

- d. In the face of numerous struggles and forces arrayed against their faith, these Hebrews had shown themselves to be true sharers in their Messiah. The writer knew that to be true, as did others who had observed their labor and service of love. Most importantly, God was witness to their faithfulness to His Son in ministering to His beloved saints, and they should rest assured that He'd taken note of it and would keep it in remembrance against a future day of completion and glory.

That day would arrive at the appointed time, but precisely for that reason, and in sure hope of it, these Jewish disciples needed to press on in their faithfulness. They mustn't rest in the writer's commendation, or allow themselves to grow weary or sluggish in running their race. And for those who were trying to coerce them back to their ancestral faith, they had a compelling answer: They had every intention of standing with their Jewish forefathers, *but in truth*. They embraced their fathers' patient, persevering hope in Israel's Messiah, but as that hope had come to rest in Jesus. In this way, they, too, would endure as seeing Him who is unseen, firm in their conviction that they would receive all that God had promised (6:11-12).

The writer was concerned that his readers view their circumstances and faith from this vantage point. And armed with this understanding, they could press on with all confidence toward the inheritance that was theirs in the Messiah. What God had promised to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), and continued to uphold in His dealings with Abraham's covenant descendents (cf. Genesis 15 with Exodus 3:1-10; Psalm 105:1-7; Isaiah 41:1-20; 51:1-5; Micah 7; etc.), He'd now fulfilled in the singular Seed of Abraham – the Israelite to whom the promises pertained and in whom they obtained their true and full realization (Galatians 3).

- Faithful Israelites in every generation had clung to this promise, believing God for it and recognizing their own place in the long and difficult process that would eventually culminate with Messiah's coming, the completion of the messianic work, and the inauguration and fruitfulness of Yahweh's everlasting kingdom.
- If these Hebrews were to be true children of their faithful fathers, they needed imitate their persevering faith and hope. But whereas the fathers, beginning with Abraham, had hoped in the messianic "day" (John 8:56; ref. also 2 Samuel 7; Luke 10:21-24; 1 Peter 1:10-12), their believing descendents saw that day in retrospect. Their hope wasn't directed toward Messiah's coming and the inauguration of His kingdom (with all that entails), but Messiah's *Parousia* and the *consummation* of the kingdom in the renewal of all things (ref. 10:35-37; cf. Acts 1:1-11; Romans 8:18-21; 1 Corinthians 15; Philippians 3:17-21; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10).

This promise – which was the foundation of Israel’s covenant life and history, and gave meaning and purpose to it – is what the writer had in mind here. He wasn’t exhorting his readers to imitate their forefathers’ faith and hope in a *generic* or *abstract* way (“your fathers trusted God, and you need to trust Him”), but to *carry on their fathers’ faith and hope* by setting theirs on the same promise – the promise God gave to Abraham (6:13-14). In that way, these Hebrews would show themselves to be Abraham’s children *indeed*: children, not by descent, but by shared faith and faithfulness focused on Yahweh’s Messiah (cf. Isaiah 49:1-13 with 51:1-5; also Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 3:26-29; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

Abraham believed God and held fast to His promise, and his faith and hope characterized his true children down through the ages, right up to the coming of the Promised One. But because that faith and hope were directed toward the Messiah and God’s work through Him, all of the faithful who lived prior to Jesus’ coming died without receiving what was promised (11:39). That being the case, it would seem that the writer was directing his readers to imitate the faith and patience of *fellow Christians*, for they were the ones who were inheriting the promises (6:12). But both the immediate and wider contexts suggest something more.

