

The writer of Hebrews is expressing his desire that his Jewish readers would follow the example of faith of Abraham and the other patriarchs who inherit the promises of God. These promises were made by God and the writer shows us how that God insured the validity of these promises by swearing an oath by the greatest person that exists: Himself.

Verses 1-10: After rebuking them for their lack of scriptural/spiritual understanding (Heb. 5:11-14), the writer of Hebrews calls on his Jewish readers to finally take the step of faith so that they can grow past the elementary principles of Christ and the basic tenets of the Mosaic Law so that their faith can blossom into true salvation. As Jews, they have been privileged to be enlightened by the word of God and have benefited from the blessings He has given to the Jewish people as a nation. However, the Jews had already rejected Jesus as a nation by crucifying Him, and so if an individual Jew personally rejects Jesus (and thus “crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh”), it will be impossible for that person to experience the renewal of the new birth. They will have rejected the only means of repentance that God has provided. The writer then uses the analogy of how the same rain from God can either bring forth herbs as a blessing from God or it can bring forth thorns and briers as a rejection by God. In the same way the word of God can either bring forth faith unto salvation or it can harden the heart of the unbeliever. However, the writer is persuaded that his readers are believers because they show the evidence in the “things that accompany salvation” and that God will bless them because they minister to the saints in the name of Christ.

11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:

The writer’s desire is that his readers will continue to show these evidences of salvation to the end of their lives. That evidence would prove that they are indeed true recipients of salvation.

12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

“That ye be not slothful [slow; sluggish]” – The Greek word used here for “slothful” is the same one translated “dull” in Heb. 5:11 (“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing”). In 5:11 the writer was saying that his readers were slow in believing the truth about Jesus. Here he is continuing to express his desire that his readers would not continue to be slow to believe but would embrace the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ.

“but followers of them who through faith and patience [endurance; longsuffering] inherit the promises” – The promises that are to be inherited are the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v. 13). These promises will be inherited by those descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who believe. Their faith enables them to wait for those promises to be fulfilled despite not seeing the evidence of their fulfillment and despite any suffering they may have to endure in the meantime (see Hebrews 11). The writer’s desire is that his readers will have the same faith and patience that those who inherit God’s promises have had.

13 For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, 14 Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.

“For when God made promise to Abraham” – The writer is referring to the event recorded in Gen. 22:15-18 after the LORD had instructed Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. When the LORD stopped Abraham at the last second, He made a promise to Abraham. **Gen. 22:15-18** “And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”

“because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself” – When men swear that they are telling the truth, they typically swear by an entity greater than themselves as confirmation that what they are saying is true (v. 16). However, God cannot defer to anyone greater than Himself because there is no one greater than God. Thus, in Gen. 22:16 God swore by Himself that the promise He was making to Abraham was true.

“Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee” – God was pleased with Abraham’s faith and promises to bless and multiply Abraham and his descendants (Heb. 11:17-19).

15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

Abraham did not see the promises of God fulfilled during his lifetime, but he patiently waited for the LORD to fulfill them at the proper time. Faith steadfastly believes even though it cannot see the evidence with the natural eye. **Heb. 11:13** “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

16 For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

The writer states how men establish truth. Men will swear by someone greater than themselves, using the credibility of this greater person to confirm the validity of their testimony. Such an oath is considered to be an “end of all strife” by settling the matter of truth. There is no longer an argument whether or not the testimony is true because it has been validated by someone greater than they are.

17 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath:

“Wherein God” – Just like men, who swear and oath by someone greater than themselves to ensure the validity of their statements, so also God did the same in order to accommodate men.

“willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability [unchangability] of his counsel [purpose]” – God was so abundantly willing to show to Abraham and his descendants (“the heirs of promise”) that His promises were unchanging that He used human methods of establishing truth so that Abraham and his descendants would be confident in the validity of the promises.

“confirmed *it* by an oath” – Swearing an oath confirmed the promises of God in the eyes of Abraham and his descendants.

18 That by two immutable things, in which *it was* impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

“That by two immutable [unchanging] things” – God’s desire to demonstrate the unchanging nature of His purpose led Him to use two unchanging things to show that we can have confidence in His purposes. These two things are the promises and the oath that He swore to confirm the validity of the promises.

“in which *it was* impossible for God to lie” – It is impossible for God to lie and so when you combine His promise (which is impossible to be a lie) with an oath confirming it (which is also impossible to be a lie) then God’s purposes become that much more reliable.

“we might have a strong consolation [comfort; assurance]” – God used these two unchanging things (His promise and His oath) to give us strong assurance and comfort in the fact that God will do everything that He has promised.

“who have fled for refuge” – Speaking of those who have sought for a place of safety from the condemnation of sins.

“to lay hold upon the hope [expectation] set before us” – In looking for the place of safety, we have laid hold upon “the hope set before us” (Jesus Christ our Savior). God has set Jesus before us as the only hope of our salvation and God wants to assure us that laying hold on that hope is not an error. The Greek word for “hope” is not our modern meaning of hope that refers only to a possibility of something happening. It refers to a firm expectation and assurance of an outcome. We can count on Jesus Christ and be assured that our salvation is complete in Him.

19 Which *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

“Which *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure [firm; reliable] and stedfast [stable]” – An anchor stabilizes a ship and keeps it from being tossed to and fro on the ocean waves. In the same way, our reliance on Christ for salvation anchors our souls and prevents us from being tossed around by the storms of this life as well as preventing us from drifting away from Christ because of the world’s influence.

“and which entereth into that within the veil” – Jesus has entered into the presence of God in the heavenly Holy of Holies on our behalf, offering His blood as an atonement for our sins.

20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, *even* Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

“Whither [where] the forerunner is for us entered, *even* Jesus” – The writer identifies Jesus as this hope, Who is also is our forerunner. Jesus prepared the way for us to enter the presence of God by going first with His own blood as an atonement for our sins.

“made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” – The writer now returns to the thought of Jesus being an eternal high priest “after the order of Melchisedec,” using the wording quoted from Psalm 110:4. He will explore this subject in more detail in chapter 7, showing that Christ’s priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood.