

Journal of Theology

Spring 2018 Volume 58 Number 1

CONTENTS

The Renaissance Six: Fanning the Fire for Reformation 3

Mark S. Tiefel

Old Testament Exegesis: Job 1:13-22 15

Paul G. Naumann

Biblical Principles Regarding Marriage and Divorce 28

Minnesota Pastoral Conference

Book Reviews

David T. Lau

Editor's Note 34

Hebrews, James (Reformation Commentary on Scripture) 35

Jeremiah, Lamentations (Reformation Commentary on Scripture) 37

Wurmbrand—Tortured for Christ—The Complete Story 40

The Narrow Lutheran Middle—Following the Scriptural Road 43

Journal of Theology

Editor: Wayne C. Eichstadt / 11315 E. Broadway Avenue / Spokane Valley, WA 99206 / editor@journaloftheology.org / (509) 926-3317

Assistant Editor: Norman P. Greve

Business Manager: James Sandeen / 501 Grover Road / Eau Claire, WI 54701 / jim.sandeen@ilc.edu

Staff Contributors: D. Frank Gantt, David T. Lau, Nathanael N. Mayhew, Bruce J. Naumann, Paul G. Naumann, John K. Pfeiffer, David J. Reim, Michael J. Roehl, Steven P. Sippert, David P. Schaller, Paul M. Tiefel Jr., Mark S. Tiefel

Correspondence regarding subscriptions, renewals, changes of address, failed delivery, and copies of back issues should be directed to the Business Manager.

Any other correspondence regarding the *Journal of Theology*, including the website, should be directed to the editor.

© 2018 by the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Please contact the editor for permission to reproduce more than brief excerpts or other “fair use.”

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright ©1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The *Journal of Theology* is the theological journal of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. The *Journal of Theology* is designed to deepen the understanding and sharpen the skills of those who teach the Word of God. The *Journal of Theology* also testifies to the confession of our church body and serves as a witness to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, and His unchanging Word.

The *Journal of Theology* is published four times annually (Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter) by authorization of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI 54701/www.clclutheran.org).

Subscribe / Renewal Change of Address

Journal of Theology
501 Grover Road
Eau Claire, WI 54701
jim.sandeen@ilc.edu

Order Online at:

www.journaloftheology.org

U.S. Subscriptions: \$20.00 for one year, \$38.00 for two years.

Foreign Subscriptions: \$30.00 for one year.

The Renaissance Six: Fanning the Fire for Reformation

Mark Tiefel

Last year was widely celebrated as the five-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. It commemorated the year in which Martin Luther wrote the Ninety-Five Theses. Other dates of significance could certainly be mentioned in connection with the Reformation. For example, the Leipzig Debate (1519), the Diet of Worms (1521), and the publication of Luther's *Small Catechism* (1529), are all worthy of note.

This year marks another important anniversary in the history leading to the Reformation. It is the six-hundredth anniversary of the conclusion of the Council of Constance. One hundred years before the Ninety-Five Theses were submitted for debate, a context for the Reformation was already being established. Beginning in 1414 and concluding in 1418, the Council of Constance set in motion a series of events that would impact the Reformation and the state of Christianity today.

One significant item at this Council was the examination, imprisonment, torture, and eventual martyrdom of the Bohemian reformer, John Huss. Huss was one of the first Renaissance-era reformers to declare that God's Word is the source of truth for the church, not councils or popes. He sought to turn people's trust back to justification by faith in Christ.

A century after Huss's martyrdom, Luther's opponents would try to tarnish his reputation by connecting him to Huss. Luther embraced this.

Just as Luther was given safe conduct for the Diet of Worms, Huss had been promised safe conduct to and from the Council of Constance. However, the church and secular leaders betrayed their promise. At this time, it was not in the Lord's plan to preserve Huss's life, but his preaching set the stage for Luther. The Council's treatment of Huss ushered in an era of harsh persecution of those who spoke against the errors of the church—a persecution which Luther and others would eventually overcome by the grace of God.

The second significant item at the Council of Constance is the main focus of this article. At that point in history, the Western church was in disarray. In the beginning of the 1300s, the newly-elected pope, Clement V, refused to live in Rome and instead chose to set up his throne in Avignon, France. Clement chose Avignon because his goal was to situate the church's influence within the most powerful European nation of the time. However, Rome was not left

completely vacant. Some seventy years later, a new line of popes assumed power and created a second papal dominion operating at the same time. This was obviously confusing and divisive to the Western church.

In 1409, the Council of Pisa elected a new pope in an effort to establish unity, but both sides rejected this decision. Consequently, a third pontifical strain was added. This plunged the church headlong into chaos and discord. Something needed to be done. It all reached a tipping point in 1414 when the Council of Constance convened to resolve the problem. Where Pisa failed, Constance succeeded. The tri-papacy was abolished, and a single pope was elected at Rome—the rightful home of the Western church in the eyes of many Christians.

The return to a single pope to rule the church indeed seemed like a monumental victory at the time, but in reality it unleashed the most immoral, turbulent, and degrading era of papal history. The men who assumed the pontificate during this century were of the basest natures. Their actions worked against what pre-Reformation men such as Huss, John Wycliffe, and others had done. These popes fueled the powder keg to which Luther would eventually strike a match. The Renaissance papacy, created at the Council of Constance just seventy years before Martin Luther's birth, impacted events and prepared the time for the Reformation to come.

Sixtus IV (Pope from 1471-1484)

The immoral infamy of the Renaissance church did not begin with Sixtus IV, but it certainly took on a new terror that had never been associated with the papal name—at least not officially. This terror was murder, and it took place in God's house.

Before Sixtus IV ascended the throne, he was considered a moderate when compared to other candidates of his time. Although there were calls for reform in the church at that time, and although the Turks were threatening Europe in the east, Sixtus IV was most concerned with consolidating power in Italy. The Italian states were aligned among prominent family lines, and wars would often break out between the factions. Sixtus IV's della Rovere family line was at odds with the famed Medici family of Florence.

In an effort to abolish the Medici line, Sixtus IV and his nephew Pietro Riario—a cardinal whom he had appointed—secretly plotted to assassinate Lorenzo de Medici and his brother, Giuliano. This plan was put into motion during the Sunday service in Florence on April 26, 1478. The assassin struck at

the high point of the Mass when the blow was least expected. Lorenzo was wounded, his brother was killed. Although the plan was conceived in such a way as to give no direct link to Sixtus, word soon spread that he was involved. Even if the accusations were false, which they weren't, the damage had been done in the eyes of the people. The head of the church had just conspired to murder two men in the church during the Mass. This tragic event had a tarnishing effect on both the papacy and Christendom for many years.

Innocent VIII (Pope from 1484-1492)

Innocent VIII followed Sixtus IV. Innocent created numerous church offices just for the purpose of selling them to the highest bidder—a practice known as simony.¹

Innocent also emptied much of the papal reserve by pursuing a grand scheme to put pressure on the ever-growing Muslim threat in the east. The Muslim Sultan was Bayezid II of the Ottoman Empire. The Sultan's brother, Prince Djem—also known as the Grand Turk—sought refuge with the Knights of Rhodes because his life was under constant threat from his brother since he was a rival to the Sultan's throne. The Knights of Rhodes received an annual payment of 45,000 ducats to keep Djem out of the Ottoman Empire. This created a bidding war from others who wanted to be paid to protect the prince. Innocent won the bidding war by offering the office of Cardinal and money.

Innocent intended to use Djem as a diplomatic bartering chip with the Muslims. But when the Grand Turk was received in Rome with a lavish ceremony, great distress and confusion reigned among Christians. The people wondered, "If the crusades were all-important divine endeavors, why is this infidel treated like royalty in the heart of Christianity?"

Innocent's legacy was one of failure. Upon his deathbed, he pleaded with the cardinals to select a better pope than he had been—which would not have been difficult to do. However, the next pope arguably became the most infamous of all. As one historian put it, "The man the cardinals elected to Saint Peter's chair following Innocent VIII proved as close to the prince of darkness as human beings are likely to come."²

¹ Simony is named after Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24) who attempted to buy the gifts of the Holy Spirit from Peter and James.

² Tuchman, Barbara, *The March of Folly—From Troy to Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2014), 81.

Alexander VI (Pope from 1492-1503)

Alexander VI took power in Rome in the same year that Christopher Columbus embarked on his voyage across the Atlantic. Alexander had tried to become pope after the death of Sixtus IV (1484). However, even his fellow cardinals feared what would come from giving him complete authority. Although Alexander was a good speaker and a handsome man, it was well-established that his heart was filled with treachery and immorality.

Alexander became a cardinal at age twenty-six (1457). The fears of many were justified when Alexander finally became pope thirty-five years later. By the time he took office, Alexander already had fathered two daughters and a son by an unknown woman. He had four more children with his official mistress, and when he was fifty-nine he took yet another mistress who was only nineteen years old.

