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Th. Laetsch

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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The Pastor's Professional Bible-Study

The term "professional Bible-study" may be taken in a two-fold sense, either making Bible-study one's profession or studying the Bible in connection with, preparatory for, in a manner appropriate to, one's profession. In both senses the faithful pastor should be a professional Bible-student. Above all, a pastor is to be able to teach, 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:2, teach, not man's wisdom, but that wisdom of God in a mystery revealed only in Holy Scripture, 1 Cor. 2:6—15. Hence he cannot be and remain a faithful pastor without making this Book the subject of his life's study, without making it his life's purpose to become better acquainted with the Bible and all that concerns the Bible. At the same time this professional study of Scripture must be intimately connected with, and continually equip him the more fully for, his life's calling, the ministry, and all its varied functions and duties. Professional Bible-study implies the will to know your Bible, to become as intimately acquainted as is humanly possible with its contents, its history, its language, its interpretation, etc. This means not only studying the oracles of God but, in addition, making oneself acquainted with that vast material which human research in the fields of history, archeology, geography, linguistics, offers to the Bible student, and which often sheds an amazing light on the contents and history of this unique Book. The pastor as a professional Bible student will endeavor to make all this material, at least as much as is available to him, subservient to his purpose of knowing his Bible better every day. Permit me to call the readers' attention to three items, Biblical Introduction, Biblical Archeology, Biblical Geography.

Biblical Introduction. — Ought not the pastor welcome every opportunity to become better acquainted with the history of the Bible and its individual books? The author of the book, the time and circumstances of its composition, its purpose, the readers to

whom it was first addressed, the assembling of the books into the Old and New Testament canons, all these and similar questions are not only intensely interesting, they are of practical profit to the pastor in sermonizing, in Bible-class work, at the sick-bed, etc. How much more forceful will be the exhortation toward care-free trust in God on the basis of Ps. 3:5 if the pastor is aware of the circumstances under which this word was first spoken. One will read the Books of Kings with far greater interest and profit if one knows the purpose of these books, viz., to show God's wisdom and grace and power in fulfilling the promise given to David that there should always be one of his sons sitting on the throne of David until the great Son of David had come. How fascinating the story of God's marvelous preservation of His written revelation throughout all the vicissitudes of the Church's history!

Biblical Archeology and Biblical Geography.—What a flood of light is thrown by the archeological researches on the history, the civilization, the character, the laws, the customs of God's people and of the heathen nations surrounding Israel, who played so important a part in the history of God's people and exercised so vital an influence on the whole nation and on many of its individual members. The pastor of today is in a position to know more about these people than was possible during the past twenty centuries, and it is to be deplored that many a pastor still ignores these splendid opportunities for a better understanding of the Bible. How completely will one revise his conceptions of the cultural background of Abraham's time and first home, of the size of cities, such as Jericho and Jerusalem in the age of Joshua, of the architecture of Biblical times, after reading such a book as, e. g., Marston's *New Bible Evidence*. No one can read Dean Stanley's *Sinai and Palestine* with its many brilliant passages or Smith's learned and thorough work *Historical Geography* without obtaining a better knowledge of the land that Jesus called His own native land, throughout whose length and breadth He went preaching and doing good, or of the country through which Israel for forty years wandered on their weary way from the Red Sea to Sinai and, again, to the boundary of the Promised Land. These men succeed in painting word-pictures in colors so vivid that one actually sees the scenery before one's eyes. One stands amazed before the awe-inspiring majesty of Sinai, or gazes with rapture on the park-like slopes of Mount Carmel, or sees the villages of Galilee teeming with life and activity, or feels the charm of that little town of Bethlehem nestling on the side of the mountain in the midst of fertile fields and vineyards. No pastor is really a professional student of the Bible unless he keeps in constant touch with the results of modern research in the field of Biblical geography and archeology.

Now, while the studious pastor will welcome every opportunity to increase his knowledge in these fields, which have provided the answer to many a historical and geographical question, which have furnished such a mass of corroborative evidence for the truth and reliability of the Biblical records, yet it will never do to study all manner of books about the Bible and then neglect the Book itself. A professional student of Milton will not be satisfied with reading books on Milton, biographies of him, essays on his style. These books may be quite valuable to the student; they may pave the way to a better understanding of his writings; they may warn against mistakes the beginner is apt to make; yet they will not and cannot take the place of personal reading and study of Milton's works. On the contrary, they may give faulty, even false impressions of Milton, may prejudice the student, may do more harm than good. All this applies to the Book of books and our study of this Book. Professional study of the Bible is impossible without a close and persistent study of this Book, whose depths no one can fathom, even if he devotes a lifetime to its study. All books written on the Bible are man-made books; the Bible alone is the oracles of God, Scripture given by inspiration of God, in words which not human wisdom teacheth nor can teach but which the Holy Ghost teacheth. Here indeed is a book preeminently worthy of our study, our lifelong professional study, the more so since we have the promise that, in studying this Book in the proper manner, we shall both save ourselves and them that hear us, 1 Tim. 4:16.

This promise, needless to say, is not given to every mode of professional study of the Bible. The Bible is not merely a book of the history of an ancient people, of a man Jesus, who succeeded in changing the history of the world. Nor is it a manual of ethics or a text-book on church polity. The Bible of the Old and the New Testament was given for no other purpose than to give us eternal life, and that life through Jesus, and Jesus alone. Without Christ the Bible would be a beautiful piece of literature, a unique collection of moral sayings and wise observations but, after all, an empty shell that could not satisfy the hunger and thirst for pardon and forgiveness. Search the Scriptures, seek in its pages eternal life, but find this life in Christ, and Him crucified, as the Propitiation for our sins. That, and that alone, is a proper study of the Bible. Such study alone has the precious promise to save the reader and them that hear him.

But how shall we go about such professional study of the Bible? This question has been ably answered in an article on *The Pastor and Bible-study* published in the December, 1937, issue of this periodical. The subject, however, is of such importance, that

a few additional remarks may not be altogether out of place. Begin your professional study preferably with one of the shorter books or epistles. Read this book or letter as you would read a letter from mother, from a close, dear friend. Read it at one sitting; then read it again and again, until you have grasped its purpose, until you are familiar with its contents, its argument, its peculiar phraseology, until its very words have impressed themselves upon your mind. At every repeated reading pay special attention to passages which you had not yet perfectly understood. Perhaps the context, the entire body and purpose of the letter, will shed light on difficult passages, or the mere fact of reading the same passage again and again will serve to render its meaning clear to you. Underscore, perhaps memorize, passages which are of special importance to you, which have appealed to you with particular force for any reason. Then turn to Luther's translation and read the same book or letter in his masterful version. Perhaps you have some of the modern translations in your possession. Although they rarely reach the beauty and simplicity of either Luther's translation or the Authorized Version and very frequently misinterpret the original, they may occasionally help in understanding a difficult passage.

Above all, however, turn to the original Greek or Hebrew text. "Sweeter, aye, and purer," says Glassius in the opening paragraph of his *Philologia Sacra*, "sweeter and purer the waters are drunk from the fountain itself. The fount of all sacred sweetness and the well-spring of living waters is the Hebrew truth of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. In both of these (and why say both? One and undivided is the truth of the heavenly Word), one may taste (since it is a fountain) and see (since it is a light) that the Lord is good and that blessed is the man that trusteth in them, Ps. 34:8. Whatever versions are drawn from this fountain are rivers and channels, in no wise to be placed on the same level with the sweetness and purity of the fountain. . . . Sweeter, yea, sweetest; purer, yea, purest, all water of life and doctrine and consolation is drawn and drunk out of the fountain of truth flowing in the Hebrew of the Old and the Greek of the New Testament." No pastor who has experienced the joy, the gratification, which comes with drinking directly from the fountain of living waters would ever think of depriving himself of this privilege merely for the sake of saving a little time and labor. We know of an old pastor, almost totally blind, who has memorized almost the entire Psalter and Book of Isaiah and who was overjoyed to receive a copy of Isaiah in pamphlet form, as he was thus enabled to hold it in his hand (the Hebrew Bible was too heavy for him), and with the aid of a strong reading-

glass and by holding the pamphlet at the correct angle he could read once again the words so dear to him and so refresh his failing memory. He knows the joy of professional Bible-study. Many a pastor has taken up the study of Greek and Hebrew after entering the ministry because he felt the urgent need of a knowledge of the original languages in which God gave His holy Word to man. Is it not a pity,—or shall we call it a pity?—is it not a shameful waste of time spent in the study of these languages, is it not an unpardonable neglect of opportunities offered by the Author of the Bible for more efficient searching of the Scriptures, if pastors who have been taught these languages for a number of years will relegate their Hebrew and Greek to the junk-pile and deliberately forget all they have learned because, as they say, they do not see the practical value of such training? Luther knew better: "*So lieb uns das Evangelium ist, so hart lasst uns ueber den Sprachen halten.*" Not less Greek, less Hebrew, in our training-schools, but more of it, and more of it in a manner that will engender love of these languages in the heart of the students.

After a pastor has read a book or an epistle in the vernacular and in the original, let him turn to the Vulgate and, if possible, to the Septuagint. The latter in particular is a very necessary tool for the professional student of Holy Writ. It is not only the oldest known translation of the Old Testament; it does not only help us to understand many an otherwise dark expression of the Old Testament; we must not forget that it influenced in a great measure the language and style of the writers of the New Testament; and many New Testament words and terms and phrases will become intelligible to us only in the light of this translation. Take the use of the word *koilia* in the Septuagint in such passages as Ps. 40:9; Job 15:35; Prov. 18:20; 20:27, 30; Jer. 4:19; Lam. 1:20; 2:11, etc., and read in the light of this meaning of the word such passages as John 7:38; Rom. 16:18; Phil. 3:19. Take the interesting rendition of Ps. 139:9 in the Septuagint: "If I lift my wings toward the morning," showing a different pointing from that of the Masoretic text. In reading the various versions, make note of differences in translations of certain words and seek to ascertain the true meaning. Why did Luther translate as he did? Why did he change the older translations? Why did the Authorized Version sometimes adopt Luther's translation and reject it in other instances? Which is the more literal, the better translation, the Authorized Version's "bowels of mercy" or Luther's *herzliche Barmherzigkeit*, Luther's *wie ein lieber Buhle einen Buhlen liebhat* or the English "as a young man marrieth a virgin"?

After having read a number of shorter books, turn to the longer portions of Scripture and study them in a similar manner.

In connection with this study, as you become more familiar with your Bible, take up dogmatical or practical questions. What does the Bible teach on capital and labor, on economics, on marriage and divorce? What is the Biblical conception of righteousness, holiness, love? How does Paul's terminology differ from that of James, Hebrews, John? Any number of similar questions will suggest themselves to the diligent reader of his Bible.

One need not be afraid of digging too deep. The Bible, the Word of the Lord God Jehovah, is an inexhaustible storehouse, an unfathomable ocean of divine wisdom and power. The richest gold-mine will eventually become less productive; its gold will be mingled with more dross, its veins and seams be stripped of every bit of precious ore; it will finally become exhausted. Not so the Word of God. The longer and deeper we dig down into it, the more treasures will we discover and unearth. The deeper we penetrate into its contents, the more glorious they will appear, the sweeter its comforts, the more sparkling its purity, the more convincing its truths, the more apparent its unity, the more precious its Gospel, its Jesus, its Father, its Holy Spirit.

Such professional Bible-study, never forgetting the heart of Scripture, Jesus, will daily furnish the pastor more thoroughly unto every good work, equip him more fully for his ministry. And this ministry, as if in grateful appreciation of this service rendered, offers in turn many an opportunity for such professional study. Such an opportunity is given to the pastor every time he must preach a sermon, and he will be a better preacher because of such professional study. To preach does not mean to read or recite what another man has written, to take down a volume of Luther or Spurgeon or the *Concordia Pulpit*, memorize its pages, and then with more or less enthusiasm and fervor hold forth for twenty minutes or half an hour every Sunday. The pastor will, above all, see what the Bible says, what Jesus spoke, what Paul wrote, what Moses penned, what Isaiah prophesied, and how these eternal truths are to be applied to present-day conditions within his own congregation. Such study of the text may take considerably more time than merely copying another man's sermon; yet the conscientious pastor will (except in cases of extreme emergency) go directly to the fountain, fill his soul and heart and spirit with living waters, and then these waters of life will flow from him into the congregation and be unto it indeed a well of water springing up into everlasting life. He will always have something worth while to tell his people. His sermons will never become tiresome. His hearers will, like him, become eager to learn more and ever more of the divine truth, to enter deeper into the understanding of these divine mysteries of salvation. As his profiting,

his progress, in expounding the Word will appear to all, 1 Tim. 4:15, so their spiritual growth, their advancement in Christian knowledge, in faith, in charity, in hope, in every Christian virtue will become the more evident every day. The preacher comes to them imbued with the Spirit of God, comes to them from the closest possible personal contact with God, that contact which is made possible by the *ipsissima verba Dei*, with the very words of his Lord and Savior, as they were uttered by Him through His servants, the prophets and apostles. And out of the fulness of his heart he speaks to his hearers. The wonderful experience granted to him, that marvelous joy of having rediscovered for himself the everlasting, unchanging truths which God has revealed for our salvation will be reflected in his sermons, and his message, his telling of these truths, will be as fresh, as inspiring, as profitable to his hearers as the finding of them was to the pastor.

Teaching confirmation classes, day-school, Sunday-school-teachers' meetings, Bible classes, offers to the faithful pastor another occasion for conscientious, thorough, professional Bible-study. The many proof-texts in our Catechism are so many goads to the instructor to assure himself by personal study of the suitability of these texts, to ascertain their point of proof, to convince himself of the Scripturalness of our Lutheran doctrine, to teach not merely because he must keep in line with the accepted synodical doctrine, because our Lutheran Confessions, or the Small Catechism of Luther so decrees, but to grow daily in the conviction that our Lutheran doctrine is in deed and truth in full and complete agreement with the infallible rule and norm of all doctrine, the Holy Bible. Let the pastor in the course of his study compile a commentary on the Scripture-passages of our Catechism based on close and careful study of text and context and make proper application to the classes to be taught, children, adults, teachers. He will find this a work of ever-increasing fascination and practical usefulness. His teaching will then be based on personal conviction rather than persuasion by human teachers, on the infallible Word rather than synodical patriotism. Such conscientious study will go far in making him a successful teacher. Especially in adult classes, in teachers' meetings, where Lutherans or non-Lutherans with some knowledge of their doctrine and that of other churches are always ready to ask for information on some vexing question, and questions which are not always easily answered, what an advantage to the pastor to have acquired by close application to the study of Holy Writ that intimate knowledge of the Book which will enable him at once to point to a word of God that will clear up the matter, remove the doubt, refute the arguments of sectarians. Such intimate acquaintance with the

Bible can be gained only by close companionship with it, by daily studying its pages. Yet the blessed fruit of such study will more than repay one for the time and labor spent on it.

Again, to mention one more point, in the proper study of mankind, the study of man, in the acquiring of *Menschenkenntnis*, which is of such inestimable value to the pastor, there is no better book than the Bible. The psychology of the Bible is the only infallible and unchanging psychology. There we find a psychology not based on the researches of sinful, fallible man, who really knows neither himself nor his fellow-man; a psychology not arriving at its results on the basis of questionnaires in which the nature and point of the questions are determined only too frequently by the subjective views and opinions of the psychologist and the answers influenced by personal likes or dislikes, ignorance of the underlying causes, misunderstanding of certain phenomena, etc.; no, in the Bible we have the objective description of the human soul and mind and its intellectual, emotional, and volitional life, its origin, its present state, its future destiny, written by Him who created this soul, who knows what is in man, John 2:25, who alone searches and knows that deceitful, wicked thing, the soul and heart of man, Jer. 17:9, 10; Ps. 139:1 ff. To neglect the findings of this divine Searcher of hearts, to regard them as out-moded simply because they are recorded in a book written 1,900 to 3,300 years ago, to ridicule them as unscientific, as childish, would prove only the truth of that Biblical statement "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools," Rom. 1:22. While not neglecting the study of modern books on psychology, the pastor will not become a blind follower of these leaders so often blind. Knowing his Bible, having imbibed its heaven-born psychology, he will make the Book the touchstone for all human efforts at explaining the mysteries of the soul-life, will reject what conflicts with the Bible, will definitely refuse to accept modern psychology's explanations of phenomena in the spiritual life of a Christian, which according to the Creator's statement cannot be explained by human reason, 1 Cor. 2:7-9, will supply from the Bible what is missing in man-made books on this subject, in brief, will reconstruct all human efforts at psychological research in the light of God's own revelation on this mysterious, yet fascinating study. For authentic, reliable, infallible information on the science of knowing man's inmost soul-life, he will go to God's psychology, the Bible.

There is not a phase in the official life of the pastor which does not offer opportunities for, and serve as a constant impulse toward, consecrated, thorough, incessant Bible study. And there is not a function of the pastor's office that will not be benefited

and better performed because of such study of the Bible. We close with two Biblical exhortations. Says Solomon, the wisest of all men, Prov. 2:1—6: “My son, if thou wilt receive my words and hide my commandments with thee, so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.” And Paul, addressing his own son in the faith, Timothy, and all faithful pastors, admonishes us all, 1 Tim. 4:13—16: “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.”

TH. LAETSCH

„Von der babylonischen Gefangenschaft bis auf Christum“

Matth. 1, 17

(In kurzem Umriss dargeboten)

I. Das Ende der alttestamentlichen Königreiche, die Gefangenschaft und die Rückkehr aus dem Exil

(2 Kön. 17; Kap. 22—25; 2 Chron. 34—36; Jer. 27—29; Kap. 52; Esra 1, 1—5. 24; 5, 1—6. 22; Neh. 7, 6—73; Dan. 1—5; Kap. 9; Haggai, Sacharja)

1. Der Untergang Israels und der Anfang des samaritanischen Reiches. Hierüber finden wir 2 Kön. 17 einen ausführlichen Bericht und eine genaue Erklärung, die sich durch den langen Satz B. 7—18 hindurchziehen und in den Worten gipfeln: „Da ward der Herr sehr zornig über Israel und tat sie von seinem Angesicht, daß nichts überblieb denn der Stamm Juda alleine.“ Als Hauptgründe für das strenge Gericht Gottes werden angegeben: der Wandel nach der Heiden Weise; das Bauen von Höhen und Aufrichten von Säulen und Ascheraidolen; die Verachtung der Gebote und Zeugnisse Gottes; der Greuel Jerobeams mit den zwei gegossenen Kälbern; verschiedene Formen von Weissagung und Zauberei. Hosea war der letzte König Israels, und es mag der milderen Form seines Götzendienstes zuzuschreiben sein, daß er länger regierte als seine Vorgänger. Seine Zeitgenossen im Südreich waren Ahas und Hiskia. Hosea regierte von 730 bis 722 v. Chr., Ahas etwa von 742 bis 727 und Hiskia wahrscheinlich von 726 bis 697 v. Chr. Die assyrischen Herrscher der damaligen Zeit waren Salmanasser IV., 727—722 (2 Kön. 17, 3) und