

To the Hebrews

Paraphrased,
explained,
for today.

GOOD NEWS

To the Hebrews

Paraphrased, explained, for today.

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It is finished!

Tetelestai

John 19:28-30

Book description: In this book I paraphrase the Letter to the Hebrews in my own words, that is, I render it in an explanatory way. As if I were trying to explain or interpret it briefly and concisely. The amount of text that has come out of this is roughly three times the number of words of a classic Bible translation.

This rendering is meant as a help to understand the letter better. It does not replace the biblical text. So always read this letter of the New Testament in a classic Bible translation as well. By that I mean translations such as the Einheitsübersetzung, the Luther translation, the Elberfelder or the Schlachter translation (German Bible translations).

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To the Hebrews

This extraordinary letter cannot be compared with any other in the New Testament¹. Like a “missing link” (a transitional form), it stands between the Old and the New Testament. In other words: It is a commentary that takes up the history and the sacrificial worship of Israel. It looks at all this and compares it with the new and far better reality of redemption through Jesus Christ. For Israelites, above all Jews in the first century who believed in Jesus the Messiah, this was enormously important. They knew their history and their worship well. Perhaps there were former priests and Levites among those addressed. *Was Jesus, the crucified one – so they may sometimes have asked and doubted – really the Messiah? Could his bloody death on the cross save, and even be a final sacrifice?*

Does an ancient letter addressed to Hebrews have anything to say to us in the West today? Especially when its themes are rooted in the Hebrew Bible, the so-called Old Testament? When it is about angels, wilderness, covenant, blood, and sacrifice? Definitely, for otherwise this letter would not have made it into the New Testament. There are those who say this letter is just as important as the one to the Romans. In other words, a great deal would be missing for the Christian faith if it did not exist.

1. From here on abbreviated as NT.

A Jewish Perspective on the Gospel

Imagine Jewish Christians, some of them perhaps even former priests from the temple in Jerusalem. We do not know where they were geographically, just as little as we know who wrote the letter. For the Jews the world had long since become a different one. The ark of the covenant had long been gone from the Most Holy Place of the temple. And whether the temple itself still existed at the time of the letter is disputed.

The sacrificial service had been instituted by God through Moses. The temple, the worship, Jerusalem, the expectation of a Messiah – all this made up the national identity of this small people and of every single Jew. Now some had come to faith in Jesus, in whom they had recognized the Messiah. For them that changed everything. All the other Jews rejected this Jesus; after all, they had crucified him. Standing on the side of this crucified one did not make life easier. Discrimination and persecution set in. These Jewish Christians could no longer focus on a visible, material worship in the temple. As followers of the Messiah they were no longer part of the Jewish people. Their conviction, their new identity, and their Messiah were purely a matter of faith, nothing to touch, nothing visible anymore.

In this tense situation, which had already lasted for some years, the temptation grew more and more to give up faith in the Messiah and to return to the old and visible. Life would become easier again, religion would be a familiar one, the Jewish people would be their home again, and they would be part of the synagogue again.

That is why the letter encourages them to persevere and hold out. It shows how much better and greater the heavenly worship and the heavenly city are, indeed the whole new covenant. The letter warns drastically against giving up and falling away from the faith, because afterward there is the danger of never coming back.

The writer fights for the hearts of the recipients of the letter: with many comparisons, with reminders of their history, and with a unique portrayal of the blessing and riches of the new covenant.

What is it like today? The post-Christian era has begun. As a professing follower of Jesus, you are a stranger, an outsider. If you do not conform, it can

be quite difficult to confess Jesus as the only bringer of salvation and the Bible as the standard for life. That is why the message of the letter is relevant today in our Western society.

Key Terms and Themes

For us as non-Jews and as readers who are hardly familiar with the history and the rites of Israel, here are a few introductory thoughts on terms that play an important role in the letter.

Angels

At the beginning of the letter, in the first two chapters, Jesus is compared with angels several times. The author wants to demonstrate impressively that he is greater than any angel. He is not a created being like the angels. Even when God the Son became a human being. That is, mortal, and even executed on a cross. Angels are “mighty ones who do his bidding”; they are stronger than human beings. They are spirits, not subject to material existence and death as we humans of flesh and blood are. Jesus the Messiah was made lower than the angels because he became a human being and actually died. But God raised him and led him out from the dead and exalted him above the angels. As **God the Son** he had always been that. He is the Creator of the visible and invisible world. But as a human being of flesh and blood he now receives a rank and a place at the right hand of God, far exalted above the angels. This place of honor, from which he will reign, he shares with us, because he calls us his brothers and sisters.

To begin to understand the world of angels from a Jewish perspective, here are some biblical texts as examples that are helpful to look up. How does the Hebrew Bible, that is, the Old Testament, speak about this? The heavenly hosts are the totality of all angelic beings. They are at God’s service and carry out his will. There are different designations, also names and ranks and ministries in the angelic world. Angels can decide to serve God or to turn away from him. Long ago, after the confusion of languages at Babel, God entrusted the nations to the sons of God, but they did not fulfill their task, sought their own honor, and did not help the people:

Deuteronomy 32:8-9 (Genesis 11:1-9); Psalm 82:6-7; Genesis 6:1-3.

1 Kings 22:19-23; Job 1–2.

Psalm 148:1-5; Job 38:4-7; Isaiah 14:12; Nehemiah 9:6; Daniel 4:13-23; 7:9-10; 8:16; 9:21; 10:13, 21; 12:1; Genesis 1:26 (“us” is the heavenly council before/around God’s throne).

The comparison of Jesus with the angels is unique in this form in the NT, and we ask ourselves why it is necessary in such detail. It seems so self-evident to us that Jesus is greater or higher than the angels. But here we must try to put ourselves in the place of the Jewish readers. For them, Jesus the Messiah was in some ways also something new, and it was constantly challenged in their surroundings, where Jesus was completely rejected. Their worldview is addressed, and so the biblical reality is taken seriously. This reality is, today and everywhere, the invisible reality that surrounds us too.

God is the sovereign ruler, but after the building of the tower of Babel he assigned angels, who are called sons of God, to the nations, to lead them and instruct them in justice and righteousness. But these fulfilled their commission poorly and abused it for their own benefit and their own veneration (Psalm 82). That is why it says that the world to come, that is, the world that will be renewed, will no longer be subject to angels. They have failed, and God has appointed the Messiah-King Jesus to rule. With us redeemed human beings at his side.

One of the greatest and mightiest sons of God is the devil. In rebellion against the Most High he fell from his high position. He became the enemy and murderer of human beings, but he was defeated by the Messiah and his death (2:14).

The first two chapters show how we as mortal human beings and sinners are set free through the death of the Messiah and now become companions, that is, friends of the Messiah. We have become his family. With him we will reign in the future. In other words: Christ is not only greater and more glorious than the angels. United with the Messiah-King, we too will be set above the angels and take their privileged place or surpass it. Paul says that we will judge angels. That must have turned the worldview of these Jews upside down. So it was worth being someone who confessed Jesus. The same privilege applies to the Christians from the nations.

The High Priest

The high priest is the key figure of the Levitical sacrificial worship. Aaron, Moses’ brother, was the first high priest, and his sons and their sons followed

him. In the Letter to the Hebrews, Christ is interpreted as the true and greater and eternal high priest. The high priest represents the people before God and leads the worship. He wore special clothing and a striking breastpiece in which 12 precious stones were set. They represented the 12 tribes that made up the people of Israel.



Right at the beginning of the letter we are pointed to the great deed of Jesus that rightly makes him this unique priest: ***He provided purification for sins*** (1:3). Sin, transgression, and ritual impurity were a problem in the people of Israel for which there had to be a solution. The same applies to all of humanity, because sin separates us from God and makes fellowship with him impossible. This

purification for sins is deepened and explained in the course of the letter as part of the glorious message of the gospel.

It is said that this deed of the Lord Jesus Christ is redemption and salvation for us (2:3, 10; 5:9; 7:25; 9:28). And liberation out of slavery (2:15) into the coming glory (2:10). *Salvation was not achieved in the devotion and solemnity of a sacrificial service in the temple, but through a horribly cruel and bloody death on the cross, which he suffered for us.* Outside the gates of Jerusalem (2:9; 13:12). The result of this saving act of Jesus Christ is described with various terms:

Eternal redemption (liberation, in 9:12, 15), *forgiveness* (9:22; 10:18), *doing away with / removal* of sin (abolition 9:26), *atonement* (to make atonement, 2:17), *sanctification* (to make holy, to sanctify, 2:11; 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12), *cleansing* (1:3; 9:14, 22; 10:2; cf. 10:22).

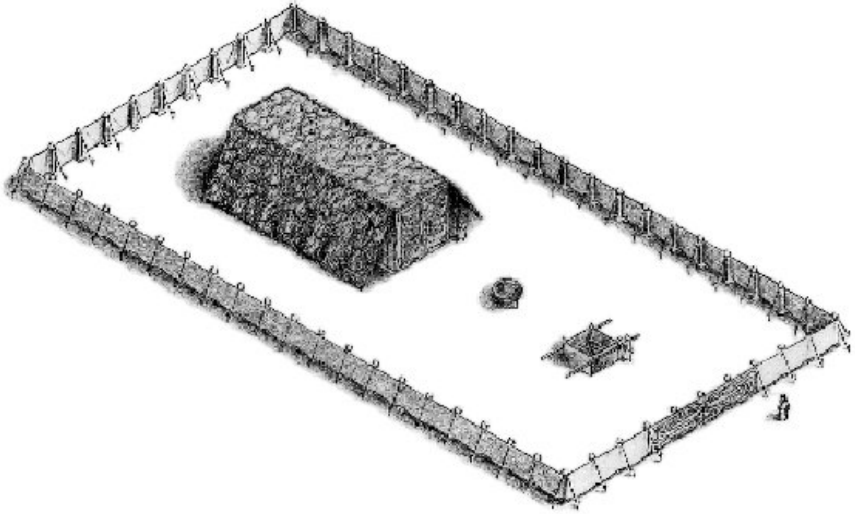
Christ is not only the high priest but is himself also the sacrifice. In both cases he ends the first or old system of sacrifice and covenant. He is the last high priest, for he lives forever, and his sacrifice is once for all and so perfect that it abolishes sin and takes it away.

As high priest he has not only solved the problem of sin; he now also stands up for us in the difficulties of our everyday lives. And he leads us in a worship that is now heavenly, where we as God's new people come to God in faith with spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise in worship.

Sinai, the Mobile Temple, the Wilderness Wandering

At Sinai the people camped for a whole year – the people who had been set free from the land of Egypt and had gone out in the so-called exodus. Here God gave his people their special identity as his royal priestly people. Here he gave them his law, and here he gave them his covenant (e.g., Exodus 19 and 20).

The mobile temple, also called the tabernacle, was a tent sanctuary. It was fenced in, or enclosed, by a courtyard. The tent in the middle contained the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, in which the ark of the covenant stood. It was a holy place where God dwelt in the cloud of his presence. He was enthroned as King of the universe and King of his people on the ark of the covenant, which is called his throne.



In front of the tent were the great altar and the great basin for washing. Here the sacrificial worship of Israel took place. Later, when Solomon builds the temple in Jerusalem, the arrangement is the same, only larger.

The Letter to the Hebrews refers to this tent sanctuary. It was made according to very precise and concrete instructions from God. All the material was donated by the people and worked by many skilled craftsmen.

Melchizedek

As if out of nowhere, a figure called Melchizedek appears in the story of Israel's forefather, the patriarch Abraham (Genesis 14). He was priest of God Most High, long before there was the Mosaic or Levitical priesthood of Israel. At the same time he was also king of Salem, of Jerusalem, before it became the City of David. We know no more than that about this person. The author of the letter makes use of exactly this circumstance by following Psalm 110, which says: ***You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*** This ancient king-priest becomes the ultimate prefiguration of Jesus. Jesus could not be a priest, since he was from the royal tribe of Judah and not from the tribe of Levi or from the family of Aaron. That is why God institutes this new priestly order, which lasts forever and replaces the previous order. So Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah,

will forever be the true king-priest. Not for Israel alone, but for the whole world. His priestly ministry has led to perfection.

The New Covenant

God made a covenant at Mount Sinai with his people, whom he had set free from Egypt. With this covenant God bound himself to his people – married them, if you like. This covenant had obligations, which were expressed in the Ten Commandments and in further commands. Keeping these commands was the condition of the covenant. But soon after they entered the covenant, they broke the first commandment and made themselves an idol, the golden calf. This incident stands symptomatically for the fact that neither Israel nor humankind as such is able to keep all these commands, and always. *That is why, because God is the way he is, he promised a new covenant that no longer depends on what we are or do or are able to do.*

The **new covenant**, whose mediator or go-between is Jesus, the Son of God, has some things in common with the old one. But the main difference is that the fulfillment does not depend on Israel's keeping of the law; rather, God ties the fulfillment exclusively to himself and his promises. The new covenant is unconditional, because it is anchored solely in God's pledge and promise through the work of Jesus Christ. The law is no longer held up before human beings to be fulfilled in their own strength; instead the law is now written on the heart and fulfilled in his people by the power of the Spirit of God. In the new covenant the problem of sin is solved once and for all through forgiveness (chapters 8–10).

We, the nations, have also been placed in this covenant and blessed, together with the Israelites to whom the letter is addressed. We think of this and remember it regularly in the Lord's Supper, or so-called Communion, at the Lord's table. For these Jews, a return to the old covenant while giving up or rejecting the new covenant would be a huge loss and a step backward.

Sacrifices in the Old Israelite Temple Worship

Did the recipients of the letter have problems with the offensiveness of Jesus' death on the cross? Did they miss the meaning of the cross, and did they perhaps miss the cleansing and redeeming logic they knew from their sacrificial worship?

The message of the gospel was: *The earthly life, the bloody death of Jesus on the cross, his being raised from the dead, and his subsequent exaltation to the right hand of God have comprehensive saving power and meaning.* Its counterpart and prefiguration is the sacrificial worship of ancient Israel. Christ's death is worked out in contrasts.

The new and better world of the Letter to the Hebrews is therefore a creative synthesis and antithesis to the history and the ritual traditions of Israel. For us in the 21st century all this is far away and foreign to our culture. But for the Jewish Christians of the 1st century it was a familiar and great theme on which much depended for them. Sin, just like ritual impurity back then, always had to be removed in order to restore relationship and make it something that could be positively experienced.

For this there were animal sacrifices that had to be brought in the case of an offense or a transgression. Either for the individual or for the whole people. However, and this is very important to notice: Whoever sinned deliberately or intentionally, e.g., idolatry, adultery, murder, child sacrifice, could not be cleansed by a sacrifice. There were offenses for which there were no sin offerings. For such deliberate sins the consequence was the death penalty. This essential limitation no longer exists in the new covenant.

The blood of the animal sacrifice played the most important role. The soul, that is, the life, is in the blood and brings about atonement. *For the Israelites, blood was the symbol of life. It was this life-giving power of the shed blood – not the death of the animal – that led to a change (cf. Leviticus 17:11). The life of the spotless animal embodied the power to restore the flawed life of the sinner.* Without the death of the animal, the blood for atonement was missing.

Atonement literally means “covering.” Indeed, sin is covered by the (perfect/pure) life of the sacrifice. Once the separating offense has been covered, the barrier is removed, and the way is open for a renewal of the relationship between the two parties.

Some sacrifices were burned on the altar, completely or in part. *Through the burning, the animal sacrifices passed over into the invisible, spiritual world of God, to whom the sacrifices were brought. Fire sometimes stands for God's wrath over sin. But in the sacrificial worship there is never any talk of wrath, but of atonement, that is, covering and cleansing of sins.* The blood of a sacrifice cleansed from sin the person or persons who brought it. This corresponds to the atonement or expiation of sins and transgressions. These are not substitutionary penal sacrifices or sacrifices of

satisfaction (satisfaction offerings). Sacrifices were not made because God needs them. People needed these sacrifices in order to be set free or cleansed from their transgression and ritual impurity.

The Letter to the Hebrews shows that animal sacrifices unfortunately only reminded people of their sins. A perfect, finally effective cleansing could not be achieved. These many sacrifices pointed, without saying so, to a last sacrifice, which, however, developed and was carried out completely differently than expected.

It is precisely the Letter to the Hebrews that shows how God accepts the violent death of Jesus (in the sense of “victim”) and sanctifies it as his complete and voluntary self-giving (in the sense of “sacrifice”). The blood of the dying and dead Messiah, the giving of his life and body, is the high point of God’s saving will and saving work. It is God himself who gives us his Son. For God, this is the final and perfect solution to our problem of sin.

Whatever we as people of the 21st century may think about this logic of salvation – it is the only solution to the problem of sin for human beings and the whole cosmos. Our sins, too, are forgiven, covered, and taken away through the blood of Jesus shed 2,000 years ago.

It is his sinless and holy life, his life given up, that has such worth that Peter speaks of the precious blood of Jesus and means exactly this: This blood can atone for all sins and take them away forever.

A sin offering and guilt offering (of a dove, a sheep, a goat, a ram from the flock, or a head of cattle/a bull) was brought by a person from his own possessions and sacrificed. Sacrificed for God, in order to cleanse the person from sin. Yet in the end the sacrificed animal was a gift of God. God is the giver of all gifts, and so also of the sacrifice for the transgressor, and thus of salvation.

Chapters 9 and 10 have the sacrifice of Jesus as their central theme. It becomes clear, looking back after Jesus’ death, that the old system of sacrifice could not lead to perfection. It constantly reminded people of sins and ritual defilement with regard to the holy place where God dwelt. But Jesus’ blood – it stands for his sinless, holy, and perfect life – cleanses and sanctifies us completely and forever. Even though his death was not in the least comparable to a solemn sacrificial ceremony in the temple. *For God, the voluntary self-giving of his Son even to death is the perfect sacrifice.*

Animal sacrifices, as the psalmist and the prophet say, were not really what God wanted at all. Human sacrifices, never ever. The incarnation of the Son of God, his holy life consecrated to God, his voluntary martyr's death – taken together, these are the perfect sacrifice, which abolishes sin in the truest sense of the word.

And once again: This blood also cleanses from those sins that were committed consciously, deliberately, and with a raised hand. That is the greatest difference from the old covenant. This difference is essential and liberating, because no unforgivable sin remains.

If all this applies to Israel, what does it have to do with us, the nations? A great deal, for everything the Messiah accomplished, everything that pointed to him in the old sacrificial worship, applies to us non-Jews as well. Everything that is promised to these Jewish Christians in the 1st century applies to us as well, without limitation. Like them, we believe in the Jewish Messiah. That is exactly why it is relevant for us too to approach this special letter with interest and to take it seriously. Even if it is hard to understand in some places.

The Great Day of Reconciliation or Atonement

Of all the festive holidays or festival seasons of Israel, there is one that stands out. The Letter to the Hebrews refers to it especially in chapters 9 and 10. It is YOM KIPPUR, the highest holiday, which is still observed today in the secular State of Israel. However, without a temple and without sacrifices.

YOM HAKIPPURIM, as it is actually called, is the highest Jewish holiday, the holiest day of the whole year; in English it is called the “Day of Atonement.” The word KIPPUR comes from the Hebrew root “K-P-R,” and its meaning is complex. It can be translated as: *to smear, to cover, to atone, to make atonement, to cleanse from sin, and to avert.* This root is also found in the word KAPPORETH, the name of the lid of the ark of the covenant. This is the place of atonement. The blood was sprinkled on and in front of this golden cover plate. God was enthroned in the cloud on this ark of the covenant and accepted this sacrifice.

What happened on this day? It was the annual “new start,” the “reset” for life in and around the sanctuary, for the priestly family and the whole people. It was about cleansing from ritual impurities that contaminated the holy place of God’s dwelling. The God and King of Israel is the Holy One, whose throne and dwelling place in the tent sanctuary (or later in the temple) had to be kept from

every defilement or cleansed from it. These defilements were not deliberate sins, but ritual ones, often unconscious contacts.

As the term says, on this day sin is covered through the blood of the sacrifice, atonement is made for the priests and the whole people, and a new beginning is made possible.

This “cleansing from sin” went hand in hand with repentance, with turning back and confession of sin. A mere sacrificial ritual without inner involvement and participation was not God’s solution to the problem of sin.

Compared with the rest of the sacrificial service, there are two special features.

The one is that the high priest went into the innermost sanctuary only this one time in the year (twice during this ceremony), there where the ark of the covenant stood. There he sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices in front of and on the ark of the covenant, the atonement cover (Romans 3:25).

For the people, the sacrifice consisted of *two* male goats. One was for God. Its blood was brought into the innermost sanctuary. The other goat was led alive into the wilderness. But only after the sins of the people had been confessed and spoken over it, with the laying on of hands, and so passed symbolically onto the animal. The animal was brought into the wilderness, to the place of death, there where sin belongs. In this way the sins of the people were eliminated and carried away. So the people, who had already fasted before this ceremony, were granted a kind of absolution after they had confessed their sins and the sacrifices had been made. But that applied only for one year. The ceremony was repeated every year. This is where the author of Hebrews starts, and he can proclaim that through Christ atonement has taken place once for all, which never has to be repeated again.

Nothing in what Christ did is merely symbolic or figurative or a shadow of reality. It is all reality and valid and lasts forever. With Jesus the Messiah, the absolute divine reality has appeared in the life and death of this true human being. So one could give the whole letter a heading with the words of Jesus that he spoke on the cross: It is finished!

Faith

A whole chapter is devoted to faith and trust. Not only in doctrinal statements, but in the lives of ancient ancestors of these Jewish Christians. Leading figures of Israel are the heroes of faith who are to be their examples. Ultimately the

Messiah himself is the greatest example, and at the same time one close to life. Even the Messiah did not get by without trials, temptation, and faith.

Living without a visible sanctuary, without a visible city, and without a Jew's identification with his people is a great challenge. For now what is visible for the follower of Jesus lies in the future. Nothing is visible and tangible anymore. All that is still visible are brothers and sisters in the faith, the fellowship of believers.

Persevering in faith, never giving up, keeping hope, realizing again and again in the heart and together with brothers and sisters in the faith the riches in Christ and keeping them before our eyes, so as to grow in spiritual maturity – that is the message of the Letter to the Hebrews.

Chapter 1

God Has Spoken in the Son – He Is Not Silent

Look back, you Hebrews, remember! Your history is alive. From the beginning Yahweh God has spoken. Not just once. In many and impressive ways. He was not silent, but made himself known unmistakably through the prophets. Often he sent them. They delivered his words. But that time is now over. For God the Son came and spoke to the world. Yes, God spoke through a prophet who is the Son. In a way like never before. It was the last prophetic word, but the divinely perfect one – and therefore the authoritative word. *Only he, the eternal Son who became human, could be this word. It was the greatest message, surpassing everything. Yes, the Son himself was the message. For Israel and the whole world.*

He really is the Son, for he is appointed heir of all things. Everything has always belonged to him, but as the Son of Man, too, everything will soon belong to him in the future. Everything was created through the Son. God the Father commissioned him to do this. In what the Son is and does, he is the perfect reflection and the radiance of the glory of God. This inconceivable glory of God came into the earthly and bodily reality and presence of the man 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. He is like the imprint of a seal that confirms God's message. *The eternal God is exactly the one who has come in Jesus. Just as we have come to know Jesus, so God has always been. And so he will always be.*

Everything the Son has created also 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. He holds the universe, space and time, in balance. He will bring everything to its glorious goal. That is what he came for.

The Son, Jesus Christ, personally gave his blood for the urgently necessary cleansing from our sins. *Paid for with his holy and uniquely perfect life.* He *made possible the impossible.* I will speak about this often. Because it is so important. That is why, as the Son of Man, he has taken the very highest place of honor. That is at

the right hand of the Majesty of God. On his eternal throne in the heavenly world.

Jesus and the Angels

Angels are superior to human beings in power and influence. But now the *man* Jesus has become greater and mightier than they are. He has received a more excellent name. This name stands for himself. For the Son. With this name, which expresses what he is, he surpasses all the angels. Never put Jesus on the same level as a mighty angel.

The Testimony of the Prophets and Psalms About the Son

I will show this with seven quotations from the words of the psalms and the prophets.

He has received from God a more excellent rank and name. For did God ever say to an angel what Psalm 2 says of the Messiah-King: “*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, born of the virgin Mary.

Or in 2 Samuel 7, where it says of David’s descendant: “*I will be his Father, and he will be my Son*”? Both words are fulfilled in their prophetic breadth and depth not in David’s son Solomon, but only in Jesus. These words point to his becoming human. Also to his resurrection and exaltation as King of the universe! ***God will bring his unique Son Jesus from the heavenly throne back into the visible world, onto the inhabited earth.*** Not only will all people experience this. All the angels will make their awe and admiration visible at this event, pay him homage, and give him honor and worship. It was just the same at his first coming – when 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. He is not created like the angels, not malleable and changeable. For he, the Firstborn, never had a beginning. In the words of Psalm 45 it says of the Son: “*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 Jesus loved God’s righteousness above all and hated lawlessness like no one else. 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 rots, 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 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 created spirit beings. Created to serve. Yes, they exist to help and stand by those who are waiting for full and final salvation. They help those who are on their way along the difficult road to the eternal reign of the Son, when he is brought into the inhabited world. To God’s eternal rest. There they inherit and receive their full salvation.

Angels have often served believers, and they do so every day. Just as they did with Jesus.

Chapter 2

Undivided Attention to What the Son Says

Because we are on the way to this great goal of salvation, we must pay even more and closer attention to what we have heard in the gospel. Otherwise, like a ship, we will not reach the safe harbor. Drift past the goal. Suffer shipwreck in our faith. Stray from the path of faith.

Through angels the law of Moses was given to us, the Hebrews, on Mount Sinai. The heavenly council of the angels was present. And the words of the law were unmistakable: 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 handed down to us through angels. *But if we carelessly pass over or gamble away, even despise, the great salvation, the rescue, given to us through the Son – what then?* How can we still escape the just judgment of God? Where can we 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, the eyewitnesses and earwitnesses, 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. To this day God himself confirms this message through supernatural signs and wonders. He does this through the outpourings of the Holy Spirit, but also through extraordinary works of power. Wherever this word was and is proclaimed and believed, the power of God and of his kingdom is at work. *These events allow no other conclusion than that this message comes from God himself. You must pay attention to this word of the Son! He was the last prophet, but at the same time the greatest, for he is the Son.*

The Son and the Angels

Once more about the angels. Back then God placed the earth under the rule of human beings – and not under that of the angels. Nor has he entrusted the world to come to the angels 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.” That applied to Adam and his descendants. *But he and they did not live up to this calling. In contrast, it applies perfectly to the Son, who became human.* If God entrusted *everything* to the Son, the Messiah Jesus, and put everything under him, nothing is left that is not subject to him. Then the angels too. Everything means everything. The unique, incomparable, and anointed man Jesus, the Son, will rule the world to come.

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

The Great Salvation Through the Son

It is also entirely God’s will – for whom and through whom all things were created – to make him, the Messiah Jesus, perfect through his sufferings on earth. To make him perfectly able to be our Savior, and perfectly able for his heavenly office and his ministry as high priest for us, which I will speak about in detail later. Not an angel, but the Son has created the great salvation, the rescue. Not by a word, but by giving his life. *He, Jesus, is the author, the leader, indeed the captain of our salvation. As this strong one he leads us, the many sons and daughters, unstoppably and victoriously to the heavenly glory that was closed to us before.* It is *many* people whom he leads out of bondage into the freedom and rest of God.

The Son, We, and the Angels

Christ has made us holy and led us out to God. Everything comes from God, who begot 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 are indeed mightier and, being immortal, superior to 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 proclaim your glorious name, O God, to my brothers and sisters ; in the midst of the heavenly council of the angels*

and of the redeemed I will sing your praise.” 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 like no one else, and God did not save him from his execution. He died. This terrible death brought this 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 of the angelic world. *Instead of being ashamed of us because of our need of salvation, our weakness, and our material frailty, he does the opposite: He proclaims and celebrates that he is bound to us forever.*

How could such a blood relationship and intimate bond come about? How was that possible? He, the Son from eternity, became fully and completely human. He made our human and mortal existence completely his own, so that he was what we are. Except for sin. He had nothing to do with that, as he proved. Even in dying he became like us, but not because of sin. His obedience and his self-giving meant his death.

Death, the Devil, and the Fear of Death

We human beings are subject to death and the fear of death day after day. But he came to defeat the devil, who has the power of death. Death plays into the devil’s hands. He likes death, because it fills helplessly exposed human beings with fear and terror. But the Son came to break the power of our death and our fear. He *defeated* the devil with his own weapon by dying himself. So he could set 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 dark power of death is broken for all who follow the captain of our salvation, Jesus Christ. A holy, sinless human being had to die voluntarily and so break into the night of death, plunder the realm of death, and make it his own realm.* Even if we still die, death has lost its hopeless, sinister grimace for us; on the contrary, it must serve us, for when we die, it will bring us to Christ in the heavenly world. 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!

A High Priest Like There Has Never Been

He was not concerned with the salvation of angels. The Son of God is not an angel, after all; he became a human being. He takes care of the seed, the

descendants of Abraham, you Hebrews. It is about you and also about all who believe as Abraham did. For in Abraham the blessing was promised to the nations as well. And all who believe are Abraham's children.

So I say once again that Jesus had to become like his brothers and sisters in everything – except, of course, 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 made atonement for our sins and taken them away. He has provided purification for sins. That is what happened every year – as a prefiguration of Jesus – in the temple in Jerusalem on the great Day of Atonement for the people of Israel. But he is the fulfillment. He has obtained the gracious forgiveness of our sins. Perfectly, once for all.*

He has not only become *high priest* for our problem of sin. No, he remains so for us until we reach the goal. He helps us on our 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 and hold us back. These sufferings, persecutions, and hardships he experienced and endured himself. More intensely than we will ever experience them. That, as I already said, has equipped him for this high-priestly ministry, so that he can feel with us, help us, and stand at our side. Had he not become a human being, had he not experienced and endured what happened to him, he could never have become such a high priest.

Chapter 3

Therefore, all you holy ones, you redeemed brothers and sisters in the faith, look to Jesus. To what he is and what he does. For you. Concentrate on him. He is our high priest for us before God. And our apostle, who comes from God and speaks to us. Our confession, the testimony that the people around us perceive from us, is founded by him – he is its content and its message. All of you are partners and sharers in God’s call through the gospel. God’s call came to you from heaven. And that is where he calls you – into his heavenly sanctuary.

Jesus and Moses

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

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

But watch out! You are and remain that only if you *hold firmly* 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.

Grumbling in the Wilderness

The Holy Spirit says in Psalm 95: *“Today, when the voice of God rings out, listen closely 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 testing me with 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 will not enter my rest, the promised land of Canaan.”

For exactly this reason, watch yourselves, so that none of you has such an evil heart. A heart full of unbelief, ready to turn away from the living God and the Messiah. You have come to know and experience this God and his goodness through Jesus the Messiah. *That is why you must encourage one another daily in this critical and embattled time.* Do this 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 you will find rest if you give up the faith. Remember: We have become his companions forever, like true brothers and sisters of Jesus the Messiah. Can there be more than that? Is it not worth going on in faith with determination?* We experience everything as true and real only if we take hold anew of the confidence of faith we had at the beginning. And hold on to it steadfastly to the end. 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 who hardened their hearts back then and provoked God? Was it not all those who had come out of Egypt behind Moses? With whom was God angry? For 40 years? Was it not with 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? To exactly 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

God's Rest, Then and Now and in the Future

You Hebrews, and all who hear and read this 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: You must not miss the goal in the end. The good news of God's coming rest has been proclaimed to us. Just as the message of the rich land of Canaan was proclaimed to those people back then through the spies. But the message about Canaan's fruitfulness did them no good. Because they did not believe it and were afraid to go in. *All of us who believe the message about the Messiah will enter the heavenly rest.* But back then it was quite 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 finished 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, long after the exodus from Egypt, God has once again appointed a new day of grace – a new "Today." Through David he promises in Psalm 95, as already quoted: "*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*" For if Joshua, Moses' successor and leader of Israel, had brought that generation into the final rest, he would not now be speaking of another rest. So there still remains a coming Sabbath rest for the people of God. *Neither the seventh day of creation, the Sabbath day, nor the land of Canaan brought the final rest of God. Only through Jesus the Messiah, who is coming again, 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 it 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. This is not about

the sins that, sadly, we 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! Let yourselves be held.

God's Living and Helpful Word

God tests us, each one of us, whether we have genuine faith. He tests us through his written word. This word is alive 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 soul. It judges and lays bare our deepest thoughts and attitudes. This sword manages, figuratively speaking, to divide soul and spirit, just as it divides bones and marrow. *In this way we can understand and assess ourselves much better. But we can 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. He knows every thought and every motive. As creatures we are accountable to him, and one day we must give account.

Our High Priest Leads Us to the Throne of Grace

That is God's nature and reality. And although we could be very afraid now because of this, we may go on confidently and courageously. For – like Israel – we have a high priest. But not in the old way. Our high priest has ascended through the heavens. Yes, all the way to the heavenly throne of God! Into the heavenly and eternal sanctuary. He has made atonement for all our sins. That is exactly why we hold firmly to our confession of Jesus! Our high priest can understand our weaknesses, our fears and worries, our tiredness and weariness, but also our doubts and resignation. He suffers and feels with us. He can do that like no one else. *For he was tempted in every way, his whole life long as a human being. Even to death on the cross. He was tried 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 remained steadfast. For he never gave in to sin and unbelief. He remained sinless and did not sin! That is our example!*

So let us come before God courageously and confidently. No matter where we are. In spiritual reality the throne is not one step away from us. The Son of God, who calls us his brothers and sisters, is always at God's throne *for us*. He invites us to come boldly to the ***throne of grace***. *Let us spread out all our worries, fears, anxieties, 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.*

His throne is ***not*** a place of judgment and accusation. But of grace. There we are welcome. We are expected. From there we receive mercy and grace. And 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

Aaron, Christ, and Melchizedek

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 lenient and understands the ignorant and those who go astray, that is, those who have sinned. For he himself is also a human being who can go astray. One who sins like everyone else. That means: He must also make sacrifices for himself.

With **Jesus** it is quite different: He was not appointed high priest by human beings. He is called to it by God. As Aaron was at the beginning. Of Christ, Psalm 2 says: “*You are my Son; today I have begotten you.*” In Psalm 110 God says of 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 requests and pleas to the only one who could save him from death. Jesus even pleaded with his God with loud cries and tears. So deeply and heavily did suffering strike 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. That was new for him. As a human being he learned obedience. He was obedient in spite of all sufferings, opposition, and contradiction. *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 source of eternal salvation. In this way he has created final, eternal, and all-encompassing salvation. 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 manner of Melchizedek. I will speak later about what that means. 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 he now finally had this

priest whom he had always wanted to have. *And with this priest, finally also an eternal salvation, which he created through his blood!*

Maturity and Immaturity

There is a great deal more to say about this. But it is also not so easy to explain. For you have, sadly, 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 words 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. Nor can he pass it on in an understandable way. He is like a little child who is not yet of age.

Proper meals are for *those who are grown up in faith, for the spiritually mature.* They are used to it and therefore trained to distinguish 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

Nevertheless, I will not start again from the beginning now – as with the times tables for first-graders. That is what you would have expected now. No. We must make progress and grow up. I will mention only a few things that are right and important. You were already familiar with them before you came to know the Messiah. But through the Messiah you have received much more. *Take hold of all the riches of the one who has ascended into heaven and sits on the throne of God. He has accomplished everything and at the same time given us gifts beyond measure.* So do not hide from your fellow Jews behind these old and familiar things, which they also believe. After all, in this way you only want to avoid their contradiction and get out of its way, so that they do not recognize you as followers of Jesus the Messiah.

We must now also leave certain elementary teachings behind us for once 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 about the laying on of hands; or the teaching about the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. When God gives time and opportunity, we will talk about these things again. *But now it is about recognizing and holding on to the greatness of our heavenly high priest and what he has accomplished and does for us.*

Falling Away from the Messiah and the Consequences

Sadly, there are those who fall away again from faith in the Messiah and return to Judaism. And that although they were once enlightened, recognized the Messiah, concretely experienced, even 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 mighty works of God's coming new world. *Nevertheless they fell away from Christ. That is as if they had crucified the Messiah once again for themselves – as back then in Jerusalem.* And had shown this clearly to their Jewish neighbors who reject Jesus. They have exposed Jesus and their faith to disgrace. For such people, who give up the faith in this way and return to life under the law and to dead works, it is downright impossible to find the freedom and grace of Christ again.

Vegetables, Thorns, and Thistles

A picture that illustrates well a life of faith, but also of falling away from Christ, is this: 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 such things. 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, he now produces nothing but weeds.

Confidence About the Hebrews

Brothers and sisters in the faith, loved by God: I am now deliberately speaking so unmistakably and harshly. But with 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 God's people? You love his name, the Messiah. That can be seen in your works, in your service for him and for God's people. I want each of you to show the same diligence. That is how one recognizes the certainty of faith and a holding on to hope to the end. In this way you will not become sluggish. So be imitators of those who through faith and perseverance inherit God's promise.

Oath and Promise

That is how it was with Abraham too. God gave him the promise of many descendants and swore an oath by himself: "*Truly, I will bless you abundantly and greatly multiply you.*" 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 is the end of all contradiction.

So God, by an oath on himself, has proved and guaranteed to the heirs of the promise – that is you – the unchangeable nature of his purpose. So through two unchangeable things – namely his oath and the promise – we have strong comfort that we will arrive at the goal. God cannot lie. We have taken refuge with him, our Messiah. He has given us new hope. It directs our faith to what lies ahead of us, which will certainly be fulfilled. *This hope is not a pipe dream, not an illusion. It is like a secure and firm anchor for us. Our innermost being is connected with*

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. That is where we will follow him one day. That is our promise. That is our hope. So he has sworn. Yes, he has become our high priest in the manner of Melchizedek.

Chapter 7

Abraham and Melchizedek

Now who is this *Melchizedek*? He was the king of Salem, which later became Jerusalem. In the time of Abraham. He was also priest of God Most High. So he was a priest-king. He went out to meet Abraham and blessed him when Abraham was returning from the 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 plunder. 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 a genealogy that would entitle him to the priesthood. *We compare him with the Son of God. He is a magnificent prefiguration 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 plunder. The sons of Levi, the priests, also have, according to the law, the right and the duty to take 10 percent for their support from their brothers, their fellow Israelites. And that although both of them, Levi and the people, are descended from Abraham and therefore all stand on the same level. Melchizedek is not even related to Abraham and received the 10 percent from him. Then he blessed Abraham, who – as I already said – had received the promise. What we must note here: The lesser is always blessed by the greater! So Abraham honored Melchizedek, the one who stood above him!

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

Now why and for what is yet another priest, like Melchizedek, indispensable? If the 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, must not this law also be changed?

That is exactly what we say with regard to Jesus, who does not come from the tribe of Levi. He comes from the tribe of Judah. About this tribe Moses said nothing that has anything to do with priestly service. Everything becomes even clearer when now a priest like Melchizedek is actually appointed. The Levitical priest is called according to the law of human regulations about descent. *But Jesus is called by the power of an indestructible life! To Christ, the Son, God testifies in a unique way: You – no one else – are a priest in the order of Melchizedek.*

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

His appointment as priest took place with God's oath. 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 manner of Melchizedek."* In this position and function Jesus has also become the guarantor, indeed the guarantee and security, of a better covenant. I will speak about this in detail in a moment.

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

Exactly such a high priest is what we needed. One who can represent us properly. Who is as holy, as innocent, and as spotless as he is. Who, set apart from sinners, has now become higher than the heavens. And sits on God's throne. One who does not need, like all the earlier ones, to sacrifice first for his own sins and then for those of the people. *No, he did not sacrifice for himself. For the people he sacrificed himself on the cross once for all.*

The law of Moses appoints as high priests human beings who have weakness. Those 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 ministry. Through his life, his death, and his crowning with 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, the heavenly sanctuary.* At the right hand of the Majesty of God. He is the minister of the true sanctuary. Not of the one that human beings once set up, but of the one that the Lord himself has made.

Every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices. He needs them to do his service. If Christ were on earth, he could not be a priest at all, since the Levitical priests already offer gifts according to the law. This Levitical service and their tent sanctuary are copies of 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 arrange everything just as I showed you on the mountain*".

The New Covenant

How surpassing the ministry of our high priest is! On top of that, 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 finding fault with his people: "*Look, the 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 I took you by the hand and led you out of Egypt. You did not live in my covenant. Then I no longer took care of you.*"

But this is the new covenant that I will set up anew for the house of Israel after these dark days of covenant-breaking: *I will anchor my perfect law in their minds. Yes, I will write it on their hearts. I will again be their God, whom they know. They will be my people. Then they will no longer have to teach their neighbor: 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.

When the Eternal One brings about and gives something new, it is both necessary and wonderful.

Chapter 9

Details of Worship in the First and Old Covenant

The first covenant had precise regulations for worship in the earthly sanctuary. This tent sanctuary, and later also the temple, looked like this: In the first part of the tent were the seven-branched lampstand and the table with the consecrated bread. That was the Holy Place. The front or first tent. The second tent, or the second part behind the second curtain, is called the Most Holy Place: the Holy of Holies. Directly in front of it stood the golden altar of incense. And in the Most Holy Place stood the ark of the covenant. A box of wood, completely overlaid with gold. In it was a golden jar with the manna, the bread from heaven from the journey through the wilderness. And Aaron's staff, which had sprouted. Finally, the tablets of the law of the first covenant. On top of the box, at both ends, were the cherubim of glory, the two angels of gold who looked down on the lid of the box. This lid is also called the atonement cover. You know all these details. So I do not need to describe them further.



Since the tent sanctuary is arranged and divided in this way, a 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 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 with regard to eternal salvation and forgiveness. *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 now the time has come when one can have a perfect, a cleansed, indeed a liberated conscience.

A New Priest, an Eternal Redemption in a Heavenly Sanctuary

For the Messiah has come. The high priest of the perfect things. Whose ministry brings about perfection. As foretold and announced. He has come for a greater, indeed a perfect sanctuary. Not an earthly one, 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, his own life, had obtained eternal redemption, he entered the heavenly sanctuary.* He went in in the power and the eternal worth of his own shed blood. His blood and life surpass those of animals in every respect. They are worth infinitely more, beyond comparison.

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 heifer, sprinkled with water on those who had touched a dead body, make people outwardly holy – *how much more will the blood of Christ bring about genuine sanctification and devotion.* For through the power and guidance of the eternal Spirit he voluntarily 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 that of the animal sacrifices. No. It cleanses your conscience! And that from dead and useless works of the law, which you know do not make you perfect. *With a free and cleansed conscience you can at last serve the living God. With liberated and cleansed hearts.*

The Will, the Inheritance, and Cleansing Through Blood

He has become the mediator of a new, second covenant with God. Because he died and sacrificed himself for our redemption from the transgressions 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 when the death of a sacrifice has taken place. Without the death and the blood of a sacrifice it is ineffective. That is why the first, the old covenant was also put into effect with blood. When Moses

read 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, indeed almost everything, are cleansed with blood. That is what the law itself prescribes. *Accordingly there is no forgiveness or cleansing of sins under the law, in the old covenant—without the shedding of blood.*

Sacrificed Once – Entered Once: It Was Finished

It was necessary for the tent, which is a copy of the heavenly sanctuary, to be cleansed by blood. But for the heavenly sanctuary a much better sacrifice was necessary. *For, as we know, Christ did not enter the earthly sanctuary set up by human beings, but went 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 enter there to sacrifice himself again and again. That was 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. According to this order of priests and sacrifices, Christ would have had to suffer many times.

No, at the time determined by God the Messiah appeared on earth once. At the culmination of the ages, when the old came to its end. *He came to solve the problem of sin once and for all through his voluntary self-giving on the cross, as the perfect sacrifice. To remove sin irretrievably through his sacrifice — sin as what separates us from God and defiles what has been created. And that just as once and irrevocably as it is appointed for human beings to die once and then to appear before God’s judgment.*

No human being dies twice, and neither does Christ! Just as once, the Messiah died once for all as a sacrifice, *to take the sins of many people upon himself. To take them into himself and bring them into death, in order to blot them out as if they had never existed. The doing away with sin happened as he took it upon himself and carried it up onto the cross into death, just as the goat with the sins of the people was sent into the wilderness, into the land of death. He has carried sin away, wiped it out, and abolished it.*

On the great Day of Atonement the people waited for the high priest to return from the tent, because then atonement and forgiveness had been accepted and carried out by God. So Christ too will leave the heavenly sanctuary one single time more: not in order then to go in again for the

forgiveness of sins. No, he will come out and appear to all who are waiting for him. Once more: *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 Weakness of the Sacrifices Back Then and the Messiah's Willingness to Sacrifice

The law with its regulations for sacrifice and the building instructions for the tent sanctuary are 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 in expectation of forgiveness. If forgiveness and perfection had been given there, the whole sacrificial service could have been ended. Then the people and the priests would no longer have needed a guilty conscience about unforgiven sins. On the great Day of Atonement – and also at every other sacrifice – *it is impossible for the blood of goats and bulls to 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 certainty of forgiveness and cleansing. Perhaps peace of conscience for a year.*

When God's Son came into the world, he pointed to the words of Psalm 40 and announced their fulfillment through himself: *“Animal sacrifices and grain offerings you, God, never really wanted. But you have given me a body. Burnt offerings and sin offerings did not really please you. Then I said: Look at me. I 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 sacrifice, and they announce something new and much better.

When he said: *“You took no pleasure in all 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 the heart and the will of God, said: *“Look, I come to fulfill your saving will”*.

So in his humanity he sets aside the first covenant and its sacrificial service in order to establish the second, new, and eternal covenant. *For through the saving will of God, which the Messiah carried out and fulfilled, we have been made holy. Cleansed from sins. Made perfect to draw near to God and to serve him. Through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus, offered once for all on the cross at Golgotha.*

Summary: The All-Encompassing, Eternal Salvation in the New and Eternal Covenant

Every priest of the old covenant *stands* there every 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 Holy One and Sinless One. His sacrifice has made *everything* right. It does not have to be repeated. That is why he has *sat down* forever. On God's throne. At the right hand of God, who celebrates the voluntary and unique sacrifice of his Son. There at the throne he waits until all his enemies are fully subjected to him. For there are a great many enemies, those who crucified him and those who reject his saving work.

For by just one single perfect sacrifice he has made us – who believe – holy forever. In this way he has brought us to his goal. We were to become what he wanted us to be. Us, who are being 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, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts and write them on their minds.*” And: “*Their sins and lawless acts I will never again remember. They are forgiven as if they had never happened. I will never again hold them against you or charge them to you.*” So when forgiveness has taken place, when it has been pronounced and confirmed by God, then no further sacrifice for sin will ever be needed. The whole Aaronic sacrificial service has ended and has thus become superfluous, indeed obsolete.

Life in the Most Holy Place

Now a great goal has been reached. Something that has always been God's heart's desire. Heaven, God's dwelling place and throne room, stands open. For all. We may come to him. We now have full confidence and may come confidently, without fear, into the innermost heavenly sanctuary before the throne of God. In faith. Not yet in the body. Through Jesus' blood. On a *new way* that did not exist before. One that is living. It does not lead to death, but into life. Into God's holy and loving presence. On this new and living way we may go forward continually. He himself, Jesus, has opened it and made it free for us. Through the curtain that blocks access in the earthly sanctuary. That is

why the curtain had to be torn. A living Jesus showed us who God is and how we should be, but were not. In his life he was like the curtain that had not yet been torn. Only his sacrifice, his death for us, opened the way. With that the old worship of priests and sacrifices has ended 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, mistakes, and sins that we still experience. He takes full responsibility for this, so that we can pray, worship, rest, and listen to God confidently in the heavenly sanctuary.

Then let us now really and constantly go to God! To his throne. With a sincere heart. Such hearts are what God is looking for. 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. With the pure water of the word of God, too, we have been washed – figuratively speaking, of course – from the dirt of sin.

What else should we do, as people so richly blessed, than confess our hope before the people around us? Not to give it up under hostility, but to hold on to it steadfastly. *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 in faith today 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 control. But for mutual motivation: to do good out of love and gratitude. To encourage our neighbors. Let us come together again and again and keep up our 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 this up completely, have grown weary, and are in danger of giving up faith and hope as well. Let us proactively encourage one another to fellowship and in hope. *For the great day of our Lord Jesus and of God is drawing ever nearer.* Day by day.

Returning to the Old Covenant and the Old Sacrificial System, and the Consequences

Whoever gives up faith and hope, consciously and deliberately, has a serious problem. For he was once allowed to recognize 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? For him there remains only a fearful expectation of God's judgment. For the old sacrificial system cannot set his conscience free. All that remains is the expectation of an unstoppable fire of judgment that will strike the enemies of the Messiah. Even whoever rejected the law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of witnesses. How terrible, do you think, will the punishment 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: “*Vengeance and repayment are mine,*” 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, after having once recognized and believed everything. No one will be able to avoid the encounter with the Eternal One. One thing is quite certain: death. And after that the judgment. All will meet the living God.

Remembering Their Former Determination and Readiness to Suffer

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 remained steadfast in faith. People insulted you with evil words and treated you like the lowest dirt and harassed you. In this way you were made a public spectacle before everyone. And when it did not hit you directly, you still stood faithfully by those who were treated this way. Those imprisoned for the sake of the faith you supported 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 publicly with Jesus, the Messiah! *For a great reward is waiting for you. Persevere!* After all, you have done the will of God. You have received Jesus the Messiah. Now follow him too! Stay with 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 one, the Christ, will come and – end all suffering forever. There is a reason why it has not happened yet. And why he has not yet come to this day.

But “*the righteous will live **by faith**! But if he shrinks back and throws faith away, 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. We hold firmly to the saving faith in the Messiah – until Christ comes again.

Chapter 11

Living by Faith – Keeping On by Faith

Faith is what matters. But what exactly is faith? Faith is a firm conviction, steadfast confidence, indeed, as it were, an anticipation of what one hopes for – and of what will come. For faith, what is to come is already as good as true.

Faith is being convinced, a conviction about what one does not see. Or 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. It did not ebb away when things got difficult. With you too things are difficult and challenging. That is why: Take them as your example.

Only faith grasps that the world came into being through God's words of creation. None of us human beings was there or saw it. Out of nothing he created the world.

Abel

By faith, at the beginning of human history, Abel offered God an animal sacrifice that pleased him. For God that was a greater sacrifice than that of his brother Cain. Cain offered fruit that had grown from the ground. By accepting the sacrifice, God testified that Abel was righteous and Cain was not. Abel and his sacrifice still have an existential message today – although it was so long ago: As sinners we need forgiveness and a new beginning through a sacrifice for us. And that is Christ, as I have described in detail.

Enoch

By faith Enoch was taken up into heaven to God. Without dying. As a living human being he went to God in heaven. Why? Because God took great pleasure in his life and wanted to have him with him – in contrast to many of his contemporaries. Without faith it is never possible to please God. Whoever comes to God, whoever tries to draw near 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

Noah received a command from God to build a large ship, the ark. On dry land. No sea within reach. Only in faith could he do such a thing. Warned by God, he built for many decades, anxiously wondering what was coming toward him. In his wildest imagination he could not picture it. By obeying God, he took his side. At the same time – by obediently building the ark – he condemned the godlessness of the people who did not listen to God. So he became a righteous man. By faith.

Abraham

Abraham too could be obedient only by faith. After he had heard God's command, he left his homeland. He set out without knowing where the goal 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. As a guest he lived 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 lived like nomads in a foreign land. But they looked further. They were waiting for a **city** that has firm and eternal foundations. A city that human beings did not build, but God himself.

Sarah

Only by faith could Sarah have a child, although she was already too old. Only because she believed that God is faithful and always fulfills his promise. That in turn means that Abraham, who was also too old, could no longer father a child. Nevertheless, countless people were born from him in spite of his age. Just as God had promised and foretold. They became as many as the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore, figuratively speaking.

The Patriarchs

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, so to speak, from afar. Their nomadic life testified that they were strangers in the land, without the rights of citizens. Whoever lives like this

shows clearly that he is looking for another, indeed a better *homeland*. Not the one they came from. They could have returned there at any time. But as strangers in Canaan they looked further. Upward. They were looking out for a *heavenly homeland*. Where God dwells. 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 assured him that through Isaac his descendants were secured. With a trembling heart Abraham went ahead with the sacrifice. 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. *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 the two sons of Joseph before his death. Each one individually. And worshiped God over it. On his deathbed Joseph foresaw in faith how all the Israelites would leave Egypt. That is why he could give instructions that his bones should then be taken along, to find rest in Canaan.

Moses

By faith Moses' parents hid their child for three months. They saw that God had something special in mind 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 renounced, indeed downright refused, to remain a son of Pharaoh's daughter. He changed sides and stood with his people Israel. He wanted to share in bearing their disgrace and their suffering. So he rejected the temporary and fleeting pleasure of sin at Pharaoh's court. He regarded the disgrace of Christ – if we look at it and 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 rage and persecution when he had killed an Egyptian. He remained steadfast in the expectation that his people would experience liberation. Even when he fled from Egypt and spent a full 40 years in a barren land. He believed and looked to God, the Invisible One, as if he saw

him right before his eyes. In faith, when he was back in Egypt again, he celebrated the Passover. And then painted the blood of the lamb on the doorposts – so that all the firstborn would be protected from the angel of death.

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

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

Rahab

A prostitute, Rahab, who lived in the wall of this city, did not perish like the others in it. For by faith she had given shelter to Israel's two spies when they were in the greatest danger. She saw that God protected Israel and that no one could stand against them. She recognized the God of Israel as the true God.

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. Brought about justice against all injustice. Obtained promises. Overcame lions. Quenched fire. Escaped persecution by the sword. And in complete weakness regained their strength. In battle and war they became strong. They drove back crowds of attackers. And women received back their dead through resurrection. Others were tortured and did not 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, sawed 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, have not yet received what was promised to them. Why? Because God has 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. Not a piece of land in Israel, but a heavenly homeland, a new earth with a new city.*

Chapter 12

The Spiritual Marathon

As in an arena, we are surrounded by so many witnesses and martyrs of the 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 connected with 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. Let go and 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, also the sin that so easily entangles us and makes us stumble. Giving up must not be an option!

Look ahead, to Jesus! Do not look to the left or to the right. Only to him. He is the greatest. He stands at the head of all believers and heroes of faith. He ran in faith. All the way to the goal. He is the pioneer and perfecter of faith. In our lives he has brought about faith, and he leads us to the goal. He let nothing turn him away from it. He counted the shame as nothing. He endured the terrible **cross**. For he looked to the great joy that was waiting for him: to sit down at the right hand of God. And the joy of leading us, many sons and daughters, into glory through his suffering of death. Think more about the one who had to endure such massive contradiction and opposition from evil people against himself. *Nevertheless he reached the goal. If he is your example, you will not grow weary and tired.*

God Uses Opposition and Discrimination to Make Us Strong

You have not yet, like Jesus, resisted to the point of shedding blood and held out against 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 handle you roughly. That 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 raised us. When it had to be, 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. He takes care of it. Everything is at his disposal for it. Let us say yes from the heart to his good hand. Even if it is sometimes hard. Then we will live. Forever.

Our earthly parents raised and punished us according to their human and fallible abilities. Only for a few years. God disciplines us without mistakes until we reach the goal. Not only in spiritual childhood. Even when we have long been on the way in faith. 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 goes 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. Provided we do not run away from his discipline. For when we accept difficulties from his hand and patiently train ourselves 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 tired and the fainthearted will still stray from the path, instead of the lame being healed.

Stick together! Together with all followers of Jesus, fight resolutely for peace among 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 and turn away from it, 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 dependent 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 against one another springs up. At first inconspicuous and hidden in the heart. But then, as it keeps growing, it disturbs the fellowship of believers and negatively influences and poisons many.

No one among you should be sexually immoral, someone who breaks his marriage or seduces women. All should always be faithful to their spouse.

None of you should be someone to whom nothing is holy. Not even God. Like Esau, who sold off his birthright for a simple dish of lentils. Shortly

afterward he realized what a reckless deed he had done. In spite of tears and earnest struggling, he did not come to a reversal of his behavior and a real change of mind.

Why It Is Worth Not Giving Up

Recognize your standing in salvation as God has given it to you. 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, which could not be touched.

- On which fire burned.
- A great cloud was there.
- Darkness and gloom wrapped it.
- Around which a terrifying storm raged.
- Where 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 no longer be spoken to them. If even an animal touched the mountain, it was to be killed. The whole drama at Mount Sinai after the sin of the idolatrous homage to 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 overwhelming new covenant. Something completely new, a wide horizon, has opened up to you. A spiritual reality, not yet visible, but one that surpasses everything we can ever imagine. We have come to Mount Zion, where God dwells:

- *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 festive assembly.*
- *To the assembly of the firstborn of all the redeemed, whose names are written in heaven.*
- *To God himself, the Judge of all people, who has made us holy and invited us.*
- *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 much better things than that of Abel, which cried out for retribution. Christ's blood makes us completely clean and holy.*

Be careful 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 called to account.

Back then this voice shook the earth. After that 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 remains forever.*

For this we thank God every day! By grace we serve this God. Let us do so in the way that pleases *him* and not ourselves. With reverence and awe, of which God alone is worthy. Not in fear, but with respect. For Deuteronomy 4:24 already 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 spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving.

Chapter 13

How Should We Live?

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 already said, they are active in service for us wherever our heavenly Father sends them. You could miss a visit from angels if you do not open your homes and are not hospitable.

Remember the prisoners and *take care of them*. And do it as if you were in prison together with them. Remember also those who are mistreated and tortured in the dungeon and have to experience this in their own bodies.

The marriage covenant and married life are to be respected and valued. In all aspects of living together. The marriage bed and the joys of sexuality belong to the married couple alone. Let sex be voluntary and without coercion. To strengthen the marriage covenant. The sexually immoral and adulterers, who break their own or another marriage covenant through sex with other women or men, or who allow themselves casual sex without a marriage covenant – God will judge them without turning a blind eye.

Live and act without love of money. Be content with what you have. It makes no sense to want to own more and more things that pass away. In spite of deprivation, poverty, and hunger, one thing remains – God’s promise: “*I will not forget you, and I will not forsake you.*” *That is why we can say with courage and determination: ‘The Lord is our helper. We do not need to be afraid. What can human beings 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. Follow their example.

Jesus Christ, our Messiah, always remains the same: in what he is, in what he proclaims, and in what he has promised. *He is yesterday, that is, in his earthly time, as today in our everyday life, and also for all eternity, at the goal of salvation history, the same faithful and true Lord.*

A New Worship

Do not let yourselves be distracted and preoccupied by all sorts of strange teachings. They can sweep you away from following the Messiah. It makes no sense to want to grow in faith through certain foods. Such external and visible things belonged to the nature of the old covenant. It was simply useless. Our heart is made firm and strong by God's grace. For we have a spiritual, better, but invisible altar. From this we eat. In a figurative sense, spiritually and in faith, we eat and enjoy the grace of the Messiah and his invisible presence. Those who still perform their service in the visible temple do not know this privilege – nor do they have any right to it.

The animals for the sin offering, 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 cleansed us and 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 with it and will cost us something. Bearing his disgrace is never in vain.

Let us look ahead, indeed upward. For nowhere on earth do we have a lasting city where we are at home. We are strangers, and that is how we are seen. We are 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.

If we live in this hope, let us offer God spiritual 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 out financially. In such sacrifices, which cost you something – time, money, energy – and perhaps mean doing without, our God takes special pleasure. Whoever is not willing to bring such sacrifices, his sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving are worth little.

Your Leaders

Follow your spiritual leaders and do not constantly criticize them. After all, they only want to protect you from dangers, so that you remain healthy and steadfast in faith. They will have to give account to God of how well and how eagerly they carried out this task. *So value and appreciate their ministry. Then they can do it with joy.* That would be very beneficial for you. Much better than if they do it with sighs or out of mere duty.

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

The Letter to the Hebrews Summarized:

The God of peace has brought our Lord Jesus out of the shameful death on the cross. His blood has founded a new, better, indeed eternal covenant. He is the great Shepherd of his sheep. Many of his followers he will soon lead out of death himself. Then, when he comes again. Then he will lead them into the eternal homeland, like a shepherd his sheep. He will pasture them at the spring of life.

If God has brought Jesus out of death, then he can and will also be present and at work in your life. He can — and that is what we pray for — move and equip us for good works. In this way we fulfill his will. All this could become reality only through Jesus Christ. To him, our unique Redeemer, belong glory and honor forever.

Bear with the words of exhortation in my letter! After all, I have written to you in few words and kept it as short as possible. Much more could have been written.

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 God's people in Christ. God's people from Italy greet you. We belong together! We stand together!

Grace be with you all! Amen.

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