- Again, the promises the writer had in mind were those God gave to Abraham (vv. 12-15), not a “promise” of personal salvation leading to the “inheritance” of eternal life in heaven. The issue of personal salvation is an implication of the writer’s argument, but it was not his specific concern in this context.
- Secondly, it was certainly true that the readers’ Christian brothers and sisters (both Jew and Gentile) had inherited the Abrahamic promises as sharers in the Messiah (again, Galatians 3:26-29), *but so had all of the faithful who preceded them*. For, though such ones had died in faith, without obtaining what they hoped for, their faith had now become sight. The One for whom Israel’s faithful had longed had come at last, and now they were “made perfect” in Him, the resurrected Messiah. But not alone, but together with their brethren who lived in the “fullness of the times” (ref. 11:40).
- The writer’s reference to Abraham also supports this perspective: “*having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.*” But the promise pertained to abundant offspring – “I will surely multiply you” (ref. Genesis 22:17), *which wasn’t a promise Abraham saw fulfilled*. Isaac and Jacob were the beginning of it, but Abraham didn’t live to see further *covenant* offspring (Genesis 17:15-21, 25:1-6). He didn’t receive in his lifetime what God promised, nor even later in the nation descended from him. The fulfillment awaited his singular Seed and the multitude who share in Him.

In context, then, the writer was exhorting his readers to persevere in patient hope of obtaining what God had promised *to Abraham*. This implicates the totality of the Abrahamic Covenant, but the specific concern was hope directed toward the promise of blessing in connection with countless covenant children (ref. Genesis 12:2, 15:1-5).

- There was a certain aspect of fulfillment in the nation of Israel descended from Abraham's twelve great-grandsons. Yahweh did indeed bless Abraham in this way, making him a great nation, but the promise of a multitude of offspring looked beyond the one nation to a covenant family composed of many nations; *Abram* ("father of a people") would realize his blessedness as *Abraham* – "father of many peoples" (Genesis 17:1-7). Thus God would fulfill His purpose and pledge to bless all of the earth's families in him.
- The covenant house of Israel reflected and reinforced God's promise to multiply Abraham, but it didn't fulfill it. That wouldn't happen until Abraham's *name* was fulfilled and he became the father of a vast family drawn from every nation, tribe, tongue and people. Abraham himself likely wondered how this was going to come about, but, over time, God revealed that a *particular descendent* would be the connection between the patriarch and this enormous family. This truth underlies Paul's insistence that the promise to Abraham and his "seed" was ultimately the promise of a *singular seed* – an "only-begotten" son (*monogenes*). Isaac, the progenitor of the Israelite covenant family, prefigured this individual (ref. Genesis 17:15-19, 22:1-2), but Abraham's obtainment of a global family awaited another *monogenes*. In that Seed, Abraham would see his faith vindicated, as God gave him offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky (Genesis 15:1-6).

Abraham closed his eyes in death, fully aware that he hadn't received what God had pledged to him (John 8:56). But he died in *faith*, fully assured that he would one day obtain the blessing of innumerable offspring. Abraham had no doubt that his God would prove faithful, but he could never have imagined the long and painful history and profound events that would see his name fulfilled and his global family realized.

Abraham's life of unwavering trust established the pattern that marked all of his faithful descendants throughout the succeeding generations; each one lived and died in faith, believing that their God would not forget or set aside His covenant and its promises. That hope was held unrequited for two thousand years, but the day of fulfillment arrived at last and the promise began bearing its fruit. God was now raising up children for Abraham – children from all peoples, but united in sharing their father's faith and hope (cf. John 8:31-40; Romans 4:1-24; Galatians 3:1-9).

In the Messiah, God was multiplying Abraham's children, and the writer's exhortation called for these Hebrews to own *their* place in Abraham's true family and stand firm in it. They were to manifest the same faith and hope that had marked their covenant father and all of his faithful children – both those who saw the Seed from a distance, and those who know Him as Messiah Jesus, resurrected and enthroned at the right hand of power.

From Abraham on, the faithful in Israel were defined by steadfastness in clinging to God's promises, which remained unfulfilled in their own lifetimes. *And they did so, not in settled ease, but through all sorts of trials and suffering* (11:8-40). They believed God, and so patiently embraced their adversity and struggles as they beheld the promises from afar. And they believed God, looking beyond their circumstances and experiences, because they trusted His *faithfulness*. They trusted that the God who had promised would indeed keep His word, and their confidence was bolstered by the fact that He'd reinforced His promise with His *oath*. The writer explained that He did this, not to bolster His own credibility, but as an act of condescending mercy to strengthen the courage and resolve of the heirs of His promise (6:16-18).

