

CHAPTER 14

The Epistle to the Hebrews

FAITH (Hebrews 11:1-40)

by G. H. Lang

Chapter 12:1-40

1. Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the proving of things not seen.
2. For therein the elders had witness borne to them.
3. By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen bath not been made out of things which do appear.
4. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts: and through it he being dead yet speaketh.
5. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God translated him: for before his translation he hath had witness borne to him that he had been well-pleasing unto God:
6. and without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing *unto him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that seek him.
7. By faith Noah, being warned *of God* concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.
8. By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.
9. By faith he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a *land* not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:
10. for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.
11. By faith even Sarah herself received power to conceive seed when she was past age, since she counted him faithful who had promised:
12. wherefore also there sprang of one, and him as good as dead, *so many* as the stars of heaven in multitude, and as the sand, which is by the sea shore, innumerable.
13. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth;
14. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own.
15. And if indeed they had been mindful of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. i6. But now they desire a better

- country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.
17. By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac: yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten *son*;
 18. *even* he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called:
 19. accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead: from whence he did also in a parable receive him back.
 20. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even concerning things to come.
 21. By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, *leaning* upon the top of his staff.
 22. By faith Joseph, when his end was nigh, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.
 23. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months by his parents, because they saw that he was a goodly child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.
 24. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;
 25. choosing rather to be evil entreated with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;
 26. accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he looked unto the recompense of reward.
 27. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.
 28. By faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of the blood, that the destroyer of the firstborn should not touch them.
 29. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were swallowed up.
 30. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about for seven days.
 31. By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that were disobedient, having received the spies with peace.
 32. And what shall I more say? for the time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David and Samuel and the prophets:
 33. who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions;
 34. quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens.
 35. Women received their dead by a resurrection: and others were tortured, not accepting their deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:
 36. and others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:

37. they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword: they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, evil entreated;
38. (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth.
39. And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise;
40. God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

1. FAITH DEFINED (ver. 1). Faith therefore is that activity of the heart which secures salvation, whether it be the deliverance of the man himself from eternal ruin or the preserving of his life from being wasted. What then *is* this power which can work such wonders?

Faith is here defined as being “assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen” (R.V.); or, taking the R.V. margin, “the giving substance to things hoped for, the putting to the proof of things not seen”; or A.V. “the substance of things hoped for,” or, as the margin, “the ground or confidence of things hoped for”; or, as a scholarly German version, the Elberfeld (by J. N. Darby), renders, “Faith is a realization of that which one hopes, a conviction concerning things which one does not see.” On the basis of later papyri the Editors of *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* say: “in all cases there is the same central idea of something that *underlies* visible conditions and guaranteeing a future possession. As this is the essential idea in Heb. 11:1, we venture to suggest the translation ‘Faith is the *title deed* of things hoped for.’” This seems inaccurate, for our *title* to every blessing is Christ, not our faith. Faith may fail and so hope die, and possession come into jeopardy; but the *title* is not impaired.

Such variety of renderings prompts inquiry as to whether a stricter sense can be reached.

i. *Faith and Hope*. Faith is viewed here as related to hope. A Christian is a person who is saved by hope (Rom. 8:24, 25); but his hope is not like that of the non-Christian, for there is not in it that element of uncertainty which inheres in every merely human hope. This uncertainty is rightly stated by the Persian poet, Omar Khayyam:

The worldly hope men set their hearts upon
Turns ashes, or it prospers; and anon,
Like snow upon the desert’s dusty face
Lighting a little hour or two, is gone.

In contrast, the Christian hope is “both sure and steadfast,” and it enters “into that which is within the veil,” as an anchor takes hold of the firm ground out of sight (ch. 6:18-20).

As is said in the passage cited (Rom. 8:24, 25), hope has necessarily to do with things unseen and future, for “hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopeth for that which he seeth?” Hope thus reinforces the present by the prospect of the future. A woman is supported in solitude and adversity by the hope that her absent husband will return: a youth struggles bravely against early poverty in the hope that the fortune of a relative will one day be his. Similarly the Christian is saved from despair and apostasy by hope.

For what that is unseen and future does he hope? For the Coming One and all that is to take place at His coming I One moonlit evening, under the palms at Chagallu, South India, I explained this hope to a company of educated Hindus— that Christ is to return from heaven; that a multitude of His dead followers will instantly leave their graves to meet Him in the air, accompanied by a smaller number who will be alive at that moment; that they will be transformed into the glory that He bears, will be presented thus before the throne of God, will return with Christ to this earth and be seen by men with Him in His glory—this and other details were set forth. Suddenly I asked the hearers what they were thinking about this program, and an elderly Brahmin blurted out the emphatic word, “Impossible!”

And impossible it is, to all human energy and effort. What, then, justifies the Christian in indulging his hope of things so unprecedented? It is faith.

ii. *Faith the Basis of Hope.* It has been stated at 1:3 that the Son of God is the “*charakter* of the *hupostasis*” of God. The lines cut in a seal form the visible representation (the *charakter*) of a coat of arms not seen at the moment. Some facts as to God are discernible in the creation, such as His everlasting power and divinity (Rom. 1:20). Other facts as to God are not thus discoverable; they are deeper, basic elements in the Godhead: such as that God is both Father and Son, that He has in His nature a principle of grace, by which He can pardon His enemies; and other features. This underlying element is in this verse 3 of chapter 1 described as the *hupostasis* of God, from words meaning that which stands under, and so supports that which is above. Of this deeper, underlying, substratum, or essence of the Godhead the Son is the visible, indelible, permanent expression, the *charakter*.

Similarly, in the verse before us (11:1) faith is said to be the *hupostasis* of hope, that which forms the basis and support of hope. He who has no faith set on Christ as the Coming One has no justifiable hope for the future of heaven, earth, or himself; for all human schemes and efforts prove elusive and illusory; we know not what a day may

bring forth, and so men, being without God, are without hope (Eph. 2:12). We hope because we believe. Hope vanishes if faith ceases.

iii. *Promise the Basis of Faith.* But this raises a further question. Faith is the basis of hope, but what is the basis of faith? What warrant have we for believing what we believe? Fifty years ago, in a large meeting of young men in the city of London, an elderly Christian gave an address. At the close a young fellow put this pertinent question: "How do you know that what you have been saying is true?"

What is the basis of faith? It is the promise of some person considered dependable. A poor youth has no prospect of developing a business; but some rich person promises adequate financial backing and the young man starts trading hopefully. A manufacturer needs a machine, costing £1,000. Being without present reserves he sees no hope of purchasing it. But a friend hands him a Bank of England note for £1,000, and faith in the Bank creates immediately an assured expectation that he can buy the machine. In like manner faith in the Bank enables the vendor to part with the machine in exchange for the piece of paper on which the promise of the Bank is printed, for he has a conviction, a sure hope, that the money will be paid on demand.

