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Theme:	**What God works through faith - According to Hebr. 11**

Unchecked computer/machine translation from German into English

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Current taken over from G&H.
Status 22.02.2004: Parts I to IX and XII (completion in spring 2004)

These instructive, encouraging and admonishing remarks of Ströter are no less groundbreaking and important for today's church of God than they were for the believers 90 years ago. Naturally, the language of the author, measured against today's German, is here and there antiquated or even misleading; however, we have limited ourselves to the most necessary changes in order to let Ströter fully express himself in his own language. - Some abridgements seemed necessary. H. Sch.

Content:

1. Faith based on the word (vv. 1-2)

But faith is an insistence on what one hopes for, a conviction of facts that one does not see (v. 1).

Already from the context of chapter 10 it is clear for the attentive reader of this letter that we are not dealing with faith, which opens the door into the new life of the spirit. We come out of the old being into the new also only by faith. But here we are unmistakably talking about the faith of the already believer who is at home in the new world, but who must now learn to move properly on the

ground of the new life on all sides. As it is written, "We walk by faith and not by sight" (2Co 5:7). And another scriptural word says: "We who do not look at the visible, but at the invisible" (2 Cor. 4:18). That is why it says already ch. 10, 35: "Therefore do not throw away your boldness (your trust), which has a great reward. " And verse 39: "But we are not of those who cowardly draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the salvation of the soul. "

Although the letter does not contain an actual address, like most of the Pauline letters, it is undoubted that it is addressed to Hebrew believers, to members of the Israelite early church, whose faith was put to a very severe test at that time. They were in a crisis that we can hardly sympathize with, unless we also realize that the whole of Christianity today is also facing a severe, drastic judgment, that storms are coming up after which little will remain of all the proud construction of the church and Christianity that has become historic.

The leading idea that one feels out of the whole letter, so to speak the key for its correct understanding, can be expressed with the one word "**better**". The Son, who is introduced in ch. 1, 1, is **better** than the angels, **better than the** first Adam, **better than** Aaron, **better than** Moses, **better than** the whole cultus ordained by God Himself, the holy things together with the holy of holies, priest and sacrifice.

Not as if all those holy things and persons, beings and ordinances were not in themselves good and well appropriate. No, everything had and has partly still its value and its meaning in the great household of God. But now the time had come when, for the sake of the stubborn refusal of the Jewish people to respond to God's purposes of grace in Christ, judgment on city and people and sanctuary should no longer be condoned. Everything in which the highest and holiest had been embodied for these believers from the circumcision, with which they had remained so closely - connected even after they had become believers - for the early Christianity of the time of the apostles does not know any conversions of Christ-believing Israelites from Judaism over to Christianity, Their faith in Christ was the mature fruit of their genuine Israelite nature and faith in all that the prophets had prophesied, and the original Christianity was Messianic Judaism - all this was now to be destroyed, dissolved, put to one side, as they well recognized. Already the storm clouds of the divine wrath judgments rose higher and higher over His stiff-necked people. How will they have been held up to them again and again, while everything still stood: And this should be our Messiah - He, of whom you preach that He will give His city, His people, His sanctuary to the Gentiles to destroy and trample underfoot?!

That was a deep pain, a terrible pain. Much, if not everything, threatened to falter. And in order to strengthen, raise up and comfort these wavering, challenged people, the letter was written with the motto: **Christ the exalted is better than all.** He is appointed heir over all. All promises are - guaranteed in Him. His priesthood remains, even though the Aaronic one is diminishing. He has entered heaven itself to appear before the face of God for us, even though no high priest of the house of Levi will ever again be able to exercise his office on the great Day of Atonement. This could only happen once a year, but now the Son represents us always in the best way before the face of the Father.

It is now necessary to persevere in faith in the One who has withdrawn into the heavens, in the inner, living union and fellowship that He has brought forth. It is now necessary to hold fast in faith to the body of all those great, delicious shadow images, who is Christ Himself (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 9:23; 10:1), seated at the right hand of God, the High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

The fact that it is born out of such a state of distress and is intended to comfort those who are so severely challenged makes this letter one of the most delicious in the entire New Testament. This will be experienced in a very special way by the congregation of Christ-believing Israelites of the last, anti-Christian days that are still to come, just as a mind that lives in the Old Testament and is well instructed in the prophetic language and way of thinking is needed to appreciate the contents of this letter properly.

Thus, through the Spirit, the writer of the letter presents a whole series of witnesses of faith, from the oldest on. He leads the readers into the rich treasury of God and lets us look into the indescribably precious, manifold teachings of God, who already, as it says in the entrance to the letter, spoke to the fathers sometimes and in many ways. It is as if he wanted to say: Do not think that you are the first or even the only ones whose faith has been put to the test, who have to keep the faith until the end. Just see what God can do with people and to people who let Him put them in the nature of the invisible world of God and its hidden powers and who agree with Him, no matter what their senses, their reason or their clever fellow men say about it.

In this way, this chapter contains a string of pearls of witnesses, men as well as women, of whom we are not so much given the story of their conversion or pictures of their inner life, but who were to prove themselves as those to whom the simple word of their God applied par excellence, whatever the circumstances might be.

And if the first thing that is said about this faith is that it is an insistence on what one hopes for, then with this single word all genuine believers are immediately characterized as **people of hope.** That is, one must first have attained a living hope, have become a real person of hope, before one can appropriate what is testified to faith here. From this we see again clearly that we are not dealing here with the initial faith, one might almost say the ABC faith, through which one first becomes a child and partaker of the divine life, but with the life in faith, as it is written: "The righteous lives by his faith. " It is "by faith in faith" (Hab. 2, 4; Rom. 1, 17). Only after we have attained a clarified, biblical hope, i.e. hope founded in the Word, through living knowledge of revealed truth, is it called to live by this faith.

Let us remember this important lesson: the believer should not and must not live from his **experience,** but from **faith.** We must never want to be satiated by what we have lived and experienced. Not as if we wanted to deprive anyone of his experience or make it doubtful for him. Salvation wants and must be experienced, i.e. it must prove itself and be active in the life of experience. But it must never be the source from which I want to draw further nourishment and strengthening, least of all must my experience, however delicious, serve me as a weapon to meet the enemy with.

As food serves the **word** alone, as it is written: "Man (i.e. the true man of God, like Jesus) does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matth. 4, 4). And as an invincible weapon, God did not give us our already made experiences - no matter how delicious and blissful they were - but the sharp two-edged sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith, with which we can extinguish all fiery arrows of the evil one (Eph. 6:11-13).

The richer the experiences our God gives us, the more chastely we must handle them. They are not given to us in order to rest in them, but only to learn to believe even better, i.e. to rest in the firm promises of the divine word.

Rom. 8,24: "It is in hope that we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man sees he no longer hopes for. But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (1 Pet 1:3).

With it agrees what is further said here: **Faith is a conviction of facts which one does not see.** Thus, to anticipate somewhat, Abraham, the father of all believers, as the Scripture calls him, was not fed by God with facts of salvation that had become historical, but only with great and ever-increasing promises or promises, for the fulfillment and redemption of which, however, God made him wait and still made him wait. **Learning to wait -** that is the great thing about this faith.

When Jesus' mother found the twelve-year-old boy, whom she had long sought with pain, in the temple, where he was questioning with the elders, and reproached him why he had done this, the son answered, "Did you not know that I must be in that which is my Father's? These were for him the only realities for his life. And these realities consisted only in the words coming from the mouth of God.

Only when what God has said - in fact, everything God has said, without any cut-off, without any artificial distinctions - becomes our only reality again, we will have reached the ground in which this designation of faith is rooted: "a convincing of facts that one does not see". Facts? Yes. Then they do not need to be stamped as historically credible first, but it is sufficient if we know: Thus it is written.

It has also the faith its good right, which may fall back on historical facts. God has already done many things, and we may believe these acts of God in Christ. But again, not because we have experienced them or because they have been scientifically certified to us, but because it is the testimony that God bears of His Son. For the testimony of God is greater than that of men (1 John 5:9). That is why John adds so sharply: Whoever does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has testified of His Son (v. 10).

In any case, the question for us is: Has God spoken? It does not matter whether what He is talking about still lies in the distant future before us or has long since become a historical fact. Therein lies also the sharpness of the reproach that Jesus makes to Thomas: "Because you have seen me, you believe, Thomas. Blessed are those who do **not see and yet believe"** (John 20:29).

There is a justified concern that in many cases among us the purely historical faith - i.e. the unquestioning acceptance of well attested historical facts - is not only the most common, but even the only known kind of faith. This is expressed unconsciously but clearly enough in the way, for example, the so-called apostolic (?) creed, which is held in the highest esteem throughout Christendom, observes the relationship between historical facts of salvation and prophecy yet to be fulfilled. In the first article there is no trace at all of the future. In the second, which deals with the Son, a very terse and puny reference to the fact that He "will come again from there to judge the living and the dead." How little satisfying this terse hint is, every living child of God will have felt often enough. And even believing theology has not brought itself to break through the narrow framework of the Apostolic in its treatment of the doctrine of the last things, while every enlightened scriptural scholar knows that in the Pauline epistles alone more is said of the future glory of the returning Son of God from heaven than of His birth, life and suffering and death together. Not to mention that the Old Testament, which testifies of Him, is full of nothing but unfulfilled declarations of the Lord's glory. And it is no better with the third article of the Apostolicum concerning the mutual relationship of the already fulfilled and the still unfulfilled word

of God.

Hence the tremendous successes of Satan, who has managed to undermine the historical credibility of the biblical reports and books so much among theologians and laymen. This is where the one-sided emphasis on historical faith and adherence to what has become historical in the church and Christianity takes its revenge. If one had been taught and practiced to live also in the firm prophetic word instead of treating it quite stepmotherly, then there would not be so much unbelief on and under the pulpit today. Then one would never have come into the almost slavish dependence on human science, which must first prove whether what is written is at all credible! How many otherwise serious and pious theologians today do not even dare to profess the whole, unbroken Word of God Old Testament, the only Bible of our Lord and His apostles, for fear of being considered unscientific!

But once we have begun to take seriously the fact that man really lives from every word that comes from the mouth of God, then we can count with unshakable confidence on the fact that all promises of God, no matter how improbable or inconsistent they may seem, will one day be fulfilled with infallible certainty just as His word has said. Then the rest of the world and mankind will also realize, to their shame but to their salvation, that God is right. Our God, however, already dignifies us today to become people whom He can and wants to let see into His secrets and who thereby grow up to divine greatness.

(Note by Heinz Schumacher: Since the years before the First World War, when Ströter wrote this, church and Christianity have largely developed downwards, to a frightening degree especially in the last decades and years. What Ströter denounces again and again: that pious people lean too much on their pious experiences as well as on what God has done historically - it has also been lost to a large extent! And Ströter did not condemn these two things, but only denounced their overvaluation compared to trusting in the Word. Today one is grateful if one still finds intimate experiences of faith and unbroken trust in God's salvation-historical action! But it is even more important - Ströter is absolutely right in this and it is also valid today - that our faith learns again to live **from the word alone in the** end, no matter whether it is already fulfilled or still unfulfilled).

Hebrews 11:2: **Such faith is witnessed by the ancients.**

This is a word for which perhaps a higher degree of understanding still exists among the children of Israel than among our generation. I do not know of any people - unless it be the clothed sons of distant Asia, the Chinese - among whom reverence for the ancients and consideration for the ancients are more valid than among the Jews. Therefore, the family life of the sons of Jacob can still today serve as an example even for the most serious Christians. I have become acquainted with examples of tender consideration and unconditional obedience of already grown-up sons to their father and mother, which can hardly be equaled among Christians.

Our world today seems to be almost exclusively for the young. The old count for little more. Now the high reputation of the old also has its dangers. In Israel, for example, the essays of the elders were more highly regarded than God's commandments. And it is no different with us. Many of our favorite Christian customs are merely based on tradition, i.e. on the reputation of the fathers. If one wanted to eliminate from our so-called Christian folk life everything that cannot refer directly to the specific Word of God, there would be very little left. What would become of all our Christian and church festivals, for example? We do not have a word of God to show for them, as, for example, Israel did for theirs. We do all these things, not because they are commanded or even recommended

by God, but because they have been handed down to us from the ancients.

However, we must be on our guard and allow ourselves to be set free by the word of truth in the gospel. For there is an immense amount of pious bondage to statutes to which God has never bound us.

But for the so heavily challenged believers from the circumcision, i.e. from Israel, this word, that such a faith is already testified by the ancients, had a special weight. This letter begins with the reference to the fact that the God who spoke to us in these last days through the Son is the same God who had already spoken to the fathers so sometimes and in so many different ways through the prophets. This reference to the organic unity and togetherness of all God's revelation must not be overlooked. For the believing Israelite, who recognized in Jesus above all the one of whom Moses in the law and all the prophets had prophesied, this was quite obvious and self-evident. So also this reference to the faith of the ancients. Not as if the word of God had needed such a corroboration for them. But it was a delicious comfort to know: The God of the fathers is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The same faithful God of the covenant in whom the fathers hoped - and they were not put to shame - is the God who has revealed himself to us in Christ Jesus, the beginner and perfecter of our faith.

Before we go on to consider the individual examples of what God was and is able to do through faith, we still need to be clear about one important fact: What is the meaning of that which we encounter at the entrance of almost every verse in this chapter, the word **"by faith"?** Whence, we ask, comes that knowledge and conviction of facts which are not seen, which is stated to be indicative of faith? The answer is only this: from **previous divine revelation** alone. In none of the examples given here is it possible to prove any other source of reference, any other origin of what is called faith.

It is of fundamental importance that we fully realize that never from **our spirit,** nor from that of any creature, from the views or experiences of any man or angel, is born or produced what the Scriptures in their chaste way designate by the word **faith.** We by no means always handle this precious linguistic vessel so chastely. We allow ourselves to pour all kinds of content into this word and out again. We stamp our own or other people's ideas, impressions, opinions, convictions with the word faith without further ado. We "believe" that it will rain tomorrow. We "believe" that there will soon be war - and what else we don't "believe".

We do no better with related, equally noble vessels of language. What do people not call everything "love"! The meanest, lowest sensual lust or the most pronounced egoism, which attaches itself to a creature, which should serve it for the satisfaction. And what thinking people do not call everything "hope"! Any more or less desirable ideas, wishes, desires we call hope, phantasties of the most inconsistent kind, juggleries of our or other spirits.

