

Chapter 6

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit.

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Saying, 'Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.' And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: 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:

Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

Commentary

{1-2} – Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

Once again, this chapter begins with the word “Therefore” – making clear that are reading a conclusion based on previous material. The author just finished chastising the Hebrew believers for their spiritual immaturity. So, he seems to have made a hard-headed decision not to dwell on the basics of the Christian faith, which matters they should have already well-learned.

Was it fair to accuse the Hebrew audience of not understanding the basics? Well, yes - the author thought so. These basics could all have been learned from the Old Testament writers, and they were all taught as the foundation stones of the New Testament Church. For instance, compare the following O.T. passages to their N.T. counterparts, regarding –

- **...repentance from dead works:**

“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work

of thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.” (Isa. 64:6-9)

“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” (Matt. 3:8,9)

“But go ye and learn what that meaneth, 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:' for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Matt. 9:13)

- **...faith toward God:**

“And he [Abram] believed in the LORD, and He counted it to him for righteousness.” (Gen. 15:6)

“Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.” (Habakkuk 2:4)

“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (Rom. 1:17)

- **...the doctrine of baptisms:**

“But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.” (Exodus 14:29)

“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” (1 Cor. 10:1,2)

“And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,) That the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: And those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: And the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.” (Joshua 3:15-17)

“Then went out to him [John the Baptist] Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.” (Matt. 3:5-6)

- **...laying on of hands:**

“And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock before the LORD: and the bullock shall be killed before the LORD.” (Lev. 4:15)

“And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat: And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.” (Lev. 16:20-22)

“And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live.” (Mark 5:22-23)

“Then laid they [the apostles] their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 8:17)

- **...resurrection of the dead:**

“Therefore prophecy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.” (Ezekiel 37:12)

“And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.” (Matt. 27:51-53)

“And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.” (John 6:39)

- **...eternal judgment:**

“But thou hast fulfilled the judgment of the wicked: judgment and justice take hold on thee. Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee.” (Job 36:17,18)

“But the LORD shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness.” (Ps. 9:7,8)

“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” (Matt. 25:46)

“Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” (Matt. 9:44)

These are the basics. If you do not understand that these things are truly proclaimed in Scripture, then you are stuck in the starting gate. In order to go on “unto perfection,” or completion, in your Christian education, it is of primary importance to understand the following:

1. You must turn from trusting in your fleshly works and rely completely on Christ's finished, complete redemption.
2. You must have faith that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. (Heb.11:6)
3. You must understand that the Father sent the Son, and only through the Son do we have admission into the presence of the Almighty.
4. As an act of submission to Christ's commands, you should be baptized in His name, publicly identifying yourself with His death, burial and resurrection.
5. You need to understand the proper order of things within the Church and the necessity of Godly leadership. "Lay hands suddenly on no man." (1 Tim 5:22)
6. You need to know that Christ promised a complete redemption, which includes the full restoration of our bodies at the final resurrection.
7. And, you need to know that God will judge His enemies and pour out an eternal punishment on those who will bear their own sin.

This is Christianity 101. But, strong meat builds on these truths to even fuller revelations. The Church needs to be mature enough to learn them, and the teachers need to be brave enough to teach them.

{3} – And this will we do, if God permit.

The word “we” in this phrase is referring to the author. He is determined to move on in his epistle to handle more complex and weighty issues, God permitting. He began this portion of his letter by admonishing believers to grow up and hear every truth that God has revealed. The original Hebrew readers were clinging to their traditions so tightly that they refused to destroy them in favor of learning the whole counsel of God.

That's not an uncommon problem today. We all approach the Scripture with our personal set of supposed "truths" which we doggedly defend, sometimes even in light of contrary verses. One of the most difficult things to do when reading the Bible is to allow it to say what it is actually saying. And, if it contradicts our theology, we must reconstruct our theology to accommodate each and every revealed truth. But that's tough to do.

Determined to move past the primary foundations of the faith, the author embarked on the first lesson of Advanced Christianity 102 and met the question of "eternal security" head-on. There has been confusion and a variety of

misinterpretations concerning the upcoming verses. For instance, there are popular theologies today teaching that we can be saved by the sacrifice of Christ, but we can later lose that salvation through ignorance, sin, or willful neglect. Then, if we get our act together and "decide" to repent, we may regain the state of being "saved." Consequently, in one lifetime we may pass through several periods of being "saved" and "unsaved."

