

fearful slaves. So when they approach God they can speak to Him in prayer frankly and openly because He has promised to listen to them and respond favorably to them.” (Lockwood, p. 172)

This confidence is an important concept in Hebrews. This Greek word occurs four times (Hebrews 3:6; 4:16; 10:19,35) Given the unique emphasis in Hebrews upon the work of Christ, the great High Priest, in gaining access to the Most Holy Place and the presence of God, by the sacrifice of His perfect blood, this confidence of the believer is the assurance that he has direct access to God by grace thru faith in Christ; that his sins are forgiven; and, that he may approach the Lord knowing that God’s promises all hold true and that his prayers will be heard.

*“After joyfully enduring severe afflictions and losses for Christ’s sake, to throw away their confidence as though it were, after all, worthless and dispensable would make no sense. Of all desertions, apostasy is the most unreasonable, for it means turning one’s back on Him who as been professed before men as the sole source and ground of our confidence; and through whose blood we have freedom of access, in full assurance of faith, into the eternal sanctuary of God’s presence. Discouraged by the perils and hardships of the wilderness, the forefathers of those to whom our letter was sent were moved with a spirit of apostasy when they asked, ‘**Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?**’ (Numbers 14:3) These Hebrew Christians of the 1st Century were in danger of following this evil example (cf. 3:12), by ‘**forsaking the God who made them**’ and ‘**scoffing at the rock of their salvation**’ (Deuteronomy 32:15) To do this would indeed have been evidence that ‘**they had thrown away their confidence**’ and returned to the deceptive and impermanent material things of the present world which previously they had professed ‘**to throw away.**’ It would be a tragic failure of ‘**earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end.**’ (Hebrews 6:11)” (Hughes, p. 432)*

“Your confidence” is secure because it does not rest upon me or anything that I must do for myself. And yet, that assurance enables me to do great things in the boldness of the Spirit who dwells within the heart of every believer.

“It is used of the confidence with which Christians may approach the throne of God since Christ is there as their prevailing High Priest; in 3:6, it is used more generally of the courageous confession which Christians should maintain without fail. It is in this last sense that it is used here, with special reference to steadfastness in adverse and disheartening circumstances; it is, so to say, the content of the Christian attitude in the world, the security of God’s salvation and open confession amidst opposition.” (Bruce, p. 271)



“The Good Shepherd Who Gave His Life For the Sheep”

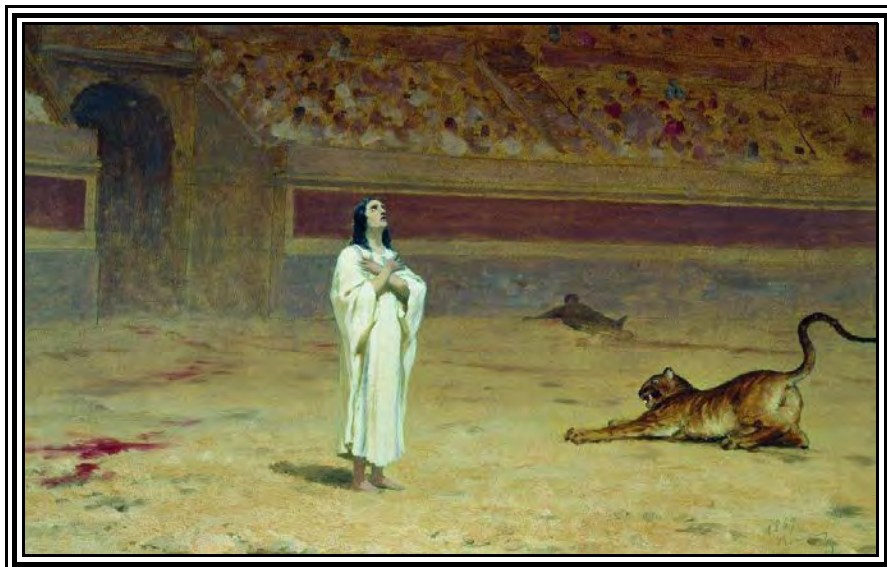
“Now this ‘confidence’ was absolutely neither their faith nor profession; but, as we have had occasion to mention several times, it is a fruit and effect of faith, whereby the minds of believers are prepared, ready and eager for every opportunity to profess their faith in the face of all difficulty and discouragement. It is a boldness of mind, a liberation from bondage to all fear in the practice of our responsibilities of our religion toward both God and man, because of our assurance that God has accepted us as His own. In this frame of mind, because of this blessed effect of faith, these Hebrews had persevered through all of their sufferings for the sake of the Gospel. In fact, without this confidence it is impossible for us to endure any great suffering either to the glory of God or on our own behalf. For if unbelief makes us doubtful of our cause; if the aid and assistance which the Gospel offers us is betrayed by our fears; if

we are humiliated by the scornful sufferings imposed upon us and weakened in our convictions; if we are not confident of the better and abiding possessions as a counter-balance against the evils of the present - it becomes impossible to appropriately endure any of these afflictions. This ‘confidence’ is opposed to all of these evils of the mind. This was precisely the grace, the faith in action, which was so admirable in Peter and John (Acts 4:13). There is no better example of this ‘confidence’ than that of these two apostles. They were bound and in prison, complete subject to the power of their enraged enemies because they had preached the Gospel, and yet with the slightest fear or hesitation, without any consideration of the possible outcome, without any concern as to how they might deal with those who had murdered the Lord Jesus - they proclaimed their faith and testified to the truth. All of these things are clearly included in this ‘confidence.’ Its foundation is invincible steadfastness of conviction and boldness in confession of the Gospel in the face of every obstacle or difficulty. It is the expression of an unshakable trust in God, and an accurate assessment of the incomparable value of the eternal reward which He has prepared. These Hebrews are encouraged to renew this confidence within themselves because they are being called upon to suffer for the sake of the Gospel. But if they are unprepared to confidently meet this challenge then they will be overcome by their adversaries.” (Owen, VI, p. 575)

The particular value of the secure assurance of the access to God which they have graciously

been given on the basis of the forgiveness of their sins and the mediation of Christ on their behalf before God is emphasized by the words ***“which has a great reward.”*** Any perceived benefits which they have been led to expect by throwing away their faith in Christ and returning to the obsolete and irrelevant former covenant are nothing more than an illusion. In the past they had always been able to discern that what they had received in Christ was ***“a better possession and an abiding one.”*** How tragically sad it would be if after all they had already been through they would throw away that which is real in favor of the delusions of the Adversary. The phrase ***“a great reward”*** literally reads *“the payment of a large wage”* in the Greek text. This unusual noun appears three times in the epistle (22:2; 10:35; 11:26) and nowhere else in the New Testament. In all of these instances it does not refer to a wage that is paid in return for work that is done or service that is rendered. The self-sacrifice of Christ upon the cross as our substitute has already been clearly and repeatedly presented as the one and only basis for salvation throughout the Epistle. *“Unlike Paul the writer is not concern with faith and works as rival means to salvation; Christ’s submission to God’s will has already been held up as an act of faith which includes that of all others who believe.”* (Ellingworth, p. 552) Instead, this ***“great reward”*** is that which the Messiah has earned on our behalf which He bestows upon us purely by grace. We receive His righteousness, innocence and blessedness because He has taken upon Himself our guilt, and endured death in our place so that we may receive the gift of life everlasting. Isaiah had used the same terminology in his beautiful description of that which God has prepared for His people, making it completely clear that the reward in question belongs to God and is bestowed upon us only by the undeserved love of God in the Messiah Jesus:

“Behold, the LORD God comes with might and His arm rules for Him; behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him. He will tend His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs in His arms; He will carry them in His bosom and gently lead those who are with young.” (Isaiah 40:10-11)



“The Blood of the Martyrs Is The Seed of the Church

“Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth; Say to the daughter of Zion, behold, your salvation comes; behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him. And they shall be called the Holy People. The Redeemed of the LORD, and you shall be called, Sought Out, a city no longer forsaken.” (Isaiah 62:11-12)

This is the ***“reward”*** of which Jesus had spoken when He sought to encourage His disciples to faithfulness in the face of the relentless opposition of the world: ***“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn you name as evil on account of the Son of Man, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.”*** (Luke 6:22-23) The rabbis of old has used the same concept to encourage the faithful remnant of Israel, urging them not to follow the easy path of expedience and worldly practicality, but rather to leave the outcome to God as they remained true to His Word without compromise or concession. In the *Pirke Aboth* (*“Sayings of the Father”*) of the Talmud, Rabbi Tarphon offered this wise counsel to look beyond the suffering of this world to the eternity which God has prepared for His people in heaven, counsel which would apply equally to the faithful Christian:

“It is not for you to finish the work, neither are you free to desist therefrom; if you have studied much Torah, much reward will be given you, and faithful is your Employer to pay you the reward of your labor; and know that the recompense of reward for the righteous is for the time to come.” (Bruce, p. 271)

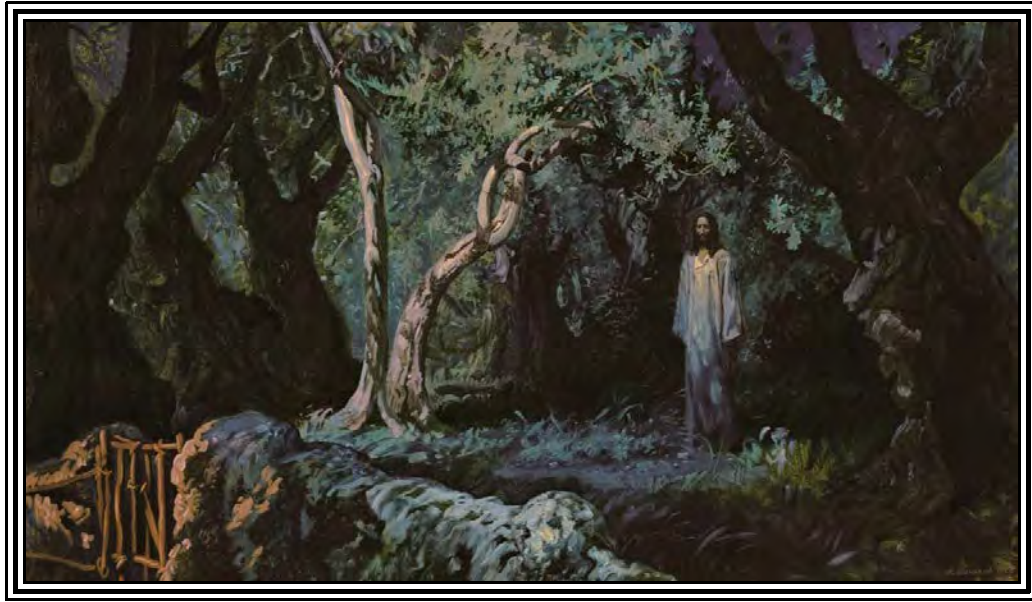


“Burning Incense Before the Divine Emperor

“For you have a need for endurance so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.” - The patience which trusts the promises of God and is willing to wait for the fulfillment of those promises in God’s good time is a key component in the Christian faith. The Christian is called to emulate the Christ. Twice in Hebrews Chapter 10, fulfilling ***“the will of God”*** has been cited as the purpose of Christ’s coming into this world.

“Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God, as it is written of Me in the scroll of the Book. When He said above, ‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings, and burnt offerings, and sin offerings (these offered according to

the Law), then He added, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will.’ He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all.” (Hebrews 10:7-10)



“Jesus Alone In Gethsemane” - Vasnetsov

Our Master’s submission to ***“the will of God”*** included the offering of Himself as the sacrifice for our sins, and all of the suffering, humiliation, and death which that entailed. *“His servants can expect no easier path as they, in their turn do the will of God and await the promised bliss.”* (Bruce, p. 272) The patient endurance of the believer in doing ***“the will of God”*** will be defined in the quotation from God’s Word which follows in the next two verses.

“Endurance” is frequently linked to faith throughout the New Testament. Although it is not always translated as ***“endurance”*** but more often as ***“steadfastness”*** the combination of the two is inevitable since faith, as Chapter 12 will assert and document by repeated example, is the God given ability to see beyond current conditions to the fulfillment of God’s promises in the future which He has prepared. ***“We give thanks to God always for all of you constantly, mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”*** (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3); ***“Therefore, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith, in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.”*** (2 Thessalonians 1:4); ***“But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith.”*** (1 Timothy 6:11); ***“You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me.”*** (2 Timothy 3:10); ***“Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.”***



"The Martyrdom of St. Perpetua"

(Titus 2:2); ***"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet various kinds of trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in neither."*** (James 1:2-3); ***"For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness..."*** (2 Peter 1:5-6); ***"I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first."*** (Revelation 2:19) Such steadfastness is needed to endure the constant

opposition of the world to the message of the Gospel. The text makes this clear with the unequivocal statement - ***"You have need of endurance."*** The assurance of receiving ***"what is promised"*** by God Himself is affirmed.

"There is a danger, as in OT times, that individual members of the community will behave in such a way as to forfeit their share in the inheritance that God has promised, and keeps in reserve for His people corporately. Here the readers need, and some of them may lack, the persistence in faith to carry them through the short period between their past courage (vss. 32-34) and their final salvation (vs.39)" (Ellingworth, p. 553)

No matter how difficult the circumstances may become the Lord has promised to sustain His own. That promise is presented with dramatic power, for example, in the Vision to the Letters to the Seven Churches in the Apocalypse of St. John as part of the message to the Church in Thyatira:

"I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first...I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I, Myself, have received authority from My Father."

And I will give him the Morning Star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelation 2:19,25-29)

To cast aside this ***“confidence”*** is to fail to do ***“the will of God.”*** As always, it is Christ Himself who provided the example for His people to emulate, and by His forgiveness of their sins He also provided the strength that was needed to follow His example:

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His steps...When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when he suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins on His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” (1 Peter 2:21-24)

Such endurance will not be easy but it is possible in Christ. The majority of those who profess to be Christian have always yielded to the pressure of the Adversary and conformed to the way of the world. But the faithful remnant will always remain until the Lord returns to take them home. The medieval mystic St. Thomas a’ Kempis expressed these truths with matchless eloquence in his classic *“Imitation Of Christ”*:



“Jesus hath now many lovers in His heavenly kingdom, but few bearers of His cross. He hath many desirous of comfort, but few of tribulation. He findeth many companions of His table, but few of His abstinence. All desire to rejoice with Him but few will suffer anything for Him. Many follow Jesus unto the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking of the bitter cup of His passion. Many reverence His miracles, but few follow the ignominy of His cross. Many love Jesus as long as adversities do not happen. Many praise Him and bless

Him as long as they receive many comforts from Him. But if Jesus hide Himself and leave them but a while, they fall either into complaining or into too much dejection of mind. But they that love Jesus for Jesus, and not for some comfort of their own, bless Him in all tribulation and anguish of heart, as well as in the highest comfort. And even if He were never to choose to give them comfort, they, nonetheless would still want to always praise Him and give Him thanks. O how powerful is pure love for Jesus, which is not corrupted with any self-love or self-interest.”(a’Kempis, II, xi)



“The prophet Habakkuk” - Tissot

“For, ‘Yet a little while and the Coming One will come and will not delay...” - To bolster his message of encouragement once more, the author turns to the Old Testament Prophet Habakkuk and the promise which the Lord had spoken through him. Habakkuk lived in the final days of the Kingdom of Judah. It was a time of turmoil and turbulence as mighty empires rose and fell. To the south Egypt remained a significant power. In Mesopotamia the Assyrian Empire which had dominated the region for generations was threatened by the rising power of Babylon. Judah had become a pawn in the struggle for supremacy between these great kingdoms. Assyria had ruled Judah with a heavy hand for over a century invading repeated, brutally suppressing all opposition, and demanding crippling tribute. The realm was morally and spiritually corrupt as idolatrous kings like Manasseh and Amon worshiped the Baal and Molech the gods of the Canaanites. There was a brief return to the worship of Yahweh during the reign of Josiah, but his successors promptly returned to the paganism which had been the dominant pattern during the period. Habakkuk is the perfect source for this confirmation of the importance of waiting and trusting in God for he, like the Hebrews addressed in this Epistle, had doubted the purpose and plan of the Lord for His people. Only when God revealed Himself to His wavering prophet in a vision was he restored to a confident trust in the divine plan. The opening phrase of the citation - **“Yet a little while”** - actually comes from Isaiah’s promise of deliverance for Judah in Isaiah 26:20

“Come, My people, enter your chambers and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the fury has passed by. For behold the LORD is coming out from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no more cover its slain.” (Isaiah 26:20-21)

Isaiah’s words promise the impending judgement of God upon their enemies - in this instance the destruction of the Assyrians by the Babylonians at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. The Israelites are instructed to conceal themselves behind closed doors in their homes while God accomplishes their deliverance. The point of the phrase ***“for a little while”*** stresses the imminence of God’s action on their behalf. The remainder of the citation comes from Habakkuk Chapter 2:

“For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end, it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.” (Habakkuk 2:3-4)



“Stone Relief Of the King Of Assyria”

Hebrews’ paraphrase of the original text addresses the situation of its intended audience directly: ***“And the Coming One will come and will not delay, but My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back my soul has no pleasure in him.”*** ***“The Coming One”*** is a common messianic title affirming the fact that the Christ who came to earth, and who ascended into heaven after His perfect life, innocent death, and triumphant resurrection will come again in glory and power to judge the living and the dead on the Last Day. The believer is identified as ***“My righteous one”*** - that is, one who has been justified, declared to be righteous before God, by virtue of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ upon the cross. The emphasis of the original text upon the immanence of the Savior’s coming is maintained as the basis for the patient endurance of believers in the midst of opposition and persecution by the enemies of the Gospel. St. Paul also cites this text at the beginning of his Epistle to the Romans as the *“sedes doctrinae”* of the doctrine of justification.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” (Romans 1:16-17; cf. Galatians 3:11)



“The Fall of Nineveh, Capital of the Kingdom of Assyria To the Babylonians” - Martin

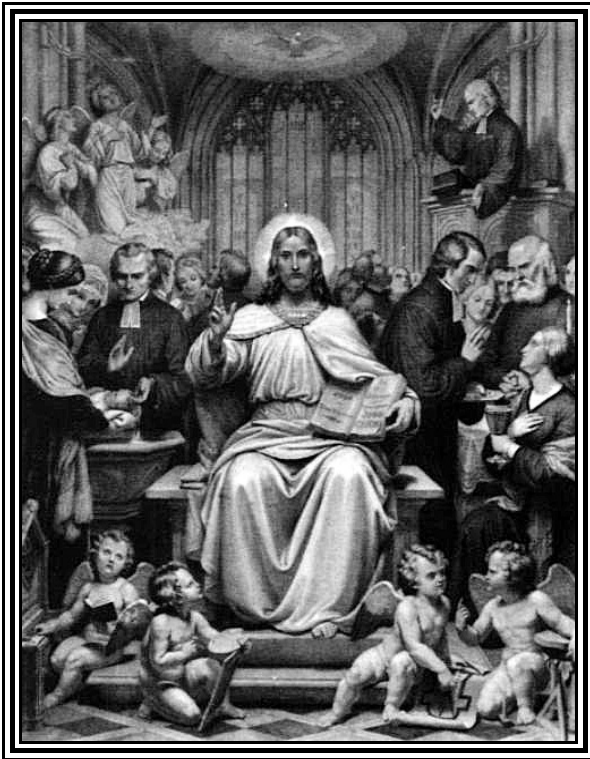
Franz Delitsch compares the message of Habakkuk’s prophecy with that of Hebrews’ word of encouragement to 1st Century Christians tempted to apostasy under persecution in this way:

“The divine word of promise which the prophet had in view was the overthrow of the powers of this world (concentrated in the Chaldean monarchy), and the manifestation or coming of Jehovah; that which the apostolic writer has here before his eyes is the final triumph of the church of the redeemed, and the manifestation or second coming of Christ. The faith, and the object of faith, is for both essentially the same - an abiding, living, life-giving trust in God the Savior, and the promised salvation which He is pledged to bring.” (Delitsch, II, p. 200)

In both instances the texts warn that the absence of faith which trusts in the impending coming of the Lord’s deliverance shall deprive the apostate former believer of its benefit - **“and if he shrinks back My soul has no pleasure in him.”** To shrink back means to abandon Christ and the community of His people as the expression of a lack of trust in His promises and faith in His coming which enables the believer to discern the worthlessness of the things of this world, including acceptance and reputation, even physical well-being and life itself in comparison with the eternal, abiding reward which God in Christ has prepared for His own and which will be revealed before human on the great day of His coming in Judgement. The core of faith is the God given ability to trust in His promises and await that outcome in the face of what seems to be the triumph of evil all around us.

“This oracle explains why the members of the congregation need to endure and how they can endure all hardship. They need to endure because they await the imminent advent of Christ for their salvation on the Day of Judgement (9:28). Only at His second coming will they receive all that God has promised. Only then will God punish their opponents and vindicate them. They will receive their great reward. In the meantime they endure by their persistent faith (10:38) in God’s promises. God Himself promises that those who have faith shall have life. They shall not just survive, but shall have life eternal with God in the heavenly realm. (12:9) That is their ‘great reward.’ The person who has faith is regarded by God as His ‘righteous one’ (10:38), the one who is righteous before Him, the one whom He commends (11:4,5,6,39), the one whom He will vindicate in His judgement (10:30). But since Jesus is the Author and Perfecter of faith (12:2), a righteous person cannot, without incurring God displeasure, shrink back from Christ and His congregation. Those who shrink from Him forfeit their life, for their access to eternal life depends upon His priestly ministry. So those who have faith and refuse to shrink from Jesus as their Savior do God’s will (10:36; 13:21) as they wait to receive their inheritance of life with God, they endure to the end (3:14; 6:11; see also Matthew 10:22; 24:13; Revelation 2:26).” (Lockwood, p. 534)

“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.” - The meticulous Law/Gospel balance of this segment of the Epistle concludes with a forthright declaration of the author’s confidence in the steadfast faith of those to whom he writes. As has so often been the case, he personally identifies with those to whom this encouraging word is written ***“we are not of those.”*** The confidence of the believer rests upon the recognition that his security rests upon the bedrock of that which God has done for him in Christ. The ***“confidence”*** and ***“endurance”*** necessary to persist in that faith and hold fast to the confession of Christ as Savior and Lord is provided by God through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, the Means of Grace which He has established to sustain His people in the face of any and every challenge. Yet none dare presume upon God’s grace, as the stern warnings of the Law articulated in this Chapter and elsewhere have made clear. Those who fail to recognize that the Christian life is a daily process of repentance and renewal, who allow themselves to trust in their own righteousness rather than the righteousness of Christ, those who neglect or abandon the Means of Grace and the gathering of the congregation around those essential life-lines of living faith, could very well find themselves vulnerable to the relentless assaults of the devil, the world, and their own sinful nature. The path from self-righteousness to impenitence; from impenitence to neglect of Word and Sacrament; from neglect of Word and Sacrament to indifference to God’s will, and from indifference to God’s will to disobedience and defiance of God’s will is a slippery slope. That progression can and will lead to hardness of heart and eventual apostasy. ***“Therefore, let anyone who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.”*** (1



“Together In Christ”

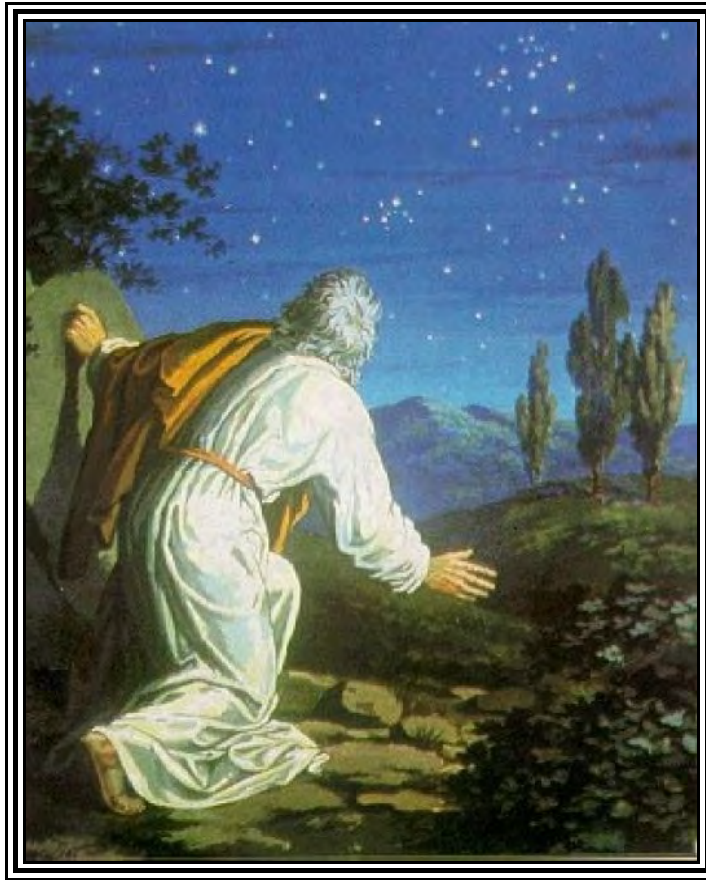
Corinthians 10:12) ***“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”*** (Proverbs 16:18) The endurance of the believer is produced to a large extent by the humble recognition of the forgiven sinner of God’s just judgement and of their need for the persistence of faith which God instills and enables only through the Means of Grace within the mutual edification of the community of faith which is defined by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. In this life the struggle between what I have become by grace and what I am by nature will never end. The dominance of either side in this battle is progressive and self-reinforcing. The more deliberately and profoundly I am in and of the Word the easier it becomes to remain in and of the Word. But, by the same token, the more I allow myself to be conformed to the world, the more difficult it will

be to recognize or resist the world’s control of my identity and my actions.

