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THIS YOU TAKE WITH YOU!*

Gordon P. Radtke

* Address to the graduates of Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, on May 21, 1988. Editor.

Stanford Ericksen, a wise and experienced philosopher in education, states in his book, *The Essence of Good Teaching*, "The lasting measure of good teaching is what the individual student learns and carries away."

In the past four days, you students have completed final examinations to review what you have learned. Permit me to spend a few minutes to review what it is that you take with you. That review will be based on a commencement address given by God to Joshua as recorded in the first chapter of his book, verses seven through nine:

Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the Law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have not I commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

Joshua had a call, a commission from the Lord to be His witness and to pass on His word of truth. Listen to the words of that commencement address once more. God said: "Only be strong and very brave . . ." Are not those strange words, when the Lord Himself had selected this man to do His work? Why one who was weak-kneed and fearful? Because the Lord chose not to send an angel, but a man. It is the character of mankind to be fearful and weak.

Therefore, in this commencement address, the Lord first of all said, "Be strong and be very brave and be careful to do . . ." Joshua is not only to hear and learn the Lord's will, but to let it be an effective hearing and learning; that it may convert into a doing according to all of the will that He had revealed unto him through Moses, His servant.

God had called Joshua to reveal His will, and it was a gracious will. It was not the thunder-and-lightning holy anger of Sinai, not God's anger with His people who had rebelled, not a letting them know that they had had it . . . that they were condemned forever. No, it was the Covenant Lord who sent a message to His people, a message that conveyed His love.

Indeed, the people had rebelled; they were a people who were sinful; they were a people who

deserved to be condemned and to die. But God loved the world and revealed that love. He said, "You are my people; I will cleanse you, I will justify you, I will reconcile you to myself. You are my people and I am your God!" To this message He then added many words of wisdom, that His children (not yet home) might walk safely on their pilgrimage through this wild world.

He continues, ". . . do not turn from it to the right or to the left." That is a temptation for any servant of God, for any disciple of Christ, for any believer. Man likes to make adjustments. He begins to do that at home when he is ever so young. He receives instruction, he has the law laid down for him by Mom or Dad, but he proceeds to make adjustments to it. And that adjustment-complex goes on through life.

The heavenly Father says, "That is dangerous business; don't try it! Do not make adjustments according to your knowledge, but trust My Truth. Do not turn to the right or to the left . . . that you may be successful everywhere you go." Successful! God had set goals and objectives for Joshua, some of which were not at all known to him. God told him to proceed well assured, strong, courageous, and not alarmed. If he were to be successful in that which the Father sent him to do, he would not turn to the right or to the left, but follow that revealed will of the Father which He had given him. In fact, the Lord said, "Do not let this Book of my Will depart from your mouth." The Book of the Lord was to determine Joshua's decisions. It was to be his peer; it was to apply the "pressure" for the decisions in his life. Then he could say with real conviction: "But my Father said . . ."

Then, "meditate!" Meditate is not to speculate, or to guess about God's will, but it is an applied discipline that searches and ponders the word that the Lord has written. Thus it may be known and applied in thought, word, and action; it may be followed by the heart, the mouth, and the hand. The Lord said to Joshua, "Meditate upon it day and night." Let it lie upon your heart, that it may bear fruit. And the fruit thereof is to show you the way to go, the things to say, the things to think, and the things to do.

"That you may be careful." The word careful primarily means that Joshua was to be on guard, to be watchful. As a dear treasure he was to guard and keep the words of the Lord's Will, to do all that was written therein. His way of life was to be one that would ever seek out what it was his Father had said about it. If He had spoken, that was it! If He had not advised him, he would prayerfully give it thoughtful concern and ask for the Lord's blessing on what he had decided. But where God had spoken, he would be watchful to observe all that He had revealed. None of it would become obsolete, none of it would become outdated. It would be contemporary until the day of eternity.

The Lord continued to address Joshua: The consequences? "Your way shall prosper, you shall succeed in the way you are going. For have not I charged you?" The Lord reminds Joshua that He is not a fellow human being of great authority, but is almighty God. He is the heavenly Father, the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings--He it is who charged Joshua with this commission. Therefore, the Lord adds, "Since I am sending you and I have revealed to you everything that you need to know, I remind you to TAKE IT WITH YOU and let it be used!"

"You, that weak and frail mortal vessel of God, will be strong and brave. And if the whole world opposes you, and you feel that you are the last one standing upon what I have said, you and I will be a majority! You will be strong and brave, you will not be afraid or discouraged, for I have shown My love and My grace to you. I am with you, with you in all the places where you will go."

Now, God would not have recorded this commencement address if it had been for Joshua alone. His words apply to all of His students, His called servants, His disciples of all time. They, too, have the great commission to go forth and to share His Word of Life, His saving love for all mankind. Because you and I also have this great commission, you and I also need to give ear to His commencement address.

Mary, I when you are teaching it will be easy for your knees to get weak. You, too, will become frustrated. But you have a call. The Lord has said to you, "Feed My lambs." And while He added many worthwhile things to be observed and to be of help to you, only one thing is essential: When you have finished your first year of teaching, or you have finished your teaching career, that you may look back and say with quiet confidence, "I gave them Your Word." Then you have reached your goal; then you have had success!

You called pastors and missionaries, Mike, 2 Dave, 3 and Mike, 4 will experience the same. It

doesn't take long to begin to shake, to become frustrated, to feel inadequate. You will be dealing with the people of God, but people of flesh and blood. And there will be problems upon problems, many of which will seem insurmountable. You will be frustrated with self, but your call is not to use your expertise in guiding God's people. Your call is simply to put God's people who are in need in touch with the specific words from God that satisfy that need. You will do that with great courage, strength, and with joy, for you are serving with His almighty Word. It will never return void but always accomplish His good will.

Thus it will be in the life of each one of you graduates, as you prepare for your life's career, as you go out to pursue your profession, as you go out to work in the world, as you establish your marriage, your home, your family, whatever your call in this life may be. What have you taken with you into life from ILC? You will be well served by math, by literature, by music, by the sciences, by languages, and other curricular offerings. But they by themselves will not keep your weak knees from shaking, will not keep you from being frustrated. See what is going on in the world. How easy it is to despair of this life, this rotting life!

But you have His Word; His will has been revealed to you, and you are going forth under His call and guidance to do His work. In a simple way you will undertake your call strong in the Lord, with great courage and without fear. And He promises you His success. That is what you take with you!

Based upon the good teaching which you have had here at ILC from your called servants of the Lord, each of you has learned the Truth that gives you Life. And you carry it away with you wherever you go until you come Home.

Go, then, dear graduates . . . THIS YOU TAKE WITH YOU! Take it with you and we will watch with satisfaction as you make your way to the very threshold of heaven! We will see you there! May God so bless you. Amen.

1 Teacher graduate Mary Timm, called to Grace Lutheran School of Fridley, MN.

2 CRM graduate Michael Wilke, called to Gift of God, Fairfax, VA, and the greater Washington, DC, area.

3 CRM graduate David Naumann, called to Mt. Olive of Detroit Lakes and St. Paul's of Ponsford, MN.

4 CRM graduate Michael Sprengeler, called by the Board of Missions to serve pro tem in the Albuquerque, NM, area.

LUTHERANISM DOWN UNDER*

Arthur Schulz

* We are sure that many of our readers, if they have not already done so, would find *How Are the Mighty Fallen*, by Gavin L. Winter, a well-written account. A copy may be obtained by writing to Pastor G. L. Winter, M/S 454, Reinbotts Rd., Lowood, Queensland, Australia 4311. – Editor

It has been well said that “those who do not learn from history are destined to repeat it.” From the study of history we learn of man's failings, shortcomings, and imperfections in the past. We can learn how his greed and selfishness have so often led him away from God and His Word of truth. Time and again we learn from history how God's judgment falls with a heavy hand upon those who depart from His way, and at the same time how richly God blesses those who continue in His Word. There is much to learn from history, if we will but open our eyes. Our readers would do well to read Luther's evaluation of the study of history in his Preface to Galeatius Capella's History (St. Louis Ed. 14:376-381; Amer. Ed. 34:269-278).

We are thankful for those in our Church of the Lutheran Confession who have prepared for future generations detailed records of our history. The booklet, *This Is Your Church*, intended to provide our children with a history of our church body, serves a wonderful purpose. Other more detailed histories have also been penned. History and its lessons are quickly forgotten if the details are not put down in writing.

Thankfully, there are others who feel the same way. Recently we finished reading a fascinating history book entitled: *How Are The Mighty Fallen*, by Pastor Gavin Winter. This book comes from Australia and provides a detailed history of the struggles and conflicts on behalf of the truth which have been waged by those who bear Luther's name in that land "down under." The sub-heading of the book reads: "A History of the Events Leading to the Downfall of the ELCA and Formation of the ELCR." The book is a publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregations of the Reformation. It first appeared in 1986 and is 170 pages in length. This book, too, is intended to help members of the younger generation remember the rock from which they were hewn.

History You will recall from your Church History that here in America our spiritual forefathers first came to this country from the German state of Saxony early in the year 1839, settling in Perry County, Missouri, and elsewhere. At that same time, in 1838, other people from the German state of Silesia emigrated to Australia. In both cases, the emigration resulted when King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Germany ordered that the Lutheran and Reformed churches be united into one State Church. Since this meant compromising the scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper and other teachings, they knew of no other solution than to depart for other lands in search of religious liberty.

From the very beginning, the streams of Lutheranism in Australia flowed in two different directions, as here in America. There were the liberals and the conservatives. Various controversies were inevitable. The Ev. Lutheran Synod of Australia (ELSA) was conservative and was affiliated with the Missouri Synod. The UELCA was liberal and had its counterparts in our country. It is not surprising to note that one controversy within the ELSA involved the doctrine of Church Fellowship, which has similarly been the center of things in the background of our CLC. At a Convention in 1902, Pastor Theodore Nickel presented a fine essay on Church Fellowship. This essay has been translated from German into English and is now available through the ELCR. This writer thoroughly enjoyed this essay, noting that it could just as well have been written in our country in the year 1988. For example, Thesis 4 (there are 5 Theses) reads: "Orthodoxy confessed by word of mouth and in writing has already then actually ceased to exist when a church-body permits in its midst the claim of equal right to a practice incompatible with Scripture and confession."

In commenting on this Thesis, the essayist correctly says: "When we are required to pass judgment on the practice of a church-body, then we must not only listen to what they teach, we must also see what they do. And if we then notice a wrong practice there, and see it happen again and again, even after repeated instruction and admonition, then we say: 'You people cling to a practice which is false; with your false practice you keep on denying what you confess with your mouth; first do away with such practice; then we will walk together, if other wise your doctrine is right.' This is of utmost importance."

This surely brings to mind a principle that was discussed in our circles in the 1950s and earlier, when the Concordia Cyclopedia definition of religious unionism was being debated, which reads: "Religious unionism consists in joint worship and work of those not united in doctrine." This principle is not popular in this ecumenical age, and our sinful flesh tries to find all kinds of excuses to keep from putting it into practice. But it faithfully reflects what God says in His Word, given for our protection in order that we may not lose the priceless treasure which we have in the Scriptures. When scriptural truths are set forth, then those truths stand firm, no matter what decade in the world's history we are talking about and no matter what country of the world is referred to.

The matter of Open Questions has been a long-standing point of controversy among the Lutheran churches in Australia. With the Brief Statement we confess: "Those questions in the domain of Christian doctrine may be termed open questions which Scripture answers either not at all or not clearly. . . . Open

questions must remain open questions” (Par. 44). This was the position held by the ELSA. But the UELCA held that such doctrines as the Church, the Ministry, predestination, inspiration, chiliasm, the Antichrist, first resurrection, conversion of Israel, Sunday, etc., must all be included among the open questions. These held that these must be treated as open questions until a “unanimous understanding” had been attained, or until all agree as to the terms and definitions. Thus the authority of the Scriptures would be set aside, to be superseded by the authority of men.

The good stand taken by the ELSA was gradually weakened, especially when liberal tendencies in the Missouri Synod were reflected in Australia. As a result of the Chicago Statement of 1945, a more liberal interpretation of Romans 16:17f found room within the ELSA. This Statement held that Romans 16:17f can only be applied to false teachers who can be proven to be unbelievers and cannot be applied to those who, though still Christians, in one point or another stubbornly hold to teachings contrary to the Word of God. Dr. Henry Hamann, Sr., of the ELSA, was one in spirit with the signers of the Chicago Statement . Being one of their leading theologians, he made use of every opportunity to encourage this view throughout the ELSA, which around this time became the ELCA.

From 1948-1953, committees from both church bodies met on several occasions. Under discussion were some Theses of Agreement , which claimed to settle the differences between the two church bodies. Absent from these Theses was any mention of Open Questions. Nevertheless, the Theses of Agreement were adopted by the UELCA in 1956 and by the ELCA in 1959. Still, the debate went on, especially in matters of church fellowship, since the UELCA had ties with the Lutheran World Federation and other liberal groups. Finally, in early 1965, a new statement entitled Document of Union was drawn up and hailed as a settlement of the last remaining differences between the two church bodies. This Document requested both churches to sever all overseas fellowships which hindered the progress of union. The ELCA was to sever its connection with the synods of the Synodical Conference, and the UELCA would sever with the LWF, the ALC, and others. Thus the new church would be free to determine what fellowships were to be pursued. The ELCA thus became guilty of separatism, deliberately severing bonds of fellowship with those whom it regarded as brethren in the faith. In March 1965, the ELCA officially adopted the Document of Union . The spirit of merger and compromise was in the air. Dr. Hamann, Sr., declared: “The ELCA abandoned the position previously held.” Debate continued for several months. In October 1965, the UELCA also adopted the Document of Union . On November 28, 1965, pulpit and altar fellowship were declared.

Early in 1966, individuals who were doctrinally well- informed began withdrawing from the ELCA. About 50 people met at Kilkivan, Queensland, on March 20, to consider forming a new church body. Their Constituting Convention met on May 29 at the same place, at which time a Constitution was adopted. The merging bodies, the ELCA and UELCA, met from October 29 to November 2 to unite into one body known as the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA). There was only one pastor of the former ELCA who refused to go along with this merger: Pastor Frederic G. Kleinig. He was, therefore, called to serve these people who were scattered about, even though he was about 66 years old at that time. The name chosen for this new church body was the Evangelical Lutheran Congregations of the Reformation (ELCR). In July 1966, Pastor Kleinig began publishing a church paper entitled Steadfast . The ELCR wished to continue in those teachings formerly held by the ELSA in its better days and by the Missouri Synod in the days of Walther and Pieper. Naturally, they suffered ridicule for the stand they took, but in this respect they fared no better than God’s faithful children have always fared down through the ages.

In 1967, at their second Convention, the ELCR applied for fellowship with the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation in the United States, with which group they believed they were in doctrinal agreement. The LCR was willing to help the aging Pastor Kleinig by sending Pastor K. Hunter and family to assist in the work of the ministry in the Federation, as it is called. Before long, however, a division occurred over the matter of 1 Corinthians 11:3-9, regarding women having their heads covered while attending divine worship. Pastor Hunter declared this matter a thing of indifference and that every woman could please herself. The ELCR felt that this was a violation of the old Lutheran principle: “A matter of indifference ceases to be a matter of indifference when confession and offense become involved.” Pastor Hunter left and formed his own group with forty-nine members. When the LCR in the U.S. backed Pastor

Hunter, the ELCR terminated fellowship with that body, feeling that their position rested on Scripture and on Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession.

In 1971, a lay missionary left the LCA and joined the ELCR, serving as a vicar. But again controversy arose, this time over the matter of worldliness, in particular, over young men wearing long hair and some girls wearing extra short dresses. Guidelines were drawn up, but the vicar declared them “legalistic” and resigned from the Federation in 1973.

Meanwhile, Pastor Kleinig was occupied with preparing a young man, Bryce Winter, for the ministry. His course covered three years and used old Missouri textbooks which are familiar also to us. On July 13, 1975, Candidate Bryce Winter was ordained and installed as Pastor of the ELCR. Pastor Kleinig retired from the active ministry but did undertake to prepare Pastor Winter’s second cousin, Gavin Winter, for the ministry. Including a study of languages, his course extended over five years. In September 1987, Pastor Kleinig passed away, so the two pastors, Bryce and Gavin Winter, serve the church body. As of this time, the ELCR consists of five congregations (at Kingaroy, Toowoomba, Woombye, Lowood, and Brisbane) in Queensland on the east coast of Australia. In addition, there are five preaching places, two of which are in Sydney and Melbourne, far to the south in New South Wales and in Victoria, respectively. Pastor B. Winter writes: “We would very much like to have our own day schools, but this is not possible because of distance and numbers. At present our baptized membership stands at 201, with four others under our spiritual care.” The press of work has caused health problems for Pastor Bryce Winter, so much of the essential work rests upon Pastor Gavin Winter.

Each issue of their church paper, *Steadfast*, begins with quotations from Luther, as well as from Dr. Walther and Pastor Kleinig, recollections from the history of the ELCR, news regarding members of the Federation, and other exhortations. Recently Pastor B. Winter wrote: “While we recognize that Scripture requires those who are one in faith to fellowship together, (and this would give us great joy, for we feel so alone here in Australia), yet we have learnt by painful experience to exercise the greatest of care to be certain that true unity of faith exists. Hence we prefer to have Christian Lutheran friends until such time as the fact of unity in faith can be established. While we by God’s grace are determined not to depart a hair’s breadth from the written Word of God, yet we are not stubborn. If it can be shown clearly from the Word of God, from the original text or from clear principles of God’s Word that we are wrong, we are prepared to retract: for it is the Christian’s duty to abide by Scripture by faith in Christ.”

Doctrine This writer has corresponded off and on with Pastor B. Winter for about 12 years. We find it refreshing that people so far apart, on opposite sides of the earth, can be agreed on so many issues of the day. But such is the unifying nature of Scripture. When people continue in Christ’s Word, they will know the truth, and the truth will make them free from mere human opinion and error (John 8:31f). At the same time, when we consider our different backgrounds and cultures, it is not to be wondered at that in some areas there may be differences existing. This does not mean that we should throw up our hands in despair, but rather that we should prayerfully sit down with our Bibles and look to see if our Lord has given us answers to these questions in His Word. Always we approach these questions in the spirit of Samuel: “Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth” (1 Sam. 3:10).

Recently the undersigned asked Pastor B. Winter to outline for him the areas in which he felt there might be differences between us. He replied: “As far as the differences in doctrine that exist between us, at present I am aware of only the following: a) 1 Cor. 11:2-16; b) Church and Ministry; c) Dt. 22:5. However, I would certainly be interested to know your stand in the following matters as well: engagement; close embrace dance; worldliness; selective fellowship; women voting and speaking in congregational meetings.”

In the opinion of the undersigned, the last-mentioned items should not constitute major problems. These are all questions which we have discussed in our pastoral conferences and have to do with putting our Christianity into practice in this unbelieving world. Pastor Winter has received copies of most or all of our publications, including *Concerning Church Fellowship* and *Concerning Church and Ministry*. We would hope that attention could be directed to those publications in an effort to come to full agreement in those areas.

At this time let us, therefore, consider especially a) and c) in the above-mentioned areas of

difference. In order to better understand the thinking of the ELCR in regard to the matter of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, we quote from their 10th Anniversary History , published in 1976, in which Pastor Kleinig wrote:

From the days of old a custom has prevailed in the Christian Church that women, when attending divine worship, have their heads covered. This has also been the custom practiced here in this country right from the beginning. And this custom is a Scriptural custom. In 1 Cor. 11:3-9 St. Paul gives the reasons for it. He states three permanent, Scriptural, and hence indisputable facts: 1) The head of the woman is the man (v. 3); 2) The man reflects the glory of God, whereas the woman reflects the glory of the man (v. 7); 3) The man was created first, the woman after the man (v. 8 and 9). Having quoted these three permanent facts, he thereupon instructs the Corinthians to observe this outwardly during worship services in the following manner: v. 10: "For this cause the woman is duty bound (Greek: *opheilei*) to have (the sign of the man's authority, namely, a covering) on her head because of the angels." The fourth reason "Because of the angels" is another very important factor. The argument was brought forth that as long as God knows that a woman in her heart is subject to the man, she surely did not need to show this outwardly by wearing a head-covering, for God can see into her heart. But St. Paul did not write: Because of God, but "Because of the angels." The angels, who are also present at divine services, are not omniscient like God. They cannot see into the heart. They can observe only outward things. Hence the head-covering . The presence of this pleases them, its absence offends them.

Pastor B. Winter answered my inquiry by going into more detail on this in a letter explaining the position of the ELCR, dated November 29, 1979:

I realize that conservative Lutheranism in America has declared the wearing of a head covering in public worship by a woman an adiaphoron. . . . The point which a lot of people miss in regard to the Augsburg Confession, Article 28, as is also clearly referred to in Article X of the Formula of Concord, is that the underlying principle there is also: "Nothing is an adiaphoron when confession and offense are involved." We do not teach that a woman merits grace or makes satisfaction for sins if a woman observes 1 Cor. 11:2-16. What we do teach is that since 1) a confession of Scriptural truths are involved when a woman wears a head covering in public worship, viz., the head of the woman is the man (Sixth Commandment); the glory of man is not to compete with the glory of God (First Commandment); and the Divine Order of Creation signifies man's predominance (v. 3-9); and 2) Offense to the holy angels (v. 10), there fore "So Paul ORDAINS . . . 1 Cor. 11:5, that women should cover their heads IN THE CONGREGATION . . ." In this way both the Augustana and the Formula of Con cord distinguish between a pure Adiaphora and something which is in itself an Adiaphora, but when Confession and Offense are involved ceases to be an Adiaphora.

What I can't understand in regard to this matter is how excellent exegetes like Stoeckhardt and Mueller miss the following: 1) the force of the Greek word *opheilo* = a moral obligation flowing from and based on the reasons in the text. If this force of *opheilo* is weakened, this not only goes contrary to excellent Greek scholars (Bengel, Robert son, Wuest, etc.) but also to the Scriptural usage of the word, as in 1 John 4:11: Since God so loved us, viz., that He sent His Son to redeem us, we are morally obligated or in duty bound because of this to love one another . . . In John 13:14 *opheilo* still has its meaning, moral obligation , but the "footwashing" is here taken in a symbolical sense, i.e., we are morally obligated to apply Christ's ex ample in humble acts of love and service to our neighbor. . . . I regard it as my sacred duty out of love to my Saviour who redeemed me at such great cost and out of love to the souls under my charge, to "tremble at the Word of God," i.e., to dread to deviate from it to the right or to the left. Concerning this I have taken an oath rightly to teach God's Word with the help of God. If I have erred or if the ELCR has erred in this or any other point, I would greatly appreciate and value it if this is pointed out. Our practice here is: where an error is made publicly, than a public apology is required, as well as a public retraction of that error and a public promise to teach the truth in doctrine and practice.

We have on hand detailed discussions on this question, beyond what is quoted above. The undersigned consulted with Prof. C. M. Gullerud and then wrote as follows to Pastor Winter, in the hope

of achieving a better understanding of what Scripture teaches on this question: “. . . First, let me say that I am convinced from our correspondence and other material that you sent me, that you have an earnest desire to remain true to the Scriptures. That encourages me to continue to write to you. When we have this desire in common, then I believe that any doctrinal question can be answered, for we have a common answer-book in God’s Word. I’m sure that you wish me to speak plainly, even as you have done in your fine letter. With the prayer that God may help me to find the right words, let me now share my thoughts with you in regard to the matter of head-covering of women in public worship.

“To begin with, I believe that you have misunderstood the reference to adiaphora in the Augustana. I believe that you are making an unwarranted distinction between what you call a pure adiaphoron and something that is in itself an adiaphoron. Certainly any so-called adiaphoron ceases to be such if it becomes a matter of confession or offense. Furthermore, your interpretation of ‘in public’ (Augsburg Confession, Art. 28, Par. 56) becomes arbitrary, for one can well refer the reference to participation in the public service as being included.

“Your reference to John 13 is quite significant. As I give the matter thought, it appears to me that this passage argues against your view rather than for it. Please permit me to explain. The use of the Greek in John 13:14 (*opheilo*) refers to the practice of washing another’s feet. I do not believe that you intend to say that the outward washing of feet is a moral obligation resting upon us. That which is binding upon our conscience is that which the washing of feet symbolized. And I am convinced that right here we are at the crux of the matter. That which the covering of the head symbolized in 1 Cor. 11 is binding upon us, and not the symbolic act of head covering. This latter fact is what Paul is emphasizing in verse 16. Furthermore, the Greek word for ‘custom’ (1 Cor. 11:16) is used only twice in the New Testament, the other reference being to John 18:39, and there it is not a thing that is binding upon all people for all time. In addition, to draw in the reference to ‘congregation’ from verse 18 is not legitimate, for this refers to the following verses, not the preceding.

What Paul is emphasizing is the binding truth that women are not to exercise authority over the man. This is not an adiaphoron! But the way in which this may be symbolized from time to time is an adiaphoron. Those who make an adiaphoron into a divisive doctrine then become guilty of causing schism. Surely neither you nor I want to become guilty of this! I gather that you and the ELCR do not consider it as being divisive. The History of the ELCR by Pastor Kleinig points out that it was Pastor Hunter who severed with the ELCR because of this matter.”

So far from a letter written on January 9, 1980. This is as far as our discussion went on this matter. Because of health problems on the part of Pastor Winter, further discussion of controversial issues would not have been beneficial to his physical well-being at that time. It is hoped that further discussion on this matter can take place to achieve hoped-for oneness in our understanding of Scripture.

The other possible doctrinal difference referred to by Pastor B. Winter is in regard to Deuteronomy 22:5, which reads: “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the Lord your God” (NKJV). The undersigned has not had opportunity to discuss this as yet with Pastor Winter. But it appears to him that, underlying this question, there is a principle involved which we would all do well to study for our own spiritual benefit. At the Wisconsin - Michigan Pastoral Conference in February of 1988, at which the undersigned first presented an introductory paper on the ELCR, a young colleague very appropriately called attention to a writing by Dr. Martin Luther, which would be most profitable reading for us all in this connection. Luther delivered a sermon in May 1525, by way of introducing the Book of Genesis. His theme was: “How Christians Should Regard Moses.” This comparatively short sermon should be must-reading for each one of us, and it would be best if the German and English could be read side by side. References are: St. Louis Ed. 3:2-17 and Amer. Ed. 35:161-174. We recommend this sermon of Luther, not because we idolize Luther or place his words on a par with Scripture, but because he leads us into Scripture and here helps us to a clearer understanding of the distinction between Law and Gospel.

Another essay which would be profitable reading in this connection is in *The Abiding Word*, 2:686-708, with the title: "Adiaphora."

In the Statement of Faith and Purpose of our CLC, we say:

We limit all forms of the exercise of fellowship relations, by which we acknowledge and treat one another as confessional brethren, to those professing Christians who meet the scriptural requirement of complete agreement in doctrine and life and do not by word or act reject any part of the pure doctrine of God's Word.

While we avoid all who preach, teach, or advocate error, we gladly receive those who, though weak in understanding and as yet in part uninformed, profess faith in their Savior and gladly hear, learn, and receive the Truth, continuing therein and renouncing all error.

May the Holy Spirit guide and direct us according to His will, that we may continue to work toward true spiritual oneness among those who confess His name! "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1).

THE INTERPRETATION OF SECOND THESSALONIANS 3:6-15: A HISTORICAL STUDY*

David Lau

* In our last issue (March 1988) we presented Pastor Paul Schaller's discussion of 2 Thess. 3:6,14,15, which was delivered at the meeting of representatives of the CLC and the WELS, held in Eau Claire on January 11-12, 1988. It is our hope that Pastor David Lau's historical study of how 2 Thess. 3:6-15 has been interpreted and used in the past in Synodical Conference circles and elsewhere will be of interest to our readers. – Editor.

The December 1984 *Journal of Theology* (27-36) printed my review of Thessalonians by Professor David Kuske, a teacher at the Wisconsin Synod seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. This review pointed out that, according to Professor Kuske, the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 is instructing the Thessalonian Christians on how they should deal with certain impenitent sinners in their congregation, namely, by excommunication. Yet at the same time the apostle is telling them to carry out this excommunication "in the frame of mind" that they are dealing with a brother, not an enemy.

Since I realized that this interpretation by Professor Kuske is different from interpretations given to the same words of Scripture by earlier leaders in the Wisconsin Synod, I soon found myself making a historical study of the interpretation of this section of Scripture. This study is now offered to the readers of the *Journal of Theology* as an example of how historical events can change the way a certain passage is understood and applied. This is of special interest to us in the Church of the Lutheran Confession, because 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 with its various interpretations played a part in the controversy between ourselves and the Wisconsin Synod that led to the formation of our church body.

First of all, we print here 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 according to the New King James Version:

But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he [NU-Text and M-Text read they] received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in

doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

THE 1949 INTERPRETATION

Now let us go back to the 1950s and see how this passage was explained and used in the controversy between the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod. In 1949, Professor J. P. Meyer of the Wisconsin Synod presented a paper on the subject, which was subsequently printed in the April 1950 *Quartalschrift*. He explained 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 as follows: “Regarding church life his instruction is very definite: have nothing to do with him—no pulpit and altar fellowship, no prayer fellowship, nor even an occasional joint prayer. And this in spite of the fact that the break has not been consummated, and they still regard him as a fellow-believer.” At this point in time Prof. Meyer explained the passage as referring to a preliminary action of disassociation that involved the total cessation of the exercise of fellowship.

In agreement with this, Pastor Egbert Schaller, then a pastor in the Wisconsin Synod, stated in 1951: “There comes a time, in dealing with those who hold to false doctrine and practice, when we must declare to them a severance of fraternal relations, refuse them fellowship at the Lord’s Table and yet thereafter continue to admonish the erring as brethren.”

Pastor C. M. Zorn, a pastor of the Missouri Synod, had expressed himself in a similar way in the October 1926 *Quartalschrift*: “When someone affiliated with the congregation walks disorderly, not in accord with the doctrine transmitted to him and all Christians by the apostles, . . . the congregation must deny him the privilege of its normal social relations; and it is self-evident that he will not be admitted to the blessed communion of the Holy Supper. . . . The congregation is not to count him as an enemy, a heathen enemy of the Word of God, but shall admonish him as a brother, which indeed he still is, and seek to restore him.”

Not all Synodical Conference leaders were this definite or precise concerning the meaning of this passage. For example, P. E. Kretzmann’s *Popular Commentary*, 1923, presents two views. He says: “The apostle seems to be recommending a course, in itself a part of church discipline, which has in view this means of winning the erring brother before the final step must be taken. Or the apostle assumes the third step to have been taken, and warns against the introduction of personal hostility into the intercourse with such a person, as the members met him in a social or in a business way.”

THE 1951 SYNODICAL CONFERENCE CONVENTION

In 1951 an event took place that in time led some Wisconsin Synod leaders to change their public explanation of 2 Thessalonians 3. At the 1951 convention of the Synodical Conference in St. Paul, Minnesota, the Wisconsin Synod representatives stated: “Though we do not at this time disavow our fellowship with the Missouri Synod in the Synodical Conference, yet we continue to uphold our protest. . . . We find ourselves in a *state of confession*.” In a 1958 study entitled *The Status Controversiae Within the Synodical Conference*, Pastor Egbert Schaller claimed: “No Scripture was cited. . . . At a later date it was officially declared that the action at St. Paul was in response to the enjoinder of God in 2 Thess. 3.”

The Wisconsin Synod church paper, *The Northwestern Lutheran* of November 2, 1952, featured Prof. F. Blume’s study of the term *state of confession*, basing it definitely on Paul’s words in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15. According to Prof. Blume, a *state of confession* over against brothers who have “fallen out of line” is by its very nature a “state of confusion.” For nothing is as it once was. Because of the statements and actions of Missouri Synod officials, the Wisconsin Synod representatives could no longer identify themselves as being one with the Missouri Synod. Prof. Blume, however, refrained from discussing the question whether all forms of fellowship were to cease at once with the persons thus labeled as disorderly.

Yet if the *state of confession* proclaimed at St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1951 was truly based on 2 Thessalonians 3, it should have followed that there could have been no pulpit, altar, or prayer fellowship

between those Wisconsin Synod representatives and the Missouri Synod after that time. For the passage says “keep away” and “do not associate,” and these words have been explained by Prof. Meyer as meaning the total cessation of the exercise of fellowship.

Pastor Schaller’s study continues: “In 1953 the Wisconsin Synod . . . resolved to make the *state of confession* its own. Even at that time no Scripture reference . . . was included.” Again, if this *state of confession* was based on 2 Thessalonians 3, the Wisconsin Synod as such should have had no more fellowship with the Missouri Synod after 1953. But this, of course, was not the case. Says Pastor Schaller: “It is not recorded that Synod as such ever implemented that relationship in accordance with” Prof. Meyer’s explanation of 1949 and 1950. “Tacitly everybody has been accorded the moral right and freedom to interpret 2 Thessalonians as he chooses.”

The *state of confession* of the Wisconsin Synod over against the Missouri Synod continued in the years from 1953 to 1961. This *state of confession* was supposedly based on 2 Thessalonians 3, which had been interpreted as meaning the cessation of the exercise of fellowship. Yet there was no general cessation of fellowship.

In 1956 the president of the Wisconsin Synod, Pastor O. J. Naumann, wrote: “The members of the Missouri Synod are truly our brethren still, to whom we owe the admonition spoken of in 2 Thess. 3:14-15. We intend, therefore, without declaring a severance of fellowship, to continue in fellowship, but in a ‘vigorously protesting fellowship.’ That means that we certainly cannot ignore the flagrant offenses that have been given by Missouri men in certain areas of our Synod.” By this time the words of Paul “keep away” and “do not associate” had been weakened to the point that fellowship continued as usual with the Missouri Synod as a whole. Only flagrant offenders were to be noted and avoided.

THE 1957 INTERPRETATION

In 1957 Prof. J. P. Meyer again published a study of 2 Thessalonians 3 in the *Quartalschrift* (January 1957). The “keep away” of verse 6 was now explained as involving “a process of some duration, involving different steps at different times.” The “do not associate” of verse 14 was now explained as meaning that “fellowshipping must be suspended, at least restricted, as will best serve the purpose which it is the aim to achieve. . . . In some cases a milder form of suspension may be sufficient. . . . Restrict, interrupt, suspend church fellowship with such a brother. . . . The offender is not yet an enemy, he is still a brother; and as brother he should be treated. . . . He does not say, Treat him in a brotherly manner, but much more, Treat him as a brother. . . . the bond of brotherhood has not yet been severed.”

The differences between the 1950 article and the 1957 article are quite plain. Prof. J. P. Meyer was my teacher, and so I am aware of his outstanding gifts as an exegete. But surely we can see how easy it is for us to make our theology conform to our practice instead of making our practice conform to the theology we have learned from God’s Word.

In a paper dated March 13, 1957, Pastors John Lau, Jonathan Schaller, and Paul Prueter, then pastors of the Wisconsin Synod, called 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 “the final admonition to be given the persistent errorists prior to actually excommunicating them.” The “do not associate” is explained in keeping with its usage in 1 Corinthians 5 as meaning “a cessation of the practice of church fellowship. . . . The apostle is yet endeavoring to win over the erring brother before the final step of Mt. 18 need be employed. Nevertheless, . . . the apostle has ordered: no company with him.” Their understanding of 2 Thessalonians 3 was in keeping with the 1950 study of Prof. Meyer.

But the practice of the Wisconsin Synod was no longer in agreement with this understanding. The three pastors therefore declared: “The Wisconsin Synod has been using 2 Thess. 3:14-15 since 1953 as the passage to support its state of confession over against the Missouri Synod. Therefore, on the basis of this same passage, since 1953 the Wisconsin Synod should have been in a ‘cessation of the practice of church fellowship’ with the Missouri Synod. However, the Wisconsin Synod has not applied this passage as St. Paul would demand.”

During this time the Wisconsin Synod developed a document on church fellowship that listed 2 Thessalonians 3 among the passages dealing with weak brothers, not among the passages dealing with

excommunication or the passages dealing with avoidance of errorists. The particular kind of weakness referred to in the passage was described as “weakness in understanding God’s truth and involvement in error.”

In explanation of this passage Professor Carl Lawrenz said: “Even now Paul does not recommend a complete break of fellow ship relations. . . . Yet their fellowship is to be restricted now; final brotherly admonition is to be administered through the act of withdrawing from these offenders. . . . If he persists, the congregation will be compelled to separate itself completely and conclusively from him, no longer considering him a Christian brother. It should be borne in mind that in these Thessalonian passages we do not have a general exhortation but counsel, practical counsel for handling a very specific disciplinary case.”

We have presented all of this historical material to show how the official interpretation of this passage by the Wisconsin Synod changed through the years, and also to show that Prof. Kuske’s 1984 understanding of 2 Thessalonians 3 differs in many respects from the position taken publicly by the Wisconsin Synod and some of its leaders and theologians in the inter-synodical controversies of the 1950s. Almost invariably the “keep away” of 2 Thessalonians 3 was considered a step prior to the final step of excommunication or the breaking off of fellowship. In the 1950s there were even times when the “keep away” became so mild as to mean nothing more than a protest. The state of confession supposedly based on 2 Thessalonians 3 became nothing more than a “vigorously protesting fellowship.”

OUR CLC CONFESSION

What about our own church body? It has been understood among us that the “keep away” and “do not associate” of 2 Thessalonians 3 imply the cessation of the exercise of fellowship. *Concerning Church Fellowship*, the confessional document adopted by the Church of the Lutheran Confession at its first convention in 1960, says: “Paul advocates in 2 Thess. 3:14-15 that we cease exercising fellowship with those who are disobedient to his words, that they may be ashamed.” At least one of our congregations, Immanuel of Mankato, Minnesota, with drew from the Wisconsin Synod in 1956 on the basis of 2 Thessalonians 3:6. The resolution of the congregation says in part: “God’s Word commands withdrawal from all brethren who do not walk in accord with His directives and commands.” The constitution of our church body lists 2 Thessalonians 3 along with 2 Timothy 4:2-3, Romans 16:17, Titus 3:10, and 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 under Article II, Purpose, and says that one of the purposes of our church body is “to protect this fellowship against the encroachment of error and unionism through united testimony and doctrinal discipline.”

In 1972 representatives from the Wisconsin Synod and the CLC met in Milwaukee for a discussion of the doctrinal issue that divides the two church bodies. The CLC representatives declared: “We are to recognize the Lord’s evangelical mandate to avoid those who teach or practice contrary to His Word,” whether they are individuals or groups. The WELS representatives agreed on this principle in dealing with individuals, but in dealing with groups “the WELS . . . contended for a possible protracted period of in-fellowship admonition when dealing with groups in error.” The term *state of confession* was used to describe this period of admonition during which error was to be disavowed but fellowship with the errorists could still continue. One of the passages used to defend this idea of protracted in-fellowship admonition, summarized by the term state of confession , was 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15. Thus as late as 1972 Wisconsin Synod representatives were still defending the in- fellowship admonition of errorists and the idea of a state of confession or “a vigorously protesting fellowship” with the disobedient on the basis of 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15 as explained by Prof. J. P. Meyer in the *Quartalschrift* article of January 1957.

Pastor G. Sydow, a pastor of the CLC, in reporting on the 1972 meetings in the *Lutheran Spokesman* of December 1972, January 1973, and February 1973 (from which the above quotations were taken), had this to say: “Concerning this Thessalonians passage it should be understood that there is disagreement among competent Greek scholars on the details of what is said. . . . However, it is a

commonly accepted procedure that passages which pose exegetical questions are not used as ‘proof’ passages. This in no way weakens the case for the scriptural doctrine of separation.”

The contention of the CLC was and is that the Wisconsin Synod was using its idea of a *state of confession* or “vigorously protesting fellowship” supposedly based on 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 to justify its failure to “avoid” (Rom. 16:17) and thus suspend or terminate fellowship with a group that was espousing error. Concerning Church Fellowship says: “When . . . such a state of protesting fellowship is proclaimed, but business is carried on as usual, with the individual continuing to treat the errorists as though they were still faithful teachers and hearers of the Word—exchanging pulpits, transferring members, intercommuning, and the like—then that use of the expression is to be condemned as a cloak for unionistic activity.”

The *Journal of Theology* of the CLC (December 1972) reported: “We have reviewed the WELS church fellowship statement and have also studied the essay delivered in exposition of the theses but find no Bible passage which allows for the above mentioned ‘IN STATU CONFESSIONIS’ procedure. We simply come back to the plain injunction of Rom. 16:17-18.”

Now we come to 1984. Professor Kuske’s interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15 says nothing about a *state of confession* or a protesting fellowship or even some kind of preliminary cessation of fellowship prior to the final termination of fellowship. Rather, his interpretation equates the “keep away” and the “do not associate” of 2 Thessalonians 3 with the excommunication discussed in Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5. This is an attractive interpretation that is simple and direct and makes it unnecessary for us to try to explain how one can refrain from exercising fellowship with someone who is still a brother. It is the same interpretation apparently accepted by the Wisconsin Synod textbook on pastoral theology, *The Shepherd Under Christ*, Northwestern, 1974. Note the references on pages 171 and 176. Second Thessalonians 3:6,14-15 is listed together with 1 Corinthians 5 as having to do with excommunication.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that not all Wisconsin Synod pastors accept this interpretation. The pamphlet prepared by the WELS Commission on Evangelism (printed in 1981), entitled *Regaining the Straying*, lists 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 with Romans 16:17 and Titus 3:10 as a passage referring to doctrinal error. The explanation, page 7, says: “Those who persist in an error which does not make the existence of saving faith impossible must be suspended from our fellowship.” This listing of 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 with Romans 16:17 is in disagreement with Prof. Kuske’s interpretation, which considers 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 as dealing with excommunication.

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

Of course the main question in all of this is whether the Greek text of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 demands or allows the interpretation of Prof. Kuske or the 1949 interpretation of Prof. J. P. Meyer or the 1957 interpretation of Prof. Meyer, and whether these various interpretations are in full agreement with all the other passages of God’s Word. We encourage competent Greek scholars among us to make a thorough study of this text to answer these questions. But let us be careful so that our explanations of this passage are not designed to justify our present teaching and practice, but rather let our teaching and practice be judged by the Scripture. And if our study leaves the matter an open question, let us be willing to agree with Pastor Sydow’s statement of 1973: “Passages which pose exegetical questions are not used as ‘proof’ passages.”

Scholars of the past have given various answers to these questions. Way back in 1519 Martin Luther preached a sermon on excommunication (*Luther’s Works* 39:5-22). In this sermon he quoted four passages, Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:14, and 2 John 10-11, and then said: “We learn from all these sayings how the ban should be used. First, we should seek neither vengeance nor our own gain . . . but rather the improvement of our neighbor. Second, punishment should stop short of his ruin or death, for St. Paul limits the goal of the ban to improvement, that he be put to shame because no one associates with him.” By ban Luther meant exclusion from the fellowship or excommunication. He said: “Its principal, real function and power is to deprive a sinful Christian of the holy sacrament and

to forbid it to him.” Luther in 1519 would have seen no problem with Professor Kuske’s interpretation.

In 1972 Marlin Jeschke, a Mennonite scholar, published a helpful study on church discipline entitled *Disciplining the Brother*. He had this to say about 2 Thessalonians 3: “The inclination to interpret 2 Thess. 3:14 as a mild form of avoidance short of full excommunication likely comes from the clause in the verse which says, ‘Warn him as a brother.’ Does ‘brother’ describe the attitude desired in the admonisher or does it indicate the status of the person being admonished? No conclusive answer can be reached from an examination of the grammar of this passage alone. There is another clue, however. It can be shown that the word for avoidance used in this text (*sunanamignusthai*), which occurs only three times in the New Testament, is the same as that employed twice in 1 Cor. 5:9,11, where its meaning is rather well established as a relationship involving excommunication.” This seems to be a strong argument for the interpretation of Professor Kuske.

In addition Mr. Jeschke says: “The conception of avoidance as an ostracism within the church is inconsistent with the nature of the church. As long as an individual is a brother, fellowship with him is normative. Only if he ceases to be a brother is this fellowship broken.” “Recourse to an ostracism in the absence of complete excommunication moves once more in the direction of major and minor excommunications, a view we discussed earlier and found incompatible with the gospel.”

But Mr. Jeschke also quotes the opposite view of Haslehurst (*Some Account of the Penitential Discipline of the Early Church in the First Four Centuries*, 1921, SPCK), who says there is “no necessary suggestion of excommunication” in 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15. He says it is “reasonable to infer that the offender might, while still enjoying such church privileges as he cared to avail himself of, be treated with a certain coldness, ostracized socially if not yet ecclesiastically. Or an act of discipline may be implied, the man being refused communion for a space. But no definite conclusion can be reached.”

Dr. Lenski throws his support to the view that 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15 refers to a disciplinary action prior to termination, that is, the 1949 interpretation of J. P. Meyer. For example, he says that the cases of idleness “were not grave, for the writers retain the word ‘brother’ and point only to withdrawal and not to expulsion and excommunication as is done in 1 Cor. 5:3-5.” Again he says: “The next step that the congregation is to take is to withdraw from such a brother. It is not ‘expel.’ It is a preliminary step, the effect of which is calculated to make unnecessary the final step.” Nevertheless, by this withdrawal Lenski understands that “this man will be refused participation in the *agapee* of the congregation and thus also in the Lord’s Supper. . . . But they are not to turn their back upon him and at once to abandon him as being hope less. . . . His sin and folly are to be held up to him in a brotherly way and with brotherly intent. . . . The members are to remonstrate with the disorderly one as they would with a brother.”

Since the exegetical problem has to do with the usage of the term “brother” in verse 15, perhaps it can be pointed out that the term “brother” is used also in Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5, which deal with excommunication. Jesus speaks in Matthew 18 of the “brother” who sins against you and says that, if he listens to your admonition, you have gained your “brother.” The “brother” is one who is, or has been, a fellow-believer, one who knows the Lord. Of course one can talk with such a “brother” about his sin in a way different from the way one would approach an unbeliever. In 1 Corinthians 5 the apostle makes a distinction between dealing with immoral unbelievers in general and with that immoral person who calls himself a “brother.” Church discipline has to do only with brothers, that is, those who have confessed Christ and claim to be Christians. We are not to judge those outside the church but those inside the church.

It is possible, then, that by “brother” in 2 Thessalonians 3 Paul is stressing the fact that we are dealing with someone who has confessed Christ and considers himself a Christian and therefore will be persuaded by Christian arguments based on God’s Word in a way that could never be true of a professed pagan unbeliever?

In conclusion, let me mention some studies of this passage made by CLC pastors. The *Journal of Theology*, March 1983, contains a study of Thessalonians by Pastor Paul F. Nolting. He says that “‘As a brother’ is not to be understood in a rather weak adverbial manner, as in a fraternal manner. The comparative participle *hos* is used with the accusative: Count him not in the category of an enemy of the gospel, but in the category of a brother who is walking disorderly. . . . The treatment prescribed for

helping the disorderly brother get back in step was ostracism” or “isolation of the sick brother for the purpose of hastening his recovery.” This explanation of the phrase “as a brother” seems to be in agreement with the 1957 explanation of Prof. Meyer. One might also want to compare Pastor Nolting’s *Ministry by Mail* sermons on 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, dated September 30, 1962, August 22, 1971, and January 22, 1984.

In an essay presented to the CLC Pastoral Conference in 1970, Pastor Norbert Reim asks the question: “Just what does Paul mean when he says that the Thessalonians should not count the errorist as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother?” In response to his own question he quotes the Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon as saying that *hos* is “almost pleonastic” in this usage. Pastor Reim then concludes: “Paul is reminding the Thessalonians that when dealing with this type of errorist, they should remember that they are not glaring at an enemy, but admonishing a brother.” Yet “he is to be avoided.” The explanation of “as a brother” is the same as that above. The emphasis on the “avoiding” is similar to the emphasis of Prof. Meyer in his 1949 presentation.

THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Paul F. Nolting

III. The Double Question: WHEN and WHAT?

(Matthew 24:1-3; Mark 13:1-4; Luke 21:5-7)

The time was Tuesday of Holy Week, late in the afternoon. After His final, most busy day of teaching in the temple, Jesus was leaving with His disciples. The three synoptists all report that one (Mark), some (Luke), and His disciples (Matthew) made a special effort to point out to Jesus the various buildings of the temple complex and the beauty of their construction. Herod the Great had undertaken the reconstruction of the temple. Forty-six years later (John 2:20) it stood there in all its glory, the pride of every Jew! Jesus had been in the temple with His disciples on other occasions. Why did His disciples feel compelled to draw Jesus’ attention to the magnificence of the temple on this particular occasion?

Earlier in the day Jesus had told the Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers, recorded by all the synoptists. The parable had a new twist, but an old ring to it. The disciples surely recalled the sad Song of the Beloved regarding His Vineyard, as told by the Lord to Israel of old by the mouth and pen of Isaiah (5). Judgment was to fall on the Vineyard, the House of Israel, because it brought forth wild grapes instead of good grapes. Centuries had passed. The Lord God of the Covenant had remained faithful; His people had hardened their hearts (Isa. 6). The vinedressers, the Nation of Israel, had down over the centuries killed the servants sent to receive the fruit. The Lord of the vineyard sent His Son as final proof of His love. Prophetically, Jesus foretold that they would kill the Son. Would that act be permitted to go unavenged? The chief priests and Pharisees pronounced judgment upon themselves and their nation when they said in answer, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their season” (Matt. 21:41). The chief priests and Pharisees perceived that this parable had been directed against them; the disciples heard.

Matthew reports that Jesus also told the Parable of the Wedding Feast (22:1-14). This time the King sent out His servants to invite His subjects to the wedding feast, but the servants received the same treatment portrayed in the Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers. They were killed. This time Jesus asked no opinion of His hearers, but simply announced the reaction of the King: “When the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city” (v. 7). Again the disciples heard!

The disciples were part of the audience when Jesus laid His eight “Woes” on the scribes and Pharisees, the religious establishment of the nation. Rhetorically He had urged them to fill up the measure of their fathers’ guilt. He had assured them that all the righteous blood shed by the nation over the centuries of their history would be avenged upon their generation. He had lamented over Jerusalem and had pronounced their house desolate (Matt. 23). The disciples heard.

What the disciples did not realize at the time was that Jesus was bringing to a climax the long list of prophecies of judgment and doom upon the Nation of Israel. Isaiah had announced that judgment in a dramatic way: “The sound of noise from the city! A voice from the temple! The voice of the Lord, Who fully repays His enemies” (65:6). One can hear the sound of the fury as the Romans centuries later torched the city and the temple. Daniel must have been filled with amazement when it was revealed to him that after the Lord had faithfully fulfilled His Covenant, “the people of the Prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined” (Dan. 9:26). The prophecy contains a heaping up of terms of judgment. It had been determined!

Nationalistic pride that bound the coming of the Kingdom with the Nation of Israel and its temple prevented the disciples from discerning the prophetic perspective of Jesus’ words of judgment. But they did hear His words! They were disturbed. Incredible! These beautiful buildings—the pride and glory of Israel! “And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down’” (Mark 13:2). What an announcement! What a confirmation of the judgments Jesus had announced by both parable and direct speech earlier that day. Stunned, the disciples followed their Lord in startled silence. It was not until they had crossed the Kidron and Jesus had sat down on the Mount of Olives with a panoramic view of the temple before them, that four of the disciples—Peter, James, John, and Andrew—ventured to ask him privately, “Tell us, WHEN will these things be? And WHAT will be the SIGN when all these things will be fulfilled?” (Mark 13:4). Luke records the question in the same way: “Teacher, but WHEN will these things be? And WHAT SIGN will there be when these things are about to take place?” (Luke 21:7). It is obvious that “these things,” concerning which the disciples were inquiring, were the destruction of the temple, which implied the destruction of the city and the nation. Jesus had announced that destruction as they were leaving the temple area.

Matthew’s formulation of the question introduces a new element, the Parousia of the Lord and the end of the age. He reports, “Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, WHEN will these things be? And WHAT will be the SIGN of Your coming and of the end of the age?’” (Matt. 24:3). The same Spirit jogged the memories of Matthew, who alone heard the Lord’s words, and of Mark, who received his account of the discourse from Peter and guided the research of Luke in establishing his account of the discourse. Why did the Spirit limit Mark’s and Luke’s formulation of the question to the Lord’s foretold judgment upon the temple, while Matthew’s formulation of the question introduced the Lord’s coming (His Parousia) and the end of the aeon? While we know that the Holy Spirit directed and guided each evangelist in the selection of his material and in the choice of his words, we cannot conclusively determine the Spirit’s mind as He inspired each writer. A Greek concordance, however, reveals that the key words in Matthew—*parousia* and *sunteleia*—are absent from the entire gospels of both Mark and Luke. Eschatology seems to have been more a concern of Matthew than it was of Mark or Luke, although Luke does record an earlier eschatological discourse of Jesus (17:20-37).

The word “*parousia*,” which, when used in connection with our Lord, is the technical term for His second coming, is used only by Matthew—four times, all in chapter 24. The first occurrence is in the question concerning the SIGN of the Lord’s Parousia. The other three appearances of the word occur in verses 27, 37, and 39 when the flow of the discourse turns to the Parousia of our Lord. The word

“*sunteleia*” is used five times by Matthew and only once elsewhere in the New Testament (Heb. 9:25). Matthew uses the word with the singular of aeon, consistently as the end of this current age, the New Testament era. Matthew used “*sunteleia*” three times in the parable chapter (13). In all cases it marks judgment time—the harvest time in the parable of the tares and the separation time in the parable of the dragnet. Matthew also used the word in the familiar passage with which he closed his gospel, (28:20: “Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end [*sunteleia*] of the age.”) The writer to the Hebrews used *sunteleia* with the plural of aeons to establish the time of the appearance of the Messiah to sacrifice Himself for sin—“at the end [*sunteleia*] of the ages” (Heb. 9:26). Whereas Matthew thought in terms of the end of the current age, the writer to the Hebrews thought of the current New Testament age as the end or last of the ages.

The questions, as recorded by Mark and Luke, reveal that the disciples were predominantly concerned with the destruction of the temple that had been so recently announced by Jesus. WHEN would this catastrophe occur? WHAT would be the SIGN that would forewarn them of this event? The questions, as recorded by Matthew, inquire in addition as to the relationship between the destruction of the temple and the Parousia of the Lord at the end of the age. “Tell us, WHEN will these things [the destruction of the temple] be?” “And WHAT will be the SIGN of Your coming [*parousia*] and of the end [*sunteleia*] of the age?” The questions in Mark and Luke connect the asking for a SIGN with the destruction of the temple. In Matthew the question of a SIGN is connected with the Parousia of the Lord and the *sunteleia* of the age. According to Matthew there was confusion in the minds of the disciples as to whether the destruction of the temple would be simultaneous with the Lord’s Parousia and the end of the age. It appears as though they thought all three events would occur simultaneously. That would mean that the SIGN for the destruction of Jerusalem would also be the SIGN for the Parousia and the *sunteleia* of the aeon.

As we have previously noted, Mark and Luke are relatively unconcerned about matters of eschatology. That is reflected in their records of the questions which are concerned only with the WHEN and WHAT SIGN of the coming destruction of the temple. Because one or the other of the disciples had asked of the relationship of the coming destruction of the temple and the Lord’s Parousia and the end of the age, Jesus addressed this concern. Both Mark and Luke take note of that part of our Lord’s presentation, but very briefly, Mark in only six verses (13:32-37), and Luke in but three verses (21:34-36). Luke is, however, the only evangelist to record an earlier eschatological discourse of our Lord (17:20-37). In sharp contrast, Matthew’s record of the Olivet Discourse contains more eschatology than instruction on the relatively imminent destruction of the temple, city, and nation, beginning at 24:36 and continuing until the end of chapter twenty-five. Eschatology was a major theme for Matthew, as his exclusive use of the terms “*parousia*” and “*sunteleia*” indicate. Nonetheless it remains valid that the immediate concern of all the questioners and the response of Jesus was with the destruction of the temple. The prophecy of that destruction triggered the questions and were the immediate concern of our Lord’s response.

IV. Don’t Be Deceived! The End Is Not Yet!

(Matthew 24:4-8; Mark 13:5-8; Luke 21:8-11)

The NKJV Bible (Thomas Nelson Publishers) gives the following heading to Matthew 24:3-14, Mark 13:3-13, and Luke 21:7-19: “The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age.” The NIV Bible (Zondervan Bible Publishers) gives as a heading for Matthew 24:1-35, Mark 13:1-31, and Luke 21:5-37: “Signs of the End of the Age.” Ylvisaker (*The Gospels*) captions Matthew 24:4-14 thus: “A warning against the visionary unrest which anticipates Christ’s advent.” Lenski (*Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*) makes these statements, “The first section of the discourse deals with the signs of the end of the world (6-14).

The fact that these signs include also those connected with the end of the Jewish Jerusalem is self-evident, although Jesus will speak of the latter by themselves” (930).

These captions reveal that the editors of the NKJV and NIV translation of the Bible and the exegetes, Ylvisaker and Lenski, believe that Jesus began His response to the questions of the disciples as to WHEN the destruction of the temple would take place and WHAT would be the SIGN of that horrible judgment by speaking of the end of the age and signs that should accompany that event. Lenski adds the gratuitous remark that it is “self-evident” that these signs included signs “connected with the end of Jewish Jerusalem.” Lenski does not believe that all the “signs” in the 4-14 section fit in the predestruction of Jerusalem time frame. What should be evident to the unbiased reader is that Jesus began His response to the question of the disciples by addressing their prime concern, His prophecy of the destruction of the temple, and so the destruction of the Nation of Israel as the covenant nation.

How could something so obvious be missed by so many? Most likely it was caused by the time remark of Jesus, “But the end [*to telos*] is not yet” (Matthew and Mark) and “But the end will not come immediately” (Luke). *To telos* is, without warrant, interpreted as “The End of the Age.” *Telos* means end or goal. Its meaning as “end” is neutral. It is not a technical term for the “End of the Age.” Matthew had used *sunteleia* as the term to designate the end of the age. What “*telos*” is the end of can only be determined by the context. It occurs in such familiar verses as “For Christ is the end [*to telos*] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4), and “. . . receiving the end [*to telos*] of your faith—the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet. 1:9). *Telos* with the article is, indeed, used twice to designate the end of the age. Paul so used it in the great resurrection chapter when he wrote, “Then comes the end [*to telos*] when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority” (1 Cor. 15:24). Peter uses *telos* the same way when he exclaims, “But the end [*to telos*] of all things is at hand” (1 Pet. 4:7). Notice that in both these instances what *telos* is the end of is determined by the context.

So also the context must determine what *to telos* is the end of in these passages in the Olivet Discourse. This lengthy discourse was occasioned by our Lord’s prophecy of the destruction of the temple. The disciples had asked two questions: WHEN would this judgment come and WHAT would be the SIGN that would forewarn the disciples of its coming? Only Matthew adds the additional concern of the disciples as to the relationship of this judgment upon the nation to the Lord’s Parousia and the *sunteleia* of the aeon. Jesus began His discourse by responding to the questions that laid so heavily on the minds of His disciples—concerning the imminent destruction of the temple. He spoke ominously of coming false “christs,” wars and rumors of wars. Then He interrupted Himself with a word of comfort, “See that you are not troubled.” Why not? “For all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.” The end of what? The end of the temple, its destruction, and so the end of the Nation of Israel in its covenant relationship to the Lord. Luke adds a remark of Jesus that confirms this interpretation. He began Jesus’ response as the others: “Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He,’ and ‘The time has drawn near.’ Therefore do not go after them.” Jesus was quoting the false christs who claimed to be “the christ” and who likewise claimed that the time was near for the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem. Jesus warned all disciples of His, “Do not go after them . . . the end will not come immediately.” There is another factor that confirms our interpretation of *to telos*. It is this that Jesus did give a specific SIGN by which His disciples would be able to know when Jerusalem was about to be destroyed—“the abomination of desolation,” but that He just as definitely stated that no signs would be given to indicate the time of His Parousia or the *sunteleia* of the aeon. But more of this later.

The prime concern of Jesus was that His disciples be not deceived. By what? First, by false christs. It was Tuesday evening; on Friday of that same week the first false christ appeared in the person of Barabbas, the “son of the father.” The chief priests and elders persuaded the mob to ask for the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. The multitude was easily deceived; the disciples were not to be deceived!

Acts 5:36 records the words of Gamaliel who referred to the unsuccessful career of a certain Theudas, who had appeared as a liberationist false christ. Four hundred people had been deluded by him. Be not deceived! Acts 8:9-13 records the encounter of Peter with Simon. The church fathers knew of him. Justin reports that Simon was worshiped as a god in Rome because of his magical powers. Jerome reports this claim of Simon: "I am the Word of God, I am the Comforter. I am all there is of God." Irenaeus substantiates that report by asserting that Simon claimed to be the Son of God and the Creator of angels. Be not deceived! When the Apostle Paul was seized by the mob in the temple and rescued by the commander of the Romans, he asked Paul whether he was the Egyptian who some time before had led four thousand followers into the wilderness (Acts 21:38). Even Gentiles were appearing as false christ! Be not deceived! Edersheim (*Prophecy and History*) comments on the addiction of the Jews to false christ, of whom there were no less than sixty, the last of which was Bar Kokhba (10). Josephus, in describing conditions in the Nation of Israel prior to the siege of Jerusalem, writes of "another body of wicked men . . . who deceived and deluded the people under pretense of divine inspiration . . . and prevailed with the multitude to act like madmen, and went before them into the wilderness, as pretending God would there show them signals of liberty." Josephus also mentions another Egyptian who "got together thirty thousand men that were deluded by him; these he led round about from the wilderness to the mount which was called the Mount of Olives, and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force from that place" (*Works of Josephus* 1: 165). Certainly there was ample reason for our Lord to be concerned about His disciples and to warn them not to be deceived. "The end is not yet!"

A second phenomenon that could lead to their being deceived was nations rising against nations. In the year 1988 we are told that more than twenty wars are in progress. But when Jesus sat with His disciples on the Mount of Olives, the world was experiencing the *Pax Romana*, an international peace imposed by the Roman legions, even as the USSR imposes such a peace in Eastern Europe. But in the decades after our Lord's ascension things began to change, especially in the years immediately preceding the siege of Jerusalem. For ten years (53-63) the Parthians waged war on the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire, ending with the victory of Vologases over the Romans in AD 62. On the western frontier the Germanic tribes were in restless stir. Then came that amazing eighteen months of political anarchy in Rome. Nero committed suicide in 68. He was followed by Galba, who was beheaded by the Guards. He was replaced by Otho, who committed suicide 95 days after being heralded emperor. Vitellius took his place and was executed by the troops of Antonius, a general of Vespasian who become emperor in 70. It must have seemed as though the world, as they then knew it, was falling completely apart. Consider the effect of the assassination of President Kennedy. What would have happened to morale in our country if we had had four presidents committing suicide or being executed by a revolting military within a period of eighteen months? "All these are the beginning of sorrows."

The third disturbing phenomenon was the twin evils of famine and pestilence. Luke reports that a certain "Agabus stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar" (Acts 11:28). Famines are always accompanied by pestilences—some 30,000 victims being reported in Rome during the reign of Nero. We know that the Apostle Paul made a special project of gathering funds for the famine victims in the Church at Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8-9).

The fourth disturbing phenomenon was the occurrence of earthquakes—always a harbinger of judgment. Secular history reports a plethora of earthquakes in the years preceding AD 70—in Crete, Smyrna, Miletus, Chios, Samos, Laodicea, Hierapolis, Campania, Rome, and Judea. It was as though the Lord was making every effort to gain the attention of Jews before judgment would fall upon their nation. Then there was the related disaster of the volcanic eruption that destroyed Pompei, February 5, 63. The site of that judgment is now a tourist attraction. All this would happen, "but the end is not yet." "All these are the beginning of sorrows!"

Mark speaks also of “troubles” without being specific. Luke adds that “there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.” Scripture contains no records of such signs, but Josephus reports that “there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year” (Josephus 453).

Do not be deceived! All these phenomena will occur prior to the end of the Nation of Israel. “All these are the beginning of sorrows,” literally, “the beginning of birthpains.” Paul used this same concept when he wrote to the Romans, “For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pains together until now” (8:22). In our current age all creation is, as it were, suffering birth pains—awaiting the delivery of the new earth and heavens. Birth pains mark the beginning of new life.

Jesus had foretold judgment upon the nation that had rejected Him. Since the time of Abraham the history and welfare of the Kingdom had been inseparably intertwined with the history and welfare of Israel. This connection was still vivid in the minds of the disciples after our Lord’s resurrection, as evidenced by their question before His ascension: “Lord, will You at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). With the figure of “birthpains” Jesus was assuring His disciples that something great, living and vital, would spring from the coming judgment upon the Covenant Nation. That was the breaking out of the Kingdom from its Jewish mold into the Gentile world. More of this later.

In this section Jesus warned His disciples not to be deceived by false christs, wars and rumors of wars, famines and pestilences, earthquakes, and signs in the heavens. All of these phenomena occurred during the forty year span between our Lord’s speaking this discourse and His coming in judgment upon the Nation of Israel. This is not to say that similar phenomena will not occur prior to the Parousia of our Lord and the *sunteleia* of the age. Just as conditions prevailing on earth before the judgment of the flood and that of Sodom and Gomorrah will recur prior to our Lord’s coming for final judgment, as He testified in this same discourse (Matt. 24:37-39), and previously (Luke 17:26-30), so conditions prior to our Lord’s coming in judgment upon the Nation of Israel will recur before His final coming in judgment. The Apostle John elaborates on these precursors of judgment in his visions of the four horsemen (Rev. 6:1-8) and of the trumpets and vials. What we are protesting against is the view that our Lord, in responding to the questions of His disciples concerning His prophecy of the destruction of the temple, began by warning them about deceptions that would confront disciples living hundreds of years later. Jesus was the great “Seelsorger.” His words were practical. He loved His own and spoke to them forthrightly of the deceptions that would confront them and their generation who would experience His judgment upon their nation. That His words have substance and meaning for every generation is in the nature of the divine, living prophetic Word.

(To be continued)

PAIDEIA

From a Pastor’s and Professor’s Notebook

Roland A. Gurgel

III

Prophecy Number 3: Numbers 23:25-24:9

The first prophecy focuses the people of God on the fact that no one can do away with the blessings of God under which they live in time and for eternity. The second prophecy proclaims the reason for the certainty of God’s blessing, viz., God finds no fault in them, for they are covered by the

righteousness of their King, Who is in their midst. The third prophecy reveals the glorious state of the Church, God's people, under God's blessings.

NOTE: The hesitancy of Balak after the second prophecy—could it be that he realized the hopelessness of his attempts to curse? “Thou shalt neither curse it nor even bless” (v. 25). If so, it is but for a moment. Give it another try. One might think of Paul's words in Romans, chapter 1: “holding the truth of God in unrighteousness”—refuse to recognize the position and power of God; go your own blind and foolish way!

A third attempt to curse is carried out in a place still nearer to the camp of Israel (an interesting point to be noted in connection with the opening words of Balaam). The camp of Israel is laid out before him. He is given a clear view of the encamped people, but the view God gives him is not that which meets the physical eye. God opens Balaam's “inner eye” to see what the human eye misses (vv. 3 and 4 of chapter 24)—outward eye closes; inner eye opened by the Lord.

It is so essential for us to remember that we walk by faith and not by sight. What “hits” our outward eye may very easily not be a true picture of the situation. The picture meeting the physical eye of Balaam as he viewed the camp of Israel and the view given him by God of the same camp is a tremendous demonstration of this truth.

What do you see as you look down from the hills of Moab over the camp of Israel? A people weary—worn after 40 years of wandering—a camp that posed many problems in sanitation—a camp that presented many difficult social situations—a camp that provided anything but a picture of beauty, of desirability. A few weeks of camping even in a desirable location may well leave us longing for the comforts, security, and pleasures of a permanent address. Sights, sounds, odors, etc., coming from the camp of several million “way-worn wanderers” must have shouted to the eye of Balaam that it would be wise to stay away from that situation.

But what a different picture God paints for the “inner eye” of Balaam and those who read God's words given through the lips of Balaam and recorded by the pen of Moses! Read verses 5 through 7 of chapter 24.

The scene is one of desirability, of tremendous beauty, of abundance, of permanent security: beautiful tents, well-watered valleys, providing productive gardens dotted with “precious” trees, and ruled over by the greatest of kings. Can this be a true picture of God's people, spiritual Israel? God's eye is always to be relied on! Even during the 40 years of wandering, how beautiful were their tents—they provided shelter; how green their fields—manna came daily in needed abundance; how well dressed—their clothes never wore out. How great their King—He provided daily forgiveness; He walked before and behind them, protecting them from their enemies; He brought them to the border of the promised land and would be the Captain of the Host leading them into that land (cf. Joshua). They would occupy a land ready for habitation, flowing with milk and honey. Yes, there is a temporal side to this picture given to Balaam, but as is most often the case with the picture God gives of the glorious situation of His people, it begins in time and finds its most glorious resolution in the eternal promised land—heaven!

Remember, God is first of all speaking here to Balak. Balak wanted to curse, destroy, do wrong with God's people. The Lord is saying to him again, “Join them, for behold their marvelous position under my blessing.” Who could ask for any thing more!

The Church of today, God's people of the 20th century, needs to hear this message, this prophecy, with regularity. We are so often tempted to feel sorry for ourselves for a great variety of reasons. What a mistake! Under God's gracious rule, we dwell in “beautiful tents,” in “well-watered valleys,” “under precious trees,” ruled over by “a lofty King.” Though our physical eye may not always see it, it nevertheless remains a fact carefully guarded and treasured by the eye of God-given faith.

NOTE: To limit “the King” mentioned here to a David or a Solomon is a mistake. When the prophecy was given, Israel had no earthly king. When Israel had kings, they were but types and too often very poor types of Christ, the King. The comparison with Agog is not with a single

man by that name but rather with the kings of the Amalakites, who all seem to have been given that title. It is important for an understanding of all these prophecies to recognize that the King spoken of within them is none other than Christ Jesus. Any other explanation simply leaves the prophecies empty.

Under the leadership of that lofty King, God's people of all times cannot be destroyed; rather, they become a power to be reckoned with. The strength of the buffalo (wild ox), the lion and the lioness is theirs; they are a blessing from God to those who bless them and a curse from God to those who curse them. Again, keep in mind: God is speaking first of all to Balak, who would curse God's people at that moment in history. But that message is there for all times!

As with the first two prophecies, the third also provides many opportunities for Bible class considerations, as well as a rich source for sermons. Perhaps it might be a good place to begin a study of the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, or the years of persecution of the Christians, or the Christians' view of trials and tribulations. We walk by God's view of our situation, not our own.

For homiletical purposes, the verses might be considered under the theme:

You, as a Child of God, Occupy a Most Envious Position for:

- I. You dwell in rich valleys (in time and eternity), and
- II. You dwell under the protection of the loftiest of kings.

(To be continued)