Quite differently the scripture, which carries also in it its supernatural origin on every leaf at the forehead. If the Bible were literature like all other human literature, even the noblest and purest, it would never have remained free from such an abuse of speech, which is quite common among us. Only a writing which has the Holy Spirit Himself as its author can keep itself absolutely chaste in this. And that is what the Bible does.

When and where it speaks of **faith**, the word means to it something that God spoke before, that He Himself brought forth through His creative and life-giving Word, and that He nourishes and draws

up to divine greatness through His Word. The ancients already drew from this source, even when they did not have a Bible of the scope and content that we have. How much more sacred and important should every word of our God be to us, since in it our God has opened to us an ocean of indescribable knowledge of Himself in the Son. Oh that an ever deeper reverence would glow through us before every word of our God! How carelessly we often treat Him. What unworthy restrictions we allow ourselves to impose on him. We have not yet begun to fathom his depths!

2. the far times (eons) have been established by God's Word (Heb. 11:3).

Verse 3: By faith we realize that the eons (world times) have been established by God's Word, so that what is seen has come into being from what is unseen.

Against the usual translation of these words: "By faith we realize that the **world was** produced by God's word" nothing can be objected insofar as it is undoubted scriptural truth that this is so. But here is a word (aeons) whose next meaning is that of a more or less extended **period of time**, therefore translated as **world time.** This does not contradict at all the other translation, because it must be obvious to everyone that if God created the **world** by His word, with it at the same time the creation of **world times** is set, in which the history of the world and its inhabitants should take place. Without such world times a world and kingdom history for the earth is unthinkable. They form the large, wide framework in which God brings His sublime plans with world and mankind to execution.

We find the same word in the entrance of this letter to the Hebrews (chap. 1, 2), where it is testified of the Son of God that God has appointed Him as heir over all, "through whom also He made the Aons (world times)". So not only **world space,** but also **world time** was created by the Son and for the unfolding of the glories of the Son, as it should happen in the context of world and human history.

Now an heir is one who has something to expect, but whose possession he has not yet taken. The Father's intention to put the Son gradually into full possession of the whole creation, the visible and the invisible, reaches back behind the eons, it happened before the foundation of the world, i.e. before there could be a world and time order. But for the execution of these enormous thoughts and aims of God with His only begotten, encompassing the whole created universe, the world times or ages are arranged and determined. And it is intimately connected with this that the Son is called an **heir, i.**e. one who has to wait until everything can and will be handed over to Him according to the pleasure of His Father.

The Father's rule through the eons that have passed so far can be clearly traced in the Scriptures. Immediately at the fall of man the seed of the woman is announced, which should crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3, *15).* From time to time, while in the meantime He lets a whole world of man perish by the judgment of the flood, God talks again and again about the promised one. But He waits 4000 years before He sends the eagerly awaited one to earth for the first time. Satan causes the appointed builders to reject the cornerstone, and he causes the husbandmen to kill the heir in order to take possession of the vineyard (Israel) (Matth. 21, 33Ä4). All this, in the hidden and miraculous counsel of God, was only for the glorification and endowment of the Son as heir over all. The postponement is only apparent. But since the return of the Son to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, 2000 years have already passed, during which He sits at the right hand of the Majesty and waits. For what? First of all, according to the Scriptures, that the Holy Spirit

may gather and prepare for Him, out of this present wicked world, which is subject to the activity of the Prince of Darkness, a **congregation of the** elect and the saints, who shall be His **Body,** His own fullness or completion. As it is written, "that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29).

This congregation is at the same time a family of true sons of God entitled to inherit, of called co-heirs of His Christ. According to the Scriptures, as long as the heir is a child, there is no difference between him and a servant (Gal. 4, 1). That is why the promised child that was born (Is. 9, 5) took on the form of a servant. And so we too must and may wear the form of a servant with Him in the eyes of the world, which did not know Him and also does not know us as what we are. If He can wait until His brothers and fellow servants are mature and ready to enter the promised inheritance with Him, we **too can wait,** knowing that God has made us fit to share in the inheritance of the saints in light (Col. 1:12). For it is written: When Christ, your life, shall appear - that is, shall be manifested in the fullness of His divine glory - then shall ye also be manifested with Him in glory (Col. 3:4). That is, the great Son and Heir over all does not come forth with His claim that the whole universe shall be subdued under His scepter until He can say: Behold, here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me (Heb. 2:13).

There we can clearly see how important it is for us - who wait for the Lord in faith as He waits for us - to recognize what the **eons** in the divine plan are all about. They serve the thorough, punctual execution of everything that the Father has decided in the Son and that the Son will execute in the fullness of time (Eph. 1:10) through the members of His conformed body, the church.

Therefore, let us not be surprised that everything does not go faster. God has eons at His disposal. And it is a matter of the most extended, in-depth, exhaustive presentation possible of all the wisdom, power, love and glory that lie resolved in the Son. There God cannot and must not hurry anything. The Arab has a meaningful saying: haste is of the devil. It is one of the most popular and successful plots of the devil, especially to provoke the children and servants of God, that they anticipate God and try to bring about things that God has promised before God's time has come. On the other hand, it is especially important to be on guard in a time and among a generation for which nothing is fast enough, which uses the whip day and night on itself and others. Nevertheless, God does not let himself be upset and upset by us. He knows what He is doing and takes time to do it thoroughly.

Whoever wants to follow God rightly must first of all **learn to wait,** like the Son who sat down at the right hand of the Father and - **waits to see** if He is already the heir over all and has all power in heaven and on earth. If we had only half as much power, how quickly and eagerly we would clean up crime, sin, shame and misery in the world in thousand-headed form. Behind our so enthusiastic efforts to bring about the Kingdom of God in church, state and society - how much carnal impatience is hidden there, because one has not understood God, the **God of the ages,** who made the eons through the Son and for Him.
It is the business of the Holy Spirit to seek, gather and prepare such people in this eon, who let the hidden glory of Christ shine into them in silence, who are ready to **wait in faith** under the heaviest pressure, in denial and neglect, until the time and hour of the Lord has come. Today, it is much more a matter of being God's people who take in all the fullness of Christ than of upsetting the world by our achievements and efforts to put it right. Thus, in the eons to come, more glory will never shine out of us than we now quietly allow to shine into us from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). This transformation into His image is not a magical process that takes place in an instant, but a growing, step-by-step faithful taking into oneself, a shining through and allowing oneself to be illuminated by

the splendor of His truth and clarity. This inner process of transfiguration happens quite independently of our affiliation to a church, community or "sect" and finds its conclusion, its goal on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The means that the Holy Spirit uses to form the glorified Christ in us is the Scriptures that bear witness to Him (Jn 5:39), never forgetting that this word refers primarily to the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament. If the Holy Spirit is to succeed in this wonderful work on and in us, then we must first become people again, to whom the whole, undivided **Word of** God alone applies, who take from God everything that He has laid down in it for instruction, for punishment, for restoration, for education in righteousness, so that the man of God may be ready, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16,17). And in doing so, it is necessary to begin where God began, i.e. "in the beginning" (Gen. 1:1). Whoever is not at home in the first book of the Bible will never get to know his God as He wants to be known, i.e. from the beginning. In that first book of the Scriptures lie the seeds of all great kingdom thoughts of God with His Christ and His mankind created in Him, through Him and to Him. There we also get very simple, easily comprehensible visual instruction about the **ages,** which God uses to give historical expression to His thoughts in them.

First, we learn about God as the Creator of heaven and earth. The next thing we hear is that the earth was desolate **and empty.** Was it so from the beginning? Did it come out of God's hand like that in the first beginning? Scripture answers this very important question with a clear no. Isa. 45:18 testifies that God did not create the earth desolate and empty. It is of great importance to realize that it is a fallen, destroyed creation that God now approaches with His Word to transform until everything becomes "very good." - Job, who lived long before Moses, perhaps before Abraham, also knows to speak through the mouth of Jehovah of a time when God laid the foundation of the earth, determined its measurements, stretched the measuring line over it, set its foundation pillars and laid its cornerstone, and when the morning stars rejoiced together and all the sons of God (the holy angels) exulted (Job 38:4-7). This was not a "desolate and empty" earth. Thus we know that before the creation of man there was a tremendous rebellion against God in the angelic world, that Satan dragged a large part of the formerly glorious sons of God into his fall with him. How long God, who after all was able to set a quick target to this evil and at any rate was able to prevent this indignation from spreading even further in the universe, carried this enmity, we cannot measure. This may have lasted aons over aeons. Very bright light falls on Genesis 1 from the assumption, which is not without justification from Scripture, that this very earth, which was created good and glorious in the beginning, was originally the seat and principality of Him whom Scripture still calls the God and Prince of this world (2 Cor. 4:4; Jn. 12:31) and who was allowed to offer it and its glory to the "second Adam," Jesus Christ, as something over which He had a right of disposal (Luk. 4:5,6).

Slowly and step by step God goes about creating light and order out of chaos. Finally, as the goal and crown of the new creation work of the six days, God formed man according to His likeness from the earth dust of this fallen and destroyed creature, and, O wonder upon wonder, allows Satan, the old serpent, His eons-long adversary and enemy, to destroy this His last and most glorious work and to bring sin, death and ruin into all mankind through the first Adam. And the holy, omniscient and omnipotent God allows this? Do we really believe that He foresaw all this, considered it well and weighed it carefully? Or do we think that the Almighty is like the foolish man who wanted to build a tower without estimating the costs to see if he would be able to build it (Luk 14:28-30)?

Were not also those fallen sons of God, the angels and powers, thrones and dominions, created by the Son and for the Son? Were they, the firstborn sons of God in the wide circle of creation, not as much the object of His love, His goodness, His good pleasure? Or do we think that God could easily

cope with the loss of whole hosts of once glorious, heavenly spirits - but us humans, us later-born, yes, us He could not help redeeming after we had fallen? How deep pious pharisaism is in us! And for what purpose had God allowed the arch-enemy to seduce mankind to fall away from God? For the extension and increase of his terrible satanic kingdom? You would think so when you see the vehemence and zeal with which God's dear servants and children rebel to the utmost against the mere thought that God had therefore let Satan loose on mankind and offered him every opportunity to do his utmost on mankind, because He was quite sure that in the "second Adam" (1. Cor. 15:45,47), Jesus Christ, all the power and cunning of Satan would not only be broken and destroyed forever, but that He would also bring all spirits to acknowledge His precious name Jesus and bow their knees in Him for the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10,11).

If God, before the foundation of the world, had such a comprehensive plan, corresponding to all possibilities, with the entire created universe in the glorious Son, for whom and through whom the universe came into existence, then it is easier to explain - even if we are left with unsolved riddles - how God, long after the outrage and overthrow of Satan and his hosts in Adam, also allows the entire human race to fall under the power of sin and death.

God's way with mankind (paradise, flood, election)

And so God gains time and space to speak "sometimes and in many ways" (Hebr. 1, 1) to His fallen children. Because man has doubted His **word** and sinned, now he has to learn slowly through eons that he should recover only by the word of God.

We are not told how long God interacted confidentially and unhindered with the sinless human couple in paradise. It must have been a wonderful Sabbath that He kept with them. We only know one thing for sure, that such a Sabbath still exists, i.e. is future (Hebr. 4, 9). God will not let up until the "second Adam" has put everything back under His feet and handed it over to Him, the Father.

So God does not stop to talk with the fallen man, although He must expel him from the paradise and give him to taste the bitterness of the death. A cherub with a flaming sword camps in front of it to preserve the way - but not to move it finally - to the tree of life. The sign of unsparing judgment is the sign of incalculable grace.

There is nothing against, but certainly much in favor of the assumption that the people worshipped in the face of the cherub until the judgment of the flood and offered their sacrifices to God, as far as they (like Abel) were children of faith.

That long world age found its shattering conclusion in the world judgment of the great, general flood, in which up to Noah and his family the whole mankind living at that time found its destruction. But that even this judgment catastrophe - the like of which God, according to His oath, will never again let come over the earth - was not the last word with rebellious mankind, we recognize primarily from the fact that God in Noah and his sons took care of a new beginning with mankind on the earth judged by water. In addition, the Scriptures also contain a clear indication of the fact that God Himself did not hand over mankind, which had drifted away in unrighteous unbelief, to hopeless destruction; rather, one of the first tasks of the Risen Lord was to go down in the spirit of resurrection power and glory and to preach to those who had once not believed in the days of Noah (1 Pet 3:18, 19).

Under changed conditions God enters again into relationship with the Noachite mankind after the flood. But mankind has not learned from the tremendous world judgment either. Soon enough there is open rebellion against the divine thoughts again. Organized, purposeful paganism arises. The - despotic world empire takes the place of the simple, patriarchal family division. Nimrod and Babel give their character to the distant course of the world. Although the heaven-storming, self-important generation probably deserves a second destructive flood, God is mindful of His oath. But from now on, He lets the God-forsaken peoples of the earth go their own ways (Acts 14:16), so that they realize where they are heading without God and His Word.

However, in His wisdom and love He Himself takes a new path, He begins a completely new, wonderful household with **Abraham,** His **chosen one,** to whom He opens up from the beginning that His choice is by no means limited to him or his descendants, but that in him all generations of the earth shall be blessed, even the most alienated from God and the most lost. Without intervening in the other course of the world in a special way, He educates in silence, as strangers on promised ground - not outstanding bearers of culture, founders of cities and states, servants who lift the world out of the seams, but sons and heirs who can wait for **His** city.

Thus, God's ABC book, the first book of Scripture, contains a clear explanation of what is meant by the word of the **world times** created and ordered by the Son and for Him.

God's way with heaven and earth

But this verse (Hebr. 11, 3) contains another, strange statement, namely that we are also initiated by faith into the mystery of the origin of the whole visible creation with its wonderful orders. After all, it is said, "so that what is seen has come into being from what is invisible." We are faced with questions with which the thinking man has occupied himself for millennia, but without being able to find the answer and solution.

There are thorough researchers and deep thinkers who, in view of the great riddle, where the universe with its inconceivable abundance of living beings actually came from and how it came into being, honestly confess: "Ignoramus et ignorabimus", in German: We don't know it and will never fathom it.

But here, in the word of God, we ignorant children of faith are initiated into the creation mystery of the Almighty. The psalmist, contemplating the sky, God's hands work, moon and stars, is overwhelmed and cries in the consciousness of human littleness and nothingness: "What is man that You remember him, and the Son of man that You thus respect him? "

With scornful derision, human wisdom points to the tiny dimensions of our globe, to the fleeting existence of the little earthling called man. As if it would be completely unthinkable that God - if there is one - should reveal Himself in a special way to such insignificant beings at all - if He can reveal Himself at all. Beside it one thinks even enormously big of the "masters of the creation" and dreams already loudly of the golden age where from the dictionary of the man of the future the little word "impossible" will be completely deleted, where the man will not only deny God, but will dethrone and replace him completely!