Thus hope depends on faith and faith on the promise; and if one's faith in the Promiser is absolute then faith creates a *conviction* as to the things not yet seen but guaranteed by the promise. But should one question the ability or the fidelity of the Bank, or if there be a doubt as to the genuineness of a bank note held, then faith will not arise nor hope be born. The assertion of the modern critic that his tampering with the text of the Bible does not touch anything material is false; it is precisely as material as questioning whether the promise of the Bank is genuine and reliable—it forbids faith and destroys hope of the promise being fulfilled.

As to the promises of God, one said to Dr. A. T. Pierson that he thought there may be as many as three thousand in the Word of God. That great Bible student replied that he knew by counting that there are more than that number in the Psalms alone, and that he thought there may be thirty thousand in the whole Book. Faith looks at these promises and at the God Who promises, and is fully assured that what He has promised He is able and ready to perform (Rom. 4:20, 21). The Guarantor of this is Christ, the Son of God: faith looks at Christ and says Amen to the promise of God, that is, *It shall be so!* (2 Cor. 1:20). Thus David said: "it hath pleased Thee to bless the house of Thy servant... . Thou, O Jehovah, hast blessed and *it is blessed* for ever" (1 Chron. 17:26, 27). Thus did David's faith impart conviction and create an assured hope as to the far distant future.

2. *Faith Illustrated.* It was such a hope as to the distant future, a hope set on Christ as the Coming One, that the first readers of this Letter needed to have rekindled in their hearts, so as thus to be saved from turning to the past and its imperfect

arrangements and losing thereby their noblest future prospects. To this end their faith needed to be re-established, and for this purpose the Writer now recounts selected examples of what faith had already enabled men of like passions to do or to bear.

i. Ver. 2, *The Elders*. And first he makes a wide statement concerning men of ancient times, "the elders (comp. Matt. 15:2). These had had "witness borne to them." By whom? Clearly by God. In ver. 4 this is stated distinctly concerning Abel, and in ver. 5 it is implied as to Enoch. Before whom did God give this testimony? In the case of Abel certainly before Cain, as the history shows (Gen. 4:6 ff.). As to Enoch we are not informed who heard God's testimony, borne to him while he was yet on earth; but it is to be remembered that at all times the angels are witnesses of what is done and said by man and God. It was to Satan and other heavenly beings that God bore witness to the character of Job, one of these "elders" (Job 1:8; 2:3).

In ver. 16 of our chapter it is stated concerning these elders that God has made clear His approval of them by preparing for them a city, that is, the heavenly city (ver. 10). This work of preparation must needs be known to the hosts of heaven. As to yet another of these elders, Daniel, an angel knew God's estimate of him, for he told him that he was greatly beloved in heaven (Dan. 10:11, 19). This was no small comfort to one who had known what it was to be greatly hated by men, and to have learned that even human esteem, honestly won, may prove useless in a day of trial (Dan. 6:14-17).

Clearly it is every way better to be among those that the Lord will confess as His faithful followers, owning them publicly before God, angels, and men, rather than by forsaking Him, to be renounced by Him in that great day of His glory (Matt. 10:32, 33; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26).

ii. Ver. 3. *Faith and Understanding*. From the earliest period of which there is secular record men have speculated as to the origin of the universe. This could scarcely have been so before the Flood, because for 930 years of that period Adam lived and could recount his original intercourse with God and what he had thus learned (Gen. 5:5). Then, too, Methuselah was contemporary with Adam and could perpetuate until the year of the Flood, when he died, that authentic account of Adam. Noah and Shem were contemporary with Methuselah, and brought that information down to 502 years after the Flood, when Shem died (Gen. 11:10, 11).

About then set in that deliberate renunciation of God laid in Rom. 1 to the charge of that succeeding generation. Light refused involves darkness; the race lost that early account of creation, retaining only such crude, debased ideas of it as can be traced in the early Sumerian myths.

But the earliest Biblical history of that post-diluvian period shows a striking exception, a survival of much of that true knowledge of early creation affairs. The book of Job records conversation between five men and reveals what extensive knowledge some still had. And some time later, Moses wrote the sublime yet brief and distinct account of creation given in the first two chapters of Genesis.

Outside the spheres where such men had influence there reigned total darkness as to the origin of the universe. Philosophers, of notable mental ability, speculated, contradicted one another, proposed mutually exclusive theories, and remained in confused uncertainty and actual ignorance. Three and a half thousand years have passed since Moses gave his account of creation, and still those who choose to ignore his account speculate as did the ancients, review, revise, restate their ancient theories, add nothing thereto, and remain as ignorant as they.

How then did such as Job, Eliphaz, Ehihu, or Moses arrive at a consistent, intelligible account of how creation came to be? What differentiated them from their blind contemporaries? It was not superior intellect, great as that of Moses evidently was; for such later inquirers as Aristotle, Plato, or Zoroaster were endowed with first-class minds.

No, the differentiating factor was FAITH. It still is so. By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God; so that what is seen hath not been made out of things visible” to the senses. The singular number (*to blepomenon* “what is seen”) regards the whole visible creation as one entity. Thus the statement has universal application, is true of the whole creation. It was all called into existence by the word of God; no part of it is eternal, or was self-caused.

Those older sages, though men of brains, could *believe*: the philosophers could not, and cannot. No one can get to know of what is beyond his personal knowledge save by believing the testimony of someone who has that personal knowledge. No one can learn the facts and features of a land he has never seen except by believing the account of someone who has been there. No one but the Creator can tell how creation was effected for no one else was present. He must give an account of it or it cannot be known; we must believe that account or we cannot know.

As the book of Job shows, those men believed what had been told by still earlier men concerning the very ancient times (Job 8:8-10; 15:17, 18). But also, pious men were still receiving instruction from God and *believing it* (Job 4:12-17; 33:12-24; chs. 38—42), and, as 38:4-7 in particular shows, this Divine instruction included the subject of the creation.

Someone has expressed the opinion that during the seven centuries or so after Plato no such intellect as his was known until Augustine. This intellectual giant said something like this: Understand my word that you may believe it, but believe God's word that you may understand it! And because God speaks of matters necessarily undiscoverable by man, for He alone knows them, there is, of equal necessity, no other way of understanding those matters but by believing what God says upon them.

But faith is not credulity. Rightly did Augustine warn men against believing his word before they understood it, for man is fallible and may err in opinion; but God is not only inscrutable but infallible, and therefore it is essentially safe and right to accept His words and act upon them without knowing their whole content or effect. Indeed, if God is, no other attitude to Him and His words is tolerable. Not to trust GOD is utter impiety, utter ruin: to believe Him is to gain understanding. That "the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom" was the conviction of the wisest man that ever pondered human life; and he added that it is the foolish who despise wisdom and instruction (Prov. 1:7).

iii. Ver. 4. *Abel*. These fundamental features are now illuminated by striking instances. The Writer begins at the beginning of human history with the first two men born to our first parents, Cain and Abel.

These were brothers, reared in the same home, benefiting by the same instruction, possessing equal privileges and opportunities. What distinguished them before God? FAITH! Abel believed and obeyed God, Cain did not.

They both revered God outwardly, for both brought to Him an offering. Abel brought a firstling from his flock, that is, something he had reared. Cain brought the fruit of the ground, something he had reared. Why then was Abel's sacrifice "better" than that of Cain? 'Wherein lay its superiority?

