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Genesis in the New Testament

David Lau

Genesis 27 and 28

First Reading: Genesis 27:30-41 Second Reading: Genesis 28:10-22

Text: Hebrews 12:14-17

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord; looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

When we read in the Bible about the conflict between the twin brothers Jacob and Esau, it is easy to feel some sympathy for the older brother Esau. His brother Jacob took advantage of him in a moment of weakness. Esau came in from the field tired and hungry, and Jacob offered him food on only one condition: that he sell his birthright, that is, that he give up his right to be called the firstborn and all the privileges that went with that right.

Many years later, when father Isaac was going to give a special blessing to Esau, Jacob stepped in the way again. He went so far as to pretend that he was Esau. He deceived his old, blind father and received the blessing Isaac wanted to give to Esau. One can hardly think of a more despicable act. In bitter anger Esau said: **“Is he not rightly named Jacob (Supplanter)? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing.”** We may think to ourselves at this point that Esau certainly had a right to be bitter and angry. Jacob kept on cheating him and taking things away from him. In our minds Esau may seem to be “the good guy” and Jacob “the bad guy.”

Now what does God say in the Bible about Jacob and Esau? Jacob’s sins are certainly not minimized, and the troubles that came to him as a consequence of his sins are spelled out in full detail. Yet Jacob is portrayed, together with his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac, as a hero of faith. In fact, God involved these three specifically in the declaration of His own name when He called Himself **“the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”** He also changed Jacob’s name to Israel, for He said: **“You have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.”**

What about Esau? What does God say about him? In our text from Hebrews 12 Esau is described as a **“profane person.”** This morning we shall consider what this means as we learn **WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT THAT PROFANE PERSON ESAU.**

What exactly is a profane person? A person who uses profanity? No, it means much more than that in this text. Basically, the description of being profane is applied to someone who has no special regard or respect for God or for the things of God. The example of Esau’s profanity (or profaneness) mentioned in our text is that he **“for one morsel of food sold his birthright.”** THE THINGS OF GOD DID NOT INTEREST ESAU.

Jacob, on the other hand, was vitally interested in that birthright. No doubt, his mother Rebekah had told him that God had said, even before he was born: **“The older shall serve the younger.”** Yet Jacob was not satisfied with this word and promise of God. He wanted to make sure for himself that the blessing would be his. So Jacob **“cooked a stew,”** the Bible says, and when **“Esau came in from the field,”** he wanted some of that stew, for he was weary and hungry. Jacob saw his opportunity and made his bargain. **“Sell me your birthright,”** he said. Esau replied **“Look, I am about to die; so what profit shall this birthright be to me?”** I’m about dead from hunger; I want to eat. What do I care about a birthright? **“Thus Esau despised his birthright,”** the Bible says. Esau was more concerned about the immediate satisfaction of his physical needs. The here and now was of more concern to him than the far-off future.

Esau did not consider how the birthright might have had the potential of giving to Esau the special blessing that he would pass down in his family the promise of the coming Savior. As

often indicated in the history of Genesis, the birthright normally had included such spiritual treasures. But this meant nothing to Esau. He was a profane person, a man of the world, a typical human being to whom the things of God were considered trivial and foolish. Who cares about pie in the sky in the vague hereafter when you can have tasty stew between your teeth right now?

By nature we all are of the same mind as Esau; we too are profane persons. This description we hear about ourselves in 1 Corinthians 2: **“The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him.”** By nature we do not think and act as spiritually minded children of God. According to our sinful flesh, we act as people of the world, who have the mindset that the things of this world are the things that interest and excite us.

Esau liked to hunt. While there’s nothing wrong with that, it seems he had no higher interests. He married two heathen women, two Hittite women who likewise had no interest in the things of God. The Bible says that these two women **“were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.”** In fact, Rebekah even said: **“I am weary of life because of the daughters of Heth,”** the two Hittite wives married to her son. When Esau finally realized that these women did not please his parents, he married a third wife, as though that would make things better. Just as he did not understand the importance of the birthright or the blessing of a Savior, so he did not understand the importance of marrying a God-fearing woman. Such was the attitude of Esau, a profane person, who really didn’t care what God considered to be important.

HOW WORLDLY AND PROFANE ARE WE? To honestly evaluate our own hearts and lives we need to examine our own priorities. What are the things which interest us? Hunting and fishing? That’s certainly fine, but hopefully we also recognize that God’s Word is even more important. Does your life revolve around your work? Of course, God wants you to work and earn your living, but there’s something even more important than careers and wages. Do you live for your family? Do you try to make your family members happy for the moment, or do you strive to go further and consider the long-range spiritual needs which they have? What tragedy takes place if we provide morsels of tasty food and earthly pleasures for our families but deprive them of the spiritual treasures of God’s Word! Are you interested in sports and athletics? Do you think you will survive if the football players go on strike? Of course, there’s nothing wrong with being interested in such things. But there certainly ought to be more important things which concern us. Otherwise, we are nothing but **PROFANE PERSONS**, loving the world and the things in the world, while the love of the Father is not in us.

Being profane has its rewards. Esau set his sights on Jacob’s stew, and he got it. For those who strive for earthly treasures, they will receive their reward. But what is the cost? Notice what Esau lost. **HE COULD NOT CHANGE ISAAC’S MIND ABOUT THE BLESSING.** Our text says: **“You know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance (or change of mind on Isaac’s part), though he sought it diligently with tears.”** Genesis supplies the details. Before the twin brothers were born, God had said the younger son would receive the blessing. And Esau himself of his own free will had sold his birthright to Jacob. Therefore he had no right to claim the blessing he had despised. Nevertheless, he came in from his hunting to seek the blessing which Isaac had foolishly promised him. Isaac, however, could not deliver on his promise. When Isaac learned that Jacob had pretended to be his brother and had received the blessing he intended for Esau, he realized that Jacob was the one God wanted to receive it. Isaac could not change his mind now, even though Esau pleaded with him. **“Bless me, even me also, O my father,”** he said. He even **“lifted up his voice and wept.”** But all his tears could not change the fact that the blessing had gone to Jacob, and there could be no reversal now.

At this point in his life Esau was not a repentant person, one who was sorry for his sins. His tears were not tears of penitent sorrow over what he had done to sin against God. This is clear from Esau’s feelings and from his words. Genesis reveals that **“Esau hated Jacob”** and planned to kill him as soon as his father Isaac was dead. Now the Bible does indicate that at a later time Jacob and Esau were reconciled and together buried their father Isaac, when he finally died 43 years later. These later events suggest the possibility that Esau might have died as a believer in the promised Savior, even though the Savior would not come from Esau’s family. Martin Luther, for one, thought that Esau later on was converted, which is altogether possible.

Our text, however, discusses Esau's life when he was unrepentant and acting only as a profane person. His experience serves as a warning for us. He missed out on Isaac's blessing. Is it possible that WE TOO CAN MISS OUT ON GOD'S BLESSING? Falling away from faith must be possible, for otherwise we would not be warned against it. Listen closely to our text: **'Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.'** Don't assume that you're a Christian if you hate your brother and want to kill him. **'Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.'** Yes, pursue peace and holiness, **'looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau.'**

Esau's bitterness caused trouble, and so bitterness can also cause trouble in our lives, even to the point that we fall short of God's grace. Oh, dear friends, let us ever be on guard. There's nothing more precious than the grace of God. There's nothing more precious than knowing that our sins are forgiven through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob believed in Jesus well in advance of His coming. We today have the great advantage of knowing the whole story of Jesus and His perfect love. His love for us is the only force capable of pushing out of our hearts that natural profaneness which dwells in us all. The free gift of His blood-bought forgiveness is the only power to keep us from being lost. The words of Scripture are urgent when they tell us: **'To be carnally minded (fleshly minded) is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.'** May the Holy Spirit lead us all to treasure Jesus as our Savior and consider Him and His Word our number one priority, so that no one among us **'fall short of the grace of God.'** Amen!

Genesis 32 and 37

First Reading: Genesis 32:3-15 Second Reading: Genesis 37:1-11

Text: Acts 7:8-15

(Stephen is speaking): **'Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people. So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers.'**

In the early days of the Christian Church in Jerusalem some of the Jews accused Stephen of speaking blasphemous words against the holy city of Jerusalem and the holy temple of God. Stephen was brought before the Jewish high council and given an opportunity to defend himself. When Stephen had finished his address, the Jewish leaders were so angry with him that they threw him out of the city and stoned him to death.

Our text contains the words he spoke in an early portion of his address, in which he recounted the experiences of Jacob and Joseph. Five times in our text Stephen made reference to the land of Egypt. One of his main objectives seems to be to prove that God was with Jacob and Joseph, even when they were not living in Jerusalem or the holy land. The Lord God Almighty cannot be confined to one land or one city or one temple; He rules over all things everywhere. And He does so for the benefit of His people.

This morning let us use Stephen's words about Jacob and Joseph as an outline for reviewing **WHAT GOD SAYS** in His Word **ABOUT THE TROUBLES OF JACOB AND JOSEPH**. Stephen says here in our text concerning Joseph: **'God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles.'** We could say the same thing about Joseph's father Jacob, and in fact, we can say the same thing about every child of God today.

Let us review first the life of Jacob and notice that **GOD WAS WITH JACOB IN ALL THE TROUBLES OF HIS LIFE AND DELIVERED HIM OUT OF THEM ALL.** Stephen says simply: **‘Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs.’** Genesis gives us the details, which describe almost nothing but troubles and more troubles. Of course, Jacob brought these troubles on himself by deceiving his blind father Isaac and getting from him the blessing Isaac intended for Jacob’s twin brother Esau. As a result of this deception Jacob was forced to run away to his uncle Laban in a far-off land. It is a good possibility that he never saw his dear mother Rebekah again. For twenty years Jacob worked for his uncle Laban, who proved to be a greedy, selfish, unfair master in every way.

What happened is the irony that, just as Jacob had deceived his father, so Laban now deceived him. Jacob worked for seven years to earn the right to marry Laban’s beautiful daughter Rachel, but on the day of the wedding Laban gave him his older daughter Leah. Then Laban insisted that Jacob work seven more years in order to have Rachel as his wife also. Do we notice how God was teaching Jacob a lesson?

Of course, having these two sisters as wives was not a pleasant experience, for they became jealous rivals. In their efforts to outdo one another in producing children, they gave Jacob their two maids as additional wives in order to bring forth still more children. Jacob ended up with twelve sons and one daughter from four different mothers. Talk about trouble! Jacob had plenty of it.

In addition, Laban was a hard man to work for; we recognize this by the fact that he kept changing Jacob’s wages and making unreasonable demands on him. Finally Jacob and his large family left Laban and returned home. But another trouble awaited him there; his brother Esau came out with 400 men to meet him.

This potential conflict with Esau was not by any means the last trouble Jacob would face. His daughter Dinah was raped. His oldest son Reuben committed adultery with one of Jacob’s wives. His sons Simeon and Levi wiped out a city of Canaanites without legitimate cause. He lost his dear wife Rachel when she gave birth to Benjamin. His son Judah committed adultery with his own daughter-in-law. His ten older sons, as Stephen said, **‘becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt.’** These same ten sons then deceived their father into thinking that Joseph was dead. Genesis says that at this point in his life **‘Jacob to re his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days.... He refused to be comforted’** (Gen. 37:34, 35).

Still his troubles were not over. Twenty years later, as our text says, **‘a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance.’** During this famine Jacob sent his ten older sons to buy grain in Egypt. But this presented a problem also, for his sons were accused of being spies. His son Simeon was imprisoned in Egypt, and the brothers were told that they could not return for more food unless they brought the youngest son Benjamin with them. Jacob was in misery once again, and he cried out in his deep anguish: **‘Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin away. All these things are against me.’**

What held Jacob’s life together as he experienced all these troubles? The only thing that kept him going was the word and promises of God, which came to him in the dream he had at Bethel and at other times in his life. God’s Word was clear: **‘I am with you and will keep you wherever you go.’** Moreover, God said to Jacob: **‘Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; ... and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’** As unworthy as Jacob was, the promise of the coming Savior was given to him, along with God’s assurance of continuing protection and deliverance. When Esau came with those 400 men, it was God’s promise that sustained Jacob. He turned to God in prayer and held God to His Word. After God delivered him from Esau, the twin brothers were reconciled, and together they buried their old father Isaac.

The same deliverance and blessing happened in connection with the later troubles in Jacob’s life. He got to see his favorite son Joseph again. His life was preserved in the great seven-year famine. He and his whole family, **‘seventy-five people, went down to Egypt.’** There the Pharaoh of Egypt gave Jacob and his family a good home, and he began to see the fulfillment of God’s promise that his descendants would be as the dust of the earth. There is no

doubt about it. **GOD WAS WITH JACOB IN ALL THE TROUBLES OF HIS LIFE AND DELIVERED HIM OUT OF THEM ALL.**

The same thing proved to be true of Joseph, Jacob's son. When he was 17 years old, Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery. But Genesis says: **"The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man."** Even though he was only a slave, his master Potiphar put him in charge of his whole house. However, this arrangement did not last long, for Potiphar's wife did all that she could to seduce Joseph into committing adultery with her. When her advances were rejected, she turned against him, lied about him and caused him to be thrown into prison. Yet again Genesis says: **"The Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper."** It wasn't long before Joseph was in charge of the prison.

Finally the day came when, as Stephen says, **"God delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house."** About nine years later the Lord even permitted Joseph to have that joyous reunion with his now penitent brothers and his old father Jacob, who had not seen him for 22 years. **"Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people. So Jacob went down to Egypt."**

It is truly an amazing account, one that we should read and reread over and over again, so that we become familiar with the wonderful workings of our God. Joseph's dream in his early youth that the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to him had come to pass in the Lord's own good time. **"God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles."**

Certainly the stories of Jacob and Joseph are recounted in such detail in the book of Genesis for our learning and our comfort. We too have grievous troubles in our lives from time to time, and we too are prone to say with Jacob of old: **"All these things are against me."** Nothing seems to turn out right. The Lord God seems to have disappeared into thin air, since we cannot see anything that He is doing in our behalf. Thus we are tempted to say with the psalmist of old: **"Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favorable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?"** (Ps. 77:7-9)

What is the proper answer to such questions? Has the Lord forgotten us in our troubles? The constant, unchanging answer of our God is there for us in the scene at the cross, where Jesus, Jacob's seed and God's only -begotten Son, suffered and died for our sins, crying out to His heavenly Father: **"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"** Jesus was forsaken because He was bearing the full guilt and penalty of our sins. God therefore forgives us all of our sins and says to us: **"I, who did not spare My own Son but delivered Him up for you all, I shall freely give you all things."** **"If God is for us, who can be against us?"** (Rom. 8:31-32) This God Himself says to us, as He said to Jacob and Joseph: **"I will never leave you nor forsake you."**

Therefore, whoever you are, whatever sins you have committed, confess those sins, cling to the forgiveness God offers you in Jesus Christ and say with all confidence: **GOD IS WITH ME IN ALL THE TROUBLES OF MY LIFE AND WILL DELIVER ME OUT OF THEM ALL.** Stephen was killed by stones because of his faith in Christ, and yet God was with him too and delivered him in the best way of all. One of the last things he saw on earth was Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ready to take him home. This is the final deliverance for which we too expectantly wait according to our God's faithful promise and according to our Savior's victorious redemption. Amen!

Genesis 43 and 49

First Reading: Genesis 43:1-14 Second Reading: Genesis 49:1-2, 8-12

Texts: Hebrews 7:14 and Revelation 5:1-7

For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.

And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

It is clear that the most important thing in the lives of Abraham, his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob was the promise God made to them concerning the Savior of the world. When God identified Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the ancestors of the Messiah, He gave them the same promise in almost identical words: **"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."**

Jacob had twelve sons from four different mothers. Which one of these sons was going to receive the promise of the Savior in that special way of being identified as the next link in the Messianic line of descent? Would it be Reuben, his oldest? In those days it was common for the oldest son to receive a double portion of the inheritance. But Reuben was not God's choice. Would it be Levi, the third son, from whom would later descend the famous brothers Moses and Aaron and all the priests of Israel? No, Levi was not God's choice to carry on the promise of the Savior, even though he was God's choice for the priesthood and all the duties connected with God's worship in the tabernacle and the temple. Would it be Joseph, Jacob's favorite son, the oldest son from his dear wife Rachel? Actually, Joseph did receive a double portion of the inheritance, since his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh were counted as Jacob's own sons. But Joseph was not God's choice to be the one through whom the Savior of the world would be born. Nor was God's choice Benjamin, Joseph's younger brother, the youngest of all of Jacob's sons.

Who then was God's choice? God's choice was Judah, Jacob's fourth son, born from his wife Leah. This morning we want to consider **WHAT GOD SAYS** in His Word **ABOUT JUDAH**, the son of Jacob who was not anywhere near as well-known as Joseph.

When we consider what the Bible tells us about Judah, it is clear that God's choice of Judah was a choice He made because of His grace; it was not a choice Judah had earned by his good character or his exemplary life. When Judah's brothers wanted to kill Joseph in their bitter envy, it was Judah who suggested selling him into slavery. Though Judah in a way had saved Joseph from an early death, it was hardly a noble act on his part to make money from Joseph's misery and then to deceive father Jacob into thinking that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal.

Judah also showed weakness of character when he married a Canaanite woman, who then gave birth to two sons who were later killed by the Lord God Himself because of their wickedness. After this Canaanite wife of his had died, Judah became entangled in more shame and vice when he committed adultery with his own daughter-in-law Tamar, who had disguised herself as a prostitute. Not knowing what had happened, he was ready to have Tamar burned to death as an adulteress when it became evident that she was pregnant. After he discovered the truth, however, he admitted that she was more righteous than he. He allowed her to live, and she gave birth to twin boys, Perez and Zerah.

Based on the Bible's own description of Judah as a sinful man, he certainly did not deserve to be God's choice for carrying on the line of the promised Savior. In fact, none of the persons in our Savior's ancestry would ever deserve to be honored in this way, for all of them were sinners. Abraham was a liar on several occasions; Isaac did not follow the Lord's will in his favoritism towards Esau; and Jacob also was guilty of such sins as deception and lack of trust in the Lord's promises. God's choice of these men as the ancestors of Jesus was always a choice based on His grace, for that is God's way. So also today we are Christians, not because we were or are better than other people. We are Christians, because God in His grace has chosen us from eternity to be His – a fact which the Bible reveals to us in 2 Timothy 1:9: **"God has saved us and**

called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.”

GOD IN GRACE CHOSE JUDAH TO BE THE ANCESTOR OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR. In spite of Judah's many weaknesses and failings, when it came time for Jacob to pass on the blessing of the Savior to one of his sons, it was Judah who received this blessing. It was to Judah that Jacob said: **“Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise... Judah is a lion's whelp... He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”**

From this time on all the Israelites knew that Judah was the one tribe among the twelve that was destined for leadership. As the lion is the king of beasts, so Judah was to be the Lion in Israel. The kings of Israel were to come from Judah and from no other tribe until finally the ultimate King of Israel would arrive on the scene, the great Shiloh, the Giver of rest to His people, and to Him all the nations would be obedient.

This prophecy began to be fulfilled when David, the son of Jesse from the tribe of Judah, was anointed by the Lord God to be king of Israel. The Lord promised David that his dynasty would last forever, that there would always be a son of David on the throne as ruler of the kingdom, even forever and ever. For hundreds of years the royal scepter remained in the family of David, until finally they became so wicked that God sent the Babylonians to take away their power. Yet the royal family of David from the tribe of Judah did not die out altogether. Though they had no earthly power for many years, God had not forgotten His promises. At the right time according to God's plan Mary, a descendant of the tribe of Judah, gave birth to a son, that is, Jesus, who would be the Lion of the tribe of Judah. So it is written: **“It is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.”** When Jesus was born, God's promise to Judah was fulfilled. For Jesus was the Lion of Judah, the Branch from Jesse's family, the Son of David, the Shiloh or Rest-Giver, who would one day see all nations bowing down before Him.

We turn now to the great vision depicted in the fifth chapter of Revelation. The apostle John saw this vision when he was an old man, living in exile on the island of Patmos. He saw God sitting on the throne of heaven. In His right hand was a scroll with writing on both sides. But the scroll was sealed with seven seals, which allowed no one to read the writing. In his vision John was crying because there was no one present who could remove the seven seals and read what was written.

Then one of the elders said to John: **“Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.”** Who is this Lion of Judah? John looked, and there, **“in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”**

This vision of John, like many of our dreams, I suppose, would be hard to put down on paper or portray visually on canvas in a painting. For we have one who is called **“the Lion of the tribe of Judah”** described at the same time as **“a Lamb”** who **“had been slain.”** To call someone a lion indicates that he is strong - the king of the beasts. But then to describe the same person as a slain lamb seems to conflict with the image of strength. Yet incredible as it may seem, THE LION OF JUDAH IS NONE OTHER THAN THE LAMB SLAIN FOR THE SINS OF ALL PEOPLE.

Judah heard the words of his father Jacob, which said that the great Shiloh would come from Judah's family. Shiloh refers to a king who has conquered all his enemies and thus has provided peace and rest for all his people. The only way that Jesus could be such a King or Rest-Giver was in the act of becoming a slaughtered Lamb. The only way there was to defeat the enemies of sin, death and the devil was the way God chose; He would have His perfect Son Jesus from the tribe of Judah become the Lamb of God bearing the sin of the world and then punish Him for all that sin. It is written that Jesus through His death won the victory over sin and death and the devil. The Lamb by His death and by His resurrection became the victorious Lion, with all authority over heaven and earth, completely able to provide His people with perfect peace and rest in the accomplished fact that their sins are forgiven.

There is an incident in the life of Judah that well portrays the role of Jesus in saving His people. It was the time when Judah's younger brother Benjamin was caught with Joseph's precious silver cup in his sack. Consequently, he was told that he must be punished. Judah stepped forward and offered to take the punishment for his brother, so that his brother might go home free to his father Jacob. There is hardly anything more moving in all of Scripture than Judah's offer to take Benjamin's punishment. Jesus, the Lion from Judah's tribe, not only made such an offer, but actually carried it out. He suffered and died in the stead of all His brothers and sisters, so that we might go home free and live forever with our heavenly Father. 'Lo, Judah's Lion wins the strife And reigns o'er death to give us life. Hallelujah! Oh, let us sing His praises!' (TLH 211:1) Amen!

Genesis 47 and 48

First Reading: Genesis 47:1-12 Second Reading: Genesis 48:1, 8-16

Texts: Hebrews 11:21; Matthew 22: 29-32; Hebrews 11:13-16; Acts 7:15-16

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.

Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem.

There is no doubt that Jacob had a hard life after he left home to escape from his twin brother Esau, who threatened to kill him. For twenty years he cared for the livestock of his uncle Laban, and that was not easy either, for Laban was unreasonable in his dealings with Jacob. When they parted after twenty years, Jacob said to his uncle: **"These twenty years I have been with you... In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times... Unless God had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands."**

At that time in his life Jacob's problems were only beginning. In his later years he experienced much more grief through the death of his wife Rachel, through the wickedness of his sons, through a grievous famine in the land, and especially through the loss of his favorite son Joseph, who had been sold by his jealous brothers into slavery in Egypt.