“The assurance of salvation always coexists with the possibility of apostasy...Even though salvation depends entirely on God’s Word with His call to believe and His gift of faith in Christ, damnation comes from the rejection of Christ and His holy Gospel.” (Lockwood, p. 536)

“The Formula of Concord” - the final document included among the formal confessions of the Lutheran Church at the end of the Reformation era, sums up the issues involved in these matters with incisive clarity in its discussion of predestination:

“It is to be considered diligently that God punishes sin with sin, that is, because of their subsequent impurity, impenitence, and deliberate sins, God punishes with obduracy and blindness those who have been converted. This must not be misconstrued as if it had never been God’s gracious will that such people should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. God’s revealed will involves both items: First, that He would receive into grace all who repent and believe in Christ: second, that He would punish all those who deliberately turn away from the holy commandment and involve themselves again in the filth of this world (II Peter 2:20), prepare their hearts for Satan (Luke 11:24,25), and outrage the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:29); and that He would harden, blind, and forever damn them if they continue therein.” (FC,SD:XI, 83)



“God’s Promise to Abraham”

HEBREWS CHAPTER 11

(1) Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (2) For by it the people of old received their commendation. (3) By faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. (4) By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. (5) By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found because God had taken him. Now before he was taken, he was commended as having pleased God. (6) And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. (7) By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. (8) By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. (10) For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose Designer and Builder is God. (11) By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she

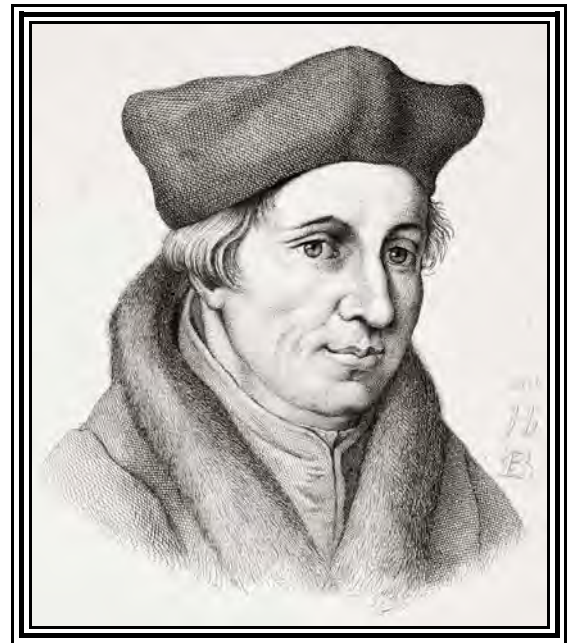
was past the age, she considered Him faithful who had promised. (12) Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. (13) These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on earth. (14) For people who speak thus are making it clear that they are seeking a homeland. (15) If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. (16) But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city. (17) By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, (18) of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.' (19) He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. (20) By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. (21) By faith Jacob when dying blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. (22) By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave direction concerning his bones. (23) By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. (24) By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. (26) He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. (27) By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. (28) By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. (29) By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. (30) By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. (31) By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. (32) And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets - (33) who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, (34) quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, and were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (35) Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. (36) Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. (37) They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were killed with the sword. They went about in the skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated - (38) of whom the world was not worthy - wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (39) And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, (40) since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

serves as motivation for perseverance in the present. Third, the faithful of old provide an alternative society that counters the baleful influence of the unbelieving world in which the hearers live.” (Cockerill, p. 514)

That continuation and connection between that which follows and that which had preceded is emphasized by the use of the particle **“now”** which identifies that which will now be presented as the completion of the discussion of the topic of faith in Chapter 10. The word **“faith”** (Greek - *“pistis”*) appears twenty-four times in Hebrews 11. It is the heart and essence of all that is said. Hence, the discussion appropriately begins with a definition of the concept of faith - **“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”** Some have criticized this definition as omitting the specific objects of the Christian faith in the life death and resurrection of Christ as the means of our forgiveness and the basis for our salvation. Such objections miss the purpose of the definition at this point in the argument of the epistle and as the introduction to the prolonged list of examples of that which faith has made possible in the lives of believers in days gone by. These words are not intended to serve as a formal or comprehensive definition of faith. Instead this is a commendation and celebration of the faith that leads to the acquisition of life. This recommendation sets the stage for the list of examples of the accomplishments of faith in the lives of the heroes of faith in former generations which will follow.

“But surely it is not mere accidents, but constituents and essential characteristics of faith which are here laid down. If we would define in the most abstract way possible the proper objects of faith, should we not say that faith always has for its object something transcendent, either beyond sense or beyond time - the glorious future or the infinite unseen? And could the sacred writer better describe faith in its relations to these objects than by the terms which he has selected here? It seems to us that a more complete and accurate definition of faith, and one more generally applicable, could not be devised than that which is here given.”
(Delitsch, II, p. 204)

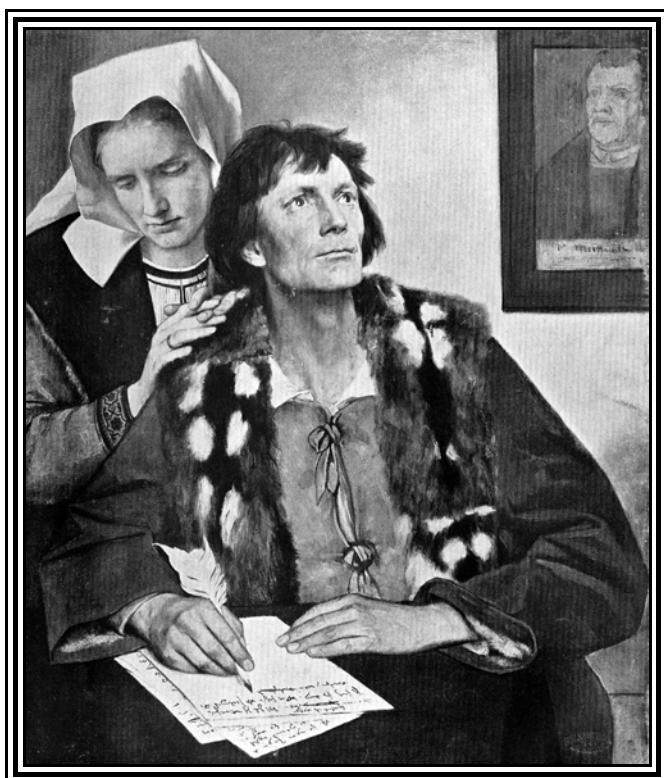
Jacques Lefevre d’Etaples, a 16th Century French Protestant theologian offered this eloquent and pointed comment about the nature of faith and the insight contained in this brief definition of faith. Faith must be recognized, he insists, totally as a gift of God’s grace, not in any way or to any extent, the product of human reason or effort.



Jacques Lefevre d’Etaples

“From himself, he continues, man cannot have his

faith, but He who is the fount and infinite source of faithfulness, provides it and increases it. This is why the disciples frequently asked, 'Lord, increase our faith!' Because reason does not attain to faith, but grace, which is superior to reason, provides it. What reason provides, is, moreover, obscure and weak, whereas what grace affords is clear and strong; and so the trusting man of faith commits himself to God; not to his own reason, but to divine Truth; not to the possibility of his own cleverness, and his position is spacious, not narrow. He who is not prepared to leave behind the possibility of his own reason, encloses himself in a dark and confining prison where the sun of grace does not shine, and the life-giving faith is not found. O divine faith, wonderful foundation of life, strong support of hope, anchor of devotion, and shining cord extended down from heaven, seizing which we climb to Him who is above and beyond all altitude." (Hughes, p. 438)



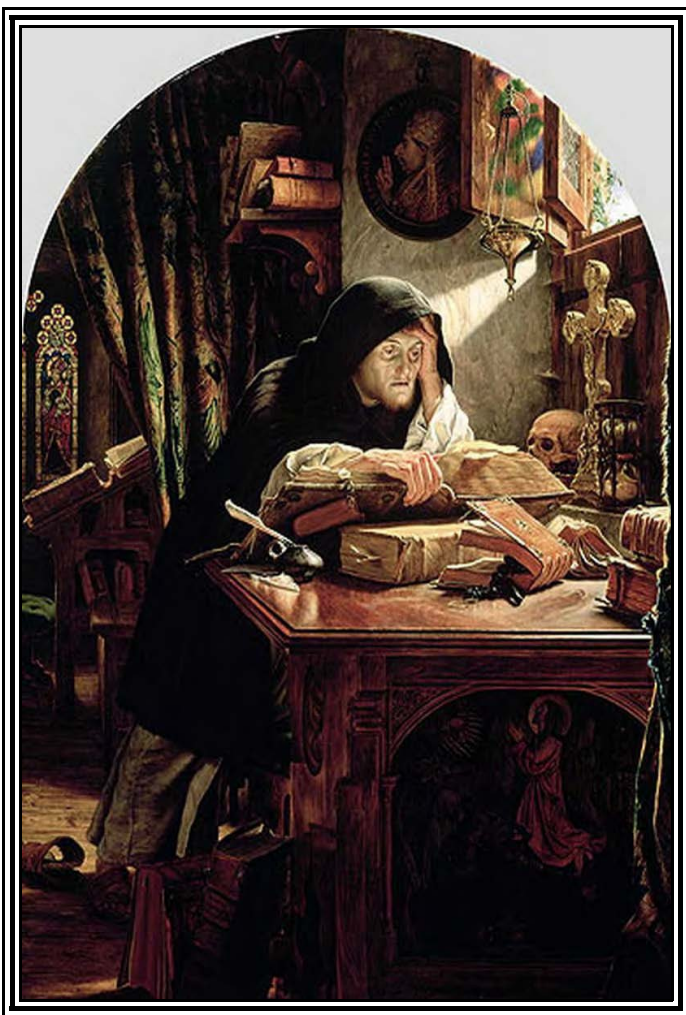
"Sola Fide"

Faith is defined in two complementary phrases as ***"the assurance of things hoped for"*** and ***"the conviction of things not seen."*** The common English translation of the first faith noun as ***"assurance,"*** while not inaccurate, weakens the sense of the original text. ***"Assurance"*** is a subjective, personal feeling of confidence. This Greek noun is more commonly used in an objective sense to identify ***"an objective reality that is unquestionable and securely established."*** (Lane, II, p. 328) The Greek philosophers used this word to distinguish reality from mere appearance. In common Greek the term referred to a title deed which irrefutably established ownership of property. ***"Assurance"*** fails to express this concept of absolute certainty by focusing on the feeling or opinion of the believer rather

than matters of fact. The point of the text would be much more clearly expressed by the more accurate rendering - ***"Now faith is the reality of things hoped for..."*** The believer has been enabled to recognize that the content of his faith is real, even though it may not yet be evident. There is not the slightest uncertainty about the realization of ***"things hoped for"*** when that hope is founded upon the promise of God. The deliberate use of this ***"title deed"*** term here expresses a guarantee of the future which God, in Christ, has prepared for His people. One commentator literally translates the phrase - ***"faith is the title deed of things hoped for"*** which captures the sense of the original perfectly. In his classic three volume *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Celas Spicq explains the implications of this

term in Hebrews 11:

“Faith is the guarantee of the heavenly realities for which we hope; not only does it render them certain for us, but it envisages them as rightfully belonging to us; it is, in itself, an objective assurance of our definite enjoyment of them. Consequently, faith takes possession of them by anticipation of these heavenly blessings and is a genuine commencement of the divine life with the guarantee of its everlasting permanence...here we bring together the theologies of John - concerning the eternal life already begun here below - and of Paul - concerning the earnest and the first fruits of the resurrection and of salvation - for this is something already accomplished for believers, even though its fulfillment is not yet.” (Hughes, p. 439)



“Sola Fide - Luther Searching For The Truth”

The second faith noun ***“conviction”*** in the phrase ***“the conviction of things not seen,”*** is also typically translated in a subjective sense, as here in the ESV. A conviction is a personal belief held by an individual. However, once again, the Greek word is more commonly used objectively to refer to factual evidence or proof. The preferable translation of the phrase would be - *faith is...the evidence of things not seen.* *“Physical eyesight produces conviction or evidence of visible things; faith is the organ which enables people to see the invisible.”* (Bruce, p. 279) The heroes of faith enumerated throughout the remainder of the chapter document how the faithful experienced His power in their lives and received His blessing. Thus, by faith, they have provided evidence for the reality of God and His present activity in the lives of His own.

“For by it the people of old received their commendation.” - Verse 2 serves as the

bridge from the definition of faith which opened the Chapter to the list of examples of faith at work which will occupy the remainder of the Chapter. ***“The people of old”*** is a respectful designation of venerable forefathers through whom the faith was passed down to the present generation and who now serve as examples of the reality of faith for those who must still

struggle with the challenges of faithfulness in this life. ***“Received their commendation”*** refers to the fact that the accomplishments of faith in the lives of these men were recalled and recorded in the sacred word of God. *“The exemplars of the faith to whom reference is made in the pages of the OT enjoy the approving testimony of Scripture, and consequently of God Himself who speaks by His Spirit through the written Word.”* (Lane, II, p. 330) God provided His commendation to their demonstration of faith as a source of encouragement for the believers of every generation to follow. *“Their attestation by God is also their validation as examples worthy of emulation by the pastor’s hearers if they too would receive the ultimate divine commendation...In various ways the ‘people of old’ described in the following verses elucidate and enrich the meaning of ‘by faith.’”* (Cockerill, p. 523)

Such listings of the faithful forefathers are not unprecedented or even unusual in Judaism. Perhaps the most extensive such list is found the Apocryphal book of *Ecclesiasticus - The Wisdom of Sirach*. That listing was designed to certify God’s choice of Israel as His chosen people and to encourage their descendants to remain faithful to His covenant with their nation. The good qualities of and accomplishments of those included were praised at length and in detail. It is more a national celebration of the glory of Israel than that of God:

“Let us now praise famous men and our fathers in their generations. The LORD apportioned to them great glory, His majesty from the beginning. There were those who ruled in their kingdoms and were men renowned for their power, giving counsel by their understanding, and proclaiming prophecies, leaders of the people in their generations and in understanding of the peoples’ learning, wise in their words of instruction; those who composed musical tunes and set forth verses in writing, rich men furnished with resources, living peaceably in their dwelling places - all these were honored in their generations and were the glory of their times. There were some of them who have left a name, so that their praises are declared. And there are some of them who have no memorial, who have perished as though they had not lived; they have become as though they had not been born, and so have their children after them. But these were, nevertheless, men of mercy, whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten, with their descendants it will remain, a goodly inheritance to their posterity. Their descendants stand by the covenants; their children also, for their sake. Their posterity will continue forever and their glory will not be blotted out. Their bodies were buried in peace, and their name lives to all generations. Peoples will declare their wisdom and the congregation declares their praise.” (Sirach 44:1-15)

Sirach’s listing continues for six chapters and includes, among others: Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Phineas, Joshua, Caleb, the Judges, Samuel, Nathan, David, Solomon, Rehoboam, Jeroboam, Elijah, Elisha, Hezekiah, Isaiah, Josiah, Ezekiel, Nehemiah, the Twelve Prophets, and Zerubbabel. Hence, the form which is used here in

Hebrews would have been familiar to his audience. A similar recitation of the faith of the forefathers, which was much more an assertion of the faithfulness of God and the manner in which He can accomplish great things thru the faith of those who trust in him is presented in 1 Maccabees 2:51:64 by Mattathias addressed to his sons the Maccabees on the eve of his death:

“Remember the deeds of the fathers which they did in their generations and receive great honor and an everlasting name. Was not Abraham found faithful, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment and became the lord of Egypt. Phineas, our father, because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood. Joshua, because he fulfilled the commandment became a judge in Israel. Caleb, because he testified in the assembly, received an inheritance in the land. David, because he was merciful, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever. Elijah because of his great zeal of the Law, was taken up into heaven. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flames. Daniel, because of his innocence was delivered from the mouths of the lions. And so observe from generation to generation that none who hope in Him will lack strength. Do not fear the words of a sinner for his words will turn into dung and worms. Today he will be exalted but tomorrow he will not be found, because he has returned to the dust and his plans will perish. My children, be courageous and grow strong in the Law, for by it you will gain honor.” (1 Maccabees 2:51-64)



“Mattathias Maccabeus Addressing His Sons”

“By faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” - This verse begins the first segment of the roll call which extends from the creation to the fall of Jericho at the beginning of the



"God The Creator" - Lucas Cranach

conquest of the Promised Land.

For the first of twenty-four times we hear the words **"By faith."** Note particularly the writer's use of the first person plural pronoun **"we"** in this phrase - **"By faith we understand."** That pronoun includes the writer, his readers and all the great heroes of faith who are yet to come in this recitation. For all of us this is essentially a matter of faith. Faith consists of knowledge, assent and most essentially trust. All of this is God's doing. It all begins here. Our knowledge of God and His nature as the one Source of all that is, and our acknowledgment of Him as the source of our being with whom we as creatures must be in relationship because He is our Source - is **"by faith."** The use of the term **"faith"** here is the natural application of its definition in Verse 1 - **"Faith is...the conviction of things not seen."** The origin of time/space reality in the creative action of God is not evident to the man apart from faith. It would appear

that there is nothing beyond that which can be seen. *"The Wisdom of Solomon"* - composed in the latter part of the Inter-testamental Period, uses the same terminology to lament the inability of natural man to recognize the identity of God as the Creator of all that is because he cannot see beyond that which they see:

"For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know Him who exists, nor did they recognize the Artisan while paying heed to His works; but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air, or the circle of stars or turbulent water or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world. If through delight in the beauty of these things people assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their LORD, for the Author of beauty created them. And if people were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is He who formed them. . For from the greatness and beauty of created things, comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. Yet these people are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find Him. For as they live among His

works, they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful. Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the LORD of these things.” (Wisdom of Solomon 13:1-9)

The Apostle Paul made precisely the same point in Romans 1, again using the seen/unseen language of Hebrews, to lament the inability of the man without faith to see beyond that which is seen, which inability leaves sinners blind to the Creator trapped in the futility of worshiping the creatures rather than the one God who made all things:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise they became fools. And exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen!” (Romans 2:18-25)



God The Creator Of The Universe

Instead of perceiving the wondrous power and wisdom of God from that which He has created, sinful man, apart from faith, is so impressed by what he can see, that he makes the various components of the visible world into his gods. This is the ultimate tragedy.

“By faith” the insight of the believer is enabled to pierce the facade of what seems to be - ***“what is seen”*** and recognize that it ***“was not made out of things visible.”*** ***“Through the visible we perceive the invisible divine reality as the actual ground of all things because of the intervention of faith.”*** (Lane, II, p. 330) He has deigned to reveal this most basic of all

truths to us in His Word. He has enabled us to accept this fact and trust in its truthfulness by bestowing upon us the gift of faith.

“The medium of understanding is the written Word of God, which activates the capacity for religious knowledge intrinsic to faith. To understand, perceive and acknowledge that God’s will as Creator is the basis of all good things is to respond to the biblical account in terms of faith.” (Lane, 2, p. 331)

These majestic words carry us back to the first chapter of Genesis and the beginning of time and space. They remind us that the essence of faith is the reality of a God who is the only independent existence, the source and creator of all that is. This truth is the basis for our relationship with Him and our trust in Him.

“The pastor is pursuing no abstract philosophical discussion of God’s existence. He is concerned about God’s place in the hearers’ lives...We are not to live as if this visible world were the ultimate reality, the final source of happiness, approval, gain or loss. We know better. We are to live as if the unseen God and His power are the ultimate reality - for they are.” (Cockerill, p. 525)

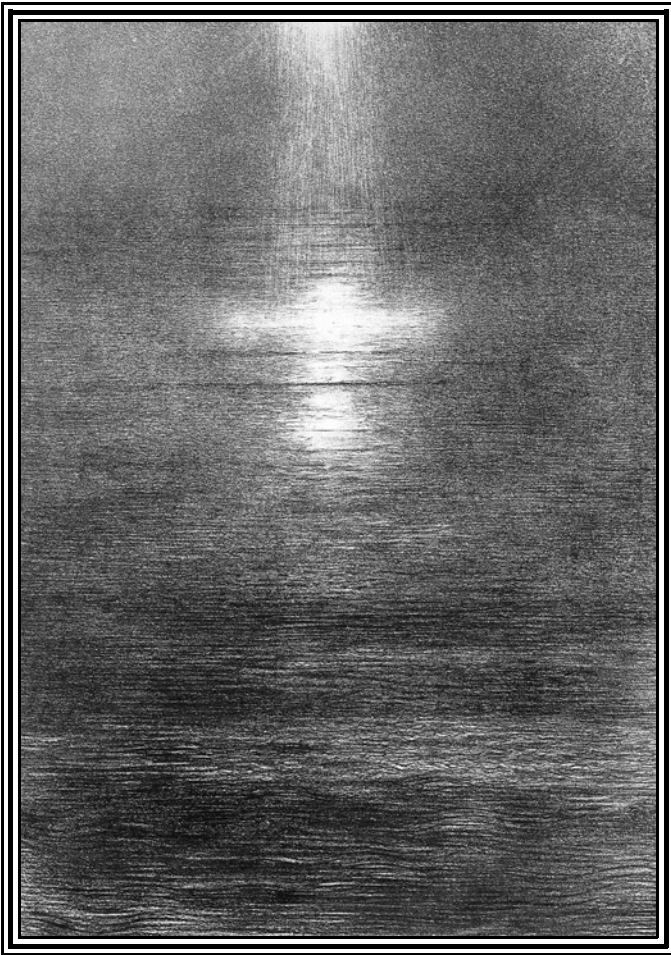
“The Universe” refers to the entire time and space reality. The same word is used in 1:2-3 in the identical context of asserting the role of Christ in the creation of all things:



“God The Creator” - Blake

“In these last days He has spoken to us by His Son whom He appointed the Heir of all things, through whom He also created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the Word of His power.”

The Greek noun can be translated as “worlds” - in reference to the space dimensions of creation in planets, stars and suns scattered across the unimaginable reaches of the universe or as “ages” to encompass the time component of that which God brought into being. **“The universe was created”** - Creation is the work of God alone. To make something out of nothing (“*creatio ex nihilo*”) is a concept which surpasses human comprehension. No human philosophy or scientific theory can answer the question of origin. Neither cogitation nor



"In The Beginning Was The Word" - Dore

experimentation are equal to the task. However, faith, which trusts the Word of God as the ultimate and infallible source of reality understands that the answer is God. He is the source of all that is - ***"By faith we understand that the universe was created."***

*"It is faith and faith only, resting on the revealed creative word, which penetrates through the veil of phenomena (***"what is seen - thing that are visible"***) to the divine super-sensual ground behind it. Creation itself is a postulate of faith. The very formation of the stage of human history, on which God's dealings with man have been displayed, is, in fact, disclosed only to faith."* (Delitsch, II, p. 223)

The agent of creation is ***"the Word of God"*** as reflected in the creation texts of Genesis and then defined in John 1 as the person of Jesus Christ the second member of the divine Trinity.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life and life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:1-5)

The same truth of creation by means of the divine Word is expressed by the psalmist in Psalm 33 as he summoned mankind to stand in wonder, worship and awe before its Creator:

"By the Word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; He put the deeps in the storehouses. Let the earth fear the LORD, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke and it came to be; He commanded and it stood firm." (Psalm 33:6-9)

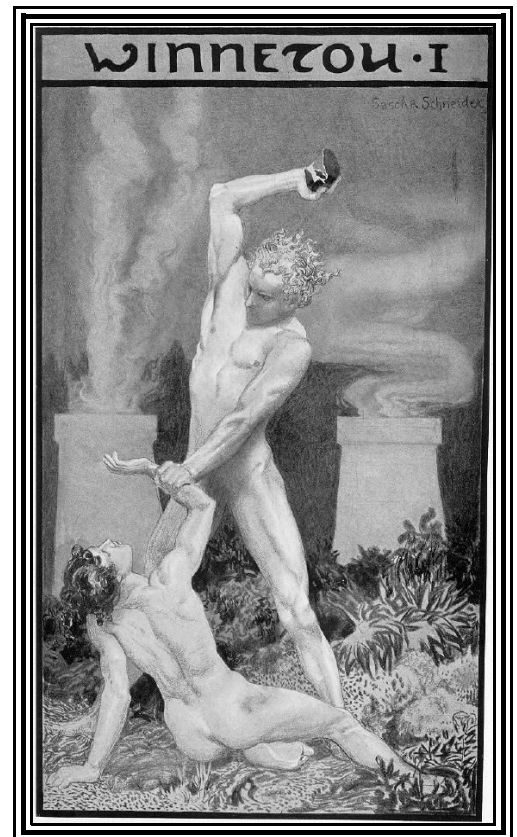
Hebrews 11:4-7

(4) By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts, and through

his faith, though he died, he still speaks. (5) By faith Enoch was taken up so he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. (6) And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists, and that He rewards those who seek Him. (7) By faith, Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain....” - The Roll Call of the Heroes of Faith begins with Abel, the son of Adam and Eve. This selection is unusual in that Abel was not usually included in such listing in the traditional literature of Judaism. The single exception is a listing in the Apocryphal Book of 4 Maccabees where the faithful mother of the seven sons slain before her eyes by wicked Antiochus includes Abel as the first martyr to die for the faith: *“While he was still with you he taught you the Law and the Prophets. He read to you about Abel slain by Cain and about Isaac who was offered as a whole burnt offering, and about Joseph in prison.”* (4 Maccabees 4:10-11) Nonetheless, Abel serves as a natural starting point for this listing since he comes shortly after creation and the fall into sin and would thus have been the first generation to live by faith in a world where sin had become the defining reality of the human predicament. At the same time, in contrast the Enoch, who follows in this listing, Abel provides an example of one who endured suffering and death as the price of his faithfulness. The contrast between Abel who died for the faith, and Enoch who was spared death because his faith was pleasing to God effectively conveys a powerful message to the believers who are the recipients of this epistle:

“In a more profound sense, however, everyone who lives by faith identifies with both Abel and Enoch. All, like Abel, will die without receiving the fullness of what God has promised. All, like Enoch, are promised triumph over death. Hebrews 12:1-3 will make it clear that this victory is assured to the faithful by Christ’s experience to the ultimate degree of both Abel’s suffering and Enoch’s deliverance. Innocent Abel died for his faith - Christ ‘endured the cross, despising the shame.’ Enoch was ‘translated’ - Christ ‘has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.’ He is both the ‘Pioneer’ and the ‘Perfector’ of faith. (12:2)” (Cockerill, p. 526)



“Cain And Abel” - Schneider



"The Death of Abel" - Anthony Balestra

Little is known of Abel beyond the brief description of his birth and the jealousy of his older brother Cain which led to murder. It is tragically significant that the first death in the aftermath of the Fall into sin was fratricide.

