

God Speaks.

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For All Who Are Searching and Want to Discover the God of the Bible

This book contains part of the New Testament, told in an explanatory narrative style. It covers the letters of Peter, John, Jude, and James. Then the Letter to the Hebrews. And finally the last book of the New Testament: Revelation.

It is a retelling in *my* words. So it is *not* the original text of these ancient documents, as we find them in many German Bible translations. It is meant as a help to understand these biblical texts even better. Or to discover them completely anew.

I put myself in the writers' shoes. Then I pass on the content in my own way – explained briefly and to the point. Especially for those who do not know the Bible at all yet. My text is about two to three times as long as the text in a Luther Bible or the Einheitsübersetzung (German Bible translations).

It is, of course, a certain kind of interpretation. But it cannot be compared with Bible commentaries. Even so, I consulted many commentaries and Bible translations for my retelling. Above all, to understand what the texts meant in their original and historical setting – with the aim of building a bridge into the 21st century. I am grateful for the many commentaries and Bible translations. However, I have not given any references. Should anyone find traces of their own thoughts in my text, I hereby expressly thank them.

Verse numbers, cross-references, footnotes, and section headings have been left out on purpose. There are only chapter numbers. Simply read a whole letter from beginning to end. Let it speak to you as a whole. The chapter numbers are only meant to help you find your way when you are looking for something or want to compare with a traditional Bible.

I myself experienced a deep, life-changing, and encouraging blessing through this work. I was allowed to drink from the pure and divine spring of the water of life. These are texts written by *human beings*. And yet at the same time – and this is true of no other book in the world – they are the *Word of God* itself. Anyone who is willing to seek this God, who has revealed himself in Jesus, will recognize and sense this.

I invite you to experience the same thing. First of all with the Bible. Or also with this free, but still faithful retelling.

I did not manage this all by myself. First, my special thanks go to Horst Stricker, a retired pastor. He spent a great deal of time meticulously sharpening my words and improving them where necessary. My thanks also go to Barbara Krupinski, who has looked over a manuscript of mine not for the first time. Last but not least, I thank Wilhelm Adelberger for typesetting the book and Tobi Stricker for the layout.

This book is published for the interdenominational initiative “Kirche für Alle” (Church for All). Its goal is to make disciples. That is why the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and those of the apostles, as they are still available today in the New Testament, are central. May this book support that goal.

Whether there will be a book with the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, and another book with the letters of Paul, depends on whether this publication proves to be a help and gives people real and lasting motivation to read the Bible.

It would be wonderful to hear about that. We are glad to receive any feedback at info@kirchefüralle.de.

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf, Sulzberg, Allgäu, May 2018

The Letters of John

- Eternal life – now and soon
- Assurance of eternal life
- God's light, love, and joy
- Forgiveness – once and for all!
- The new commandment of love
- The world and the will of God
- The family of God
- Victory through faith

The First Letter of John

When Jesus made us Twelve his disciples, something completely new began. Something that changed everything and will never end. It is about Jesus, who is the Word. He revealed the real life to us. We testify and report everything we heard from him, the Word of life. It was more than just words. You could see that life and marvel at it – yes, touch it and embrace it. He was a *human being* like us, and we followed him for three years. We experienced him up close.

The life of God, his very own life, truly came to us in Jesus, in all its power and fullness. All people urgently need it. We apostles, and many others too, have seen it. We are witnesses who proclaim this tremendous news to you. He, the Son, who is eternal life in person, came from God. He himself told us again and again that he had been sent by the heavenly Father. The Father wanted his Son, who carries within himself this life of God's glory, to come to us. That is why the Son of God became a human being. For only in this way can the divine life reach us and become our life – we who are at the mercy of death. All those among you who deny that the Son of God truly became human should know this too.

We have to tell you everything we have seen and heard of Jesus. When you hear it and believe it, Jesus becomes the center we share. The heart that binds us together. In Jesus, and in no one else, we have fellowship with one another – and, as unbelievable as it may sound: fellowship with the heavenly Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. For he gave us a share in the life of God.

Through Jesus all of us, you and we, simply all who follow Jesus, are one heart and one soul. Like a family that belongs together and shares everything. In this relationship and in this unity lives the joy of the triune God. A joy that surpasses all earthly and worldly joy. And could not be greater. This heavenly family joy is felt by all who live consciously and actively in the fellowship of God's family.

There is, however, something that does not fit at all with this fellowship and closeness to God. Jesus' message was clear and plain. He pointed us apostles to something very important that we absolutely have to pass on to you. If we did not do so, we would be guilty toward you: God, the Eternal One, is holy. He

himself is the purest and brightest *light*. He dwells in light. He cannot bear sin and never compromises with anything that contradicts his glorious nature. For example, lovelessness, ingratitude, selfishness, and disregard of or rebellion against his good commands, which are the very best for us. Nothing of this kind of darkness is to be found in God – nor in Jesus. Of course, this does not mean darkness in a literal or physical sense. It is about the darkness that darkens our hearts and leaves our outlook on life without direction. The word of God calls this condition sin and unrighteousness, being separated from this glorious God, who is light.

So if we were to claim – as some among you do – that we have fellowship with this glorious God, and yet lived in darkness, that is, in self-will, without asking about God and his will, that would be a flat lie. And never the truth. But if we live in God's light, into which Jesus brought us once and for all, then we have a living and lasting *fellowship* with one another *and* with the Father and his Son. In his light, in his love, and in the joy of the Father's house.

But can we really live in this holy light of God and stay there? After all, we fail and sin again and again! Yes, we can. Thanks be to God forever. There is a reason why we can stand in his light forever: His Son, Jesus Christ, gave his blood and his life on the cross. Through this we are cleansed from our sins *forever*. This precious *blood*, shed once, cleanses us for as long as we will still sin. Back then, today, and in the future! We are always in fellowship with God. Even when we still sin. Jesus' blood alone is our eternal security and guarantee. It is not our obedience or disobedience that makes fellowship with God possible or destroys it. God looks at the precious blood of his Son – that is the only reason we are safe. Forever. Just as long ago the blood of the Passover lamb protected all the Israelites from judgment. We are cleansed from *all* our sins. Even from those we overlook, forget, or are not aware of. And those that, sadly, we will still commit.

But should anyone think, as the false teachers claim, that we have no sin at all and need no cleansing through Jesus' blood, that is a great error. We would then be living past the truth and past reality. We would be leading ourselves astray. Our sins would plunge us into ruin.

There is only one way to be freed from this lie of sinlessness and self-deception. Only if we *recognize* our sins and confess them to God do we get free from our sins. Only in this way do we receive the forgiveness that God wants to

give us through Jesus' blood. Only by recognizing and confessing, that is, by putting into words the sins we are aware of, do we come into true and living fellowship with God, the Father and the Son. And so also into the fellowship of all followers of Jesus who live under Jesus' cleansing blood. Forgiveness is given to us for *all* sins. Once again: Even for those we have forgotten or are not aware of. And those we will still commit.

Have we earned it at all, or do we have any claim to God taking away our sins? No! But Jesus, who gave his life for us, is the assurance that God forgives. The precious blood of Jesus stands for his holy and sinless life. He sacrificed it for us. To God this is of immeasurable worth. That is why he has committed himself, on the basis of this blood of his Son, to forgive everyone who in faith claims Jesus' sacrifice for himself and relies on it completely. God always keeps his word! For he is faithful and just!

Once again, because everyone should know it: Whoever claims that we, as children of God, automatically live without sin is deceiving himself. The self-deception is even worse when we sin and think it is not sin. Then we make God out to be a liar. For he has shown us clearly what sin is. Whoever really believes he has no sin and lives sinlessly is lost, because he does not claim Jesus' blood by confessing his sins! That is why this is a false teaching that leads to ruin.

Chapter 2

Dear friends, it is obvious, and I really should not have to write it: Do not sin! When the eternal and glorious God calls us human beings into fellowship with himself, then we should think and feel about sin exactly as he does. We want to grow and increase in this way of feeling.

Fellowship with God also includes honestly seeing and admitting our failures. For, as we must honestly ask ourselves, is there anything at all that we do that is *absolutely* pure and holy? But if we, as children of God, have sinned once again, we are never lost because of it. Nor is our fellowship with the Father and the Son interrupted or restricted. For *everything* has already been forgiven. We do not need forgiveness all over again. And no one less than Jesus, the Son of the Father, who gave his blood for us, is our advocate and guarantor before the Father. He is our security forever. He is *the Righteous One*. We ourselves, the unrighteous, could never have wiped out our sins.

Jesus wiped out all our sins through his blood. He is the perfect and unique *atonement sacrifice* for our sins. Now God no longer finds anything unrighteous in us. For all our unholy, unrighteous deeds, which were directed against God and against people, have been forgiven and taken away in Jesus. His sacrifice is of such great worth that it could wipe out all the sins of all the people in the world. But of course, only those who take refuge in Christ and his sacrifice receive forgiveness.

How, then, can we know that we know Jesus and follow him? Simply by loving and doing his *commands*. If someone claims to have a living and life-changing relationship with Jesus, but does not keep his commands, and does not even try, he is lying to himself. And to others. The truth of God cannot be present in such a person. But whoever does what Jesus says, in him the love of God is at home – yes, it has reached its goal. He has not only received the love of God, but has also returned it and passed it on.

If we keep and do his word, we are in Jesus. And whoever claims to be in Jesus has no choice but to live as Jesus lived. Then people will see that the love, the mercy, the truth, and the holiness of Jesus Christ can be seen in us too.

Dear friends, I am not really writing you a new command. It was new when Jesus gave it to us disciples. In that sense it is the old, original, and still valid command. You received it when you received Jesus in faith. At the same time it is forever a *new command*. For through Jesus it gained an absolutely new dimension – as the command of *love*. There had never been anything like it before. This command of love truly lived in him – and today it lives in us. His life has become our life too. Yes, he lives in us! In this way, and only in this way, can we live and love as he did. In Jesus the true light came into the world. With that, the new and coming age had dawned. The darkness must give way more and more. It has also been driven out of our hearts. We live in God's light. And the day is coming when the darkness will disappear completely and Jesus will light up everything.

Whoever claims to live in this light but does not love his *neighbor*, but hates him, inevitably belongs to the darkness. Whoever loves his neighbor belongs to the light. In God's light he is safe from stumbling and falling away from the faith. I have to say it once more: Whoever hates his neighbor is in the darkness. That is disastrous, for whoever walks around in the dark does not see where he is going. In the dark he is blind.

Children loved by God: All your sins, even those you will still commit, are forgiven you! The only reason for this is the mercy of God, which he has promised and given us in Jesus. His name guarantees it!

You *fathers* and *mothers* in the faith, you have grown spiritually into such people because you know and love Jesus like no one else.

You *young people*, one day you too will be such fathers and mothers. Now, through Jesus, you have overcome the evil one, the devil, by faith.

You children who have not been in the faith for long, you have recognized something very important and fundamental: that God, the Eternal One, is your heavenly Father.

I have written to you fathers and mothers because your knowledge of Jesus, your love for him and your enthusiasm for him make you what you can now be in the faith for others.

I have written to you young people because you are strong in Jesus. Above all because God's word, everything Jesus said, is important to you and you do it. With Jesus and his word you have managed to overcome the devil. All the false teachings he spreads and the people he has led astray could not take you by surprise.

Be careful, and do not love what people love and do who do not care about God and Jesus. True love can hold on to only one thing. Whoever wishes for a life like the unbelievers', or is envious of it, does not know the great love of the heavenly Father. The *love of the Father* cannot be at home in this world that is far from God. Nor is it welcome there.

A society in which not God but the evil one rules is driven above all by three things:

By giving in to and indulging every kind of *desire* – whether love of money, ambition, sexuality, prestige, or addiction.

Then the *lust of the eyes*, which looks only at what is of this world, what is visible and seductive. And so it literally loses sight of what truly gives life meaning.

Finally the *pride of life* – such as showing off, arrogance, overestimating oneself and comparing oneself with others, bullying, and much more.

The person without God sees himself as the king of his own life, as if there were no God. None of this can ever come from the heavenly Father. All of it will one day disappear and be over. The only rescue, the only way to escape this

downfall, is to do what Jesus says. Doing God's will is the only worthwhile alternative to the world. It is the only way to experience God's new, eternal, holy, glorious world to come in the light. And to be there forever in eternal life.

You children of God, with Jesus the *last hour* has begun. He said that the *antichrist*, the false bringer of salvation, will come. But even now many antichrists have appeared who, like a would-be Christ, put themselves in the place of Jesus. They have set themselves against him. That is why we can say that the last hour has come. It is very sad that these people even come from us, from our own midst. They did claim to belong to the family of God. But that is not true. If it really were true, they would have stayed with us. But God has exposed them: they are not from God, but from the evil one. They have no business being among us. For they teach and spread what is false.

We all have the *anointing* from Jesus. He has given us the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has taught us that Jesus is the Christ, the eternal Son of the Father. I have not written to you so that you would hear these things for the first time. For you already know them. Hold on to them. The lies of these people have absolutely nothing to do with the truth.

So which people who speak about Jesus must be called liars? Surely those who deny that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah chosen by God! Such a person is the antichrist, who denies the *Father* and Jesus, his *Son*. He says that God is not a Father at all and cannot have a Son. So whoever denies that Jesus is the Son of the Father can neither know the Father nor have him as his own Father. But whoever holds that Jesus is the Son of the Father, stands by it, and bears witness to it, has God, the Father. He is truly a child of God. You have heard it this way from the beginning. If you hold on to this as a truth that is not for sale, then you are in God's light. Connected with the Father and the Son.

And for us who hold on to it, the unique promise of the Father applies, which he has fulfilled and made true in his Son, the man Jesus: We, as mortal human beings who are sinners, are to receive eternal life! Sin and death will be defeated. We will be children of God.

I have to write all this to you. For there are people going around, traveling preachers, who want to lead you astray and rob you of these glorious and vital truths. Let me come back once more to the anointing you have received from Jesus. That is, of course, the Spirit of God, who will remain in you and with you. He was there from the very beginning. That is why you do not need to let

these deceivers and liars teach you. Trust the Holy Spirit. He teaches you what is true. Stay close to Jesus, the Son of the Father.

And now I look ahead, my friends. I see the day when Jesus will appear visibly in the sky. That will be a day of the greatest joy. An incomparable day of celebration, when at last we will meet our Lord Jesus with all our senses. If we want to experience this glorious day in that way, then we must already now live with Jesus as if he were visibly with us. And follow him eagerly until that day. If we do not, then this day will take us by surprise. Or frighten and shame us. And hopefully it will not then turn out that some of you did not belong to him at all.

If we have recognized that God is absolutely righteous, then we can also tell whether someone lives out righteousness as Jesus did: Such a person is born of God.

Chapter 3

Can you even begin to grasp with what *boundless love* God, the Father, loves us? He has made us his children, out of his very own being! That was his eternal plan and will. No one, not even an antichrist or a false prophet, can take this from us or call it into question: We really have become children of God. God wanted it so.

You cannot tell this from our outward appearance. People did not recognize Jesus outwardly as the Son of God either. He and we looked no different from all other people. Nevertheless, we are children of God! Even if the future marks of being God's children cannot yet be seen outwardly.

One thing is absolutely certain: All children of God will soon be completely *like* the glorified Jesus Christ. We will see him as he is. And we will be filled with nothing but wonder. This very fact is the center of our hope. It motivates us every day to remove from our lives, without compromise, everything that does not fit his holiness and glory. In this way we are already becoming more and more like him now.

Whoever lives as if there were no God is in truth a sinner, someone who misses his eternal goal. For God created him. He keeps him alive. He ought to be grateful to him. Such a lifestyle is also called lawlessness. Whoever denies God and his authority lives in anarchy. By living without God, people have piled up an unbelievable amount of guilt through sin. No one can undo these sins against God and people. The guilt can never be made good by human means.

But that is exactly why Jesus came: to take away our sins. He can take them away as if they had never happened. No one else could do that! Only he alone. Why? Because he was in no way infected by sin and never sinned. He was the Righteous One.

Whoever follows Jesus and wants to do what he says does not obey sin. All who live as if God did not exist have neither understood Jesus nor submitted to him as the Savior and Lord of their lives.

Children of God, do not make compromises! From God's perspective there is always only an either – or! That is why I do not talk about gray areas, but emphasize a clear black-and-white contrast of the truths I am passing on to you. Whoever wants to obey God and lives by his commands is righteous. Just as Jesus was righteous in his life. Whoever lives as if God did not exist sins and misses the goal of his life. Such people then do what the *devil* has always done. He rejected God's authority from the very beginning and spread this anarchy. Yes, he led angels and people astray to do the same. Everyone who sins ultimately lets himself be inspired by the devil and stands on his side. But Jesus, God's beloved Son, came to destroy everything the devil has done, all his evil works. The works of the devil do not have the last word! You can already see that now. For every child of God is born of God and therefore no longer determined and ruled by sin. That a child of God does not have to keep on sinning – that is God's work in us alone! The life of God, his word and his Spirit, is present in his children. That is why it is not even possible for his children to love sin and live as if the Father did not exist. In the end, no one can deny his true nature. Either it is from God or from the devil. That is why no one may fool himself in this matter. All who do not ask about God, and live accordingly, cannot possibly be born of God and be children of God. A child of God can be recognized above all by love for his neighbor. Whoever does not love his neighbor selflessly and with deeds, as Jesus did, is not born of God.

When you first heard about Jesus and his good news, *love* for one another was the decisive thing that made the great difference. It should always remain so: that we love one another. The most shocking example of the opposite is the old and well-known story of Cain. He acted from the devil, the evil one, by murdering his brother Abel. Why did he do it? Everything he did was evil, because he was from the evil one. But his brother was righteous. Abel was not from the devil, but from God.

So do not be surprised when something like this keeps happening today as well. It belongs to the nature of evil to hate what is good and holy and righteous and loving. Yes, to destroy it. The people who live without God hate us more or less. For they sense that we want to do what God wants. The difference between them and us could not be greater. Because we are born of God, we have been rescued and have crossed over from death to life. Death wants to destroy life. That is nothing other than hatred. And the true and genuine sign of life in a child of God is that we love our neighbor, above all the children of God. Conversely, this means beyond any doubt: Whoever does not love his neighbor is still in death. He is not a child of God. Everyone who hates his neighbor is even a murderer like Cain – whether he actually kills someone or hates him with his head and heart. It should be clear to everyone that someone who hates his neighbor cannot have eternal life, even if for a short while it may have looked that way.

How do we recognize what is really meant by love? The greatest *example*, and also the standard for what genuine divine love is, we see in Jesus. Out of love he laid down his life for us and sacrificed it on the cross. If he did that for us, it cannot be otherwise: We will do the same for the children of God. And for our neighbor too. But *living out love* does not mean immediately sacrificing one's life for others. It means, for example, quite simply that I, as the one who owns something, stand by the other person in his need and give him what he urgently needs. If someone is not moved in his innermost being by the need of his neighbor, then the love of God cannot be present in him. The essence of God's love is that we notice our neighbor's need, are moved by it, and do everything we can to help.

Children of God, stop just talking about love and making many words about it. Live out genuine love for God in deed and without selfish motives.

Instead of helping our neighbor, our heart often clings to what we ought to give away. When we let go of our life and our possessions for the sake of our neighbor, then we are in the truth. When our selfish heart does not let go, even condemns selfless giving, considers it unnecessary to love our neighbor, or leaves it at words, then we set ourselves above God's command, which is greater than we are. God sees the motives and objections of our heart exactly. We must learn to resist these feelings of our heart and to value the command of God's love more highly. When our heart *lets go* in order to help our neighbor

generously and selflessly, then we have free and joyful confidence before the Father. After all, we are loved by him as his children. We may bring our requests to him and experience that he gives us gifts. When we gladly give to our neighbor to relieve his need, then the Father also gladly gives to us. For his command is important to us, and we gladly fulfill it. In this way our life is a joy to him. He gives to us gladly when we give gladly!

God, the Father, gives us this *command* to put our trust entirely in his Son Jesus Christ – in his glorious greatness and in the fact that he is enough for everything, truly everything. In life and in death. Just as much a part of this command is that we love one another, just as Jesus said. Whoever keeps this command remains in Jesus, and Jesus remains in him. Can we know that Jesus is in us? Yes, through the Holy Spirit. He bears witness to this truth for us and gives us inner certainty and peace about it. This Spirit does not only bear witness to it. Jesus has given us this Spirit so that he is with us always and for all time.

Chapter 4

Dear friends, many *false prophets* are going around in the world. They are the liars I have already spoken about, who went out from us. In contrast to the Spirit of God, whom you have, lying spirits are at work through these prophets. That is why you should not believe every person who wants to teach you. Test whether it comes from God. You recognize the true Spirit from God by the fact that he proclaims the truth about Jesus. Namely, that Jesus Christ really became a human being, was one, and always remains one. Even though he was and always is the eternal Son with the Father. Whoever does not believe this and confess it before others is not from God. He is filled with a spirit of deception, the spirit of the antichrist. This antichrist will one day appear publicly in a big and spectacular way. But already today this spirit is at work through such false prophets and would-be messiahs. They spread lies about the true Christ.

Children of God are born of God. They have seen through the lying prophets and overcome them. In you is the *Spirit of God*, who is stronger than the spirit of the world. These prophets have their origin in the godless, but nevertheless religious, world. They speak only what comes from the world and what pleases the world. We, on the other hand, are from God. And whoever knows and loves God understands us. Whoever is not from God does not

understand what we say. Again it is a matter of either – or for me: Either the Spirit of truth is speaking, or the spirit of lies and error.

Dear friends! Let us love one another. *Love* comes from God. Everyone who loves as God loves is born of God. He knows and loves God. Whoever does not love as God does, does not know him. For God's deepest and eternal nature is pure love. God has given us this holy love. By sending his one and only Son to us human beings. Because his Son became a human being, we have received life. He brought it to us. This love is completely undeserved. It did not have its origin in us – as if we had loved God. No, he loved us first and sent his Son to take away our sins through his sacrifice.

Dear friends, if we have been loved like this, beyond all expectations and undeservedly, then we are positively obliged to love one another. When we love one another, God remains in us. His love is, as it were, alive and at work in us – yes, it has reached its goal. God is Spirit, and no one, no human being, has ever seen him. But something of him can be seen and grasped through the love with which God's family loves one another.

How can we understand that we are in him? And he in us? Through his Spirit we can understand it. And through his Spirit this living and close bond and fellowship of love is possible.

We apostles and disciples of Jesus have seen it and testify to you: The Father truly saw how lost we were and sent his Son. As the Savior of the whole world. For all people the Father sent his Son.

Whoever believes and confesses that Jesus is the Son of God has fellowship with God and is connected with him. We have come to know and believe how great a love God has for us. *For God is love*. His whole being is purest, self-giving love. No god has ever shown himself like this. That is what defines him completely. *Everything* he does and is comes from love. Whoever lives in this love remains in God, and God in him – recognizable by the fact that we are grateful to the Father from the heart and love our neighbor.

The love of God has changed us completely. We have been given the gift of boldness and confidence before God. That is why we have *no fear* of the day of *judgment*, when everyone will have to give account before the holy and righteous God. What counts and stands firm there is solely the fact that we have lived in the world as Jesus lived. That is true when we do his word – which is a matter of course for all who are born of God. Even if that may never succeed one

hundred percent. But we do not need to be afraid because of that either. Fear of God is never part of the nature of God's love. On the contrary, the *perfect love of God* drives out fear of the day of judgment, or of failing to live like Jesus. Fear is, after all, already a kind of judgment, which can lead to despair. Whoever is still afraid of God and his judgment does not yet trust. He has not yet come to rest through God's love and Jesus' forgiveness.

We love God and our neighbor. For he loved us first.

It is important and must never be forgotten: If someone claims to love God but hates his neighbor, he is a liar. Whoever does not love the brother he can see with his own eyes, how can he love God, whom he cannot see? We have this command from God: Whoever loves him naturally loves his neighbor too.

Chapter 5

Everyone who *believes* and *confesses* that Jesus is the Messiah, that is, the Christ, is a child of God. Born of God. The Father and the children are bound together in love. Everyone who loves God naturally also loves the one who is born of him. How can we tell whether we love the children of God? By the fact that we love God and do his word and his commands. In us, the children of God, the love of God leads us to know and do his commands. For those who have the life that comes from God, these commands are not burdensome. They do them gladly. For whoever is born of God overcomes the world, which for its part denies God's commands. A society that rejects God and his commands also wants to conquer our hearts. We are supposed to live like them too. But we stand firm and remain victorious. Our trust in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit helps us to hold on to the victory over the world. Who can overcome the world that is far from God and fend off its claim to own us? Only those who *believe* that Jesus is the Son of God. The world and the false prophets do not believe this. But we do, and we hold to it.

Jesus Christ came for us. He became fully and completely human. False teachers claim that at his baptism the "divine Christ" came down on the man Jesus of Nazareth. And that shortly before his death it left him again. But Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had himself baptized in water by John because he wanted to. And he himself gave himself as a sacrifice on the cross. Through his shed blood he has cleansed us from our sins. The Holy Spirit of truth has testified this to you from the beginning. Yes, as the law of Moses requires, I can

name two or three witnesses for you: the water, the blood, and the Spirit. With one voice they affirm that God's Son became a human being. His ministry began with his baptism in water. And the same Son of God died at Golgotha. People can claim anything, but God's testimony is greater and therefore trustworthy. The final authority. God has testified about Christ exactly what the three witnesses have testified. Whoever believes in this Christ carries and keeps this unanimous testimony in his heart. Whoever rejects God's testimony about his Son makes God out to be a liar.

What God testifies about the Son is important and reliable. It concerns us too, very concretely. He has given us *eternal life*! This life is in no one else but in his Son. In Jesus Christ, who became human, died for us, and rose again. And whoever has received the Son into his heart with trust has the Son, and with him eternal life. For he is the life. Whoever has not received the Son can never have eternal life.

I am writing this to you so that you may know once and for all – not merely hope or feel it in a wavering way – and also not doubt that you have eternal life. Provided you believe in the Son of God. He is eternal. He became human. He died for us, rose again, and was taken up into glory. From there he will come back. All this, and more, is contained in the name of Jesus, in whom you believe.

Everything I have written to you about God invites us to be in his presence. Full of childlike trust and carefree confidence. Before his kind face. Above all when we *ask* him for something. He hears us and answers us. After all, we ask for what he wants. For we know him and his will – what pleases him. We can ask him for absolutely anything, for we know that he will answer us. When what we asked for is granted by God, then we know that this is the answer to our request. God forgets no request and answers at the right time. Even when we ourselves have already forgotten the request.

Children of God are a *praying family*. Especially when a member of the family is obviously and continually acting against God's will. That is a serious matter. That is why the brother or sister needs our prayer, so that he or she recognizes the sin, confesses it, and gives it up. Our prayers are absolutely necessary. For they will give life to the brother or sister when God answers us. In this way he or she returns, as God wants: into conscious and lived-out fellowship with the Father and the Son. And with the family of God.

There is sin that leads to death. A brother or a sister, children of God, cannot commit such a sin. This sin marks the false prophets and the whole world, which lies in death. All unrighteousness is sin. No matter whether a child of God commits it or a false prophet. But the sin of a child of God does not mean his death. The sin of the world, however – it leads to eternal ruin. For it rejects Christ and his sacrifice for sin.

Whoever is born of God and is a child of God does not keep on sinning, and does not sin with delight. That is why it is not a sin that leads to death. Nor can it be. In this letter, for the sake of clarity, I have explained the truth in a pointed way, in clear contrasts, yes, in black-and-white terms. The one who is born of God does not sin, because Christ protects him and holds him fast. Christ is always stronger. He is the victor over the evil one. That is why the evil one cannot touch or ruin the one who is born of God.

We know for certain that God has given us new birth. The people who reject God, on the other hand, are on the side of the evil one, the devil. They are in death. This difference, yes, this contrast, did not come about through ourselves. It came about through Jesus. The mission of the eternal Son of God was to show us God – his holy nature, his light, and his love. And to reveal to us why he had to come for us. For the believer it is vitally important to recognize Christ, the True One, who is different from all the *gods* and *idols* of the world. Everything stands or falls with Jesus, whom we proclaim to you. We are inseparably bound to him forever. To Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. He is the true God and eternal life. No one should overlook this, let alone deny it.

In view of this truth about the Son of God, all I can do at the end of my letter is to emphasize: Everything that belittles, weakens, or calls into question Jesus Christ and his honor – that is and remains an idol. My friends, be careful that you do not tolerate or admire in any form any visible idols, nor any “inner” ones, such as honor from people or wealth that we cling to.

The Second Letter of John

John, the elder, is writing to you. One who serves you as a shepherd and is concerned for you. To you, the chosen lady and her children. To you, a small community of believers whom I love with all my heart. I mean the love that comes from God's truth. But also from Jesus Christ. All who have recognized Jesus Christ as the truth and love him love you too. The truth we share is the foundation, the direction, and the measure of this love! The *truth* will remain in us, because Jesus Christ is in us. Always and forever! The fellowship of believers will live forever in the fellowship of God's love. In eternal life.

God's grace, his mercy, and his peace will be with us. With each one of you – day by day. From God, our Father in heaven. And likewise from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father. He too is God. God the Son. Who became human and revealed God's truth and love to us human beings. In this truth and love we live as children of God!

I was so very glad when I saw some of your children living in the truth. They are keeping the *command* of the Father that Jesus brought to us. That is why I ask you to do what we have heard from the beginning. Not a new command that should surprise you, but the old one: that we should love one another.

To remain and live in the love of the Father means to keep his commands: to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and to love one another. His commands are an expression of his love for us. They also serve to protect us. Against the traveling *false teachers*. Many deceivers are out and about today, eager for converts, in order to spread their lies. They confess and proclaim that Jesus has not come in the flesh. They deny that God the Son became fully and completely human – as we are: Born in Bethlehem. Grown up in Nazareth. Died on the cross outside the gates of Jerusalem. As atonement for our sins. Bodily risen. And taken up into heaven as a human being. Whoever denies these facts, in part or in whole, is a deceiver and an accomplice of the coming antichrist.

These deceivers are a real *danger*. So watch yourselves. Be on your guard! So that we do not lose what we have worked for. You are the fruit of our missionary work! You yourselves have worked for eternal life. You have done

the work of God and believed in his name for eternal life. We do want to receive the full reward that has been promised to us. It is only given if we hold on to the truth, live in it, and do not go beyond what has been revealed about Christ from the beginning.

Anyone who does not remain in the *teaching of Christ* as you have heard it from the beginning – God does not live in such a person. Anyone who remains in the teaching about Christ, the Son of God who became human, is connected with the Father and the Son. They live in him.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring the teaching about Christ as I have explained it to you from the beginning, do not take him in. Do not even let him speak. Do not greet him and welcome him as you would otherwise receive a welcome guest. For whoever does greet such a person in this way shares in his evil works. Whether he wants to or not. If a traveling teacher comes to you and you do not know whether he speaks the truth about Christ, then *clarify* that first. Once that is clarified, take him in. Always take a clear position when it comes to our Lord Jesus Christ. Here there must never be neutrality or indifference. Otherwise our whole reward is at stake.

I ought to write much more. With paper and ink. But it is much better and more wonderful to talk with you in person. For in such fellowship, where we talk face to face, there is always great joy.

Warm greetings also from here, from the believers here, among whom I am at home.

The Third Letter of John

I, John, the elder, the presbyter, am writing to you, my dear Gaius, whom I love in the truth. In the truth that came to us through Jesus Christ and has won our hearts, so that we live in the love of God.

Dear Gaius, how much I wish for you, and pray for it, that all may go well with you in every way. In your outward as well as your inner being. That you may have a good, smooth path.

How glad I was when brothers who had met you reported how much you align your life with the *truth*. I am glad that the fruits of the truth in your heart are visible to everyone. I have no greater joy than to see that my children are living in the truth. Those whom I was privileged to lead to Christ, the truth, and who are now filled with him. Yes, who even hold on to the truth in love and love their brothers and sisters in the faith and their neighbors.

Dear friend, it is faithfulness to the truth, the way you have treated the brothers. Men you do not even know. They have testified here with us in the house church to your faithfulness in showing hospitality, and have celebrated it. When such brothers are traveling as missionaries, then equip them for their onward journey. That pleases God and honors him. They serve him. In this way their ministry is supported. For they are not traveling for their own sake. They have gone out for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. To proclaim him. In doing so they do not rely on support from the pagans, but always look for their fellow believers on the spot. These are obliged, yes, they owe it to them, to take them in. But do not take deceivers into your houses. Only the genuine missionaries. In this way we become coworkers for the truth and are active participants in the work of the Lord. In his kingdom.

I have written to the house church to which you, dear Gaius, belong. So that these brothers would be taken in. But Diotrephes does not take our request seriously. He loves to be *first* among them. And to decide things on his own authority.

When I come to you, I will remind him of this dismissive attitude and call him to account. This absolutely must be cleared up. For he accuses us without reason with malicious words. And he is not satisfied with words, but simply

turns away the brothers who serve us all and are looking for a place to stay. And he hinders those who want to give them lodging. He even threatens to throw them out of the house church. That is behavior that does not belong in the fellowship of believers.

Dear Gaius, do not let such behavior provoke you into acting the same way. Do not imitate what is evil, but what is *good*. There is a simple and clear rule: Whoever does good is from God. For God is good. Whoever does evil has not seen God. He overlooks what God is like. He overlooks the fact that God accepts us and that we are to accept one another.

Demetrius is one of those who were turned away. Even though, as the bearer of this letter, he is well spoken of by everyone. There is nothing against taking him in. The truth is his priority. He stands up for it and he lives in keeping with it. We testify to that too. And you know very well that we speak the truth.

There would be much more to write. But it is better to talk face to face and to share with one another in the fellowship of believers.

The peace of God be with you. The friends here send you greetings. Greet each of the friends who share your mind personally from us. Every single one.

The Letter of James

- The testing of faith
- Doers of the word
- The royal law of freedom and love
- Poor and rich in the kingdom of God
- Faith and works
- Small tongue – big impact
- Wisdom from above – or from below
- Friendship with the world
- The Lord's coming is near
- The Judge is standing at the door
- How we treat one another
- Prayer for the sick

The Letter of James

James, a servant of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time his physical brother. Just in passing. I am writing to all the twelve tribes of Israel who are scattered among the nations. In the diaspora. You are not forgotten. The Israel of God remains preserved and is not lost. You are God's people of the new covenant that the Messiah has founded! I greet you, wherever you may live.