But we do not let ourselves be frightened or disturbed by such behavior, because we know that behind all the visible and temporal things there is the great, almighty, glorious Creator God, who

does not just go off on a wild goose chase, but has mercy on all His works, who does not forget even the young ravens when they cry, and who clothes the lilies of the field more gloriously than Solomon could have adorned himself. But we also know - and this again only by faith, not by our own mental work - that everything visible must enter into judgment, because in everything there is the death germ of transitoriness and nothingness. Creation is subject to decay, Scripture teaches us, but in hope (Rom. 8:19-23). God will roll up the heavens like a mantle; like a garment the earth He has given to the children of men will become obsolete; but then comes the great, incomprehensible process of transformation, the glorious trial, beyond which lie new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell (Heb. 1:10-12; Rev. 21:1; 2 Pet. 3:13). Yes, the whole eager waiting of the creation in labor is directed to the imminent revelation of the children of God (Rom. 8, 19 ff.). This is more than just the pausing of a certain date. It is about the completed formation of the members of His body in accordance with His own transfigured body - the result of the power effect with which He will also subdue all things to Himself (Phil. 3, 21). Only by means of a "body" of life-bearers, who are full of His spirit and like Him have become conquerors of death, can and will the glorious Head over the universe (Eph. 1, 22) fill the coming ages - one by one - with demonstrations of the abundant riches of His grace, of which they are the firstfruits (Eph. 2, 7). And one by one, all areas of the great, vast creation of His and our God and Father will be reached by His righteous judgments, purified by fire and thus brought towards their original destiny - the glorification of the Son for the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2, 11).

Thus, by faith we look forward with great peace to the day when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the earth and the works (of men) therein shall be burned up. For He who judges them is the heir over all (Hebr. 1, 2), and we are joint heirs, if we have otherwise become partakers of His sufferings (Rom. 8, 17). Behind everything created and visible, be it beauties of creation or depths of misery, we recognize the Invisible One, His eternal power and divinity, and trust Him that He will never deny Himself.

3. witnesses of faith before the flood judgment (Abel, Enoch, Noah)

Hebr. 11, 4-7: By faith **Abel offered** a greater sacrifice to God than Cain; through this he also received testimony that he was righteous, since God testified about his gifts, and through this he still speaks, even though he died. - (Verse 5:) By faith **Enoch** was caught up, that he saw not death, and he was found no more, because God had caught him up; for before he was caught up he was given testimony that he was well pleasing to God. - (Verse 6:) But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he who is to come to God must believe that He is there and will reward those who seek Him. - (Verse 7:) By faith Noah, out of prudence, built an ark to save his house, because he had received a prophecy concerning what was not yet seen; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness of faith.

After we have been introduced in verse 3 to the significance of the great **world times** which God has established for the orderly unfolding of the glories of His Son, the Holy Spirit himself now first introduces us to three examples of witnesses of faith who belong to that first, oldest world time which begins with the Fall and concludes with the great end of the world, the final judgment for the mankind of that time: **Abel, Enoch and Noah.** They are certainly not the only faithful witnesses of God during that age, during which people perverted their way on earth. They undoubtedly represent a selection in which particular thoughts and ways of God are expressed in a particularly emphatic manner.

The first, **Abel,** reaches back into the beginnings of the fallen mankind, while the last, Noah, forms the link between that oldest and the completely new world order after the judgment of the flood. The middle one, **Enoch, occupies** a very peculiar position, as one who does not belong to this world order at all.

These are outstanding heights of the life of faith on which we meet these three witnesses. We gladly allow ourselves to be led to such heights, since we are also called to become **people of the heights, to** walk on the **heights of** God, and to breathe the **air of the heights.** It makes the eye bright, the view clear and the chest wide. This is what we need as called sons of God whose walk is in heaven. But the divine way to His **heights** leads through the **depths.**

That is why this series - and with it the whole string of pearls of witnesses to the faith of which this chapter is about - begins with **Abel,** i.e. with the one who was strangled by his brother, who shed his blood for the sake of God's truth.

We are told only one thing about this first blood witness: that he offered God a sacrifice from the firstlings of his flock, that is, a bloody, innocent lamb or kid. There we already clearly encounter the slain **lamb** and thus the core of the gospel of God (1. Petr. 1, 19.20; Rev. 5, 6) - the ground that stands immovable whether earth and heaven perish. Now we also know why the beginning had to be made just with this. Because this was the deepest reason of the divine love and redemption thoughts with the whole creation, even before the foundation of the world was laid. Therefore it is written: "No one can lay another foundation except the one that is laid" (1 Cor. 3:11). And again: "There is salvation in no other, neither is there any other name under heaven given among men, whereby we can be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Thus it is clear before us that the sacrifice of Abel bears witness to the **eternal, immovable ground of all salvation for all creatures of all time.**

The next witness is **Enoch, who** was raptured without seeing death. Long enough the inexorable rule of death had already lasted in mankind since Adam, so that one had to recognize well: Against him there is no help, no protection with the people. Then God intervenes - quite abruptly - and sets a peculiar example of incalculable scope, an example which testifies in a quite unambiguous way how God, the Holy and True One, understands and intends to completely overcome, to devour death in His humanity without any human intervention. This is the **great, glorious goal that** God has set for Himself with His humanity that has fallen prey to death - death is to be completely abolished and eliminated (1 Cor. 15:26).

There **could be no Enoch before** there **was an Abel. There was no** other way to stop the one who has the power of death, the devil, than by the Lamb of God tasting death for all by the grace of God.

This also gives us the key for the correct explanation of the third testimony, that of the believing Noah. Noah was so called by his father Lamech because "he will **comfort** us for the labor and toil of our hands, which comes from the ground that Jehovah has cursed" (Genesis 5:29). A puzzling, strange word in view of the fact that Noah had to announce the approaching end of the world and world judgment and also experienced it, whereby however only eight souls were saved over to the earth renewed (in the picture) by judgment.

Noah - and this is the "consolation" of his name - thus means the **new beginning through judgment** for a humanity hopelessly corrupted in itself. And this clearly reflects the divine method, the most

effective procedure of our great Savior-God, who knows how to make a new beginning even beyond the most devastating judgments. Righteous, unsparing judgment on a corrupt world is **not the final end of** God's thoughts, but a **means to the end of carrying out His great thoughts of salvation.**

Also this Noah (consolation) cannot be thought without previous judgment on the blameless, unblemished lamb. Only in this way can the holy God save through judgments and make the ungodly righteous, because the sinless one was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21).

No one says that this certainly only refers to Noah and his people, but not to the judged unbelieving world. On the contrary, it is exactly about this world. For the Son of God was sent into the dungeon so that those who were judged according to the flesh would now live in the spirit of God (1 Pet 3:19,20; 4:6).

Thus, in these three witnesses of faith from the oldest period, we have before us, so to speak, the entire divine program with mankind worthy of death:

1. **The original cause of all salvation** - the strangled lamb.
2. **goal of God's thoughts -** complete overcoming of death in mankind.
3. The **way to this goal** - unsparing judgment, beyond which lies the new beginning.

4. the meaning of divine election - Abraham's obedience of faith and ability to wait

Heb. 11, 8-10: In faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go forth into a land which he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went forth not knowing whither he came. (Verse 9:) In faith he settled over into the land of promise as into a strange one, and dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; (verse 10:) for he waited for the city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

These words bring us to a new main section in this rich chapter. They introduce us to a whole new housekeeping (economy or administration) of our great God.

We have already seen how God with Noah and his sons made a new beginning with sinful mankind on the earth devastated by a terrible judgment, but at the same time also renewed to a certain extent. How deeply that elementary judgment has imprinted itself in the mind and memory of mankind, can probably still be seen from the circumstance that one still finds today with almost all peoples of the earth the traces of a flood saga which show in their main features unmistakable similarities with the biblical flood judgment.
Also it is clearly recognizable from the still preserved folk tales of the oldest culture peoples, how after the flood with them the memory of the conditions prevailing on earth before the flood has more or less clearly preserved. The ideas of a glorious garden of God on earth, which hostile powers want to destroy and rob, but which had to be carefully guarded and bravely defended, are well preserved. These thoughts have been distorted and distorted in the course of the millennia, but they are still recognizable. They all bear the same beautiful features and are a telling proof of the rich heritage of a precious tradition, with which mankind was allowed to begin its course anew on the earth afflicted by judgment.

There is good reason to believe that the paradise from which our first parents were expelled remained on earth for some time, closed and well preserved by the cherub with a flaming sword, who at God's command camped east of the Garden of Eden to preserve the way to the tree of life. We have no word of God for the fact that paradise disappeared from the earth before the Flood. Rather, it seems to have been the constant visual lesson throughout all those centuries that God would never give up the idea of opening the way to the tree of life for mankind again. It seems that the pious people of that time, from Adam and Abel on, together with the descendants of Seth, offered their sacrifices and worship to God in the presence of the cherubim. Thus mankind of that time lived in the shadow of paradise, without law, without government or human authority, without the formation of states, in large families whose heads, priests and leaders were the patriarchs.

All this lasted long enough to be imprinted in an almost indelible way in the thinking and feeling of mankind - a great visual lesson of God both of His relentless judgment seriousness and of His all-judgment outlasting love thoughts.

In spite of such a rich religious legacy, which they took with them to the so terribly judged earth, the descendants of Noah, however, very soon again took ways, which only too clearly confirmed the natural corruption of the human heart. Soon the alienation from God and open rebellion against the divine supremacy was again in full swing. Not only organized nations and empires were formed, but also despotisms and dominions based on violence and oppression. Again, God has been anticipated, who undoubtedly intends, and perhaps already announced to the fathers, to establish a beneficial regime on earth for peace and blessing, for order and the building up of human society.

From that time also date the beginnings of the sinister **Babylonian disease, from** which mankind suffers severely up to the present day and from which our whole vaunted cultural being will still perish: We mean the addiction to pile up in big cities, to build towers reaching up to the sky and to offer pronounced resistance to the clearly recognized, salutary will of God to spread over the wide land.

The revelation of our God leaves us no doubt that our God's ways with His redeemed mankind shall and will one day find their perfect expression in a great and indescribably glorious city of God. But here again the deep-rooted unbelief, i.e. disobedience of the blinded mankind, which anticipates the most magnificent achievements of God by its own power and for its own glorification, in order to cut short His glory, if it were possible, shows itself.

But the judgment does not stay away. God descends from heaven and confuses the language of the presumptuous strivers. And until this day we humans do not understand each other, even if we have learned the same mother tongue. And yet, even in this **Babylonian judgment of confusion,** mercy boasts against inexorable severity, that is, the judgment must again serve to preserve and recover, however painful. If mankind would have kept one and the same language, it would have long since been clumped together in such an unbridled way that it would have rotted in itself. It is probably only thanks to this confusion of languages that mankind has spread over the whole world in a way that is useful to it. At every turn we encounter the delicious fact that our God always pursues thoughts of salvation with His chastisements, no matter how severe.

But what path does God take with a humanity that, as He Himself says, no longer shrinks from anything that it once set out to accomplish (Genesis 11:6,7)? - The first essential feature of His new procedure is that He lets the world of nations, which is in love with itself and presumptuous, with its glamorous and powerful empires, its giant buildings, its great achievements in all areas of culture

and technology, go their own ways (Acts 14:16). It is as if He told them in clear words: Well, do your utmost, strive, research, build, govern, rule and switch according to all your natural ability, I do not put anything in your way; but I go my own way. Let us see who will go the farthest!

God treads the path of election

Then God chooses from one of the oldest and most important cultural peoples of those days, that of the Chaldeans, one man, only one, to whom He reveals His thoughts, whom He prepares in a very peculiar school for the salvation of a lost human world and creation: in the **school of faith.** He gives him, as we will see, no cultural tasks to solve among the pagan nations, in the midst of which He raises him to be the father of all believers. God knows well that mankind cannot be helped out of its deep agony with culture.

Without noise, without great fuss, completely quietly and unnoticed, God takes His chosen **Abraham to the** side in order not only to present His program to him for memorization and recitation, but also to train him himself to be the personal bearer of blessing and salvation for all mankind. "In you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3; 22:18). This is the divine word of promise. This is the simple, short, world-encompassing program. The method is at the same time clearly determined, it is that of the farthest all-embracing working through **chosen ones.**

Certainly, a whole series of questions can be raised as to why God chose just this One and only this One, and others to which our God does not owe us the answer and also does not give it. But one thing stands brightly before us, that this divine program embraces all lost humanity and that God never thought of limiting His salvation only to His elect. Rather, they are the appointed instruments and mediators of God's great, all-encompassing thoughts of love to all the rest of the human world. Or should God have meant that He wanted to save only the one Abraham out of all the generations of men living at that time, whom He chose, while He let the others go their own ways of perdition? This alone makes clear the monstrousness of an idea that would like to make the chosen ones the only ones saved.

And another question should be asked much more often than it happens:
How far has God actually come with the fulfillment of that promise given to Abraham of the seed through which all the families of the earth were to be blessed? Can this be determined with any certainty? We think so.

It is undeniable that God allowed two thousand years to pass before He sent the promised seed - for that is what it was primarily about (Gal. 3, 16) - into the world for the first time. But His own people, to whom He was sent according to the Scriptures, did not receive Him, and God took Him back to Himself for the time being (Hos. 5, 15; Matth. 23, 39). Two more millennia have passed and still the world waits for the one in whom all its generations shall be blessed. Our God has been able to make use of the long, weary delay in a wonderful way to bring forth a secret that He had previously kept secret and kept to Himself (Eph. 3, 3-7), namely that during the hardening of His own chosen people He wanted to give His Son from all nations a congregation of **pure chosen ones,** which He virtually calls His **body,** His **fullness.** The creation of this church is so essential for the complete presentation of His Christ that its revelation in glory, when He will soon appear out of heaven, cannot be imagined without the simultaneous revelation of His church in glory (Col. 3, 4).

But the work of the Holy Spirit in the preparation of the church, the body of Christ, has not yet been completed. But this church is, according to its innermost nature and calling, a **church of the elect,** of the children of Abraham. It by no means represents all that God wants to save from the generations of mankind at all and bring to the knowledge of His truth. Rather, they are only the organs that the glorious Son will use in the future ages for the presentation and demonstration of His abundant grace (Eph. 2:7).