It could lie only in the FAITH of Abel's heart as he offered. He must have believed something that God must have made known of His mind, and he acted upon it. It is clear that such a sacrifice implied, yea, was an acknowledgment of his own desert of death, and a confession that he believed that the death of an innocent substitute would be accepted by God for his own deliverance from the judgment of his sin.

Throughout human history this has been the great divide and still is so. Abel and Cain proved to be two heads of two spiritually divergent and opposed sections of mankind. 1 John 3:1:12; Jude 11; Matt. 23:34, 35. The followers of Cain have been innumerable, those of Abel the minority. But God "had respect unto Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain and his offering he had not respect" (Gen. 4:4, 5). Just how this was indicated is not stated, though it is shown as to some later occasions, as Gen. 15:17; Judges 6:21; 13:19, 20; 1 Kings 18:38; 2 Chron. 7:1.

We are told however that God expressed His mind plainly to Cain (Gen. 4:6, 7). But one who has rejected atoning sacrifice can readily reject remonstrance and harden himself to commit any crime. So Cain went on to murder his brother, because the latter's works were righteous, whereas his own were evil. And the Scripture traces further back the ground of this radical difference by the remark that "Cain was of the evil one" (1 John 3:12). He had faith in God's Enemy and followed him, whereas Abel had faith in God Himself and obeyed Him. The statement that "Cain was *out of (ek)* the Evil One" is intensely solemn. As to his merely natural make-up, by being begotten of his father and born of his mother, he inherited from them that bias to sin which is native to us all. But in addition he had drawn in an aggravated impetus to evil derived out of Satan. This lie must have done in spite of the warning found in the experience of his parents in Eden. John is here applying to Cain something he had heard Christ say to certain liars and murderers: "Ye are *out of your father the devil*" (John 8:44). You derive your ideas and spirit from him. So had Cain done, and quickly murdered his brother and then lied to God about it. As the Spirit of God can make men supernaturally holy so Satan can make men supernaturally wicked.

In what Power, in what Person is the reader trusting?

iv. Vers. 5 and 6. *Enoch*. There pass five or six hundred years of which God has recorded nothing but a frightful development of wickedness (Gen. 6:5). Then in the thick darkness a bright line shines out, there arises a man of FAITH: Enoch trusted God, and walked with Him, while others walked with the Evil One.

From Jude (vers. 14, 15) we learn that Enoch's faith was engaged pre-eminently with the Coming One. Transported in spirit into the day of the Lord, seeing its mighty drama pass before his inward vision as if then present, he described what he saw as if it were a past event and cried "Behold, the Lord came with His holy myriads to execute judgment." With that awesome expectation he passed his time cultivating fellowship with God. The future controlled the present, which is to live by FAITH.

While yet he lived among the godless God bore witness that he had been well-pleasing to Him; and later, while he was yet in what for that age was but early manhood, God signally confirmed this His testimony to His faithful servant by suddenly removing him alive to the world above.

It has practical bearing for us to observe that rapture was God's response to godly living. It was of grace, for removal to the heavens can never be claimed of right; yet it was grace rewarding faith, and the godly life that faith produces; it was not of grace irrespective of piety and fidelity; "for *before* his translation he *hath had* witness borne to him that he *had been* well-pleasing to God."

Using a poet's license, Montgomery, in a stirring scene in his poem *The World before the Flood*, pictures Enoch as having been seized and brought before the impious monarch of the day. There he utters his prophecy as to the Lord coming to punish the ungodly. Greatly enraged, the monarch rushes upon him to strike him dead, but—Enoch is not there! "He was not found, for God translated him."

Thus among other wonders which faith can effect is this notable wonder: it can produce such living as pleases God well and qualifies for rapture to the world above. And without such faith it is simply impossible to be well-pleasing to God. Given a man who denies the existence of God, and therefore has no expectation that he will be rewarded should he seek unto God, obviously such a man must be as displeasing to God as a subject who should choose to ignore his sovereign and disregard the laws of the land. He that draweth near to God must believe that He exists, as well as that He becomes a rewarder to those who seek after Him. Thus these activities Godward are an exercise of FAITH.

Such faith in us, O God, implant,
And to our prayers Thy favour grant
In Jesus Christ, Thy saving Son,
Who is our fount of health alone. (P. Herbert.)

v. Ver. 7. *Noah*. In like manner the faith of Noah led him to anticipate confidently a future for which there was no precedent and to act accordingly. He was warned by God that there was coming a catastrophic judgment such as had not been known by mankind. He believed God and took the steps necessary to the saving of himself and his family. Thus his FAITH had a twofold aspect.

(1) It condemned the men around, who disbelieved God and therefore disregarded the warning.

(2) It assured to Noah the righteousness which is of faith. For when a man did really believe God, with such a faith as governed his conduct, God then and there imputed to that man the justifying work that the Son of God would later do on behalf of that man by dying for his sins. Historically, from the point of view of time, that justification did not become his before the justifying work had been wrought on the cross; but in the reckoning of God, Who is above time, it was reckoned to be his when he exercised faith, and thereupon he became "*heir*" to it, that is, one whose title was secure though possession was deferred.

The case of Noah, treated so succinctly by our Writer, has other deeply important instruction.

His exemption from the *temporary* judgment of the Flood was on the ground of his *personal* righteousness in contrast to the godlessness around. "Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for *thee* have I seen righteous before me in this generation" (Gen. 7:1). This was not the imputed righteousness, but his own personal right practice. God would not destroy the righteous with the wicked (Gen. 18:25).

But so to act, so to walk with God, against universal opposition, was proof of FAITH, faith further displayed by building the ark; to this faith God *imputed* that righteous work of Another which secures from *eternal* wrath.

The *typical* teaching of Noah and the ark is not always rightly understood. Usually the ark is taken as the type of Christ. Surely the strict position is this: (a) That righteous Noah is a type of the Righteous One, the Saviour; (b) The ark made by Noah represents the work wrought by Christ for salvation; (c) Noah's family were granted salvation from death solely for Noah's sake, not because of any righteousness of their own: "Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for *thee* [not you all] have I seen righteous before me." So it is now: "your sins are forgiven you for *His* name's sake" (1 John 2:12). (d) Yet each of them had to accept deliverance personally, by association with Noah, and by entering the ark. This act proclaimed the individual faith of each, so that they also were saved by faith.

Further. The Lord declared unequivocally that the state of the world at the time for His return to it will be "as were the days of Noah" (Matt. 24:37-39; Luke 1:26, 27). There will be utter absorption in things earthly and present, utter disregard of the foretold wrath, so that as "the Flood came and took them all away" so shall men be cozening themselves with talk of "peace and safety" when "sudden destruction cometh upon them" at the coming of Christ, "and they shall in no wise escape" (1 Thess. 5:3). This is the solemn and uniform testimony of the Word of God.

Yet teachers beyond number have befooled themselves and their hearers by asserting the exact contrary of this, even that the gospel shall go on prospering until all men will have accepted its message, the kingdom of God have thus been established on earth, and *then* will the Lord come. For the last days of this age to be like this would require that in the days of Noah men gradually and universally were persuaded to give up their wicked ways; and so the Flood never came at all.