If we happen to die during a "saved" period, we are Heaven-bound, but if we die during one of our "unsaved" periods we are destined to Hell. Usually this teaching insists that the way to guarantee that we will continue in the "saved" condition is to perform "acts of faith." This method of keeping our faith "active" guarantees that we will remain in a "saved" state. But, such thinking is simply "faith in faith." In other words, this theology does not rely on the finished work of Christ for salvation. It rests on an individual's ability to keep themselves in a "saved" condition through acts of the will. It is a form of what Paul called "will worship" (Col. 2:23). I have heard one preacher liken the grace of God to a faucet, where the grace flows out. But, the preacher insisted that it was up to us to keep ourselves underneath the flow of that faucet. Such preaching completely undermines the very concept of grace, which is "unmerited or undeserved favor or kindness."

To make the waters even murkier, some preachers use the upcoming passage as a proof text to argue that once a man has fallen away, it is impossible for him to recover. Thus, they use these verses to scare people into better performance, to guarantee they remain in that "saved" condition rather than fall away and get "blotted out" once and for all.

Fortunately, that's not even close to what the author intended. He will argue that it is impossible for a saved man to fall away at all. He will say that Christ has determined the salvation of some people and it is impossible for Him to lose those people. True Christianity is an "ever forward" proposition. It doesn't look back, move back, or go back.

“And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:62).

That's why the author said that we should move toward perfection, or completion, not constantly going back to lay again the foundations of the faith. If it were possible to lose our salvation, we would have to return to those basics again and again in order to be regenerated again and again. But, as we'll see, there is no such possibility.

Let's dig in.

{4-6a} – For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, And were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance;

The author stated an impossibility. There is something here that is utterly not possible. What is that thing? That's the crux of this whole argument. He began by describing a certain type of people who have the following distinguishing characteristics:

- a) They are "once enlightened." That's the Greek term "*photisthentas*." It is better translated "having been enlightened." It is a participle in the passive voice. In other words, these people were the passive recipients of enlightenment. Their eyes were opened, their ears began to hear, but their new understanding was a gift from God.
- b) They have "tasted of the heavenly gift." Or better yet, "having tasted the heavenly gift." It's the Greek "*geusamenous*." There is a jump here to the middle voice, indicating their response to being enlightened. They have begun pursuing heavenly things. They have experienced the joy and comfort of Christ. They have pursued the path that leads to eternal life. Notice, however, that what they've bitten into is a gift, not something they earned, figured out, or obligated God to give them. And, it's not a gift that was begun or secured by earthly means, it is a "heavenly gift."
- c) They "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost." Here again, the phrase "were made" - or better still "having been made" - is in the passive voice. It's the Greek word "*genethentas*," the participle form of "*ginomai*," which most frequently speaks of something made from nothing. When the apostle John wrote of the creation of the universe, he used this same term – "All things were made [*ginomai*] by him; and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3).

God in Christ created all things from nothing by the authority of His spoken word. Likewise, in this Hebrews verse, these people were passive recipients of the Spirit of God indwelling them. Through no effort or value within themselves, they were "made," created anew from nothing, to be the tabernacles of the Holy Spirit. As well, the aorist tense of "*genethentas*" refers to a past action, most likely indicating God's divine initiative in graciously sending His Spirit to them.

- d) They "have tasted the good word of God." Again the author bounced back to the middle voice. The Greek participle "*geusamenous*" - "having tasted" - implies their response in reading and understanding God's Word, taking

it to heart, and being transformed by it. They value it and see it as good in and of itself. This is the outgrowth of the Spirit's activity within them.

- e) They have experienced "the powers of the world to come." Their thoughts go far beyond this mortal existence and their day-to-day survival. These people look forward to, and have "tasted" the power - "*dunameis*" - of the eternal age to come. They are looking forward to their celestial home. That Greek term "*dunameis*," from which we get the word "dynamite," is most often a reference to miraculous power. And it is indeed a miracle when men look beyond the limits of their flesh to seek the kingdom of God in all its glory and eternal majesty.

So we have a vivid description of someone who has been the recipient of God's gracious enlightenment, ingested the heavenly gift, was filled with the Holy Spirit, is committed to the Word of God, and looks ever forward to God's exercise of dominion and power on behalf of the believers. Sounds kinda' like a Christian, doesn't it?