These considerations should be enough to convince us that our God is not in a hurry in the execution of His great all-embracing thoughts. He can allow Himself to give the god and prince of this world, together with the mankind blinded and ruled by him, enough time and leeway to perform their utmost and best, to cross His divine plans, to anticipate them, to seemingly thwart them, in order to leave them afterwards none, Not even the slightest excuse, when they will have arrived at complete bankruptcy, and to provide the astonished world, angels and men, with the proof that **everything has** to **serve Him** and that He **knew how to deal with all hostile powers in the** Son.

Abraham's Way of Obedience

Now back to Abraham. The first thing we are told about him is that he went out in obedience without knowing where he was going. This does not look very great yet, especially since the thing it was about was not even completed. But it was a beginning, even if a very humble and small one. And the Holy Spirit does not mind reporting something seemingly so small here. We can't all start with great, world-shaking deeds of faith right away. But we can all make a good start with simple, unconditional obedience, no matter what it costs us. This is testified to Abraham. Just as openly, however, it also emerges how Abraham got stuck on the way, i.e. he went out, but not yet immediately **into the** promised land. And what did he get stuck on? It was probably family considerations. God had not said anything about a stopover on the way, for example in Haran, but Abraham made a stopover, and only after his father had died there, he continued (Genesis 11:30-32; 12:4; Acts 7:4).

In the simplest words, the essence of the life of faith is brought before our souls: It is **obedience to the known word and will of God and** renunciation of previous understanding or recognition. He went out without knowing where he was going. It is a matter of trusting God on His word, without first looking and convincing oneself by sight or other means of proof that everything is as God presents it.

This is elementary teaching that God starts with but does not stop at. It must continue and it continues. What God starts, He also carries out, even if it goes through bitter, painful judgment, but rather all Terachs must die, before God lets His goal drive with His chosen ones. He does not spare the costs that His own make to Him. (Terach was the father of Abraham, Genesis 11:27,32).
In verse 9 we are told that he also moved in faith to the land of promise. There we get such a precious instruction that it will be worthwhile to stay there a little. We are confronted with basic features of the divine activity, which are indescribably delicious and very much to be taken to heart. We are faced with the clear fact that the great God, the Almighty, does not disdain to reckon with our human sluggishness, with our obtuseness, our unwillingness and stubbornness and unruliness. **God allows Himself to be delayed by our hesitation, but never to be deterred from carrying out His thoughts and purposes,** no matter what it may cost Him and us until He gets there.

And not only that, but one can already see here how God knows how to make the delay we owe

Himself serviceable, which is certainly not our merit, but His indescribable glory and one of the best guarantees that God will reach His goal under all circumstances. We receive our punishments, we are sharply chastised, His chosen people are locked into unbelief for millennia - **but His gifts and calling do not repent Him, He does not** reject His **people,** He still achieves His original goal with them, despite all the obstructions and machinations of hostile, satanic powers.

So God says to His child Abraham: "Well, if you are not ready to move in right away, then we will wait, but you will move in, that's it. And Abraham moved in, and the Holy Spirit testifies to him that he did it in faith, i.e. without reluctance. But it cost judgment.

The whole history of sin and misery of Adamic mankind is only the dark foil on which the indescribable love of the Father in the Son, who is therefore also called the second and last Adam, stands out in radiant splendor. But God reaches His goal, even if only by the most terrible fire judgments, of which His burning love and holiness is capable. **What He did not succeed in doing with the first Adam, the second and last one will accomplish completely,** just as certainly as the same Israel, which for the first time fought God's thoughts with the world of nations to the utmost and was cast out into thousands of years of judgment for it, will for the second time respond to everything that God has decided in Christ for His people and all the rest of mankind. **God's ways of love lead through death, hell and damnation, through terror and darkness and ruin to the complete final triumph of His original intentions of love. No one can hinder His work.** Hallelujah!

Abraham waited for the city of God

That Abraham dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign one only in tents, i.e., led a nomadic or wandering life, is now explained and justified in the 10th verse by saying of him: "He waited for the city which has the foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

It stands to reason that special emphasis is placed on this circumstance here. It is also meant to tell us something special. We are not wrong if we understand this as if Abraham would not have been able to lead such a foreign life in the promised land if he had not learned and practiced waiting for the city of God.

It can also be assumed that God perhaps spoke to His trusted friend Abraham already early about such a city, which has Himself as the master builder and creator. For it is self-evident that one cannot wait for something of which one has no knowledge nor idea at all. Abraham must have either already known from his ancestors about God's intention to found a great city of God on earth one day, which would serve Him as a dwelling place for His human children, or he must have received revelations about it from God Himself, which, however, have not been recorded for us.

The assumption that Abraham by tradition had already known of such a plan of God is therefore not to be rejected completely, because it is found that he actually walked in the footsteps of the believing patriarchs before the flood in the play, who were also nomads like him, while the line of the Cainites shows city builders and culture founders.

It seems to be very significant to us that right from the first murderer of his brother, Cain, it is reported that he built a city and called it after the name of his son Hanoch (= Enoch) (Genesis 4:17). And until this day all the praised achievements of our culture and civilization cost the lives of our brothers. How many victims of flourishing human lives mining alone claims every year is downright

staggering. And what would today's civilization be without coal, ore and iron? Life in the countryside - agriculture and animal husbandry - does not require such hecatombs of human sacrifice. Thus the scripture reports to us that arts in ore and iron as well as the production of musical instruments had their origin in the line of Cain. From this, of course, it must not be concluded that all culture or civilization is ungodly or of the devil. For God Himself, through the "man after His own heart," David, instituted a very rich musical cultus among His people. And once and again the Psalms call for the glorification of God with psalteries and harps, with trumpets and cymbals. And the temple of Solomon was undoubtedly an outstanding example of the noblest architecture, which itself may well be called the noblest of the arts. But we are reminded that all our highly praised cultural activity bears the mark of Cain on its forehead. It has been the enemy's favorite way from the beginning, and it still is today, to get people to anticipate God. In the school of God, however, one must **learn to wait,** otherwise one is of no use to our God, who is a master in waiting and letting wait.

Waiting for God

And what did this so desired waiting of the believing Abraham consist of? This is the practical lesson we have to learn.

Two certain, complementary points of view can be indicated, which form the resting poles, between which God-willed waiting moves. For this waiting is by no means an idle, apathetic or even dull brooding or simulating and speculating.

The first and foremost thing is an unshakable faith that God will, under all circumstances, even if He delays for a long time, still keep His promise, carry out His plan once it has been made and reach the goal He Himself has foreseen beforehand. One could call this the positive side of waiting, in which the whole soul is penetrated in the deepest and clearest way by the conviction that defies all doubt, that the **word of** the **Lord is true and that what He promises** is **certain.** It makes no difference whether there has already been a deposit for what God has promised or not; whether the undertaking has already had a preliminary, initial fulfillment or none at all. Likewise, it does not matter at all to such a waiting faith whether what God promises has any natural probability or cannot be grasped by the human mind at all, i.e. goes beyond all thinking. Only one thing is valid: Has God spoken?

The other, negative side is just as important, namely that one absolutely renounces to make any own effort or endeavor in order to want to hunt down the goal clearly set by God on another way than the one designated by Him and at some other, earlier time than the one set by Him.

Israel was supposed to have a king, but they could not wait until the hour appointed by God for it had struck. So God gave them a king in His wrath. But this did not prevent Him, as we noted above, from giving them His chosen servant in His time to shepherd Jehovah's people. But there came 40 severe years of judgment on the disobedience and rashness. "They have not rejected thee," Jehovah said to Samuel, "but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them" (1 Sam. 8:7).

The Son of God, the Anointed of Jehovah, Jesus Christ, was promised that He would smite His enemies with a rod of iron, like potter's vessels (Ps. 2:7-9). But when the hour came for Him to be given into the hands of His adversaries according to God's premeditated counsel, He could justifiably call out to His overzealous disciple Peter: Do you not think that I could ask the Father and He would send me more than 12 legions of angels? But He had understood the Father and **could wait** until His

God's time had come that He would get all His enemies to the footstool of His feet.

This is the rare art that has lost almost all course in today's Christianity. The church knows that it is called to carry out the reign of God in the world and mankind, i.e. to inherit the kingdom of God, but it **cannot wait.** She has become unwilling to completely renounce the principles of the world and to be content with the fact that she, with her head rejected by the world, must also be rejected and misjudged if she wants to rise with Him, to reign with Him.

The descendants of Abraham were to exercise judgment on the tribes of the Canaanites in His time. But the same Abraham, to whom God gave a brilliant victory over his enemies in the deliverance of his nephew Lot, had to **wait** until the measure of the Amorites was full, had to lead a pilgrim life in the midst of the God-hostile environment, since he would have preferred to have cleared up energetically already in his lifetime with all Canaanite evil and abomination.

These are lessons that people do not like to hear today. The church on earth is pulling out all the stops to clean up the ungodly nature in the world in its own way. It cannot wait for God's time to do so because it has not grasped the importance of maturing **for judgment** and because it has lost the understanding of the fact that God can and will carry evil throughout the ages and make all satanic machinations subservient to His great purposes.

Abraham was waiting for the city whose builder and creator is God. - What does the whole great, weary, troubled world know of Him who is the Head over all? But it will know with adoring amazement when the city of God, the holy heavenly Jerusalem, will have descended from heaven like a adorned bride, whose lamp is the Lamb, and when the One seated on the throne will say: "Behold, I am making all things new! (Rev. 21). And His great words will be followed by even greater deeds.

The eager longing of the groaning creature, among whom we may certainly include the groaning millions of oppressed and oppressed peoples and nations of the earth, will be satisfied, their desire for a regiment of justice and peace on earth will be satisfied. But not by a mortal, imperfect, and very broken church, but by Him who is a Master to help, a righteous God and a Savior. There will be order, exemplary order, super-ds and subordination with great peace in their wake, reigning on earth. **The city of God is coming.** Its builder and creator will lay down His masterpiece on that day. And heaven and earth will rejoice. For God will dwell with men, and they will be His people, and He Himself, their God, will be with them. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:3,4).

It is worth the effort to wait for this city, as Abraham, our father, did. To wait with deep fervor and longing of heart, with unceasing faithful supplication, with quiet blessed peace and joyful hope for the unfailing fulfillment of the faithful promises of the true God. To wait in humble, obedient suffering for the saints on earth and for those who may not know or understand God, whether they are already His true children and sincere servants. To wait in conscious renunciation of present distinction, honor, or recognition among men, even under dishonor, repudiation, and misjudgment on the part of those who love us. The end of such waiting will be joy.

5. Sarah thinks God is faithful

Hebr. 11, 11.12: By faith Sarah also received power to conceive the seed in spite of her age, because she considered Him faithful who had promised it. Therefore children sprang from one body, which died, as the stars of heaven in multitude, and as the sand upon the shore of the sea, which cannot be numbered.

One is surprised to find the name of Sarah here. For had not Sarah, during the visit of those three men (Genesis 18:10-15), listened under the door of the hut to hear what would be said to her master Abraham concerning herself? And when she heard that in her old age motherly happiness was still intended for her, she had laughed incredulously. And when the Lord asked her, "Why does Sarah laugh?" she denied it.

And this Sarah, laughing incredulously and lying to the Lord's face, is drawn into this line of witnesses of faith? How might this happen?

This is a delicious example of the fact that faith is fundamentally a gift of grace from our God and not the result of our own ability or desire. The word: "To whom I am gracious, I am gracious" (Exodus 33:19) retains its meaning. And in matters of faith, nowhere is there room for human boasting or merit.

Our God can also cope with an incredulously laughing and then denying Sarah, if He chastises her with His serious, punishing: Yes, you laughed! There her guilt is exposed unsparingly and before witnesses, her own nature is judged by the word of the Lord, the sharp, two-edged sword. The Lord cannot let His chosen ones get away with anything, since He is holy and true. The flesh must be judged.

And only after all carnal, self-willed rebellion against the great promise of God in Sarah has been silenced, may what is written here be testified of her: By faith she received power to conceive in spite of her age, because she considered him faithful who had promised it.

This was the great, important lesson she had to learn: to consider Him faithful who had made the promise.

One only needs to put oneself in the position of the great, omnipotent God, who in the full consciousness of His omnipotence bends down to His human children and opens His mouth to things, which He has decided and well considered in wisdom and love, in order to then measure how much He must care that at least His chosen ones regard Him as faithful, i.e. trust Him that He can and will do everything, what He promises.

A small, narrow, limited God, whom I can experience! A great, exuberantly glorious God, as He puts Himself before me in the word of promise! That is why many children of God are so sadly narrow, because they think they have to limit themselves in the things of God to what belongs to their personal life of salvation and its care.

In the 12th verse, the Word of God draws the instructive conclusion from the result of the divine procedure with the mother of the promised heir: "Therefore from one body, even from a dead body, children sprang forth like the stars of heaven in multitude and like the sand on the shore of the sea, which cannot be numbered. It was a great thing that God wanted to do to His chosen handmaid, and He did it. She might justly have already sung a hymn of praise, such as we later hear from the lips of the Virgin of Nazareth: "Great things have He done for me, the Mighty One, whose name is

Holy" (Luk 1:49). Although she was probably no more aware of the full significance of her experience than her later daughter from David's tribe.

We were allowed to point out above (at verse 8 and 9) that God also knows how to make the hesitation of His faithful in the execution of His commands serviceable. A quarter of a century had passed over Sarah, who was then already 65 years old. All natural hope for offspring had completely disappeared.

The agreement that Sarah made with her lord and husband concerning her Egyptian maid and whose fruit Ishmael had become, this sad result of the amalgamation of faith and own ability - makes this quite clear.

But what neither Sarah nor Abraham had intended nor could have intended, the Almighty achieved: His chosen ones had reached where He wanted and had to have them, in order to now be able to express the mystery of His miraculous working, namely that He is a God above all gods, the Almighty, who can still beget and bring forth life even from death.

This great basic law of divine salvation comes into effect here for the first time. Significantly, it happens just there, where it is necessary for the first time to call forth the promised seed. Isaac, Sarah's son, was by no means "the" promised seed. But because he was supposed to be an unmistakable forerunner and shadow of the future promised one, the Christ, the great principle had to come to the fore and be expressed right in his birth, which later constitutes the basic tone of the entire redemption through Christ, namely "life out of death" (cf. Rom. 11, 15; Eph. 2, 1.4-6).