Such misunderstanding results from a want of FAITH in what God says plainly upon this subject. How vital is simple faith, the faith of the little child (Matt. 18:3). No one who thus simply *believes* what Christ said on this subject can mistake His meaning.

vi. Vers. 8-10. *Abraham*. Some centuries passed between the Flood and the call of Abraham. In that period nothing requiring to be recorded in God's history

occurred, except the portentous rebellion at Babel, with the Divine judgment in the confounding of human speech and the consequent dispersion of mankind.

But that rebellion indicated how deep-seated was the opposition of man's heart to God and His will, how quickly and thoroughly that opposition could blaze forth, how steadily and rapidly degeneracy could develop, how speedily the warning of the Flood was ignored. The grounds and the course of this alienation from God are given in Rom. 1. God was holy, men loved evil, and so they resolved to break His bands asunder and cast away from them his cords. Gen. ii tells the beginning, Ps. 2 foretells the end; the long connecting period is consistent with the beginning and the end: "the mind of the flesh is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7).

That was a very dark period, the gloom being relieved, as far as is shown, by the testimony of Melchizedek alone, and he living far from the first world center. In Mesopotamia men had multiplied, races had developed, civilization had progressed, wealth, art, culture had advanced. But knowledge of God had died, idolatry had triumphed, morals had degenerated, vice and cruelty flourished with luxury and splendor. It seemed that when Melchizedek should die the true God would lose any place or honour on earth.

But He leaves not Himself without witness. "Brethren and fathers, hearken. The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham" (Acts 7:2). He was a heathen, an idolater (Josh. 24:2, 15). He dwelt in a grand and royal city. But the sight of that superior glory dispelled his darkness as to God, blotted out the brightness of Ur of the Chaldees, turned its glory to ashes, shattered for him its prospects and ambitions and made him a liberated devotee of the true and only God. Henceforth he walked by FAITH, as had Enoch and Noah before him, and became the spiritual father of all since his day who have so walked (Rom. 4:16).

For the encouragement of his readers, and us, our Writer points out that Abraham's call by God was answered by a faith in God which displayed its strength and genuineness, as all genuine faith does, by (1) *Obedience*: "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed." He who trusts another will do what he suggests.

(2) *Separation*: He "obeyed to go out." He abandoned country, business, prospects, politics, society, war, even his family, and walked after God. The separation was a *sine qua non* to such a walk with such a God; it was utterly indispensable. For that world entire, of which he had been a native, was "lying in the Evil One," was his sphere of influence, where his spirit worked and ruled in the sons of disobedience, where God was denied (1 John 5:19; Eph. 2:2).

It has always been thus, it still is so: “Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore is minded to be a friend of the world constitutes himself an enemy of God” (Jas. 4:4). The alternative is inexorable. The world and the kingdom of God are separate spheres of moral existence; they nowhere intersect, overlap; so that it is impossible to stand in both at once. So Abraham “went out,” physically in his case, for such was the call of God for him; but all his children must likewise “go out” as to heart affection, interests, and moral associations, or there can be no walk with God.

But this demands a living, active FAITH. Only faith can carry obedience so far.

(3) *Promises as to the Future.* His faith was shown by accepting God’s promise as to the unseen and the future: “he was to receive a place for an inheritance,” and believing this he set forth to go to that place.

(4) *Walking in the Dark.* He did not know “whither he went,” but he went! The philosopher lifted his eyebrows and said, Quixotic! The man of affairs shrugged his shoulders and said, A wild goose chase! The prudent said, He’ll come back sadder and wiser! But he went! and to-day his children sing:

One step I see before me;
‘Tis all I need to see:
The light of heaven more brightly shines
When earth’s illusions flee;
And sweetly through the silence comes
His loving “Follow Me.”

So on I go—not knowing, I would not if I might;
I’d rather walk in the dark with God
Than go alone in the light;
I’d rather walk by faith with Him
Than go alone by sight. (M. G. Brainerd).

(5) *Sojourning.* A sojourner is properly one who stays in a place just from day to day (*jour*, a day). The Greek word it translates *paroikeo* pictures an alien dwelling for a while alongside the citizens of a land but himself a foreigner in it, as the Israelites in Egypt (Acts 7:6; 13:17; Ps. 105:23, LXX). Thus did Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *feel* themselves to be aliens amidst the -inhabitants of Canaan, thus did they deport themselves. The land was theirs by God-given title, but possession was deferred. Others held it, and they were as aliens in it (Ps. 105:12, LXX).

Thus still do Abraham's true children feel at heart in relation to the whole earth. It is theirs by Divinely granted title, for "the meek shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 37:11; Matt. 5:5; 1 Cor. 3:21-23); but as yet the godless hold it by permission of God, and men of faith heed the exhortation, which they feel and know to be appropriate to their situation, "Beloved, I beseech you, as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain," to be marked by abstinence, holiness, and seemly behavior among men (1 Pet. 2:11; where the word *parepidemos*, rendered "pilgrim," pictures one staying for a time in a foreign land and so without citizen status or rights).

Such an aloof life among abominable, cruel, and violent idolaters, as were the races of Canaan, involved for Abraham and his family problems, perplexities, and perils, which the histories fully illustrate. Even a thousand years later, in the earliest Roman period, any citizen could enslave the person and seize the property of any chance alien and there was no redress. But FAITH brought into these trials the guidance, protection, and sufficiency of the living GOD, and, in spite of failures during his education in faith, Abraham so lived among those peoples that on an occasion when he described himself to them as but "a stranger and sojourner" with no rights, they at once replied, "my lord: thou art a prince of God among us" (Gen. 23:3-6). Thus did faith secure dignity; he who humbled himself was exalted, and he who never compromised with the godless approved himself to their conscience and brought acknowledgment and glory to his God.

(6) Of the sojourner the tent is the outward sign. The resident builds a house. The pilgrim expects to move on, as God may guide. He disencumbers himself as far as possible. He is content in heart with *the least* that is necessary; indeed, if he grows to the stature of a Paul, he learns "to take pleasure in necessities" (2 Cor. 12:10).

In early Bible history we hear Jacob respond to the promises of God and say: "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and a garment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall Jehovah be my God" (Gen. 28:20, 21). The company and guidance of God, till the father's house be reached; and by the way bare necessities to suffice! Surely here is the true pilgrim, the spirit of the true Christian.

And at the end of Bible history we hear Paul saying to a younger fellow-pilgrim: "Godliness with contentment is great gain . . . having food and coverings we shall be therewith content," adding that they that are determined to have more than these necessities pierce themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:6-10).

Oh bliss to leave behind us
The fetters of the slave;
To leave ourselves behind us,
The grave-clothes and the grave!

To speed, unburdened pilgrims,
Glad, empty-handed, free;
To cross the trackless deserts
And walk upon the sea. (Ter Steegen.)

