

A theatrical cantata closely related to the Gospel account of Jesus calming the storm, dominated by soloists.

J.S. Bach

Form: Aria (A) - Recit (T) - Aria (T) - Aria (B) - Recit (A) - Chorale. The cantata is in chiastic form. Bach often used chiastic (x-shaped/symmetrical) forms, in which center movements (where the mirror image begins) provide the crux of the matter. There antithetical elements meet or are paradoxically inverted (formal inversion reflects an aspect of reversal or turning in the text). For Alfred Dürr's comments and Martin Petzoldt's outline, see note.

Martin Petzoldt outlines the symmetrical form (*Bach-Kommentar* 2:507):

4. B arioso. Small faith creates fear.
5. B aria. Storms fall silent at his word.
3. T aria. Storms weaken faith.
6. A recit. Jesus helps through his word.
2. T recit. Jesus remains silent despite the need.
7. Chorale. Jesus stands by me.
1. A aria. Jesus sleeps.

Introduction & updates at melvinunger.com.

NBA I/6; BC A39

4. S. after Epiphany (BWV 81, 14)

*Romans 13:8–10 (Love is the fulfilling of the law)

*Matthew 8:23–27 (Jesus calms the sea)

Librettist: Unknown

FP: 30 January 1724 (Leipzig: St. Thomas)

This cantata belongs to Bach's first cantata cycle in Leipzig (see note).

Instrumentation:

Flauto dolce I, II

Oboe d'amore I, II

Vln I, II

Vla

SATB

Continuo

"The opening aria employs the typical resources of the time to depict the sleeping Jesus: strings in low register, doubled at the octave by recorders, throbbing pedal notes in the continuo, and low held notes sung by the alto (similar expressive means are employed by Bach in the aria 'Sanfte soll mein Todeskummer' from the Easter Oratorio, BWV 249). But the cantata aria is not only a lullaby: it is also a lament, as revealed by its numerous diminished intervals and augmented or chromatic seconds. And its text frames an anxious question, hence the singer's not coming to rest on the tonic but closing, with voice raised in pitch, on the second degree in a dominant context." (Dürr/Jones, p. 216,

Aria. • Jesus sleeps in boat during storm; I am without hope (81/1).
(Larghetto) = 56. Recorders are often used for contemplation of sleeping and/or death.

1. Recs.

Ritornello

Str

E minor

Frequent descending catabasis (sometimes nearly 2 octaves), suggest the threat of drowning described in the Gospel reading.

The 3-note rocking motive suggests sleep. It is related to the alto's C-D# opening, and may derive from the closing chorale at "ob es itzt gleich kracht und blitzt."

G# dim.7

A minor

A# dim.7

B7

E minor

9.

Alto. Line 1.

Word painting: Long, low note for "sleeps."

Alto is often the intimate voice of faith, here it represents one of the disciples in the boat.

Je - sus schläft,

Je - sus schläft,

Form (Rhyme: ABBA)
Ritornello (mm. 1-9) Em
Line 1 (9-15) Em-B7
Lines 2-4 (15-22) E7-Am-Em
Lines 2-4 (23-27) A7-Dm-A7
Rit (27-31) A7-Dm-Am
Line 1 (32-44) Am-B7
Rit (45-53) Em

For biblical background, see note.

E minor

E minor

D# dim.7

E minor

13.

Lift: Inflection for question.

Lines 2-4 (follow without ritornello).

was soll ich hof - fen, was soll ich hof - fen, was soll ich hof - fen?

Seh' ich

Recs

E minor

E7 A minor

(B7) E minor

B7

E minor

B7

E7

A vocal lift and a pause on the dominant seventh emphasizes the question and the lack of proper harmonic resolution before the next section of text represents uncertainty or unfulfilled hope.

16.

nicht mit er-blasstem An-ge-sicht, mit er-blasstem An-ge-sicht schon des Todes Abgrund

The reference to "Abgrund" ("abyss") points to the threat of drowning in the Gospel reading.

A minor G7 C major A minor

19. Long, low note for the "open abyss."

of - - - fen, des To - des Ab-grund of-fen?

+Str

Long descending scale depicts the descent into the abyss.

