I bow and bless the sacred Name,
Forever blest.

2The God of Abraham praise,
At whose supreme command
From earth I rise, and seek the joys
At His right hand.

I all on earth forsake,
It s wisdom, fame, and pow'r;
And Him my only portion make,
My shield and tow'r.

3He by Himself hath sworn,
I on His OATH depend;
I shall, on eagles' wings upborne,
To heavn' ascend;
I shall behold His face,
I shall His pow'r adore,
And sing the wonders of His grace
Forever more.

4The whole triumphant host
Give thanks to God on high
"Hail, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!"
They ever cry.
Hail, Abraham's God, and mine!
I join the heav'nly lays;
All might and majesty are Thine,
And endless praise.

Hebrews 6:17 In the [same](#) way [God](#), [desiring even more](#) to [show](#) to the [heirs](#) of the [promise](#) the [unchangeableness](#) of His [purpose](#), [interposed](#) with an [oath](#), ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Greek: [en o perissoteron boulomenos](#) (PMPMSN) [o theos](#) epideixai (AAN) [tois kleronomois tes epaggelias to ametatheton tes boules autou emesiteusen](#) (3SAAI) [horko](#).

Amplified: For God is not unrighteous to forget or overlook your labor and the love which you have shown for His name's sake in ministering to the needs of the saints (His own consecrated people), as you still do. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#)) ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

NLT: God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Phillips: So in this matter, God, wishing to show beyond doubt that his plan was unchangeable, confirmed it with an oath. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

Wuest: In which God, more abundantly desirous of demonstrating to those who are inheritors of the promise the immutability of His counsel, interposed with an oath,

Young's Literal: in which God, more abundantly willing to shew to the heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel, did interpose by an oath,

IN THE SAME WAY GOD DESIRING EVEN MORE TO SHOW THE HEIRS OF THE PROMISE: en o perissoteron boulomenos (PMPMSN) o theos epideixai (AAN) tois kleronomois tes epaggelias (singular):

- 1 Co 12:11. James 1:18. 2 Pe 3:9) (Ps 36:8. Song 5:1. Isaiah 55:7. Jn 10:10. 1Pe 1:3
- Heb 6:12. Heb 11:7, 9. Ro 8:17. Gal 3:29. Ep 1:11. Ja 2:5. 1Pe 3:7
- Ge 17:7. Ac 2:39. Gal 3:17, 29
- Hebrews 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

In the same way - Wuest says this "refers to the entire previous clause. The idea is "in accordance with this universal custom." Since the oath has this convincing power among men, God disregards the insult implied in man's doubting His Word, and condescends to human infirmity, confirming His Word by an oath. ([Hebrews Commentary online](#))

Desiring (willing, intending) ([1014](#))(**boulomai**) refers to a settled desire, one born of or springing from reason and not from emotion. To will, to wish, to will deliberately, to intend, to have a purpose, to be minded. **Boulomai** expresses the idea of the deliberate and specific exercise of volition (an act of making a choice or decision). Stated another way **boulomai** conveys the sense of more than simply wanting a desire or wish to be fulfilled. It conveys the stronger sense of choosing one thing over another or of preference of one thing before another. **Boulomai** is more likely to express God's will of decree whereas the verb *thelo* refers to God's will of desire. **Boulomai** carries the tone of a preordained, divine decision, somewhat more deliberate than *thelo* (Lk 22:42).

Wuest - The word "**desiring**" is the translation of **boulomai** which speaks of a desire that is based upon the reasoning faculties as over against *thelo*, a desire that arises from the emotions. God, facing human infirmities, was minded to do thus and so. ([Hebrews Commentary online](#))

Show ([1925](#)) (**epideiknumi** from **epí** = upon + **deíknumi** = show, make known character or significance of something by visual, auditory, gestural, or linguistic means) literally means to cause to be seen, to exhibit (Acts 9:39). Figuratively it means to show to be true, to prove to be true beyond a doubt and so to demonstrate convincingly. In Luke 17:14 Jesus' command to the lepers to '**show** themselves to the priests was intended to be "proof" for the priests (cf. Mk 1:44) In Acts 9:36 the idea is to display or show all that Dorcas had done for the disciples. In Hebrews 6:17 the writer continues the forensic or legal terminology in this section and **show** could be translated "prove" as in Acts 18:28 where Apollos **demonstrated** "in public debate" that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. A related verb (*apodeiknumi*) is used in Acts 25:7 where we read that the Jews were unable to "prove" their charges against Paul in court.