"Now Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.' And again she bore his brother, Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time, Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering He had no regard. So Cain was very angry and his face fell. The LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry and why has your face fallen? If you do well will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you but you must rule over it.' Cain spoke to Abel, his brother. And while they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is Abel, your brother?' He said, 'I do not know! Am I my brother's keeper?' And the LORD said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. And when you work the ground it shall no longer yield to you its strength and you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.'" (Genesis 4:1-12)

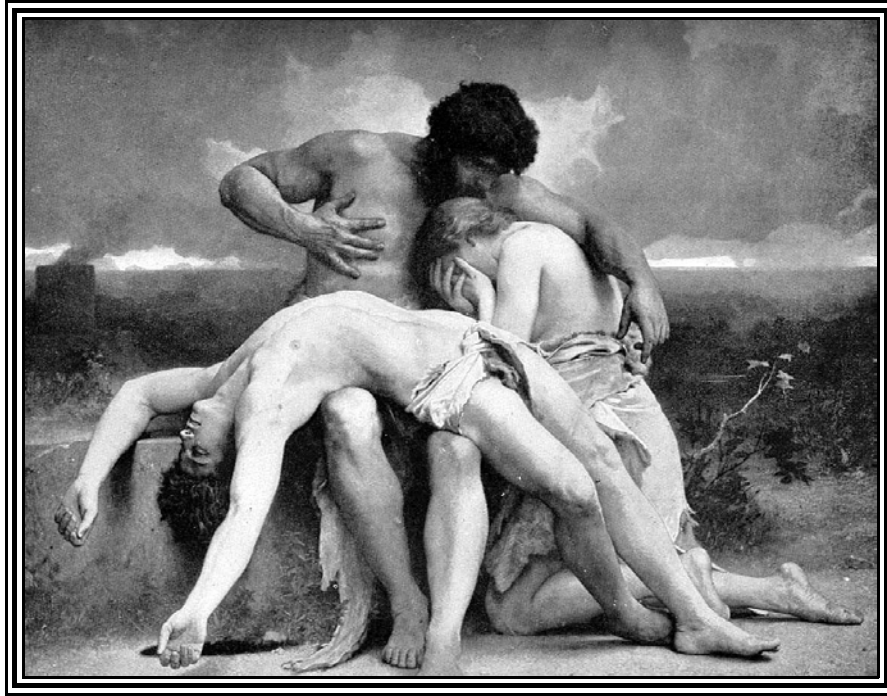
Abel's actions, like those of all the others who follow him in this grand listing, is introduced

with the crucial words **“by faith”** thus indicating that faith is both foundation and the motive of Abel’s identity and his actions. At the same time **“by faith”** reveals that the suffering and death which he endured came about as the negative result of sinful opposition to his faith. Both Abel and his brother Cain **“brought to the LORD an offering”** - that is, they both followed through the outward ritual actions of religion. Genesis does not reveal a time frame between the expulsion from the Garden and either the birth of the boys or the tragic events of their dispute. The vague wording of Genesis 4:3 - **“in the course of time”** - signals disinterest in such details. Given the fact that Cain and Abel were adults with families the assumption of a significant interval is required. It is also clear that fallen man was painfully well aware of his sinfulness and the separation from God which was its consequence. When Cain was born Eve rejoiced - *“I have gotten a man, the Lord!”* - clearly an allusion to the promise of the deliverer who was to undo the damage inflicted by the serpent. The names of the two brothers signals the difference in their characters. **“Cain”** is derived the verb *“to acquire”* while **“Abel”** means *“breath”* alluding to the fragility of man’s existence in sinful world. Whether the offerings presented Cain and Abel were the result of divine command or the instinctive recognition on the part of Adam’s sons that such actions were an appropriate response to the blessings of the Creator is not stated. Leupold contends that if there had been a divine institution of such sacrifices it would have been mentioned in the biblical text and that therefore this was an appropriate human initiative.

“More nearly true is the supposition that the sacrifices were originated by their father Adam, and since no commandment is recorded either authorizing or requesting sacrifice, we are, no doubt, nearer the truth when we let sacrifices originate spontaneously on man’s part as a natural expression of a devout spirit and of gratitude toward the omnipotent Giver of all good things. Sacrifice meets a deep need of the human heart. If sacrifice had originated in a commandment of God, it might well be thought of as a thing of sufficient importance to be permanently recorded in divine Scripture.” (Leupold, I, p. 193)

The distinction between the two offerings does not appear to be the consequence of the gift itself but rather the different attitude of the givers. Cain’s sacrifice is simply identified as **“an offering of the fruit of the ground”** while the text stresses the Abel’s gift was **“the first born of his flock and of their fat portions.”** The distinction suggests that Abel eagerly gave the first and best, while his brother routinely or even begrudgingly complied with the requirement. *“The outward difference betokened also an inward one...Abel’s sacrifice was an expression of heartfelt thankfulness, or, as our author says, tracing the disposition of his mind to its root, an expression of his faith.”* (Delitsch, II, p. 227) God’s comment to Cain confirms this view as He points to Cain rather than to the content of his offering as the source of the problem which resulted in the rejection of that offering. **“Why are you very angry and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you**

do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.” (Genesis 4:4-5) Cain was angry with God when he should have recognized that God should be angry with him. He should have repented of the sin which led to the rejection of his sacrifice rather than compounding that sin by becoming angry with God and with his brother. God’s warning informed Cain that this pattern of sin would intensify and lead to even greater sin if he continued to refuse to repent and return to God. The phrase



“Adam And Eve Grieving the Death of Abel”

In the Hebrew text of the phrase ***“Sin is crouching at the door, its desire is for you”*** the verb ***“crouching”*** is a variation of the Akkadian title for the demon of temptation ***“Rabisu.”*** In this way, the colorful language of the phrase depicts sin as a malevolent demon with great power lying in wait to pounce upon its careless prey. Cain has recklessly opened the doorway to that trap by his own anger and resentment. The promise implicit in God’s warning to Cain is that if he will recognize his sin and repent, his sacrifice will be as acceptable as that of his brother. The phrase ***“but you must rule over it”*** reflects the imagery of the demon lying in wait for its prey who must be overcome by faith.

Genesis simply reports that whatever the reason may have been - ***“The LORD had regard for Abel and his offering but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.”*** (Genesis 4:7-8) Hebrews emphatically declares that the difference between the two was the faith of Abel and the absence of faith on the part of Cain. ***“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.”*** (11:4) Luther contends that Hebrews is precisely correct in this assessment and that this insight is of profound theological significance as a conclusive demonstration of the fundamental truth of justification by grace through faith in Christ alone. The Reformer goes so far as to declare that the story of Cain and Abel, in light

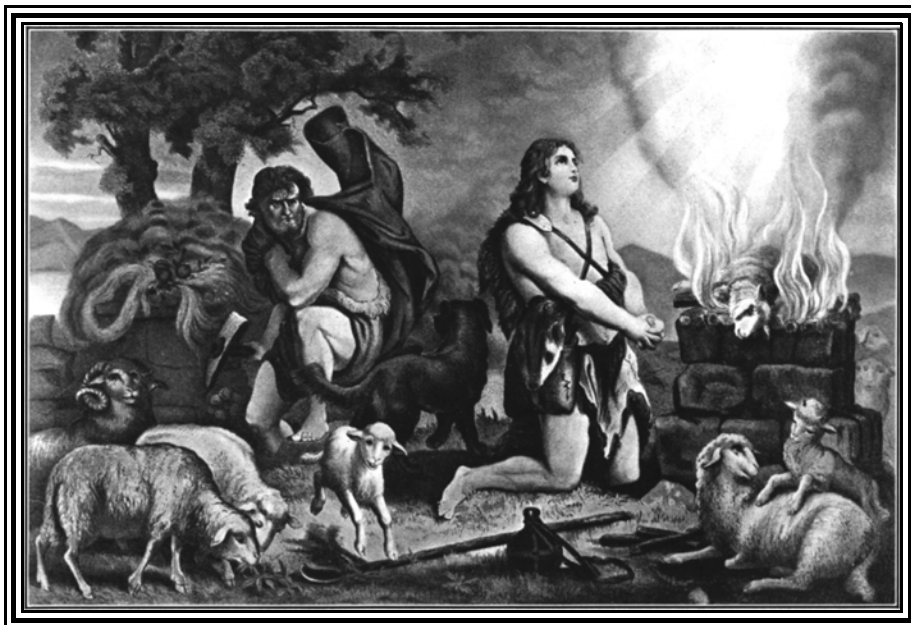
of its commentary in Hebrews 11, is the most forthright assertion of the Gospel in Scripture:

“But the verdict of the Epistle to the Hebrews is different; it declares that because of his faith Abel brought the more excellent offering (Hebrews 11:4). And so the fault lay not in the materials that were offered but in the person of him who brought the offering. The faith of the individual was the weight that added value to Abel’s offering, but Cain spoiled his offering. Abel believes that God is good and merciful. For this reason his sacrifice is pleasing to God. Cain, on the contrary, puts his trust in his primogeniture; but he despises his brother as a worthless and insignificant being. What then is God’s decision? He gives to the first born the position of one born later, and to the one born later He gives the position of the first born. He looks toward Abel’s offering and shows that the sacrifice of this priest pleases Him, but that Cain does not please Him and is not a true priest...This is an outstanding passage. Therefore it must be carefully taken note of and methodically studied. It would be sufficient if the New Testament had a statement praising the trust in God’s mercy over against the trust in works as clearly as it is praised here at the beginning of the world. When Moses says ‘The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering’ does he not clearly indicate that God is wont to look at the individual rather than at the work, to see what sort of individual he is. If then, the individual is good, his work also pleases Him; but if the individual is not good, his work displeases Him. This is the essence of our teaching. We teach and confess that a person rather than his work is accepted by God, and that a person does not become righteous as a result of a righteous work, but that a work becomes righteous and good as the result of a righteous



“Cain And Abel” - Bronze Relief - Ghiberti

good person, just as the text here proves. Because God has regard for Abel, He has regard also for his offering; and because He has no regard for Cain, He has no regard for his offering either. The text gives clear support to this conclusion, and this cannot be denied by our opponents. Moreover, there follows from these words the very clear and very valid conclusion that Abel rather than his work was righteous and that the work please because of the person, not the person because of his work. The latter is what our adversaries maintain when they teach that a man is justified by his works and not by faith alone. Thus the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has looked at this passage (Genesis 4:4-5) with pure and clear eyes when he says, 'By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God bearing witness concerning his gifts.'...Abel, on the other hand, acknowledges that he is an unworthy and poor sinner. Therefore, he takes refuge in God's mercy and believes that God is gracious and willing to show compassion. And as God, who looks at the heart, judges between the two brothers who are bringing their offerings at the same time. He reject Cain not because his sacrifice was inferior (for if he had brought the shell of a nut in faith as a sacrifice, it would have been pleasing to God), but because his person was evil, without faith and full of pride and conceit. By contrast, He has regard for Abel's sacrifice because He is pleased with the person. Accordingly, the text distinctly adds that first He had regard for Abel and then for his sacrifice...Therefore, this passage is an outstanding and clear proof that God does not have regard for either the size or the quality or even the value of the work, but simply for the faith of the individual...God is not interested in works, not even in those which He Himself has commanded, when they are not done in faith. He is even less interested in the works which have



"The Rage Of Cain" - 19th Century Bible Illustration

been invented by men without a Word of God; He is interested in faith alone, that is, the reliance on His mercy through Christ. Through it people begin to please God, and after that their works also please Him. Thus, Cain's offering did not please because the unbelieving Cain did not please. On the other hand, Abel's offering pleased because Abel pleased; and this was so because of his faith, since it did not rely on his own worthiness, his sacrifices or his work, but on the plain promise which had been given about the woman's Seed. Accordingly, this text has to do with our conviction concerning justification, namely, that a human being rather than his works must be just, and that he is accepted by God without any works, solely through grace which faith believes and apprehends. Nor does faith, as a work, make just, but it makes just because it apprehends the mercy, together with a humble confession of its sins and unworthiness which hopes that God will grant His pardon through Christ...This passage is altogether worthy of careful consideration." (LW,1,251-259)



"His Blood Cries Out"

The declaration of Hebrews that Abel ***"was commended as righteous"*** reflects the traditional identification of Abel as one justified by his faith. Christ's denunciation of the scribes and the Pharisees, for example, refers to Abel in this way; ***"Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some of whom you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar."*** (Matthew 23:34-36)

John used the same terminology in his first epistle to warn against anger which leads to violence as in the murder of Abel by his brother: ***"We should not be like Cain who was of the Evil One and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous...Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."*** (1 John 3:12-15)

In contrast, the Wisdom of Solomon condemns Cain as ***"an unrighteous man"*** who departed from God's wisdom in his rage: ***"But when an unrighteous man departed from her in his***



“My Brother’s Keeper

anger, he perished because in rage he killed his brother.” (Wisdom 10:3) In his “Antiquities of the Jews” - which tells the story of God’s people from creation to the revolt against Rome, Josephus relates the story of Cain and Abel using the same language, describing Abel as “a lover of righteousness”:

“Adam and Eve has two sons. The elder of them was named Cain, which name, when it is interpreted signifies a possession; the younger was Abel which signifies sorrow. They had also daughters. Now the two brothers were pleased with different courses in life; for Abel, the younger, was a lover of righteousness, and believing that God was present at all his actions, he excelled in virtue and his employment was that of a shepherd. But Cain was not only wicked in other respects, but was

wholly intent upon getting, and he first contrived to plow the ground. He slew his brother on the occasion following - They had resolved to sacrifice to God. Now Cain brought the fruits of the earth, and of his husbandry. But Abel brought milk, and the first fruits of his flocks; but God was more delighted with the latter oblation; when he was honored by what grew naturally of its own accord, than he was with the invention of a covetous man, and gotten by forcing the ground; whence it was that Cain was very angry that Abel was preferred by God before him, and he slew his brother, and hid his dead body, thinking to escape discovery.” (Josephus, Antiquities, 1:3)

Abel was regarded in rabbinic tradition as the first innocent victim of evil, the first martyr/saint to give his life in order to remain faithful to the Lord. The high esteem in which Judaism held Abel is most clearly reflected the *“The Testament of Abraham”* written about 100 B.C. The book tells of a visit by the patriarch to the afterlife on the eve of his own death guided by the Archangel Michael. There he sees a breathtaking scene of three judgements. The first of those judgements is presided over by Abel who is described in the most impressive way:

“And Abraham said, ‘My Lord Commander, who is this all wondrous judge? And who are the angels who are recording his judgements? And who is the sun-like angel who holds the balance? And who is the fiery angel who holds the fire?’ The Lord Commander said; ‘Do you see, all pious Abraham, the awesome man who is seated upon the throne? This is the son of Adam the first-formed, who is called Abel, whom Cain the wicked killed. And he sits

here to judge the entire creation, examining both righteous and sinners....For every person has sprung from the first-formed, and on account of this they are first judged here by his son. And at the second coming they will be judged by the twelve tribes of Israel, both every breath and every creature. And thirdly they shall be judged by the Master God of all; and then, thereafter the fulfillment of that judgement will be near, and fearful will be the sentence and there is none who can release. And thus the judgement and recompense of the world is made through three tribunals. And therefore a matter is not established by one or two witnesses, but every matter shall be established by three witnesses.” (Testament of Abraham 13:1-8)

The Apostle Jude also used Cain as a prototype of those whose actions are motivated by greed: ***“Woe to them, for they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain.”*** (Jude 11) The identification of Abel as one ***“commended as righteous”*** here in Hebrews 11 also reflects the title of the Messiah as ***“the Righteous One who shall live by faith”*** in Hebrews 10:36.

“Through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.” - Abel was declared to be ***“righteous”*** by God Himself. The empirical evidence of that divine declaration was the fact that God accepted Abel’s offering while rejecting that of his brother Cain. The manner in which God demonstrated His acceptance of Abel’s offerings is not specified either here or in Genesis. In Hebrew tradition, fire from heaven descended upon the altar of Abel and consumed his offering while that of Cain remained untouched. This tradition may have been influenced by the experience of the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal upon Mount Carmel. The verb ***“commended”*** is the same word which had previously been used in Verse 2 in reference to ***“the people of old”*** who had ***“received their commendation”*** by faith. Luther savors the clarity and power of these words:



“Cain And Abel” - Van Leyden

“Therefore it is clear that these words of the apostle have the same meaning that is recorded in Genesis 4:4 - ‘God had regard for Abel’ namely, first because of his faith, not because of his work, for this follows - ‘and for his offerings.’ Accordingly, this is the crossroad where the truly righteous and the hypocrites separate. For those who are truly righteous press forward to works

through faith; the hypocrites, with perverse zeal press forward to grace through works, that is, to what is impossible.” (LW, 29. P. 232)

Classic Puritan commentator John Owen correctly notes that the murder of Abel is the first skirmish in the ongoing warfare between those who are truly God’s people and those who serve the god of this world either as hypocrites within the visible church or outright opponents of all that is good and godly. The conflict first evidence in Cain’s murder of his brother will continue until the end of time.

*“And here we have the prototype of the believing and the malignant churches of all ages - of them who under the profession of religion are truly ‘born again of the Spirit’ trusting in the promise; and those who have not been born again. The apostle affirms that what began here still continued in his own day: **“But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.”** (Galatians 4:29) This was the first public display of the hostility between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Genesis 3:16) as St. John declared - **“By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil...We should not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother.”** (1 John 3:10,12) The death of Cain was the pledge and prototype of the death of Christ. It was the first example and consequently the pattern and example of the two seeds throughout all ages...The basis of the difference between Cain and Abel was their different identities. One was a true believer, born of the Spirit and heir of the promise. The other was of the evil one under the power of sin and malice. Despite their different identities, the two brother co-existed temporarily in outward peace and harmony. This remains true of believers and unbelievers to this very day. Cain’s hatred was triggered by the outward worship of God. Until that worship began he lived in peace with his brother, as others walking in the way and spirit of Cain continue to do...In this public worship Abel was diligently attentive to the mind of God and the expression of his faith in action, as we have shown. Cain paid little attention to these things, but put his confidence in the external form of his worship. But for the true believer the solemn worship of God is the most important that we act in faith governed by God’s Word and will. This is demonstrated in the example of Abel. Those who follow the example of Cain follow their own inclination and intention. God demonstrated his approval of one and His disapproval of the other. This provoked the rage and malice of Cain which led to the death of his brother. Their worship was different, both in its substance and its manner. That did not bother Cain. He preferred his own way to that of his brother. But when God revealed His approval of Abel’s worship and His disapproval of Cain’s, Cain resolved to seek his vengeance in his brother’s blood...Satan fills the hearts of evil men with envy and malice and stirs them*

to persecution... True believers find such fulfillment and joy in their acceptance by God that they are willing to undergo any persecution on its behalf. This only serves to provoke the world even more. This is where persecution began and has continued throughout history. Those whom God approves must expect that the world will disapprove them and will ruin them if it can. The difference between the true believer and the hypocrite will most often be revealed by differences in worship. This is the way it has always been between the true church and false worshipers. The blessing of God is worth infinitely more than life. This is plainly revealed by the example of Abel.” (Owen, 7, pp.26-27)

“And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks” -

The reference here to Abel speaking on after his death may be an allusion to God’s comment to Cain that ***“The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.”*** (Genesis 4:10) However, that view is difficult to defend given the probability that the intent of the cry of Abel’s blood to which God refers is most likely a cry for justice and revenge upon his brother the murderer. The Apocryphal book of 1 Enoch presents amplifies the Genesis account to describe the soul of Abel leading the cries of the souls of all the righteous for justice upon their murderers: *“I asked Rufael, the angel who was with me, and said to him, ‘This spirit, the voice which is reaching into heaven like this and is making suit, whose spirit is it?’ And he answered me, saying, ‘This is the spirit which had left Abel, whom Cain his brother had killed.*

It continues to sue him until all of Cain’s seed is exterminated from the face of the earth, and his seed has disintegrated from among the seed of the people.” (1 Enoch 22:5-8) The same point is made in the apocryphal *Book of Jubilees*:



“The Souls Beneath The Altar” - Durer

“And in the third week of the second Jubilee, Eve bore Cain. And in the fourth she bore Abel. And in the fifth she bore Awan, his daughter. Cain killed Abel because the sacrifice of Abel was accepted, but the offering of Cain was not accepted. And he killed him in the field and his blood cried out from the earth to heaven, making accusation because he killed him. And the Lord rebuked Cain on account of Abel because he killed him. And He made him a fugitive on the earth because of the blood of his brother.” (Jubilees 4:1-4)

These texts are often associated with the Vision of the Seven Seals in Revelation 6:9-11



“Cain And Abel” - 17th Century Bible Woodcut

which in the opening of the sixth seal presents the blood of the martyrs crying out to God for the coming of the judgement and just vengeance upon their murderers:

“When he opened the sixth seal I saw under the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the Word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, ‘O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before You will judge and avenge out blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.”

The view that the Genesis 4 reference to the blood of Abel crying out to God from the earth is a cry for vengeance is further supported by the comment in Hebrews 12:24 which describes Jesus as ***“the Mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood which speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”*** If this is the correct understanding of Genesis 4, as it would seem to be, then it is unlikely that God’s reference to the blood of Abel there should be linked to the assertion of Hebrews that Abel still speaks even though he is dead. The emphasis here is clearly on the connection between Abel’s faith and his ability to speak on after his death. Based on the text’s assertion that ***“Through his faith, though he died, he still speaks”*** Luther presents the convincing argument that it is example of faithful Abel which speaks on across all generations:

“By means of a remarkable example God proves that he cares for those who are oppressed, since after the death of Abel He Himself speaks for him. Even though in this way He points out somewhat obscurely that the soul is immortal

and that there is eternal life, yet He does so with power. Thus a righteous man lives, acts, and speaks more truly and better when he no longer lives, acts, and speaks in himself, but when he lives, acts, and speaks in God. For that Abel lives in God, he shows by reason of the fact that he also speaks in God. Thus, 'though he is dead he still speaks' so that he who, when he was alive, could not teach his one brother through his faith and example, now that he is dead, that is, live far more vigorously, teaches the whole world. So great a thing is faith, that is, life in God. For this reason, it is altogether fitting to sing (Psalm 112:6) 'The righteous shall be in everlasting memory' (that is, in the memory of eternity). Thus, Chrysostom says: 'How does he who is dead still live? From the fact that he is in the mouths of all which shows that he is alive. For if he had a thousand tongues when he was alive, he would never have been held in such great admiration as he is now held when he is dead.' But by this we are all exhorted not only that death should not be feared, but that it should even be desired as what for Abel, and every righteous man, is a door and a crossing over from humanity to divinity, from the world to the Father, from wretchedness to glory. For in this way God has shown from the very beginning of the world, and of Scripture, what great blessings He can make out of a few evils. For Abel had to be slain that the glory of life might be greater in Abel than the disruption of the death that was brought in by Adam." (LW,29.p.234)



"The Curse of Cain" - Leighton



“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death....” - The total of that which we know of Enoch is written in Genesis 5:18-24. He was ***“the seventh after Adam”*** (Jude 14), the son of Jared and the father of Methuselah. He lived 365 years. Without further explanation Genesis declares that ***“he walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.”*** As is so often the case the paucity of information in the biblical text fueled a fascination which produced an abundance of references in apocryphal tradition. Three books of Enoch were composed during the first two centuries AD. They detail his journeys through the heavens and the visions of the end times which God revealed to him. Jude 14-15 appears to be a quotation from 1 Enoch 1:9 - ***“It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold the Lord comes with ten thousand of His holy ones, to execute judgement upon all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have***

committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” Enoch is traditionally identified with teaching and the wisdom of God. Jubilees 4:17 indicates that he was *‘the first among men who are born on earth who learned writing and knowledge and wisdom.’* He was renowned for his wisdom and his ability to teach that wisdom to others: *“Enoch was found perfect and he walked with Yahweh, and was taken, a sign of wisdom to all generations. (Sirach 44:16)* He is characteristically presented as the foremost paragon of righteousness during the era between creation and the flood, a time when the wickedness which led to that judgement flourished and festered:

“There was one who pleased God and was loved by Him, and while living among sinners he was translated. He was caught up lest evil change his understanding or guile deceive his soul. For the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good, and roving desire perverts the innocent mind. Being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long years; for his soul was pleasing to the Lord, therefore He took him quickly from the midst of wickedness. Yet the peoples saw and did not understand, nor take such a thing to heart, that God’s grace and mercy are with His elect, and He watches over His holy ones.”
(Wisdom, 4:10-15)

In its acknowledgment of the faithfulness of Noah, *Jubilees* indicates that the patriarch was superior to all but Enoch in his righteousness before the Lord: *“On account of his righteousness*

in which he was perfected, his life was more excellent than any of the sons of men except Enoch, for the work of Enoch had been created as a witness to the generations of the world so that he might report every deed of each generation in the day of judgement.” (Jubilees 10:17) Yet, to say that Enoch **“walked with God”** as does Genesis or that **“he was commended for having pleased God”** as here in Hebrews does not suggest sinless perfection. For Enoch was also commended as **“an example of repentance to all generations.”** The hyperbole of Judaism’s traditions notwithstanding, Enoch was most certainly a superb example of faith which was demonstrated in submission to the will of God. Thus Hebrews rightly declares - **“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found because God had taken him.”** Righteousness and faith are inseparably united in Hebrews, the former the expression and demonstration of the latter. The life which Enoch lived prior to his being taken up to heaven was the demonstration of his faith, thus, **“Before he was taken up he was commended as having pleased God.”** That fact, in and of itself, is proof positive of his faith because - **“Without faith it is impossible to please Him.”**