Do not be alarmed when your faith is put to the test by all kinds of sudden difficulties and frightening events. Poverty, unjust suffering through persecution, loneliness, disappointment, and much more can make you sad and assail you. But in this there is also a reason for joy. For the *testing* of your faith produces perseverance and steadfastness. The problems and difficulties make sense, even if you do not see it right away. They are not meant to weaken your faith but to strengthen it. So place great value on your perseverance in faith. Hold on! Do not give up! Even when you feel weak in the trial, reach your limits, and have many questions. In this way you grow slowly but steadily toward spiritual maturity and strength in faith. Then you will notice that you lack nothing, unlike at the beginning, when the trial took you by surprise. Trials are meant to make you strong. Never forget that.

If you lack *wisdom*, if you – especially when your faith is being tested – do not know what to think, do, and say, then turn to your God. He is waiting to give you wisdom when you ask him for it. For our God always gives gladly. Unlike us humans, he does not reproach us. It is not his way to blame us for our questions and missteps. When we ask him for wisdom, it is important that we do so in faith. By firmly counting on the fact that he really acts. Whoever doubts that God gives to us is like a wave of the sea, tossed back and forth by the wind. Whoever constantly doubts God's willing giving will indeed not be heard. A person with two hearts in his chest, with faith and doubt, without inner stability, runs the risk that all his ways will be unstable. His prayer will not be answered. Resist even the smallest doubt that undermines your faith and could grow into a giant that defeats you in the end.

Poor and lowly brothers and sisters among you should boast in their high position in the Messiah Jesus. Rich and well-to-do brothers and sisters should boast in the fact that their wealth ultimately means nothing. It does not make them higher in rank or more valuable than the poor. Pictured in an image, the rich (like the poor) are like a flower that withers under the rising sun and the hot wind that follows – like grass. The flower has wilted and its blossom has fallen. Its beauty is gone. In the same way rich people and their successes will wither. Suddenly everything that seemed important is over.

I come back once more to the beginning. Blessed are all who remain steadfast and persevere when their faith is tried and tested. For after patient enduring and holding out comes eternal life. That is the victor's crown for devotion in faith. All who love God will receive this victor's crown! Those who held on to God even in difficulties and did not doubt his love.

When trials come upon you, that is not from the outset a temptation to evil. Even though you may feel it that way. But there is also *temptation* by evil. However, when someone is tempted or lured into evil, no one should claim that he is being tempted by God. Being led astray is something completely different from being tested in faith. For God cannot be tempted by evil or lured into evil at all. He himself will therefore never lead anyone astray or guide anyone into doing something evil.

When someone is tempted, he is enticed by his own lustful desire and lured into evil. Dragged away like a fish that has snapped at the bait and now hangs on the hook. When we give in to desire, then sin comes into the world as in a birth. When sin is then fully mature, grown up, so to speak, it gives birth to death. A sin that matures – instead of being pulled up like a weed – leads almost inevitably to spiritual death. Already in this life, but certainly in eternity. Fellowship with God breaks apart. In time and in eternity! Whoever sows sin will reap sin and death. Unless this cycle is broken by the grace of God. We are responsible when we give in to our desires to sin. To notice and feel desire and lust is not yet sin. But giving in to desire means letting sin run its course. It will kill us if we do not kill it.

Let no one be deceived! Every good *gift* and every perfect present always comes down from above. Not from us humans. Even if it looks that way. It comes from God, the Father of the heavenly lights, who created the stars in the sky. His nature, his faithfulness does not change. Even if there are changes

among the stars, with him never. That applies to his will to give us wisdom instead of leading us into evil. His nature, his faithfulness, and his love are unchangeable, unambiguous, unwavering. Not divided like the doubters.

His greatest gift is that he has given us *new birth* through the word of truth of the gospel. Not the natural birth that he gave us as Creator, but our new birth from above, from heaven, for redemption, made us the firstfruits of his creatures. Firstfruits that bear witness to the beginning of all the renewal that will soon come.

That is why, dear brothers and sisters, let everyone always be quick to *listen* – and slow to *speak*. Especially slow to anger. Even when something annoys you, or you feel insulted and hurt. Spontaneous, violent, and rash anger does not bring God’s righteousness into the situation between people. It only makes it worse. Human anger never produces God’s righteousness. Never. Instead, part consistently and for good with everything that can lead to outbursts of anger – such as meanness, a malicious attitude, and every overflow of wickedness. How can you manage that? Accept the word of God and his instruction with a humble attitude. Let this word, which was planted in you as DNA at your new birth, grow. And change you. This word can change your life. It has the power to do so! And it has the power to give us the life to come. For it is this word that saves you for eternal life when Jesus comes again.

I am saying nothing other than this: Be *doers of the word*. The word is given to be done. Not only to be listened to. Whoever only hears it but does not do it is lying to himself. It is as if he had looked into a mirror and immediately forgotten what he saw. As if he had not looked into it at all. He saw what he should change, but indifferently forgot it, as if nothing had happened.

But whoever regularly looks intently into the perfect law of freedom, into the law of Christ, and does not forget who he is, and at the same time carries out what he has heard, is blessed by God in what he does. He is set free to do what God wants. He no longer has to be angry, but now brings about God’s righteousness by doing what pleases God.

If someone thinks of himself that he serves God and follows the instructions of the law of freedom, but does not have his speech under control, his worship is worthless.

Genuine, selfless *worship* of our heavenly Father means not forgetting widows and orphans, but visiting them and standing by them in their sad

situation, in which their very existence is threatened. True worship helps all the helpless and homeless, because that corresponds to the heart of God.

That also means not behaving like the world, which does not care about God's instructions and ignores widows and orphans; not adopting the thinking and the way of life of the world, but putting it off and consciously being different. Just as God wants.

Chapter 2

My brothers and sisters! Practice faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of all the glory of God, *without favoritism*. Before him we can all only be equal!

Imagine someone comes into your synagogue wearing splendid clothes and a thick gold ring. At the same time a poor man also comes in – with a dirty garment or rather shabby clothes. You then look at the outward appearance and say: “Come, sit here comfortably.” But to the poor man you say: “Stand over there at the back” – or “Sit down here on the floor by my footstool.” Do you really think Jesus would have done it that way? Is that not more than contradictory? Have you not reacted thoughtlessly and made a distinction that does not even exist? One even gets the impression that you are setting yourselves up as judges. And with devious calculations for your own advantage on top of it.

Listen carefully, my dear brothers and sisters: Has God not chosen precisely the *poor* of the world to become *rich* through faith? Yes, to make them heirs of his coming reign? At any rate, he has promised this to all: to the poor as well as to the rich who love him from the heart.

But you have despised the poor man and dishonored him. Is it not sadly the case that the rich oppress you and keep you down? And, wherever possible, drag you into court? Do they not, by this behavior, publicly blaspheme the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was called out over you in baptism?

For all who confess this name, the King of kings, only his *royal law* should apply: Love your neighbor as yourself. To fulfill *that* is good and right. But if you judge a person by appearance and value him by his possessions, then you sin. The law convicts you as lawbreakers.

If you think you are keeping the law this way, you are mistaken. For if you stumble in just one command of the law, you have broken the whole law. For he

who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

So speak and act as those who are at all times judged by the *law of freedom*. We are set free! But that means: set free to love. At the end of life God’s judgment without mercy will be directed against all who have treated the poor and weak, widows and orphans, without mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. It need not fear any condemnation. Indeed, it needs no verdict at all. If everyone were merciful, there would be no need for judgment.

What good is it, my dear brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ but has no *works* that bear witness to that faith? How can such *faith* save him?

If there is a brother or a sister who is freezing, hungry, and without daily food and drink, and you say: Go in peace. Keep warm and eat your fill! And you do not give such people what they need – what use or value is that supposed to have? The faith of someone who acts so heartlessly and does no works of mercy is dead.

Someone could say to this person who relies on his faith without works: You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith without works! How am I supposed to recognize your faith? I will show you my faith by my works. Your faith consists merely in believing that God exists. That is good. But consider: even the demons, the evil spirits, believe that. Yet they tremble before their Creator because of their wickedness. Even in them something of faith can be seen. But they are not saved on the basis of this faith, any more than you are. For without works your faith is dead, lifeless.

You really must think about your faith, you thoughtless person. Just look at Abraham. Was he not justified by works because he was willing to sacrifice Isaac? From this you can see that his faith and his works went hand in hand. Yes, his works sealed his faith. They made his faith complete. In this way the word of Scripture in Genesis 15 was fulfilled: “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” He was even called God’s friend.

From this you see that a person is saved and justified on the basis of his works, which reflect living and saving faith. By faith alone, insofar as it is dead and without works of mercy, indeed inactive, no one is saved.

Was not the prostitute Rahab, who lived in the city wall of Jericho when the Israelites conquered Canaan, also justified and saved by works in the same way?

For she had taken in the two spies, hidden them, and sent them off by another way.

Think also about this comparison: Just as a human body without the spirit-soul is dead, so faith without works is dead.

Chapter 3

Do not regard becoming a *teacher* or preacher as the greatest ministry in the church. The motive of standing in the spotlight or being given special attention is tempting. Why should we not get involved in that? Being a speaker is attractive! All who teach and instruct others will one day be assessed and judged by God according to their words. Precisely because they know more than others, they bear a greater responsibility to show it in daily life as well. And that does not always succeed, by any means. For we all stumble often and make mistakes. Yes, we sin again and again. Especially with our words.

Whoever makes no mistakes in speaking, with all the many words that pass our lips, would indeed be able to control his whole body and keep it in check. Comparable to horses. We put bits into their mouths. And with them we steer their whole body. In this way they obey us. Or let us think of the great ships at sea. They are driven along by strong and violent winds. Yet they are steered by a small rudder.

In the same way the tongue is a small organ, yet it boasts of great things. For example, a small fire can set a great forest ablaze. It is similar with our tongue. It is capable of unleashing a world full of unrighteousness. It has set the whole world on fire and keeps on playing with fire.

It is the tongue that defiles the whole body and causes much harm. It continually sets the world on fire through evil, deceitful, slanderous, and lying words. It is itself set on fire by hell, the epitome of all evil.

All wild animals on land, in the air, or in the water have been tamed by human beings. But no human being can bring the *tongue* under his control. No one can master the tongue so completely that a false or wrong word never slips from his lips. It is an untamable evil, full of deadly poison.

With the tongue we praise God and the Father. With the same tongue we curse human beings, who are made in the image of God. Out of one and the same mouth come praise and cursing. Who can approve of that? Is it possible

for bitter and sweet water to gush out of the same spring at the same time? Or do olives grow on a fig tree, or figs on a grapevine?

Who is *wise* and understanding among you? Only those who also show it in their lives. Namely in good conduct and in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and quarrelsomeness in your hearts, then there is no reason to boast as if you were wise and understanding. You are lying to yourselves, because your life is the opposite.

This wisdom that determines and steers your life does not come from above, from our God and Father. It is a wisdom *from below*, from the earth. An unspiritual one – worse still – a demonic one. All quarrelsomeness and jealousy come from below and destroy. Where they spread, there is disorder, and one must reckon with every kind of evil deed.

The wisdom from above, from heaven, from God, is completely different. First of all, it is completely pure, like God himself. Then it is peace-loving. Kind. Open to instruction. Full of mercy and of many good things for people, impartial and sincere. All this comes from God. He is our example.

Whoever sows peace and makes peace will reap peace, because that corresponds to righteousness.

Chapter 4

What do you think: Where do the wars and quarrels among you come from? They do not come from just anywhere. Or always from others rather than from you. The reason and the cause is you yourselves. For it comes from your desires for possessions and wealth. These desires wage war within you and keep breaking out. But: you desire and get nothing. You murder and are jealous and still cannot obtain anything. You quarrel constantly, plot and wage war against your neighbors. Against the poor and the rich alike. Nevertheless you still do not get what you want. You have nothing because you do not entrust yourselves to the Giver of all gifts. You want to take everything into your own hands. And when you ask God, you simply receive nothing. Because you pray with selfish intent, in order to receive something that you want to keep selfishly for yourselves in your cravings and enjoy on your own.

You adulterers and adulteresses: Do you not know that friendship with the world, that is, with a society that rejects God and his commands, is enmity with God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world, in whatever matter, behaves

at that moment like an enemy of God. It is as if he had changed sides. Whoever joins with people and opinions that are directed against God and his good commands makes himself a friend of the world in doing so. Or do you really think Scripture speaks in vain, just like that and without reason? The Spirit who lives in us jealously longs for our whole heart. He wants us *completely*. He is not willing to share our affection with anything else. Just as you men are never willing to share your wives with other men, so God is not willing to receive only half of our loyalty.

He demands undivided loyalty. But all the greater is the grace he gives: God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.

So submit yourselves humbly to our God. With this attitude of heart, resist the devil and his enticements. Then he will flee from you. For what can he do against you when God is on your side? *Come near* to God. Turn back to him. Ask him without selfish motives. Then he will come near to you. Then you are in fellowship with God.

Wash your hands, you sinners, with which you have done wrong. Dedicate your hearts anew to God. Stop living double-hearted lives and decide wholly for God.

Get really serious. Experience a thorough turning to God. Lament and mourn and weep over yourselves. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up! Start completely anew and leave the old behind. Change your thinking. Repentance and turning around are the insight with the best outlook.

Brothers and sisters, do not speak against one another. Do not run each other down through malicious gossip. Anyone who speaks evil against his neighbor is in fact also speaking against the royal law of love and even judging it. You are then not a doer of the law, but you set yourself up as judge over this divine law. It is not you who issue the laws and determine what may or may not be done. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. He is the one you are dealing with when you set yourselves above the law of love. Who are you to judge and condemn your neighbor at all? Judgment is surely the business of the Lawgiver alone.

Now a word to you who are full of *entrepreneurial zeal* and want to make a profit. You say self-confidently: "Today or tomorrow we will go into the city and do good business and earn money." Actually, you do not even know what

tomorrow will bring. For what is our life? It is like a vapor or mist that appears for a short time and then vanishes. Our life is no more than that. You should for once become aware of this uncertainty. You do not hold your life in your own hands. Why not put your plans under this motto: If it is the Lord's will, and we live, then we will do this or that. But now you go around bragging about your successes. This bragging and exaggerating is evil. You act as if everything would succeed for you without the Lord. Yet he is the one who gives to you and blesses you with gifts.

If someone recognizes that he ought to do good but does not do it, then he sins. He commits a sin of omission.

Chapter 5

One more word to you *rich* people who unscrupulously increase your wealth – and in doing so put your trust in your possessions: Weep and wail over the misery that will come upon you. Your wealth will rot, and your showy clothes will be eaten by moths. Your gold and silver will corrode. The corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire.

You have nothing better to do in these last days than to keep increasing your wealth. And that at the expense of others.

Look! The wages of your workers and day laborers, which you have kept for yourselves and not paid out, cry out loudly to the Lord. The cries for help of desperate harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. There they are heard and taken seriously.

But you live in luxury and self-indulgence. You squander and waste what they so urgently need. You have fattened yourselves like animals for the day of slaughter. You act as if every day were a feast of slaughter.

All the while you have condemned the workers and the righteous. You have murdered them by your conduct. And they, the righteous, do not resist. Like Jesus, they do not defend themselves. Like him, they remain without violence. In spite of your injustice, which cries out to heaven.

You disadvantaged and oppressed brothers and sisters: Be patient until the *coming* of the Lord! Then, when he comes, these abuses and injustices will end.

Look, the farmer waits patiently for the harvest of the precious crops. He waits patiently for the early and also the late rains. In the same way you, too,

have patience and perseverance. Encourage one another and strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord, our Messiah, has drawn near.

Do not grumble against one another, so that you will not be judged. God will take care of those who oppress you. The *Judge* is standing at the door. Take care that your own conduct does not fall under judgment either.

Look at those who are examples of how to bear and endure suffering. The prophets, who prophesied in the name of the Lord. Look, we do honor those who persevered and did not give up. *Job*, too, was an example of how to persevere in spite of the greatest losses, suffering, grief, sickness, doubt, and lament. And not give up. You have seen how the Lord turned everything around and ended his suffering. Yes, the Lord is rich in compassion and mercy. He is with you and suffers with you in your troubles. So take courage and rely on the Lord. Wait for him.

But above all, brothers and sisters, do not swear oaths voluntarily when you are not required to do so in court. Do not simply swear in your everyday speech when it is not even necessary. Neither by heaven nor by earth. Nor with any other oath. Let your yes simply be a reliable yes and your no simply a reliable no. In this way you will not fall under judgment through careless swearing.

Is anyone among you going through difficulties or trouble? He should seek comfort and help in prayer. And pray for strength to endure in difficulties. If someone is in good spirits in spite of trouble, full of joy, then he should sing songs of praise.

If anyone among you is seriously *ill*, he should call the elders of the local church, so that they come to him. To pray for him. Over him, the seriously ill person – so that he gets well. As they do so, they should anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord and dedicate him symbolically and anew to Christ, the Anointed One. *Prayer* offered in firm trust will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise him up. If the sick person has committed sin that led to the illness, then he should confess it openly, so that he may be forgiven. Not every illness is caused by sin. But receiving forgiveness has an effect that goes beyond physical healing – salvation. When we sin against one another, it is important to confess our wrongdoings to one another and to pray for one another. If illness was the result of these transgressions, then you will be healed. The prayer of a righteous person – not only that of the elders – has great power and can change everything for the good!

The prophet *Elijah* of old was a human being with the same feelings and perceptions as we have. He prayed earnestly and intensely that it would not rain. And it did not rain for three years and six months. And then he prayed again. And then it rained, and the earth produced its fruit again.

My friends, if someone wanders from the truth and leads his life away from God, then such a person is on the way to spiritual death. But if someone succeeds in bringing such a straying believer back to insight and to faith and in restoring fellowship with Jesus, then he may know that he has saved a person from eternal death. And will cover a multitude of sins that arose on the way away from God.

The First Letter of Peter

- On the way to the heavenly inheritance
- God refines and changes us – constantly
- God's word, the true mother's milk
- Unjust suffering – normal for Christians
- Can we really do good to those who persecute us?
- Jesus, the Lamb of God – Redeemer and example
- The victory of the cross over hell, death, and the devil
- Christians as strangers passing through
- God's faithfulness and care

The First Letter of Peter

I, Peter, an apostle and envoy of our Lord Jesus Christ, am writing to you. To all of you who live in the diaspora, scattered abroad. Everywhere in the Roman provinces – in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. You are there as strangers who have no rights of citizenship. And yet you have a home with God, the Father. He knew and loved you even before you lived. He has chosen you. As he once chose his people Israel.

The Holy Spirit has made you holy. Taken out of the world, in order now to be obedient to God. You have been brought under the sanctifying and cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. You now belong wholly to God!

May abundant grace and peace from God carry, fill, and guide your life for God!

We praise our God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! We worship him. Together. With words and songs of praise. For his great *mercy*, which reached out to us. For he has given us new birth. From death to life. From hopelessness and emptiness to a living *hope* – through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It has changed everything. Forever.

Through the Risen One a wonderful future has been given to us. An imperishable, unlosable, and holy *inheritance*. It is kept safe for us in heaven. Stored up with God himself. The day is near when we will receive it, to live in it forever: a new heaven and a new earth. That is our living hope, our sure confidence.

This great day of salvation, when the inheritance is handed out, has not yet come. We are on the way there. God himself protects and carries us and leads us to the goal. And on this sometimes difficult stretch of the road he strengthens our faith. Soon salvation will be revealed. For us – and for all people. Then, when we pass from faith to sight.

Then there will be great joy. As never before. Even if today we live in trials and testing. They are necessary for strengthening our faith. Even if for a short time that can bring sadness and resignation with it. But through it your faith is made firm, and Jesus will be honored on the glorious day when he comes again. The hard testing and proving, yes, the fiery, intense *refining* of our faith that we

experience through persecution and exclusion, can be compared to the smelting of gold. Pure and gleaming gold comes out of the furnace. In the same way, on that glorious day your refined faith will also shine and be celebrated with Jesus.

You love him more than anything. And that even though you have never seen him. Unlike me, who traveled with him for three years and also saw the Risen One. You believe in him and you are faithful to him – even though you do not see him. In this you receive and feel great and deep joy. A joy so great that it can only come from heaven.

Yes, we look ahead with great longing to the great day of salvation. When it snatches us out of our earthly, embattled, and still mortal existence. When Jesus comes again. This salvation already occupied the prophets of old. They searched and inquired when they held out the prospect of this grace of God for you in prophecy. They foretold it through the Spirit of Christ. They wanted to know when and how this would happen. They testified to the sufferings of the Messiah. But also to the glories that would follow his sufferings on the cross.

Even then they recognized: We will not experience these events ourselves. But we are writing them down for future generations. Now the *gospel*, the good news, has been proclaimed to you. Those who testified to it did so, like the prophets of old, through the Holy Spirit. He was sent down from heaven for the proclamation of the gospel in the whole world. A heavenly message for lost people on earth! So great and glorious is the wealth of salvation and grace in this message that even the angels – although it does not concern them at all – are extraordinarily interested in it. They try to look into the mystery, as the prophets of old already did. So be aware of what a significant time of grace you are living in when you hear and believe such precious things, which have come only with Jesus.

Activate and focus your thinking as people who possess the precious gospel of salvation! Just as Israel once got ready to leave Egypt, so be ready, too, for Jesus' coming. Be sober-minded. Self-controlled. Do not let yourselves be confused in your thoughts and feelings by the pressure of persecution and hostility. Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you from heaven when Jesus comes again.

Now you are God's children. Obedient to him. The selfish desires of the old life without God no longer determine your life. Back then you lived in ignorance. But now God has called you out of it to himself. Because he is *holy*,

you too are becoming holy! Holy in all your thinking, speaking, and doing. It is written in Leviticus 11, addressed to his people: “Be holy, because I am holy!” Let that be your motto in life. Simply be different: imitators of God.

Live as strangers without rights of citizenship in reverent fear of God. The one whom we may call on as our Father is an incorruptible and impartial Judge. He judges and passes sentence without regard to the person. The slave and the king are equal in God’s judgment. One day our works, not our status, will be judged and assessed by God according to his standards.

At the same time we may and should know that we have been *redeemed* from our old and empty way of life, which we took over from our parents. Redemption was not paid for with perishable gold and silver. For then redemption itself could be perishable. No, we have been redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Like a pure and perfect sacrificial lamb he gave himself up to death.

Even before the earth existed, God planned that he should come as a human being. But only now, at the end of the ages, has he come for us. Through him you believe in God. For he has led us to God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory on his throne, at his right hand. That is why we place our faith and all our hope in this God. In no one else.

Your hearts have been purified by God. Dedicated to him. Because you are obedient to his truth, his message to you. Only because of that can you love as well. Sincerely. Love one another passionately. Persistently. With the love that reaches out and turns toward the other. From a pure heart. Without false motives. And without expecting anything in return.

You have been born anew. I already told you this at the beginning. Not of perishable seed, which would again produce only what is perishable. No, you have been born again of imperishable seed. This seed is the living and enduring *word of God*. In Isaiah 40 it says: “All people are like grass. Their glory is like a flower. The grass dries up and withers. The flower falls and passes away. But the word of the Lord endures forever.” It is precisely this living word of God that has been proclaimed to you in the gospel. This spoken word of God has the creative power and authority to produce new life and faith in you. This word has changed us completely through the *new birth*. That is why today we can live completely differently than before: We are now living eternal life!

Chapter 2

Nevertheless, the bad thoughts, deeds, and words of our old existence have not automatically disappeared. We are called to remove them from our lives like weeds before they overgrow everything. These include malice and wicked schemes, hypocrisy and corrosive envy. But also evil gossip and slander behind other people's backs.

Rather, like newborn babies, be *eager* for the spiritual and pure mother's milk. That is God's word. Only in this way can you grow! Toward the goal, salvation, when Jesus comes again. After all, you have tasted that the Lord is good. So drink all the more of the word.

He, Jesus, the Messiah, is the living *Stone*. We come to him. We constantly orient ourselves toward him. He was rejected by people – to this day. But with God – and that alone counts – he is chosen and precious.

We too are like living stones. We are being built up into a spiritual *house*, into a temple of God, where God's Spirit lives. We have been appointed as holy *priests*, to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. They can please God only because we offer them through Jesus. First, our life is to be a sacrifice: doing good for our neighbor. But also honoring God together with words and songs of thanksgiving, praise, and worship.

In Isaiah 28 it says: "See, I lay in Zion a cornerstone, a chosen and precious one. Whoever trusts in him will not perish." All this preciousness has been given to you because you trust him. It is completely different with those who reject him, who do not trust him. Isaiah 8 says: "This stone, which the builders rejected and considered useless, has become the most important stone of the house. The one that holds everything together. But a stumbling stone, an obstacle and an offense for all who do not believe." They stumble and fall when judgment comes. All who set themselves against the Messiah in this way will not be able to stand.

But see what God has chosen you for. Not each one on his own, but together. As a community. We have received great privileges, which we possess and experience only together. For you are his chosen *family*! Begotten by him and born again. Willed by God before all time.

You have become a *royal* family of priests. Even though you have neither royal descent nor priestly descent. You serve the King of kings.

A holy nation. With its heavenly King, Jesus. A spiritual people to which one does not belong by descent. And which also knows no geographical borders.

A people that is God's possession alone. It belongs to no one else. No power of the world, nor of the invisible world, can rob him of it, overpower it, and take possession of it.

You have become all this so that God may be made known and recognized in the world through you. By proclaiming all the excellencies and mighty deeds of God. Through your life. In word and deed. In this way you stand up as priests for the lost world.

He has *called you out* of the darkness of idolatry and of distance from God. To himself – into the glorious light of his love. Once you were not a people. But now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy. But now you have received mercy. The prophet Hosea already said this. How wonderful that everything has turned out so well for you, and what you have been counted worthy of.

Dear friends, you live in the diaspora as strangers. But you are that in a spiritual sense too. As those who are born again, you are strangers and guests among the nations. So abstain from worldly and sinful *desires*. They wage war against our renewed heart. To beguile it and win it back.

Live an honorable life among the peoples. Full of good works. They know and see very well what is honorable and good. Even if they themselves do not live that way. Live like this even when, against their better knowledge, they slander you as evildoers. When they one day get into great difficulties, when hard days dawn, then – because they have seen your life with God – they will fall silent. They will give glory to God and be convicted of their sin.

Submit to the human and governmental order. The Lord wants it so, because that is a testimony for him. Whether to the emperor as the supreme human authority. Or to his governors, who are authorized by him to punish and prosecute crimes. And to praise and commend those who do good.

God wants ignorant people who do not know him to be silenced by your *good deeds*. So that their slanders stop. Not through violence, but through *works of love*! Consider what groundbreaking deeds they must be to be able to silence them. You are free, and you do this not under compulsion but from renewed hearts. You do not use your freedom in Christ as a pretext or cover for doing evil. After all, you are God's servants and bondservants.

Honor all people. Love the family of God, your brothers and sisters in the faith. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

You household slaves, obey your masters. Not only the gentle and good ones. But also those who are perverse and unpleasant and harass you. It is a sacrifice pleasing to God when you endure unjust *suffering* and disadvantages.

After all, it is not praiseworthy if you suffer and are beaten because you sin and defy your masters. But if you persevere in doing good and have to put up with humiliations as you do so, then you honor God. That pleases him. All of us are called to such conduct. Not only you slaves. For this is exactly how *Jesus* lived. He is our *example* and has left us the greatest model for such conduct. He suffered for us. We follow in his footsteps. We follow Jesus – even though you do not see him, as we did back then – and want to become as he is. He, who did not commit a single sin, not even in secret. Whose words were always honest, without deceit or cunning. Who was insulted in the vilest way – and did not insult in return. Tormented with suffering, he threatened no one with revenge, although he could have done so. He handed it over to the one who will judge justly, namely his heavenly Father.

He himself carried all our countless sins in his body up onto the *cross* of Golgotha, the wood of curse and torture. Just as back then the *sins* were transferred to the animal sacrifice by the laying on of hands, and it was then slaughtered, laid on the altar, and burned there: in the same way he took over our sins and bore them. With the forgiveness of our sins our old life has come to an end. In this way we can escape a life in sin. We are set free from the power of sin and now live for righteousness. Set free from the burden of sins. Which he bore. By his wounds at Golgotha we have been made well and healed, as the prophet in Isaiah 53 could not have put it more aptly. Made whole in heart and conscience.

For like helpless sheep we wandered about. Without a shepherd. But now we have returned to our good and faithful Shepherd. He now watches over us and leads us on the way of life. To quiet waters and green pastures.

Chapter 3

The attitude of submission also applies to the wife. She will lead her husband, who does not yet believe, to Jesus by loving him, doing good to him, and esteeming him. By praising his good deeds. Respecting him. Not through many

words. Rather through your respectful conduct and a holy life that is experienced at close range. The real adornment of women should not consist in attracting attention through outward things. Your adornment should consist in your gentle and quiet nature. Anchored in your hearts. That pleases God and delights him. That was also the adornment of the holy women who put their hope in the living God and at the same time submitted to their husbands. In this way Sarah obeyed Abraham and even called him lord. You have become the spiritual children of this married couple. So do good wherever possible. For all people. Do not let anything confuse or deter you from living consistently in this way.

You *husbands*, be understanding and loving toward your wives. Make every effort to understand how your wives think and feel. Find out what they need in empathy, understanding, and attention. Talk with them. Share yourselves. Open up to them. Do not demand of them the same things you demand of yourselves. Apart from exceptions, they are emotionally more vulnerable and often physically weaker than you. That is why they need your strength. Just like you, they will inherit eternal life, and they are in no way inferior to you men. If you live like this in your marriage, then you will gladly pray together, be spiritually one, and together experience God's mercy at the right time.

Everything should help you as followers of Jesus to live in spiritual harmony and to strive together toward *one* goal. Have compassion and genuine love for one another. Not only for those you like. Be full of love toward all your brothers and sisters. Be merciful. Just as God is toward you. Be humble. Do not repay evil you have suffered with evil. Nor insult with insult. On the contrary: bless them, your brothers and sisters in the faith and also people who do not yet believe. Wish them well – and let them know and feel it. For you will soon inherit the blessing. Out of this abundance you can already bless now and act like Jesus.

Whoever wants to enjoy life and see good days, and does not want to have to reckon at every moment with being caught out, must speak nothing evil against or about anyone. He must turn away from all evil and simply do good. He must seek peace with everyone and pursue this peace persistently, as if it could escape and vanish forever.

It is like a law of nature: The *eyes of the Lord* look over the whole earth and look on the righteous. On the one who does good. And on their prayers. He

hears their pleading. But he is not at all pleased with those who do evil. Whoever does evil has God against him and must sooner or later experience his wrath.

So who can it be who does you harm when you do what is good? And do not stop doing it? Does such a person have any justification for it before God? If you nevertheless experience evil and suffer because you do good, then you are to be congratulated. Do not be afraid of these people. And do not have the same fears and worries as these people, who do not know God's faithfulness as a Father. They do not know our Messiah. So focus even more on the Lord, the Messiah! Do not fear people, but him alone. Whoever fears him will no longer be afraid of anyone.

Even in difficult situations, when you experience suffering, be glad and ready to bear witness to your hope in the Messiah in an understandable way. When people ask you why you are so different and accept disadvantages and suffering, then confess your hope. The hope I have already written to you about in this letter. Take pains to explain it to everyone as well as possible. Simply and clearly. In such a way that the person you are talking with can understand it too. In his own language. The defense of your hope should never be arrogant. Respect those who ask, and be glad when they approach you about it. God is at work in them, just as he has been in you.

Keep a good conscience about your life. Then, when people accuse you of bad things or insinuate them, they will sooner or later have to back down sheepishly and admit that they are in the wrong.

In any case it is better, if God wills it so and lets it happen, to suffer for good deeds rather than for evil deeds. That need not be hard for you either when we look at our great example: For Christ, too, *suffered* in the same way. Unjustly. For sins he did not commit. Namely for ours. On the cross. The righteous for the unrighteous – for us! What for? To bring us to God. To lead us out of a foreign land, out of the cold and lonely night of sin, to his God and Father. Into his holy and loving presence. Home!

He was put to death on the cross. In his battered and tortured body. That is what his murderers and the invisible powers of darkness had set out to do. But that was not the end. Through God's Spirit he was made *alive*. The Spirit of life and of resurrection. Through him he was raised to a new existence of immortality. In this Spirit, as the Risen One, he went into the underworld. Into

the prison of death. To the spirits, the fallen sons of God from the days of Noah. To them he proclaimed his *victory*. In the days of Noah – before the flood – these angels came to human women and with them fathered the giants. A great sin in the eyes of the Lord. It brought unimaginable wickedness upon the earth. That is also why the great flood came. These fallen sons of God wanted to destroy humanity and thwart God's plan of salvation. Their children, the giants, perished in the flood. But their spirits live on. These are the demons that harm people. But Christ proclaimed his victory to the imprisoned sons of God. Their end and their ruin. His message to them was a good one for us humans: Your plan and that of your descendants, the demons, will not succeed. I am the *Victor* over hell, death, and the devil. My death was not the end, but the beginning of the new exodus. People will be free. I have led them to God.

Through the deadly waters of the great *flood* a few, in fact only eight people, were saved. From the old world over to the cleansed earth. That points to you today, who are also few. In *baptism*, in the water, what happened in the flood is reflected in you. Salvation! Not outwardly, say as a ritual cleansing from outward dirt. No, baptism is a binding declaration of faith and obedience to God. A decision of the heart, indeed a vow, to serve him with a clear conscience. Why? Because Jesus rose from death. Entered into heaven. Sat down at the right hand of God. Where all angels and authorities and powers of the invisible heavenly world are subject to him, the Son of Man. To him we swear *allegiance*. Sealed and proclaimed through baptism. Not only before the people who were present. Also before the invisible world and its prince, the devil, and his angels. Every baptism confirms and announces their final *defeat*. Even if for a short time they can still harm believers. We have changed sides and belong forever to Jesus, the Victor.