So already here the folly of those is judged who think that death is more powerful than life and that death forms a barrier in the humanity bound and enslaved by it, before which even the Son of God must turn back with His eternal thoughts of salvation. It is hardly believable, but only too true, how deeply in believing circles the idea has taken root that for people who have died once (but especially twice) all hope of salvation is cut off (cf. Rev. 20:14: second death). To believe that God's grace can ever benefit even those who have died unbelievingly is considered a fundamental false doctrine. And this with children of Abraham by faith! So deeply lie glorious, fundamental truths of God buried under the rubble of dogmatic traditions and usury. But thank God, life is and remains more powerful than death and all truths, however deeply buried and however solemnly sealed, will one day celebrate their resurrection.

Here now a twofold seed is mentioned, which sprouted "from a single and indeed dead body", namely a seed like the stars of the sky in quantity and again like the sand at the shore of the sea, which cannot be counted. Certainly, both images have in common the idea of the great, innumerable multitude, which sprouted from the "one and only dead body" and still sprouts again and again. Because the end of the sprouting is not to be thought at all yet, if at all ever.

The scripture clearly says that the children of the resurrection will neither be free nor be set free, and therefore there will be no natural descendants (Luk 20:34-36). But this does not say the least against the possibility of spiritual fruitfulness, i.e. the bringing forth of "life from the dead" in future ages precisely through "children of the resurrection". If believers already have a spiritual fatherhood in this world, a capacity to beget and nurture spiritual children (1 Cor. 4:15), how should not those who have attained full life through the resurrection of the dead be granted a much wider and richer fertility to produce spiritual children "from the dead"?

But we think that here not only the uncountable number of the children who sprouted from the dead body is referred to. We think that also the two used and different images want to tell us something different.

When God first promised Abraham, after he had separated from Lot, all the land as far as he could see to the north, south, east and west, for his eternal possession, He added: "And I will make your seed like the dust of the earth (or: dust of the land); if a man can number the dust of the earth, so shall your seed also be numbered" (Genesis 13:16).

God uses the same language again later with Jacob: "And your seed shall be as the dust of the earth" (Genesis 28:14). But He spoke differently to Isaac, as He confirmed to him the promise He had given Abraham before. With him it says: "I will multiply your seed like the stars of heaven" (Genesis 26:4). This phrase does not occur in Jacob.

So we have then three different images in the whole before us: seed like the dust of the land, like the sand of the sea and like the stars of the sky. The first designation draws the narrowest circle, which at first encloses only the promised land (and its dust). The second encompasses the sand of the sea, i.e., the vast, great world of nations on earth as it dwells by all the seas. The third reaches up into the regions above the earth and speaks of a heavenly seed that cannot be numbered. What riches, what fullness of promised blessing and life in these three simple images alone! And all this has sprouted from a single, and indeed dead body! What is the meaning of all that is dead in the face of such a God?

6. faith looks beyond death to God's purposes

Hebr. 11, 13-16: These all died in faith without having received the promised things, but only saw them from afar and welcomed them and confessed that they were strangers and without citizenship on earth; (14:) for those who say these things indicate that they are looking for a fatherland. (15:) And if they had thought of that from which they had departed, they would have had time to return. (16:) But now they seek a better, namely the heavenly. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

These verses form a somewhat surprising insertion. They interrupt the calm course of the begun sequence in a striking way. The presentation has not yet finished with Abraham, the actual "father of the faithful", there comes this insertion with its remarkable opening: These all died in faith...
At first glance, one would be tempted to suspect a shift in the factual arrangement of the material. But there is no reason to really assume such a shift.
And on further reflection, the apparent disruption and interruption of the context appears not only as a thoughtful but very instructive highlighting of an important truth.

The basic tone on which this intercalation is tuned is audible enough from the first sentence: These all have died in **faith**. In addition, immediately before, there was talk about the "one and only dead body", from which an innumerable seed sprouted and still sprouts. And immediately after that (in v. 17) the account continues with Abraham, who was ready to give the heir of the promise by faith into death, because he counted on God being able to raise even from the dead.

So we are not mistaken in the assumption that this strange insertion wants to emphasize with special emphasis that **only the faith,** which does not have to do with what is experienced, with what

is acquired and experienced, but with God's promises encompassing heaven and earth, does not need to be afraid of death. Death, seen from close up, has a terrifying appearance. Death, seen from the vantage point of the great promises of God that encompass the eternities, shrinks into nothingness. It all depends on the point of view.

So here again an admonition to step out of the narrow circle of only personal experience of salvation, where one piously moves almost only around oneself, and to go up to the height of divine goals and thoughts, which do not revolve around our person, but which have their center and starting point in the "promised seed", in the heavenly fatherland, in the city of God.
By the "promised", of which it is said that those who died in faith - among whom Abraham may certainly also be understood, although his life of faith is still spoken of later - did not receive it, but only saw and welcomed it from afar, we will probably have to understand first and foremost the heavenly fatherland, the firm immovable kingdom (as it is called in Hebr. 12, 28) according to the entire following context.
But this must not prevent us from thinking at the same time of the promised "seed", the heir of the kingdom and heir over all, Jesus Christ. For without Him there will certainly be no immovable - kingdom nor the sending down of the city of God prepared in heaven. From the fact that Paul refers the expression **"the" seed** (Gal. 3, 16) definitely to the Christ of God, it can be seen that the faithful look of Abraham and those who died like him in faith was directed beyond Isaac to the One who was to come. As Jesus' own mouth testifies in another scripture: "Abraham, your father, rejoiced that he should see my day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56).

There we again encounter the wonderful way of faith oriented to God's promise, to fix our gaze firmly and securely on ages stretching far beyond: on the great final goals of God with the "seed," the heavenly country, the city built by God, without even dealing with the question of one's own happiness in the meantime, or clinging to it.
But what do we have to think of the **fatherland** mentioned in verse 14, to which the predicates "better" and "heavenly" are added? As the most frequent and most common answer to it we are told briefly: This is the heaven itself. How readily this answer has been received and inwardly processed in Christian thought and feeling, so that the idea has virtually become second nature to most Christians, is eloquently testified to by countless songs and poems in which the keynote is a longing for heaven and a great willingness to leave the earth for ever.

One ignores quite calmly the fact that neither from the mouth of God nor in the speeches and prophetic references of the holy men of God in the Old Testament even the slightest trace or suggestion is to be found of it that the promised **country** and **kingdom** lie in heaven and are to be attained only there. On the contrary, the promise is repeated to Abraham and his seed in the clearest possible way one after the other: **"This land** which you see, on which you lie" or "which I swore to your fathers to give them" - this shall be your inheritance, "the land of the Canaanites, Amorites" etc. (Genesis 13:15; 15:18-20; 28:13).
Based on this, also e.g. Stephen emphasizes through the Holy Spirit, since he emphasizes the position of faith of the father Abraham (Acts 7, 3 ff.), that God did not give him an inheritance in the land, not even a foot wide, and yet promised to give it to him as property and to his seed after him, since he did not have a child yet. (It does not occur to Stephen for a moment to say: God fulfilled this to Abraham by taking him to the beautiful heaven!)

But, some people certainly object, is it not clearly written here in v. 16 that they were looking for the **heavenly** fatherland? With this it is clear that heaven and only heaven can be meant.
This looks compelling, but it is not at all. For we have already indicated above that these promises

are not only about the **land,** but also about the immovable **kingdom** as well as the great, glorious **city of** God.
Now God's kingdom is also called the "kingdom of heaven" or the kingdom of heaven once and again in the scriptures (e.g. Matth. 5, 3; 8, 11; 13,11). But the same scripture teaches unequivocally that this kingdom of heaven is by no means destined for heaven, nor is it to be established in heaven, but on **earth.** Just as the whole of Christianity prays countless times in the Lord's Prayer: Thy - kingdom come. Your will be done on **earth as it is in** heaven.

The King and heir of this future kingdom has temporarily withdrawn into heaven and sat down at the right hand of His Father, waiting until He may come again and establish His Messianic kingdom on earth and give the power and dominion under (not in) heaven to His holy and glorious ones (Dan. 7:22,27).

The great goal of God is to bring about heavenly
Conditions on earth.

Furthermore, the Scriptures testify that the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, will be prepared in heaven, but is not destined for heaven, but will be sent down from heaven as a tabernacle of God with the children of men (Rev. 21:1-3, 10-14).
Thus it is irrefutably shown that it is nothing with the attempt to read out of the word "heavenly" the meaning "situated in heaven" or "destined for heaven". The heavenly **King is destined** for the earth and its inhabitants; His heavenly kingdom no less, and His glorious **residence city** likewise.

And what will then become of the better, the heavenly fatherland? Well, nothing less than the first **beginning and dawn of** the renewal and transformation of this poor earth and its peoples, still oppressed by the curse and groaning under all kinds of mismanagement.
The great goal of God for the earth and its inhabitants is the bringing about of heavenly conditions, the elimination of sin and death, the restoration of divine, perfect order and tranquility, the abolition of all woe and suffering under the whole heaven.
And because those witnesses of faith believed their God and neither got involved in plans to improve the world nor prepared a "beautiful heaven" for themselves for undisturbed enjoyment, God is not ashamed to be called their God. As it was already said to Moses: I am the God of Abraham, the God of Jsaac, the God of Jacob (Ex 3:15; Luk 20:37).

7) Abraham's faith also credits God with raising the dead.

Hebr. 11, 17-19: In faith Abraham offered Isaac when he was tempted, and offered the only begotten, he who had received the promises, to whom it was said, In Isaac shall a seed be called unto thee. He counted on the fact that God was able to raise even from the dead, from where he received him again in a parable.

The course of the exposition, interrupted by the interposition in verse 13-16, is now calmly resumed, as if the Scripture wished us to understand clearly that for the calm execution of the divine thoughts and purposes with His elect there may well be delay and sojourn, but never abandonment or remission.
We have been told that "these all died in faith," that is, that the greatest obstacle in the eyes of men, and one which is insurmountable to men, death, has intervened without their having obtained the fulfillment of that which was promised to them. But one recognizes well that in God's eyes and

also in the eyes of these people of God death does not enjoy at all the high reputation which mankind has so readily conceded to it as the great obstacle. What power and importance has been attributed to death, even in the believing community!
On the one hand, death has been ascribed redemptive powers which, according to Scripture, are never its own, but which belong exclusively to the prince of life. People have gotten so far out of their depth that it has become quite common to write over the New Testament references to the imminent coming of the Lord quite calmly to death, so that innumerable Christians no longer have any understanding at all for the significance of the coming of the Lord Jesus, because they have been taught to regard their own death as the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Lord's return.
On the other hand, it is taught in all seriousness that once a man has died, all and every possibility of bringing salvation to him is cut off forever. With the bodily death of the sinner, who dies in his sins, all and every hope of salvation par excellence ceases. Even the "prince of life" (Acts 3:*15)* could no longer help such a person. Until his death, such a person is the object of God's searching and soliciting love and grace in Christ. With his bodily death, this love, as far as he is concerned, turns into the inevitable, never-ending wrath of God. This would then result, for example, in this not so rare situation: An unconverted person is murdered by another godless evildoer. From that moment on, the murdered person is only the object of God's punishing wrath, a child of hell and never-ending torment. The murderer, on the other hand, remains, merely because he is still alive, the object of God's love and grace! But as soon as he dies, the love of the Son of God can neither reach him nor save him!
Now dying is a very serious matter, especially unrepentant dying, and no one should think that he should take it lightly. But it does no service to the truth to exaggerate the power and importance of death, just to make unrepentant sinners afraid and to drive them to a quick conversion at any cost, at the expense of the overwhelming power of life of Him who put a stop to the one who had the power of death and who swallowed up death in His victory (Hebr. 2, 14; 1 Cor. 15, 54) and who will completely dismiss it as the last enemy from the whole creation of His and our Father. The serious, terrible truth that it is terrible to fall into the hands of the living God, since our God is also a consuming fire, and that it is set for man to die once, (but after that judgment (Heb. 10:31; 12:29; 9:27), **needs no exaggeration for its confirmation.** Least of all an exaggeration that is done at the expense of the omnipotence and glory of Him who killed death by His death and of whom it is written: "Just as they (men as a whole) all die in Adam, so they (the same whole) will all be made alive in Christ (1 Cor. 15:22).
In addition, the Scripture expressly declares that Christ died and came to life again for this purpose, that He is Lord over the dead and the living (Rom. 14:9). It cannot be expressed more clearly in human language that Christ **also has the authority to enter the realm of the dead at any time and to work there according to all His ability and pleasure (**1 Pet **3:**18,19; **4:6; Rev** 1:17,18). It is a deeply deplorable arbitrariness that one has allowed oneself to limit this His unlimited authority to the effect that He is Lord over the dead, however, but only in order to finally hand them over to the second death at the "last judgment". Then the whole rule of the prince of life over the death would mean nothing else than a finite **servant service for the prince of darkness,** to whom he hands over uncounted millions of deceased to endless agony and torture.
But here (Hebr. 11) one breathes a completely different air. Here the whole presentation is carried by a calm certainty of victory even in the face of death, as far as the triumphant execution of all great thoughts of God is concerned.
For these people of faith, who lived their life of faith from the power of divine promises, death was also an enemy overcome, but never a cause to waver in their trust that God would absolutely and without fail bring forth everything He promised.
It is testified to Abraham that he passed the most difficult imaginable test of his faith victoriously when God tempted him (put him to the test). We may well say that God was quite sure of His cause