Finally towards the end of his life Jacob experienced better times. His sons repented of their previous wicked deeds; he was reunited with his son Joseph, who was now a prominent official in Egypt; and he had the satisfaction of knowing his whole family was with him in Egypt, there by God's own approval. For God Himself appeared to Jacob as he was ready to move to Egypt and told him: **"Do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt."**

Jacob came to Egypt as an old man, where Joseph introduced him to the mighty Pharaoh. The Pharaoh took one look at Jacob and asked him to reveal his age. Jacob answered: **"The days**

of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life.” For us 130 years of life seems like many more years than the oldest people are known to live in modern times. For Jacob it was few, because his great-grandfather had lived to be over 200 and his father had lived to be 180. At the age of 130 Jacob felt that he was an old man, who had lived through evil days.

However, let's take note that he called his life a pilgrimage. Jacob knew that the evil days on this earth were not all there was in store for him. **IN HIS PILGRIMAGE ON THIS EARTH JACOB LOOKED FORWARD TO THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S PROMISES.** We cannot summarize Jacob's life by simply saying that he lived and he died. We must rather say, as the Bible says, that he lived by faith and he died in faith. God tells us in His Word **ABOUT JACOB'S FAITH IN LIFE AND IN DEATH.**

The letter to the Hebrews says: **‘By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.’** According to Genesis the act of worshipping actually took place first. Jacob asked his son Joseph to make sure that his body would not be buried in Egypt, but rather that he would be buried with his fathers in the promised land of Canaan. When Joseph swore to Jacob that he would bury his father in Canaan, Jacob worshipped the Lord. To Jacob this was very important, for it showed his faith in God's promise to him that the land of Canaan was the promised land and the place where God's people would settle and thrive and grow. In fact, Canaan is where God would keep His greatest promise by sending the promised Savior of the world to be born there, live there, die there and rise victoriously from the grave in that land.

Shortly after Joseph assured Jacob that his body would be buried in Canaan, Joseph brought to his father his own two sons: Manasseh the older and Ephraim the younger. He wanted Jacob to bless his two sons. So he placed the older son at Jacob's right hand and the younger son at Jacob's left hand. But Jacob did something very unusual. He crossed his hands, giving his right-hand blessing to the younger son and his left-hand blessing to the older son. Joseph objected, but Jacob insisted, and our text says that he did it **‘by faith.’** That is, he believed what God had revealed to him about the great future of Ephraim, which was more wonderful than the blessed future promised to Manasseh. Jacob believed God's Word revealed to him and blessed Joseph's sons ‘by faith.’

Let us realize, however, that Jacob's faith and the faith of his sons went beyond the expectation of certain earthly blessings concerning the land. Of course, the land was important because God had promised it to them. Stephen said in his address contained in Acts 7 that it was not only Jacob, but his sons as well, who had their dead bodies transported to the land of Canaan to be buried there rather than in Egypt. **‘Jacob died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought.’**

It is clear that Jacob looked forward to even more than the future settlement and growth of his family in Canaan. The letter to the Hebrews says that Jacob and the other forefathers **‘tied in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.’**

What kind of homeland did they have in mind? The land of Haran, where Uncle Laban lived? No! The land of Canaan, where Abraham and Isaac had been pilgrims? That was certainly the land promised to their descendants, but not their own ultimate homeland. The land of Canaan was really only a picture and prophecy of a much better homeland – heaven itself, a place where the Lord God will be our eternal God and we will be His everlasting people, living in harmony and peace and bliss with God and with each other forever. So says our text: **‘They desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.’**

When Jacob appeared as an old man before the Pharaoh and talked about his pilgrimage on earth, he was indeed expressing his faith in a heavenly homeland that God had promised to him and his people. Few and evil were his days on earth – all the more reason to look ahead to the city of God, to **‘the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.’**

Our faith today is directed towards the same goal, is it not? All the earthly promises to Jacob have already been fulfilled. God gave those people a great nation in the land of Canaan.

We think of Moses and Joshua, and the prominent kings David and Solomon. It was a great nation with a great impact on the world, for God eventually sent the Savior of this world through that nation. From the Jewish race came our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us and rose again to win forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Because of Jesus and what He did in our place, we too can have the same outlook on our future as Jacob had on his. Few and evil may be our days on this earth, since this world is a vale of tears, as we experience it day by day. But we, like Jacob, are desiring and looking forward to a better country, a heavenly country. We are looking for and expecting the city of God that He has prepared for all of His people.

Will our hopes and dreams come true? Think of Jacob, who lived and died in this faith. Shall his faith be put to shame, or shall it come to pass as he believed? We know the answer. **THE LORD GOD HIMSELF TESTIFIED THAT JACOB AS A BELIEVER SHALL RISE FROM THE DEAD TO LIVE WITH GOD FOREVER.**

Hundreds of years after Jacob died and his body was buried in Canaan, the Lord God appeared to Moses at the burning bush and said to him: **‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’** God was not ashamed to be called the God of Jacob. Why? Because God had prepared a city for Jacob. God firmly intended to raise Jacob from the dead on the Last Day and have him live in the heavenly land that Jacob saw and trusted by faith. The living God is not and cannot be the God of dead people. The living God is the God of the living. If God is the God of Jacob, then Jacob must live, and he must live forever.

The Sadducees at the time of Christ did not believe in any resurrection of the dead. They tried to ridicule the very idea of a resurrection. But in our text from Matthew Jesus confronted them with these forceful words: **‘You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.’**

Jesus’ own resurrection from the dead is the guarantee. He is the first fruits, as the Bible says. He rose, never to die again. He rose to keep His promise that **‘because I live, you will live also.’** It’s only a matter of time before all those who believe in Him, Jacob included, shall rise at His second coming to live with Him forever. Amen!

(to be concluded)

EXEGESIS: ISAIAH 61:1-6

Paul Naumann

Translation

- v. 1 *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me,
because the LORD has anointed Me to proclaim Good News to the oppressed,
He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted,
to announce release to the captives, and the opening of eyes to the prisoners.*
- v. 2 *To proclaim the LORD's year of favor, and our God' s day of vengeance,
to comfort those who mourn,*
- v. 3 *To bring about a change for Zion' s mourners,
giving them a crown instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit.
And they shall be called the strong oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to glorify Him.*
- v. 4 *Then they shall rebuild the ruins of antiquity,
they shall raise up the ancient wastes,
they shall restore the waste cities,*

- the desolations of many generations.*
- v. 5 *Then strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,
and the sons of foreigners shall be your plowmen and vineyard workers.*
- v. 6 *Then you will be called ' the priests of the LORD,'
you will be referred to as ' the ministers of our God.'
You will eat the wealth of the Gentiles,
and you will take their glory for yourselves.*

Overview

Isaiah has aptly been called "the Gospel of the Old Testament." August Pieper states that there is more Gospel in this one book than in the rest of the Old Testament combined. Exemplary of this joyous proclamation is the section we have before us, where we hear Messiah, the great Servant of the Lord, addressing the reader directly with a description of His redemptive work.

Second Isaiah, covering chapters 40-66, brings to the fore the future glorification of the Church. Pieper divides the work into three major divisions: chapters 40-48, the deliverance of God' s people out of Babylon; chapters 49-57, the redemption from the guilt of sin; and chapters 58-66, the spiritual, eternal deliverance. It is into this third division that the present text falls, demonstrating as it does the spiritual freedom bestowed upon sinners by the anointed Servant of the Lord.

As so often in the Old Testament (and the New Testament, for that matter), we are presented here with a two-fold prophecy. That is, the words of the prophet find fulfillment both in a near-term and a long-term sense. In the present passage many of the prophet' s words apply to the gracious return granted by God to the exiles in Babylon. At the same time, and more significantly for us, the prophecy also is fulfilled in the wonderful deliverance from sin bestowed upon us by Christ. Sin constitutes a self-imposed exile from God, but "...God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

Verse One

1 רוּחַ אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה עָלַי יַעַן מָשַׁח יְהוָה אֹתִי
 לְבַשָּׂר עֲנֻיִם שְׁלַחְנִי לְחַבֵּשׁ לְנִשְׁבְּרֵי-לֵב
 לְקַרְא לְשִׁבּוּיֵם דְּרֹר וּלְאַסְוִירִים^a פְּקַח-קוֹחַ^a :

- v. 1 *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me,
because the LORD has anointed Me to proclaim Good News to the oppressed,
He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted,
to announce release to the captives, and the opening of eyes to the prisoners.*

prep, short for <i>יַעַן אֲשֶׁר</i> always in a causal sense; <i>because</i> ; cf. LXX & Luke 4, <i>ὅτι εἶπεκεν</i> [יען]	
Piel inf constr + pref <i>לְ</i> ; <i>publish, bear (good) tidings, preach, show forth</i>	לְבַשָּׂר [פְּשָׁר]
adj (<i>עֲנָה</i> = oppress), here as a subst, m pl; <i>oppressed, humble, poor, afflicted</i>	עֲנֻיִם [עֲנִי]
Qal perf 3 m + 1 c sing pron suff; <i>send</i>	שְׁלַחְנִי [שְׁלַח]
Qal inf const + pref <i>לְ</i> ; <i>bind; bind up, dress (wounds), heal</i>	לְחַבֵּשׁ [חַבֵּשׁ]
Niph part m pl const + pref <i>לְ</i> ; <i>be broken</i>	לְנִשְׁבְּרֵי [שְׁבַר]
Qal pass part m pl + pref <i>לְ</i> ; <i>carry off; lead captive</i> ; pass part: <i>captive, prisoner</i>	לְשִׁבּוּיֵם [שְׁבַה]
n m; <i>freedom, release</i> ; with <i>קָרָא</i> = <i>proclaim freedom</i>	דְּרֹר [רֹר]
Qal pass part m pl + pref <i>לְ</i> + pref <i>וְ</i> ; <i>bind, fetter</i> ; pass part: <i>prisoner</i>	וּלְאַסְוִירִים [אַסַר]
obscure, possibly related to <i>פָּקַח</i> = <i>open</i> , cf. notes below	פְּקַח-קוֹחַ

Grammar:

This is a long verse, with some obscure language and difficult elements. Particularly troublesome is the strange construction at the end of the final colon, פקח־קֹחַ. The root פקח means "to open"; hence some have construed קֹחַ as "prison" and translated "...to open the prison (for the prisoners)." But it is difficult to demonstrate the meaning "prison" for קֹחַ, which occurs nowhere else in the OT. The critical apparatus of BHS offers two possible solutions: "Read with Q^a and several other manuscripts פקח־קֹחַ; OR (emend to) פִּקְחֵ."

The first solution proposes that we see not two words, but one verb of the reduplicated form קֹחַ־קֹחַ. This would presumably have some intensive meaning, such as "throwing open." In support of this is Q^a, the Isaiah Scroll from Cave 1, the most important of the Dead Sea scrolls. It is the oldest manuscript of Isaiah in existence, by about a thousand years. However, it is a somewhat popularizing text and not necessarily to be preferred in every case over the Masoretic Text (MT).

The second suggestion is to emend to פִּקְחֵ, presumably an infinitive construct, though in that case one would expect פִּקְחֵלְ, as in 42:7 where (interestingly) the word is used not of prison doors but of eyes.

Isaiah's usage in chapter 42 points us to the real solution. The Septuagint (LXX) renders καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν: *and recovery of sight to the blind*. Significantly, the LXX version is quoted verbatim by Christ in Luke 4:18. One need not cast about for meanings when the exegesis has already been given by the Son of God. Regardless of the spelling of the word, its meaning must pertain to *the opening of blind eyes*. Presumably the reference here is to bringing out into the sunlight those forlorn prisoners, whose eyes had been blinded - figuratively or literally - by long confinement in a dark dungeon. There is ample support to be found for this happening in the historical description of prisons in the ancient Near East. Many were subterranean, where little or no light could penetrate, and thus one might conceivably go blind after years of confinement underground. The imprisonment of Joseph comes to mind, as well as that of Daniel.

