

EVERYONE'S LUTHER

**PREFACES TO THE
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE**



DR. MARTIN LUTHER

These prefaces were originally published in *Works Of Martin Luther Translated With Introductions and Notes Volume VI*, by A. J. Holman Company and The Castle Press, 1932. The copyright was not renewed in 1960, releasing the text into the public domain.

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ISBN: 978-1-387-49395-1

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Introduction

Luther's work on the translation of the Bible into German extended over many years. His translation of the New Testament was begun in 1521, during his residence at the Wartburg; it was published in September, 1522.

Before the New Testament came off the press, he was already at work upon the Old Testament. November 2, 1522, he wrote to Spalatin, "In translating the Old Testament, I am only at Leviticus... I have decided to shut myself up at home and hasten the work, so that Moses may be in press by January. We shall publish this separately, then the historical books, and finally the prophets, for the size and cost of the books make it necessary for us to divide them and publish them a little at a time."

This is the procedure that was actually followed. The first part of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, was published in 1523. It was followed closely by the second part, which contained the remainder of the historical books, and which was completed before December 4th. At that time he was at work on the third part. This section, which comprised Job, the Psalter, and the Books of Solomon, appeared in 1524. The work on the prophetic books proceeded very slowly. It was not completed until 1532, though single books were published separately before that time, — Isaiah in 1528, Daniel in 1530. After the publication of the prophets, all the books were collected into one volume, and Luther's complete Bible appeared in 1534.

Meanwhile, Luther was continually revising the work that was already in print. The second edition of the New Testament, issued three months after the first (December, 1522) contained many alterations in the text, as did the second edition of the Psalter in 1531. In this work of revision, as in the original translation, Luther had the assistance of his Wittenberg colleagues, — Melancthon, Bugenhagen, Jonas, Cruciger, Aurogallus, and George R6rer. Luther called them his Sanhedrim. Their weekly meetings discussed

the passages that seemed to need correction or amendment. The changes which Luther approved were incorporated in the editions after 1534. The most important of these was that of 1541. The last edition which Luther himself supervised appeared in 1545.

As an aid to the understanding of his Bible, Luther provided most of the books with prefaces. In most cases they were very brief and consisted of little more than summaries of contents; in a few instances they were more extensive, and discussed questions of the nature of the books, of date, authorship, and doctrine. Because of the importance of some of these prefaces, it has seemed wise to include all of them in this edition, with the exception of those to the Apocrypha, which are interesting, but not especially important.

Literature. There is a large literature on Luther's Bible translation. The best summary of it is that of Nestle, in the *Realencyk* 3:70ff. In the Weimar Edn., there have been published, to date, five volumes of Luther's Bible, four of which deal with the German Bible. There are extensive bibliographies. The work is, however, not yet complete.

The prefaces are collected in Erlangen Ed. 63:7 ff., and St. Louis Ed. 14:2ff.

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Introduction to the Old Testament 1545 (1523)

There are some who have a small opinion of the Old Testament, thinking of it as a book that was given to the Jewish people only, and is now out of date, containing only stories of past times. They think that they have enough in the New Testament and pretend to seek in the Old Testament only a spiritual sense. Origen, Jerome, and many persons of high standing have held this view, but Christ says, "Search in the Scriptures, for they give testimony of me," and St. Paul bids Timothy continue in the reading of the Scriptures, and declares, in Romans 1:2, that the Gospel was promised by God in the Scriptures, and in 1 Corinthians 15:3, he says that Christ came of the seed of David, died, and rose from the dead, according to the Scriptures; and St. Peter, too, points us back, more than once, to the Scriptures.

They do this in order to teach us that the Scriptures of the Old Testament are not to be despised, but to be read, because they themselves base the New Testament upon them, and prove it by them, and appeal to them, as St. Luke writes, in Acts 17:11, saying that they at Thessalonica searched the Scriptures daily to discover whether it agreed with what Paul taught. The ground and proof of the New Testament are surely not to be despised, and therefore the Old Testament is to be highly regarded. And what is the New Testament except an open preaching and proclamation of Christ, appointed by the sayings of the Old Testament and fulfilled by Christ?

But in order that those who know no better may have incentive and instruction for reading the Old Testament, I have prepared this introduction, with whatever ability God' has given me. I beg and faithfully warn every pious Christian not to stumble at the simplicity of the language and the stories that will often meet him there. He should not doubt that however simple they may seem, these are the very words, works, judgments, and deeds of the high majesty, power, and wisdom of God; for

this is Scripture, and it makes fools of all the wise and prudent, and stands open to the small and foolish, as Christ says, in Matthew 11:25.

Therefore let your own thoughts and feelings go, and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines, which can never be worked out, so that you may find the wisdom of God that He lays before you in such foolish and simple guise, in order that He may quench all pride. Here you will find the swaddling-clothes and the mangers in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds.

Simple and little are the swaddling-clothes, but dear is the treasure, Christ, that lies in them.

Know, then, that the Old Testament is a book of laws, which teaches what men are to do and not to do, and gives, besides, examples and stories of how these laws are kept or broken; just as the New Testament is a Gospel book, or book of grace, and teaches where one is to get the power to fulfill the law. But in the New Testament there are given, along with the teaching about grace, many other teachings that are laws and commandments for the ruling of the flesh, since in this life the spirit is not perfected and grace alone cannot rule. Just so in the Old Testament there are, beside the laws, certain promises and offers of grace, by which the holy fathers and prophets, under the law, were kept, like us, under the faith of Christ.

Nevertheless, just as the peculiar and chief teaching of the New Testament is the proclamation of grace and peace in Christ, through the forgiveness of sins; so the peculiar and chief teaching of the Old Testament is the teaching of laws, the showing of sin, and the furtherance of good. Know that this is what you have to expect in the Old Testament.

We come, first, to the books of Moses; he teaches in his first book how all creatures were made, and (as the chief cause for his writing) whence sin came, and death, namely, by Adam's fall, from the devil's wickedness. But immediately thereafter, before Moses gets to the law, he teaches whence the help is to come, by which sin and death are to be driven out; namely, not by the law or men's own works (since there was no law as yet), but by "the

seed of the woman,” Christ, promised to Adam and Abraham. Thus from the beginning of the Scriptures, and throughout them all, faith is praised above all works and laws and merits. The first book of Moses, therefore, is made up almost entirely of illustrations of faith and unbelief, and the fruits that faith and unbelief bear, and is almost a Gospel-book.

Afterward, in the second book, when the world was now: full, and was sunk in blindness, so that men scarcely knew any longer what sin was or where death came from, God brings Moses forward with the law and takes up a special people, in order to enlighten the world again by them, and by the law to reveal sin anew. Thus He organizes this people with all kinds of laws, and separates it from all other peoples, has them build a tabernacle and begins a form of worship, appoints princes and officers, and provides His people splendidly with both laws and men, to rule them in the body before the world, and in the spirit before God.

The special topic of the third book is the appointment of the priesthood, with the statutes and laws according to which the priests are to act in teaching the people. There we see that a priestly office is instituted only because of sin, to proclaim sin to the people and make atonement before God. Thus all of its work is to deal with sin and sinners. Therefore no temporal wealth is given to the priests and they are neither commanded nor permitted to rule men’s bodies, but the only work that is assigned them is to care for the people who are in sin.

In the fourth book, after the laws have been given, the princes and priests instituted, the tabernacle and the form of worship set up, and everything that pertains to a people of God made ready, then the work and the practice of all this begins, and a test is made of the way that such an order of things will go and what will happen under it. That is why this book says so much about the disobedience of the people and the plagues that came upon them, and some of the laws are interpreted and the number of the laws is increased. For that is the way it always goes; laws are quickly given, but when they are to go into effect and be enforced, they meet with nothing but hindrance, and nothing will go as the law demands. This book

is a notable example of how there is nothing at all in making people righteous with laws, but, as St. Paul says, laws cause only sin and wrath.

In the fifth book, after the people have been punished because of their sins, and God has enticed them a little with grace, in order that by His kindness in giving them the two kingdoms they might be moved to keep His law with pleasure and love, — then Moses repeats the whole law, with the story of all that has happened to them (except what concerns the priesthood), and explains anew everything that belongs either to the bodily or to the spiritual government of a people. Thus Moses, as a perfect lawgiver, fulfilled all the duties of his office; he not only gave the law, but was there when men were to fulfill it, and when things went wrong, he explained it and re-established it. But this explanation in the fifth book really contains nothing else than faith toward God and love to one's neighbor; for all God's laws come to that. Therefore, down to the twentieth chapter, Moses, in his explanation of the law, guards against everything that may destroy faith in God, and from there to the end of the book, against everything that hinders love.

It is to be observed, in the first place, that Moses provides so exactly for the organization of the people under laws as to leave human reason no room to choose a single work of its own, or to invent its own form of worship; for he not only teaches fear, love, and trust toward God, but also provides so many ways of outward worship, — sacrifices, thanksgivings, fasts, mortifications, etc., — that no one needs to choose anything else.

Moreover he gives instructions for planting and tilling and marrying and fighting and ruling children, servants, and households, buying and selling, borrowing and repaying, and everything that one can do, either outwardly or inwardly. It goes so far that some of the prescriptions are to be regarded as foolish and useless.

Why, dear sir, does God do that? In the end, because He has taken this people to be His own and has willed to be their God; therefore He would so rule them that all their doings may surely be right in His eyes. For if anyone does anything for which God's Word has not first given warrant, it

counts for nothing before God and is labor lost, for in the Fifth Book in Deuteronomy 4:2 and Deuteronomy 12:32, He forbids any addition to His laws, and in Deuteronomy 12:8 He says that they shall not do what seems to them right. The Psalter, too, and all the prophets lament that the people are doing good works that they themselves have chosen and that were not commanded by God. He cannot and will not suffer those who are His to undertake to do anything that He has not commanded, no matter how good it may be; for obedience, which depends on God's Word, is of all works the noblest and best.

Since this life, however, cannot be without external forms of worship, He put before them all these forms and included them in His commandment, so that if they must or would do God any outward service, they might take one of these, and not some form of service that they themselves had invented. So they could be sure and certain that their work was done in obedience to God and His Word. Thus they are prevented on every hand from following their own reason and free will, in doing good and living aright; and yet room, place, time, person, work, and form are so determined and prescribed, that they cannot complain that they must follow the example of alien worship.

In the second place, it is to be noted that the laws are of three kinds. Some speak only of temporal things, as do our imperial laws. These are established by God chiefly because of the wicked, that they may not do worse things. Such laws are for prevention rather than for instruction; f414 as when Moses commands to dismiss a wife with a letter of separation, or that a husband shall bring an "offering of jealousy" for his wife, and may take other wives besides.

All these are temporal laws. — There are some, however, that teach the external worship of God, as was said above.

Over and above these are the laws about faith and love, so that all other laws must and ought to be measured by the laws of faith and love; that is to say, they are to be kept where their observance does not conflict with faith and love; but where they conflict with faith and love, they are entirely void.

Therefore we read that David did not kill the murderer Joab, though he had twice deserved death; and in 2 Samuel 14:11 he promises the woman of Tekoa that her son shall not die, though he has slain his brother; Absalom, too, he did not kill. Moreover, David himself ate of the holy bread of the priests, and Tamar thought the king might give her in marriage to her stepbrother, Amnon. From these and similar stories one sees plainly that the kings, priests, and heads of the people often transgressed the laws boldly, at the demand of faith and love, and therefore that faith and love are always to be mistresses of the law and to have all laws in their power. For since all laws aim at faith and love, none of them can be valid, or be a law, if it conflicts with faith and love.

Even to the present day, then, the Jews are greatly in error when they hold so strictly and so hard to some of the laws of Moses. They would rather let love and peace be destroyed than eat or drink with us, or do things of that kind. They do not see the real meaning of the law. This understanding of it is necessary to all who live under laws, and not to the Jews only; for Christ says, in Matthew 12:11, that one might break the Sabbath if an ox had fallen into a pit, and might help it out, though that would be only a temporal necessity and a temporal injury; how much more then ought one boldly break all kinds of laws when bodily necessity demands it, provided nothing is done against faith and love, as Christ says that David did when he ate the holy bread.

But why does Moses mix up his laws in such a disorderly way? Why does he not put the temporal laws together in one group and the spiritual in another, and the laws of faith and love in still another? Moreover, he sometimes repeats a law so often and uses certain words so many times that it becomes tedious to read it or listen to it. The answer is that Moses writes as the case demands, so that his book is a picture and illustration of government and life. For this is what happens when things are moving, — now this work has to be done and now that, and no man can so arrange his life (if he is to act in a godly way) that this day he uses only spiritual laws and that day only temporal, but God disposes the laws as He sets the stars in the heavens and the flowers in the fields, and a man must be ready every

hour for anything, and do the first thing that comes to his hand. The books of Moses are mixed up just this way.

That he is so insistent and often repeats the same thing shows the nature of his office; for one who is to rule a people with laws must always hold on, always insist, and be patient with the people, as with asses. No work of law is done with pleasure and love; it is all forced and compelled. Since Moses, then, is a lawgiver, he has to show by his insistence that the work of the law is a forced work, and has to make the people weary, until, through this insistence, they recognize their illness and their dislike for God's Law, and long for grace, as appears below.

In the third place, Moses' true intention is to reveal sin, and put to shame all the presumption of human ability; therefore St. Paul calls him in Galatians 2 and 3, "a minister of sin," and his office "an office of death;" and in Romans 3 and Romans 7:7, he says, "By the law cometh only the knowledge of sin," and "by the works of the law no one becomes righteous before God. For by the law Moses can do, no more than tell what men ought to do and not to do; but power, and ability to do it and not to do it he does not give, and so he lets us stick in sin. If we, then, stick in sin, death presses instantly upon us as vengeance, and punishment for sin.

Therefore Paul calls sin "the sting of death," because it is by sin that death has all its right and power over us. But if it were not for the law, there would be no sin; therefore it is all the fault of Moses, who, by the law, stirs up and censures sin, and then upon sin death follows, with its power, so that Moses' office is rightly called by St. Paul an office of sin and death; for by his law-giving he brings nothing upon us but sin and death.

Nevertheless, this office of sin and death is good and very necessary; for where God's law is not, there human reason is so blind that it cannot recognize sin. Human reason does not know that unbelief and despair of God is sin; nay, it knows nothing about man's duty to believe God and trust Him; thus it goes on, hardened in its blindness, and feels this sin not at all, doing meanwhile some works that would otherwise be good and leading an outwardly honorable life. Then it thinks it stands well, and

enough has been done in this matter. We see this in the heathen and the hypocrites, when their life is at its best. Besides, the reason does not know that the wicked inclination of the flesh and hatred against enemies are sin, but because it feels that all men are so inclined, it holds that these things are natural and right and thinks it enough to guard against outward wrongdoing.

Thus it goes on and regards its illness as strength, its sin as right, its bad as good, and can make no progress.

See, then! To drive away this blindness and hardened presumption, Moses' office is necessary. Now he cannot drive them away, unless he reveals them, and makes them known. He does this by the law, when he teaches that men ought to fear, trust, believe, and love God; and ought to have beside no evil desire or hatred for any man. When Nature, then, hears this aright, it must be frightened, for it certainly finds neither trust nor faith, neither fear nor love to God, and neither love nor purity toward one's neighbor, but only unbelief, doubt, contempt and hatred to God, and only evil will and desire toward one's neighbor. But where it finds this, death is instantly before its eyes, ready to devour such a sinner and swallow him up in hell.

See, that is what is meant by bringing death upon us by sin and killing us by sin, that is, stirring up sin by the law, and setting it before our eyes, and driving all our presumption into despondency and trembling and despair, so that a man can do no more than cry, with the prophet, "I am rejected by God," or, as we say in German, "I am the devil's; I can never be saved."

That is what St. Paul means by those short words in 1 Corinthians 15:56, "The sting of death is sin,' but the strength of sin is the law." It is as if he were saying, "Death stings and slays us, because of the sin that is found in us and makes us guilty of death; but sin is found in us and gives us so mightily to death, because of the law, which reveals sin to us and teaches us to recognize it; we did not know it before, and therefore felt secure."

Now see with what power Moses conducts and performs his office. For, in order to put Nature to the very utmost shame, he not only gives laws that speak of natural and true sins, such as the Ten Commandments, but he makes sins of things that are in their nature, no sins, and forces and p erasers sins upon them in heaps. For unbelief and evil desire are, in their nature, sin, an worthy of death; but not to eat leavened bread on Easter, and to eat any unclean beast, to make no sign on the body, and all those things that the Levitical priesthood deals with as sin, — these things are not, in their nature, sinful or wicked, but they become sins because they are forbidden by the law. This law can be done away; but the Ten Commandments cannot be done away, for sin against the Ten Commandments would be sin, even though there were no commandments, or they were not known; just as the unbelief of the heathen is sin, even though they do-not know or think that it is sin.

Thus we see that these many laws of Moses were given not only to prevent anyone from choosing ways of his own to do good and live well, as has been: said above, but rather that sins might become more, and be heaped up beyond measure, to burden the conscience so that hardened blindness might have to recognize itself and feel its own. inability and nothingness in respect of good, and thus be compelled and forced by the law to seek something beyond the law and its own ability, namely, God's grace, promised in Christ, Who was to come. Every law of God is good and right, even if it only bids men carry dung or gather straw, and no man can be righteous or good of heart who does not keep this good law, or who keeps it unwillingly. But Nature cannot keep it otherwise than unwillingly; therefore, through God's law, it must recognize and feel its wickedness, and it must sigh and long for the aid of divine grace in Christ.

Then, when Christ comes, the law ceases, especially the Levitical law, which, as has been said, makes sins of things that are not in their nature, sinful. The Ten-Commandments do not cease, in the sense that they are no longer to be kept or fulfilled, but Moses' part in them ceases, and no longer strengthens sin by the Ten Commandments, and sin is no longer the sting of death. For through Christ sin is forgiven, God is reconciled, and man's

heart has begun to be inclined to the law. Moses can no longer rebuke it and make it sinful, because it has not kept the commandments and is guilty of death, as he did before grace came and before Christ was there.

St. Paul teaches this, in 2 Corinthians 3:7, when he says that the glory in the countenance of Moses ceases because of the glory in the countenance of Jesus Christ; that is, the work of Moses, which makes sinners of us and puts us to shame with the brightness of the knowledge of our wickedness and nothingness, no longer causes us pain and no longer terrifies us with death. For we now have the glory in the face of Christ, that is, the work of grace whereby we know Christ, by whose righteousness, life, and strength we fulfill the law and overcome death and hell. The three apostles saw Moses and Elias on Matthew Tabor, and yet were not frightened at them, because of the tender glory in the face of Christ; but in Exodus 34, where Christ was not present, the children of Israel could not endure the glory and brightness in Moses' face, and he had to put a covering over it.

There are three kinds of pupils of the law. The first are those who hear the law and despise it, and lead an impious life, without fear. To these the law does not come. They are signified by the calf-worshippers in the wilderness, on whose account Moses broke the tables; he did not bring them the law.

The second are those who attempt to fulfill it by their own power, without grace. They are signified by the people who could not look on Moses' countenance, when he brought the tables a second time. To these the law comes, but they endure it not; therefore they put a covering over it and lead a life of hypocrisy, with outward works of the law, though the law makes everything sin, if the covering is removed. For the law shows that our ability is nothing without Christ's grace.

The third are those who see Moses clearly, without a covering. These are they who understand the meaning of the law and how it demands impossible things. Then sin comes into power, death is mighty, Goliath's spear is like a weaver's beam and its head weighs six hundred shekels of brass, and all the children of Israel flee before him, but David only. Christ, our Lord, saves us from all that; for if Christ's glory did not come along

with this glory of Moses, no one could bear the glory of the law, the terror of sin and death. These pupils fall away from all works and presumption and learn from the law nothing else except to recognize sin and to sigh for Christ; and this is the true work of Moses and the true purpose of the law.

So Moses himself has told us that his work and teaching should last until Christ, and then cease, when he says in Deuteronomy 18, "A prophet shall the Lord thy God raise up unto thee from among thy brethren, like unto me; him shalt thou hear, etc." This is the noblest saying in all of Moses; indeed it is the very pith of him; and the apostles appealed to it and made great use of it to strengthen the Gospel and abolish the law; all the prophets, too, drew heavily upon it. For since God here promises another Moses, whom they are to hear, it follows of necessity that he would teach something different from Moses; and Moses gives up his power to him, and yields to him, so that he may be heard. This prophet cannot, then, teach law, for Moses has done that to the uttermost, and for the law's sake there would be no need to raise up another prophet. Therefore this word was certainly spoken concerning the teaching of grace and concerning Christ.

For this reason also, St. Paul calls the law of Moses "the Old Testament," and Christ does the same when He institutes "the New Testament." Thus it is a testament, because in it God promises and bequeaths to the people of Israel the land of Canaan, if they keep it. He gave it to them, also, and it was confirmed by the death and blood of sheep and goats. But since this testament rested not upon God's grace, but upon men's works, it had to grow old and cease, and the promised land had to be lost again, because the law cannot be fulfilled by works. And another testament had to come, which would not grow old, and would not rest upon our deeds, but upon God's words and works, so that it might last forever. Therefore it is confirmed by the death and blood of an eternal Person, and an everlasting land is promised and given.

Let this be enough about the books and work of Moses. 'What, then, are the other books, the prophets and the histories? I answer: They are nothing else than what Moses is; for all of them do the work that Moses does, and

guard “against the false prophets, that they may not lead the people to works, but allow them to stay in the work of Moses and the knowledge of sin. They hold fast to this purpose, in order to keep the people conscious of their own impotence through a right understanding of the law, and thus drive them to Christ, as Moses does. Therefore they enlarge upon what Moses says of Christ, and furnish two kinds of examples, — pies of those who understand Moses and those who do not understand him rightly, — together with examples of the punishments and rewards that come to both.

Thus the prophets are nothing else than administrators and witnesses of Moses and his work, to bring everyone to Christ through the law.

In conclusion, I ought also indicate the spiritual meaning presented to us by the Levitical law and the Mosaic priesthood. But there is too much of this to write; it needs space and time, and should be expounded with the living voice. For Moses is, indeed, a well of all wisdom and understanding, out of which has sprung all that the prophets knew and said. Moreover, even the New Testament flows out of it and is founded in it, as we have heard. Let it be my service to give a little hint to those who have the grace and understanding to search for it.

If, then, you would interpret well and surely, set Christ before you; for He is the man to whom it all applies. Make nothing else of the high priest Aaron than Christ alone, as is done by the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is almost enough, all by itself, to interpret all the figures of Moses. Likewise it is certain that Christ Himself is both the sacrifice and the altar, for He sacrificed Himself, with His own blood; as the same Epistle announces.

Now, as the Levitical high priest, by his sacrifice, took away only the artificial sins, which were in their nature no sins, so our high priest, Christ, by His own sacrifice and blood, has taken away the true sin, which is in its nature sin, and He has gone in once through the veil to God to make atonement for us. Thus you should apply to Christ personally and to no one else, all that is written about the high priest.