in this case. He knew what a precious life of faith had been produced in His friend Abraham. He Himself had begotten it in him and nourished it with ever more extensive promises, and He knew well how the pure gold would prove itself in the hottest fire.
But it is worthwhile for us to investigate the way in which Abraham had become such a victorious confidence, which did not shrink even from the death of the only begotten, but simply reckoned that God could make alive even from the dead.
On the way of experiential knowledge this had not become to him. Until then, there had not been a single case of a dead person being raised. For the explanation of this clear testimony of the Scriptures that Abraham counted on the fact that God could also raise from the dead, we have no other way out than the assumption that this friend of God, who received from his God ever richer promises, the fulfillment of which could only lie in the far distance, gradually became more and more certain in the conclusion that there could finally be no other way for Jehovah to accomplish all the great things, of which He spoke to His servant, ~s by **raising the dead.** It was certain for him: The living God can and will never let any death hinder Him in the execution of what He has planned.
To what extent this must actually have been the case with Abraham becomes quite clear to us from the character of the sacrifice he was prepared to make when he was tempted by God. As far as the Scriptures give us information about it, God had not indicated with a syllable before that He would demand something from Abraham one day, in which in reality only a thought of God should be reflected, which had moved His heart before the foundation of the world, namely the love intention of **the surrender of the only begotten for** a lost world. That God from the beginning had it in mind with Abraham to bring him so far that he was ready for it inevitably, cannot be doubtful to us probably. But He had told him nothing about it before.
And when the hour had come when God could dare to make such a request to His servant Abraham, it was to His indescribable joy that He had completely succeeded in His experiment. There was at last a man of faith who clearly reflected this deepest thought of God's love, without suspecting that God had all along intended only to bring it forth in him through the creative, life-producing word of prophecy, transforming it into God's image.
This was a result that not pious experiences, blissful feelings, exuberant meditations had achieved in Abraham, but his constant faithful contact, his persistent resting in the unbreakable promises of his God.
One thinks one can almost hear the tone of triumphant joy in the words with which the angel Jehovah falls into the arms of the father Abraham, who has already drawn the knife to slaughter the son: Because you have done this, I have sworn by myself! This was a masterpiece of divine education in the school of faith. The result was not an inert dreamer floating in the clouds, but a man of God who, without suspecting it, had grasped as if by instinct the deepest and most wonderful thing in the heart and nature of his God**: the mystery of the love that gives the Son (Rom. 8:**32).
The addition "from where he also received him again in a parable" only confirms the striking correspondence between the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham and the offering of the only begotten by the father. For **three** days the sorely tried Abraham walked beside his son who had already been slain in spirit. But **on the third day** God gave him back his Isaac, **as it were made alive from the dead.** Since the whole action should be considered only as a **shadow image** - like e.g. also the sinking of Joseph into the pit by his brothers or his later elevation to the right of the Pharao over whole Egypt -, a real slaughter of Isaac was not thought with God. The offering by the father was morally accomplished in an absolutely sufficient way. And so God was now able to give him back the sacrificed son as alive from the dead, **an image of His own great Isaac,** who was really given into death, in order to be raised on the third day just as really and bodily from the dead by the glory of the Father. And Abraham stands before us as one who did not miscalculate in his God when he trusted Him with the greatest thing imaginable, namely that He was also able to make alive from the dead. But if God is able to do this, and that without any barrier and deduction from **all** death,

then there is **no** more **insurmountable** obstacle for the **final victorious realization of all God's thoughts with His whole mankind.**

8. In the face of death, Isaac and Jacob and Joseph look to the future of their people.

Hebr. 11, 20: **In faith Isaac also blessed Jacob and Esau concerning the future.**

First of all, it is noticeable that very little is said here about **Isaac.** However, also in Genesis the report of Isaac's deeds, wanderings and experiences takes a relatively small, modest space. Of Abraham deal full thirteen chapters of that book, of Isaac only three and some verses of the fourth. The history of Jacob then again takes up ten chapters and that of Joseph again as much as that of Abraham. This is all the more remarkable, since in Isaac we have before us one of the clearest and richest models of the Messiah.

It is indeed very delicious what we are told about **Isaac**, namely that he had dug up again the wells which his father Abraham had dug, but which had been buried by the envious inhabitants of the country, and had made a number of new wells in addition. This was an exceedingly blessed and profitable activity, to leave in his footsteps living springs of water at which men and cattle could feast and refresh themselves. This is better than to erect the most beautiful art buildings as monuments to supposed great deeds of conquest and subjugation of enemies. Such a way reminds us of the word of the Lord Jesus: "He who believes in me, as the Scripture says, from his body will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). And if there will be nothing more to report about us for posterity than that we have dug wells that gave water of life at every turn, then we are well off, even if no proud marble monument "immortalizes" us (?).
Now here it is only recorded what he has said about his two sons concerning the future. He has blessed them both, it is clearly written here. So also Esau, this despiser of his firstborn? Yes, also the Esau. Everything that Scripture, especially the 12th chapter of this letter, has to say about Esan, who later, when he wanted to inherit the blessing (of the firstborn), had to discover that it was irretrievably lost to him, although he desired it with tears, remains right.

It is important that we learn to make the right use of this serious story. It is certainly wrong and not in accordance with the simple meaning of the Scriptures to count Esau among the damned or lost without further ado or to cite him as an example of this. His father neither cursed him nor killed him nor cast him out of his house nor denied him his filial status. Esau alone has forfeited his **birthright**, and that forever. Even his father Isaac could not get it back for him, as unmistakable as his intention was to do so.
Esau is and remains blessed by his father Isaac, but with a lesser blessing than his brother Jacob. This must be recognized and accepted. And if one wants to make a practical application of this to the life of faith in our days, then one must be careful not to carry something into it that is not in it. It is quite inadmissible to see or portray Esau as a damned man who is hopelessly lost. But children of God should be warned, as it is also done in Hebr. 12, not to miss the grace of God, which leads to bitterness, disturbances and stains, but by no means to final damnation or expulsion from the house of God.

Verse 21: **In faith Jacob blessed each of Joseph's sons as he died, and worshipped, leaning on his staff.**
Here it is to be noticed again clearly that with the establishment of this delicious row of faith witnesses another spirit than the human one has been decisive and driving and that also this New

Testament author has spoken, driven by the Holy Spirit and not only by his own spirit. For without question, the writer of this letter was certainly an Israelite, a Hebrew according to his ethnicity. No born Gentile was able to write such a doctrinal letter as this letter to the Hebrews.

to write. And then we must ask ourselves whether a true Israelite, if he wrote this out of his own impulse, would have found nothing worth reporting in the life of the progenitor of the children of Israel other than the act of blessing the two sons of Joseph? Was it not then father Jacob of whom the prophet Hosea testifies, "He fought with the angel, he cried and pleaded with him, and was victorious; at Bethel he found him" (Hos. 12:5)? If that momentous faith struggle and victory was deemed worthy of record there, then a repetition was also warranted here, as well as it is with Father Abraham in this chapter. But the Spirit of God follows an order and grouping which He is most definitely aware of, though we do not see through it. He omits what is not to be mentioned, and inserts what we might hardly have thought worth mentioning.

The thought dominating all these verses seems to be just that from that interposition in vv. 13-16: "These all died in faith, not having received that which was promised." Thus Isaac stands before us as one who is near to departing. So here Jacob quite clearly as one dying. And in the next example it is Joseph who, at his end, remembers the departure of the children of Israel and gives instructions because of his bones. The main emphasis should therefore be on the fact that all these people of faith in the face of the approaching death did not think so much about their own lot and fate after death, but their spirit lived and moved just then in the great promises of God concerning His kingdom thoughts with His people and the nations of the earth.
Things were strange at that meeting of the venerable patriarch **Jacob,** also called **Israel** (Genesis 32:29; 48:8), with the two sons of his favorite Joseph, as we are told in Genesis 48. First, he adopts Ephraim and Manasseh, "born to you in Egypt," as his own, "like Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine." He then embraces and kisses them both. Joseph then took both of them, Ephraim in his right hand, on Israel's left, and Manasseh in his left hand, on Israel's right, since Manasseh was the firstborn and he wanted to bestow upon him the blessing of the firstborn from his father. But Israel stretched out his right hand and placed it on Ephraim's head, but his left hand on Manasseh's head, and with hands thus clasped he blessed them. That is, as ancient rabbis have noted, the blessing of the two occurred under the sign of the cross formed by the two folded arms of Jacob.
Thus the dying prophet of Jehovah put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh, as the Scriptures note. Now, as the later course of history makes clear to us, the leadership of Ephraim became very disastrous to the whole house of Israel. Jeroboam was an Ephraimite, and it was he who not only alienated the ten northern tribes from the legitimate royal house of David, but who made the whole newly formed kingdom of Israel sinful through the calf service he established in Dan and Bethel to keep the people from visiting the only legitimate temple and altar at Jerusalem (1 Kings 12).
This is the deep rift, that "damage of Joseph" which has remained unhealed to this day and which became the subject of one of the most delicious prophecies of the prophet Ezekiel. According to it, Jehovah will take the scattered children of Israel from among the heathen, among whom they have come, and gather them again from everywhere, and bring them into their own land, and make them one people upon the mountains of Israel; and they shall all have but one king, neither shall they henceforth be two nations, nor divided into two kingdoms.... "And my servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. And they shall walk in my statutes, and observe my judgments, and do after them" (Ezek. 37:*21-25).*
Thus, even if the prophetic gaze of the dying patriarch saw the "cross" coming that would result from Ephraim's leadership over all Israel, this in no way prevented him from nevertheless carrying out the recognized will of Jehovah to bless the younger over the elder.
And he worshipped, leaning on his staff. There is much talk in the word of God about the staff of

the men of God. Jacob remembered at Jabbok how he had gone over that brook and had only "that staff," and now it had become two hosts (Genesis 32:11). In the hand of Moses, the rod of God was a strange instrument for the execution of divine judgments on the one hand and divine help-through on the other. With his outstretched staff Moses called forth the frogs and gnats that plagued Egypt, and with outstretched staff he parted the waters of the Red Sea so that the people passed through dry-footed. With his staff Moses struck the rock at the word of the Lord, and water flowed out to water all Israel, and the barren staff of Aaron greened, blossomed, and bore ripe almonds in a single night. And how beautifully the royal psalmist spoke of the rod and staff of Jehovah, his faithful shepherd (Ps. 23).
Thus the weary body of the dying Archfather rested on his staff, on which he leaned in grateful adoration, a memorial of the marvelous ways that the God of his fathers also guided him throughout his life.

Verse 22: **In faith Joseph remembered at his end the exodus of the children of Israel and gave instructions because of his bones.**
The life of Joseph, so rich in exemplary features, who was treated so shamefully and disgracefully by his brothers, the whole house of Jacob, but then became the savior of the same family that had misjudged and sold him; who was counted among the evildoers and yet was completely innocent, but then was elevated to the right hand of the majesty of Pharaoh - all this is passed over here with chaste silence, although it could certainly have been used in a worthwhile way. Also with him again only the one moment is emphasized, as with his **end the** clear view was given to him into the distant **future of his people.** The thought of one's own, purely subjective salvation does not lie in the field of vision at all. This should be an effective defense against the delusion that there can be no other, higher occupation for the children of faith than that of their own salvation. Let us see here any clear traces of such a pious-egoistic way! Were these people of God therefore indifferent to their salvation? Truly not. But they had recognized that the God who had redeemed and preserved them had higher interests than their personal salvation and preservation, and these interests were their separating thoughts, in which they lived and weaved.
Joseph commemorated the exodus of the children of Israel. And he had been the man appointed by God, who had successfully used all his powerful influence with Pharaoh for the settlement of Jacob and his sons in the land of Gosen in Egypt. His life's task had been to create a secure existence, space and opportunity for a prosperous national development for the now growing and multiplying lineage of his brothers after the flesh. And Joseph had enough statesmanlike insight to recognize in the evening of his life that Israel's national history was still in its infancy, that the critical years of its development were still in the offing. How obvious it would have been for him to make his political testament in Egypt in the sense that he would have given the greatest possible support to the - further prosperous development of his fellow tribesmen in the land of their adoption. Here he could be something to them by his enormous influence still after his death. The threads of Egyptian politics were in his hands. It would probably have been easy for him to arrange that after his passing his brothers were provided for by privileges and vested rights in a way that would have secured his lasting memory as one of the greatest benefactors of his people.
But in faith his view is directed to something completely opposite. In the spirit of prophecy, he sees his people destined to leave the land where he had called them to settle. He sees them set as executors of the divine judgment on the people who will oppress them. He sees that the promises given to the fathers cannot be "spiritually" reinterpreted to Egypt, but that they go to Canaan and have to find their fulfillment in Canaan.
What difficulties and tribulations this would entail for his people could certainly not be hidden from him; he was too much of a statesman for that. But all these considerations did not have weight enough to make him waver in his faithful expectation that Jehovah would carry out His word and

His oath in great faithfulness and accuracy. Israel must and would leave Egypt and go to the promised land from which the fathers had been driven by hardship to Egypt. But Egypt was not the destination of God's ways with His people.
And he gave instructions because of his bones. We read about this in Genesis 50:25, that Joseph took an oath from his brothers, the sons of Israel, saying, "When God will visit you, you shall bring up my bones from here with you."
After what Joseph did in obedience to the command of his dying father Jacob in the same field, when he not only had the latter's bones embalmed with great pomp by Egyptian physicians, but also brought them to Canaan with a brilliant retinue of Pharaoh's servants and buried them in the cave of the field of Machpelah (Genesis 50), one can hardly interpret his testamentary disposition of his own bones in any other way than as a personal, clear testimony to his own hope. He was confident that God would not only give His people the promised land as an eternal possession until the great day of resurrection, but that he himself would also have a share in such inheritance and possession at the end of days.

9. acting out of faith with Moses' parents and with Moses

Heb 11:23: In **faith Moses was kept hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that he was a fine child, and they did not fear the king's commandment.**

With these words, the account moves on to a third main group of witnesses to the faith. The first one covered the time of the forefathers, from Abel to the flood. The second concerned Abraham and his lineage until the death of Joseph. This third one begins with the parents of Moses and ends with Rahab the harlot, i.e. it covers the time from the bondage of Israel in Egypt to the conquest of Jericho. Thus a clear plan emerges in the whole arrangement, which is determined by the large time periods in the household of our God. Under the most diverse circumstances, in all kinds of situations of life, the living word of divine revelation proves to be powerful to produce faith and to work great things through faith.

In the verse 23 before us, we are first told about a seemingly small, but in its consequences and effects highly significant deed of a believing parental couple. Amram and Jochebed, both from the house of Levi, are reported to us as the parents of Moses, the "man of God" (Genesis 26:59).

It was a "new king" who arose in Egypt, who "knew nothing of Joseph," as we read in Exodus 1:8. This refers to a new and indeed foreign (i.e., Assyrian) dynasty, according to the words of the prophet Isaiah *(52:4):* "My people went down to Egypt of old, that they might be strangers there, and the Assyrian oppressed them without a cause." For such a foreign ruler, of course, all the great state-preserving measures of a viceroy, such as Joseph the Hebrew had been, had no meaning, so that he would have treated his fellow tribesmen kindly. On the contrary, at the sight of the quite extraordinary increase of Israelite settlers in the land of Gosen, fear and apprehension seized him that these colonists "might, if war arose against us, go over to our enemies and fight against us."

Thus, "prudent measures" were then taken against them to curb their sinister increase, and these increased to the cruel command to throw all the newborn babes of the Hebrews into the water (Exodus 1:10, 22).