Alexander was no stranger to the efforts of those who were seeking reform. It was during his reign that the fires of reform began to rise in Italy through the preaching of Girolamo Savonarola. Alexander moved decisively to excommunicate, imprison, and kill Savonarola. Although Luther was only fifteen years old when Savonarola was killed, it no doubt made an impression on his young faith. Luther later wrote,

Following this example [the martyrdoms of Jerome of Prague and John Huss] the pope and his heresy-hunters have burned other good Christians in other places, fulfilling the prophecy concerning the Antichrist that he will cast Christians into the oven. It was for this reason that Pope Alexander VI ordered the burning of that godly man of Florence, the Dominican Girolamo Savonarola and his brethren. This is the way in which the holy church of the papists serves God. To do better they would consider a disgrace.³

Alexander's immoral legacy will be cemented forever in the actions of his most infamous child, Cesare. Cesare was appointed as a cardinal at a young age but quickly gave up life as a church leader. He, as his father, was entirely invested in temporal matters—Cesare was simply more transparent about it. He was known for his fits of rage and hot temper and was even found guilty in the murder of his own brother-in-law. What was his father's response? He did not punish the boy, but threw him a lavish party of lewd sexual debauchery.

³ *Luther's Works*, Volume 32 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1958), 87f

Alexander met his end in 1503 when he attempted to poison a rich cardinal in order to seize his assets. The plot was discovered by the intended target, who then bribed the assassin to turn the tables on Alexander. So, unbeknownst to him, Alexander was on the receiving end of the very cold-hearted plan that he himself had conceived.

Alexander's reign marked the high-point of immorality among the Renaissance popes. Much more from the pages of history certainly could be shown. One historian sums up the state of the church at this time,

From the moment of its return to Rome, therefore, the papacy had become a fundamentally militaristic institution and had found itself obliged to indulge in the conspiracies and bloodshed that were an integral part of Renaissance warfare. But while this reflected a decidedly unchristian dimension to the Renaissance papacy, the popes displayed a remarkable absence of shame. If anything, they actually showed a certain pride in their violent ways.⁴

The more the popes of this era struggled to consolidate their power and wealth, the more it began to slip away as the people and honest church leaders began to recognize the institution for what it was—a completely anti-Christian office. However, this truth, though already at work beneath the surface, was not yet discernable to the casual observer. The next pope stayed the course which Alexander had set by continuing the vain pursuit of earthly power.

Julius II (Pope from 1503-1513)

Julius II, the nephew of Sixtus IV, is infamous for his infatuation with war—which further scandalized the church. He became known as the “warrior pope,” even leading troops into battle wearing his papal robes. When a leader of the Swiss army agreed to support Julius in a war against France, the price for the support was a cardinalship. The common people were more than confused at the sight of a newly-elected cardinal fighting with sword and pike against fellow Christians.

⁴ Alexander Lee, *The Ugly Renaissance—Sex, Greed, Violence, and Depravity in An Age of Beauty* (New York: Doubleday, 2013), 273.

Luther wrote of Julius in disdain by saying,

[Priests are to] deal gently with the matter of the same sacrament, that is, with the people of Christ. But now these consecrated hands and anointed fingers are being soaked in fury more dreadful than any poison, in such a way that they wield arms and cannon. . . . Therefore these priests chosen rather from among demons are also appointed on behalf of demons against Christ and the Christians. Julius above all.⁵

As one who cared for the arts, Julius enlisted the great Renaissance artist, Michelangelo, to construct his tomb in St. Peter's Basilica. Julius had lavish tastes and was not content with the layout of St. Peter's. He began plans to remodel it and initiated a sale of indulgences in 1506 in order to fund the renovations. Little did he know what the end result of this vain endeavor would be. Just over a decade later, the hammer would sound in Wittenberg.

When Julius conquered the city of Bologna, he commissioned Michelangelo to construct a statue of himself three times larger than life-size. When Julius examined the cast in clay, the artist asked him if he wanted to be memorialized with a book in his hand. Julius replied, "Make it a sword, I know nothing about reading."

For years, church leaders and members had called for a forum in which to discuss the abuses of the church and to begin reforming its evil. When pressure from internal and external foes began to mount, Julius convened the Fifth Lateran Council in a desperate attempt at self-preservation. The Council took place in Rome during May 1512. Egidio of Viterbo, a respected church leader and general of the Augustinian monastic order, gave an introductory speech. His remarks about the church were bold, especially considering that he delivered them in Julius's presence. They also give us an honest look into the state of the church at the time:

In her present condition the Church has been lying on the ground like the dead leaves of a tree in winter. . . . When has there been among the people a greater neglect and greater contempt for the sacred, for the sacraments, and for the holy commandments? When has our religion and faith been more open to the derision even of the lowest classes? When, O Sorrow, has there been a more disastrous split in

⁵ *Luther's Works*, Volume 29 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 170f

⁶ Lee, *The Ugly Renaissance*, 274

the Church? When has war been more dangerous, the enemy more powerful, armies more cruel? . . . Do you see the slaughter? Do you see the destruction, and the battlefield buried under piles of the slain? Do you see that in this year the earth has drunk more blood than water, more gore than rain?⁷

The Fifth Lateran Council, though noble in its intent, failed to make any substantive changes. Foreign armies that threatened Julius's reign lost momentum and retreated back to France. The papacy actually regained the lost territories, all of the bloodshed had been for nothing. Julius, already advanced in age; passed away the following year.

As is the case with many of God's plans, no one was prepared for what would soon take place. The realization of true reform was beginning to appear on the horizon and had been in motion long before any council. In many ways, Julius's atrocities combined perfectly with Alexander's to set the stage for the Reformation. They were both men who were completely overwhelmed by their self-desire. It blinded them to what was coming. For Julius, the self-desire was a matter of force; for Alexander, it was a matter of lifestyle. Both were diseases of the heart which were manifested in action.

Luther, God's agent for that impending reform, wrote about Julius's death by comparing him to Saul, Ahithophel, and Absalom (the enemies of David), saying,

Where is he now, where is all his strutting and boasting? Thus we should only be still, and those who are now raging and trying to storm heaven and overturn boulders will disappear the same way. Let us only be quiet for a while and pass by; when we turn around, they will all be gone, if only we trust God.⁸

With hindsight, we can see just how accurate Luther was. Julius, as every other pope and all opponents of the Word both past and present, had his time and has now faded away. The lesson is to remember our own frailty and weaknesses, to return to the Lord in repentance, and to trust that He will help us number our days and gain wisdom by His Word.

⁷ Tuchman, *The March of Folly*, 109.

⁸ *Luther's Works*, Volume 14 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 227.

Leo X (Pope from 1513-1521)

For many Christians during the Renaissance, the last glimmer of hope for reform rested on the shoulders of Leo X. Leo's given name was Giovanni. The son of Lorenzo de Medici, he was born into fame and fortune and was a member of what was perhaps the most prominent family in Europe during the Renaissance. The Medicis of Florence had long battled with other families and factions within Italy, oftentimes pitting them against the popes. But then their time for power and influence arrived. Giovanni became a cardinal at age sixteen and was elected pope at age thirty-seven.

Again, the people's initial reaction was hopefulness. This was even true for Luther, who wrote in 1518,

Finally, we now have a very good pope, Leo X, whose integrity and learning are a delight to all upright persons. But what can this man who is so worthy of our respect do amidst such confusing circumstances? He is worthy of having become pope in better times, or of having better times during his pontificate.⁹

It would not take long for Luther to realize that Leo's shortcomings were not a result of mere circumstance. Rather, they were directly related to his persistent abuse of God's Word and, in particular, the highest of all teachings—justification through Christ Jesus. Leo, though pious on the outside, was no different from Alexander or Julius. His glaring lack of respect for the Word of God would prove to be his stumbling block and the ultimate undoing of the superficial unity which the Church had so far enjoyed. The will of God was presented clearly to Leo through the Lutheran Reformation, but instead of submitting to it, he became its foremost adversary.

It was not just Luther who began to see the papacy for what it truly was. Many scholars and theologians were pointing out the same things. Tuchman quotes Erasmus's *Colloquies*, "[W]ere wisdom to descend upon [popes], how it would inconvenience them! . . . It would lose them all that wealth and honor, all those possessions, triumphal progresses, offices, dispensations, tributes, indulgences. . . . [It would require prayers, vigils, studies, sermons,] and a thousand troublesome tasks of that sort."¹⁰

⁹ *Luther's Works, Career of the Reformer*, Volume 31 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 155

¹⁰ Tuchman, *The March of Folly*, 121f

The difference between Luther and others of the Renaissance was that Luther saw these abuses for what they were: departures from the Word of God and an attack upon it. Under the influence of the papacy, many people had forgotten that the Word of God was supposed to be the primary interest of the church. Modern scholars today continue to insist that the indulgence controversy broke out in Germany because of such things as anti-Roman sentiment, the absence of centralized power, and high taxes. While these things may indeed have caused anger, not one of them was the primary reason why the Reformation took place. The overarching cause was the reawakening of the people to God's truth, especially as it pertained to how a person is saved from his sin. Luther was the mouthpiece for this movement. If he would have been just another political protester, no significant or lasting changes would have taken place.

We know how the rest of Leo's story unfolded. By the time he gave any attention to the Lutheran Reformation, it was already beyond his ability to control. He underestimated Luther as unlearned and brash, forgetting that it is Christ Himself who speaks and works through those who use the Word. *"He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me"* (Luke 10:16).

