

# LUTHER'S WORKS



# LUTHER'S WORKS

VOLUME 13

SELECTED PSALMS II

*Edited by*

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## *General Introduction*

THE first editions of Luther's collected works appeared in the sixteenth century, and so did the first efforts to make him "speak English." In America serious attempts in these directions were made for the first time in the nineteenth century. The Saint Louis edition of Luther was the first endeavor on American soil to publish a collected edition of his works, and the Henkel Press in Newmarket, Virginia, was the first to publish some of Luther's writings in an English translation. During the first decade of the twentieth century, J. N. Lenker produced translations of Luther's sermons and commentaries in thirteen volumes. A few years later the first of the six volumes in the Philadelphia (or Holman) edition of the *Works of Martin Luther* appeared. Miscellaneous other works were published at one time or another. But a growing recognition of the need for more of Luther's works in English has resulted in this American edition of Luther's works.

The edition is intended primarily for the reader whose knowledge of late medieval Latin and sixteenth-century German is too small to permit him to work with Luther in the original languages. Those who can, will continue to read Luther in his original words as these have been assembled in the monumental Weimar edition (*D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*; Weimar, 1883 ff.). Its texts and helps have formed a basis for this edition, though in certain places we have felt constrained to depart from its readings and findings. We have tried throughout to translate Luther as he thought translating should be done. That is, we have striven for faithfulness on the basis of the best lexicographical materials available. But where literal accuracy and clarity have conflicted, it is clarity that we have preferred, so that sometimes paraphrase seemed more faithful than literal fidelity. We have proceeded in a similar way in the matter of Bible versions, translating Luther's translations. Where this could be done by the use of an existing English version — King James, Douay, or Revised Standard — we have done so. Where

it could not, we have supplied our own. To indicate this in each specific instance would have been pedantic; to adopt a uniform procedure would have been artificial — especially in view of Luther's own inconsistency in this regard. In each volume the translator will be responsible primarily for matters of text and language, while the responsibility of the editor will extend principally to the historical and theological matters reflected in the introductions and notes.

Although the edition as planned will include fifty-five volumes, Luther's writings are not being translated in their entirety. Nor should they be. As he was the first to insist, much of what he wrote and said was not that important. Thus the edition is a selection of works that have proved their importance for the faith, life, and history of the Christian Church. The first thirty volumes contain Luther's expositions of various Biblical books, while the remaining volumes include what are usually called his "Reformation writings" and other occasional pieces. The final volume of the set will be an index volume; in addition to an index of quotations, proper names, and topics, and a list of corrections and changes, it will contain a glossary of many of the technical terms that recur in Luther's works and that cannot be defined each time they appear. Obviously Luther cannot be forced into any neat set of rubrics. He can provide his reader with bits of autobiography or with political observations as he expounds a psalm, and he can speak tenderly about the meaning of the faith in the midst of polemics against his opponents. It is the hope of publishers, editors, and translators that through this edition the message of Luther's faith will speak more clearly to the modern church.

J. P.  
H. L.

## *Introduction to Volume 13*

LIKE its predecessor, Volume 12, this volume of LUTHER'S WORKS contains several commentaries that he provided for individual psalms. Commentaries on groups of psalms appear in Volumes 10 and 11 and in Volume 13. The commentaries in the present volume, like those in Volume 12, are derived principally from Luther's classroom and from his pulpit; but they do not all owe their origin to his activity as a professor and a preacher. This collection of commentaries also provides some insight into Luther's work as an author.

The first of the commentaries, following the sequence of the psalms, is also chronologically the first—the *Commentary on Psalm 68* (Weimar, VIII, 4–35; Saint Louis, V, 656–695). Both this commentary and the *Commentary on the Magnificat* (LUTHER'S WORKS, 21, pp. 295–358; cf. Introduction to Vol. 21, p. xvii) were completed during Luther's involuntary exile at the Wartburg; both appeared in 1521. The Feast of the Ascension fell on May 9, 1521; and with the castle congregation Luther celebrated that feast with a versicle from Ps. 68: 17, 18. The same psalm was the source of the introit for the Feast of Pentecost, celebrated on May 19, 1521. It seems that this prompted Luther to prepare a translation and commentary on the psalm. Within a week it was finished, and he could write to Melanchthon on Trinity Sunday, May 26: "I am sending the psalm that is sung during these feasts. If you wish, and if the presses are idle, you may publish it, dedicated to whomever you please. I have prepared it in my leisure, lacking the necessary books. Otherwise you may turn it over to my friends and to Christian Aurifaber to read, or give it to Amsdorf." Unlike the *Magnificat*, this commentary was printed rather speedily. A letter quoted in Weimar, IX, 801, indicates that the manuscript was going to the printer in June; and on August 6, 1521, it appeared in print. Its German title is "Deutsche Auslegung des 67. Psalms"; from Psalm 9 to Psalm 147, as they are counted in our versions and in the Hebrew, there is a discrepancy of one between those versions and

the Septuagint and the Vulgate. At this stage Luther was still following the numeration of the Latin version.

Two of these commentaries are interesting because in them Luther uses a psalm as the basis for an essay on the Christian prince, as a *Fürstenspiegel*. The first of these is the *Commentary on Psalm 82* (Weimar, XXXI-1, 189–218; Saint Louis, V, 696–731). This translation originally appeared in the Holman edition of *Works of Martin Luther*, IV, 287–323; with some revisions it is reprinted here, with the permission of the Muhlenberg Press, holders of the copyright. Apparently the immediate provocation for its composition were the visitations to the churches of Saxony, which proved an eye-opener into the conditions of religious and moral life in the towns and villages. A letter written by Lazarus Spengler on March 17, 1530, indicates that Luther was already working on the commentary then. Luther's preface to Justus Menius' (d. 1558) book on the Anabaptists, dated April 12, 1530, refers to the book as a finished product. Possibly it was completed even before Luther left Wittenberg for the Koburg on April 3, 1530. By June 2, 1530, the first edition was out of print.

Another manual for the Christian prince is the *Commentary on Psalm 101* of 1534 (Weimar, LI, 200–264; Saint Louis, V, 800–887); additional helpful materials appear in Weimar, LIII, 659–678, as well as in several modern editions. In the commentary Luther disclaims any firsthand knowledge of conditions at court, but in the commentary he also demonstrates a knowledge intimate enough to qualify those disclaimers. In fact, it may well have been his intimate knowledge of conditions that suggested the desirability of such a *Fürstenspiegel*. With the death of Elector John, August 16, 1532, John Frederick had become prince, the same prince to whom Luther had dedicated his *Commentary on the Magnificat* of 1521 (cf. LUTHER'S WORKS, 21, 297). The accession of the new prince brought changes, not all of them good (cf. p. 216). And in this commentary Luther took it upon himself to speak the candid truth to the prince and to his subjects. A comparison of the two essays on the Christian prince gives some indication of how specifically pointed many references in this commentary are. Though Luther wrote the commentary in 1534 and may have begun it late in the preceding year, the first edition bears the date 1535. In the translation we have endeavored to preserve the flavor of the original, in which scholars have discerned almost 200 proverbial expressions or allusions; wherever the proverb

was rhymed, we have sought to rhyme the translation as well, even when this required certain liberties with the literal meaning of the words in the proverb.

Princely personages were also involved in the composition of Luther's *Commentary on Psalm 112* (Weimar, XIX, 297–336; Saint Louis, V, 1098–1131). On June 12, 1526, the Gotha-Torgau League was re-established. Two of the princes who entered it were the dukes of Lüneburg, Ernest and Francis, nephews of Elector Frederick the Wise. It was in connection with their trip to Magdeburg that they visited Wittenberg and heard Luther preach the sermons that formed the basis of this commentary. From the items collected in Weimar, XX, 436, 443, 445, it appears that the dates of the sermons were: June 9, June 16, and June 17, all in 1526. By the end of August in that same year the first printing seems to have appeared. As the Weimar editor indicates, Luther probably did not supervise the printing himself. If he had, he might have paid more attention to editorial niceties and consistencies. For example, he begins the commentary as a message of comfort; later he gives it a different twist, perhaps in recognition of the notables in his congregation whom he may not have originally expected. It is noteworthy that in the South German reprint of the commentary it was considered advisable to temper its severity by the omission of direct references to the Emperor.

The remaining three commentaries are not political in their content and emphasis. The *Commentary on Psalm 90* (Weimar, XL-3, 476 to 594; Saint Louis, V, 732–799) is the only commentary in this volume that was based on lectures. As Luther indicates (p. 75, note 1), it was one of his last expositions of anything but the Book of Genesis in his classroom. He lectured on Psalm 90, using Latin predominantly, on October 26, November 2, 3, 9, 10, 1534; and on March 8 and May 31, 1535. His faithful scribes — George Rörer, Caspar Cruciger, and Veit Dietrich — recorded the lectures. Rörer prepared the manuscript for the printer, and Dietrich published it in 1541. The printed version is an expansion of the notes; in some cases this involved merely the supplying of missing references (e. g., p. 130), while in others there were changes as to substance (p. 124). Thus the juxtaposition of lecture notes and printed version provides an excellent opportunity to study the ways of Luther's editors. Where the loss of the lecture notes makes such a comparison impossible, instances like this commentary would suggest the need for caution in ascribing

every statement to Luther; but the skepticism of some historians seems equally unwarranted.

In sharp theological contrast to Psalm 90 is the *Commentary on Psalm 110* (Weimar, XLI, 79–239; Saint Louis, V, 922–1055). While the earlier commentary was a Christian thanatopsis, this is a celebration of the kingship of Christ. It originated in a series of eight sermons preached on the following dates in 1535: May 8, May 10, May 29, May 30, June 5, June 9, June 12, and June 13. At each point where one sermon ends and another begins, we have indicated this in a footnote, together with the date. Luther had long cherished a high estimate of Psalm 110, calling it one of the most Christian psalms in the Old Testament; that estimate had prompted him to write an exposition of it in 1518 (Weimar, I, 689–710; IX, 180–202). In a statement at table in 1532 he indicated his desire to expound the psalm once more if his health and strength held out. Again it was Rörer who took down the notes of the sermon, and Cruciger saw the commentary through the press; it seems to have appeared in printed form in 1539.

The *Commentary on Psalm 111* (Weimar, XXXI-1, 393–426; Saint Louis, V, 1056–1097) is noteworthy in at least two respects: as an exegetical statement of Luther's liturgical and sacramental teachings, and as one of the few instances when he sharply distinguished between the way Jewish believers had read a psalm and the way "our interpretation" would read it. As he indicates in his introduction, he had been giving thought to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, thought to which he gave expression in his "Exhortation to the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord." Convinced that Psalm 111 pertained to the Jewish Passover, he sought to apply it to the Christian Passover, the Eucharist. Therefore he went through the psalm twice: the first time he interpreted it as a pious believer of the Old Testament would have understood it, except for occasional lapses into a "Christianized" interpretation; the second time he took it as a description of the Sacrament. The time of composition is fixed. It came after the treatises referred to in the introduction (cf. p. 351, note 1), and the dedication is dated November 28, 1530 (cf. p. 354, note 8).

J. P.

# PSALM • 68

*Translated by*

*MARTIN H. BERTRAM*



# PSALM • 68

About Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost

1. *Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let those who hate Him flee before Him!*<sup>1</sup>

WHEN Christ died, God feigned sleep and pretended that He did not see the raging Jews. He permitted them to rally and gather strength, whereas the poor disciples fled and scattered. And now, when the Jews assumed that they had carried the day and that Christ had been laid low, God woke up again and raised Christ from the dead. Then things took an entirely different turn, and the disciples were gathered together. Now the ranks of the Jews divided; some believed and obtained favor, while others incurred the disfavor of God and were dispersed by the Romans. The prophet viewed this judgment and this conduct. He was indignant over the way the Jews were exulting because of Christ's death and the disciples' flight, and he cried: "Let the rejoicings of God's enemies come to an end! Let God arise and effect a change! Let Him raise Christ from the dead!"

2. *As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melts before fire, let the wicked perish before God!*

Here we find two beautiful similes. Smoke is dissipated by the wind, wax is melted by fire. This is an allusion to the Holy Spirit, who is a fire and a wind (Luke 3:16, 17). For "spirit" means a wind with which God fans and converts us into spiritual beings. This

<sup>1</sup> Here Luther's original adds the following notes: "This God is Christ Himself, who raised Himself from the dead, one God with the Father. The face of God means that God reveals Himself and makes Himself present in a knowable fashion. That takes place through His Word and works; it is terrible for the wicked and comforting for the pious."

wind and this fire came from heaven to earth after Christ's resurrection and now converts the world through the Gospel.

For such great enemies, who presume to contend against heaven and earth, it must be a disgrace to be compared to smoke and wax. Smoke rises, flutters about freely in the air, and acts as if it wanted to blind the sun and to storm heaven itself. But actually what does it amount to? A mere breath of air will dissipate this arrogant smoke, and no one knows what has become of it. Similarly, all the enemies of the truth plot pretentiously and rage furiously; but in the end they fare the way the smoke does against the wind and the sky. In fact, this smoke vanishes of itself, even without any wind.

Wax is heavy and hard, comparable to stone or wood; but, faced by fire, it flows away like water, yes, it is consumed and disappears. Likewise all enemies of the truth flourish at first. In the beginning they seem more solid than the Rock, Christ Himself (1 Cor. 10:4). But when they encounter the fire of the divine Word and Spirit (Jer. 23:29; Luke 3:16), that is the end for them — a merciful end if they choose, an unmerciful one if they refuse.

3. *But let the righteous be joyful; let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy!*

Though the dear disciples and all lovers of the truth have been mourning while the enemies gained the upper hand and triumphed, now they find their great delight in Christ's resurrection and in the victory of the truth. Their joy is pure and God-pleasing; for they exult before God over the truth and over spiritual matters, while the enemies rejoice over their own wickedness.

4. *Sing to God, play psalters to His name. Pave the way for Him who rides in Araboth. His name is the Lord, be of good cheer before His face.*

In other words, "Praise and magnify Christ as the one true God with the Father." This happened for the first time after the resurrection. In John 7:39 we read: "As yet the Spirit had not been given, because Christ was not yet glorified." But now the Holy Spirit has glorified Him as the Son of God (Rom. 1:4). And here the prophet points to such singing and glorifying of the divinity of Christ in the future.