“For whoever would draw near to God must believe...” - The definition of faith here presented is similar to its counterpart in 11:1 in that faith is comprised of conviction about present reality and hope for future blessing. In this instance the current conviction is the reality of God - **“He exists.”** The second phrase - **“He rewards those who seek Him”** pertains to the believer’s confidence in the fulfillment of God’s promise of blessings. It is evident that faith presupposes the existence of God. God is the supreme and eternal object of all true faith. The belief of which the text speaks is not merely the conviction that there is a god, some sort of vague deism that is open to the possibility of some sort of divine reality about which nothing certain of specific can be known. No, **“whoever would draw near must believe.”** The terminology is blunt and unambiguous. The central core of faith is the conviction that **“He exists.”** The language here recalls the sacred name **“Yahweh”** - **“I AM”** first revealed to Moses at the burning bush. The object of the faith is and must be the one true God, **“the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God”** (1 Timothy 1:17). This is the God who is Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. This is the God who reveals Himself in His Word and whose Word is the ultimate and the only standard of truth for it carries the authority of its divine Source. If one would dare to approach the one God that drawing



“The Ascension of Enoch”



Icon Of Enoch And Elijah

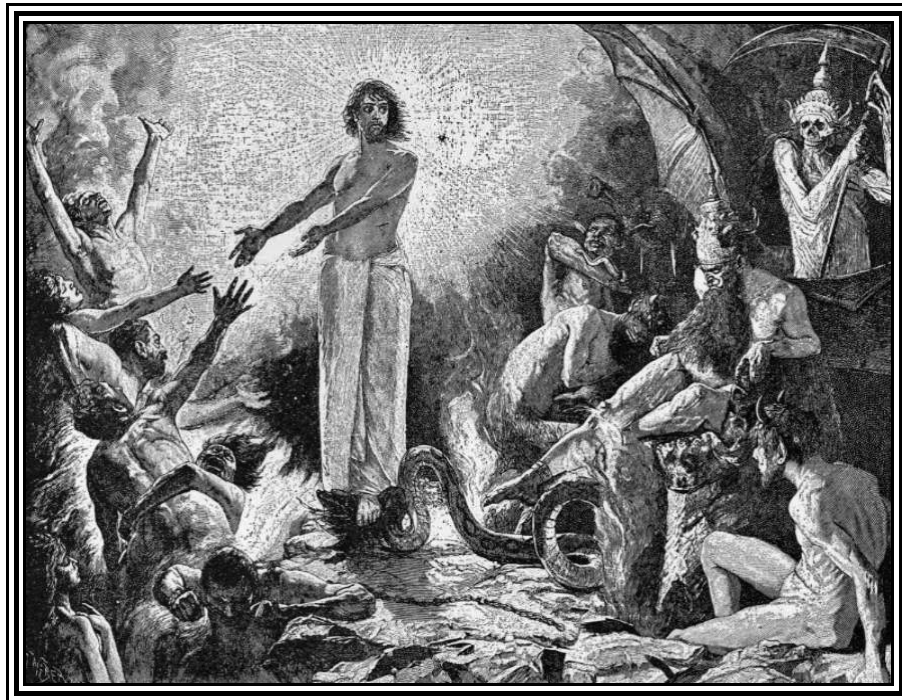
near must take place on His terms in humble awe and adoration in full submission to His will and with complete recognition of the unworthiness of the sinful creature to stand before the righteous and holy Creator. All of this and more is contained in the simple words ***“whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists.”*** The boldness to approach the one God is comprised of confident trust ***“that He rewards those who seek Him.”*** These words express the trust which is the essence of faith. Trust in the gracious promises of God which invites the sinner and offers forgiveness and life on that basis on that which God has done for him in Christ. Such faith is itself God’s gift from beginning to end, and, as Thomas Aquinas has correctly stated the reward of that faith is God Himself: *“The reward is nothing but God Himself because man ought not to seek anything else from Him - Genesis 15:1 - ‘I*

am your Protector and your exceeding great reward.’ - for God gives nothing other than His own self.” (Hughes, p. 461) This truth is expressed by the psalmist: ***“Send out Your life and Your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my exceeding joy, and I will praise You with the lyre, O God, my God!”*** (Psalm 43:3-4) The Greek text of this phrase literally says *“He is a Rewarder.”* While the English is somewhat awkward it more clearly expresses the concept that God Himself is the promised reward and that the confidence of the believer is actually a personal trust in the character of God. Faith rests securely upon the character and the power of God. We trust Him because of who He is.

*“God is a ‘Rewarder’ to those who seek Him in the sense that He Himself is their reward. This fact permanently excludes any thought of merit on the part of those who are rewarded. For who could merit God as his reward? God’s rewarding, particularly since He Himself is the reward is an act of infinite grace and generosity. This clearly indicates the precise object of faith which is intended here. The promise of God as the Rewarder who gives Himself to believers points directly to Christ. The giving of that reward is the ultimate gift. Thus the apostle intends to encourage believers **“to draw near to God”** because of that most wonderful gift.”* (Owen,7,p.44)

“By faith, Noah being warned by God concerning events...” - Following the brief pause of Verse 6 and its redefinition faith, the roll of the heroes of faith continues with the patriarch Noah. The description deliberately begins with the assertion that Noah believed God’s incredible warning concerning the impending flood which is characterized as ***“events not seen.”*** This terminology, of course, is drawn from the definition of faith in 11:1 - ***“the conviction of things not seen.”*** The applicability of this example across the centuries which separated Noah from the recipients of the epistle is particularly potent because Scripture uses the Great Flood as a prototype of the Final Judgement.

“For Christ also died once for sin, the Righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared in which a few, that is eight persons, were brought safely through water.” (1 Peter 3:18-20)



“The Descent Into Hell” - Rochegrosse

“If He did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement...For they deliberately ignore this fact that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water, by the Word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and the earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction



"The Flood" - Comerre

of the ungodly." (2 Peter 2:5,9; 3:5-7)

Hence the subtle message of the text becomes, as Noah the believer heeded the warning of God so also you as believers ought to heed the warnings of God today. This unique introduction provides an effective way to highlight the primary components of faith. In this instance, the revelation that God was about to destroy humanity by a flood which would engulf the entire planet certainly would have strained anyone's credulity. Such a thing was completely unprecedented and a global disaster on such a scale would have far exceeded the limits of human imagination. At the same time the news that mankind was about to be exterminated in an act of divine judgement would have to have been unwelcome news, which would have made its acceptance all the more difficult and painful. Hence, in this particular instance - as is often the case - faith necessitated submission to the will and purpose of God and the acceptance of that which contradicted my own preference or opinion. This is the humble faith demonstrated preeminently by our Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as He prayed - ***"Not my will but Thine be done."*** (Luke 22:42) Noah's response to the warning of the flood serves as a reminder that the believer's expectation of the day of judgement involves not only the anticipation of heaven, which is most frequently the case, but also the recognition of the threat of condemnation of the unbeliever from God has graciously delivered them. In this context, it is most appropriate that Noah undertook the construction of the ark ***"in reverent fear."*** He did not doubt the capability of God to carry out a judgement upon this scale nor did he challenge the rightness of that judgment. At the same time he trusted in God's promise that he and his family would be delivered from the flood by means of the ark and obeyed the Lord's command while, at the same time he urgently warned others of the impending danger and was thus hailed as a ***"herald of righteousness"*** (2 Peter 2:5). The *"Sibylline Oracles"* a series of books composed with Judaism in the latter part of the inter-testamental period, offers this

intriguing description of the story of Noah and his preaching to the unrighteous people of the days before the great flood:

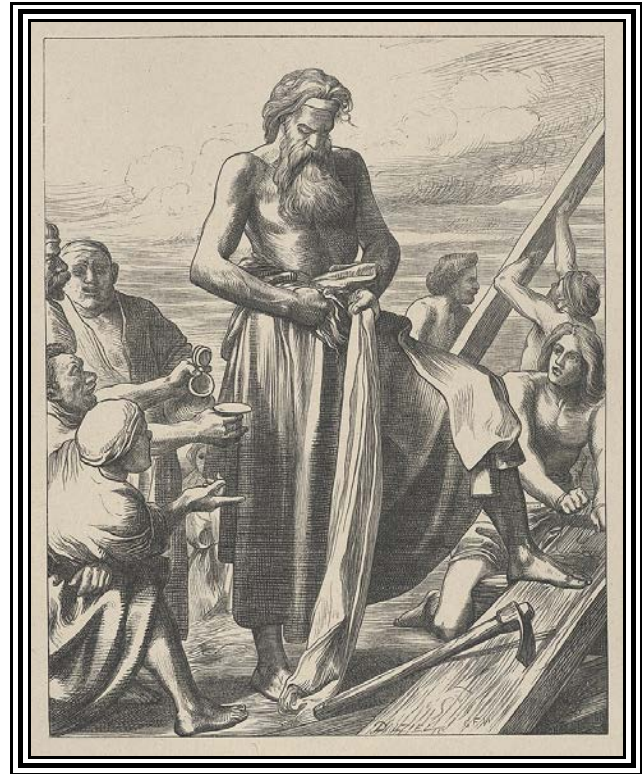
“Noah alone among all was most upright and true, a most trustworthy man concerned for noble deeds. To him, God Himself spoke as follows from heaven: ‘Noah, embolden yourself and proclaim repentance to all the peoples so that all may be saved. But if they do not heed, for they have a shameless spirit, I will destroy the entire race with great floods of waters. But I bid you to construct quickly an imperishable wooden house, flourishing with unthirsting roots. I will place a mind in your breast, and crafty skill and will put measures in your lap; I will take care of everything so that you and as many as live with you will be saved...And then, having craftily devised all in turn, he entreated the people and began to speak in words like these: ‘Men, sated with faithlessness and smitten with a great madness; what you did will not escape the notice of God, for He knows all things, the immortal Savior who oversees everything, who commanded me to announce to you so that you would not be destroyed by your hearts. Be sober, cut off evils, and stop fighting violently with each other, having a bloodthirsty heart, drenching much earth with human blood. Mortals, stand in awe of the exceeding great, fearless heavenly Creator, imperishable God, who inhabits the vault of the heaven, and entreat Him, all of you, for He is good, for life, cities, and the whole world, four-footed animals and birds, so that He will be gracious to all. For the time will come when the whole immense world of men perishing by waters will wail with a dread refrain. Suddenly you will find the air in confusion and the wrath of the great God will come upon you from heaven. It will truly come to pass that the immortal Savior will cast forth upon men, unless you propitiate God and repent as from now, and no longer anyone do anything ill-tempered or evil, lawlessly against one another but be guarded in holy life. When they heard him, they sneered at him each one, calling him demented, a man gone mad. Then again, Noah cried out a refrain: ‘O very wretched, evil hearted fickle men, abandoning modesty, desiring shamelessness, tyrants in fickleness and violent sinners, liars sated with faithlessness, evildoers truthful in nothing, adulterers, ingenious in pouring out slanders, not fearing the anger of the most high God you were preserved til the fifth generation to make retribution. You do not bewail each other, cruel ones, but laugh. You will laugh with a bitter smile when this comes to pass, I say, the terrible and strange water of God. Whenever the abominable race of those who worship idols, a perennial race upon the earth, flourishing with unthirsting roots, disappears root and all in a single night, and the earth-shaker, land-quaker will shatter cities, complete with their inhabitants, and the hiding places of the earth, and will undo walls, then also the entire world of innumerable men will die. But as for me, how much will I lament, how much will I weep in my wooden house, how many

tears will I mingle with the waves? For if this water, commanded by God comes on, earth will swim, mountains will swim, even the sky will swim. All will be water and all things will perish. Winds will stop and there will be a second age.” (Charlesworth,I, pp.212-213)

Hebrews’ description of Noah makes it clear that the combination of recognizing God’s power and trusting in His promise constitutes faith which is then put into action.

“Such ‘reverent fear’ is the full recognition by the way one lives of God’s awesome sovereign power and faithfulness. Noah came to such a recognition of God by faith, that is, by believing both God’s promise of a flood and in His fearsome power to bring it about. His ‘reverent fear’ became real in his obedience - ‘he built and ark.’” (Cockerill, p. 532)

Genesis stresses that the pre-flood age in which Noah lived was a time when evil reigned supreme while perversion and corruption were flaunted on every side. The cumulative effects of sin had continued to intensify in every generation since the creation of Adam and Eve and the world had degenerated into an dark abyss of violence, lust, and death. It was in the midst of this profound corruption that Noah lived as a righteous man resolved to serve the Lord.



“Noah Scorned Before the Flood” - Dalziel

“When man began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, the sons of god saw that the daughters of man were attractive, and they took as their wives any that they chose. Then the LORD said, ‘My spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh. His days shall be one hundred and twenty years. The Nephalim were on the earth in those days and also afterward, when the sons of God came into the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. And the LORD God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth and that every intention of his thoughts was only evil continually...But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation...Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth and behold it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.” (Genesis 6:1-5; 8-9; 11-13)



“The Eve Of The Deluge” - Scott

Noah was viewed in Judaism as a paragon of righteousness, particularly in view of the moral corruption and decay in which he lived as noted in the Genesis texts above. Through His prophet Ezekiel, for example, God had warned rebellious Israel that a few righteous men would not cause Him to spare a corrupt nation. He made His point by using three outstanding examples of righteousness, one of which was Noah.

“Son of Man, when a land sins against Me by acting faithlessly and I stretch out My hand against it and break its supply of bread, and send famine upon it and cut off from it man and beast, even if these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness., declares the LORD God...Or if I send a pestilence upon that land and pour out My wrath upon it with blood to cut off from it man and beast, even if Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, as I live, declares the LORD God, they would deliver neither son nor daughter. They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness.” (Ezekiel 14:12-14; 19-20)

This pattern continued throughout the inter-testamental period. *The Wisdom of Sirach* notes: “Noah was found perfect and righteous; in the time of wrath he was taken in exchange; therefore a remnant was left to the earth when the flood came.” (Sirach 44:17) “*The Wisdom of Solomon*” identifies Noah as the agent through whom God preserved His saving wisdom amid the righteous judgement of the flood: “When the earth was flooded because of Cain, Wisdom again preserved it, steering the righteous man by a paltry piece of wood.” (Wisdom 10:4)

Noah who in “***reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household***” is the first man to whom the term “***righteous***” is applied in Scripture. “***Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.***” (Genesis 6:9) As he proclaimed the

truth of God and warned of the impending deluge he validated that warning by the example of his own life, lived in accordance with God's Word and will. God commanded Noah to enter the ark with his family as the flood was about to begin with the same assertion of righteousness - ***"Then the LORD said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation.'"*** (Genesis 7: 1) Genesis uses the same phrase - ***"Noah walked with God"*** - to describe him which had previously been used to characterize the life of Enoch (cf. Genesis 5:22). His faithful witness in word and deed provided the contrast which, in fact ***"condemned the world"*** removing every excuse or plea of ignorance contending that they had not been warned. At the same time Noah's example proved that God's demands upon mankind were not unreasonable or impossible.

"Noah condemned the world, severely increasing the gravity of their sin's guilt, in that he believed and obeyed when they refused to do so. He provided an example of what which God required of them in himself, thereby proving that God's demand was not unreasonable, evil, or impossible. This made their sin all the more severe...Thirdly, Noah condemned the world by leaving it totally without excuse. The man who removes the major plea that a guilty person can make in his own defense can rightly be said to have condemned him. This is exactly what Noah did to the world in which he lived. He left them no pretense that they had not been warned of their sin and of God's impending judgement. He left them with no basis upon which to plead that their judgement be removed or even delayed." (Owen,7, p. 53)



"The Coming Of The Flood" - Bruegel



“Noah The Herald Of Righteousness”

Jesus expressed the same concept when he declared that the people of Nineveh who repented upon hearing the message of Jonah and the Queen of Sheba who traveled half way around the world to hear the divine wisdom of King Solomon would rise up to condemn the Jews who spurned the witness of the Son of God standing before their very eyes.

“The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the south will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.” (Matthew 12:41-42)

Paul also makes use of the obedience of some as a condemnation of the disobedience of other in Romans 2. The apostle warns Jews who are demanding the circumcision of Gentile Christians that the uncircumcised Gentile who actually lives by the law of God condemns the circumcised Jew who does not obey the law.

“But circumcision is indeed of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So if the man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. For a Jew is one inwardly and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the Spirit.” (Romans 2:25-28)



“Noah’s Thank Offering” - West

“And became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” - Given the emphasis of this entire segment upon the primary importance of faith, it should come as no surprise that the righteousness of Noah is identified as ***“the righteousness that comes by faith.”*** Faith is the gift of God by means of which His righteousness is conveyed to the believer. That righteousness is the result of the substitutionary atonement accomplished by the perfect life and innocent death of the God/man Jesus Christ. As St. Paul declares:

“But God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved - and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not of works so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:4-10)

“I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ Jesus, the righteousness from God that depends on faith - that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and may share in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” (Philippians 3:8-11)

“Yet we know that a person is not justified through the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, for by

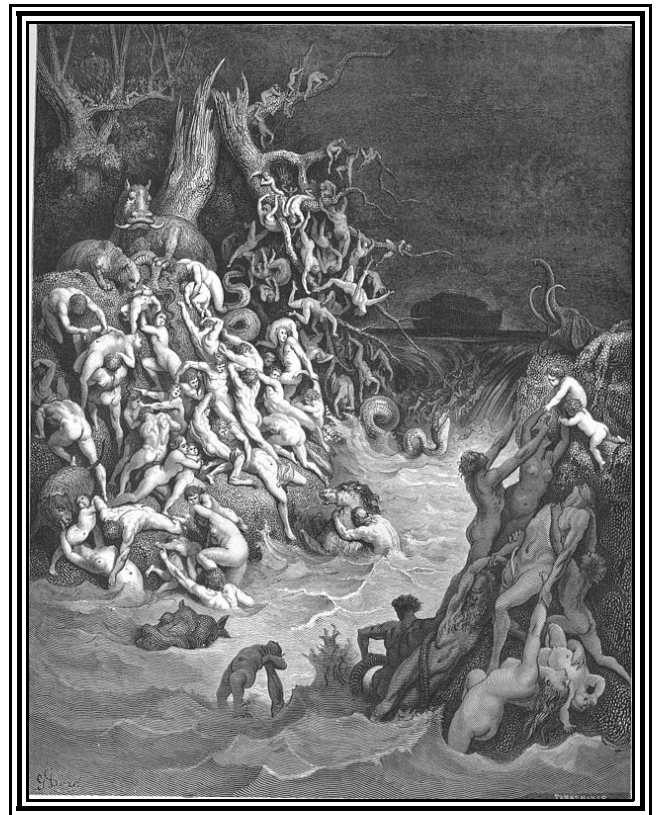
works of the law no one will be justified...And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (Galatians 3:15-21)

The use of the ***“heir”*** terminology - ***“an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith”*** - further emphasizes the fact that this righteousness is a gift of God’s undeserved love which could never be earned by the good works of any human being. ***“Man is an heir of the righteousness of faith. It is not of his own earning or deserving, but a gift, a possession, which passes over to him from a heavenly Father.”*** (Delitsch, 2, p. 232)

“It is the heir who becomes the possessor, and the inheritance of righteousness into which Noah entered was the inheritance that God has provided in Christ; for as Thomas Aquinas affirms, no one in any age is saved except through faith in Christ, and on the basis, either anticipated or fulfilled, of His mediatorial work. Christ, indeed, is supremely and uniquely the Heir. He it is, and none other, ‘whom the Father has appointed the Heir of all things’ (1:2). Noah and every other heir of righteousness is only so by having been made one with Christ, the sole Heir, by faith.” (Hughes, p. 464)

Here to the language of Hebrews echoes the terminology of St. Paul in stressed God’s grace as the only basis for salvation:

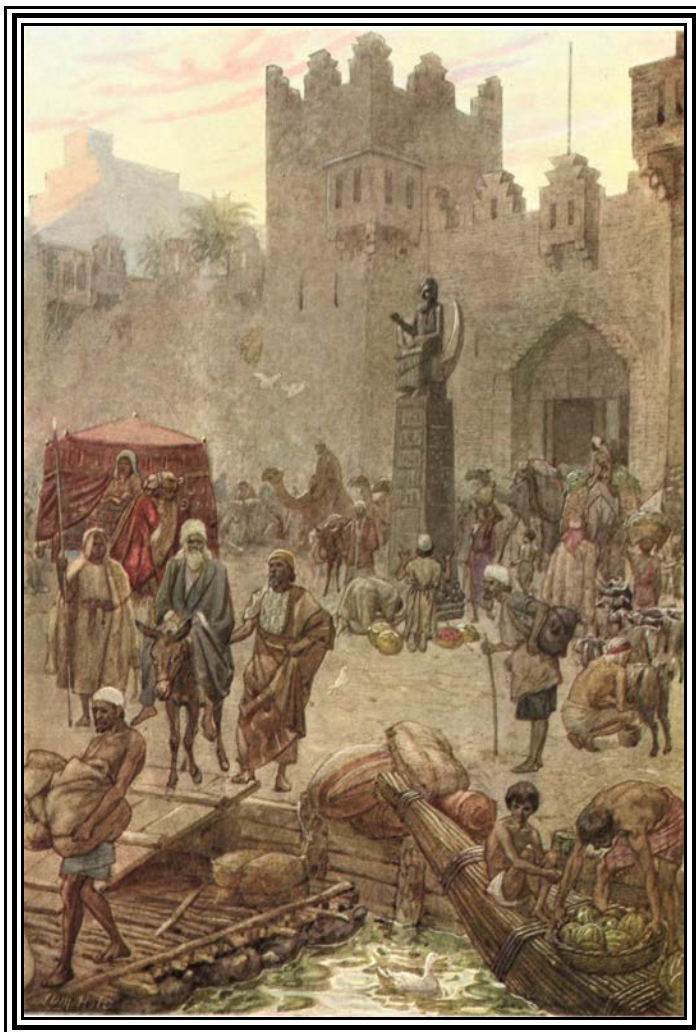
“For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.’ Now to one who works, his wages are not counted to him as a gift, but as his due. And to the one who does not work, and believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness...For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may depend on grace and be guaranteed to



“The Flood” - Dore

all his offspring...Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into His grace in which we stand and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 4:2-5, 9, 13-16; 5:1-2)

“And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring and heirs according to the promise. I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave...But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba, Father!’ So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, an heir through God.” (Galatians 3:29; 4:1-7)



“Abram’s Departure From Ur” - William Hole

Hebrews 11:8-12

(8) “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out not knowing where he was going. (9) By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob heirs with him of the same promise. (10) For he was looking forward to a city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. (11) By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. (12) Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven, and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

“By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place...” -

Having completed his survey of the

heroes of faith in the earliest history of humanity, the author now proceeds to the age of the patriarchs of the Israelite nation. It should come as no surprise that Abraham, the founder and father of the nation would be portrayed in greater detail than anyone else in the listing.

Abraham is the epitome of the man of faith. In *“Praise of the Elders”* canticle which parallels this format in Hebrews, Sirach also places particular emphasis on Abraham as the father of the nation:

“Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations, and no one has been found like him in glory; he kept the law of the Most High and was taken into covenant with Him; he established the covenant in his flesh, and when he was tested he was found faithful. Therefore, the Lord assured him by an oath that the nations would be blessed through his posterity; that He would multiply him like the dust of the earth, and exalt his posterity like the stars, and cause them to inherit from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.” (Sirach 44: 19-21)

Genesis 15:6 reports of Abraham: ***“And he believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness.”*** The connection between Abraham’s faith and his righteousness before God in this text is unequivocal and emphatic. This affirmation is repeatedly cited in the New Testament as an expression of the foundational principle of salvation by grace through faith alone.

“For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness...But the words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us, who believe in Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” (Romans 4:6,22)



“Abraham’s Journey To Canaan”

“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith...Does He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law or by hearing with faith - just as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness...And if you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:16)

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works, and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness’ - and he was called ‘a friend of God.’” (James 2:21-23)

The description of the faith of Abraham begins with his call by the Lord, recorded in Genesis chapter 12.

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house, to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” (Genesis 12:1-3)

God called Abram to leave his ancestral home in Mesopotamia, first from the ancient city of Ur of the Chaldees, near what would become the Persian Gulf, moving up the broad valley of the two rivers to the town of Haran, and from Haran southwest around the edge of the Arabian desert into the land of Canaan on the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. His pilgrimage is defined as an act of faith first of all because it took place in obedient response to God’s call - ***“Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out.”*** Secondly, he acted in faith because of his trust in God’s subsequent promise that he and his descendants would receive the land to which they were going as an inheritance - ***“to a place that he would receive as an inheritance.”*** The promise that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan was not given until after his return from Egypt as reported in Genesis 13:

“And the LORD said to Abram after Lot had separated from him; ‘Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all that land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise walk through the length and breadth of the land for I will

give it to you.” (Genesis 13:14-17)

Abram had no idea how he would come into this land which was already populated by peoples much more numerous and powerful than he. Nor did he and wife Sarah have any children although he was already seventy-five years old at this point. But he trusted in the promise of God all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. Such trust is, of course, a primary component of faith. Nor did he know where he was going. God’s call and promise did not specify a destination but simply indicated that God would lead him to the place - ***“And he went out not knowing where he was going.”*** Furthermore, Abram’s obedience to God’s call required him to abandon his settled, secure urban existence to live as a nomad in a foreign country where he would remain an outsider, perceived by the residents of that land as an intruder - ***“By faith he went to live in the land of promise as in a foreign land, living in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.”***

The wording of God’s call seems to go out of its way to emphasize the scope of everything which Abram was being called to give up: ***“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house.”*** (Genesis 12:1) All these things were the basis for a man’s security in the ancient world in terms of both economic viability and physical survival. And yet God specifically indicated that Abram was to give up all of these things in favor of an unknown future in an unspecified place with none of the social structures which provided his safety and support. Abraham’s unquestioning obedience to God’s command founded upon trust in God’s promise thus provides a superb example of faith at its best. 1st Century Judaic philosopher Philo of Alexandria expresses that concept well when he writes:

“Impelled by an oracle calling him to leave his native land and family and paternal home, and move to another country, he made eager haste to do so, considering that speed in giving effect to the command was as good as its full accomplishment; in fact, it looked as though he were returning to his homeland from foreign parts rather than leaving his homeland for foreign parts...Abraham departed the moment he was bidden, taking no thought for anything, either for his fellow-clansmen, or wardsmen, or schoolmates, or blood relations on father’s or mother’s side, or country, or ancestral customs, or community of nurture or home life, all of them, ties possessing a power to



“Abram Traveling To Canaan” - Copping

allure and attract which it is hard to throw off, he followed a free and unfettered impulse and departed with all speed from Chaldea, a land at that time blessed by fortune and at the height of its prosperity...This is a testimony to faith which the soul placed in God. Manifesting its gratitude, not on the basis of accomplished facts but on the basis of expectation of things to come. For the soul, utterly dependant on good hope, and considering those things which are not present to be, without doubt, present already because of the trustworthiness of him who has promised has won as its reward that perfect blessing, faith, as is said later on.” (Philo, De Abrahamo, 62, 66, 68f.)