So what can we say about such an individual? If - and that's a big "if" - that person were to fall away from the faith, it would be impossible to take him back to square one - repentance - and renew him all over again. Now, pay attention. There's a very big Greek term at work here. It is the infinitive term "*anakainizo*" - to renew. It means, "new, but qualitatively different."

You see, if Christ died intending to save these people, gifting them with enlightenment and the Holy Spirit, but any of them were able to fall, then that means and method of salvation did not work. There would have to be a brand new, qualitatively different kind and form of salvation to resave those persons, because the original attempt had failed.

Think through this with me. Those who preach that a person can be truly, in fact, saved and later fall away have admitted Christ's inability to accomplish true salvation through His crucifixion and resurrection. It didn't work for that person! Jesus attempted to save them, but He failed! And to gain such a person back, knowing that the first attempt was a failure, would require another, qualitatively different, system of salvation. The first cross was futile. There would have to be yet another cross, yet another sacrifice, yet another shedding of blood, yet another resurrection and yet another salvation.

So now, why is it impossible for this type of fallen person to be restored?

Because, it is impossible to put Christ back up on the tree. He did it once and He intends that one, single sacrifice to be eternally effective. So, if - and now we know why that's such a big "if" - such a person could walk away from Christ and be damned, the cross of Christ was of no effect at all.

{6b} – [it is impossible] If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

How horrible! The preachers who preach anything other than the definite perseverance of the saints are putting Christ to an open, public shame. They don't realize that when they attach the name of Jesus to the idea of "falling away," they are announcing to the world that Jesus is weak and incapable.

They shame Him. And when they preach that an apostate person may regain His "saved" standing with God, they crucify our Lord over and over again. They take these people back to the foundations, back to scratch, back to the cross, demanding a new crucifixion on behalf of those who claim to have believed and left and believed again. They put the Lamb of God to an open shame.

What dreadful words - words that precede judgment.

{7-8} – For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

This is an allegory, an analogy by which we can learn a lesson. God sends the rain to the Earth, and He is faithful to send it repeatedly. That causes food to grow to feed the ones who tend to the garden. That bounty is a blessing from God. Still, weeds spring up among the good plants. They are part of the curse on the earth that was declared back in Eden. The good gardener knows to pull them up and burn them.

Likewise, God sends His Spirit into the earth. As a result, some people grow. And they are "meet" or acceptably appropriate to the one who planted them. Christ is the vinedresser who teaches and guides us, tending to His garden. Consequently, our growth, our protection from the choking weeds, and our being found good by the vinedresser, are all gifts from God. But, Christ will also uproot the thorns, planted by Satan, and send them to their fiery judgment.

It's all up to God. He blesses us with His Spirit; He causes us to grow; He sent the faithful vinedresser; He protects us from the thorns and briars; He will find us to be good fruit, acceptable in His sight; and He will burn the enemies that would have stunted our growth or choked us to death.

The author's point is that it is impossible to fall away from the true faith of Christ. It was purchased for us with an eternal price and it satisfied an eternal debt. The blood was of infinite value, and we are the passive recipients of an infinite gift.

It is impossible for the true believer to fall away because Christ will not be laid to an open shame, giving opportunity for the evil denizens of Hell and Earth to laugh Him to scorn because His plan was a failure. God will not, I say most assuredly, have His Son subject to failure, embarrassment, or public humiliation. To the definitive contrary, He is the Rock of our salvation (Psalm 18:2). He is the surety of our redemption (Heb. 7:22). We are secure in His hands, and He is securely in the Father's hands (John 10:28-29). He is Almighty and He will not stand before His Father with one sheep missing (John 6:39). That's the will of the Father, and it is the crowing success of the Son.

{9} – But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

The first century audience must have been thrilled to see that word “but.” Despite his stern warning of God's full intention to judge and eternally punish, the author made clear that he was not pointing his warning directly at the recipients of this letter. Rather, he was certain they will escape the fiery judgment and share in salvation.

So, the previous passage was intended as instructional, theological truth, topped off by the declaration that ignorance of God's words and ways will result in destruction. But, to press my point, the author was not directly warning his audience of believers to flee any impending consequential judgment. Rather, he was convinced that his audience was eternally secure.

So, that set the tone for this whole passage - "Grow up, and I'm confident you will. Consider the things of God wisely, and I trust He will reveal even more to you." And, on what basis could the author be so confident?

Two things: first, God's faithfulness. And, second, their love of the brethren.

{10} – For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

The primary evidence that a person belongs to Christ, according to Jesus' own testimony, is that he will show sacrificial love toward his brethren.

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:34-35)

Look closely at that new commandment. Jesus did not say, "Love each other" and leave it at that. He added, "as I have loved you." That raised the bar a few notches. If He had not defined the particular type of love He was commanding, we would have been content to define it according to our own ability and "comfort

level." But, Jesus used a particular Greek word that will help us understand His intention.

In the English language we are stuck with only one word - love. And, we've had to stretch its meaning to cover a dizzying variety of circumstances. I may say that I love my wife, I love pizza, I love to play music, I love my dog, and I love God. Despite the huge variation in type and depth, I'm stuck with that one word. But, the Greek language had three primary terms; all translated "love."

- 1) "*Eros*" is a fleshly, erotic form of emotion. It is not found anywhere in Scripture.
- 2) "*Phileo*," in simplest definition, most closely represents tender affection. It's an "I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch mine" type of love. It's the type of love most humans are capable of when dealing with other humans. But, in John 5:20, it is even used of the love of the Father for the Son. Interestingly, though, *phileo* is never used in a command to men to love God.
- 3) "*Agapao*" - and its corresponding noun "*Agape*" - is a word not found in classical Greek literature; it is distinct to revealed religion. Often times it's translated "charity" in the Bible, meaning "benevolent love." But, to quote from Spiros Zodhiates, "Its benevolence is not shown by doing what the person loved desires, but what the one who loves deems as needed by the one loved."¹ In other words, God's love for us was such that He gave His only begotten Son to die, despite the fact that we did not want, expect, or recognize the gracious gift. Thus, God's love for man was demonstrated in giving Christ. And, Christ's love was revealed in His sacrificial death on behalf of His beloved. So, the distinction of "*agapao*" is its willingness to love the unlovely, sacrificially and without condition.

That is the word in Heb. 6:10 – “your work and labour of agape.” They had a love that transcended simple, fleshly desires. They had a love that rose above brotherhood or kinship. They had a love that gave sacrificially for Christ's sake without worrying about whether they would be embraced or beloved in return. And, that "*agape*" love manifested itself. They didn't simply sit around and declare, "I love you, man!" They were motivated to serve. They ministered to each other's needs. They humbled themselves to tend to one another's lack. They loved as Christ had loved them.

One more thing - this type of love is not natural. It is not of the flesh. It is not in the heart of men to exorcise their natural lusts and give themselves to the service of others. It takes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to produce such love. Thus, Christ could make it the evidentiary mark of those who were His.

But, that's only half of the reason the author gave for trusting that these people were secure. Even if they rose to the occasion time and again but God paid no

attention, it would have been of no eternal profit. But, "God is faithful" (1 Cor. 1:9). He would never forget their "... work and labour of love [agape]."

"God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Num. 23:19)

One of the primary evidences that God's Spirit has indwelt us is that we have a supernatural love for Him and for the One whom He sent. We express this love by serving and ministering to others who also love Him. God takes such sacrifice personally and declares that we have done these things "in His name," loving Him through loving others.

"... Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matt. 25:40)

And, the best part - He will never forget it.

{ 11 } - *And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.*

How can we know for sure that we are secure? How can we have any assurance of our salvation? Be diligent to serve. It is easy to assume we would help if the opportunity arose. But, it is another thing to seek out brethren in need and put the effort into ministering to them. And, even tougher, we need to minister humbly, not looking back to make sure they appreciated it or noticed how magnanimous it was of us to stoop down. Rest in the knowledge that God knows.

Love because He loved. Help because He helped. Minister because He ministered. Sacrifice because He sacrificed. Give because He gave. And, wait for Him to lift you up. He will, you know? He will because He is faithful to remember and won't be unrighteous to forget. And, He'll reward you. He'll make you a joint-heir with Christ. He will credit your love of the brethren as love for Him and He will give you peace and assurance.

Be diligent. Never give up. Press on until the end.

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

The author exhorted his readers, particularly his Hebrew audience, to remember "the promises." Give all diligence to service and ministry, following the example of the faithful men and women who have preceded us. Follow them who realize that our God is a God of promises. Though He is under no obligation to reveal Himself, instruct, save, or even commune with any of us, God has nevertheless

dangled promises throughout His Word. Some of those promises were to specific people and they occurred almost immediately - such as the promise to Joshua that the moment the priests bearing the ark touched the soles of their feet to the water of the Jordan River, the water would part for them to cross over (Josh. 3:13). Other promises were immense and have evolved over hundreds, and even thousands, of years. One such promise is interwoven into our text.