Comments:

The Son of God is the speaker. This warrants mention only because of the plethora of higher critics who have identified *the prophet* as speaking here in the capacity of God's herald. Of course, this cannot be. Nowhere else does the prophet set himself forward so prominently, and he certainly never appropriates to himself the exalted office described in these verses. All argument is closed with the exegesis of our Lord Himself, who after reading these verses in the synagogue of Nazareth closed the book and stated, "*This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears*" (Luke 4:21). It is Christ Himself, the exalted Servant of the Lord, whose words ring forth to us in these verses.

The section begins majestically. Though it is never cited as a *sedes* for the doctrine of the Trinity, Lenski notes with reverence that all three Persons are represented in this single verse. Messiah, the Anointed, is sent forth by the God the Father to proclaim the good tidings of salvation, and to that end the Holy Spirit is poured out upon Him. The preposition *עָלָיו* is emphatic and calls to mind the baptism of our Lord, when the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and *rested upon Him* (καὶ ἐρχόμενον ἐπ' αὐτόν - Matt. 3:16).

The seldom-used personal pronoun *אֲנִי* is striking and emphatic. *The Lord has anointed ME*. This gives the lie to the modern notion that we all worship the same God but with different names, that there are many different roads to the same God, etc. One writer put it well: "That is akin to saying, 'All roads lead to the same place. Just get on the highway and drive, drive, drive - and you'll eventually end up in Tucson.'" Jesus said *ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα ἢ διὰ μέσου μου*. "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The promises of this verse are comforting in the extreme. The prophecies of freedom for captives, release for prisoners, and the like certainly find an appropriate near-term fulfillment in

the return of God' s people from exile in Babylonia. More significant, however, is the longterm prophecy of a *spiritual* deliverance, which would extend to sinners of every nation, in every era.

The office and duties of the Messiah would be to *proclaim good news to the oppressed*. This is an overt reference to the preaching of the gospel. The verb כָּשַׁר in the Piel corresponds precisely to the Greek εὐαγγελίζομαι and is the word the LXX uses here. Part of Jesus' mission was to preach the gospel, to bind up the broken-hearted, to free men from the dark dungeon of sin. The word דָּרַר, *release*, is especially precious in this regard. Lest the trembling sinner doubt what is meant, Christ in His use of the LXX translation equates the Hebrew word דָּרַר with the Greek word ἄφεσις and thus expresses the truth that forgiveness of sins is the very release of the sinner from the guilt and punishment of his sins.

Who are to be the recipients of this grace? Moralists of every age have made hay with the word עָנָוִים, rendering it "*humble, godly*" and trying to demonstrate that the people to whom the Lord grants favor are those who first show themselves pious and devout and therefore become worthy of His favor. How depressing it would be if that were true! But the root of the verb עָנָו and of the cognate adjective form always carries with it the sense of being "*poor, miserable, afflicted*." It is specifically to those who have no merit of their own that the Savior comes – to those who are poor in spirit, afflicted by their sin and broken-hearted with contrition. Jesus said, "*I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance*" (Matt. 9:13).

Verse Two

לְקַרְאֵ שְׁנַת־רְצוֹן לַיהוָה וַיּוֹם נַקָּם לְאַלְהֵינוּ׃²
 לְנַחֵם כָּל־אַבְלִים׃

V. 2 To proclaim the LORD's year of favor, and our God' s day of vengeance, to comfort those who mourn,

noun m; *favor, pleasure, desire, will*

רְצוֹן [רצה√] = be pleased]

noun m; *revenge, vengeance*

[נָקָם]

Piel inf constr + pref ל־; *to breath, sigh; Piel: to console, comfort*

לְנַחֵם [נָחַם]

Qal part m plural (pausal); *mourn, lament, grieve*

אַבְלִים [אַבַּל]

Grammar:

The prefixed ל־ before יְהוָה and אֱלֹהֵינוּ is a seldom seen *possessive* use of the preposition; cf., e.g., 1 Samuel 14:16: וַיִּרְאוּ הַצִּפִּים לְשָׂאוֹל, "*The watchmen of Saul saw...*"

The spelling of the last word in the verse (אַבְלִים) seems strange for a Qal masculine plural participle, since the paradigm leads us to expect a form similar to קֹטְלִים. The spelling makes sense, however, if two things are kept in mind: אַבַּל is a פ־א verb, which takes *hatef-patah* under the first radical rather than *holem*; also, the word is in pause, coming as it does before the *silluq*, which explains why the vowel under the *beth* is lengthened to *se*. We can be confident that the pointing of אַבְלִים is correct.

The editors of BHS suggest that the *silluq* should come after לְאַלְהֵינוּ, ending the verse at that point and appending the final colon to the start of the next verse. It seems to be a neat idea, but (as so often) no textual or versional support is offered, and the suggestion is safely rejected.

Comments:

The terms שְׁנַת־רְצוֹן לַיהוָה and יוֹם נַקָּם לְאַלְהֵינוּ are parallel members denoting the same event – the arrival of the New Testament era of salvation in the person of Jesus Christ. A parallel is found in the OT Year of Jubilee, for which the phrase קָרָא דְרֹר (v. 1) is a technical term. In the Year of Jubilee all property would return to the original owner, and all slaves would be released from their servitude. In a broader sense, the arrival of the New Testament Church would

be an era in which God would bestow His undeserved favor on oppressed sinners, and the vengeance of God would fall upon those who oppress them.

Is the concept of revenge out of place here? Not at all! The dire warning of Christ comes to mind: “Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers” (Luke 11:46). Those who believe that salvation is by works and teach others so may expect the Lord's severest judgment. Indeed, “it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6).

However, as Jesus also said, *blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*. For all those who are burdened with sin and mourn their abject inability to atone for themselves, God pours out the precious balm of the Gospel's comfort. “*Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you*” (Matt. 9:2).

Verse Three

לְשׁוֹם³ | לְאַבְלֵי צִיּוֹן^a | לְתַתּוֹ לָהֶם פֶּאֶר תַּחַת אֶפֶר^b
 שִׁמְן שֶׁשׁוֹן תַּחַת אֶבֶל | מִעֲטֹה תְהִלָּה תַחַת רוּחַ כְּהָה
 וְקָרָא לָהֶם אֵילַי הַצֶּדֶק | מִטֵּעַ יְדוּהָה לְהַתְפָּאֵר:

V. 3 To bring about a change for Zion's mourners,
 giving them a crown instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning,
 the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit.
 And they shall be called the strong oaks of righteousness,
 the planting of the LORD, to glorify Him.

Qal inf const + pref. -לְ; put, place, lay; make, do; render, establish, appoint;
 bring about a change, substitute

adj (as subst), m pl constr + pref. -לְ; mourning

noun m s; ornament; headdress, crown

noun m s; ashes, dust

noun m s; joy

noun m s; garment

adj, f sing; faint, dim, pale

Pual perf 3 s m + waw cons.; call, name

noun m pl const; ram; door-post, jamb; terebinth, strong oak

noun m s const; planting, plantation

Hith inf const + pref. -לְ; glorify, beautify, adorn

לְשׁוֹם [שׁוֹם]

לְאַבְלֵי [אַבֵּל]

פֶּאֶר=shine, glitter [פָּאֵר]

אֶפֶר [אָפֶר]

שִׁשׁוֹן [שִׁשׁוֹן]

עֲטוּהָ = clothe [מִעֲטוּהָ]

כְּהָה [כְּהָה]=be faint, dim, feeble [כְּהָה]

וְקָרָא [קָרָא]

אֵילַי [אֵיל]

מִטֵּעַ = to plant [מִטֵּעַ]

לְהַתְפָּאֵר [פָּאֵר]

Grammar:

Variants: the editors of BHS speculate that לְאַבְלֵי צִיּוֹן is "probably an addition." Since they offer no evidence, the speculation is rejected. They also indicate in the apparatus that the word לְתַתּוֹ is not present in LXX or the Syriac and should be deleted. The evidence seems meager and is insufficient to warrant consideration.

לְשׁוֹם is somewhat troublesome, lacking a direct object: "To put (what?) for Zion's mourners..." Common meanings for שׁוֹם are put, place, lay, etc. However, in certain contexts שׁוֹם seems to signify a change in condition, or a substitution of one condition for another. In Exodus 14:21, for example, God literally put the sea for dry land (וַיִּשָּׂם אֶת-הַיָּם לְחֶרֶב). Cf. Ezekiel 35:4 and Isaiah 41:15. Here in the absence of a direct object, I rendered somewhat freely: To bring about a change for Zion's mourners. That is the sense.

The major feature of Hebrew poetry is parallelism of members within a verse. We do occasionally see other literary devices as well, such as alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc. There is

an interesting transposition of letters in the words פָּאֵר תַּחַת אֶפֶר. *He shall give them a crown instead of ashes.* The first and second radicals are switched in the two words. I tried to think of an analogous example in English, but couldn't. Only a slight change in spelling, but what a striking difference in meanings! One is struck again and again by the elegant and graceful language in which the Holy Spirit couches the glad tidings of salvation.

It is interesting to check the Masoretic notes in the margin of the text. The circles above the words לְאֶבְלֵי and מַעֲטָה (and two others in v. 3) direct us to a ל in the margin, which indicate that the words are unique with this spelling in the Bible. A similar note indicates that וְקִרְא occurs seven times. The word מַטְע, *planting*, occurs "twice, once with patah and once with qames." The other occurrence is Ezekiel 34:29. Incidentally, if you take the trouble to check these references, you will invariably find the Masoretes to be correct. This is one reason I am personally inclined to stick faithfully to the Masoretic Text and shy away from the speculative emendations of modern scholars. No one in our day knows the OT text like the Masoretes did, computer-age innovations notwithstanding.

Comments:

In this verse the Lord gets down to specifics, telling us what the "Good News" of verse one really is and exactly wherein the "comfort" of verse two consists. Again, there is a near-term and a long-term aspect to the prophecy. For the lonely exiles in Babylonia, mourning the fate of their beloved Jerusalem, there would be a blessed exchange of mourning for gladness in the return of the remnant. For the remnant of believers in the New Testament era, Christ would bring them beauty, joy and praise in the establishment of the new covenant of grace.

The vivid imagery fits the greatness of the gift of salvation and beautifully describes the gospel-worked transformation of sinners into saints. From the desolate ashes of lives ruined by sin God will raise up kings and priests, those who justly wear the crown of eternal life won for them by Christ. Those in deep mourning over their sin, upon them will the Savior pour out the oil of joy – the healing balm of sin forgiven, of guilt covered, of pardon desperately sought and graciously granted. Similar language occurs in Psalm 45:7-8: *God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions. All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad.*

Those redeemed by Messiah will be called *the strong oaks of righteousness*. Lest we lose sight of the source whence this righteousness comes, the passage specifies it as "*the planting of the LORD.*" This vivid imagery is employed elsewhere in the OT, most notably in the First Psalm: וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ שְׂתוּל עַל-פְּלִיגֵי מַיִם, *He shall be like a tree, planted near streams of water.*

Furthermore, we the recipients of God's grace need to bear in mind the ultimate purpose of this outpouring of blessings. It all happens לְהַתְּפָאֵר: *so that He might be glorified.* Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that God would bestow upon them *all the good pleasure of His goodness.* To what end? *That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you* (2 Thess. 1:11-12). The purpose of the Christian's life is to reflect glory upon the One who has redeemed him.

