

Hebrews 13:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Analysis

This verse constitutes one of Scripture's most comprehensive promises regarding God's unfailing presence. The statement 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee' employs double negation in Greek ('ou me se afiso oute me sekataleipo') - a construction that emphasizes absolute, unconditional commitment. The two-fold promise addresses both active abandonment (leaving) and passive dereliction (forsaking), ensuring comprehensive coverage against any perception of divine withdrawal. 'Never' (Greek 'ou me') is the strongest negation available in Greek, indicating something that is literally impossible. The verb 'forsake' (kataleipo) specifically means to leave behind or abandon in a place of trial - a term frequently used of desertion under duress. This promise directly contradicts the experience of spiritual despair where believers often report feeling abandoned. Yet the writer insists this feeling is deceptive - God's presence persists irrespective of subjective emotional experience. The historical antecedent echoes God's promise to Joshua (Joshua 1:5): 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' establishing a pattern where God reiterates this covenant promise during seasons of significant transition and challenge. The promise applies not to extraordinary circumstances but to ordinary Christian existence, addressing the daily temptation to believe ourselves abandoned when facing ordinary struggles.

Historical Context

Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians around 64-70 AD (possibly before the destruction of Jerusalem) who faced severe pressure to abandon their faith in Jesus and return to Jewish observance. They endured public reproach, confiscation of property (Hebrews 10:34), and community ostracism. Some may have experienced imprisonment (Hebrews 13:3). In this context of hardship testing their faith, the writer grounds Christian perseverance not in individual strength but in Christ's perpetual intercession and presence. The quotation of Joshua 1:5 activates typological thinking: as Joshua faced the daunting task of conquering Canaan yet received this promise, so these Hebrew Christians faced the demanding pilgrimage of faith amid cultural pressure. The historical Jesus had promised 'lo, I am with you always' (Matthew 28:20), establishing the risen Christ as the fulfillment of God's covenant presence. The Hebrews audience, facing the collapse of the old covenant system (the temple destruction was imminent), needed reassurance that Christ himself was their sanctuary and presence. Church fathers like Chrysostom interpreted this verse as foundational for Christian courage under persecution - believers need not fear persecution or death if Christ's presence remains. The verse addressed the psychological reality that faith is tested precisely when feelings of abandonment seem most overwhelming.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does God's promise of never forsaking us address the common experience of feeling spiritually abandoned during trials?
2. What is the significance of the double promise (neither leaving nor forsaking) rather than a single statement of presence?
3. Why is the historical context of Joshua's conquest relevant to Hebrew Christians facing cultural and social pressure?

4. In what ways does this promise address the fear of gradual spiritual decline or the loss of God's guidance?
5. How does Christ's continued intercession (Hebrews 7:25) relate to this promise of perpetual presence?

Interlinear Text

Αφιλάργυρος	ο	τρόπος	ἀρκούμενοι	τοῖς			
be without covetousness	G3588	Let your conversation	and be content	G3588			
	G866			G714			
παροῦσιν	αὐτὸς	γὰρ	εἴρηκεν	Οὐ	μή	σε	ἀνῶ
with such things as ye have	he	for	hath said	G3756	G3361	thee	leave
G3918	G846	G1063	G2046			G4571	G447
οὐδέν	οὐ	μή	σε	ἐγκαταλίπω			
nor	G3756	G3361	thee	forsake			
G3761			G4571	G1459			

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 31:8 (Parallel theme): And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.

Joshua 1:5 (Parallel theme): There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

Deuteronomy 31:6 (Parallel theme): Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

1 Samuel 12:22 (Parallel theme): For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people.

Isaiah 41:17 (Parallel theme): When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.

1 Chronicles 28:20 (Parallel theme): And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.

Psalms 37:25 (Parallel theme): I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.

Isaiah 41:10 (Parallel theme): Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

Genesis 28:15 (Parallel theme): And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

Matthew 6:25 (Parallel theme): Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?