(7) Ver. 16. Such abandoning of the past and abstaining in the present is possible only to the one to whom the future is bright and secure. Those ancient believers “looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose architect and builder is [none less than] God.” Now it is FAITH alone that can make that prospect real and powerful to the heart. This verse intimates how rich and clear was the information as to the future and the heavenly granted in those early times. Abraham was given a foreview of the day of Christ and it greatly gladdened him (John 8:56). That glorious future drew him on, and reduced the present to its due proportion of being but a preparatory stage of life, a journey to a grand goal. That prospect has continually enabled men of faith to “reckon that the sufferings of this present period are insignificant in comparison with the glory which shall be revealed with regard to us.” (Rom. 8:18, Alford.)

vii. Vers. 11, 12. *Sarah*. But not only can FAITH make a man to become a prince, it can make a woman a princess (Gen. 17:15: Sarah = princess).

The skeptic says that miracles are contrary to the universal unvarying course of things, to the law of Nature; *therefore* they are impossible; *therefore* they never have happened; *therefore* the Book that recounts them is unbelievable! Q.E.D. The afore determined goal has been reached: the Bible has been discredited. And this all the evidence to the contrary notwithstanding! We do wisely to ignore the skeptic even as the skeptic ignores the evidence.

Sarah at first argued as does the skeptic. When it was stated by God that she should bear a son although this had become by age a sheer physical impossibility, she just laughed at the idea. It was contrary to the laws of Nature and to uniform universal experience; it never had been, it never could be! Yet it came to pass. How?

On the part of God by the exercise of His creative power. Could not an *almighty* Creator, had He seen *fit*, have caused that every child should be born of a mother only? Why, then, should He not do once (in the case of Jesus) what He could have done always? Could not such a Creator have ordained that every woman should be capable of bearing children throughout her life, however prolonged? Why, then, should He not effect this in special instances, such as those of Sarah and Elizabeth? (Luke 1:7, 18). Prejudice makes the skeptic foolish.

But on Sarah's part the event required FAITH. “By faith Sarah herself received strength.” So by faith we acquire understanding and by faith we receive strength. The honest doubter can test this. Let him but *really* believe something that God says,

believing in the sense of taking what God says into his own inner soul with the determination to trust it and therefore to obey it—Let him thus have FAITH and he will find his mind enlightened and his inward nature strengthened.

Such faith is fruitful. Without Sarah's faith Abraham's faith would have been inoperative. It was because (*dio*) she too, the wife, had faith that he, the husband, by her believing co-operation received the fulfillment of the Divine promise and became the ancestor of a vast posterity, a posterity to be yet vaster, by man uncountable. No one but God can foresee the possible outcome of a single act of faith by a single believer. One seed can yield an hundredfold the first year, and these ten thousandfold the next year. It is a mighty thing to have faith in God, for then nothing is impossible that God has promised.

viii. Vers. 13-16. *Strangers and Pilgrims*. Where there is the heart of the alien and pilgrim faith produces striking effects.

(1) *Faith's Endurance*. These of old held their course undeviatingly, throughout long lives, even unto death: "these all died according to (*kata*) faith," consistently with the principle of faith and by its sustaining energy. They did not receive what was promised. The promise they did receive, the benefits promised they did not receive; but nevertheless they expected these and waited in confident expectation. They knew that possession of Canaan was a distant matter, for God had told Abraham of the lengthy sojourn in another land, under oppression, and that it would be only after four hundred years that the fourth generation of his descendants would secure the land (Gen. 15:13-16). But faith saved them from hope deferred making the heart sick; the righteous held on his way (Pro. 13:12; Job 17:9). Similarly, when leaving His followers the Lord told them that His absence would be lengthy. He was going to a far country and only "after a long time" would He return (Luke 19:12; Matt. 25:19). But this did not hinder them from greeting from afar I-us coming as their steadfast hope.

(2) *Faith's Vision*. Thus faith is longsighted: they greeted the distant future and, indeed, a far more remote future and country than the land of Canaan. They walked in that land, yet knew it was not their best or final country. They were seeking a still better country, a heavenly, that land of which "the city that hath the foundations" is the center and glory. They had received the call to inherit the heavenly, as well as the earthly, and faith looked beyond the latter to the former and anticipated it as their goal and portion.

That there was not revealed in their time the *whole* purpose of God concerning that heavenly prospect, that the full development of the counsels of grace was not opened up, nor the steps by which the Father's house would be filled, did not lessen the fact that the heavenly world was set forth as their prospect, that they confessed this as their goal and hope, and lived as not of the present in the midst of the men of the world whose portion was entirely in this life and who sought no other.

It is still thus. The natural man “minds earthly things.” He is Bunyan’s Man with the muck-rake, indifferent to the shining crown above his head. But still the man of faith forgoes the present to secure the future. He takes nothing for granted, but presses “on toward the goal, the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3: 14). His title is secure and he means to secure possession.

Abraham might have written some lines of one of his German children which may be translated as follows:

To gain that prize I towards that goal will struggle
Which God has set before;
To gain that prize ‘gainst sin and death I’ll battle
And with the world make war;
And if it brings me here but shame and troubles
And scorn, if pain life fills,
Yet seek I nothing of earth’s empty baubles;
My God alone my longing fills.

To gain that prize, to reach that crown I’m pressing
Which Christ doth ready hold;
I mean His great reward to be possessing,
His booty for the bold.
I will not rest, no weariness shall stay me,
To hasten home is best,
Where I some day in peace and joy shall lay me
Upon my Savior’s heart and rest.

(3) *Faith’s Perseverance*. Those saints of old could have returned to Chaldea: God would not have hindered it by force; they were free agents. The Christian can return to the world as his sphere of life. But Canaan is forfeited if the called return to Chaldea or the redeemed to Egypt.

(4) *Faith’s Reward*. The supreme reward of faith is to be approved and acknowledged by God. The Lord Jesus assured His disciples that if anyone should be ashamed of Him in this age He will be ashamed of that man and will deny him before God and angels in His coming day (Matt. 10:32, 33; Luke 12:8, 9). Paul applies this to us of this age (2 Tim. 2:10-13). It is here applied retrospectively to those ancient pilgrims. They had confessed the true God among peoples who rejected Him: He had not been ashamed to confess them as His servants.

He did so at the time, as the Psalmist remembered: “He suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, He reproved kings for their sake; Saying, Touch not mine anointed, And do my prophets no harm” (Ps. 105:14, 15. See Gen. 20:3-7; 31:29).

But there must be a nobler Divine acknowledgment inn-tended here, a confession before the angels, as Christ said; for it says that God “hath prepared for them a city.” Therefore that heavenly city was prepared already in their time, and the hosts on high know whose heavenly abode Jerusalem above is, the mother city of all pilgrims of all ages (Gal. 4:26).¹

With what supreme interest must they therefore watch the earthly course of God’s pilgrims since they know the glorious goal to which their faith aspires and God will conduct them. It is easy to understand their readiness to serve the high interests of the heirs of this great salvation (ch. 1:14). It is easy to feel why Paul was equally ready, with a more than angelic concern, to toil, suffer, even to die that God’s chosen might “obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, *with eternal glory*” (2 Tim. 2:10). Each of the pilgrim heart likewise labors gladly, unweariedly, to further the steps of his fellow-pilgrims, so that none shall stumble, fall, or wander. It is a mark of the genuine pilgrim.

ix. Vers. 17-19. *Abraham’s Sacrifice*. Faith can sacrifice its all, at the demand of God. Faith can seal its own doom, as Jesus did by acknowledging before the Council that He was the Son of God (Matt. 26:63-66). Thus Abraham gave back to God the most precious of all the gifts God had first given to him, even Isaac. It was not only that he was called to a terrible and heart-desolating deed, even to kill his own son; nor that he must descend to one of the most ghastly practices of the devil-driven heathen around him (Deut. 12:31); but with that surrender he seemed also to deprive himself of all prospect of the great future which God had covenanted to confer; for it was all to be granted through Isaac. But more and worse was involved. If God’s promise and oath failed who could any more trust Him? Then were all hope dead throughout the universe; Satan’s triumph were complete and the reign of sin and death eternal.

But faith is strong where reason fails. This dire prospect was impossible. God’s covenant being absolutely certain of accomplishment it followed that, though Isaac must then and there die, yet must he then and there come again to life; and the man of faith says to his servants, “I *and the lad* will go yonder; and we will bow down [in worship], and *come again* to you” (Gen. 22:5).

¹ This being so, how strange is the “dispensational” notion that saints of early times who had been offered by God a heavenly portion and had embraced it, suffered for it, walked in the light of it, pressed toward it, shall nevertheless not reach or share it.

Here is faith's glory and triumph; it can *bow down* before God and His good will. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly', and to love mercy, and to *bow down* to walk with thy God ' (Micah 6:8).

Faith expects resurrection. It lives in the realm beyond death. Had the prospect of resurrection been already shown to Abraham? Was it part of the original deposit of truth given to men in those earliest ages? Or was it a pure induction by which faith sanctified reason, that as Isaac *must* be the one to beget descendants, so that God's promise shall be fulfilled, *therefore* he *must* return to life at that time and in natural human condition?

In the fact Abraham was not required to make the sacrifice, but he did make it in the intention and act of his heart; and having thus, as it were, received him back from the dead he and his son trod together their path of life as on resurrection ground, beyond the power of death.

To such depth of devotion, to such height of communion can faith attain. No believer can conceivably be required to go further in sacrifice. The father of the whole family says to each of his children, "If ye have FAITH . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20).

x. Vers. 20, 21, 22. *Isaac, Jacob, Joseph*. It is happy when faith passes to the fourth generation, as here.

From the lives of these three the Writer emphasizes again the great lesson that faith in God gives assurance as to the future.

As faith depends on the goodness it finds in God it is not daunted by the evil it finds in man. *Isaac's* faith pierced beyond the carnality of Esau and the crookedness of Jacob and he blessed them both. He knew the thoughts of God for each and was bold to bless them in spite of themselves. We shall learn later an important lesson from the fact that Esau was *blessed*. Paul, as a shepherd of souls, was not daunted by the evils he met in the Christians at Corinth, and his faith was rewarded in their recovery. Monica cried long to God for her profligate son Augustine and her faith was recompensed by his conversion.

Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph though, like Abraham, he knew his descendants must remain long in Egypt and suffer affliction (Gen. 15:13). But FAITH looked on to the promised deliverance and return to the land of promise.

Joseph counted upon that same event and directed that his bones should share in the restoration. Was this mere sentiment? or did he look on to the resurrection in the land of his people's glory?

Thus faith triumphs over darkness, distance, and even death itself.

xi. Vers. 23-29. *Moses*. The affliction of Israel set in; oppression intensified; their racial extermination was plotted and ordered. It was a bitter period, and the bitterest fact of it all was that the people of God gave way to the pressure and sank to the level of their oppressors. They worshipped the degrading gods of Egypt (Jos. 24:14; Ezek. 20:8); and the legislation by Moses is proof that they had become depraved morally. Slavery always debases. But this gloomy epoch produced notable examples of FAITH, of which the Writer cites five.

(1) ver. 23. *Moses' parents* defied the royal order that boy children were to be killed. "They were not afraid of the king's commandment." They well might have been, and it was only faith in the superior power of God that kept their hearts free from that fear. For the kings of Egypt were ferocious wild beasts, as their own monuments show. The visitor to Karnak still sees pictures on their palace walls showing one monarch grasping the long hair of several hapless captives and smashing their heads with a mace, and another king throwing miserable men to the crocodiles in the Nile.

As their faith nerved Moses' parents to brave such fury, why should those here addressed fail in the storms and dangers? Or why should we?

(2) Vers. 24-26. *Moses' Choice*. The world lay at his feet. Its wealth, glory, power, prospects were in his grasp. He was a prince of the royal house. But he deliberately renounced it all. He chose by preference the evil lot of the people of God. For the pleasures of the world were sinful, and withal transitory. He had been granted a vision of the Messiah (*to Christou*), and of the reward of righteousness to be gained in Christ's kingdom and day. This he gladly embraced as far, far richer than all the treasures of Egypt.

Let the visitor to the Museum at Cairo tarry in the jewel Room and ponder awhile. He sees around him priceless jewelry, with golden ornaments and furniture from the palaces of Egypt of those very centuries. Yet all are merely recovered fragments of those days of fabulous riches.

But FAITH calculates otherwise than does sight. To it the reproach of Christ is of higher value than the riches of the world. But if His *reproach* is of such inestimable worth, what shall His reward be?

Observe the word *recompense*. it translates a word (*misihapodosia*) allied to a word (*antapodosis*) found at Col. 3:24, where the oppressed slaves of the Roman world were encouraged to godly behavior by the assurance that, if in their hard lot they would serve the Lord Christ, of that Lord they should "receive the *recompense* of the inheritance."

The word is a good rendering of the Greek words, for it means to give back an *equivalent*, as a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, to make the scales even. FAITH is sure that Christ will do this and it acts accordingly, whether it be Moses the prince or a hapless slave.

It is an obvious reproach to a king that any of his subjects should be captured by his enemy and enslaved. In the ancient days that reproach attached also to the god of that king and people, for it was evident that he could not protect his worshippers. Thus the enslavement of Israel was a reproach to Jehovah, their deity. This reproach Moses accepted by stooping to espouse Israel as his people.

How sweet is the thought that then and now Christ has shared the sorrows of His people. He might have said to Pharaoh what He long after said to Saul of Tarsus, "Why persecutest thou ME?" For, as Isaiah said of that earlier time in Egypt, "In all their affliction HE was afflicted" (Isa. 63:9).

It is thus made plain that Jehovah and Christ are the same God. Let then the people of Christ take comfort and strength in Him; let them follow Him into the desert as Israel did Jehovah, for continuing thus to the end they shall secure the heavenly recompense which He has promised and faith expects.

(3) Ver. 27. *Moses' Renunciation*. "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible." This can scarcely refer to his flight from Egypt after he had killed the Egyptian who was smiting the Hebrew, for of that it is said that "Moses feared ... and fled from the face of Pharaoh" (Exod. 2:14, 15). Here it is said that he did *not* fear the king.