Since we do not have Christ in our midst today physically, but are only walking in faith, we cannot sing praises to His person or

address His person in song. But we sing praises to His name; this we praise, this we address, this we preach and confess. This is what is meant by “playing psalters to His name.” A psalter is a book of praise; a psalm is a song of praise or a laudatory poem such as the poets composed, sung in times past to the accompaniment of string music. This relates to all the sermons of the sweet Gospel which proclaim God’s grace, honor, and praise. As the fingers strum the strings to accompany the song of the mouth, so the preaching is accompanied by deeds and miraculous signs.

“To pave the way” is to improve a bad, swampy, and bottomless road with debris, fagots, and stones, to make a previously impassable road fit for travel. This refers to human hearts. The evil, foul, and bottomless quagmires of their various evil tendencies once made them entirely unfit for the paths of God. Yes, the more one traveled them with the heavy wagon of the Law and the commandments, the worse things grew. For commandments do not make anyone better, in fact, they make everyone worse.

But the Gospel and the proclamation of God’s name in Christ do construct a solid highway, for faith furnishes a good foundation and dries out every foul marsh of the wicked flesh. And now Christ rides on them; that is, He performs in them His works, which are love, joy, peace, kindness, meekness, chastity (Gal. 5:22). Let us note the word “ride.” He does not stand still; for the life in faith implies progress, a walk or journey toward heaven into another life.

The words “who rides in Araboth” indicate the nature and the type of faith. *אֲרָבוֹת* means desert; *אֲרָבוֹת*, vast desert. The prophet here alludes to Exodus 13:21, 22: “And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them along the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night; the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.” No path crossed the immense waste, nor was there a route in the air; the cloud and the fire led the way. God directed in *אֲרָבוֹת*, that is, in uncharted and wild and desolate tracts.

This is God’s manner—to take devious and desolate paths.<sup>2</sup> These are all paths of faith; and faith does not follow the dictates

<sup>2</sup> Here Luther’s original adds the following note: “Thus this Lord does not go forward with visible pomp on steeds and chariots, but in *אֲרָבוֹת*, secretly in the spirit.”

of reason and the senses, but stands by calmly and permits God to take the lead. Faith neither knows nor wants to know whither, how far, how long, or through what. When God reigns in us through faith, when we unconcernedly follow Him, when we let Him hover over us and lead us, He is traveling in Arboth. And all this is the work of the Gospel.

“His name is the Lord.” Though He is a man, He has nonetheless been made Lord over all things. Therefore we follow His direction and let Him travel before us in Arboth. To be sure, the Hebrew reads: “In God is His name”;<sup>3</sup> that is, His name is in the Godhead, He is God coequal with the Father. He is not separate from God, but is and remains in God.

“Be of good cheer before Him.” That is: “You must have a good conscience and confidence in His mercy, produced by that faith which permits Him to lead in Arboth.” For the believer possesses peace and joy before God and is of good cheer.

5. *He is a Father of the fatherless and Protector of widows. He is God in His holy habitation.*

You certainly ought to be of good cheer, because He, through faith, works a good conscience in you. Because of your faith, you may be forced here on earth to leave father, friend, life, goods, and honor. You may have to become poor and wretched orphans and widows, suffering violence and injustice at the hands of all. Then you will find comfort in the knowledge that the Lord of creation is the Father of such orphans and the Avenger of such widows, that He is not distant, but near you, and that you need not seek Him in Jerusalem or Rome. He resides in the midst of His Christians; there He is surely to be found. But He is not content just to dwell there. No, He also wants to be a God among them, a God to whom all hearts may flee, who freely gives all, does all, and is able to do all; in brief, who is all that you should have in a God.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew phrase is *אֱלֹהֵי הַיְהוָה*. The use of the Hebrew preposition *בְּ* in this and other passages is called the “*בְּ* of essence” by the grammarians; its connotation is similar to that of the English “as” or “in the power of,” indicating that the one involved (usually God) is entitled to the dignity in which he appears.

<sup>4</sup> This is an early instance of Luther’s insight into the meaning of “having a god,” developed more fully in the familiar exposition of the First Commandment in Luther’s Large Catechism.

But this calls for faith. For the Father, the Judge, God, is present invisibly. His dwelling is holy; that is, it is set apart and can be seen only with the eyes of faith. If you believe that He is your Father, your Judge, your God, then this is what He is.

6. *He is the God who gives the desolate a home to dwell in; He leads out the prisoners at the right time. But the obstinate dwell in a parched land.*

Apart from faith, all doctrine and life separate and disunite mankind. The formation of sects is the inevitable result, even though there may be only two persons in a house. For their whole existence revolves about external works and ways, which will necessarily be varied. You will find one abounding in this prayer, one in that. One is a Carthusian monk, one a barefoot friar.<sup>5</sup> One goes on pilgrimages, one endows institutions, one fasts. If hearts cling to any of these, discord, hatred, pride, and all sorts of misery will surely follow. Therefore there is no god, no doctrine, no life, no means that produces unanimity other than this God with His agency of faith. This faith draws us all into the Spirit; there all things are harmonious, and all external differences disappear. This does not imply that no external differences remain; it merely means that the heart does not cling to these, that these do not set one person against the other, even if the whole world dwelt together under one roof.

First of all, however, it is imperative that man be taken captive by the Law and be placed into the bondage of sin, that is, in terror<sup>6</sup> of his conscience. He who feels no sin will not be impelled to seek grace; he will pay no attention either to the Gospel or to faith. Therefore the Law is conscience' jailer, chains, fetters, and prison. The Law points to sin and exposes it, and thus it takes conscience captive (Rom. 4:15; 7:7, 8). God does not deliver us from these bonds whenever we deem it necessary, but He permits us to be humbled and tormented in them until we thirst for grace. Now He comes and gives us His Word, to which we cling, and leads us out of captivity. Thus we escape a terrified and despondent conscience, and we get

<sup>5</sup> Luther frequently used this designation for various medieval monastic orders, among them the Franciscans and his own Augustinians.

<sup>6</sup> The word translated here with "terror" is *Angst*, which Luther uses to describe the feeling when one is pushed into a narrow place from which there is no escape. Thus it has some of the connotation of the word "dread" in Soren Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Dread*.

a good and sure conscience. That is the twofold work and performance of Christ in us: He kills us, and He resurrects us; He humbles us, and He exalts us, each in His good season; this is indicated by the two pillars in the desert, the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. (Ex. 13:21, 22).

But the obstinate perceive and pay attention neither to the one nor to the other; they remain in their sects and persist in their outward modes of life. They must dwell in barren and arid parts, that is, they bear no fruit; for they believe not, and therefore they have not. To the outside world and in their own sight they appear as the most useful, the best, the saintliest, and the smartest in heaven and on earth. They boldly take for granted that the believers reside in barren areas, and they alone in verdant Paradise. The prophet calls these ׀׀׀׀׀, which is best translated with "the stubborn ones," those who refuse to pursue the right course. No matter how one attempts to guide and direct them, they run hither and yon, like headstrong and untamed horses.

