



Knowing what the Hebrews knew

Old Testament background for Hebrews 5:11-6:20



Promises that are almost unbelievable

In Genesis 1-2, everything seemed good. God had created a wonderful world, placing a man and woman in that world as kaitiaki and providing them with all of their needs. But in Genesis 3 the man and woman broke faith with their Creator and a downward spiral began. Despite some rays of hope, the general scene was bleak from Genesis 3 to 11. However God had not given up on humanity. He initiated something special with a man named Abram (later renamed Abraham). Abram and his wife Sarai (later renamed Sarah) were old when God revealed these promises to them (see "A long wait", below), and had been unable to have children (Genesis 16:1). Also, many other people groups were living in the land promised to them (Genesis 15:18-21).



Read Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-8; 17:15-22 for records of God's amazing promises to (and through) Abraham. *This set of promises is referred to in Hebrews 6:13a. See Galatians 3 for an inspired explanation of how these promises relate to Jesus – and to us.*



A long wait

God's promise to make Abram into a great nation came when he was 75 years old (Genesis 12:4). He eventually became a father when he was 100 years old! (See Genesis 21:5.) He then waited a further 60 years for his first grandchild to be born (Genesis 25:26).

Abraham's patient faith is referred to in Hebrews 6:15.

Extreme faith and God's oath

When Isaac was born, Abraham received the first major fulfilment of God's promises to him. This boy would be the one through whom all of Abraham's countless descendants would come. But then God asked Abraham to do a seemingly contradictory - and unimaginably hard - thing. Abraham's faith response prompted God to make an oath.



Read Genesis 22:1-19 for the story of how Abraham demonstrated his faith, and the oath God made in response. *The oath in verses 16-18 is referred to (and partially quoted) in Hebrews 6:13-20.*

Beyond the curtain

As part of the Law of Moses, God instructed the Israelites to set up a sacred space (the "Tabernacle") in the midst of their travelling community (Exodus 25:8-9). Within this space was a two-roomed tent. The first room (the "Holy Place") was separated from the second, smaller room (the "Most Holy Place") by a special curtain (Exodus 26:31-33). The Most Holy Place was the focus of God's presence amongst the Israelites (Leviticus 16:2). Only the High Priest could enter it, and only once a year: on the Day of Atonement.



Read Leviticus 16:11-17. *This description of the High Priest's actions beyond the curtain on the Day of Atonement is referred to in Hebrews 6:19-20. More on the Day of Atonement in Hebrews 9-10.*



Engaging with the message

Questions & answers for Hebrews 5:11-6:20



Hot spots

- 1) What's alive for you in this passage? (Things that stand out, "aha" moments, questions you have, etc)



Digging into the passage

- 2) According to the author, what are some marks of mature faith (5:11-6:3)?
- 3) In 6:4-8, the author refers to people who turn away from God and who cannot be brought back to repentance. What has this got to do with the maturity theme of the previous verses (5:11-6:3)?
- 4) How have the Hebrews been expressing their faith (6:9-12)?
- 5) What key point(s) is the author making by using the example of Abraham (6:13-20)?



Connecting life and faith

- 6) What is "solid food" for a follower of Jesus (5:12-14)?
- 7) What are you doing (or could you do) to mature in faith? Consider your answers to questions 2 and 5, and try to be specific and practical.
- 8) How are God's promise and oath to Abraham an encouragement to you today? (For some ideas on this, read Galatians 3).