Chapter 4

Since Christ suffered in his body, tangibly and painfully, in our place, as a substitute for our sins, you too should be ready for such suffering. For whoever comes into such suffering because he follows and confesses Jesus has no time to give himself over to sins. Although the suffering gets him into difficulties, the sinful temptations have been put to rest. They no longer occupy him then. We no longer want to spend the time that remains to us on this earth on the interests and desires of the people who deny God. No, we want to do *what God*

wants. Not what the people around us think is great. We have already spent long enough doing what society and the mainstream want to prescribe and consider good. That includes unrestrained debauchery of every kind. Drunkenness, gorging, and carousing. Shameful idolatry with cult prostitution. All to fulfill and satisfy oneself. And to grab whatever can be grabbed. Now they are surprised that you no longer join in this senseless and harmful carrying-on. They cannot understand that the fulfillment and joy they seek in their permissiveness is found in Jesus. That is why they heap abuse on you and feel they are on the right side of life. But they will all have to give account for this way of life and for their abuse. The day is coming when God will demand an account from them. From all who are still alive then, and also from all who have already died. Christ, the Redeemer, has been proclaimed both to those who have died and to you, the living. So that all may receive the gift of eternal life – through the Holy Spirit. With this hope of eternal life, even a life and death full of suffering is not a defeat but a victory. In contrast to those who rejected the good news and died without the hope of eternal life and must await the day of judgment.

The *end* of all things is at the door! Everything old, perishable, and sinful will come to an end. All who have followed Jesus await a new beginning in God's glory.

Be clear-minded. Do not give in to any intoxication, religious or worldly. Be active in *prayer*. Do not miss any opportunity for it – whether you are alone or in fellowship. Above all, have genuine and lasting *love* for one another, a love that devotes itself to the other helpfully, selflessly, and without self-interest. This love, which comes from God, covers many sins. It forgives! And it does not keep dragging up the sins of others to accuse them. Prove your love in free and inviting hospitality. Without complaining about the effort and the expense.

In everything serve one another with the *spiritual gifts* that each of you has received. Namely as the Holy Spirit has allotted them to each one. You have received the rich, this all-embracing and many-sided grace of God as a gift. Handle it responsibly and constructively as faithful stewards. Pass the grace on. When someone in your fellowship speaks to you, his words should be recognized and heard as words from God. When someone serves others in practical ministry, let it be done through the strength of God. Only when everything is worked by God is he made great and honored. For that is always

the goal. It is never about our success, but about God's honor. Through Jesus Christ, who has led us to God, but also to one another. He made this possible in the first place. We must never lose sight of that. To him therefore be all honor and power and glory forever. Amen.

Children loved by God: Do not be surprised and alarmed when the *unjust suffering* for Jesus' sake seems to you like a fiery blaze. It serves to refine your faith, as I already wrote to you at the beginning. Rejoice, too, when you now have to experience the same suffering as the Messiah did back then. For then you will rejoice and shout for joy when Jesus comes again visibly before the whole world in power and glory and completes your salvation.

Yes, you are to be congratulated when people insult you because you bear and confess the name of Christ. Among them the name of Christ is blasphemed. Among us it is honored and held high. That is why the Spirit of God's glory rests on all of you. God's holy, loving, and protecting presence surrounds you in all suffering. As it once surrounded Israel in the cloud of glory, the Shekinah. Day and night it was visibly there.

None of us should be rightly punished and suffer for that reason. Say as a murderer, a thief, or an evildoer. Or as someone who pushes his way into other people's affairs that are none of his business. But if someone suffers because he belongs to Christ, because he is known as a Christian, then he should by no means be ashamed, as in the cases just mentioned.

The time has come for *God's judgment* to be revealed. It has already begun. It actually begins first with us. With God's own house. As it once did with his people, when judgment began at the temple in Jerusalem. God's holy judgment will not condemn us but cleanse us and set us right. It will show us his holiness and cleanse out of our lives whatever does not fit with him. That includes being refined through suffering. In view of God's judgment we want to live holy lives, as I said at the beginning. But where does the end of those lead who have not believed the good news of salvation and grace? Who remained disobedient? If we, the righteous, are saved and brought to the goal only with great difficulty, what will become of the sinners and the ungodly?

So all who suffer wrong, if God wills it so and permits it, should entrust their lives, with all their weaknesses and faults, to him. The faithful Creator stands by his assurances and promises. But this request and surrender to God should come from a life in which we do good to others and want what is best

for them. Without resigning ourselves. Precisely in the suffering that is inflicted on us, we entrust ourselves to God. In this way we receive the energy to do good in spite of unjust suffering. Only God can give something like that.

Chapter 5

The flock of God, the fellowship of believers, is to be cared for, protected, and provided for. Taking care of this is especially your duty and task, you *elders*. I tell you shepherds and spiritual leaders that I, as your fellow elder, stand under the same duty. I say this as an eyewitness of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus. But also as one who will share in his radiant glory, which all will see when he comes again. You elders, tend the flock of God as good shepherds. Your care should not be given under compulsion, but from the heart and willingly. Nor in order to gain some advantage by it. Do not behave like rulers! You are to win and convince hearts with your exemplary lives. And when soon the *Chief Shepherd*, the great Shepherd, our Lord Jesus, appears, then you will receive the victor's crown of glory for your commitment. Yes, then we will all share in his glory.

You who are younger, respect the elders! Learn from them. After all, they are ahead of you in experience. Accept their instructions. But also test them before the Lord.

All of you, respect one another and clothe yourselves with humility. Never think highly of yourselves. For God opposes the proud. To the humble he gives grace – as Solomon already said in Proverbs 3.

Accept the situation in life in which the mighty hand of God has placed you. Do not be discontented. And do not complain about unjust suffering either. Or about what makes life hard for you. Trust in the faithful Creator and never forget: He will lift you up at the right time and take the burdens from you. In this life, but at the latest when Jesus comes again.

You may and should cast all your *worries* and burdens on him! For there is no one who cares for you so much – as he does! Our Creator sees everything. No one takes care of you – as he does. Always hold on to that. Even if at first glance it does not look that way.

Always be on spiritual alert. For our greatest enemy, the devil, is prowling around. Like a roaring lion he wants to show his strength, to intimidate, and to cause fear. Yes, he is on the lookout for prey and will strike when he finds it. Through persecution and fear of death he wants to force the followers of Jesus

to give up their faith. But resist him, standing firm in faith. Do not be afraid. Give fear no room. Be aware: You are not the only ones who have to go through this. The persecution of those who belong to Christ is happening in the whole world.

The greatest security and encouragement in every situation is and remains this knowledge: The *God of all grace* is our God. He has called us to himself, to his own glory, in Jesus Christ. After a short time of suffering, that will be our eternal home. On this way, even through suffering, he will restore us, prepare us, and make us complete. As it pleases him. He will so strengthen and fortify our faith that we persevere in spite of suffering, do good, and remain firmly established. No matter what comes: Nothing will throw us off course.

This letter is being delivered to you by the faithful Silas (Silvanus). I have written to you only briefly about what matters most. About the true grace of God, in which you stand and live – in spite of suffering.

Greetings to you from the one in Babylon who is chosen together with you. And from Mark, my spiritual son in the faith.

Greet one another with the kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are united with Christ and rooted in him.

Amen.

The Second Letter of Peter

- Participants in the divine nature
- Growing in faith
- The reliable word
- The prophetic word
- False teachers
- The old and the new earth
- The judgment and patience of God

The Second Letter of Peter

Simeon, also called Peter, is writing to you. My Lord, Jesus Christ, called me that. I belong wholly to him – I am his servant alone. I am also his envoy, his apostle. I am writing to you because you, too, have received the same precious faith from Jesus as we disciples did at the beginning. All of us have received this faith from him alone, our God. And from our Savior Jesus Christ. God is just. That is why he gave all of us, the apostles, us Jews, and also the other nations, the same precious faith. This faith gives us a share in everything God has given us. He will give us even greater things, because in Christ we have been declared righteous.

Be blessed overflowing with more and more grace and help from our God. For everything we so urgently need every day. Especially in persecution and hostility. May he also bless you with peace in every situation of life. In this we recognize our God and our Lord Jesus. For he is our inexhaustible source of grace and peace.

God himself, in his *divine power* – which can be seen especially in his creation – has equipped and enabled us with everything. So that at last we can live for his glory. Especially in his work of redemption, when God called us and revealed himself to us unexpectedly and undeservedly. Then we recognized his glory and divine power – at work through the one who died and rose again for us: Christ. We recognized with what determination he gave us the very greatest and most precious *promises*. His great salvation. Eternal life. The gift of his Spirit. And in his own time a new heaven and a new earth. Through these promises, which he fulfills in us, God has made his own nature, his life, ours. We do not become gods, as some dream. We do not receive God's nature in everything that belongs to God alone. But we share in his divine nature. In this way God – his love, grace, and mercy, his holiness and righteousness – becomes visible in us through our lives in many situations. To his glory, because something of him can be seen! Recognizable to all the people we have to do with. Through us they will get to know this unique God. After all, through God's call we have fled from the ruin and corruption of the world. We have broken with the greed for life that so fascinates people without God. More than that: We have left this

brittle and perishable way of existence behind us. In this way we have escaped the corruption toward which these people are living.

Precisely for this reason we should show all *diligence* and commitment and devotion in the faith we have received. In this faith, with the determination that God has also shown toward us, we should move forward with conviction and resolve. It is worth it!

But resolve absolutely needs *knowledge*. All determination must be directed in the right direction. We must know God's thoughts through his word and get to know them more and more. In everything we need wisdom from God.

Knowledge in turn should be accompanied by *self-control* and discipline. We always need this self-control and restraint, above all when we are moving in a society where people give free rein to their desires.

Self-control should be firmly anchored in young and old, for a whole lifetime. In it we should persevere and remain steadfast.

In all *perseverance* and steadfastness, your concern should always be to please God. It is not about following human commandments or traditions that we could pride ourselves on.

Pleasing God means first of all seeking and living out fellowship with our brothers and sisters in the faith, whom God has also called. With all those whom he has brought together with us in our place and throughout the world. We want to *love* them selflessly.

The highest is always the love of God himself. It fills us. And through it we are able to love God, the brothers and sisters, and our neighbor. This love must be the motivation for everything we do. Otherwise everything is worthless!

All these important qualities that I have named are completely *normal* for disciples of Jesus. That is why they should characterize you and shape you more and more. That means genuine spiritual *growth* toward maturity in faith. We cannot have enough of these virtues. Then you will not be sluggish, lazy, or idle in your faith either. Yes, you will then bear abundant fruit for God. In this way the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ deepens in us. It never comes to an end. For Jesus is incomparably glorious, unsearchable, so to speak. He is the beginning, the center, and the end of everything – including our devotion. This growing knowledge with the heart causes God's nature to become more and more visible, to God's joy – as I have already written.

But if hardly anything of these qualities can be seen – in contrast to earlier, too – then one is *blind*. One no longer wants to see the glory of our Savior. One is nearsighted, only squints, indeed one has then become afraid of the light. It is as if one wanted to forget that the God of glory has called us to himself. Such a person has forgotten the cleansing from his former sins through the public confession of baptism in water. But it no longer helps him if he now lives as he did before. Even though he has been cleansed from his past sins in baptism, the sins he is now piling up will be his ruin.

That is why, dear brothers and sisters, as far as it depends on you, make God's call and your election *firm*. In this way confirm God's intervention in your life. Just as decisively as God called you and took hold of you, follow Jesus just as decisively. Your life should be a clear and joyful answer to the grace of God. In this way you will not stumble on the way to God's glory, let alone stray from the way of truth. A triumphant and jubilant entry into the coming *reign* of our Lord and Savior lies ahead of you. That will be an incomparable and unforgettable event. The door to this kingdom, the goal of faith, is already wide open now! That is our living and reliable hope. For that, every effort and all devotion are worth it.

As long as I live, I will be concerned and always ready to remind you of this glorious prospect. That also includes the central qualities of following Jesus. I do this although I am aware that you already know all this and are firmly established in this truth. But as long as I am still in this fragile body, I will keep you alert by reminding you of these things – and, if necessary, shake you awake. For my departure from this world is near. I will soon take down this earthly and mortal body like a tent. And then be with my Lord. He has revealed to me this imminent departure from you. What I am writing to you here is very important. I will always do everything so that you keep these insights in your hearts and minds – especially when I am no longer with you.

Above all, this includes one unforgettable event. For we disciples did not follow myths, clever ideas, dreams, or stirrings of emotion. When we told you about the great power and the future glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, we did so as *eyewitnesses*. We testified only to what we experienced and saw with our own eyes on the holy mountain, up on snow-covered Hermon. We were privileged to experience how Jesus was enveloped in radiant light by God, his Father, and transfigured. He shone like the sun. From the brilliance of this

majestic glory came a voice that said: This is my Son, whom I love above all. He has all my pleasure. He alone is the joy of my heart.

On this very mountain, where the disobedient sons of God came down from heaven before the great flood, took women for themselves, and fathered giants. In this way they wanted to corrupt humanity. I will come to speak of that shortly. On this mountain Jesus lets the whole invisible world know that there is a Savior for lost humanity. The power of darkness is coming to an end.

We three disciples who were there could hardly speak for awe. We had never experienced anything like this with Jesus. But it became clear to us that this was the fulfillment of the *prophetic words* of all the prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and all the rest. They speak of God appearing in glory at the end of time. With our own eyes we have seen the *fulfillment* of these prophecies. A kind of preview of what all people will one day see. This prophetic word of God, whose fulfillment we saw and heard, is like a light in a dark and gloomy place. That is the world that rejects Jesus and persecutes us. This night will soon be over, for the bright *morning star* already rose when we saw Jesus like that on the mountain. The day of our Lord Jesus Christ is coming unstoppably. The morning is already dawning. Look to this morning star, which the world does not see. It loves the night and shies away from the light.

The prophets did not follow their own thoughts. The coming glory of which they spoke and wrote was revealed to them – guided and carried along by God's Holy Spirit. Take that into your hearts and hold on to it! They in turn passed on to us the word of God they had received. By the way, this applies to the whole prophetic word. We find it in the writings of the Hebrew Bible, which we call the Old Testament.

The prophetic word, the sum of the prophecies, is not the idea of human beings. For people called by God were moved and *guided* directly by the Holy Spirit. What they perceived from God they testified to and wrote down. They were carried along by the Spirit, just as the wind blows into the sail of a ship and drives it forward. But these people were not typewriters or puppets of God. Rather, he enabled them as persons to write, with their own minds and their own words, what he wanted to communicate.

Chapter 2

I want to point out clearly that the prophetic word can also be disregarded. Worse still are self-appointed, false prophecies. Back then there were already lying prophets in Israel. Today there will be teachers among you who do not tell the truth and are not sent by God either. They and their *false teachings* will lead to factions and sectarian groups. The whole thing is a ruinous affair for all who are affected and involved. For with it the false teachers deny their Master, Jesus Christ, who bought them. Him they should serve. And not themselves. The ruinous things they do, they sadly do in his name. With this monstrous claim they bring ruin upon themselves. Either already in their lifetime; but most certainly in the last judgment on the Last Day. Although their false activity is so obvious, many still follow them. Because of this, the way of truth is maligned. For they claim to be walking the way of truth, which is not the case. People who are impressed by it think they have found the way of truth, although the opposite is true. When they realize this, they want nothing more to do with it. They rightly feel that they have been deceived about the way of truth.

These false teachers are *greedy* for your possessions and your money. With deceitful words that you fall for, they pick your pockets. Such conduct always brings God's judgment in its wake. From God's perspective it has never been any different. Ruin will overtake such people, as I have already said.

God will call everyone to account for their sins. That also applies to the beings of the invisible world. *Angels*, the sons of God, the Watchers, had evil intentions on earth. They had marriages and consequently sex with women, from which the giants were fathered. That is what Moses called the children of these unions. In addition, they showed people evil things, which led to great wickedness and corruption on the earth. These sons of God have been judged. God did not spare them. And long before the final judgment they were cast down into darkness and put in chains, so that they could not do any more evil. There they are held for the day of the great judgment.

There are many examples showing that God cannot bear or tolerate sin. God did not spare the whole ancient world. He brought the deadly flood of water upon all the ungodly of those days. Also upon the many giants whom the sons of God had fathered with evil intent. Only Noah was righteous, who

proclaimed the righteousness of God and the coming judgment. He and his family, eight people in all, were spared and saved by the ark.

Another warning example for all the ungodly is the destruction and burning to ashes of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*. There lived righteous Lot, who was rescued shortly before the city was destroyed. For him the violence and readiness for violence of these ungodly people, the worship of the heavenly bodies, and their contact with dark powers were unbearable. It pained him in his soul to have to watch and live through it day after day.

These examples are meant to warn us. But also all deceivers as well as the deceived. And they encourage us by showing how God protects his people, who are righteous and fear him, and rescues them from judgment. He does this when they live in the fear of God among these ungodly people. All the unrighteous and ungodly will not get away. At the latest after their death, on the day of judgment, they will receive their punishment.

Judgment will certainly strike those who live out their desires without restraint. For they disregard Christ as the Ruler whom they ought to obey. Such self-willed characters do not shrink from blaspheming heavenly powers either. In contrast to them, angels who rank below these heavenly powers do not dare to pronounce a blasphemous judgment on them before God. And that even though they would have reason and occasion enough to do so.

These false teachers do not know what they are blaspheming and what they are taking on. They behave like animals without understanding, bred only to be slaughtered. They will perish in their own corruption. They receive their just reward for what they have done.

They love reveling in broad daylight. Instead of working. They wallow in their own deceptions. They come to your fellowship meals, where you gather. All the while they have only one thing on their minds, and you can see it in them: to find a woman who will commit adultery with them. They are slaves of sin. They are a great danger for believers who are not yet firmly grounded. It is precisely such people they look for. With the aim of seducing them. You can read the greed in their eyes. Exploiting and abusing others – that is what they are really good at. They are nothing but children of the curse. They have left the straight way of truth. Yes, they have wandered off it. They have chosen the way of Balaam: a prophet who was willing to prophesy falsely for a soothsayer's fee. But he received a severe as well as miraculous rebuke. The donkey he was riding

rebuked him with human words and so restrained the prophet's folly. The donkey saw the angel of the Lord, but the prophet did not.

These false prophets are like springs that have no water. That is why they are useless and a deception. They are like clouds driven back and forth by a storm. In the end only darkness remains for them, in eternal darkness. With bombastic speeches they make promises and at the same time conceal that all they care about is satisfying selfish desires. With this they lure and seduce precisely those who have just escaped the error of the world through faith. They talk about great freedom and with it entice those who are still very young in the faith. But they themselves are *slaves* of their own corruption. The freedom they promise is not freedom but slavery. They are subject to their own corruption like slaves.

Those whom the false teachers have their eye on, in order to lead them astray, have only just escaped the error of the world and its desires. Because they have come to know the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they found security and stability with him. But if they now slide back through this deception into the world from which they fled, then they are worse off now than before. It is so bad that it would have been better for them, the deceivers and the deceived, never to have known the way of righteousness and truth at all. Since they have turned away again, they reject the holy command of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom they had after all come to know through the gospel.

Sadly, the word of Proverbs applies to such sad cases: The dog returns to what it vomited up before, to eat it again. The proverb applies in the same way: The sow that has just been washed wallows again in its own filth. I have to put it this drastically!

Chapter 3

This is now the second letter to you. With it I am appealing to your memory. At the same time I want to sharpen your thinking: Hold fast to the word of the prophets, to whom I have already pointed you. Keep remembering the *command* of our Lord Jesus Christ, which his envoys, your apostles, have passed on to you.

Above all, you should know one thing: In the last days *scoffers* will come who have nothing to do with the fear of God. Do not let them surprise or intimidate you. They live only according to their desires. They will say: Where is this *coming of Christ* that was promised? Nothing can be seen of it. Everything stays as it is.

As it has been since ancient times. But they deliberately overlook something decisive. From the beginning, heaven and earth have existed by God's will. Out of the water God caused the earth to come forth by his word. He separated the land from the water, as well as the waters below on the earth and above in the sky. In the same way God ordered that the ancient world of that time should perish in water. Through the rain from heaven as well as through the masses of water that burst forth from the earth and flooded everything. So it is certainly *not* true that everything has stayed as it was at the beginning. God intervened in the course of history as if out of nowhere, suddenly and powerfully. The flood overwhelmed the ancient world of that time and cleansed it of all the ungodly.

In the same way the present heavens and today's earth are being kept by God himself for the fire on the day of the coming judgment. That will mean the destruction of all the ungodly and scoffers. Back then it was God's cleansing judgment with water. The future judgment will happen through fire. As surely as the flood came, so surely and suddenly will God's consuming judgment come.

The question of when all this will happen, and how long it has already taken and will still take, should not trouble you, dear friends. For with our Lord it is not our earthly measure of time that rules. One day with him is a thousand years with us. And a thousand years with us are like a single day with him. Be sure of it: The Lord is *not* delaying his coming. He has promised us that. Some think he is deliberately making us wait a long time – or perhaps will not come at all! We should not think that way. Rather, he is patient with everyone. For he does not want anyone to be lost. That is why he grants us Jews, as well as the nations, indeed all people, plenty of time to change their minds and turn around.

The promise remains unchanged and will be fulfilled: The *day of our Lord* will come! And it will come like a thief in the night. Unexpectedly. Precisely when very few are counting on it. This day will be mighty and unique. The rebellious heavenly powers will be judged, and the heavens above the earth will pass away with a crackling roar. In this way the earth and everything people have done and made on it will, figuratively speaking, lie exposed and be handed over to the fire of God's judgment. Everything that has no lasting substance will be destroyed. The cleansing fire of judgment will melt everything on the earth. Only the righteous in Christ will still be found on it. Only they will remain forever.

The angels who fell into sin, the perverse events in Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as the wickedness of a whole generation before the great flood – they are harbingers of what will definitely come upon us too.

Does all this have meaning for our life today as well? Absolutely: Live in such a way that what you do and what you leave undone has lasting substance and *eternal value*. Only that will survive the judgment by fire. Be holy and live for the glory of God! Wait with eager longing for the day of God! Whoever lives like this longs for this day of God to come as quickly as possible. Then all the supernatural rebellion of heavenly powers will be removed, and the heavens will catch fire and melt in the blaze.

We are not unhappy about this consuming judgment by fire. For in its place God will make a *new heaven* and a *new earth* our eternal home. That is what the prophet Isaiah already announced. The old earth will be cleansed in the judgment – namely from sinners and from sin and all its consequences. As it was back then in the flood. But now it will happen through fire. Comparable to a hot smelting of gold. The earth will be cleansed, transformed, and created anew. It will be a place where – unlike today – perfect *righteousness* is at home forever. The new earth will be completely different from the one we know now. It will be completely free. Free from death, from every kind of curse, injustice, sickness, war, hatred, hunger, poverty, fear, and the struggle for survival. But free also from joylessness, loneliness, depression, and inner emptiness. This new earth, however, will be inhabited only by those who seek and honor God.

Precisely this perspective, and nothing less than that, is the *goal* of our journey of faith. So let yourselves be challenged to stand before him in the light, blameless and spotless, on the day of God's promise. We meet this holy God in peace – without any fear. We are to be found as righteous people. We pass through the judgment that strikes this world in order to enter the new world, the eternal *reign* of Jesus Christ.

And I say it once more: The fact that Jesus' return seems to be delayed means salvation for the world. For he is patient. In this way he still grants people time and room for repentance and turning around.

This is also what our dear brother Paul wrote in his letters, full of wisdom. Admittedly, they are sometimes not entirely easy to understand. And sadly they are twisted and misunderstood by those who are not firm in the faith or are

ignorant. But they do that with all the other Scriptures too, and so bring ruin upon themselves.

But you, my dear brothers and sisters, who now already know all this in advance through my letter, be watchful! Be on your guard so that you are not swept away by the headwind and the posturing of these lawless people and fall from the firmness of your faith.

Rather, I encourage you: ***Grow*** in grace! ***Recognize*** the overflowing grace of our God more and more. Stake your life on the grace of God in Christ. Make progress in faith. Above all, grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Remember who he is and what he has done for us. Remember, too, his words and commands. Bear witness to him. Love him. Honor him. Worship him and do what he has said.

To him be the glory! To whom else? Already today we love and honor him. And how much more on the day of God, when the reign of Jesus shines forth finally and forever, when the new heaven and the new earth will be filled with the knowledge and glory of the Lord! Amen.

The Letter of Jude

- Our most holy faith
- The deceivers
- Deception
- God's judgment
- The protection of God's love
- How we treat one another
- Our goal

The Letter of Jude

Here I, Jude, am writing, who belong to Jesus Christ body and soul and serve him. I am the physical brother of James – and of the Lord Jesus. I am writing to you who have been called by God through the gospel. To follow him. To you who are loved by our God and Father as his own children. You are secure in God. His treasure and possession. Kept by Christ, who holds you fast in everything that happens. God's mercy, his peace, and his love will be given to you ever more abundantly. In this way your life will be fulfilled. And it will become visible what he has given you.

I had so looked forward to writing to you about the great salvation we share. To set before your eyes the great mercy of God. But also how hopeless our situation and our lostness were. But for good reason I have to concentrate on something even more important. I felt positively compelled to urge you and call on you to fight for the faith that was once for all handed down. The faith that the apostles received from our Lord Jesus and delivered to us. This faith, which gave us salvation, is in danger! For certain people have crept into the fellowship of believers. With cunning and the art of seduction. They take the grace of God as permission to live in debauchery and sin. They say: We can do what we want; God will always forgive. In this way they deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Him we are to obey – and not run after sinful desires. But their judgment and end are already certain now. That is how it has already been announced. We know God's verdict on those who do such things from the ancient traditions.

You surely know these stories from the Hebrew Bible and from the Jewish traditions. I will remind you of just three events that fit your situation today well. As a warning against these unscrupulous deceivers.

The Lord set Israel, his people, free from slavery in Egypt in a spectacular way. Nevertheless he punished those among the people who did not believe and let them all perish in the wilderness.

Even angels, the sons of God, were put in eternal chains, in darkness. Until the great day of judgment. Because they abandoned their calling and their position as angels and united with human women in the days of Noah.

Unbelievable: They fathered giants and deliberately brought chaos into the world before the great flood.

Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality. Men pursued flesh other than that of women. They demanded sex with the heavenly messengers whom God sent to Lot. That is how Genesis 19 reports it. These cities, on which the fire of judgment fell, serve as an example that they must endure eternal punishment in fire. Left to themselves forever, lost and alone.

God's judgment does not fail to come: physical death, as with Israel in the wilderness. Bound in the underworld, as with the fallen sons of God. The eternal judgment by fire, as with Sodom and Gomorrah.

All these sins, or very similar ones, you will find in these people I am warning you about. They imagine that they receive confirmation of what they do through visions. For their sexual immorality. For rejecting the authority of God and of Christ. And for their blasphemous talk about dark angelic powers, without having in any way the power and authority of God to do so.

Even Michael, one of the mightiest angels of all, when he disputed with the devil – a mighty and dark angelic power, the adversary of God – about the body of Moses, did not dare even to pronounce a blasphemous judgment on him and his evil intentions. Out of respect! Michael only said: The Lord rebuke you!

These people blaspheme something they have no idea about. They do not know what they are taking on. But in what they do know about, what they understand and do instinctively like animals, in that they perish in their animal-like drives. They have no moral compass whatsoever, nor any spiritual insight.

Woe to them! These deceivers have reason to be afraid. They are doing what Cain, the murderer and envier, already did. They are religious! But they move away from God's presence and reject his authority.

Like Balaam, they do things for money. Out of greed and the craving for profit. They let themselves be bribed and fall into the error of thinking they could accomplish something in the spiritual world.

Like the rebellious Korah, they will perish in God's judgment. They presume to take what is not theirs.

It is a disgrace that these people are present at your shared meals. They stuff themselves and act as if everything were fine.

They are like clouds that announce rain but do not bring it. They lie. They are driven back and forth by the wind. Without a hold.

They are like trees in late autumn. But they have no fruit whatsoever. They are bare, dead for the second time. Uprooted.

Wild waves of the sea. Their shame foams over. Windbags.

Wandering stars, thrown off course, giving no orientation.

Like the fallen angels, they go into the blackest darkness. For all time.

You know that Enoch, Adam's descendant in the seventh generation, already spoke the word of the Lord about such people: "The Lord has come, together with his holy angels. He stands in their midst. To carry out judgment. Because of their ungodly deeds. Because of their insolent and ungodly words. Against him, the only Lord and Master."

They are always grumbling and are never satisfied with their situation.

They seek only their own desires and do not ask about God's will.

They speak big and arrogant words about themselves.

They grovel before people and flatter their way in when they can gain some advantage.

When you meet these people, or when they have already crept in among you, then remember the words of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. Beloved of God, they foretold that at the end of time scoffers would come. People who follow their urges in an ungodly way. Their whole life mocks the holiness of God. These people poison your communities and stir up divisions. They are people who are earthly-minded and do not have the Spirit of God living in them. They do not know the true life of God.

But you, dear friends, have our most holy faith as the foundation of your fellowship. Build up the church on it and do not destroy it like these false people. This faith, which the Lord and his apostles proclaimed to us, cannot be replaced by anything. That is why we are to fight for it, as I said at the beginning. Do not be passive toward these false people. Stand up!

Find strength for this in prayer. Pray out of the Holy Spirit! Be aware of his presence and leading. Let him carry you inwardly and in your heart. He leads us into God's presence. Never pray merely as a pious fulfillment of duty, but come joyfully to God's throne. Again and again!

Remain in the protection of God's love, which is unchangeably great. Remain in Jesus' love and keep his commands. Completely different from these

false people, who deny the Master.

Hope in the mercy of the coming Lord Jesus Christ. He will meet us on his day and bring us safely across into eternal life.

Be merciful to those who doubt this hope. Stand by them, and do not judge them harshly or insult them.

Save others as if snatching them out of the fire. Those who have all but given up the faith. Do everything you can, as if you were rescuing someone from a burning house.

Have mercy on others who have already been led astray by these people and are imitating their lifestyle. But be careful not to tolerate their lifestyle silently. Hate these sins and expose them. But never hate those who have been led astray.

Take courage! Our Savior-God can protect us so that we do not stumble into doubt or be led astray. He can keep us until we reach the goal. He will gather us all before his face. No blemish will be on us. Not terror but heavenly joy and jubilation fill us in his presence. Then the celebration begins. And never ends.

That is what our God is like. Our unique Savior. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, God has become our Savior.

To him belong, and to him are due, all honor, majesty, power, and authority. Before all time and now and forever.

Amen.

The Letter to the Hebrews

- Jesus – this is what God is like
- Jesus, our great apostle and high priest
- Prayer and worship at God's throne
- Life in the sanctuary
- The new covenant
- It is finished
- Made holy and perfect forever!
- The great Day of Atonement fulfilled in Jesus Christ
- Faith
- The unshakable kingdom

The Letter to the Hebrews

Look back, you Hebrews! Into your history. From the beginning Yahweh God has spoken. Often. In various and impressive ways. He made himself known through the prophets. He sent them. They delivered his words. But that time is over for good. For God the Son came and spoke to the world. Yes, God spoke through the Son in a way he never had before. It was the last prophetic word, but the perfect one – and therefore the authoritative word. It was the greatest message, surpassing everything. Yes, the *Son* himself was the message. He was the great salvation for all.

This Son is appointed heir of all things. Everything will belong to him. Everything was created through the Son. The Father commissioned him to do so. All this happened just as Yahweh God willed it. For the Son is and remains, in what he is in his very nature, *and* in all his works, the perfect reflection and radiance of the glory of God. This glory determines the nature, the earthly and bodily reality and presence of Jesus. In the Son, in Jesus, the glory of God is revealed and shows itself. Visible, tangible, within reach. What until then could be known of God only in fragments, bit by bit, through the prophets, now becomes completely clear in Jesus. The eternal God is exactly the one who has come in Jesus. Just as we have come to know Jesus, so God was and always has been. And so he will always be.

Everything the Son has created lives from him. As if by an umbilical cord. Everything exists only through him – through his mighty word of life and almighty power. Everything is in his hand.

The Son, Jesus, personally fought for the urgently necessary cleansing from our sins. He paid for it with his life. He *made possible* the *impossible*. I will speak about this often. Because it is so important. That is why he has taken the highest place of honor. That is at the right hand of the Majesty of God. On his eternal throne on high.

In the creation order, angels rank above human beings. But now the *man* Jesus has become greater and mightier than they are. He has received a more excellent name. As a human being. This name stands for himself. For the Son. With this name he surpasses all the angels.

I will prove this with seven quotations from the Holy Scriptures. He has received from God a more excellent rank and name. For did God ever say to an angel what is said of the Messiah-King in Psalm 2: “You are my Son; today I have begotten you”? No! He, the Son, had no beginning and was not created either, but was brought forth into the world in a unique way. As the incomprehensible incarnation of Yahweh, his becoming human.

Or perhaps in 2 Samuel 7, where it says about David’s descendant: “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”? Both words are fulfilled in their prophetic breadth and depth only in Jesus. These words are timelessly true. They point especially to his becoming human. But also to his resurrection and exaltation as King of the universe!

God will lead his unique Son Jesus down again from the heavenly throne into the visible world, onto the inhabited earth. All people will see it. And all God’s angels will go down on their knees before him, pay him homage, and give him honor and worship. It was just the same at his first coming – when Jesus, God the Son, became human.

Of the angels God says in Psalm 104: “I make the angels winds and send them out. They are my servants, whom I make flames of fire.” But of his Son he says something completely different. For he, the Firstborn, is not created and never had a beginning. In the words of Psalm 45 it is said of the Son, Jesus: “Your throne, O God, stands firm, and above all things, without beginning and without end, forever and ever. The scepter, your staff of rule, is righteousness. Your reign is righteous.” For in his earthly life Jesus loved God’s righteousness above all and hated lawlessness. That is why God anointed *him* with the oil of joy and gladness. He called him to be king, no one else. Not an angel either. He is the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ.” And *we* are his companions, not the angels!

Of the Son God says in the words of Psalm 102: “In the beginning you created the universe; it is the work of your mighty hands. Yet it will perish, but you will remain. Everything grows old and decays, like a worn-out coat that is rolled up and changed. The universe will be transformed and changed, so that it does not fall apart. It will become new through the Son. But you, the Son, you are the same, the Unchangeable One, whose years never end and who never needs renewal.”

Did God ever speak to an angel the words of Psalm 110: “Sit with me on the throne, and be sure that the day is coming when you will set your feet on all your enemies, as on a footstool”? He receives the place of honor. He will reign. Not the angels.