The point, though, is that God's promises are trustworthy. The faithfulness of God is laid bare for all to see every time He casts a promise out into time and history. If even one of God's promises ends up wanting, then God is less than perfect and complete. So, the author, encouraging his readers to be faithful and patient, knowing that God would not be unrighteous to forget them, pointed to the primary Old Testament example of faith under trial and patience, under extreme "impossibilities" - the first Hebrew (Gen. 14:13).

{13} ~ For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself,

The author reached back into Hebrew history. This essential premise - God's immutable promise to Abraham - is going to be a fundamental building block of the author's developing theology.

How secure are God's promises? If they are not entirely certain, then we cannot rest our eternity on them. But God, Himself, is the surety of His own promises. The veracity of His Word is backed by the dependability of His character. One of the chief attributes of God is that He is faithful. And since there is no larger object of faith toward which God could exercise His faithfulness, He is, in fact, faithful to Himself.

"If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." (2 Tim. 2:13).

{14} ~ Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.

The author reminded his readers of a specific event from Genesis 22, when Abraham was up on Mt. Moriah preparing to sacrifice Isaac, the child of promise.

"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." (Gen. 22:15-18)

God secured that promise with an infallible seal. There being nothing greater than God, God swore by His own unchanging Self. So, to drive home the point, how secure are these promises?

Regardless of how we choose to interpret these promises and their fulfillment, they must absolutely be fulfilled to the "nth" degree, because the very credibility and faithfulness of God hangs on every word. And what a wonderful, far-reaching promise it was! It spoke of generations of people growing innumerable. It spoke of victory over their enemies. It spoke of worldwide blessing. But there was one little problem for Abraham. He was in his early hundreds. He had only two sons and one was sent away (Gen. 21:10, Gal. 4:30).

That's not exactly a nation, and two sons can't guard all the gates of their various enemies. Plus, even if they started walking immediately they could not reach the whole earth to be a blessing to them. The promise was so large that it overreached Abraham's ability to see it completed during his terrestrial lifetime.

So, what would be the proper response? Faith and patience.

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

Here's where things get a bit dicey. Theologians wrangle over verses like this one. It may have been a reference to receiving the child of promise – Isaac. After all, Abraham and Sarah were unable to produce a natural offspring and heir. After waiting for nearly fifteen years, they received the child through whom all the other promises would flow. Perhaps that's the focus of the author's words here.

But, what if he's saying something larger? The words say Abraham obtained the promise – which included descendants like the sand and stars, superiority over their enemies and blessing to all the nations of the earth. However, in Chapter 11, the author will say that Abraham "died in faith, not having received the promises" (11:13, 11:39).

The question is, "When, or in what sense, did Abraham obtain the promise?"

To say he obtained the fullness of these promises in his lifetime requires that we diminish the scope of the promises rather dramatically. And, Hebrews 11 makes clear that such was not the case. But we can gain a great deal of insight into Abraham's relationship with God's promises by looking at an earlier telling of them.

Before Isaac was born, God promised the land of Canaan to Abram, and Abram questioned God for proof. God's response was that He would control the flow of human history to bring it about, but Abram would die and be buried. Abram

would not live to see the fulfillment of it. He would only see the promised child who would be heir to it. The generations that carried the promise would live out God's guarantee, and their ultimate destiny, back in that very same land, would be the answer to Abram's question.

“And he [God] brought him [Abram] forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? ...And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.” (Gen. 15:5-8,13-16)

God is not limited to time or fleshly lives. His promises and their fulfillment may occur over the span of many lifetimes. God sees them as one continuous flow of gracious fulfillment, even as the actors within the framework of God's providence come and go.

So, back to our original question - when did Abraham, through faith and patience, obtain the promise? I think Jesus answers our question:

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:56-58)

There are two things going on in this verse. Number one, Abraham lived to see the day of Christ, and he rejoiced in it. Why? It was part of the promised fulfillment. Through Abraham's descendants all the nations would be blessed. Christ's incarnation was the culmination of that blessing - the Messiah had come and Abraham was witness to it. He had obtained the promise.