Just as many despots before and after him, Leo committed the fatal error of not listening—neither to the people nor to the Lord Almighty. In 1520, Leo issued the papal bull, *Exsurge Domine*, in which he condemned Luther as the "wild boar which has invaded the Lord's vineyard." He even allied himself with Charles V at the Diet of Worms, perhaps in an attempt to pass off responsibility. Luther's response revealed the galvanized faith of one who was convicted, not by man's opinions, but by the holy and inspired Word of God. He burned the papal bull in defiance and declared without remorse, "Here I stand. . . ." The line had been drawn. It is a line that continues to this day where faithful servants and followers of God place their hope, not in the vain efforts of sinful men, but in the timeless truth of God's Word.

Leo's legacy is linked to his pleasure of spending and sparing no expense. During his eight years in office, he left a major deficit in the papal treasury despite his numerous fundraising campaigns which included expanding on indulgence sales. He was a leader who truly reflected the state of the church. As he was busy spending money to buy influence and power for the papacy, his followers were misled into spending money in a vain attempt to buy eternal salvation for their souls.

Conclusion

We can only imagine how dangerous it was to live as a faithful Christian during the time of the Renaissance. Excommunications, threats, and executions rained down from the church leaders more than absolutions and benedictions. To be outside the Pope's favor was to be an enemy of the state. Freedom as a citizen, let alone as a child of God by faith was rare.

Yet, perhaps our age is equally dangerous. We live in an era of outward peace and religious tolerance. Many Christians today believe the impact of the Reformation has died away and that the differences that separate us are only superficial. Popes in our day are not vengeful tyrants who are willing to indulge in murder to keep their power. Public relations agents and social media accounts portray the pontiff as a lovable grandfatherly figure who blesses children and kisses the poor. Yet, under this guise, the hooks of Satan continue to drag souls away with the careless and cruel doctrines of self-righteousness and working to earn God's favor. As sophisticated as our age may appear, the greatest horror of the Renaissance—man-directed glory—is still alive and well today.

We are assaulted by a passive form of persecution today. We are told to tolerate, to blend long held distinctions, to lessen Spirit-inspired laws, and to love at the expense of truth—sometimes even at the expense of reality. We are told to focus on crime, poverty, and social justice, rather than repentance of the heart and the promise of eternal life in Heaven through Christ.

Because of Satan's tactics, our ministries can often feel like grasping in the dark. It is difficult enough to battle the enemies of God's Church, but today at times it may seem nearly impossible to even detect them. Yet, it was not always straightforward for the reformers either. The key for them was to ascertain the evil and its cause. Once they saw the papacy for what it was, they applied the Word of God, and then it was only a matter of time before the Lord's will was accomplished.

We have the same hope and the same Word to use today for the same effect. The opponents of Christ take many subversive forms, hiding behind the concealment of politics, free speech, and human sensibility. But, with Christ and His Word in our hearts and proclaimed from our pulpits, the victory is only a matter of patient waiting by faith.

In 1527, the tiny window of Renaissance papal rage came to an end when Charles V sacked Rome. This was clearly the Lord's hand at work. While the

papacy has always been a thoroughly anti-Christian institution, its most infamous years were confined to this tiny sliver of history (1414-1527). Instead of centuries of blatantly outward wickedness, there was one little season of direct hostility, and God used it to highlight the great contrast between His grace and truth and the vain foundation of the papacy. We can be thankful that the Lord spared faithful Christians from more of this evil and bloodshed at the hands of the church.

Many things changed between 1414 and 1527. At the beginning of this era, Huss died “in the truth of the Gospel”¹² and the pope returned to Rome. The papacy saw its rebirth quickly snuffed out by immorality, wickedness, and destruction. At the end of this era, the unconditional gospel which Huss confessed had exploded throughout Europe and would not be silenced. Luther and the other reformers had triumphed. But even more so, God triumphed. The papacy, which many had assumed was the most secure institution in all of Christendom, was shown to be a fraud. The Reformation, which many had underestimated as nothing more than a cultural blip in history, had changed the world.

It was not a random concoction of the right political and cultural influences that brought the Reformation into existence. It was the Holy Spirit leading men and women to the singular purpose of His Word, namely, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. This was the bright light in a dark time that no amount of papal or governmental power could suppress. And it’s the same light that shines before the gloomy backdrop of our sins as we take refuge in Jesus and wage the same battle against the humanism of our age. Let us learn from these lessons in history and always stand for our Savior—the true Christ—and upon the solid foundation of His Word.

¹² This quotation is believed to be among Huss’s final words. Thomas Cahill, *Heretics and Heroes—How Renaissance Artists and Reformation Priests Created Our World*. (New York: Doubleday, 2013), 30

Bibliography

Cahill, Thomas. *Heretics and Heroes—How Renaissance Artists and Reformation Priests Created Our World*. New York: Doubleday, 2013.

Lee, Alexander. *The Ugly Renaissance—Sex, Greed, Violence, and Depravity in An Age of Beauty*. New York: Doubleday, 2013.

Luther's Works. Selected Psalms III, Volume 14. St. Louis: Concordia, 1958.

Luther's Works. Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews, Volume 29. St. Louis: Concordia, 1968.

Luther's Works. Career of the Reformer I, Volume 31. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1958.

Luther's Works. Career of the Reformer II, Volume 32. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1958.

Tuchman, Barbara. *The March of Folly—From Troy to Vietnam*. New York: Random House, 2014.



Old Testament Exegesis

Job 1:13-22

Paul G. Naumann

Translation

¹³ And it came to pass one day that his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine at the house of their brother, the firstborn. ¹⁴ And a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the she asses grazing near them, ¹⁵ and the Sabeans attacked and took them. And the young men they struck down with the edge of the sword, and only I alone escaped to tell you."

¹⁶ While this one was still speaking, this other one came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and lit the sheep and the servants on fire, and consumed them, and only I alone escaped to tell you."

¹⁷ While this one was still speaking, this other one came and said, "The Chaldeans made three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them, and the young men they struck down with the edge of the sword, and only I alone escaped to tell you."

¹⁸ While this one was still speaking, this other one came and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine at the house of their brother, the firstborn, ¹⁹ and behold, a great wind came from across the desert and struck down the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they died, and only I alone escaped to tell you."

²⁰ Then Job rose and tore his robe, and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. ²¹ And he said, "Naked I came out from the womb of my mother, and naked I shall return there. It is the LORD who gave. It is the LORD who has taken. Let the name of the LORD be blessed."

²² In all this Job did not sin, nor attribute folly to God.

[Author's translation]

Overview

In the preceding section of Scripture we were introduced to the man named Job, and we were given a behind-the-scenes look at the circumstances which underlay the difficult trial that he was about to endure. *“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil”* (Job 1:1).

The way in which one understands the expression, “blameless and upright” (תָּם וְיָשָׁר) will necessarily color your interpretation of the entire book. If it means, “innocent and without sin,” then the sufferings Job endures are rank injustice, and the confrontation between God and Satan devolves into nothing more than a mythic morality play—a grand wager, one that would indeed be farcical if it were not for the tragic and excruciating effects on the life of Job. This is, in fact, the view arrived at—with scant variation—by most higher critical scholars. This book of Job doesn’t even rise to the level of tragedy. In this case, Job’s suffering is merely pathos, gratuitous torture, akin to the purposeful breaking of a bird’s wings in order to observe its agony. This book of Job is a mere curiosity and a rather ugly and distasteful one at that.

If, however, תָּם וְיָשָׁר speaks of the personal integrity and devout faith of a believer, then the book takes on a new and far deeper significance. And if that expression, used of a faithful believer in the true God, includes (as we know it must, Job 19:25) the justification that results from faith in God’s promise of a Redeemer, then we have a work that is of tremendous significance to every believing child of God who has endured, or will endure, severe suffering. For this book is not about suffering in general, but rather about the suffering endured by faithful believers in the Messiah of God. As such it speaks to all of God’s children in all generations.

The majority of the Book of Job is poetry, and is perhaps the most difficult Hebrew in all of the Old Testament. The section before us, however, is all prose, with the possible exception of verse 21. The vocabulary, for the most part, is not difficult. There are few variants, and they are minor. The difficulty of this section is of a different nature. It is hard to read, not because the language is difficult, but because the subject matter is so harrowing and painful. The temptation is to look away, not to take to heart Job’s sufferings, or at least not to dwell on them, so painful is their description. But we dare not look away. For this is our story, too. The account of Job’s sufferings has deep significance for every Christian who ever has undergone or ever will undergo great suffering. In other words, for *every* Christian.