The angels are and remain spirit beings. Created to serve. Yes, they exist to help and stand by those who are waiting for full salvation. They help those who are on their way along the difficult road to the eternal reign of the Son. And to God’s eternal rest. Angels have often served believers. Just as they did with Jesus.

Chapter 2

Because we are on the way to this great goal, we must pay careful attention to what we have heard in the gospel. Otherwise, like a ship, we will not reach the harbor. Drift past the goal. Suffer shipwreck in our faith.

Through angels the law of Moses was given to us, the Hebrews, on Mount Sinai. Before the heavenly council of the angels. And these words were unambiguous: Whoever does them will live. Whoever does not do them will die. There is just retribution for everything we do – on the basis of the law that was given to us through angels. But if we carelessly pass over the great salvation, the rescue through *the Son*, or put it at risk, indeed disregard it, what then? How can we then still escape the righteous judgment of God? Where can we then still flee?

This salvation came and began through our Lord Jesus. He proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom. After his death and resurrection he commissioned his disciples to proclaim everywhere the great salvation he had accomplished. They also confirmed to us the good news of the kingdom and of salvation with which Jesus had begun. God himself has confirmed this message to this day through supernatural signs and wonders. He still does. He does this through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but also through extraordinary mighty deeds. Wherever this word was and is proclaimed and believed, the power of the kingdom of God is at work. These events allow no other conclusion than that this message comes from God himself. You should pay attention to this word *of the Son*! He was the last, but at the same time the greatest prophet, for he is the Son.

Back then God placed the earth under the rule of human beings – and not of the angels. He has not entrusted the world to come to the angels either, or given it to them as an inheritance. In Psalm 8 it says: “What is man that you think of him, or the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels – the Elohim, the created sons of God – but you crowned him with glory and honor; you put everything under his feet.” If God entrusted and subjected everything to the Son, the Messiah Jesus, then nothing is left that is not subject to him. The angels included. Everything means everything. The unique, incomparable, and anointed man Jesus will rule the world to come together with human beings, with us, his companions, whom he has redeemed and called. Even the angels.

However, we cannot yet see and experience this universal reign of Jesus in its unimaginable dimension. But one day the time will come. When his hour has come. But what we already recognize now in faith and with the eyes of the heart is this: Jesus, who during his earthly life as a human being was lower than the angels. Who suffered death for all and tasted the full bitterness of a violent death. For all of us. So that in this way God’s grace would benefit the whole creation. And because he did the impossible, let himself be crucified, and died, he is now clothed with God’s glory and honor, indeed crowned with the victor’s crown of glory.

It is also entirely in keeping with the will of God – through whom and for whom all things were created – to make him, the Messiah Jesus, perfect through his sufferings on earth. Perfect for his office and ministry as High Priest, about which I will speak at length. He, Jesus, is the author, the leader, indeed the captain of our salvation. As such he leads us, the many sons and daughters, unstoppably and victoriously to the heavenly glory that was previously closed to us.

Christ has made us holy and led us out to God. Everything comes from God, who fathered his Son as a human being on earth. Just as he did us, his sons and daughters. That is why the Messiah *as a human being* is not ashamed before the angels, who after all rank above human beings, to call us *human beings* his brothers and sisters. In the heavenly council of the angels, the Elohim, he openly confesses, as Psalm 22 says: “I will declare your glorious name, O God, to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the heavenly council of the angels I will sing your praise.” And elsewhere it says: “I will put my trust in him, in the

God who wanted to have this new family.” At the cross they mocked him, saying he should trust in God to be saved: He trusted in his God, yet he died nevertheless. But this is the wonderful result, as Isaiah 8 says: “Here am I, and the children God has given me as brothers and sisters.” The Messiah presents all of us, his great, indeed countless human family, to the heavenly council, and proclaims and celebrates that he has bound himself to us forever.

How could this come about? How was it possible? He, Jesus of Nazareth, became fully and completely human. He made our human and mortal existence entirely his own, so that he was what we are. Except for sin.

We human beings were subject to death and the fear of death day after day. But he came to defeat the devil, who holds the power of death. He came to break the power of death and of fear. Through sin and transgression we stand under the death sentence of the law. And the devil, the accuser, insists on this sentence. But Christ set us free through his own sacrificial death, by paying the ransom for our sins with his own death. In this way he was able to free all who all their lives were in distress of conscience and fear of death under the law, which they can never fulfill. Now the power of death is broken and ineffective for all who follow the leader of our salvation, Jesus Christ. Our captain of salvation has defeated the devil and taken away his power and his weapon: In him there is freedom from sin and death!

He was not concerned with the salvation of angels. After all, he did not become an angel; he became a human being. He takes care of the seed, of the descendants of Abraham, you Hebrews. It is about you and also about all who believe. For in Abraham the blessing was promised to the nations as well. And all who believe are Abraham’s children.

So I say once more that Jesus had to become like his brothers and sisters in every way – except, of course, for sin. Only in this way could he become a merciful, compassionate, and faithful High Priest for us before God. What has he done for us? He has taken away our sins. Removed them and put an end to them. That is what happened – as a model pointing to Jesus – in the temple in Jerusalem for the people of Israel. But he is the fulfillment. He has obtained forgiveness of our sins. Perfectly, once for all.

He has not only become *High Priest* for our problem of sin. No, he remains so until we reach the goal. He helps us on the journey of faith. He intercedes for us before God. He prays for us. For we are weak, surrounded by

temptations and persecutions that want to lead us off the path. He himself experienced and endured these sufferings, persecutions, and hardships. More intensely than we will ever experience them. As I have already said, that has equipped him for this high-priestly ministry, so that he can sympathize, help, and stand at our side. Had he not become a human being, had he not experienced and endured what happened, he could never have become such a High Priest.

Chapter 3

That is why, you holy ones, you redeemed brothers and sisters in the faith, look to Jesus in faith. Concentrate on him. He is our High Priest and God's Apostle. As High Priest he is with God for us. As Apostle he is with us for God. All of you are partners and sharers in God's call through the gospel. God's call came to you from heaven. And it is there that he calls you – into his heavenly sanctuary.

Jesus was and is faithful to the one who appointed him to this ministry and office – as Moses also was in all his house, Israel, the old people of God. But Jesus has greater honor than Moses. In the same way the builder of a house has greater honor than the house he has built. Every house, of course, is built by someone; but the one who built everything is God himself. Jesus is God, who created everything, including Moses and his house.

Moses was faithful in his service in this house. That was a model and testimony of what has been proclaimed to you. That is Christ, the Son. He stands *over* this house. Not like Moses. He was only a servant *in* this house. The house that Christ has created and that belongs to him is us: his family, the daughters and sons of God!

But watch out! You are that only if you *hold on* to the joyful confidence and the hope we can be so proud of – and at the same time remain steadfast to the end of your life or until the glorious coming of the Messiah.

The Holy Spirit speaks in Psalm 95: "Today, when the voice of God rings out, listen carefully and do what he says. Instead of hardening your hearts. For that is how it was in the rebellion, in the days of testing, in the wilderness. Back then your ancestors tested me by challenging me and putting me to the test in doubt, although they had seen my faithfulness and care for 40 years. That is why I was angry with that generation. I said: Their hearts are always going astray.

They simply never recognized my good ways, and they did not want to. Then in my holy anger I swore: This generation that left Egypt – except Joshua and Caleb – will not enter my rest, the promised land of Canaan.”

Precisely for this reason, watch yourselves, so that no one has such an evil heart. A heart full of unbelief, ready to fall away from the living God and from the Messiah. You have come to know and experience this God and his goodness through the Messiah Jesus. That is why you should encourage one another daily in this critical and embattled time. Do so constantly, so that none of you is blinded by the deceitfulness of sin, led astray into unbelief, and hardened. It is a deception to believe that one finds rest by giving up the faith. Remember: We have become companions forever, like true brothers and sisters of the Messiah Jesus. Can there be more than that? Is it not worth going on resolutely in faith? We experience everything as true and real only if we hold steadfastly to the end the confidence of faith we had at the beginning. And do not give up the faith. There is no shortcut on the journey to God’s rest.

God’s warning is: “Today, indeed whenever you hear my voice, do not harden your hearts as you did back then in the rebellion.” Who was it back then who hardened his heart and provoked God? Was it not all those who had come out of Egypt following Moses? With whom was God angry? For 40 years? Was it not all who had sinned and whose bodies remained lying in the wilderness? To which Israelites had he sworn that they would not enter his rest? Precisely to those who were disobedient and hardened their hearts against him. We see clearly that they could not enter the promised land because of their unbelief.

Chapter 4

You Hebrews, and all who hear and read my letter: Let us be seriously concerned to actually reach the rest of God that he has promised us! You must not fall back on the way there. And above all: not miss the goal at the end. The good news of God’s coming rest has been proclaimed to us. Just as it was proclaimed to them back then by the spies, about the rich land of Canaan. But the message of Canaan’s glory was of no use to them. For they did not believe it. We, all who believe the message about the Messiah, will enter the heavenly rest. But back then it was completely different. They did not enter the rest that God had promised them. For again and again they hardened their hearts and did not trust God.

From the beginning God shows that there is still a rest. Even though the works of his creation were already completed at the beginning. That is why they should have believed. Moses said: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” But here it says: “They, the generation that went out of Egypt, will certainly not enter my rest.” But to us it is promised that we will enter the rest, provided we trust. Those who heard the good news back then, however, did not come to rest because of their disobedience. But now God has once again, long after the exodus from Egypt, set a new day of grace – a new “Today.” Through David he promises in Psalm 95, as quoted earlier: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” For if Joshua, the successor of Moses and leader of Israel, had brought that generation into the final rest, he would not now speak of another rest. So there still remains a future Sabbath rest for the people of God. Neither the seventh day of creation, the Sabbath day, nor the land of Canaan brought God’s final rest. Only through the returning Messiah Jesus, through his sacrifice and through his reign, will God’s final and eternal Sabbath rest become reality. For whoever has one day entered this Sabbath rest, this peace of God, has – just like God himself – come to rest from his works. Just as could be seen at the beginning.

So let us confidently do everything we can to enter his rest. None of us should fall on the way there, as those people did back then. It is not about the sins we sadly commit every day. It is about believing in Christ, the Messiah, and holding on to him. Do not let go of him. He holds you fast!

God tests us, each one individually, as to whether we have genuine faith. He tests us through his written word. This word is living and therefore effective. It speaks to us as if God were speaking to us directly and personally. And his word is sharp, indeed sharper than a double-edged sword blade. For it penetrates into our innermost inner life. It judges and lays bare our deepest world of thought and our attitudes. This sword manages, figuratively speaking, to divide soul and spirit, just as it does bones and marrow. In this way we can understand and assess ourselves much better. But also recognize dangers and destroy them in the power of this word – or simply avoid them.

There is nothing in the great creation that the Creator does not see. No creature, not a single human being, can hide from God or flee from him. All are as if naked before him. We cannot fool him. He sees everything. As creatures we are responsible to him and will one day have to give account to him.

That is God's nature and reality. And although we could be very afraid now because of it, we may go on with confidence and courage. For we have – like Israel – a High Priest. But not in the old way. Our High Priest has ascended through the heavens. Yes, all the way to God's heavenly throne! Into the heavenly and eternal sanctuary. He has atoned for all our sins. Precisely for this reason we hold fast to our confession of Jesus! Our High Priest can understand our weaknesses, our fears and worries, our tiredness and weariness, but also doubt and resignation. He suffers and feels with us. He can do that like no one else. For throughout his whole life as a human being he was tempted in every way, just as we are. Even to death on the cross. He was assailed and put to the test. He was tempted to refuse the cross and the terrible pain and to take the easy way without the cross. But he stood firm. Unlike us. For he never gave in to sin and unbelief. He remained sinless and did not sin!

So let us come before God with courage and confidence. No matter where we are. For the Son of God, who calls us his brothers and sisters, is always at God's throne *for us*. He invites us to come freely to the *throne of grace*. Let us spread out all our worries, fears, apprehensions, and doubts at this heavenly throne. Give thanks. Worship. Let us spend time there at the throne of grace – in faith and in the Holy Spirit. Come to rest – and find his peace. Listen to him.

For us his throne is *not* a place of accusation. But of grace. There we are welcome. We are expected. From there we receive mercy and grace. Precisely when we need it. God will always answer our requests and pleas. In the way that is good for us. But in his time. At the right time! Never too late! Our help comes from God, who made heaven and earth.

Chapter 5

A high priest is chosen from among human beings to stand before God on behalf of human beings. He brings gifts and sacrifices to the altar for them. For the sins of the people of Israel. He himself is patient with and understands those who are ignorant and going astray, that is, those who have sinned. For he himself is also a weak human being. Someone who sins like everyone else. This means: he also has to offer sacrifices for himself.

With *Jesus* it is completely different: he was not appointed high priest by human beings. He was called to it by God. As Aaron was in the beginning. Of Christ it says in Psalm 2: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father."

In Psalm 110 God says about him: “You are a priest forever. Not like Aaron, but like Melchizedek.”

What did his earthly life look like? What qualified him to be high priest? What did he have that Aaron did not have? His life was filled with prayer. With petitions and pleading to the only one who could save him from death. Jesus even pleaded with his God with loud cries and tears. That is how deeply and heavily the suffering struck him. He was heard. Because he trusted God alone and obeyed him alone. And feared and respected him more than anything. And that although he was the eternal Son, indeed God – equal to the Father. Before he became human, he did not know this obedience. It was new for him. As a human being he learned obedience. He was obedient in spite of all suffering, opposition, and hostility. These challenges were not in vain. For now he has reached the goal. Made perfect on God’s throne. Something unique has come out of this holy life and death. His mission is accomplished. For his opponents he was the occasion for crucifixion. For us he is the occasion and the source of eternal salvation. In this way he has brought about final, eternal, and all-embracing rescue. For *all* who follow and obey him.

This is exactly the kind of priest God was looking for! Jesus is now a priest in the order of Melchizedek. What that means I will come to later. When he ascended into heaven, into the heavenly sanctuary, God received and honored him solemnly. God greeted him with the words: “You are high priest like Melchizedek.” In this way God let everyone know that now at last he had this priest whom he had always wanted to have. And with this priest at last also an eternal salvation, which this priest has won!

There is a lot more to say about this. But it is also not all that easy to explain. For unfortunately you have become sluggish and hard of hearing. And that although you have known the Messiah for a long time. *You* could and should have been teachers long ago. But you need to learn the ABCs of God’s sayings all over again. And from the ground up, as if you were hearing them for the first time. You have to be given milk, like little babies, instead of proper food. Everyone who – figuratively speaking – still gets milk is inexperienced. He does not really know the word of God’s righteousness, which is given as a gift through Christ alone. Nor can he pass it on in a way others can understand. He is like a small child who is not yet of age.

Proper meals are for those who are grown up in the faith, for the spiritually mature. They are used to it and therefore practiced in distinguishing between good and evil, wrong and right. They know how and why they hold on to Jesus Christ and his gospel even in persecution and rejection.

Chapter 6

All the same, I am not going to start again from the beginning now – as with the times tables. That is what you would have expected. No. We have to make progress and grow up. I will only mention a few things that are right and important. They were already familiar to you before you came to know the Messiah. But through the Messiah you have received much more. *Take hold* of the whole wealth of the one who ascended into heaven and is seated on the throne of God. He has accomplished everything and at the same time given us gifts beyond measure. So do not hide behind these old and familiar things, which your fellow countrymen also believe, so as not to meet with opposition from them.

Now we also have to leave certain elementary teachings behind, and not start again from the beginning: with repentance from dead and useless works and rites that cannot save; faith in God; the teaching about washings, or the laying on of hands; or the teaching about the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. If God gives time and opportunity, we will talk about these again too. But now the point is to recognize and hold on to the greatness of our heavenly high priest and what he has accomplished and does for us.

Unfortunately there are those who fall away from faith in the Messiah and return to Judaism. And that although they were once enlightened, recognized the Messiah, and concretely experienced, indeed tasted, the heavenly gift of the Holy Spirit. Although they heard the word of God and understood it. They were even able to see and experience the miracles of God's coming new world. Nevertheless they fell away from Christ. It is as if – as back then – they had crucified the Messiah once again for themselves. And let their fellow countrymen who reject Jesus know it. For such people, who give up the faith and return to life under the law and to dead works, it is virtually impossible to find the freedom and grace of Christ again.

A picture that illustrates well a life of faith, but also of falling away from Christ: The farmland often receives rain and God's blessing, and because of sun

and rain it produces useful and edible vegetables. But the same farmland can, in spite of the rain, also grow nothing but thorns and thistles. Nobody needs things like that. They can even hurt. So thorns and thistles are not a good sign. Rather a kind of curse. In the end everything is burned. Whoever falls away from Christ is, so to speak, like this soil. In spite of the blessing he has experienced, in spite of good fruit he may once have produced, now he produces nothing but weeds.

Brothers and sisters in the faith, loved by God: I am speaking so unmistakably and harshly on purpose. But in you we see the good fruit. The Lord's salvation is yours. How could God be unjust and forget what you have done for him and for his people? You love his name, the Messiah. One can see it in your works, in your service for him and for his people. I want each of you to show this same diligence. By this one recognizes the assurance of faith and a holding on to hope to the very end. Then you will not become sluggish. So be imitators of those who through faith and perseverance inherit God's promise.

That is how it was with Abraham too. God gave him the promise and swore an oath by himself: "I will surely bless you richly and greatly increase your numbers." And because Abraham persevered, he received the promise – although everything spoke against it and it took so long until it was fulfilled. People swear by someone greater, God by himself. An oath puts an end to all argument.

So by an oath on himself God has proven and guaranteed to the heirs of the promise – and that is you – that his purpose cannot change. So through two unchangeable things – namely his oath and the promise – we have strong comfort that we will reach the goal. God cannot lie. We have taken refuge with him, our Messiah. He has given us new hope. It directs our faith toward what lies ahead of us, which will certainly be fulfilled. This hope is no daydream, no illusion. It is like a sure and firm anchor for us. Our innermost being is bound to heaven. The *anchor of hope* is not anchored in us, but in the innermost heavenly sanctuary. At the throne of God. For that is where Jesus has entered for us. As our forerunner. There we will follow him one day. That is our promise. That is our hope. That is what he has sworn. Yes, he has become our high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Chapter 7

Now who is this *Melchizedek*? He was the king of Jerusalem. In the time of Abraham. He was also priest of God Most High. He was a priest-king. He went out to meet Abraham and blessed him when he was returning from his victory over the kings who had carried off his nephew Lot. That is how it is described in Genesis 14.

Abraham gave him a tenth of the spoils of war. Translated, Melchizedek means “king of righteousness.” The city of Salem also means peace. So he is king of righteousness and of peace. We know neither his father nor his mother. Nor any genealogy that would entitle him to the priesthood. We compare him with the Son of God. He is a magnificent foreshadowing of the Messiah. Of Melchizedek we know neither the beginning nor the end of his life. It is the same with the Son of God, the Messiah. Like Melchizedek he is a priest forever.

How great this king must have been, to whom Abraham, our forefather, even gave 10 percent of the spoils of war. The sons of Levi too, the priests, have the right and the duty under the law to take 10 percent from their brothers, their fellow countrymen, for their support. And that although these, just like themselves, are descended from Abraham and therefore all stand on the same level. Melchizedek is not even related to Abraham, and yet he received the 10 percent from him. Then he blessed Abraham, who – as I already said – had received the promise. What we must note here: it is always the lesser who is blessed by the greater! So Abraham honored Melchizedek!

The Levites, that is, people who are mortal, receive the 10 percent. In that sense even Levi – who is a receiver of the tithe – gave it to Melchizedek. For Levi did so indirectly through his forefather when he met Melchizedek, although Levi was not yet born.

Why, then, is yet another priest needed, one like Melchizedek? If forgiveness of sins, perfection, and free access to the sanctuary for all are supposed to be guaranteed by the priesthood of the Levites! On the basis of the law of Moses. If God changes the priesthood, does not this law also have to be changed?

That is exactly what we are saying with regard to Jesus, who does not come from the tribe of Levi. He comes from the tribe of Judah. About that tribe Moses said nothing that has anything to do with priestly service. Everything becomes even clearer now that a priest like Melchizedek actually has been

appointed. The Levitical priest is called according to the law of human rules of descent. But Jesus is called on the basis of the power of an indestructible life! It is uniquely testified by God of Christ, the Son: You – no one else – are a priest in the order of Melchizedek.

So the corresponding commandment of Moses regarding the priesthood is declared invalid because of its weakness and uselessness. The law did not lead to perfection. Instead, a better hope is now introduced – through this new priest. Through this hope we now all draw near to God.

His installation as priest took place with an oath sworn by God. Not so with those from the tribe of Levi. With Jesus we hear God say: “The Lord has sworn and will never regret it. You are a priest for all time in the order of Melchizedek.” In this position and function Jesus has also become the guarantor, indeed the guarantee and security, of a better covenant. I will come to that in detail in a moment.

In the Levitical priesthood one priest followed another, because they all died sooner or later. But he remains forever. His priesthood does not change. Nor can it be passed on to anyone else anymore. Because his priestly service is never interrupted and never ends, he is able to save completely and bring to the goal all who draw near to God through him in prayer and worship. He lives forever to stand up for them at the throne of God and to pray for them.

That is exactly the kind of high priest we needed. One who can represent us properly. One who is as holy, as innocent, and as pure as he is. Who, set apart from sinners, has now been raised higher than the heavens. And sits on God’s throne. One who does not need, like all those before him, to offer sacrifices first for his own sins and then for those of the people. No, he did not offer a sacrifice for himself. For the people he offered himself on the cross once for all.

The law of Moses appoints as high priests people who have weakness. People who sin. And die! The word of God’s oath, which came only after the giving of the law, appoints *the Son*. He was made perfect for this service. Through his life, his death, and his coronation in glory. For all eternity.

Chapter 8

The main point of what we are saying is this: we have a high priest who has sat down in the heavenly throne room. At the right hand of God’s majesty. He is

the minister of the true sanctuary. Not of the one that people once built, but of the one that the Lord himself has made.

Every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices. He also has to have them in order to do his service. If Christ were on earth, he could not be a priest at all, because the Levitical priests already offer gifts according to the law. This Levitical service and their tent sanctuary depict heavenly realities. The whole earthly worship and the sanctuary are a shadow of heavenly things. When Moses set up this tent, God's instruction to him was: "See to it that you make everything just as I showed you on the mountain."

How surpassing is the service of our high priest! In addition he has also become the mediator of a new covenant. This was established for us on the basis of much better promises. If the first covenant of the law had been faultless, a second would never have been sought. For back then, in Jeremiah 31, the Lord spoke while he rebuked his people: "Look, days are coming when I will establish a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will be different from the covenant I made with your ancestors on the day when I took you by the hand and led you out of Egypt. You did not live in my covenant. And so I no longer cared for you."

But this is the new covenant that I will establish anew with the house of Israel after these dark days of the broken covenant: I will anchor my perfect law in their thinking. Yes, I will write it into their hearts. I will be their God again, whom they know. They will be my people. Then they will no longer have to teach their neighbor: Come on, know the Lord, our God! For then they will all, the least and the greatest, truly know me. I will be gracious to them in spite of their wrongdoings. I will never again remember their sins.

Because he speaks of a *new* covenant, he has made the first one old. What grows old becomes obsolete. It will soon disappear forever.

Chapter 9

The first covenant had precise regulations for worship in the earthly sanctuary. This tent sanctuary looked like this: in the first part stood the seven-branched lampstand and the table with the consecrated bread. That was the Holy Place. The second tent, or rather the second part behind the second curtain, is called the Most Holy Place. Directly in front of it stood the golden altar of incense. And in the Most Holy Place stood the ark of the covenant. A chest made of

wood, completely overlaid with gold. In it was a golden jar with the manna from the wilderness. And Aaron's staff, which had sprouted. Finally the tablets of the law of the first covenant. On top of the chest were the cherubim of glory, the two angels of gold, looking down on the atonement cover. All these details are familiar to you. So I do not need to describe them any further.

Since the tent sanctuary is arranged and divided in this way, the priest goes into the first part every day to do his service. Only the high priest goes into the second part. Only once a year. He goes in with the blood of the sacrifice. He offers it for himself and for the sins of the people. By this the Holy Spirit makes it clear that the way into the Most Holy Place is not open, nor even known, as long as the first part does not allow direct access. So the time in which this whole service is carried out is useless as far as salvation and forgiveness are concerned. For all the gifts and sacrifices cannot relieve the conscience, let alone make those who offer them perfect. For food, drink, and washings are external things that cannot make the heart perfect, cleanse it, or change it. But the time has now come when one can have a perfect, a cleansed, indeed a set-free conscience.

For the Messiah has come. The high priest of the perfect things. Whose service brings about perfection. That is how it was foretold. He has come for a greater, indeed a perfect sanctuary. Not built with hands. It is not of this world at all. Nor does it have anything to do anymore with the blood of goats and calves. For here the blood of Christ is at work. After his own blood flowed on the cross and obtained eternal redemption, he entered the heavenly sanctuary when he was taken up into heaven. He went in in the power and lasting validity of his own shed blood. His blood surpasses that of animals. It is worth infinitely more.

And he does not come out of the sanctuary again like the high priest in the earthly sanctuary. Nor does he have to come out again. For he has obtained an eternal and perfect redemption for us. There is nothing to repeat.

If the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow, sprinkled with water on those who had touched a dead body, make them outwardly holy – how much more will the blood of Christ bring about real sanctification. For through the power and guidance of God's eternal Spirit he freely gave himself to God, sacrificed on the cross. And that without any blemish or anything blameworthy. His blood does not cleanse and sanctify outwardly like the blood of animal

sacrifices. No. It cleanses your conscience! And that from dead and useless works of the law, which you know will not save you. With a free and cleansed conscience you can at last serve the living God.

He has become the mediator of a new, second covenant with God. Because he died and sacrificed himself to redeem us from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. Through him, our mediator, all who have accepted the call of the gospel can receive the promised and eternal inheritance. A covenant only comes into force once the death of a sacrifice has taken place. Without the death and the blood of a sacrifice it has no effect. That is why the first, the old covenant was also put into effect with blood. When Moses had read out all the commands of the covenant to the people, he sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices with water and scarlet wool on the book of the covenant and on all the people. He said, as Exodus 24 reports: “This is the blood of the covenant to which you are now bound.” But not only the book of the law and the people were sprinkled. The tent sanctuary and the vessels used in worship too, indeed almost everything is cleansed with blood. That is what the law itself prescribes. Accordingly there is no forgiveness or cleansing of sins *under the law* – without the shedding of blood.

It was necessary for the tabernacle, which is after all a copy of the heavenly sanctuary, to be cleansed with blood. But for the heavenly sanctuary a much better sacrifice was necessary. For Christ, as we know, did not enter the earthly sanctuary built by human beings, but directly into heaven, to the throne of God. There he stands up for us as high priest. Before the face of God.

He did not go in there to sacrifice himself again and again. That is how it was with the high priest under the old covenant, who goes in again and again, not with his own blood but with the blood of an animal sacrifice. Under this order of priests and sacrifices Christ would have had to suffer many times.

No, the Messiah appeared once on earth at the time appointed by God. He came to solve the problem of sin once and for all by giving himself on the cross as the perfect sacrifice. And just as once and irrevocably as people are destined to die once and then to appear before God’s judgment. The Messiah was sacrificed once, indeed once for all, to bear and blot out the sins of many people in their place.

Then he will leave the sanctuary once more: not in order to go in again for the forgiveness of sins. No, he will come out and appear to all who are waiting

for him. Once again: not to solve the problem of sin, but to save completely those who trust him and to lead them into the heavenly sanctuary, into God's eternal rest.

Chapter 10

The law with its regulations for sacrifices and the building instructions for the tent sanctuary is like a shadow of something greater. Namely of the perfect things that have now been revealed and have come in Christ. That is why sacrifices that are offered again and again, every year on the great Day of Atonement, can never make perfect. On this day the whole people comes to the tent sanctuary expecting forgiveness. If forgiveness and perfection had been given there, the whole sacrificial service could have been ended. Then people and priests would no longer have needed to have a bad conscience about unforgiven sins. On the great Day of Atonement – and on other occasions too – the blood of goats and bulls *cannot possibly* take away sins. Even though the annual Day of Atonement with its sacrificial rites reminds people of their sins again and again! But it could not bring about a lasting assurance of forgiveness. Perhaps peace of conscience for a year.

When Jesus came into the world, he pointed to the words of Psalm 40 and showed that they were fulfilled in himself: “Animal sacrifices and grain offerings you, God, never really wanted. But a body you have given me. Burnt offerings and sin offerings did not truly please you. Then I said: Look at me. I have come to fulfill your saving will. That is already written about me in the scroll of the Old Testament.” These words of God come much later than the law of Moses with its regulations for sacrifices, and they announce something new and much better.

When he said: “You took no pleasure in any of the sacrifices, indeed you did not want them at all” (although they are offered according to the law of God) – then the Son, who understood God's heart and will, said: “Look, *I* have come to fulfill your saving will.”

In this way he does away with the first covenant and its sacrificial service in order to establish the second, new, and eternal covenant. For by God's saving will, which the Messiah carried out and fulfilled, we have been made holy. Cleansed from sins. Through the sacrifice of Jesus' body offered once for all on the cross at Golgotha.

Every priest of the old covenant *stands* there day after day and performs his service. Again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. How could they? Sacrificed animals know nothing about sin. But Christ, the perfect priest, has offered a single sacrifice for sins. Himself, the sinless one. His sacrifice has made *everything* right. It does not need to be repeated. That is why he has *sat down* forever. On God's throne. At the right hand of God, who celebrates the sacrifice of his Son. There he waits until all his enemies are completely subjected to him. For by one single perfect sacrifice he has made us – we who believe – holy forever. In this way he has brought us to his goal. We were to become what he wanted us to be. We, who are made holy by God himself in order to be with him, in his sanctuary.

That is exactly what the Holy Spirit testifies in the words of the ancient prophet Jeremiah: "This is the covenant I will establish with them, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts and write them on their minds." And: "I will never again remember their sins and lawless acts. They are forgiven, as if they had never happened. I will never again hold them against you or charge them to your account." So once forgiveness has taken place, once it has been pronounced and given, there is never again any need for a further sacrifice for sin. With that the whole sacrificial service has become superfluous, indeed obsolete.

Now the great goal has been reached. Something that was always the desire of God's heart. Heaven is open. For everyone. We may come to him. We now have full confidence and may come boldly, without fear, into the innermost heavenly sanctuary before the throne of God. In faith. Not yet visible. Through Jesus' blood. On a *new way* that did not exist before. A way that is living. It does not lead to death but into life. Into God's presence. On this new and living way we may keep on going forward. He himself, Jesus, opened it up and set it free for us. Through the curtain that, as it were, closes off the sanctuary. That is why the curtain had to be torn. A living Jesus showed us who God is. In his life he was like the curtain that had not yet been torn. Only his sacrifice, his death for us, cleared the way. With that the old cult of priests and sacrifices has come to an end forever.

And he is also *our* great priest over the house of God. He is with God for us. He takes us by the hand and leads us into the presence of God. He also guides us in the presence of God, in spite of all our weaknesses, faults, and sins, which

we still experience. He takes full responsibility for this, so that we can confidently pray, worship, rest, and listen to God in the heavenly sanctuary.

Then let us now really and constantly go to God! To his throne. With a sincere heart that seeks God. In full assurance, which only faith gives us. For our hearts have been cleansed with his blood. A conscience that constantly accuses us because of our sin no longer exists. We have also been washed from the dirt of sin with the pure water of the word of God – in a figurative sense, of course.

What else should we do, having been given so richly, than confess our hope and hold on to it? A hope that is the Messiah himself, on God's throne, from where the universe is ruled. A hope that one day what we already possess today in faith will become true and visible. For no one is as faithful as the one who gave us this promise.

Yes, let us watch out for one another in love and care. Not as a form of control. But to motivate one another: to do good out of love and gratitude. To encourage our neighbors. Let us come together again and again and cultivate fellowship, pray, and worship. Nothing at all should be able to keep us from doing this as regularly as possible. That is how we make progress in faith. Some have given it up altogether, have grown weary, and are in danger of giving up faith and hope as well. Let us actively encourage one another toward fellowship and in hope. For the great day of our Lord Jesus and of God is coming closer and closer. Day by day.

Whoever gives up faith and hope, consciously and deliberately, has a serious problem. For he was once allowed to know the truth, but then throws it away again. If he has once recognized the sacrifice of Jesus and then rejects it again – for him there is no other sacrifice he can appeal to. What sacrifice can still save him then? All that remains for him is a fearful expectation of divine judgment. For the old sacrificial system cannot set his conscience free. All that is left is the expectation of an unstoppable fire of judgment that will strike the enemies of the Messiah. Even anyone who rejected the law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of witnesses. How terrible do you think the punishment will be for the one who now tramples the Son of God, Jesus the Messiah, underfoot – as if he were dirt? And who regards as unclean the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which makes holy and perfect? And who now insults the Spirit, who once brought him this grace and enlightened him about it, as if it

were the worst thing that ever happened to him? We say this because we know the one about whom Moses said in Deuteronomy 32: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. And also: “The Lord will judge his people.” There can be no doubt about that. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God with one’s sins, with one’s rejection of the Messiah and his sacrifice. No one will be able to avoid the encounter with the living one. One thing is absolutely certain: death. And after that the judgment. Everyone will meet the living God.

Just look at everything you have already endured for Christ on your journey of faith. At the beginning, many days ago, when you were enlightened by the Spirit of grace, you took on an unusual amount of struggle and suffering. You stood firm in the faith. People insulted you with evil words as if you were the lowest dirt, and harassed you. So you were made a public spectacle before everyone. When it did not hit you directly, you faithfully stood by those who were treated this way. You supported those imprisoned for the sake of the faith as if you yourselves were in prison. You even joyfully accepted being robbed of your property. You knew that you all have a possession that is much better and, above all, lasts forever.

So do not throw away your confidence, your trust, and your hope, like those who give up the faith. Stand up publicly for the Messiah! For a great reward is waiting for you. You should persevere! After all, you have done the will of God. You have received Jesus the Messiah. Now follow him too! Keep at it – so that God’s promise is fulfilled in your life. Until then it is only a very little while, as the prophet Habakkuk says. The coming Christ will come and – be there forever. There is a reason why the time has not yet come.