The verse has been thought to refer to that earlier incident because it is mentioned *before* the passover which follows next. The explanation may be found in the change of tense which introduces the mention of the passover. Both before and after it the events are described by the past tense (the aorist); he refused, he chose, he accounted, he looked for, he forsook, he endured, and (ver. 29) they passed through; and so forth. But in ver. 28, the tense is the perfect: "By faith *he hath* instituted the passover," that is, hath already done it (yet recently—perfect, not preterite) before the last preceding action.

This means that the forsaking Egypt covers and includes the whole period from the night of the passover to the passage of the Sea. At his final interview with Pharaoh Moses had told the king of the impending slaughter of the firstborn and that thereupon he and all Israel would depart. It was one whole action which by faith in his God he declared in advance, without the slightest fear of any preventive or retaliatory measures that cruel tyrant might attempt, and, in the issue, did attempt.

Moses knew his man, and could well imagine the diabolical fury that would be incited in him by the death of all the firstborn children, including his own, and the massacre of Israel he would attempt. But Moses had his eye on El Shaddai, the almighty God of Abraham; “he endured as seeing Him Who is invisible,” Jehovah, the Covenant Keeper; and without any fear of the fury of Pharaoh he went ahead with the preparations for abandoning Egypt entirely, finally, of which the passover was the first step.

It is Moses’ faith that is mentioned, but he was exercising it on behalf of all his people; as a mother left with a family will trust in God for help for them all.

It is thus still for FAITH. “Our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ; wherefore let us keep festival” (1 Cor. 5:7, 8); and an essential feature of this feast is that “*thus* shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, and your staff in your hand: and ye shall eat it in haste,” eager for the march out of Egypt (Exod. 12:11).

For to the Christian “Egypt” is the “world,” the lamb is Christ, the fire that roasts the Lamb, and renders it food for faith, is the cross; and he who by faith appropriates that cross as his own death, his own true life, feels henceforth, and says, “Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14). He is a pilgrim.

And when Moses or Paul says “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord,” and can add, “for whom I suffered the loss of all things,” he does not plume himself on having done something noteworthy for God, but he further adds, “I count them but refuse,” like to that which we refuse to keep at hand because it is unseemly and offensive (Phil. 3:7, 8). When Egypt has been wholly renounced the heart says:

“Poor is our sacrifice whose eyes
Are lighted from above;
We offer what we cannot keep,
What we have ceased to love.”

(4) Ver. 28. *Moses and the Passover*. The instituting of the Passover was the act of Moses; therefore it is said “*He* kept the passover.” What a mighty step of faith it was. He believed in the reality and power of “The Destroyer” (*ho olothreuon*). Who was this? He was that terrible executioner of the wrath of God who was well known to the ancient world. Concerning the subordinate demons he controls for the execution of widespread judgments we read: “They have over them as king the Angel of the abyss [the underworld of the dead and of imprisoned spirits], his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek tongue he hath the name Apollyon” (Rev. 9:11). Both names mean the Destroyer.

Upon this dread fallen angel-prince, and his dreadful work, the reader may consult my *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (159, 160). At page 351 it is said: "In various places where this Destroyer is shown acting it is as the executor of signal Divine wrath on special sinners. For example, Exod. 12:23; 2 Sam. 24:15, 16; 2 Kings 19:35; Ezek. 9:1-7; Rev. 6:8; 9:1-11."

The skeptic may scoff, the Christian may forget; but Moses believed, and therefore took the step necessary and adequate for protection, "the sprinkling of the blood." This has been explained above (chapter 11, 4). That great Destroyer is still active, and there is still only the one protection, "the precious blood of Christ."

(5) Ver. 29. *The Red Sea*. What a step of faith was this! To descend from the shore above the level of the water to the depths beneath it, with shimmering walls of water towering on either side, ready to rush down into their normal place— how perilous a path! Yet Israel passed through in safety, while the enemies of God perished there. Why the difference? FAITH, only faith! Of themselves Israel could no more have kept up those walls than could the Egyptians; but trust in God brought into activity the power that creates and controls all things.

Faith can safely take a path of peril when God commands, but not otherwise. Nor can unbelief follow safely. It has been wisely said: "never run before your faith, and never lag behind your conscience." A minister saw from the New Testament that it is not the mind of the Lord that preachers of His message should have a stated salary. In faith he abandoned the plan to depend on God his Father for support. Asked by other ministers whether he would have them all do the same he answered, "Which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned." But many men of faith have taken this step with great enrichment to themselves and their hearers.

xii. Ver. 30. *Jericho*. The forty years in the desert yielded the poisoned berries of unbelief, rather than the pleasant fruit of FAITH. This period is here passed over. The years that the locust of unbelief eats yield nought that helps others.

The desert discipline having wrought its good work Israel entered the pleasant land to fight for possession of what was already their own. At once a mighty obstacle confronted them; a city walled up to heaven and stoutly manned.

It is ever thus. Each that will enjoy his heavenly portion in Christ (Eph. 2) must wrestle against "the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6: 12). These are not to be dispossessed by ordinary measures. The victory that overcomes the world-system and its spirit rulers is our FAITH; for "who is the one conquering the world but the one believing [that hath faith] that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:4, 5).

God's ways are not our ways. Our ways are directed to serving our own glory; God's ways are such as give the glory to Him (Judges 7:2). To march in silence round an embattled city is folly to the military scientist. To shout is all very well, but senseless if you do not shout *and* strike. Nor will anything but FAITH take such clearly useless steps. But faith takes them, and the walls collapse.

xiii. Ver. 31. *Rahab, the Harlot*. Since all the inhabitants of Jericho are doomed to die, why should one woman be spared, and her relations for her sake? Was she morally better than the rest? Nay, rather the reverse. Then what secured for her the exemption denied to the rest? Her FAITH! She believed what she had heard of the purposes of the God of Israel and acted accordingly. At grave risk of death at the hands of the king, paying the penalty of being a traitor, she put her trust in Jehovah by protecting His messengers. It was her faith alone that distinguished her from the rest and to which God responded. There is no clearer proof that salvation is by faith; only it must be the faith that displays itself by works. But they are works produced by faith; not works that are dead by lacking the vitalizing property of faith.

This is the test to be applied to men alive on earth when the King returns—Did they or did they not succour His servants when persecuted? Had they faith to do this, or had they not? (Matt. 25:31-46). Divine principles are alike in all days. "According to your faith" is one of these.

xiv. Vers. 32-34. *Faith's Variety*. "And what shall I more say." What indeed! Nothing more is needful to illustrate and justify FAITH. Not but that there are many other illustrious illustrations: "Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets." What dangers they defied; what difficulties they defeated; what obstacles they overcame; what victories they won; what possessions they secured.

And what different types of men they were, in social position, morals, physique, culture. Yet had each and all the one unifying, dominating, conquering quality—FAITH in God, and so they did and saw wonders.

xv. Vers. 35-38. *Faith's Testings*. Nor was it only strong men that triumphed by faith. Women also were renowned in heaven's annals. At Zarephath, a heathen town, in a prolonged famine a destitute widow had faith to trust the word of the God of Israel that He would support her if she supported His servant. The perpetual recompense was a perpetual supply of food; the special reward was that Elijah restored to life her dead boy. And the pious Shunamite received the like gracious reward through Elisha (1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 4).