Verse Four

וּבְנוֹת הַחֲרָבוֹת עוֹלָם שְׂמֵמֹת רְאִשָּׁנִים יִקְוֹמְמוּ
וְחִדְּשׁוּ עֲרֵי הַחֲרָב שְׂמֵמֹת הַיָּדָר וְדוֹרָא:

V. 4 *Then they shall rebuild the ruins of antiquity,
they shall raise up the ancient wastes,
they shall restore the waste cities,
the desolations of many generations.*

noun f pl constr; *desert, waste; desolation, ruin*

noun m sing; *distant past, antiquity; distant future, eternity; world; age*

חֲרָבוֹת (חֲרָבָה)

[עוֹלָם]

noun f pl const; *astonishment, horror; desolation, waste*
Piel perf 3 m pl + *waw*-cons; *renew, restore*

שָׁמֹת [שָׁמָה]
וְחִדְּשׁוּ [חִדְּשׁוּ]

Grammar:

Variant: The apparatus suggests adding another יְקוֹמְמוּ to the end of the verse in order to bring the fourth colon into exact parallelism with the second. In support of this they again cite the Isaiah Scroll from Cave 1 in Qumran. I am skeptical for the same reasons listed above; also, the addition isn't necessary for the understanding of the verse.

דֹּר וְדֹר literally means *a generation and a generation*. The expression indicates a long period of time, spanning many generations. Compare similar constructions in Deuteronomy 32:7 and Exodus 3:15.

Comments:

Many see God the Father taking up the narrative at this point (cf. NKJV's use of a closing quotation mark at the end of v. 3 to indicate the translators' opinion that Messiah Himself has finished speaking). It depends on whether Yahweh's speech begins here or in verse eight, but for the meaning of the text it scarcely matters. The benefits God will bestow upon the returning remnant of His people are beautifully elucidated either way.

A more difficult question arises as to whether at this point the prophecy becomes solely a description of the physical return of Israel from exile and no longer has specific application to the New Testament era. Confessional scholars, like Lenski, continue to see a double prophecy. I agree with Luther that "one cannot find Christ too often in the Old Testament" and am inclined to see, if not direct fulfillment, at least a valid application to the Church of the New Testament. Certainly, a similar prophecy finds such an application in the speech of James to the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15: "Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up'" (Acts 15:13-16).

Verse Five

וְעַמְדוֹ זָרִים וְרָעוּ צֹאנֵכֶם וּבְנֵי גֹזֵר אֶפְרַיִם וְכֹרְמֵיכֶם⁵

V. 5 Then strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,
and the sons of foreigners shall be your plowmen
and vineyard workers.

noun m s; *stranger, alien, foreigner*

[גֹּזֵר]

noun m pl + 2 m pl pron suff; *plowmen*

אֶפְרַיִם [אֶפְרַיִם] = to dig אֶכְרֵי

noun m pl + 2 m pl pron suff + pref וְ; *vinedresser*

וְכֹרְמֵיכֶם [כֹּרְמֵיכֶם]

Comments:

The near-term fulfillment of this verse is clear: a remnant of Israel would return and take possession once again of the hills and fields of the Promised Land. Some would even enjoy the luxury of being able to hire laborers from among their Gentile neighbors. While one hesitates to project the conditions of this prophecy too far into the future, I was interested to note a news item which highlighted the large proportion of Palestinian workers employed in Jewish-owned businesses in modern-day Israel and the West Bank. There are so many of these that the economy is subject to upheaval whenever the Palestinians call a strike, or the Israelis close their borders. This sequence of events raises an interesting question: to what extent might the Old Testament prophecies of return find a fulfillment in the establishment of the modern state of Israel?

In any event, if we do see a two-fold prophecy in this verse, we are left to answer the question of how it applies to the New Testament Christian Church. Pieper offers a rather labored interpretation, seeing here a continued reference to the Jewish people, who as Christians in New Testament times would hold a supposedly exalted position in the Church. The physical work and

material wealth of the Gentiles would become a grand asset of the Christian Church, in which the Jewish Christians would be the leaders. I don' t think this interpretation holds water.

It seems more natural to me, especially in light of the following verse, to see this verse as addressed to **spiritual** Israel (Cf. Romans 2:28-29: *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.*) Spiritual Israel, in that case, is the Christian Church, and the reference to alien plowmen and vineyard workers is not a pejorative one, but a simple reference to those Gentile Christians who would find their place as workers in the kingdom of God. Indeed, we ourselves fall into this category, being among those to whom Christ refers in Matthew 21:41: *He will lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.*

Verse Six

וְאַתֶּם כְּהֵנָּה יִהְיוּ תִקְרְאוּ מִשְׁרְתֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ יֹאמְרוּ לָכֶם
 תִּיל גּוֹיִם תֹּאכְלוּ וּבְכֹבֹדָם תִּתְיַמְרוּ׃⁶

V. 6 Then you will be called ' the priests of th^eLORD,'
 you will be referred to as ' the ministers of onGod.'
 You will eat the wealth of the Gentiles,
 and you will take their glory for yourselves.

Niph impf 2 m pl: *call, name*

תִּקְרְאוּ [קרא]

Piel part m pl const; *to serve, minister* (often of divine service)

מִשְׁרְתֵי [שרת]

noun m s + 3 pl pron suff; *glory, honor*

וּבְכֹבֹדָם [כבוד]

Hith impf 2 m pl; *change oneself* (for someone); *take one' s place*

תִּתְיַמְרוּ [ימר]

Grammar:

The only problem word in the verse is the last one, תִּתְיַמְרוּ, stemming from יָמַר, lit. *you will take (their) place*. In contrast, most commentators and all English versions render something similar to: *in their glory you will boast*. In order to render this way, though, one has to emend to הִתְאַמַּר, with אָמַר as the stem. I dislike emendation and am even less pleased with the several unsupported suggestions in the apparatus of BHS. If the spelling is correct, then it comes from a rare stem, and the only clue we have to a possible meaning is the Hiph' il הִימַיְתַּר, *change*, in Jeremiah 2:11b: *But My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit* (וַעֲמִי הִמַּיְתַּר כְּבוֹדוֹ בְּלוֹא יוֹעִיל). In the case of Isaiah's use of the Hith' pael, I rendered freely in the last colon: *and you will take their glory for yourselves*.

Comments:

If this is a reference to the spiritual Israel, the New Testament Christians, then the first half of the verse at least is easy to interpret. Certainly we may find application to the universal priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9, Rev. 1:5-6).

I agree with Lenski that the "wealth" and "glory" of the Gentiles cannot refer to earthly wealth and physical glory. As in the rest of the passage, a spiritual truth is expressed here. The reference must be to the *spiritual* wealth of the Church, wealth which would, from the time of Pentecost onward, flow into the kingdom of God from every nation on earth. Such spiritual riches are amply reflected elsewhere in the NT. Consider references such as James 2:5 (*"rich in faith"*), Luke 12:21 (*"rich toward God"*), 1 Timothy 6:18 (*"rich in good works"*) and Revelation 3:18 (*"gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich"*).

May we Christians - and particularly we *pastors* - glory in our exalted position as priests of the Lord. Yes, let us take care to work faithfully, as God' s plowmen and vinedressers. But along the way let us also remember to rejoice, for no one has greater reason for so doing! Let us

revel in the crown, the oil of joy and the garment of praise, which the Lord has provided for each of us in Christ. In doing so, we will accomplish the purposes of God, for then "we shall be called the strong oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to glorify Him."

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THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, SPEAKING IN TONGUES AND EXTRA-BIBLICAL REVELATION

David Schierenbeck

The article below was written and presented in a format suited for discussion in the setting of a pastoral conference. It was not intended to treat the topics comprehensively nor be the final word on the matters addressed. Nevertheless, it is the hope of author and editor that the observations here presented and especially the Scriptures referred to will serve the reader in guiding him to carefully consider what the Bible says about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and extra-biblical revelation.

GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. **Scripture seems to distinguish between "the gift of the Holy Spirit"** (the Spirit Himself given to each believer, along with the faith and forgiveness He brings through the Gospel and also through Baptism – *Romans 5:14-1; 1 Corinthians 12:3 & 13; Acts 2:38-39; Titus 3:5-6*) **and "gifts of the Holy Spirit"** (special God-given abilities with which to serve the body of Christ – *Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4*).

2. **Scripture distinguishes between the "fruit of the Spirit"** (the outward responses of faith sought from and wrought in all believers – *Galatians 5:22-23*) and the **"gifts"** of the Spirit (distributed variously by the Spirit according to His will – *1 Corinthians 12:4-11*).

3. **Scripture identifies the purpose of these "gifts"** (to serve others and for the common good of the Church – *1 Peter 4:10; Ephesians 4:7-16*).

4. **Scripture identifies** what many of **these gifts** are (*Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4*). **Some helpful distinctions** between these gifts have been made:

- the **natural** (Spirit-given, sanctified abilities of believers) and
- the **miraculous** (gifts beyond the natural order and ability of man);
- the **temporary** (foundational, confirmatory, miraculous) and
- the **permanent** (intended for the church of all ages).

This does not exclude God' s use of any miraculous gifts at any time according to His gracious will.

5. **Context** will often determine whether these **gifts** should be understood in a **miraculous** or **general sense**. Consider the distinction made in these examples:

	<u>Miraculous</u>	<u>General</u>
Prophecy	Direct revelation from God	Proclaiming God' s Word
Healing	Miraculous occurrences	Through Medicine
Tongues	Miraculous unknown language	Language abilities

6. The **greatest gift**, both in terms of serving and benefiting others and its enduring nature, **is love** (*1 Corinthians 13*).

Have we, with our appropriate confessional concerns, properly **instructed and encouraged** our people properly in their **use of these gifts**?

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

1. The "**speaking in tongues**" of Scripture refers to the special **gift** of the Holy Spirit to be able to **speak in foreign languages previously unknown to the one possessing the gift** (*Acts 2, especially verses 8-11*).

2. The **primary purpose** of the **gift of tongues** was to enable people to **hear** "the **wonderful works of Gods**" in their own dialect (*Acts 2:11*). In emphasizing the working of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace (*Romans 10:11; John 17:20*), we see **no purpose or edification to the church** to be gained by a private tongue-speaking which cannot be understood (*1 Corinthians 14:6-12,19*). The validity of this or any other miraculous gift must be established before it can be accepted by the church (*1 Corinthians 14:27-28; Jeremiah 23:31-32; 1 Peter 4:11a; 2 Corinthians 13:1*).

3. *1 Corinthians 12-14* **rejects the misunderstanding and misuse of tongue-speaking** in the Christian church at Corinth. A careful examination of the beliefs and emphases of today' s Pentecostals and other "charismatics" has identified concerns similar to and even beyond the Apostle Paul's list of concerns. To briefly illustrate the contrast, we note the differences in the dominant confessional positions and emphases of the following two denominational groups:

<u>Confessional Lutherans</u>	<u>Charismatics</u>
Person and work of Jesus	Presence and power of Holy Spirit
Justification by faith alone	Subjective inner spiritual experience
Holy Scripture	Direct Revelation
Spirit through Word & Sacrament	Spirit without means
Words and promises of God	Personal feelings

"It appears to be historically true that every supplement to faith carries within its elf the almost irresistible tendency of becoming eventually a specific advancement beyond faith and thus to become inevitably the goal of a new spirituality of a purportedly higher Christian type. Faith itself then becomes but a step in the right direction. In a word, the supplement 'and' is pregnant with the irresistible tendency to become the central 'more'" (Frederick Bruner, *A Theology Of The Holy Spirit*, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 1970, p. 283).

4. In His ascension farewell address of *Mark 16:15-18* (the textual attestation is sound), **Jesus leaves His universal and timeless commission to His disciples**: "Go and preach the gospel to every creature" so that many may believe and be saved (vv. 15-16). Jesus also promises that

"those who believe on His name" will receive accompanying miraculous signs (v. 17). In carrying out His Great Commission, the preaching of the apostles was indeed confirmed by these miraculous signs. However, this **passage does not establish the universal and permanent continuation of these miraculous gifts** for believers of all ages.

5. **1 Corinthians 13:8** informs us that **"tongues shall "cease."** The context appears to point to Judgment Day (v. 12) when tongues along with prophecies and knowledge as well as faith and hope will give way to "sight." Since there are textual questions (tongues "ceasing" vs. knowledge and prophecy "passing away"; the precise meaning of tongues, knowledge and prophecy; and especially the *τέλειον* in v. 10 referring to the fullness and perfection of heaven or the maturity and completion of the Scripture canon), this passage should **not be used** as a **"sedes doctrinae"** for the **absolute cessation of apostolic gifts** in the church.

6. **Hebrews 2:3-4** clearly **relates the confirmation of the apostolic preaching to the "signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit" given to them:** "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?" This is **similar to Jesus' Messianic claims being confirmed by similar signs** (*John 20:30-31*). Once the apostolic era ended and the Scriptures were completed, the promise of and need for these confirmatory and miraculous gifts also ended. There is **no** Scriptural basis for concluding that the Holy Spirit will produce **another Pentecost** experience, including the gift of speaking in tongues. We have the Holy Scriptures, which alone have the power of God to convince human hearts (*John 17:17*). Because the all-powerful God can do anything, any of these signs could occur at any time, but we have no reason to expect them.

7. The sources of **church history have indicated** that **once the New Testament Scriptures were completed, these gifts no longer occurred** as they did in the **apostolic age** (i.e., for the same purpose and with the same frequency). The apostolic gifts were not a part of the Reformation process in the sixteenth century and were virtually non-existent until the Pentecostals claimed to have them in the early 20th century. This does not appear to be random historical coincidence. Rather, it appears that the miraculous "signs" promised in *Mark 16* and reported in *Hebrews 2*, which were given to confirm the apostles' unique ministries and the message of their inspired Word, had served their divine purpose and were no longer a necessary part of God' s plan for the building of His Church.

EXTRA—BIBLICAL REVELATION

1. **Our every spiritual need is met through God' s inspired and saving Word.** All true confessors of Christ agree that there is **no need for nor any promise of a new Scriptural revelation** from God (*Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18-20*)

2. Although in His wise providence our almighty and loving **God still controls and uses events** in our world and in our own lives **to guide** us and **bless** us as His children (*Genesis 50:20; Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 8:28; 1 Peter 1:7*) and although He can and still does **provide needed gifts** for His people and church and even, if necessary, **perform miracles** according to His gracious will, we **neither look for them nor rest our faith** upon them. Rather, our **faith and focus must always be on His "more sure Word of prophecy"** which alone is the light that shines in our dark world (*2 Peter 1:19-21*).

What the Bethany Seminary Faculty (ELS) said in this regard is to the point: "We believe that in the kingdom of this world and in regard to earthly things God works through the laws of nature which He Himself has established. We believe that He is actively ruling today and that He can work miracles today even as in Biblical days. But God has not left us to determine which those miracles are, since they are in the realm of God' s hidden majesty. Only God the revealer can declare authoritatively how a certain act is to be understood. In other words, we recognize the sovereignty of God to work miracles in the kingdom of this world, but only He can interpret them to us and that through His special revelation, i.e., the Word of God. We can deal only with the

' revealed God' and not with the ' hidden God' ” (from “A General Statement of the Bethany Seminary Faculty Defining a Charismatic” – dated December 15, 1977 and printed in the February 20, 1978 issue of *Christian News*).

Book Reviews

The four eschatological books reviewed in this issue are listed in the order of their publication. They are also given in the order in which the reviewer, David Lau, wishes to present them, as he intentionally gives special and lengthier treatment to the contents of the last book by Jeffrey A. Gibbs.

Stanley Grenz: *The Millennial Maze - Sorting Out Evangelical Options*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1992. Paperback, 239 pages.

The book by Stanley Grenz, professor at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, provides a good introduction to the various eschatological views held both in previous times and at present; these views are postmillennialism, historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, and amillennialism. In his preface the author relates his own personal journey and reveals his current personal preference. “I have left the dispensationalism bequeathed to me by my father and childhood church community.... My theological odyssey ... has led me out of the older dispensationalism, through historic premillennialism, into an amillennialism sympathetic to postmillennialism” (pp. 10-11).

Grenz’s definitions on pages 24-28 are as follows. Premillennialists “expect the return of the Lord prior to the thousand-year period mentioned in Revelation 20.” They “anticipate that Jesus will be physically present on the earth to exercise world dominion during his thousand-year reign.”

Dispensational premillennialists, following the teachings of John Darby and C. I. Scofield, make a clear distinction between the New Testament church and national Israel. “Thus, national Israel, not the New Testament church, is prominent in the dispensationalist understanding of the vision of the thousand years.” In their view Old Testament prophecies of the New Testament church await literal fulfillment by the nation of Israel. The establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948 was to them a clear sign of the coming millennial age. “The majority of dispensationalists hold to the pretribulational rapture.” Unfortunately, dispensational premillennialism is the general viewpoint of the fantastically popular *Left Behind* series of books and movies.

Postmillennialists, on the other hand, “anticipate that the physical return of Christ will occur *after* an earthly golden age” (the millennium), which “will be a period of time much like our own, but with a heightened experience of goodness, due to the pervasive influence of Christian principles throughout the world.”

Amillennialism literally means “no millennium.” Amillennialists generally believe that the millennium of Revelation 20 “could symbolize the church age in its entirety” or “the reign of departed saints in the heavenly realm during this age.” They “anticipate that the Second Coming of Christ will mark the beginning of eternity.”

Although there have been some notable exceptions, Lutherans by and large have been rightly called amillennialists, because they generally teach that the millennium of Revelation 20 is that period of time between Christ’s first coming and His second coming at the end of time.

After presenting all of these views at length, Grenz maintains that Christians can learn something from all of them. He says: “The church as a whole has displayed true wisdom in consistently refusing to endow any one millennial view with the status of orthodoxy” (p. 209). He does not believe fellowship should be broken on account of different teachings on the millennium.

Obviously, we disagree with him at this point, for it is our confession in paragraph #42 of the *Brief Statement* of 1932: “We reject every type of Millennialism.... We reject the whole of Millennialism, since it not only contradicts Scripture, but also engenders a false conception of the kingdom of Christ, turns the hope of Christians upon earthly goals and leads them to look upon the Bible as an obscure book.” Moreover, paragraph #44 insists that Chiliasm (or Millennialism) is not “an open question which Scripture answers either not at all or not clearly.”

Nevertheless, we do concede that there are certain sections of Scripture (for example, the last chapters of Daniel, Matthew 24 and parallel passages, and many of the chapters of Revelation) where orthodox Lutherans have tolerated differences of interpretation, as the reviews of the other three books to follow will demonstrate.

John Bray: *Matthew 24 Fulfilled*, John Bray Ministry, 1996. Paperback, 293 pages.

John Bray, a Baptist evangelist born in 1921, was at one time a dispensationalist. However, continued study of Matthew 24 and other prophetic sections of Scripture has led him finally to espouse the so-called preterist view. As he himself says in his introduction to *Matthew 24 Fulfilled*, “While this book is actually a commentary on the entire 24th chapter of Matthew, the specific purpose of the book is to show that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the ‘end of the age,’ and the **parousia**/coming of the Son of man, all occurred in the first century in A.D. 67-70” (p. 7).

Bray admits that he is not a scholar who knows Greek and Hebrew. Nevertheless, in his desire to prove that dispensational premillennialism – the seemingly predominant view among evangelicals today – is only a very recent interpretation unheard of before 1864, Bray has done research in many theological libraries in various places in the world. He has studied the records of Josephus and Eusebius of ancient times. He has uncovered the pre-dispensational interpretations of earlier Christian scholars such as Henry Hammond (1681), Thomas Newton (1754), N. Nisbett (1802), John Gill (1809), Thomas Scott (1817), Adam Clarke (1837), and David Brown (1858). Bray also makes heavy use of more recent scholars such as Milton Terry, John Broadus, J. Marcellus Kik, Loraine Boettner, and David Chilton.

Bray considers all the fascinating details of Matthew 24 such as “the abomination of desolation” (v. 15), the “great tribulation” (v. 21), and what was to take place “immediately after the tribulation of those days” (v. 29). He believes the prophecies concerning these events have already been completely fulfilled. In his view the abomination of desolation is fully explained by the parallel passage in Luke 21:20, where Jesus says: “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.” Bray therefore maintains: “This is not some event that is supposed to happen in our future during a Tribulation period either just before or after a future Rapture” (p. 44), as maintained by most dispensationalists.

With regard to the great tribulation Bray asserts: “This great tribulation is an actual historical fact, and we need not try to make anything else out of it. The Great Tribulation is not a period of time in **our** future. It already happened years ago” (p. 64). Bray proves this point by copious quotations from the historian Josephus as well as from Bible commentators of earlier centuries. George Ladd, a premillennialist, is quoted as saying: “This futuristic interpretation with its personal Antichrist and three and a half year period of tribulation” (so popular among dispensationalists today - DL) “did not take root in the Protestant Church until the early nineteenth century” (p. 88).

In Bray’s view what is foretold in Matthew 24:29-31 has also already taken place. It does seem to follow that if the “tribulation” refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, then what follows “immediately” after the tribulation must also have already taken place. Bray’s interpretation, which he claims “was held pretty much as a consensus 100-150 years or so ago” (p. 108), is that the language concerning the sun, moon, and stars is not to be understood literally, but that our Lord is using the same kind of apocalyptic language that the Old Testament prophets used in speaking of God’s judgments on nations and people. There are many examples of such language: Psalm 18, Isaiah 13, Isaiah 34, Ezekiel 32, Daniel 8, and Joel 2. Bray concludes: “God

'came' and 'descended' many times in the Old Testament at times of judgment upon groups of people. Apocalyptic language was used to describe those events. Why should we not believe that Jesus would employ the same kind of language in His references to the coming wrath to be visited on Israel?" (p. 135).

What Bray says concerning all these prophecies of Matthew 24:4-34 is based very strongly on Jesus' words in v. 34: "This generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place." Bray's view: "Our understanding of the word 'generation' has to be that of a time period which would include some of those living in Jesus' day. Therefore it is our belief that ALL the things Jesus mentioned prior to **verse 34** actually took place in the first century, and more precisely, during the time ending with A.D. 70" (p. 220).

However, Bray goes well beyond such claims. He maintains that all of Matthew 24 was fulfilled in the years AD 66-70, even verses 35-51 (pp. 268, 272). In fact, he claims that the book of Revelation was written before the destruction of Jerusalem and likewise foretells these events. He also maintains that 2 Peter 3:1-13 does not refer to the end of the world but to the end of the Jewish nation, and that therefore "the new heavens and a new earth" (2 Pet. 3:13) "refer to this present dispensation, the gospel age" (p. 245). Finally, Bray says that "most all of the passages in the New Testament which are generally used to picture a coming of Christ in our future to judge the world are actually passages referring to the coming of Christ which the disciples expected in their generation (Matthew 24:34) and which Jesus had promised would take place before all of them were dead (Matthew 16:28)" (p. 174).

These comments show that by his studies Bray has gradually become a preterist. In his own words he says that his interpretation "is known as the 'preterist' interpretation of Matthew 24, because it teaches a 'preterite' (past) fulfillment of these things. Our interpretation sees only past events in this passage. There is no double-fulfillment. There are no mixed-up passages which change the time factor. There is no 'transition' verse" (such as that taught by J. Marcellus Kik - DL) "separating the destruction of Jerusalem from another event 2,000 years or so in the future" (p. 108). Bray claims: "The preterite (past fulfillment) interpretation of both Matthew 24 and the book of Revelation is gaining ground all over the country" (p. 148).

R. C. Sproul: *The Last Days According to Jesus*, Baker Books, 1998. Hard cover, 253 pages.

R. C. Sproul is a Calvinistic seminary professor, prolific author of theological books and chairman of Ligonier Industries, an educational organization. His book centers on the various statements Jesus made concerning a coming of His that would take place in the lifetime of His contemporaries. These statements primarily are Matthew 10:23, "*You will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes*"; Matthew 16:28, "*There are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom*"; and Matthew 24:34, "*This generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.*"

Enemies of the gospel of Christ have used these passages to try to prove that Jesus was mistaken. His disciples expected Jesus to come again in their lifetime, they say. His failure to do so means, according to their argument, that Jesus is not who He said He was and that He cannot be trusted. Sproul is convinced that Christians have not done a very good job of responding to such attacks.

Sproul's book is intended to introduce Christians to preterism, the view that in a certain sense Jesus *did come* in the lifetime of His generation, and on that basis to show that Jesus can very well be trusted as our Savior and Lord. Sproul divides preterists into two classes: radical preterists (also known as full preterists), who claim that "all future prophecies in the New Testament have already been fulfilled," and moderate preterists (also known as partial preterists), who teach that "many future prophecies in the New Testament have already been fulfilled" (p. 24). Sproul says that "the purpose of this book is to evaluate moderate preterism and its view of eschatology" (p. 24).

On page 157 Sproul prints a table showing the differences between full preterists and partial preterists:

	<u>Full Preterists</u>		<u>Partial Preterists</u>	
	<i>A.D. 70</i>	<i>End of history</i>	<i>A.D. 70</i>	<i>End of history</i>
Coming of Christ	yes	no	yes	yes
Resurrection and rapture	yes	no	no	yes
Day of the Lord	yes	no	yes	yes
Judgment	yes	no	yes	yes

Sproul believes we must reject full preterism as contrary to plain Scripture. Quoting another, he says (p. 170): “There can be only *one* Resurrection of believers. And this Resurrection, which coincides with the Rapture, will take place on the *Last Day*.” Certainly this is what Jesus and His apostles taught. See John 5:28-29; John 6:40; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 2 Timothy 2:1.

Sproul “does see a lot of merit in the partial preterist approach” (p. 158). In explanation he says: “While partial preterists acknowledge that in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 there was *a* parousia or coming of Christ, they maintain that it was not *the* parousia. That is, the coming of Christ in A.D. 70 was a coming in judgment on the Jewish nation, indicating the end of the Jewish age and the fulfillment of a day of the Lord. Jesus really did come in judgment at this time, fulfilling his prophecy in the Olivet Discourse. But this was not the final or ultimate coming of Christ” (p. 158).

A large part of the book is devoted to the Olivet Discourse recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. One of the appendices prints these three accounts in parallel columns. In his analysis Sproul presents the various arguments used by preterists to show that the great tribulation pertains to the troubles in Jerusalem before its destruction in AD 70 and that the abomination of desolation clearly refers to the Roman armies surrounding Jerusalem.

When he comes to Matthew 24:29-31, Sproul admits: “Perhaps no portion of the Olivet Discourse provides more difficulty to the preterist view than this one” (p. 42). Indeed, it seems that most Christians reading these words about sun, moon, and stars and the sound of a trumpet think in terms of Jesus’ final coming at the end of time. But we must reckon with the “immediately” of Matthew 24:29 and Jesus’ statement in Matthew 24:34: “This generation will by no means pass away till all these things” [that Jesus has been talking about – DL] “take place.” Sproul summarizes the moderate preterist position as maintaining the view that “the graphic language used by Jesus to describe the attending events [in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem - DL] is metaphysical and consistent with the poetry of fervor used by Old Testament prophets” (p. 48). In fact, Sproul concedes that the preterists have a strong case. “The imagery employed by Isaiah (Isaiah 13 and Isaiah 34) is striking in its parallel to that of the language used by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse” (p. 44). Sproul quotes one of the preterists as saying, “If the fate of Bozrah [Isaiah 34:3-5] might properly be described in language so lofty, why should it be thought extravagant to employ similar terms in describing the fate of Jerusalem?” (p. 45).

Sproul devotes one entire chapter to the meaning of the term “generation” in Matthew 24:34. He mentions an alternate view, like that of Ylvisaker in *The Gospels*, that “generation” here means “race” or “nation” and “our Lord’s words mean no more than that the Jewish race or nation should not pass away, or perish, until the predictions which He had just uttered had come to pass” (p. 59). But Sproul admits that the evidence presented by preterists on this point are “weighty” (p. 62), leading him to grant that Jesus with the term “this generation” most likely meant the persons living at that time.

Other chapters of the book deal with the teaching of Paul, the teaching of John in Revelation, and the varied opinions of scholars on such matters as the Antichrist and the millennium. On these questions, it seems, Sproul does not take sides. He simply lists the various schools of thought on the millennium question, as Grenz did in the book discussed above. On the matter of Antichrist Sproul refers to the confessional Lutheran teaching thus: “The Reformers

commonly considered the papacy as the antichrist” (p. 179). He shows that the Antichrist is “both *against* Christ and a *substitute* for Christ” (p. 179) and that the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2:7 has been identified “as the Roman government, Paul himself, and the Holy Spirit” (p. 180). Many preterists, however, think that the Roman Emperor Nero was the Antichrist and that the prophecy has thus been fulfilled.

Jeffrey A. Gibbs: *Jerusalem and Parousia - Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel*, Concordia Academic Press, 2000. Paperback, 272 pages.

We yearn for a Lutheran scholar to study these eschatological questions thoroughly, and perhaps we have found such a one in Jeffrey Gibbs, a professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. His book, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, is an edited version of a doctrinal dissertation completed in 1995. The subheading, *Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel*, indicates the primary area of the study, the discourse of Matthew 24:1-26:2, which Gibbs labels ED throughout his book.

In the last paragraph of the opening chapter Gibbs announces his intentions: “I shall attempt to allow Matthew 24:4-25:46 to be interpreted in light of the overall eschatological point of view of Jesus and the narrator of the gospel. Furthermore, I am seeking to understand the role that the ED plays within the entire narrative of the gospel. The goal is to read the discourse of Matthew 24:1-26:2 as the implied reader does” (p. 22).

By “implied reader” Gibbs means the original persons for whom Matthew wrote his gospel. These are the Christians living in the period between the writing of the gospel and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The implied reader is specifically referred to by Matthew himself in Matthew 24:15 where the comment is made, usually placed within parentheses: “Whoever reads, let him understand.” Thus Gibbs is trying to determine, on the basis of the evidence within Matthew’s gospel, how the implied reader of Matthew’s gospel would understand Matthew’s recording of Jesus’ words in the ED.

Chapters two through five set the stage for the key presentation of the Eschatological Discourse itself in chapter six. In these chapters Gibbs concentrates on the various scattered eschatological statements of Jesus, such as Matthew 10:23, Matthew 16:28, and Matthew 26:64.

In Matthew 10:23 Jesus tells His disciples: “When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” What is meant by the *coming* of the Son of Man in this verse? Gibbs replies on page 73: “It is clear that the future ‘*coming of this man*’ at times refers to the Parousia of Jesus at the consummation of the age (ἐρχομαι in 16:27; 24:44; 25:31). This point is so obvious as to need no verification. What is not so widely acknowledged is that ‘comings’ of this man (or God or of the reign of heaven) in the future (with respect to the story-time of the gospel) may refer to events other than the consummation of the age.”

Thus Gibbs does not agree with the full or radical preterists who believe the Parousia itself is past. Nevertheless, he recognizes, as I think we all should, that the “coming” Jesus refers to in Matthew 10:23 must take place in the lifetime of at least some of the disciples to whom Jesus is speaking. On the basis of various pieces of internal evidence Gibbs concludes: “The implied reader will understand ‘the coming of this man’ predicted at 10:23 as a reference to the ruin of Jerusalem and the laying waste of the temple that this same Jesus predicts elsewhere, especially in 23:34-39 and 24:2” (p. 75).

Gibbs also presents an extended discussion of Matthew 16:27 and Matthew 16:28 and the relationship between these two verses. In Matthew 16:27 Jesus says: “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of the Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.” Matthew 16:28: “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” As an explanation of how the two statements of Christ are related to each other, Gibbs says: “A comparison of the two sayings will make clear the likelihood that they are, in fact, referring to two different, though related events” (p. 107). “The function of 16:28 would seem to be to verify, authenticate, and underscore the validity of the statement in 16:27, without being a reduplication of its content” (p. 108).

Again on the basis of internal evidence within Matthew's Gospel, Gibbs surmises that "it is virtually certain that the implied reader does not find in Matthew's story a near-expectation of the judgment day during the lifetime of the disciples in the story" (p. 109). Instead, Gibbs argues for the view "that the implied reader will understand Jesus' agony in the garden as the true fulfillment of 16:28" (p. 111). I think I understand Gibbs' reasons for saying this, but I am wondering whether this passage, like Matthew 10:23, could more likely refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. By that time some standing there with Jesus had tasted death (John's brother James, for example), but some had not.

With regard to Matthew 26:64 Gibbs emphasizes the exact wording that Jesus uses in His remarks to the high priest Caiaphas and his cronies: "Nevertheless, I say to you, *from now on* ['hereafter' in NKJV] you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." "From now on" is the accurate translation of the Greek words used in this passage. Gibbs says that is "something that will begin from the time of his utterance and extend out from there" (p. 142). "Very soon after Jesus utters the words of 26:64, the high priest and the Sanhedrin will see things that are true about this man, namely, that he is sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven" (p. 143). On the basis of internal evidence Gibbs argues: "The apocalyptic signs at Jesus' death and resurrection, the testimony to Jesus' resurrection given by the tomb guard, and the predicted destruction of Jerusalem all serve as the events that the religious leaders actually will see from now on" (p. 148).

In summary Gibbs maintains that "the implied reader knows that the destruction of Jerusalem, which Jesus has repeatedly predicted (10:23; 21:43; 22:9; 22:44; 23: 34-39; 26:64) will occur during the lifetime of the generation of the disciples in the gospel's story" (p. 156). All of this he presents as background for the implied reader's understanding of the ED itself (Matt. 24:4-25:46).

The Eschatological Discourse (ED)

It was on Tuesday of Holy Week that Jesus' disciples showed Him "the buildings of the temple" (Matt. 24:1). Jesus responded by pronouncing judgment: "Not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matt. 24:2). Some of Jesus' disciples then asked Him: "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).

Gibbs contends that the disciples' question is really a double question and that Jesus' answer first takes up the first question and then the second question. "I regard the first half of the ED as Jesus' response to the disciples' first question in 24:3 and the second half of the ED as Jesus' response to the disciples' second question in 24:3" (p. 167). The first question is this: "When will these things be?" "These things" refer clearly to Jesus' words about the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. Jesus answers this question by His words in Matthew 24:4-35. The second question is this: "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" Jesus answers this question by His words in Matthew 24:36-25:46.

Gibbs points out the contrast between these two sections. In the first section Jesus first talks to His disciples about future events that will happen before the temple will be destroyed: "false christs, deception, wars and various upheavals, hatred and persecutions for the disciples, apostasies, false prophets" (p. 171). Yet these events are not really signs of the soon-to-happen destruction of the temple. Jesus clearly says: "The end is not yet" (Matt. 24:6) and "All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:8). Thus they are signs *preceding* the destruction but not signs *of* the destruction. Gibbs says: "In the first part of the ED, the danger of being 'deceived' is very real.... The verb 'deceive' occurs at 24: 4, 5, 11, 24" (p. 171). "By contrast, 24:36-25:46 contains no theme of the danger of deception" (p. 171). In the second half the emphasis is on vigilance and faithfulness, so that they are ready for the end.