The second revelation in this verse is that Christ pre-dates Abraham. Being God - Jesus identified Himself as "I AM" - He was there from the start. Hang on to that thought, because it's going to show up again when we discuss Melchizedek.

Abraham obtained eternal life after leaving this tent of human flesh. From that vantage point he saw his seed expand without number, and he witnessed the coming of the Christ, the blessing to all the earth, the "Seed" singular (Gal. 3:16).

“For all the promises of God in him [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.” (2 Cor.1:20)

Abraham believed God. He endured patiently, despite his circumstances, and received the child Isaac. After his death God methodically wove the strands of history into a divine tapestry, bringing the promises together, culminating in the advent of Christ. And Abraham saw it. Chalk it up as "promise obtained."

{16,17} ~ For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath.

The author points out that even between two men, when one swears an oath to perform a certain duty, that oath puts an end to any strife between them. When men swear an oath, they swear it on some greater principle or person than themselves. Likewise, God swore to Abraham that He would accomplish every detail of the promise He made, and He swore by His own holy Self. That ended it. The oath from God made every word sure and certain. Abraham could rest assured.

But, God did not make a secret promise. He intended to openly display His faithfulness to, and through, Abraham's descendants. God did not just want Abram to believe this; He wanted Abram's descendants, who bore these promises generation after generation, to believe them. He intended that the "heirs of promise" be convinced of the "immutability of His council." In other words, God does not change. He does not change His mind. He does not change His intentions. He does not change His decrees. Once He has declared something, it is set in eternal stone. As James described it –

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (James 1:17)

So, to make it obvious to the millions of descendants of Abraham that God was actively working on their behalf, He confirmed it with an immutable oath.

{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.

This verse is so jam packed with cool stuff; we are going to have to consider it in sections.

That by two immutable things ...

As I've mentioned, Abram was childless and his wife past childbearing when God gave him the promise of innumerable offspring. And, Abram was a wanderer, a sojourner, a man without a home - in short, a Hebrew - when God promised him the land of Canaan.

“And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.” (Gen. 15:8-12)

These were the elements of a covenant. The idea was that when two men struck a bargain they would separate an animal and walk together through the pieces, vowing that if either of them failed to perform their part of the deal, they would be killed like the animals. But Abram was unable to do his part. He could not walk through the torn sacrifices; he was anesthetized. He was asleep. He could do nothing but passively observe.

“And, it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.” (Gen. 15:17)

Two elements passed through the animals, sealing the covenant (v.18). They were both from, and of, God. In fact, God used these same forms as He led Abram's descendants out of Egypt and back to this very land, completing the proof He offered in response to Abram's question.

“And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.” (Exod. 13:21-22)

Another aspect of these elements is that “two” is the number of adequate witness in Scripture. This concept is woven into both testaments and is the basis of the Ninth Commandment against “bearing false witness” (Deut.19:15, Mat.18:16, 2Cor.13:1, Rev.11:3). “Two” were sufficient to complete the transaction; they were adequate to perform the ritual and seal the covenant. And, these two elements, being symbols of the power and presence of God, were “immutable,” unchangeable, and unalterable.

So, first point – the Abrahamic Covenant is immutable, unchangeable.

... in which it was impossible for God to lie, ...

The two immutable elements stood as witnesses testify to the truth of the pact. They were proof that God said it and meant it. And, "God is not a man that He

should lie..." (Num. 23:19). So, the promises at the base of this covenant cannot be altered. It is confirmed by the very truth of God. The covenant promise was (and is) as secure as God's own veracity, honesty and trustworthiness.

Second point – the Abrahamic Covenant is trustworthy.

... we might have a strong consolation, ...

Whenever the author used pronouns, we readers and commentators must be careful not to skew his perspective. Clearly, in this context, he was exhorting his first century Hebrew brethren. He laid the Abrahamic Covenant in front of them and insisted on its immutable character and unchanging foundation.

Those Hebrews, descendants of Abraham, were the natural heirs of this promise, which had yet to see its complete fruition in the first century – nor is it wholly finished today. However, not seeing the finished promise does not in any way diminish God's intent to complete it every whit. Again, God is above time. And, knowing that God is faithful to keep His Word, those who live under covenant promises from God have a strong consolation.

... who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.