But “the righteous one will live *by faith!* But if he shrinks back and throws away his faith, I take no pleasure in him.” But we do not belong to those who shrink back and give up the goal of faith and end in destruction. No! We belong to those who believe and are fully saved, who hold on to saving faith – until Christ comes again.

Chapter 11

Faith is what matters. But what exactly is faith? Faith is a firm conviction, steadfast confidence, indeed, as it were, a taking hold in advance of what one

hopes for – and of what will come. For faith, the future has already become true.

Faith is being convinced, being certain of what one does not see. Does not yet see. I will make this clear to you with encouraging examples of our ancestors, people like us. In them faith was alive. And it did not ebb away when things became very difficult – as you are experiencing too.

Only faith understands that the world came into being through God's words. None of us human beings was there or saw it. He created the world out of nothing. That is what his word says.

By faith Abel, at the beginning of human history, offered God a pleasing animal sacrifice. For God that was a greater sacrifice than that of his brother Cain. Cain offered fruits that had grown from the ground. By accepting the animal sacrifice God testified that Abel was righteous and Cain was not. Abel and his sacrifice – although it was so long ago – still have a message today that goes to the heart of our existence: as sinners we need a substitute. Our own good works are not enough to be accepted by God.

By faith Enoch was taken up to God in heaven. Without dying. He went to heaven as a living human being. Why? Because God took great pleasure in his life and wanted to have him with him – unlike many of Enoch's contemporaries. Without faith it is impossible ever to please God. Whoever comes to God in order to be close to him must of course believe that he exists. But not only that. He must also believe that God rewards and answers those who seek him sincerely and persistently.

Noah received a command from God to build a large ship, an ark. On dry land. No sea nearby. Only faith could do something like that. Warned by God, he built for many decades, anxiously waiting to see what might be coming his way. Not even in his wildest imagination could he picture it. By obeying God, he took his stand on God's side. At the same time – by obediently building the ark – he condemned the godlessness of the people who did not listen to God. In this way he became a righteous man. By faith.

Abraham too could be obedient only by faith. After he heard God's command, he left his homeland. He set out without knowing where the destination was. To a place he was to receive from God as an inheritance.

By faith he wandered about in the land that had been promised to him as an inheritance. He lived as a guest in an unknown region, in tents. With his son

Isaac and his grandson Jacob. They were all heirs of the same promise that Abraham had received.

They stayed in a foreign land like nomads. But they looked further. They were waiting for a city that has firm and eternal foundations. A city that people have not built, but God himself.

By faith Sarah, although she was already too old, was still able to have a child. Only because she believed that God is faithful and always fulfills his promise. That in turn means that from an Abraham who was too old, who really could no longer father a child, countless descendants were nevertheless born. Just as God had promised and foretold.

These patriarchs died in faith. They did live by the power of the promise of the inheritance. But they could not yet take possession of it. They saw the inheritance from afar, so to speak. Their nomadic life testified that they were strangers in the land, without the rights of citizens. Whoever lives like that shows clearly that he is looking for another, indeed a better homeland. Not the one they had come from. They could have returned there at any time. But as strangers in Canaan they looked further. Upward. They were watching for a heavenly homeland. Where God lives. That is why God is not ashamed to be called the God of these three patriarchs of Israel. He is called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were on their way to him in faith. That is why God has prepared a city for them in the heavenly homeland. An eternal home.

Only by faith did Abraham pass the greatest test of faith in his life: when he offered up his only son, Isaac, the bearer of the promise. God had promised him that through Isaac his descendants would be secured. Abraham went to the sacrifice with a trembling heart. For he knew that God can even raise the dead. Although the sacrifice of Isaac was stopped at the last second by God himself, it was as if he had carried it out. In this sense Abraham was able to take his son Isaac into his arms as if he had risen from the dead.

By faith Isaac blessed his sons Jacob and Esau with regard to things to come. In the same way, by faith, Jacob blessed his 12 sons. Each one individually. And worshiped God as he did so. On his deathbed Joseph foresaw by faith how all the Israelites would leave Egypt. That is why he gave instructions that his bones were to be taken along then.

By faith Moses' parents hid their child for three months. They saw that God had something special in store for him. That is why they were not afraid of

Pharaoh, who had ordered the death of all newborn boys. By faith the grown-up Moses gave up, indeed downright refused, to remain a son of Pharaoh's daughter. He changed sides and went over to his people. He wanted to share their disgrace and suffering. So he rejected the temporary and fleeting pleasure of sin at Pharaoh's court. He regarded the disgrace of Christ – if we interpret it from today's point of view – as greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. Moses looked ahead, to the reward in Canaan. He did not fear Pharaoh's anger and persecution when he had killed an Egyptian. He stood firm in the expectation that his people would experience liberation. Even when he fled from Egypt and spent 40 years in a barren land. He looked to God, whom he did not see, as if he saw him right before his eyes. In faith he celebrated the Passover. He brushed the blood of the lamb on the doorposts – so that all the firstborn would be protected from the angel of death.

By faith they passed through the Red Sea, which had parted. As on dry land. The Egyptians who were pursuing them tried it too. For them, of course, faith played no role. That is why they perished in the collapsing waters.

By faith the walls of the first city in Canaan, Jericho, fell down. After they had marched around the city for seven days.

A prostitute, Rahab, who lived in the wall of this city, did not perish in it like the others. For by faith she had given shelter to the two spies of Israel.

I could say so much more. Tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel, and also the prophets. How through faith they conquered kingdoms. Spread and practiced justice. Obtained promises. Overcame lions. Quenched fire. Escaped persecution by the sword. And in utter weakness regained their strength. In battle and war they became strong. They drove back hordes of attackers. And women received back their dead through resurrection.

Others were tortured and refused to accept release. So as not to deny their faith. For they believed in a better resurrection – the one to eternal life. Others were mocked and flogged. Were in chains and in prison. Others were stoned, sawn in two, beheaded. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins. Suffered great want. Oppressed. Mistreated. For the world they had no value, no significance, no standing. They wandered about in deserts and mountains. Hid in caves and holes in the ground.

All whom I have named here, whose faith was attested, did not receive what had been promised to them. Why? Because God had planned something better.

For us! They had to wait for that. So that we too would inherit and belong. So now they *and* we are brought to the goal together. In the new covenant. All of us together now receive something much better than what was promised back then.

Chapter 12

As in an arena, we are surrounded by so many witnesses and martyrs of faith. They are all examples for us. The proof that faith and perseverance are worth it. Although they no longer live in our world, we are bound to them through faith. So let us not give up the race of faith, and let us take over the baton from them. Let us keep running. Throw away whatever gets in the way. Lay aside every useless and hindering weight that slows us down. Ignore every distraction and temptation. Above all, the sin that so easily entangles us and makes us stumble.

Look ahead, to Jesus! Do not look to the left or to the right. Only at him. He is the greatest. He stands at the head of all who believe. He ran in faith. All the way to the finish. He is the pioneer and perfecter of faith. He has brought about faith in our lives and leads us to the goal. He let nothing divert him from it. He counted the shame as nothing. He endured the terrible cross. For he looked to the great joy that lay before him: namely to sit down at the right hand of God. And to lead many sons and daughters to glory. Just think of the one who had to endure such great hostility and opposition from evil people. Nevertheless he reached the goal. If he is your example, you will not grow weary and lose heart.

You have not yet, like Jesus, resisted to the point of shedding blood and endured against the opposition. Against the sin of falling away from Jesus, the Messiah. You have forgotten the word of encouragement that speaks to you as sons and daughters: “My son, welcome it as a blessing when the Lord does not leave you as you are. Do not lose heart when the Lord sometimes has to deal with you firmly. This happens out of love, because he loves his sons and daughters unconditionally. If you experience no correction and discipline at all, then you are not sons and daughters of the heavenly Father at all.”

After all, our earthly parents also brought us up. When necessary, with strictness. We obeyed them too. Should we not then submit to our heavenly Father and accept his discipline? He is the Father of spirits. All the angels are at his disposal, and they serve us. Even if we do not see it. Our upbringing is

important to him, and he takes care of it with everything at his disposal. Let us say yes from the heart to his good hand. Even when it is sometimes hard. Then we will live. Forever.

Our earthly parents brought us up and punished us according to their human and fallible abilities. Only for a few years. God disciplines us without any mistakes until we reach the goal. Not only in spiritual childhood. Also when one has already been on the way of faith for a long time. Why? So that we become more and more like him. Like his unique divine nature and his holiness. God's discipline is a preparation for the future and never a punishment for the past.

Such discipline, when one is going through difficult times, is no reason for joy. Rather a reason for sadness, if we are honest. But in it a precious fruit that pleases God grows unstoppably in our lives. As long as we do not run away from his discipline. For when we accept difficulties from his hand and patiently practice in them, we are changed. For the better. Even if we ourselves do not notice it or do not want to admit it.

In Isaiah 35 it says: "Therefore strengthen the feeble hands and the weak knees, and walk on a straight path." Otherwise the weary and the fainthearted will still stray from the way, instead of the lame being healed.

Stick together! Fight resolutely together with all followers of Jesus for peace with one another. Likewise for holiness, by hating every sin and distancing yourselves from everything that does not please God. If we do not hate sin, we will *not* see God as our Father on that great day.

And watch out for one another, so that none of you lives outside the grace of God and makes his salvation and life depend on himself and his works. Or falls back into the law, the old covenant.

See to it that no poisonous root of bitterness and malice springs up in any of you. Hidden in the heart at first. But then, as it keeps growing, it troubles the fellowship of believers and influences and poisons many in a negative way.

No one among you is to be sexually immoral. Everyone is to be faithful to his or her spouse.

None of you is to be someone to whom nothing is sacred. Not even God. Like Esau, who sold off his birthright for a simple dish of lentils. Shortly afterward he realized what a reckless thing he had done. In spite of tears and eager struggling he did not come to a reversal of his behavior and to a real change of mind.

Value your standing in salvation the way God sees it. As followers of the Messiah you have not come to the old covenant, which began back then in fear and terror. At a visible mountain, Sinai:

- That could not be touched.
- On which fire was burning.
- A great cloud was there.
- That gloom and darkness enveloped.
- Around which a frightening storm was raging.
- At which a loud trumpet blast could be heard.
- And a loud and clearly audible voice.

The listeners could no longer bear the words and begged that they not be spoken to them anymore. If an animal so much as touched the mountain, it was to be killed. The whole drama at Mount Sinai after the sin of the golden calf was so terrifying that even Moses admitted: I am trembling with fear of the Lord's anger.

You followers of Jesus the Messiah: God has given you an overwhelmingly new covenant. Something completely new, a wide horizon, has opened up for you. A spiritual reality, not yet visible, but one that surpasses everything we could ever imagine. We have come to Mount Zion, where God lives:

- To the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.
- To tens of thousands of heavenly messengers, angels of God, in a great joyful and solemn festal gathering.
- To the assembly of the firstborn of all the redeemed, who are written down in heaven.
- And to God himself, the Judge of all people, before whom we are now holy.
- To the righteous who have died and have already arrived at the heavenly goal.
- To Jesus, the Messiah. The mediator of the new covenant.
- And to his blood. It speaks of much better things than the blood of Abel, which cried out for vengeance. Christ's blood makes us completely clean and holy.

Take care that you do not refuse the one who has spoken to you from heaven in Jesus. Those who back then at Mount Sinai and in the wilderness heard the divine voice from the earth but rejected it could not escape. If we hear the

divine voice from heaven through Jesus and reject it, then all the more will we be held accountable.

Back then this voice shook the earth. Afterward he foretold through the prophet Haggai: “Once more I will shake the earth, but not the earth alone, but also the heavens.” Through this shaking everything created will pass away. But in this quake it will then become clear what withstands the shaking and does not pass away. Through the Messiah we are receiving an unshakable kingdom that will remain forever. For this we thank God every day! By grace we serve this God. Let us do it in the way that pleases *him*, and not ourselves. With reverence and respect befitting God. Not in fear, but with a certain awe. For already in Deuteronomy 4:24 it says: “For us too, God, to whom we belong, is like a consuming fire. A jealous God.” But the consuming fire does not want to destroy us – after all, we live in the new covenant – but to accept our sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Chapter 13

Live out love for all your brothers and sisters in the faith. Show it in hospitality. Invite one another generously. In this way some of you have already – without knowing it – given lodging to angels. As I have already said, they are active in service for us wherever our heavenly Father sends them. So you could miss a visit from angels if you are not hospitable.

Remember those in prison. And do so as if you were in prison together with them. Also those who are mistreated and have to experience it in their own bodies.

The covenant of marriage and married life are to be respected and valued. In every aspect of living together. The marriage bed and the joys of sexuality belong to the married couple alone. That strengthens the marriage covenant. The sexually immoral and adulterers, who break their marriage covenant through sex with other women or men, or who allow themselves casual sex outside the covenant of marriage – God will judge them without turning a blind eye.

Live free from the love of money. Be content with what you have. It makes no sense always to want to own more of what passes away. In spite of privation, poverty, and hunger, one thing remains – the divine promise: “I will not forget you and will not abandon you. That is why we can say boldly and

resolutely: The Lord is our helper. We need not be afraid. What can people do to us?”

Let yourselves be encouraged by the commitment, the faith, and the faithfulness of those who proclaimed the word, the gospel of God, to you. See how they remained in the faith to the end of their lives.

Jesus Christ, our Messiah, always remains the same: in what he is, in what he proclaims, and in what he has promised. Yesterday, that is, in his time on earth, as well as today in our everyday lives, and also for all eternity, at the goal of salvation history, he is the same faithful and true Lord.

Do not let yourselves be distracted and preoccupied by all kinds of strange teachings. It makes no sense to want to grow in faith through certain foods, because such external and visible things belonged to the essence of the old covenant. It was simply useless. Our heart is strengthened and made firm by grace. For we have a spiritually better, invisible altar. We eat from it. In a figurative sense we eat of the grace of the Messiah and of his presence. Those who still perform their service in the visible temple do not know this – nor do they have any right to it.

The sacrificial animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest are burned outside the camp. So Jesus too suffered outside the city of Jerusalem and endured the cross. When he made us holy through his shed blood.

So let us go out to him. Let us leave the old system of the first covenant completely behind us. Even if it brings disgrace and will cost us a good deal. To bear his disgrace is never in vain.

Let us look ahead, indeed upward. For on earth we have no lasting city anywhere where we are at home. We are strangers. Passing through on our way to the city that is to come. The heavenly Jerusalem, the city of our great King, is already waiting for us.

As we live in this hope, let us offer God sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. At all times. In every place. Alone and together. Not animal sacrifices on a visible altar. No. Spoken and sung words of thanksgiving, praise, and worship. Remember: God dwells in the praises of his people.

When you bring such sacrifices, with words, then by no means forget the material sacrifices – with which you do good to those in need or help them

financially. Our God takes special pleasure in such sacrifices, which cost you something – time, money, energy – and perhaps mean doing without.

Follow your spiritual leaders and do not keep criticizing them. After all, they only want to protect you from dangers, so that you remain healthy and steadfast in the faith. They will have to give account before God of how well and how diligently they carried out this task. So value and appreciate their service. Then they can do it with joy. That would be very much to your benefit. Much better than if they do it with sighing or purely out of duty.

Pray for us! We want to do everything and to live in a way that pleases God. Pray even more for me! Then I can soon be with you again.

The God of peace has brought our Lord Jesus out of death. His blood has founded a new, better, indeed eternal covenant. He is the great Shepherd of the sheep. How many he himself will soon bring out of death, into the eternal homeland, and pasture them at the spring of life. Then, when he comes again

If God has brought Jesus out of death, then he can and will also be at work in your life. He can – and that is what we pray for – move and equip us for good works. Also to do his will. All this through Jesus Christ. To him, our Redeemer, belong glory and honor forever.

Bear with the exhortations in my letter! After all, I have written to you in few words and kept it short.

Our brother Timothy has been released. Together we will soon be with you and finally see you again.

Greet all your spiritual leaders. Simply all the saints in Christ. The saints from Italy send you greetings.

Grace be with you all! Amen.

Revelation

What Awaits You IN THE BOOK of Revelation

Apocalypse Now! That is the title of a world-famous, extremely dark anti-war film from the 1980s. The book of the Bible that comes next is also called Apocalypse. It too is full of dark scenes. But unlike in the film, there is much light, hope, and the victory of good at the end of the story. Apocalypse does not mean “end-time or doomsday scenario” – but “unveiling.” What is unveiled is how God overcomes evil and suffering. God’s story with his world ends in the new Jerusalem, on a new earth. The departure into a new world, into a new creation, is the high point. A point that becomes a line that never ends again. That is what makes it worthwhile to follow Jesus, so as to experience it too.

But I must warn you. This last book of the Bible is totally different from everything you have read so far. John, a disciple of Jesus, wrote down in his old age what he saw. He was allowed to enter God’s heavenly throne room. He saw the opening of the book with the seven seals, which is followed by a series of dramatic scenes.

John sees and describes a world of tremendous, imaginative power and forceful images. He practically invites us to take part in this drama in the movie theater of our own minds. As a rule the book was read aloud to the gathered Christian congregation. People listened. Not everyone followed along in his own Bible as people do today. The listener is opened up to a world full of symbols, signs, and surreal images that are foreign to us in the 21st century. Often disturbing, bizarre, dramatic, even cruel and exaggerated. Seemingly contradictory or illogical. But also beautiful, overwhelming, comforting, and promising images.

In John’s time this literary style was quite popular. It is called Jewish *apocalyptic*. This style of writing has not existed for a long time. In a very, very small way one could compare it today with a mixture of *Jurassic Park*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *Star Wars*. A roller-coaster ride awaits you. Into heaven and back to earth. The whole thing several times over. Into the future. Yes, fasten your seat belt!

Apocalyptic addresses the existential crisis of faith. A crisis because everything looks as if God is silent in the face of injustice. Why does evil

escalate and reach such an unimagined scale? In its own special way apocalyptic courageously emphasizes that God has *not* turned his back on the world and his people. The opposite is the case. Nothing has slipped out of his hand. He will intervene unexpectedly and drastically. He will definitely bring about rescue. Evil will be defeated and his people will be saved.

Try to grasp the *big picture*, the whole. It is not first of all about details and fine points in the text. In your mind, do not go too close to the picture. Take one or two steps back, so that you have the whole picture before your eyes. It is like an impressionist painting, in which the details do not matter. What matters is the overall impression the painter wants to convey. Apocalyptic does not attach importance to small details, but to the message of the whole picture. Details sometimes serve only to reinforce the whole. If you try to keep the whole in view, you will more than a few times be moved to amazement and awe, indeed to worship.

Within apocalyptic visions there are different elements: symbolic, predictive, hinting or alluding to something, literal or figurative. Also combinations of these elements. That does not exactly make it easy for us. What is *important* at this point is: not everything in Revelation, not even everything from chapter 4 on, is necessarily prediction in the sense of prophecy about the future. Whether something is to be interpreted as future must be well founded, for after all it was addressed to Christians in antiquity, almost 2000 years ago. And if it is, then we can never know exactly how it will be fulfilled. Apocalyptic is not a news report from the future.

It certainly is also about things that are still to happen. And also about what has already happened. But it is important to accept that this book does not intend to be a timetable of the future. There is *no timeline*. And we cannot construct one into it either. Assume that the 7 seals, 7 trumpets, and 7 bowls you will read about do not all follow one after another, but happen side by side in parallel, since they describe different aspects of the same events.

To put it plainly: Revelation is *not a crystal ball* in which we can see details of the future. It is not about information. It is a call to faithfulness.

Spiritual realities, and historical events too, are made vivid with symbols and figurative language. That is why by far the most of it cannot and must *not literally* be understood.

The struggle between light and darkness, between God and the devil, is described in the language of war and violence. That is how the Jews hoped for the coming of the Messiah, as God's warrior, who would destroy the enemies in the literal sense. But what does the liberator look like in John's vision? He hears of the Lion of Judah, who has triumphed. When he wants to see the lion, he finds none. But he sees a Lamb. In the very center of God's throne. A Lamb with a mortal wound. One could call this the key scene of the book.

The *war* in Revelation is *to be understood spiritually*. And not as literally directed against people. The Lamb uses neither violence nor coercion, but overcomes without violence through his own death. Christ and his followers are part of a cosmic conflict that is won not by power, but by truth and faithfulness. The resistance of the followers of Jesus is modeled on the example of Jesus – *nonviolent*. With the readiness to lose one's life. For that is their victory. The language of war is always figurative. The main combatants are not literally a Lamb or a seven-headed dragon. Nevertheless the spiritual war between lies and truth, faithfulness and deception, takes place no less really than a literal war. It is so real that the followers of Jesus can literally lose their lives. They are a true "Salvation Army" that does not fight against flesh and blood.

In trying to understand the language and images of this war, it is good never to forget: the Jesus in Revelation is the same as in the Gospels. The Jesus in Revelation is the Jesus on the cross – namely the sacrificed Lamb. At first glance Revelation will give the impression that he is a warrior who uses violence. So completely different from the one we know and love. No, he is and remains *the same*. John is very careful about how he describes Jesus. The sword from his mouth is the truth, the word of God, the faithful testimony, and *not* the weapon that kills. With this Jesus before our eyes we read Revelation. Then we recognize that John is precisely not describing the grim warrior who takes revenge. That is the thinking of the world, of the gods and the myths. Nevertheless all authority has been given to him, in heaven as on earth. His coming does not have to be accompanied by swords – as Peter once wanted to defend Jesus. One day his visible presence will be enough to silence everyone.

For the end of the history of this world he has received from the Father the task of carrying out the judgment. And wherever people persistently show hostility to him and his disciples, do violence to them, and otherwise too remain stubbornly malicious toward people and creation – he will put an end to that.

Everyone will have to answer before him. *Justice* will triumph and have the last word!

Back then apocalyptic was more or less understandable in what it meant to say and what it did not. That is no longer the case for us today. Nevertheless, with a little knowledge of the old stories and of world history at the beginning of our era, one can get quite far. Almost everything John sees has counterparts or roots in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament. In Revelation the threads from the Old Testament come together. For it describes the fulfillment, the consummation of the world. So when you try to interpret the images of Revelation, do *not* rely on your Western logic. Here a Jew is writing within the Hebrew world of thought, and also as a child of his time. Interpretations are often possible only in the light of the Old Testament. In my explanatory rendering I have laid out the trail here and there, which one can follow further.

John also reflects the world in which he lived. For example the Roman Empire, in which emperors were worshiped as god. Yes, without naming names, he *criticizes* with allusions and images the idolatry and lifestyle of his time. In the kingdoms and cities of the world the role of the followers of Jesus is contested and not triumphant. They suffer because they are faithful to the word of God, confess Jesus as the true Lord of the world, and do not give in to deception. Many lose their lives because of it. But their death is their victory.

Much in Revelation seems to be different from how it looks on the surface. This conviction of the sacrificial Lamb runs through the book like a common thread. Death for Jesus' sake is a victory, but one that comes into its own only at the consummation. In a similar way the downfall of those who have wronged the followers of Jesus must be assessed. They looked like victors. But they are not! The great example is the Lamb of God, who triumphed through his death on the cross. Not through power and violence, but through giving himself up to death. Through nonviolence. Only in this way has the new creation become possible at all – already now.

In this respect the book is more relevant today than ever. A true *book of comfort*. Encouragement of the most intense kind, for God's plan and victory are certain, even if it costs us our lives.

This book has the goal of making God and Jesus great. It is a call to remain in him, with him, and close to him. Even when the whole world does the

opposite. Listeners and readers are encouraged not to give up faith and following Jesus.

In its prophetic effect Revelation also wants to reach hardened hearts. It is like a storm meant to shake people awake.

Another goal is worship. Again and again it describes how God and the Lamb are worshiped. *Join in the worship.* Let yourself be swept along by the greatness of God.

This book is written concretely to seven churches in Asia Minor, in what is today Turkey. It is addressed to all people. It is meant to influence our hearts and change us. But also to motivate us to take a new path, if necessary. For that to be possible, we have to allow the Apocalypse simply to speak to us. With the help of these dramatic images. One has to really feel the emotional language.

We already know John through his Gospel, the account of the life and words of Jesus. When you read Revelation, do not forget: it too is gospel, the good news. It is the last and most intense call of all to accept freely what God in grace wants to give to everyone – but forces on no one. It is an invitation that cannot be ignored to be part of God's new and eternal world!

One last thing. In some places apocalyptic *remains* mysterious. Questions remain. But do not stop reading because of that. Read this book. Again and again!

Revelation

- The little Lamb, the Lion of Judah – and the dragon
- The book that makes you happy
- Who is worthy of worship?
- Who is the King of the world?
- The Lord who is coming back
- Hope for the church
- The triumph of the Lamb
- Martyrs and victors who follow the Lamb
- The return of the King
- Comfort for the congregation
- The goal of all things
- Revelation means unveiling!

Revelation

This is the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apocalypse. The unveiling. About him, the Messiah, the King of kings, and about the goal of history.

God gave it to him, the Son of Man, to pass on. To his servants and followers. To show them and to let them in on what must soon take place. In God's plan of salvation for this world.

An angel was sent to show John, the well-known disciple and servant of Jesus, everything that will take place in dramatic signs. He recorded it in writing. And so he testified to what he heard and saw almost 2000 years ago: the word of God and the testimony about Jesus Christ. Thank God! He wrote it all down for us!

Happy are all who read these prophetic words of God or hear them when they are read aloud! All are to be called happy who also keep what John testifies in writing like a divine treasure – and do it. For the time when these words will be fulfilled is near. It will surely come. It could happen at any moment.

I, John, am writing to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor, to which the Lord has addressed his prophetic word.

May the grace and peace of God increase among you! Through the living God. Who is, who always was, and who is to come! From Yahweh, the eternally existing one, who is there for you.

And from the seven spirits who are before the throne of the Almighty and All-knowing! Who guarantee the presence and the working of the Holy Spirit in every place and at every time. With his people. And wherever God reigns. And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness and martyr. He was faithful to the point of death. But came back from the dead. As the firstborn: as the first and highest of the new world of the resurrection; of the new creation of heaven and earth. As the first of all who will rise. He is the ruler of all the kings of the earth. Those who wanted to get rid of him will now be subjected to him. No one will stand before him.

He is the one: Jesus, who loves us! Always. Like no one else. Who is on our side! Who accepts us!

He has forgiven and taken away our sins, our lawless deeds, our self-will. Through his blood, through his sacrificial death on the cross at Golgotha.

He has made us lost sinners *kings*, to reign with him. Without our being of royal descent.

He has made us, who were hopeless and insignificant, *priests* of God, who may live in God's presence. And carry his glory into the world.

We are a gift from Jesus to his Father! As kings and priests. Not for ourselves. As in the beginning in paradise. Adam and Eve too were priests and kings for God. But they lost everything. But now the time of restoration is coming. Through Jesus: a new and better paradise!

To this God, who in his love renews the whole creation and does not give up on his creatures: to him be glory and power over all things forever!

Amen.

This Lord, the King of kings, is coming! Visible to all people – in the clouds of heaven! This event – the visible presence of Jesus Christ – turns everything upside down, so that whole nations fall into fear and terror. Even those who nailed him to the cross and pierced him will see his coming. Even if they have already died. Everyone must see this event, when heaven and earth meet. When the Judge and the Savior comes, for the second time.

Horror and panic will strike especially those who neither expected nor honored him. With their guilt, indifference, and contempt they will stand shaken before the one who is coming in power and glory: Jesus Christ. For us this day is the fulfillment of all hope. Everything will be changed forever. The goal has been reached. And now it really begins. Hallelujah! Yes, Amen!

I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord, God Yahweh. The First and the Last. The eternally existing one: who is, who was, and who is to come. The one who keeps everything alive, El Shaddai. Who fills every lack. Who rules over all. Who knows everything. Who is always there. Who is never too late. Who reaches his goal.

I, John, your brother, who like many of you am in distress and tribulation for the sake of his name. Because we belong to his kingdom. Through suffering on the way to glory. We wait patiently for him, who will also put an end to all our suffering. In his own time.

I was on the island of *Patmos* in *exile*. Not voluntarily. I was banished because I hold fast to the word of God and confess Jesus Christ as the true ruler of the

world. The Roman authorities do not like that at all! That is why they took me prisoner as an apostle among the Christians in the province of Asia Minor, in order to weaken us.

On the first day of the week, on the Lord's Day, I remember it exactly, the Spirit came over me. I was seized in the Spirit of God. Again and again I saw myself carried into another, heavenly world. I heard and saw great things!

This is how it began: when I was in the Spirit, a loud, mighty voice spoke to me from behind. Like a trumpet. "What you see now, and everything you are still going to see, write it on a parchment scroll. Send it to seven churches in Asia Minor. To Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

I turned around, toward the voice, to see who was speaking to me so powerfully. And then I first saw seven golden lampstands and their light. And in the midst of these seven lampstands the one who had spoken to me. He looked like a human being.

Who is it, I asked myself. An angel? No. God himself? It was *Jesus*. But not the familiar one, the one close to me, as I had known him. No. Completely different. Hear for yourselves.

He wore a long robe, like a priestly gown that reached down to his feet. At chest height it was tied with a golden sash.

It was immediately clear to me that this Son of Man, like a priest, inspects the lampstands, cleans them, and supplies them with oil. In priestly dignity. Also with royal honor. And with the authority of a judge.

The hair of his head was white like wool. Like snow. He alone is holy and pure. And also ancient, as Daniel 7 says. For he is eternal and inviolable. I was reminded of what the ancient prophet Daniel saw and experienced. Because it was so similar. And in these moments I was to experience the same as he did.

His eyes were like flames of fire. They radiated the glory of God. They saw through everything and searched everything. With perfect holiness.

His feet shone like glowing bronze in a smelting furnace. Great is his steadfastness and strength. Tested and proven in his life on earth.

His voice was mighty. Like the roar of a great waterfall that makes the earth tremble. To the comfort of his own and the terror of his enemies.

He had seven stars in his right hand.

Out of his mouth came a sharp, double-edged sword. A symbol of the word of God and of truth and faithfulness. He is the incorruptible Judge. Perfect justice has the last word.

His face was like the shining sun at noon, which one cannot look at without going blind.

This appearance was so terrifying, so frightening, that I, like Daniel long ago, fell at his feet. As though dead. Nothing in me could stand before him. It was simply overwhelming. A true encounter with God.

Then I felt how he laid his *right hand* on me. Like a friend. And he said to me: “Do not be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I was before all time and will always be. And the Living One. The risen Son of Man. For I was dead. Put to death in disgrace on the cross. But now I am alive. Forever. For all eternity. I have broken through death and conquered it, and I hold the keys of death and of the realm of the dead. The powers of death will give way. There will be no more fear.”

Write down what you will see. What happens in the last days – beginning with my arrival in Bethlehem up to my return on the clouds of heaven.

He explained to me the mystery of the seven lampstands and the seven stars he held in his hand. What did they mean? The seven stars are angels. Representatives of the seven churches. It seemed strange and wonderful to me at the same time. They stand for these churches, which are on earth, in seven cities of Asia Minor. At the same time, through the angels, they are already present in heaven, where their home is. At the throne of God. They are held in his strong hand. These churches belong to him, the Son of Man.

Chapter 2

This wonderful Lord, God’s Kyrios, has commissioned me to write a letter with an important message to the angel of the church in *Ephesus* – and so also to the worldwide church. From him to whom the seven churches belong. From the one who holds them in his mighty hand and performs a priestly service among the seven golden lampstands. His message is:

I know you down to the last detail. Your good works too, and your love for your neighbor. You take great pains. Your patient perseverance in all your serving is also exemplary.

Also that you give no room to evil people in your midst and do not tolerate them among you. Those who came and said they were apostles, you tested and exposed. For they were false apostles.

You have also patiently endured suffering for the sake of my name. You have not grown weary.

But with all the good, there is something essential that you have given up! *Your first love*. Your love at the beginning – when I met you for the first time and won your heart. Back then your love for me, for your brothers and sisters in the faith, and for the people around you was burning and fresh. It was the reason and the motivation for everything you did.

Consider how far you have fallen. Turn around, repent. Do the works you did at the beginning. Out of genuine love.

If you do not return to that, I will remove your lampstand. Then you will no longer be fit to be a witness for me in Ephesus. You will no longer shine for me if you show no remorse and do not repent. For love is the most important and the greatest thing. Without it, everything is nothing.

But I commend you for hating the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate – that is, those who tolerate immorality, lead others astray, and recommend eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Whoever has an open ear, let him hear what I say to the churches through the Spirit of God. Whoever overcomes this condition and returns to his first love will be richly rewarded by me. I will give him the right to eat from the tree of life. It stands in the middle of the paradise of God. In the new and better Eden. In the new Jerusalem. In the new world that I have created through my death and my resurrection. There he may enjoy it forever without interruption.

To the angel of the church in *Smyna* – and to all who belong to this church in this city – I write on behalf of Jesus. I pass on what is said by the one who is the First and the Last. Who was before all things and will stand victorious as the Last. Who died, but came to life again. Who lives forever. The conqueror of death.

I know exactly your works of love, the persecutions and sufferings you endure for me. And also your poverty. But never forget: you are rich in me. The world to come belongs to you.

I also know the blasphemies and slanders of those who proudly call themselves Jews. Although they are Jews by descent, in truth they are a

synagogue of Satan. They hate the Messiah Jesus – and all who follow him. Above all the Jews among you who believe in me.

Do not be afraid of the suffering for Jesus' sake that you still have to endure. The devil, Satan, will throw some of you into prison. He will mobilize Jews and pagans against you, so that you give up the faith. But the opposite will happen: your faith will be tested and strengthened. Your distress will last ten days. A time that I determine and that no one can change. Not even Satan.

Be faithful to the point of death! Do not give up when you are offered life and freedom in return for paying homage to the emperor or to the idols. For I will give you the victor's crown of life. If you remain faithful to the point of death, you will live on, indeed – you will experience true life. In my eternal kingdom. In my glory. With me.

Whoever has ears should listen, pay attention, and do what I say to the churches through the Spirit. You must take me seriously. Take me at my word. It is important, and I do not keep repeating myself.

Whoever overcomes and remains faithful to the point of death will not be hurt by the second death. That is eternal death, separated from me. Far from me in the lake of fire. All who have not followed me and have rejected me will suffer it. But you will live, because I live.

To the angel of the church in *Pergamum* – and to all who belong to this church – I write on behalf of Jesus Christ. I pass on what is said by the one who has the sharp, piercing, double-edged sword. His word is irresistible.

I know about all your good works of love. I know exactly where you dwell and live. Namely where Satan's throne is. Where he reigns and holds people captive in idolatry. Where nothing of me can be seen, there you hold fast to my name. You have not denied your faith in me, the invisible one, in the face of all these visible temples in your city. Not even when my faithful witness Antipas was killed in Pergamum. There where Satan is at home and stirs people up against you.

But I have something against you that I will not accept. There are some among you who approve of the teachings of Balaam and hold on to them. Back then he taught Balak how he could defeat the people of Israel. Not through military power, but through seduction. Namely by taking part in sacrifices to idols and the sexual debauchery that went with them.

In the same way there are some among you who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, who also approve of sexual permissiveness. I hate these teachings, which destroy and harm the church.

Since you are all responsible for this, repent. Be sorry and turn around! You must change this and take action against it. If you do not do so at all, or only halfheartedly, then I myself will come. With my fierce sword that comes out of my mouth. I will wage war against them and see to it that they turn around and repent. Or see to it that they are removed from your midst.

Whoever has ears should listen, pay attention, and do what I say to the churches through the Spirit.

To the one who overcomes the Balaamites and Nicolaitans, and does not take part in the idol feasts and sexual debauchery, I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. Not the meat sacrificed to idols, but the true food of heaven is waiting for you.

I will give them a white stone. As white as the manna. Pure. And on it I will write his new name, which only the one who receives it knows: no condemnation, but acquittal and newness of life in a new age that has already begun. In a relationship with me as my personal friends.

To the church in *Thyatira* writes the one whose eyes shine like a flame of fire, which see through everything and cannot tolerate anything evil. Who has feet like gleaming bronze, as if they were glowing in a furnace. Who takes an uncompromising stand when it comes to holiness and truth.

I know and value all the good you do. Your genuine love and your faithful service. And your patient perseverance. What you are now doing for me is clearly more and more intense than what you did at the beginning. I am familiar with your progress.

But nevertheless I have something against you. You tolerate a woman who is like Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, and you let her do as she pleases. She calls herself a prophetess, and many among you listen to her. But what she says does not come from me. She teaches my servants and *leads them astray* into taking part in idolatrous temple banquets. On top of that there is sexual debauchery. Sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. And you do not intervene!

She has been doing this for a long time. I gave her time to change her mind, so that she would stop her seduction and immorality. But she absolutely did not want to listen to me. That is why I will judge her and turn her bed of

prostitution into a sickbed. So I will reject her! But also those who have been seduced and led astray, who carry on with her. I will bring them into great distress if they do not change their minds, turn around, and stop the works of Jezebel. Her spiritual children, who have bound themselves to her and obediently do what she says, I will strike dead with deadly disease, unless they repent and really turn around.

All the churches will know that I am the one who searches hearts and minds. Who sees through everything and sees all. In my church no one will do such things without being responsible for it and giving account. I will repay each one according to his works.

But to you, the rest, who do not follow the teaching of Jezebel: *bold on to what you have*. You have not come to know the deep things of Satan, which those people boast about. You have not followed this pretended knowledge, like those who boast of having grasped all this with their supposed special insight. Even worse is their claim that this behavior is not sin. On all the others I lay no burden. But I do demand faithfulness and devotion to me and to my word – until I come.

Whoever overcomes Jezebel and her works, and does my works until he has reached the goal, to him I will give authority over the nations. Even if you now seem insignificant and are unable to do anything against Jezebel and her followers. Together with me you will rule the nations and shepherd them like a shepherd, with care and love. The rebellious you will smash like clay pots. I have received this from my Father. And the overcomers too will receive this power and authority from me.

I will give them the morning star. They will shine and reign with me, the Messiah-King, the bright morning star. Forever. Soon the day will dawn.

Whoever has an ear, let him hear what I say to the churches through the Spirit. Do my will! I speak through my Spirit and my word to every church on the whole earth!

Chapter 3

To the angel of the church in *Sardis* – and so to all who belong to this church – write: This is what the one says who has the seven spirits of God. Isaiah 11 also speaks of them. Who at the same time holds the seven stars, the seven angels of the churches, and so all the churches in his hand.

I know your works and everything you do. I know what is really going on with you. You are known as a living and active church. But in reality you are *lifeless*, yes, spiritually dead. You lack a living, conscious relationship with me. You mistake your quiet, your peace, and your well-being for the quiet of the grave and of spiritual death. So wake up! Take care of and look after those who are already in the process of dying spiritually. Strengthen them, so that they do not die. I have not found your works good before my God. They will not last.

Remember with what joy you received my word when you heard it for the first time. Hold on to this word, my gospel, and change your thinking. Turn back to my word. It is not too late yet. You can be revived again.

If you do not wake up and strengthen your people and return to my word, then I will come to you. Not with blessing, but like a thief. You will not know when disaster is coming. I will judge you if you do not turn around.

But there really are some among you who have not soiled their clothes. They distance themselves from what does not please me. Nor do they adapt to your pagan and idolatrous surroundings. *Those are exactly the ones I am looking for.* In the resurrection they will receive white and pure clothes – from me. Together with me they will go walking and be on their way in the new Jerusalem. On the new earth. For they are worthy. Others in Sardis kept their distance and avoided them because they wanted to please me. But they are exactly the ones who will be my guests of honor.

Whoever in Sardis – and now I am speaking to each one individually – overcomes spiritual death, does not stain his clothes, and turns back to my word, will receive white clothes from me. I will not blot him out of the book of life – the register in which all who belong to my God are entered. I will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

Whoever has an ear, let him hear what I say to the churches through the Spirit, and do my will! I speak through my Spirit and my word to every church on the whole earth!

To the angel of the church in *Philadelphia* – and so to the whole church, to all who belong to it – I am to write: This is what the Holy and True One says, whom one can trust completely. He is the Son of David, who has the keys of the King – and with them the power to open or shut doors. No one else can do that. And no one has the authority to stop or push back what I do.

I know and examine your works very closely as well. See: I have opened a door for you that no one can slam shut. There will be spiritual fruit. I am giving you access to people, to lead them to me. So you have *little strength*, it is true, but it can accomplish a great deal. You have not despised small beginnings and unspectacular things. For you have kept and done what I say. And you have not denied my name in the city of Philadelphia, but have boldly confessed it. In spite of opposition, mockery, and hostility.

I am the one who brings it about that some of the Jews come to faith. As has already happened. But I also know about those Jews who attack you because of it with malicious gossip and slander. They have thrown you out of the synagogue. But they are not true Jews. They deny everything that they should do and believe as genuine Jews. They belong to the synagogue of Satan. I will make them fall down before you and before their fellow countrymen who follow me. They will have to acknowledge that I love you. And not those who reject me, the true Jew, the Messiah.

You have kept and proclaimed my word to wait patiently for me. You live in the hope of my coming. That is why I will also keep you in the time of great deception. It will soon flood the whole world, to test all who live on the earth.

Keep it before your eyes again and again: I am coming soon. Yes, unexpectedly! So by all means hold on to what you have. Do not give it up. Keep at it. Then no one will rob you of the victor's crown.

Whoever overcomes, and keeps my words and confesses my name, I will make significant, like a pillar in the temple sanctuary of my God. His perseverance and his confession of my name will be his honor forever. He will never again go out of this heavenly temple of God. There he will be at home. I will write the name of my God on him. And the name of the city of my God. That is the new Jerusalem, which will come down out of heaven onto the new earth. And I will write my new name on him. So he will belong to my God forever. And be a citizen of the new Jerusalem forever. He will also belong to me, who bought him with my blood. To me, the creator of the new world order, the Risen One.

Whoever has an ear, let him hear what I say to the churches through the Spirit – and do my will! I speak through my Spirit and my word to every church on the whole earth!

To the angel of the church in *Laodicea* – and so to the whole church – I am to write, to all who belong to it: This is what the one says who is the Amen. In whom everything is guaranteed to be fulfilled. Who has the last word. The faithful and true witness is speaking. I, Jesus, who paid for his confession and his devotion with his blood. The one who is the beginning of creation is speaking, the creator of the first as well as of the new creation – through the power of his resurrection.

As with all the other churches, I know you too. I know what you do. I will tell you at once, directly and plainly: you are neither cold nor hot! Oh, if only you were cold, like a refreshing drink of cool, clean water. Or hot – for a soothing bath or hot tea. But you are lukewarm. Neither cold nor warm. When one drinks something so indefinable, expecting it to be cold or hot, one spits it out. That is exactly how it is for me with you. You are a characterless halfway thing. Undecided. You have a bit of everything. But far too little. If only you were on fire for me. Or downright against me – then there would be more hope than now.

Why are you so lukewarm? Because you are conceited and full of yourself. You say: I am rich and have become prosperous. I need nothing and no one. Neither grace nor brothers and sisters in the faith outside your church. But what you do not see: in reality you are in a wretched, pitiable state. You are like a beggar. Poor and blind. Naked, without an outer garment.

That is why I can only give you one piece of advice: buy gold from me. Pure gold, refined in the fire. Only in this way will you become truly rich. And white clothes, so that you are no longer naked and your pitiful state is covered. You can also get salve for your eyes from me, so that you finally see what is true and how you stand before me.

All whom I love, you too, I correct. I hold their sin before their eyes so that they turn around. I discipline them. That can be painful, but it is very healing. Make an effort and be eager to ask me for everything you lack. Repent! Turn around! Admit your miserable state, so that you can make a new start.

I am not welcome among you at all. But I am standing at your door. I knock, in order to come in. I call. If anyone among you hears me and opens the door of his heart to me, then I will come into his life. Then we will eat together and have living, practical fellowship. I am waiting for someone to open the door. I force no one to do it.

Whoever overcomes and comes to me, whoever truly asks for what he so badly lacks, will sit with me on my royal throne and reign with me. Just as I, as the faithful witness, have overcome and was faithful to the point of death. That is why my Father has seated me on his throne, to reign with him.

Whoever has an ear, let him hear what I say to the churches through the Spirit – and do my will! I speak through my Spirit and my word to every church on the whole earth!

Chapter 4

After I had seen the majestic Christ in the midst of the seven lampstands and had written the seven letters to the churches, I looked up and saw an open door in heaven. Then I heard a voice speaking to me – loud as a trumpet. I had already heard it before. It commanded me to come up and enter heaven through the door. There I was to see what would happen next, after what I had already seen, and what there was to be seen.

All in all, as I remembered later, things in heaven were to *open* four more times after that. In all, *five visions* opened up to me, with different images, but they all ended with the return of the Messiah. It became clear to me that they did not always follow one another, but described something that also ran in parallel, side by side, and at the same time, because they all ended in the one great goal.

Then the Spirit came over me and carried me through the door into heaven. I saw God. In a throne room. But much bigger. Nowhere, on no side, did it end. For there in the center I saw a mighty throne. A place – like the eye of a storm. Like the epicenter of all things.

A person was sitting on this majestic *throne*. I could only make out the outline. The throne was not empty. And that reassured me greatly. Obviously I was to see this scene first of all. Namely: that God is greater and stands above everything. And that he has the last word. And that he reigns and remains in control, even when it does not look like it.

And the one who sat there looked like a precious stone of jasper or carnelian, which shine beautifully in a glorious reddish color. Overwhelming.

Above the throne, from one side to the other, shone a radiance like a rainbow. But sparkling like a green precious stone of emerald. Simply impressive.

Around the throne I saw further thrones in a circle. They were smaller. I counted 24. On them sat figures I could make out. They were elders. Men of advanced age. They were dressed in white. On their heads they wore golden crowns, like victors' wreaths. Just as the angels represented the churches, so in the elders I saw the saints of all times. Like the 12 fathers of Israel and the 12 apostles together. They were all in white and, as overcomers, had received the victors' crowns. Like kings and priests.

From the throne in the center flashes of lightning shot out. Voices could be heard. And mighty thunder. As back then, when God revealed himself to Moses at Sinai. I realized that from this throne the whole universe, including the earth, was held together and sustained.

Before the throne seven torches of fire were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God, who are sent out over the whole earth. They, that is, the Spirit of God, light up the way to salvation and make the righteousness of God shine out.

The area before the throne looked to me like a great sea. But not made of stormy and churning waves, but of solid glass. Shining like crystal. It is stronger than all powers and forces of nature. The sea of peoples, too – restless and godless nations – freezes before this throne as if into ice. Like sapphire pavement at the feet of God. Comparable to what Exodus 24 says, when Moses and the elders went up Sinai to God.

At the throne, indeed in the very center of the throne, and around it, I saw four living creatures. They moved like angels. And yet completely differently. Simply unique. So close to the one on the throne. They had eyes everywhere. In front and behind. The prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel had seen something similar long ago. They appeared to me like the forces that hold the universe together.

I saw these creatures in a sequence. Not in the sense of a ranking. They represented the Eternal One as Creator. And his living connection with *his creation*. How he sees, and wants to see, everything and everyone in it. In all four directions of the compass. As its caring Creator and powerful Sustainer he keeps everything in view:

The first creature looked like a lion. This wild, royal animal.

The second creature looked like a young bull. A strong animal.

The third creature had a face like a human being. I perceived it differently from the other creatures. It showed me the human being in his privileged role

as bearer of God's image.

The fourth creature was like a flying eagle. Swift, majestic, and mysterious.

All four creatures, which were covered with eyes inside and out, had six wings.

These creatures, who see everything and speak without pause, tirelessly repeat again and again these few words, which alone are worthy: Holy, holy, holy is God Yahweh, the Lord God! The Almighty, the Pantokrator, El Shaddai! The eternally existing one! Who was, who is, and who is to come!

How *infinitely* exalted and infinitely different, indeed how superior he is compared to us human beings and to other creatures!

Whenever the four living creatures call out in worship honor and thanks, majesty and glory to the Most High, who lives forever and ever, the 24 elders fall on their knees before their thrones. Before the one who sits on the throne. God.

They pay homage to him who lives forever and ever. Yes, they lay their victors' crowns before the throne and all say together: Not we, but you alone are worthy. You alone are to receive glory and praise, honor and power.

For you have created everything – the whole universe. It was your *will* alone. You created it for yourself. Because of you, all this exists. Without your will there would be nothing. Only you would be there.

What dignity, that we are the result of his will! Included in his creation. The whole earth is full of his glory.

Chapter 5

Then I saw a *scroll* in the divine right hand of the one who sat on the throne. It was written on both sides. So extensive that one side was not enough. But it was sealed with no fewer than seven seals of wax. By God himself.

I looked at this scroll. And it suddenly became clear to me that something extraordinarily important was at stake. The fate of the world obviously depended on it. It was like a charter of God's almighty power, his knowledge of all things, and his guidance of history.

Then a strong, great angel came before the throne. He called out with a loud, thundering voice that all creatures in the universe heard: "Who is worthy and entitled to open the scroll with the seven seals? To carry out what is written in it?"

But no one stepped forward who dared to do it. No one in heaven, no one on earth or under the earth, in the realm of the dead. There was a deathly silence. Oppressive. No one could open the seals or look inside.

I was seized by despair. I began to *weep* bitterly. For that would mean that everything would stay as it is. No hope of freedom or of liberation from death, pain, and sickness. Wars would go on and on. Hunger and suffering would remain. There would be no new earth. The miserable struggle for survival would be endless for most people. Will the world never get a victor?

But one of the 24 elders came to me and laid his hand on me. He knew what I could not know at that moment. He said to me: Do not weep! There is a solution. See, one has triumphed. The royal *Lion* of the tribe of Judah. The promised Messiah. A descendant of Judah and of David. He, the Messiah, is worthy to open the scroll and to break the seven seals.

Relieved, I looked up to see the mighty lion, the victor. But what did I see? I saw a Lamb – looking as if it had been slaughtered. A sacrificial lamb. With a mortal wound on its neck. So the Lion was a Lamb. The Lion had not triumphed through power and violence, but through his death – like a *Lamb*! Completely different from the world of rulers and Caesars. God triumphs through the vulnerable little Lamb. Without violence. Unlike a lion. His death is the most important event of all time: the decisive victory over the history of suffering of this world. It guarantees all the promises. And God's victory over all hostile powers.

The Lamb – with the heart of a lion – now stood in the very center of the throne. Where it belongs. In the midst of the four living creatures. And within the circle of the 24 elders. It stood at the center! Everything looked to this little Lamb with its mortal wound. Yes, God made himself one with the Lamb and in this way showed what he himself is like and how he directs history. Without violence, power, and coercion, in sacrificial self-giving, he reaches the glorious goal of history, which I was yet to see.

Unlike all the lambs I had seen before, it had not two but seven horns. That is, divine fullness of power. Although a little Lamb, all power and authority had been given to it. In addition it had seven eyes. These again are the seven spirits of God, who are sent out over the whole earth and see everything. And at the same time enlighten people for salvation.

This Lamb now went to the throne. It took the scroll from the right hand of the one who sat on the throne. He held it out toward the Lamb. It was a moment for eternity. Majestic and yet strange. After all, it was only a Lamb. But in its hand, the hand of the Messiah who had died and risen, now lay the fate of the world. And it could not be in better hands.

And when it had taken the scroll, this is what happened: the 24 elders fell down as before. Even the four living creatures bowed down low. They all paid homage to the Lamb. The 24 elders, the kings and priests, had bowls full of incense, as in a heavenly temple. The incense in the bowls was all the prayers of the saints. Their worship, petitions, and laments too. They also held harps, with which they struck up a new song. It really had to be a new song! For through the Lamb everything, really everything, had now become different. They sang to the Lamb in worship and thanksgiving:

You alone are worthy to open the scroll, to break the seals, and to read and carry out what is written in it.

For you, the Lamb of God, were sacrificed. With your blood you have bought us for God. From every tribe, every language and nation and people.

You have made them all, the many from the *whole earth*, *kings* and *priests* for our God.

They will reign over the earth! And do what was in God's heart. From the beginning. And serve him before his face.

When their song was over, I saw angels who were also gathered around the throne with the living creatures and the elders. It was such a great multitude of angels, like the stars in the sky. Like a sea of angels, who now joined in this praise of the Lamb. It was unimaginable heavenly praise. So mighty that I could hardly believe what I saw and heard:

Worthy is the Lamb who was sacrificed!

May he receive all power, wealth, and wisdom.

All strength, honor, glory, and praise.

When the angels had said this, the whole universe joined in the praise. I heard every creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth, on the sea and in the sea, saying:

To the one who sits on the throne, namely God the Father, and to the Lamb, the eternal Son of the Father, alone belong praise and honor and glory and power. And that forever and ever.

Then the four living creatures said: Amen. And the 24 elders again fell down on their faces and worshiped.

Chapter 6

Now the Lamb began to open the seals one after another. But each time the opening was accompanied by the mighty, thundering voice of one of the four living creatures at the throne, calling out: Come here, and look closely!

I did so. When the *first seal* was opened, I saw a white horse. On it sat one who had a bow. And a victor's crown was placed on this rider. And he, the angelic being, galloped off to conquer wherever he went. Like a conqueror of the world. It was not a good angel.

It became clear to me that there is no security. Nowhere. Kingdoms are defeated and overrun. New empires arise. The Roman Empire and the Roman peace too will one day fall. Because God wills it.

When the Lamb opened the *second seal*, the second living creature spoke just like the first: Come here and look closely!

Now again I saw a horse. A fiery red one. On it sat one who was given authority to take peace away from people and nations. Then they would kill one another. In countless wars and civil wars. The rider was given a large sword, with which he destroyed peace. This one too was not a good angel.

God and the Lamb no longer held back these wicked and destructive forces of evil. It is his judgment when he gives room to the forces of evil. He does not need to command them; of their own accord they do the evil that spreads out here in Revelation.

When the Lamb opened the *third seal*, the third living creature also spoke: Come here and look closely!

Then I saw a black horse. On it sat one with a pair of scales, used to weigh wheat and barley.

From the midst of the four living creatures came a voice with the message: One day's ration of wheat for the daily wage of a day laborer who works 12 hours. And three days' rations of barley for a day's wage. Oil and wine are not to be damaged. These are extremely inflated prices for basic foods. But the less necessary oil and wine are cheap to get. Unequal societies, in which most people fight for survival every day when war and drought destroy the harvests – and hunger comes. And yet some live in luxury. Yes, that is a world that was never

meant to be like this. It cries out for redemption. People are to turn back to their Creator and Provider.

When the *fourth seal* was opened, the fourth living creature spoke: Come here and look closely!

Now again I saw a horse, an ashen-pale one. The name of the rider on it was “Death.” Hades, the realm of the dead, accompanied him. He took captive all the dead, those who had been killed, who lived on in the beyond, in the invisible world, until the day of the great judgment. This angel of death and destroyer was given authority to kill a quarter of the inhabitants of the earth. With the sword of war, with famines and plagues, and through the wild beasts of prey of the earth.

All these riders showed me how God calls people to turn back through judgment. Even in judgment he shows his grace and does everything so that people will listen to him. Through his kindness, but also through catastrophes.

When the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw something completely different. In the heavenly temple I recognized the altar of burnt offering. At the foot of the altar I saw people standing who had been killed by violence because they had obeyed the word of God and testified to Jesus. Like the Lamb, they too had sacrificed their lives and given them up to death. Now they are in heaven, with the Lamb and with God.

These *martyrs* cried out together, lamenting loudly before the throne: “How much longer, Sovereign Lord, Holy and True One, until you call our murderers to account for our innocent blood and judge those on earth who killed us? So that this injustice comes to an end.”

Then first of all each of them was given a white robe. For they were worthy as overcomers. Yes, through death they have overcome – like the Lamb. The one on the throne himself told them to rest for a little while from their hard journey through life as witnesses of Jesus. Until their companions in suffering on earth had also been killed, and so the number of martyrs was complete. The day of reckoning is coming. Because of these many martyrs it definitely has to come. Evil will not exist much longer.

Then came the *sixth seal*. And that was the end of world history. The judgment of the world. The day of reckoning. A very great earthquake shook the earth. The sun no longer shone and turned black. The moon turned red as blood. The stars of the sky fell to the earth like unripe figs that drop when the

tree is shaken violently. The sky rolled up like a scroll. All the mountains and islands were moved to other places in this chaos.

Nothing will be as it was. The order of the universe and the order of society will be dissolved. All of that is no longer needed now. All these events are the very essence of the end and of the appearing of God.

What did people do in the face of this cosmic end of the world? All the kings, the great and the rich, the generals and the mighty, every slave and every free person tried to find shelter in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. Now every social difference no longer mattered at all. All were affected alike.

In their despair they begged the mountains and rocks to fall on them. To hide them and protect them from the one who sits on the throne. From the eternal, living, only, and holy God, the Judge of the whole earth. And from the wrath of the Lamb. Until then I had neither heard nor seen anything of an angry Lamb. But after all, world dominion and judgment have been given to the Messiah, who was once tormented and killed in Jerusalem. I had almost never seen Jesus angry. Once in the temple he was really angry, because his Father's house was being dishonored.

He will save his followers and deal with their persecutors in justice. For the great day of his wrathful judgment on all unrighteousness has now come. No one can escape it. No one. And people realize that this is the end and that they were on the wrong side. For God and the Lamb meant nothing to them.

And who can stand before the *wrath of the Lamb*?

That was what I was to see next. There really were those who stand.

Chapter 7

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth. They were holding back the wind. So that no wind would blow over the earth, over the trees and the sea. Then I saw another angel, a fifth, coming from the rising of the sun, from the east. Sent by God. And he brought a seal with him. The seal of ownership of the living God.

This angel called out with a mighty voice to the four angels: Do not harm the earth, nor the trees and the sea, when you let the storm break loose. Not until we have visibly marked all the servants of God on earth with this seal on their

foreheads. In this way they will be protected in the tribulation and will reach the goal, eternal life at the throne of God.

These angels of the forces of nature always and at all times want to harm people. But God protects people. In judgment he withdraws his protection and preserves only those who serve him.

Then I heard how many they were to seal: 144,000. From all the tribes of the sons of Israel, that is, of Jacob. I had never heard or read their order the way I heard it now.

From Judah 12,000. From Reuben 12,000. From Gad 12,000. From Asher 12,000. From Naphtali 12,000. From Manasseh 12,000. From Simeon 12,000. From Levi 12,000. From Issachar 12,000. From Zebulun 12,000. From Joseph 12,000. From Benjamin 12,000.

These were all those from Israel who followed Jesus, the Messiah, and were therefore so despised and persecuted by their fellow countrymen, the Jews. By the synagogue of Satan, as I had already written. They, to whom the gospel had been proclaimed first, formed the core and the beginning of the church. They were the firstfruits. Known by God and his own possession. In complete contrast to all the other Jews, who rejected the Messiah. Indeed, the truly chosen still live in God's heart and plan, represented in the symbolic full number of the 12 tribes. Even if they cannot be found at present. Yes, all Israel will be saved when the great harvest of the nations – which I was about to see – has been gathered in. My fellow countrymen, whom I so much wish would recognize Jesus as their Messiah.

Then after this I saw a countless, enormous multitude of peoples. Like a great sea of people before the throne of the Most High. They came from all peoples, tribes, nations, and languages. That was the great international harvest of the nations, indeed the fruit of the anguish of his soul, as Isaiah had foretold about the suffering of Jesus. They all stood before the throne and before the Lamb. They wore white robes. In their hands they held and waved palm branches and fronds and celebrated the victory of the Lamb and the new, *final exodus*. A shiver ran through me as I heard them call out in a single mighty chorus of jubilation the words: We owe our salvation to the one who sits on the throne alone. To our God and to the Lamb.

When this happened, I saw all the countless angels standing around the throne. As in an arena, but larger than people can build. For them the redeemed

international crowd of people was the wonder of all wonders. The 24 elders and the four living creatures were among them too. They all fell on their faces and worshiped God. They said Amen to what the people had called out. Then they worshiped, saying: To our God belong all praise, all glory and wisdom, and thanks and honor and power and strength! To him alone, for all time! Now and always.

Then, as before, one of the 24 elders spoke to me. He asked me and wanted to know whether I could imagine who these people were, standing before the throne in white clothes, and where they had come from. I did not know. I really had no idea, and I told him so. I was eager to hear what he would say.

He said: These are the ones who come out of the *great tribulation*. All of these have washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. They have believed in forgiveness through Christ's blood. That, and only that, is the reason why they are now here, before the throne of God, before his face, and serve him. Day and night and forever. As kings and priests. In his heavenly temple. And God, who sits on the throne, will set up his dwelling over them and around them and will be with them. He will come to them and camp with them. They will never again suffer hunger or thirst. The struggle for survival and anxiety about their existence are no more. Nor will the parching heat of the sun ever come upon them. For the Lamb himself, who is at the center of the throne, will tend and pasture them like a caring and loving *shepherd*. He will lead them to the living and bubbling *springs of water* of eternal life.

God will *wipe away* every *tear* from their eyes. They will never weep again, because there will no longer be any reason for it. There will be no more pain, no more grief, no more war. God and the Lamb make everything new.

When the elder told me this, I could hardly take it in. Was the Lamb's harvest really going to be so enormously great? After all, at Pentecost and in Jerusalem I had experienced how thousands came to faith. And afterward too there were many. And now here in Asia Minor there were many. But so many? I was at a loss for words. Wonderful! Then the gospel will have reached the ends of the earth. God's people are always *greater* than we think.

But they had all come out of the tribulation in which I too was, and had experienced hard things for the sake of the faith. But they had remained faithful. Now they had entered the heavenly throne room. From everywhere.

Arrived at the goal. Right there with their God and with the Lamb, who had bought them for God.

Now I knew who can stand before the wrath of the Lamb and before the one on the throne. And who cannot.

Chapter 8

Now the Lamb opened the seventh seal. With that, the scroll was completely open. Heaven was silent with sheer suspense. Half an hour of silence and stillness. Just as everything falls silent when God's presence appears in judgment and judgment is about to come.

Now something had been opened for the second time; this time it was the seventh seal. With it began the *second series of visions*, which was also to end with the return of Christ.

Then it went on, and I saw *seven angels* standing before the throne. Each of them was given a *trumpet*.

But there was yet another angel. With a golden censer. He stood right at the altar of incense before the throne of God. He was given much incense. He put this incense on the altar. Together with the many, indeed countless prayers of the saints, so that they would rise up before God in the fragrant smoke. What a comfort for the persecuted church that the prayers reach the one who can answer them.

But then the angel put some of the burning coals from the altar into his censer – and hurled it onto the earth. That was an answer to all the prayers that rose from the earth to heaven. Then came thunder, voices, lightning, and an earthquake. God does not wait until the last day to answer the prayers of his people and of the martyrs.

After that, the seven angels with their trumpets were ready to sound them and announce further judgments – judgments to which the people here in Asia Minor react with particular fear.

The *first angel* sounded his trumpet. Then hail and great, flashing, glaring bolts of lightning were hurled down on the earth. A third of the trees burned up, and all the green grass.

The *second angel* sounded his trumpet. Then something that looked like a huge, burning mountain was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into

blood. A third of the creatures in the sea died. And a third of the ships on the sea were destroyed.

The *third angel* sounded his trumpet. Then a great star fell from the sky, burning like a torch. It fell on a third of the rivers and springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. Because of it, a third of the waters turned into wormwood. Many people who drank the water died. For the water had become bitter.

The *fourth angel* sounded his trumpet. Then a third of the sun and of the moon and of the stars was struck. They were darkened, so that a third of the day had no light, and the night as well.

Much of this reminded me of the ten plagues in Egypt that he brought on a stubborn Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

Then I saw an eagle flying high in the sky, crying out so loudly, as if it were suffering along with them: Woe, woe, woe! Those who live on the earth will still experience three more trumpet judgments! They would be even worse than the first four.

Chapter 9

Then the *fifth angel* sounded his trumpet. I saw that a star had fallen from the sky. An angel who received the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit, the Abyss. He unlocked it, and thick black smoke poured out of the shaft. Like smoke from a furnace. The whole air and the sun were darkened.

But hidden in the smoke were locusts, which now came out onto the earth. They were given power like that of scorpions, which use their poisonous sting to wield power.

They were given a horrible task. They were not to strip trees and fields bare, as locusts normally do, to rob people of their food. No, they were to torment and harm people with their poisonous stings. But only those who do not have God's seal of ownership on their foreheads. They were given five months to downright torture people. A period limited by God, matching the life cycle of the locust. They did not kill the people, but took pleasure in tormenting them. Torments so terrible, both mental and physical, that people try to kill themselves and see dying as their only way out. But this will be denied them. Death will practically flee from them. But those who belong to God will be spared.

The locusts looked like an army equipped for war. On their heads were golden victor's crowns. Their faces were like human faces. Their hair was long like women's hair. They had teeth like lions' teeth, to tear their prey. They were armored with breastplates of iron. The roar of their beating wings sounded like many chariots drawn by horses, rushing into battle. Their tails were like those of scorpions, fitted with a poisonous sting at the end. With these they were given authority to torment people for five months.

An army of evil spirits that maliciously torments the people who keep on rejecting God's patience.

Their leader and king is a fallen archangel from the Abyss. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon. In Greek he bears the name Apollyon – the Destroyer. If even human beings are corrupt and evil, how much more the angels of the Abyss, the dark spirit beings that the evil one has hurled out of the pit! How often the Destroyer had already been on the move in earlier times. Also when he killed the firstborn in Egypt.

Now the *first woe* is past. Two more woes are still to come.

After that, the *sixth angel* sounded his trumpet. And I heard a voice from one of the four horns of the altar that stands before God. It said to the sixth angel: Release the four evil angels who are bound at the great river, the Euphrates, so that they can carry out their evil work. At the Euphrates, the border of the Roman Empire, which separates it from the dreaded Persians.

And the four angels were released, who had been prepared for this very hour to kill a third of mankind. They were mighty troops of horsemen who set out to carry out the judgment. A huge army, almost too large to count. Like the Parthians, the powerful enemies of Rome, who are a threat to the Roman Empire and were never defeated.

The horses and those who rode them looked like this: They had breastplates that were fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow. The heads of the horses were like lions' heads. Out of their mouths come fire, smoke, and sulfur. The power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails. For their tails are like poisonous snakes, with which they inflict harm.

The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, still showed no remorse. They went on living their lives as before. Despite these judgments, they did not turn away from all the evil they were doing. They got involved with demons and evil spirits and worship idols – made of gold, silver, iron, stone,

and wood – idols that could neither see, nor hear, nor walk. They did not repent and did not turn away from their murders and occult sorcery – and from making gods of themselves. Nor from their unrestrained sexual immorality and their thefts. No turning away from evil and no turning to God.

All these events, these judgments of God, were after all like a megaphone, calling people loudly and clearly to turn back, so that they would finally grasp that they are safe only with the living God.

Chapter 10

After that I saw another angel coming down to the earth. A strikingly mighty one – wrapped in a cloud as if in a robe. Above his head was a radiant glow, like a rainbow. His face shone brightly like the sun. His feet were like pillars of fire. In his hand he held a little scroll that lay open. It was the scroll whose seven seals the Lamb had opened: It contained the whole counsel of God concerning this world, and how he carries it out in divine wisdom.

He set his right foot on the sea without sinking into it. And his left foot on the land. In this way, in the name of God, he claimed the land and the sea as God's property. Then he called out with a loud voice, like the roar of a lion. And when he had called out, the seven thunders spoke with their own voices.

Then I began to write down everything the seven thunders had expressed. But a voice from heaven warned me not to write it down. It was to be sealed up and kept secret. It was God's business alone. We human beings cannot and will not know everything – and if we do, then only when we reach the goal.

And the mighty angel who stood on the sea and on the land raised his hand with the scroll toward heaven and swore an oath by him who lives forever. By him who created heaven and what lives in it. By him who created the earth and what lives on it. And who created the sea and everything that lives in it. This oath said very clearly: There will be no more delay and no further postponement. The end has come. It falls in the days when the seventh angel begins to sound his trumpet. Then the mystery of God, his plan for this world, will be accomplished. Just as he announced it to his servants.

Then I heard the voice from heaven again. It was Jesus speaking to me. I was to go to the angel who stood on the sea and on the land and take the *scroll* from his hand. I went to him and asked for the book. He gave it to me and said: Eat it up. In your mouth it will be sweet as honey. But in your stomach it will be

bitter. Then I took it and ate it up, just as Ezekiel once did. And it really was sweet as honey in my mouth. But in my stomach I felt that it was bitter. All the suffering and lament that came from the judgments was contained in it. But it was also sweet in my mouth and showed me God's faithfulness toward his servants, whom he will reward and invite into his new world.

Then they told me that I must prophesy again – about peoples, nations, and languages and about many kings. The book I had eaten contained all these prophecies.

Chapter 11

Then I was given a measuring rod. Get up and measure the *temple sanctuary* and the altar and those who worship there. But not the outer court outside the temple. It has been given to the nations. They will trample the holy city, Jerusalem, for 42 months.

Looking back, that was the temple in Jerusalem as it once existed until the year AD 70. In it I recognized, symbolically, those who faithfully performed the service. The Messianic Jews, the true remnant of Israel in the midst of their fellow countrymen, who disregarded the Messiah and had been led astray by the nations. This also reminded me again of the 144,000 who were sealed from all the tribes of Israel, and of the antichristian resistance of their unbelieving brothers.

And during this time I will give my *two witnesses* full authority. For 1,260 days, that is, 42 months, they will prophesy. Humbly and lamenting – clothed in sackcloth. These two are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the whole earth. And whoever wants to harm them or silence them – fire then comes out of their mouths and destroys their enemies. Yes, whoever harms them must be killed. They even have the power to shut up the sky so that no rain falls during the time they are prophesying, exposing people's sins and accusing them. Much as with Elijah back then. They even have the authority, like Moses, to turn the water into blood. They can strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

I wondered who these two might be. Are they to be understood symbolically? In the end I saw in them, most likely, the representatives of the church. Even if that is hard to understand at first glance. But their faithfulness, their testimony, their devotion from the very beginning seem to suggest it. They

accepted every kind of affliction. Like the two witnesses, the church of believers, too, could not be stopped while under God's protection and authority. No matter how severely it was oppressed. The judgments took place for its sake, until in the end everything came to a head. The church did not literally destroy its enemies. Its battle is spiritual. Through its message the enemies were silenced. Sometimes events turned in its favor in miraculous ways.

When the days of the witnesses are over, the beast from the Abyss – about which I will report in detail later – will attack them. Indeed: The beast will overpower them and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city of Jerusalem, which spiritually and morally is just as godless as Sodom and Egypt. It is the city where our Lord Jesus was crucified. But what is said about this city ultimately applies to all cities, yes, to the whole earth and to all who live on the earth.

Many from every people, tribe, language, and nation will witness this victory of evil. For 3½ days they lie in the street. The whole world, all who serve idols and reject or despise the living God and Jesus, rejoice over it. They will send one another congratulations and gifts. For at last those are dead who tormented them for 3½ years with their plagues and constantly pointed out their sins and injustices to them. With the aim of bringing them to repentance and conversion, just as Pharaoh, back then, was also meant to come to repentance.

But then, after the 3½ days, something totally unexpected happened – yes, something downright absurd in people's eyes. Life came back into the two witnesses. Just as God in the beginning breathed life into Adam, or breathed his breath into the dry bones in Ezekiel, so now with these two faithful martyrs. They rose from death. That terrified all the many who saw it. They were seized with great fear. For they all heard this loud voice from heaven saying to the two: Come up here! And like Elijah back then, and like their Lord Jesus, they went up to heaven in a cloud. Before the eyes of their enemies.

In the same way, the congregation of believers will in the end be all but wiped out. But in the end their *martyrdom* will be their *victory*. Just as the Lamb conquered through death. The church will be caught up to God. And received and exalted by him. That is its victory and, at the same time, the beginning of the end for its enemies.

In that hour of horror over the two prophets and their being caught up, a great earthquake struck. A tenth of the city of Jerusalem collapsed. Seven

thousand died in this earthquake. All the rest were terrified and then gave glory to the God of heaven. Yes, there was remorse and turning back, which is what the judgment intended. All Israel will be saved at the end of days.

With that the *second woe* is past. The *third woe* is coming soon.

Then I waited eagerly for the *seventh angel* with his trumpet. And when he sounded it, there were loud voices in heaven. They said: Now the whole world, the whole earth, has been handed over as the kingdom of God to the Lord, Yahweh, and to his Christ, his Anointed One. Now his reign begins, and it will last forever.

The 24 elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces when they heard this and worshiped, saying: We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, who always was, who is, and who is to come. For now at last you have ended the dark age and begun your final *reign of peace*.

The nations have been angry for thousands of years. But now, after long patience, your final wrath has come. And at last the time has come for all the dead to be judged before your throne. And to all your servants, from all the millennia, you will give their *reward*. To the prophets, to all the saints, yes, to all who fear your name. To the small and the great alike. But just as you give the reward to your servants, so you hand over to destruction those who have destroyed the earth and the people on it.

And the conclusion of this tremendous vision of the end of the ages was that the temple in heaven was opened, the Most Holy Place, and the ark of God's covenant could be seen. Then come lightning, voices, thunder, and an earthquake and great hail. Everything that had happened came from the innermost sanctuary, where God sits enthroned. All of it was his sovereign will, which is made known to us here.

That was the *third time* that something *opened*. This time the temple. With it began the *third series of visions*, which also ended with the coming of the Lord Jesus in glory.

Chapter 12

Then a great sign appeared in the sky. I saw a young *woman*, heavily pregnant, clothed with the sun. Under her feet was the moon. On her head she wore a crown of 12 stars. She cries out in pain in her labor. She is about to give birth.

But I saw yet another great sign in the sky. A huge, fiery red *dragon*. A many-headed water serpent, like a hydra, like Leviathan from Psalm 74, the sea monster. It had seven heads and ten horns. On its heads it wore seven crowns. Its huge tail sweeps a third of the stars away, down to the earth. An exceedingly powerful, intelligent, and menacing – yes, murderous – being.

This serpent-dragon reared up before the woman who is about to give birth. It wants to devour the child as soon as it is born. The woman gave birth to a *son*. He was destined to rule the world and all the nations. But the dragon wanted to prevent this, because it wants to rule and possess the world itself. Yet something strange happened: The dragon could not seize the boy, for he was snatched up to God, to his throne. It was obvious that the dragon could not stop God's plan.

I began to sense what these signs were meant to signify. The woman was Israel, besieged by the Romans. Above all the faithful in Israel, who were longing for the Messiah.

And there was no more fitting sign than a seven-headed dragon to portray the great adversary, the enemy of God. Yes, it was he who inspired Herod to massacre the children of Bethlehem in order to kill Jesus. And afterward, again and again, he tried to kill the Messiah. When in the end he seemed to have succeeded, he had to realize: Jesus' death on the cross was not his triumph, but his greatest and final defeat.

I knew such images and stories from the myths of the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Greeks. Obviously God took some of this in order to reinterpret it in a new light – namely, in terms of the one to whom world dominion truly belongs. For he is the Redeemer – Christ the Lord. He is the true God of the persecuted Christians. That is no myth, but truth. And with these heavenly signs that I saw, he renders all the old myths and their gods meaningless.

Yes, and these signs in the sky pointed to a *constellation of stars* that announces the birthday of the boy, the Messiah. It had already shown the Magi from the East the way to the stable where the boy was born. When the sun stands in the middle of the constellation of the Virgin, right where she carries the child in her womb; the moon at her feet; below it the constellation of the poisonous Scorpion; the stars of the constellation of the Lion like a garland above her head; and then – extremely rarely – when Jupiter, the king of the planets, and

the royal star Regulus in the constellation of the Lion touch: That was September 11, three years before our era. This constellation of stars pointed to the arrival of the Messiah in a stable in Bethlehem. In the Jewish calendar, the birthday of Jesus Christ fell on New Year's Day. And so did the birthday of *Noah*. Yes, the coming of the Messiah was a true new beginning. A new Noah, who brings a new creation and overcomes forever Satan and his angels, the fallen sons of God, and their offspring, the demons. The dragon had swept a third of the angels out of heaven with its tail. Yes, that many angels had followed him in his rebellion. But in the end the boy, the male child, the Lamb, will triumph.

The woman then fled into the wilderness. To a place that God has prepared. There she was taken care of for a period of 1,260 days, that is, *3½ years*. Exactly as long as the two witnesses had prophesied. Several times I came across this period in different units. As times, days, and years. This length of time, of which Daniel already speaks, becomes here the symbol and the epitome of the affliction of all who follow the Lamb. It began when the boy was snatched up to the throne of God and glorified. A time that lasts until he comes again and begins his reign over the world. Yes, the terrible persecution of the faithful Jews under the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes lasted 3½ years. The witness of our Lord lasted 3½ years. And for 3½ years Jerusalem was besieged before its destruction by the Romans. Like Israel, the woman went into the wilderness to experience God's care, on the journey to him.

Then war broke out in heaven. The archangel Michael and his angels fought against the fiery red dragon and its angels. But the dragon and its angels could not stand against Michael and his army. For the dragon, the devil, and the angels who follow him, there is no longer any access to God's throne in heaven. That is the beginning of their end.

The great dragon is the ancient serpent from Eden, who led the first human beings astray. He is also called the devil and Satan. He is the adversary of God and the deceiver – yes, the god of this whole world. He leads the nations astray. He was hurled down to the earth. The prince of this world has been driven out, as I once heard Jesus say.

Now that the boy, that is, Jesus the Messiah, has taken his seat on God's throne, at God's right hand, the accuser of our brothers no longer has any right to be in heaven. Jesus has obtained eternal redemption through his blood.

This tremendous event in heaven was celebrated with a loud voice. I heard these groundbreaking words: *Now salvation has been accomplished.* The power and the kingdom of our God have come. And the power and authority of his Christ, God's Anointed One.

For the accuser of our brothers has been banished from heaven. Hurlled down to the earth. He who had nothing better to do than to accuse the brothers before God nonstop for thousands of years because of their sins, and to insist on their punishment. But there is no reason anymore, and there will never again be any reason, to accuse the brothers before God. That is a thing of the past! For the saints, the followers of Jesus, are now set free from their sins by the blood of the Lamb. In the blood of the Lamb everything has been washed away. By the blood they have overcome the devil. By their confession of the Lamb and their faithfulness. That is why many of them were killed. They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Just like the Lamb who redeemed them.

Therefore heaven, and all who live there, the angels and the saints who have been made perfect, should rejoice. They should celebrate, because the turning point of the ages has come. The victory of the Lamb changes everything and will change everything forever. But on earth there is no celebrating yet. For the devil has been hurlled down. He knows very well that he does not have much time left, since in heaven the victory of the Messiah is already being celebrated. And because he does not have much time, he will deceive and destroy people with great fury. In the delusion and false belief that he can rob the Messiah of dominion over the world and establish it for himself. Woe to the people on the earth, for the devil has come down to you.

His fury was directed above all against the woman who had given birth to the Messiah. That is, against those from Israel who believed in the Messiah and followed him. He persecuted them. The woman was helped in a supernatural way. She was given two great eagle's wings so that she could fly into the wilderness, to the place of refuge, where for the 1,260 days, the 3½ years, a time, times, and half a time, she is taken care of and *spiritually protected*. The dragon could not seize her, and it tried to drown her with a torrent of water from its mouth. But again the woman was helped: The earth opened up, and the flood of water from the dragon's mouth was simply swallowed. He tried everything, but could not win.

He became so furious that he could not harm the woman. Then he turned against all the others who keep God's commands and confess Jesus Christ. They are the woman's offspring. All the many from all nations who found their way to Christ through the mission of the Jewish Christians. The dragon attacks all who follow the Lamb, wherever he has the chance. All over the earth.

Chapter 13

Then I was taken to the shore of the sea to see further signs.

I saw a *beast coming up out of the sea*. It looked terrible and resembled the fiery red dragon. For it, too, had seven heads and ten horns. On the ten horns were crowns. On the heads was written a name of blasphemy against God Most High.

The beast – or better, the monster – was similar to the beast figures that Daniel had once seen and described. They symbolized world empires and their rulers. So did this beast, which rose out of the raging sea of nations. Only now it was a single one in which all these beasts of Daniel were united or combined. It looked like a dangerous, swift jaguar or leopard. Its feet were like those of an insatiable bear. Its mighty mouth was as big as a lion's. A terrifying predator that embodies a diabolical world power.

And now I also saw who gave this beast its power and the throne from which to rule. It was the *dragon*. Yes, the beast was like an incarnation of the dragon, the dragon become flesh. It seemed to me as if the dragon had made this beast come out of the sea. It was its creation.

Then I saw how one of the seven heads was fatally wounded by the sword, and the beast was about to die. But although the wound was fatal, it quickly healed. That filled the people on the earth with amazement, and they admired the beast.

That is why they worshiped the dragon, because it had given the beast such power and authority. And they worshiped the beast in the same way and said: Who is like the beast? Who is able to wage war against it or defeat it?

I was amazed. The little Lamb in the center of the throne also had a fatal wound. This seemed to me like an imitation, like a *parody*. As if the dragon wanted to be like God the Father and the beast his son. The people did not see the dragon, only the beast. The beast was the revelation of the dragon.

It was an anti-God and antichristian alliance. The beast, a ruler like a king and emperor, was allowed to speak arrogantly of great things that impressed people. And to utter blasphemies against God and the Lamb. It could do as it pleased. For 42 months. The beast continually blasphemed the living God. It brazenly challenged the God of heaven and all who serve him in heaven. The beast felt strong and invincible. The beast was even given the freedom – by the living God himself – to wage war against all the saints and even to conquer them. The beast killed as many saints as possible, in order to wipe out from the earth the memory of the living God and his Christ.

The beast was given freedom – as hard as it was for me to understand this – political and military authority to rule. God withdrew his protection to let all this come about. It ruled over every tribe, every language, and every people. In a new world order the beast unites all who live on the earth and do not know the God of heaven. They pay homage to this ruler. These are all those who are not written in the Lamb's book of life – the Lamb who was sacrificed to redeem people from every tribe, language, and nation.

Whoever has ears, let him listen carefully. For the *saints* this means captivity everywhere. For many it means death by the sword. There must be no illusions about that. But it happens only as long as God wills it. Whoever follows the Lamb can expect the same fate. This is how the endurance and perseverance of the saints, the followers of Jesus, stand out in this dark time. And their faithfulness and their faith.

I understood that there was a very similar ruler in my own days. After all, I myself was a prisoner on Patmos. I was not killed. But that, too, happened in some places. As in Smyrna and Pergamum, as I have already written. Until the end there will be rulers over world empires who have themselves worshiped and who will kill followers of Jesus. Will there be such a one before the end – like the beast – to whom everything I saw will apply? With a fully developed inhuman, anti-God, malicious nature? God is sovereign and reaches his goal. Even if there may be an end-time climax such as the earth and mankind have never yet seen.

A *second beast* was to belong to this as well. Also a beast figure, like a surreal hybrid creature. I now saw this one rising up out of the earth. As if out of a grave. It had two horns, like a lamb. But the voice of the dragon sounded from it, as if the dragon were speaking through this beast. It was bound up with the

first beast and had received all authority from the first beast. This beast did everything to make people worship the first beast. The beast whose fatal wound had healed so miraculously. The second beast performed great signs. It could even make fire fall from heaven.

With that, a dark, devilish trinity had been revealed. This second beast was like a parody of the Holy Spirit, who glorifies Christ. The second beast glorified the first beast, the ruler. The second beast also symbolizes a human being, a minister of propaganda who leads astray the people who do not follow the Lamb. Into destruction. A false prophet who succeeds through the extraordinary signs he was empowered to perform. These signs were so impressive, and so honored and glorified the greatness of the first beast, that the people who do not know the true God worship this first beast from the sea as God.

Then the second beast calls on the people to set up a statue to the first beast, the one with the healed fatal wound, which had come back to life. This false prophet, who looked like a lamb, now gave life to this statue, which embodied the first beast. Yes, he was given the ability to do this by the living God himself, so that this image lived, could speak, and even gained intelligence to track down all those who did not worship the first beast. All who did not do so were then killed by this statue that had come to life.

The false prophet, the minister of propaganda of the first beast from the sea, causes all people, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to bear a visible mark. Either on their right hand or on their forehead. This ensured that only those who paid homage to the beast and proved it with this mark could still buy and sell. The mark contained either the name of the beast or the numerical value of its name. Whoever has wisdom, let him calculate the number of the beast. It is the number of a man. The beast is a human being. And the number is 666.

I, John, was already living in a difficult time full of trials, when Christians were persecuted and emperors had themselves worshiped as God. Some of what I saw reflected my own time and will do so again and again. What I had now seen, however, went beyond that. Perhaps it describes the future, probably the last period of human history, shortly before the Lamb returns to take up his reign. God will withdraw his protection and allow the powers of darkness, and the people they use, to have power and to perform signs, to lead mankind astray

and to control it completely. Because they did not turn back through the judgments and plagues. God's judgment takes place where, after much patience, God withdraws his protection and abandons people to themselves and to the evil powers of darkness.

Chapter 14

While I was still pondering this darkness and was shaken by it deep inside, my gaze was directed upward again, into heaven. Into the light. There stood the true Lamb of God on the heavenly Mount *Zion*. With the Lamb were the 144,000 who were sealed, with the name of their Father on their foreheads. The same ones I had already seen. They were united with the Lamb. Shortly afterward I was to see more overcomers, just like the great international multitude before.

I heard a voice from heaven. It was like the roar of mighty rushing waters and like mighty thunder. But I also heard the sound of harpists playing on their harps.

They are playing an entirely *new song*. Before the throne and the four living creatures and the 24 elders. Only the 144,000 could sing this song. They had been purchased from the earth. No one else knew it. They love the Lamb as a virgin loves her bridegroom. They followed the Lamb wherever he went. Without loving their own lives. They were purchased from among mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb.

They spoke nothing evil, told no lies, said nothing false. They are blameless through the Lamb before the throne of God.

What a comfort! What an encouragement that darkness does not have the last word. The Lamb and the saints will triumph, and their rejoicing will have no end.

Then I saw another angel flying in midair. He flew over the whole earth. For he had a message for all who live on the earth. For every nation, tribe, language, and people. It was a good message, the *eternal gospel*. With a loud voice, so that everyone heard it, he called out: Fear the living and true God. Give glory to him alone. Worship the Creator, who made heaven and earth and the sea and the springs of water. For the hour of judgment is imminent.

This message applied at all times. And it applies up to the very last hour. Even when the two beasts have blinded mankind and there is no longer any

knowledge of God. God will make sure that people will hear the good news, the gospel.

A second angel followed him, who also had a message. A message of comfort to all the saints, but also terrible news for everyone else: Fallen, fallen is *Babylon*, the great city. She has made all the nations drunk with the wine of her passion for prostitution and unfaithfulness.

I will report more about Babylon. I had seen a great deal more of this city. Babylon stands for the global and highly developed world system. A city in which God does not live and is not welcome, in contrast to the new Jerusalem.

A third angel followed and said with a loud voice: If anyone worships the beast from the sea and its statue and pays it homage, and receives the mark on his hand or forehead, he will drink of the wine of God's fury. This wine is kept undiluted in the cup of his wrath. Yes, all who worship the beast and do not listen to the eternal gospel will be tormented with fire and sulfur before the holy angels and before the Lamb. Yes, they will recognize the Lamb, but he will not be able to help them, because even then they will reject him.

The smoke of this fire and this torment rises up and never stops. The fire burns forever, for ever and ever. These people will not burn in a literal fire. They will exist and find no rest. Their conscience will torment them. Their loneliness will torment them. To know: The living God exists. But they did not worship him. Now they will be outside forever. A torment full of self-reproach. They will bitterly regret having worshiped the beast and its image. God never wanted them one day to be forsaken by him and left to themselves. They never wanted God's nearness and will therefore never again experience how infinitely good God's nearness is. These drastic images could not be more vivid, and they stand as a warning of the highest urgency. Whatever this place will be like, no one will want to be there.

In contrast to this stands the self-sacrificing endurance of the saints in the deadly time of the beast. Those who kept God's commands and their faith in Jesus. They will have a hard time enduring through this time of great trial. Those who worship the beast will have it easy. But beyond death it will be the other way around. Then forever.

For I heard a voice say: Blessed are *the dead who die in the Lord*. Yes, says the Spirit joyfully: They will rest from their labors. Nothing of what they have

worked for Jesus will be in vain. Their deeds follow them, and they will last forever.

Again I saw something. A white cloud, and seated on it was someone – the Son of Man. Just as Daniel, too, had seen him. It was Jesus. He had a royal crown on his head and in his hand a sharp *sickle*. He seemed to be waiting for something. Then an angel came out of the heavenly temple and called out loudly to the Son of Man: Take your sickle and reap! For the hour to reap has come. It is the very last hour for the harvest, because it is already almost dried up. And the Son of Man on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

Yes, God's patience waits until the very end, as long as it is at all possible. Then Jesus brings in the harvest of his people and takes them home. All who have followed him and held fast to his name.

For his own it will be rescue in this last hour. A harvest of blessing. But there is also a *harvest of judgment*. For the rest. For another angel came out of this heavenly temple. He, too, had a sharp sickle. Now yet another angel came out from the heavenly altar. He had power over the fire. He was an angel of judgment. He called out very loudly to the angel with the sickle: Send your sickle into the grape harvest. Gather the grapes from the vines, for the grapes are ripe. Then this angel harvested the vine of the earth and threw the grapes into the winepress, where the grapes are trampled. That is the great winepress of the wrath and fury of God. It is trodden outside the city of Jerusalem. Out of the winepress flowed much red grape juice, like blood. So much that it rose as high as the horses' bridles. Over a distance of 300 kilometers.

A horrifying image. Powerful. But all people had time, as long as the harvest was growing and ripening. When in the end evil and lawlessness have gained the upper hand, the harvest will come. God's judgment is serious and not to be taken lightly. A man reaps what he sows. God cannot be mocked. No one should try to challenge him, as the beast from the sea did – an example for all who pay it homage to imitate.

Chapter 15

Then I saw another sign in heaven. A great and marvelous one. Seven angels with the *seven last plagues*. They complete the wrath of God.

But before these plagues broke loose, what I had seen before – the raging of the two tyrannical monsters – was brought to a close. How many witnesses of Jesus the beast had killed! The beast had conquered the saints. But now I saw them. For they were the true victors. They had not loved their lives and had been faithful unto death.

I saw something like a sea of glass. Mixed with fire. Frozen solid like ice. On the shore of this sea, at the throne of God, as I had already seen it at the beginning, there they stood. Those who had overcome the beast and its statue and the mysterious number of its name. They had harps and played them in praise of God. As if, in a *new exodus*, they had just come out on the safe side of the shore. Rescued from the antichristian beast – just as Israel back then was rescued from Pharaoh. Who went under in the sea and met his end. Just as it will also happen with the two beasts. That is why they also sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: “Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God, Sustainer of all things. Just and true are your ways, by which in your sovereignty you lead the nations to your goal. For you are the real King of the nations. On your heavenly throne. Who is so foolish as not to fear you and accept that God is and remains God? And not give you glory? For you alone are holy. No one is like you. All nations will come and pay you homage. For the day is coming when your deeds will be revealed to all nations and they will acknowledge that you alone are God and no one else.

Then I saw the heavenly temple. The door opens, and the seven angels with the last plagues came out. They were dressed in clean, shining garments and had a golden sash around their chests. Then one of the four living creatures came and gave the seven angels seven golden bowls. These were filled with the fury and wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever.

Then the whole temple was filled with smoke from the presence of God’s glory and his power. Until the angels had poured out their seven bowls of wrath. Until then no one could enter the temple.

Chapter 16

Then I heard a loud voice. It was the command to the angels to pour out their bowls, full of God’s fury, on the earth.

The *first angel* poured out the first bowl on the earth. Then ugly, painful sores broke out on the people. But only on the people who bore the mark of the

beast and paid homage to the statue of the beast. God makes a distinction, just as back then in Egypt, when his people were spared most of the plagues, unlike the Egyptians.

The *second angel* poured out his bowl on the sea. And the whole sea turned into blood. The whole sea died, and everything that lived in it. As in Egypt, too, when Pharaoh constantly defied God's instructions through Moses.

The *third angel* poured out his bowl on the springs of water and the rivers. They, too, turned into blood and died. Then the angels responsible for the waters of the earth – that is, the angels in charge of particular realms, in this case of nature – said: “You are absolutely just. You who are and who were, who were never created. The Holy One, the Incomparable One. Who cannot tolerate sin. It is just that you turn the waters into blood and people can no longer live. For they have shed much innocent blood of the saints and of the prophets, without cause and with violence. Now you give them blood to drink. They have deserved nothing else. And the martyrs deserve that their shed blood be remembered.” In the same way, God made the Egyptians drink blood for the many baby boys that Pharaoh had killed.

Then I heard the altar speak – the altar at whose foot I had already seen all the martyrs: “Yes, Lord God, Sustainer of all things! True and just and right are your judgments and your fury and wrath.”

Then the *fourth angel* poured out his bowl on the sun. Then the heat of the sun became so great that people are scorched as if by fire. And so it came about that people were scorched by intense heat. But instead of coming to a change of mind and paying homage to God, they cursed the God who has power over these plagues.

The *fifth angel* poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast. Its whole realm was plunged into darkness. As back then in Egypt, where it became pitch dark for three days, so that the darkness could be felt. This darkness will be of such a kind that it causes pain in body and soul. Because of their pain, people gnawed their tongues. And through it all they cursed the God of heaven, just as their king, the beast, had shown them. They did not repent of their way of life and went on living in their sinful deeds. Because of their pains and sores they cursed God instead of pleading with him to rescue them.

The *sixth angel* poured out his bowl of wrath on the great river, the Euphrates. Because of this the river dried up, something that otherwise never

happened with this great river. So this natural border was removed, and the way was open for the kings from the east. Then I saw three impure spirits come out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast from the sea, and out of the mouth of the beast from the earth, that is, the false prophet. These spirits looked like frogs. They are demonic spirits that perform signs. These spirits go out to all the kings of the earth to lead them astray with their propaganda signs, so that they all gather for war. For war against God and the Lamb. But it will not be their war. It will be God's war. They will come to the battle on the great day of God, of El Shaddai, the Almighty, who holds everything in his hand.

Look, says Jesus – as he already said to the church in Sardis – I am coming like a *thief*. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps watch and keeps his clothes on, so that he does not have to go about stripped and naked and his shame be exposed. For these hard times I repeat these words, just as I had already heard them from him himself in Israel. Everyone should hear them and take them to heart. A great deal is at stake – yes, everything.

And the kings of the earth gathered with their armies at a certain place. They came to Armageddon. That is its name in Hebrew. That is Jerusalem and Mount Zion. There the last great war will take place between light and darkness, between the Messiah and the devilish trinity of the devil, the beast, and the prophet. They want to storm the mountain of God, the mount of assembly, in order to set up their world government. Do the kings of the earth want to be like the world ruler of Isaiah 14? Yes, but their desperate attempt will not succeed. I will describe that later. For I was able to see that, too, already. I was allowed to recognize what will one day become history.

Then the *seventh angel* poured out his bowl into the air. Then a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne of the Most High, of him who holds and sustains everything in his hand: "It is done!"

And there came voices, lightning, and thunder. This was now the *fourth* time I saw it. And each time the events became more intense. Tremendous accompanying signs describe the end of the world. Just like the earthquake. It was more powerful than any other in the history of mankind before it. Through it the great city of Jerusalem was split into three parts. And all the cities of the nations collapsed as well. And Babylon – that is, Rome, the great prostitute –

was remembered before God, so that she would be given the cup filled with the wine of God's wrath.

That was the end of the old world order, as I had already seen several times. Every island vanished. Mountains could no longer be found. They were simply gone. Hailstones as heavy as talents, 40 kilograms each, fall from the sky on the people.

But instead of repenting and turning back to the one who can end the plagues, people once again curse the God of heaven because of this plague of hail. For it is very great. Much greater than the one in Egypt in the time of Moses.

Chapter 17

Then one of the seven angels with the bowls came to me and said: Come with me, I will show you God's verdict and judgment on the great prostitute, on *Babylon*, who sits by many waters. She has led all people astray. First the kings of the earth committed adultery with her and took their pleasure in her. They made the heart of Babylon their own. Then, through the unfaithful prostitute and the kings who had fallen for her, all the people who live on the earth became drunk on her wine of lust and prostitution. They were completely manipulated by her. In this sense the ancient great capital Nineveh had once been called a prostitute by the prophet Nahum, and the city of Tyre by Isaiah. Not literal prostitutes. Rather in a figurative sense: as a place of idolatry and godlessness that spreads this way of life everywhere like poison.

The Spirit of God then led me into a wilderness. Whether in the body or in the Spirit – that I cannot say. From there I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast. It was the great prostitute Babylon. The beast looked familiar to me. Blasphemies against God could be seen written on it. It had seven heads and ten horns. It was the first beast, the one I had seen coming up out of the sea. The beast that was directed and inspired by the red dragon, by Satan.

The woman who sat on the beast and was carried by this beast was truly striking: She was seductively dressed in purple and scarlet. Overlaid with gold and studded with pearls and precious stones. She had a golden cup in her hand, from which she drank. The cup was filled to the brim with abominable things. Above all with the filth of her immorality. Something was written on her forehead, too:

Mystery
Babylon the Great
Mother of Prostitutes
Abomination of the Earth.

This woman was drunk with the blood of the executed witnesses of Jesus. Yes, she could not get enough of gloating over the sight of God's slain servants. A horrifying sight. What I saw there, the whole hideousness of this great capital, including all the infatuated participants who belonged to it – that is the last great bastion of the antichristian empire. I recognized Rome in it, but it can apply to all great cities.

I, John, was greatly astonished. I was horrified. I was speechless at having to see such obscenity, unbridled greed, and violence that holds human life in contempt. What did it mean, this sign? It was, after all, expressing something real. Something that was yet to happen? The angel was surprised at me and asked: Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast with the seven heads and ten horns that carries her.

The beast you saw once was, and then was no more. It is about to return and come up out of the Abyss. But its final destruction cannot be stopped. So that was this antichristian world empire with the antichrist as political ruler and dictator. Everything was once again just an aping of the true God. For God always was. He is and is to come. He – unlike the beast – will *remain forever*, together with the Lamb.

Those who live on the earth and are not written in the book of life will be tremendously impressed by this beast. Because it once existed, then perished, and now comes forth again even stronger. As if it were rising from the dead. That, too, was a parody of Jesus the Lamb, who was dead and now lives forever.

This is the interpretation for whoever has understanding. The seven heads of the beast correspond to seven hills. On these the woman sits. And these hills are also seven kings. Five of the kings have fallen. One is alive. Another, the seventh, has not yet come. And when he has come, he must remain for a little while.

The whole picture reminded me of Rome with its seven hills. It was Rome. And there the prostitute was sitting at the same time. But that was perhaps only a stopover in history. The fulfillment of what I saw was not the Rome of my

days. The fulfillment of this image could become something even greater. Something I would no longer live to see, since I have already reached the end of my life.

Five of the *seven* kings had fallen. Yes, the world empires – from Egypt, through Assyria, through Babylon and Medo-Persia, to Greece – no longer existed. The *sixth* world empire is Rome. Then one was to come that no one yet knows. But an *eighth* king was to come – the last world empire, with a false messiah as king. A world empire that, like all the previous empires, at its core and in its nature despises the true and living God, and in which people worshiped the idols and their rulers as gods. This last empire, and with it all the previous empires, will perish, as Daniel describes it. Daniel saw a stone. Namely Christ. It rolled down the mountain and smashed the statue that represented the world empires. Then comes the messianic kingdom of peace. It will last forever.

And the beast that was, perished, and lived again is the *eighth* king, and at the same time he is like all the previous ones, one of them – not literally, but in his nature. When he comes, he goes straight to his destruction, as the angel had just revealed to me. Like a pagan messiah who leads people astray and draws them after him. But who is confronted, unmasked, and defeated by the true Messiah. The *ninth* king by this count is the true Messiah-King, who will remain forever.

And the ten horns are kings, as also described in Daniel 7. They will be there at the time of the end-time antichrist. They do not have power from the beginning and do not yet have a kingdom of their own. But when the hour of the beast has come, the short time, the 3½ years in which it receives unlimited power, then these ten kings will receive their kingdom and their authority. All ten will place themselves completely in the service of the beast and become dependent on it, and they will form a coalition. All of them together will try, in total overconfidence and delusion, to wage war against the Lamb in heaven. To push him off the throne.

But the Lamb will conquer them. They do not stand a chance. For no one else is the Lord of all lords and the King of all kings. And the Lamb is not alone. Following the Lamb are all whom he has called to himself through the gospel, who are chosen and have followed the Lamb faithfully to the end. They are given the honor of following the Lamb into the last war. As witnesses of what happens. For the Lamb needs no help. Many of those who follow him

were killed by the beast and the prostitute and may now be on the side of the victor.

The angel went on: The waters where the prostitute sits are all the peoples and tribes and languages of the earth.

But then the angel said something completely unexpected: Then the beast with its ten horns, that is, the ten kings, will suddenly hate the prostitute. Although she was carried by the beast and they had made common cause. The beast will tear the clothes off the woman, devour her, and seize everything that belonged to her. Whatever the beast cannot use, it will burn with fire. The beast tolerates no power and greatness beside itself. As we saw before, it demands people's worship for itself alone.

Why did the beast suddenly have such hatred for the woman? Because God himself had put it into the heart of the beast and of the ten kings to do this. God can turn anything and everything as he wills, and in a way that is perfectly right. God is superior in every respect to all his creatures who have turned away from him. To reach his goals he needs neither coercion nor violence.

The woman, Babylon, lost all her power to the beast. With that her judgment was sealed. So the antichristian beast was nothing other than an accomplice carrying out God's will – probably without knowing it. But the rule of the beast, too, which had now become even greater, was to last only until God's word for the last days is fulfilled.

The woman I had seen is the great world capital of the end times. Greater and more powerful than Rome ever was. And yet totally similar to Rome, with its perverse gods, its decadence, its anti-God culture, and at the same time its drive for economic success. Beyond that, though, also the fascination of its religious soul, a kind of unified religion that will spread to all other cities, yes, over the whole earth. This Babylonian cup – yes, numbing and intoxicating – will be passed around the whole earth. All of this was born thousands of years ago in the literal city of Babylon, when people wanted to climb up to the throne of God with a great tower reaching to heaven. This will become many times worse when the time of the end has come. Before Babylon is destroyed by the beast, she was the ruler over all.

Chapter 18

Then I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority. The earth was lit up by his radiance and by the glory God had given him. That was real and divine glory, in contrast to the showy, perishable glory of Babylon. And he cried out with a loud voice over the whole earth: Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great.

For she had become the dwelling place of many demons. These were the evil spirits of the giants who had perished in Noah's flood. They were the fallen sons of God, who wanted to harm people and thwart God's plan. Babylon had willingly taken in these impure spirits and no longer let them go. Just as she harbored the unclean birds that symbolize these dark, invisible beings. Babylon was filled with invisible evil powers, servants of the dragon. They steered and influenced everything so that it was directed against the true God and his commands.

All nations have drunk of her wine of unbridled passion, of love of money, of idolatry and sorcery, of decadence and indulgence, and of sexual license. Even if many poor people did not really share in it. All the kings of the earth have committed adultery with her and united themselves with her. The merchants of the earth have grown rich through her.

Then I heard another voice, addressed to the people of God, the witnesses of Jesus: Come out of Babylon, so that you do not share in her sins. Otherwise you will also share in her plagues. The mountain of her sins reaches up to heaven. Because of it God has now remembered her. He commands: "Pay her back as she has paid others back! But pay her back double for all the evil she has done. Against me and against people. What she had in her cup, the blood of the saints – pay her back double for it.

As much as she glorified herself at the expense of others and lived in luxury, and never asked about wrong and right, about good or evil – give her that much torment and grief and loneliness in return. For she said in her heart: 'I sit here secure as queen. I am no widow and never will be, for all the kings want me. I will never experience mourning.'"

In the world system people think and act as if everything will always go on like this. Progress secures our future. You just must not lose faith in it. But this

faith in progress is not founded on God, but on man. It is therefore doomed from the outset.

That is why her plagues will come suddenly and in a single day. Death, mourning, and famine. She will be consumed by fire. For mighty is the Lord God who judges her. And he commands the beast, the monster from the sea, to carry out this judgment.

And all will weep and mourn over this downfall – the destruction of Babylon. Above all, all the kings who committed adultery with her and could therefore live in the lap of luxury – like the prostitute herself.

When on that day they see the smoke of her burning from afar, and fear and terror seize them too, then they will say: “Woe! Woe! The great city, Babylon, the strong and mighty city! In just one hour her judgment has come, and her wealth and influence have collapsed into a great heap of rubble.”

The merchants of the earth are horrified, and they weep and mourn over the death of the prostitute, because no one buys their goods anymore. Because the whole world economic system has collapsed. There had been trade in gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, and fine linen; in purple, silk, and scarlet; in citron wood, articles of ivory, articles of costly wood; in bronze, iron, and marble; in cinnamon, amomum, and ointment; in resin products and incense; in wine, oil, fine flour, and wheat; in cattle and sheep, horses and carriages; in serfs and human souls. All the choice fruit you enjoyed is gone. Your splendor and glitter have vanished.

The merchants who traded in all these things and grew rich will stand far off in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning. They say in horror: “Woe! Woe! The great city! Richly dressed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, gilded with gold and covered with precious stones and pearls.”

The merchants are in shock, for it took only one hour to lay waste this great wealth and to destroy the world economic system.

The people on the ships, too, the helmsmen and all the crews, saw the downfall of the great city from the sea. They saw the enormous cloud of smoke like a sign in the sky and said: What city was ever like this great city?

And they threw dust on their heads and cried out, mourning and weeping: “Woe! Woe! The great city!” Because she had made rich all who had trading ships. And now everything has come to an end in one hour and crumbled into nothing. Their future is gone.

But in heaven this downfall was seen quite differently. Rejoice and celebrate, all you saints, apostles, and prophets! For God has carried out the judgment on her! On the city where you were never at home. The city that hated you because you predicted her downfall. The city you went out from.

Then I saw a mighty angel pick up a great millstone and throw it into the sea. He said: In this way Babylon, the great city, will be thrown down with great force. Like Atlantis, she will never be found again.

The sound of flute players, harpists, and musicians and trumpeters will never again be heard in her. She had provided culture, endless entertainment, and distraction and had cast her spell over people. Artists, too, and the art they created will no longer be found in her. Nor will the sound of the millstone that ground the grain into fine flour be heard anymore. The light of the many lamps will no longer shine in you. Nor will the joyful voice of bride and bridegroom be heard in you anymore.

For your merchants were the great ones of the earth, who brought your goods everywhere and supplied all people with them. But for people that was like a drunken frenzy. Your trade was like sorcery that led people astray. Your drug – yes, your idol – was consumption, and money was mammon.

For at the same time in you, the great city, the blood of saints and prophets was shed, and the blood of all who have been slaughtered on the earth was found. People did not want to hear the voice of God through these blood witnesses. Babylon felt they were a threat. The prostitute wanted to wipe out every memory of God, the Giver and Creator of all these gifts and abilities. And to kill the witnesses of Jesus by force, wherever they could be seized.

Chapter 19

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven. It came from a huge crowd, shouting: “Hallelujah” – Praise God! Salvation comes from God the Lord, to whom all glory, all honor, and power belong! For his judgments are true and perfectly just. For he has judged the great prostitute, who corrupted the whole earth with her prostitution. He has demanded an account for the much blood of his servants that she violently shed, and he has carried out justice on her. She violently snuffed out lives – and now loses her own.

And in heaven they said: “Hallelujah! Her smoke rises for ever and ever!” This city will never exist again. It remains an eternal heap of ruins.

I, John, was truly glad to receive a heavenly perspective again now, after I had seen all these things in the city.

And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell on their faces and worshiped God, who sits on the throne. And they cried out with one voice: “Amen! Hallelujah”!

Then a voice came from the throne, saying: “Praise our God, you who fear him, you his servants. The lowly and the small, just like the great!”

Then I heard the voice of a great multitude, which I had heard once before. It was like the roar of mighty waters and like the rumbling of loud thunder: “Hallelujah! The Lord our God has now taken up his reign and his rule! Now we can give free rein to our joy, be glad, and give him glory! The time has come. The goal has been reached. We are safe forever. At home forever with God and the Lamb. All enemies are defeated. A new age is beginning. For God has established his reign, visible and present everywhere.

Since I had been caught up into heaven, I had already seen the end of world history and the downfall of God’s enemies several times. Now, I think, for the *fourth time*, I was shown the way to the goal of salvation history – accompanied by rejoicing, worship, loud voices, and thunder.

The crowning conclusion of this *fourth unit* was even more beautiful than in the previous visions. For it flowed into a heavenly wedding. The long-awaited *wedding of the Lamb* had come! And the Lamb’s wife has made herself ready and dressed for this wonderful wedding. She was ready to follow the Lamb and to wait for his return. The bride was given a wedding dress. Of fine linen, shining and white.

This woman was the true *bride*. She is the beloved of the King. Her beauty was simple, but genuine and deep and pure. Completely different from the false bride, the prostitute Babylon. She first had to meet her end before the wedding feast could now begin.

The bride is the beloved of the Lamb. Loved with unimaginable love. Love unto death. For she has made her dress white in the blood of the Lamb.

The bride, the wife of the Lamb, is all the saints from all times. And her wedding dress reflects all the good deeds done by the saints on earth. There, on that great day, they will be recognized and seen. Nothing of what they did in tireless commitment for Jesus has he ever forgotten. The bridegroom, the

Lamb, will admire the beauty of the bride in all that she is to him and has done for him.

And an angel said to me: “Blessed are all who are invited to this wedding supper of the Lamb!” And the angel confirmed it once more and said: “These are the true and reliable words of the living God!” I knew it, after all, from my Lord. *All* are invited to the wedding and welcome. But only those may be there who have accepted the invitation.

The wedding began, and it never ended. The celebration goes on without end. The love of the Lamb is celebrated. The reign and presence of God are celebrated. Forever.

I was so moved and overwhelmed by this that I fell down at the feet of the angel to pay him homage. But he said, almost in alarm: “No, do not worship me. Never. Under no circumstances. I am a created being. I am a servant – just like you, together with your brothers who also hold to the testimony of Jesus. Always worship God alone. Never human beings. Not even when they have died. Not angels either. Worship God and the Lamb, Jesus. For the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus and about Jesus.” The Spirit of God bears witness to Jesus and makes him great.

Now, for the *fifth time*, something opened up for me. For the last time. This time it was the whole of heaven that opened toward the earth and described its end. It began directly with the return of the Messiah. For now he himself appeared. In person. Jesus. He came as a *rider* on a *white horse*.

He, the victor, my Jesus. The rider was called “Faithful and True.” He judges in righteousness in the name of his Father, who has empowered and commissioned him to do so. He carries out justice by executing justice.

Again, as before, I saw his eyes, which were like flames of fire. Eyes that see through everything, assess it, and judge it. On his head he wears many crowns. Royal dignity belongs to him alone. Not to the beast or the dragon with their crowns. He bears a name written that only he himself knows, no one else. A name he has received from his Father, expressing his unique relationship with him.

He wore a robe dipped in blood. It struck me that it had already been dipped in blood before he came to the earth. Yes, it was his own blood, which he shed for us. This sacrificial death gave him the right to go out now into this spiritual battle. Besides other names, he also bears the title: The *Word of God*. Yes, he is

what God has to say. He is the Logos, the one who expresses who God is, what God wants and says.

As I had already seen before, he was not alone. The armies of heaven, the angels and the saints, followed him on white horses. Dressed in fine linen, in pure white linen in the color of victory. A mighty army.

Out of the mouth of the first rider came a sharp sword, with which to strike down the rebellious nations. What he says will happen, and it is the truth. His word is his strongest weapon. The word of truth and righteousness.

I understood that these military images of mighty warfare are not to be applied literally, one to one. There will not really be a material battle. No, the victory was already won on the cross. It will not be won on this day of his appearing. Christ, the Lamb, is not a bloodthirsty and cruel warrior. The antichristian beast certainly is. Christ is not an avenging angel. No! He is the just and incorruptible Judge, who pronounces the verdict and carries out justice through the truth of his word. He is and remains the Lamb. In this event, too, it is so. He alone judges the army of the beast, not those who follow him. His word is the double-edged sword. His word is enough. I had experienced that back then in the garden, when they were looking for Jesus and wanted to arrest him. When he said, I am he, they all fell to the ground as if struck down. When he comes, his visible presence will be enough to bring everyone to their knees.

He will be the shepherd with an iron scepter. He will rule people with the care and affection of a good shepherd.

And he treads the winepress of the fury and wrath of God Almighty. Although Christ is the Lamb, and although God's grace is inexhaustible, here, in the final confrontation, grace falls silent and hides itself, since justice must now be carried out on those who fight against him, who reject him – yes, who hate him. It remains true: It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God in this way.

Another name is written on his robe and on his thigh, a name that means the end of all opposition: *King of kings* and Lord of lords.

When I saw this rider with his army coming from heaven toward the earth, another angel appeared, calling out with a loud voice to all the birds in the sky: “Come, all of you, and gather for the great supper of God. So that you can eat the flesh of kings, of generals, of the mighty, and of horses and of those who ride them. The flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small.” What a

contrast to the wedding supper of the Lamb, to which, after all, everyone had been invited. This language was horrifying, but also typically apocalyptic. This drastic language had only one purpose: to warn everyone against taking this path, the one on which all who had worshipped the beast were walking.

Now I saw a huge army on the earth. The beast from the sea, this antichristian world ruler, and the kings of the earth and their armies were gathered to wage war against the one who sat on the horse and against his army, which came from heaven.

It was a bizarre situation. How could it be that people form an alliance and set themselves against the King of kings? How great can delusion be? How great the overconfidence? An insane undertaking, to fight against the Son of God and challenge him. But ultimately this confrontation always also consisted in this: that the beast was a satanic deceiver and Christ the true Word of God.

Consequently, there was no battle either. No slaughter with dead on both sides. No. The beast was captured. Resistance was futile. Together with the beast, the false prophet was also removed, who had led people astray with his miraculous signs so that they would serve the beast and pay it homage. Both men, whom I had seen coming forth as the beast from the sea and as the beast from the earth, were seized and thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. They were not brought there to be annihilated. Rather, the lake of fire is the epitome of distance from God, of loneliness and emptiness and darkness. A place and a state that, as already mentioned, has no end. A place with no exit and no escape route. Without hope. Here the earthly history of these two men came to an end, and God had no other place for them than this one. All the judgments they had experienced on earth – comparable to Pharaoh in Egypt when he was confronted by Moses – had not brought these men to repentance. In the truest sense of the word, like animals, they had followed only their instincts.

The rest, who had followed the two beasts, were killed by the sharp sword of the one who had led the heavenly army on his white horse. All the birds that had followed the angel's call gorged themselves. So many soldiers had followed the frog spirits that had gone out to gather the kings of the earth to this place, to Armageddon, as I had seen with the sixth bowl of wrath.

Christ, the Redeemer and Perfecter of the world, ended the battle against evil as quickly as it had begun. The evil one, and with him evil itself, is defeated.

Chapter 20

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven. He had the key to the Abyss, the bottomless pit. And in his hand a great iron chain. And the dragon, the ancient serpent, Satan, was seized. He was put in chains for 1,000 years, thrown into the Abyss, and locked away. He put up no resistance. He knew that his time had come. The Abyss was locked and sealed. For a thousand years he could no longer lead the nations astray. When the 1,000 years are over, he must be set free for a short time.

I was glad that Satan was put under lock and key. But I was amazed that he was not also thrown into the lake of fire like the beast and the false prophet! Could it be possible that God would give the deceiver of mankind, the murderer from the beginning, one more opportunity to do evil? Was the drama to repeat itself once more? When I saw the next scene, I began to grasp what I was meant to understand and what it signified.

I saw thrones set up. On them sat the martyrs who came out of the time of the beast's rule. Now their time had come to sit in judgment. Of the martyrs it was said: I saw the souls of those who had held faithfully to the testimony of Jesus and had been obedient to the word of God to the end. That is why they had been beheaded and, for the sake of their faithfulness, had lost their heads and with them their lives. They had not worshiped the beast, the antichristian dictator, nor its statue. Nor had they received the mark of the beast on their foreheads or hands. These blood witnesses and martyrs now came to life in the resurrection from the dead. And with that their time had come to judge and to reign together with the Christ, the Messiah. For 1,000 years.

I had read something similar in the prophet Daniel, in his seventh chapter. There the most terrible, the last of the four beasts, which had killed the saints, was defeated. But then these saints received thrones and dominion and a kingdom from God himself. And that happened here as well. Whereas before the beast had conquered the saints in its kingdom, which lasted 3½ years, now the martyrs were vindicated. Everything turned in their favor. Judgment was entrusted to them and dominion handed over to them, together with the Messiah. But not for *3½ years*, but for *1,000 years*.

All the rest who had died – and these were all who had followed the beast and the false prophet – did not come to life. Not until the 1,000 years were

over.

In the writings of the Jews I had often read of an intermediate kingdom that was to be established after the coming of the Messiah and before the new creation. Here I noticed how – as with other figures from the Jewish world of thought and from the myths of the Greeks before – it was being reinterpreted. This image is meant to describe vividly the downfall of the beast and the triumph of the martyrs. This image of the thousand-year kingdom serves to demonstrate the victory of the martyrs over the beast. That alone is what it aims at – and not at a literal kingdom of limited duration. Rather, I was simply to set the 1,000 years over against the short 3½ years.

For the resurrection of the martyrs is the *first* resurrection. Blessed and holy is whoever takes part in this first resurrection. Over these who have been raised, the *second death* has no power. All these who have been raised – and this includes *all* followers of Jesus – will be priests of God and of Christ. Yes, Christ has made us priests and kings. And now the time had come when this would be fulfilled without any limitation. They will reign with Christ a thousand years.

The beast, on the other hand, suffers the *second death*, and with that this dark kingdom comes to an end.

This image of the downfall of the devilish trinity – of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet – is sharpened one more time. In order to show finally that the victory of the martyrs in the kingdom of Christ can never again be undone, the devil is given one last opportunity to lead the nations astray once more.

After a thousand years Satan will be released from his prison. He will go out in every direction and lead all nations astray. He will gather Gog and Magog for war. A symbolic army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They marched up across the broad plain of the land and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, the impregnable heavenly Jerusalem.

What would happen? It happened quickly and without a fight. Fire fell from heaven and devoured the huge army.

Now the moment I had been waiting for had come. The deceiver of the nations, the devil, was thrown into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. There the beast and the false prophet were already waiting. They will be tormented there day and night, for ever and ever. There the satanic trinity was reunited –

the trinity that had stirred up the nations against God and the Lamb and had conquered the saints, the followers of Jesus.

The victory of the saints is God's *last word*. The renewed deception by the devil is not a repetition of the beast's rule, but a *sign* that after the visible coming of the Messiah, the rider on the white horse, the question of power has been settled finally and forever. Now there can indeed be no new rebellion. Just as the kingdom of Christ, after 1,000 years, is no longer in danger of being overrun once more. It is eternal and finds its fulfillment in God's new world, which I was soon allowed to see.

I, John, began to grasp that the end of world history and the end of the first, fallen creation had now come. I saw a great *white throne* and him who was seated on it. Before this person heaven and earth, the whole universe, virtually fled.

I saw countless people. All who have ever lived, they stood before the throne. The small and the great. All were called there and had to appear there. There was not a single exception. And all were treated the same.

It was the great day of judgment. The *Last Judgment*. The day on which everything people have done is judged justly by God. The day when every person finally becomes aware that he must give account to his Creator for everything he has done.

Books were opened in which the life story and all the thoughts, motives, and deeds of people were stored, as in a perfect memory with unlimited storage capacity. But another book was there too. The book of life. It was opened.

The dead who stood there were judged justly according to what they had done.

The dead truly came from everywhere. Even from places where people thought they had vanished forever. They came from the depths of the sea. Death and Hades, too, gave up the dead that were in them. And all the dead were judged according to what they themselves had done.

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. Death was finally defeated, and the realm of the dead along with it, because it was no longer needed. The previous order of all things came to an end here. The lake of fire is the second death, the last and final death. It is not a place of annihilation. For there people go on existing. But in a state in which they will feel the evil they have done against God and people.

Although all people were judged precisely and justly according to their works, it was also examined whether they were written in the book of life. There, that was an important – yes, the most important – question of all. The question was whether someone had believed in the Lamb and followed him in order to receive eternal life. In this book of life of the Lamb were recorded all who had worshiped the living God.

If any of those who stood before the throne were not found in this book, they were thrown into the lake of fire. Even when many good works were found in the books, but their name was not in this book. They were handed over to the lake of fire. People froze with terror and despair. For no one ever wanted to come to this terrible place. And no one was predestined for it. It is the place where people receive their just punishment, the consequence of their evil works – and where God, in grace, even takes into account the good works they consciously did. Those who were found in the book of life entered into the eternal joy of their Lord. Undeserved, by grace, for they trusted in the Lamb, who had died for their evil deeds.

The others went into separation from God. A farewell with no return for those who were thrown into the lake of fire. Here, too, the image was so vivid because it stands as a warning for all who hear it. For all to whom God does not matter. They, too, are meant to be reached by this drastic language.

Chapter 21

I, John, had seen many things on my journey through heaven that I knew, in this or a similar form, from our Hebrew Bible. Now I was allowed to see the fulfillment – indeed, the completion – of all the promises. Only because I knew the Scriptures of the old covenant could I understand at all what all the signs and events I saw meant.

Now I saw what is the *fulfillment* of our hope and expectation: I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The old earth, as I had known it, was no longer there.

The sea was no more. The sea in the figurative sense, out of which the beast came up – the menacing, churning sea of nations – was gone.

I did not see this new earth as I had expected. As an idyllic landscape, with mountains, rivers, plants, and lakes. Like so much else before, it was shown to me again in symbols and images: as a *city*, as a *bride*, and as a *garden*. This described the new reality from the perspective our hearts long for most: namely,

in relationship with God and the Lamb, in their nearness and presence. Of course there will be mountains, rivers, plants, lakes, and animals, as in the first creation, for it was very good.

I knew the promise of a new heaven and a new earth from Isaiah 65 and 66.

Then I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven onto the new earth. From God, out of his throne. Here his counsel was fulfilled.

This city was like a bride who has adorned herself for her husband. And I was soon to learn what this city was all about. It was the perfected fellowship of the redeemed. On the one hand they were the city, and on the other hand they lived in the city. All the images I saw were in a special way multidimensional and had more than one meaning. Simply rich in meaning. Different from our old, earthly reality, in which we still live.

I heard a loud voice speaking out of the throne: Look, the *dwelling place of God* is in the midst of people. And God will set up his eternal home, his dwelling place, with people. And he will live with them. On the new earth. And people will be his peoples. And God himself, the Eternal One and Almighty, will have fellowship with them. Their God. They will see him as he is. Heaven and earth come together. The invisible world becomes the visible world. Faith has turned into sight.

And like a comforting mother, he will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will never again be tears of grief, fear, and despair. Everything will turn into carefree joy. All disgrace will be removed. Death, which everyone fears and which destroys everything, will be no more. There will be no more mourning or crying, and no more pain either. For the first things – the old, the fallen, the lost, and the hopeless – are no more.

And he who was seated on the throne said: Look, I am making everything new.

And he who was seated on the throne spoke directly to me and said: “Write, for these words are certain and true. They are absolutely reliable.” When you saw what I saw and heard what I heard, these words were exactly right for me. For it was so unbelievably glorious, in view of the world I lived in, to experience such a different world. And it really is going to come about. Yes, for God everything is already there. For I heard him say to me: “It is done. I am the

Alpha and the Omega. The Beginning and the End. I have always been there and always will be. What I promise, I will do. You can rely on me.”

I will give the thirsty living water from my spring. Free of charge, without cost. Water that does not quench bodily thirst, but the thirst for me and for genuine and true life. Everyone may come and drink: of eternal life, of my new creation, the glorious home. It moved me deeply how my God longed for people, how he called them all to be part of his new creation. But he did not make the decision for people. They had to decide *for themselves* to drink of this water of life, by receiving the gospel of grace.

Those who overcome and believe what I say, and who hold fast to it, will inherit this new creation. But no victory without a struggle! Not triumphant or perfect, but decided for Jesus. No light-footed triumph. Rather, the narrow way to God’s new world is challenging and uncompromising. The new world will belong to them. I will be their God, and each will be my son and daughter.

But not all people will become sons and daughters of God. Not all will experience the new earth: cowards who followed Jesus only halfheartedly for fear of persecution; unbelievers to whom God is a matter of indifference; people who committed abominable deeds; murderers and the sexually perverse; occultists who got involved with demons; idolaters for whom money, honor, and self-fulfillment were the most important things – and liars whose whole life was a lie – they will all suffer the second death, because they did not turn back. Because they did not drink the water of life, this free gift of God. They will end up in the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. They rejected every warning. Their eternal existence is full of self-reproach, because they did not heed God’s warnings.

Then one of the seven angels who had the last bowls of wrath came. He said to me: “Come! I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain. As once he had done with the old prophet Ezekiel. From there the view was tremendous. And I saw the great city, holy Jerusalem, as it came down out of heaven from God onto the earth. This city was inhabited – indeed, filled – by the glory of God. It shone like a precious jewel. Its radiance was like that of a crystal, a jasper.

The city was surrounded by a great wall. Yes, the constant insecurity and the hounding of the church had been transformed into God’s everlasting keeping and protection.

It had 12 city gates. So there was an inside and an outside. At the gates stood twelve angels as gatekeepers. At the same time as representatives of the 12 tribes of Israel. Their names could be read on the gates. I already knew them from before I saw the great international multitude before the throne. On the east side there were three gates – and likewise on the north, south, and west sides.

The people of God, of the old as well as of the new covenant, were united forever in this city. That was also evident beneath the city. I saw twelve foundations. On each of these foundations stood one of the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. I, John, was greatly amazed – I found my name engraved there too. What an honor for us disciples.

The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod, a golden measuring stick, in his hand, to measure the city and its gates and walls.

The city was foursquare. Like a square. He arrived at a measurement of almost 2,300 kilometers. The length of the city, its width, and even its height are equal. So the city had the shape of a cube. All its lengths were perfectly equal.

I knew that the ancient cities of Babylon, Nineveh, and Rome too were laid out in a square. But not in height.

What did this remind me of? Yes, there was only one cube I knew of, and that was the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and in the temple. This place was like a perfect cube. In it was the ark of the covenant. It was the throne of God. So this enormous city was like the Most Holy Place, where God himself dwells. That confirmed to me what I had already heard. God will live with people and so bring heaven to earth and make the earth his Most Holy Place.

All the dimensions of the city were supernatural, spiritual, and symbolic. Of immense depth and breadth. Now the wall was measured. It was 12 x 12, that is, 144 cubits thick. An angel's cubit is also a human cubit. So the wall was about 70 meters thick or high. An insurmountable wall, which represented and guaranteed the security of the great and holy city.

Just as I had already seen the city shining, so the wall was made of jasper. That is also what the one looked like whom I had seen on the throne at the very beginning. The whole city itself was of the purest gold, like transparent glass. Clear, transparent glass did not yet exist in our day, which is why what I saw was something very special.

Each of the twelve foundations, on which the names of the Twelve were engraved, evidently consisted of a single precious stone. Like unimaginably beautiful jewelry.

The first foundation stone with jasper; the second with sapphire; the third with chalcedony; the fourth with emerald; the fifth with sardonyx; the sixth with carnelian; the seventh with chrysolite; the eighth with beryl; the ninth with topaz; the tenth with chrysoprase; the eleventh with jacinth; the twelfth with amethyst.

Most of these precious stones I knew from the breastpiece of the high priest. That could be no coincidence.

And the twelve gates of the city were – I could hardly believe my eyes – twelve enormous pearls. Each of the gates was made of a single enormous, flawless pearl.

The main street of the city, its lifeline, was of pure gold, like transparent glass. Yes, all the streets of the city were like that.

In the city of Jerusalem I saw no temple, which amazed me. For if any city had a temple, it was Jerusalem. But the Lord God Almighty himself and the Lamb are its temple. The whole city was, after all, a temple, laid out as a cube – like the Most Holy Place of the temple.

Although there will be a sun and a moon, the city does not need the light of the sun, nor the light of the moon at night. The glory of God's presence lights up the city. The lamp of the city is the Lamb. Jesus, the light of the world. If one day the sun burns out, that will have no significance for the new earth.

I remembered a small detail from the history of Israel, when the ninth plague came, a darkness so dark that it could be felt. For three days. But in the houses of the Israelites there was light, there where the Passover lambs were. Under the sixth bowl of wrath, darkness had already come over the kingdom of the beast. Now, in the consummation, the Lamb was the light of the city. Outside the city was darkness. There are all those who did not want to enter this city.

Although there is an inside and an outside – the saints in the city, the unbelievers outside – this many-layered image of the new Jerusalem shows the new earth, the vibrant life, the creative work, discoveries, culture, music, art, and everything else that God has given people as potential.

The nations of the earth will live in the light of this city. Their kings and peoples will, as Isaiah said, bring their glory into it. They will come to the capital of the new earth and bring everything glorious with them, to the honor and enrichment of the city.

The city gates will no longer need to be shut at night. There will be no night at all anymore. The danger of the night, when enemies and thieves lie in wait, is no more. Fear of the night is a thing of the past forever. It will be like a single day.

The glory and honor of the nations – whatever glorious material, intellectual, and spiritual goods they have – they will bring into this city of God. To delight it and honor it and enrich it.

Nothing impure will ever enter the city. Those who are not “washed in the blood of the Lamb” have no access. Nor anyone who committed abominable atrocities. No liars, as God himself already emphasized. It will be a holy place. In God’s presence everything must be in harmony with him.

Chapter 22

Now I was given a new view within this city. I saw a place of inexhaustible divine life.

The angel now showed me a river. A stream of flowing water. Water of life. Crystal clear. The water shone and sparkled like crystal. This stream of water flowed from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In a similar way, Ezekiel had seen water – a river that kept growing larger – flowing out of the temple. Now I knew where this river really came from. Namely, directly from the throne of God. It filled everything with life and growth.

In the middle of the city was the main street of gold, and beside it was the river of the water of life. On both sides of the street and of the river the trees of life could be seen. It bears fruit twelve times a year. Every month its fruit ripens. Not comparable to nature as we know it today. The abundance and variety of the fruit was indescribable.

The leaves of these trees are like medicine for the healing of the nations. In reality there will no longer be any illness of a physical or emotional kind. No one, not even whole peoples, will ever again be struck by epidemics, by anything that makes them sick or weak. The healing powers of eternity will keep them from it.

There will no longer be any curse. It has been lifted by Christ and his sacrifice on the cross. This was now a new and better paradise than in Eden at the beginning. Because Christ died like a lamb and rose again. As the beginning and origin of the new creation.

Yes, the one throne of God and of the Lamb was in this city. As if God and the Lamb had moved from heaven to live with people. He had moved his throne, from which he rules the universe, to the earth.

And his servants will serve him joyfully. And they will see his face. The face of God. That is the very highest thing there can be for created beings. Above all because they were all once godless sinners. Who can understand this miracle of grace?

God's name will be written on their foreheads, because they belong to him.

The night of death, of fear, of loneliness and danger will be no more.

A lamp that lights up everything will no longer be needed. Nor will the sun be necessary anymore. Once it has burned out, it will not be missed. God himself and the Lamb will be their light and shine over them.

They will reign for ever and ever. Not over people. They will now carry out the creation mandate from the beginning, to subdue the earth. Just as God intended. All the redeemed will carry out their tasks in the new creation with joy and a sense of fulfillment.

So I was allowed to catch a glimpse of the new world we are all waiting for. I saw the new creation in many dimensions, in changing metaphors: as a bride, as a city, and as a garden. I saw it like the Most Holy Place, which now extends over the whole earth. All people, wherever they are on the new earth, will see God's face. Because he will dwell on the earth, visible to all. He will have fellowship with them, visit them, and speak with them. Just as once in Eden, with Adam and Eve, in the cool of the day. We will talk with God and the Lamb. Ask many questions – and receive answers we did not expect.

And the angel said to me: "These words of God are certain, true, and reliable. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place. Look! I, Jesus, am coming soon – yes, unexpectedly!

Blessed are all who keep the words of this book and do them!"

You do not have to understand the meaning of all the words and images. But encouraged by the victory of God and of the Lamb, we keep the message of

the book and follow the Lamb.

I, John, saw and heard all this. I fell down at the feet of the angel who had shown it to me. That is how overwhelmed I was. Then the angel spoke, and I remembered that this had happened once before: “Do not do that under any circumstances. I am, after all, only a servant of God, just like you followers of Jesus. We angels serve your brothers and sisters and the prophets and all who hold fast to the words of this book. Worship God alone.”

Then he said to me: “Do *not* seal up the words of prophecy in this book, as Daniel once had to do. For the time is near. The words apply to this time. Already today.”

Whoever does wrong may go on doing wrong, and whoever takes pleasure in impurity may go on making himself impure. But let him consider the end and rethink his life. But whoever acts as is right should go on doing what is right, and whoever leads a holy life should go on living in a way that pleases God. This is how overcomers live, who stand firm and faithful to the end and do not give up out of discouragement, fear, or failure. When they fall, they get up again, because they live in the power of God’s grace.

Look, I am coming soon, quickly and unexpectedly! So be ready at all times to meet me with joy and expectation. I will bring the reward for each person with me. The reward each one has earned, according to what his work, his deeds, and his labor have been.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. With this name I, Jesus, sign the whole book of Revelation.

Blessed are those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb! With the dirty robe of their lives they may never come to the wedding of the Lamb. But if they wash their robes by believing in me, Jesus, and in the forgiveness that comes through my death, then they may eat from the tree of life. Then they will go through the pearly gates of glory into the new Jerusalem, the holy city.

Everyone may come. Whoever stays outside has wanted it that way himself. Outside remain the dogs, who are attached to what is unholy and want to remain in it and reject redemption. The sorcerers, who have gotten involved with dark powers. The sexually immoral, who have revered sex as their god. The murderers, the idolaters, and all who love the lie. Because they loved sin more than God and did not want to turn back, they may not enter into the eternal joy of the city of God.

I, Jesus, have sent my angel to show you all these things and to testify to them. It comes from me. It is not an invention of human beings or of angels. All churches, not only the seven in Asia Minor, should know this.

I, Jesus, am the Root of David, the promised Messiah. The true descendant of David. I am the bright Morning Star. I am the star of which Balaam spoke long ago, which was to come forth out of Israel. As Redeemer and Perfecter of the world, who brings an eternal morning that no night will ever follow.

And the Holy Spirit and the bride, the church of all followers of Jesus, say: Come, Lord Jesus! And whoever hears this call, let him join in and say: Come! Let us express our longing and speak it out loud.

Whoever is thirsty – for God, for peace, for life, meaning, and hope – let him drink of the water of life! As long as there is still time, as long as grace lasts, it can be had free of charge. It cannot be earned through good works. It must be taken as a free gift. We receive it only free of charge!

God pursues his goal for people with holy passion and seeks to win their hearts, so that they may spend eternity with him.

To everyone who hears the prophetic words of this book I say: “If anyone willfully adds anything to this book and thereby falsifies the message of the book, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book.

If anyone takes away anything from the message of this book and suppresses it, God will take away from him access to the tree of life and to the holy city.”

He who testifies to all these things, because he wants us to know them, says: “Yes, I am coming soon!”

We answer full of hope: Amen! Come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints, at all times and in every place. Until he comes.

“God himself will be the final goal of our longing – him we will behold without end, love without weariness or fatigue, and praise.”

Augustine of Hippo

In Closing

I very much hope that as you read, you sensed how God speaks to you and how he is fighting for your heart. How he encourages, teaches, but also warns against everything that does not come from him and therefore harms us.

Thank him for all the good things he has said about you and also directly to you.

If you have any questions, write to us: info@kirchefüralle.de

Write to us also if you are interested in getting to know the other letters of the New Testament and the Gospels in this form.

Here are a few more important tips:

Read the Bible. Regularly, if possible.

- Read the Bible together with other people – and share your thoughts with one another.
- Start with the accounts of the life of Jesus, the Gospels.
- Pray that God will make his word come alive for you – as if he were speaking directly to you.
- Read the text aloud, twice in a row.

Ask the following questions of the text:

- What heading would you give this text?
- What does the text say about God and Jesus?
- What does the text say about people?
- What do we learn from the text?
- What should we do?
- How does the word encourage us?

When you meet again, talk about your experiences and what has happened to you.

Seek contact and fellowship with Christians who love and honor Jesus; who value, read, and take the Bible seriously.