“Ur Of the Chaldees In The Time Of Abraham”

Under such circumstances, Martin Luther hailed Abraham as “*the highest example of the evangelical life*” which places its sole confidence on the promise of God in His Word.

“In the first place, it was hard to leave his native land, which it is natural for us to love. Indeed, love for the fatherland is numbered among the greatest virtues for the heathen. Furthermore, it is hard to leave friends and their companionship, but most of all to leave relatives, and one’s father’s house...In the second place, he went out with no knowledge of where he was going, with nothing for him to follow except the Word of God concerning things which were nowhere to be seen. For just as for us the place where Enoch and Elijah are situated is shrouded in darkness, in gloom, in ignorance, and in the invisible things of God, so to Abraham, this place to which he was called was completely hidden. And this is the glory of faith, namely, not to know where you are going, what you are doing, what you are suffering, and after taking everything captive - perception and understanding, strength and will - to follow the bare voice of God and to be led and driven, rather than to drive. And thus it is clear that with this obedience of faith Abraham gave a supreme

example of an evangelical life, because he left everything and followed the Lord. Preferring the Word of God to everything and loving it above everything, he was a stranger of his own accord, and was subjected every hour to dangers of life and death.” (LW, 29, p.238)

“For he was looking forward to the city which has foundation whose designer and builder is God.” - The writer pauses in his description of the life of Abraham and his family to offer a word of explanation as to the basis of the patriarch’s amazing trust in God’s promises and obedience to His commands. The primary focus of Abraham’s was not this world nor the things of this world. By faith he discerned the transience of all such things. This world is for but a brief time and then it will be gone. Only that which is of God will endure. The ancient city of Ur was the most advanced metropolis of its day, with soaring temples and glorious palaces. But all are now reduced to dust ground beneath the heels of the conqueror again and again. Abraham recognized that faith in God granted him access ***“to the city which has foundation whose designer and builder is God.”***



“The Call Of Abraham” - Lillien

Many thousands of years have passed since the call of God came to him, and he still dwells safe and secure within that heavenly realm. Modern Bible critics dismiss these people and their faith as myths and legends to be dismissed with haughty disdain by the sophisticated scholars of today. That was most certainly not the perspective of the writer of this epistle. These people and their faith in the promises of God were real. Their obedience to God as the expression of their faith could therefore serve as an example and an inspiration to the recipients of this letter two thousand years ago and to us today. By faith we too look forward ***“to the city which has foundation whose designer and builder is God.”***

“Our author is content to treat Abraham and all the others listed in this catalogue as real historical characters from whose experience later generations can learn. Nor was his insight at fault in discerning in the promise to Abraham something more abiding than the fairest earthly possession. To those who place their trust in Him, God gives possessions of real and incorruptible value. Since, in our Lord’s words, ‘Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob live in Him’ (Luke 20:38); their true heritage must be based in the being of God; if the New Testament writers were not misguided in portraying

them as the ancestors of the family of faith, their essential blessings must be of the same order as the blessings enjoyed by their spiritual children under the new covenant. The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for in both the Old and the New Testaments everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and Man.”
(Bruce, p. 294)



“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” - Schaefer

The text places particular emphasis upon the fact that this permanent dwelling place is entirely the work of God - **“whose designer and builder is God.”** The **“designer”** is the one who lays out the plans for the project, the man in whose mind the concept originates. We would identify him as the architect. **“The builder”** is the one who actually constructs the plan which the architect has devised. Today he would be identified as the contractor. In this instance the entire project is God’s, in both concept and implementation. The permanence of this refuge is expressed in the phrase **“the city that has foundations.”** Unlike the tents which serve as the home of Abraham as he wanders through the hills of Canaan following his flocks and herds, which are designed to be portable and temporary, erected one day and dismantled the next, this city is designed to last forever. This is possible because its **“builder and designer is God.”** This terminology is used throughout the Old Testament to express the reliability

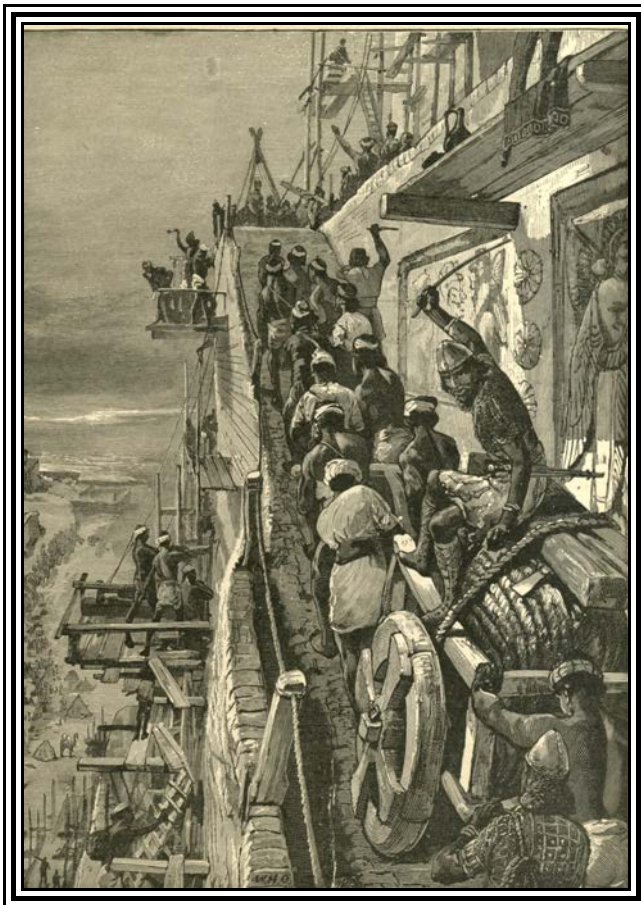
and permanence of God in contrast to the unreliable, ever changing circumstances of man. The city of God is an eternal place of safety and refuge.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in time of trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter, He utters His voice, the earth melts. The LORD of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”
(Psalm 46:1-7)

“As we have heard, so we have seen, in the city of the LORD of Hosts, in the city of our God, which the LORD will establish forever....Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever.” (Psalm 48:8,12-14)

“On the holy mount stands the city He founded; the LORD loves the gates of Zion, more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God...And of Zion it shall be said, ‘This one and that one were born in her; for the Most High Himself will establish her. The LORD records as He registers the people, ‘This one was born there.’” (Psalm 87:1-3;5)

“He will dwell on the heights; His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; His bread will be given Him, His water will be sure. Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty; they will see a land that stretches far...Behold Zion, the city of our appointed feasts! Your eyes will see Jerusalem, an untroubled habitation, an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be plucked up, nor will any of its cords be broken.” (Isaiah 33:16-20)



“The Construction of The Great Temple At Ur Of The Chaldees” - 19th Century Engraving

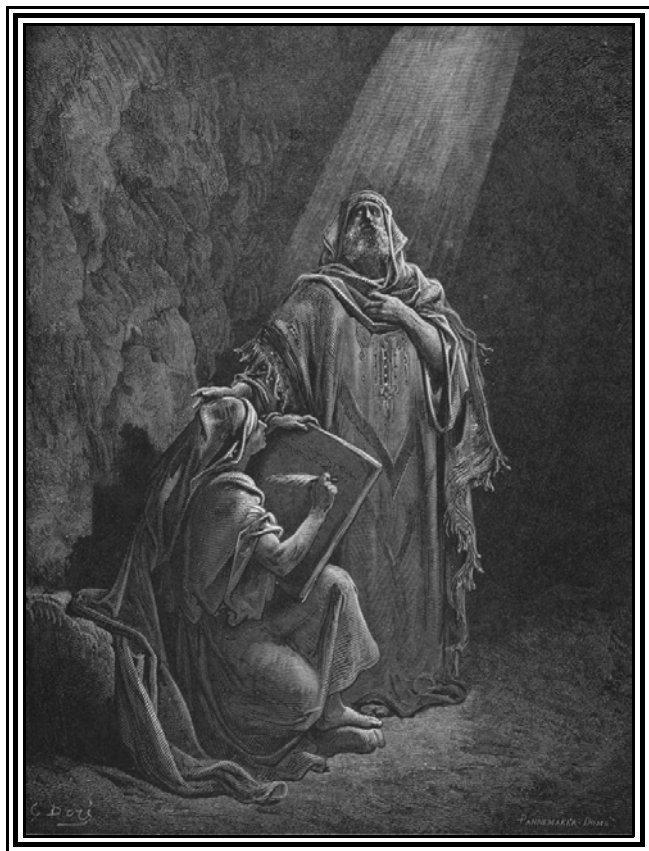
St. Paul makes the same point in Galatians when he draws the contrast between the earthly Jerusalem and its heavenly counterpart which is the ***“mother”*** of all believers in Christ: ***“Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, she corresponds to the present Jerusalem for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free and she is our mother. (Galatians 4:25-26)*** Scriptures’s most dramatic description of the heavenly city, of course, is provided in the visions of Revelation:

“The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven...And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven

from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great high wall with twelve gates, and at the twelve gates, twelve angels, and on the gates, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were inscribed - on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south, three gates, and on the west, three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” (Revelation 3:12; 21:10-14)

In the apocryphal “*Apocalypse of Baruch*,” Baruch, the scribe of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:4-8), assured by God that the earthly Jerusalem - which was about to be destroyed by the

Babylonians - was not His true dwelling place. Instead, the dwelling place of God is in the heavenly city of Jerusalem. God indicated to Baruch that He had revealed this heavenly city to Adam before the fall into sin and later it was shown to both Abraham and Moses. This text was written at the end of the inter-testamental period and may be reflected in the content of this segment of Hebrews.



“The Prophet Jeremiah Dictating To His Scribe Baruch” - Gustav Dore

“Or do you think that this is the city of which I said - ‘On the palms of my hands I have carved you’? It is not this building that is in your midst now; it is that which will be revealed with me, that was already prepared the moment that I decided to create Paradise. And I showed it to Adam before he sinned. But when he transgressed the commandment it was taken away from him - as also Paradise. After these things, I showed it to my servant Abraham in the night between the portions of the victims. And again I showed

it also to Moses on Mount Sinai when I showed him the likeness of the Tabernacle and all its vessels. Behold, now it is preserved with me - as also Paradise. No go away and do as I command you.” (Baruch 4:2-7)

Hebrews will return to the subject of the everlasting city of God twice more in Chapter 12:22-24 and 13:13-14. In both instances, the permanence of that city in contrast to the trials of this world is presented as a source of encouragement to believers to remain steadfast in the faith. ***“But we have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God the new Jerusalem and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the***

firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.” “Therefore, let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.”

“By faith, Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised.” - The ESV’s translation of Verse 11 reflects the traditional understanding of the Greek text. However, the majority of Greek scholars across the theological spectrum from conservative to liberal are convinced that this view is not consistent either with the language of the original or the description of Sarah’s role in the Genesis account of the birth of Isaac. The crux of the linguistic problem is the meaning of the verb *“to conceive.”* This Greek verb consistently refers to the male role of depositing the seed in the womb rather than the female role in receiving it. F.F. Bruce sums up the argument in this cogent manner:

“The one firm argument against taking Verse 11 as a statement of Sarah’s faith lies in the fact that the phrase traditionally rendered ‘to conceive seed’ just does not mean that; it refers to the father’s part in the generative process, not the mother’s. A literal translation would be ‘for the deposition of seed’; the word does not denote the receiving or conception of seed. This is a straightforward matter of the natural sense of a Greek word...All that we know of the usage of this Greek word at the time renders it in the highest degree improbable that it would be employed in the sense of ‘conception’ especially by one so sensitive to Greek usage as our author is.” (Bruce, p. 296)

The distinction is more a matter of linguistics than theology. Assuming that the objection to the traditional understanding is correct, as it appears to be, the assertion of faith as the ultimate cause of the conception of Isaac is simply shifted from Sarah to Abraham. At the same time, this understanding maintains the continuity of the argument in which Abraham is the example of faith throughout. The verse would then be translated *“By faith Abraham was then enabled to become a father, even though Sarah herself was barren and past the normal age of child-bearing, because he considered the one who had made the promise faithful.”* This is the preferable understanding



“Sarah’s Laughter” - Jan Provoost



"Sarah Presenting Hagar to Abraham" - Rubens

of the Greek text and the context of the statement. At the same time, Sarah's role in the events described in Genesis hardly seem to be exemplary of faith. She greeted the announcement of God's promise with incredulous laughter (Genesis 18:9ff.) after having orchestrated the substitution of her handmaiden Hagar as a surrogate mother whose child would legally have been considered her own. (Genesis 16)

In that case, Abraham's trust in God's promise that he would be the father of a great nation, all of the contrary indications of his circumstances notwithstanding, becomes the second example of the faith which characterized the life of Abraham throughout. Once again, as in his obedience to God's call to leave his home and journey into an unknown future in Canaan, by any reasonable standard the promise of descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore was not credible. Abraham was an old man, seventy-five years old at the time of his call and nearly one hundred by the time of Isaac's birth. He and Sarah had been married for many years and throughout their marriage Sarah had been barren. The text indicates that she was now well past the normal age of fertility. When Sarah overheard the angel's promise that she would be pregnant within a year, the text notes - ***"Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah."*** Her thought was - ***"After I am worn out and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?"*** At the time of Sarah's scheme to substitute her handmaiden Hagar, and its success in the conception of Ishmael, Abraham was evidently still virile. But now, at age one hundred, that was no longer the case. Thus the text notes that short of a miracle, neither of the two were capable of intercourse or childbearing - ***"even though Sarah herself was barren and past the normal age of childbearing...from one man and him as good as dead."*** The phrase ***"and him as good as dead"*** is typically translated ***"and he already impotent."***

“The sharing of physical intimacy had apparently ceased for the couple and menopause had occurred long ago. The reference to the condition of Abraham’s body describes him as dead as far as the natural possibility of fathering a child was concerned. This serves to stress that it was the performative power of God’s spoken word alone that accounts for ‘descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the innumerable grains of sand on the seashore.’ (Lane, II, p. 355)

The central importance of the miracle of Isaac’s birth as a central component of Israel’s heritage is indicated by the frequent repetition of the promise and its fulfillment throughout the Old Testament.

“But Abram said, ‘O LORD God, what will You give me for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eleazar of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘Behold You have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.’ And behold the word of the LORD came to him. ‘This man shall not be your heir. Your very own son shall be your heir.’ And He brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven and number the stars if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed the LORD, and He counted it to him for righteousness.” (Genesis 15:2-5)

“And the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven and said, “By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is



“Abraham Traveling Through Canaan With Sarah And Hagar”

on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (Genesis 22:15-18)

“Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and I will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws.” (Genesis 26:3-5)

“O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,’ I am not worthy of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that You have shown to Your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But You said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude..’” (Genesis 32:9-12)

“Go in and take possession of the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, to give to them and to their offspring after them...Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven...And you shall make response before the LORD your God, ‘A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous...Whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, you shall be left few in number because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God. And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and in multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you.” (Deuteronomy 1:10; 10:22; 26:5; 32:12)

The miraculous birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah and the creation of the Israelite nation from this single child became the defining reality of the unique identity of the chosen people. The text places particular emphasis on the contrast between the one old man and the immense magnitude of the nation which would be descended from him - *“Therefore, from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of the heavens and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”* Hebrews specifically uses the terminology of the Genesis texts to remind the reader that this

wondrous outcome could only have been the result of divine intervention as the faithful God fulfilled the promises which He had made to Abraham. The deliberate repetition of the words ***“as many”*** is designed to give particular emphasis to the magnitude of the nation which came forth from this one old man because of his faith in the promises of God.

Centuries later the prophet Isaiah would remind his recalcitrant hearers of how far they had come under the blessing of a gracious God as both a word of encouragement and admonition

-

“But you Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham My friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth and took from its farthest corners, saying to you, ‘You are My servant; I have chosen you and not cast you off.’ Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you. I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:8-10)

“Listen to Me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD; look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you, for he was but one when I called him that I might bless him and multiply him.” (Isaiah 51:1-2)

When Nehemiah sought to rededicate the exiles who had returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity, and to instill in them a renewed sense of their identity as the chosen people of God, he began by reminding them of the call of Abraham and the promise of the land to the offspring whom God would provide the father of their nation. Nehemiah recognized that it was this heritage that set Israel apart from everyone else and that an awareness of this heritage had to be restored if Israel was to survive as a distinct people in a world where they were a statistically insignificant group which no longer had a country to call their own.

“You are the LORD, the LORD alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that are in them, and You preserve all of them, and the hosts of heaven worship You. You are the LORD, the God who chose



“Icon Of Abraham And Sarah”

Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. You found his heart faithful before You and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorites, the Perrizite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And You have kept Your promise for You are righteous.” (Nehemiah 9:6-8)



“The Sacrifice Of Isaac”

Hebrews 11:13-16

(13) These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar and having acknowledged that they were strangers on the earth. (14) For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. (15) If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. (16) But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city.

“These all died in the faith, not having received the things promised....” - Once again the writer pauses in his recitation of people and events to offer a comment on the nature of faith. This interruption of the narrative is somewhat surprising in that it comes in the middle of the events of Abraham’s life rather than at the end of the summary of the patriarchal period after Verse 22. As it stands, the explanation of perspective in these verses serves to explain the nature of the faith when enabled Abraham, and by extension his descendants, to do the remarkable things which are described in the preceding and following verses. This serves to emphasize the unique role of Abraham as the founding father, the primary patriarch, as it were, from whom all who follow, including Isaac and Jacob, are descended. Three examples of Abraham acting on the basis of faith have thus far been cited: his obedient response to God call to leave his home and family; his willingness to dwell as a nomadic alien among the Canaanites, and his trust in the promise that even in his old age he would



“The Burial Of Sarah In The Cave At Machpelah”

still have a son through whom a great nation would be descended.

Opening with the assertion that *“These all died in the faith”* reveals that faith transcends death for the believer and although they did not witness the fulfillment of God’s promises during their earthly lives they will nonetheless experience the fulfillment of those promises despite death. The terminology shifts slightly here from the characteristic *“By faith”* with which all of the other segments have begun. The digression is because this sentence addresses the death of the patriarchs. Unlike their trust, patience and obedience, their dying was not a result or expression of their faith. Rather, it was condition in which their deaths occurred by means of which their deaths were transformed from an end to a beginning.

“As men who had seen and greeted afar off the promised good, and led in consequence a pilgrim life, they died in the exercise of the same confident expectation in which they had lived...They died ‘in faith’ believing in an eternal, faithful God and His promises and their own abiding relations with Him. The object of their hopes, then, was the same glorious world of the future which the New Testament reveals, though for them its true character and their present hold upon it might still be covered by an impenetrable veil.” (Delitsch, II, p. 244-245)

Hence most English translations shift their rendering from *“by faith”* to *“in faith.”* The particular blessing of that faith in this immediate context was that it enabled them to acknowledge that *“they were strangers and exiles on earth...seeking a homeland”* beyond the scope of their earthly existence.

“Death, with terrible finality disintegrates man as a person, obliterating his faculties and frustrating his ambitions; but faith, which triumphs over the vicissitudes of life, transcends also the negation of death. If this were not so,

the principle of faith would be completely nullified. But the hour of death in particular is the hour of the victory of faith. It is especially in the case of those who are dying that faith prevails, and in death that hope in things which are future and invisible shines most brightly.” (Hughes, p. 477)



“Isaac And Ishmael Bury Abraham

“Not having received the things promised but having seen them and greeted them from afar...” - The wording of the text precludes the application of these references to earthly promises of national legacy or the possession of the promised land. The intended sense of the text is clearly much more profound than such trivial things. These people recognized by faith that they were not truly of this world and that their only real homeland would be found in the heavenly presence of their Creator, in whose promises they had trusted. They ***“acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”*** An exile is one who is temporarily in a place which is not his true home. That is exactly the way in which the believer views his earthly life. When Abraham identified himself as ***“a sojourner and a foreigner among you”*** when seeking permission from the Hittites to purchase a burial plot for Sarah (Genesis 23:4) his words were infinitely more profound than a reference to his status in the land of Canaan. Jacob expressed the same thought in Genesis 47:9

when he described his own life and that of his forebearers as a ***“sojourning.”*** ***“The years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained the days of the years of the lives of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.”*** Thus did our Lord Himself affirm that Abraham lived and died in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah/Savior: ***“Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad. And so the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham! And Jesus said to them, truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’”*** (John 18:56-58) King David gave poetic expression to this concept in Psalm 39, ***“Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry, hold not Your peace at my tears. For I am a sojourner with you, a guest like all my fathers.”*** (Psalm 39:12) St. Paul expresses precisely the same concept when he writes to the Philippians: ***But our citizenship is in heaven. From it we await a Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body by the power that***

enables Him even to subject all things unto Himself.” (Philippians 3:20-21) Peter expressed this idea in the salutation of his first epistle: *“To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with His blood.”* (1 Peter 1:1-2) Our true home can only be in the new heavens and the new earth which God had promised. Until then we are all strangers and pilgrims. (Cf. Revelation 21:1ff.) As the classic Lutheran funeral hymn confesses: *“I am but a stranger here, heaven is my home. Earth is a desert drear, heaven is my home. Danger and sorrow stand, round me on every hand, heaven is my fatherland, heaven is my home.”*

“Their faith, accordingly met the challenge to penetrate beyond death and beyond this present world, for the promise of an everlasting possession and universal blessing portended far more than the rights to a piece of geographical territory and a privileged posterity...The land of promise itself was a foreign land to them and their hope was concentrated on an eternal and transcendental realm in which they themselves as well as the succeeding generation of those who belonged to the line of promise would be everlastingly blessed...The victory of faith at the moment of death was the culminating acknowledgment of what they had confessed in a life of pilgrimage, namely that they were strangers and exiles on the earth, that is to say, that this present world system was not their true home and ultimate destination.” (Hughes, p. 478)

The believer’s trust in the promises of God enables him to live life on earth in eager expectation of that his God has prepared and to face grim death itself without fear. ***“Not having received the things promised”*** the faithful have nonetheless ***“seen them and greeted them from afar”*** as those promises were revealed and received from God in His Word. The fascinating Greek verb translated ***“greeted them from afar.”*** The word literally refers to someone who is returning to their homeland after a prolonged absence or exile and who pauses at the first glimpse of that land in the distance to salute that most precious place and give thanks for their homecoming.

“For those who say such things show clearly that they are seeking a homeland.” - The writer clarifies the significance of the patriarch’s identification of themselves as ***“strangers***



“A Pilgrim And A Stranger”

and exiles on the earth” as an unmistakable indication that ***“they are seeking a homeland.”*** The verb ***“they are seeking”*** indicates the active pursuit of a destination or goal and thus emphasizes that such faith is reflected in actions and obedience.

“These verses also portray how intensely they pursued these promises. Verse 13 had described the limitations imposed on Abraham and those who first received God’s promise, and, by implication on all the faithful who lived before Christ. They experienced neither final entrance into the eternal city, nor the present participation in the reality made available through Christ. They lived simply with the conviction that these promises of access into the eternal city would be fulfilled in the future. Even so, they pursued this goal with vigor. The pastor expects nothing less from his hearers...The path pursued by faith in no course of passive indolence. Because these heroes who lived by faith were aliens on earth, most anxious to reach their home, they ‘diligently sought’ it by persevering in the life of faith and obedience.” (Cockerill, p. 551)

St. John Chrysostom expands upon that life of faith and obedience by which Abraham demonstrated that he was a stranger and an alien in this world looking toward his heavenly homeland with these powerful words:

“They were strangers in relation to the whole world. And with reason, for they saw in it none of the things which they wished for, but everything foreign and strange. They indeed wished to practice virtue, but here there was much wickedness, and things were quite foreign to them. They had no friend, no familiar acquaintance, save only a few. But how were they ‘strangers.’ They had no care for things here. And this they showed not by words but by their deeds. In what way? God said to Abraham, ‘Leave what seems to be your country and come to on that foreign.’ And Abraham did not cling to his family, but gave it up as unconcerned as if he were about to leave a foreign land. God said to him, ‘Offer up your son’ and he offered him up as if he had no son; as if he had divested himself of his nature, so he offered him up. The wealth that he had acquired was visible to many passers-by, yet this he accounted as nothing. He yielded the first places to others. He threw himself into danger. He suffered troubles innumerable. He built no splendid houses, he enjoyed no luxuries, he had no care about dress, which all are things of this world; but he lived in all respects as belonging to the city beyond. He showed hospitality, brotherly love, mercifulness, forbearance, contempt for wealth and for present glory, and for all else.” (Oden, p. 188)

“If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.” - The point of comparison here is not Abraham’s departure



“Seeking A Home In Heaven”

from Mesopotamia to journey to Canaan. This earthly journey was significant only insofar as it demonstrated the insignificance of all the things of this world and the patriarch’s willingness to submit unconditionally to the command and promise of God. If this had been the issue, it would have been only too simple to turn around and go back to the physical comforts and security of Mesopotamia. The road was always available, offering the path of disobedience and doubt. But Abraham and those who came after him never abandoned their faith and trust in God. The believer, who is committed to the promise of an eternal homeland infinitely superior to the temporary distractions of this world, the hardships and afflictions of the pilgrimage constantly tempt him to turn back instead of going on to the heavenly city. The response of faith, however, is not to turn back, but to move steadfastly forward toward the destination

which God has prepared for those who love Him. Unlike the faithless Israelites who whined to Moses about returning to Egypt every time an obstacle or an inconvenience confronted them in the wilderness, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob remained faithful.

“Abraham’s thoughts, and those of his son and grandson after him, were oriented not toward Ur or even Haran, but toward God. They could have sought for roots in the great city that had been their ancestral home. Their unsettled existence in Canaan offered them abundant ‘opportunity for returning.’ If they had not regulated their lives in accordance with faith, the experience of alienation in the promised land would have provided an incentive for turning back. That they showed no inclination to do so is indicative of the orientation of faith toward the promise.” (Lane, II, 358)

“But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one.” - The writer has already ruled out both the promised land of Canaan and the original homeland in Mesopotamia as the ultimate destination of those who perceive themselves to be **“strangers and exiles on earth.”** He now identifies that desired goal as **“a better country.”** The verb **“they desire”** is especially powerful in Greek. It means **“to aspire to”** or **“to long for”** with an intensity the results in a particular pattern of behavior.

“They were molded by a clear and concentrated will that took into account the reality of the promise of God. Their response to the divine promise dictated that the direction of their longing must be the better, heavenly homeland. Their attitude was informed not by reason or experience but by faith. In the same obedience of faith that Abraham exhibited when he left Ur, they oriented their lives to the city that is to come, which is qualitatively superior to every other place. This is an eschatological perspective that became pervasive of their whole lives.” (Lane, II, p. 359)

The adjective **“better”** has been used throughout the epistle thus far to describe *“both the fully sufficient and effective work of Christ in cleansing God’s people from sin and the permanent and eternal blessings made available through that work (1:4; 6:9; 7:19,22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:35,40; 12:24).”* (Cockerill, p. 553) The comparative form of the term typically affirms the superiority of the new covenant in Christ to the former covenant of Judaism. In this instance, the comparison is between all the things and places of this world and the eternal realities of God in the new heaven and the new earth. The steadfast endurance and perseverance of God’s people in the face of every adversity, and their rejection of all worldly values and priorities as false clearly reveal that their goal is something more, something entirely beyond all the things of this sinful world - **“a better country, that is, a heavenly one.”** Henry Francis Lyte expressed the conviction beautifully in his classic hymn *“My Rest Is In Heaven, My Rest Is Not Here.”*

*“My rest is in heaven, my rest is not here;
Then why should I tremble when trials are near?
But hush’d my sad spirit, the worst that can come
But shorten’s my journey and hastens me home.*

*It is not for me to be seeking my bliss
Nor building my hopes in a region like this;
I look for a city that hands have not piled,
I long for a country by sin undefiled.*

*Let doubt then and danger my progress oppose,
They only make heaven more sweet at its close!
Come joy or come sorrow, what e’er may befall;
An hour with my God will make up for them all.”*

“Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city.” - God declares **“Those who honor Me, I will honor!”** (1 Samuel 2:30) The patriarchs honored God by trusting in His promises and obeying His commands. They put their faith in Him. In response, God graciously deigned to be designated as **“the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”** (Exodus 3:6) A examples out of scores of texts from



"Moses At The Burning Bush"

both Old and New Testaments must suffice to demonstrate how the names of these ancient patriarchs became hallmark which has identified the God of the covenant across all the generations:

"Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you., the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and thus am I to be remembered throughout all generations. God and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:15,16)

"But the LORD said to Moses, 'Put out your hand and catch it by the tail' so he put out his hand and caught it and it became a staff in his hand - that they might believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has appeared to you." (Exodus 4:5)

"I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by My name, the LORD, I did not make Myself known to them. I also established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners...I will bring into the land I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I AM the LORD." (Exodus 6:2-4, 8-9)

"The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you." (Acts 3:13-14)

"When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight and he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord, 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. And Moses trembled and did not dare

to look.” (Acts 7:31-32)

Karl Barth wrote: *“God does not need us. Indeed, if he were not God He would be ashamed of us. We, at any rate cannot be ashamed of Him.”* (Bruce, p. 300) That fact that God is willing to be associated with these men in a manner so profound and so permanent reflects the depth and substance of His commitment to those who are His own by faith. *It expresses a more than outward and transient relation. Those whose names are so associated with that of the Eternal One are united with Him in a covenant of life for eternity.”* (Delitsch, II, p. 217) ***“The city”*** which God has prepared for them is, of course, ***“the homeland,” “the better country”*** which had been their goal, desire and destination while they lived here on earth and by which they demonstrated their faith and trust in God.



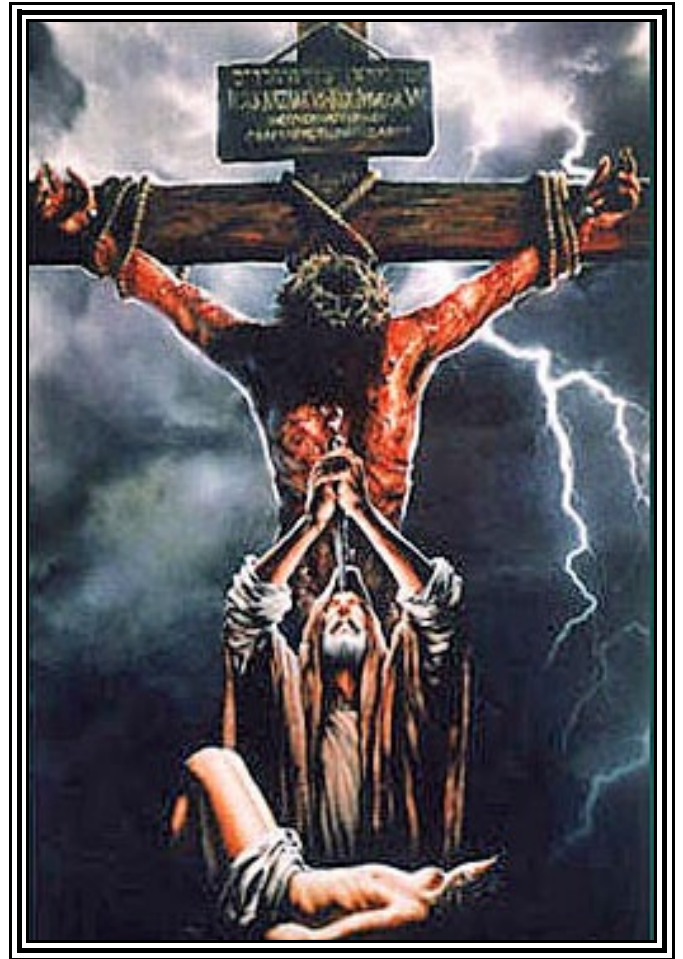
“The Sacrifice Of Isaac”

Hebrews 11:17-22

(17) By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, (18) of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named. (19) He considered that God was able to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. (20) By faith, Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. (21) By faith Jacob when dying blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. (22) By faith, Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

“By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac...” - Having defined yet another dimension of the faith which is the theme of this chapter, the writer now returns to the narration of the events of Abraham’s life which illustrate that faith in action. Abraham had answered the call of God and left his family and his homeland; he had lived in the land of Canaan as a pilgrim and an alien, and he had trusted in the promise that from he and his wife

Sarah a great nation would be born. But the greatest test of Father Abraham's faith was yet to come. In Hebrew the sacrifice of Isaac is called the "*Akedah*" which means "*the binding*." In a beautifully appropriate way, "*Akedah*" refers both to the literal action of Abraham in binding Isaac to the stone altar which he had erected on the rugged ridge line of Mount Moriah and to the binding of Abraham's will to the Word of God by faith. The entire process from God's initial command to sacrifice his son to the final deliverance of Isaac from the blade of Abraham's upraised knife is related in considerable detail in Genesis 22. That detail reflects the significance of the testing both as a model for faithfulness under the most extreme duress and a prototype of God's sacrifice of His only Son upon the cross. The tense of the Greek verb "*was tested*" is imperfect which signifies an ongoing process. In this way the writer reminds his readers that God's testing of Abraham was not a single event but involved



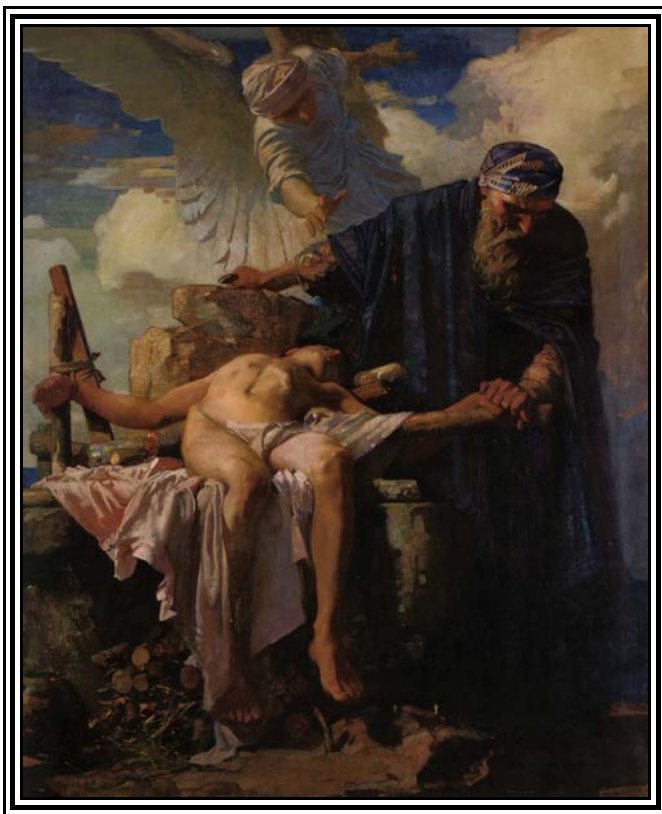
"Sacrifice Your Only Son"

everything that happened from the initial command to the last minute intervention of the angel to rescue Isaac. In contrast, the verb "*offered up*" is in the perfect tense which signifies an action which is complete - thus revealing that Abraham's act of faithful obedience was perfectly fulfilled without the actual slaughter of his son upon the altar. His obedient trust in God had been demonstrated by his readiness to obey the command of God. Those who quibble with the text's assertion that Abraham "*offered up Isaac*" when, in fact, the death of Isaac was forestalled at the last moment by the Angel of the Lord, have missed the point of the entire series of events. Abraham did actually offer up his son as the ultimate expression of obedient trust in the purpose of God. Had the Angel not appeared the patriarch was fully prepared to give back to the Lord the boy whom the Lord had given to him as the careful wording of the text indicates - "*and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his own son.*" "*The promises*" which Abraham had "*received*" pertained first to the birth of the child in Abraham's old age and the origin of a great nation from his descendants through Isaac. The magnitude of the challenge to faith which confronted Abraham at that moment is revealed in the fact that God's present command to slaughter the boy upon the altar of sacrifice seemed to be in direct contradiction to all of His promises of a countless posterity through this very person. Thus, St. John Chrysostom marvels that such faith puts Abraham in a class of his own among all the other

heroes of faith enumerated in this listing and announces that the challenges confronted by contemporary believers are nothing compared to those of Abraham:

“Great indeed was the faith of Abraham! In the case of Abel, Noah, and Enoch, there was an opposition of reasonings to be overcome, and it was necessary to go beyond human reasoning. In the case of Abraham, however, it was necessary not only to go beyond human reasoning but to manifest also something more. For what was of God seemed to be opposed to what was of God; faith opposed to faith and command opposed to promise. I mean this; God had said, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and I will give you this land.’ (Genesis 12:1,7) But then He said, ‘He gave them no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length.’ (Acts 7:5) Do you see how what was done was opposed to the promise? Again, God said, ‘Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.’ (Genesis 21:12) and he believed, and again God says, ‘Sacrifice to Me this one who was to fill all the world through his seed.’ Do you see the opposition between the commands and the promise? He enjoined things that were in contradiction to the promises, and yet, not even so did the righteous man stagger, nor say he had been deceived...But you endure nothing except what was promised, and still you are troubled.” (Oden, p. 190)

“His only son of whom it was said, ‘By Isaac shall your offspring be named.’” - Isaac was



“The Angel of the Lord Stopping Abraham”

not, in fact, Abraham’s only son. Ishmael was also his son through Hagar. But, as the text actually points out, Isaac was the only child of the promise, ***“his only son of whom it was said, ‘By Isaac shall your offspring be named.’”*** Furthermore, at this point in the Genesis account Hagar and Ishmael had been banished from Abraham’s household at the insistence of Sarah (Genesis 21:8-21) and so legally Isaac was Abraham’s only son. The text of Genesis places particular emphasis on the unique role of Isaac in Abraham’s life with the threefold identification - ***“your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love.”*** (Genesis 21:1) Hebrews also identifies Abraham as ***“the one who received the promises...’Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’”*** In this way the mind-boggling contradiction between that which God had promised Abraham both about the birth of Isaac and

the great nation which would be descended from him on the one hand and the cruel command to now kill that son on the altar of sacrifice is highlighted.

“These verses recall the most severe and unexpected trial of Abraham’s faith, so much that it was by this trial more than any other that the rocklike firmness of his faith was confirmed and established. ‘When he was tested’ - that is, by God, by being commanded to do something which in itself seemed altogether outrageous and destructive of the very promise he had embraced, he demonstrated his complete trust in God he obeyed without calling into question the divine wisdom or goodness...Abraham knew that God is altogether holy, just and loving, and that He cannot be untrue to Himself; and he realized that it was not for him, a sinful, finite creature, to query the Word of his infinite Creator, indeed, that to query the Word of God is to query the goodness of God. This trial, in fact, so far from shaking Abraham’s faith, actually served to establish it, for through it the unchangeable character of God’s purpose and the impossibility that God should prove false to His promise became more than ever the great motivating reality to him as he pressed forward on his pilgrimage.” (Hughes, p. 481)



“Abraham And Isaac On The Journey To Mount Moriah”

“He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.” - The text of Genesis reveals no hesitation or doubt on the part of Abraham. Rather, he promptly complied with God’s command and setting about doing what he had been instructed to do. In fact, when they reached the base of Mount Moriah, Abraham instructed his men to await them there with this revealing comment: ***“The boy and I will go on there and worship, and we will come back to you.”***

(Genesis 22:5) It is evident from these words that Abraham fully expected Isaac to come back down the mountain with him. This divinely inspired commentary in Hebrews 11 indicates, in fact, that his expectation was that he would sacrifice Isaac and that God would then resurrect him from the dead. Abraham obviously never considered the possibility that God could be untrue to His promise.

“The impression that we get from the biblical narrative is that Abraham treated it as God’s problem; it was for God and not for Abraham to reconcile His promise and His command. So when the command was given, Abraham promptly set about obeying it; his own duty was clear, and God could safely be trusted to carry out His responsibility in the matter.” (Bruce, p. 304)

Such is the amazing confidence of faith. The allusion to resurrection further serves to link the sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham to the sacrifice of Jesus by God the Father. In the latter instance it was by means of a resurrection from the dead that the saving purpose of God for mankind was accomplished.



“Isaac Blessing Jacob” - Govet

“By faith, Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.” - The faith of Isaac is illustrated by the fact that he passed his blessing on to his sons. No mention is made of the trickery by which Jacob, the younger son obtained the blessing of the firstborn which Isaac intended to give to Esau. The story of the blessings in Genesis 27 indicates that when Isaac learned of the trickery he made no attempt to revoke the blessing which he had mistakenly given to Jacob. In the face of Esau’s rage at being deprived of his birthright, Isaac advises Jacob to flee to uncle’s camp and reiterates that the covenant will pass to him rather than his brother: ***“God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you that you may become a company of peoples. May He give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham.”*** (Genesis 28:3-4) Hebrews indicates that the fact the he believed there

to be a genuine blessing to pass on to his son was evidence of his faith.

“When Isaac pronounced the blessing upon Jacob the promises made to Abraham were activated with respect to the future were activated...A second blessing was conferred upon Jacob which expresses Isaac’s concern for the realization of the promises given to Abraham concerning numerous descendants and the possession of the land. Isaac’s readiness to upon Jacob ‘the blessing of Abraham’ was indicative of his faith. Isaac’s faith consists in the sanctioning of an arrangement which, humanly speaking, posed a threat to the attainment of that which had been promised because of the reversal of the normal order with the younger son usurping the place of the elder.”
(Lane, II, p. 364)

The inclusion of Esau in the narrative here may be designed to serve as a warning that God’s blessing is not a birthright but can, in fact, be lost through disobedience and unbelief as was the case with Esau and his descendants.

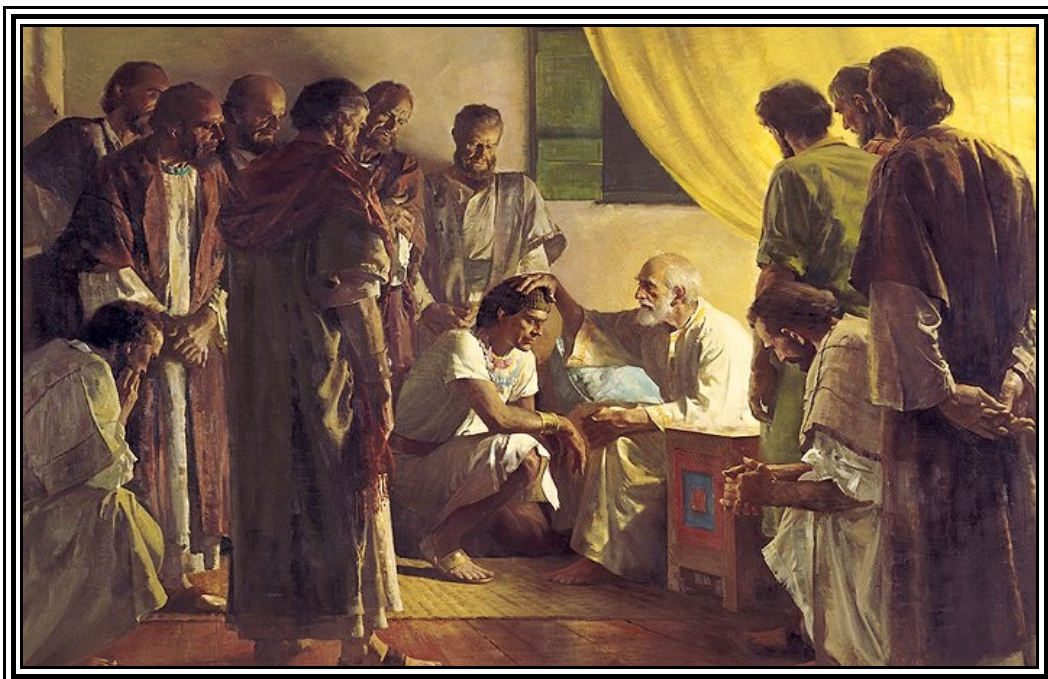


“Jacob Blessing The Sons Of Joseph” - Rembrandt

“By faith, Jacob when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.” - The passing of the blessing from one generation to the next is once again cited as evidence of faith, in this instance from Jacob to his grandsons, the sons of Joseph. Commentators note with surprise that Hebrews chooses the blessing of Joseph’s sons rather than the blessing of Jacob’s own sons from whom the twelve tribes of Israel would be derived. The reason may be that once again traditional human practice is ignored as God chooses to work according to His own will. In the case of Isaac’s blessing of Jacob

the younger son had received the his older brother's blessing by means of trickery. In the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh Jacob deliberately gave the primary blessing to Ephraim, the younger son, over his father Joseph's objection. No explanation is provided in the text (Genesis 48:1-22). It may be that Jacob's is deliberately replicating his own experience in abandoning the traditional practice of primogenitor. The text here describes Jacob ***“bowing in worship over the head of his staff.”*** A clearer translation of the phrase would be *“worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.”* One may visualize the scene as the feeble old Jacob, on the verge of his death, struggles to rise from his bed and depends on the support of staff to remain upright. The early church fathers tended to perceive in these words an acknowledgment of both the status of Joseph in Egypt and a prophecy of the division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon and the fact that the northern ten tribes would be ruled by a king from the tribe of Ephraim, Joseph's son. Chrysostom writes:

“Here we ought to set down the blessings entirely, in order that both his faith and his prophesying might be made manifest. ‘And worshiped leaning,’ he says, ‘upon the top of his staff.’ Here he means Jacob not only spoke but was so confident about the future things as to show it also by his act. Forasmuch as another king was about to rise from Ephraim, therefore it is said, ‘and he bowed himself upon the top of his staff.’ That is, even though he was now an old man, he bowed himself to Joseph, showing the obeisance of the whole people which was to be directed to him. And this, indeed, had already taken place when his brothers bowed down to him. But it was afterwards to come to him through the ten tribes. Do you see how he foretold the things which were to be afterwards? Do you see the great faith they had, and how they believed ‘concerning the things to come.’” (Oden, p. 196)

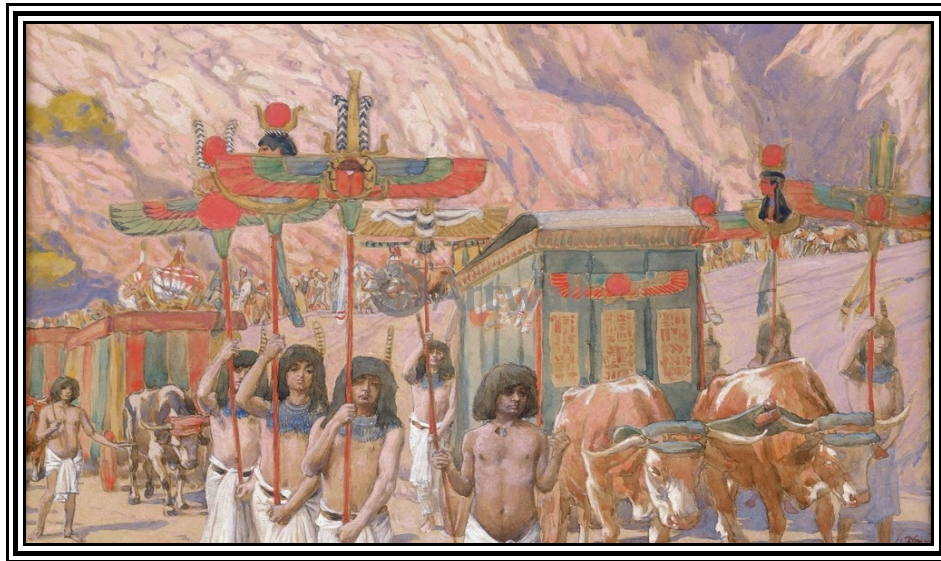


“Jacob Blessing His Sons”

Be that as it may, the shepherd's staff, mentioned here is the mark of the pilgrim, the traveler who has no permanent home. Thus this reference serves as a reminder that Jacob lived as a sojourner and a stranger to the very end of his life.

“By faith, Joseph at the end of his life made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.” - The patriarchal segment of the roll ends with the burial instructions which Joseph gave to his brothers. The closing verses of the Book of Genesis report:

“So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years. And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation; The children also of Machir, the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph's own. And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, ‘God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here.’ So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him and put him in a coffin in Egypt.” (Genesis 50:22-26)



“The Bones of Joseph Carried To Canaan In the Exodus” - Tissot

Joseph had no doubt that God would fulfill his promise to bestow the land of Canaan upon the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He recognized, therefore, that the Children of Israel would not remain permanently in Egypt. He made careful provision that when the exodus from Egypt would occur in the providence of God that his remains would be taken with them to be buried with those of his ancestors. This dramatic evidence of absolute confidence in the promise of God is a most appropriate way to conclude this segment and bridge to the section on Moses and the deliverance from Egyptian bondage which follows. Psalm 105 relates the crucial role played by Joseph in the accomplishment of God's purpose for His chosen people:

*“O give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name,
 Make known His deeds among the people
 Sing to Him, sing praises to Him, tell of all His wondrous works
 Glory in His holy name, let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice
 Seek the LORD and His strength, seek His presence continually!
 Remember the wondrous works He has done,
 His miracles and the judgements He uttered
 O offspring of Abraham His servant, children of Jacob, His chosen ones.
 He is the LORD our God, His judgements are in all the earth.
 He remembers His covenant forever, the word that He commanded for a thousand
 generations.*

*The covenant that He made with Abraham, His sworn promise to Isaac,
 Which He confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant;
 Saying, ‘To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance.
 When they were few in number, of little account, and sojourners in it;
 Wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people,
 He allowed no one to oppress them; He rebuked kings on their account,*



“Joseph In Egypt” - Jacobo Pontormo



“The Preaching Of Stephen” - Carpaccio

*Saying, ‘Touch not My anointed ones, do My prophets no harm!’
 When He summoned a famine on the land and broke all supply of bread,
 He had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph who was sold as a slave.
 His feet were hurt with fetters, his neck with a collar of iron;
 Until what He had said come to pass. The Word of the LORD tested him.
 The king sent and released him, the ruler of the people set him free;
 He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions;
 To bind his princes at his pleasure and to teach his elders wisdom.
 Then Israel came to Egypt. Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.
 And the LORD made His people very fruitful, and made them stronger than their foes.*

The patriarch Joseph also figures prominently in the preaching of Stephen of Jerusalem to the hostile crowd outside the Temple which led to his martyrdom. Stephen retraces the history of the Israelites to demonstrate that the rejection and persecution of God’s prophets is a consistent pattern throughout this history, culminating in the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus. The integral connection between the crowd before him and those who had been guilty of rejection in the past is reinforced by Stephen through the repeated use of the identification *“our fathers”* whenever he refers to the brothers of Joseph throughout the text. Like the author of Hebrews, Stephen also cites the return of the bodies of Joseph and his brothers to Shechem as an important detail of this sequence of events.