Here, God's oath reinforced His promise, and so pertained to the same issue, namely blessing connected with abundant offspring. The writer didn't elaborate, but it seems he was referring to the oath God swore to Abraham after he offered Isaac (Genesis 22:1-18). Although the Scripture associates God's oath with the entirety of His covenant with Abraham (Genesis 24:7, 26:1-5; cf. Exodus 13:5-12), the focus here is on the promise of offspring, and this was the concern in God's oath at Moriah.

Assuming the writer had this event in mind, it illumines how he was treating the relationship between the promise and the oath. It shows that God didn't intend His oath to *motivate* Abraham's faith in His promise of offspring; rather, He swore it *because* Abraham had demonstrated his faith by offering Isaac (Genesis 22:15-17). *God's oath acknowledged and affirmed Abraham's unyielding faith in His promise, demonstrated by his continuing to believe God for it, even while following His command to nullify it by killing Isaac* (Hebrews 11:17-19). God's oath was His gracious reward to Abraham, by which He reassured him that, whatever may come – even things that seem to overthrow His promise, Abraham would assuredly become the father of a vast, worldwide covenant family.

Yahweh's promise and oath – “*two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for Him to lie*” – had commanded and strengthened Abraham's faith and hope, and so it was for all of Israel's faithful. Now, they called for the same response from these first-century Hebrews. They, too, were to abide in faith and faithfulness, drawing strong encouragement from God's promise and oath, and taking refuge in the hope they held out.

But, again, there was an important difference. Their forefathers had hoped in the day of the Messiah and His triumph and kingdom (the “age to come” – *Olam Ha Ba*), whereas these Hebrews (and all who claim faith in Jesus’ name) were to set their hope on the fruit and final goal of Messiah’s triumph: the kingdom’s sure progress and its climax at the end of the age in Jesus’ appearing, the renewal of all things, and their “summing up” in Him (Romans 8:18-21; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Ephesians 1:9-10).

Abraham and the Israelite faithful lived with their hope tethered to the God who’d promised and sworn, and who continually showed Himself faithful toward what He’d pledged. These Hebrews, on the other hand, had their hope tethered to the One who *Himself* embodies God’s faithfulness. God had sworn by Himself (6:13), thereby assuming full responsibility for what He’d pledged. If His promise were to fail or fall short, the failure would be His own and fall entirely on His shoulders. Abraham understood that God was staking His promises on His own person and integrity, but the way in which this was to play out, no human being could ever have imagined. God swore by Himself, not just because there was nothing greater to bind His oath to, but to underscore that He intended, in and by Himself, to accomplish what He promised. *More than simply hazarding His own integrity, He was hazarding Himself.*

God made it clear to Abraham that He fully owned His promises, but He revealed to later generations that He was going to fulfill them by a mighty intervention and conquest. Yet no one had any idea that Yahweh’s triumphal return to Zion would involve *incarnation*. He wouldn’t simply see to the promises’ fulfillment; He was going to fulfill them *in Himself* in Jesus, the incarnate Messiah. This truth was hidden from past generations, but these Hebrews understood it, if indeed their faith in Jesus was genuine. *But more than that, they understood, as a matter of historical circumstance, the profound and mysterious way all of this fulfillment came about.* Through the Christ event and their faith in Him, they had come to understand that all that God is, all that He purposed and prepared for, and all that He has done and will do has its verity (its “yes and amen”) in His triumphant, messianic Son. God had indeed hazarded Himself when He swore to Abraham, but in the sense that He intended, two millennia later, to embody Himself in the promised Seed.

That One had entered the world as Abraham’s offspring (Matthew 1:1), but as *True Man* – divine Image-Son, with a view toward God’s promise of a global family of true children. This was Jesus’ goal in “entering within the veil” as regal High Priest; He did so, not just as a mediator, but a *forerunner*, leading the way for the other image-children tethered to Him as sharers in Him. Thus their hope, like Abraham’s, is steadfast and sure. But unlike his, theirs is grounded in the full intimacy of image-children and divine father; theirs enters within the veil (10:19-23, 12:18-24).