Epideiknumi - 7x in 7v - demonstrating(1), point(1), show(4), showing(1). Three uses in the **Septuagint** - Est 3:13, Pr 12:17, Isa 37:26.

Matthew 16:1 The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to **show** them a sign from heaven.

Comment - They wanted Jesus to "prove" (through a miracle) that He was who He claimed to be. Their request categorized them as sign seekers who would never be given a sign except that of Jonah (Mt 16:4).

Matthew 22:19 "**Show** Me the coin used for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius.

Matthew 24:1 Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to **point** out the temple buildings to Him.

Luke 17:14 When He saw them, He said to them, "Go and **show** yourselves to the priests." And as they were going, they were cleansed.

Acts 9:39 So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and **showing** all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.

Acts 18:28 for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, **demonstrating** by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

Hebrews 6:17 In the same way God, desiring even more to **show** to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath,

God desired to **give proof** and demonstrate how committed He was to carry out His promise to the readers (heirs) by giving His oath as surety or guarantee. This is a powerful picture. God Who Himself alone is Judge of all, condescends in a sense to say "I swear to fulfill My promise to you"! This is an incredible truth for finite, created beings to receive from their Creator Who justifiably could have annihilated us all forever! Oh, how deep the canyons of God's mercy to lost sinners such as me.

Heirs (2818) (**Kleronomos** from **kleros** = a lot - lots were cast or drawn to divide property or select a winner or an heir + **nemomai** = to possess, to distribute among themselves), literally refers to one who obtains a lot or portion. It is one who receives something as a possession or a beneficiary (the person named as in an insurance policy to receive proceeds or benefits). It signifies more than one who inherits and it includes the idea of taking into possession. The New Testament usage of **kleronomos** applies primarily to the realm of spiritual inheritance.

Detzler records a different origin stating that **kleronomos** "is a combination of two words: **kleros** (a lot or inheritance) and **nomos** (law). Thus the word **kleronomos** indicates the legal distribution of possessions or lots to heirs... In the original Greek culture, possessions were passed on to any person named in one's will. In fact, Greeks often built their fortunes for the purpose of passing them on to favored relatives. The Romans widened the concept to enable the distribution of possessions or wealth among close friends or loyal servants. To the Jews, however, an inheritance was usually reserved for one's children. In fact this was preserved in the Law as the principle to be followed. The Greek Old Testament also used **kleros** to refer to casting of the lot, as was seen in the use of the Urim and Thummim (Ex. 28:30; Lev 8:8). (Detzler, Wayne E: New Testament Words in Today's Language. Victor. 1986)

In the Greco-Roman world the word **kleronomos** was a legal term and was found on ancient inscriptions of Asia Minor to refer to a son after he was succeeded to the inheritance as representative of his father, undertaking all the duties and obligations of his father.

A heir is one who receives or is entitled to receive some endowment or quality from a parent or predecessor

Inheritance terminology is frequent in Hebrews (see **notes** Hebrews 1:2, 1:4, 1:14; 6:12, 6:17; 9:15; 11:7, 11:8; 12:17, see Galatians 3:29, see **note** Romans 8:17)

Promise (1860) (**epaggelia/epangelia** from **epi** = intensifies verbal meaning + **aggello** = to tell, declare) originally referred to an announcement or declaration (especially of a favorable message) but in later Greek came to mean a declaration to do something with the implication of obligation to carry out what is stated (thus a promise or pledge). **Epaggelia** was primarily a legal term denoting summons, a promise to do or give something, but in the NT speaks primarily of the promises of God.

Wuest - The word "**promise**" is preceded by the definite article in the Greek text, pointing to a definite, particular promise defined in the context. It is the promise to Abraham and his posterity found in Heb 6:14. ([Hebrews Commentary online](#))

Epaggelia is used in Hebrews 14 times in 13 verses (27.4% of all 51 NT uses) (See **notes** Hebrews 4:1, Hebrews 6:12, 6:15, 6:17, Hebrews 7:6, Hebrews 8:6, Hebrews 9:15, Hebrews 10:36, Hebrews 11:9, 11:13, 11:17, 11:33, 11:39)

TDNT summarizes this word group writing that it has the following nuances -**a.** The first sense is "to indicate," "declare," "declaration," "report." **b.** When the state declares something, it becomes an "order." **c.** In law we find the senses "accusation" and "delivery of a judgment." **d.** We then find the senses "to declare an achievement," "to show one's mastery," "to profess a subject." **e.** Another sense is "to offer," "to promise," "to vow." As regards promises, tension between word and deed is felt, so that promises are often seen as worthless. **f.** A special type of promise is the "promise of money," and in this sense the idea of a "subscription" or "donation" arises (state liturgies, gifts to rulers at their accession, priests promising gifts in support of their candidature). **g.** In the Hellenistic period we also find a sacral use for the "proclamation" of a festival. Among all the instances, only one example has been found for the promise of a deity. ([Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Eerdmans](#))

THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF HIS PURPOSE INTERPOSED WITH AN OATH: to ametatheton tes boules autou emesiteusen (3SAI) hork:

- Ge 1:9, 18. Job 23:13, 14. Ps 33:11. 110:4. Pr 19:21. Isaiah 14:24, 26, 27. 25:1. 46:10. 54:9, 10. 55:11. Jer 33:20, 21, 25, 26. Malachi 3:6. Ro 4:13, 16. 11:29. Ja 1:17. of his. Ex 19:6. unchangeable Acts 20:27. Interposed interposed himself. Heb 6:16. Ge 26:28. Ex 22:11. Gal 3:20. Oath. He 8:6. Jer 33:20, 21)
- [Immutability; Unchangeable](#)
- God's attribute - Immutable
- Hebrews 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Unchangeableness (276) (**ametathetos** from a = without, + **metatithemi**= change condition or place, transfer) literally never changing, not to be transferred. The idea is that which is fixed, unalterable or immutable. This word was used in secular Greek in the context of wills and contracts and signified a stipulation that could not be disregarded or annulled. Once properly made a will was **ametathetos** unchangeable by anyone but the maker. The writer of Hebrews uses this word (in the only 2 uses in Scripture in Hebrews 6:17 and Hebrews 6:18) with powerful, well known forensic (legal) ramifications (immutability of a legally written will) to add to the force of the encouragement he extended to his readers.

Spoken of God's constitutional will. This Greek word was used in wills and contracts and signified stipulation that could not be annulled. Here the writer conveys the strong certainty of IRREVOCABILITY of God's purpose as expressed in His promise (His Word) and in His oath.

Wuest - The word "**immutability**" is the translation of **ametathetos**. The word is from **metatithemi**. Tithemi means "to place," and meta prefixed refers to a change. Thus, the compound word means "to change place," thus "to transpose" two things, one of which is put in place of the other. The derived noun **metathemenos** means "a turncoat." The Greek letter Alpha prefixed to the word makes it mean the opposite to what it meant originally. That is, God will not change His position as to His promise. Having made the promise, He will stand by it. He is not a turncoat. He will not change His position as to His promise, because that promise rests upon His counsel, and that is **ametathetos** also, immutable. ([Hebrews Commentary online](#))

Purpose (plan) (1012)(**boule**) when used of man expresses a decision, a purpose or a plan which is the result of inner deliberation. **Boule** is that which has been purposed and planned. **Boule** has in it the ideas of intelligence and deliberation. In other words **boule** describes the result of deliberate determination which in the present context reflects the product of not just a "mastermind" but God's heart of infinite love.

NIDNTT says that in secular Greek **boule** "denotes an intention, a deliberation. It also stands for the result of a deliberation in the sense of a decision of the will, a resolution, a counsel or an edict. So already in Homer (Il. 2, 53) an assembly of men is called a **boule**, when it became an institutional body (e.g. the Council of the Five Hundred in Athens, Herodotus 5, 72; 9, 5).

Wuest - The word "**counsel**" is the translation of **boule**, which word is allied to **boulomai** "to desire, which desire comes from one's reason." The Triune God in council convened brought forth this counsel to the effect that the soul might find a sure refuge in the Lord Jesus. This counsel is immutable.

Interposed (KJV - Confirmed) (3315)(**mesiteuo**) is a verb which means to be a mediator between two contending parties.

Wuest - The word "**confirmed**" is the translation of **mesiteuo** which means "to act as mediator between litigating or covenanting parties, to accomplish something by interposing between two parties." A **mesites** is a sponsor or surety, so **mesiteuo** comes to signify "to pledge one's self, to give surety." God placed Himself between Himself and the inheritors of the promise. Expositor's quotes Delitzsch as follows: "God descended, as it were, from His own absolute exaltation, in order, so to speak, to look up to Himself after the manner of men and take Himself to witness; and so by a gracious condescension confirm the promise for the sake of the inheritors"; and Davidson, "He mediated or came in between men and Himself, through the oath by Himself." ([Hebrews Commentary online](#))

God actively, actually intervened as surety by declaring His oath. The picture is God pledging Himself as SURETY or GUARANTEE in regard to His "contracted obligation".