Gibbs points out that in the hinge verse (Matt. 24:36) Jesus uses a construction (περι δε) that is often used by New Testament writers to reach back and introduce a new topic. See 1 Corinthians 7:1 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1. Thus in verse 36 Jesus begins to answer the second question of the disciples. "Jesus' words in 24:36, 'But concerning that day and hour no one

knows' are precisely the hinge that one would expect to find when the ED moves from its first major part to its second major part" (pp. 173-174).

In his analysis of the ED Gibbs finds five subunits in the first part of the discourse and six subunits in the second part. "The first subunit, 24:4-14, warns the disciples not to think that the tumultuous events of history, nature, and their own experience are signs of the end.... Before the end will come, the gospel of the reign of heaven will have been preached to all nations" (p. 174).

The second subunit, 24:15-22, presents the true signal that the temple is about to be destroyed, namely the appearance of "the abomination of desolation." Jesus then instructs His disciples to flee from Jerusalem and Judea at once.

The third subunit, 24:23-28, returns to the warning about false christs and false prophets. In this connection Gibbs says that "the Parousia of Jesus will be as unmistakable as the lightning flash that stretches from horizon to horizon" (p. 174).

With reference to the fourth subunit, Matthew 24:29-31, Gibbs says: "I shall argue that in 24:29-31 Jesus utilizes eschatological language in a way that parallels the Old Testament prophets. His purpose is to describe the events of end-time judgment that God will bring upon the nation of Israel through the destruction of Jerusalem, and to underscore the ensuing mission to all the nations. The sequence of events in 24:29-32 parallels the salvation-historical sequence found in the parables of the Wicked Tenants (21:33-46) and the Wedding Feast (22:1-13), namely (1) judgment upon the nation of Israel whose leaders and crowds rejected Jesus as Christ and Son of God, followed by (2) the turning of invitation and outreach to the Gentiles. The subunit is bound together chiefly by its unique use of extravagant eschatological language" (pp. 174-175).

Jesus wraps up His answer to the disciples' first question ("When will these things be?") by saying: "This generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place" (Matt. 24:34).

Gibbs defends his position by various arguments which cannot be mentioned in detail. But I think it will be profitable for us to examine some of the detail on Matthew 24: 29-31, which reads as follows in Gibbs' translation (p. 197): "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And at that time, that which shows this man who is in heaven will appear, and at that time all the tribes of the land will mourn and they will see that this man is coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he with a great trumpet sound will send his messengers and they will gather his elect from the four winds – from the corners of heaven until their corners."

Since "the terrible Judean persecution" is the "great tribulation" of Matthew 24:21, what Jesus describes in verses 29-31 must come "immediately after the tribulation of those days." Gibbs says: "The thirteen occurrences of this adverb [εὐθέως] in Matthew's Gospel all demand or support the normal sense of 'immediately' rather than a more vague translation such as 'very soon.' The implied reader will expect that the events subsequently described will happen immediately after the graciously shortened tribulation in Judea" (p. 188).

Since "the Hebrew prophets at times employed the extravagant language of theophany and eschatology to refer to events within history" (p. 188), "the implied reader will understand Jesus' words in 24:29 as 'figurative' language that refers to an event within history because he or she knows that is the way that Isaiah 13:10 and similar passages function" (p. 195). With reference to the fall of Babylon Isaiah indeed declared: "For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine." Gibbs adds: "If such language could describe the realities when Babylon (Isaiah 13:10) or Egypt (Ezekiel 32:7-8) fell under God's judgment, how much more could it apply to the tragedy of Jerusalem's ruin" (p. 197). In this section various Old Testament texts are examined: Judges 5:4-5; Psalm 68:7-8; Psalm 18:1-19; Jeremiah 4:23-28; Ezekiel 32:1-16; Isaiah 13:1-19.

Gibbs defends his translation of "in heaven" in Matthew 24:30 as being adjectival rather than adverbial. He says his understanding is possible grammatically, although not necessary, and it fits in well with what Jesus says in Matthew 26:64 and Matthew 22:44. Thus the sign that shows Jesus is in heaven "will be the destruction of Jerusalem, for in that event the implied reader

perceives the truth that God has vindicated Jesus over his enemies, the religious leaders of Israel” (p. 199).

Gibbs also defends his translation of “land” in the clause: “At that time all the tribes of the land will mourn” (Matt. 24:30). “Immediately after the days of Judean tumult and persecution God will manifest himself in theophany (24:29) and the appearance of ‘that which shows this man in heaven’ (24:30a) will cause ‘all the tribes of the land’ to mourn” (p. 200). Gibbs does not understand this mourning to be a mourning of repentance, as in Zechariah 12.

The last section of Matthew 24:30 (“they will see that this man is coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”) Gibbs likens to Matthew 26:64. “The implied reader knows of three ways that Jesus’ words to the religious leaders in 26:64 will be fulfilled: (1) through the eschatological signs that accompany Jesus’ death and resurrection (27:51-54); (2) through the testimony to Jesus’ resurrection that the tomb guard gives to the religious leaders (28:11-15); and (3) through the predicted destruction of Jerusalem that lies beyond the temporal boundaries of the story” (p. 201). Yet “the events of 24:30 will occur within the lifetime of Jesus’ opponents who are so consistently referred to in Matthew’s gospel as ‘this generation’” (p. 201).

Gibbs’ understanding of Matthew 24:31 is this: “Following the eschatological judgment on Jerusalem, which is also the earthly manifestation of ‘this man in heaven,’ Jesus will send out his messengers to carry out the eschatological mission task of gathering the elect from the farthest reaches of the world” (p. 202). This understanding fits in with what Jesus said in His parables of the Wicked Tenants (Matt. 21:33-46) and the Wedding Feast (Matt. 22:1-13). “The judgment upon Israel as a nation through the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem is followed by a mission to the Gentiles in its fullest expression” (p. 202).

Gibbs points out that the angels (spirit beings) of the Last Day are not concerned solely with gathering, but their gathering always mentions also the separating, as in Matthew 3:12; Matthew 7: 21-23; Matthew 25:1-13; Matthew 13:41, 49; Matthew 22:1-14; and other passages.

With regard to the last subunit (Matt. 24:32-35) of the first half of the ED, Gibbs says that “the point of the comparison in 24: 32-33 is that warning signs enable one to know in advance when an event is about to happen” (p. 204). “When you see all these things, know that it is near – at the doors!” Gibbs takes “it” in this sentence “as the destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent fullness of the Gentile mission” (p. 204).

As stated earlier, Gibbs understands Matthew 24:36 as the hinge verse separating Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ first question from His answer to the second question. This understanding makes it easy to explain the apparent contradiction between Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:33-34 (“when you see all these things, know that it is near”) and His words in Matthew 24:36 (“of that day and hour no one knows”). Everything that Jesus has said up through verse 34 was to take place in the lifetime of that generation. There were signs indicating when it would happen. But when Jesus now answers the disciples’ second question about the sign of His coming and the end of the age, His response is that there is no sign and no one can know or predict when it will take place except Jesus’ Father in heaven.

In the second half of the ED Gibbs has spotted six subunits. “The first subunit, 24:37-42, begins the remarkable thematic emphasis upon the unknowability of the time of Jesus’ Parousia” (p. 175). In the second subunit, 24:43-44, “there is an implied story-parable about an unwary householder and a thief who breaks in” (p. 175). The third subunit, 24:45-51, “describes a servant who is either wise and faithful or wicked” (p. 175). The fourth subunit, 25:1-13, is the parable of the Ten Maidens. All these subunits “have emphasized the theme of the suddenness and unknowability of the Parousia” (p. 176). The fifth subunit, 25: 14-30, is the parable of the Talents, emphasizing the need for faithfulness on the part of Jesus’ disciples as they await the great final Day. The sixth subunit, 25:31-46, “describes the Parousia itself and the ensuing judgment” (p. 176).

Although this review has been lengthy, it still does not do justice to Gibbs’ arguments and evidence for the positions he takes. He is thorough and careful in his presentation. I believe his thesis is worthy of study in pastoral study clubs and conferences, even though his conclusions may differ from some long-held convictions. His position is very similar to the position taken by J. Marcellus Kik (*The Eschatology of Victory*) without Kik’s postmillennial flavor. Some years

ago this position was presented in study clubs and conferences in some areas of our church body by Pastors Paul F. Nolting and George Barthels. The *Lutheran Spokesman* of March 1973 printed Pastor Barthels' review of Philip Mauro's book on this topic, *Seventy Weeks and the Great Tribulation*. The *Journal of Theology* (Vol. 27, #2, pp. 31-40; Vol. 27, #4, pp. 20-33; Vol. 28, #2, pp. 31-40) printed Pastor Nolting's presentation of the Olivet Discourse, but for some reason the promised conclusion to the study ("to be continued") was never printed.

In conclusion, it seems that Gibbs tries to base his arguments on Matthew's Gospel alone. But surely a thorough study of Jesus' eschatological discourse must use Mark and Luke as equally valid sources. In my opinion this study of Matthew 24 by Jeffrey Gibbs could be improved by a consideration and comparison of the parallel accounts in Mark 13 and Luke 21 and, in part, Luke 17. For example, Gibbs does not even mention Luke's explanation of 'the abomination of desolation' (Matt. 24:15), namely, 'Jerusalem surrounded by armies' (Luke 21:20).

In this same connection Gibbs does not spend much time discussing Daniel's prophecies of 'the abomination of desolation' in Daniel 9:27, Daniel 11:31 and Daniel 12:11. It could have been pointed out that only Daniel 9:27 associates 'the abomination of desolation' with the destruction of Jerusalem. Daniel 11:31 refers to the defiling of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria, as Gibbs mentions on p. 184. There is no discussion of what the phrase means in Daniel 12:11.

It seems to me that Gibbs' discussion of the 'trumpet' in Matthew 24:31 is rather weak. In fact, there is no mention of 'trumpet' at all in the text except in footnote 209 on p. 239, where Gibbs explains: 'The 'trumpet' is a piece of symbolism that occurs in varying biblical and extrabiblical contexts; cf. Allen, *Matthew*, 259. Note the symbol's eschatological use at 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 1:10; 4:1; 8:2, 6, 13; 9:14. I would concur with Beare, 'Synoptical Apocalypse,' 130, who writes that in 24:31 the trumpet is 'merely an incidental borrowing from the general stock' of imagery. Cf. Burnett, *Testament*, 360." Since "trumpet" is a term that leads New Testament readers to think of the final end of the world, it seems that Gibbs ought to have spent a little more time explaining why "trumpet" in this place does not refer to the final end.

Other possible improvements would be an index to Scripture passages and topics. Each chapter concludes with the many footnotes for that chapter. Indeed, a total of about 80 pages of text is used for the scholarly footnotes. I confess that I did not read all of them. No doubt, the many footnotes reflect the fact that this book was originally a doctoral dissertation. At the end of the book there is a 14-page bibliography. The content of the footnotes and bibliography surely indicate that Gibbs did his homework.

His advisor and guide, Professor Jack Dean Kingsbury of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, was apparently well-satisfied with his student's work. The back cover provides this testimonial from Professor Kingsbury: "This book provides a careful interpretation of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel that results from a close reading of the text. The thesis is that the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 both fulfills Jesus' predictions of this and prefigures Jesus' Parousia at the end of the age. Gibbs proves himself to be a master of both literary method and his material. Pastors and seminarians will be treated to a sumptuous fare of new and existing insights. Anyone who preaches on Matthew's Eschatological Discourse will surely want to read this book first!"

- David Lau

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