But the pious daughter of Levi believed the words of Jehovah, which she must have heard without them being reported to us; because the faith, of which is spoken here, has always only divine revelation as its source. Of some outstanding servants of God it is reported to us in detail what God had opened to their parents before the birth of the babies about them for a sign and testimony So of Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist and of Jesus himself. We do not know anything about what God foretold to the parents about the baby Moses. But God must have spoken to them, otherwise they could not believe and act in faith.

When the baby was born and they recognized him as what they had been told before, as a "fine child", they confidently disobeyed the king's command, remembering that God must be obeyed more than men. They also experienced the precious effect of this faithful action - the liberation from all fear of man.

Mere natural love for her child or the most touching devotion to the "fine child" could at most increase this fear of the murderous enemy, never free her from it. Only faith could do that.

Yes, when it was no longer possible to conceal the vigorously developing child, this faith was even able, in a subtle irony, even if the parents were probably unaware of it, to entrust the little darling to the deadly element into which, according to the king's command, all Hebrew babies were to be thrown. That which was to be the ruin was transformed in the hand of faith into a means of salvation.

Verse 24-26: By faith Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter; he would rather suffer adversity with the people of God than have temporal pleasure of **sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked on the reward.**

The infant thus miraculously preserved and drawn out of the water (of death) has grown into a mature man, in whom the almighty and truthful God of Israel now performs a masterpiece of His marvelous ability, through His firm prophetic word, to destroy all the attempts of the enemy and to make everything serviceable to Himself for the execution of His own great thoughts in judgment and grace.

That "wise measure" of the cruel Assyrian, which was intended to bring about the escape of the children of Israel from Egypt, led to the fact that the very "fine child", whose life was threatened along with the others, was raised by Pharaoh's daughter, as it were at the king's own table and at the king's expense, to become a young man and a man, the one who was chosen by the God of the Hebrews to lead His people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.

So also in the Great Satan, the archetype of that murderous Assyrian, by his attack on the life of the "fine child" of the virgin from David's house - on Jesus - only caused that life and immortality could be brought to light by the gospel of the great savior God.

And now Moses, the one "drawn out of the water", has become great. Perhaps we may take this in a double sense: great, i.e. matured and matured in years, having reached full manhood; in addition, great in the sense of influential, respected, an acknowledged important, highly inclined and excellently educated man, a called leader of the people.

Thus the moment had come when he had to make the most important decision of his life. Undoubtedly, Pharaoh's daughter had made him the offer to be declared by formal adoption as her own son and thus as a rightful claimant to the crown of Egypt. She probably knew his Hebrew origin, and it was certainly not concealed from him by his own mother, who was given to him as a wet nurse. The assumption is more than probable that it was his mother from whose lips Moses learned in early childhood the words of divine revelation which had been given to his parents even before his birth.

The words of Stephen (Acts *7:25):* "But he thought that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation through his hand" can hardly be interpreted in any other way than that Moses himself was thoroughly convinced of his own divine calling to be the savior of his people. And he did so **by faith, i.**e. not out of fanatical love for his oppressed fellow tribesmen, not out of deep-rooted national opposition to the foreign, Assyrian dynasty, but because the word of Jehovah had come to him and had been received by him faithfully and obediently.

In all these examples, the Scriptures have to do exclusively with how the revealed word has proved to be faith-effective. **God has spoken - otherwise no faith.** And people have let God speak and have given Him alone the right; thereby they became and were granted what is testified here.

If Moses had not had before him the offer of Pharaoh's daughter to be her son, he could not have refused it. And if he had not had a clear, definite revelation from God that he was called by Jehovah to do something else, he would never have been able to make such a choice and decision.

And what he had received about it as the word of God had sunk into well-prepared soil. The pious Jochebed had taken care of that. And although the boy and youth was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, although human knowledge and human ability might have piled up mountains high with him, the wonderful germinating and driving power of the seed of the divine word sown early in his heart could not be crushed or destroyed by it. When Moses "grew up," there was a tremendous breaking through of the creative life forces that had lain dormant in his heart and mind for decades, but now rose victoriously from the depths with elemental force and enabled him to utter a **refusal**, to make a **choice, and to make an appreciation that** gave his life an entirely different turn, filling, and meaning.

What did this step do in the eyes of the people? Who can measure it? How moving must have been the parting from the high woman who had been so proud of the "son" whom she had drawn out of

the water and whose career as a ruler she had so brilliantly envisioned with good reason! And his youthful comrades, the companions in his studies and in all the noble and high aspirations of his brilliant, outstanding mind - how they will have grabbed their foreheads and asked themselves whether he must not have completely lost his mind, the man who could reject such a career and prefer to be considered a member of the outlawed race of Hebrew slaves. That was social and political suicide!

But what did all these considerations of human prudence accomplish? What did all the considerations of the pleading desires of Pharaoh's daughter mean? They could not obscure the shining truth that he was a chosen son of the chosen people of the most high and living God. And through this people, the seed of Abraham, the friend of God, all the generations of the earth were to be blessed.

His own heart might tell him as loudly as it wished that he, as ruler in Egypt, would be in a position to put an immediate end to the oppression of his brothers according to the flesh and to create for them humane conditions of existence, even to secure for them a leading role in the social and political development of the Pharaonic empire. How close to his mind was the consideration that in the providence and guidance of God his whole education from childhood had been in one direction, to make him capable for the Egyptian royal throne, to enable him to become the founder of a new, outstanding dynasty.

But like fog before the sun, all these thought formations, however plausible, had to give way in the face of the clear realization that Almighty God had a mighty task for him - not to raise Israel to a higher level in Egypt, nor to make an excellent ruler for Egypt**, but God's purpose with Israel pointed out of Egypt,** meant unsparing judgment for the people they had to serve, and aimed at laying the foundation for Jehovah's kingdom under the whole heaven on the soil of the land promised and promised to the fathers.

There is talk about the "trouble of the people of God". Who were the "people of God" at that time? None other than the morally and religiously deeply sunk Hebrew tribe, a bunch of hated and feared, oppressed and despised slaves. **And to share their shame, their misery, their deep humiliation, Moses preferred to the temporal pleasure of sin!** Such a miraculous work is achieved by **faith**, which has not yet experienced anything, felt or sensed anything, but which only **counts on divine promises as the only realities, which learns to see with God's eyes and to measure with God's measures.**

And what is meant by "temporal indulgence in sin"? There is no reason at all to consider Moses a dissolute or dissolute bon vivant or lecher, whom his faith would have lifted out of the depths of immorality. There are "temporal pleasures of sin" which need not have such an aftertaste. A man can live his profession, his family, his art or other high, noble goals, but if he lives all this not **in God** and **for God,** but **only for himself,** his whole life becomes sin.

Verse 26 speaks of the **"reproach of Christ",** which Moses by faith valued higher than Egypt's treasures. Some might ask: But what did Moses know, what could he know about the reproach of Christ, who should appear only after more than one millennium? This is another example of the peculiarity of the word of divine revelation, which cannot be measured by human standards. Of this the apostle Peter says a clear word: "After this blessedness the prophets have sought and searched, who prophesied of the grace that was done unto you; they searched to what and what time the Spirit of Christ which was in them pointed, who testified beforehand of the sufferings appointed for Christ, and of the glory that was after. It was revealed to them that they ministered not unto themselves, but unto us, with the things which were now preached unto you...." (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

Unfortunately, we are too little acquainted with the wondrous work of the spirit of wisdom and revelation, by which those holy men of God were inspired and driven, who lived and stood so completely in the word of prophecy, whose inner vision was far more focused on the future than is

mostly the case with the believers of our day. If the firm word of prophecy were more justified among us, such words would seem much less, no, not at all strange, but quite natural, especially since we too are called in the gospel to the fellowship of the sufferers who are in Christ.

And not only did Moses, the man of God, bear the disgrace of Christ with submission, not only did he patiently accept it, but his faith enabled him to consider it greater wealth than all the treasures Egypt could offer him. This is the victory of faith that overcame the world!

"For he looked upon the **reward**." This, then, is by no means a reprehensible, but a perfectly legitimate and commendable motivation for faithful action, choosing, valuing, and deciding. Scripture speaks quite clearly of **crown** and **prize of battle,** of **reward** and **probation** in the good fight of faith. It does not mean the gift of eternal life. It remains a free gift of God's sovereign grace in Christ, as it is written, "By grace are ye saved, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8). And again, "Death is the wages of sin; but the gift of God's grace is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Moses is still waiting for this reward today, just as surely as the Christ of God Himself is waiting for the full prize for which His soul has worked. The 39th verse of our chapter testifies to this very definitely. Nor should we be misled by the privilege that befell Moses when he appeared with Elijah on the holy mountain in clarity, as they talked with Christ about His departure from Jerusalem (Luk 9:30, 31). For if the glory that was manifested in the Lord was only temporary and passing, it was no less so in the servants.

Verse 27: **In faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's wrath; for he clung to the unseen as if he saw him.**

Moses had already left Egypt once, 40 years ago, out of fear, after it had become notorious that he had slain the Egyptian who had done violence to an Israelite. That flight of Moses must not be confused with this leaving Egypt in faith. And yet older and newer interpreters of Scripture have managed to interpret this word Heb. 11:27 to that flight, even though it says there (Ex. 2:14) quite clearly, "And Moses feared," while here it is just as clearly declared, "He feared not the king's wrath."

No, this was not a flight out of fear. This time it was the conscious, persistent insistence on the complete fulfillment of the divine demand to Pharaoh: "Let my people serve me! In this, Moses adhered to **the Invisible One as if he saw him,** i.e. he remained firm and unbending in the face of all the cunning maneuvers of the devious enemy who stood behind Pharaoh to destroy Israel; he remained steadfast in the face of all the fierce raging of the powerful monarch.

10 Missing. Currently being proofread... (Two examples of obedience of faith of the people of Israel).

11. missing. Currently being proofread.... (The Faith of Rahab)

12. believing action and believing acquiescence

Heb 11:32-38: And what more shall I say? I would not have time to tell you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel, and about the prophets who by **faith** conquered kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained the promised, blocked the lions' mouths. They have extinguished the power of fire, have escaped the edge of the sword, have gone from weakness to strength, have become strong in battle, have put the host of the strangers to flight. Women have recovered their dead by resurrection; **but others** allowed themselves to be tortured and did not accept release, that they might obtain a better resurrection. **Others** experienced mockery and scourging, plus gangs and imprisonment; they were stoned, burned, sawed, suffered death by the sword, wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, suffered want, oppression, abuse. The world was not worthy of them; they wandered about in deserts and mountains, in caves and holes of the earth.

First of all, it is worth noting here that Scripture does not specify the individual acts of faith of the witnesses still summarily mentioned here. It leaves it to us to supplement them ourselves from the relevant biblical accounts. A procedure which, in any case, can only benefit us. For nothing is more effective and conducive to understanding the thoughts and ways of God than a careful comparison of Scripture with Scripture. And if the Scriptures themselves still give us the key to use, then we are secured against misinterpretation as far as possible.

On the other hand, we have to note that all biblical personalities still mentioned here are considered from the point of view that they were **people of faith**, quite apart from their personal or moral character. We have already pointed out that in this enumeration of witnesses of faith we encounter some whose names we would probably not have included here. We should take to heart that we are not called to criticize them, but to learn from them. The Holy Spirit uses them as examples of what **God works through faith,** regardless of virtue or vice, moral nobility or low estate. **His eyes look after faith,** since He knows well what we are in ourselves, that we are all - sinners.

It is also noticeable that in the brief mention of the names in verse 32 the chronological order has not been observed, as we already found similarly in verse 31, since the act of faith of Rahab preceded the fall of the walls of Jericho mentioned in verse 30. Thus Gideon is mentioned here before Barak, Samson before Jephthah and David before Samuel. Therefore, there must be another reason for the order observed here.

The first four were all judges in Israel, while David, Samuel and the prophets belonged to the latter class of men of God. Of the first four, Gideon and Jephthah were arguably the most significant in demonstrating their faith-struggle for God and with God. Of the two mentioned in between, Barak and Samson, the common feature of interest is that they were in special relations with wives: Barak to Deborah and Jael for blessing and salvation for Israel and for himself; Samson to his wife and to Delilah, both of whom betrayed him into the hands of the enemy.

In the second group David stands as a prophet of God with justification in front, while Samuel appears like an intermediate link between judge and prophet. He himself unmistakably bears this double character.

A. Gideon.
He was the fourth judge in Israel, which in his days groaned under the yoke of the Midianites. The

Lord made him a contending hero and a courageous servant of Jehovah through the word He spoke to him, which Gideon received with faith. In the hiddenness of the winepress He revealed Himself to him, who wanted to redeem Israel through him from the hand of the strong enemies. He left him only a small crowd in front of the people. Thus Gideon went from weakness to strength, became strong in battle, and put to flight the host of the strangers."

B. Barak.
This one also gained victory through Jehovah. He heard the word of the Lord through the prophetess Deborah, who was judging Israel at that time (Judg. 4:4-5). It was Jabin, the Canaanite king, who was hard on Israel in those days. And Jehovah had said that He would deliver Sisera, the dreaded captain of the field, into the hand of a woman, since Barak had become fainthearted and had refused to go up unless the woman Deborah went up with him. And so it happened that Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, pierced the temple of Sisera, who was slumbering exhausted in her hut, with a peg of her tent.

Perhaps the key to the conspicuous prominence of women on this occasion lies in the words the singer put into the mouths of the princesses of the Canaanites to comfort Sisera's mother: Should they not find and distribute booty? One or two wives for each man (Judges 5:30)? From this it could probably be concluded that the Canaanites were particularly intent on stealing women during this campaign, and for this God visibly gave them into the hand of a woman.

C. Simson.

While Barak was supported and strengthened by two wives chosen and appointed by God, Samson had very sad experiences especially with wives. They delivered him into the hands of the Philistines.

Let us not forget that we are dealing here only with the **one** feature of the lives of these men, that they **believed** God **in the** execution of their special mission to execute the vengeance of God on the enemies of His people. We must be careful not to apply the standard of New Testament morality to their actions.

Before Samson was born, the angel of the Lord had spoken of his future mission to the believing parents. In this faith he had grown up. He lived up to it. He executed the known will of God on the enemies of Israel. This gives him the right to a place in this row of witnesses.

It is important to note that it only says about Samson: The spirit of the Lord came over **Samson. There** could be no question of an **indwelling of** the Holy Spirit in that household of God. Thus, in the Old Testament, there are manifestations of the spirit, gifts and powers of the spirit, without the possession of the Holy Spirit, as the believing church knows it.