A minor A minor E major

23. Lines 2-4.

Seh' ich nicht mit er-blasstem An-ge-sicht schon des To - des Abgrund of - -

A7 D minor D# dim.7 E major A minor A minor

27.

fen? Ritornello

A minor A7 D minor A minor D# dim.7 E major A minor

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31. Line 1. Stretched note for "hoffen" ("hope").

Je - sus schläft, was soll ich hof - - fen, Je - sus schläft, -

A minor B7 E minor E minor

35. Strings imitate voice.

— was soll ich, was soll ich hoffen? Je - sus schläft, Je - sus schläft, -

F major 7 B7 E minor E minor B7

39. Recorders continue... Recorders unison... Strings tacet...

was soll ich hof-fen, was

E minor D# dim.7 E minor (E7)

42. The question (with its "hoffen" motive) is repeated for emphasis against minimal accompaniment, "evoking a lonely and hopeless situation." (See Petzoldt 2:508.)

soll ich hof-fen, was soll ich hof-fen, was? was? was soll ich hoffen? + Strings

Strings tacet... D# dim.7 B7 E minor B7

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Ritornello (with strings)

45. *mf* *E minor* *mf* *p*

49. *mf*

E minor *E7* *A minor* *(B7)* *E minor* *E minor*

G# dim.7 *A minor* *A# dim.7* *B7* *E minor* *E minor* *E minor*

81/2. **Recitativo.** *Secco* • Prayer: Why dost thou stand far off in my peril? (81/2).

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 5 mm.

A quotation of Psalm 10:1: Why dost thou stand afar off, O Lord? Why dost thou hide thyself in times of trouble? (Luther 1545: Herr, warum trittst du so ferne, verbirgst dich zur Zeit der Noth?), which reflects the disciples' cry to Jesus in the Gospel reading: "Save Lord, we are perishing."

1. *Tenore* *E re.* *G#* *A* *B* *F* *C#* *D*

Herr! War-um bleibst du so fer- ne? War-um verbirgst du dich zur Zeit der Noth?

Lord! Why (standest) thou so far-off? Why hidest thou thyself in-a time of

Secco *NBA: trittst* *Diminished 7th chords emphasize the anguish of the questions.*

E major *G# dim.7* *E7* *A7*

Each question ends with a rhetorically inflected lift.

3. *B-flat* *G* *E-flat* *F#* *C*

Noth, da Al-les mir ein kläg-lich En-de droht? Ach, wird dein Au-ge nicht durch meine Noth be-

need, when everything me (with) a deplorable end threatens? Ah, (is) thine eye not by my need moved,

C# dim.7 *A7* *F# dim.7* *D major* *(D7)* *B7* *D# dim.7*

For biblical background, see note.

Phrygian cadence often used for questions.

NBA: vordem den



NBA: so 7. *we-get,* *das* *sonst-en nie zu schlummern pfleget?* *Du* *wie-sest ja mit ei-nem Ster-ne* *vor-*

which otherwise never to slumber is-wont? Thou didst-show indeed with a star in-former-times

E7 *C#7* *F# minor* *B7* *E minor*

The text combines an allusion to Psalm 121:3-4 (He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep) with allusions to the account of the wise men being guided by a star (a reference to the recent Feast of Epiphany) and biblical passages about God's promise to lead. See note.

9.

mals die neu bekehrten Weisen, den rechten Weg zu rei-sen. Ach, lei-te mich durch

the newly-converted wise-men, the right way to journey. Ah, lead - me by

A7 D major D major F#(7)

Downward scale for "leite" might suggest danger.

12.

dei-ner Au-gen Licht, weil die-ser Weg nichts als Ge-fahr ver-spricht.

thine eyes' light because this course nothing but danger promises.

A# dim.7 B minor D7 C# dim.7 G minor G major G major

Aria. Bravura storm aria (extremely difficult).

81/3. **Allegro.** (Allegro moderato $\text{♩} = 112$.)

• Storm waves of Belial assail the Christian (81/3).

Strings depict the storm, reminiscent of the day's Gospel reading. Violin I plays furious waves of 32nd notes, while the continuo and lower strings play stile concitato figures (see note).

1.

Ritornello Strings

G major

5.

G major D7

9.

G major

13.

G major

Belial (i.e., the devil) is seen as the author of the storm, and harmonic clashes (which contrast highly with the underlying G major tonality) are used to depict "Belials Bächen" ("Belial's waters"). The word is set higher each time (increased urgency).

16. **Tenore.** Cross relations for "Belial" (see NBA).

Die schäumen den Wel-len von Be - - li - al's Bä - chen,

Text painting: Vln I depicts the "schäumenden Wellen" ("foaming waves").

F#-E

For biblical background, see note.

G major G major F# dim.7 G major

21. This type of aria is called a "Devisenarie" (a term coined by Hugo Riemann) or "motto aria." After the ritornello, the singer presents the first phrase of the aria as a kind of motto. This is followed by a short instrumental bridge before the aria proper begins. The motto sets the tone (and the literary perspective) for the movement.

die

mf Ritornello

C major A minor B minor G major G major

25. schäu - men - den - Wel - len von Be - - li - al's Bä - chen - ver -

NBA: G#

B major B pedal

G major G7 G# dim.7 A minor A7

29. dop - peln die Wuth, ver -

The singer adopts the "wave figure" while the instruments hammer in stile concitato.

A# dim.7 B minor B minor

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33.

dop - peln die Wuth; die schäu - men - den - Wel - len - von

E7 A major A7

37.

Chromaticism
for "Belials
Bächen"
("Belial's
waters").

Be - li - al's Bä - chen ver - dop -

G# dim.7 A major D major

The singer doubles the Vln I briefly in unison (see also m. 105).

40.

- peln die Wuth, ver - dop - peln die Wuth.

A major D major D major

Ritornello

44.

Ein Christ soll zwar wie Wellen

D major D major

47.

Adagio. (♩ = 80.) NBA has "corrected" the original (see note). Allegro.



Felsen stehn, -

Word painting: The storm resumes but the singer stands firm ("stehn" = "stand").

p mf

D7 B7 E minor G(7)

With a switch from dactylic meter to iambic, the text turns from a paraphrase of the Gospel account to interpretation. Because iambic meter is typical for

51. **Adagio.** **Allegro.**

wenn Trübsalswinde um ihn geh'n,

A second lull in the storm is brief, but the singer stands firm against the storm.

p *mf*

C major C# dim.7 D minor G minor F(7)

55. **Adagio.** **Allegro.**

ein Christ soll zwar wie ~~Weil~~ ~~ien~~ steh'n, wenn Trübsalswinde um ihn geh'n,

A third lull in the storm is longer but still relatively brief.

p *mf*

B-flat major A7 D minor E7 A minor

58. Konrad Küster writes, "For the re-entry into the dactyl sequence in the fifth line, Bach again achieves the 'consistently aria-like' music of the opening section—regardless of the fact that he is still in the middle section of a da capo aria. Bach thus uses the emotional charge of the music in the A section for the last two lines of the B section: mm. 57–75)." See Konrad Küster, ed., *Bach Handbuch* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1999), p. 227), translated from the German original.

doch su - chet die stür - men - de

p

A minor E7

62. Fluth, die stür - men - de Fluth die

p

D minor G7 C major

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66. Kräf - te des Glau - bens zu schwä - - - -

C major C7 F major

70. - - chen, die Kräf - te des Glau - - - - bens

G major C major

74. zu schwä - chen. Die schäumen den

Ritornello

mf *p*

C major C major

79. Wel - len von Be - li - al's Bä - chen,

The statements rise chromatically as tension increases...

C7 A7 D minor

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83. 

die schä - men - den - Wel - len - von Be - li - als

p

D minor

D7

B7

87. 

Bä - chen, die schä - men - den

mf *p*

E minor

E minor

91. 

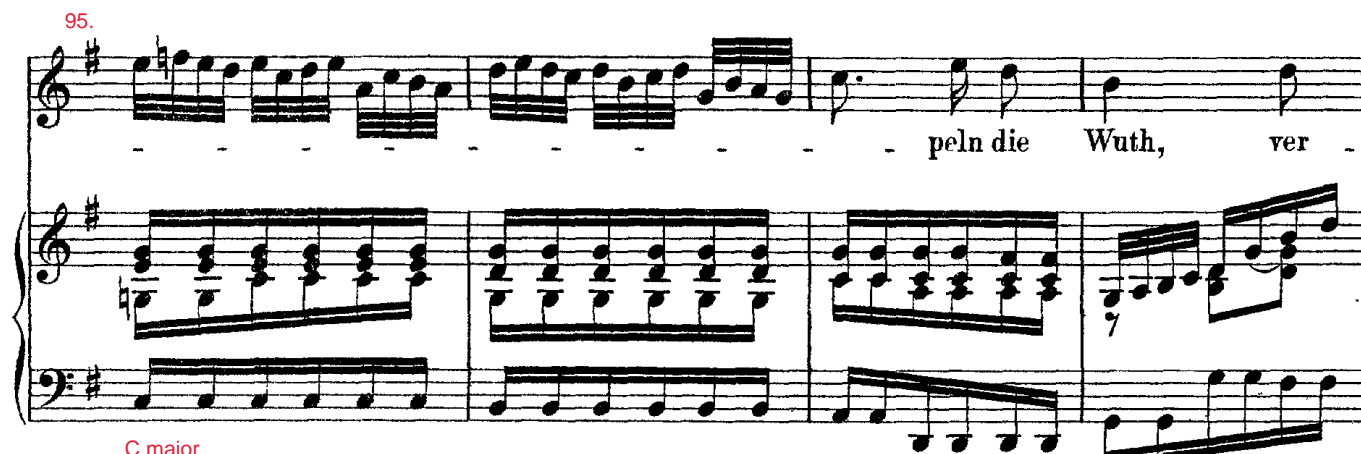
Wel - len - von - Be - li - als Bä - chen ver - dop -

G7

G# dim.7 G7

A minor

G7

95. 

- peln die Wuth, ver -

C major

D7

G major

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99.

dop - peln die Wuth, die schäu - men - den Wel - len von -

A7 D7 G major

103.

Be - li - al's Bä - chen ver - dop -

C# dim.7 D major G major

The singer doubles the Vln I briefly in unison.

106.

- peln die Wuth, ver - dop - peln die Wuth.

G major G major

110.

G7 C major G major

113.

G major G major

No. 4 is the central (pivot) movement in the cantata's chiastic form, where antithetical elements meet or are paradoxically inverted (formal inversion)

reflects an aspect of argument (in the text). Here Jesus' counter-question encourages faith that he is active instead of fear that he is absent. It "employs thematic material of such homogeneity that it virtually turns into a two-part fugue or invention; in fact, the biblical text could easily be added to the continuo part too. What emerges is a 'speech' movement of the most compelling effectiveness." See Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, p. 217.

Arioso. (Evangelium St. Matthäi, Cap. 8, V. 26.)

81/4. (♩ = 50.) •Vox Christi: O ye of little faith, why fear? Matthew 8:26 (81/4).

Emphasis on "ihr."

1. Basso.

For biblical background, see note.

The bass (in the tradition role of vox Christi) sings Jesus' reaction to the disciples' fear in face of the storm.

Ihr Klein - gläu - bi - gen, war - um seid ihr so furcht - sam?
Ye of-little-faith, why are ye so fearful?

Continuo alone (Continuo aria)...
P R.H.

B minor

4.

Jesus repeated question, "why?" is asked 12 times, as if directed individually to each of the 12 disciples.

Ihr Klein - gläu - bi - gen, war - um seid ihr so furcht - sam?

mf R.H.

B minor B minor A7 D major

7.

warum seid ihr so furcht - sam, ihr Klein - gläu - bi - gen, warum seid ihr so

mf p

B minor G# dim. F# minor F# minor E7

10.

furcht - sam, seid ihr so furcht - sam, war - um? war - um seid ihr so

Rhetorical lifts for "why?"

F# minor E7 C# minor B minor E# dim.7 F# minor

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The overlapping entry of continuo and singer suggests tightness: fear clamping the heart. (See Petzoldt, *Bach-Kommentar* 2:512.)

13. *furcht - sam, ihr Klein - gläu - bi - gen, war - um* seid ihr so *furcht - sam,*
On the final note of the cadence, the continuo re-introduces the theme; the singer answer in stretto.

mf

F# minor B minor C#7 F# major B minor D7

16. *seid ihr so furcht - sam, war - um? warum* seid ihr so *furcht - sam, war -*

p

A7 B7 E minor F#7 B minor B minor B7 E minor B7

19. *um? warum? ihr Klein - gläu - bi - gen, war - um* seid ihr so *furchtsam?*

mf *p*

E major E minor F#7 G major E minor E minor iv6 V B major

Phrygian cadence, often used for questions.

81/5. Aria.

Another bravura storm aria.

1. Allegro. (♩ = 96.)

•Christ's rebuke to raging sea: Be still! (81/5).

Oboes d'amore play the "Schweig, schweig" motive.

The bass continues with Jesus' command in the Gospel account: Matthew 8:26: Then [Jesus] rose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

Ritornello (Strings and continuo in unison)

f *mf*

Ob d'am I Vln I (up 8va) Ob d'am II

E minor E minor G major

The rising bass figure is later associated with "aufgetürmtes Meer" ("towered up sea").

Form (Rhyme: ABCBC)
Ritornello (mm. 1-9) Em
A. Line 1 (10-19) Em-CM
Line 2 (20-24) GM
Rit (24-28) GM-Em
Line 1 (28-37) Em
(opening orchestral material returns in 35)
Line 2 (38-43) Em
Rit (43-51) Em [Fine]
B. Lines 3-5 (51-60) Em-Am
Lines 3-5 (61-72) Am-Bm da capo

4. *p*

G major B7 E minor

While the strings continue to portray the raging storm, the oboes d'amore repeat the "schweig" ("be still") command of Jesus.

6.

mf *p* *cresc.* *f*

E minor

9. **Basso.** A Section. Line 1.

In the A section, Jesus authoritatively and aggressively commands the storm to stop (cited in the parallel Gospel account in Mark 4:39).

Schweig' schweig' aufgethürmtes Meer!

Ob d'am I & II

Fast rising scales depict "aufgethürmtes Meer" ("towered up sea").

E minor

Strings

E minor

E minor



12.

Schweig' schweig' aufgethürmtes

mf

E minor

14.

Meer, aufgethürm

17.

tes Meer, schweig' schweig'! aufgethürmtes

Vln I

E minor E7 A minor A7 D major E minor

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19. Line 2.

Meer, schweig', schweig'! Ver-stumme! ver -

Vln I (up 8va)

C major G major G major

22. Rhetorical pause after the command to be silent.

stum-me, Sturm und Wind, Sturm und Wind, Sturm und Wind, verstumme, ver -

Bass and continuo in parallel 3rds.

Strings

G major D7

24.

stumme, Sturm und Wind!

Ob d'am I

mf Ritornello

Vln I

Ob'am II

G major G major

27. Line 1.

Schweig', schweig', auf-ge-thürm-tes

Vln I

G major E minor

The image displays a page of a musical score for J.S. Bach's Church Cantata BWV 81. It features four systems of music, each with a vocal line and instrumental accompaniment. The first system (measures 19-21) shows the vocal line with lyrics 'Meer, schweig', schweig'! Ver-stumme! ver -' and the instrumental line with Vln I (up 8va). The second system (measures 22-24) shows the vocal line with lyrics 'stum-me, Sturm und Wind, Sturm und Wind, Sturm und Wind, verstumme, ver -' and the instrumental line with strings. The third system (measures 24-26) shows the vocal line with lyrics 'stumme, Sturm und Wind!' and the instrumental line with Vln I and strings. The fourth system (measures 27-29) shows the vocal line with lyrics 'Schweig', schweig', auf-ge-thürm-tes' and the instrumental line with Vln I. Red annotations highlight specific musical features and lyrics.

29.

Meer! Schweig, schweig;

E minor

E minor

32.

aufgethürmtes Meer,

E minor

34.

— auf ge - thürm - - - tes Meer, schweig, schweig'! auf ge - thürm -

Bass and continuo in parallel 3rds with opening material.

Ob d'am I

Ob d'am II

Vln I

E minor

G major

37.

- - - tes Meer, schweig, schweig'!

Line 2.

Verstumme!

Vln I

B7 E minor

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39.

verstumme, Sturm und Wind, Sturm und Wind, Sturm und Wind, ver -

Obs d'am tacet...

Bass and continuo in parallel 3rds.

E minor

Rhetorical pause after the command to be silent.

42.

stumme, verstumme, Sturm und Wind, Sturm und Wind!

B7

E minor

Ritornello

E minor

44.

Ob d'am I

Ob d'am II

mf

Vln I (up 8va)

E minor

G major

47.

B7

E minor

p

mf

49.

In the B section, the idea that God keeps the waters within limits becomes a metaphor for God protecting the "elect," stilling the storm. The language is reminiscent of passages such as Job 26:10 (Luther 1545: Er hat um das Wasser ein Ziel gesetzt = He has set a boundary for the waters). See also Psalm 65:7, 89:9, 107:29, Jeremiah 5:22.