“And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt, but God was with him and rescued him out of all of his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, King of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and

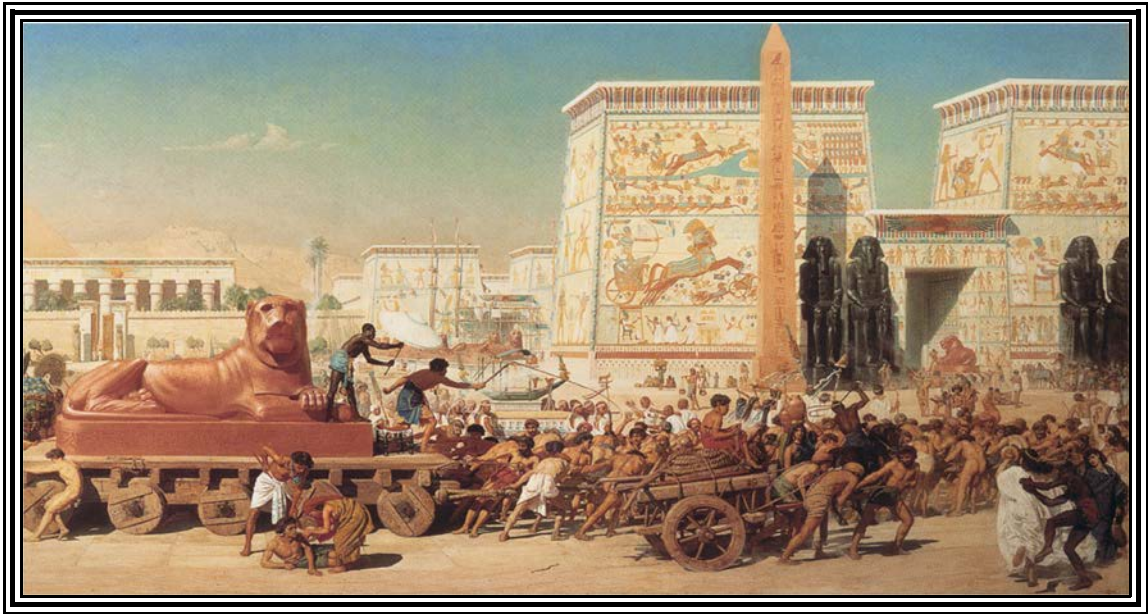
over all his household. Now there came a famine over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father, and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. And Jacob went down into Egypt and he died, he, and our fathers, and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.” (Acts 7:9-16)

Joseph had spent nearly all of his life in Egypt, but Egypt was not his home. He had risen to power and wealth there and would no doubt have been buried in a splendid mausoleum



“The Call of Moses With the Infant Christ in the Arms of the Virgin” - Nicholas Froment

in the manner of the Egyptians. When family, in the providence of God, came down to join him in Egypt, Joseph recognized by faith that their sojourn in that land would also be temporary. God had other plans for the Children of Israel as a part of His greater plan for the salvation of the descendants of Adam. Hebrews reports that the patriarch specifically referred to *“the exodus of the Israelites”* from their bondage in the land of Egypt. In Hebrew piety across all the centuries to follow the exodus under Moses is consistently viewed as the prototype of the great redemption which would one day be accomplished by the coming of the Messiah. It is thus most fitting that the faith of Joseph be illustrated by his emphatic instructions that his bones go forth with his people in the exodus to be returned to the land of promise. This deathbed faith reveals a confidence that not even death itself can prevent the fulfillment of God’s promises. Both in Genesis, and here in Hebrews 11, Joseph’s confident anticipation of the exodus forms the bridge to the narrative which follows - in the Old Testament, the Book of Exodus itself, and - here in Hebrews 11, the citation of the life and ministry of Moses as the next example in the roll call of heroes. Joseph’s unshakeable confidence is faith at its finest.

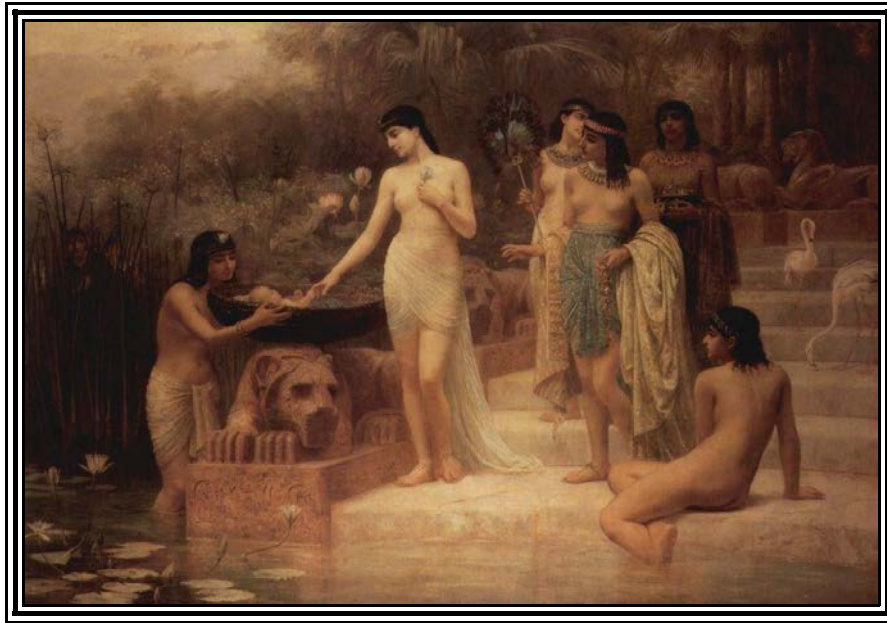


"Israel In Egypt" - Edward Poynter

Hebrews 11:23-28

(23) By faith, Moses when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful , and they were not afraid of the king's edict. (24) By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) choosing, rather, to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. (26) He considered the reproach of Christ to be great wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. (27) By faith, he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. (28) By faith, he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.

"By faith, Moses, when he was born, was hidden by his parents for three months..." - Moses, the author of the Torah, the foremost and founding prophet of the Hebrew nation, comes next on the roll call of exemplary believers. In Jewish legend and folklore, the achievements of Moses were wildly exaggerated and extravagantly embellished with miracles and magic. Hebrews provides *"a more sober summary"* (Bruce, p. 308) of his life, following the biblical account related in the book of Exodus. Once again the narrative here is similar to that of Stephen's more extensive account in his Jerusalem sermon. The basic point of his presentation is that the Jewish rejection of Jesus is simply the culmination of a history of Israelite rejection of God's prophets. For Stephen, Moses becomes a prototype of the scorned Messiah. ***"He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand. But they did not understand."*** He reminds his incredulous audience that Moses had actually prophesied the coming of the Messiah whom



"The Discovery of Moses" - Edwin Long

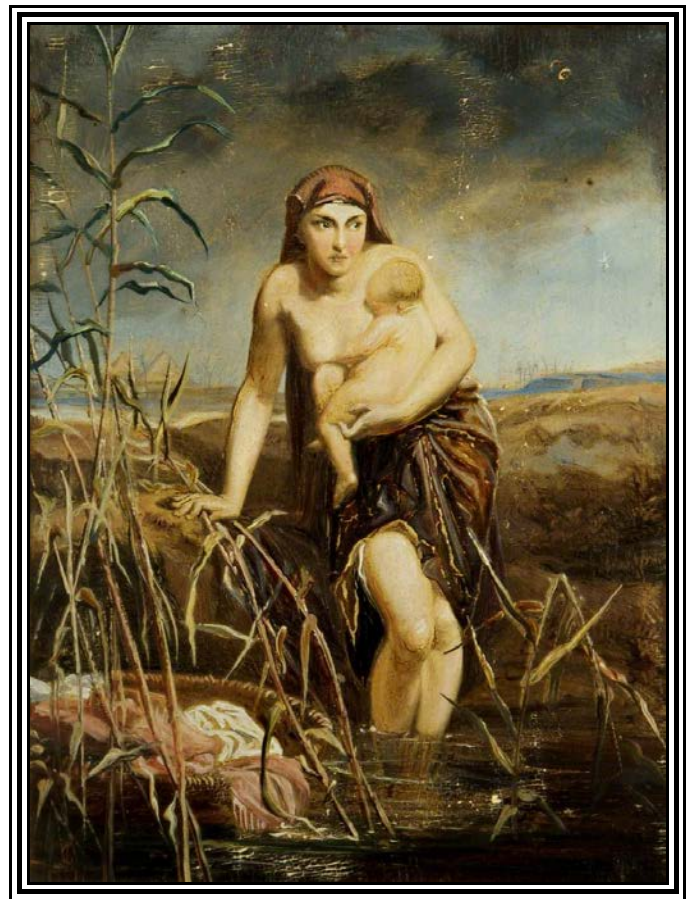
the Jews would reject, a prophecy which now had been fulfilled in Jesus:

"But as the time of the promise drew near which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, until there arose over Egypt another king, who did not know Joseph. He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. At this time, Moses was born, and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds. When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man, and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand. But they did not understand. And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?' But the man who was wronging his neighbor, thrust him aside, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' At this retort, Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian. And when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight and he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord; 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, 'Take

off the sandals from your feet for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt. This Moses whom you rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ - this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers’... Our fathers refused to obey him by thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt... You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit! As your fathers did, so do you!’ (Acts 7:20-44)

The faith cited in Verse 23 is, of course, not that of Moses himself, but of his parents, Amram and Joshabed (Numbers 26:59). Their trust in God gave them the courage to defy the cruel edict of Pharaoh that all the male children of the Israelites were to be killed - ***“They were not afraid of the king’s edict.”*** *“They chose to fear God rather than the might of Pharaoh. Moses’ father Amram chose to respect the commandment of God rather than the decree of the king. Their confidence in God’s power to accomplish His sovereign purposes more than outweighed their fear of reprisals because they had disobeyed the royal decree.”* (Lane, p. 370) The terminology here which explains their decision parallels that of the Exodus account: ***“The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child she hid him for three months.”*** (Exodus 2:2) The phrase ***“when she saw that he was a fine child”*** has elicited considerable discussion

among commentators. There must obviously be more involved here than physical beauty. The NIV more accurately translates the Greek text’s description of Moses as *“an extraordinary child.”* Somehow, in a manner unspecified in the text, it was made evident to Amram and Joshabed that God had a special purpose in mind for this boy. Therefore, he could not be allowed to die with all of the other Hebrew babies slaughtered by the pharaoh.



“Jochebed Entrusting Her Son To The River”

“Wherein, precisely did their faith lie? Probably the statement that Moses was “a goodly child” means more than that he was a beautiful baby. We are perhaps intended to infer that there was something about the appearance of the child which indicated that he was no ordinary child, but one, destined under God to accomplish great things for his people...Some appreciation of the divine purpose to be accomplished through Moses is implied in his ascription of faith to Amram and Jochebed.” (Bruce, p. 309)

Josephus reports the rabbinic tradition that God appeared to Amram in a vision to foretell the role which he was to play in the deliverance of his people:

“A man whose name was Amram, one of the nobler sort of the Hebrews, was afraid for his whole nation, lest it should fail, by the want of young men to be brought up hereafter, and was very uneasy about it, his wife being then with child, and he knew not what to do. Hereupon, he took himself in prayer to God, and entreated him to have compassion upon those men who had remained faithful to His laws and grant to them deliverance from the miseries which they were now called upon to endure, and the frustrate their enemies hopes of the destruction of the nation and cause them to fail. Accordingly, God had mercy on him and was moved by his supplication. He stood by him in his sleep and encouraged him not to despair of His divine favor in the future...Know, therefore that I shall provide for you all in common what is for your good, and particularly for you, I will provide that which will make you famous. The child whom the Egyptians fear whose coming has doomed the Israelite children shall be your child. He shall be hidden from those who watch and seek to destroy him. And when he has been brought up in a surprising way he shall deliver the Hebrew nation from the distress they now



“Moses Rescued By The Daughter of Pharaoh” - Alma-Tadema



“Joseph In The Court Of Pharaoh”

suffer under the Egyptians. His memory shall be famous as long as the world lasts, not only among the Hebrews but among all people. This will demonstrate my love for you and for those who will come after you. He shall also have a brother upon whom I will bestow my priesthood, and his descendants shall continue it after him throughout all time.” (Josephus, “Antiquities” II, 9, 3)

“By faith, Moses, when he was grown up refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” Moses was a man of faith *“whose life is marked by the awareness of the presence and power of the unseen God, and believing obedience to His Word.”* (Bruce, p. 308) The Epistle has already commended Moses as a superlative example of faith and a faithful servant of God:

“Just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house. For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses - as much more glory as the builder of the house has more honor than the house itself. ..Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house, as a servant, to testify to all the things that would be spoken later. But Christ is faithful over all God’s house as a Son.” (Hebrews 3:2-6)

Now, the writer will document a series of examples which demonstrate the faith of Moses in action. In the providential purpose of God, Moses was not only rescued from the waters of the Nile, but was rescued by the daughter of Pharaoh which would have placed him in the palace of the king and given him every advantage of knowledge, wealth and power which mighty Egypt was capable of providing. Stephen notes: ***“And Moses was instructed in all***

the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in all his words and deeds.” (Acts 7:22) Philo of Alexandria, in fact, contends that Pharaoh’s daughter was her father’s only child, and that she remained childless herself. If this were accurate, then Moses would have been heir to the kingdom. By choosing solidarity with his own people he would have been giving not only wealth and power by the throne of the grandest empire of the ancient world. The text here indicates that this choice was made ***“When he had grown up.”*** This terminology reflects the language of Exodus 2:11 - ***“One day when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens.”*** Stephen is more specific, indicating that this occurred when Moses was forty years old: ***“When he was forty years old it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the Children of Israel.”*** (Acts 7:23) Stephen’s specification allows for the division of the life of Moses into three forty year periods first as a prince of Egypt, then as an exile in Midian, and finally as the prophet of God to bring the Children of Israel out of Egypt to the promised land. It would appear that Moses had become aware of his Hebrew heritage through his interaction with his mother who had been brought into the household of Pharaoh to care for him in the early years of his life. (Exodus 2:7-10)

By faith, Moses recognized that all of the worldly privileges which he enjoyed as a prince of Egypt were temporary and insignificant (***“fleeting”***) in comparison to ***“the reward”*** obtained by the people of God in Christ. An attachment to such things in preference to enduring the mistreatment by the world which is the price of the discipleship of God’s people is sinful. Thus the juxtaposition here ***“choosing to be mistreated with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.”*** The verbs in this paragraph are emphatic, signaling that Moses made firm, forceful, deliberate choices based on consideration which occurred over a period of time in the context of faith - Moses ***“refused... choosing rather...he considered.”*** (Acts 7:20-44) Only by faith is such discernment possible. The recognition of the relative worthlessness of all the things of this world in comparison to ***“the reproach of Christ,”*** that is, enduring the opposition and persecution of the world as a consequence of your refusal to conform to its standards and the ultimate ***“reward”*** to which it leads is a core component of authentic faith.

“Moses renounced the status which he enjoyed in Egypt as a member of the royal household. He could not identify himself both with the Israelites and with the Egyptians; he had to choose one or the other. To choose the side of a slave nation, with all the contempt and privation which that entailed instead of the substantial advantages and prospects which were his as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, must have seemed an act of folly by all worldly standards.” (Bruce, p. 310)

Such choices must be made in the unique circumstances of the lives of every believer. There can be no combination of Christ and the values of this world nor any compromise between them. They are mutually exclusive. This is, to use Bonhoeffer’s apt phrase, *“the*

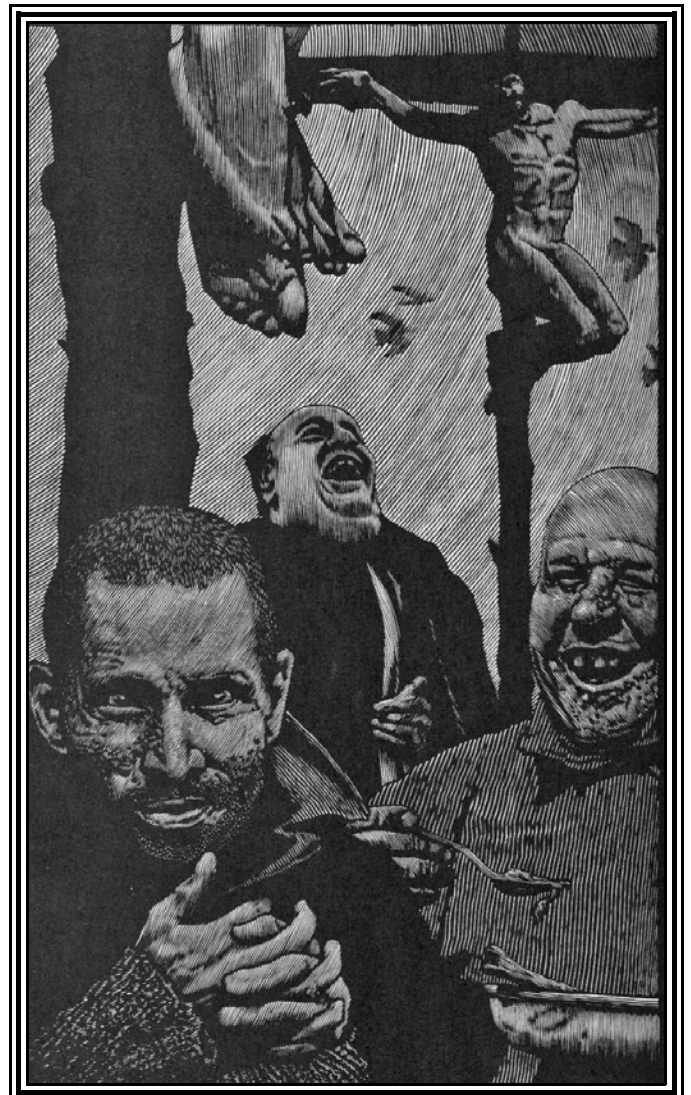
cost of discipleship.”

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.” - “The reproach of Christ” is a profoundly significant phrase. At the outset, it is important to note the use of this phrase - ***“the reproach of Christ”*** - as the equivalent of ***“to be mistreated with the people of God.”*** ***“Christ,”*** the Anointed One is the perfect exemplification of His people. The rejection, opposition, and suffering which He experienced as the result of His faithfulness to the will and Word of the Father are an indication that which can be expected by every faithful Christian.

“The identification of God with His people here is noteworthy. The words which the God of Israel put in Moses’ mouth when he went to Pharaoh to demand His people’s release: ‘Israel is My son, My firstborn!’ (Exodus 4:22) are as applicable to Jesus personally as they are to Israel corporately. Jesus the Messiah is one with the messianic people, bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. “In all their affliction, He was afflicted” (Isaiah 63:9) and in the fullness of time, He too, like His people before Him was called out of Egypt and had His own exodus to accomplish (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15). The stigma and disrepute which the people of God bore, were borne in concentrated form by the Lord’s Anointed.”
(Bruce, p. 311)

It is likely that the author here, has in mind the messianic lament of Psalm 89: ***“Remember, O Lord, how Your servants are mocked, and how I bear in My heart the insults of all the many nations, with which Your enemies mock, O LORD, with which they mock the footsteps of Your Anointed.”*** (Psalm 89:50-51) These somber words of prophecy were literally fulfilled at our Lord’s crucifixion by the mockery heaped upon Jesus as He died in anguish:

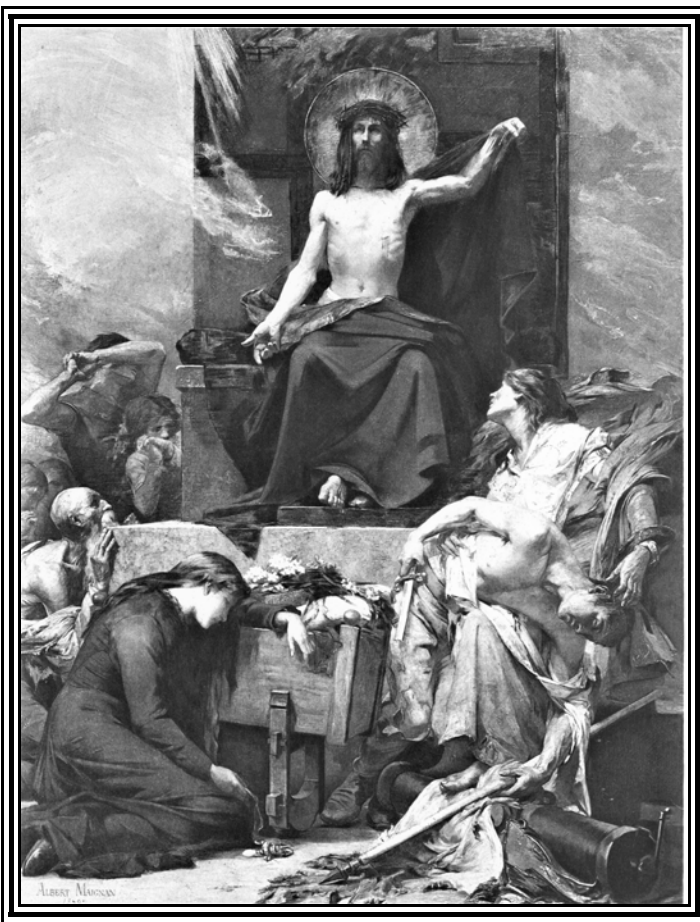
“And those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads and saying: ‘Aha!’



“They Mocked And Reviled Him”

You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself and come down from the cross!’ So also the chief priests and the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, “he saved others. He cannot save Himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.’ Those who were crucified with Him also reviled Him.” (Mark 15:29-32)

Moses was prepared to endure the reproach of Christ, that is, the world’s inevitable rejection of Christ and the Christian, rather than to remain in the comfort and security of the royal palace. That was a certain indication that he had received the gift of faith and was able to perceive reality as it truly is in the sight of God. This is what Jesus means when He calls upon us to ***“take his cross and follow Me.” “And whoever does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”*** (Matthew 10:38-39) Christ Himself is the prime example of such cross bearing. As Hebrews will remind us in Chapter 12, He despised the shame and died upon that cross for us and for our salvation. ***‘Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.’*** (Hebrews 12:1-2)



“Take Up Your Cross And Follow Me” - Maigan

“When, within the context of the New Testament, the author speaks of the Christ here, he is speaking specifically of the single Messianic person of the Redeemer. As this chapter shows so clearly, for the man of faith, the way of obedience is also the way of suffering, and in choosing this path, Moses was conforming to the pattern which was to have its perfect exemplification in the obedience and suffering of Him who in a unique and ultimate sense is God’s Anointed One. ...Christ Himself, as our author repeatedly stresses, chose the way of obedience, even though it led to humiliation and suffering and death, for this was the cost of our redemption.” (Hughes, p. 496)

The key to Moses’ ability to discern the value of the ***“reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt”*** lay

in the fact that his vision was not limited to the things of this world - ***“for he was looking for the reward.”*** The faith perspective of Father Abraham had been previously defined in a similar manner, using similar vision terminology - ***“For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose Designer and Builder is God.”*** (Hebrews 11:10) Faith is ***“the conviction of things not seen.”*** (Hebrews 11:1). The summary of the faith of all the champions listed in the initial segment of the roll call from Abel to Jacob also describes faith as the ability to discern beyond the transitory, temporary things of this world another eternal reality which God has prepared for His own. ***“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them, and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles here on earth.”*** So also Moses was ***“looking to the reward.”*** This insight enabled him to recognize the emptiness of mighty Egypt’s wealth and power and to identify himself with the oppressed people of God. In the verses which follow we will learn that his ability - like that of his parents (cf. vs.23) not to fear the wrath of Pharaoh and his willingness to leave Egypt and dwell in the wilderness of Midian were the result the faith which enabled him to endure ***“as seeing Him who is invisible.”*** Faith is vision which penetrates through the facade of things as the seem to be in this sinful world to view the true reality which exists for the people of God in Christ.



“The Reward In Heaven”

The verb in this phrase which characterizes Moses’ attention to ***“the reward”*** suggests concentrated attention, intense scrutiny. The verb is in the imperfect tense in Greek which indicate a continual pattern of ongoing action. This looking forward to the reward is the characteristic practice of his entire life, yet another way of saying that Moses was a man of faith.

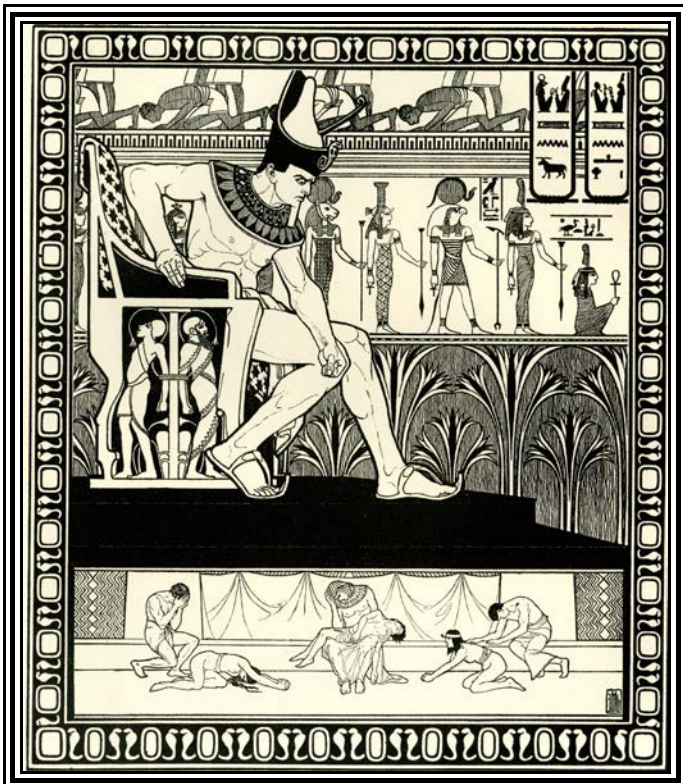
“Moses deliberately turn his attention away from the present suffering to the future reward. His faith consisted in an emphatic refusal of the present, visible rewards of status and privilege in the certain expectation of the yet unseen, but enduring reward bestowed by God, to whom he could only look ahead.”
(Lane, p. 373)

“The reward” of which the text speaks is all that which God has prepared for the believer in the glorious eternity of life with Him in heaven. One must carefully avoid reading any thought of human merit into the use of this term. Our reward has been won for us in the blood of Jesus Christ alone.

“True Christian confidence has a great reward, so that to throw away our confidence by abandoning the struggle is also to throw away our reward. That reward is the incomparable glory which awaits all who are faithful to the end (Rom. 8:18), the imperishable inheritance prepared for God’s redeemed people (1 Pet. 1:4), the crown of righteousness which God will bestow on all those who love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). The relationship of the present pilgrimage to the future reward is the relationship of faith to hope... This great reward is a strong encouragement to perseverance; but it is far from being the prize for human merit, as though man’s deserving established a claim upon God. The confidence which it crowns is not self-confidence, that is, the confidence in one’s own worth, but precisely confidence in God, and this is the exact antithesis of self-merit and self-assurance. The blood of Jesus, that is to say the perfect atonement provided by the incarnate Son through His sacrifice of Himself in our stead, is the whole substance of our confidence. The only merit in which the Christian trusts is the merit of Christ. As English reformer William Tyndale wrote: ‘All that I do and suffer is but the way to the reward, and not the deserving thereof... Christ is Lord over all and whatsoever any man would have of God, he must have it freely given him for Christ’s sake. Now to have heaven for mine own deserving.

