

Nautical Terms Used in the Book of Hebrews

Nautical Terms in Greek Language Used in the Book of Hebrews

The book of Hebrews employs several Greek words which in secular use were nautical terms and give vivid pictures regarding the Christian life. These maritime expressions draw from the nautical language of the ancient world, where sea travel was essential for commerce, communication, and survival. The author of Hebrews uses these terms to convey profound theological truths about faith, perseverance, and divine aid in the time of need.

Παραρρέω (Pararrheo) - "To Drift Away"

Reference: Hebrews 2:1 (commentary)

Literal Meaning: To drift away from moorings; to slip away unnoticed

Nautical Background: Originally described a ship that has slipped its anchor or drifted off course without the crew's awareness

Theological Application: Warns believers against the gradual, imperceptible drift away from their faith and the gospel message they have heard

Unique Usage: This word appears only once in the New Testament in Hebrews 2:1

In depth study: See pararrheo

Related Resource:

- Are You Spiritually Drifting?

Προσέχω (Prosecho) - "To Pay Attention"

Reference: Hebrews 2:1 (commentary)

Literal Meaning: To pay attention

Nautical Background: **Prosecho** meant to moor a ship, to tie it up and was also used to mean "to remain on course".

Theological Application: Clearly in Hebrews the writer is calling his readers to remain on course with the Gospel, the New Covenant and not go back to the rituals of the Old Covenant.

In depth study: See prosecho

Katecho "Hold Fast"

Hebrews 3:6 (commentary) but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we **hold fast** our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

Hebrews 3:14 (commentary) For we have become partakers of Christ, if we **hold fast** the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,

Hebrews 10:23 (commentary) Let us **hold fast** the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;

Literal Meaning: To hold fast, keep in possession, possess

Nautical Meaning: It was a nautical technical term meaning to hold one's course toward, to head for, or to steer for (Acts 27.40)

Theological Significance: Holding fast to confidence, beginning of one's assurance or one's confession is indicative of the doctrine of perseverance which is a marker of genuine salvation.

In depth study: See [katecho](#)

γκυρα (Agkura) "Anchor"

Reference: Hebrews 6:19 (commentary)

Literal Meaning: retain, keep in possession, possess

Nautical Background: Essential maritime equipment for securing vessels in harbors or during storms

Theological Application: Hope is described as "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" that enters the heavenly sanctuary

Spiritual Metaphor: Represents the believer's secure connection to Christ and the certainty of salvation

In depth study: See agkura

Πρόδρομος (Prodromos) "Forerunner"

Reference: Hebrews 6:20 (commentary)

Literal Meaning: A scout ship or advance vessel

Nautical Background: In ancient harbors, especially Alexandria, small pilot boats (prodromos) would guide larger ships safely through dangerous waters and sandbars

Theological Application: Jesus is described as our "forerunner" who has entered the heavenly sanctuary ahead of us, ensuring our safe passage

Historical Context: These pilot boats carried anchors from larger ships to secure harbors, guaranteeing the main vessel's eventual safe arrival

In depth study: See prodromos

Βοήθεια (Boetheia) "Help"/"Assistance"

Reference: Hebrews 4:16 (commentary)

Literal Meaning: Critical assistance, especially nautical aid

Nautical Background: Specifically refers to the frapping process - using ropes or cables to undergird and strengthen a ship's hull during storms⁹

Biblical Parallel: This same word appears in Acts 27:17 (see commentary), describing the literal frapping of Paul's storm-damaged ship

Theological Application: God's grace provides timely, critical assistance when believers face spiritual storms - like emergency maritime aid that holds a ship together

In depth study: See boetheia