B Section.

cresc.

p

E minor

G major

Lines 3-5.

Dir sei dein Ziel ge -

52.

set - zet, da - mit mein aus - er - wähl - tes Kind, mein aus - er - wähl - - -

Ob d'am I
mf Vln I

Ob d'am II

E7 A minor A minor C major

55.

- - - tes Kind, mein aus - er - wähl - tes Kind kein Un - fall -

Vln I (up 8va)

E7 A minor

57.

je ver - let - - - zet, kein Un - fall je ver - let - - - zet, je ver - -

N6 E7 A minor

60.

let - - - zet. Dir sei dein Ziel ge -

Lines 3-5.

Ob d'am II Ob d'am I

A minor A minor D7 G major

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62. set - zet, da - mit mein aus - er - wähl - tes Kind, mein aus - er - wähl - - -

Ob d'am II
Ob d'am I
Vln I

G major F#7 B minor

65. - - - tes Kind, mein aus - er - wähl - tes Kind kein Un - fall -

Vln I

D major B minor

67. je ver - let - - - - zet, kein Un - fall je ver - let - - - - zet, je ver -

Ob d'am I & II

Strings

N6 F#7 B minor

70. let - - - zet, Descending chromatic 4th, traditional symbol of lament. Ob d'am II Ob d'am I Strings tacet. kein Un - fall je ver - let - - - zet.

B minor F#7 G major E major E minor B major B minor F# major B minor

Deceptive cadence

Da Capo.

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81/6. **Recitativo.** •Relief that Christ speaks a word and calms the storm (81/6).

1. **Alto.** Blest (am-I); my Jesus speaks a word, my helper is awakened, Thus

Wohl mir! mein Je - sus spricht ein Wort, mein Hel - fer ist er - wacht: so

Alto is often the voice of faith.

Secco

D major G major

For biblical background, see note.



4. must the waves' storm - misfortune's night, and all sorrow (be) gone.

muss der Wel - len Sturm, des Un - glücks Nacht und al - ler Kum - mer fort.

enharmonic change

81/7. **Choral.** (Mel: „Jesu, meine Freude.“)

+Ob d'am I, II
Vln I

+Vln II

+Vla

Poetic cues making the chorale a suitable choice for the final movement include references to storms, foes, crashes and lightning, sin and hell —with “Stürmen” serving as the linking keyword. For biblical allusions, see note.

Soprano. 1/7. NBA: für

Un - ter dei - nen Schir - men bin ich vor den Stür - men al - ler Feinde frei.

Alto. Lass den Sa - tan wit - tern, lass den Feind er - bit - tern, mir steht Je - sus bei.

Tenore. Lass den Sa - tan wit - tern, lass den Feind er - bit - tern, mir steht Je - sus bei.

Basso. NBA: wütern

Un - ter dei - nen Schir - men bin ich vor den Stür - men al - ler Feinde frei.

Lass den Sa - tan wit - tern, lass den Feind er - bit - tern, mir steht Je - sus bei.

Active, descending bass line (cf. BWV 64/8, 87/7).

This is the 2nd stanza of 6 in the 1650 chorale “Jesu, meine Freude” by Johann Franck (1618–1677).

13. NBA: itzt

Ob es jetzt gleich kracht und blitzt; ob gleich Sünd' und Hölle schrek - ken: Je - sus will mich dek - ken.

Ob es jetzt gleich kracht und blitzt; ob gleich Sünd' und Hölle schrek - ken: Je - sus will mich dek - ken.

Ob es jetzt gleich kracht und blitzt; ob gleich Sünd' und Hölle schrek - ken: Je - sus will mich dek - ken.

Ob es jetzt gleich kracht und blitzt; ob gleich Sünd' und Hölle schrek - ken: Je - sus will mich dek - ken.

Em Em A7 DM Em BM Em Em

Em GM Gm Bm Bm BM Em F#7 BM -M

This motive is featured in the cantata, starting in no. 1.

For biblical background, see note.



Martin Petzoldt notes that in Bach's other settings of this chorale, he sets the final phrase very similarly to the opening one. Here it is different, the bass floating gently downward to a restful landing, “making invulnerability and protection audible.” See *Bach-Kommentar* 2:515.