If the promise of inheritance remained for the first century Hebrew readers – as it remains for believers reading today - then those who hoped to see its completion had safe refuge in God's immutability. No matter what, no matter how opposing the circumstances, God will keep His promises to Israel and to the Church; to everyone who flees to Him as refuge from doubt. Notice, too, how specific this language is. The author declared the Abrahamic promise to be still in effect, unchanged and inalterable, and he beckoned the first century Hebrews to take comfort in that hope.

Allow me to draw a theological conclusion from this verse. If the covenant with Abraham was already completed when the author was writing (after the death and resurrection of Christ), then what was the point of reminding his audience of the promise and their hope relative to that promise? Clearly, he believed there remained at least part of the promise unfulfilled. But, we will get to that in Chapter 11.

{19} - Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

How is it with our souls? Are we in any danger? Can we be tossed about by the angry waves or shipwrecked midway through our journey? Not if our hope of salvation, by grace through faith, is the anchor that secures us through these

rocky seas. It is a steadfast hope, built on God's Word and protected by God's own immutable faithfulness.

New Testament believers have an entrance to God that was never before available to mortal men. In the collective Hebrew memory, they knew what furniture sat behind the veil of the tabernacle, but they'd never seen it. They knew God met with the High Priest behind the veil once a year, but they had never witnessed it. They knew the sacrifice for sin was offered behind the veil, but they knew they couldn't offer it. They knew that behind the veil lay "the holiest place," but they knew they were not welcome.

But, when Christ died, "Behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Mat. 27:51a), and for the first time, common men were invited into the Holiest Place.

Why? God no longer dwelt there. He had taken up residence in His people, the lively stones that make up His living temple (1 Pet. 2:5). And, being indwelt with God's own spirit, we become "kings and priests unto God" (Rev. 1:6), gaining access to the holiest place, God's presence.

But wait - it gets better! The furnishings and divisions of the tabernacle were types and shadows, pointing toward the true substance (Heb. 9:24). And just as the High Priest entered in for all the people of the Old Covenant, but only once a year, so our High Priest entered into the Holiest Place in Heaven with a sacrifice for the people of the New Covenant, and He did it only once. So, we get to stand before Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, and worship in the Most Holy Place in the universe.

The veil is torn. The Father is satisfied. C'mon in!

So, if we put all these pieces together, we see the author proclaiming Abraham's promises, and God's unchanging faithfulness, within the context of Christ's death and completed redemption. In other words, the promises of God will be completed down to the minutest detail. But, the catalyst, the surety, the author and finisher of Abraham's promises is Christ. That fact was the anchor that would secure the Hebrew audience in their faith. And, God's immutable faithfulness to His promises is the anchor for our souls.

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

The firstfruit of the resurrection (1Cor. 15:20,23) paved the way, and His priesthood continues to this day, to this very moment, reconciling sinners to God and ushering them into His perfect presence. He forged the path to the holiest place and is preparing a place for us (John 14:2). That's a promise. That's a guarantee. And, it's immutable. It secures your soul like an anchor.

Oh, and we're finally approaching the Melchisedec connection. Want to know where Christ got His priestly credentials? After all, He wasn't a descendant of Aaron. And, what exactly is "the order of Melchisedec"?

Well, that's in Chapter 7.

Let's take a moment to recap and apply what we've learned –

How can we have "full assurance of hope unto the end"?

It starts with hope. Do you hope in Christ? Are you "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"? (Titus 2:13)

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is." (Jer. 17:7)

How can we know assuredly that our hope will endure all the way to our last day, last minute, and last breath?

The answer is - you are not its foundation. Your hope and faith are not dependent on your fallible, unstable will. They are firmly established on the unerring, unalterable, everlasting, all-powerful word of promise that God made to Christ. To wit, that He would give His Son a people. And, if the Spirit of God indwells you, your soul is securely anchored in the finished work of Him who promised you eternal life --- and, He cannot lie.

After all, more than just your salvation is at stake here. The veracity, the faithfulness, the power, and the authority of the One whose word holds the universe together will all tumble down in ignominious defeat if one single person for whom Christ died fails to enter the Most Holy Place.

Your "full assurance of hope unto the end" can take refuge in the knowledge that our God will not be denied. You are His. And, He will bring you all the way home.

As for the immutable Abrahamic Covenant, we will have more to say about that in the upcoming chapters. Stick around.

ⁱ Zodhiates, Spiros. *"The Hebrew/Greek Key Study Bible"*. (AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, Tn. 1984.) Pg. 1656