But the high priest's sons, who are engaged in the daily sacrifice, you should interpret to mean ourselves, who, in the presence of our father Christ, sitting in heaven, live here on earth in the body, and have not passed through to Him except by faith, spiritually. Their office of slaughter and sacrifice signifies nothing else than the preaching of the Gospel, by which the old man is slain and offered to God, burned and consumed by the fire of love, in the Holy Ghost; and this sacrifice is a sweet savor to God, that is, it produces a conscience that is good, pure, and secure before God. This is the interpretation that St. Paul makes, in Romans 12:1, when he teaches that we are to offer our bodies to God, a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice; and this we do (as has been said) by the constant practice of the Gospel, by preaching it and believing it.

Let this suffice for the present as a brief suggestion for seeking Christ and the Gospel in the Old Testament. He that reads this Bible should know that I have been careful to put the Name of God that the Jews call *Tetragrammaton* in capital letters, and the other, which they call *Adonai* half in capitals; for among all the names of God, these two alone are applied in the Scriptures to the real, true God, while the others are often ascribed to the angels and saints. I have done this so that men can draw the strong conclusion that Christ is true God, since Jeremiah 23:6 calls Him LORD, saying, "They shall call Him LORD, our Righteousness." The same thing is to be found in more passages.

Herewith, I commend all my readers to Christ, and ask that they will help me get from God the power to carry this work through to a profitable end, for I freely admit that I undertook too much, especially in trying to put the Old Testament into German. The Hebrew language, sad to say, has gone down so far that even the Jews know little enough about it, and their glosses and interpretations (which I have tested) are not to be trusted. I think that if the Bible is to come up again, we Christians are the ones who must do the work, for we have the understanding of Christ, without which the knowledge of the language is nothing. Because they were without it, the old interpreters, even Jerome, made mistakes in many passages.

Though I cannot claim that I have got everything, nevertheless, I venture to say that this German Bible is plainer and surer, at many points, than the Latin, and so it is true that if the printers do not, as usual, spoil it with their carelessness, the German language has here a better Bible than the Latin language. I call upon its readers to say whether this is so.

And now, of course, the mud will stick to the wheel, and there will be no one so stupid that he will not want to be my master in this work, and criticize me here and there. Let them go. From the beginning I have considered the fact that it would be easier to find ten thousand to criticize my work than one to do a twentieth of it after me. I, too, would like to be a great scholar and give brilliant proof of what I know by criticizing St. Jerome's Latin Bible, but he also could defy me to do the work after him.

If there is anyone who is so far above me in scholarship, let him undertake to translate the whole Bible into German, and let him tell me, after that, what he can do. If he does better than I, why should he not be preferred to me. I thought I was a scholar, and I know that, by God's grace, I am more learned than all the sophists in the universities; but now I see that I cannot handle even my own native German tongue. Nor have I read, up to this time, a book or letter which contained the real German language. No one thinks of speaking German rightly either, especially the people in the chancelleries and the miserable preachers and wretched writers who think they have the right to change the German tongue, and invent new words for us every day, — *beherzigen*, *behandigen*, *erspriesslich*, *erschiesslich*, and the like. Yes, my dear man, there are also *bethoren* f424 and *ernarren*. f425 In a word, if we were, all of us, to work together, we would have plenty to do in bringing the Bible to light, one with his knowledge, another with his language. Even as it is, I have not worked at this alone, but have used the services of anyone whom I could get. Therefore I ask everyone to desist from abuse and leave the poor people undisturbed, and help me, if he can. If he will not do that, let him take up the Bible himself and make one of his own. Those who only abuse and worry others, are certainly not so godly and honest that they would care to have a pure Bible, since they know that they cannot produce it; but they would like to be clever masters of

another's science, though in their own science they have never been even pupils.

May God complete the work that He has begun. Amen.

Preface to the Book of Job

The book of Job deals with the question, whether misfortune can come to the righteous from God. Job stands fast, and holds that God chastises even the righteous without reason, to His praise, as Christ also says, in John 3:9, of the man who was born blind.

His friends take the other side and make a great, long talk, defending God's justice, and saying that He punishes no righteous man; if He punishes, then the man who is punished must have sinned. They have a worldly and human idea of God and His righteousness, as though He were like a man and His law were like the world's law.

Job, to be sure, when he is in danger of death, talks, in his human weakness, too much against God, and thus sins amidst his sufferings; nevertheless, he insists that he has not deserved this suffering more than others have; and that is true. But at last God decides that Job, by speaking against Him, has spoken wrongly, in his suffering; but that he spoke the truth in what he said, replying to his friends, about his innocence before the suffering came.

Thus this book leads the history up to this point, — God alone is righteous, and yet one man is more righteous than another, even before God. It is written for our comfort, in order that we may know that God allows even His great saints to stumble, especially in adversity. Before Job comes into fear of death, he praises God at the theft of his goods and the death of his children; but when death is in prospect and God withdraws Himself, his words show what kind of ideas a man, however holy he may be, has against God, when he gets the notion that God is not God, but only a judge and wrathful tyrant, who applies force and cares nothing about a good life.

This is the finest part of this book. It is understood only by those who also experience and feel what it is to suffer the wrath and judgment of God, and to have His grace hidden.

The language of this book is more lofty and splendid than that of any other book in all the Scriptures, and if it were translated everywhere word for word (as the Jews and foolish translators would have it done), and not, for the most part, according to the sense, no one would understand it; as, for example, when he says “The thirsty will drink up his goods,” meaning, “Robbers shall take them from him”; or “The children of pride have not gone therein,” i.e., “the young lions, that stalk proudly”; and many similar cases. Again, by “light” he means “good fortune,” by “darkness,” “misfortune,” etc.

Therefore, I think that this third part must take its medicine, and the wiseacres must say of it that it is an entirely different book from the Latin Bible. Let them go. We have done our best to use language that is clear and that everybody can understand, giving the genuine sense and meaning.

We can allow anyone to improve on it.

Preface to the Psalter

Many of the holy fathers praised and loved the Psalter above all other books of Scripture; and although the work itself gives praise enough to its master, nevertheless we must give evidence of our own praise and thanks.

In past years very many books have been peddled around, legends of the saints and passionals, books of examples and stories, and the world has been filled with them, so that the Psalter lay, meanwhile, under the bench and in such darkness that not one Psalm was rightly understood; and yet it gave off such a fine and precious fragrance that all pious hearts felt the devotion and power in the unknown words, and loved the book for them.

I hold, however, that no book of examples or legends of the saints finer than the Psalter has ever come, or can come, to the earth. If one were to wish that, from all the examples, legends and histories, the best should be selected and brought together and put in the best form, the result would have to be the present Psalter. For here we find not only what one or two saints have done, but what He has done who is the head of all saints, and what the saints still do — the attitude they take toward God, toward friends and enemies, the way they conduct themselves in all dangers and sufferings; all this, beside the divine and wholesome and commandments of every kind that are contained there.

The Psalter ought to be a dear and beloved book, if only because it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly, and so typifies His kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom that it might well be called a little Bible. It puts everything that is in all the Bible most beautifully and briefly, and is made an Enchiridion, or handbook, so that I have a notion that the Holy Ghost wanted to take the trouble to compile a short Bible and example-book of all Christendom, or of all saints. Thus,

whoever could not read the whole Bible would here have almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book.

But above all this, the Psalter has this fine virtue and quality: — other books make great ado over the works of the saints, but say very little about their words; but the Psalter is a pattern; it gives forth so sweet a fragrance, when one reads it, because it tells not only the works of the saints, but also their words, how they spoke with God and prayed, and still speak and pray. The other legends and examples, when compared to the Psalter, present to us only dumb saints; but the Psalter pictures really bold, living saints.

Compared with a speaking man, a dumb man is to be thought a half-dead man; and there is no mightier or nobler work of man than speech, since it is by speech, more than by his shape or by any other work, that man is most distinguished from other animals. By the carver's art a block of wood can be given the shape of a man, and a beast, as well as a man, can see, hear, smell, sing, walk, stand, eat, drink, fast, thirst, and suffer from hunger, frost, and a hard bed.

Moreover, the Psalter does still more than this. It presents to us not the simple, common speech of the saints, but the best of their language, that which they used when they talked with God Himself, with great earnestness, on the most important matters. Thus it lays before us, not only their words, rather than their works, but their very hearts and the innermost treasure of their souls, so that we can look down to the foundation and source of their words and works, that is, into their hearts, and see there what kind of thoughts they had, and how their hearts were set and how they acted in all kinds of cases, in danger and in need. The legends, or examples, which speak only of the works and miracles of the saints, do not and cannot do this; for I cannot know how a man's heart is, even though I see or hear of many great works that he does. And just as I would rather hear what a saint says than see the works he does, so I would far rather see his heart, and the treasure in his soul, than hear his words. And that is the richest thing about the saints that the Psalter gives us, — we can be certain

of how their hearts were toward God, and what words they used to God and every man.

A human heart is like a ship on a wild sea, driven by the storm-winds from the four quarters of the world. Here it is struck with fear, and worry about coming disaster; there comes grief and sadness because of present evil.

Here breathes a breeze of hope and of expectation of happiness to come; there blows security and joy in present blessings. These storm-winds teach us to speak with earnestness, and open the heart, and pour out what lies at the bottom of it. He who sticks in fear and need speaks of misfortune very differently from him who floats on joy; and he who floats on joy speaks and sings of joy quite differently from him who sticks in fear. It is not from the heart, men say, when a sad man laughs or a glad man weeps; that is, the depths of his heart are not open, and what is in them does not come out.

What is the greatest thing in the Psalter but this earnest speaking amid these storm-winds of every kind? Where does one find such words of joy as in the psalms of praise and thanksgiving? There you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into fair and pleasant gardens, nay, as into heaven, and see what fine and pleasant flowers of the heart spring up' from fair and happy thoughts of every kind toward God, because of His benefits. On the other hand, where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiful words of sadness than in the psalms of lamentation? There again you look into the hearts of all the saints, as into death, nay, as into hell. How gloomy and dark it is there, with all kinds of troubled outlooks on the wrath of God!

So, too, when they speak of fear and hope, they use such words that no painter could so depict fear or hope, and no Cicero, or orator, so portray them.

And, as was said, it is the best thing of all that they speak these words to God and with God. This gives the words double earnestness and life, for when men speak with men about these matters, what they say does not come so strongly from the heart, and burn and live and press so greatly.

Hence it comes that the Psalter is the book of all saints, and everyone, in whatever case he is, finds in it psalms and words that fit his case and suit him exactly, as though they were put thus for his sake only, so that he could not put it better himself, or find better words, or wish for better. And this, too, is good; for when these words please a man and suit him, he becomes sure that he is in the communion of saints, and that it has gone with all the saints as it goes with him, since they all sing one song with him.

It is especially so, if he can speak to God as they have done, which must be done in faith, for their words have no flavor to a godless man.

Finally, there is in the Psalter security and a well-tried escort, so that one can follow all saints in it without peril. The other examples and the legends of the dumb saints bring forward many works that one cannot imitate; but they also bring forward many more works which it is dangerous to imitate, and which commonly start sects and disturbances, and lead away from the communion of saints, and tear it apart. But the Psalter holds you to the communion of saints and away from sects for it teaches you to be of like mind in joy, fear, hope, sorrow, and to think and speak as all the saints have thought and spoken.

In a word, would you see the holy Christian Church painted in living color and form and put in one little picture? Then take up the Psalter and you have a fine, bright, pure mirror that will show you what the Church is; nay, you will find yourself also in it and the true *gnothi seauton*, and God Himself, besides, and all creatures.

Let us see to it, then, that we thank God for these unspeakable blessings, and let us receive them and use them, and exercise ourselves in them to God's praise and honor, lest we earn something worse. Heretofore, in the time of darkness, what a treasure it would have been thought if one were able rightly to understand a Psalm, and to read or hear it in intelligible German; and we did not have that treasure. But now blessed are the eyes that see what we see and the ears that hear what we hear; and yet I fear — nay, sad to say, we see it! — that things are going with us as with the Jews in the wilderness, when they said of the bread from heaven, "Our soul

loatheth this poor food.” We should remember, however, that alongside of this story stands the story of how they were plagued and died, lest the same thing happen to us.

To this may God, the Father of all grace and mercy help us, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be praise and thanks, honor and glory, for this German Psalter and for all His numberless, unspeakable benefits to all eternity. Amen, Amen.

Preface to the Books of Solomon

Three books bear the name of Solomon. The first is *Proverbia*, “Proverbs,” which may rightly be called a book of good works, for in it he teaches us how to lead a good life before God and the world.

He pays especial attention to the young people and instructs them, in fatherly fashion, according to God’s commandments, with comforting promises of how well it shall go with the good, and with threats of how the wicked will have to be punished. For young people are of themselves inclined to all evil and, besides, because of their inexperience, they do not understand the wiles and wickedness of the world and the devil, and are far too weak to withstand bad examples and causes of offense, and are not able to govern themselves, but if they are not trained they are ruined and lost before they get their bearings. ^{f432} Therefore they need and must have teachers and rulers, to exhort, warn, rebuke, and chastise them, to hold them constantly to the fear of God and to His commandments, and to keep off the devil, the world, and the flesh.

This, then, is what Solomon does diligently and richly, in this book, putting his doctrine into proverbs, so that it can be grasped the more easily and kept the more gladly. Any man who intends to become righteous might well take this book as a hand-book, or prayer-book, for daily use, and read it often, and see his own life in it.

For a man must go one of two ways — he must either let his father chastise him or let the executioner punish him; as they say, “You may escape me, but not the hangman”; and it would be good to impress this constantly on the young people, so that they might know without doubt that they must suffer either the father’s rod, or the executioner’s sword, just as Solomon, in this book, is constantly threatening the disobedient with death. There is no way out of it; God leaves nothing unpunished. We see in our own

experience that disobedient knaves perish in strange ways, and finally get into the headman's hands when they least expect it and feel most secure. Public witnesses and signs of all this are the gallows, wheels, f433 and places of execution at the gates of all the cities. God, through the temporal government, has put them there to terrify all those who will not let themselves be trained by God's Word into obedience to their elders.

Therefore in this book Solomon calls all those who despise God's Word "fools," and all those who keep God's commandments "wise." This does not hit the young people only, though his chief purpose is to teach them, but people of all stations, from the highest to the lowest. For just as youth has its own vices, against God's commandments, so every other station has its own vices, and they are worse than the vices of youth. So the proverb says, "The older, the worse"; and again, "Age helps no folly."

Even if there were nothing evil in the higher stations, no such vices as greed, pride, hatred, envy, etc., nevertheless this one vice would be bad enough, namely, that they want to be shrewd and wise when they ought not to be, and everybody is inclined to do something else than what is committed to him, and to leave undone that which is committed to him.

For example, a man in the spiritual office wants to be wise and active in worldly things, and there is no end to his knowledge of them; on the other hand, a man in worldly office has a head too small to hold all his superfluous knowledge about the conduct of the spiritual office.

Of such fools all lands, all cities, all houses are full, and in this book they are diligently rebuked, and everyone is exhorted to mind his own business and to do faithfully and diligently the duty that is committed to him. Such people are called wise men; the disobedient are called fools, though they do not want to be, or be called, either disobedient men or fools.

The second book is called Koheleth; we call it "The Preacher." It is a book of comfort. When a man would live an obedient life, according to the teaching of the first book, and attend to his duty or office, then the devil, the world, and his own flesh block the way against him, so that he becomes

weary and disgusted with his duty, and is sorry for everything that he has begun; for things will not go as he wants them to. Then arise worry, labor, disgust, impatience, and murmuring, and a man is ready to let go hand and foot, and do nothing more. For if the devil cannot prevent obedience on the right hand, by means of curiosity and desire, he will hinder it on the left hand with worry and vexation.

Now as Solomon, in the first book, teaches obedience in the face of mad lust and curiosity, so in this book he teaches that men are to be patient and steadfast in obedience, in the face of unpleasantness and temptation, and are constantly to do the duty of the hour with peace and joy. What they cannot keep or alter, they are to let go; they will be well off.

The third book is a song of praise, in which Solomon praises God for obedience, as for a gift of God. For where” God is not the householder and ruler, there is neither obedience nor peace in any station of life; but where there is obedience and good rule, there God dwells, and kisses and embraces His dear bride with His Word, which is the kiss of His lips.

Therefore, when things, in the land or the home, go, so far as possible, according to the first two books; then one may well sing this third book, and thank God, who has not only taught us this, but has Himself done it.

Amen.

Preface to the Proverbs of Solomon

Because this book deals especially with fools and wise men and everywhere praises wisdom and rebukes folly, it is necessary to consider its language and its words, to see what he means by fools and wise men.

Therefore, in order that this profitable book may be the plainer, I shall here sketch this out in a few words, as clearly as I can.

It is the way of King David, in the Psalter, and especially of King Solomon (and perhaps it was the manner of speaking in their time) to give the name of fool not to those whom the world calls fools, or who are born fools, but to all kinds of loose, frivolous, heedless people, most of all to those who live without God's Word and act and speak according to their own reason or purposes; though usually these are, before the world, the greatest, wisest, mightiest, richest, and holiest. Thus Paul calls the Galatians, and Christ the Pharisees, and even His own disciples, fools, so that you may know that when Solomon speaks of fools, he is speaking not of plain or insignificant people, but of the greatest people in the world.

That which Solomon here calls wisdom is nothing else than the wisdom of God, which is taught in God's words and works; therefore he is constantly citing God's commandments and works. Besides, no proverbs have their origin anywhere else than in God's words and works, since all human proposals are vain and deceptive, and nothing comes out of them except what God wills and does; as we say in German, *Es ist dir bedacht, abet nicht bescheret*, and *Wer das Gluck hat, fuhr die Braut heim*. f437 These and like proverbs come from the fact that men have to see and learn that men's proposals and hopes constantly fail and turn out otherwise than they intend, and they have at last to observe that another turns the wheel.

Some, then, have called this Other God, some Fate. Accordingly the proverbs in all tongues and languages are sure and certain, since they are

founded on God's works and come out of God's works, even though God's Word is not there. On the other hand, by folly he means nothing else than what takes place without God's Word and works. A wise man is one who guides himself by God's Word and works; a fool one who presumptuously guides himself by his own mind and notions.

From this we see what a splendid, wise, and fine man King Solomon was.

He took things so seriously that amid so many royal duties, he undertook to be a teacher, and especially a teacher of the most necessary thing of all, teaching and training the young people how they should act blessedly before God according to the spirit, and wisely before the world with body and goods. For this is the most important thing that men can have on earth, as King Solomon saw very well; and they cannot have it unless they are trained in youth. This book, therefore, ought early be impressed on the young people throughout the world and put into daily use and practice; undoubtedly it was for this purpose that it was made and written by King Solomon, as an example to all kings and lords to take an interest in the young people. To this may God give His grace. Amen.

Preface to the Preacher of Solomon

This book is called in Hebrew Koheleth, that is, “one who speaks publicly in a congregation”; for Kahal means a congregation gathered together, what is called in Greek *ekklesia*. But this book was certainly not written or set down by King Solomon with his own hand; but what others heard from his lips was put together in this form by the scholars, as they admit at the end, when they say, “These words of the wise are as spears and nails, fixed by the masters of the congregation and given from one shepherd.” That is to say, certain persons, selected by the kings and the people, were appointed, at that time, to fix and arrange this and other books, handed down by Solomon, so that thus everyone would not have to make books as he pleased; for they lament in the same place that “of making books there is no end,” and forbid others to take up the work.

These men here call themselves “masters of the congregation,” and books had to be accepted and approved by their hands and their office. For the Jewish people had an external government, instituted by God, and such a thing as that could be done surely and rightly. This book, too, is put together by others out of the sayings of Solomon, and the doctrine and sayings of some wise men are added at the end. The Song of Solomon, too, has the appearance of a book composed by others out of things received from the lips of Solomon. Therefore, no order is preserved in these books, but one thing is mixed with another, since they did not hear all of it from him at one time; and this has to be the nature of such books.

Now this book ought to really have the title, “Against the Free Will”; for all of it tends to show that all men’s counsels, proposals, and undertakings are vain and fruitless and always have a different end from that which we want and expect. Thus he would teach us to be passive and let God alone do everything, above and against and without our knowledge and counsel.

Therefore you must not understand this book to be abusing God's creatures when it says, "All is vanity and misery"; for God's creatures are all good (Genesis 1:31 and 2 Timothy 4:4), and this book itself says that one shall be happy with one's wife and enjoy life, etc. It teaches, rather, that the proposals and purposes of men for dealing with creatures all go wrong and are all in vain, if one is not satisfied with what is ready to hand, but wants to be master and ruler of things that are yet to come. In that case, everything goes backwards, and a man has had only his trouble for his pains, and things turn out, anyhow, as God wills and purposes, not as man wills and purposes. To put it briefly, Christ says, in Matthew 6:34, "Be not anxious about the morrow, for the morrow will have its own anxiety; it is enough that every day has its own evil." That saying is a gloss and table of contents for this book. Anxiety for us is God's affair; our anxiety goes wrong anyhow, and is only lost trouble.

Preface to the Prophets

To human reason the prophets seem of small account, and little of value is found in them. This is especially so when Master Wisehead comes along.

He knows the Scriptures by heart and has them at his finger-tips, and out of the riches of his spirit, he regards the writings of the prophets as mere worthless, dead talk. That is why the lives and works of the prophets are no longer noticed, and only their words and histories are heard. This is no wonder, when God's Word, too, is despised, even though the signs and events, and the kingdom of Christ, as well, are daily before men's eyes; and how much more would it be despised, if the stories and the deeds were no longer extant. Just so the children of Israel despised God and His Word when they had before their eyes the manna, the fiery pillar and the bright cloud, and the priesthood and the principedom.

Therefore we Christians ought not be such shameful, sated, ungrateful wiseacres, but should read and use the] prophets with earnestness and profit. For, first of all, they proclaim and bear witness to the kingdom of Christ, in which we now live, and in which all believers in Christ have heretofore lived and will live until the end of the world.

It is strong encouragement and encouraging strength to have for our Christian life such mighty and ancient witnesses by whom our Christian faith is greatly encouraged in the belief that it is the right station in the eyes of God, in contrast with all other wrong, false, human holiness and with the sects, which are a source of great offense and temptation to a weak heart, because of the great show that they make and of the multitude of their adherents, and, on the other hand, because of the Cross and of the small number of those who hold to the Christian faith. So, in our days, the hordes of the Turk, the pope, and others are great and powerful causes of offence.

For this, then, the prophets are useful to us; as St. Peter claims, in 1 Peter, that it was not unto themselves that the prophets made known the things that were revealed to them, but to us, “to us,” he says, “they made them known.” For they have thus “ministered to us,” with their prophesying, in order that he who would be in Christ’s kingdom might know that he must first suffer many things before he comes to glory, and that he must govern himself accordingly. By this we become sure of two things’ first, that the great glory of Christ’s kingdom is surely ours, and will come hereafter; and second, that it is preceded by crosses, shame, misery, contempt, and all kinds of suffering for Christ’s sake. Thus we shall not become disheartened through impatience or unbelief, or doubt the future glory, which will be so great that the angels desire to see it.

In the second place, they show us many great examples and experiences illustrating the First Commandment, and it is portrayed in masterly fashion, in both words and illustrations, so as to drive us powerfully to fear of God and faith, and to keep us in them. For after they have prophesied of Christ’s kingdom, all the rest is nothing but illustration of how God has so strictly and severely confirmed the First Commandment, and to read or hear the prophets is surely nothing else than to read and hear God’s threats and comforts. God threatens the godless, who are careless and proud, and if threatening does not help, He enforces it with penalties pestilence, famine, war, until they are destroyed; thus He makes good the threat of the First Commandment. But He comforts those who fear God and are in all sorts of need, and enforces His comfort with aid and counsel, by all kinds of wonders and signs, against all the might of the devil and the world’ thus He also makes good the comfort of the First Commandment.

With such sermons and illustrations the prophets minister richly to us, teaching us that we need not be offended when we see how carelessly and proudly the godless despise God’s Word, and pay no heed to His threatenings, as though God were a mere nothing; for in the prophets we see that things have never turned out well for any man who has despised God’s threatening, even though they were the mightiest emperors and kings and the holiest and most learned people on whom the sun ever shone.

On the other hand, we see that no one has been deserted who has dared to rely upon God's comforts and promises, even though they were the most miserable and the poorest sinners and beggars that were ever on the earth, nay, even though it were a slain Abel and a swallowed Jonah. By this the prophets prove to us that God keeps to His First Commandment, and wills to be a gracious Father to the poor and believing, and that for Him no one is to be too small or too despised; on the other hand He wills to be an angry Judge to the godless and the proud, and no one is to be too great, too mighty, too wise, too holy for Him, whether it be emperor, pope, Turk, and the devil beside.

For this reason it is, in our days, profitable and necessary to read the prophets, so that, by these illustrations and sermons we may be strengthened and encouraged against the unspeakable, innumerable, and (if God will) the final causes of offense given by the damned world. How completely the Turk holds our Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom for a mere nothing, compared with himself and his Mohammed! How greatly the poor Gospel and God's Word are despised, both among us and under the papacy, compared with the glorious show and riches of human commandments and holiness! How carelessly the fanatics, the Epicureans, and others like them walk in their own opinions, contrary to Holy Scripture! What an utterly audacious, wild life everyone now lives, following his own self-will, contrary to the clear truth, now as plain as day!

It seems as though neither God nor Christ were anything; stiff less does it seem that God's First Commandment was so strict!

But they say, "Wait a bit, wait a bit! Suppose the prophets are lying, and deceiving us with their histories and sermons!" More kings than they, and mightier, yes, and worse knaves than they, have gone to destruction; and these will not escape. Needier and more wretched people, too, have been gloriously helped; and we shall not be deserted. They are not the first to be defiant and boastful, and we are not the first who have suffered and been tormented. See, it is thus that we make the prophets useful to ourselves; read in this way, the reading of them is fruitful.

To be sure, there is in them more of threatening and rebuke than of encouragement and promise, and it is good to observe the reason. The godless are always more in number than the righteous; therefore one must always be more insistent on the law than on the promises. Even without the promises, the godless feel secure, and they are most agile in applying the divine encouragements and promises to themselves and the threats and rebukes to others, and they do not let themselves be turned, by any means, from this perverted notion and false hope. For their motto is *Pax et securitas*, "There is no need!" They stick to that, and go with it to destruction, as St. Paul says, "Destruction cometh upon them suddenly."

Again, since the prophets cry out most of all against idolatry, it is necessary to know the form which this idolatry had; for in our time, under the papacy, many people flatter themselves pleasantly and think that they are no such idolaters as the children of Israel. For this reason, then, they do not think highly of the prophets, especially of this part of them, because the rebukes upon idolatry do not concern them at all. They are far too pure and holy to commit idolatry, and it would be laughable for them to be afraid or terrified because of threats and denunciations against idolatry. That is just what the people of Israel also did. They simply would not believe that they were idolatrous, and therefore the threatenings of the prophets had to be lies, and they themselves had to be condemned as heretics. The children of Israel were not such mad saints as to worship plain wood and stone, especially the kings, princes, priests, and prophets, though they were the most idolatrous of all; but their idolatry consisted in letting go of the worship which God had instituted and ordered at Jerusalem, and where else God would have it, and improving on it, establishing it and setting it up elsewhere, according to their own ideas and opinions, without God's command, and inventing new forms and persons and times for it, though Moses had strictly forbidden this, especially in Deuteronomy 12, and pointed them to the place that God had chosen for His tabernacle and dwelling-place. This false worship was their idolatry, and they thought it a fine and precious thing, and relied upon it as though they had done well in performing it, though it was sheer disobedience and apostasy from God and His commands.

Thus we read in 1 Kings 12:28, not simply that Jeroboam set up the two calves, but had it preached to the people besides, "Ye shall no more go up to Jerusalem; lo, here, Israel, is thy God, who led thee out of Egypt."

He does not say, "Lo, here, Israel, is a calf," but "Here is thy God who led thee out of Egypt." He confesses freely that the God of Israel is the true God and that he led them out of Egypt; but men are not to run to Jerusalem after Him, but rather to find Him here at Dan and Beersheba, where the golden calves are. The meaning is: — One can sacrifice to God and worship Him as well before the golden calves as before a holy symbol of God, for so men sacrificed to Him and worshiped Him before the golden ark. Lo, that is deserting the worship of God at Jerusalem, and thereby denying God, who has commanded that worship, as though He had not commanded it.

So they built on their own works and devotion and not purely and alone on God. With this devotion they afterwards filled the land with idolatry; on all the hills, in all the valleys, under all the trees they sacrificed and burned incense, and all this had to be called serving the God of Israel; he who said otherwise was a heretic and false prophet. That is the real committing of idolatry, — undertaking to worship God, without God's bidding, out of one's own devotion; for He will not have us teach Him how He is to be served. He wills to teach us and to prescribe His worship; His Word is to be there and it shall give us light and leading. Without His Word it is all idolatry and lies, however devout it seems, and however beautiful it seeks to be. Of this we have often written.

From this it follows that among us Christians all those men are idolatrous, and the prophets' denunciations apply to them, who have invented or still keep new ways to worship God without God's order and commandment, out of their own devotion, and, as they say, with good intentions. For by this they surely put their reliance on works that they themselves have chosen and not simply and solely on Jesus Christ. In the prophets these people are called adulteresses, who are not content with their own husband, Jesus Christ, but run after other men, as though Christ alone

could not help, without us and our works, or as though He alone had not redeemed us, but we must also do something toward it. And yet we know very well that we did nothing toward having Him die on the Cross, taking our sins upon Him and bearing them on the Cross, not only before the whole world could think of any such thing, but before we were born. Just as little, and even less, did the children of Israel do toward bringing the plagues upon Egypt and Pharaoh and setting themselves free through the death of the first-born of Egypt. God did this alone, and they did nothing at all toward it. "Nay," say they, "the children of Israel served idols with their worship, and not the true God, but we serve in our churches the true God and the one Lord Jesus Christ, for we know no idols." I answer: That is what the children of Israel also said. All of them declared that their worship was given to the true God, and even less than our clergy would they permit anyone to call it the serving of idols. On this account they killed and persecuted all the true prophets; for they, too, would know nothing of idols, as the histories tell us.

For thus we read in Judges 17:1, that the mother of Micah, when he had taken from her the eleven hundred pieces of silver, and returned them, said to him, "Blessed be my son from the Lord. I vowed this silver to the Lord, that my son shall take the silver and have a graven image made of it, etc."

Here one learns clearly and certainly that the mother is thinking of the true God, to whom she has vowed the silver, to have a graven image made of it.

She does not say, "I have vowed the silver to an idol," but "to the Lord," which name is known among all Jews as the name of the one true God. The Turk also does the same thing; he names the true God in His worship and means Him who created heaven and earth. Likewise do the Jews, Tartars, and now all unbelievers. Nevertheless, it is all sheer idolatry.

Again how strange was the fall of that wonderful man Gideon! To the children of Israel, who desired that he and his children should rule over them, he said, "I will not be your lord, nor will my children, but the Lord (that is, the true God) shall be your lord." And yet he took the jewels that they gave him and made of them, not an image or an altar, but a priest's

garment, and out of devotion, he wanted to have a worshiping of God in his own city. But the Scripture says that all Israel committed harlotry with it, and this house went to destruction because of it. Now this great and holy man was not thinking of any idol, but of the one true God, as his spirited words bear witness, when he says, "The Lord shall rule over you, not I." By these words he plainly gives honor to God alone and confesses only the true God and will have Him held as God and Lord. So, too, we heard above that Jeroboam does not call his golden calves idols, but the God of Israel, who has led them out of Egypt; and this was the only true God, for no idol had led them out of Egypt. Nor was it his intention to worship idols, but because he feared (as the text says) that the people would fall away from him to the King of Judah, if they were to go to Jerusalem, according to custom, to worship God, he invented a worship of his own, by which he held them to him, and yet intended by it to worship the true God, who dwelt at Jerusalem; but it was not to be necessary to worship God in Jerusalem only.

Why many words? God Himself confesses that the children of Israel intended to worship, not an idol, but Him alone; for He says, in Hosea 2, "At that day, saith the Lord, thou shalt call me 'My husband' and call me no more 'My master'. For I will take the name of the Baalim out of her mouth, so that one shall no more remember this name of Baalim." Here one must confess it true that the children of Israel intended to worship no idol, but the one true God. God says plainly, here in Hosea, "Thou shalt call me no more 'My Baal'." Now the worship of Baal was the greatest, commonest, and most glorious worship in the people of Israel, and yet it was utter idolatry, despite the fact that by it they intended to worship the true God.

Therefore it helps our clergy not at all to allege that in their churches and chapters they serve no idol, but only God, the true Lord. For here you learn that it is not enough to say or think, 'I am doing it to God's glory; I mean it for the true God; I will serve the only God.' All idolaters say and intend that. Intentions and thoughts do not count, or those who martyred the apostles and the Christians would also have been God's servants, for they, too, thought that they were doing God service, as Christ says in John 16:2;

and Paul in Romans 10:2, testifies for the Jews that they are zealous for God, and says in Acts 26:7, that by serving God night and day they hope to come to the promised salvation.

On the contrary, let everyone have a care to be sure that his service of God is instituted by God's Word, and not invented out of his own devotion or good intention. One who is accustomed to serve God in ways that have no testimony of God for them ought to know that he is serving, not the true God, but an idol that he has imagined for himself, that is to say, he is serving his own notions and false ideas, and thereby is serving the devil himself, and the words of all the prophets are against him. For this God, who would let us establish worship for Him according to our own choice and devotion, without His command and Word, — this God is nowhere; but there is only one God, who, through His Word, has abundantly established and commanded all the stations and the services in which it is His will to be served.

We should abide by this and not turn aside from it either to right or left; do neither more nor less; make it neither worse nor better. Otherwise there will be no end of idolatry and it will be impossible to distinguish between true worship and idolatry, since all have the true God in mind, and all use His true Name.

To this one and only God be thanks and praise, through Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord blessed forever. Amen.

Preface to the Prophet Isaiah

If anyone will read the holy prophet Isaiah with profit and thus understand him the better, let him not despise this advice and instruction of mine, unless he has better advice and is better informed. In the first place, let him not skip the title, or beginning, of this book, but learn to understand it as thoroughly as possible, so that he may not think that he understands Isaiah well, and afterwards have to put up with, it when someone says that he has never understood the title and first line, let alone the whole prophet. For this title is to be considered almost a gloss and a light on the whole book, and Isaiah himself points his readers to it, as though with his fingers, as the occasion and reason for his book. But to him who despises or does not understand the title, I say that he shall let the prophet Isaiah alone or, at least, that he will not understand him thoroughly, for it is impossible to gather or observe the prophet's writing and meaning rightly and dearly, without a thorough understanding of the rifle.

When I speak of the title, I do not mean only that you read or understand the words "Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Kings of Judah"; but that you take up the last book of Kings and the last book of Chronicles, and take in the whole contents of them, especially the stories, speeches, and events that occurred under the kings named in the title, clear to the end of those books. For if one would understand the prediction, it is necessary that one know how things were in the land, how matters lay, what was in the mind of the people, and what kind of intentions they had for or against their neighbors, friends and enemies; and especially what attitude they took, in their land, to God and the prophet, toward His Word and His service.

It would be will, also, to know how the lands were situated with reference to one another, so that the strange, unfamiliar words and names might not make reading disagreeable and understanding dark and hard. To do my simple Germans a service, I shall briefly describe the country situated about

Jerusalem or Judah, where Isaiah lived and preached, so that they may better see whither the prophet turned when he prophesied toward “noonday” or “midnight.” f444 On the East, the nearest thing to Jerusalem, or Judah, is the Dead Sea, where, in ancient days, Sodom and Gomorrah stood. Beyond the Dead Sea lies the land of Moab and of the children of Ammon. Farther beyond lies Babylon, or Chaldaea, and farther still the land of the Persians, of which Isaiah speaks much.

Toward the North, lies Mount Lebanon and, across it, Damascus and Syria, but farther on, and to the East, lies Assyria with which Isaiah deals much.

Toward the West, along the Great Sea, lie the Philistines, the worst enemies of the Jews; and along the Sea, to the North, lie Sidon and Tyre, which border on Galilee.

Toward the South are many lands, — Egypt, the land of the Moors, the Red Sea, Edom, and Midian, so situated that Egypt lies to the West of the middle.

These are the lands and the names about which Isaiah prophesies as neighbors, enemies, and friends, surrounding the land of Judah like wolves around a sheepfold. With some of them they made alliance after alliance, but it helped them not at all.

After this, you must divide the prophet Isaiah into three parts. In the first he deals, like the other prophets, with two subjects. First, he preaches to his people and rebukes their many sins, especially the manifold idolatry which has got the upper hand among the people, — as godly preachers, now and at all times, do and must do, — and keeps them in check with threats of punishment and promises of good.

Second, he disposes and prepares them to expect the coming Kingdom of Christ, of which he prophesies more! clearly and more often than does any other prophet. He even describes, in Isaiah 7:14, the Mother of Christ, how she is to conceive and bear Him without injury to her virginity, and in Chapter 53, His Passion together with His Resurrection from the dead. He

proclaims His kingdom powerfully and in plain language, as though it had then come. This must have been a splendid, highly enlightened prophet. For all the prophets do the same thing; they teach and rebuke the people of their time, and they proclaim the coming and the Kingdom of Christ and direct and point the people to Him, as to the Savior both of those who have gone before and of those who are to come; but one of them does this more than another, one more fully than another; among them all, however, Isaiah does the most and is the fullest. In the second part, he has to do especially with the empire of Assyria and the Emperor Sennacherib. He prophesies more and at greater length than any other prophet about how the emperor shall subdue all neighboring lands, including the kingdom of Israel, and impose much misfortune on the kingdom of Judah. But there he stands like a rock, with the promise Jerusalem shall be defended and be saved from him; and that is one of the greatest miracles in the Scripture, not only because of the event, that so mighty an emperor should be defeated before Jerusalem, but also because of the faith, with which men believed it. It is a miracle, I say, that any one at Jerusalem could have believed in such an impossible thing. Isaiah must, without doubt, have heard many bad words from the unbelievers. But he did it; he defeated the emperor and defended the city. He must have stood well with God and been a precious man in His sight!

In the third part, he deals with the empire of Babylon. Here he prophesies of the Babylonian Captivity, with which the people are to be punished, and of the destruction of Jerusalem by the emperor of Babylon. And it is here that he does his greatest work, encouraging and upholding a people yet to come amid this future destruction and captivity, so that they might not believe that all was over with them, that Christ's kingdom would not come, and that prophecy was false and vain. What a rich and full preaching he presents! — Babylon, in its turn, will be destroyed, and the Jews be released and return to Jerusalem. He even tells, with proud defiance of Babylon, the names of the kings that shall destroy it, namely, the Medes and Elamires, or Persians; and he expressly mentions the king who shall release the Jews and help them back to Jerusalem, namely, Cyrus whom he calls "God's anointed," long before there is a kingdom in Persia. For he is concerned

altogether with Christ, that His future coming and the promised kingdom of grace and salvation shall not be despised, or be lost upon His people and be of no use to them, because of unbelief or great misfortune and impatience; and this would be the case, unless they expected it and believed surely that it would come. These are the-three things that Isaiah deals with.

He does not treat them in order, however, and give each of these subjects its own place and put it into its own chapters and pages; but they are so mixed up together that much of the first matter is brought in along with the second and third, and the third subject is discussed somewhat earlier than the second. But whether this was done by those who collected and wrote down the prophecies (as is thought to have happened with the Psalter), or whether he himself arranged it this way according as time, occasion, and persons suggested, and these times and occasions were not always alike, and had no order, — this I do not know. He has at least this much order, — he brings in and deals with the first and most important subject, from beginning to end, all the way through the second and third parts; and that is what we ought also do in our sermons, always running along with the other things our most important matter, viz., the rebuking of the people and the preaching of Christ, even though we may now and then undertake, as occasion arises, to preach of other things, such as the Turk or the emperor, etc.

Remembering this, anyone can readily comprehend the prophet and be at home in him, and not be led astray or become impatient because of the order of the prophecies, as it happens to those who are not accustomed to it. We have done our best to make Isaiah speak good, clear German, though he has accommodated himself to it with difficulty and done his best to prevent it. Those who know both German and Hebrew well, will easily see that, especially the hair-splitters, who persuade themselves that they know everything; and there are enough words of threatening and terror against the stubborn, proud, hard-heads, — if that would help. What profit there may be in reading Isaiah, I prefer to let the reader discover for himself, rather than tell him; and for one who does not, or will not, discover it for himself, there is not much profit to speak about. He is full of

living, encouraging, heartening sayings for all poor consciences and miserable, disturbed hearts; and there are enough words of threatening and terror against the stubborn, proud, hard-heads; if that will help.

You should not think of Isaiah, except as a man who was despised among the Jews and considered a fool and madman. For they did not regard him as we now regard him, but, as he himself testifies, in chapter 58, they shot out their tongues and pointed their fingers at him and held his preaching as foolishness, all except a few godly children in the crowd, such as King Hezekiah. For it was the habit of the people to mock the prophets and hold them madmen; and this has happened to all servants of God and preachers; it happens every day and will continue.

It is also to be observed that the thing for which he most rebukes the people is idolatry. The other vices, such as display, drunkenness, avarice, he touches on hardly thrice, but reliance on their own self-chosen idol worship and their own works, or their confidence in kings and alliances, he rebukes all the way through. This was intolerable to the people, for they wanted such conduct to be right. Therefore they are said, at last, through King Manasseh, to have slain him as a heretic and deceiver and, as the Jews say, to have sawn him asunder. f446

Preface to the Prophet Jeremiah

Few comments are needed for an understanding of the prophet Jeremiah, if one will only have regard to the events that took place under the kings in whose time he preached. For his preaching had reference to the condition of the land at that time.

In the first place, the land was full of vices and idolatry; they slew the prophets and would have their own vices and idolatry go unrebuked.

Therefore, the first part, down to the twentieth chapter, is almost entirely rebuke and complaint of the wickedness of the Jews.

In the second place, he also foretold the punishment that was at hand; namely, the destruction of Jerusalem and of the whole land, and the Babylonian Captivity, and the punishment of all the nations also. Yet, along with this, he gives encouragement, and promises that at a definite time, after the punishment is over, they shall be released and return into the land and to Jerusalem.

This subject is the most important that is in Jeremiah, for on account of it Jeremiah was raised up, as is indicated in the first chapter by the vision of the rod and the seething caldrons that came from the North.

And this was highly necessary; for since this cruel misfortune was to come upon the people, and they were to be torn asunder and carried away out of their land, many pious souls, such as Daniel and others, would have been driven to despair of God and all His promises, because they would not have been able to think otherwise than that it was all over with them and they were utterly cast off by God, that no Christ would ever come, but that God, in great anger, had taken back His promise because of the people's sin. Therefore Jeremiah had to be there and proclaim the punishment and the wrath, telling them that it would not last forever, but for a fixed time,

such as seventy years, and that afterwards they would come again into grace.

With this promise he had also to encourage and sustain himself, or he would have had little comfort and happiness. For he was a sad and troubled prophet and lived in miserably evil days. He had a peculiarly hard ministry, besides, for through more than forty years, down to his imprisonment, he had to say hard things to obstinately wicked people, and do little good, but rather look on while they went from bad to worse; they wanted to kill him, and they put much hardship upon him.

Beside that, he had to live through it, and see it with his own eyes, when the land was destroyed and the people led captive, and there was great misery and bloodshed. And this does not include what he had, afterwards, to preach and suffer in Egypt, for it is believed that he was stoned to death by the Jews in Egypt. f447 In the third place, like all the other prophets, he prophesies of Christ and His kingdom, especially in the twenty-third, and thirty-first chapters, where he clearly prophesies of the person of Christ, of His kingdom, of the new testament and the end of the old testament. But these three subjects do not follow one another and are not separated in the book in the way that they actually came along. Upon the first subject, indeed, there is often something in a later chapter which happened before that which is spoken of in an earlier chapter, and so it seems as though Jeremiah had not composed these books himself, but that parts of his utterances were taken and written into the book. Therefore one must not care about the order, or be hindered by the lack of it.

We learn from Jeremiah, however, among other things, that, as usual, the nearer the punishment is, the worse the people become, and the more one preaches to them, the more they despise his preaching. Thus we understand that when it is God's will to inflict punishment, He lets people become hardened, so that they may be destroyed without any mercy and not appease God's wrath with any repentance. So formerly the men of Sodom not only despised righteous Lot, but even plagued him, when he taught them; and yet their own plague was at the door: Pharaoh when about to be

drowned in the Red Sea, had to afflict the children of Israel twice as much as before: and Jerusalem had to crucify God's Son, when its own final destruction was on the way.

So it now goes everywhere. Now that the end of the world is approaching the people rage and rave most horribly against God, and blaspheme and damn God's Word, though they well know that it is God's Word and the truth. Besides, so many fearful signs and wonders are appearing, in the heavens and among all creatures, which threaten them terribly, and it is a wicked, miserable time, even worse than that of Jeremiah.

But so it will be, and must be. They will be careless, and sing, "*Pax* There is no need!" and only persecute everything that accords with the will of God, and all the threats of the signs will be wasted, until (as St. Paul says) their ruin overtakes them suddenly and destroys them before they are aware of it.

But Christ will know how to keep His own, for whose sake He lets His Word shine forth in this shameful time, as He kept at Babylon Daniel and those like him, for whose sake Jeremiah's prophecy had to shine forth. To the same dear Lord be praise and thanks, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God over all, to eternity. Amen.

Preface to the Prophet Ezekiel

Ezekiel, like Daniel and many more, went willingly into captivity at Babylon, along with King Jeconiah, according to the counsel of Jeremiah, who constantly advised that they submit to the king of Babylon and live, and not resist, or they would be destroyed (Jeremiah 21:8).

Then, when they had come to Babylon (as Jeremiah shows in Jeremiah 24:6, with his kind words of encouragement), they became impatient and were sorry beyond measure that they had submitted, since they saw that those who had stayed in Jerusalem, and not surrendered, had possession of the city and everything, and hoped to make Jeremiah a liar and defend themselves against the king of Babylon, and remain in the land.

The false prophets helped, encouraging the people at Jerusalem to think that Jerusalem would not be captured and that Jeremiah was a lying heretic. Along with this went the usual circumstance, that those at Jerusalem claimed that they were holding honestly and firmly to God and Fatherland, but that the others had submitted, and deserted God and Fatherland, and were faithless traitors, who could not trust or hope in God, and went over to their enemies because of the vile talking of Jeremiah, the liar. That hurt and embittered those who had submitted to Babylon and their captivity became a double one. O how many a sound curse must they have wished on Jeremiah, whom they had followed and who had led them astray so miserably!

Therefore, God raised up in Babylon this prophet Ezekiel to encourage the captives and prophesy against the false prophets at Jerusalem and confirm the word of Jeremiah. This he does thoroughly, and prophesies far harder and far more than Jeremiah of how Jerusalem shall be destroyed and the people perish, with king and princes; but along with this, he promises that they shall return home to the land of Judah. This is the most important

thing that Ezekiel did in his own time, and he deals with this down to chapter 25.

After that, down to chapter 34, he extends his prophecy to all the lands round about, which the king of Babylon was to afflict. Then follow four chapters on the spirit and kingdom of Christ, and after that on the last tyrant in Christ's kingdom, Gog and Magog. At the end he rebuilds Jerusalem, encouraging the people to believe that they shall go home again; but in the Spirit he means the eternal city, the heavenly Jerusalem, of which the Apocalypse also speaks.

A New Preface to the Prophet Ezekiel

St. Jerome and others write that it was, and still is, forbidden among the Jews for any man under thirty years of age to read the first and last parts of the Prophet Ezekiel and the first chapter of the First Book of Moses. f450 To be sure, there was no need of this prohibition among the Jews, for Isaiah 29:11 prophesies that the entire Holy Scripture is sealed and closed to the unbelieving Jews; as St. Paul also says, in 2 Corinthians 3:15, that the veil of Moses remains over the Scripture, so long as they do not believe in Christ.

Their works prove that too; for they rend and torture the Scriptures in their interpretation of them, like filthy swine wallowing and rolling in a pleasure garden, so that it would be desirable if they were to stay unentangled with the Scripture, though many of our own people cling so tight to the rabbis and have such confidence in them, that they judaize more than the ancient Jews themselves.

This vision in the first part of Ezekiel, however, is nothing else, as I understand it (let another improve on it!) than a revelation of the kingdom of Christ in faith, here on earth, in all four quarters of the whole world, according to Psalm 19:4, In *omnem terram* . For no one can be a prophet, as St. Peter testifies, unless he has the Spirit of Christ. But to give an interpretation of all of it is too long a matter for an introduction.

To put it briefly this vision is the spiritual chariot of Christ in which He rides here in the world, that is, His entire holy Church. There are the four beasts, which he calls, in Ezekiel 10:1, “Cherubim,” for He sits, rides and travels on cherubim, as the Scripture often declares; each has four faces and they stand like four horses in a square, yet inside and between the wheels. For there are also four wheels in a square about the beasts, by each beast a

wheel, so arranged that they can go to the four quarters of the world, that is, in front, behind, to both sides, without needing to turn.

Likewise the living creatures go, on round feet, toward the four quarters of the world and need not turn. Here is no axle, pole, frame, pin, rack, wagon, rope, or trace, but the Scripture drives it all surely from within. Above is heaven, like a saddle-cloth, and in it a throne for a saddle, and on it God, that is, Christ, sits.

The four wheels go alike, for all churches in the four corners of the earth, that is, in the whole world, have an equal, single, harmonious gait, in faith, hope, love, the Cross, and all spiritual things, and are not driven from without, by doctrines of men, but from within, by one Spirit (Romans 8:9, 1 Corinthians 12:5, Ephesians 4:4).

And the four beasts also go with the wheels, or rather the wheels with them, forward, backward, upward, and to both sides; for the apostles, or preachers, the Word of God, baptism, sacrament, keys and all that belongs to the spiritual government of the Church are also alike and in agreement throughout the world. And the beasts and the wheels hold fast together, so that the chariot is one, without external binding, fastening, or bracing. Thus everything is fourfold, — four beasts, four faces to a beast, four feet to a beast, four hands to a beast, four wings to a beast, four wheels, and four spokes to a wheel. That signifies, as said, that Christendom, or the kingdom of Christ, is to go to the four corners, that is, into all the world.

This vision, however, signifies the end and destruction of the synagogue, or of Judaism, that is, of the priesthood, the worship, and the organization given and instituted by Moses, all of which were instituted for no longer time than until the coming of Christ, as St. Paul says in Romans 8:3 and 2 Corinthians 3:6, and Christ Himself in Matthew 11:13. The Epistle to the Hebrews also deals fully with this subject and the Jews take terrible offense at it, and it is a stumbling-block to them, even to the present day.

In opposition to the blindness of the Jews, it should be known especially that all the prophecies which say that Israel and Judah shall return again to

their lands and possess them in a bodily way forever, are long since fulfilled, and that the hopes of the Jews are utterly vain and lost. For this prophecy contains two things. The first is that Israel and Judah shall return to their land after their captivity, and this came to pass through King Cyrus and the Persians, before Christ's birth, when the Jews returned to their land and to Jerusalem from all countries, and came to Jerusalem every year to the feasts, even out of foreign lands, and drew many Gentiles with them and to them.

But the hope of the Jews that there shall be another physical return, when all of them together shall come back into the land and set up there the old Mosaic order of things,-this is a dream of their own and there is not a letter in the prophets or the Scriptures which says or signifies anything of the kind. It is written, indeed, that they shall return out of all lands whither they have been driven, but not all of them, only some of them out of all lands. There is a great difference between a return of all the Jews and a return out of all lands. The return out of all lands is fulfilled, but the return of all the Jews was never prophesied, but rather the opposite; just as at Jerusalem, while it was yet standing, both before and after the Captivity, not all the people were the people of God, but the most of them were people of the devil, idolaters and murderers, and the worst people on earth.

The second thing, and the best thing in this prophecy, and one that the Jews will neither see nor heed, is that God promises to create something new in the land and make a new covenant, not like the old covenant of Moses that they dream about. This is plainly there in Jeremiah 31 and many more places. There are to be no more two kingdoms, but one kingdom, under their King David, who is to come, and it shall be an everlasting kingdom in the same physical land.

This, too, is fulfilled. For when Christ came, and found the people gathered out of both Israel and Judah, and out of all lands, so that the land was full, He began the new order, and established the promised new covenant, and did it not at any spiritual place, or at another physical place, but exactly in the same physical land of Canaan, and at the same physical Jerusalem, as had been promised, whither they had been brought back out of all lands.

And although they did not want this covenant, or rather would not accept it, it has, nevertheless, remained an everlasting covenant, not only at Jerusalem and in that land; but it broke out from there into all the four corners of the world, and remains to the present day, both at Jerusalem and everywhere. For the place, Jerusalem, is still there, and Christ is Lord and King there, as in all the world; He helps and hears all those who come thither, as He does in all the world. Meanwhile He lets Mohammed, with his tyranny, and the pope with his jugglery, do what they do; He is and remains Lord over all.

The Jews hold fast to the name of Israel and claim that they alone are Israel and we are Gentiles; and this is true so far as the first part of the prophecy and the old covenant of Moses are concerned, though this is long since fulfilled. But according to the second part of the prophecy and the new covenant, they are no longer Israel; for all things are to be new, and Israel, too, must become new, and they alone are the true Israel who have accepted the new covenant, which was established and begun at Jerusalem.

For according to the old covenant I am no Israelite, or Jew; but I claim that I am the son of St. Paul and an Israelite or Benjamite; for he is my father, not the old Paul, however, but the new Paul. He is still the old Paul, but out of the old Paul there has arisen a new Paul in Christ, and he has begotten me in Christ by the Gospel, so that according to the new covenant, I am like him. Thus all the Gentiles who are Christians are the true Israelites and new Jews, born of Christ, the noblest Jew. Everything, therefore, rests in the new covenant, which the Messiah was to found, making all things new, as He has done.

And this rule is to be noted well, — when the prophets say of Israel that it is all to return or be gathered, as in Micah 2:12, Ezekiel 20:40, etc., they are certainly speaking of the Israel, no member of which will remain outside the everlasting kingdom of Christ. It cannot possibly be understood to mean the old Israel, for the most of them, living and dead, stayed in Assyria and Babylonia and only a very few returned; Ezra numbers them all.

The Jews, however, want to have a Messiah according to the old covenant, and pay no heed to this new covenant. So they miss both covenants and hang between heaven and earth; the new covenant they will not, the old they cannot, have. Therefore the Scriptures are sealed against them (Isaiah 29:10) and they understand none of the prophets, and they are here without any government, either physical or spiritual. The physical, earthly government they have not, for they have neither king nor lord, neither kingdom nor principedom; the spiritual, too, they have not, for they will not accept the new covenant and have to be without a priesthood. In a word, they not only despised this new covenant, but persecuted it and wanted to extirpate it and would not endure it; and their covenant has been destroyed by it.

Even though Jerusalem could have remained and the whole ancient order, the new covenant would, nevertheless, have had to come and make all things new, in order to fulfill the Scriptures; as they are now fulfilled in Christendom; namely, there would have had to be at Jerusalem an apostle, bishop, or preacher, — as Christ Himself established things, — who would have had to rule Christ's Church there, preach the Gospel, baptize, administer the Sacrament, absolve, bind, etc. If the high priest, — Caiaphas, or another, — had been unwilling to do this, an apostle would have had to do it, or one of the apostles' successors, as has happened heretofore and must happen. Thus the eternal kingdom of Christ would have had to rule even in the old Jerusalem, as well as in all the world, as the prophecy had promised, and the old kingdom of Moses would have remained as a temporal government.

For so the old, worldly, temporal government remains in all the world, and does not at all prevent the establishment of the new, spiritual, everlasting rule and kingdom of Christ under it and within it, though this kingdom has its own peculiar nature, as we clearly see. Especially is this the case where there are righteous kings and princes, who tolerate this new, everlasting kingdom of Christ under their old government, or accept it themselves, promote it, and desire, as Christians, to be in it. Otherwise the greater part of the kings, princes, and lords hate the new covenant and kingdom of

Christ as poisonously and bitterly as the Jews at Jerusalem, and persecute it and would wipe it out, and like the Jews, they go to destruction because of it. That is what happened to Rome and will happen to others also, for it is promised that Christ's new kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and the old kingdom must perish in the end.

It is well to remember, too, that since God Himself calls this kingdom a new kingdom it must be a far more glorious kingdom than the old kingdom was or is, and that it was God's will to make it a far better kingdom than the old one; and even though it had no other glory, this alone would be enough to make it glorious beyond measure, — that it is to be an everlasting kingdom that will not come to an end like the old, human kingdom.

Now beside this, it contains such immeasurable, glorious blessings as forgiveness of sins, peace with God, security against everlasting death and all evil, communion with the divine Majesty, with all angels and saints, joy and pleasure in the whole creation, even in a bodily sense; for this same body, which is now the old body, shall also become new, together with the whole creation, as the soul has already begun to become new in faith.

Therefore the Jews do themselves wrong and injury when, through the Messiah, they desire, not the new kingdom, but the former, old, transitory kingdom, where they will possess, in mortal flesh, silver, gold, wealth, power, honor, pleasure, and joy, which are counted before God as very little things, nay, as nothing at all; for if He had willed to promise such a kingdom, He would call it, not a new kingdom, but another and better kingdom.

And in comparison with this world's goods, nothing else can be called new and better, except only the spiritual, everlasting, blessed goods in heaven, among which there can be nothing bad or evil. But among the earthly, old, temporal goods, however, glorious, — such as the Jews dream that they will get from their Messiah, — there must always be much that is bad, much that is evil; at least death must be there, and an end of these goods.

These two things Ezekiel teaches us when he encourages the people to expect the return from Babylon, but prophesies more about the new Israel and the kingdom of Christ. That is his vision of the chariot, and it is also the temple, in the last part of his book.

He who would understand this building of the temple, altar, city, and land, which Ezekiel describes, must take up *Lyra*, with his figures and glosses, otherwise he will toil and labor at the task in vain; and since we have not known how better to put the figures on paper, we have not attempted it, and refer the reader to *Lyra*; and besides, it is not possible to plot out a building on paper, but a carved model would have to be made.

About the significance of it, one doctor has thought one way, another a different way. But the understanding of it that is held by the Jews and others like them is, above all things, to be rejected. They think it is “the third temple,” which must be built by the Messiah, who is to come, and in their foolish and vain hope, they claim for it much great glory. The blind and ignorant people do not see that the text cannot stand the interpretation of their dreams, as *Lyra*, too, has powerfully shown. For Ezekiel says neither that this city shall be called Jerusalem, nor that it shall stand at the place where Jerusalem is situated.

Jerusalem hangs on the north side of the mountain and the Temple stood in the midst of it, on Mount Moriah, and the castle of Zion high up toward the south. But this city of Ezekiel is to lie to the south and he says, “It shall be called *Dominus ibi*, ‘There God,’ or ‘God there,’ that is, ‘There God Himself is.’ And the Temple shall not be in it but, as the reckoning shows, it shall be seven good, big, German miles to the north; and the city on the high mountain shall be close to nine good, big, German miles both in length and breadth, so that the encircling wall shall be thirty-six German miles around; we may call that a little city, and the hill; on which it lies, a little hill.

If a citizen, living at the southern end of the city, wanted to go to church, or to the Temple, he would have to walk sixteen miles, nine through the

city and seven to the Temple. The blind Jews do not see this absurdity, for this cannot be any physical building; still less can it be at the place where Jerusalem is situated, as they falsely hope.

There shall also be a great water, flowing out of the Temple into the Dead Sea (as the papists, — fools that they are! — sing of their holy water), and this fits in nowise into the landscape of Israel.

Besides, the tribes and the land of Israel are very differently divided and arranged, so that the city and the Temple shall not lie in any tribe of Israel, though Jerusalem was previously located in the tribe of Benjamin. All of this and much more is plainly given in the text.

The altar shall be eleven ells high and fourteen ells wide at the top, so that even if a priest manages to mount the steps, he must have an arm seven ells long to reach onto the altar and arrange the sacrifice. It would have to be something of a priest, fifteen or sixteen good, big ells tall.

Therefore, this building of Ezekiel is not to be understood to mean a physical building, but like the chariot, so the building at the end is nothing else than the kingdom of Christ, the Holy Church, or Christendom, here on earth until the last day.

But how all the parts of the prophecy are to be interpreted and arranged, this we will leave until that life in which we shall see the whole building finished and complete. We cannot see it all now, since it is still in building, and much of the stone and wood that belong to it is not yet born, let alone prepared for the building. It is enough that we know it to be the house of God and his own building, in which we all are.

One who has the leisure and the inclination can look into it and search it, if he will take up God's Word and the sacraments, with the powers and effects which the Holy Ghost works in the Church through them, and bring these things into agreement. The Revelation of John can also help.

From the Preface to the Prophet Daniel

From this we see what a splendid, great man Daniel was, before both God and the world. First before God, for he, above all other prophets, had this special prophecy to give, that is, his work was not only to prophesy of Christ, like the others, but also to count the times and years, determine them, and fix them with certainty. Moreover, he arranges the kingdoms with their doings, down to the fixed time of Christ, in the right succession, and does it so finely that one cannot make a mistake about the coming of Christ, unless one does it willfully, as do the Jews; and from that point on till the Last Day, he depicts the condition and state of the Roman Empire and the affairs of the world in such a way that no one can make a mistake about the Last Day or have it come upon him unawares, unless he does it willfully, like our Epicureans.”

Therefore it seems to me that St. Peter has Daniel especially in mind when he says, in 1 Peter 1:11, “The prophets searched what time and what manner of time the Spirit of Christ signifies, etc.” The “what” means that he definitely reckons and determines the time, how long and how many years it is to be until then; the “what manner” means that he finely depicts the way that things are to be in the world at that time, who is to have supreme rule, or where the empire is to be. Thus he proclaims, not only the time, but also the life, the form, and the nature of the time; and this strengthens our Christian faith immeasurably and makes us sure and firm in our consciences, since we see before our very eyes the course of events that he described and depicted so plainly and truly for us in his book so long ago. For Daniel prophesies boldly and determines plainly that the coming of Christ and the beginning of His kingdom (that is, His baptism and preaching) is to happen five hundred and ten years after King Cyrus (Daniel 9), and the empire of the Persians and Greeks is to be at an end, and the Roman Empire in force (Daniel 7,9), that Christ, therefore, must

certainly come at the time of the Roman Empire, when it was in its best state, and that it was to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, since after it no other empire was to come, but the end of the world was to follow, as Daniel clearly announces in Daniel 2 and 7.

Before the world, too, he is a splendid and great man, for we see here that he rules the first two kingdoms as their head. It is as though God were to say, "I must have people for these kingdoms, even though I allow my Jerusalem and my people to be destroyed in order to get them." To be sure, he was never a king and never had great wealth or honor from his work; nevertheless, he had the work, the business, and the duties of a king and attended to them all; for it is the way of the world that the people who do the most work at court get the least out of it, and those who do nothing get the most, according to the saying of the Gospel, "One soweth and another reapeth." Nay, what is worse, he had to take hatred, envy, danger, and persecution as his reward, for that is the reward with which the world is accustomed to repay all services and benefits.

But that did not hurt Daniel; he was the dearer to God because of it and God rewarded him all the more richly, and held Daniel as a king in Babylon and Persia. For He counts and judges according to deeds and their fruits, not according to persons and names. Therefore Daniel was, in actual fact, the true king of Babylon and Persia, though he bore no royal title and had not much wealth from it, but rather misfortune and all kinds of danger. Lo, thus God can encourage His captive Jews, by taking the son of a burgher from destroyed Jerusalem and making him a two-fold emperor, in Babylon and Persia. Among all the children of Abraham, none was so highly exalted in the world as Daniel. Joseph was great in Egypt with King Pharaoh, David and Solomon were great in Israel, but they were all little kings and lords compared with the kings of Babylon and Persia, with whom Daniel was the foremost prince and whom he miraculously converted to God. And beyond doubt, he produced great fruit among the people in the two empires, bringing them to a knowledge of God and saving them, as is well indicated by the letters of these emperors and their command that the God of Daniel should be honored in all lands (Daniel 2,6). This Daniel we

commend to the reading of all good Christians, to whom he is comforting and profitable in these wretched, last times; but to the godless he is of no profit, as he himself says, at the end, "The godless remain godless, and do not heed." For the prophecies of Daniel, and others like them, are written, not only in order that men may know the events and the tribulations that are to come, and satisfy their curiosity, but in order that the righteous shall be encouraged and made happy, and strengthened in faith and hope and patience, since they here see and hear that their misery has an end, that they are to be freed from sins, death, the devil, and all evil, and be brought into heaven, to Christ, into His blessed, everlasting kingdom. So Christ, too, in Luke 21:28, encourages His own with terrible news, and says, "When ye shall see these things, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption is near, etc." So here, too, we see that Daniel always ends all his visions and dreams, however terrible, with joy; namely, with Christ's kingdom and advent, and it is on account of this advent, as the most important and final thing in them, that these visions and dreams were given, interpreted, and written.

One who would read them with profit must not depend entirely on the histories or events, or cling to them and go no farther, but must pasture and comfort his heart with the promised and certain advent of our Savior Jesus Christ, which is the blessed and joyful redemption from this vale of misery and wretchedness. To this may this same Lord and Savior help us, praised with the Father and the Holy Ghost, forever. Amen.

Preface to the Prophet Hosea

Hosea lived and preached, as he himself indicates in the title, at the time of Jeroboam, the second and last king of Israel, at which time Isaiah also lived in Judah, also Amos and Micah; but Hosea was the oldest of them.

Jeroboam, too, was a fine and fortunate king and did much for the kingdom of Israel, as 2 Kings testifies in chapter 2 Kings 14:23; nevertheless, he continued in the old idolatry of his ancestors, the kings of Israel, so that, although there were many fine men in the nation, they could not make the people righteous. For the devil had inflicted this misery on the people, that they always killed the prophets and sacrificed their children to the idols, and so filled the land with the guilt of blood, because of which he here threatens Jezreel, in Hosea 1:3.

It appears, however, as though this prophecy of Hosea was not fully and entirely written, but that pieces and sayings out of his preaching were arranged and brought together into a book; but we can trace and discover in it this much, at least, — he performed two duties, fully and boldly. The first was that, in his time, he preached hard against idolatry and bravely rebuked the people, together with his princes and priests, because of which he certainly tasted of death, like the others, and had to die as a heretic against the priests and a rebel against the king; for that is a prophetic and apostolic death, and so Christ Himself had to die. The second was that he also prophesied powerfully and very encouragingly about Christ and His kingdom, as is shown especially by chapters 2, 8 and 14.

But no one should think, because he uses the words “harlot” and “harlotry” many times and took a harlot-wife (chapter 1) that he was unchaste in words and works; for he speaks in a spiritual sense, and the “harlot-wife” was his real, honest wife, and with her he begot legitimate children; but the wife and children had to bear those shameful names as a sign and rebuke to

the idolatrous nation, which was full of spiritual harlotry, that is, idolatry, as he himself says in the text, “The land runneth from the Lord after whoredom.” In the same way Jeremiah wore the wooden yoke and carried the cup, and all the prophets usually did some strange thing as a sign to the people. So here, Hosea’s wife and children had to have harlots’ names as a sign against the whoring, idolatrous nation. For it is not to be believed that God would bid a prophet practice harlotry, though some have thus interpreted this passage in Hosea.

Preface to the Prophet Joel

Joel does not indicate at what time he lived and preached, but the ancients say that it was in the time of Hosea and Amos. We are satisfied with that, and have no better suggestion.

He is a kindly and gentle man and does not denounce and rebuke as do the other prophets, but beseeches and laments, and would make people righteous with good, friendly words, and protect them against harm and misfortune; but it happened to him as to the other prophets, — they did not believe his words and held him a fool.

Nevertheless, he is highly praised in the New Testament, for, in Acts 2:16, St. Peter quotes him and Joel had to provide, the first sermon that was preached in the Christian Church, on Pentecost, at Jerusalem, when the Holy Ghost was given. St. Paul, too, makes glorious use of the saying, “He that calleth on the name of the Lord shall be saved,” which is contained in Joel 2.

In the first chapter, he prophesies future punishment upon the people of Israel; they are to be destroyed and carried away by the Assyrians; and he calls the Assyrians caterpillars, grasshoppers, beetles and vermin. For the Assyrians devoured the kingdom of Israel bit by bit, until they had completely ruined it; but in the end, King Sennacherib had to suffer defeat before Jerusalem. Joel touches on that here in Joel 2:20, when he says, “And him from the north will I drive far from you.”

In the end of the second chapter, and from there on, he prophesies of the Kingdom of Christ and of the Holy Ghost, and speaks of the everlasting Jerusalem. He speaks of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and says that the Lord will summon all the Gentiles thither for judgment, and the ancient Fathers understand that to refer to the Last Judgment. I do not condemn this

interpretation, but hold, nevertheless, that Joel's meaning is as follows, — As he calls the Christian Church the everlasting Jerusalem, so he calls it also the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for the reason that all the world is summoned to the Christian Church by the Word, and there is judged and punished by preaching, since all of them together are sinners before God.

So Christ says, "The Spirit of truth shall punish the world because of sin."

For the Valley of Jehoshaphat is the valley of judgment. So, also, Hosea calls the Christian Church the Valley of Achor.

Preface to the Prophet Amos

Amos fixes his own time. He lived and preached at the time of Hosea and Isaiah, and preached against the same vices and idolatry, or false sanctity, as did Hosea, and also proclaimed the Assyrian captivity.

He is violent, too, and denounces the people of Israel throughout almost the whole book, until the end of the last chapter, where he foretells Christ and His kingdom and closes his book with that. No prophet, as I think, does so little promising and so much denouncing and threatening, so that he may be well named Amos, that is, “a burden,” or “one who is hard to get along with and irritating,” especially since he was a shepherd and not of the order of prophets (as he himself says in Amos 7:17), and came, besides, out of the tribe of Judah, from Tekoa, into the kingdom of Israel, and preached there as a foreigner. Therefore, it is said, the priest Amaziah, whom he rebukes in chapter 7, had him beaten to death with a rod. f454 In the first chapter he is hard and dark, when he speaks of three and four sins, and many have puzzled vainly over it, and sought far and wide for the meaning. But the text, I believe, clearly shows that these three and four sins are only one sin, for he always names and indicates only one sin.

Against Damascus, for example, he names only the sin that “they have threshed Gilead with iron chariots,” etc.

But he calls this sin “three and four” because they do not repent of the sin or recognize it, but rather boast of it and rely upon it, as though it were a good deed, as the false saints always do. For a sin cannot become worse, or greater, or more, than when it would be a holy, godly work, and makes the devil God, and God the devil. So, too, three and four make seven, which is the end of numbers in the Scripture where one turns back and begins to count again both the days and the weeks.

He is quoted twice in the New Testament. The first time is in Acts 7:42, where Stephen quotes the fifth chapter against the Jews and shows by it that the Jews did not keep God's Law from the time that they came out of Egypt. The second' time is in Acts 15:16, where St. James quotes from the last chapter as a proof of Christian liberty, that the Gentiles, under the New Testament, are not bound to keep the law of Moses, which the Jews themselves have never kept and cannot keep, as St. Peter preaches in Acts 15:10. These are the two most important bits in Amos, and they are two very good bits.

Preface to the Prophet Obadiah

Obadiah does not indicate the time when he lived, but his prophecy applies to the time of the Babylonian Captivity, for he encourages the people of Judah with the thought that they shall return to Zion.

His prophecy is directed especially against Edom, or Esau, which bore an especial and everlasting hatred and envy against the people of Israel and Judah, as usually happens when friends turn against each other; and especially when brothers fall into hatred and enmity against each other, that enmity is beyond measure.

So the Edomites hated the Jewish people immeasurably, and had no greater joy than to see the captivity of the Jews, and boasted and mocked at them in their misery and wretchedness. Almost all the prophets denounce the Edomites because of their hateful wickedness; even Psalm 137:7 complains of them and says, “Remember the Edomites, O Lord, in the day of Jerusalem, who said, ‘Down with it, down with it to its foundation.’” Such conduct as this inflicts more than ordinary pain, this mocking and laughing at the wretched and the troubled, this defying them and boasting against them, which subjects their faith in God to great and strong temptations and urges them mightily to despair and unbelief. Therefore God here appoints a special prophet against these vexatious mockers and tempters. He encourages those who are troubled and strengthens their faith with threats and denunciations against these hostile Edomites, i.e., those who mock the wretched with promises and assurances of future help and rescue. He is, in very deed, a needed comfort and a useful Obadiah in such distress.

At the end, he prophesies of Christ’s Kingdom that it shall be not at Jerusalem only, but everywhere. For he mixes all the nations together, — Ephraim, Benjamin, Gilead, the Philistines, the Canaanites, Zarephath, — and this cannot be understood to refer to the temporal kingdom of Israel,

for according to the law of Moses, these tribes and peoples had to be separated in the land.

The Jews interpret Zarephath to mean France and Sepharad to mean Spain.

I let that go and believe none of it. On the contrary, I let Zarephath be the town near Sidon and Sepharad a town or district in Assyria where those at Jerusalem were captives, as the text plainly says, "And the captives of Jerusalem that are at Sepharad." But let anyone believe about this what he will.

Preface to the Prophet Jonah

There are some who would hold, as Jerome shows, that this prophet was the son of the widow at Zarephath, near Sidon, who fed the prophet Elijah in the famine (1 Kings 17:9 and Luke 4:26). They give as a reason that he here calls himself “the son of Amittai,” i.e., “a son of the True One,” because his mother said to Elijah, when he had raised him from the dead, “Now I know that the word of thy mouth is true.”

Let anyone believe this who will; I do not believe it. His father’s name was Amittai, Latin, Verax. German, *Wahrhaftig* , from Gath-Hepher, a town in the tribe of Zebulun (Joshua 19:13); for it is written in 2 Kings 14:25, “Jeroboam restored again the boundary of Israel from Hamath unto the Sea of Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which He spoke by His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet of Gath-Hepher.” Moreover the widow of Zarephath was a Gentile, as Christ says in: Luke 4:26, but Jonah here admits that he is a Hebrew.

So we gather that this Jonah lived at the time of King: Jeroboam, who was the grandfather of King Jehu, in whose time King Uzziah reigned in Judah.

At this time, too, the prophets Hosea, Amos and Joel were in the same kingdom, in other places and towns. From this we can readily gather what a splendid and precious man this Jonah was in the kingdom of Israel. God did great things through him, for it was through his preaching that King Jeroboam was so fortunate and won back all that Hazael, King of Syria, had taken from the kingdom of Israel.

But greater than all that he did in his own nation were his attacks upon the great and mighty kingdom of Assyria, and his fruitful preaching among the Gentiles, which accomplished results that could not have been accomplished among his own people with many sermons. It was as though

God willed to demonstrate by him the word of Isaiah, "He that hath not heard, shall hear it," as an illustration of the fact that they who have the Word richly despise it mightily, and they who cannot have it accept it gladly. Christ Himself says, in Matthew 21:43, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to the Gentiles, who bear its fruits."

Preface to the Prophet Micah

The prophet Micah lived at the time of Isaiah. He even uses the words of the other prophet, in Chapter 2, and thus one notes that prophets who lived at the same time used almost the same words in preaching of Christ, as though they had consulted.

He is one of the fine prophets, who rebukes the people severely for their idolatry, and constantly refers to the coming of Christ and His Kingdom. In one respect he is unique among the prophets, for he points with certainty to Bethlehem, naming it as the town where Christ was to be born. For this reason, he was famous under the Old Covenant, as Matthew shows, in Matthew 2:6.

He denounces, he prophesies, he preaches; but he believes that in the end, even though Israel and Judah have to go to pieces, Christ will come and make it all good. So, too, we now have to rebuke, denounce, encourage, and preach, and then say, “Even though all be lost, Christ will come at the Last Day and help us out of all misfortune.”

In the first chapter, he is difficult, and uses many allusions... The grammarians will note that and observe the pains that we have taken.

Preface to the Prophet Nahum

The prophet Nahum prophesies of the destruction that the Assyrians were to inflict upon the people of Israel and Judah, and that actually was accomplished by Shalmanezzer and Sennacherib, because of the people's great sins, though only in so far, that the righteous remnant of them was preserved, as Hezekiah and those like him experienced. Therefore, it seems that he was before Isaiah, or at least contemporary with Isaiah.

After that, he announces the destruction of the kingdom of Assyria, especially of the city of Nineveh, which was very righteous in the time of Jonah, but afterwards became full of wickedness again, and greatly afflicted the captives of Israel, so that even Tobit announces the final ruin of its wickedness, and says. "Her iniquity will be her end." True to his name of Nahum (for Nahum means *consolator*, in German, "Comforter") he comforts God's people by telling them that their enemies, the Assyrians, shall be destroyed.

At the end of the first chapter, he speaks, as does Isaiah 52:7, of the good preachers who proclaim peace and salvation on the mountains, and bids Judah exceedingly rejoice. Though that can be understood to refer to the time of Hezekiah, after Sennacherib, when Judah was rescued, and maintained itself against King Sennacherib, nevertheless, it is a general prophecy, and refers also to Christ, telling that the good tidings and the glad worship of God, taught and confirmed by God's Word, shall remain in Judah. Thus he is, and is rightly called, a real *Nahum*. f458

Preface to the Prophet Habakkuk

This Habakkuk is a prophet of comfort, who is to strengthen and support the people and prevent them from despairing of the coming of Christ, however strangely things may go. Therefore, he needs all knowledge and everything that can serve to keep faith in the promised Christ strong in their hearts. His message is as follows.

It is true, indeed, that because of their sins, the land must be destroyed by the king of Babylon. But Christ and His kingdom shall not fail to come on that account. On the contrary, the destroyer, the king of Babylon, shall have little good out of it, and he, too, shall perish. For it is the nature of God's work to help when there is need and to come at the right moment, as the song says, "He remembereth mercy when trouble is there"; or as the proverb says, "When the rope holds tightest, it breaks."

In like manner, we must support Christians in anticipation of the Last Day, even though it appear that Christ delays long and will not come; for He Himself says that He will come when men least think it, when they are tilling and planting, buying and selling, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Thus some, though not all, can be preserved in faith; for this requires both faith and preaching, as we see every day.

From all this we see that this Habakkuk lived before the Babylonian Captivity, possibly in the time of Jeremiah, and the meaning and purpose of his writing is easy to understand.

Some books say of Habakkuk that he brought food from the land of Judah to the prophet Daniel, when he was in prison. This has neither foundation nor probability. Besides, it does not agree with the time reckoning, since, so far as we can gather from Habakkuk's prophecy, he was older than Jeremiah, who lived through the destruction of Jerusalem, of which

Habakkuk prophesied. But Daniel was after Jeremiah, and had lived long before he was thrown into prison.

But Habakkuk has the right name, for Habakkuk means, in German, “an embracer,” i.e., one who embraces another and takes him in his arms. That is what he does in his prophecy; he embraces his people and takes them in his arms; i.e., he comforts them and holds them up, as one embraces a poor, weeping child, so that it may be quiet and satisfied, because things will go better, if God wills.

Preface to the Prophet Zephaniah

Zephaniah lived in the time of the prophet Jeremiah, for as the title shows, he prophesied under King Josiah, as did Jeremiah. For that reason he prophesies the very same things as Jeremiah, namely, that Jerusalem and Judah shall be destroyed and the people carried away because of the wicked life, of which they do not repent.

He does not, however, like Jeremiah, name the king of Babylon as the one who is to inflict this destruction and captivity, but only says that God will bring misfortune and affliction upon them so that He may move them to repentance. For none of the prophets could ever persuade this people that God was angry with them. They relied continually on the claim that they were, and were called, God's people, and whoever preached that God was angry with them must be a false prophet, and must die, for they would not believe that God would leave His people. It was just as it is today, when all who teach that the Christians err and commit sin and that God will punish them, are denounced and killed as heretics.

But he prophesies this disaster not to Judah only, but also to all the surrounding and neighboring lands, such as the Philistines, Moab, the Ethiopians and the Assyrians. The King of Babylon is to be God's rod upon all lands.

In the third chapter, he prophesies gloriously and clearly of the happy and blessed kingdom of Christ, which shall be spread over all the world.

Although he is a small prophet, he speaks more about Christ than many other great prophets, more than even Jeremiah. By this prophecy he gives the people rich comfort, so that they may not despair of God because of the Babylonian Captivity and their disaster, as though God had cast them off forever, but might be sure that, after their punishment, they would

receive grace again and get the promised Savior, Christ, with His glorious kingdom.

Preface to the Prophet Haggai

Haggai is the first prophet given to the people after the Babylonian Captivity, and by his prophecy the Temple and the worship of God were set up again. Besides, for two months Zechariah was given him as a companion, so that God's Word by the mouth of two witnesses might be the more surely believed, for the people had fallen into great doubt whether the Temple would ever be rebuilt.

It is our opinion that Daniel is speaking of this prophet, when he says, in Daniel 9:25, "From the time when the command goeth out that Jerusalem shall be rebuilt, until the prince, Christ, there are seven weeks and two and sixty weeks, etc." For although a decree had gone out before from King Cyrus that the Temple should be rebuilt at Jerusalem at his (the king's) expense, yet it was hindered until the time of Haggai and Zechariah, when God's decree went out through them, then the work went on.

He denounces the people, however, because they had given no thought to preparing the Temple and the worship, but had only been careful and greedy to get property and houses for themselves. For this reason they were afflicted with famine, with injury to their crops, — wine, corn, and all kinds of grain, — as an example to all the godless, who pay no heed to God's Word and worship, and are always greedy to fill their own bags. It is only to them that the text applies, when he says, "Their bag shall be full of holes."

So we find in all history that when men will not support God's servants or help maintain His Word, He lets them be greedy for their own gain and gather wealth continually; but at last He causes the bag to be full of holes, and blows into it, so that it turns to dust and melts away, and no one knows what becomes of it. Either he will eat with them, or they shall find nothing to eat.

In the second chapter he prophesies of Christ also, and says that He shall soon come, “A comfort of all nations,” by which he indicates in a mystery that the kingdom of the Jews shall have an end, and the kingdoms of all the world be destroyed and become subject to Christ. This has happened before now and is constantly happening until the Last Day, when it will all be fulfilled.

Preface to the Prophet Zechariah

This prophet lived after the Babylonian Captivity and with his comrade, Haggai, helped to rebuild the Temple and bring the scattered people together again, so that government and order might again be set up in the land. He is in truth one of the most comforting of the prophets, for he brings forward many lovely and comforting visions, and gives many kindly words, in order to encourage and strengthen the troubled and scattered people to set up the building and the government, in spite of the great and various resistance which they had endured. He does this down to the fifth chapter.

In the fifth chapter, under the vision of the letter and the ephah, he prophesies of the false teachers who are afterwards to come among the Jewish people, and who will deny Christ; and this still applies to the Jews at the present day.

In the sixth, he prophesies of the Gospel of Christ and the spiritual temple, to be built in all the world, because the Jews denied Him and would not have Him.

In the seventh and eighth a question arises which the prophet answers, encouraging and exhorting them once more to build the Temple and establish the government; and with this he concludes the prophecy about the rebuilding in his time.

In the ninth, he goes on to the time to come, and prophesies, first, in chapter 10, of how Alexander the Great shall win Tyre and Sidon and Philistia, so that the whole world shall be opened to the coming Gospel of Christ, and he leads King Christ into Jerusalem on an ass.

In the eleventh, however, he prophesies that Christ shall be sold by the Jews for thirty pieces of silver, for which cause He will leave them, so that Jerusalem shall finally be destroyed and the Jews be hardened in their error and dispersed, and thus the Gospel and the Kingdom of Christ come to the Gentiles, after the sufferings of Christ, in which He, as the shepherd, shall be smitten, and the apostles, as the sheep, be scattered. For He must first suffer and thus enter into His glory.

In the last chapter, when he has destroyed Jerusalem, he abolishes the Levitical priesthood, with its organization and vessels and festivals, and says, "All spiritual offices shall be common, for the service of God, and shall not belong to the tribe of Levi only"; that is, there shall be other priests, other festivals, other sacrifices, other worship, which other tribes can observe, nay, even the Egyptians and all Gentiles. That means that the old testament is to be abolished and taken away.

Preface to the Prophet Malachi

The Hebrews believe that this Malachi was Ezra. We let that pass, because we can know nothing certain about him, except that, so far as we can gather from his prophecy, he lived not long before Christ's birth and was certainly the last prophet; for he says, in chapter 2, that Christ the Lord shall come soon.

He is a fine prophet, and his book contains beautiful sayings about Christ and His Gospel, which he calls "a pure offering in all the world"; for by the Gospel God's grace is praised, and that is the true, pure thank-offering.

Again, he prophesies of the coming of John the Baptist, as Christ Himself points out, in Matthew 11:14, calling John His angel and the Elijah, of whom Malachi writes.

Besides, he denounces his people severely because they do not give the priests their tithes and other services. Even when they gave them, they did it faithlessly; sick and blemished sheep, for example, had to be good enough for the poor priests and preachers. That is the way it usually goes; those who are true preachers of the Word of God must suffer hunger and want and false teachers must always have their fill. To be sure, the priests, too, were denounced because they took these offerings and sacrificed them. That was the work of dear Sir Avarice.

But God here declares that He is greatly displeased with this, and calls this faithlessness and wickedness a disgrace, put upon Him. Therefore He threatens to leave them and take the Gentiles as His people.

Afterwards he denounces the priests especially, because they falsified the Word of God and taught it faithlessly, and abused their priestly office, and did not rebuke those who offered blemished things or were otherwise

unrighteous, but rather praised them and called them righteous, so that they might get offerings and profit from them. So avarice and care for the belly have always injured the Word and worship of God, and always make hypocrites of the preachers.

He denounces them also because they troubled their wives and despised them, and thereby defiled their sacrifices and worship. For it was forbidden in the law of Moses to offer troubled sacrifices to God, and those who were troubled dared not sacrifice or eat of the sacrifice. They did this who troubled their wives and made them weep, and they tried to help themselves by the example of Abraham, who had to drive out Hagar and trouble her. But he did it not for self-will, just as he had not taken her to wife because of a whim.

Preface to the New Testament 1545 (1522)

It would be right and proper that this book should appear without preface and without any other name than that of its authors, and convey only its own name and its own language. But many wild interpretations and prefaces have driven the thought of Christians to a point where no one any longer knows what is Gospel or Law, Old Testament or New. Necessity demands, therefore, that it should have an announcement, or preface, by which the simple man can be brought back from the old notions to the right road, and taught what he is to expect in this book, so that he may not seek laws and commandments where he ought to be seeking the Gospel and God's promises.

Therefore it should be known, in the first place, that the idea must be given up that there are four Gospels and only four Evangelists. The division of the New Testament books into legal, historical, prophetic and wisdom books, is also to be rejected entirely. Some make this division, thinking that by it they are somehow comparing the New with the Old Testament. On the contrary, it is to be held firmly that,] Just as the Old Testament is a book in which are written God's laws and commandments, together with the history of those who kept and of those who did not keep them; so the New Testament is a book in which are written the Gospel and the promises of God, together with the history of those who believe and of those who do not believe them. For Gospel is a Greek word, and means in Greek, a good message, good tidings, good news, a good report, which one sings and tells with rejoicing. So, when David overcame the great Goliath, there came among the Jewish people the good report and encouraging news that their terrible enemy had been smitten and they had been rescued and given joy and peace; and they sang and danced and were glad for it.

So the Gospel, too, is a good story and report, sounded forth into all the world by the apostles, telling of a true David who strove with sin, death, and devil, and overcame them, and thereby rescued all those who were captive in sin, afflicted with death, and overpowered by the devil; He made them righteous, gave them life, and saved them, so that they were given peace and brought back to God. For this they sing, and thank and praise God, and are glad forever, if only they believe firmly and are steadfast in faith.

This report and encouraging tidings, or evangelical and divine news, is also called a New Testament, because it is a testament, when a dying man bequeaths his property, after his death, to heirs whom he names, and Christ, before His death commanded and bequeathed this Gospel, to be preached into all the world, and thereby gave to all who believe, as their possession, everything that He had, that is, His life, in which He swallowed up death; His righteousness, by which He blotted out sin; His salvation, with which He overcame everlasting damnation. A poor man, dead in sin and tied for hell, can hear nothing more comforting than this precious and tender message about Christ, and from the bottom of his heart, he must laugh and be glad over it, if he believes it true.

Now to strengthen this faith, God promised this Gospel and testament in many ways, by the prophets in the Old Testament, as St. Paul says, in Romans 1:1, "I am separated to preach the Gospel of Christ, which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scripture, concerning His Son, who was born of the seed of David, etc."

To indicate some of these places: — He gave the first promise, when He said to the serpent, in Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; he shall tread on thy head and thou shalt sting his heel." Christ is the seed of this woman, and He has trodden upon the devil's head, i.e., sin, death, hell, and all his power, for without this seed, no man can escape sin, death, or hell.

Again, in Genesis 22:18, He promised Abraham, "Through thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." "Christ is the seed of Abraham," says St. Paul, in Galatians 3:16, and He has blessed all the world through the Gospel, for where Christ is not, there is still the curse that fell upon Adam and his children when he had sinned, so that all of them together are guilty of sin, death, and hell, and must belong to them.

Against this curse the Gospel blesses all the world by the public announcement, "He that believeth in this seed shall be blessed," that is, rid of sin and righteous, and shall remain alive and be saved forever; as Christ Himself says, in John 11:26, "He that believeth in me shall never die."

Again, He made this promise to David, in 2 Samuel 7:12, when He said, "I will raise up thy seed after thee, who shall build a house to my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." That is the kingdom of Christ, of which the Gospel speaks, an everlasting kingdom, a kingdom of life, salvation, and righteousness, and all those who believe shall enter into it from out of the prison of sin and death.

There are many more such promises of the Gospel in the other prophets also, for example, in Micah 5:2, "And thou; Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though thou art small in comparison with the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall come for me Him who is Lord in Israel"; and again in Hosea 13:14, "I will redeem them from hell and rescue them from death; death, I will be to thee a poison; hell, I will be to thee a pestilence."

The Gospel, then, is nothing but the preaching about Christ, Son of God and of David, true God and man, who by His death and resurrection has overcome all men's sin, and death and hell, for us who believe in Him.

Thus the Gospel can be either a brief or a lengthy message; one can describe it briefly, another at length. He describes it at length, who describes many works and words of Christ, — as do the four Evangelists; he describes it briefly who does not tell of Christ's works, but, indicates shortly how by His death and resurrection He has overcome sin, death, and hell for those who believe in Him, as do St. Peter and St. Paul.

See to it, therefore, that you do not make of Christ a second Moses or of the Gospel a book of laws and doctrines, as has been done heretofore; and certain prefaces, even those of St. Jerome, speak for this. For the Gospel does not really demand works of ours by which we become righteous and are saved, nay, it condemns such works; but it does demand faith in Christ, that He has overcome for us sin, death, and hell, and thus makes us righteous, and gives us life and salvation, not through our works, but through His own works, death, and suffering, in order that we may avail ourselves of His death and victory, as though they were our own.

To be sure, Christ, in the Gospel, and St. Peter and St. Paul besides, do give many commandments and doctrines, and expound the law, but these are to be counted like all Christ's other works and benefits. To know His works and the things that happened to Him, is not yet a knowledge of the Gospel, for if you know only these things, you do not yet know that He has overcome sin, death, and devil. So, too, it is not yet knowledge of the Gospel, when you know these doctrines and commandments, but only when the voice comes that says, "Christ is your own, with His life, teaching, works, death, resurrection, and all that He is, has, does, and can do."

We see, also, that He does not compel us but invites us kindly and says, "Blessed are the poor, etc.;" and the apostles use the words, "I exhort," "I entreat," "I beg." Thus one sees on every hand that the Gospel is not a book of law, but really a preaching of the benefits of Christ, shown to us and given to us for our own, if we believe. But Moses, in his books, drives, compels, threatens, smites and rebukes terribly; for he is a law-giver and driver.

Hence it comes that to a believer no law is given by which he becomes righteous before God, as St. Paul says in I Timothy 1, because he is alive and righteous and saved by faith, and he needs nothing more, except to prove his faith by works. Nay, if faith is there, he cannot hold himself back; he shows himself, breaks out into good works, confesses and teaches this Gospel before people, and risks his life for it. Everything that he lives and does is directed to his neighbor's profit, in order to help him, not only to

the attainment of this grace, but in body, property, and honor. He sees that this is what Christ has done for him, and he follows Christ's example.

That is what Christ meant when He gave, at last, no other commandment than love, by which men were to know who were His disciples and true believers. For where works and love do not break forth, there faith is not right, the Gospel does not take hold, and Christ is not rightly known. See, then, that you so approach the books of the New Testament as to learn to read them in this way. [From all this you can now judge all the books and decide, among them which are the best. John's Gospel and St. Paul's Epistles, especially that to the Romans, and St. Peter's first Epistle are the true kernel and marrow of all the books. They ought rightly be the first books and it would be advisable for every Christian to read them first and most, and by daily reading, make them as familiar as his daily bread.

In them you find not many works and miracles of Christ described, but you do find it depicted, in masterly fashion, how faith in Christ overcomes sin, death, and hell, and gives life, righteousness, and salvation. This is the real nature of the Gospel, as you have heard.

If I had to do without one or the other, — either the works or preaching of Christ, — I would rather do without His works than His preaching; for the works do not help me, but His words give life, as He Himself says. Now John writes very little about the works of Christ, but very much about His preaching, while the other Evangelists write much of His works and little of His preaching; therefore John's Gospel is the one, tender, true chief Gospel, far, far to be preferred to the other three and placed high above them. So, too, the Epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter far surpass the other three Gospels, — Matthew, Mark and Luke.

In a word, St. John's Gospel and his first Epistle, St. Paul's Epistles, especially Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first Epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that it is necessary and good for you to know, even though you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore St. James' Epistle is really an epistle of straw,

compared to them; for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it. But more of this in other prefaces. f470

Preface to the Acts of the Apostles

This book should be read and regarded not as though St. Luke had written of the personal works and lives of the apostles for an example of good works and good lives only; though this is the way it has sometimes been taken. Even St. Augustine and many others have looked upon the fact that the apostles had all things in common with Christians as the best example which the book contains; though this did not last long and had to stop, after a time. On the contrary, it is to be noted that by this book St. Luke teaches the whole Church, to the end of the world, the true chief point of Christian doctrine; namely, that we must all be justified only through faith in Jesus Christ, without any addition of law or help from good works.

This doctrine is the chief intention of the book and the author's principal cause for writing it. Therefore he stresses so mightily, not only the preaching of the apostles about faith in Christ and how both Gentiles and Jews must be justified by it without any merits or works, but also the examples and the instances of this teaching, telling how Gentiles as well as Jews were justified through the Gospel only, without the law. So St. Peter testifies in Acts 10:28 and Acts 15:9, that, in this matter, God made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, but just as He gave the Holy Ghost to the Gentiles through the Gospel though they lived without the law, so He gave Him to the Jews through the Gospel, and not through the law or because of their own works and merits. Thus he puts side by side, in this book, both the doctrine about faith and the example of faith.

This book might well be called, therefore, a commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul. For what Paul teaches and insists upon with words and passages of Scripture, St. Luke here points out and proves with examples and instances which show that it has happened, and must happen, as St. Paul teaches, to wit, that no law, no work justifies men, but only faith in Christ.

Here, in this book, you find, then, a fair mirror, in which you can see that it is true. *Sola fides justificat*, “faith alone justifies,” for all the examples and instances of this doctrine contained in it are sure and comforting testimonies, which neither lie nor deceive you.

For see how St. Paul himself was converted; how the Gentile, Cornelius, was converted through St. Peter’s word, the angel telling him beforehand that Peter would preach to him, and so he would be saved. Look at the proconsul Sergius, and all the cities where Paul and Barnabas preached; look at the first council of the apostles at Jerusalem, in Acts 15:2; look at all the preaching of St. Peter, Paul, Stephen and Philip; — you will find that it all comes to one thing; it is only through the faith of Christ, without law and works, that we must come into grace and be justified. By means of this book, used this way, we can stop, in masterly fashion and mightily, the mouths of opponents who point us to the law and our own works and publish their foolish unwisdom to all the world.

Therefore St. Luke says that these illustrations of faith amazed the pious Jews, who had become believers, and that the unbelieving Jews became mad and foolish over it. And this was no wonder, for they had been raised in the law and had been accustomed to it from Abraham down and it could not but vex them that the Gentiles, who were without law and God, should be, like themselves, in God’s grace.

But that our people, who are all Gentiles, should slander and persecute this doctrine is ten times worse; for here we see, and cannot deny, that the grace of God and the knowledge of Christ came to our forebears without law and merit, nay, when they were in horrible idolatry and blasphemy. But they will gain as much by their slander and persecution as the Jews gained by their raging and raving. He who had before threatened the Jews and had Moses sing, “I will make you wroth with that which is not my people, and with a foolish folk will I make you angry,” and said in Hosea 2:23, “I will call ‘My people’ those who were not my people” (i.e. those who live without law and works), and who kept His word, He, I say, threatens these slanderers of ours with the same things, and He will surely keep His word, as He has

already begun to do; but they will not believe it until, like the Jews, they have the experience. Amen.

Preface to the Epistle to the Romans

This Epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.

Therefore, I, too, will do my best, so far as God has given me power, to open the way into it through this preface, so that it may be the better understood by everyone. For heretofore it has been evilly darkened with commentaries and all kinds of idle talk, though it is, in itself, a bright light, almost enough to illumine all the Scripture.

To begin with we must have knowledge of its language and know what St. Paul means by the words, law, sin, grace, faith, righteousness, flesh, spirit, etc., otherwise no reading of it has any value.

The little word “law,” you must not take here in human’ fashion, as a teaching about what works are to be done or not done. That is the way it is with human laws, — the law is fulfilled by works, even though there is no heart in them. But God judges according to what is at the bottom of the heart, and for this reason, His law makes its demands on the inmost heart and cannot be satisfied with works, but rather punishes works that are done otherwise than from the bottom of the heart, as hypocrisy and lies.

Hence all men are called liars, in Psalm 116:11, for the reason that no one keeps or can keep God’s law from the bottom of the heart, for everyone finds in himself displeasure in what is good and pleasure in what is bad. If, then, there is no willing pleasure in the good, then the inmost heart is not set on the law of God, then there is surely sin, and God’s wrath is deserved,

even though outwardly there seem to be many good works and an honorable life.

Hence St. Paul concludes, in chapter 2, that the Jews are all sinners, and says that only the doers of the law are righteous before God. He means by this that no one is, in his works, a doer of the law; on the contrary, he speaks to them thus, “Thou teachest not to commit adultery, but thou committest adultery”; and “Wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself, because thou doest the same thing that thou judgest”; as if to say, “You live a fine outward life in the works of the law, and judge those who do not so live, and know how to teach everyone; you see the splinter in the other’s eye, but of the beam in your own eye you are not aware.”

For even though you keep the law outwardly, with works, from fear of punishment or love of reward, nevertheless, you do all this without willingness and pleasure, and without love for the law; but rather with unwillingness, under compulsion; and you would rather do otherwise, if the law were not there. The conclusion is that at the bottom of your heart you hate the law. What matter, then, that you teach others not to steal, if you are a thief at heart, and would gladly be one outwardly, if you dared?

Though, to be sure, the outward work is not far behind such hypocrites!

Thus you teach others, but not yourself; and you yourself know not what you teach, and have never yet rightly understood the law. Nay, the law increases sin, as he says in chapter v, for the reason that the more the law demands what men cannot do, the more they hate the law.

For this reason he says, in Romans 7:14, “The law is spiritual.” What is that? If the law were for the body, it could be satisfied with works; but since it is spiritual, no one can satisfy it, unless all that you do is done from the bottom of the heart. But such a heart is given only by God’s Spirit, who makes a man equal to the law, so that he acquires a desire for the law in his heart, and henceforth does nothing out of fear and compulsion, but

everything out of a willing heart. That law, then, is spiritual which will be loved and fulfilled with such a spiritual heart, and requires such a spirit.

Where that spirit is not in the heart, there sin remains, and displeasure with the law, and enmity toward it; though the law is good and just and holy.

Accustom yourself, then, to this language, and you will find that doing the works of the law and fulfilling the law are two very different things. The work of the law is everything that one does, or can do toward keeping the law of his own free will or by his own powers. But since under all these works and along with them there remains in the heart dislike for the law and the compulsion to keep it, these works are all wasted and have no value. That is what St. Paul means in Romans 3:20, when he says, "By the works of the law no man becomes righteous before God." Hence you see that the wranglers and sophists are deceivers, when they teach men to prepare themselves for grace by means of works. How can a man prepare himself for good by means of works, if he does no good works without displeasure and unwillingness of heart? How shall a work please God, if it proceeds from a reluctant and resisting heart?

To fulfill the law, however, is to do its works with pleasure, and love, and to live a godly and good life of one's own accord, without the compulsion of the law. This pleasure and love for the law is put into the heart by the Holy Ghost, as he says in Romans 5:5. But the Holy Ghost is not given except in, with, and by faith in Jesus Christ, as he says in the introduction; and faith does not come, save only through God's Word or Gospel, which preaches Christ, that He is God's Son and a man, and has died and risen again for our sakes, as he says in Romans 3:25, Romans 4:25 and Romans 10:9.

Hence it comes that faith alone makes righteous and fulfills the law; for out of Christ's merit, it brings the Spirit, and the Spirit makes the heart glad and free, as the law requires that it shall be. Thus good works come out of faith. That is what he means in Romans 3:31, after he has rejected the works of

the law, so that it sounds as though he would abolish the law by faith; “Nay,” he says, “we establish the law by faith,” that is, we fulfill it by faith.

Sin, in the Scripture, means not only the outward works of the body, but all the activities that move men to the outward works, namely, the inmost heart, with all its powers. Thus the little word “do” ought to mean that a man falls all the way into sin and walks in sin. This is done by no outward work of sin, unless a man goes into sin altogether, body and soul. And the Scriptures look especially into the heart and have regard to the root and source of all sin, which is unbelief in the inmost heart. As, therefore, faith alone makes righteous, and brings the Spirit, and produces pleasure in good, eternal works, so unbelief alone commits sin, and brings up the flesh, and produces pleasure in bad external works, as happened to Adam and Eve in Paradise.

Hence Christ calls unbelief the only sin, when he says, in John 16:8, “The Spirit will rebuke the world for sin, because they believe not on me.”

For this reason, too, before good or bad works are done, which are the fruits, there must first be in the heart faith or unbelief, which is the root, the sap, the chief power of all sin. And this is called in the Scriptures, the head of the serpent and of the old dragon, which the seed of the woman, Christ, must tread under foot, as was promised to Adam, in Genesis 3:3.

Between grace and gift there is this difference. Grace means properly God’s favor, or the good-will God bears us, by which He is disposed to give us Christ and to pour into us the Holy Ghost, with His gifts. This is clear from chapter 5, where he speaks of “the grace and gift in Christ.” The gifts and the Spirit increase in us every day, though they are not yet perfect, and there remain in us the evil lust and sin that war against the Spirit, as he says in Romans 7:14 and Galatians 5:17, and the quarrel between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent is foretold in Genesis 3:15. Nevertheless, grace does so much that we are accounted wholly righteous before God. For His grace is not divided or broken up, as are the gifts, but

it takes us entirely into favor, for the sake of Christ our Intercessor and Mediator, and because of that the gifts are begun in us.

In this sense, then, you understand chapter 7, in which St. Paul still calls himself a sinner, and yet says, in Romans 8:1, that there is nothing condemnable in those are in Christ on account of the incompleteness of the gifts and of the Spirit. Because the flesh is not yet slain, we still are sinners; but because we believe and have a beginning of the Spirit, God is so favorable and gracious to us that He will not count the sin against us or judge us for it, but will deal with us according to our faith in Christ, until sin is slain.

Faith is not that human notion and dream that some hold for faith. Because they see that no betterment of life and no good works follow it, and yet they can hear and say much about faith, they fall into error, and say, "Faith is not enough; one must do works in order to be righteous and be saved."

This is the reason that, when they hear the Gospel, they fall to — and make for themselves, by their own powers, an idea in their hearts, which says, "I believe." This they hold for true faith. But it is a human imagination and idea that never reaches the depths of the heart, and so nothing comes of it and no betterment follows it.

Faith, however, is a divine work in us. It changes us and makes us to be born anew of God (John 1:13); it kills the old Adam and makes altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers, and it brings with it the Holy Ghost. O, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith; and so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to do, but before the question rises; it has already done them, and is always at the doing of them. He who does not these works is a faithless man. He gropes and looks about after faith and good works, and knows neither what faith is nor what good works are, though he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works.

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times. This confidence in God's

grace and knowledge of it makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all His creatures; and this is the work of the Holy Ghost in faith. Hence a man is ready and glad, without compulsion, to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, in love and praise of God, who has shown him this grace; and thus it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light from fire. Beware, therefore, of your own false notions and of the idle talkers, who would be wise enough to make decisions about faith and good works, and yet are the greatest fools. Pray God to work faith in you; else you will remain forever without faith, whatever you think or do.

Righteousness, then, is such a faith and is called “God’s righteousness,” or “the righteousness that avails before God,” because God gives it and counts it as righteousness for the sake of Christ, our Mediator, and makes a man give to every man what he owes him. For through faith a man becomes sinless and comes to take pleasure in God’s commandments; thus he gives to God the honor that is His and pays Him what he owes Him; but he also serves man willingly, by whatever means he can, and thus pays his debt to everyone. Such righteousness nature and free will and all our powers cannot bring into existence. No one can give himself faith, and no more can he take away his own unbelief; how, then, will he take away a single sin, even the very smallest? Therefore, all that is done apart from faith, or in unbelief, is false; it is hypocrisy and sin, no matter how good a show it makes (Romans 14:23).

You must not so understand flesh and spirit as to think I that flesh has to do only with unchastity and spirit only with what is inward, in the heart; but Paul, like Christ, in John 3:6, calls “flesh” everything that is born of the flesh; viz., the: whole man, with body and soul, mind and senses, because everything about him longs for the flesh. Thus you should learn to call him “fleshly” who thinks, teaches, and talks a great deal about high spiritual matters, but without grace. From the “works of the flesh,” in Galatians 5:20, you can learn that Paul calls heresy and hatred “works of the flesh,” and in Romans 8:3, he says that “the law was weak through the flesh,” and this does not refer to unchastity, but to all sins, above all to unbelief, which

is the most spiritual of all vices. On the other hand, he calls him a spiritual man who is occupied with the most external kind of works, as Christ, when He washed the disciples' feet, and Peter, when he steered his boat, and fished. Thus "the flesh" is a man who lives and works, inwardly and outwardly, in the service of the flesh's profit and of this temporal life; "the spirit" is the man who lives and works, inwardly and outwardly, in the service of the Spirit and the future life.

Without such an understanding of these words, you will never understand this letter of St. Paul, or any other book of Holy Scripture. Therefore, beware of all teachers who use these words in a different sense, no matter who they are, even Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Origen, and men like them, or above them. Now we will take up the Epistle.

It is right for a preacher of the Gospel first, by a revelation of the law and of sin, to rebuke everything and make sin of everything that is not the living fruit of the Spirit and of faith in Christ, so that men may be led to know themselves and their own wretchedness, and become humble and ask for help. That is what St. Paul does. He begins in Chapter 1 and rebukes the gross sin and unbelief that are plainly evident, as the sins of the heathen, who live without God's grace, were and still are. He says: The wrath of God is revealed from heaven, through the Gospel, upon all men because of their godless lives and their unrighteousness. For even though they know and daily recognize that there is a God, nevertheless, nature itself, without grace, is so bad that it neither thanks nor honors Him, but blinds itself, and goes continually from bad to worse, until at last, after idolatry, it commits the most shameful sins, with all the vices, and is not ashamed, and allows others to do these things unrebuked.

In chapter 2, he stretches this rebuke still farther and extends it to those who seem outwardly to be righteous, but commit sin in secret. Such were the Jews and such are all the hypocrites, who, without desire or love for the law of God, lead good lives, but hate God's law in their hearts, and yet are prone to judge other people. It is the nature of all the hypocrites to think themselves pure, and yet be full of covetousness, hatred, pride, and all

uncleanness (Matthew 23:25). These are they who despise God's goodness and in their hardness heap wrath upon themselves. Thus St. Paul, as a true interpreter of the law, leaves no one without sin, but proclaims the wrath of God upon all who live good lives from nature or free will, and makes them appear no better than open sinners; indeed he says that they are hardened and unrepentant.

In chapter 3, he puts them all together in a heap, and says that one is like the other; they are all sinners before God, except that the Jews have had God's Word. Not many have believed on it, to be sure, but that does not mean that the faith and truth of God are exhausted; and he quotes a saying from Psalm 51:4, that God remains righteous in His words. Afterwards he comes back to this again and proves by Scripture that they are all sinners and that by the works of the law no man is justified, but that the law was given only that sin might be known.

Then he begins to teach the right way by which men must be justified and saved, and says, They are all sinners and without praise from God, but they must be justified, without merit, through faith in Christ, who has earned this for us by His blood, and has been made for us a mercy-seat by God, Who forgives us all former sins, proving thereby that were we aided only by His righteousness, which He gives in faith, which is revealed in this time through the Gospel and "testified before by the law and the prophets."

Thus the law is set up by faith, though the works of the law are put down by it, together with the reputation that they give.

After the first three chapters, in which sin is revealed and faith's way to righteousness is taught, he begins, in chapter 4, to meet certain objections. And first he takes up the one that all men commonly make when they hear of faith, that it justifies, without works. They say, "Are men, then, to do no good works?" Therefore he himself takes up the case of Abraham, and asks, "What did Abraham accomplish, then, with his good works? Were they all in vain? Were his works of no use?" He concludes that Abraham was justified by faith alone, without any works; nay, the Scriptures, in

Genesis 15:6, declare that he was justified by faith alone, even before the work of circumcision. But if the work of circumcision contributed nothing to his righteousness, though God commanded it and it was a good work of obedience; then, surely, no other good work will contribute anything to righteousness. On the other hand, if Abraham's circumcision was an external sign by which he showed the righteousness that was already his in faith, then all good works are only external signs which follow out of faith, and show, like good fruit, that a man is already inwardly righteous before God.

With this powerful illustration, out of the Scriptures, St. Paul establishes the doctrine of faith which he had taught before, in chapter 3. He also brings forward another witness, viz, David, in Psalm 32:1 who says that a man is justified without works, although he does not remain without works when he has been justified. Then he gives the illustration a broader application, and concludes that the Jews cannot be Abraham's heirs merely because of their blood, still less because of the works of the law, but must be heirs of Abraham's faith, if they would be true heirs. For before the law — either the law of Moses or the law of circumcision — Abraham was justified by faith and called the father of believers; moreover, the law works wrath rather than grace, because no one keeps it out of love for it and pleasure in it, so that what comes by the works of the law is disgrace rather than grace. Therefore faith alone must obtain the grace promised to Abraham, for these examples were written for our sakes, that we, too, should believe.

In chapter 5, he comes to the fruits and works of faith, such as peace, joy, love to God and to every man, and confidence, boldness, joy, courage, and hope in tribulation and suffering. For all this follows, if faith be true, because of the over-abundant goodness that God shows us in Christ, so that He caused Him to die for us before we could ask it, nay, while we were still His enemies. Thus we have it that faith justifies without any works; and yet it does not follow that men are, therefore, to do no good works, but rather that the true works will not be absent. Of these the work righteous saints know nothing, but feign works of their own in which there is no

peace, joy, confidence, love, hope, boldness, nor any of the qualities of true Christian works and faith.

After this, he breaks out, and makes a pleasant excursion, and tells whence come both sin and righteousness, death and life, and compares Adam and Christ. He says that Christ had to come, a second Adam, to bequeath His righteousness to us, through a new spiritual birth in faith, as the first Adam bequeathed sin to us, through the old, fleshly birth. Thus he declares, and confirms it, that no one, by his own works, can help himself out of sin into righteousness, any more than he can prevent the birth of his own body.

This is proved by the fact that the divine law — which ought to help to righteousness, if anything can — has not only not helped, but has even increased sin; for the reason that the more the law forbids, the more our evil nature hates it, and the more it wants to give rein to its own lust. Thus the law makes Christ all the more necessary, and more grace is needed to help our nature.

In chapter 6, he takes up the special work of faith, the conflict of the spirit with the flesh, for the complete slaying of the sin and lust that remain after we are justified. He teaches us that by faith we are not so freed from sin that we can be idle, slack, and careless, as though there were no longer any sin in us. There is sin; but it is no longer counted for condemnation, because of the faith that strives against it. Therefore we have enough to do all our life long in taming the body, slaying its lusts, and compelling its members to obey the spirit and not the lusts, thus making our lives like the death and resurrection of Christ and completing our baptism — which signifies the death of sin and the new life of grace — until we are entirely pure of sins, and even our bodies rise again with Christ and live forever.

And that we can do, he says, because we are in grace and not in the law.

He himself explains that to mean that to be without the law is not the same thing as to have no laws and be able to do what one pleases; but we are under the law when, without grace, we occupy ourselves in the work of the law. Then sin assuredly rules by the law, for no one loves the law by nature;

and that is great sin. Grace, however, makes the law dear to us, and then sin is no more there, and the law is no longer against us, but with us.

This is the true freedom from sin and the law, of which he writes, down to the end of this chapter, saying that it is liberty only to do good with pleasure and live a good life without the compulsion of the law. Therefore this liberty is a spiritual liberty, which does not abolish the law, but presents what the law demands; namely, pleasure and love. Thus the law is quieted, and no longer drives men or makes demands of them. It is just as if you owed a debt to your overlord and could not pay it. There are two ways in which you could rid yourself of the debt, — either he would take nothing from you and would tear up the account; or some good man would pay it for you, and give you the means to satisfy the account. It is in this latter way that Christ has made us free from the law. Our liberty is, therefore, no fleshly liberty, which is not obligated to do anything, but a liberty that does many works of all kinds, and thus is free from the demands and the debts of the law.

In chapter 7, he supports this with a parable of the mar-tied life. When a man dies, his wife is single, and thus the one is released from the other; not that the wife cannot or ought not take another husband, but rather that she is now really free to take another, which she could not do before she was free from her husband. So our conscience is bound to the law, under the old man; when he is slain by the Spirit, then the conscience is free; the one is released from the other; not that the conscience is to do nothing, but rather that it is now really free to cleave to Christ, the second husband, and bring forth the fruit of life.

Then he sketches out more broadly the nature of sin and the law, showing how, by means of the law sin now moves and is mighty. The old man hates the law the more because he cannot pay what the law demands, for sin is his nature and by himself he can do nothing but sin; therefore the law is death to him, and torment. Not that the law is bad, but his evil nature cannot endure the good, and the law demands good of him. So a sick man

cannot endure it when he is required to run and jump and do the works of a well man.

Therefore St. Paul here concludes that the law, rightly understood and thoroughly comprehended, does nothing more than remind us of our sin, and slay us by it, and make us liable to eternal wrath; and all this is taught and experienced by our conscience, when it is really smitten by the law.

Therefore a man must have something else than the law, and more than the law, to make him righteous and save him. But they who do not rightly understand the law are blind; they go ahead, in their presumption, and think to satisfy the law with their works, not knowing what the law demands, viz., a willing and happy heart. Therefore they do not see Moses dearly, the veil is put between them and him, and covers him.

Then he shows how spirit and flesh strive with one another in a man. He uses himself as an example, in order that we may learn rightly to understand the work of slaying sin within us. He calls both spirit and flesh “laws,” for just as it is the nature of the divine law to drive men and make demands of them, so the flesh drives men and makes demands and rages against the spirit, and will have its own way. The spirit, too, drives men and makes demands contrary to the flesh, and will have its own way. This contention within us lasts as long as we live, though in one man it is greater, in another less, according as spirit or flesh is stronger.

Nevertheless, the whole man is both spirit and flesh and he fights with himself until he becomes wholly spiritual.

In chapter 8, he encourages these fighters, telling them not to condemn the flesh; and he shows further what the nature of flesh and spirit is, and how the spirit comes from Christ, Who has given us His Holy Spirit to make us spiritual and subdue the flesh. He assures us that we are still God’s children, however hard sin may rage within us, so long as we follow the spirit and resist sin, to slay it. Since, however, nothing else is so good for the mortifying of the flesh as the cross and suffering, he comforts us in suffering with the support of the Spirit of love, and of the whole creation.

For the Spirit sighs within us and the creation longs with us that we may be rid of the flesh and of sin. So we see that these three chapters (6-8) deal with the one work of faith, which is to slay the old Adam and subdue the flesh.

In chapters 9, 10, and 11, he teaches concerning God's eternal predestination, from which it originally comes that one, believes or not, is rid of sin or not rid of it. Thus our becoming righteous is taken entirely out of our hands and put in the hand of God. And that is most highly necessary. We are so weak and uncertain that, if it were in our power, surely not one man would be saved, the devil would surely overpower us all; but since God is certain, and His predestination cannot fail, and no one can withstand Him, we still have hope against sin.

And here we must set a boundary for those audacious and high-climbing spirits, who first bring their own thinking to this matter and begin at the top to search the abyss of divine predestination, and worry in vain about whether they are predestinate. They must have a fall; either they will despair, or else they will take long risks. ^{f474} But do you follow the order of this epistle. Worry first about Christ and the Gospel, that you may recognize your sin and His grace; then fight, our sin, as the first eight chapters here have taught; then, when you have reached the eighth chapter, and are under the cross and suffering, that will teach you the right doctrine of predestination, in the ninth, tenth and eleventh chapters, and how comforting it is. For in the absence of suffering and the cross and the danger of death, one cannot deal with predestination without harm and without secret wrath against God. The old Adam must die before he can endure this subject and drink the strong wine of it. Therefore beware not to drink wine while you are still a suckling. There is a limit, a time, an age for every doctrine.

In chapter 12, he teaches what true worship is; and he makes all Christians priests, who are to offer not money and cattle, as under the law, but their own bodies, with a slaying of the lusts. Then he describes the outward conduct of Christians, under spiritual government, telling how they are to

teach, preach, rule, serve, give, suffer, love, live, and act toward friend, foe and all men. These are the works that a Christian does; for, as has been said, faith takes no holidays.

In chapter 13, he teaches honor and obedience to worldly government, which accomplishes much, although it does not make its people righteous before God. It is instituted in order that the good may have outward peace and protection, and that the wicked may not be free to do evil, without fear, in peace and quietness. Therefore the righteous are to honor it, though they do not need it. In the end he comprises it all in love, and includes it in the example of Christ, Who has done for us what we also are to do, following in His footsteps.

In chapter 14, he teaches that weak consciences are to be led gently in faith and to be spared, so that Christians are not to use their liberty for doing harm, but for the furtherance of the weak. If that is not done, then discord follows and contempt for the Gospel; and the Gospel is the all-important thing. Thus it is better to yield a little to the weak in faith, until they grow stronger, than to have the doctrine of the Gospel come to naught. This is a peculiar work of love, for which there is great need even now, when with meat-eating and other liberties, men are rudely and roughly shaking weak consciences, before they know the truth.

In chapter 15, he sets up the example of Christ, to show that we are to suffer those who are weak in other ways, — those whose weakness lies in open sins or in unpleasing habits. These men are not to be cast off, but borne with till they grow better. For so Christ has done to us, and still does every day; lie bears with our many faults and bad habits, and with all our imperfections, and helps us constantly.

Then, at the end, he prays for them, praises them and commends them to God; he speaks of his office and his preaching, and asks them gently for a contribution to the poor at Jerusalem; all that he speaks of or deals with is pure love.

The last chapter is a chapter of greetings, but he mingles with them a noble warning against doctrines of men, which are put in alongside the doctrine of the Gospel and cause offense. It is as though he had foreseen that out of Rome and through the Romans would come the seductive and offensive canons and decretals and the whole squirming mass of human laws and commandments, which have now drowned the whole world and wiped out this Epistle and all the Holy Scriptures, along with the Spirit and with faith, so that nothing has remained there except the idol, Belly, whose servants St. Paul here rebukes. God release us from them. Amen.

Thus in this Epistle we find most richly the things that a Christian ought to know; namely, what is law, Gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, the cross, and also how we are to conduct ourselves toward everyone, whether righteous or sinner, strong or weak, friend or foe. All this is ably founded on Scripture and proved by his own example and that of the prophets. Therefore it appears that St. Paul wanted to comprise briefly in this one epistle the whole Christian and evangelical doctrine and to prepare an introduction to the entire Old Testament; for, without doubt, he who has this epistle well in his heart, has the light and power of the Old Testament with him.

Therefore let every Christian exercise himself in it habitually and continually. To this may God give His grace. Amen.

Preface to the First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians 1545

In this Epistle, St. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to be one in faith and love and be careful to learn the chief thing, at which all reason and wisdom stumbles; namely, that Christ is our salvation.

In our day, when the Gospel has come to light, there are many mad saints, — called spirits of sedition, fanatics, and heretics, who have become wise and learned all too quickly, and, because of their great knowledge and wisdom, cannot live in harmony with anybody. One wants to go this way, another that way; as though it would be a great shame, if everyone were not to try something of his own and to put forth his own wisdom. No one can make them see their folly, for, at bottom, they neither know nor understand anything about the really important matters, even though they jabber much about them with their mouths.

So it was with St. Paul, too. He had taught his Corinthians the Christian faith and freedom from the law; but the mad saints came along, and the unripe wise men; they Split the unity of the doctrine and made a division among the believers. One would be a Paulist, another an Appollist, another a Petrist, another a Christist; one wanted circumcision, another not; one wanted marriage, another not; one wanted to eat meat sacrificed to idols, another not; some wanted to be free from slavery; some of the women wanted to go with uncovered hair, and so on. They carried it so far that one man abused his liberty and married his stepmother; some did not believe in the resurrection of the dead; some thought lightly of the Sacrament. Things got so wild and disorderly that everyone wanted to be master and to teach, and make what he pleased of the Gospel, the Sacrament and faith. Meanwhile, they let the main thing go, as though it were long since worn out; — namely, that Christ is our salvation, our righteousness, our

redemption. This truth can never hold the road, when people begin to be knowing and wise.

That is just what is now happening to us. Now that we, by God's grace have opened the Gospel to the Germans, everyone wants to be the best master and have the Holy Ghost all to himself, as though the Gospel had been preached in order that we should show our cleverness and reason, and seek for reputation. These Corinthians may well be an example for our people in these days, for they, too, need such an epistle. But this is the way things have to go with the Gospel; mad saints and unripe wise-men have to start disturbances and offenses, so that the "approved," as St. Paul says, may be manifest. Therefore St. Paul rebukes and condemns this dangerous wisdom most severely and makes fools of these saucy saints. He says outright that they know nothing of Christ, or of the spirit and gifts of God, given to us in Christ, and that they should begin to learn. There must be spiritual folk who understand it. The desire to be wise and the pretense of cleverness in the Gospel are the things that really give offense and hinder the knowledge of Christ and God, and start disturbances and contentions. This clever wisdom and reason can well serve to make mad saints and wild Christians; but they can never, never know our Lord Christ, unless they first become fools again, and humbly let themselves be taught and led by the simple Word of God. This is what he deals with in the first four chapters.

In chapter 5, he rebukes the gross unchastity of the man who had married his stepmother, and would put him under the ban and give him over to the devil. Thus he shows the right way of using the ban; it must be laid upon open vice, with the consent of the believing congregation, as Christ also teaches in Matthew 18:17.

In chapter 6, he rebukes contention and disputing before the courts, especially before heathen and unbelievers; and teaches them that they shall either settle their cases among themselves or suffer wrong.

In chapter 7, he gives instruction concerning chastity and the wedded state.

He praises chastity and virginity, saying that they are profitable for the better attending to the Gospel; as Christ also teaches, in Matthew 19:12, concerning the chaste who are chaste for the sake of the Gospel or the kingdom of heaven. But Paul wills that it shall not be forced or compulsory, and that it shall not be kept at the risk of greater sin; otherwise, marriage is better than a chastity which is a continual burning. In chapters 8 to 12, he discusses, in many ways, how weak consciences are to be led and how men are to conduct themselves in external matters, like eating, drinking, apparel, and taking the Sacrament. Everywhere he forbids the strong to despise the weak, since he himself, though he is an apostle, has refrained from many things to which he had a right. Moreover the strong may well be afraid, because, in ancient Israel, so many were destroyed of those who were brought out of Egypt with miracles.

Alongside of this, he makes some digressions of wholesome doctrine.

In chapters 12 and 13, he discusses the many different gifts of God, among which love is the best, and teaches them not to exalt themselves but to serve one another in unity of spirit, because there is one God, one Lord, one Spirit, and everything is one, no matter how much diversity there is.

In chapter 14, he teaches the preachers, prophets, and singers to use their gifts in an orderly manner and only for edification, and not put forward their sermons, knowledge, and understanding to gain honor for themselves.

In chapter 15, he rebukes those who had taught and believed wrongly concerning the resurrection of the flesh.

In the last chapter he exhorts them to brotherly assistance of the needy with temporal support.

Preface to the Second Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

In the First Epistle, St. Paul rebuked the Corinthians severely for many things, and poured sharp wine into the wounds, and terrified them. But an apostle should be a preacher of comfort, to raise up terrified and fearful consciences, rather than to frighten them. Therefore, in this Epistle, he praises them once more, and pours oil into their wounds, and shows himself wonderfully kind to them, and bids them receive the sinner back with love.

In chapters 1 and 2, he shows his love toward them, how all that he said, did, and suffered was for, their profit and good, and how they ought to trust him for the best.

After that, he praises the office of the Gospel, which is the highest and most comforting of all works and is for the profit and good of men's consciences. He shows how it is nobler than the office of the law, and how it is persecuted, and yet increases among believers, and produces, through the Cross, a hope of eternal glory. But with all this he touches the false apostles, who were concerned with the law, rather than the Gospel, and taught mere outward holiness, which is hypocrisy, and allowed the inner shame of unbelief to continue. This he does in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

In chapters 6 and 7, he exhorts them to obey this preaching with works and sufferings, and concludes by praising them, so that he may incite them to go forward in it.

In chapters 8 and 9, he exhorts them to contribute temporal support and help, in a time of scarcity, to the saints in Jerusalem, who, at the beginning, had given up all their goods.

In chapters 10, 11 and 12, he deals with the false apostles.

In chapter 13, he threatens those who had sinned and not reformed.

Preface to the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians

The Galatians had been brought by St. Paul from the law to the true Christian faith and the Gospel; but after his departure, false apostles came, who were disciples of the true apostles, and turned the Galatians about again, so that they believed that they had to be saved by the works of the Law and that they committed sin if they did not keep the Law, as even some high persons in Jerusalem pretended (Acts 15:1).

To refute them, St. Paul magnifies his office and will not have himself considered less than another apostle and glories in the fact that his doctrine and office are from God alone. He does this to stop the boasting of the false apostles, who supported themselves with the works and names of the true apostles. He says, it is not true, even though an angel, or even he himself were to preach it, to say nothing of disciples of apostles, or of apostles themselves.

This he does in chapters 1 and 2, and concludes that everyone must be justified without merit, without works, without law, but only through Christ.

In chapters 3 and 4, he defends all this with passages of Scripture and illustrations and parables, and shows that the law brings sin and a curse, rather than righteousness, which is promised by God out of pure grace, and is fulfilled through Christ without the law, and given to us.

In chapters 5 and 6, he teaches the works of love that ought to follow faith.

Preface to the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

In this Epistle, St. Paul teaches, first, what the Gospel is, telling how it was provided by God alone in eternity and earned and sent forth through Christ, so that all who believe on it become righteous, godly, living, saved men, and free from the law and sin and death. This he does in the first three chapters.

Then he teaches that different doctrines and the commandments of men are to be avoided, so that we may remain true to one Head and become sure and genuine and complete in Christ alone, in Whom we have everything, so that we need nothing beside Him. This he does in chapter 4.

Then he goes on to teach that we are to practice and prove our faith with good works, avoid sin, and fight with spiritual weapons against the devil, so that, through the Cross, we may be steadfast in hope.

Preface to the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians

In this Epistle St. Paul praises the Philippians and exhorts them to abide and go forward in true faith and to increase in love. But since injury is always done to faith by false apostles and teachers of works, he warns them against these men, and points them to many preachers, — some good, some bad, — including even himself and his disciples, Timothy and Epaphroditus. This he does in chapters 1 and 2.

In chapter 3, he rejects the faithless and human righteousness that is taught and held by the false apostles, and holds himself up as an example of one who had lived a glorious life in this righteousness, and yet thought nothing of it, because of the righteousness of Christ. For that other righteousness makes the belly its god, and makes enemies of the cross of Christ.

In chapter 4, he exhorts them to peace and to good outward conduct toward one another; and he thanks them for the present they have sent him.

Preface to the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Colossians

As the Epistle to the Galatians resembles and is modeled on the Epistle to the Romans, and comprises in outline the same material that is farther and more richly developed there; so this Epistle resembles that to the Ephesians and comprises in outline the same contents.

First, he praises the Colossians, and hopes that they may abide and increase in faith and love. He sketches out what the Gospel and faith are; namely, a wisdom which recognizes Christ as Lord and God, crucified for us, concealed from the world, but now manifested through His work. That is chapter 1.

In chapter 2, he warns them against the doctrines of men, which are always contrary to faith and depicts these doctrines as they are depicted nowhere else in Scripture, and criticizes them in masterly fashion.

In chapter 3, he exhorts them to be fruitful in the pure faith, doing all sorts of good works for one another; and he describes the works that belong to each station in life.

In chapter 4, he commends himself to their prayers, and gives them greetings and encouragement.

Preface to the First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians

This Epistle St. Paul writes out of especial love and apostolic care. For in the first two chapters, he praises them because they have received the Gospel from him with such earnestness as to be steadfast in it through affliction and persecution, and to have become a fair example of faith to all congregations everywhere, and, like Christ and His apostles, to have suffered persecution from the Jews, their own friends. So he had himself suffered and led a holy life when he was with them. Therefore he thanks God that his Gospel has borne such fruit among them.

In chapter 3, he shows the diligent care he takes, lest this labor of his and its praiseworthy beginning be brought to naught by the devil, with doctrines of men. Therefore he has sent Timothy to them to find this out, and he thanks God that things are still right among them; and he hopes that they may continue to grow.

In chapter 4, he exhorts them to guard against sin and do good to one another. He also answers a question, which they had presented to him through Timothy, touching the resurrection of the dead, whether all would rise at once, or some after others.

In chapter 5, he writes of the Last Day, how it shall come suddenly and quickly, and gives them some good directions for governing other people, and tells them what attitude they are to take toward the lives and teachings of others.

Preface to the Second Epistle of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians

In the First Epistle, Paul had solved for the Thessalonians the question of the Last Day, telling them that it would come quickly, as a thief in the night. Now it is wont to happen that one question always gives birth to another, because of misunderstanding; and so the Thessalonians understood that the Last Day was already close at hand. Thereupon, Paul writes this epistle and explains himself.

In chapter 1, he comforts them with the eternal reward that will come to their faith and their patience in afflictions of every kind, and with the punishment that will come to their persecutors in eternal pain.

In chapter 2, he teaches that before the Last Day, the Roman Empire must pass away and Antichrist rise up before God in the Church, and seduce the unbelieving world with false doctrines and signs until Christ shall come and destroy him by His glorious advent, first slaying him with spiritual preaching.

In chapter 3, he gives some admonitions, especially that they shall rebuke the idlers, who will not support themselves by their own labor, and if they will not reform, that they shall avoid them; and this is a hard rebuke to the clergy of today.

Preface to the First Epistle of Saint Paul to Timothy

This Epistle Paul writes to give a model to all bishops of what they are to teach and how they are to rule the Church in every station, so that it may not be necessary for them to rule Christians according to their own human opinions.

In chapter 1, he commands that a bishop keep true faith and love and resist the false preachers of the law who, beside Christ and the Gospel, would also insist on the works of the law; and he includes, in a brief summary, the whole Christian doctrine concerning the purpose of the law and the nature of the Gospel; and he sets himself up as an example to all sinners and troubled consciences.

In chapter 2, he commands to pray for men of all stations, and orders that women are not to preach or wear costly adornment, but be obedient to their husbands.

In chapter 3, he describes the kind of persons that bishops, or priests, and their wives ought to be, also the deacons and their wives, and praises those who desire to be bishops of this kind.

In chapter 4, he prophesies of the class of false bishops and clergy, opposed to those spoken of above, who will not be persons of that kind, but will forbid marriage and foods and, with their doctrines of men, will aim at the very opposite of the things he has described.

In chapter 5, he gives commands concerning the conduct of widows and young women, and tells what widows are to be supported from the common funds; also how godly and blameworthy bishops, or priests, are to be held in honor or punished.

In chapter 6, he exhorts the bishops to cleave to the pure Gospel, to concern themselves with it in their preaching and their living, and to avoid unprofitable and curious questions, which are put forward only in search for worldly reputation and riches.

Preface to the Second Epistle of Saint Paul to Timothy

This Epistle is a farewell letter, in which St. Paul exhorts Timothy to continue laboring for the Gospel, as he has begun. This is needful, since there are many who fall away, and false spirits and teachers are rising all around. Therefore it behooves a bishop always to watch, and to work at the Gospel.

But he prophesies especially, in chapters 3 and 4, concerning the perilous time at the end of the world, in which a false spiritual life will lead all the world astray with an outward show, under which all kinds of wickedness and wrong will have its being; and, sad to say! we now see this prophecy of St. Paul all too abundantly fulfilled in our clergy.

Preface to the Epistle of Saint Paul to Titus

This is a short Epistle, but a model of Christian doctrine, in which is included, in masterly fashion, all that it is necessary for a Christian to know and live by.

In chapter 1, he teaches what kind of man a bishop, or pastor, ought to be; namely, one who is pious and learned, in order to preach the Gospel and bring to naught the teachers of works and human laws, who always war against the Christians and lead consciences astray from Christian liberty, into the captivity of their human works, as though these would make them righteous before God, when there is really no profit in them.

In chapter 2, he teaches men of every station — the old, the young, women, men, masters and servants — how they are to act, as those whom Christ, by His death, has won for His own possession.

In chapter 3, he teaches to honor the worldly rulers and obey them, and declares again the grace that Christ has won for us, so that no one may think it enough to be obedient to rulers, since all our righteousness is nothing before God; and he commands to avoid the obdurate and heretics.

Preface to the Epistle of Saint Paul to Philemon

This Epistle gives us a masterly and tender illustration of Christian love; for here we see how St. Paul takes the part of poor Onesimus and advocates his cause with his master all that he can, and acts no differently than if he were himself Onesimus, who has done wrong. And yet he does this, not with force or compulsion, as was his right, but he lays aside his rights and thus compels Philemon, also, to waive his rights. What Christ has done for us with God the Father, that St. Paul does for Onesimus with Philemon.

For Christ laid aside His rights and overcame His Father with love and humility, so that He had to put away His wrath and His rights and receive us into favor, for Christ's sake, who so earnestly advocates our cause and takes our part so tenderly. For we are all his Onesimi, if we believe.

Preface to the First Epistle of Saint Peter

This Epistle St. Peter wrote to the converted heathen, and exhorts them to stand fast in faith and to increase through all manner of suffering and good works.

In chapter 1, he strengthens their faith through the divine promise and the power of salvation to come, and shows that this has not been deserved by us but was proclaimed before by the prophets. Therefore they ought now to live holy lives, as new creatures, and forget the old life, like men who are born anew through the living and eternal Word of God.

In chapter 2, he teaches them to recognize Christ as the Head and Cornerstone and, like true priests, to sacrifice themselves to God, as Christ sacrificed Himself, and begins to give instruction to all classes of men.

First, he teaches generally to be in subjection to temporal rulership; afterwards he teaches particularly that servants are to be subject to their masters and suffer wrong from them for Christ's sake, who also suffered wrong for us.

In chapter 3, he teaches wives to be obedient, even to unbelieving husbands, and to adorn themselves with holiness; likewise, that husbands are to be patient with their wives and bear with them; and then that Christians, in general, are to be humble and patient and kind to one another, as Christ was because of our sins.

In chapter 4, he teaches to subdue the flesh, with sobriety, watching, temperance and prayer, and to be comforted and strengthened with Christ's sufferings; and he instructs the spiritual rulers to deal only with God's words and works, and everyone to serve another with his gifts, and not wonder, but rejoice, if we have to suffer for Christ's sake.

In chapter 5, he exhorts the bishops and priests how they are to live and care for the people, and warns us against the devil, who without ceasing pursues us everywhere.

Preface to the Second Epistle of Saint Peter

This Epistle is written against those who think that Christian faith can be without works. Therefore he exhorts them to test themselves by good works and become sure of their faith, — as one knows trees by their fruit.

Then he begins to praise the Gospel, as compared with doctrines of men, saying that men ought to hear only it, and no doctrines of men; for, as he says, “No prophecy ever came by the will of man.”

Therefore, in chapter 2, he warns against the false teachers who are to come, who go about with their works, and thereby deny Christ. He threatens these men severely, with three terrible illustrations, and paints them so clearly, with their avarice, pride, audacity, fornication and hypocrisy, that one must plainly see he means the clergy of today, who have swallowed the whole world in their avarice, and lead a free, fleshly, worldly life.

In chapter 3, he shows that the Last Day will come soon and though in the eyes of men it may seem a thousand years, yet in the eyes of God it is as one day. He describes what will happen at the Last Day, how everything shall be consumed with fire. He prophesies also that, at that time, people will be scornful, and think nothing of faith, like the Epicureans.

Briefly, chapter 1 shows what the Church should be like at the time of the pure Gospel; chapter 2 shows how it was to be in the time of the pope and the doctrines of men: chapter 3 shows how, afterwards, people will despise both the Gospel and all doctrine, and believe nothing, and that is now in full swing, until Christ comes.

Preface to the Three Epistles of Saint John

The First Epistle of John is a genuine apostolic epistle and ought properly to follow right after his Gospel. For as, in the Gospel, he deals with faith, so here he opposes those who boast of faith without works, and teaches in many ways that works cannot be absent, where faith is; if they are not present, then faith is not genuine, but is lies and darkness. This he does, not by insisting upon the law, as James' Epistle does, but by inciting us to love as God has loved us.

He also writes vigorously against the Corinthians, and against the spirit of Antichrist, which was beginning even then to deny that Christ was come in the flesh, and which is now for the first time really in full sway. For although men do not now publicly deny with the lips that Christ is come in the flesh, they do deny it with their hearts, by their doctrine and life. For he who would be righteous and be saved by his own works and deeds does the same as he who denies Christ, since Christ is come in the flesh in order to make us righteous and save us without our works, by His blood alone.

Thus this Epistle fights against both parties, — against those who would be in faith without any works, and against those who would be righteous and be saved with works. So it keeps us in the true middle way, that we may become righteous and free from sin through faith, and afterwards, when we are righteous, practice good works and love for God's sake, freely and without seeking anything.

The other two Epistles are not epistles of doctrine, but examples of love and faith, and have, besides, a true apostolic spirit.

Preface to the Epistle to the Hebrews

Hitherto we have had the right certain chief books of the New Testament.

The four following had, in ancient times, a different reputation. In the first place, that this Epistle is not St. Paul's, nor any other apostle's is proved by the fact that it says, in Hebrews 2:3, that this doctrine has come to us and remains among us through those who themselves heard it from the Lord. Thus it is clear that he speaks of the apostles as a disciple to whom this doctrine has come from the apostles, perhaps long after them.

For St. Paul, in Galatians 1:1, testifies mightily that he has his Gospel from no man, neither through men, but from God Himself.

Again, there is a hard knot in the fact that in chapters 6 and 10 it flatly denies and forbids to sinners repentance after baptism, and in Hebrews 12:17, it says that Esau sought repentance and did not find it. This seems, as it stands, to be against all the Gospels and St. Paul's epistles; and although one might make a gloss on it, the words are so clear that I do not know whether that would be sufficient. My opinion is that it is an epistle of many pieces put together, and it does not deal with any one subject in an orderly way.

However that may be, it is a marvelously fine epistle. It discusses Christ's priesthood masterfully and thoroughly, out of the Scriptures, and interprets the Old Testament finely and richly. Thus it is plain that it is the work of an able and learned man, who was a disciple of the apostles, learned much from them, and was greatly experienced in faith and practiced in the Scriptures. And although, as he himself testifies in Hebrews 6:1, he does not lay the foundation of faith, which is the work of an apostle, nevertheless he does build finely thereon gold, silver, precious stones, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:12. Therefore we should not be hindered, even

though wood, straw or hay be mixed in with them, but accept this fine teaching with all honor; though to be sure, we cannot put it on the same level with the apostolic epistles.

Who wrote it is not known, and will not be known for a while; it makes no difference. We should be satisfied with the doctrine that he bases so constantly on the Scriptures, showing a right fine grasp upon the reading of the Scriptures and the proper way to deal with them.

Preface to the Epistles of Saint James and Saint Jude 1545 (1522)

Though this Epistle of St. James was rejected by the ancients, I praise it and hold it a good book, because it sets up no doctrine of men and lays great stress upon God's law. But to state my own opinion about it, though without injury to anyone, I consider that it is not the writing of any apostle.

My reasons are as follows:

First: Flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture, it ascribes righteousness to works, and says that Abraham was justified by his works, in that he offered his son Isaac, though St. Paul, on the contrary, teaches, in Romans 4:2, that Abraham was justified without works, by faith alone, before he offered his son, and proves it by Moses in Genesis 15:6. Now although this Epistle might be helped and a gloss be found for this work-righteousness, it cannot be defended against applying to works the saying of Moses in Genesis 15:6, which speaks only of Abraham's faith, and not of his works, as St. Paul shows in Romans 4. This fault, therefore, leads to the conclusion that it is not the work of any apostle.

Second: Its purpose is to teach Christians, and in all this long teaching it does not once mention the Passion, the Resurrection, or the Spirit of Christ. He names Christ several times, but he teaches nothing about Him, and only speaks of common faith in God. For it is the duty of a true apostle to preach of the Passion and Resurrection and work of Christ, and thus lay the foundation of faith, as He Himself says, in John 15:27, "Ye shall bear witness of me." All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach Christ and deal with Him. That is the true test, by which to judge all books, when we see whether they deal with Christ or not, since all the Scriptures show us Christ (Romans 3:21), and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ (1 Corinthians 15:2). What does not teach Christ is not

apostolic, even though St. Peter or Paul taught it; again, what preaches Christ would be apostolic, even though Judas, Annas, Pilate and Herod did it.

But this James does nothing more than drive to the law and its works; and he mixes the two up in such disorderly fashion that it seems to me he must have been some good, pious man, who took some sayings of the apostles' disciples and threw them thus on paper; or perhaps they were written down by someone else from his preaching. He calls the law a "law of liberty," though St. Paul calls it a law of slavery, (of wrath, of death and of sin (Galatians 3:23; Romans 7:11).

Moreover, in James 5:20, he quotes the sayings of St. Peter, "Love covereth the multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8) and "Humble yourselves under the hand of God" (1 Peter 5:6), and of St. Paul (Galatians 5:10), "The Spirit lusteth against hatred"; and yet, in point of time, St. James was put to death by Herod, in Jerusalem, before St. Peter. So it seems that he came long after Sts. Peter and Paul.

In a word, he wants to guard against those who relied on faith without works, and is unequal to the task [in spirit, thought, and words, and rends the Scriptures and thereby resists Paul and all Scripture], and would accomplish by insisting on the Law what the apostles accomplish by inciting men to love. Therefore, I cannot put him among the chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from putting him where he pleases and estimating him as he pleases; for there are many good sayings in him.

Concerning the Epistle of St. Jude, no one can deny that it is an extract or copy from St. Peter's second epistle, so very like it are all the words. He also speaks of the apostles as a disciple coming long after them, and quotes sayings and stories that are found nowhere in the Scriptures. This moved the ancient Fathers to throw this Epistle out of the main body of the Scriptures. Moreover, Jude, the Apostle, did not go to Greek-speaking lands, but to Persia, as it is said, so that he did not write Greek. Therefore,

although I praise the book, it is an epistle that need not be counted among the chief books, which are to lay the foundation of faith.

Preface to the Revelation of Saint John (1)

There are many kinds of prophecy in the Church. One is prophecy which interprets the writings of the prophets. Paul speaks of it in 1 Corinthians and 14, and in other places. This is the most necessary kind and we must have it every day, because it teaches the Word of God, lays the foundation of the Church, and defends the faith; in a word, it rules, preserves, establishes and administers the preaching-office.

Another kind foretells things to come which are not previously contained in Scripture, and this prophecy is of three sorts. The first does it in express words, without symbols and figures. So Moses, David, and more of the prophets prophesy of Christ, and Christ and the apostles prophesy of Antichrist, false teachers, etc. The second sort does this with symbols, but sets alongside them their interpretation in express words. So Joseph interprets dreams and Daniel both dreams and symbols. The third sort of prophecy does it without either words or interpretations, like this book of Revelation and like the dreams, visions and symbols that many holy people have from the Holy Spirit. So in Acts 2:17, Peter proclaims, out of Joel, "Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your youths shall see visions, and your elders dream dreams." So long as this kind of prophecy remains without explanation and gets no sure interpretation, it is a concealed and dumb prophecy, and has not yet come to the profit and fruit which it is to give to Christendom.

This is the way it has been with this book heretofore. Many have tried their hands at it, but until this very day they have reached no certainty; and some have brewed into it many stupid things out of their own heads. Because its interpretation is uncertain and its meaning hidden, we, too, have let it alone hitherto, especially since some of the ancient Fathers held the opinion that it was not the work of St. John, the Apostle, as is found in the *Ecclesiastical*

History, Book 3, Chapter 25. This question we, for our part, still leave open, so that no one may be compelled to hold it for the work of St. John, the Apostle, or of whomever else he will. Since, however, we would gladly be certain of its meaning, or interpretation, we will give other, and higher, minds something to think about, and also state our own ideas.

Since it is intended as a revelation of things that are to happen in the future, and especially of tribulations and disasters for the Church, we consider that the first and surest step toward finding its interpretation is to take from history the events and disasters that have come upon the Church before now and hold them up alongside of these pictures and so compare them with the words. If, then, the two were to fit and agree with each other, we could build on that, as a sure, or at least an unobjectionable interpretation.

Accordingly we hold — as, indeed, the text itself says, — that the first three chapters, which speak of the seven congregations in Asia and their angels, have no other purpose than simply to show how these congregations arose at the time, and how they are exhorted to abide and increase, or reform. We learn, besides, that the word “angel” is to be understood later on, in other pictures or visions, to mean bishops and teachers in the Church, — some good, like the holy Fathers and bishops; some bad, like the heretics and false bishops; and in this book there are more of the latter than of the former.

In chapters 4 and 5, there is a picture of the whole Church that is to suffer these future tribulations and plagues. There are four and twenty elders before God (that is, all the bishops and teachers in harmony); they are crowned with faith, and praise Christ, the Lamb of God, with harps (i.e. they preach) and worship Him with censers (i.e. practice themselves in prayer). All this is for the comfort of Christians, that they may know that the Church is to abide, in the plagues that are to come.

In Revelation 6:1, the future tribulations begin. First come the bodily tribulations, such as persecution by the temporal, government, which is the

rider with the bow, upon the white horse; then war and bloodshed, which is the rider with the sword, on the red horse; then scarcity and famine, which is the rider with the scales, on the black horse; then pestilence and the plague, who is the rider like death, upon the pale horse. For these four tribulations always surely follow the ungrateful and the despisers of God's Word, together with others, such as the overthrow and the changing of governments, all the way down to the Last Day; as is shown in Revelation 6:10; and the souls of the martyrs also work for this, with their crying.

In Revelation 7:2 and 8, begins the revelation of the spiritual tribulations, i.e. all kinds of heresies. This is preceded again by a comforting picture, wherein the angel seals the Christians and keeps off the four bad angels; so that once more it is certain that, even under heretics, the Church will have good angels and the pure Word, as the angel shows with his censer, i.e. with prayer. These good angels are the holy Fathers, like Spiridion, Athanasius, Hilary, the Nicene Council, etc.

The first bad angel is Tatian, with his Enchrates, who forbade marriage and wanted to become righteous by their works, like the Jews.

For the doctrine of work-righteousness had to be the first doctrine against the Gospel, and it also remains the last, except that it is always getting new teachers and new names, such as the Pelagians, etc.

The second is Marcion, with his Cataphrygians, Manichaeans, f497 Montanists, etc., who boast their spirits above all the Scriptures and move, like this burning mountain, between heaven and earth, as do, in our day, Munzer and the fanatics.

The third is Origen, who embittered and corrupted the Scriptures with philosophy and reason, as the universities have hitherto done among us.

The fourth is Novatus, with his Cathari, who denied penance, and wanted to be purer than others. Of this sort, too, were, afterwards, the Donatists. Our clergy, however, are all four at once. The scholars, who know history,

will know how to reckon this out; for it would take too long to tell it all and prove it.

In chapters 9 and 10 the real misery begins, for these earlier bodily and spiritual tribulations are almost a jest compared with the plagues that are to come. At the end of Revelation 8:13, the angel himself announces that three woes are to come, and these woes are to be inflicted by the other three angels — the fifth, sixth, and seventh — and then the world is to end.

Here both kinds of persecution, the bodily and the spiritual come together, and there are to be three of them — the first great, the second greater, the third the greatest of all.

Now the first woe, the fifth angel, is Arius, the great: heretic, and his companions, who plagued the Church so terribly everywhere that the text here says that righteous people would rather have died than see such things; but they had to see them and not die. Indeed, he says that the angel from hell, called the Destroyer, is their king; as if to say that the devil himself rides them. For they persecuted the true Christians, not only spiritually, but physically, with the sword. Read the history of the Arians, and you will understand this figure and these words.

The second woe is the sixth angel, the shameful Mohammed, with his companions, the Saracens, who inflicted a great plague on the Church, with their doctrines and with the sword. Along with this angel, in order that this woe may be all the greater, comes the strong angel with the rainbow: and the bitter book, that is the holy papacy, with its great spiritual show, the masses. They lay hold upon the temple with their laws, throw out the choir and start a sham church, or outward holy place.

In chapters 11 and 12, two comforting pictures are put between these evil woes and plagues; one the picture of the two preachers and the other of the pregnant woman, who bears a man-child, despite the dragon. They indicate that some pious teachers and Christians are to continue, under the first two woes and under the third, which is yet to come. And now the last two woes

run together, and make a last combined attack upon the Church, and so, at last, the devil knocks the bottom out of the cask.

Then comes, in chapter 13 (in answer to the trumpets of the last of the seven angels, who sounds at the beginning of chapter 12), this seventh angel's work, the third woe, viz., the papal empire and the imperial papacy.

Here the papacy gets the temporal sword also into its power, and rules not only with the book, in the second woe, but also with the sword, in the third woe; for they boast that the pope has both the spiritual and the temporal sword in his power. f504 Here, then, are the two beasts; the one is the empire, the other, with the two horns, the papacy, which has now become a temporal kingdom, yet with the reputation and name of Christ. For the pope restored the fallen Roman Empire and conveyed from the Greek to the Germans, and it is an image of the Roman Empire rather than the body of the empire, as it once was. Nevertheless, he puts spirit and life into this image, so that it has its classes and laws and members and offices, and actually operates to some extent. This is the image that was wounded and did live.

The abominations, woes, and injuries which this imperial papacy has wrought, cannot now be told. For, in the first place, by means of his book, the world has been filled with all kinds of idolatry — monasteries, foundations, saints, pilgrimages, purgatory, indulgence, celibacy and innumerable other creations of human doctrine and works. In the second place, who can tell how much bloodshed, slaughter, war, and misery the popes have wrought, both by fighting themselves and stirring up the emperors, kings and princes against one another.

Here, now, the devil's final wrath gets to work; there, in the East, the second woe, Mohammed and the Saracens; here, in the West, papacy and empire, with the third woe. To these is added, for good measure, the Turk, Gog and Magog, as will follow in chapter 20. Thus the Church is plagued most terribly and miserably, everywhere and on all sides, with false doctrines and with wars, with book and sword. That is the dregs, the final

plague; after it come almost nothing else than pictures of comfort, telling of the end of all these woes and abominations.

In chapter 14, Christ first begins to slay His Antichrist with the breath of His mouth, as Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, and the angel with the Gospel comes against the bitter book of the strong angel. The saints and virgins stand again about the Lamb, and preach the truth. Upon this Gospel follows the second angel's voice, saying that the city of Babylon shall fall and the spiritual papacy be destroyed.

It follows, farther, that the harvest shall come, and those who cleave to the papacy against the Gospel shall be cast outside the city of Christ, into the wine-press of God's wrath; i.e., by the Gospel they are separated from the Church and condemned to God's wrath. They are many, and the winepress yields much blood. Or, perhaps, this may be a just punishment and judgment upon our sins, which are beyond measure and overripe.

After this, in chapters 15 and 16, come the seven angels with the seven bowls. The Gospel increases, and attacks the papacy on all sides by means of many learned and pious preachers, and the throne of the beast, the pope's power, becomes dark and wretched and despised. But they grow wroth and confidently defend themselves; for three frogs, three unclean spirits go forth from the mouth of the beast and stir up kings and princes against the Gospel. But it does not help; the battle takes place at Armageddon. The frogs are the sophists, like Faber and Eck and Eraser.

They croak much against the Gospel, but accomplish nothing, and continue to be frogs.

In chapter 17, the imperial papacy and papal empire is included, from beginning to end, in a single picture, and it is shown, as in a summing up, how it is nothing, — for the ancient Roman Empire is long since gone; and yet exists, — for some of its lands, and the city of Rome besides, are still here. This picture is presented here as one presents a malefactor publicly before a court, so that he may be condemned. It is to be known that this

beast, too, is shortly to be damned, and “brought to naught by the manifestation of the Lord’s coming,” as St. Paul says, in Thessalonians 2:8.

In chapter 18, this destruction begins and the glorious great splendor comes to naught, and the courtesans, who rob the endowments and steal the livings, cease to be; for even Rome must be plundered and stormed by its own protector at the beginning of the final destruction.

Yet they do not leave off; they seek around, they encourage and arm and defend themselves. As he says here, in chapter 19, when they can do nothing more with the Scriptures and with books, and the frogs have croaked their last, they take hold in earnest, try to win by force, and gather kings and princes for battle. But they are disappointed; the one on the white horse wins, until both beast and prophet are seized and cast into hell.

While all this is happening, there comes, in Revelation 20:7, the stirrup cup Gog and Magog, the Turks, the red Jews, whom Satan, who has been bound for a thousand years and, after the thousand years, is loose again, brings up; but they are soon to go with him into the lake of fire. For it is our opinion that this picture, which is separate from the preceding, has been put in because of the Turks, and that the thousand years are to begin at the time when this book was written, and that at that time the devil was bound; though the reckoning need not hold out to the very minute. After the Turks, the Last Judgment follows quickly, at the end of this chapter, as Daniel 7:7 also shows.

At last, in chapter 21, the final comfort is depicted. The holy city is completely ready and is led as a bride to the eternal marriage; Christ alone is Lord and all the godless are damned and go, with the devil, into hell.

With this interpretation we can profit by this book and make good use of it.

First, for our comfort! We can know that neither force nor lies, neither wisdom nor holiness, neither tribulation nor suffering shall suppress the Church, but it will gain the victory and overcome at last. Second, for our warning against the great and perilous and manifold offense that is to come

upon the Church; for because these mighty and imposing powers are to fight against the Church, and it is to be deprived of outward shape and covered up under so many tribulations and heresies and other faults, it is impossible for the natural reason to recognize the Church.

On the contrary, it falls away and takes offense, and calls that the Christian Church which is really the Christian Church's worst enemy. On the other hand it calls them damned heretics who are really the true Christian Church. This has happened before now under the papacy, and Mohammed, and all other heretics. Thus they lose the article of the Creed, "I believe one holy, Christian Church."

Some of the wisecracks are doing just that now; they see heresy and dissension and short-comings of many kinds, they see that there are many false, many ill-living Christians; and so they decide off-hand that there are no Christians. They have heard that Christians are to be a holy, peaceful, united, kindly, virtuous folk. Accordingly, they think that there should be among them no offenses, no heresy, no short-comings, but only peace and virtue. They ought to read this book and learn to look upon the Church with other eyes than those of reason.

For this book, I think, shows enough of terrible and monstrous beasts, horrible and vindictive angels, wild and awful plagues. I shall not speak of the other great faults and weaknesses that have always been in the Church and among the Christians, so that the reason has had to lose the Church among such things. Here we see clearly what cruel offenses and shortcomings there have been before our times, and one might think that the Church was now at its best, and that our time is a golden age compared with those that have gone before. Do you not think that the heathen also took offense at these things and held the Christians for self-willed, loose, contentious people?

This article, "I believe one holy, Christian Church," is an article of faith, as well as the rest. The reason, therefore, cannot recognize it, though it puts all its glasses on. The devil can cover it over with offenses and tumults, so that

you have to take offense at it. God, too, can hide it with faults and shortcomings of all kinds, so that you become a fool and pass such judgment on it. It will not be known by sight, but by faith, and faith concerns the things we do not see; (Hebrews 11:1); and the Church joins with her Lord in the song, "Blessed is he that takes no offense in me."

A Christian, too, is hidden from himself; he does not see his holiness and virtue, but sees in himself only lack of virtue and of holiness; and you, dull wise man, would behold the Church with your blind reason and your unclean eyes!

In a word, our holiness is in heaven, and not in the world, before men's eyes, like goods in the market. Therefore, let there be offenses and tumults and heresy and faults, and let them do what they can! If only the word of the Gospel remains pure among us, and we love and cherish it, we are not to doubt that Christ is with us, even when things are at their worst; for we see, in this book, that, through and above all plagues and beasts and bad angels, Christ is with His saints, and wins the victory at last.

Preface to the Revelation of Saint John (2) 1522

About this book of the Revelation of John, I leave everyone free to hold his own ideas, and would bind no man to my opinion or judgment; I say what I feel. I miss more than one thing in this book, and this makes me hold it to be neither apostolic nor prophetic. First and foremost, the Apostles do not deal with visions, but prophesy in clear, plain words, as do Peter and Paul, and Christ in the Gospel. For it befits the apostolic office to speak of Christ and His deeds without figures and visions; but there is no prophet in the Old Testament, to say nothing of the New, who deals so out and out with visions and figures. And so I think of it almost as I do of the Fourth Book of Esdras, and can nohow detect that the Holy Spirit produced it.

Moreover, he seems to me to be going much too far when he commends his own book so highly, — more than any of the other sacred books do, though they are much more important, — and threatens that if anyone takes away anything from it, God will deal likewise with him. Again, they are to be blessed who keep what is written therein; and yet no one knows what that is, to say nothing of keeping it. It is just the same as if we had it not, and there are many far better books for us to keep. Many of the fathers, too, rejected this book of old, though St. Jerome, to be sure, praises it highly and says that it is above all praise and that there are as many mysteries in it as words; though he cannot prove this at all, and his praise is, at many points, too mild.

Finally, let everyone think of it as his own spirit gives him to think. My spirit cannot fit itself into this book. There is one sufficient reason for me not to think highly of it,—Christ is not taught or known in it; but to teach Christ is the thing which an apostle is bound, above all else, to do, as He says in Acts 1:8, “Ye shall be my witnesses.” Therefore I stick to the books which give me Christ, clearly and purely.