7. *O God, when Thou didst go forth before Thy people, when Thou didst march through the wilderness. Selah.*

Thus far we have been informed in the preface about the theme which the psalmist contemplates celebrating in song, namely, Christ and His Gospel. Now, as he embarks on this subject, he begins with a reference to the ancient story of God's leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt through the desert. This is its significance:

"O Christ, at the time when Thou didst go before the Israelites in their exodus from Egypt, Thou didst presage and symbolize Thy resurrection, by means of which Thou didst really precede Thy people out of the Egypt of this world to Thy Father. Thus by Thine example and Thy Word Thou dost now also lead them through the desert of faith after Thee to the Father. And if the earth trembled and the heavens rained before Thee at the time, which merely presaged Thy resurrection, how much more should the earth tremble and the heavens pour down now in the true exodus!" For in Exodus 19:16-19 we read that Mount Sinai lightened and thundered and grew dark, enveloped in a vehement storm; the earth quaked with all the aspects of a mighty upheaval. And attended by these violent phenomena of nature, the Law, affirmed by such storm and rain, was delivered to Moses. The prophet refers to this in the following verse:

8. *The earth quaked, drops came down from heaven at the presence of the God of Sinai, at the presence of the God of Israel.*

God is termed a God of Mount Sinai and of Israel,<sup>7</sup> thereby outwardly identifying Him with a certain place and a person. For at the time of the prototypes, concerned with external things, the worship of God had to be connected outwardly with a place and a person. But in the New Testament, when the day of the prototype has ended and all are united in one faith, neither God nor His worship is any longer tied to one person or place; nor does His name any longer imply this. Today any believer is the child and servant of God, regardless of residence, whether he lives in Babylon or on Mount Sinai, whether he is Jew or Gentile.

The earthquake and the rain of that time point to the proclamation of the heavenly Gospel and man's conversion on earth, which took place after Christ's departure from this world. This is his topic in the next verse.

9. *Free rain, O God, Thou wilt scatter. The heritage is Thine, it is tired, Thou wilt administer it.*

Here the psalmist speaks of "rain"; in the preceding verse he used the term "drops from heaven." Now he means rain in abundance, which is not confined to one place but descends diffusely wherever it will, whereas in verse eight the drops concentrated only on Mount Sinai. Here God Himself dispenses the rain; in verse eight the heavens released it. The psalmist uses a peculiarly descriptive word, the Hebrew word יָרִיף, which I translated with "Thou wilt scatter"; it really means to shuttle back and forth in the four directions of the compass. This is reminiscent of the movements of the sacrificing priest in the Old Testament. Some sacrifices he raised up and down before God, perpendicularly, others horizontally, toward the south and the north, the east and the west.<sup>8</sup> Thus David says that Christ will distribute the rain over all the world, and not merely over Sinai and Jerusalem.

<sup>7</sup> Here Luther's original adds the following note: "Ex. 6:3: 'By My name, יהוה I was not known to them.' This is the reason why that name was ineffable and had no etymology: then He bound Himself as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Israel; but now He is יהוה to anyone and everyone."

<sup>8</sup> Apparently Luther is referring to the various actions prescribed for the sacrificing priest in Lev. 1—3.

This is to signify that the preaching of the New Testament, since Christ's true exodus from this world, will far excel that of the Old Law. For while it rained sparsely there, it is to rain in abundance here; while it descended only on one spot there, here it will be diffused over all parts of the world; while it affected only one nation there, Israel, here a general shower will be dispersed over all, Gentile and Jew. The Gospel will not be confined to one country and one nation as the proclamation of the Law was. Those drops were released by the heavens, too, by the angels through Moses, in God's stead, as St. Paul declares in Galatians 4.<sup>9</sup> But this rain Thou, O God, wilt distribute Thyself. "Free rain" could also be interpreted to mean that the teaching of the Gospel is free and that it engenders free hearts, which are no longer bound to externals but live freely by faith. That is the Christian liberty of which Psalm 110:3 speaks: "Thy people will be spontaneous."<sup>10</sup> But the rain on Sinai, the Law of Moses, produces enslaved hearts, chained to various external works and practices. And thus it does not bestow a free and happy conscience, but weak, restless, and unwilling consciences. The Gospel, on the other hand, does achieve happy, willing, and free consciences; for in it everything is free.

The quaking of the earth at Sinai also finds its counterpart in the New Testament, in the fact that those in possession of faith and the Gospel must suffer much throughout their lives. As no rest is granted the earth, their lives and their bodies will not know tranquillity either. The body must live and be exercised incessantly till the time of death, so that the vices of the flesh become mortified and the old Adam is destroyed. Therefore the psalmist says here: "The heritage is Thine" and "it is tired." It is tired from so much quaking and suffering and therefore stands in need of comfort and aid. And because it is Thine, O God, and Thou art its only master by inheritance, neither Moses nor any other servant holds dominion here as Moses did over the Israelites. It is evident that he must reign here who can dwell in the spirit, who can guide and direct; and that is none other than Thou, O God. The inheritance is Thine, and Thou wilt administer it well. The world regards sufferings a penalty, portending utter destruction;

<sup>9</sup> The original has "Gal. 4," but the passage referred to is Gal. 3:19.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Luther's fuller discussion of this passage, p. 286. The translation "spontaneous" was one which Luther had taken over from the Latin version.

but Thou, O God, dost employ suffering for preparing and conditioning Thine inheritance. It prospers by the means which seem to spell its doom. Moses was incapable of doing that with his people, for they were not his inheritance. Nor are any outward saints able to do it; for wherever their external works and practices fail them, they are really crushed. There is nothing in their spirit, neither faith nor Gospel, which could help them endure and overcome such a defeat.

10. *Thy flock will dwell in it; Thou wilt provide for the humbled, O God, in Thy goodness.*

By means of the preaching or the rain of the Gospel, pious, simple folk are gathered into Christendom; these are Christ's flock. He Himself calls them His sheep, oxen, and asses.<sup>11</sup> We all are the sheep, the apostles and preachers are the oxen, and those who labor and bear their various crosses are the asses. All of these willingly and gladly submit themselves to Christ. The psalmist says expressly "Thy flock," as if he wanted to say: "Moses' flock and all those who deal with the Law and with works without faith are not numbered among Thy flock. They are neither submissive, nor do they receive the free rain. They all perform their tasks for fear of punishment or hope of gain, and for this reason they will not remain in Thine inheritance."

Since the members of Christ's flock are subjected to much suffering for their faith's sake and are humbled and oppressed and despised by all, God manifests His loving-kindness toward them so that after much humiliation they taste and experience ever more how good, loving, and kind God is. Thus the many abasements and sufferings teach the simple believers to become ever better acquainted with God, to trust Him and believe in Him and thereby grow strong and rich and established in their confidence in God's kindness. This is what the psalmist means when he says: "In Thy goodness, O God, Thou wilt provide for the humbled." That is: "Through his humiliation and suffering, Thy goodness, O God, will find a way to him. He will now surrender his own goodness and no longer count it gain, solely intent upon collecting a treasure for himself in Thy goodness." This is nothing else than a growth in faith (Rom. 5:3, 4). To this the

<sup>11</sup> The reference to "sheep" comes primarily from John 10:1-16; the reference to "oxen" appears to come from 1 Cor. 9:9 and 1 Tim. 5:18, which quote Deut. 25:4; the reference to "asses" may be part of a tropological interpretation of Matt. 21:1-11.

flock of Moses, the workrighteous, and the disciples of the Law will never attain; for it must be effected by faith and the free rain. Thus man prepares nothing but evil for himself. All the good accruing to him comes from God.

11. *God will give the command that the host of the evangelists be great.*

These words can be related to what Christ says in Luke 21:15: "For I will give you a mouth," that is, eloquence and speech "and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict." And Matthew 10:20: "For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." Where God does not provide the message, a sermon is useless. The apostles proclaimed nothing but what the Holy Spirit prompted them to say, as St. Luke writes in Acts 4:31. For wherever God does not suggest the words, there is no sermon at all, or it is a vain and pernicious sermon. But whenever He does inspire the words, He inspires nothing but words of grace, and that means the Gospel. Therefore God did not want to proclaim the Law of Moses by Himself but had it conveyed by the angels through the mediation of Moses and Aaron.

In the present verse God says that He will give a host of evangelists. This we find confirmed in 2 Corinthians 3:6, where St. Paul says: "We are preachers not of the letter but of the Spirit," i. e., preachers of grace and not of the Law. This came to pass in the apostles and their successors throughout the world. God blessed the world with a host of these, dispatching them into all the world, as befits the time of grace.

The psalmist uses a martial term: "great is the host," not a rabble but a host armed and arrayed for battle. Here we find an intimation that the Word of God does not generate peace but strife on earth. This is borne out by Christ's words in Matthew 10:34: "I have not come to bring peace on earth, but a sword." The soldiers and the warfare of the New Testament are not of a secular but of a spiritual nature. And the weapons are not sword and armor, steed and mount, but solely the Word of God, as St. Paul declares, 2 Corinthians 10:4: "For the weapons of our warfare are not physical, but have divine power to destroy strongholds." Therefore, although the psalmist uses the military term "hosts," he also calls them "evangelists," whose weapons are the Word and its proclamation. It is clear that the Gospel alone conquers the world for the faith.

12. *The kings of the hosts will be friendly toward one another, and the adornment of the house will divide the spoil.*

Scripture speaks of Christ as “Lord of hosts,”<sup>12</sup> because His Christendom continuously wages war with the Gospel against the devil, the world, and the flesh. The kings of these hosts are the apostles, whom the world regards as poor servants; but in the sight of God they are great kings, for they are the ones who converted the whole world. Each one in his particular sphere of action led his army to Christ. These kings were of one mind. They loved one another, and they preached one and the same message of faith — all this in conformity with the Gospel. Therefore they bore so much fruit. But after the days of the apostles, the bishops soon lost this harmony. They dissented and preached various and sundry things. Finally the works and doctrines of men flourished instead of faith and the Gospel; this gave rise to discord and innumerable sects. Therefore these bishops cannot in good reason be termed kings of the hosts but weaklings and princes of the carnival.<sup>13</sup> They are all sham and pretense, devoid of all earnestness and sincerity. Consequently, this verse cannot pertain to them but only to the apostles, whose concord in faith, in doctrine, in administration, and in life was perfect. It is true that several bishops followed in their footsteps, but at no time were these as much of one mind as the apostles. The Old Testament prophets were even less agreed. In view of all this it is not surprising that Holy Writ acclaims the apostles as miracles. By reason of their unanimity of mind they bore such rich fruit and converted the world, a feat that has never been equaled.

In the Hebrew tongue the word for the adornment of a house is also the designation for a housewife or a married woman.<sup>14</sup> And very aptly so. For without wife and child there would probably be neither house, village, nor city on the earth. A house devoid of wife and child is no home. This is especially pertinent with reference to holy

<sup>12</sup> As he does very often in his writings — the most familiar instance is the hymn “A Mighty Fortress” — Luther identifies the Old Testament “Lord of hosts” with Christ.

<sup>13</sup> Luther’s German phrase is *fursten der fastnacht larven*; it refers to the commoners who dressed in princely costume on the night of the pre-Lenten carnival, but who had only the appearance, not the authority, of princes.

<sup>14</sup> The Hebrew phrase is מַלְכֵי בָיִת, the first word of which Luther here takes to be identical with the word used in Jer. 6:2, an identification that is not accepted by some modern philologists.

Mother Church. She is a true housemother and the bride of Christ. Through the Gospel she magnificently adorns Christ's home with many children. That is what the prophet means when he says that the women at home divide the spoil, or the booty. Again he uses warlike words very appropriately, for in battle the victor obtains the spoils and the booty.

With the weapon of the Gospel the kings of the hosts have fought valiantly, wrested the world from the devil's grasp, and despoiled him of his realm. And now Mother Church distributes these spoils and ordains them for various divine services, each one according to his peculiar gifts — some for prophecy, others for teaching, others for administrative duties, others for general service to the poor. All this we find described by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. Christ also refers to these same spoils in Luke 11:21, 22, when He says that a strong man is overcome by a stronger one, who divests him of his armor and divides his spoils.

13. *If you sleep between the boundaries, the wings of the doves will be covered with silver, and the wings on their back with gold.*

How is this to be understood? What obscure speech! First of all, we must know that the wings of birds represent preachers or preaching. The cherubim on the mercy seat would tend to bear that out (Ex. 37:7, 8). According to Psalm 147:15 the Word of God runs swiftly; indeed, it flies and flits over us. The dove is also the church, which flies as she preaches. Her wings are covered with silver when she proclaims the pure Scriptures and Word of God, which is called silver in Psalm 12:6 and in Isaiah 1:22. But the doctrines of men, which fly astray, are wings of a bat, as Isaiah 2:20 calls them, covered with slime and stench; or they are the wings of black ravens. The silver pinions, however, designate the teaching of faith. The golden wings on the back are the teaching of love. For the sum and substance of the entire Gospel is faith in God and love of neighbor. Therefore the psalmist speaks of the wings which emerge from and spread away from the body as covered with silver, and of the wings of the back which tend toward the body as golden in color. Faith points away from us toward God; love bears all things (1 Cor. 13:7) and points us toward our body, that is, toward our neighbor. In many Scriptural passages love is symbolized by gold.<sup>15</sup> All who believe and love,

<sup>15</sup> Luther apparently has in mind the occasional use of gold as a symbol for love, for example, in Lam. 4:1.

and teach comformably, are the pinions of these doves. Undoubtedly the psalmist based this metaphor on real doves, many of which have white, glossy wings, gleaming like silver, and pretty green-and-gold-colored wings on the back. In addition, the dove is without guile, and thus it becomes a symbol of the many spiritual qualities which must abound in Christendom. Thus this verse indicates the teaching of the Gospel and the content of the Word which the kings of the hosts proclaim.

“Sleeping between the boundaries” or limits pertains to spiritual sleep. The psalmist wants to say that the soul sleeps when it does not esteem temporal goods more than a dream. He calls them “boundaries” because these temporal goods do not constitute a permanent abode or even a pathway, but are finite. For every hour we must live in expectation of death and the end of our temporal life and goods. And whosoever “deals with this world,” as St. Paul says (1 Cor. 7:31), “as though he had no dealing with it,” sleeps within these boundaries and peers with the waking eyes of faith over these boundaries into the life beyond. Such are really imperturbable men; they are taught by God, and now they themselves are ready to teach faith and love in accordance with the Gospel. This is what it means to be buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4) and to celebrate the Sabbath. We furthermore glean from this verse that those who are greedy and ambitious for honor cannot be preachers of the Gospel; this is only for those who do not care about temporal goods, honor, pleasure, and life. Throughout Scripture, greed is strictly forbidden for ministers and teachers.<sup>16</sup> They must be asleep to temporal silver and gold; their wings must be adorned with a different type of silver and gold. If they are to preach, of course they must live here on earth, since the dead cannot preach. They are to sleep, be like the dead in their life, keenly aware of the fact that this life is only a boundary and that all things are but transitory. They must seriously reflect on this.

*14. When the Almighty distributes the kings over them, they will become white as snow in Zalmon.*

Here the psalm declares that those teachers who are free of greed and covetousness and who preach the Gospel purely are received only from God. Christ says in Matthew 9:38: “Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” Thus the prophet

<sup>16</sup> The principal references are 1 Peter 5:2; 1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7.

does not merely inform us in this psalm with regard to the content and source of the proclamation or about the identity and qualifications of the preachers; but he also tells us from what source the latter are to be acquired. In the New Testament the proclamation and the Word of God are all-important. Therefore our text declares: "Not when man chooses, but when God distributes kings, bishops, and preachers over the church, will all flower and prosper; then all will become snow-white and purged of sin." Since faith alone purifies from sin, as St. Peter says in Acts 15:9, and since faith is dependent solely on God's Word, no one can preach the Word of God unless he is sent by God, as St. Paul teaches in Romans 10:15. From this it must follow that all man-made doctrine is injurious and renders a person unclean and coal-black.

Behold the term used by the prophet!  $\text{יְיָ}$  is the Hebrew word he uses for God. The Hebrew tongue has many names for God, some of which reflect His power, some, His majesty, some, other works and attributes of His. Similarly, the German language uses the names God, Lord, Father, the Supreme Being, the Almighty, Creator, etc.<sup>17</sup> Thus He is called  $\text{יְיָ}$ , perhaps because He prospers and preserves all things so excellently as a mother suckles a child.<sup>18</sup> It is as though he were saying: "If God, who nourishes and preserves all things, distributes bishops among His churches, then the proper nourishment will be vouchsafed, namely, the Word of God." That is the peculiar work of the Holy Spirit, who is called the Giver of life and nourishment (Ps. 104:27-30).<sup>19</sup>

"Distribute" here means to reveal. These bishop-kings do not only step forward freely and courageously and expose themselves to danger on behalf of the sheep of Christ, instead of running for cover, as the herdsmen, the greedy, and the hirelings (John 10:12) usually do. But they also have a clear view and understanding of their teaching and are able to expound and explain the obscure verses of Scripture. Christ refers to this in John 10:3, where He says that the gatekeeper,

<sup>17</sup> The German words are: "gott, herr, vatter, der ubirste, der almechtige, Schepffer."

<sup>18</sup> Thus Luther derives  $\text{יְיָ}$  from  $\text{יָד}$ , used in passages like Job 24:9 for "breast"; usually it is interpreted as a proper name derived from the verb  $\text{יָדָה}$ , "to have power," though other etymologies have also been suggested.

<sup>19</sup> Apparently this is an echo of the phrase in the Nicene Creed, where the Holy Spirit is called "the Lord and Giver of Life."

the Holy Spirit, will open the door to those that enter. For if God does not open and explain Holy Writ, no one can understand it; it will remain a closed book, enveloped in darkness.

Zalmon is a mountain of which we read in Judges 9:48, overgrown with tall, heavy timber. In German one might style it a black forest, a dark forest, or a black or dark mountain;<sup>20</sup> for לִשְׁ is a shadow, and חֹלֵם is a darkness produced by a shadow. This dark forest is the Old Testament Scripture, which is dark and black in itself. And all those who dwelled in it without faith remained dark and black in their own works. Their understanding was wrong, and so was their way of life. As Abimelech (Judges 9:48) cut wood from this same Zalmon and consumed the Shechemites with it, thus the teachers destroy souls by teaching nothing but law and works and by patterning themselves only after the external works of the fathers, without emulating their faith.

But in the New Testament the Old Testament is quoted and used everywhere; by God's mercy and His revelation this leads to a clear understanding of faith, no matter how dark and obscure it remains for the unbelievers. We reach into the dark, black forest and become snow-white. We observe that all the apostles appeal to the Old Testament, citing clear and lucid passages from it in substantiation of the faith. And prior to that, the Jews had quoted these same passages daily, and yet they remained obscure and dark to them. For the מְרַחֵם, the Distributor and Nourisher, who spreads the wings of the cherubim and the doves, had not been given at the time.<sup>21</sup> First Christ had to die and to bring Him. Is it still surprising to hear that black becomes white and darkness light? That is the miraculous work of God.

15. *The mountain of God is a fat mountain, a many-peaked mountain, a fat mountain.*

Up to this point the Evangel and the evangelists, both their work and their character, have been described. Now the psalmist informs us of the fruits and results of their work. Through the instrumentality

<sup>20</sup> In his *Lectures on Judges*, begun in 1516, Luther comments in greater detail on the allegorical significance of this dark forest (Weimar, IV, 573), applying it there to the shadows and trials through which the church must pass, rather than to the obscurity of the Old Testament, as he does here.

<sup>21</sup> Luther is referring here to the Holy Spirit, as his later discussion (p. 20) indicates.

of God's Word the Christians are gathered and made fat, rich, and fruitful in all good things. In consequence, they can truly be called "a hill of God, a fat mountain, a many-peaked mountain." Thus the church is portrayed here as a high mountain with many peaks, one beside and towering over the other, as we behold this in nature. But these are not wild, barren, and unproductive mountains but so full of fruit that God Himself, one might say, would like to dwell in their midst. That is Christendom, endowed through Gospel and faith with many rich graces and gifts, replete with all virtues, wisdom, knowledge, strength, good works, and the like. But Christians are not all equally endowed; the one excels the other in these gifts. Thus St. Paul says, 1 Corinthians 12:11: "God apportioneth." That is why the psalmist speaks of a "many-peaked mountain"; i. e., he speaks of a mountain and a mountain range: One mountain, to reflect the one uniform faith in all, but many peaks in the range to indicate the manifold gifts apportioned individually by the Holy Spirit. In the latter the Christians show differentiation. Thus the variety of gifts within the unity of faith is established, resulting in "fatness" and productivity, which flow only from such unity.

16. *Why do you leap, you many-peaked mountains? This is the mountain which God desired for His abode, yea, where the Lord will dwell forever.*

Here the unity comes to an end. The psalmist again speaks of many-peaked mountains. He refers to the synagog and its kind, without unity of faith and split into many sects and various practices of external works. They are in agreement in nothing but their persecution of the one mountain of God. They, too, have many peaks. The one surpasses the other in understanding, in skill, and in works. In the eyes of the world they often outdo the true mountain of God. Yes, they believe that they alone are the abode of God. They are self-complacent; they judge, condemn, and persecute all others — and that, as they declare, for the sake of God and the truth. Therefore the prophet rebukes them here, as he says: "You disparate multifarious hills, you unbelieving sanctimonious hypocrites, why do you leap? What reason do you have to boast of God and your truth? Why do you esteem yourselves so highly? After all, you are not the mountain of God. Here is the mountain on which God has His abode, which you condemn as though it were the devil's mountain. Yes, God will sojourn on this mountain to the end of days; as He says in Matthew

28:20: 'Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.' You may believe that you will destroy it; but it will endure, and you will perish." We observe that these mountains are not called "fat"; but, as we saw in verse six, "the obstinate dwell in a parched land."<sup>22</sup> Therefore there can be no fruit. They are all wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15).

17. *The number of God's wagons is twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands. God is in them with Sinai in holiness.*

Two factors contributed toward making Christendom seem insignificant to the Jews: in the first place, the small number of Christians; and, secondly, the pride of the Jews at having received the Commandments from God on Mount Sinai, as they said (John 9:28, 29): "You may be His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He comes from." The prophet makes reply to this and denies that the Christians are small in number. On the contrary, their number is so vast that it cannot be computed by man. For "twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands" signifies in the language of Scripture a throng which only God and not man can count, since he doubles and multiplies the extreme number thousand. In the eyes of the Jews the number of Christians was inconspicuous; but in the eyes of God it was immense, a number hidden from man.

To forestall their boasting that God was with them and not with the Christians, the psalmist says: "God is in and with them. The same God whom you have heard on Mount Sinai is in them with Sinai and all that happened there." Since the Law was given on Sinai, this name still represents the Law in Holy Writ, as St. Paul confirms in Galatians 4:24, 25.<sup>23</sup> The Jews, to be sure, received the Law at Sinai, but they do not keep it. For that matter, they were not willing to hear it at Sinai (Ex. 20:19). For faith, and not works, is the fulfillment of the Law. And not he who works but he who believes is justified and saved (Rom. 1:16, 17; Mark 16:16). Now the prophet wants to say: "You assume that the God of Sinai is with you. I declare that He is not. He is in this His wagon. Here is Sinai, here is the fulfillment of the Law, here is the God of Sinai, whom you refuse to hear and whose Law goes unheeded. Therefore God by no means

<sup>22</sup> Cf. p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> The original has "Gal. 5."

resides in them with Sinai but in holiness, i. e., in those who retain God's Law in their hearts by faith and thus are truly holy. You, however, have the God of Sinai and His Law only in external works and not by faith. For this reason the God of Sinai and His Law are in an unholy place in you. Outwardly you adorn yourselves, but inwardly you contaminate the God of Sinai together with His Commandment." In brief, the psalmist assigns the God of Sinai a place only in the believers, and not in the work-righteous. For the Law is fulfilled solely by faith; and there Sinai, too, will be in true holiness.

But why does the psalmist call Christendom a wagon here and no longer an army as in verse 12? The answer: He is here thinking of Christendom as it appears before God. Man, on the other hand, sees Christendom contending with the Gospel and faith against the world and the devil. This involves warfare and unrest, and armies are arrayed; mountains and mountain peaks are pertinent subjects there, and wisdom and virtue come into play. But before God gentle and calm tranquillity prevails. He dwells in a cheerful and clear conscience. Inwardly, that is where God dwells. As Psalm 76:2 testifies, His abode has been established in peace. Therefore God moves and rides in His Christians as in a comfortable, covered wagon, and they travel together from this life into life eternal. For the wagon is not stationary, which means that the Christians increase daily in spiritual stature, always possessing the peace of a good conscience.

18. *Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast plundered the plunder, Thou hast received gifts among men. Nevertheless, some are still rebellious against the fact that the Lord dwells here.*

This is the cardinal verse of the entire psalm. St. Paul quotes it in Ephesians 4:8. The psalmist here refers to the festivals of Ascension and Pentecost. This is the import of his words: "All the miracles foretold here of the Gospel and Christendom are traceable to Thine ascent into heaven. For there Thou didst receive all power and didst send the Holy Spirit to the earth with His gifts, by means of which the Gospel was proclaimed, the world converted, and all that was predicted fulfilled." That He ascended on high implies, of course, that He first descended into hell, as St. Paul expounds this in Ephesians 4:9. Therefore He said (John 16:7):<sup>24</sup> "If I do not go away, the Holy Spirit will not come." It was necessary for Him to rise from the dead and ascend into heaven before the Holy Spirit could come.

<sup>24</sup> The original has "John 18."

When the psalmist declares, "Thou hast plundered the plunder," he means that the evil Foe had stolen men from God and led them away into his realm of sin and death. Then Christ appeared on the scene; and like Abraham in Genesis 14:14, 15, He took the devil by surprise, retrieved the plunder, and deprived the robber of his spoils. Thus, whoever believes in Him has the promise of eternal deliverance from sin, death, and the devil.<sup>25</sup> Abraham pounced upon and overcame the enemy at night with but a few servants and put them to flight as far as Hobah, which is on the left side of Damascus. One could enlarge on that theme.

The psalmist does not say: "Thou hast given mankind gifts," but "Thou hast received gifts among men." This may be construed to mean, as St. Peter says Acts 2:33, that He has received such gifts from the Father to relay to men. For He has not received them only for Himself and into Himself, but they were bestowed on Him to infuse into men. This outpouring of gifts came to pass at Pentecost and repeatedly thereafter. Therefore it might not be so amiss to assume that Christ, who receives the gifts in heaven and conveys them to man, is also received in man here on earth. For whatever we do in faith Christ does in us, and all His experiences are shared by us. However, I prefer the first interpretation.

Although all those signs and gifts were visible and manifest in Christ's disciples, the rebellious Jews refused to believe that Christ was Lord and God and that He dwelt in His disciples. They claimed to be the exclusive dwelling of God. This is recorded here to keep us from being surprised if not everyone believes us or the Gospel. People remain stubborn and hardened even in the face of the truth and of miracles such as were performed in the apostles.

*19. Blessed be God daily, who burdens Himself with us. This is a God of our salvation. Selah.*

Now the psalmist begins to praise and laud such grace and goodness, saying: "That is a gracious God! Surely He is to be magnified and exalted, who has encumbered Himself with us, assuming all our misery and our sin and death as His own, overcoming all these in Himself. That is a veritable God of salvation and of succor." The

<sup>25</sup> This metaphor of the crucified and risen Christ as the battler against the devil and the victor over man's tyrants is one which Luther took over from the church fathers and used throughout his life (cf. p. 135); in his writings it stands side by side with other metaphors for the reconciliation between God and man, notably with those of sacrifice and of satisfaction.

Law and good works do not<sup>26</sup> answer the purpose of exterminating death and sin. This was first effected when He came who is God and who took upon Himself both sin and death and destroyed them within Himself, as St. Paul says 1 Corinthians 15:54. For who else could save us but He who was able to deliver us from sin and death? That was achieved by God alone, who carried our burden and extirpated it. Thus He became a God of our salvation, i. e., a God who saves us. The word "burdens" could also be interpreted to mean that He liberates us from the Law and from sin and now places His easy yoke and light burden on our shoulders. This would find corroboration in Matthew 11:30: "For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." This is tantamount to saying: "I relieve you of the intolerable burden of sin and a bad conscience and impose a few temporal sufferings." However, I incline to the first interpretation.

20. *This God is a God who saves, and He has become for us a God of escape from death.*

It would have been bootless if He had assumed our burden and conquered death only for Himself. But as matters stand, He presented us with His victory, conquering sin and death in our behalf, so that we, who were held captive by the evil spirit and lived in sin and death without any God and Lord, henceforth would have our own Lord and God, who reigns over us in such a manner that through Him we were saved and escaped death. What more fervent wish does mankind entertain than deliverance from death? And now our God has become just such a Lord and God, who satisfies this ardent longing of all men for escape from death and for salvation. As this verse sets forth, His kingdom means nothing else than accomplishing our salvation and being a God who snatches us from death.

But here our faith is so feeble that it fails to understand His kingdom. For it would seem that He is killing and condemning all those who believe in Him. He lets them come to grief and suffer terribly, giving the impression that He is a Lord of destruction and of entry into death.<sup>27</sup> But this has a purpose. God does this in order that salvation and deliverance from death be received by faith, which

<sup>26</sup> We have supplied the word *nit*, as the Weimar edition and some older editions have done.

<sup>27</sup> The play on words in the German original is difficult to reproduce in English. The text has the word *ausz zu gehen*, and Luther uses the word *ausgang* in expounding it; here the word is *eyngang*.

believes that life emerges from death and that perdition ends in salvation. Therefore the psalmist did not choose an idle and indifferent word here. He says very definitely: "God has become an agent of escape from death for us, or a God to whom belong the issues of death." He does not say that we shall not die, but that we shall issue or go forth from death, or escape from death. But to go forth from death presupposes that we have entered death. Therefore the Lord first thrusts all His own ignominiously into death, and then and there He becomes their God and Lord, who liberates them from death. That is indeed a God of salvation and of escape from death. The unbelievers do not accept this; therefore they must enter death and remain there, since they do not possess this God of salvation and the Lord of escape from death. The next verse deals with them.

21. *But God will shatter the heads of His enemies, the hairy crown of him who walks in his guilty ways.*

It is known well enough that the Jews have at all times been Christ's greatest enemies, their claim to be God's most loyal friends notwithstanding. It is undeniable that this verse chronicles their fate: their head is shattered; they no longer have a kingdom, a government, a priesthood. Soon after Christ's ascent they lost that head and never regained it, which is the result of but one crime, namely, their hostility to Christ and their refusal to let Him be God. Their government is called "heads" and "hairy crown," i. e., a handsome curly head. The Jewish priesthood was an attractive order, rich and respected. Their splendor is intimated by Absalom's beautiful hair (2 Sam. 14:26). The head is the highest position in any nation; the hair on the head represents the great men in this highest position. They enhance the power of the head; they embellish it with their riches, honor, and might. But now the Jewish government has been destroyed; their head has been shorn bald. In Isaiah 3:24 God expresses this figuratively, when He says that He would give "baldness instead of well-set hair."

All this is the consequence of their refusal to believe in Him who takes away both sin and death, and of their persistence to remain in their guilty ways, as our text declares. To be sure, they are not aware of their sin or of the reason for their total destruction. In times past they had experienced repeated captivity; but still they had always retained their head and government, or at least a prophet or priest. Never before have they been shorn as bald as after Christ's ascension.

22. *The Lord said: "I will convert them from Bashan, I will convert them from the depths of the sea."*

Since the Jews would not lend ear to the apostles' preaching and accept Christ, the apostles turned their attention to heathendom, which God now converted in the stead of the Jews. God foretold in our verse that such a conversion would take place after the destruction of the Jews. St. Paul also informs us of this in Romans 11:11, 25.

The terms "Bashan" and "the depths of the sea" pertain to heathendom. Bashan was a country beyond the Jordan, in which King Og, a mighty giant, ruled (Num. 21:33; Deut. 3:11). The word Bashan means fat and corpulent. The kingdom, consequently, was fat and mighty above others. After Christ's ascension this country Bashan no longer existed. Therefore the psalmist can apply this term to heathendom, for heathendom had many great and mighty kings, primarily the Roman Empire. Now Christ and His poor apostles took on these big, fat, and powerful men and made Christians of them and among them. The words "the depths of the sea" also point to heathendom. Christ attacked this at its most formidable spot, its greatest depth, namely, in Rome and the Roman Empire. For the ocean is the most powerful at its greatest depth. On the other hand, it is possible that this fatness and depth may also refer to the great blindness and depth of sin of the heathen, in which they were reared and which they practiced. Yet God drew His own by conversion from the depths of the sea, i. e., from among the mightiest of this world. However, this cost much blood, as is evident from the following verse.

23. *Therefore Thou wilt bathe Thy feet in blood. The tongues of Thy dogs will come from Thy foes.*

What is meant by Christ's feet? Jeremiah (Jer. 2:24, 25) compares preaching with a course. St. Paul does likewise in Galatians 2:2, when he declares that he has run, meaning that he had preached. And Isaiah (Is. 52:7) uses similar imagery of the Gospel: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the preacher."

In other words, the feet of Christ are the office of the ministry. By means of this weapon alone Christ attacked the world, traversed it with these feet, and preached to it. But this office was bathed in blood; for many of its members were tortured because of it, particularly in Rome and the Roman Empire. However, the kingdom of Christ was not stifled in this blood, nor did it perish. Despite the

large number of martyrs it survived. Only from God's point of view was it dipped in blood. The world takes a different view of the matter.

But that is not all. As Abel grew more eloquent through his blood after his death, which accused and cried out against his murderer Cain (Gen. 4:10), so Christ raised other preachers after His feet had been bathed in blood through the martyrdom of the apostles. These preachers indicted the murderers, raised their voices and barked aloud, as they advanced the Gospel more and more.

Thus from the blood of the preachers there emerged the tongues of the dogs of Christ; and these did not issue from Christ's friends but from His foes. For Christ first converted those who had once violently opposed the Gospel. Later they became eminent preachers, such as Augustine and many others.

The psalmist chose the term "tongues of dogs" advisedly, because these have healing power.<sup>28</sup> In the Gospel (Luke 16:21) we read that dogs licked the wounds of poor Lazarus. Those are the preachers who cleanse and heal the wounds of a smitten conscience with their salutary message and who take upon themselves the frailties of the brethren with brotherly love. St. Paul enjoins in Romans 14:1 that the weak in the faith should be received and not rejected. Such teachers rise from the blood of the martyrs.<sup>29</sup> They not only bark against the foes, but they also heal the wounds of feeble friends. However, at present the bishops are biting, slashing, and devouring the weak friends, while they are licking and healing the wounds of the strong enemies. Those are the devil's dogs.

24. *Thy solemn processions are seen, O God, the processions of my God, my King, in holiness.*

God's "processions" represent His work, which is steadfast love and faithfulness. Thus we read in Psalm 25:10: "All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness." However, it requires great skill to recognize God's work and to let Him work in us, so that all our work will in the end be God's and not our own. This is the proper celebration of the Sabbath, to rest from our own works and to be full of God's works. All this is effected in us through faith, which

<sup>28</sup> On the basis of Luke 16:21 it was generally thought in Luther's day that the saliva of dogs had healing power.

<sup>29</sup> An allusion to Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 50; Luther frequently quotes this as a proverb (cf. *Luther's Works*, 12, p. 174, note 8).