To seek to have heaven as a reward for my own works, is to seek praise for myself rather than for Christ. For I cannot have it both by grace in Christ and by my own merits for free giving by grace and deserving cannot stand together.’” (Hughes, p. 432)

“By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king...” - There is a disparity between Hebrews’ assertion of Moses ***“not being afraid of the anger of the king”*** and the original account in Exodus which states almost exactly the opposite: ***“Then Moses is afraid and thought surely the thing is known. When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land***



of Midian.” (Exodus 2:14-15) This difference suggests that the reference here is not to his fearful flight from Egypt after the death of the taskmaster but rather to his final abandonment of Egypt at the time of the exodus.

“The report that he left Egypt does not refer to his flight to Egypt for fear of Pharaoh (Ex.2:15), but to his abandonment of Egypt together with all the Israelites in the exodus. His abandonment of that land was a gradual process that begins with God’s call for him to bring the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex. 3:7-10), continued with his repeated demands for their release by Pharaoh (Exodus 5-11), and culminated by his departure from Egypt with them (Exodus 12:31-36). The remark that Moses was ‘unafraid of the king’s anger’ (Heb. 11:27) recalls all Pharaoh’s threats and Moses’ refusal to be intimidated by them. So ‘by faith’ in God’s promise that He would be with him when he went to Pharaoh and brought the Israelites out from Egypt (Exodus 3:12) Moses left Egypt once and for all, just as Abraham had left his original homeland. (11:8)” (Kleinig p. 568) demands for their release by Pharaoh (Exodus 5-11), and culminated by his departure from Egypt with them (Exodus 12:31-36). The remark that Moses was ‘unafraid of the king’s anger’ (Heb. 11:27) recalls all Pharaoh’s threats and Moses’ refusal to be intimidated by them. So ‘by faith’ in God’s promise that He would be with him when he went to Pharaoh and brought the Israelites out from Egypt (Exodus 3:12) Moses left Egypt once and for all, just as Abraham had left his original homeland. (11:8)” (Kleinig p. 568)



“The Exodus” - Martin

“He endured as seeing Him who is invisible” - The theme of discernment continues as the author explains how Moses was able to endure through the complex series of events which would lead to the fulfillment of his unique role as the primary, founding, leader of the Israelite nation. The verb ***“endured”*** carries the connotation of perseverance upon a chosen path rather than turning away or changing course as the result of obstacles or difficulties. The Epistle uses this verb consistently in reference to the endurance of suffering in anticipation of God’s future reward. In this instance that spiritual discernment is described by the unique phrase ***“as seeing Him who is invisible.”*** This is a message of direct practical application to the wavering Hebrews who are the recipients of the epistle.



“We have already seen that those who live ‘by faith’ do so because they have already seen with the eyes of faith the fulfillment of God’s future promise. Thus, Noah was ‘warned of things not yet seen’ (vs.7); Abraham, and those associated with him ‘saw’ the God-built eternal city (vs.13); Moses himself ‘kept looking toward the reward. Moses, however, demonstrates that people who live by faith are also able to ‘endure’ under suffering and persecution because with the eyes of faith they can ‘see the Unseen One’ at work in the present. They are confident that ‘God is’ (vs. 6). By faith they know that God’s power is available to enable their perseverance even when His presence is not apparent. This reality, so singularly demonstrated by Moses, was anticipated by his parents who could ‘see’ God at work in his birth. While assurance of God’s promise may motivate the faithful, it is confidence in His power for the present that enables them to persevere in the face of persecution and

hardship. Such endurance is the opposite of the apostasy against which the pastor has repeatedly warned his hearers.” (Cockerill, p. 576)

As in previous phrases the emphasis here is upon an ongoing consistent pattern of behavior which came to characterize his entire life - ***“as seeing Him who is invisible.”*** The Greek pays particular stress upon the intensity and the continuity of this ***“seeing”*** which most



“Israel At Sinai”

English translations fail to express. One commentator suggests that a more accurate rendering of the verb would be “*for he kept the One who is invisible continually before his eyes.*”

“It was the fact that Moses kept the invisible God continually before him that explains how he succeeded in overcoming his fear through faith...The emphasis, however, falls on continually seeing the unseen God. The reference is not to the awesome event at the burning bush, as if to say that Moses saw one who is invisible, but to a fixed habit of spiritual perception. Moses’ departure was an act of faith motivated by the vision of God which faith invested with substantial reality. The explanation of Moses’ lack of fear testifies to an eschatological faith oriented to the future because it seized upon the reality of God and of the reward that He bestows in response to active faith...Moses looked beyond the events of the present to the as yet unseen events of the future. From the pastoral perspective of the writer, the firmly entrenched habit of Moses in keeping God continually in view establishes a standard for imitation by the community in its experience of fear and governmental oppression.” (Lane, p. 376)

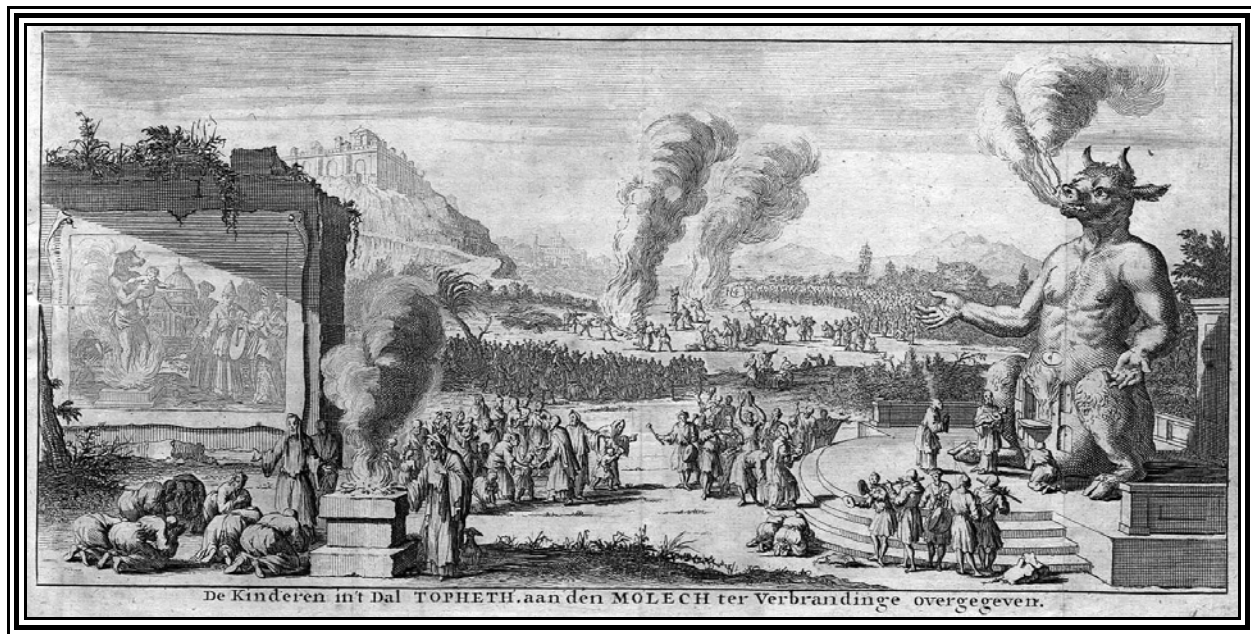
The invisibility of God, in contrast to the tangible idols of the pagan world is a regular theme in the writings of the prophets. When Moses requested a glimpse of God upon Mount Sinai, the Lord’s reply was unequivocal:

“Moses said, ‘Show me Your glory.’ And He said, ‘I will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you My name, the

LORD. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy upon whom I will show mercy. But' He said, 'you cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live.' And the LORD said, 'Behold, there is a place by Me where you shall stand upon the rock. And while My glory passes, I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with My hand until I have passed by, and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.'" (Exodus 33:18-23)

When Moses recounted the presence of God at Sinai to the Children of Israel in Deuteronomy, he placed particular emphasis on the fact that they heard the voice of God byt they did not see him in contrast to the pathetic idols of the heathen:

"Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, there was no form, but only the sound of a voice...Therefore, watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire, beware, lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the



"The Israelites Worshiping the Idol Molech In The Valley of Hinnon"

likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. And beware lest when you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the people under the whole heaven." (Deuteronomy 4:12-19)

Philo of Alexandria, foremost Hellenist Jewish Philosopher at the end of the Intertestamental period, points to this single factor as defining the difference between Moses and Pharaoh in their confrontations prior to the exodus. Pharaoh could not comprehend the concept of an invisible god and was therefore incapable of acknowledging the God of Israel:

“But the monarch, who from his cradle had had his soul filled with all the arrogance of his ancestors, and who had no notion in the world of any god appreciable only by the intellect, apart from those objects which are visible to sight, answered them with insolence, saying; ‘Who is it I am to obey? I know not this new Lord of whom you are speaking. I will not let the nation go, to be disobedient, under the pretense of fasts and sacrifices.’” (Philo, p. 467)



“The Destroyer Passing Through The Land Of Egypt” -

“By faith he kept the Passover, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.” - The final example of faith attributed to Moses is the establishment and observance of the Passover. This would have served as a most powerful and poignant example of trust in the promises of God and obedience to His commands based upon that trust. The Passover was, in many ways, the most prominent of the great festivals of Judaism, a celebration of national deliverance and a demonstration of God’s willingness and ability to rescue His people at a moment of dire need.

“The Passover became for Israel a perpetual memorial of the last night that their forefathers spent in Egypt, when the Angel of Death passed through the land destroying the firstborn in every home, apart from those whose doorways were marked by the blood of the paschal lamb, for at the threshold of those dwellings the God of Israel Himself stood guard and prevented the Destroyer



"The Death Of Egypt's Firstborn" " Alma Tadema

from entering." (Bruce, p. 314)

This reminder that the God of the Passover is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ would have served as an effective way to assure the waverers among his readers, who were tempted to return to their ancient faith, that Christianity was not a different faith but the fulfillment and completion of that which their forefathers had believed across the centuries.

For Moses to hear and obey God's command was an act of faith in the most profound sense. Throughout the ten plagues Moses had responded to God's command without question or challenge, secure in the trust that God's strategy was sound and that the Lord had the power to carry out everything which he had been instructed to proclaim to the proud king. At the same time, Moses willingness to place himself and his people in direct defiance of the monarch, who could at any time have ordered their destruction, as a demonstration of faith. This is most clearly the case in regard to the final plague. Moses did not question either the capacity of God to dispatch this fearsome **"Destroyer"** throughout the land, nor His ability to selectively exempt those dwellings whose doorways had been marked with the blood of the pascal lambs. He simply obeyed and made preparations for the exodus which God had promised would take place on the following day. The most pertinent part of the Passover deliverance is not the destruction of Egypt's firstborn and the exodus which followed, but the preservation of the people of God in the midst of deadly peril, a lesson directly applicable to the circumstance of the original readers of Hebrews.

"The destruction of the firstborn of Egypt was the greatest of the ten plagues and God's greatest act in delivering his people save the crossing of the Red Sea described in the next verse. The establishment of the Passover, however, embodies something even greater than the destruction experienced by Egypt -

the preservation of God's own - by faith - amidst such destruction. The pastor included the application of blood because it was the blood on the doorpost that was necessary 'in order that the destroyer might not touch their firstborn.' The Angel of Death who struck down the firstborn of Egypt would not ever 'touch' the firstborn of God's people. The word 'firstborn' is neuter plural, and therefore comprehensive. All the firstborn, both human and animal were saved from death by 'the application of the blood.' Yet it is hard to escape the impression that the pastor is thinking of the 'firstborn' as representative of the people of God in its entirety." (Cockerill, p. 580)



"The angel of Death" - Schaeffer

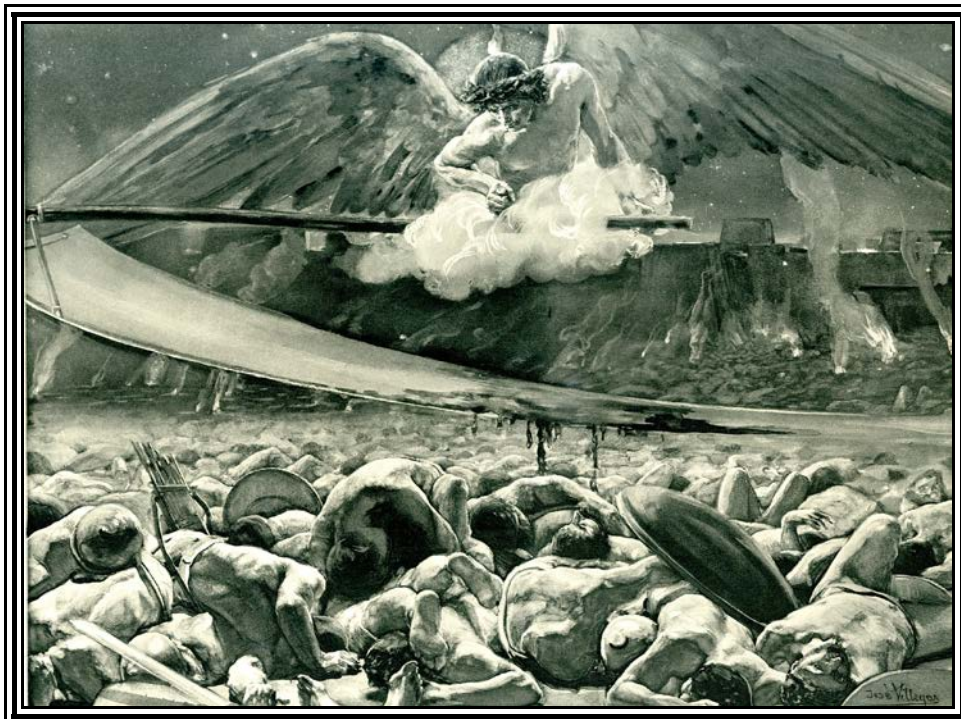
The title **"Destroyer"** is derived from Exodus 12:23 - **"For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the Destroyer to enter your houses to strike you."** Variations of the term appear in Genesis 19:13-14 in reference to the angels whom the Lord sent to destroy Sodom and Gommorah - **"For we are about to destroy this place for the outcry against this people has become great before the LORD and the LORD has sent us to destroy it. So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters. 'Up! Get out of this place for the LORD is about to destroy the city' But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting."** The same word appears in 1 Chronicles 21:11-16 in reference to the angel whom God would send in response to the census ordered by King David:

"So Gad came to David, 'Thus says the LORD; 'Choose what you will. Either three months of famine, or three months of devastation by your foes while the sword of your enemies overtakes you, or else three days of the sword of the LORD, pestilence upon the land with the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the territory of Israel...So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel, and 70,000 men of Israel fell. And God sent the angel to Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD saw, and He relented from the calamity. And He said to the angel who was working the destruction. 'It is

enough. Now stay your hand.’ And the Angel of the LORD was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David lifted his eyes and saw the Angel of the LORD, standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem.”

The Assyrian siege of Jerusalem was ended by the Angel of the Lord who struck down the hosts of Sennacherib overnight: *“And that night the Angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when the people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib, king of Assyria, went home and lived at Nineveh.”* (2 Kings 19:35-36; cf. Isaiah 37:36; 2 Chronicles 32:31) The prophet Isaiah promised Israel that if they remained faithful to the covenant He would strike down their enemies through the agency of the mighty angel: *“I have also created the Ravager to destroy; no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed; and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgement. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from Me, declares the LORD.”* (Isaiah 54:16-17)

The only other New Testament usage of the term is in 1 Corinthians 10:10 where Paul applies it to the angel who struck down the grumbling Israelites in the desert: *“We must not put Christ to the test as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble as some of them did, and were destroyed by the Destroyer.”* “The Destroyer,” it would seem is a powerful angel called upon to implement God’s judgement in the form of death and destruction at crucial moments in the history of the people of God. Dr. Shaul Bar offers this summary of the Old Testament evidence in *“The Jewish Bible Quarterly:”*



“The Angel Of The Strikes Down The Host Of Sennacherib”

“The particular term ‘destroying angel occurs twice in the Bible, in II Samuel 24:16 and its parallel, 1 Chronicles 21:15. Other allusions to this destroyer can be found in Exodus 12:23 and Isaiah 54:16. The story of Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem may also allude to a destroying angel (II Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36; II Chronicles 32:21), although the term there used is simply ‘malakh.’ In the cultures of the ancient Near East, the gods were believed to be responsible for death and destruction. The Bible, however, does not convey such a configuration. Instead, the destructive agents act according to God’s instruction; they are His messengers, and it is the Lord who initiates death and destruction...It seems then that we must distinguish the ‘destroying angel,’ from the messengers of death who come to punish individuals only. By contrast, the Destroyer is sent by the Lord to kill multitudes through a plague. Unlike the deadly messengers who bring both natural and premature death, the Destroyer brings only a premature and painful death...The Lord delegates some of His power to angels, which are not independent entities acting on their own volition. Nowhere does the Bible refer to some enduring independent power whose entire rationale is death and destruction.”

Hebrews 11:29-31

(29) By faith, the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. (30) By faith, the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. (31) By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with the disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.



“The Crossing Of The Red Sea”

“By faith, the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land...” - In the final event from the life of Moses the focus shifts from the prophet’s faith to that of the people. No doubt the

most dramatic of all of God's miracles to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage, the destruction of Pharaoh and his host at the Red marks the complete termination of that bondage and the beginning of the long journey to Mount Sinai and into the wilderness beyond. It might be described as an act of generosity to cite this great event as a demonstration of the peoples' faith. Their response to the sight of Pharaoh's chariots in pursuit was certainly less than faithful;

“When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, ‘Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us to die in the wilderness? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt; ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.’ And Moses said to the people, ‘Fear not! Stand firm and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you and you have only to be silent.’” (Exodus 14:10-14)



“Pharaoh In The Red Sea” Frederick Bridgman

The struggling faith of the Israelites in this instance is a perfect example for the readers of the epistle who are struggling with the temptation to relapse from Christianity to Judaism. The inclusion of the Red Sea episode serves to assure these Hebrews that faith is not simply and uninterrupted serenity which is never troubled by doubt or fear. Faith is, in fact constantly challenged by such things. For Israel at the sea, as for believers in every place and time, the antidote for those doubts and fears is to cling to the Word of God. Moses,



“The Destruction At the Red Sea”

God’s prophet, proclaimed the Word of God and promised that the Lord would bring them safely through the waters of the sea. ***“Fear not! Stand firm and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians which you see today, you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”*** (Exodus 14:13-14) The people responded to God’s promise and moved forward into the sea, crossing, as God had promised upon dry land.

“In what did the faith of the Israelites consist? The answer is to be found in the implied comparison between their situation and that of the readers of Hebrews...The Israelites had been saved from destruction at the time of the Passover, yet now, as the Egyptians pursue them towards the Red Sea they are afraid they had never left Egypt. Moses instructs the people to stand firm...and the crossing takes place.

The result is that after the event ‘the people feared the Lord and believed God and Moses His servant. The implications for a group of Christians tempted to apostasy are so clear that the author does not need to spell them out in detail.’ (Ellingworth, p.619)

The text draws the clear contrast between the fearful but faithful Israelites and the faithless Egyptians who drown trying to duplicate the feat of crossing the sea on dry land. The deliverance at the sea and the destruction of the mighty host of Pharaoh is celebrated throughout the Old Testament as an awesome display of the sovereign power of God and of His ability to rescue His people even in times of utmost need.

***“Both we and our fathers have sinned;
We have committed iniquity, we have done wickedness.
Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider Your wondrous works;
They did not remember the abundance of Your steadfast love;
But rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.
Yet He saved them for His Name’s sake,
That He might make known His mighty power.***

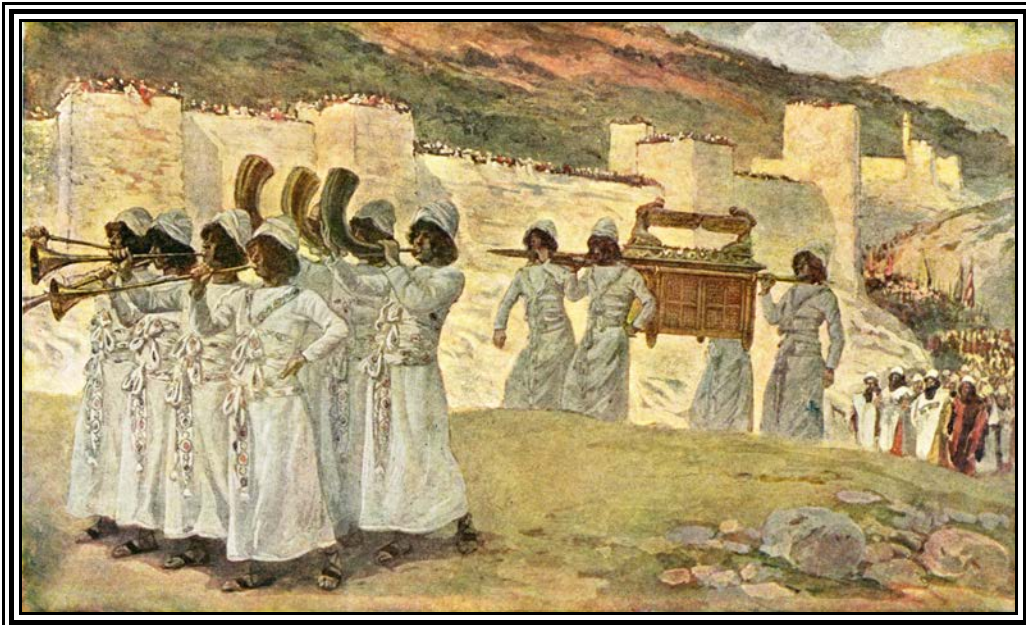
*He rebuked the Red Sea and it became dry,
And He led them through the deep as through a desert.
So He saved them from the hand of the foe,
And redeemed them from the power of the enemy.
And the waters covered their adversaries, not one of them was left.
Then they believed His words, they sang His praise.” (Psalm 106:6-12)*

*“Thus says the LORD who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters,
Who brings forth chariot and horse, army and warrior;
They lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished like a wick.” (Isaiah 43:16-17)*

*“Was it not You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep,
Who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?
“And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing;
Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
And they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”
(Isaiah 51: 10-11)*

It is no co-incidence that the list skips over the forty years in the wilderness. This period had already been cited in the epistle as a time of faithlessness and disobedience.

*“As it is said, ‘Do not harden your hearts as in rebellion.’ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt and were led by Moses? And with whom was He provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.”
(Hebrews 3:15-19)*



“The Fall Of Jericho” - James Tissot



“The Fall of Jericho” - Dalziel

“By faith, the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days.” - The next demonstration of faith, like that of the crossing of the Red Sea, is attributed not to an individual but the entire Israelite nation. The fall of the Canaanite city of Jericho was the first great victory of Joshua’s conquest of the promised land. It was accomplished not by the prowess of Israel upon the battlefield, but by the miraculous intervention of God. Jericho was one of the foremost cities of the Canaanites and was renowned for its impregnable fortifications. The manner in which God brought about its downfall, specifically noted here in the text, was designed to test and to display the faith of the children of Israel. God, of course, could have brought about this feat instantaneously. He chose not to do so. Instead the Israelites were instructed to march around the city’s massive outer wall for seven days. The people were led by the Ark of the Covenant, carried by Levitical priests. The presence of the Ark at the head of the procession, as the symbol of God’s unique presence with His chosen people, was a tangible expression of their identity as God’s people and of their trust in His ability to fulfill the promises of the covenant which He had established with them. This battle, as the first direct encounter between Israel and a Canaanite culture which was much more sophisticated and advanced than their would be conquerors, would serve as a test of Israel’s ability to accomplish its goal. Jericho, as a city which had successfully withstood many a siege and which was perceived to be unconquerable was the perfect place for this display of the irresistible power of the God of Israel. No doubt, as the Israelites marched around the base of the great walls over and over again, the citizens of Jericho howled down their taunts and insults at these sheep herders who foolishly believed they could succeed where so many others had failed. The seven day repetition of the march

served as a challenging test of Israel's faith. There is no indication in the text of Joshua that they balked at God's command or that they faltered in their obedience during the seven days which followed. Their father's failure to trust in the power of God to accomplish the conquest of the land had led to the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. This generation evidently had learned that with God nothing was impossible. With the miraculous crossing of the Jordan fresh in their minds, they trusted in God and obeyed His command. And the walls of Jericho came tumbling down. The people are not mentioned in Verse 30. The focus remains on the power of God and His willingness to use that power on behalf of His own which is the foundation of faith. Nor is Joshua, the leader of the nation cited at this point, for this was a collective demonstration of faith on the part of all the Israelites.



“Rahab - The Harlot Of Jericho”

“Faith, in this instance, consisted in the readiness to act in accordance with God’s mandate. It was expressed by Joshua, the priests, and the company of fighting men. From a military standpoint, the assurance that a great walled city could be taken by simply encircling it for seven days, the silence broken only by the muffled tramp of feet, the sounding of rams horns, and a loud shout on the seventh day, must have seemed remote from reality. But the people complied with the instructions that God had given, and their faith was rewarded. After they had marched around the city seven times, on the seventh day at the pre-arranged signal, the people shouted - ‘and when the people gave a loud shout’ - the wall collapsed so every man charged straight in and they took the city.’ (Joshua 6:20) The incident was recalled in the conflict with the Seleucid forces at the time of Judas Maccabaeus: ‘But Judas and his men, calling upon the great Sovereign of the world, who without battering rams or engines of war overthrew Jericho in the days of Joshua, rushed furiously upon the walls. They took the city by the will of God.’ (2 Maccabees 12:15-16) For the community of faith, addressed in the homily, the message of this example is clear;