Verses 13-15

וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וּבָנָיו וּבָנֹתָיו אֹכְלִים וְשׂוֹתִים יַיִן בְּבֵית
אֲחֵיהֶם הַבְּכוֹר:

וּמִלְאָדָּה בָּא אֶל־אִיּוֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַבָּקָר הָיוּ חֲרָשׁוֹת
וְהָאֲתָנוֹת רְעוֹת עַל־יְדֵיהֶם:

וַתִּפֹּל שֶׁבַע וַתִּקַּחֶם וְאֶת־הַנֶּעֱרִים הָכּוּ לְפִי־חֶרֶב
וְאִמְלָטָה רַק־אֲנִי לְבִדִּי לְהַגִּיד לָךְ:

And it came to pass one day that his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine at the house of their brother, the firstborn.¹⁴ And a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the she-asses grazing near them,¹⁵ and the Sabeans attacked and took them. And the young men they struck down with the edge of the sword, and only I alone escaped to tell you."

| | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| וְשׂוֹתִים | Root: שָׁתָה | Qal part. masc. pl. abs. <i>drink</i> |
| הַבְּכוֹר | Root: בָּכַר "be born first" | n. masc. sing. abs. <i>firstborn</i> |
| הַבָּקָר | Root: בָּקַר "seek, inquire, split" | n. masc. sing. abs. <i>cattle, herd, ox</i> |
| חֲרָשׁוֹת | Root: חָרַשׁ | Qal part. fem. pl. abs. <i>engrave, plow, devise</i> |
| וְהָאֲתָנוֹת | Root: אָתוּן | n. fem. pl. abs. <i>she ass, she donkey</i> |
| רְעוֹת | Root: רָעָה | Qal part. fem. pl. abs. <i>pasture, tend, graze</i> |
| וַתִּפֹּל | Root: נָפַל | Qal impf. 3rd fem. Sg. + waw const. <i>fall, fall upon, attack</i> |
| שֶׁבַע | | Proper noun. <i>Sheba, Sabeans</i> |
| וְאִמְלָטָה | Root: מָלַט | Niph impf. 1st sg. + waw const. + parag. הָ <i>be delivered, escape</i> |

Remarks

All the events of this section take place in quick succession, on the same day. Here is a worst-case scenario illustrating just how quickly blessings can be removed from the life of a believer. For Job, this is “very quickly indeed.” Interestingly, the blessings that were described as having been bestowed by God upon Job in verses two and three—children, flocks and camels, herds and donkeys—are taken away in exactly reverse order—herds and donkeys, flocks and camels, children.

The section begins with a happy domestic scene, one of the festive dinners enjoyed by Job’s children, as previously outlined in verse four of chapter 1. Job’s children are “drinking wine,” though there is nothing in the text to indicate a sinful overindulgence. It is simply a picture of joy and normalcy, one that will serve as a sharp contrast to the catastrophe to come and will illustrate just how suddenly satisfaction and complacency can be replaced by suffering. One thinks of Jesus’ observation in regard to Noah, *“And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all”* (Luke 17:26-27).

Everything is fine until a messenger suddenly arrives on the scene. The word is מַלְאָךְ, which can mean “angel,” but here clearly represents merely a servant who has a message to announce. He is out of breath and bearing a message of very bad news. “The oxen were plowing,” הַבָּקָר הָיוּ חֹרְשׁוֹת indicating that Job was not merely a nomadic herdsman, as some scholars have supposed, but engaged in farming. Job was a wealthy man and that wealth was represented by livestock. Oxen, sheep, and cattle were the million-dollar homes and the BMWs of Job’s day. Of special value was the female livestock (she asses), capable of breeding offspring.

The messenger dwells on the calm which prevailed at the moment. Here again is the picture of domestic tranquility, the way matters stood on the very cusp of disaster.

It was the perfect time for a raid, and the Sabeans took advantage. שֶׁבָא is a proper noun, apparently the town (or region) Seba, considered the mother of its inhabitants and thus feminine. Here, the place name stands in place of the raiders, its inhabitants. The Sabeans were Semitic people most likely hailing from southern Arabia near modern Yemen. Their descendants became wealthy traders. We meet the Queen of Sheba much later in I Kings 10.

וַתִּפֹּל “and they fell,” or “and they fell upon,” indicates the abrupt nature of the attack. The Sabeans seized Job’s valuable oxen and donkeys. The נַעֲרִים “youths,” were no doubt Job’s servants—men who fought the raiders on their master’s behalf. They were overwhelmed, however, and were destroyed, literally, “by the mouth of the sword” (לְפִי־חֶרֶב). The sword’s edge is frequently referred to as its “mouth” because the sword devours its victims (Deuteronomy 32:42, I Samuel 2:2). At this point, already we have not only a massive loss of property, but also loss of life.

“Only I alone escaped to tell you.” Of the massive loss and of the many dead, there is only one survivor—the messenger himself. It is no coincidence, of course, that each of the succeeding disasters yields a single survivor, a lone messenger to bring the increasingly evil tidings to Job.

Verse 16

עוֹד זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמֶר אֵשׁ אֱלֹהִים נִפְלָה
מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַתִּבְעַר בַּצֹּאן וּבַנְּעָרִים וַתֹּאכְלֵם
וְאִמְלָטָה רַק־אֲנִי לְבַדִּי לְהַגִּיד לָךְ:

While this one was still speaking, this other one came and said, “The fire of God fell from heaven and lit the sheep and the servants on fire, and consumed them, and only I alone escaped to tell you.”

מְדַבֵּר Root: דִּבֶּר Piel part. masc. sg. *speak*

וַתִּבְעַר Root: בָּעַר Qal impf. 3rd pers. fem. sg. + waw cons. *burn, kindle, consume*

Remarks

The messengers of woe succeed one another with bewildering rapidity. The Piel participle מְדַבֵּר indicates that the first messenger has not even finished his statement when the second arrives on the scene. With Job still reeling from the loss of his oxen and donkeys, he learns that his sheep as well, along with another group of servants, have been destroyed. This time, however, the agency of their destruction is not human.

“The fire of God fell from heaven.” This phrase, אֵשׁ אֱלֹהִים is challenging. Some conservative commentators (among them, surprisingly, *The Lutheran Study Bible*¹) and all higher critical scholars see here a reference to the natural phenomenon of lightning. In the text it is called “the fire of God,” but these are the words of the servant, who arguably may have misunderstood the event. Certainly lightning represents a devastating and deadly force—more people are killed by lightning worldwide each year than by tornadoes and hurricanes combined. So lightning can kill people, granted. But it's difficult to see how this natural phenomenon could have accounted for the catastrophe presented in this verse. The Qal verb וַתִּבְעַר is descriptive—it means “to kindle,” or “to light something on fire,” thus my translation. Whatever this “fire of God” was, it was certainly supernatural. It instantly lit all the sheep and shepherds on fire, and completely burned them up. Fire is described elsewhere as an agent of God's destruction (Genesis 19:24, Numbers 16:35, 1 Kings 18:38, 2 Kings 1:10).

If the precise agent of the destruction is in question, its outcome is not. A further large portion of Job's wealth was instantly liquidated, along with the sad loss of even more of his faithful servants. As previously, only one survived—the messenger.

Verse 17

עוֹד זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמֶר כְּשָׂדִים שָׂמוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה
 רָאשִׁים וַיִּפְשְׁטוּ עַל־הַגְּמָלִים וַיִּקְחוּם וְאֶת־הַנְּעָרִים
 הָכּוּ לְפִי־חֶרֶב וְאִמְלָטָה רַק־אֲנִי לְבַדִּי לְהַגִּיד
 לָךְ׃

While this one was still speaking, this other one came and said, “The Chaldeans made three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them, and the young men they struck down with the edge of the sword, and only I alone escaped to tell you.”

כְּשָׂדִים

Proper Noun *Chaldeans*

שָׂמוּ

Root: שִׁים

Qal perf. 3rd pers. c. pl. *put, place, lay*

וַיִּפְשְׁטוּ

Root: פָּשַׁט

Qal impf. 3rd pers. masc. pl. + waw cons. *strip, invade*

¹ *The Lutheran Study Bible* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009)

Remarks

If livestock was the wealth of the ancient near east, then camels were the pinnacle of that wealth. Job may have been consoling himself that, notwithstanding the remainder of his livestock was gone, he still had his valuable camels. If so, such a consolation would have been short-lived.

While the Sabeans were Arabic plunderers from the south, the “Chaldeans” כְּשָׁדִים, were Aramaean plunderers from the northeast. They were nomadic cattle herders from the area between the two rivers Tigris and Euphrates, later the ancestral homeland of Terah and Abram. These warlike raiders were present in the area long before the neo-Babylonians, who later would be referred to as “Chaldeans” also. The fact that they formed “three heads” שְׁלֹשָׁה רָאשִׁים, or bands, shows that they were veteran raiders, well-organized and efficient. The great wealth of Job’s camels is stripped away (פָּשַׁט), as suddenly and comprehensively as the rest of his livelihood. Job’s servants again give their lives to the edge of the sword in defense of their master’s property. It was all in vain—the wealth was gone, and the people were dead. In the depth of his loss and woe, Job may have wondered how things could possibly get worse. He would soon find out.