But there were greater triumphs of faith. The tortured were offered release and honour if they would renounce the true God, but they did not accept their deliverance but died under frightful torments. The fourth book of Maccabees narrates such

instances of fidelity and fortitude. Our Writer tells what infused such vigor of soul. They suffered the extremes of torture “that they might obtain a better resurrection” (ver. 35): that is, a nobler resurrection than those the mothers secured for their dead boys. These were brought back to face the trials and sorrows of this earthly life; but there is to be a resurrection unto heavenly life, life free from the troubles and miseries of this present age. These heroes knew that to suffer now according to the will of God, even unto death, was the way to assure a part in that better resurrection. It was their FAITH as to that future of glory that sustained them.

As the Writer details the almost incredible woes that the faithful had endured he passes the striking comment, “of whom the world was not worthy” (ver. 38). The world had thought them not worthy a place in its circle. A sound judgment knows that a wicked world is not worthy to be honored and blessed by the presence of the holy. Faith reckons that it is far better to be ostracized by the world than to be excluded from the communion of saints and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

xvi. Vers. 39, 40. *Faith's Perfecting*. Even in this life such faith secures endorsement and testimony from God and man. Yet all those men and women who trusted God died without having received that heavenly and eternal bliss promised. They had lived by faith, they died in hope, and still by faith they wait in hope.

To what purpose is this extended delay before they are granted their full reward? It lies in the purpose of God to sum up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10), that is, to bring all things together under one Head at one and the same time. And that time is not yet, for beyond the purpose that concerned those saints of pre-Christian ages there lay the further purpose to gather out from all races a new company, the church of God. Those before cited were almost all Hebrews, Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Rahab being the four exceptions named.

These were indeed enough instances to show that the plan of God included the blessing of all the families of earth, according to the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:3). When our Epistle was written that plan was being expanded and the body of Christ was being gathered from all nations, and included the Writer and his readers. It was not possible that “*they* apart from *us*” should be made perfect. And still this out-gathering goes on, and will do so until the day of Christ; and therefore still the godly dead must wait for their perfecting until all is ready for Christ to be all in all.

What, in the sense of this passage, is it to be perfected? The Son of God shall tell us. Walking as a man in humiliation on earth He bade some to tell a wicked king, “Behold I cast out demons and perform cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I am perfected.” Here is the same word, and it referred to His death, for He added: “Howbeit, I must go on my way to-day and to-morrow and the day following; for it cannot

be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem” (Luke 13:32, 33). So that the third “day” was that of His crucifixion.

But the two earlier “days” were each of some period, not of twenty-four hours, so that the third also will be the same. Nor was His shameful death a perfecting. The death state is an imperfect condition, because the soul, the ego, is destitute of both spirit and body. Perfection consists in the rejoining of soul and spirit in a heavenly house, a body of resurrection glory. It was the restoration to Him of His original divine glory that was Christ’s perfecting, and this took place by resurrection and ascension to the Father.

It is thus, and only thus, that the people of Christ can be perfected. In the death state they too are imperfect, unclothed, a soul without a body, a state Paul did not desire (2 Cor. 5:4). For himself and his fellow-believers he longed for that house, that body of glory, which is from God, from heaven; and that is granted only by resurrection, or by rapture, and these await the descent of the Lord from heaven in His day (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Therefore Paul prayed thus: “And the God of peace sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame in the parousia of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23). The dead are not entire, but incomplete, and must remain so until the coming of the Lord.

Our passage was written long after the ascension of Christ. It tells us that the saints of former days were still not perfect. They were disembodied, without that resurrection form and nature which alone empowers a human being to leave the world of the dead and present itself in the presence of the glory of God. Without that body of glory man could not endure that Divine light, nor could a naked soul be permitted in that perfect realm and glory. Either resurrection or rapture is imperative.

If the notion were fact that Christ at His resurrection and ascension removed from Hades the godly dead and took them to heaven,² then one of *two* things must have happened: either they were perfected, by the gift of the body of glory, in which case for them “resurrection is past already,” which Paul regarded as serious error, overthrowing faith (2 Tim. 2:18); or else these were taken to heaven imperfect, which is impossible.

Now our passage denies explicitly that they had been perfected at the ascension of Christ, for it asserts that “apart from us” they cannot be made perfect, and we shall not be so until the day of Christ. This is confirmed by the fact that one of the men of faith named by the Writer, David, had not ascended to heaven by the day of Pentecost, though Christ had already done so (Acts 2:34). And that believers now are not perfected

² Of this idea Pearson (*The Creed*, on Art. 5) says: “this opinion, as general as it bath been, bath neither the consent of Antiquity, nor such certainty as it pretendeth. Indeed, very few (if any) for above five hundred years after Christ, did so believe that Christ delivered the saints out of Hell [Hades], as to leave all the damned there.”

at death is clear from Paul's statement that "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6); a plain hint that, so far is the believer from being perfected at death, that the work of perfecting is carried on until the day of the Lord.

It was but natural that when the idea was made prevalent that Christians go to heaven at death, then the resurrection and the coming of the Lord ceased to be felt as urgent and indispensable; for in that case the departed had attained at death all that is possible.

But for the godly of old and the godly of to-day resurrection *is* indispensable, and is the first element in "the favour that is being brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13). It is upon *that* that they of earlier times set their hope; it is upon it that we are exhorted to set our hope undividedly. The sphere and the measure of that glory will differ between one and another. In that house of the one heavenly Father there are *many* abiding places, many regions (John 14:2), and "one star differeth from another star in glory" (1 Cor. 15:41). But for them and for us the mighty prospect and promise holds good, that, to them that expect Him Christ shall appear a second time unto salvation (chapter 9:28), salvation perfect and perfecting, complete, heavenly, eternal.

It is not to be doubted that, by the mercy of God and on the ground of the redemption wrought by Christ, multitudes of all ages, past, present, and to come, who repented of sin and confessed and forsook it, did obtain, do obtain, or shall obtain forgiveness and salvation, according to such promises as Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35, and the quite general assurance of Prov. 28:13 just cited. But those who, in addition to Seeking pardon through sacrifice, had set their heart upon the heavenly city, and by faith walked on earth as strangers and pilgrims, these shall reach the goal they sought, toward which they struggled, in hope of which they suffered. From all lands, all times, all races such shall be gathered unto the Lord, perfected together.

O happy band of pilgrims
Look upward to the skies,
Where such a light affliction
Shall win you such a prize. (Neale.)

The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Practical Treatise for Plain and Serious Readers
Faith (Chapter 14) by G. H. Lang.

First Printing, The Paternoster Press, 1951

Second Printing, Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc., 1985

Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc.

P.O. Box 1246

Hayesville, NC 28904

(706) 896-3333

Special permission has been granted to InTheBeginning.org by Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc. to copy this chapter from The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Practical Treatise for Plain and Serious Readers by G. H. Lang.

These pages may NOT be reproduced or altered for any pecuniary or publishing purposes without expressed permission from the publishing company.

Original document was scanned with an [Epson 636 Expression scanner](#) using [TextBridge Pro98](#) software as the interface to [WORD97](#).