The content and object of our faith are very different from what there was to believe for Samson. But our faith, like his, rests on the same foundation, the unbreakable word of the living God.

D. Jephthah.

Like Gideon, the Scriptures call him a contending hero - him, the son of a harlot! Nevertheless, he feared the Lord and was versed in the Scriptures and in the history of his people, the people of Jehovah. His message to the king of the Ammonites bears eloquent witness to this (Judges 11:14-

27). He clearly recognized the hand of Jehovah in all that concerned his people. Thus he calls Him to be a witness and judge between Israel and the children of Ammon. To this Jehovah responded with a decisive victory over the enemies of His people. Again, this is simply that Jephthah knew and believed God's Word. That honored God. And that is why his name is mentioned here.

That the same Jephthah spoke rash words before Jehovah, which caused him and his only daughter great pain, he has in common with a greater servant of God, Moses himself.

E. David, Samuel and the Prophets.

It is impossible for us to highlight here in detail, or even in the main features, the various occasions that are reported to us in Scripture from the lives of those mentioned here of acts of their faith. We must be content with this general reference. But we still want to pay some attention to the special works or traits that are now indicated to us as having been worked by faith.

In the first row are ten pieces that were **worked by** God through **faith.** After that, a whole number of equally important and delicious things are mentioned, which were **endured and borne through faith.**

They have conquered kingdoms.
One might be tempted to think mainly, if not exclusively, of material victories like those Joshua won over the Canaanites or David over the Syrians, Moabites, Amalekites and Philistines. These victories were also won (at least in part) by faith. But here in the Greek text a time word is used that brings us closer to another thought, namely the one of moral victories like Samuel won over Saul by obedience of faith while his king was defeated and came to an end with terror. Or to victories like Elijah over Ahab or Elisha over other kings of Israel.
These were battles of faith for the truth of God against men in divinely ordained positions, not against declared external enemies of God's people. Battles that were therefore much more difficult and painful than even the bloodiest battles. In our life of faith, the battles with the inner enemies are incomparably hotter than with all external opponents.

Justice worked.
We do not have to think of the personal righteousness of faith, although such a righteousness is attributed to Abraham and Noah in this very chapter. Nevertheless, we believe that this expression is on the same line with the just mentioned conquering of kingdoms. We think here again of a case like that of the prophet Elijah, who asserted the right of Jehovah to sole worship and asserted it victoriously in Israel in spite of formidable opposition, and who then executed the righteous judgment of God upon the priests of Baal. Similarly, God's saints on earth will surely one day have both kingdoms to conquer and justice to enforce when His day comes to give reward to His servants and prophets (Rev. 11:18).

Promised attained.
Again, it must be noted **that** faith can only be spoken of after God has spoken, and that God's promises are given under all circumstances by divine **grace** alone, so they can never be obtained as a reward or even as a merit**.** Likewise, the word does not mean that they have already seen or experienced the fulfillment of the promises (v. 39). But quite a number of these witnesses of faith have received both personal promises and promises beyond their person, namely messianic promises, and have received or grasped them in faith and made them their own. The word "obtained" is to be understood in this sense.

The lion's throat is clogged.
The words remind us of Samson and of Daniel. Especially the latter prophet of Jehovah is a shining example, since he was thrown to the lions in the kennel because of his faithfulness in his worship. Certainly, Daniel had before his eyes what God had done for Samson and for David, and he gained confidence that the same God would be able to save him as well. And such a powerful atmosphere of faith emanated from him that even the pagan king Darius said, **"Your God, whom you serve without ceasing, save you!"** And so it happened**.**
It is only wonderful that the Holy Spirit here assigns to **faith what the** Scriptures otherwise quite clearly describe as the **work of God. God** blocked the lions' mouths. And here it is declared: They have stopped up the mouths of lions **by faith.** This is grace worthy of worship.

The violence of the fire extinguished.
This unmistakably goes to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who countered the threats of the enraged Nebuchadnezzar with complete calmness of faith: There is no need, O King, for us to answer you. Our God, whom we honor, can well deliver us from your hand and from the fiery furnace. And if He will not do it, still you shall know that we do not worship your gods. And although they were not spared the ordeal of fire, but were plunged bound into the sevenfold increased embers, they experienced: In the midst of the consuming embers they walked unbound with a fourth unharmed, to the horror of the king and his great ones. In His fellowship, even today, we can walk in the midst of the hottest fires of affliction and temptation, unbound, unharmed by the fires.

The sword's edge escaped.
This is what the harlot Rahab experienced with her whole house before Joshua struck the city of Jericho with the edge of the sword. Thus David escaped again and again the murderous attempt of king Saul on his life. Thus he laid the giant Goliath in the dust before he could even unsheathe his mighty sword. Thus the prophet Elijah escaped the murderous sword of the godless Jezebel. Indeed, time would be lacking to enumerate all examples of this kind alone, how the Lord honored the faith of His servants and handmaidens in such a way. And what He did in former times, He can still do today
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From weakness to strength.
This reminds us of words like Rom. 4:19, 20: "And Abraham was not weak in faith, that is, he did not look at his body, which was already dead, nor at Sarah's womb, which was dead ... but was strong, giving glory to God by faith, being fully persuaded that what God had said He was also mighty to do." - There is, after all, another weakness born of fear of men, like that of the prophet Elijah when he fled from the wrath of Jezebel. Such a thing is not to be recommended. But a despondency in one's own ability, like that of the prophet Isaiah, when he beheld the majesty of Jehovah in His temple and exclaimed, "Woe is me, I am of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips!" Out of such weakness, the touch of the burning coal at the altar made him strong, so that he had to say: "Here I am, send me!

When we are weak, then we are strong as Paul tells us (Cor. 2, 12) who was allowed to make delicious experiences in this area. On the other hand: Cursed is he who relies on men and takes flesh (his own or other) for his arm!

Having become strong in the quarrel, they have put the army of the **strangers to flight.**
These two statements essentially belong together, so we do not want to separate them. They express very clearly that the n of faith always costs and means struggle. It should be noted that **our**

struggle is not against flesh and blood, but with spirit powers, with principalities and powers in the heavenly (air) regions (Eph. 2, 6,12). The most obvious application of these words is certainly to material victories over earthly and visible enemies. But as far as these enemies were enemies of God's people, they were backed by hostile powers from another world, who were interested in thwarting the thoughts and goals of God with the chosen people.

We are certainly not mistaken when we think here again of father Abraham, who was not really a man of war, but peacefully grazed his flocks in the land where he was a stranger. He was not out for conquests, although God had promised him the possession of the land with an oath. But when his nephew Lot was taken captive by the enemy and he had to be rescued, he became strong and drove the army of the foreigners into flight. And his victory was even greater when he answered the king of Sodom's offer to enrich himself with the booty he had taken: I will not take from you a thread nor a shoestring, lest you say that you made Abraham rich! And behind the king of Sodom stood the God and prince of this world, who would have liked to see Abraham become beholden to the king of Sodom. But also this "stranger" was brilliantly beaten out of the field.

Women received their dead back through resurrection.
The son of the widow of Sarepta and the son of the Sunamite, who was miraculously given to her, are the two examples that come into question here (1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 4). She had experienced the powerful and friendly help of the God of Israel in the terrible famine in such a way that she could boldly conclude that such a God could also snatch her dead son, the support of her widowhood, from death and give him back to her. And while the prophet of the Lord measured the body of the deceased with his body on the upper floor and spread himself over it, she will have raised her hands to the God of Elijah, who had already once saved her and her child from death by a sign and miracle of his omnipotence and goodness. And she was not deceived.
And in the case of the Sunamite it was not different. Should the God, who gave her the son quite unsought and uninvited and yet not unwanted, have given him only to deprive her of him again so soon?
Noteworthy is the fact that in both cases what happened to those two sons is definitely called **resurrection.** If we did not have a later, namely the Pauline revelation about this subject (cf. 1. Thes. 4, 16: 1. Cor. 15), we would have to be content with this designation. But even now, when we know about a better resurrection, we must by no means ignore that fact of simple restoration to natural life - without transformation into the likeness of Christ and His transfigured
Body - therefore strike out lowly. It stands very massively and powerfully on the sheets of divine revelation. And the reference of Jesus that in the days of His earthly ministry, dead people rose from the dead is for the Lord a resounding proof of the authenticity of His messianic mission compared to His wavering forerunner John (Matth. 11,5). There is a danger that New Testament believers have too little idea of the tremendous significance of that simple resuscitation from already completed death in the great work of God with a lost mankind that has fallen prey to death.

This also shows the profound difference between the **pagan doctrine of immortality** (or rather, the belief in immortality, because even paganism was not certain about it) and biblical hope, i.e., the certainty of the **resurrection of the body,** a truth for which pagan philosophy had no understanding, but which seemed to it like an absurdity (Acts 17:32). To paganism, corporeality was regarded only as a disdainful servitude to matter, from which death brought salvation; therefore it was praised and glorified. An abolition or elimination of bodily death by resurrection of the body seemed little desirable. So completely was the pagan mind blinded by the one who has the power of death, the devil.

But others.
This now opens up a group to whom the Holy Spirit testifies, not what they have **done** by faith for God and with God, but rather what they have **suffered and endured for the** sake of faith. They too belong by right to the "cloud of witnesses" that we have around us.

They allowed themselves to be tortured and did not accept release so that they could obtain a resurrection that is better.
What is meant here are probably those martyrs from the time of the Maccabees, of whom we are told by the (apocryphal, but nevertheless valuable) Book of Maccabees. There we read of a mother and her seven sons who remained steadfast despite the greatest tortures to which the dreadful Antiochus Epiphanes subjected them in order that they should renounce Jehovah by eating pork. From the mouth of the second is delivered to us the beautiful testimony: You wicked man, you may take away my temporal life, but the Lord of all the earth will raise us up who die for His law's sake to eternal life (2 Macc 7:9). The two following blood witnesses also freely confess: "I will gladly let go of these limbs for the sake of His law, for I hope that He will restore them to me. And: This is a great comfort, that when men strangle us, we hope that God will raise us up again (verse 11.14). They were offered release and honor if they would only live pagan and defile themselves against the law of their God. In any case, the resurrection they hoped for was better (Joh. 5,28. 29; Acts 24,15; Rev. 20, 11-13)**.** Therefore it is not necessary to refer to the "better" resurrection in the sense of the Pauline revelation (1. Thess. 4,16.17), which those blood witnesses for the law could not even think of, since nothing of such a resurrection was revealed.

Others experienced ridicule and flagellation, plus gangs and prison.
There is no lack of biblical examples, even without the need to refer to the history of the Maccabees. From the pages of Israelite history we can clearly see how fierce and oppressive must have been the persecution, reviling and expulsion of those who wanted to remain faithful to their God under all circumstances. And the history of the Christian church for almost two thousand years provides proof that religious persecution has always been the cruelest, bitterest and most diabolical.

They were stoned, burned, sawed, suffered death by the sword, wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, suffered want, oppression, abuse.
Thus, Naboth was most shamefully stoned, **i.e.** punished as a blasphemer, since he only held on to his paternal inheritance in holy fidelity (1 Kings 21), remembering that Jehovah had commanded never to alienate the land. Perhaps the author of Hebrews was also thinking of Stephen, who was stoned for the name of Jesus, from whom he would not renounce.
The Scriptures do not give us any examples of those who were burned and cut into pieces. But if you read what is said in 2 Kings 24:3,4, you can imagine that there must have been some whose blood was shed innocently and under great torture and horror.
The characteristic of all these **"others" who have** suffered evil for God is just this, that whoever believes God more than man, even the pious man, always has to suffer for it. So deeply rooted is the innate enmity of the natural man against God and His word. The form of suffering changes with the times, but the suffering remains until the time when our shine is crowned in the sight.

The world was not worthy of them. A strange, but very delicious insertion, before the last words are spoken about their manifold suffering, their wandering in deserts and mountains in caves and holes of the earth. These witnesses of faith, these strange people who under all circumstances only pay attention to what God has said, were and are not considered worthy to have their part in the world. They are rejected, despised, reviled, they are considered to be out of their minds, they are

persecuted as dangerous to mankind or to the ruling religion, as enemies of the progress of the development of the human race, as backward.
God's judgment is the other way around: The world is not worthy of them. They are the most expensive and precious things that God calls His own in this world, because they have recognized Him, know themselves to be one with Him and build and trust in His word alone, people who are only available for God.

Heb 11:39,40: **For all these who received a good testimony through faith, yet did not obtain what was promised, because God provided something better for us, so that they would not be perfected without us.**
The words point us back to the almost identical remarks in verse l3-16 From a comparison of the two passages it is quite clear that all the witnesses of faith listed here had their eyes fixed on what lay beyond the grave, i.e. on the great **central fact of all God's revelation**, the **raising of the dead.** So it was with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to whom God had promised the possession of the promised land for their person. As strangers in the Promised Land, they rejoiced in this divine promise, but never attempted to usurp it by taking possession by force while they were still alive. They learned to wait. They did not obtain what was promised.
For God has planned something better for us, and by this, besides the writer, the readers of this letter are meant here. This better can again only be understood if we hold that the great divine purposes will have their fulfillment **beyond the resurrection, i.**e. in the realm of the transfigured **body life.** As long as we are in the body of this nothingness, we are strangers and absent from the Lord (2Co 5:6,8). Although we have the firstfruits of the Spirit as a pledge, we still long for the redemption of our body (Rom. 8,23). And the apostle has given us the assurance in 1 Thess. 4:17 that those who have fallen asleep in the Lord will not lag behind us, provided we are alive and remain for the coming of the Lord, but they will rise first. After that, those who are alive, those who are left, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air at the same time as them. The better thing that God has provided for the survivors is the **swallowing up of the mortality of** this body of ours, which is in a state of decay, by **immortality by** means of a **transformation without death** - in a moment, at the time of the last trumpet /1. Cor. 15, 51.52).

And here, on the other hand, it is just as clearly stated that those are not to be **completed without us.** This completion can only be interpreted as **resurrection.** With this, the delusion is again most definitely resisted, as if with the blessed death the completion for the believers already begins, an error, which still prevents thousands of God's dear children today from heartily rejoicing in the genuine biblical hope of the Lord's coming for His own, devouring death, and preparing for it.

...is supplemented:

This interpretation of Heb. 11 will be continued in the following G&H issues in 2003. The following are the topics:

10. Two examples of obedience of faith of the people of Israel
11. the faith of Rahab