Verses 18-19

עַד זֶה מְדַבֵּר וְזֶה בָּא וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנִיךָ וּבָנוֹתֶיךָ
אֹכְלִים וְשׂוֹתִים יַיִן בְּבֵית אֲחִיהֶם הַבְּכוֹר:

וַהֲנָה רוּחַ גְּדוֹלָה בָּאָה מֵעֶבֶר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיִּגַע
בְּאַרְבַּע פְּנוֹת הַבַּיִת וַיִּפֹּל עַל-הַנְּעָרִים
וַיָּמוּתוּ וְאִמָּלְטָה רַק-אֲנִי לְבַדִּי לְהַגִּיד לָךְ:

While this one was still speaking, this other one came and said, “Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine at the house of their brother, the firstborn,¹⁹ and behold, a great wind came from across the desert and struck down the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they died, and only I alone escaped to tell you.”

| | | |
|-------------|-------------------------------|--|
| וַיַּגֵּעַ | Root: נָגַע | Qal impf. 3rd pers. masc. sg. + waw cons. <i>touch, reach, strike</i> |
| פְּנוֹת | Root: פָּנָה (assumed) פָּנָה | Noun fem. pl. cons. <i>corner</i> |
| וַיָּמוּתוּ | Root: מוּת | Qal impf. 3rd person. masc. pl. + waw cons. <i>die</i> |

Remarks

Hardly had Job absorbed the news of the loss of his precious camels when another messenger arrived with tidings far worse. God had, thus far, permitted Satan to attack Job's property and servants, next the devil would extend his malevolent hand to something far more precious to Job—his family.

The description of the happy domestic scene is repeated for the third time. The moment is well-chosen for catastrophe, for all of Job's children—whom he loved so much and for whom he prayed fervently and daily (Job 1:5)—were assembled under one roof. The building in which they are gathered was suddenly struck by a "great wind."

Scholars have speculated about exactly what the "great wind" רֹחַ גָּדוֹלָה was. Since it came "from across the desert" (מֵעֵבֶר הַמִּדְבָּר) some scholars speculate that it may have been the infamous *sirocco* that originates in the Sahara and can sweep into Mediterranean regions with hurricane-force wind speeds. Others say it was a tornado, or some sort of powerful dust devil or whirlwind which would explain its ability to strike (וַיַּגֵּעַ) the four corner posts of the house simultaneously.

Again, if the exact nature of the phenomenon is in question, its results are not. The house collapsed, crushing Job's children and killing them—all of his children.

"*It fell upon the young people, and they died.*" Such a simple statement! Such a paucity of words, but introducing to Job's eyes what a limitless abyss of grief! For any parent, this is the nadir of sorrow. Only a parent can truly understand the penetrating and harrowing nature of the sorrow suffered when a child dies. One calls to mind the abject grief reflected in the words of King David, who had lost only one son (and a rebel at that). "*O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!*" (2 Samuel 18:33). But to lose *all* of one's children,

all at once! The mind shrinks from the prospect of such a catastrophe. Again, *we want to look away*. But we dare not—not if we wish to find comfort for ourselves, and not if we wish to offer effective and godly comfort to our parishioners in their times of sorrow. Thankfully, God’s Word gives us the answers we need for this. We can make a good start by observing the actions and the words of faithful Job as he reacts to the unprecedented tragedy that has befallen him.

Verses 20-21

וַיָּקָם אִיּוֹב וַיִּקְרַע אֶת־מְעָלוֹ וַיִּגְזַז אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ וַיִּפֹּל
אֲרָצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה׃

וַיֹּאמֶר עָרֹם יָצֵאתִי מִבֶּטֶן אִמִּי וְעָרֹם אָשׁוּב שָׁמָּה
יְהוָה נָתַן וַיְהוָה לָקַח יְהִי שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבֹרָךְ׃

Then Job rose and tore his robe, and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. ²¹ *And he said, “Naked I came out from the womb of my mother, and naked I shall return there. It is the LORD who gave. It is the LORD who has taken. Let the name of the LORD be blessed.”*

| | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| וַיִּקְרַע | Root: קרע | Qal impf. 3rd pers. masc. sg. + waw cons. <i>Rend, tear, tear in pieces</i> |
| אֶת־מְעָלוֹ | Root: מעל = “transgress” מַעֲלִיל | Noun masc. sg. Cons. + 3rd pers. Masc. suffix. <i>robe</i> |
| וַיִּגְזַז | Root: גזז | Qal impf. 3rd pers. masc. sg. + waw cons. <i>shear, mow, cut off</i> |
| וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה | Root: שחח | Hishtaphel impf. Impf. 3rd pers. masc. sg. + waw cons. <i>bow down, worship</i> |
| עָרֹם | Root: עור = “be exposed” עָרֹם | Adj. masc. sg. abs. <i>naked</i> |
| מְבֹרָךְ | Root: ברך | Pual part. masc. sg. abs. <i>bless</i> |

Remarks

The loss described in the previous verses are comprehensive and catastrophic. Job has all of his earthly possessions stripped away in a matter of hours, and then he learns that all of his precious children are dead as well. His actions, recorded for our benefit in the pages of Holy Scripture, form a model of how pious believers are able to react when suffering enters their lives.

Job wastes no time indulging in expressions of anger, self-pity, or even astonishment. There is no “five stages of grief” process for him. Rather, he gets up—וַיָּקָם, the waw-consecutive indicating an action that immediately followed his hearing of the news. He rends his “robe,” מָעִלּוֹ—an elaborate outer garment worn by the wealthy over the tunic (1 Samuel 24:5,12; 18:24). From ancient times, the rending of the robe symbolized the tearing of the heart in sorrow. Also common in the ancient near east was the practice of shaving one’s head as an expression of sorrow. This would later be proscribed in the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 19:27-28). Both were actions expressing sincere grief at Job’s personal loss. This is reflexive and wholly natural at such times. Pastors sometimes blunder in assuming that the loss of a loved one is less painful when it is expected, for example, in the case of an aged relative. But pain is pain and even these long-anticipated losses bring suffering. How much more so the sudden, comprehensive loss endured by Job! He expresses his great grief in ways customary to his time.

What did Job do next? The verb וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה is an unusual Hishtaphel form, a reflexive verbal stem similar to the Hithpael, except that the first root letter of the verb is transposed with the ה of the prefix. The meaning of the verb is “to bow down,” “to worship.” Given the words that follow, we conclude that Job is doing more here than simply collapsing to the earth in grief, as many might suggest. No, even in the midst of his greatest suffering, Job is truly worshiping—giving all glory to God and acknowledging His goodness and justice. The experienced pastor will quickly call to mind faithful members who, after devastating personal losses, were nevertheless found in the Lord’s house the following Sunday, worshiping the true God, and drawing comfort for their sorrow.

What follows is the simple words that are the expression of Job’s worship. *“Naked I came out from the womb of my mother, and naked I shall return there. It is the LORD who gave. It is the LORD who has taken. Let the name of the LORD be blessed.”* Notable here is the fact that the name of Yahweh is found in the mouth of Job. Though not, as far as we know, a relative or

descendent of Abraham, and therefore not of the chosen people of God, Job is a follower of the true God, Yahweh. He confesses two things, the first concerning himself and the second concerning the God whom he worships. All mankind emerges “naked” (עָרֹם) from the בֶּטֶן, womb. This is both physically and metaphorically true of birth. “*When he begets a son,*” says Solomon, “*there is nothing in his hand*” (Ecclesiastes 5:14). No one is born with a silver spoon in his mouth, or any other kind of spoon, or any cutlery whatsoever. “*For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out*” (1 Timothy 6:7).

The phrase, אָשׁוּב שָׁמָּה, *I shall return there*, is challenging. Adam came from the dust and every person is destined to return to dust when he dies. Job’s words reference the beginning and end of life and express the self-evident fact that man leaves life as he enters it—naked, possessing nothing. Job’s point is clear: material possessions are not eternally portable and are of little importance in any case. His attitude toward his earthly possessions, and even those beloved children who had graced his life, was to resign them all to the goodness, wisdom, and mercy of the Lord.

In the second part of his confession, Job anticipates the conclusion of the apostle James, “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning*” (James 1:17). Job, even in the face of inconceivable suffering, made a simple and childlike statement of trust in the LORD. “*It is the LORD who gave. It is the LORD who has taken.*” Job’s conclusion is equally simple: “*Let the name of the LORD be blessed.*”

Verse 22

בְּכָל-זֹאת לֹא-חָטָא אִיּוֹב וְלֹא-נָתַן תִּפְּלוֹה
לְאֱלֹהִים:

In all this Job did not sin, nor attribute folly to God.

חָטָא Root:חָטָא

Qal perf. 3rd pers. masc.
sg. *sin*

תִּפְּלוֹה Root:תִּפַּל = “*show oneself foolish*”

Noun fem. sg. abs. *folly*

Remarks

What an example and encouragement for believers! Job endured incredible suffering, and yet resisted the temptation to question the wisdom and the will of God. תִּפְלוּה is an obscure word, meaning “rudeness, coarseness, or foolishness.” Job did not “give God folly,” i.e., he did not attribute to God a moral error or mistake in judgment. In other words, He did not find fault with God. If only we all could follow his example!

Sadly, there is more suffering to come for Job, including a severe attack on his physical health. In the following thirty-seven chapters there are indeed times when the expressions of Job’s suffering and lament amount very nearly to a questioning of God’s judgment and justice. But here Job expresses a simple faith in God, a conviction that God knows what he’s doing even if Job himself does not. This core conviction of Job’s, that God is good and has His reasons, will be maintained by Job throughout all of his long and difficult exploration of suffering, and despite the poor and misguided advice of his friends.

