

Hebrews 11:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. This verse summarizes the patriarchs' faith (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) and establishes a pattern for all believers. "Died in faith" (kata pistin apethanon, κατὰ πίστιν ἀπέθανον) means they maintained faith throughout life until death—their faith endured, not wavering despite unfulfilled promises. Faith persevered though sight never arrived.

"Not having received the promises" (mē labontes tas epangelias, μὴ λαβόντες τὰς ἐπαγγελίας) indicates the patriarchs never saw promises' earthly fulfillment during their lifetimes. Abraham was promised land, descendants, and blessing to nations (Genesis 12:1-3), yet died owning only a burial plot (Genesis 23), with only one covenant son. This non-reception demonstrates faith's essence—trusting God despite delayed fulfillment.

"But having seen them afar off" (porrōthen autas idontes, πόρρωθεν αὐτὰς ἰδόντες) describes prophetic vision—they perceived promises' future reality through spiritual sight. "Were persuaded of them" (kai peisthentes, καὶ πεισθέντες) means firmly convinced, fully assured despite lack of tangible evidence. "Embraced them" (kai aspasamenoi, καὶ ἀσπασάμενοι) uses the imagery of greeting dear friends—

they welcomed promises as precious realities though distant.

"Confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims" (xenoi kai parepidemoi eisin, ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι εἰσιν) reveals faith's practical outworking. "Strangers" (xenoi, ξένοι) means foreigners, aliens. "Pilgrims" (parepidemoi, παρεπίδημοι) means temporary residents, those passing through. They publicly acknowledged earth wasn't their final home—they sought a heavenly country (v. 16).

Historical Context

Abraham left Ur (a prosperous Mesopotamian city) at age 75, wandering as a nomad in Canaan until death at 175 (Genesis 12-25). Isaac and Jacob similarly lived in tents, never permanently settling (Genesis 26-50). Their refusal to settle demonstrated faith—they could have returned to Mesopotamia's urban civilization but chose to sojourn in Canaan, trusting God's promise. First-century readers facing persecution understood the tension: abandoning Christianity for Judaism or paganism offered immediate relief (like returning to Ur), but faith required embracing pilgrim identity, trusting unseen heavenly realities over visible earthly security. The patriarchs' confession echoed Genesis 23:4 (Abraham: 'I am a stranger and a sojourner'), Genesis 47:9 (Jacob: 'few and evil have the days of the years of my life been'), and Psalm 39:12 (David: 'I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner'). This pilgrim motif threads through Scripture (Philippians 3:20, 1 Peter 1:1, 2:11), calling believers to live as citizens of heaven temporarily residing on earth.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How do the patriarchs' example of dying in faith without receiving promises encourage believers today?
2. What does it mean practically to 'see promises afar off' and be persuaded of them?
3. How should viewing ourselves as 'strangers and pilgrims' affect our relationship with earthly possessions and pursuits?
4. Why is public confession of pilgrim status essential to authentic faith?
5. In what ways does modern Christianity compromise the 'stranger and pilgrim' identity?

Interlinear Text

Κατὰ πίστιν ἀπέθανον οὗτοι πάντες μὴ λαβόντες τὰς
in faith died These all not having received G3588
G2596 G4102 G599 G3778 G3956 G3361 G2983

ἐπαγγελίας ἀλλὰ πόρρωθεν αὐτὰς ιδόντες καὶ
the promises but afar off them having seen and
G1860 G235 G4207 G846 G1492 G2532

πεισθέντες, καὶ ἀσπασάμενοι καὶ ὁμολογήσαντες ὅτι
were persuaded of and embraced and confessed that
G3982 G2532 G782 G2532 G3670 G3754

ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι εἰσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
strangers and pilgrims they were on the earth
G3581 G2532 G3927 G1526 G1909 G3588 G1093

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 11:39 (Faith): And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:

Hebrews 11:27 (Faith): By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

Psalms 39:12 (Parallel theme): Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.

Romans 8:24 (Parallel theme): For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

John 8:56 (Parallel theme): Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

Genesis 23:4 (Parallel theme): I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.

Ephesians 2:19 (Parallel theme): Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

1 Peter 1:17 (Parallel theme): And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:

1 Peter 2:11 (Parallel theme): Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

Job 19:25 (Parallel theme): For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: