

Living Faith for Practical Christian Life

By

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You can be a Hero of Faith

Faith is absolutely important in the life of the believer. It's a key characteristic of "the divine nature" and is, in fact, the primary evidence that a person knows God. Without faith, one is at a spiritual dead end! Such a person can never excel in the things of God, because he lacks what it takes to believe in God in the first place.

Knowing the great importance of faith in their spiritual lives, the apostles once said to the Lord, "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). Another way is to listen to the Word: "So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

This is the overall purpose of the study—to hear the life stories of Biblical heroes who through faith obtained eternal trophies of righteousness under conditions of extreme difficulty, attained their God-given destinies, and turned impossibilities into possibilities. The remarkable fact is that almost all the 'heroes' and 'heroines' were ordinary folk like you and me, but they rose to the challenges of their lives by exercising faith and shot into Biblical stardom. Studying the lives and challenges of the Biblical personalities mentioned in Hebrews 11 should give our faith a tremendous boost so that we will be empowered to overcome our own challenges and join the ranks of the ancient people of faith.

But what is faith? And how does it fit into the overall theme of the book of Hebrews?

The Epistle to the Hebrews: the Faith Booster

The Letter to the Hebrews was written with the two-fold purpose of showing the superiority of Christ and His ministry of redemption and then, on that basis, inspiring greater faith in its main target audience—Jewish Christians who faced the danger of falling away from faith in the Messiah back into OT Judaism consisting in animal sacrifices and the temple services of the Levitical priesthood. Hence statements of warning like:

Heb. 2:1-4:

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip.

"For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward;

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *Him*;
“God also bearing *them* witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will?”

Heb. 3:12-14:

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

“But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end”.

Heb. 6:4-6

“For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,

“And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

“If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame”.

Heb. 10:26-31

“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

“But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

“He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

“Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

“For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people.

“*It is* a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”.

Moreover, the believers to whom the letter was addressed were under relentless persecution, and this added to the pressure to abandon faith in Christ. The author refers to this matter in Heb. 10:32-34:

“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;

“Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

“For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance”.

He then encourages them:

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

“For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” (Heb. 10:35-36).

And what is that “promise” which requires endurance in doing the will of God?
The coming of Christ to bring ultimate salvation to the righteous who believe in Him to the end:

“For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.
“Now the just shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in Him.
“But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:37-39).

In chapter 11, the author (likely the Apostle Paul) defines what this all-important faith is and expands the understanding of his readers with illustrations of the righteous life of faith lived by the saints of old. The illustrations are meant to showcase the *extraordinary exploits ordinary* men and women chalked by dint of sheer faith. What made the difference in their lives in their generation was faith. Faith will make the difference in your life too, making a spiritual hero out of you.

The Believer’s Hall of Fame

That’s the name I have given to the 11th chapter of Hebrews. That is the chapter that catalogues the heroic deeds of OT followers of God who met the challenges and trials of their time by exercising unshakeable faith in God and His promises. But first, we need to have a firm grasp of the concept of faith so we can “believe to the saving of the soul”.

Appropriately verse 1 starts with the definition of faith: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (KJV). In other words, faith is what gives substance or reality to what is hoped for; it’s the proof of “things not seen”. To have hope therefore presupposes faith; faith is what makes the hope tangible and real in your heart; it’s what underlies and upholds hope. That’s why the Lord Jesus tells us in Mark 11:24: “Therefore I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them”. What you prayed for is still a hope, but Christ says consider that hope a reality on the basis of faith, and “ye shall have them”. Faith, then, is hope concretized—something so sure and real and definite as to be felt, a deep conviction within one’s heart that the hope is as good as real. This naturally rules out doubts, allowing faith to prove itself, as Jesus earlier pointed out to His disciples when Peter called His attention to a fig tree He cursed (Mark 11:12-14, 19-21) barely 24 hours before:

“And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.
“For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith” (vv. 22-23).

And faith is also the evidence or demonstration of what we have not seen. These include the promises of God, Christ seated on the right hand of the Father, the kingdom of heaven, the resurrection, ascension, eternal life, and a host of uncountable unseen realities.

By believing in these unseen things, we demonstrate that we believe they are real. And this comes to govern our whole mindset, influencing our life choices and actions. Hence “by it [faith] the elders obtained a good report” (v. 2). Faith was the single most important factor in their lives. Everything they did was predicated on faith, and they won God’s approval.

In fact, faith should be the defining element of any credible relationship with God. Without it, we are cut off from God and God is cut off from us; without it, appreciating His very doings becomes impossible. Faith is the first step to knowing and walking with God.

It begins with understanding how God brought the creation into being out of immaterial, invisible things: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (v. 3).

It’s a hard concept for the natural mind to understand. How could matter have come out of the incorporeal, or even out of nothingness? (Rom. 4:17).

This is where faith becomes imperative. Through faith it’s wholly possible to understand that the universe was created by the Word or command of God, because faith does not operate on the basis of visible or physical things but on the basis that what is unseen is evidentially real. The understanding that comes from faith, then, is that the visible creation was made of things which are not visible, namely the Word of God. In Ps 33 we read:

“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.

“He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: He layeth up the depth in storehouses.

“Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

“For He spake, and it was *done*; He commanded, and it stood fast” (vv.6-9).

The “word of God” and “the breath of His mouth” are synonymous terms. The word of the LORD obviously came from His mouth as He spoke. What is rendered “breath” is ‘*ruach*’ in Hebrew and has a wide range of meanings, prominent among them: “wind”, breath, spirit, mind, animation, disposition, energy of life” (*Brown-Driver-Briggs’ Hebrew Definitions*). So then, the heavens and all the host of them were created by the Spirit of the mouth of the LORD, which is His Word. It was by this same method that He gathered the waters then standing on the earth into one place as the sea (Gen. 1:9). His unequalled, unprecedented creative genius calls for reverence from all humanity; He deserves to be regarded with awe. For His method of creation is as miraculous as is straightforward, is as awesome as is inimitable and majestic: “For He spake, and it was *done*; He commanded, and it stood fast”.

The word God spoke to bring the universe into being were words of command, which happened as He spoke. This Word of creation is the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us. He has always been with the Father since the beginning, and all things were

made by Him, “and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3, 14). Jesus Christ is the Spirit of the Almighty, the Word that made all things:

“For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him:

“And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.

“And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence.

“For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell” (Col. 1:16-19).

Just as it takes faith to believe in what He did at creation, so it takes faith to believe in what He’s doing now. Without faith the road is closed to all knowledge of God. Faith is the vital quality agnostics and atheists lack—they can’t accept the reality of God because He’s invisible and unapproachable (1 Tim. 6:16). If God exists, they reason, there must be empirical evidence of His existence.

Yet His unseen existence is clearly manifest through His visible creation—which no one else has claimed or been ‘discovered’ to have originated. So it’s a deliberate denial of what there’s ample evidence of:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

“Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them.

“For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:18-20).

In Psalms 14 & 53 David puts down the basic motivation of the God-deniers to their corrupt and evil nature: “The fool hath said in his heart, *There is* no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: *there is* none that doeth good” (Ps 53:1).

Thank God for His gift of faith (Rom. 12:3). You are far more advanced than the great and famous of this world—the scientists, explorers, and inventors—who, despite their inventions, and discoveries and research works, don’t believe in God. Their horizon is limited; they don’t see reality beyond the physical.

But you see beyond the physical because you have faith. You ‘see’ God enough to pray to Him, and He grants your requests; you trust in the 2000-old stripes of Jesus for your healing and you are healed; you request the invisible protection of the angels of God and you are kept out of harm’s way in ways that could only be miraculous. The reality of God is not the least ambiguous to the believer; faith brings home to him the ineluctable truth of the existence, glory and power of God.

As 2 Cor. 5:7 put it, “We walk by faith, not by sight”.

Faith is our most important asset as far as our relationship with God is concerned. And the author makes that plain in the sixth verse:

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him”.

This verse is the heart of the whole chapter; the author’s central idea. All the stories of the Bible personalities expand on this one idea—that through faith they pleased God and therefore He duly rewarded them, having “diligently” sought Him when they came to believe in His invisible existence!

So here we look at our first set of faith heroes—Abel, Enoch and Noah.

Faith for Doing Righteousness

The common achievement of our first three heroes which they attained through faith was righteousness. This makes faith vital to righteousness, and should never be thought of as separate and mutually exclusive. It’s the basic motivation for and sustaining power of righteousness.

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

“But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Heb. 11:4-7).

The text clearly establishes a correlation between faith and righteousness, with faith being the driving force behind the righteous deeds of the subjects.

Giving Cheerfully to God comes from Pure Faith

Abel, who heads the list of the heroes of faith, was credited with righteousness for offering “a more excellent sacrifice than Cain”. And God Himself was the witness of his righteousness when He approved of his gifts. Abel’s offering of an “excellent sacrifice” showed clearly that He absolutely believed in God and was indeed a “diligent” seeker of Him. God accordingly rewarded him with acceptance of his gifts, and even though he’s dead (Cain slew him), his faith still speaks, inspiring succeeding generations. He did what is righteous (see Matt. 23:35) because he had faith.

In the Genesis account, Cain and Abel, who were born to Adam and Eve after the fall when God did not openly reveal Himself to man, at a point in time presented their respective offerings to Him. Cain, the firstborn, was a farmer (Gen. 4:2), and he “brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD” (Gen. 4:3). Abel, a shepherd, “brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering” (Gen. 4:4). “But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell” (v. 5).

Some have argued that God accepted Abel’s sacrifice because he offered a blood sacrifice which ensured the remission of sin (Heb. 9:22) and, more importantly, prefigured the ultimate sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God. There’s some truth to it, as far as Biblical typology is concerned, (that is, OT types and shadows finding their fulfilment in NT antitypes and realities). But that was not the basic reason why God rejected Cain’s offering. After all, wasn’t each to present an offering from the produce of his respective occupation—Cain from his farming and Abel from his sheep rearing? If so, Cain could not have been faulted for bringing an offering of food, if he had willingly offered it.

The real issue was the manner in which Abel offered to God as opposed to the manner in which Cain offered his. The attitudes of the two brothers were unlike. While the Bible does not describe the type and quality of the food offering Cain brought (whether succulent, fresh, big, etc), it does describes Abel’s: he “brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions” (*ESV*). Cain’s hardly merited a detailed description—it paled into insignificance beside Abel’s!

Abel had offered with a willing heart; he offered the choicest lamb to God. But Cain merely performed a perfunctory duty; his heart was not in it. He lacked true faith which impels one to “diligently” seek God; the inferior sacrifice he brought was the proof.

Giving cheerfully to God who you cannot see takes faith. Without faith,

- You will not be able to offer with a willing heart
- You will see the offering as a ‘waste’
- You will use the offering as an opportunity to show off (Matt. 6:2)
- You will give out of compulsion (2 Cor. 9:5)
- You will not offer bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6)
- You will give grudgingly (see 2 Cor. 9:7).
- Unlike Abel, you won’t give the best of what is God has blessed you with.

But we are supposed to give in recognition of God as the Source and Giver of all our blessings (1 Chron. 29:11-12). We read in Prov. 3:9-10: “Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine”.

However, given what human nature is—*faithless* in its unregenerate self—people are more inclined to offer reluctantly than willingly. This accounts for the repeated divine warnings against offering undesirable presents and sacrifices to the LORD. In Deut. 17:1 God warned the Israelites: "You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep in which is a blemish, any defect whatever, for that is an abomination to the LORD your God" (ESV).

In the time of the prophet Malachi, the LORD still had cause to complain:

"A son honoureth *his* father, and a servant his master: if then I *be* a father, where *is* mine honour? and if I *be* a master, where *is* my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise My name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised Thy name?"

"Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted Thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD *is* contemptible.

"And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, *is it* not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, *is it* not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 1:6-8).

And it all boiled down to attitude—an unwilling spirit:

"But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence [stolen] or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD.

"Cursed be the cheat [or deceiver] who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and My name will be feared among the nations" (vv. 13-14 *ESV*).

Since God blesses and rewards people of faith who offer willingly to Him (2 Chron. 31:10), what does He have in store for so-called believers who treat Him with contempt by offering inferior gifts to Him with a grudging heart?

The answer is in Mal. 2:

"And now, O ye priests, this commandment *is* for you.

"If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay *it* to heart, to give glory unto My name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay *it* to heart" (Mal. 2:1-2).

While the curse is directed at the priests because they failed to teach the people to bring a befitting sacrifice to God, the people who brought it in the first place could not escape punishment either. Prov. 21:27 says, "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?"

The attitude was the problem; they were unwilling, but they gave to the LORD anyway. In the process, they begrudged every offering they made, and it showed in the INFERIOR QUALITY of the things they offered to God. The LORD who searches all hearts accurately read their minds: "How tired we are of all this!" (*GNB*). They found the whole 'business' of offering to the LORD wearisome and burdensome; a nuisance.

And when you consider that in the NT the term “priest” applies to all the members of the body of Christ (1 Pet. 2:9), the curse where God curses one’s blessings for offering Him ‘unacceptable’ offering equally applies to us.

In Haggai chapter 1 God took the Jewish returnees from Babylon charged with the rebuilding of His temple to task:

“Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

“Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages *to put it* into a bag with holes.

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

“Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.

“Ye looked for much, and, lo, *it came* to little; and when ye brought *it* home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that *is* waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

“Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed *from* her fruit.

“And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon *that* which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands” (Hag. 1:5-11).

When we withhold from God, He curses our blessings. We never attain our full productive potential because, instead of divine favour, God creates unfavourable conditions for us. The secret of all blessing is God: “The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it” (Prov. 10:22).

As the Giver of all true blessings, God has ordained, as one of His established paths to blessing, that “it’s more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35; Luke 6:38). However, generous giving in the sight of God is not necessarily measured by the large amount one gives but the amount one gives in proportion to his/her resources. Thus somebody may give GHC1000 and another GHC10, but it’s possible that the latter gave out much more than the former in the eyes of God, because out of his fewer resources he had offered a significant amount. This was what Christ commended a poor widow for:

“And He looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury.

“And He saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.

“And He said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all:

“For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had” (Luke 21:1-4; also Mark 12:41-44).

Now, do you find it difficult to give willingly and generously to God even when you have the means? The antidote is faith; it’s the key to offering an “excellent sacrifice” to God from the heart. It will not be easy, but do realize that God truly exists with all His majesty, glory, power, and excellence and that your offering will not go waste. If you sincerely give to Him

out of faith, He will be the first to authenticate your offering as a worthy offering of the righteous offered in faith. And He will reward you.

So then, we offer to God for our own good, although it might not seem so on the surface. This is the misconception God clears in Ps 50, correcting the wrong notion that our offerings somehow serve His 'selfish' interests, not ours:

"Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.

"And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God *is* judge Himself. Selah.

"Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I *am* God, *even* thy God.

"I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, *to have been* continually before Me.

"I will take no bullock out of thy house, *nor* he goats out of thy folds.

"For every beast of the forest *is* Mine, *and* the cattle upon a thousand hills.

"I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field *are* Mine.

"If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world *is* Mine, and the fulness thereof.

"Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

"Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:

"And call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me" (Ps. 50:5-15).

It's crucial that we give generously from the heart on the basis of faith, because anything short of this will amount to sin. So Romans 14:23 says, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin".

This spiritual principle was poignantly borne out when Cain killed Abel in the wake of the rejection of his offering. As he boiled with rage and jealousy against his brother, the LORD had warned him "sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (Gen. 4:7 *ESV*).

Cain ended up being controlled by sin. The result was his murder of righteous Abel—all for lack of faith leading to an unacceptable offering which in itself was sin! Oh, how precious faith is!

A 300-year Devotion to God by Faith

If an "excellent sacrifice" was the specific righteous act of Abel accomplished through faith, what was Enoch's?

His citation reads:

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb. 11:5).

A simplistic reading of the text would suggest that Enoch was “translated” thereby escaping death on account of his faith only and that he did not perform any righteous deeds. But the text itself shows there was more to Enoch than his faith—his faith produced a life of devotion to God, a life which “pleased God”.

We read about Enoch in Genesis 5 in relation to his genealogy:

Gen 5:18-24

“And Jared lived an hundred sixty and two years, and he begat Enoch:

“And Jared lived after he begat Enoch eight hundred years, and begat sons and daughters:

“And all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty and two years: and he died.

“And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah:

“And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters:

“And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years:

“And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him”.

Of the 365 years he spent on earth, Enoch walked with God for three hundred years after he fathered his firstborn Methuselah at age 65. And death was never mentioned in reference to him. Enoch simply disappeared, “for God took him”.

It was a feat that could only be accomplished through faith. For three centuries, Enoch, who was of the seventh generation from Adam (Jude 1:14), consistently and faithfully walked with God. The phrase “walk with God” comes from the Hebrew word *‘halak’* (Strong’s #2585) and primarily means ‘to walk or go’. But it also has a great variety of applications, both literally and figuratively, and these include: “along, behave (self), come, be conversant, follow, forward, go (about, abroad, along, away, forward, on, out, up and down), proceed, move, live, manner of life (fig), to traverse, to walk about” (*Strong’s and BDB Hebrew Dictionaries*).

Thus the phrase “walk with God” suggests that “Enoch lived in close fellowship with God, leading a life of devotion and piety” (*NET Bible*). He had an intimate relationship with God in which he was never out of step with God in thought, word and deed. Enoch was in tune with the will of God; he lived the will of God. Like the “blessed man” of Ps 1, his social life was regulated by the law of God which he meditated and lived day and night. The result was that he “walked with God” and not with sinners, and that for 300 hundred years!

Yet Enoch did not live the life of a recluse, shut off from society. He lived a normal social life in which he had sons and daughters, even as he “walked with God”. Nevertheless, Enoch did not allow the cares of this life to overshadow his devotion to God. His priority was doing the will of God in an age and society in which wickedness and ungodliness ruled.

It was only a few generations back (the 3rd generation from Adam) that men had begun to call on the name of the Lord:

“And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For, *said she*, God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel; for Cain slew him.

“And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enosh: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD” (Gen. 4:25-26 RV).

Enoch’s society was not one in which the fear of God and obedience to His will was the norm; it was a society thoroughly given to wickedness. But Enoch tenaciously held on to God and to His righteousness by faith, resisting all temptation to conform to the pervasive ungodly culture around him. In speaking of the false teachers that had infiltrated the church and that Enoch directed his prophetic denunciations against men of that kind (vv. 4-13), Jude gives us a glimpse into the society of Enoch and the bold stand he took for righteousness:

“And to these also Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His holy ones,

“To execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their works of ungodliness which they have ungodly wrought, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him” (Jude 1:14-15).

Jude specifies which Enoch he refers to by describing him as “the seventh from Adam”, i.e. of the seventh generation from Adam from the line of Seth, to distinguish him from the other Enoch who was Cain’s son (Gen. 4:17) and was not reckoned as belonging to the lineage of Adam traced through Seth. After he was driven away, Cain was regarded as an outcast from the family of Adam, and his lineage was never traced back to Adam. However, with Abel, who was to have succeeded Adam as the head of the second generation, slain by Cain, Seth, the third born, assumed the position, and it’s his lineage that Enoch, who “walked with God”, belonged to. The line of descent is in this order: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Cainan, Mahaleel, Jared, Enoch (Gen. 5:1-18).

And this Enoch was not just a passive follower of God, but a prophet and advocate of righteousness in a society steeped in wickedness. Like all true prophets, Enoch pointed out the sins of the people and pointed them to the path of righteousness short of which the Lord would come with myriads of His holy ones to execute judgment on them. The repeated use of the words “ungodly and ungodliness” emphasizes the state of corruption and impiety into which the whole fabric of the then antediluvian society had sunk prior to the judgment of the deluge. Ungodliness pervaded everything the people did—from their actions to their words. They *wickedly* conceived evil (Ps 36:4), *wickedly* committed the evil and *wickedly* reproached Enoch and blasphemed the Lord when he reprovved them for their wickedness. The people loved to spite God. But Enoch was not one to be deterred. He stayed the course. He remained committed to God and consistently thundered against ungodliness for three hundred years until “he was not, for God took him”!

He had lived a life of righteousness by faith in an age where almost everybody lived to gratify the evil passions of the flesh and not for God. But Enoch made a name for himself in the annals of the righteous; he “pleased God”, as the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (the *Tanach*), rendered the phrase “walked with God”. Because the

author of Hebrews quoted from the Septuagint that expression found its way into Heb. 11:5: "...before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God".

Another variant Septuagint translation is "God translated him" instead of "God took him" as in the *Tanach*. By "translation" (Grk *metathesis* #3331), the translators meant "transfer from one place to another, *transposition*, that is, *transferral* (to heaven), change, removing, translation" (*Strong's and Thayer's Greek Definitions*).

And "he was not found". Enoch's transfer from earth to heaven might have caused quite a sensation. People woke up to the news that he had simply disappeared, or perhaps others saw him being whisked away. Whatever it was, he was not found among men again and there was no record of his death, "for God took him".

Apparently Enoch was not taken to heaven in his natural body, since "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50). His perishable body was changed into a spiritual, imperishable heavenly body (1 Cor. 15:44, 46, 49, 51, 53). Hence "God had translated him". This meant Enoch skipped the intermediate stages of death and resurrection, the established route to glory for the righteous (except those who remain alive till Christ's return) (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

For Elijah, the only other living saint to be taken to heaven (2 Kings 2:1, 11), the case could not be different. He was similarly translated—changed and removed to heaven. With the exception of these two saints, all the dead saints are in a specific area of heaven called Paradise as disembodied spirits (2 Cor. 5:6-8; Phil. 1:21, 23; Acts 7:55-56, 59; Luke 23:43, cp Rev. 2:7). Hebrews 12:23 calls them "the spirits of just men made perfect". And they are in a state of consciousness—so conscious they complained to the Lord when He opened the fifth seal in Rev 6:

"And when He had opened the fifth seal, I saw [in spirit] under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

"And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

"And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they *were*, should be fulfilled" (Rev. 6:9-11).

Often, those who believe that the soul or spirit of a man also 'dies' upon his physical demise quote Eccl. 9:10 as support for the belief that "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest". Yet reading from verse 5, the context of the scripture is not about the believer; it concerns the unbeliever whose only hope is in this life and thus has no future reward from God after spending his life pursuing the pleasures of earthly life. He's told to make the most of his earthly life, since that is all his portion in his vain life on earth and yet is ironically said to have God's approval. Unlike the unbeliever who is forgotten after death, Ps 112:6 says the righteous will be "remembered forever" (cp Prov. 10:7). Earthly life is not all to the believer's life, for "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19).

The statement that “the dead do not know anything” does not mean the termination of personality or personhood, but that they know nothing about present, ongoing events on earth as they would have known them were they still alive (Job 14:21). As soon as death sets in, the bodily senses used to perceive such things cease, but the “spirit in man” given to him by God which caused him to understand while he lived lives on and in fact returns to God—the righteous to Paradise and the unrighteous to Hades (Job 32:8; Eccl. 12:7; 1 Pet. 3:19-20; Luke 16:22-23). This “spirit” which is attached to the soul (where personality resides) and usually synonymous with it (1 Thess. 5:23) does not die and therefore whatever ‘memories’ it had accumulated cannot be lost.

Moreover, knowledge as in skill for doing things is vastly different from being conscious of one’s past and present life. Even for the righteous dead, the skills they acquired on earth as tradesmen and professionals will not follow them into the grave to continue their earthly occupations there. Yet they do not lose all consciousness and remembrance when they exit this life. In the Story of Lazarus and the Rich man (the only parable where Jesus mentions a character by name, implying a true story known to the hearers), both Lazarus and the rich man were conscious of their pasts and remembered that they knew each other (Luke 16:19-31; cp Isa. 14:9-11).

This goes to reinforce Christ’s statement in Matt. 10:28 that physical demise doesn’t necessarily entail cessation of the soul: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”.

Similarly, to support their belief that the saints will never live in heaven and that none of them, dead or living, has ever been there, some quote John 3:13 to disprove that Enoch and Elijah ever went to heaven: “... no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven”.

Here again, it’s the context which helps to clarify the meaning of the text. The quoted passage is part of Christ’s discourse with Nicodemus where He teaches the Jewish leader that he needs to be “born again” before he can enter the kingdom of God. But twice Nicodemus indicated he found it difficult to understand Christ’s spiritual teaching on the Holy Spirit baptism (vv. 4 & 9). It was at this juncture that Christ said that He was the only One who had come down from heaven with heavenly teachings and that no man had ascended to heaven for the purpose of bringing back to earth heavenly teachings, except He “the Son man who IS in heaven” (v. 12; see Deut. 30:11-14).

Although Christ was on earth as He spoke with Nicodemus, He insisted He was in heaven since He was in constant touch with heaven (see Matt. 11:25-26 & Luke 10:21) and He Himself represented heavenly truth (John 14:6). The same could not be said of either Enoch or Elijah. God did not take them up to heaven for the purpose of bringing back ultimate truth to man as is applicable to Christ, but to set an example that in the glorious future “the tabernacle of God [will be] with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Rev. 21:3).

Indeed, the Apostle John testifies that God’s people will be in heaven at the end of the three and half year rule of the last Babylonian Empire of the last antichrist:

“And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God:
“For true and righteous *are* His judgments: for He hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand.
“And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever” (Rev. 19:1-3).

Thank God, Enoch as well as Elijah is ahead of us in heaven as a testimony to God’s faithfulness to His promise to make His people His co-residents in heaven someday. In John 14, Christ assured His disciples:

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me.
“In My Father’s house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also” (vv. 1-3).

The divine promise is sacrosanct, but it will require an Enoch-like faith of persistent devotion to God before we can be assured of our own translation into heaven at God’s appointed time. Interestingly, our age is as ungodly as Enoch’s. The world abounds not just with sinners but with brazen sinners who commit evil knowing full well that it will offend God. A case in point is the growing acceptance of homosexuality around the world in defiance of the word of God which flatly forbids it: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Lev. 18:22 *ESV*).

Now, not only is homosexuality largely accepted but also so-called same-sex marriage continues to be legally recognized in a number of countries. In other countries where such legal recognition is not accorded same-sex relationships, same-sex couples are granted the legal status of ‘civil partnerships or unions’. As of writing in June 2012, same-sex marriage has been **legalized in**: The Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Spain, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, Argentina, the U.S. states of Massachusetts, California, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, Washington D.C., New Hampshire, New York, and in Mexico City; **recognized** (e.g. if done elsewhere), **but not performed in**: Israel (see Rev. 11:8), Mexico, the U.S. states of Rhode Island and Maryland, and the Australian state of Tasmania. Meanwhile, **Civil unions or partnerships have been legalized in**: Denmark, UK, Brazil, France, Finland, Greenland, Austria, Ecuador, Colombia, Uruguay, Nepal, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Slovenia, Switzerland, Ireland, Luxembourg, New Zealand and the Australian states of Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales, and the Australian Capital Territory.

Modern sinners thumb their noses at God, and they have found refuge in the world’s powerful rulers and civil law (see Jer. 23:14). The ungodly world of Enoch is back. It will take his iron faith not to be enticed away from the truth of God in this “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) but to advocate it as he did in his time for 300 years. The Apostle Paul foretold our time:

“This know also, that in the LAST DAYS perilous times shall come.
“For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers,
disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,
“Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent [i.e. without self-
control], fierce, despisers of those that are good,
“Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;
“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Tim.
3:1-5).

These are truly evil days. Selfishness, greed, bluffing, arrogance, impiety, rebellion among children, ingratitude and un-holiness have overrun the society. Fellow feeling has dissipated, replaced with intransigence, slander, unrestrained libido, cruelty, treachery, reckless living, conceit, and the love of worldly pleasure at the expense of love for God. Worse, those who appear to be godly are only pretended followers of God as they would not let the power of the true faith change them. These behaviours are all true of our time and growing worse by the day. But rather than conform, the stern warning to us as true believers is that “from such turn away!”

True, wickedness abounds in these perilous last days, but grace is not extinct. In these same last days, God is speaking to all men not just by prophets but by His very own Son (Heb. 1:1-2) and is also pouring out His Spirit upon all converted, obedient flesh (Acts 2:17-18).

So you have two clear choices: You can be an Enoch of your time or you can be like one of his godless contemporaries. If you choose the former, know that your own personal strength will fail you. You will need faith, which will constantly validate your hope in God and demonstrate the reality of His unseen truths in your life. You are not called to follow God for some limited time but to “endure [in His truth and righteousness] to the end” (Matt. 24:13).

Enoch, the seventh man from Adam, did not stop living in close fellowship with God for three hundred years; you will certainly have a much lesser time within which to walk with God on this earth. But however short your time, you cannot do without the secret of Enoch’s spiritual success—faith! Truly, “the just [or righteous] shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:38-39).

A quotation from the Septuagint version of Habakkuk 2:4, the message of the scripture is that the righteous shall only maintain his righteous life by the constant exercise of faith in the Lord, not by his personal strength or effort or merits. Otherwise, he will draw back into sin and incur the displeasure of the Lord. So the believer who looks forward to “the saving of the soul” can never have enough of faith—and ideally faith should characterize the Christian life from conversion to the grave or to ascension (for those who live till the return of Christ). This is what the Apostle meant when he wrote in Rom. 1:16-17: “... I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith”. Yes, it’s by continual

trust in God that we will have continual divine strength to live His righteous life and to withstand the temptations and trials that will necessarily come our way as believers.

Short of this, the righteous, or one who claims to be so, will miserably fail in his spiritual life, and none of his former righteous deeds will count any more.

Ezekiel 33:13

“When I shall say to the righteous, *that* he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it”.

Ezekiel 18:24

“But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, *and* doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die”.

That’s why faith is imperative. While your own strength will fail you because there’s no inherent goodness in you apart from God (Rom. 7:18; Jer. 17:9; Prov. 28:26), faith never fails because it connects you to a higher power which now becomes your enabling power of righteousness. Apart from faith, it’s impossible to please God because your own efforts cannot keep you righteous before Him. And the author of Hebrews took pains to stress that all-important truth in relation to Enoch’s faith which ultimately led to his translation: “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith *it is impossible* to please *Him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:5-6).

Faith is the only way to please God. Without faith, you claim to follow God in vain. You will never please God, because you will not come to believe that He truly exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. What then will motivate you to genuinely seek Him, let alone rely on Him for strength to do His will?

The result will be a life that displeases God. “But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul”. If so, faith is not just an option; it is a must. If we by faith continue to please God to the end like Enoch, we will also be changed and taken up by God at the resurrection and ascension of the saints when the seventh or last trumpet (Rev. 11:7) is blown.

1 Cor. 15:51-54

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep [the sleep of death], but we shall all be changed,

“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

“So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory”.

1 Thess. 4:16-17

“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”.

Luke 17:34-36

“I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.
“Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.
“Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left”.

The ascension will occur at “night” because at that time the sun will have been darkened and the moon dimmed, “and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt. 24:29-31; cp Joel 2:31, Acts 2:16-21).

Blessed are you if you are one of “the elect”. But it all boils down to faith—faith to persevere in righteousness so as to please God. “The just shall live by faith”. That Enoch amply demonstrated for 300 years. But now is your turn to please God by faith. If you don’t abandon faith but continue to please God by faith, one glorious day you will come to experience the truth of Jesus’ statement in John 8:51, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death”. His word is as certain as day and night. If Enoch believed it and never saw death, so will it be unto you if you believe it and live His righteousness by faith in Him. The way of faith never fails. “By it the ancients received a good report”.

In an Age of Unprecedented Evil, one Man Lives for Righteousness by Faith

He was a unique man in his generation; his godly life was so excellent it won the admiration of God Himself. And why not? His was an age steeped in wickedness, and not one righteous person could be found besides him. His faith stood him in good stead; it kept him going in the way of righteousness.

Our subject is the Noah of the famed flood catastrophe in the Bible. Heb. 11 acknowledges his life of faith thus: “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (v. 7).

Noah's faith is of the finest type. His faith in God's warning of the unseen expressed itself in godly fear which impelled him to godly action leading to his being saved with his family—in contrast to the unbelieving world whose ungodly life rightly deserved condemnation.

In logical order, then, this is how Noah's faith 'played out':

First, Noah believed in the warning God gave him concerning "things not yet seen"—the flood which would not strike the earth until 100 years later as God's judgment on sinners. But it was not just the considerable length of time it would take for the 'unseen' to happen that called for faith. There is a strong indication that, as of the time God gave the warning, it had probably not rained on the earth since creation, let alone experienced a flood. We read in Gen. 2:4-6:

"These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,

"And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground.

"But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground".

The next mention of "rain" in the Bible is in Gen. 7:4—the rain which brings the flood!

But whether or not Noah had a prior experience of rain, he believed God. Thus, following his conviction that the warning was true and would happen accordingly, he was "moved" with godly fear to prepare the ark which God asked him to build and thereby saved his family. The term "moved with fear", from the Greek word '*eulabeomai*' (2125), means to be "circumspect, implying to be apprehensive or in a religious sense to reverence". It denotes the reverential attitude with which Noah received God's warning and the great care he took to carry out his every instruction, including getting all animal species into the ark, not to mention their feeding. In other words, He was as eager to obey God out of reverence as he was to do His exact wish with caution. Noah's faith was so genuine he could not bring himself to obey God half-heartedly. His deep reverence for God influenced both his obedience and his manner of obeying Him.

Such is a life of faith that would please God. And indeed God promises to bless believers who do His work devotedly (1 Cor. 15:58; Heb. 6:10), but He denounces those who do His work reluctantly: "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD negligently, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood" (Jer. 48:10 RV). In Phil. 2:12, the Apostle Paul exhorts us: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling".

And then Noah's faith condemned the world. How could that be? Noah's faith condemned his unbelieving contemporaries because his faith and attendant obedience showed that, by their refusal to believe and obey God, they had chosen the way of condemnation. For if they had believed and acted on faith as he exemplified, they would have been saved just as he was. Since they did not but rather continued in lawlessness, Noah's faith highlighted their

guilt even more making them objects of God's just condemnation. Because of the constant witness of his holy life, their wickedness had become inexcusable.

Albert Barnes in his *Notes on the Bible* explains further:

By the which - By which faith.

He condemned the world - That is, the wicked world around him. The meaning is, that by his confidence in God, and his preparation for the flood, he showed the wisdom of his own course and the folly of theirs. We have the same phrase now in common use where one who sets a good example is said to "condemn others." He shows the guilt and folly of their lives by the contrast between his conduct; and theirs. The wickedness of the sinner is condemned not only by preaching, and by the admonitions and threatenings of the Law of God, but by the conduct of every good man. The language of such a life is as plain a rebuke of the sinner as the most fearful denunciations of divine wrath (e-Sword).

In short, "Noah's faith condemned the rest of the world by bearing witness to God's reality and His desire for holiness" (*NLT Commentary*).

"And [he] became heir of the righteousness which is by faith". This does not seek to tell us Noah came to inherit "the righteousness which is by faith" as in inheriting a family property left for one but that he came to be counted among the people of God who obtained true righteousness on the basis of faith. This proves that in both the Old and New Testaments, faith is considered the only credible ground of righteousness or God would never reckon any person as righteous before Him. And in fact, true righteousness is impossible to attain outside of faith. Hence "the righteousness of God [is] revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17). By divine standard, therefore, Noah was a righteous man because, first, he was a man of faith and his faith manifested itself in a life of godliness.

Can the same thing be said of you? Does your faith vindicate itself in a holy life heaven would applaud? Should God examine you now (and He's doing so even now), will He see a discernible, clear-cut difference between you and the faithless world, as to your manner of life and values? What will set you apart from unbelievers as a man or woman of faith? The simple answer is your life of obedience; it is the showcase for your faith.

But who was the man Noah?

According to his genealogy, Noah was born two generations after Enoch, and he was an exceptional man of his time.

"And Methuselah lived an hundred eighty and seven years, and begat Lamech:

"And Methuselah lived after he begat Lamech seven hundred eighty and two years, and begat sons and daughters:

"And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died.

"And Lamech lived an hundred eighty and two years, and begat a son:

“And he called his name Noah, saying, This *same* shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed.

“And Lamech lived after he begat Noah five hundred ninety and five years, and begat sons and daughters:

“And all the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy and seven years: and he died.

“And Noah was five hundred years old: and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (Gen. 5:25-32; see also 1 Chron. 1:1-4; Luke 3:36-38).

And what was Noah’s time like? We know the time of Enoch to be full of ungodly men who deliberately and maliciously disobeyed God and blasphemed His holy name. But did things get any better between the time of Enoch and the birth of Noah, spanning some 500 years?

The testimony of scripture is that the world of Noah’s time was a world of unspeakable evil. The moral and spiritual environment of his day literally stank to the high heavens! Moral corruption and alienation from God were the defining characteristics of the human society. Man had become totally depraved and godless. God was heartbroken:

“And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them,

“That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they *were* fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.

“And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also *is* flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.

“There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare *children* to them, the same *became* mighty men which *were* of old, men of renown.

“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.

“And it repented the LORD that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart.

“And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth Me that I have made them.

“But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

“These *are* the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man *and* perfect in his generations, *and* Noah walked with God.

“And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.

“And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Gen. 6:1-12).

The Almighty does not regret His doings (Num. 23:19; Mal. 3:6), but in the days of Noah He’s said to have regretted creating man as a way of emphasizing how human wickedness had reached intolerable levels at the time. Man had become so evil he no longer retained any godly element that could be of comfort to God. Everything He saw in man—his thoughts, his speech and his actions—was a source of grief to His heart. Man, whom He had made so perfect, in His image and likeness, had nothing good in him. Absolutely no redeeming

feature! The joy of creation was lost. Whereas in the beginning, God saw that man, like all His other creations, was “very good” (Gen. 1:31), in just ten generations from Adam, God now saw that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Man had gone past the point God could continue to bear with him; greed, bloodshed, slander, sexual immorality and all sorts of abominations were now the make-up of humanity. He resolved to destroy mankind together with all life on earth.

But how did it come to this point of insufferable evil?

The first cause, in the line-up of the contributory factors in the unprecedented wave of wickedness in the days of Noah, was population explosion. The immediate cause was, in turn, an increase in the female population and hence more births (v. 1).

Second, “the sons of God”, on finding the women attractive, chose those they wanted as their wives (v. 2). God’s immediate reaction on witnessing this phenomenon was, “My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also *is* flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years”. Man’s uneasy relationship with God dating back to the Fall had started to deteriorate even more. Man now freely and increasingly indulged his fleshly instincts and passions, such as illicit sex. And indeed, the Hebrew word ‘*basar*’ (Strong’s 1320) translated “flesh” highlights this. It not only means the body (of man or beast) but also the male organ of procreation, blood relations, the flesh as frail or erring (man against God) and mankind in general (*Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Definitions, BDB*). Thus man was totally given to the deeds of the flesh and thought and behaved as his lusts prompted him; there was no restraining him. Man had turned completely carnal and sensual. But he still had the spirit or breath of God breathed into him at creation (Gen. 2:7; Job 27:3), and that spirit was in constant agitation with his fleshly ways. So the LORD decided to shorten man’s life to 120 years so His spirit would not continuously chafe at man who had become base and sensual. Is it any wonder that long life is promised the obedient? Prov. 3:1-2 tells us: “My son, forget not My law; but let thine heart keep My commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee”.

However, Yahweh’s statement that “My spirit shall not always strive with man” does have a deeper, secondary meaning. It also refers to the activity of God’s Spirit in illuminating man’s understanding and ‘reasoning’ with him to amend his evil ways especially as carried out through His messengers. Thus the spirit “striving with man” conveys the idea of trying to suppress, rule, judge, or contend with man by means of moral persuasion and appeal to his conscience. In this sense, the “Spirit” would refer to “the Spirit of Christ” at work in not only Noah but also in Enoch before him (1 Pet. 1:10-11) as He sought to convict man of his evil ways and bring him back to God. Therefore, Yahweh granting man 120 years meant He would not put up with man beyond 120 years and that during this grace period, His message of repentance calling man back from the brink of his destructive ways would have been preached. This is the period the Apostle Peter refers to as the time when “the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah” (1 Pet. 3:20) but waited in vain for the disobedient to turn from their evil deeds.

The lesson is that God by His Spirit will only strive with man up to a certain point; He will not strive perpetually. He says in Prov. 1:23-28:

“Turn you at My reproof: behold, I will pour out My Spirit unto you, I will make known My words unto you”.

“Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;

“But ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof:

“I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;

“When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.

“Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me”.

Certainly the longsuffering of the LORD is not forever, but He bears with man in expectation that he would see reason and come to repentance: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). But after repeated rebukes and warnings to no avail, destruction will be swift and sudden: “He, that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Prov. 29:1). Thus “... the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10).

So don't try the patience of God by grieving His Spirit with which you have been sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). How? “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:31-32). Although “the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah” while the ark was being prepared, it was not forever. The flood eventually came and wiped out the entire world population sparing only righteous Noah and his family of seven (1 Pet. 3:20).

But given that 100 years (counting from the birth of Japheth) elapsed—from the time God commissioned Noah to build the ark—until the time he entered the ark (Gen. 5:32, 7:6-7, 11), it's probably the case that Noah received the charge to warn the people some 20 years before he was told to build the ark or the 120 years were shortened by 20 years because of the impenitence and astronomical wickedness of the people.

Now the third factor: “Giants” who were the offspring of the sexual relations (intermarriage) between “the sons of God” and some of the women of the time appeared on the earth as tyrants and men of fame (v. 4). The observation God made at this point in human history was that “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (v. 5).

But who were “the sons of God”?

Several theories have been put forward as to the identity of “the sons of God” mentioned in Gen. 6:2 & 4 as having sexual relations with women. But two views have traditionally held sway: the ‘human explanation’ and the ‘angelic explanation’.

The first view is that “the sons of God” refer to individuals from the godly line of Seth (Gen. 5) who intermingled with women from the ungodly line of Cain (Gen. 4:16-24; 1 John 3:12). The offspring of these intermarriages were the “giants” or in Hebrew the *Nephilim*, representing a corrupted human line which needed to be wiped out in flood. The main appeal of this interpretation lies in the fact that the *Nephilim* text immediately follows the genealogies of the parallel lines of human ancestry that descended from Adam through Cain, the ungodly, and Seth, the godly.

Another major support for the ‘human explanation’ theory is Jesus’ statement in Matt. 22:30 that the angels in heaven do not marry. Moreover, the law of *biogenesis* dictates that kind begets kind (as in Gen. 1:11, 12, 21, 24). Also, Paul makes the point that there are different kinds of bodies in the realm of divine creation and that there are “celestial bodies” and there are “terrestrial bodies” (1 Cor. 15:38-40). If so, two different kinds of bodies (i.e. angelic and human) can never co-join. Lastly, Moses did not even use the regular Hebrew word for ‘angel’ *malak* in Gen. 6:2 & 4 (which he later uses 28 times in the Pentateuch) but rather used *gibbor* which is used many times in the O.T. to refer to human men described as “mighty” (e.g. Judges 6:12).

But if it’s only a matter of two groups of humans from different lines intermarrying, what could be so unusual about that? And why not call the sons or descendants of Seth by their identifiable collective name (as in ‘the children of Israel’) but rather “the sons of God”? In Old Testament theology, what images did that the term “sons of God” evoke? Assuming the name “sons of God” designates the sons of Seth, are we to take it that Seth’s offspring did not have Adam’s sin nature and that they were pure from all sin? By the same term, will it not also mean that only the male descendants of Seth intermarried with Cain’s female descendants to produce the unholy seed of the *Nephilim*?

The ‘human explanation’ theory leaves many questions unanswered.

The truth of the matter is that the Hebrew phrase ‘*byne-ha’elohim*’ meaning “sons of God” always refer to angels in the OT (as in Job 1:6, 2:1; 38:7; Dan. 3:25). Secondly, the Hebrew word ‘*Nephilim*’ (translated “giants” in Gen. 6:4) should actually be rendered “fallen ones” or “feller”. The usual Hebrew word for a man of great stature is ‘*rapha*’ (Deut. 3:11; 1 Chron. 20:6). Even though in Num. 13:32-33 ‘*nephilim*’ was used to describe the giant-sized “sons of Anak” by 10 of the spies who brought “an evil report” on their expedition to the land of Canaan, we must see it as a descriptive comparison and not their actual identity. This is because, first of all, the *Nephilim* of Noah’s age were all destroyed in the flood. Additionally, Noah and his surviving family were not part of the *Nephilim* to perpetuate their race. So the term was only used as an exaggeration for effect intended to make the people grumble against Moses and disobey God. This is evidenced by the fact that the word ‘*rapha*’, rather than ‘*nephilim*’, is used to describe the same Anakims in Deut. 2:11.

So then, “the sons of God” were the fallen angels who took on physical form (which the holy angels sometimes even did, Gen. 18:1-2, 19:1-3; Judges 6:11-12; 13:2-11; Luke 1:11, 26-28) and cohabited with human females and brought forth the *Nephilim*. As these angels had already rebelled against God and were not counted among the holy angels of God in

heaven, it should not be surprising that they would seek to have sexual relations with women, especially if that would further the agenda of the master to corrupt the whole earth. They would have no qualms about cohabiting with women, even though the holy angels in heaven would. Josephus, the renowned Jewish historian, notes in his *The Antiquities of the Jews*: "... many angels of God kept company with women, and begat sons that proved unjust, and despisers of all that was good, on account of the confidence that they had in their own strength; for the tradition is, That these men did what resembled the acts of those whom the Grecians call giants" (1.3.1).

It's also a matter of historical record that the early church believed and taught the 'angelic explanation' for "the sons of God" enigma in Gen. 6. It was not until the fourth century that the rival 'human explanation' view cropped up as a result of angel worship and enforced celibacy. In the former instance, a denial that angels engaged in sexual immorality with women would portray angels as far above such despicable moral behaviour and therefore worthy of veneration. In the second instance, the celibate state would be safeguarded from flagrant violations, as monks would have no scriptural justification to engage in sexual activities on the basis that even angels had relations with women!

Finally, that some fallen angels are chained in darkness (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 1:6; cp Luke 8:31) and some unchained but have access to high places (Job 1:6; Eph. 6:12) suggests a special judgment on those chained fallen angels. Considering that not even Satan, the chief Adversary of God, is chained, what other 'high crime' could have accounted for the punishment of the chained angels if not for their illicit involvement with women in the days of Noah?

The language of Jude 6 supports such a view. It contains an accusation that the chained fallen angels did not keep their "proper abode or estate", but transgressed into an activity or realm which was not theirs: "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day".

Since all the fallen angels of Satan participated in the rebellion against God, why is it that it's only this select group of fallen angels that are kept in chains under darkness awaiting the judgment of the last great day?

The only credible explanation is the chained angels are those fallen angels who had sexual relations with women for which reason God sent the deluge to destroy all their evil seed of *Nephilim* together with all the wicked of the time. Rev. 20 suggests that these 'promiscuous' fallen angels are presently chained in a pitch-dark abyss or "bottomless pit" where Satan will be incarcerated and chained during the millennial reign of Christ with His saints:

"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

"And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

“And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season” (Rev. 20:1-3).

The text does not give a sense of an abyss that is non-existent or unknown prior to the events it describes. The “key” of the abyss is kept in heaven and the holy angels in heaven must know about this dreadful place of judgment where the chained unclean spirits languish in darkness. Moreover, Rev. 9 shows that “the bottomless pit” is not yet to receive its first, solitary inmate in the ‘person’ of Satan. It’s presently crawling with hundreds of thousands of unclean spirits who will be unleashed on the world of the unrighteous in the form of locusts as the 42-month rule of the Antichrist draws to a close.

Rev 9:1-6

“And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.

“And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

“And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

“And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

“And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.

“And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

Rev 9:11

“And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon”.

If these unclean spirits are the same as the fallen angels which slept with women in the days of Noah, then woe betides those without the seal of God! Those fallen spirits are singularly vile as geniuses of evil! And after a very long time of not practicing their ‘craft’, they must jump at the opportunity to be able to hurt people again.

No wonder, the offspring of the fallen angels were not only wicked but bullies and tyrants into the bargain. The Hebrew name *Nephilim*, beyond describing a man of huge frame, also connotes a tyrant or bully who delights in oppressing the weak and the vulnerable. And that was the essence of the sordid character of the *Nephilim*. Although wicked by nature in all aspects, cruelty and the use of brute force was a specialty of the *Nephilim*. They were cold-blooded sadists who showed no mercy to their victims.

However, instead of attracting odium, the people of the time stood in awe of the *Nephilim*. Hence they were “mighty men which were of old, men of renown”. They might have been distinguished from the mass of the people by some special qualities or memorable exploits of theirs. But since they were masterminds of evil, their exploits could not have been

anything noble or honourable. Sadly, the whole human population had become ungodly and therefore could no longer appreciate the godly and the honourable, but what would appeal to their warped values. Even if the *Nephilim* achieved anything that seemed to be worthy of respect, its end could certainly not be good. They were the offspring of angelic-human unions with a demonic imprint of evil in their being; they could never do good. Yet they were the celebrities of their time, and they led the way in immorality and violence. The rest of society cheered and followed suit (see 2 Tim. 3:1-4). How detestable human behaviour had become in the sight of God! How low man had sunk in morals!

We read in Prov. 17:15: “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD”. Those evil days of moral topsy-turviness have returned:

“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

“Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!

“Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, and valiant men in mixing strong drink, “Who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of his right!” (Isa. 5:20-23 *ESV*).

The last factor which contributed to the high incidence of wickedness unknown before the time of Noah was, of course, that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”. Man was continually conceiving, germinating, incubating, devising and hatching murder, deceit, and wickedness of every sort. No let-up in his evil thinking and imaginings. It was “evil continually”, without break! Because the inner self was corrupt, it would only bring forth evil after evil.

The *Jamison, Faucett, Brown Critical, Experimental Commentary* notes, “The corruption had not only become universal, it had assumed a colossal character in the two aspects of lust and cruelty; and so intent were the men of that period in devising means of indulging the lowest propensities of their nature, that not only did they commit deeds of wickedness, but the ‘very imagination of their thoughts’—those embryonic beginnings of emotional mental activity which give moral character to all that proceeds from them—‘were only evil continually.’ The language implies a prodigious excel of depravity.”

The *Adam Clarke Commentary* also states, “They were in a state of wickedness. All was corrupt within, and all unrighteous without; neither the science nor practice of religion existed. Piety was gone, and every form of sound words had disappeared. This wickedness was *great [rabbah]*, ‘was multiplied;’ it was continually increasing and multiplying increase by increase, so that the *whole earth* was corrupt before God, and was filled with violence, profligacy among the lower, and cruelty and oppression among the higher classes, being only predominant.”

As one writer explains, not only does the Hebrew for “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart” mean, “THE WHOLE IMAGINATION”—but also “signifies the purposes and desires of the heart – EVERYTHING about mankind's motives, schemes, plots, conquests, lusts, ideas, dreams, fantasies – it was ALL WICKED, building on itself, feeding on itself, growing

and multiplying, ALL THE TIME -- incessantly, continuously, without interruption!" (William F. Dankenbring, "Sodom, Gomorrah, and the Days of Noah!", p. 2).

In short, the everyday life of man was characterized by unrelenting evil, not godliness. His soul was blackened with abject depravity. Man himself had become the breeding ground of every dissolute behaviour and vile thought imaginable. All his faculties and every fibre of his being had been hijacked for evil causes and ends in ways similar to what has been described in the following scriptures.

Mic. 2:1-2

"Woe to them that devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand.

"And they covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away: and they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage" (RV; see also Ps 36:4).

Prov. 6:12-19

"A worthless person, a man of iniquity; he walketh with a FROWARD MOUTH;

"He WINKETH WITH HIS EYES, he SPEAKETH WITH HIS FEET, he MAKETH SIGNS WITH HIS FINGERS;

"FROWARDNESS is in his HEART, he DEVISETH [by the MIND] evil continually; he soweth discord [the evil deed performed].

"Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; on a sudden shall he be broken and that without remedy.

"There be six things which the LORD hateth; yea, seven which are an abomination unto him:

"Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood;

"An HEART that DEVISETH WICKED IMAGINATIONS, FEET that be SWIFT in running to MISCHIEF;

"A false witness that UTTERETH LIES, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (RV; see also Ps 140: 1-8; Hos. 4:1-2).

Every part of his being is a full participant in the work of evil. Such was the nature of wickedness in the days of Noah, albeit on a far grander scale and ever festering.

The wickedness of man (whereby he had distanced himself from God and all godly virtues) caused God such great pain that He regretted making man on earth. Again, human vileness is in the spotlight—it had gotten to a level where the justice of God could no longer wait. Thus God who does not change His mind is said to have regretted. It's a loaded expression meant to impress on us the unpardonable gravity of human wickedness and the need for divine justice. As Eccl 8:11 puts it, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil". In this connection, the divine regret could only signal man's undoing; it tolled the death knell of all humanity.

God's reaction to the great wickedness of man was to destroy man and all life on earth:

“And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth Me that I have made them.

“But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

“These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God” (Gen. 6:7-9).

Noah was a nonpareil in his age. He was righteous and upright—that is, flawless, devout, and god-fearing—in his generation. “And Noah walked with God”. He enjoyed close fellowship with God; he delighted in His way and lived for Him in holiness. Noah stood out from the crowd.

The justice of God would not lump the righteous with the wicked and destroy both. It’s the destruction of the transgressors and sinners that shall be together (Isa. 1:28). But “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Pet 2:9). God looked on Noah with special favour; His grace rested on Noah.

That “grace” meant Noah would be spared from the destruction divinely decreed against all flesh:

Gen 6:10-22

“And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.

“And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.

“And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

“Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.

“And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits.

“A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it.

“And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.

“But with thee will I establish My covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.

“And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female.

“Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive.

“And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them.

“Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he”.

The unremitting ungodliness of his day” accentuated Noah’s holiness as never known of another saint. While “Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations”, “the earth was filled with violence ... and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth”.

But was the world of Noah deprived of all divine knowledge as to somehow ‘justify’ their execrable lifestyle?

In his book *Willmington’s Guide to the Bible*, Dr Harold L. Willmington insists that the contemporaries of Noah had enough spiritual light to keep them on the straight and narrow. He lists seven sources of this light:

- a. *“They had the witness of nature.
‘Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse’ (Rom. 1:19-20).*
- b. *“They had the witness of conscience.
‘For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another’ (Rom. 2:14-15).*
- c. *“They had the promise of a Redeemer.
‘And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel’ (Gen. 3:15).*
- d. *“They had the knowledge of the sacrifice.
‘And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering’ (Gen. 4:4).*
- e. *“They had the preaching of Enoch.
‘And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him’ (Jude 1:14-15).*
- f. *“They had the preaching of Noah.
‘And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly’ (2 Pet. 2:5).*
- g. *“They had the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
‘And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years’ (Gen. 6:3).
“But all this light produced life for only eight human beings” (p. 26).*

How sad! But it only reaffirms the words of the Jesus in John 3:19: “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil”.

So the generation of Noah knowingly chose to ignore God, because “they loved darkness rather than light”. Consequently, all flesh was wiped out except Noah and his family plus selected species of animals.

Noah was the lone light of His time.

Subsequently, in every generation, God has sought out individuals who love His light so they will shine as lights in a dark world of sin. God requires His followers to still stand out from the crowd by their blameless and holy conduct: “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:14-15).

If you are a true light as a true child of God, you will not blend in with the crowd; you will stand out from the world. You will neither love the world nor the evil desires and vanities of the world as proof that you are consumed with love for the heavenly Father. “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15-17).

Smart move. Love for God, proven with faith and righteous deeds, brings preservation and eternal life. Noah’s love of the light preserved him. Although all flesh was condemned to perish, Yahweh established His covenant with him, for “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him; and He will shew them His covenant” (Ps 25:14).

The ark was the means of escape and preservation; the building of it was a tremendous test of Noah’s faith. The Bible does not tell us how much ‘technical’ knowledge Noah had about ship building or even the marine technology of the time. But even for the technically minded, the task of building a ship of the dimensions and functions as given to Noah by God should be herculean. But Noah did not balk at the divine commission. He was a man of faith; he will carry it through by faith. Faith entertains no impossibility: “... verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith” (Matt. 11:23).

So how big was Noah’s Ark?

“The size of the ark was approximately 450 feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and forty-five feet high. It had a deck total of 97,700 square feet, or the equivalent to more than an area of twenty standard college basketball courts. Its total volume was around 1,500,000 cubic feet and the gross tonnage exceeded some 14,000 tons. (See Gen. 6:14-16). It was not until 1884 A.D. that this huge boat was exceeded by modern man (when Italian vessel, Etna, was

built). *The Queen Elizabeth ocean liner had a total length of 1018 feet, so the ark was nearly half this size. Author Frederick Filby writes:*

‘The Ark was, according to the specifications laid down, to be 300 cubits long by 500 cubits wide by 30 cubits high. The ratios of these numbers are very interesting. They obviously reflect an advanced knowledge of ship building. The Babylonian account which speaks of the Ark as a cube betrays complete ignorance. Such a vessel would spin slowly around. But the Bible ratios leave nothing’. (*The Flood Reconsidered*, p. 90). (*Willmington’s Guide to the Bible*, p. 29).

The task in hand was truly a work that would take unalloyed faith in the Almighty God to accomplish. And Noah was not wanting in that. But how did he get the specified classes of animal species into the ark from the different remote areas and nations of the earth as God commanded him?

“In the first place, we are told that God Himself gathered these animals (Gen. 7:8, 9). In addition, the indication is strong that prior to the flood the continents of the earth were not separated by vast bodies of water as they are today.

“How did Noah possibly pack all those animals on board? First it must be asked how many animals were involved here? Millions? Hundreds of thousands? Hardly. One of America’s leading systematic taxonomists lists the following numbers for animal species according to the best estimates of modern taxonomy:

<i>‘Mammals</i>	<i>3,500</i>
<i>‘Birds</i>	<i>8,600</i>
<i>‘Reptiles and amphibians</i>	<i>5,500</i>
<i>‘Worms</i>	<i>25,500</i>

“Taking this into consideration, one may reasonably conclude that no more than 35, 000 individual vertebrate animals the size of a sheep (overall average) boarded the Ark. It has been estimated that a modern train hauling 150 boxcars could easily handle these animals. But the Ark had a carrying capacity of more than 520 cars! In other words, there was more than enough room in the Ark. Noah and his family could have played shuffleboard on the deck had they chosen to do so.

“How did Noah feed and keep these animals for an entire year? Of course, we may only speculate. A possible solution [aside from God’s instruction to store food in the ark, Gen. 6:21] might have involved that mysterious animal physiology known as hibernation. Hibernation is generally defined as a specific physiological state in an animal in which normal functions are suspended or greatly retarded, enabling the animal to endure long periods of complete inactivity. This suggestion would not seem to be unreasonable, for the animals went aboard two by two (the clean animals by sevens) and came off the same way—including the rabbits” (ibid., p. 29).

One cannot objectively look at the scale of the work and the planning and resources and labour that went into the building of the ark and not see Noah’s faith in action. His faith showed in his raw dedication and the hard work expended on the project—from having to fully grasp the concepts, and measurements and designs as precisely as God gave them—to the actual back-breaking work of building the ark from scratch. He demonstrated an

advanced knowledge of ship building that clearly points to God as the One who taught him all the specifications and the other requirements either by direct vision or by inspiration, in so far as “Noah did all that God commanded him – he did indeed” (*NET Bible*).

Isn't He that “teacheth man knowledge” (Ps 94:10) the universe's best Instructor? Surely, “*there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding*” (Job 32:8). “In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, while they slumber on their beds, then He opens the ears of men and terrifies them with warnings” (Job 33:15-16 *ESV*).

So Noah only had to believe God and act on his faith, and God would Himself inspire and instruct him to do all that He required him to do. God always rewards faith. When God instructed the Israelites to build the Tabernacle in the wilderness, He “spoke to Moses, saying,

“See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah:
“And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship,
“To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass,
“And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.
“And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee” (Ex. 31:1-6).

Ex 35:30

“And Moses said unto the children of Israel, See, the LORD hath called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah;
“And He hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship;
“And to devise curious works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass,
“And in the cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work.
“And He hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he, and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan.
“Them hath He filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work.

Exodus 36:1-3

“Then wrought Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whom the LORD put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all that the LORD had commanded.
“And Moses called Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it:

“And they received of Moses all the offering, which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of the sanctuary, to make it withal. And they brought yet unto him free offerings every morning”.

Noah needed only to believe—and he did not engage God in any ifs and buts. He believed that He who had commissioned him will see him through to the end; He would accomplish His purpose in him. What is in this for us?

1 Thess. 5:24

“Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it”.

Phil. 4:13

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”.

So, what has the Lord put in your heart to do for His glory? Don’t be worried about it; don’t feel intimidated! His grace will make the burden lighter. The tasks He gives to us are never meant to be accomplished with our strength. The Lord had a special message for Zerubbabel who was charged with the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple:

Zech 4:6-10

“Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

“Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.

“Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you.

“For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth”.

The ‘seven eyes’ represent “the seven Spirits of God” (Rev. 4:5; 5:6)—the abundant supply of God’s Spirit of grace! Divine anointing will begin the work and finish it.

So Noah experienced in his building of the Ark. He had “found grace in the eyes of the LORD”, and that grace empowered him in his work of righteousness, and it preserved him. The Ark was the visible symbol of the divine grace Noah received and the means of his preservation.

Gen 7:1-24

“And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.

“Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female.

“Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.

“For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth.

“And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him.

“And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth.

“And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood.

“Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth,

“There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah.

“And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth.

“In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.

“And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

“In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark;

“They, and every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort.

“And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life.

“And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the LORD shut him in.

“And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth.

“And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters.

“And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered.

“Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered.

“And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man:

“All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died.

“And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.

“And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days”.

Over the years, sceptics have raised doubts about the Biblical account of Noah's ark and the great flood which swept away the antediluvian world. Some have even suggested that the existence of parallel flood narratives in other ancient civilizations is conclusive proof that the Biblical account is equally a legend and therefore a myth. Critics especially cite the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. While there are many similarities between the Biblical flood account and the Babylonian flood account, they differ in several significant details. The website *Gotquestions.com* explains more:

“In both accounts, samples from all species of animals were to be on the ark, and birds were used after the rains to determine if flood waters had subsided anywhere to reveal dry land. There are other similarities between the Gilgamesh flood account and biblical flood account.

“One major point of clear agreement is that a global flooding disaster occurred in ancient times. Portions of the Gilgamesh account (Chaldean Flood Tablets) have been found dating back to 2000 B.C. or earlier. Tablets containing the full story, however, date to approximately 650 B.C., or well after the Genesis account (c. 1450 – 1410 B.C.) These Chaldean tablets, from the city of Ur (modern day Southern Iraq), describe how the Babylonian God Ea decided to end all life except for the ark dwellers with a great flood. Ea, believed by the Babylonians to be the god who created the earth, selected Ut-Napishtim (or Utnapishtim) to construct a six-story square ark.

“During the mid-nineteenth century, this complete “Epic of Gilgamesh” (from 650 B.C.) was unearthed in some ruins at Nineveh’s great library, and the depth and breadth of similarities and differences became evident. Here is a more extensive listing of the similarities and differences:

- *“God (or several gods in the Gilgamesh account) decided to destroy humankind because of its wickedness and sinfulness ([Genesis 6:5-7](#)).*
- *“A righteous man ([Genesis 6:9](#)) was directed to build an ark to save a limited and selected group of people and all species of animals (Noah received his orders directly from Jehovah God, Utnapishtim from a dream).*
- *“Both arks were huge, although their shapes differed. Noah’s was rectangular; Utnapishtim’s was square.*
- *“Both arks had a single door and at least one window.*
- *“A great rain covered the land and mountains with water, although some water emerged from beneath the earth in the biblical account ([Genesis 7:11](#)).*
- *“Biblical flooding was 40 days and nights ([Genesis 7:12](#)) while the Gilgamesh flood was much shorter (six days and nights).*
- *“Birds were released to find land (a raven and three doves in the biblical account ([Genesis 8:6-12](#)); a dove, swallow, and raven in the other).*
- *“After the rains ceased, both arks came to rest on a mountain, Noah’s on Ararat ([Genesis 8:4](#)); Utnapishtim’s on Nisir. These mountains are about 300 miles apart.*
- *“Sacrifices were offered after the flood ([Genesis 8:20](#)).*
- *“God was (or gods were) pleased by this ([Genesis 8:21](#)), and Noah and Utnapishtim received blessings. Noah’s was to populate the earth and have dominion over all animals ([Genesis 9:1-3](#)); Utnapishtim’s was eternal life.*

- “God (or the many gods) promised not to destroy humankind again ([Genesis 8:21-22](#)).

“Perhaps most interesting is how the stories remain consistent over time. Although the complete Epic was discovered in the mid-nineteenth century, much earlier segments (before the writing of Genesis) have been discovered and dated. Yet most significant is the greater fidelity of the Hebrew account. This is attributed to the importance of Jewish oral tradition and the possibility that some of the story was recorded by Noah or from his time, which would make the Hebrew account precede the Babylonian version.

“Some scholars hypothesize the Hebrews borrowed the Babylonian account, but no conclusive proof has been offered to support this. Based on the many and varied differences and details within these stories, it seems unlikely that the biblical version depended upon an existing Sumerian source. Further, given the Jews’ reputation for passing down information scrupulously from one generation to another and maintaining a consistent reporting of events, Genesis is viewed by many as far more historical than the Epic of Gilgamesh, which is regarded as mythological because of its numerous gods and their interrelationships and intrigues in deciding the fate of humankind.

“Certainly, for those who believe the Bible is God’s Word, it is sensible to conclude He chose to preserve the true account in the Bible through the oral traditions of His chosen people. By God’s providence, Jews kept this account pure and consistent over the centuries until Moses ultimately recorded it in the Book of Genesis. The Epic of Gilgamesh is believed to contain accounts which have been altered and embellished over the years by people not following the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (<http://www.gotquestions.org/Gilgamesh-flood.html>).

Then others have denied that the flood, if it happened at all, was universal. *Willmington’s Guide to the Bible* examines Biblical and scientific objections to this view:

- “The need for an ark. God commanded Noah to build an ark to save both a remnant of humanity and the animal creation. But if the flood were local, then all the effort to build it would have been totally unnecessary and the whole story becomes ridiculous. Noah could have just trotted down the road a few miles and escaped.*
- “The worldwide distribution of man before the flood. In Genesis 4:16, Cain “went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden”. Some believe this to be a reference to China.*
- “The comparison between the historical flood judgment and the coming fire judgment. The Apostle Peter (2 Pet. 3:3-7) states definitely that as God once destroyed the world by a flood, He will someday do likewise through a fire. As the Bible clearly teaches, the entire earth will be burned (2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 21:2), we logically conclude that the entire earth was once flooded. Few local flood advocates would propose a “local fire” theory.*
- “If the flood was local, then God lied to Noah when He promised never to send a destructive flood again (Gen. 9:11). But there have been, of course, many local destructive floods since.*

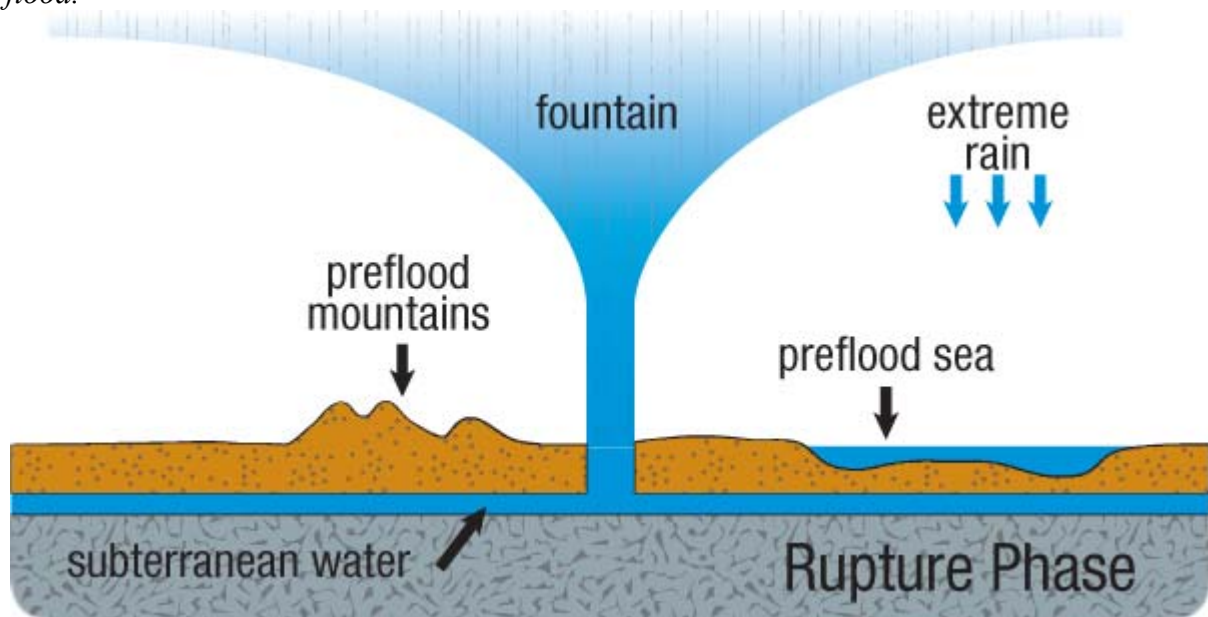
- e. *“Flood traditions can be found in the history of every ancient civilization culture. The early aborigines of nearly every country of the world have preserved records of the universal flood. Dr. Richard Andree collected forty-six flood legends from North and South America, twenty from Asia, twenty from Asia, five from Europe, seven from Africa, and ten from South Sea islands and Australia.*
- f. *“Marine fossils have been found atop mountains. Scientists of the nineteenth century were dismayed to find that, as high as they climbed, the rocks yielded skeletons of marine animals, ocean fish, and shells of mollusk. Thus, in ancient days, flood waters streamed over Mount Everest and all other mountains. A whale’s skeleton was once found on top of Mount Sanhorn on the Arctic Coast, and other similar skeletons a mile high on California’s coastal range.*
- g. *“Many fossil ‘fish beds’ exist all over the world. The Science Magazine, January 9, 1959, states:
“More than a billion fish averaging 6 to 8 inches in length died on 4 square miles of bay bottom off the California Coast line.”
Ivan Velikovsky writes:
‘When a fish dies its body floats on the surface or sinks to the bottom and is devoured rather quickly, actually in a matter of hours, by other fish. However, fossil fish found in sedimentary rocks is very often preserved with all its bones intact. Entire shoals of fish over large areas, numbering billions of specimens, are found in a state of agony, but with no marks of a scavenger’s attack’ (Earth in Upheaval, p. 222).*
- h. *“Because of the worldwide animal fossil graveyards. Robert Broom, South African paleontologist, estimates 800 billion skeletons of vertebrate animals exist in Karroo formation alone. To this can be added the tens of thousands of fossils of all kinds found in the LaBrea tar pits in Los Angeles, California.*
- i. *“Evidence of water bodies in present desert areas.*
- j. *“Evidence of a recent drastic rise in the sea level.*
- k. *“The universal occurrence of rivers in valleys too large for the present system.*
- l. *“Evidence from the geologic column suggests two things:*
- m. *(1) That there was a continuous deposition of the stratum layers from beginning to end. There is no erosion in between the layers. In fact, in some layers there are actual ripple marks. In other stratums there exists one or more vertical tree trunks, with the same tree making its way up from top to bottom!*
- n. *(2) That fossils from supposed different “ages” in the evolutionary theory actually lived at the same!” (p. 28).*

Actually, the questions raised about the worldwide Biblical flood arise more out of ignorance than out of informed, valid inquiries for truth. For example, people take it for granted that the ecology and topography (the lay of the land, mountain ranges, etc) of Noah’s age were the same as today. But the pre-flood world was a very different world from ours. In a review of the eighth edition of the science book *In the Beginning: Compelling Evidence for Creation and the Flood*, the hard-hitting conservative Christian website *World Net Daily* refers to some of the research findings of the author Walt Brown, director of the Phoenix-based Center for Scientific Creation:

“According to Brown, the earth was an extremely different place before Noah’s flood. Oceans were much shallower and mountains much lower. He notes that it is no coincidence that more than [230 flood legends](#) – with many common elements such as a sole surviving family in a boat – exist from every corner of the earth. In fact, the flood of Noah is the very device that sets Brown’s hydroplate theory in motion.

“Many skeptics ponder how the entire earth could have been covered in water, especially with many mountain ranges extending miles into the sky. Brown argues that pre-flood oceans contained half their present volume of water and that the Earth’s massive mountain ranges were not yet pushed up.

“Brown contends that ‘water depth would be 9,000 feet everywhere’ if the earth’s surface was completely smooth, easily covering the low-lying mountains that existed at the time of the flood.



“Tapping into the scientific validity of the Bible, Brown lets the book of Genesis uncork the source of the floodwaters that reshaped the earth to its present appearance.

“In the 600th year of Noah’s life, on the 17th day of the second month – on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened,’ reads Genesis 7:11-12. “And rain fell on the Earth 40 days and 40 nights.”

“For those wondering where such torrents of water would originate, Brown also has students examine the beginning of the Bible’s first book, which specifies that underground waters were set in place on the second day of Creation.

““And God said, ‘Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water,’ states Genesis 1:6-7. ‘So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it.’

“This expanse, says Brown, is the earth’s crust separating the shallow oceans and seas above from the water trapped underneath, before much of it jettisoned during the flood two millennia later.

“‘About half the water now in the oceans was once in interconnected chambers about 10 miles below the entire earth’s surface,’ explains Brown. ‘The average thickness of the subterranean water was at least three-quarters of a mile. Above the subterranean water was a granite crust; beneath the water was earth’s mantle.’

“Brown gives a visual of what he calculates the earth looked like before catastrophic forces pushed mountains tens of thousands of feet higher.

“‘Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas were ... joined across what is now the Atlantic Ocean,’ Brown asserts. ‘On the pre-flood crust were deep and shallow seas, and mountains – generally smaller than those of today, but some perhaps 5,000 feet high.’

“Yet not all subterranean water escaped during the flood, asserts Brown. He argues that earthquakes provide evidence that oceans of water still exist underneath the crust, noting that only underground channels of water could rapidly transmit shockwaves thousands of miles from the epicenter.

“Effects of this transmission are evidenced around lakes, where the crust is thinner. If the shockwaves were going through solid rock, instead of water, the earthquake’s effects would never extend great distances, as it did after an Alaskan earthquake, when transmitted shockwaves broke boat moorings in Louisiana’s Lake Pontchartrain – more than 4,000 miles away” (http://www.wnd.com/2012/06/does-science-prove-noahs-flood/?cat_orig=faith).

The truth of the Bible, the God-breathed Word, cannot be overturned. As the prophet says, “The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom is in them?” (Jer. 8:9). Noah’s flood did occur on a universal scale, accentuated in the Biblical narrative by the repeated use of the word “all” (Gen. 7:17-23). Today, that great universal destruction serves as a warning to our present generation “upon whom the ends of the world [or ages] have come” (1 Cor. 10:11). Christ warned His disciples in His Mount Olivet prophecy:

“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only.

“But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

“For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

“And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

“Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

“Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left” (Matt. 24:36-41).

The gist of Jesus’ warning message is that His second coming will catch people unawares just as the flood took people by surprise in the days of Noah. He explains why:

1. With the exception of the Father, not even the angels, much less man, know nor can know the exact date of His return. God keeps the exact date of Christ’s return secret for two reasons: (a) to keep His saints in a state of preparedness at all times (Matt.

- 24:42-44; Mark 13:33-37); (b) to expose false prophets who will give false dates of the Lord's return, when He Himself says we should look for *signs* of His coming.
2. People will live for the present, binging on food and drink and getting married to each other just as Noah's contemporaries lived before the flood came and swept all of them away except Noah. So then, the people of the last days will be preoccupied with satisfying their physical appetites instead of living in anticipation of the Lord's return. And indeed the pursuit of pleasure is very much in evidence in our world today, in fulfillment of the prophetic word that "in the last days ... men ... shall be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:1-2, 4). In present-day Ghanaian society and, I believe, elsewhere, pleasure seeking has virtually reached levels of absurdity. Public holidays are no longer the quiet times it used to be in which people, especially workers, rested their tired bones and perhaps reflected on the significance of the day. Holidays are now a pretext for orgies—binge drinking and 'beach jams' where nudity is glamourized and all sorts of lewd entertainment are organized in the name of holidaying! Worse still, funerals have not been spared. Traditionally solemn occasions for mourning the dead and commiserating with the bereaved, funerals are now part of the fun time too. While the bereaved family, the organizers, see it as a time to show off their wealth and perhaps genteel status, the mourners—nay the *invited guests*—expect to eat and drink to their fill; they expect to have a 'good time' at the funeral. Insufferable vanity!
 3. Nonetheless, as surely as the flood came and Noah entered ark, the Lord says He will come, and His elect will be taken away with all others left behind. Those taken away were those disciples who, while involved in everyday life (as farmers or housewives), heeded the warning and prepared themselves. Those left behind, however, made light of the warning, being only concerned with the things of this life.

So, the main idea Christ impresses on us as believers is not so much the return of the social conditions of Noah's time in the last days (though that is definitely implied) as the semblance of normal everyday life which gives the false impression that neither His coming nor the judgment is imminent. As He had been warning of the last days since the beginning of the chapter, His main concern was the indifferent attitude that will grip so many in the last days under a cloud of looming destruction.

And sure, social conditions similar to those of the antediluvian world will prevail in the last days prior to Christ's return. For example, the *Nephilim* spirit of wickedness, violence and sensuality has staged a comeback in the lifestyle of much of today's society, with scripture characterizing people of the last days as "selfish, greed, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unforgiving, slanderous, incontinent, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, full of conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, who pretend to godliness but live in defiance of its life-transforming power" (2 Tim. 3:1-5). Although the actual *Nephilim* race was wiped out in the flood, their base life is still being practised because unsaved man is still under the thumb of the old serpent that corrupted the then world. Scripture testifies that the old serpent, also called "the prince of the power of the air", manipulates and controls unregenerate mankind to this day by means of lust (Eph. 3:1-3). Thus like the *Nephilim* of old, "inventors of evil" (Rom. 1:30) have appeared on the scene.

Yet many will not be bothered about this disturbing trend of increasing evil carried out with equally increasing sophistication. They will live it up—partying and getting married among themselves.

But not so for us true believers. We must be in a constant state of preparedness for our Lord's return: "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel" (Amos 4:12).

The preparation called for is mainly spiritual, consisting in a life of holiness and fasting-prayer. This is not to say that we must not eat or drink at all. By all means, we must eat and drink for strength, but not to give ourselves to food and drink as gluttons do:

"Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!
"Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!" (Eccl. 10:16-17).

Moderation is the watchword. As a people who live in expectancy of the Lord's return, we must be moderate in all things—gentle towards others and restrained in our activities and even 'legitimate passions', for "the Lord is near" (Phil. 4:5; 1 Cor. 7:29-31).

By so doing, we will not be caught napping—unprepared and off guard! The Master cautions us in Luke 21:34-36:

"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.
"For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.
"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man".

Anything short of this will belie our readiness for the Lord's return as we will have aligned our attitude with the prophesied scoffers who daily deride the coming of Christ, saying "where is the promise of His coming?"

No lukewarm believer will publicly impugn or ridicule prophesied return of Jesus, but his lifestyle of overindulgence would speak volumes about his level of preparedness. The Apostle Peter warned in 2 Peter 3:

"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:
"That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour:
"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,
"And saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation

“For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:

“Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

“But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

“But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (vv. 1-10).

What message does the Apostle have for us?

In brief, he says doubts about the Lord’s coming are untenable in the light of the Biblical evidence. For this reason, he warns us not be swayed from the words of the prophets and of the apostles but instead come to the realization that the emergence of scoffers is itself a fulfilment of prophecy that “that there shall come in the last days scoffers” who will live as slaves to their lusts, instead of living in godliness (vv. 2-3).

And they direct their taunts at the prophesied coming of the Lord, saying “where is the promise of His coming?” In other words, the scoffers will argue that the supposed unchanging state of creation is a pointer to the fact that no change will ever occur (v. 4).

But Apostle Peter says they are sadly mistaken. He presents the following reasons to explain why the sceptics are wrong and his contrary position right and sensible:

1. It’s not true that change has never occurred since time immemorial. Change does happen—a fact creation itself highlights but which the scoffers (for the sake of their view) deliberately overlook. The truth is, the present world we see is a result of change. The heavens and the earth have not always existed; God created them by His Word at ‘a point in time’—“in the beginning” (Gen. 1:1). Moreover, “the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the [watery] deep” (Gen. 1:2). Then God salvaged the earth from the chaos when He said, “Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas: and God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:9-10; cp Ps 136:6) (v. 5). Like today, rival theories to the revealed truths of God did exist in the time of the Apostle Peter. As *The IVP Bible Background Commentary (New Testament)* brings to our knowledge, the scoffer’s position did not evolve out of vacuum; it had a philosophical background: “Aristotle and his adherents (the Peripatetics) believed that the universe was eternal. His view caught on even outside Peripatetic circles, and Philo [first-century Jewish philosopher] had to address the idea. Epicureans denied that God acted in the world; they also believed that matter was indestructible (on the atomic level) and that the universe was infinite” (p. 731).

The Apostle tore all that into shreds on the strength of incontrovertible Biblical truth logically reasoned!

2. A cataclysmic change did happen in the time of Noah when the then world was overflowed with water and all flesh perished except Noah and his family (v. 6; Gen. 7).
3. The “same Word” that brought changes to the universe in times past has reserved the present cosmos for the day of fiery judgment and destruction of the ungodly (v. 7).
4. As to the question of delay (a long belaboured issue to which he now addresses himself), we need to understand that God is not time-bound like man, but is eternal (Ps 90:2, 4). Therefore, what men will consider to be long or short makes no difference to Him. He has no past, nor present nor future; He only has eternity, and He knows all things in a ‘broad sweep’ of measureless eternity. So then, God manages time as it best suits His purposes and has a programme for everything. As the all-powerful sovereign God, He is at liberty to use the shortest time (“one day”) to accomplish one purpose and the longest time (“1000 years”) to accomplish another. He will not be stampeded into doing anything (such as His Son’s return) before or behind ‘schedule’ just to prove that His promise is sure (v. 8).
5. Therefore the supposed ‘delay’ is no delay at all but in line with God’s present programme of bearing with man, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (v. 9; 1 Tim. 2:4). “God is not slow in keeping His promise”—that the scoffers and all others need to understand.
6. Because God’s promise is certain, “the [prophesied] day of the Lord will come”. But it will not come the way the scoffers would expect (see Amos 5:18-20); it will “come like a thief in the night”—unexpectedly and unannounced. And the day will be characterized by great cataclysmic judgments and upheaval in which “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10).
7. Because the universe will violently perish in such manner, shouldn’t we live a holy, godly life in anticipation of the inescapable certainty of “the day of God”? (vv. 11-12).
8. However, what should truly motivate us to holiness should not be the certainty of the destruction, but His promise to give us “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (v. 13). This is what should impel us to be “diligent” (i.e. hard working, earnest) in godliness so “that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (v. 14).

Thus, in the final analysis, it will take Noah-like faith to live a holy life in demonstration of our unwavering trust in the yet unseen promised Kingdom. And we should not relax in reaching out to the lost and warning the world of the coming fiery judgment of God against all sinners. Like Noah of old, we must be “preachers of righteousness” in this ungodly age of ours: “And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly” (2 Pet. 2:5). The Lord Jesus will come again:

“And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

“Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10-11). Amen!

A Man Trades His Country for an unknown city of God by Faith

After the account of Noah, we encounter perhaps the greatest hero of faith: Abraham, the father of the faithful and God’s “friend forever” (Rom. 4:16; 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa.41:8; Jam. 2:23).

A paragon of true faith, Abraham never shrank back once he took the step of faith to follow God’s calling (see Heb. 10:37-39). He lived as a true righteous man of faith and won the approval and everlasting friendship of God.

But what is so special about Abraham’s faith? Why does he loom so large in the annals of Biblical faith?

The answer is in his indefatigable faith-attitude; an attitude so unyielding in hope and trust in God that it refused to brook impossibility and failure in the fulfilment of God’s promise(s) even when the circumstances strongly suggested so.

The faith narrative on Abraham reads:

Heb 11:8-19

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

“For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

“Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

“Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

“For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

“And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

“But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city.

“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

“Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called

“Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure”.

To sum up Abraham’s faith story, we realize that he demonstrated faith in God through a series of actions which testified to his acceptance of His promise, even though he was aware that the ultimate fulfilment of it still lay in the future.

Thus when God called Abraham to go out to a place earmarked for him to inherit someday, he “obeyed” by setting out on a journey but without knowing his exact destination (v. 8). Who, but a man of faith of Abraham’s calibre, would embark on such an uncertain journey on the say-so of a God you could not see and in the hope of possessing an unknown land based on His promise vaguely given?

We read in Gen. 11:27-32

“Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot.

“And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees.

“And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah.

“But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

“And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.

“And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran”.

Abraham, a descendant of Shem, belonged to the emergent world of the post-diluvian era in which the dispersion of humanity took place after the Tower of Babel debacle when God threw the then monolingual tongue of man into a babel or confusion of languages! That was “When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam after He “scattered them abroad from that place upon the face of all the earth. And they quit building the city” (Deut. 32:8; Gen. 11:8 *MKJV*; cp Gen. 10:25).

The period before the dispersion was dominated by a famed man of valour, a celebrity of some sorts, called Nimrod. He was reputed to be “a mighty hunter before the LORD” (Gen. 10:9). And a “mighty hunter” he was. He was the one who rose to the occasion in the immediate post-diluvian era when, in contrast to the depopulated earth, ferocious beasts freely prowled the earth in large numbers and posed a grave threat to the wellbeing of people. Nimrod, with his prowess in hunting, hunted down the beasts and killed lots of them.

Halley’s Bible Handbook says of him:

“Nimrod was the most outstanding leader in the 400 years between the Flood and Abraham. Grandson of Ham and born soon after the Flood, he may have lived through the

whole period (judging from the ages mentioned in 11:10-16). He was a very enterprising man.

“His fame as a ‘mighty hunter’ meant that he was the protector of the people at a time when wild animals were a continual menace. Early Babylonian seals represented a king in combat with a lion; this may be a tradition of Nimrod” (p. 100).

But he was “mighty hunter” in another sense altogether—and that “before the LORD”, i.e. against Him, an adversarial “before” (as in Num. 16:2). He pursued men; he hunted men (see Jer. 16:16) and recruited them for his cause: he wanted to build a civilization, a one-world empire, that would not only thwart God’s charge to Noah and his sons to “be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth” (Gen. 9:1; cp 1:28) but would also be a lasting monument to human ingenuity and greatness without God. It was a pure existentialist project to make a name for themselves (Gen. 11:1-4).

By this time, “the human race had multiplied sufficiently and developed arts and crafts to build a city and a ‘tower that reaches to the heavens.’ This is not mere hyperbole, but an expression of pride (‘make a name for ourselves’) and rebellion against God and His explicit command to ‘fill the earth’ (Gen. 9:1). Self-glory, and man-made unity to replace the unity forfeited by abandoning the fear of God were evidenced” (Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Handbook*, Moody Publishers, 2005, p. 52).

The hunt for self-glory—that was what motivated Nimrod to graduate from ‘mere’ animal hunting to “a mighty hunter before Yahweh”. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament* observes:

“... Nimrod as a mighty hunter founded a powerful kingdom; and the founding of this kingdom is shown by the verb [יָחַד] with ׀ consec.] to have been the consequence or result of his strength in hunting, so that the hunting was most intimately connected with the establishment of the kingdom. Hence, if the expression “a mighty hunter” relates primarily to hunting in the literal sense, we must add to the literal meaning the figurative signification of a “hunter of men” (“trapper of men by stratagem and force,” Herder); Nimrod the hunter became a tyrant, a powerful hunter of men. This course of life gave occasion to the proverb, “like Nimrod, a mighty hunter against the Lord,” which immortalized not his skill in hunting beasts, but the success of his hunting of men in the establishment of an imperial kingdom by tyranny and power”.

A new epoch had been reached in human history, and the pacesetter was again the man of the moment—Nimrod. He was the first to think up large communal settlements or cities and to materialize them: “The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city” (Gen. 10:10-12 *ESV*).

To this city-dwelling trend was added a new trend—the trend of mass migration after God confounded the language of the people and dispersed them over the face of the earth. Terah, Abraham’s father, happened to jump on the migration bandwagon. Thus “Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son’s son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son

Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there” (Gen. 11:31).

But way back in Ur God had already instructed Abram to uproot himself from his home country and from his people and travel to a land He would show him: “The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you’” (Acts 7:2-3).

The Bible does not tell us when Abram came to know *El Shaddai* (God Almighty) (Ex. 6:3) for the first time. (Some have speculated that either Job, Shem or even Melchizedek showed him the way of salvation). But Mesopotamia from which God called him out was a thoroughgoing pagan society. Joshua, in his last message of warning to the Israelites said to them:

“And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.

“Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac” (Joshua 24:2-3 ESV; see also v. 14).

The archaeologist’s spade has shed greater light on Joshua’s statement made in the dim and distant past. Archaeologists have not only unearthed the ruins of Abraham’s ancient hometown of Ur (silencing Bible sceptics), but also their religion. The city boasted of two temples, one dedicated to the moon-god Nanna and the other to his wife, Ningal.

“Nanna’s special functions were to light up the night, to measure time (Sumer observed a lunar calendar), and to provide fertility. Nanna was expected to give general prosperity: fish in rivers, plants on land, long life in the palace, abundance of cattle and dairy products to cow herders, as well as human fertility. ... In line with the phases of the moon, festivals were celebrated on the first, seventh, and fifteenth days of the month during the Third Dynasty of Ur. ... In addition to the state cult or the city cult, the populace worshipped personal gods. In some of the houses rooms were set aside as shrines; often reception rooms doubled as shrines. Commonly these shrines had an altar in the corner, standing about waist high. Here one might worship a family or a personal god, but nothing is known of the beliefs or practices of private cults of that sort. Passing references to personal deities do appear in letters of citizens of Ur found on clay tablets dating to the period.

“That was the religious environment in which Abraham grew up and did his business. Joshua makes it clear that Abraham’s father at least worshiped idols—and Abraham may well have done so as well for many years” (Howard F. Vos, Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs, p. 10-11).

So, in effect, God called Abraham out of both a physical place and a false religion. The call to emigrate involved a spiritual ‘coming out’.

Haran would not be his final destination. Although Terah had set off with his family with the express intention of settling in Canaan, for some unknown reason, he settled for Haran and

pitched camp there. But Abram still had some miles to trudge—to a land which God had yet to show him! He carried a divine burden to found a righteous family (Gen. 18:19) through whom all the nations of the earth would be redeemed to God. Spiritually speaking, the post-diluvian world as a whole had been a miserable failure. The *Tower of Babel* episode showed how quickly the people had recovered the rebellion and evil mind-set of the pre-flood world.

Abraham was the human instrument chosen by God to make available to humanity His salvation life once again. He had to have lots of faith!

Soon Yahweh spoke to Abram:

“Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”.

“So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

“And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came” (Gen. 12:1-5).

The very act of making up one's mind to 'get out' in obedience to God was an act of faith, not to mention packing bag and baggage and setting off to an unknown land! Ur of the Chaldees was no hamlet, neither Haran where Abram lived for some time with his father. It would take an extraordinary man of faith to contemplate on embarking the journey.

Abraham was such a man:

“Abraham embarked on a truly unusual move when he left Ur of the Chaldees for a territory known variously as Canaan, Palestine and, later, as Israel. Consider that God commanded it in a personal appearance to Abraham in a pagan society where people worshiped many gods. Then, too, God didn't tell Abraham where He was sending him or what he should do when he got there. We make adequate and sometimes elaborate preparations when we move. We have chosen a town, bought or rented a house, landed a job, and arranged for a moving van. Not Abraham—he had no idea where God would take him when he pulled up stakes and left Ur” (Howard F. Vos, Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs, p. 5).

So what was Ur like?

“For us today, Ur is not an important place, nor is it located in one of the more progressive regions on earth. Conditions were quite different then, however. Instead of being situated in a cultural and political backwater, Ur was at the forefront of developments. If we have our chronology straight, Ur controlled a powerful empire and was perhaps the greatest city-state in the world at the time.

“Not only was Ur an important and prosperous place in Abraham’s day, but it also stood in the general area where civilization began. The usual view is that civilization involves such developments as writing, the wheel—for pottery making and transportation—monumental architecture, the decorative arts, and metallurgy. All of these things appeared first in southern Mesopotamia, and the people who get credit for these achievements were the Sumerians, who lived at the northern end of the Persian Gulf and who controlled Ur in Abraham’s day” (Howard F. Vos, Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs, p. 6).

Why would Abraham leave such a civilized, prosperous place for a land he was yet to be shown?

A seaport on the Persian Gulf, at the mouth of the Euphrates River, Ur was “the magnificent city in all the world; a center of manufacturing, farming, and shipping, in a land of fabulous fertility and wealth, with caravans going in every direction to distant lands, and ships sailing from the docks of Ur down the Persian Gulf with cargoes of copper and hard stone” (Dr. Harold L. Willmington, *Willmington’s Guide to the Bible*, p. 37).

Ur was no rustic place. It was an imperial city with a team of administrators who administered the provinces on the king’s behalf. With a population of about 250, 000, brisk commerce was carried out in the city alongside brick making, logging and metalwork. Ur had schools where the children of the upper classes received training, and it was walled and had streets. Storey buildings, usually two stories, dominated the skyline.

A cosmopolitan city-dweller, Abram “probably started life as an upper class family member in a reasonably spacious permanent home in town” (*Customs and Manners*, p.19). In his adult life, Patriarch Abram was probably a merchant prince. Hence by the time he left Haran for Canaan, he had acquired considerable wealth (Gen. 13:2). For Haran, his ‘transit point’, was itself an important commercial centre. Its name meant what it said, “caravan city”—a bustling trade centre!

Why on earth would Abraham want to leave Ur and then Haran for a yet-to-be disclosed place far low in sophistication, affluence and prosperity?

The answer is unshakeable FAITH in God and in His promises! To him the promises of God were so sure and dependable as to stake his life and future on. He was prepared to risk everything—his country, his family, his business, his prestige and his very life—because he had absolute faith in the promise-Giver!

Abraham was ready to sacrifice the present certainty and comfort because he believed God had something far better for him. Leaving plush Ur was the sacrifice to make; it was his cross to bear.

Beloved, a life of sacrifice is the disciple’s calling or he is not worth the name. The Master tells us in Luke 14:26: “If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple”.

What does the Master mean? Does He mean we should despise our parents or detest ourselves before we can qualify to be His followers?

He speaks in comparative terms of not esteeming any other thing more than Himself. In other words, give priority to the cause of the Master. Notice how He clarifies the same statement in Matt. 10: "He that loveth father or mother MORE than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter MORE than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it" (vv. 37-39).

It's a call to a higher purpose, an opportunity to enjoy a higher life. Heb. 3:1 calls it "the heavenly calling" and Phil. 3:14 "the high calling of God in Christ Jesus". And it's a call to separation as far as we have been called with "a holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9).

Self-denial is the centrepiece of this heavenly call to separation or consecration to God as opposed to the world and its values, and social ties and priorities. That is the cross every true believer should bear: "Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24).

In leaving Ur in obedience to God, Abraham gladly laid the cross of self-denial on his shoulder and separated from his family, his friends, his business and everything dear to him in this life so that he might demonstrate greater love for God.

What about you? What are you ready to sacrifice to stay devoted to the Lord? Remember, He has made Himself absolutely clear: "friendship with the world is enmity with God" (Jam. 4:4).

If you value your relationship with God more than anything else, you will gladly separate yourself from interests, friends and relatives whose influence and lifestyles are sure to endanger your fellowship with God.

So Abraham set off. And when he reached the dreary place of promise, what became of the promise?

Abraham did not immediately come into the promise. He was still a sojourner, dwelling in tents down to his second and third generation descendants; Isaac and Jacob, who were "heirs with him of the same promise", likewise dwelt in tents in Canaan, the land of promise (v. 9).

That the promise was still future was evidenced by the fact that Abraham was neither put in charge of the country nor did he live permanently in the comfort of a walled house. Instead, he "sojourned" in the land, that is, moved about from one spot to another as one would in a strange land. Indeed, 'the Canaanite was then in the land' when "Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. ...
"And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

“And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

“And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south” (Gen. 12:6-9).

Abram only got a reiteration of the promise from God, not a divine fiat to inherit the land. Consequently, He could hardly put down roots in one particular place in the land. As Stephen points out in Acts 7:5, God “gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child” (ESV). Nevertheless, God was so sure of His promise that He ordered Abraham to walk up and down the land to get a feel of the real estate earmarked for his descendants:

“And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

“For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

“And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

“Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

“Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD” (Gen. 13:14-18).

Abraham did feel the land with the soles of his feet at God’s command, but he’s still on the move! The promise is not yet. And Abraham has not yet lost faith! He lived Heb. 10:35-36: “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise”.

Let this same scripture rule your life of faith. Patiently wait for the promise of God; don’t give up just yet! Though it lingers it will not delay, it will surely come to pass (Hab. 2:3).
Halleluiah!

But what was the secret of Abraham’s faith? What kept his faith going despite the apparent ‘frustrations’ with the promise?

Abraham’s secret was that his horizon lay beyond the visible and the earthly. “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (v. 10). This was the city where he could be assured of a secure, permanent dwelling, a city of “foundations”, not one of tents:

“And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

“Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

“And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

“On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

“And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:10-14).

If you are of the faith of Abraham and you have no such ultimate, noble objective in view, your faith is headed for a dead end: “here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (Heb. 13:14).

Do you share this joyful hope? If yes, you must “patiently wait for it”:

“... we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

“But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it” (Rom. 8:24-25).

This hope is presently laid up for us in heaven (Col. 1:5), and God has graciously granted us His power to wait for it in holiness through faith:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

“To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

“Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

The hope will not materialize until “the last time”. So faith as “the reality of what is hoped for” (HCSB) is crucial; it’s what sustains the hope.

Therefore, like Abraham, the foundation of our faith should not lie with what we see but the unseen promise of God, the city of sure and lasting foundations reserved for us in heaven:

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me.

“In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:1-3).

Need He say any more? “Believe in God, believe also in Me”. True faith sees the “mansions” even now, and so it never despairs no matter how long it will take for the promise to come to pass. Such was the faith Abraham had. He sojourned in tents in the land of promise just as we—whom He has promised us eternal life (1 John 2:25)—now live in the temporary tents of our bodies awaiting the new building God will give us, “a house not made with hands, [but] eternal in the heavens”:

“For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

“For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling,

“If indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked.

“For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened--not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

“He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Cor. 5:1-5 *ESV*).

As God asked Abraham to walk up and down the promised land to assure himself of the truth of His promise, so He has given us His Spirit to assure us of the certainty of His promise to give us eternal life in a glorious heavenly body. Thus the indwelling Spirit of God acts as would a deposit or part-payment in a business transaction: our receipt of the Spirit guarantees to us God’s promise of eternal life (Eph. 4:30), just as the deposit guarantees the sale to the buyer, although he is yet to pay the balance.

This is one of the great lessons the life of Abraham teaches us. Like he, “we have no continuing city here; we seek one to come”. And the promise is sealed and guaranteed: “I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11).

Meanwhile, Sarah, Abraham’s wife was barren—a problem made worse by the fact that she was now past the age of childbearing. At once, this plunged the promise into a credibility crisis, making it highly improbable. Because God had promised to make of Abraham a great nation with his innumerable descendants occupying the Land of Promise, their childlessness greatly militated against the viability of the promise. But Sarah judged the Promise-Giver “faithful” indicated in her coy reply to the Lord when He promised her she would have a child in a year’s time “I laughed not”, though she initially did within herself (Gen. 18:9-15). As a result of Sarah’s faith, she received strength to conceive in her old age—something biologically impossible for a woman in her menopause (v. 11).

Similar faith was at work in aged Abraham enabling him to visualize himself as the progenitor of descendants as uncountable as the stars of the sky and the sand by the seashore, even though he was “as good as dead” because of his advanced age (v. 12).

The basis of Abraham’s faith in this instance is further explained in Rom. 4:17-21. Here, we are told that because Abraham believed in God who brings the dead to life and calls into existence things that do not exist (v. 17), he saw in himself the fulfilment of God’s promise to make him ‘a father of many nations’, despite all human reasons to the contrary.

1. Therefore, when humanly speaking he had no reason to hope, he believed in the hope of God’s promise to become the father of many nations (v. 18).
2. For this same reason, he was not weakened in faith on the basis that his body was now dead—*sterile*—because of his old age as was equally true of Sarah’s womb (v. 19). After all, God could restore life to both of them!

3. Instead, his faith was fired up and thus didn't have misgivings about the promise of God through lack of faith "but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" about His yet unfulfilled promise (v. 20). This was because he was "fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform" (v. 21).

Can you testify to this kind of faith? Do you thank God about the promises He has made to you in the scriptures? Do you glorify Him when, in answer to your prayer, He reveals that blessings or a great victory is on the way?

Abraham gave glory to God about His promise which was not yet fulfilled at the time he glorified Him. The only explanation is that Abraham wholly and intensely believed God's promise and the unfailing certainty of its fulfilment. He could only thank God for the promise. To Him the promise was as good as real—that it was made by God Almighty meant it was a done deal! He possessed the promise by faith, and he demonstrated it by giving glory to God.

The best analogy is to be found with a postdated cheque. You thank a benefactor or a business partner on receipt of a postdated cheque from him, although you know full well that the cheque will not be due for cashing until some weeks or even months later. Still you thank him, because you believe the cheque-giver is credible and the cheque will not bounce when presented to the bank on the due date.

That was how Abraham saw God—he saw Him as trustworthy and capable. Hence he was "fully persuaded" that what God had promised, "He was able also to perform".

A man with such an unbending trust in God would never despair of faith. Thus the testimony of Abraham's faith-life together with that of his wife and immediate descendants (son Isaac and grandson Jacob) shows that they believed in the promises of God till death, having foreseen and embraced those promises as coming to certain fulfilment in the far-off future: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (v. 13).

Till God fulfilled His promises to them, the patriarchs saw themselves as "strangers and pilgrims on the earth". This tells us they didn't expect the promises to be fully fulfilled in their earthly lives. A stranger or a pilgrim has no certain, permanent abode; he's in transit, head for another place. So is the believer: "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11).

An indulgence of the lusts indicates we are no strangers but citizens of this world which Satan controls through the lusts of the flesh and mind, the way of life of all the unsaved (1 John 5:19; Eph. 2:2-3).

That the aforementioned forerunners of faith had unwavering conviction in the promises of God till death plainly shows that they had a definite objective in view: they sought a country. And they sought it so earnestly that it never crossed their minds to return to the country they originally came from, even though they could have easily done so. The overriding motivation which kept them pursuing the promises to their death was that they “desired a better country, that is a heavenly” one. Hence they were prepared to suffer all shame and ridicule for the sake of their God and His promises, for they were fully convinced that He had prepared them a city (vv. 14-16).

A double-minded believer who is unable to prioritize his spiritual obligations as against the cares of this world is not fit for the Kingdom:

“And He said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

“Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.

“And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.

“And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:59-62).

The righteous person who lives by faith never drawbacks into perdition but continues to believe to the saving of his soul which will be fully realized at the coming of the Expected One (Heb. 10:37-39).

But it’s not a cosy ride all the way; there are bumps on the road. Following God and His promises comes at a price: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12; see also Acts 14:22; Ps 34:19).

“Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13).

If we truly believe the promise, we will never be minded to look back. Unlike Demas, a former co-worker of the Apostle Paul: “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia” (2 Tim. 4:10).

Indeed, we will not be ashamed of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as to ‘back out’ but feel ‘proud’ of it. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).

Yes, persecution and name calling is part of the package, but the outcome is certainly glorious—righteousness, salvation, eternal life, eternal glory in the Kingdom of God. Why

should a supposed believer who has truly embraced these virtues and promises of God ever feel ashamed of the Gospel?

The patriarchs, with even the limited spiritual light of their time (Matt. 13:17; 1 Pet. 1:10-12), weren't ashamed. They believed till death!

As an example of his unshakeable conviction in the promises of God, Abraham by faith offered Isaac, "his only begotten son", in obedience to God because he was convinced that God's promise concerning Isaac as the chosen progenitor of his promised seed could not be broken. Indeed, he considered that if worst came to worst, God would raise Isaac back to life for He was able—in order that His promise might stand. And sure He did raise him up figuratively speaking by providing a ram in his place (vv. 17-19).

The account of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is one of the all-time popular stories of the Bible. It's a moving story of a loving father willing to sacrifice his beloved son out of a greater sense of duty to the God with whom he had "an everlasting covenant" and who promised him the child in the first place. It was a great test of Abraham's faithfulness and love for God. At the same time, the very thought of sacrificing his dearest Isaac must have been a torturous thought for him. And to date it certainly is poignant and spine-chilling when we come upon the dialogue where Isaac breaks his father's stony silence: "'My father': and he said, 'Here am I, my son'. And he said, 'Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?'" (Gen. 22:7).

Father Abraham's answer is faith-filled: "'My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together" (v. 8).

But when they reached the spot on mount Moriah where God had showed Abraham to sacrifice his son, "Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

"And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

"And the Angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

"And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me.

"And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

"And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.

"And the Angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,

"And said, By Myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

"That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

“And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen. 22:9-18).

Calvary is secured: “... God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Isaac, Abraham’s only begotten son, has been exchanged for Yeshua, Yahweh’s only begotten Son, and been given to Abraham’s seed and all the families of the world who through him are also blessed. Thus God “preached the gospel” to Abraham ahead of time (Gal. 3:8).

And the personal oath He swore to Abraham following his admirable show of faith in the offering of Isaac is meant to demonstrate more clearly to us, the heirs of the promise, the unchangeable character of His purpose. We read in Heb. 6:

“For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself,

“Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.

“And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

“For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

“Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath:

“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

“Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 6:13-20).

Surely, God’s promise is inviolable in itself, but He confirmed it with an oath He swore by Himself to make His promise even stronger and certain without a shadow of doubt in the minds of the heirs of the promise as a source encouragement to them. It’s a hope that anchors the soul in the sure promises of God embodied in Jesus, our High Priest ministering for us in the Holy of Holies in heaven (see 2 Cor. 1:20; Heb. 8:1-2; 10:19-21).

The God of Abraham is certainly a God to trust with all our hearts and to trust forever as the patriarchs did. Because like Abraham before them they believed till their dying day that the greater fulfilment of the promises still lay ahead, it’s said that both Isaac and Jacob made predictions about the future to their offspring: “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff” (vv. 20-21).

God’s promise did not end with them; their descendants would inherit and carry it forward. That was why Jacob “worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff” (Gen. 47:31) as he blessed each of the two sons of Joseph. Yahweh was true, and He would certainly fulfill His

promise in the lives of the two boys. That called for praise and worship—just like how Abraham gave glory to God for His promise!

And it was a great blessing he pronounced on them. A blessing from the ever flowing fount of the everlasting Abrahamic covenant:

“And it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

“And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed.

“And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me,

“And said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession.

“And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.

“And thy issue, which thou begetteth after them, shall be thine, and shall be called after the name of their brethren in their inheritance.

“And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem.

“And Israel beheld Joseph's sons, and said, Who are these?

“And Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place. And he said, Bring them, I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them.

“Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And he brought them near unto him; and he kissed them, and embraced them.

“And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed.

“And Joseph brought them out from between his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth.

“And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near unto him.

“And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn.

“And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day,

“The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (Gen. 48:1-16).

The blessing Jacob pronounced on his grandsons was predicated on the Angel who redeemed him from “all evil” blessing the lads. That Angel is the faithful covenant God of Abraham; the Angel Yahweh who spoke to Abraham out of heaven on mount Moriah, the Redeemer of Israel (Isa. 63:9), our Messiah *Yeshua*—Yah saves!

Will you praise His holy name now for His promises to you? His promise never fails: “Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:24).

This is the truth the life of Abraham, as well as that of his immediate descendants, amply testifies. Although God’s grand promise to Abraham as “the heir of the world” (Rom. 4:13) was not fulfilled in his lifetime and still awaits fulfilment, God amply rewarded his life of faith with temporal blessings: “And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things” (Gen. 24:1).

The LORD exhorts us:

“Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.

“Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him” (Isa. 51:1-2).

It’s a call to both the faith (Gal. 3:7) and obedience (or “works”, John 8:39) of Abraham. Such is the life that secures the promises of God now and forever.

An Unusual ‘Macabre’ Faith

Joseph on his dying bed had one pressing wish he wanted accomplished for him after his death. It was an unusual will to say the least, but for Joseph it was important enough to warrant an oath from his kinsfolk:

“And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

“And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.

“So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt” (Gen. 50:24-26).

The account in Genesis does not mention, but Joseph’s order about his bones was born of faith: “By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones” (Heb. 11:22).

Joseph was more concerned about the children of Israel leaving his remains behind than whether God would bring the people of Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land. As far as he was concerned, God’s promise of bringing the Israelites to Canaan was an unalterable certainty, *a fait accompli*, but man was notoriously fickle. Thus whereas he could fully and without a shred of doubt count on the promise of God, Joseph would take no chances with his brethren. He made his brethren swear to him that they will not forget to carry his bones along with them when (not if) the LORD, in fulfilment of His promise, led them out of Egypt into Canaan.

Egypt would not be the terminus of the promise—not even for Joseph, the governor of Egypt and the second-in-command after the Pharaoh. God would fulfill His promise according to His specifics of how, when and where. Joseph’s was an uncompromising faith. With all the tribulations he had gone through and the great victories and honour God had given him in fulfilment of His promises to him, Joseph would have this kind of faith. He was sold into slavery by his brothers to forestall his dreams of greatness, but because God’s promise is unfailing, Joseph’s enslavement was his pathway to glory and honour in Egypt. Eventually, his brothers bowed themselves to him—the very hated thing his dreams had suggested and for which they sought to do away with him.

Joseph knew from personal experience that God’s promises work. And it was so evident in his parting words to the children of Israel: “God will SURELY visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob”.

Because of the oath the children of Israel swore to Joseph, Moses made sure to take along Joseph’s remains embalmed in a coffin some four hundred years later when God brought them out of Egypt with a strong hand: “And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you” (Ex. 13:19).

Joseph believed Yahweh so absolutely that he shuddered to think that the Israelites might leave his bones behind when His promise to take them out of Egypt came to pass.

Can you lay claim to such implicit faith in God? You had better, for every promise of His is ‘Yes’ and ‘Amen’:

“But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay.

“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in Him was yea.

“For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2 Cor. 1:18-20).

Moses Exemplifies the Triumphant Power of Faith

The next character we encounter in Hebrews chapter 11’s ‘Hall of Faith’ is Moses. What lessons of faith do we learn from the life of this great prophet of Israel whom “Yahweh knew face to face?” (Duet. 34:10).

The overall impression we get from the succinct description of Moses’ life in the chapter is that his life exemplifies the triumph of faith over fear and danger. And it ran through his life from his birth to the inception of his life’s mission as God’s prophet and Israel’s leader in his adulthood.

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment” (Heb. 11:23).

By pure satanic design rather than by mere coincidence, Moses was born at a most inauspicious time for a Hebrew male child to be born in Egypt. He was born in the days of “a

new king” in Egypt, “who knew not Joseph” (Ex. 1:8). It was a time of both great peril and promise for Israel, as Deacon Stephen observes in Acts 7: “But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph” (Acts 7:17-18).

The rise of “a new king” speaks of presumably the rise of a new dynasty several hundred years after the death of Joseph, a dynasty different from the one which made Joseph a ruler of Egypt. It was this dynasty which, threatened by the growing population of the Israelites, “dealt craftily” with them and enslaved them, only for the Israelites to expand even more (Ex. 1:9-14). To rein in the ballooning population of Israel, the Pharaoh then introduced a policy of infanticide against Hebrew male children with an order to the Hebrew midwives to kill all Hebrew baby boys at birth. “But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive” (Ex. 1:15-21). Finally, “Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive” (Ex. 1:22).

In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus, the Jewish historian, gives us additional insightful background information which further explains Pharaoh’s panic decision to eliminate all Hebrew male babies. While he corroborates the Biblical information that the Israelites had grown too numerous for the comfort of the Egyptians and also that they had become prosperous in the land causing their hosts to be envious of them (for they reared cattle when they came to Egypt), Josephus further discloses that there was a spiritual dimension to Pharaoh’s genocidal decree. An Egyptian oracle had foretold of the birth of a Hebrew child who, if allowed to grow, would champion the cause of his people and bring down Egypt:

*“One of those sacred scribes, who are very wise in foretelling future events truly, told the king, that about this time there would a child be born to the Israelites, who, if he were reared, would bring the Egyptian domination low, and would raise the Israelites; that he would excel all men in virtue, and obtain a glory that would be remembered through all ages” (“Jewish Antiquities”, *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, 2.205, pp. 96-97, 1999).*

In panic reaction to the oracle, Pharaoh not only ordered the killing of all Hebrew male babies but also directed that “if any [Hebrew] parents should disobey him, and venture to save their male children alive, they and their families should be destroyed” (ibid. p. 97).

Thus, in effect, Pharaoh’s decree had turned the Hebrew parents into the killers of their own male children; they had become the prime instruments of their male babies’ destruction. Otherwise, they risked having their entire families and their own selves wiped out! With observers to watch and officers to implement the murderous edict, the Hebrew parents had little choice but to comply. After all, sacrificing their newborn males was the ‘lesser evil’ compared to a scenario of complete annihilation of the Israelite nation should they not comply.

However, the Hebrew parents could not bring themselves to murder their own infants in cold blood, not even by suffocation. They adopted a milder approach: they put their male newborns out of their homes so the infants would die from exposure to the elements.

Stephen again tells us about this in Acts 7: “The same [Pharaoh who knew not Joseph] dealt subtly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live” (Acts 7:19).

It was during this time of grave threats to the Israelite community in general and Hebrew male children in particular that Moses was born. Scholars are unsure of the exact identity of the dynasty then in power in Egypt. Moses was either born during the time of the *Hyskos* when invading Asiatics took power in Egypt or during the powerful Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt. Whatever dynasty ruled at the time of his birth, it was a dangerous time for a male Hebrew child to be born in Egypt at the time Moses was born.

But Moses was no ordinary child. According to Josephus, God had foretold his birth in a vision to his father Amram who, out of fear for the future of his people, and at a time his wife was pregnant, had prayed to God to “afford them deliverance, and to render abortive their enemies’ hopes of the destruction of their nation”. In answer to Amram’s prayer, God revealed Himself to him in a dream and told him that as He preserved and blessed Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the forefathers of the Israelites, in the face of dire circumstances, so He would show His favour to their descendants. Accordingly, the Lord assured Amram that the prophesied Hebrew child, “out of dread of whose birth the Egyptians have doomed the Israelite children to destruction, shall be this child of yours, and shall be concealed from those who watch to destroy him: and when he is brought up in a surprising way, he shall deliver the Hebrew nation from the distress they are under from the Egyptians” (ibid., 2.215 & 2.216, p. 97).

In confirmation of God’s promise, when the time came for Jochebed, Moses’ mother, to give birth to him, she had an unusually easy labour so much so that “it was not known to those that watched her, by the easiness of her pains, and because the throes of her delivery did not fall upon her with violence” (ibid., 2.218, p. 97). That was why after Moses was born, his parents, Amram and Jochebed, both of whom belonged to the clan of Levi (Ex. 2:1, 6:20; Num. 26:59), managed to hide him in their home for three months without any of the informants knowing.

Nevertheless, their very act of keeping the baby indoors for that long—with all the risks associated with it, like the baby crying, or the informants later finding out and telling on them—stemmed from pure faith. This becomes plainer when we consider that papa Amram and mama Jochebed’s action flagrantly defied the king’s order, the breach of which meant their utter destruction together with their grown children. But faith was the driving force. The defiance of Moses’ parents clearly showed that they were not afraid of the king’s decree, but that they were resolved to preserve a promising child.

The moment Moses was born, his specialness struck his parents: “he was a goodly child” (Ex. 2:2). But not only to his parents; he was beautiful to God too: “In this time Moses was born, and was beautiful to God, who was brought up three months in his father’s house” (Acts 7:20 *MKJV*). Thus through faith in God, who had promised Israel deliverance through their child, Moses’ parents were determined to keep him alive in spite of the king’s decree. In the sight of both God and parents, Moses was a “proper” or “goodly” child. He was a child of destiny; he had to live at all costs.

Beloved, the devil never attacks anything but that which is worthy, honourable and promising. As Moses' parents bravely demonstrated, the only effective counter to the threats and attacks of the devil at such times is faith. Thus whenever he launches the most ferocious attacks on you, it's a sign that he has seen something good coming your way, and he's hell-bent on preventing it. Such is not a time to fear, but to believe.

In the days of the prophet Isaiah, when Rezin, the king of Syria (Aram) and Pekah, the king of the northern kingdom of Israel, formed a military coalition against Ahaz, king of Judah, the one message Yahweh had for the king of Judah was not to fear but be firm in faith or he would not stand at all:

“And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it.

“And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.

“Then said the LORD unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-jashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field;

“And say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah.

“Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying,

“Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal

“Thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.

“For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people.

“And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established” (Isa. 7:1-9).

The evil conspiracy against Judah was vicious and threatening, and Ahaz was naturally overcome with fear. But from God's perspective, the threat was hollow and the conspirators goners. In fact, Ephraim, representing the northern kingdom of Israel, was destined to be permanently deported to Assyria in 65 years' time (see 2 Kings 15:29, 17:1-6, 24; cp Ezra 4:2). So why fear?

God's assurance was calm and strong: “Thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass”. Ahaz had only to believe in the LORD by relying on Him instead of looking to Assyria for help, and he would be “established”.

Fear has no place in our lives so long as we operate by faith. Because all that would make us afraid is nullified by the realization that God has power over all things, our attitude is no longer influenced by the unfavourable circumstances we find ourselves in. Instead of fear, a mindset of faith prevails—God's limitless power is able to put all things right!

Such is the faith attitude God expects of us:

“I, even I, am He that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass;
“And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?” (Isa. 51:12-13).

By His emphasis on His ‘Person’, “I, even, I”, the LORD draws our attention to *WHO HE IS* in contrast to the threat that has gotten the better part of us. A threat that has so overwhelmed us that we have forgotten to believe in the salvation of Yahweh our Maker, the all-powerful Creator who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth. Instead, we have stood in fear of mortal man whose end is just around the corner. Although he huffs and puffs as though he will swallow us up this instant, it’s a mere bluff. As far as God is concerned, the oppressor hardly went through the motions of venting his anger—his fury has petered out!

The infinite power of God has nipped the fury of the oppressor in the bud, even though he is still at it—blustering and threatening. But that’s how God sees it, and we must see it the same way too. Faith is that which enables God and His people to be on the same wavelength. Otherwise, His stern injunctions “fear not!” “fear not!” made over 60 times in the scriptures, will not have any positive impact on us. The fear will still be there because faith is lacking.

However, as true believers we need to remember that “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).

Thank God, for the victory of faith. Moses’ parents hid him for three months, and when he could no longer be hidden, Pharaoh’s daughter gave him royal cover and paid his longsuffering mother for nursing his own son! Amram and his wife’s singular step of faith had been rewarded by God hundredfold:

Ex 2:3-10

“And when she [Jochebed] could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch [so water would not percolate through], and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink.

“And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.

“And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it.

“And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.

“Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?

“And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother.

“And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it.

“And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water”.

Josephus gives us additional juicy details:

*“Thermuthis was [the name of] the king’s daughter. She was now diverting herself by the banks of the river; and seeing a cradle borne along by the current, she sent some that could swim, and directed them to bring the cradle to her. When those that were sent on this errand came to her with the cradle, and she saw the little child, she was greatly in love with it, on account of its size and beauty; for God had taken such great care in the formation of Moses, that He caused him to be thought worthy of bringing up, and providing for, by all those that had taken the most fatal resolutions, on account of the dread of his birth, for the destruction of the rest of the Hebrew nation. Thermuthis directed them to bring her a woman that might afford her breast to the child; yet would not the child admit of her breast, but turned away from it, and did the like to many other women. Now Miriam was by when this happened, not to appear to be there on purpose, but only as staying to see the child; and she said, ‘It is in vain that you, O queen, call for these women for the nourishing of the child, who are no way of kin to it; but still, if you will order one of the Hebrew women to be brought, perhaps it may admit the breast of one of its own nation’. Now since she seemed to speak well, Thermuthis directed her procure such a one, and to bring one of those Hebrew women that gave suck. So when she had such authority given her, she came back and brought her mother, who was known to nobody there. And now the child gladly admitted the breast, and seemed to stick close to it; and so it was, that, at the queen’s desire, the nursing of the child was entirely entrusted to the mother” (“Jewish Antiquities”, *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, 2.225-227, pp. 98. *Emphasis mine*).*

The daughter of the powerful king of Egypt who badly sought the death of Moses ended up as Moses’ benefactress—and Pharaoh had no idea his daughter was rearing their nemesis! Moses was destined to be Israel’s deliverer, the champion of enslaved Israel who would someday stand up to Pharaoh and all the might of Egypt. Yet Pharaoh’s servants fed him and clothed him and gave him all the royal care and treatment befitting a prince of Egypt. After all, he was “a beautiful child”—beautiful to the princess and most likely to all her attendants. The divine favour noticed on Moses at birth stayed with him (compare Luke 2:52). Josephus tells us that, from childhood, Moses was blessed with high intellect, physical strength and a fair and noble presence. He was a child prodigy with an arresting aura:

“Now Moses’ understanding became superior to his age, and even far beyond that standard; and when he was taught, he discovered greater quickness of learning than was usual at his age, and his actions at that time promised greater, when he should come to the age of a man. God did also give him that height, when he was but three years old, as was wonderful. And for his beauty, there was nobody so impolite as, when they saw Moses, they were not greatly surprised at the beauty of his countenance.

“.... Thermuthis, therefore, perceiving him to be so remarkable a child, adopted him for her son, having no child of her own. And when one time, she had carried Moses to her father, she showed him to him, and said she thought to make him her successor, if it should please God she should have no legitimate child of her own; and said to him. ‘I have brought up a child who is divine form and of a generous mind; and as I received him from the bounty of the

river, in a wonderful manner, I thought proper to adopt him for my son, and the heir of your kingdom” (ibid. 2.230-231, 2.232).

As the story goes, the king hugged the child and lovingly placed his diadem on his head, but Moses threw it down to the ground and, in a fit of childish anger, “kicked it around, and trod upon it with his feet”. On witnessing the ‘scene’ made by the child, the soothsayer who had earlier predicted Moses’ birth “*made a violent attempt to kill him; and crying out in a frightful manner, he said, ‘This O king, this child is he of whom God foretold, that if we kill him we shall be in no danger; he himself affords an attestation to the prediction of the same thing, by his trampling upon your government, and treading upon your diadem. Take him, therefore, out of the way, and deliver the Egyptians from the fear they are in about him; and deprive the Hebrews of the hope they have of being encouraged by him.’ But Thermuthis prevented him, and snatched the child away. And the king was not hasty to slay him, God Himself, whose providence protected Moses, inclining the king to spare him. He was, therefore, educated with great care. So the Hebrews depended on him, and were of good hopes that great things would be done by him; but the Egyptians were suspicious of what would follow such his education. Yet because, if Moses had been killed, there was no one, either akin or adopted, that had any oracle on his side for pretending to the crown of Egypt, and likely to be of greater advantage to them, they abstained from killing him” (ibid. 2.233-237).*

Moses, the great fear of Egypt, was now Pharaoh’s heir presumptive (his likely successor), and the Egyptians were quite resigned to it.

With time, Moses grew into a fine prince, well educated and well mannered and as well as well versed in the martial arts of weapon handling and combat:

“And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

“And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds” (Acts 7:21-22).

One daring act of faith by Moses’ parents has ‘pulled off’ an incredible blessing. The lesson is that, when we take an initial step of faith in the face of danger and threats, God takes care of the rest. He always blesses the work of faith.

However, Moses was never destined to be a daughter of Pharaoh for much longer than would be necessary. He had a mission to accomplish. The mission required that he broke ranks with Egyptian royalty and abandoned his princely life. If the mission would see the light of day at all, faith was imperative:

“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

“Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

“Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward” (vv. 24-26).

The stakes were high; he had much to lose and to suffer for throwing in his lot with God's people as opposed to remaining a prince of Egypt. It meant "affliction with the people of God" instead of indulgence in the fleeting pleasures of sin; it meant suffering reproach for the sake of Christ rather than continued enjoyment of the treasures of Egypt. But Moses was possessed of a new dynamism; he was possessed of faith. The "reproach of Christ" was of greater value than the treasures of Egypt because he was looking forward to a more enduring reward.

"The treasures of Egypt"! That's an indication that the Egypt of Moses' day must have been a land of great wealth and power. As the historical records show, the Egypt of Moses' day was not a primitive society or even a developing nation state; it was an empire, and it was at its imperial height: "This was the period when Egypt ruled the East, the heyday of pharaonic glory. ... Great pharaohs of this era include Amenhotep I (c. 1546-1525), Thutmose I (c. 1525-1512), Thutmose II (c. 1512-1504), Queen Hatsheput (c. 1504-1482). It was the era of Moses' birth and youth. Thutmose III (c. 1490-1436) was a great builder, conqueror and enslaver of the Israelites" (*The New Unger's Bible Handbook*, p. 71-72).

What could be more desirable than being a prince of Egypt? It came with perks and trappings people would fall over themselves to grab.

But Moses took a decisive step of faith to throw off his princely garb, not on an impulse or out of youthful exuberance to present himself as a hero to his suffering people. He already had prestige as a royal of Egypt. Choosing a life of struggle and suffering with downtrodden slaves is not the path to worldly fame. At age 40, Moses was now a fully grown man, and he had taken a rational decision to disown his class identity as Pharaoh's daughter's son and Pharaoh's heir presumptive. He fully counted the costs, weighed all the pros and cons, and arrived at the conclusion that he had made a far better choice because of "the reward":

"And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

"And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian:

"For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.

"And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?

"But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?

"Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?

"Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons" (Acts 7:23-29; see also Ex. 2:11-15).

His life's mission had begun to stir in him. The time was ripe for Moses to identify with his people and share in their plight and shame. They were the chosen people of God, a people the Lord of all the earth would later call "My firstborn" (Ex. 4:22), My "peculiar treasure", "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6). So Moses came to the rescue of a suffering Israelite and punched and pummeled the oppressive Egyptian till he died! He was

now acting on what he felt in his heart towards his brethren. It was a calling he needed to fulfill no matter the consequences. He was sure he was on the side of righteousness in siding with his oppressed people against the Egyptians whose prince he was.

And he was keenly aware of the costs—a backlash from the palace was to be expected. Apart from the loss of his social position as a royal of Egypt, he could be severely punished and even killed for betrayal and treason.

But how would his own people receive him?

Not as a knight in shining armour! An Israelite who turned on his fellow Hebrew the day after Moses killed the Egyptian retorted, when Moses told him not to treat his brother so: “Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?”

That was a cost Moses didn’t factor in; he couldn’t have foreseen it.

The deed was out, spread by his own people, whom he least expected to endanger his mission so early. Soon Pharaoh heard of it and sought to kill Moses. “But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well” (Ex. 2:15).

It’s one of the pitfalls of a divine mission—the greatest discouragements may usually come from the least expected quarter. It’s always good preparation to keep this in mind. God never assured us that it will be smooth sailing all the way when we commit ourselves to His work. There’s always a price to pay, but the price never outweighs the reward. That was why Moses was willing to abandon all the wealth and glories of Egypt for the reward of the reproach of Christ. The spiritual math favours the latter:

Rom. 8:18-23

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

“For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope,

“Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

“And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”.

2 Cor. 4:17-18

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal”.

The Apostle computed well. Whatever price we are paying now as believers for the sake of Christ and His gospel do not bear comparison with the reward that awaits us at Christ's return. The glory He will manifest in us will be superabundant; it will be immeasurable—beyond the imaginable (1 Cor. 2:9). Creation as a whole will enter a renaissance not known since *Paradise Lost* (Isa. 11:4-9; 65:17-19). At his fall in Eden, man dragged the natural world down with him, infecting it with the curse God pronounced on him (Gen. 3:17-19). Since God created the natural world for man and indeed empowered him to exercise dominion over it (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:4-8), then logically that which was created for man, and subject to man, cannot be free from curse if mankind was himself now under curse for disobedience. So God subjected the creation to vanity too on account of man (not that it deserved it), and it has been whining and pining since then.

The sentence will only be lifted when you and I, by His grace, break free from the shackles of death and mortality into our “glorious liberty” as the Spirit-filled children of God who have finally received our greater “adoption”, namely “the redemption of our [mortal] bodies”. (See Eph. 4:30). The divine son-ship we attained when God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, “crying Abba, Father”, (Gal. 4:6-7) will have its full meaning when we finally “bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Cor. 15:49 *NET Bible*).

That is certainly an incomparable reward for any present suffering. It's an eternal reward—“an exceeding and eternal weight of glory”. That it is as yet unseen does not detract from it; that's even a plus, a merit considering the great distinction of value God has put between the visible and the invisible: “the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal”.

So what price are you now paying for choosing to identify with God's people—to whom belong the promises, the glorious resurrection, eternal life, and the heavenly kingdom—as against the world? Loss of friends? Alienation from unbelieving relatives? Name calling? And you are already in despair?

Moses spurned his high social standing and even the throne of imperial Egypt because he reckoned it was a small price to pay for the future reward Christ would give him. Paul counted his family pedigree and Pharisaic religiosity and self-righteousness as “dung” that he might gain Christ (Phil. 3:4-8). The apostles as a collective suffered the worst indignities and deprivations so others could come into the riches of Christ at all costs:

“Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.

“For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.

“We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.

“Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace;

“And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:

“Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

“I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you” (1 Cor. 4:8-14; cp 2 Cor. 11:23-27).

Determined to lay hold of the incomparable heavenly prize of eternal life and glory, the Jewish Christians of the first century *joyfully* bore the fiery persecutions that were inflicted on them for their faith and witness in Yeshua:

“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;

“Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

“For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

“For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

“For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Heb. 10:32-37).

They looked to the reward—“a better and an enduring substance” in heaven, but not until “He that shall come” comes will the reward be obtained. In the meantime, confidence (faith) and perseverance in the doing of God’s will is the watchword: “Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised” (ESV). The Expected One will come with the reward and not delay!

“You have not yet resisted to the point of bloodshed in your struggle against sin”, Heb. 12:4 tell us, yet many so-called believers have fallen by the wayside: they have capitulated to sin and given in to peer pressure!

They took their eyes off the reward or at least computed it wrongly—much less than its incalculable worth. Disciple Peter shuddered to make that mistake. So he asked the Master right after His encounter with the rich young man who for his “great possessions” declined Christ’s offer of discipleship:

“Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

“And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

“And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matt. 19:27-29).

The grand prize is the heavenly glory, but earthly blessings are equally guaranteed. That is why we must never look back to the world, the flesh or anything that will distract us from

the goal of the calling. “Behold, I come quickly”, says the Faithful and True, “and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12).

It was this reward that fueled Moses’ faith to abandon Egypt not fearing Pharaoh’s anger: “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is Invisible” (Heb. 11:27).

At face value, not fearing the king’s wrath but running way from his domain nevertheless sounds quite strange to the ear. The logical question to ask is, ‘if you aren’t afraid of the king, then why not stay and face down the king’?

But the very fearlessness of Moses was in the running! For he did run from Egypt: “Now when Pharaoh heard of this thing [Moses’ killing of the Egyptian bully], he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well” (Ex. 2:15).

Moses was not a timorous soul; he was not visionless and indecisive. He would not acquiesce; he would not kowtow to Pharaoh just because he was angry and sought to kill him. For him, there was no turning back; the mission had suffered a setback but it could never be abandoned! If Moses was truly afraid of the king, the best recourse was to have thrown himself at the mercy of the king and tried to ingratiate himself back into his favour. After all, he was regarded as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. But nay, Moses fled!

That very act of fleeing was an act of faith. Any faithless coward would have hesitated or abandoned the idea altogether. The public roads by which he could exit Egypt were under surveillance. But Moses was determined to leave Egypt—he chose an even more dangerous route: the desert. Josephus tells us, “but when he had learned beforehand what plots [of Pharaoh] there were against him, he went away privately; and because the public roads were watched, he took his flight through the deserts, and where his enemies could not suspect he would travel; and, though he was destitute of food, he went on, and despised that difficulty courageously; and when he came to the city of Midian, which lay upon the Red Sea, and was so named after one of Abraham’s sons by Keturah, he sat upon a certain well, and rested himself there after his laborious journey, and the affliction he had been in” (*Jewish Antiquities*, 2.256 & 257).

Here was a man of faith and determination. He braved the desert; he braved hunger and the perils of the wilderness because he could not afford give up his vision. His flight was not just a matter of escaping from Pharaoh or Egypt for that matter. The sense of the Greek word ‘*kataleipō*’ (Strong’s #2641) translated as “forsook” connotes an element of defiance in the fleeing. The Greek verb essentially means “to leave behind, to depart from, leave, to be left, to bid (one) to remain, to forsake, leave to one’s self a person or thing by ceasing to care for it, to abandon, leave in the lurch, to be abandoned, forsaken, to cause to be left over, ...; like our “leave behind”, it is used of one who on being called away cannot take another with him..., like our “leave”, leave alone, disregard, of those who sail past a place without stopping” (*Thayer’s Greek Definitions*).

Such was the significance of Moses' flight from Egypt. He was severing ties with Egypt; he was turning his back on Egypt (his past) for good. It was a demonstrable break with his past so he could focus and pursue his divine mission. *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible* explains more:

“By faith he forsook Egypt,.... Either when he fled to Midian; this was before the eating of the passover, and so it stands in its proper order; whereas, his going out of Egypt with the children of Israel was after it, and mentioned in [Heb 11:29](#). The word "forsook" implies fleeing; and then it was when Pharaoh's wrath was kindled against him: but it may be said, that Moses seemed then to be afraid of it, seeing he fled: to which it may be answered, that he showed great courage and intrepidity in slaying the Egyptian; and he took no methods to gain the king's favour, when the thing was known; his fleeing was consistent with courage, and was a point of prudence, and in obedience to the will of God: his departure shows, that he would not desist from the work he was called unto; but that he waited God's time, when he should be again employed; wherefore he endured affliction and meanness in Midian, and waited, patiently, till God should call him again to service: or this is to be understood of the time when he led the children of Israel out of Egypt; when he had many difficulties on the part of that people: they were seated and settled in the land of Egypt; they knew nothing of Canaan, nor of the way to it; and, besides, that was in the possession of others; they were a very morose, impatient, stiffnecked, and an ungovernable people, whom he led into a wilderness, without food or arms; and their number was very large; and he had many difficulties, on the part of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The Israelites were in the midst of them; he brought them out from among them, with the spoil of them in their hands; he knew the changeableness and fury of Pharaoh's mind, and yet he led them out, and left Egypt,

“not fearing the wrath of the king; of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; though it was as the roaring of a lion: so such as are called by grace, from a state of darkness and bondage, and out of a strange land, forsake this world, and leave their situation in it, their sinful lusts and pleasures, the company of wicked men, and everything that is near and dear, when it is in competition with Christ; not fearing the wrath of any temporal king or prince; nor of Satan, the prince of this world:

for he endured; afflictions, reproach, and menaces, with patience and courage; his mind was not broken with them, nor overborne by them; he expected divine help, and persevered; and so do such, who are called by the grace of God:

“as seeing Him who is invisible; that is God, as the Syriac version expresses it; who is not to be seen corporeally, though intellectually; not in His essence, though in His works of creation and providence; not immediately, though mediately in and through Christ; not perfectly now, though face to face hereafter. Moses saw Him visionally, and symbolically in the bush; he saw Him by faith, and with the eyes of his understanding; and so believing in His power, faithfulness, &c. did what he did” (e-Sword).

Moses had keen awareness of the One on whose errand he was. He was not hallucinating. He endured the loss of his princely position, he endured affliction, and he endured hunger for the sake of One who is Invisible because he believed and understood that, that Invisible does exist and see him, although he Moses could not see him physically. His personal faith in the unseen God ran so deep he was prepared to risk the security of Pharaoh's palace for an uncertain future.

The same Invisible God has called us, and He's eternal, all-knowing and all wise (1 Tim. 1:17). Do you have a strong personal conviction in yourself that He's real and that you are obliged to live His will for your life? 1 John 5:10 says, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son" (1 John 5:10).

The life of Moses studied so far shows that he cared less what men thought of him or expected of him. It was with the Invisible God he had to do. To Him he was answerable. His will was his business.

Similarly, we must know what we are about. Our God is still invisible, but He has called us in truth. If we seek Him with diligence, we will have His approval and reward: "I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right" (Isa. 45:19).

So run your Christian race with conviction and purpose. Run to win:

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

"Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

"So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.

"But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

The athlete who won the prize had an unshakeable goal in mind, and he put in his all—he "exercised self-control in all things". We need to develop the same mindset and discipline if we will secure our imperishable prize of eternal life. Let the body feel affliction, let it endure the hard knocks of spiritual discipline, fasting-prayer and maturity. We are not aimless; therefore, we cannot expend our time and energy on that which will not profit us in any way in the long run. We must obtain the reward. Otherwise we will be disqualified from the race—declared worthless, rejected, castaway!

That was too great a loss, an incalculable loss. So Moses endured!

He endured much more than space will permit us to recount. He endured a shepherd's rough life in Midian (Ex. 3), though he had been a prince in Egypt. He endured the sight of the blazing but un-burnt bush, he endured the arduous journey back to Egypt with his young family, he endured the strong opposition and threats of Pharaoh when he demanded Israel's freedom, and he endured the disbelief of his own people.

His return to Egypt was not to catch up on his past; he bore a message of redemption in a land of oppression: 'Let My people go'! As believers, this should be the only reason why we

ever get in touch with the world—to proclaim the message of the good news of salvation to the oppressed of Satan. And sure, trouble and persecution would test us just as Moses endured in his mission.

But Moses endured in faith, and that faith was rewarded. The Invisible One for whose sake he endured performed extraordinary signs and wonders in Egypt through him. While the children of Israel were spared, those supernatural signs unleashed severe judgments on Pharaoh and his people.

But the last straw that would break the camel’s back was the death of all the firstborns of Egypt, man and beast:

“And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts.

“And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more.

“But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel” (Ex. 11:5-7).

That “difference” was anchored in a special ordinance God asked the Israelites to perform; it involved the eating of a ‘last meal’ in Egypt. The ordinance of Passover, as it came to be called, “included the following provisions: (1) the taking of a lamb, or kid without blemish, for each household on the 10th of the month; (2) the killing of the lamb on the 14th at even; (3) the sprinkling of the blood on doorposts and lintels of the houses in which it was to be eaten; (4) the roasting of the lamb with fire, its head with its legs and inwards - the lamb was not to be eaten raw nor sodden (*bāsha*) with water; (5) the eating of unleavened bread and bitter herbs; (6) eating in haste, with loins girded, shoes on the feet, and staff in hand; (7) and remaining in the house until the morning; (8) the burning of all that remained; the Passover could be eaten only during the night (Ex 12:1-23)” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, e-Sword).

The purpose of the Passover ordinance?

The death decreed against all Egypt would *pass over* the homes of Israelites having the blood of the slain lambs sprinkled on their doorposts and lintels:

“For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.

“And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt” (Ex. 12:12-13).

It turns out God did not do the killing Himself. The job was assigned to a “destroyer”:

“Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover.

“And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning.

“For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you” (Ex. 12:21-23).

Ps 78 identifies “the destroyer” as “a band of destroying angels” (NASB) out on a mission of destruction: “He cast upon them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them. He made a way to His anger; He spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence; And smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham” (vv. 49-51).

Those “evil angels” obviously belonged to the class of the ‘trigger-happy’ evil spirit in 1 Kings 22:19-22 who delightedly offered to be “a lying spirit” in the mouths of all the false prophets of Israel so apostate Ahab would be misled into war and die. These evil spirits relished doing evil. Only God could stop them. And in this instance, He said the blood of the lambs would keep them at bay.

It was up to Moses and the Israelites to act on God’s Word. Thankfully, Moses was a man of faith. Because of his great faith in the Invisible God and His promise of protection, he was not remiss in scrupulously following the divine instructions and teaching the Israelites so. If not, the ‘evil angels’ would have surely harmed Israel. Hence “Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them” (Heb. 11:28).

In this New Testament time, we have the consummate *Passover Lamb* in Yeshua, the Son of God:

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

“And looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36).

As the antitype of the Passover lambs slain in Egypt and subsequently in Israel, Yeshua fulfilled all aspects of the Passover ceremony, only a grander scale.

Like the Passover lambs, He was chosen and marked out for death (sacrifice) on the evening of ninth Abib, "six days before the Passover", that evening (for He ate "supper") reckoned as 10th Abib according to Bible time (in which a new day begins at evening, Gen. 1:5; Lev. 23:32) (John 12:1-2). Meanwhile, the Passover proper would be observed as a holy day of holy convocation on the 15th (Ex. 12:14-21) following the slaying of the lambs on Passover eve, 14th Nisan. It was on this evening, the beginning of the 10th of Abib, that Mary took "a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this" (vv. 3-7).

Jesus was condemned to die on "the Preparation day of the Passover", 14th Abib, (John 19:14) and was later nailed to the stake on the same day. Between 12noon ("the sixth hour") and 3pm ("the ninth hour"), "there was darkness over all the land" while Christ hanged on the tree. Shortly after this, He gave up the ghost (Matt. 27:45-50) around the same time as the lambs were being killed. Because the day following "the preparation day" was a Sabbath (15th Abib), in which no menial or "servile work" is done (Ex. 12:16; Lev. 23:35-7), being "a high day", the Jewish leaders asked to have the victims' legs broken and their bodies taken down (John 19:31). Yeshua, however, was already dead by this time, and His legs were not broken (v. 33). The time should be approaching sunset by now when Joseph of Arimathaea came for Jesus' body for burial (vv. 38-41).

Like the lambs, Yeshua, the Lamb of God, was without blemish right from birth:

Luke 1:35

"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God".

John 8:46

"Which of you convinceth Me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?"

Heb 4:15

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin".

1 Peter 2:21-22

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth".

Heb 9:12-14

“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

“How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

1 Peter 1:18-19

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

“But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”.

Then the Passover lambs were to be roasted whole with their heads, legs and entrails intact. So it was prophesied of Christ and so it happened when He died: “He keepeth all His bones: not one of them is broken” (Ps 34:20).

Like the blood lambs sprinkled on the doorposts, the blood of Yeshua has been sprinkled on all new covenant believers:

Luke 22:20

“And the cup in like manner after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood, *even* that which is poured out for you” (RV).

Heb 12:22-24

“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

“To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

“And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel”.

1 Peter 1:2

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied”.

Instead of actual brick houses, our bodies are now the objects of the sprinkling of Jesus' blood, and it does a perfect job of it (Heb. 10:14). The blood sanctifies our body, soul and spirit (see 1 Thess. 5:23), to the extent of ‘purging our conscience from dead works’! Cleansing by Yeshua's blood is an absolute necessity because true believers are “a spiritual house”, a holy temple in which Yahweh dwells by His Spirit and in which we offer spiritual sacrifices to Him as His priests through *Yeshua Ha'Mashiach*, His Son (1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:20-22).

Like the use of unleavened bread at the Passover meal, we are to “purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover

is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:7-8).

Leavened bread, which has the fermentation agent of yeast which causes the dough to rise or swell, is symbolic of sin, and Paul uses it in an extended metaphor in 1 Cor. 5 to denote the creeping laxity of the Corinthian church in matters of morality and spiritual discipline:

“It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

“And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you” (vv. 1-2).

“Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (v. 6).

So sin and the condoning of it puff up, and there is always the danger of it infecting others in a viral spread through the community, if left unchecked. But now that Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed for us, WE HAVE BEEN MADE UNLEAVENED. Leaven, sin, has been removed from our lives (Matt. 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:24; Titus 2:14). Let us therefore celebrate our redemption (from sin) in Christ, “not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”.

Hypocrisy is a particular spiritual leaven to watch out for:

“In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, He began to say unto His disciples first of all, ‘Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1).

In our continuing comparative analysis of the similarities between the type(s) and Antitype of the Passover Lamb, we discover that just as the remains of the Passover lambs which were not allowed to decompose but burnt, so Christ’s body did not see corruption (Acts 2:30-31).

Then too, the Passover meal was eaten in the evening followed by the Exodus (redemption) that same night. It’s not a matter of mere coincidence that the greater Passover ascension (redemption) day will also occur at “night” when, at the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man, the sun darkens as the angels of God gathers up the saints of God (Matt. 24:29-31; Luke 17:34; cp Ex. 12:42).

That night faith and obedience would make all the difference—as it did for Moses and the Israelites. Therefore, on the basis of faith, secure yourself under the redemption power of the blood of Jesus and scrupulously adhere to the instruction: harbour no leaven of sin and malice in your heart. If not, it only shows that you have no faith in the redemptive, substitutionary blood of the Lamb of God.

But be informed that, for those of us who believe, the blood of the Lamb of God offers us continuing, eternal redemption and is presently represented in heaven as the slain Lamb

before the throne: “And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth” (Rev. 5:6).

Like Israel, we have not been appointed to wrath but to salvation:

“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, “Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him” (1 Thess. 5:9-10).

A night of wailing is not our fate, but a night of redemption!

The LORD had promised a great wailing in Egypt that fateful night. And sure there was:

“And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle.

“And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead” (Ex. 12:29-30).

Next time midnight judgment strikes, there will be worldwide wailing! All the ‘first-borns’ of Satan will die, that is, the choice men of fame who fight God in the war of Armageddon on behalf of Satan. They will all die in battle (Ex. 12:29; Rev. 6: 15-17, cp Isa. 2:9-12, 20-21; Rev. 17:12-14, 19:15-18). And there will be great wailing on earth that night: “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7).

But the redeemed will be headed for glory! Christ will come to be glorified in His saints (2 Thess. 1:10).

However Satan begrudges the redemption of God’s people and will definitely seek to reverse it. So Pharaoh and his army gave the Israelites a chase and cornered them by the banks of the Red sea. It was the military might of imperial Egypt pitted against poor, defenceless slaves trudging in the desert schlepping along their young ones and belongings and possibly tired. It was danger at close range. But faith saved the day:

“By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned” (Heb. 11:29).

But how did Israel get into the grave danger they faced at the Red sea from Pharaoh and his troops? And what role did faith play in their eventual deliverance?

First, the all-knowing God is never overtaken by events. He seemed to have planned the route the Israelites would take as they journeyed out of Egypt into freedom from the very outset. We read in Ex. 13:17-22:

“And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt:

“But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt.

“And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you.

“And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness.

“And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night:

“He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people”.

Yahweh would guide them on the way “in a pillar of a cloud” by day and “in a pillar of fire” by night. And they ended up at the Red sea, a veritable danger zone!

Exodus 14 shows the Israelites had not lost their way; they were at the Red sea at God’s express command for a special reason:

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

“Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baal-zephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea.

“For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in.

“And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so” (Ex. 14:1-4).

In directing Israel to change course and pitch camp “between Migdol and the sea” which would hem them in on each side by mountains and ahead of them by the sea, His intent was to get glory over Pharaoh and his army so that “the Egyptians may know that I am Yahweh”.

That intent had been long nursed by God. While sending additional plagues on incorrigible Pharaoh and his people, God told Moses to give Pharaoh a special message from Him: “And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee My power; and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth” (Ex. 9:16; see also Rom. 9:17).” A secondary purpose hinted at was to show the ultimate outcome of Pharaoh’s hardheartedness (see Job 9:4).

The Red sea was the designated venue for that long-awaited final showdown which would forever settle the question of who was mightier as far as Yahweh and Pharaoh were concerned.

So God got Israel to a point of vulnerability (a dead end, in effect) vis-à-vis the Pharaoh threat in their journey in the desert, and the Egyptians walked into the trap:

“And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?

“And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him:

“And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them.

“And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand” (Ex. 14:5-8).

Josephus adds that besides the six hundred chariots, the Egyptian army which pursued the Israelites included “fifty thousand horsemen, and two hundred thousand footmen, all armed” (2.324). Meanwhile, the children of Israel journeyed on “with an high hand”—with their heads held high, entertaining no fear or danger of being pursued and overran by Egyptian troops. They were completely oblivious of such possibility. Had not the Egyptians been quite happy to rid their country of them in the aftermath of the death of the first-borns? Had they not generously given them gifts to facilitate their urgent departure? (See Ex. 12:30-37).

But suddenly the unsuspecting Israelites saw the Egyptian army coming after them in hot pursuit. Immediately, their hearts sunk. They cried out to God and vented their spleen on Moses:

“But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon.

“And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD.

“And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?

“Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.

“And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.

“The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” (Ex. 14:9-14).

Moses spoke with a calmness that belied the seriousness of the situation. It was pure FAITHSPEAK which totally ignored the danger that stared them in the face and instead focused the people’s attention on God and His saving power. And it was so definitive; his voice did not betray a hint of doubt as to the outcome: “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace”.

Nevertheless, the situation was frightening. The Israelites had been entrapped by the Egyptians: to go forward was the sea, to go back were the Egyptians with their cruel instruments of death, and they were hedged in on the left and on the right by mountains.

The Israelites were effectively under siege, considering that the Egyptians “also seized on the passages by which they imagined the Hebrews might fly, shutting them up between inaccessible precipices and the sea; for there was [on each side] a [ridge of] mountains that terminated at the sea, which were impassable by reason of their roughness, and obstructed their flight; therefore they there pressed upon the Hebrews with their army, where [the ridges of] the mountains were closed with the sea; which army they placed at the gaps of the mountains, so that they might deprive them of any passage into the plain” (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 2.325).

The fearful outbursts of the Israelites as the Egyptian army advanced on them typify the knee-jerk reactions of a young faith, an immature follower of God. The fellow who is young in faith is yet to fully appreciate the faithfulness of God, the infallibility of His power and the unconventional nature of His doings. Never allow your emotions to be influenced by the strength and speed of the storm but by a calm assurance that God is able to still the storm and will still the storm by His all-conquering power by some means known only to Him.

Yahweh is always in control, and He was in total control of the unfolding events at the Red sea. Everything had been choreographed according to His predetermined purpose. The children of Israel needed not to have feared as Moses, being privy to God’s mind, exhibited, although in the heat of the moment he seemed to be momentarily confused. So the LORD prodded him:

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go FORWARD [towards the sea]:

“But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.

“And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get Me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.

“And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten Me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen” (Ex. 14:15-18).

The miracle power of deliverance was all along in his hand, but Moses hesitated, what with all the commotion the Israelites raised. Early on, God had told Moses at the ‘burning bush’ encounter: “And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs” (Ex. 4:17).

But here Moses held “the rod of God” (Ex. 17:9) and seemed to have forgotten to put it to use, forgotten its reason for being. Did you ever forget God’s power in the face of an overwhelming crisis? Did the crisis leave you so dazed and confused you momentarily forgot to seek divine intervention?

It's all too human to focus on a ballooning crisis, but calling on God should be the first thing to do in a time of trouble.

Nah 1:7

"The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him".

Ps 50:15

"And call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me".

God has a stake in our deliverance, in that it brings Him glory and plaudits. So why would He hesitate to help us?

Ps 46:1-5

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

"Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

"Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.

"There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High.

"God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early".

The world is in convulsions, is in upheaval. The earth has veered off its orbit and is quaking and jerking; volcanoes have erupted dumping mountains of lava into the sea; the waves of the sea crash and foam, and the mountains reel as the waves splash on them. But we will not fear. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble". Instead of apprehension, we are in a state of joyous calm: the peace of God that flows like a river from His throne (Isa. 48:18; Rev. 22:1) has given us an oasis of peace and assurance in a world in turmoil.

This oasis is only available to the people of God who constitute His city: "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High". But why this exclusive privilege? "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early".

Help will come *at the break of dawn* (i.e. "right early")! Satan will plot and do his worst under the cover of darkness, but he cannot stave off the light of the morning of God's glory. The darkness is past; the true light now shines (1 John 2:8). This is the Light that glows in our hearts as believers (2 Cor. 4:6) and is greater than the prince of darkness who is in the world: "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Our source of miracle power—our rod—is closer. The power resides within us.

Eph 3:20-21

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,
“Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen”.

1 Cor. 1:24

“But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God”.

So Yahweh instructed Moses to tell the people to move forward towards the sea, while he stretched the miracle rod over the waters of the Red sea. And he (Moses) will divide the sea, and Israel will walk on dry ground on the riverbed where ordinarily there is no way. Meanwhile, God would harden the heart of Pharaoh and his hosts and they would be tempted to pursue the Israelites right into the sea. Then Yah would get His deserved glory over Pharaoh. It was an ingenious stratagem, and Pharaoh fell for it. He had no way of knowing the Red sea confrontation would turn out to be his Waterloo.

In the meantime, God took care of the immediate threat:

“And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them:
“And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night” (Ex. 14:19-20).

Surely, “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them” (Ps 34:7).

All this while, Moses had the rod stretched over the sea; a miracle was in the works:

“And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

“And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

“And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

“And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians,

“And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.

“And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

“And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.

“But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

“Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore.

“And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and His servant Moses” (Ex. 14:21-31).

The deed was awesome. A single operation had seen the Egyptians buried in the depths of the sea and Israel saved out of their hands by walking on dry ground in the same sea depths. This was certainly phenomenal and unprecedented, a masterstroke by all standards. Naturally, the Israelites were overawed. The miracle could have elicited no other reaction but to impel reverence and faith: “the people feared Yahweh, and believed Yahweh, and His servant Moshe”. They were completely flummoxed; their worst fears had not been confirmed. God had turned their nightmare into a sweet, unbelievable dream:

“When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.

“Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, ‘The LORD hath done great things for them’.

“The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad” (Ps 126:1-3).

Yah had pleasantly surprised the fear-stricken Israelites, for “He alone doeth great wonders” (Ps 136:4).

Viewed logically, it’s tempting to see it as foolhardy of Pharaoh and his army to have followed Israel into the sea when he had no clue as to how the Red sea parted and for what purpose. But it was all part of the divine game plan to bring Pharaoh to judgment and to ruin for his wickedness. God Himself instigated the foolhardy decision of Pharaoh to go after the Israelites in the midst of the sea.

We read in Isa. 43:15-17:

“I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.

“Thus saith the LORD, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters;

“Which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power; they shall lie down together, they shall not rise: they are extinct, they are quenched as tow [wick]”.

Having decoyed Pharaoh and his bloodthirsty troops into the sea, “it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, ‘Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians’”.

The enemy who persist in hounding you will realize too late in the day that he has pursued you to his own ruin! So don’t give up faith. Your God is with you as a mighty Warrior (Jer. 20:11), and His solemn promise is that “affliction shall not rise up the second time”; ‘He will make an utter end’ (Nah. 1:9).

For hundreds of years, the Egyptians oppressed the children of Israel who were God's very own people and thought they would oppress them forever. After all, they had succeeded in enslaving them and they seemed so helpless. But it was a matter of time before their God, the faithful, covenant-keeping God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, powerfully intervened. The covenant people of God are not destined to live a life of permanent suffering and oppression; there is always a time when God arises and comes to their defence.

Ps 12:5

"For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, NOW will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him" (Ps. 12:5).

Rom 16:20

"And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen".

At the end of the dramatic display of divine power, the set goals of the LORD were achieved: He gave His people great deliverance, and His people revered and believed Him. At the same time, He got His glory over Pharaoh (Isa. 63:11-14) and Pharaoh his just punishment.

In the miraculous parting of the Red sea, Yah dispensed both judgment and mercy at the same time. Moses duly celebrated it in song:

Ex 15:1-13

"Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

"The LORD is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt Him.

"The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is His name.

"Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea

"The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone.

"Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: Thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.

"And in the greatness of thine excellency Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against Thee: Thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble.

"And with the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

"The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.

"Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters.

"Who is like unto Thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?

"Thou stretchedst out Thy right hand, the earth swallowed them.

"Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation".

The point of all mercy and deliverance from God is to make His people cleave to Him so that they make Him their habitation.

Ps 105:36-45

“He smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their strength.

“He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes.

“Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them.

“He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night.

“The people asked, and He brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven.

“He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river.

“For He remembered His holy promise, and Abraham His servant.

“And He brought forth his people with joy, and His chosen with gladness:

“And gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labour of the people;

“That they might observe His statutes, and keep His laws. Praise ye the LORD”.

The *Song of Moses* is not done yet; it will be sung one more time under a slightly revised title, “the song of Moses the servant of God, and the Song of the Lamb”. This time not on the redemption side of the banks of an earthly Red sea but on “a sea of glass” before the very throne of God in heaven! The fall and judgment of another Pharaoh, the end-time antichrist, is decreed and guaranteed:

“And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.

“And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

“And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints.

“‘Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgments are made manifest’” (Rev. 15:1-4).

All the doom of the beast is contained in “the seven last plagues”. When finally the last dose of the plague is administered, the kingdom of the beast will fall in spectacular style, and “the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day” (Isa. 2:11, 17).

And this takes place at the end of a 6000-year duel with the devil, dating back to Eden when Satan presented himself to man as a rival supreme being. Finally, God got His glory—His decisive victory over the devil and all his angelic and human minions.

It takes nothing else but faith to foresee such a day. God never fails to fulfill His promises, no matter how long it takes. This is a truth we should always keep in mind. This was the truth that energized Moses’ faith as opposed to the faithless attitude of the Israelites. He knew the mind of God, for He had revealed it to him beforehand.

Similarly, we must learn to be attuned to the mind and ways of God through our study of His ways and doings recorded in the scriptures. Although His ways are not our ways nor His thoughts our thoughts, we must trust Him at all times to do us good according to His Word that has come to us (Isa. 55:8-13). The ultimate goal of His plans for us is give us a future of hope: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer. 29:11 *ESV*)—those were His words for the first batch of Jewish exiles living in Babylon at the start of a 70-year captivity there.

Yahweh is always in firm control; our continual trust in Him is what is most important. He deliberately led Israel on a route which was apparently unhelpful, even dangerous, but for Him it was best for His plans and purposes. When Moses by faith obeyed Him, the results were marvellous, and God was vindicated and glorified.

So, if a detour, rather than a direct route, will serve God’s higher purpose, why not believe and bear with Him?

That is one truth to extrapolate from the Red sea experience. God always knows best and acts best in all situations in which He’s involved in the lives of His people in His ongoing salvation work.

We read in Ps 66:10-12:

“For Thou, O God, hast proved us: Thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.

“Thou broughtest us into the net; Thou laidst affliction upon our loins.

“Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water:
BUT THOU BROUGHTEST US OUT INTO A WEALTHY PLACE”.

It was trial and affliction at first, but it ended well: He has brought us to a place of abundance!

Our unflagging faith in the face of all the storms and threats of Satan will see us through to this beautiful end.

Moses had every reason, humanly speaking, to fear and to doubt the possibility of getting the people to safety through an invisible way in the Red sea. Like the rest of the Israelites, it was only natural to envision their bloodied dead bodies floating on the bloody waters of the Red sea and Pharaoh having a ghoulish laugh at their ill-fate. But Moses’ faith tapped into a different reality: ‘God’s promise does not fail, for He is all-powerful to bring it pass. Therefore, the salvation He has promised His people Israel will definitely happen’. This reality was what his eye of faith saw and so he exhorted the Israelites, ‘stand still and see the salvation of Yahweh’.

Moses then charged the people to “go forward”, and the unseen reality of his faith became physically real to all as the sea parted and the Israelites walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea to freedom! Halleluiah!

The divine Word of promise that has come to us cannot fail, no matter the great odds against it. Therefore, we must always believe because it is the Word of God that always prevails. Amen!

Jericho Falls by an Unconventional Strategy of Victory

It had been 40 years since Israel left Egypt with God's "stretched out arm and with great judgments" on their oppressors (Ex. 6:6). The 40 years of their sojourn in the wilderness had continued to witness God's miracle power in their lives: Yahweh rained bread (manna) from heaven to satisfy their hunger, brought fresh water gushing out of the Rock to quench their thirst, and descended on mount Sinai to proclaim the Law engulfed in fire and smoke and a pyrotechnics of lightning and thunder.

And He did much more. When the people complained, He promised them a feast in the wilderness, and an uncountable number of quails came fluttering into the camp of Israel. When established enemy nations threatened them on the way, He led a nation of former slaves to stunning victories over them. The faithful covenant God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was Israel's constant guide and companion and never once removed from them His visible presence in the cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night (Ps 78:14).

But the 40-year period was also characterized by complaints and bad behaviour. Many of the Israelites rebelled and openly challenged God and his servant Moses. The consequence was that the whole Exodus generation fell under severe divine judgment: None of that generation, including Moses and Aaron, would make it to the Promised Land of Canaan, except Joshua and Caleb.

The new leader God chose to succeed Moses was Joshua, and He impressed on him early on that his success was in wholehearted obedience:

"Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying,

"Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, *even* to the children of Israel.

"Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

"From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.

"There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

"Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.

"Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it *to* the right hand or *to* the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

“Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God *is* with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Joshua 1:1-9).

The reiterated promise was firm, but its fulfilment was premised on action and obedience. The extent of your territory will be determined by the extent of your leg activity. “Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you”. Every move you would make within the boundaries of the Promised Land stretching from the Mediterranean coast to the river Euphrates in the east would result in a conquest and a territorial acquisition. The promise was guaranteed; what it would take to inherit it was faith-driven action.

So it is with every divine promise or word. Unless you act on it, you have effectively rejected it. You are so destitute of faith that you see no point at all in making a move. But God’s promise, according to the rule of faith, is already a reality; only you have not yet seen it physically. Therefore, the action you take on something you have not seen is the proof that you believe in its existence enough to go for it.

Meanwhile, failure was out of the question. The Eternal was with Joshua, and He assured him that “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life”.

Joshua’s mandate was not in doubt. Yahweh was emphatic that Joshua would execute the mandate of his office as Israel’s chosen leader: “unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them”. But only if Joshua would obey His commandments and instructions, ponder it, memorize it and live it each day of his life.

Success would not fail to be his.

So Joshua readied the people for the takeover. Jericho was the first battle challenge to Israel on Canaanite soil. The astute military general he was, Joshua sent two spies on a reconnaissance mission in the city. There, they found a collaborator in Rahab, the harlot. She did a good job of hiding them from the authorities and then helped them return safely undetected. The report of the spies went well for the nation: Israel had won the psychological war—the fear of the advancing Hebrews had fallen on the inhabitants of the land (Josh. 2).

However, the overall commander, the commander-in-chief of Israel’s army, was the Lord in heaven. From His command centre in heaven, He ordered Israel to pass through the Jordan River. Of course, Israel needed to cross the river to get to the other side. But beyond that, crossing the Jordan by passing through it was, in the judgment of God, central to Israel’s conquest of the entire land of Canaan.

Joshua 3:5-17

“And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the LORD will do wonders among you.

“And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people.

“And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.

“And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan.

“And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God.

“And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

“Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan.

“Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man.

“And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap.

“And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people.

“And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,)

“That the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho.

“And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan”.

Yahweh had several motives for ordering this miracle Jordan River crossing. One was to supernaturally convince Israel of Joshua’s divine leadership credentials. By choosing to do this divine authentication by a miracle similar to the Red sea parting, God sought to leave the Israelites in no doubt that He would work through Joshua the same way He worked through Moses and thus ensure that Joshua earned the respect of the Israelites as the chosen of God the same way Moses earned their respect when He used him to part the Red sea (Ex. 14:31).

Because God always uses human agents to accomplish His purposes on earth, including His ongoing great salvation project, it is important to not only believe in Him but also the people through whom He channels His messages and directions. For “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). King Jehoshaphat recognized this truth and told his people to bank on it when the nation, faced with the threat of invasion by a coalition of nations, received a prophetic word, in response

to their nationwide fasting and prayer, that the battle was the Lord's and that they would not need to fight and yet would carry the day:

"Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation;

"And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.

"To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel.

"Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.

"And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD.

"And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

"And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper.

"And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for His mercy endureth for ever.

"And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.

"For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another" (2 Chron. 20:14-23).

But there's a caveat. Believe not all prophets or people who claim to be ministers of God. Evil spirits equally operate through people who present themselves to the world as prophets.

1 John 4:1

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world".

2 Peter 2:1-3

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

"And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

“And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not”.

Nevertheless, at no point in time is the earth without God’s true prophets. *Endangered species*, yes, but never extinct! And they preach God’s true message of repentance and obedience to His law with the Lord bearing witness to their ministry, “both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will” (Isa. 8:20; Heb. 2:3-4; Mark 16:20).

Such has been the pattern since Moses, and it could not be different with Joshua as a true minister of God.

Another reason for the Jordan miracle crossing was for Yahweh to demonstrate His all-conquering power as “the Lord of the whole earth” borne forth in the Ark of the Covenant. The term “the Lord or Ruler of the whole earth” proclaimed the truth that Yahweh is “the Maker and Possessor of the whole earth, the whole terraqueous globe; and can do what He pleases in the earth, or in the water; and can control the powers of nature, and do what is beyond them, things miraculous and astonishing”. To this extent, He passes before Israel into Jordan, “not only unto it, but into it, into the river itself; and, by the power of Him whose presence was with it, the waters of Jordan were to be divided, to give them a passage through it as on dry land, and so it came to pass” (*John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*, e-Sword). After witnessing this stupendous miracle in which the Jordan dried up for a stretch of twenty miles or more (the waters heaped up upstream at the city Adam), the faith of the Israelites would undoubtedly increase greatly and grow in strength.

The third and foremost reason was conquest-related. The people had to have implicit faith in God as their commander-in-chief and learn to obey His every instruction. A powerful way of accomplishing this was the miraculous stopping of the waters of the Jordan as the feet of the ark-bearing priests touched its watery surface enabling the children of Israel to walk through it on dry ground. It was a tactical military move to boost faith and morale, and Joshua did not fail to make that plainly known:

“And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that He WILL WITHOUT FAIL drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan” (vv. 9-11).

Despite the upbeat report of the spies, one thing was sure: Jericho was not a pushover. The city was walled and well defended. Archaeological excavations have shown that Jericho was built on a mound (raised earth) which was reinforced with a stone revetment (a retaining wall) around it. On top of the mound stood Jericho’s famed wall, a double wall with houses (such as Rahab’s) built in between. A city of such complex fortification works, Jericho was virtually impregnable by ancient standards.

Moreover, security had lately been beefed up in reaction to the spy incident: “Jericho was straitly [tightly] shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in” (Josh. 6:1).

Understandably, Joshua was a little worried. Jericho’s fortifications made it an almost impossible target for invasion and conquest. Yet Israel’s blessed destiny lay in those walls tumbling down so they could go in to possess the land.

As Israel’s chosen leader, Joshua owed a duty to both God and the nation to conquer the walled city; he carried the destiny of a whole nation. But the very first battle of destiny was proving rather problematic to start with.

Joshua was not alone, however. The God who commissioned him, the God of Israel, was his sure help. It was to Him he turned in prayer and meditation as he espied Jericho at close quarters. Soon he had an encounter with a sword-bearing visitor:

“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?

“And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto Him, What saith my lord unto his servant?

“And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so” (Josh. 5:13-15).

The Warrior with a drawn sword was no doubt the pre-incarnate Christ, our Master Yeshua, the captain of our salvation (Heb. 2:10). If He were an ordinary angel, He would have forbade Joshua from bowing and worshipping Him as the Apostle John was routinely forbidden from doing by the angel assigned to him during his spiritual tour of heaven (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9).

But Yeshua is Divine attested so by the Father Himself: “”But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom” (Heb. 1:8).

As God, Yeshua has been worshipped in His pre-incarnation (Gen. 18:2 & John 8:56, 58; Ex. 34:5-8), in His incarnation as *the Word made flesh* (Matt. 2:11, 14:33; cp Matt. 28:9, 17) and in His post-ascension glory (Rev. 1:17, 5:8). He is the *Adonay* sitting on the right hand of Father Yahweh awaiting the ultimate subjugation of His enemies: “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool” (Ps. 110:1; see also 1 Cor. 15:24-26; Heb. 10:12-13). He will be worshipped for ages without end (Ps. 2:7-12, 68:29; Rev. 15:3-4; 5:9-14).

Yeshua Messiah is the great mystery of godliness:

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim 3:16).

This “God manifest in the flesh” is the heavenly Potentate who revealed Himself visibly to Joshua. And He came readied for battle—with His sword drawn! He was “the captain of the armies of Yahweh”, the Michael of old (see Rev. 12:7-10; Ps 68:17); Jericho posed no problem. His mission was definite. He had come to fight the LORD’s battle. What a relief this must have been to Joshua. Instinctively, he fell at His feet in worship; the battle had been won! But did He have any specific instructions for him as his humble subordinate in charge of His earthly division?

The military strategy the Captain of the LORD’s host unfolded to Joshua sounded quaintly novel, very unmilitary. It involved marching around the walled city of Jericho once each day for six days and on the seventh day marching around it seven times. Well, armed men were to lead the procession but with no instructions to use the arms, perhaps they were just there to add colour to the carnival.

It was an unusual military strategy, but then this was from the captain of the hosts of Yah. Although Joshua, a veteran warrior, was used to conventional weapons (Ex. 17:13), this was a war directly under the command of the heavenly captain. It was a matter of unquestioning faith in the Captain of the armies of Yah or a flat rejection.

Joshua chose the former. Hence “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (Heb. 11:30).

The Jericho campaign would be prosecuted on the terms and strategy of the Captain of the armies of Yah:

Josh 6:2-16, 20-21

“And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.

“And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days.

“And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets.

“And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.

“And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests, and said unto them, Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD.

“And he said unto the people, Pass on, and compass the city, and let him that is armed pass on before the ark of the LORD.

“And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns passed on before the LORD, and blew with the trumpets: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD followed them.

“And the armed men went before the priests that blew with the trumpets, and the rereward [a rearguard of civilians] came after the ark, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets.

“And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout

“So the ark of the LORD compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp.

“And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD.

“And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them; but the rereward came after the ark of the LORD, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets.

“And the second day they compassed the city once, and returned into the camp: so they did six days.

“And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner seven times: only on that day they compassed the city seven times.

“And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

“So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

“And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword”.

The strategy required the least exertion of personal force. Measuring about eight and one-half acres in size, Jericho was a city the Israelites could easily march around once a day or even seven times in a day. The Israelites were basically on an exercise to please the heavenly Captain. It was not their war.

A military strategist par excellence, the Captain of the LORD's hosts knew exactly what to do to breach the defences of Jericho, physical and psychological. The psychological was the reason for the march; the physical involved the use of a less subtle tactics, but equally effective, which He kept up His sleeve until the last minute.

So, why did God order the march?

“A modern reader of the attack on Jericho may think it rather quaint or a little stupid for the Israelites to be marching around the walls of the city. But the people of Jericho got over the first terror of the Israelite host filing around the walls and gradually relaxed. Then on the seventh day the peaceful procession suddenly turned into a frenzied assault and caught the offenders off guard” (Howard F. Vos, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners and Customs*, p. 120).

What about the destruction of the physical defences?

“God at times intervened [in Israel’s wars with enemy nations] through a natural phenomenon. In the case of Jericho, many have suggested that an earthquake caused the walls to fall. And it may be that [the] earthquake action and aftershocks connected with the crossing of the Jordan [Ps 114:3-4, 5-7] so weakened the walls that they did collapse. If so, the miraculous element was the timing, as with the crossing of the Jordan: the walls fell just as the Hebrews attacked” (ibid., p. 121).

What a wonderful God we serve. And what an ingenious commander He is! The solution to the Jericho wall headache was in the palm of His hands. Jericho, this formidable early hurdle to Israel’s promised destiny, was cleared in a matter of days and with no casualties on the Israeli side.

During the war of Armageddon, in the closing phase of Gentile history, the heavenly Captain will repeat His Jericho earthquake stunt targeted at the seat of the world government of the antichrist:

“And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.

“And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.

“And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

“And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found” (Rev. 16:17-20).

That should tell you the Captain never retires from active service. Not when they are raging battles involving His chosen people on earth.

Again, He has declared the battle as His (2 Chron. 20:15; 1 Sam. 17:47), a declaration which is cause for worship. Like Joshua, we should bow the knee in worship and thanksgiving. The battle is already won. The Lord is our timely help. Intractable Jericho is about to fall.

As Joshua rightly judged, we cannot fight the exceptionally tough battles of our God-given destinies better than the Captain of the armies of Yahweh. If we let Him, He will fight and win the battle according to the master strategy He has devised for our victory. But like the Israelites, we will still have a part to play, largely one of obedience.

Now, what are His instructions for us to follow this time?

In His primer of war instructions and strategy, the first important truth to learn relates to the nature of the war:

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

The war is an unconventional war, and therefore requires the use of unconventional weapons to fight it. If so, the enemy must also be using spiritual weapons or at least have some element of the spiritual.

However, the good news is that “the weapons of our warfare” as spiritual Christian warriors are “mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds”. In other words, they are effective, they work; they hit their targets and achieve results. They are able to and do demolish spiritual strongholds and fortresses.

For they are “MIGHTY THROUGH GOD”. This God who has all power and has no equal (Ps 62:11, Isa. 46:5, 40:25), who is all knowing, all wise, and the Creator of all things, including spiritual principalities. It is through His “eternal power” (Rom. 1:20) that the weapons of our warfare are mighty!

And who is the enemy with whom the spiritual war is being waged?

He is Satan, a fallen angel once called Lucifer. He staged a putsch against the Most High in heaven in an attempt to take His place but was decisively crushed by Michael, the pre-incarnate Christ (Rev. 12:7-10; Isa. 14:12-14). When he was banished to earth, the angels who joined in his rebellion became demons, and he became their chief (Matt. 12:24).

The Captain knows him better than anyone else. He characterizes him as “a murderer from the beginning” and “the father of lies” (John 8:44). His overall objective is to “steal, kill and destroy” (John 10:10).

He is not likely to be a nice fellow or a benign captor if he happens to defeat you!

But the devil is a sly guy, a master of dissembling and deception. The confrontational is not his usual ploy. It’s deadly to be fighting him while remaining ignorant of his schemes: “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11).

It was this ugly character trait of Satan that Adam and Eve discovered to their hurt rather too late:

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

“For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him” (2 Cor. 11:3-4).

The old serpent is still at it with his old trick. He’s disseminating falsehood and deception but not in his name. He has put on a disguise many will fall for—the name of the Saviour, Jesus (Matt. 24:5; 2 Cor. 11:13-15).

He has his guns aimed at you 24/7.

If he had his way, the devil “sift you like a wheat” from Christ (Luke 22:31-32); make you a puppet of his will (Eph. 2:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:26); ruin your business (Job 1:8-16); ruin your family (Job 1:17-19); afflict you with sickness (Job 2:4-8; 2 Cor. 12:7); tempt you into sin (1 Chron. 21:1; Matt. 4:1, 8-10); hinder your progress (1 Thess. 2:18; 1 Cor. 16:9; cp 2 Thess. 3:1-2), accuse you to God on account of some shortcoming (Rev. 12:9; Zech. 3:1-3; cp Rom. 8:33-34); claim your body in death (Jude 1:9), and make you a candidate for hell fire just like himself (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:9, 12, 21:8).

In this evil enterprise, Satan does not rest; he is always on the prowl seeking his next victim. Therefore “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

Stay clear-headed and restrained; stay alert to his devices, and never stop praying (1 Pet 4:7; Luke 21:34-36). You will always see through his tricks.

The devil is not invincible. God has given us weapons to fight him, and they always prevail over him when put to use under the direction of the Captain. Don't give up yet. Submit yourself to God and thereby win to your side His unassailable power. Then resist the devil in faith, and he go scurrying for cover (Jam. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9).

“The weapons of our warfare are mighty through God”. So be valiant in battle. You are not going to suffer defeat; the weapons are not going to fail you. They are MIGHTY through God!

Have absolute faith in the Captain and in His instructions. Your victory has been foreordained. Only be strong:

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

“And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph. 6:10-18).

The enemies are the deadliest organized group of villains you could think of—they are perpetrators of “spiritual wickedness in high places”. These are high-level demonic powers who behind the screen of an unseen spiritual underworld incessantly assail mankind on a

daily basis, but especially you as a believer. But your strength (and victory) is in wielding the weapons God has given you.

Don't be derelict in using them. Buckle truth around your waist so you will remain unassailable and free (2 Cor. 13:8; John 8:32); put on the breastplate of righteousness so you will be established (Isa.54:14); put on your spiritual military boots and march to the spiritual war front for souls; extinguish the fiery attacks of the enemy with "the shield of faith"; put on your crown of victory in Christ, "the helmet of salvation"; and brandish the sword of the Spirit, the two-edged sword of the Word (Heb. 4:12), through constant prayer. The demons are in fast retreat, defeated and bruised. For "the weapons of our warfare are MIGHTY THROUGH GOD"!

Because of these highly effective spiritual weapons, believers are "more than conquerors" (Rom. 8:37). They cannot fail. It is victory at every turn in all circumstances. So then, the enemy never succeeds in achieving its objective of tearing us away from Christ no matter how hard he tries:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

"As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

"Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39).

The trials that we have endured - tribulation, distress, persecution, etc - and what we may endure in the future—*all combined*—cannot separate us from "the love of God which is Jesus Christ, our Lord". We will always overcome as our forebears of faith overcame: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. 12:11). Amen!

The Harlot who had Faith

It was a sensation. If today's mass media were available, it would have dominated the headlines for weeks. Former slaves were now on a march of triumph, aided by an action God who supernaturally divided the Red sea and led them to destroy mighty kingdoms in their path.

As the Israelites advanced, the fear of them fell on the nations of Canaan. This, however, did not produce admiration for Israel; it produced hatred. The natural feeling was to stop them.

Such was the mood in Jericho when Joshua sent the two spies into the city. It was a city-state that been living in mortal fear since the Israelites made their first incursion into the

land. However, they were determined not to take any chances. So they set a watch for suspicious visitors and intruders.

Then the spies entered under the dim cover of dusk. The city's intelligence officers trailed the Israelite visitors to the door of a prostitute whose house was by the wall.

The spies had planned well. Calling at the door of a prostitute at night would disguise their mission in the city. Once inside, they had a story to tell rather than for the usual service men seek from prostitutes. It was a strange encounter. On one hand, were holy men on a holy mission, and a notorious prostitute (she must have been well known for the Israelites to have heard of her) on the other hand. They sought her cooperation to spy out *her* city. But it was a bizarre cooperation the spies sought, in that it depended to a large extent on the response of a harlot who ordinarily wouldn't care about their mission nor betray her nation. Yet they continued to talk. Halfway through their discussion, they were interrupted by a knock on the door. It appeared the game was up. But was it?

Let's read the Biblical account for the rest of the story:

"And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there.

"And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country.

"And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country.

"And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were:

"And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them.

"But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.

"And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords: and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate.

"And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof;

"And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

"For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

"And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

"Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token:

"And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

“And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.

“Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall.

“And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way.

“And the men said unto her, We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear.

“Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee.

“And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him.

“And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear.

“And she said, According unto your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window.

“And they went, and came unto the mountain, and abode there three days, until the pursuers were returned: and the pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but found them not.

“So the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all things that befell them:

“And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us” (Josh. 2:1-24).

As the scriptural account makes it abundantly clear, faith in Israel's reputed God of wonders and in His unconquerable power was the singular factor that influenced Rahab's decision to cooperate with the spies. Although she was a prostitute, she realized that even if she handed them over to the city authority, who could overcome this invincible Yahweh God of Israel? So, rather than fighting Him and facing certain destruction, why not side with Him and be preserved?

She had absolute faith that God would deliver up Jericho into the hands of Israel. Hence the oath she made them swear to her to keep her and her relatives alive when (not if) that happens.

Her faith was unwavering. The God of Israel, of whom she had heard, would do as He had intended. That unshakeable absolute faith of Rahab showed in her actions:

“Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?” (Jam. 2:25).

Rahab not only “justified” or demonstrated her faith when she hid the spies and sent them back safely, but also her faith showed in the very the risks she took in doing so. She could have easily been found out especially as she let them out by her window in a city on high

alert for spies who had lodged nowhere but her house! If caught, she and her family would have certainly been made an example of as traitors and collaborators. Nothing short of public execution could have been meted to them and their 'visitors'.

But Rahab, the harlot, risked all to identify with the historic destiny of Israel. She believed that Israel was a divine mission to fulfill a divine destiny, and that, that destiny was unstoppable.

The end result of her demonstration of faith is celebrated in Hebrews 11:31:

"By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace".

Her preservation, along with her relatives, on the day Jericho fell in a tumultuous, bloody onslaught, vindicated her faith, as the salvation Christ will give us on His return will ultimately vindicate our faith and all the righteous deeds it inspired:

"So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

"And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.

"But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her.

"And the young men that were spies went in, and brought Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel.

"And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD".

"And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho" (Josh. 6:20-24).

It's inspiring to note that Rahab's faith was not short-lived or limited to her initial actions with regard to the spies. Her faith proved to be fruitful in the long term. It led her to obey the God of Israel, and she actually became a full member of the holy community of Israel. Remarkably, Matthew includes her in Jesus' ancestry: "And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse" (Matt. 1:5).

Rahab is an encouraging story of how God can turn around even the basest person into a saint and use him or her for a noble purpose. Of course, faith is always required, for "without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

If the wonders of the God of Israel she *merely* heard at a distance convinced her of His reality and power, then Rahab is miles ahead of many people today. Instead of faith, cynicism is the predominant attitude among modern men and women, a truly “faithless generation”. Such is the high level of unbelief that people are likely to scoff at a divine miracle they have witnessed before their very eyes, let alone believe in a reported miracle and an absentee God who caused it.

But Rahab believed. She could not ignore the hard evidence of Israel’s unstoppable divine destiny. That evidence was plain to her considering the fact that Israel, a nation recently freed from Egyptian slavery, was now on the doorstep of her Canaanite city, after having won one phenomenal victory after victory over several kingdoms. Rahab’s faith made a difference for her, and she was saved.

Now, if a rotten sinner like Rahab, the harlot, was saved because of her faith, surely there is hope for everyone who believes, for God is “rich unto all” who out of faith call on Him:

“For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.
“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him” (Rom. 10:11-12).

Beloved, you will experience the riches (or generosity) of His grace if only you will believe and take steps of righteousness to justify that faith. The “God of all grace” (1 Pet. 5:10) will move you from nothing to abundance and from shame to glory. He will make you completely worthy. That is how He polished up Rahab, the harlot. He so transformed her that He counted her worthy to include her in His Son, the Messiah’s human ancestry.

His riches have not been exhausted since the days of Rahab. They are still available to you if you have faith.

The Potentialities of Faith are Unimaginable

The narrator of the great exploits of faith is breathless at this point; he’s overwhelmed and lost for words. The exploits are too numerous and extraordinary to recount. Time will *equally* fail us to retell and analyse them all:

“And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:
“Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,
“Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.
“Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:
“And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment:
“They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented;

“(Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

“And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: “God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb. 11:32-40).

Briefly recapped, faith

- Produced rare bravery in war which tipped the scales of victory in favour of the underdogs.
- Produced deeds of righteousness.
- Overcame life-threatening situations.
- Ensured the dead were brought back to life.
- Enabled people to endure persecution spurning a release that would endanger their having a better future resurrection (see John 5:28-29)—and persecution of the cruelest sort too, such as scourging, stoning, imprisonment in chains, the sadistic sawing people into two, banishment to uninhabitable places stripped of the basic comforts of life , etc.

Yet all they can show for their faith **for now** is “a good report” (vv. 2, 39); they have not as yet received the promise of their faith. And we of the current generation of believers are the reason for this—“that they without us should not be made perfect” with the full realization of the promise that set them on the path of faith.

And now the spotlight is on us. God has provided *something better* for us to excel in faith—the challenge for you and me today as children of faith. The goal that sustained the faith of the determined, suffering saints of old was the promised city above. As *Wilmington’s Guide to the Bible* put it, “They deposited their faith in the vaults of that celestial city ‘which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God’ (11:10)” (p. 524).

Although we still look to this city to spur us on in our faith (2 Pet. 3:13), God says in the 40th verse of Hebrews chapter 11 that He has provided us “some better thing” to inspire greater faith in us so that together with the forbears we will receive the joyous rewards of faith, no doubt, in the celestial city of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ is that greater impetus for faith:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [whose lives of faith were recounted in chapter 11], let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

“Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

“Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

“In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (Heb. 12:1-4 *ESV*).

The faithful lives the old people of faith lived in spite of the temptations of sin they encountered ought to encourage us to run the race of salvation unencumbered by sin. But we need to be encouraged MORE by the One standing at the finishing line and fix our gaze on Him as we race on! He is the Author and Finisher of faith, the Alpha and Omega of faith, if you will.

Albert Barnes explains more in his *Notes on the Bible*:

“Looking unto Jesus - As a further inducement to do this, the apostle exhorts us to look to the Saviour. We are to look to His holy life; to His patience and perseverance in trials; to what He endured in order to obtain the crown, and to His final success and triumph.

“The author and finisher of our faith - The word “our” is not in the original here, and obscures the sense. The meaning is, He is the first and the last as an example of faith or of confidence in God - occupying in this, as in all other things, the pre-eminence, and being the most complete model that can be placed before us. The apostle had not enumerated Him among those who had been distinguished for their faith, but he now refers to Him as above them all; as a case that deserved to stand by itself. It is probable that there is a continuance here of the allusion to the Grecian games which the apostle had commenced in the previous verse. The word “author” - ἀρχηγὸν archēgon - (marg. beginner) - means properly the source, or cause of anything; or one who makes a beginning. It is rendered in [Act 3:15](#); [Act 5:31](#), “Prince”; in [Heb 2:10](#), “Captain”; and in the place before us, “Author.”

“It does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. The phrase “the beginner of faith,” or the leader on of faith, would express the idea. He is at the head of all those who have furnished an example of confidence in God, for He was himself the most illustrious instance of it. The expression, then, does not mean properly that He produces faith in us, or that we believe because he causes us to believe - whatever may be the truth about that - but that He stands at the head as the most eminent example that can be referred to on the subject of faith. We are exhorted to look to Him, as if at the Grecian games there was one who stood before the racer who had previously carried away every palm of victory; who had always been triumphant, and with whom there was no one who could be compared. The word “finisher” - τελειωτὴν teleiōtēn - corresponds in meaning with the word “author.” It means that He is the completer as well as the beginner; the last as well as the first.

“As there has been no one hitherto who could be compared with Him, so there will be no one hereafter; compare [Rev 1:8](#), [Rev 1:11](#). “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last.” The word does not mean that he was the “finisher” of faith in the sense that he makes our faith complete or perfects it - whatever may be true about that - but that He occupies this elevated position of being beyond comparison above all others. Alike in the commencement and the close, in the beginning of faith, and in its ending, He stands pre-eminent. To this illustrious model we should look - as a racer would on one who had been always so successful that he surpassed all competitors and rivals. If this be the meaning, then it is not properly explained, as it is commonly (see Bloomfield and Stuart in loc.), by saying that the word here is synonymous with “rewarder,” and refers to the βραβευτῆς brabeutēs - or the distributor of the prize; compare notes on [Col 3:15](#), There is no instance where the word is used in this sense in the New Testament (compare Passow),

nor would such an interpretation present so beautiful and appropriate a thought as the one suggested above.

“Who for the joy that was set before him - That is, who in view of all the honor which He would have at the right hand of God, and the happiness which He would experience from the consciousness that hH had redeemed a world, was willing to bear the sorrows connected with the atonement.

“Endured the cross - Endured patiently the ignominy and pain connected with the suffering of death on the cross.

“Despising the shame - Disregarding the ignominy of such a mode of death. It is difficult for us now to realize the force of the expression, “enduring the shame of the cross,” as it was understood in the time of the Saviour and the apostles. The views of the world have changed, and it is now difficult to divest the “cross” of the associations of honor and glory which the word suggests, so as to appreciate the ideas which encompassed it then. There is a degree of dishonor which we attach to the guillotine, but the ignominy of a death on the cross was greater than that; there is disgrace attached to the block, but the ignominy of the cross was greater than that; there is a much deeper infamy attached to the gallows, but the ignominy of the cross was greater than that. And that word - the cross - which when now proclaimed in the ears of the refined, the intelligent, and even the frivolous, excites an idea of honor, in the ears of the people of Athens, of Corinth, and of Rome, excited deeper disgust than the word “gallows” does with us - for it was regarded as the appropriate punishment of the most infamous of mankind.

“We can now scarcely appreciate these feelings, and of course the declaration that Jesus ‘endured the cross, despising the shame,’ does not make the impression on our minds in regard to the nature of His sufferings, and the value of His example, which it should do. When we now think of the “cross,” it is not of the multitude of slaves, and robbers, and thieves, and rebels, who have died on it, but of the one great Victim, whose death has ennobled even this instrument of torture, and encircled it with a halo of glory. We have been accustomed to read of it as an imperial standard in war in the days of Constantine, and as the banner under which armies have marched to conquest; it is intermingled with the sweetest poetry; it is a sacred thing in the most magnificent cathedrals; it adorns the altar, and is even an object of adoration; it is in the most elegant engravings; it is worn by beauty and piety as an ornament near the heart; it is associated with all that is pure in love, great in self-sacrifice, and holy in religion. To see the true force of the expression here, therefore, it is necessary to divest ourselves of these ideas of glory which encircle the “cross,” and to place ourselves in the times and lands in which, when the most infamous of mankind were stretched upon it, it was regarded for such people as an appropriate mode of punishment. That infamy Jesus was willing to bear, and the strength of His confidence in God, His love for man, and the depth of His humiliation, was shown in the readiness and firmness with which He went forward to such a death.

“And is set down at the right hand of the throne of God - Exalted to the highest place of dignity and honor in the universe; [Mar 16:19](#) note; [Eph 1:20-22](#) notes. The sentiment here is, ‘Imitate the example of the great Author of our religion. He, in view of the honor and joy before him, endured the most severe sufferings to which the human frame can be subjected, and the form of death which is regarded as the most shameful. So amidst all the severe trials to which you are exposed on account of religion, patiently endure all - for the

glorious rewards, the happiness and the triumph of heaven, are before you” (*Albert Barnes Notes on the Bible*, e-Sword).

A model of faith way beyond our ability to emulate, we might say. But Yeshua is not just our consummate example of faith; He is also our High Priest who empathizes with us in our “infirmities” (Heb. 4:15) and intercedes for us (Heb. 7:25). So long as we trust Him, He will keep us from stumbling in our race of salvation:

“Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 1:24-25).

But be inspired by the faith of the Lord as well. Don’t fall for sin; resist it firmly. The opposition and hostility He endured at the hands of sinners is simply beyond compare (see Mark 14:41; 1 Pet. 2:20-23). Our struggle against and to overcome sin has not yet reached the point where, rather than renouncing our godly integrity, our blood is shed (i.e. martyred). So if we give in to sin on account of relatively lighter temptations, then our endurance level is rather low and not of the quality exemplified by Christ.

But Christ is our supreme Model of faith. And to Him we must look for inspiration, strength and power. If we run the race focused on Him, we will surely reach the finishing line where He already is ahead of all saints and crown us with the joy that is presently set before us together with all other saints who have run the same salvation race of faith in every age of history. Halleluiah!

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