Job believes he has a Redeemer (19:25) and that he will stand justified by that Redeemer at the last. Job believes the same thing we do, namely, that God is our heavenly Father who loves us and has provided redemption for us. He is a loving parent who, after all, made the most difficult sacrifice and voluntarily gave up His innocent Son into death so that we frail sinners could stand vindicated and justified at the last great Day. With faith in this gracious God, Job might have sung already two millennia before the Reformation,

The Word they still shall let remain
Nor any thanks have for it;
He's by our side upon the plain
With His good gifts and Spirit.
And take they our life,
Goods, fame, child, and wife,
Let these all be gone,
They yet have nothing won;
The Kingdom ours remaineth.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 262:4)

Bibliography

Evan-Shoshan, Abraham. *A New Concordance of the Old Testament*. Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1985.

Dhorme, E. *A Commentary on the Book of Job*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984.

Driver, S.R., and G.A. Gray. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1977.

Engelbrecht, Edward A. (General Editor), *The Lutheran Study Bible, English Standard Version*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009.

Fuerbringer, L. *The Book of Job*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1927.

Girdlestone, R. B. *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1897.

Harkavy, Alexander. *Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary to the Old Testament*. New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1914.

Harris, R. Laird, ed. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980.

Hester, David C. *Job*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005

Honsey, Rudolph E. *People's Bible*. Volume 18, *Job*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992.

Keil, Johan Karl Friedrich and Franz Julius Delitzsch. *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1875.

Williams, Ronald J. *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967.



Biblical Principles Regarding Marriage and Divorce

(A Study Document)

Editor's Note: This study of God's Word as it applies to marriage and divorce is the product of several years' study by a number of pastors serving in the Minnesota Conference. The Minnesota Pastoral Conference of the Church of the Lutheran Confession completed work on this document in November 2017.

What is Marriage?

Marriage is an institution of God. God defined marriage as the union of one man and one woman when He brought Eve to Adam. It is His will that this union should be lifelong.

Genesis 2:18-24: *And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.*

Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Matthew 19: 4-6: *[Jesus] answered and said to them [the Pharisees], "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."*

When does marriage begin?

We believe that marriage begins when the couple has fulfilled the state's requirements and has publicly made their vows to each other (public consent). We believe that the government has the God-given right to regulate marriage. As Christians, we are members both of the church and of the state and are subject to both.

We reject the idea that a couple can bypass the governmental requirements. Only if the government mandates something that is contrary to God's Word can a Christian scripturally disobey the government.

Mark 10:6-9: [Jesus said], *"But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."*

1 Peter 2:13-17: *Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*

Romans 13:1-7: *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.*

Acts 5:29: *But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."*

When does marriage end?

We believe that marriage ends with death or divorce. In the case of divorce, this includes the government's current practice of granting divorce, which is a public, legal declaration that the couple is no longer married.

We reject the idea that a marriage is ended by private declaration of one of the parties or by any act of unfaithfulness.

Romans 7:2: *For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.*

1 Corinthians 7:39: *A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.*

Matthew 19:8,9: [Jesus] said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

1 Peter 2:13-17: *Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*

Romans 13:1-7: *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for*

conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

Does adultery (πορνεία) automatically end a marriage?

We believe that adultery (πορνεία) is a violation of the divinely established one-flesh marital union, but it does not mandate divorce. Reconciliation allows the couple to remain as husband and wife. God-pleasing reconciliation includes repentance and forgiveness.

While it may be beneficial for the couple to renew their vows, we reject the idea that Scripture requires a re-marriage after cases of adultery (πορνεία).

Ephesians 4:32: *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Under what circumstances may a Christian file for divorce without sinning?

Scripture grants the injured party the right to divorce for adultery (πορνεία) or malicious desertion.

Matthew 5:31-32: [Jesus said], *"Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery."*

Corinthians 7:15: *But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.*

How do we address the situation when a Christian divorces without scriptural grounds?

We believe that this is handled in the same way we handle other cases of public sin.

Matthew 18:15-18: *"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he*

refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

The fruits of repentance may include reconciliation and a restoration of the marriage, though this may not always be possible. We reject the idea that Scripture requires restoration of the marriage as a fruit of repentance.

Matthew 3:8: *"Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,"*

John 8:10-11: *When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."*

Is there ever a reason to say that a marriage ends before a divorce is finalized by the state?

We believe that the state has an important, God-given role in the public declaration of divorce, as it does in the public declaration of marital consent. This does not empower the state to unilaterally declare divorce against a couple's will. Rather, the state publicly and legally confirms an intent to divorce on the part of one or both spouses.

In our recognition of when a marriage is ended, we see no scriptural reason to separate what happens before God and what happens publicly through the state.

1 Peter 2:13-17: *Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*

Romans 13:1-7: *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will*

have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

Is a marriage that ends for unscriptural reasons truly ended?

We believe that the act of divorce—pursued by one or both spouses—ends any marriage, whether the reasons are scriptural or unscriptural. A couple would need to legally remarry in order for them to live again as husband and wife in a God-pleasing way.

We reject the idea that following divorce the couple is still married in God's eyes, no matter what caused the divorce to occur.

Matthew 19:6: [Jesus said], *“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*



Book Reviews

David T. Lau

Editor's Note: In 2011 Inter-Varsity Press launched its "Reformation Commentary on Scripture" with publication of the first volume, *Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians* (New Testament Volume X).¹ When completed, the series will be twenty-eight volumes (thirteen Old Testament, fifteen New Testament). Three other volumes have already been reviewed in the *Journal of Theology*: *Genesis 1-11* (Old Testament Volume I), *Ezekiel, Daniel* (Old Testament Volume XII), and *Philippians, Colossians* (New Testament Volume XI).²

The contents of each volume in this series is taken from specific Bible commentaries written by individual Reformers from the late 1400s to the mid-seventeenth century. "Much of the material has not been previously available in the English language. The authors chosen represent various confessional positions: Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Puritan, and Anabaptist. A few humanists who remained Roman Catholic are also included, such as Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam. What will be particularly useful for confessional Lutherans, of course, are the exegetical comments of Martin Luther himself, as well as the writings of Philip Melancthon, Johannes Bugenhagen, Johannes Brenz, Caspar Cruciger, Erasmus Sarcerius, George Major, Jacob Andreae, Nikolaus Selnecker, Johannes Wigand, and Johann Gerhard. Many of the writings of the lesser known Lutheran leaders have been available only in Latin up to this time, and so we are happy that translators are now willing and able to make this material accessible to us."³

With the following reviews of the *Hebrews*, *James* and *Jeremiah, Lamentations* volumes, the *Journal of Theology* is resuming its reviews of this commentary series. We will continue going forward with reviews of the most recent volumes, but we will also circle back to offer reviews of volumes that have been published during the four years between our last review and this issue. The reviews of this series are generally limited to the Lutheran comments, which is approximately one-third of each volume.

¹ Reviewed in the *Journal of Theology*, Volume 52, Number 4 (December 2012), p. 21

² *Journal of Theology*, Volume 53, Number 2 (June 2013), p. 27

³ *Journal of Theology*, Volume 52, Number 4 (December 2012), p. 21

The published volumes of this series can be viewed at the Immanuel Lutheran Seminary Library. The past reviews as well as all past issues of the *Journal of Theology* can be accessed at www.journaloftheology.org.

Ronald Rittgers, Editor: *Hebrews, James* (Reformation Commentary on Scripture—New Testament XIII), Inter-Varsity Press Academic, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2017, hard cover, 341 pages, 51 preliminary pages.

This volume of Inter-Varsity's series of reformation commentaries treats two New Testament books that are among those few which were spoken against (*antilegomenon*) by some of the early Christians. The Lutheran reformers who are quoted in this volume had some difficulties with the anonymous letter to the Hebrews and even more so with the letter of James. They recognized that neither of these letters was most likely written by apostles such as Paul, Peter, or John. They also struggled with the contents of these letters. The letter to the Hebrews seemed to them to teach the impossibility of repentance after serious sin, and the letter of James seemed to contradict Paul's teaching of justification by faith alone.

The introduction by Editor Rittgers summarizes the views of Lutherans like this. He says, "That salvation can be lost through serious post-baptismal sin . . . was the most challenging aspect of Hebrews for the reformers" (p. xlv). As far as James is concerned, Martin Luther's early view that the letter of James was "an epistle of straw" influenced his students. Veit Dietrich, for example, is quoted as saying that the book of James "is not only worthy of censure in some places, because it extols works so highly against faith, but it is also throughout a patchwork teaching comprised of many pieces that do not fit together" (p. xlviii). Luther himself had a more favorable view of James in his later years and, according to Rittgers, "other Lutheran reformers, such as Erasmus Sarcerius, took a more optimistic view of James" (p. xlviii).

Since the passages in Hebrews and James that caused trouble for the Lutherans were not always fully understood or rightly interpreted at first, we can understand the difficulty they had in accepting these books as Holy Scripture on the same level as the books that were unanimously accepted by the early church. For example, Hebrews 12:17 says of Esau: "[W]hen he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears." Our Lutheran fathers objected to the idea that God refused to forgive Esau even though he pleaded

for it. They did not realize that the word *repentance* in this context refers to a change of mind on the part of Isaac, Esau's father, who did not change his mind about the blessing that he had given to Esau's brother Jacob. For clearer understanding, the new *Evangelical Heritage Version* Bible has this translation: "*Certainly you know that afterward he was rejected when he wanted to inherit the blessing, for he found no chance to change his father's mind, even though he sought it with tears.*"⁴

Closer study of James 2:14-26 on the part of other Lutherans also led to a better understanding. For instance, Lucas Osiander (1534-1604) wrote, "James treats the term justification differently than Paul. . . . This saying of James need not be opposed to the teaching of Paul concerning justification" (pp. 235-236). Likewise, Andreas Althamer (1500-1539) taught, "The little word 'to justify' is not always taken to mean the making of a pious and righteous person out of an unrighteous person *before God*; rather, it is often used to refer to being held and regarded as pious and righteous *before people*" (p. 235, emphasis added). It is clear that Paul and James were addressing different circumstances, and this is the explanation for their different ways of speaking.

As far as the authorship of these letters is concerned, Luther was of the opinion that Apollos might have written the letter to the Hebrews. The letter of James could not have been written by John's brother James since he was the first apostle to be put to death for his faith. James the Less was one of the twelve apostles and possibly could have written the letter. But the more likely author of the letter was James, the brother of Jesus and the head elder of the congregation in Jerusalem—a very prominent leader as indicated by the book of Acts (12:17; 15:13; 21:18) and Galatians (1:19; 2:9; 2:12). It is reasonable to believe that he addressed his fellow Jewish Christians in the very early years of the church, warning them against the same kind of sins that were evident among the Pharisees.

As always, these commentaries include comments not only by Lutherans, but by leaders from among the Reformed, the Anabaptists, the Church of England, and even a few of the Roman Catholics who were trying to reform the church from within. Among the Lutherans quoted most frequently in this volume are Johannes Bugenhagen and Lucas Osiander on Hebrews, and Andreas Althamer and Lucas Osiander on James. We also can read a few remarks by Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, Erasmus Sarcerius, and Johann Spangenberg.

⁴ *Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV), New Testament & Psalms* ©2017 Wartburg Project, Inc.

A lengthy appendix gives biographical sketches of all the authors quoted. For example, Andreas Althamer is described as a “German Lutheran humanist and pastor. Forced from the chaplaincy at Schwaebisch-Gmuend for teaching evangelical ideas, Althamer studied theology at Wittenberg before serving as a pastor in Eltersdorf, Nuremberg, and Ansbach. A staunch Lutheran, he contended against Reformed theologians at the 1528 disputation at Bern and delivered numerous polemics against Anabaptism. He also composed an early Lutheran catechism, published at Nuremberg in 1528” (p. 277). Where else would we be able to find such information?

Should we let Martin Luther have the last word, so that we realize that his views on Hebrews and James were not as negative as often believed? Of Hebrews he wrote, “It is . . . a marvelously fine epistle. It discusses Christ’s priesthood masterfully and profoundly on the basis of the Scriptures and extensively interprets the Old Testament in a fine way” (p. 3). It is a bit harder to find favorable comments by Luther with regard to James, although he is willing to admit that “there are many good sayings in him” (p. 201). As far as the main point of James that “*faith without works is dead*” (James 2:26), Luther was in perfect agreement, for he wrote: “If faith is there, one cannot hold back; one proves oneself, breaks out into good works, confesses and teaches this gospel before the people, and stakes one’s life on it” (p. 232).

We believe that the publishing of these reformation commentaries is a worthwhile project.

J. Jeffery Tyler, Editor: *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Reformation Commentary on Scripture – Old Testament XI), Inter-Varsity Press Academic, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2017, hard cover, 609 pages, 67 preliminary pages.

Editor Tyler points out in his introduction that the radical wing of the Reformation liked to use the prophet Jeremiah’s writings to justify their forceful actions which were intended to wipe out what they considered idolatry and establish a visible kingdom of the Lord. Martin Luther (1483-1546) and more conservative students of the Bible had to point out that Old Testament methods are not the way our Lord wants Christians to act in these New Testament times. Moses’ law demanded death for false teachers and idolaters. Christ tells us that we are not to pull weeds out of the field (i.e., the world [Matthew 13:38]) until the harvest. We are forbidden to use force and the world’s methods in our kingdom work today.

In studying this book, I restricted myself to reading only the comments of the Lutheran writers. No doubt the views of others may also have their value at times, although one would have to be on guard against the opinions of such radicals as Karlstadt and Muentzer, as well as comments from Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and Johannes Oecolampadius.

Luther and other confessional Lutherans did not dismiss the book of Jeremiah as unimportant. Even though Luther never lectured or wrote extensively on Jeremiah, Tyler tells us that Luther cited “Jeremiah and Lamentations fifty-three times in his lectures on Isaiah and ninety-two times in his lectures on the Minor Prophets” (p. xlvii). But it was Luther’s pastor, Johannes Bugenhagen (1485-1558), who lectured on Jeremiah and then produced a massive commentary in Latin (about 1,200 pages) on the prophet in 1546, the year of Luther’s death. Tyler is very generous with Bugenhagen’s comments.

The other Lutheran commentator who is often quoted in this volume is Nikolaus Selnecker (1530-1592), one of the authors of the *Formula of Concord* of 1577. Selnecker’s commentary on Jeremiah was published in 1566 and was written in German. Other Lutherans who are quoted more than once include Johannes Brenz (1499-1570), Philip Melancthon (1497-1560), Martin Luther, and a professor of Hebrew in Strasbourg named Johann Pappus (1549-1610).

As we would expect, the above-mentioned Lutherans delighted especially in the many Messianic prophecies of Jeremiah’s book. Commenting on Jeremiah 23:5-6, Luther says that this passage “completely and powerfully establishes this article of our faith—that Christ is true God and of divine nature” (p. 223). Bugenhagen finds reference to Jesus’ birth in Jeremiah 31:22, “*For the Lord has created a new thing in the earth—A woman shall encompass a man.*” Bugenhagen explains: “Our ancestors before us understood this passage with reference to the pregnant mother of the savior, which is the true meaning of this promise. . . . A woman will encircle and carry in her womb that promised seed of a woman, not the seed of man. She will encircle and enclose within her maternal organs the greatest, most steadfast, and largest crusher of the serpent’s head, that omnipotent man” (pp. 295-296). With reference to Jeremiah 33:14-26, Selnecker comments, “This passage repeats the marvelous promise from chapter 23, concerning the Messiah who is, namely, Jehovah, and a branch of David; that is, the true eternal God and the true human being. . . . Because of Him God the Father wills that all those who commit misdeeds, who believe in Him, be forgiven” (p. 325).

With regard to the book of Lamentations, however, both Bugenhagen and Selnecker want to restrict Jeremiah's sorrow to the events of that time without any reference to the sufferings of Christ. Bugenhagen says: "The prophet weeps over the destruction of Jerusalem, the kingdom of Judah, and the miserable captivity of the people. . . . Nothing is said here concerning the passion of Christ" (p. 456). Selnecker supplies the reason for this reluctance to speak about Jesus' suffering by saying, "In previous times the papacy understood and laid out this whole chapter (Lamentations 3) as if it were about the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ; so our Lord Christ Himself was complaining against the Jews who martyred, tortured, beat, crucified, and killed Him. . . . Jeremiah only describes here the captivity of the Jewish people" (p. 478).

Certainly we would have to agree that Jeremiah was speaking about the calamities of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, it seems that for us Christians, God's punishment of His chosen city and His appointed temple because of the people's sins does indeed point ahead to God's punishment of His own Son because our sins and the world's sins were laid on Him. Think of Lamentations 1:12, for example. Jeremiah cries out, *"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted on the day of His fierce anger."* Jeremiah is speaking about the city, of course, but how can we Christians refrain from thinking ahead to the time when not God's city, but God's own Son, was subjected to God's fierce anger for the sake of our salvation?

Our Lutheran fathers were helped in a very personal way by their meditations on these Scriptures. Two extensive quotations from Nikolaus Selnecker will help us understand the background for his hymn "Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, #292).

With reference to Lamentations 3:21-33 Selnecker relates, "I had fallen into very difficult, dangerous, and despairing thoughts—more difficult than I can say or have time to say. I could neither rest nor sleep. I often broke out in anxious sweats and often fell into unconsciousness. I would argue with myself for long stretches and think, 'Oh, God, are You not mine? Shall I pass on in this melancholy state while doubting, anxious, and desperate, feeling no consolation and dying without faith? How did I get here?' See, God knew that while in such torment, my heart was coming alive, fresh, and happy once more. For I thought, 'What are you doing in such sorrow that you are serving the devil? Grab onto God and His word and promise. He is truly your God and Father through Christ His Son. Why do you worry so?' Then I was again

confident and sure that I was a child of God. . . . So do not hesitate to support and console each other with the example of Jeremiah” (p. 487).

A second quotation offers Selnecker's view concerning the success of Luther's Reformation. From our point of view today, we can see how the gospel which Luther recovered and preached had a vast influence on many people in many places. But Selnecker was not yet able to see the big picture. In his eyes not much had been accomplished. He wrote: “In Germany God the Lord at first brought to light His dear gospel through that invaluable man Doctor Luther. But only a few people followed him and among those, the majority sought carnal freedom. Thus God has punished Germany and visited her through the violence of the farmers and gave understanding to the authorities, as it was said, ‘He had contempt for the princes.’ At the same time God allowed such fire and evil graciously so that His dear Word would be valued. But little or no reform followed. Therefore, God visited many places with the Turk, the English sweating sickness, great famine, disease, and other misfortunes. Moreover, there were the heretics, rebels, and sects as well as the iconoclasts, sacramentarians, antinomians, or resisters; as one also calls them now, the Anabaptists, enthusiasts, and the like. But nothing has helped. Now one can see this in many awful signs—eclipses, comets, earthquakes, floods, and economic upheaval. . . . Such things the true God does, so that He may move us to confess our sins and to repent and so that we may be well in body and soul. But if we do not follow Him, as we need, so He will appear to us as an enemy” (p. 471).

Now sing Hymn #292 with new understanding.

The Voice of the Martyrs: *Wurmbrand—Tortured for Christ—The Complete Story*, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2018, hardcover, 384 pages.

The contents of this book are not altogether new. The back cover says: “Now, for the first time, both sides—the husband's side and the wife's side—of this amazing story are told in one book. *Wurmbrand* tells of Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand, combining stories and research from the following books: *The Pastor's Wife*, *In God's Underground*, and *Tortured for Christ*.”

Neither Richard nor Sabina were Christians in their youth. When he was 25 years old in the year 1934, Richard Wurmbrand worked for a brokerage firm in Bucharest, Romania. He came from a Jewish family, but he was more interested in money, women, alcohol, and the satisfaction of his fleshly desires.

Sabina Oster also came from a Jewish family in Romania. But when she went to school in Paris, she learned the ways of the world and became an immoral atheist. On a trip back to Romania, she was introduced to Richard, and within a short time they were spending all their free time together. "Every night they went to nightclubs and theaters, parties and bars, casinos and cabarets" (p. 23).

The two were married by a Jewish rabbi, but their lives did not become more religious at first. In fact Richard was not even faithful to his wife, but they stayed together and enjoyed their carefree lifestyle. Their joy ride came to an end when Richard came down with tuberculosis and was not expected to live. At this point his atheism, his materialism, and the Communism he had begun to embrace did not help him at all. When Sabina visited him in the sanatorium where he was being treated, she was amazed to find her husband reading the New Testament. As a strict Jew, Sabina had not even been allowed to speak the name of Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile an old man in a neighboring village had been praying for the opportunity to speak about Christ to a Jew. When he met Richard, his prayers were answered. Through their meetings together and their study of the Bible, the Holy Spirit made Richard into a Christian. His wife was not happy. She had not wanted to be married to a Christian. Richard explained that Christianity was nothing other than the Jewish religion in fulfillment of God's promises. She then began to read the New Testament herself.

Nevertheless, when the day came for Richard's baptism, she decided to take her own life. But she could not go through with it. In order to help his wife understand the benefits of believing in Christ, he took her to vulgar movies and immoral nightclubs. After one such venture she came home and said to him: "Richard, I'm going straight to the pastor's house, and I'm going to make him baptize me. It'll be like taking a bath after all this filth" (p. 48). The Holy Spirit had begun to do His work in her heart also. They were now a Christian couple. The Lord gave them a son whom they named Mihai. "The Wurmbands, who once feared that children would only interfere with their pleasure-seeking lifestyle, were now gloriously happy" (p. 51).

Richard then studied to become a Lutheran pastor. "He was fascinated by the life and legacy of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformer Martin Luther. . . . For Luther, salvation was by grace, not works. Knowing full well the depths of his own depravity, Richard understood that no one could be good or holy enough to merit salvation" (pp. 58-59).

But their life from that time on became dangerous and difficult. Yes, Richard became a Lutheran pastor and his Lutheran congregation grew to one thousand persons, mostly converts from Judaism. But Romania was first overrun by the Nazis until Hitler was defeated and took his own life. Then came the Communists, and their occupation was much worse than the Nazi occupation. Simply by confessing Christ boldly and openly, Richard and his wife became targets of persecution. The remainder of the book details the imprisonments, the tortures, the pain, the depression, and the loneliness endured by both husband and wife. The back cover summarizes this period as follows: "Richard spent fourteen years in prison. He was tortured, beaten, and locked into a solitary confinement cell. Sabina Wurmbrand spent three years in a labor camp nearly freezing to death as she and other prisoners worked on the Danube Canal."

This book gives you the bloody details of those horrible years. Mihai had to be raised by others during much of his life because both of his parents were imprisoned. The hardest lesson to be learned was to put into practice the teachings of Jesus to love our enemies and forgive those who do us harm. Both of them used the opportunities given them to talk about Christ and the hope of salvation. Many were brought from the darkness of unbelief to the light of faith through their words and actions. Even some of their tormentors learned to know Christ and trust in Him.

I wonder how many of us would have been able to remain faithful in the face of such continuing torture that lasted years and years. Most of us have never come close to being tested like this. But finally after 200 pages or so of descriptions of torture, we come to page 354, where we read, "God has given him back to me, Sabina thought, rushing to embrace him."

In the days that followed, Richard reflected on his imprisonment—fourteen years total. During that time, he had forgotten how to write, and because of his starvation and drugging, he had even forgotten much of the Scripture he had memorized. But he did remember one passage that offered sweet comfort: *'So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her'* (Genesis 29:20). A new life of poverty awaited Richard and Sabina, but that mattered little. They had each other and would live in freedom together" (p. 357).

Their work in Romania continued until December of 1965 when the three Wurmbrands were permitted to leave. They finally settled in the United States. They devoted themselves to publicizing Communist practices and helping

those being persecuted. Their continuing testimony led to the founding of the organization “The Voice of the Martyrs,” the publishers of this book.

Christians all over the world should read this book. Christians who live in relative peace and ease should read this book, for it is written, “*Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also*” (Hebrews 13:3).

Daniel M. Deutschlander: *The Narrow Lutheran Middle—Following the Scriptural Road*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2011, paperback, 236 pages, 8 preliminary pages.

This helpful book has been around for a few years, but this reviewer became aware of it only recently. It is a worthy addition to the writings of Pastor and Professor Deutschlander, author of *Grace Abounds*, *Civil Government*, *The Theology of the Cross*, and, most recently, two volumes of devotions titled *On Giving Advice to God*. In my estimation all of these books are worthy of reading and rereading, especially by confessional Lutheran pastors and teachers and their spouses. The author seems to understand the particular temptations and dangers that face those in the public ministry and other mature Christians as well.

In *The Narrow Lutheran Middle*, Deutschlander sees the Scriptural road as a narrow path with deep ditches on both sides. In avoiding the ditch on one side, it is easy to fall into the ditch on the other side. For example, on the question of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility, Calvinists end up in the ditch on one side, teaching that God from eternity chose some persons to be saved and others to be lost. Arminians, on the other hand, teach that every human being chooses for himself whether he will be saved or lost. Both Calvinists and Arminians seem to believe that a choice must be made between the two, and there is no third possibility. Using our reason, we will come to the same conclusion. It’s either one or the other. But Scripture teaches that both Calvinism and Arminianism are partly right and partly wrong, and that the narrow middle road, that Lutherans try to follow, does not follow strict laws of logic, but is nevertheless the truth that God wants us to believe for our salvation.

The problem in this case, as in so much true theology, is that human reason seeks to exalt itself above God’s revelation in Scripture. Deutschlander’s first chapter discusses the role of reason in Christian theology, concluding: “In the

temple of God, reason is the servant and the scullery maid; the Bible is queen!" (p. 5)

In the chapters that follow, the author deals with the right relationship between predestination and human responsibility, between doubt and presumption, between carnal security and despair, between the priesthood of believers and the public ministry, between the mission commission and the doctrine of election, and between the competing sides in the so-called "worship wars." There is also a chapter on what the author calls the narrow middle between good good works and bad good works.

In all of these deep questions Martin Luther's dogged determination to teach as doctrine only what the Bible itself teaches as doctrine enabled him in most cases to stay on the narrow middle road. This was God's special gift to him. The Lutheran confessors of the next generation like Martin Chemnitz and the other authors of the *Formula of Concord* proved themselves to be faithful to Luther's example in this respect. If there are two doctrinal teachings that seem to contradict one another, both teachings need to be taught according to Scripture, instead of trying to reconcile them and in the process deny what Scripture teaches. The later Lutheran dogmaticians in their attempts to explain Scriptural doctrine sometimes wandered off into expressions that clouded the truth, such as the teaching that God elected sinners in view of their faith (*intuitu fidei finalis*). The Bible teaches that God elects individuals to faith, not because of foreseen faith.

Obviously, Deutschlander believes that doctrine is important, and that teaching doctrine correctly is also important. Surely we can agree with him in this.

