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The Interpretation of Difficult Bible Passages

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providential because, without it, the world would have been sunk in superstition."

On page 407 he quotes Joseph Watteroth, later professor at the Catholic University of Vienna: "The Protestant Reformation has been of wonderful assistance in purifying customs and doctrines. Luther was right on many points, and if this had been recognized, a schism would have been avoided. We owe it to the Protestants that we are at last able to understand the genuine truths of the Gospel in our own language, so that they may become accessible to all. Their learned men have despoiled the history and religion of the Church of all monkish fancies and excrescences which had been added to it; they laid the foundation of a sane philosophy based upon experience and religion; they are far in advance of us in all branches of literature; their schools have supplied our universities with the best teachers and our institutions with worthy officials. We, it is true, have had many extremely able men; but they have been prevented from fully exercising their faculties by Catholic oppression, for which reason we are now far from being able to offer a counterpoise to Protestantism in Germany."

Oak Park, Ill.

The Interpretation of Difficult Bible Passages

By W. ARNDT

(A CONFERENCE ESSAY)

What a grand book we have in the Bible! While we are said to live in a new age since scientists have learned how to split the atom and there is preached to us the philosophy of collective action in national and international affairs in the labor world and politics — a philosophy which is definitely in the saddle and riding fast and furiously — we Lutherans cling to the old Book. We say it comes from God and it leads to God. In this world's wilderness we grope about, dark night hovers over us, we are lost in bogs and morasses, a lightning bug now and then appears, creating a false hope, and disappears as quickly as it came, and then, when every prospect of our finding the way home is gone, there comes from the

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hand of God the bright light of His Word, illuminating the scene and showing plainly the road we must travel to reach our Father's house, in which there are many mansions. Think of 2 Pet. 1:19: "We have something more sure, the prophetic Word, to which you do well if you give heed as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts" (free rendering). In many of our church collects we thank God for His holy Word. And let us, each time when one of them is read, join heartily, reverently, ardently in the prayer, realizing fully that the praise is not too fulsome nor the appraisal too enthusiastic.

You see from what I have said of the Bible and the Word of God that I do not at all hesitate to identify these two concepts. Some people refuse to take this step. The Bible contains the Word of God, they say, but you must not hold that it is the Word of God. All Modernists that I know of speak in this fashion. An early representative of this group of people, Dr. C. A. Briggs of Union Seminary, in a work entitled *The Bible, the Church, and the Reason*, said concerning the writers of the Scriptures, "We affirm that they are infallible on all matters of divine revelation, in things wherein men need an infallible revelation from God. . . . We do not claim that the writer of the poem of creation knew biology or astronomy better than the exponents of modern science. They are authentic for their purpose, to determine every question of religion, doctrine, or morals." Dr. Fosdick puts it this way (*The Modern Use of the Bible*, p. 51): "We live in a new world. We have not kept the forms of thought and categories of explanation in astronomy, geology, biology, which the Bible contains. We have definitely and irrevocably gotten new ones, diverse from, and irreconcilable with, the outlooks on the universe which earlier ages in general and the Bible in particular had. Whatever we may think of it, this is a *fait accompli*." On this sentiment the changes are rung, and the slogan always is: "The Bible contains the Word of God, but it is not the Word of God." That view of the Scriptures we emphatically reject as being a violation of what the Bible itself teaches concerning its origin and character. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," we assert, repeating the words of the Apostle Paul. What we say in particular against the charge that the Bible teaches an outmoded world view,

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how we counter with the statement that whatever the Scripture says is true; that this, however, does not mean that the Bible is a book of science, that its purpose is not to teach biology or astronomy, that in speaking of the phenomena of the physical universe it uses the terminology of everyday life, as we do, too, our supersophistication notwithstanding; that it often employs poetic imagery in speaking of the mechanics of the universe—all that I shall not dwell on here. Our literature abounds in essays and treatises where this teaching is upheld.

I

Today we wish to speak of Bible passages that present difficulties. Yes, there are difficulties in the Scriptures. When first uttered, that may seem to be a shocking statement. How can the Bible, the Word of God, given us for our salvation, contain difficulties? Having such a source and such a purpose, it must be perfect, clear, unambiguous, a smooth road without stumbling blocks, thorns, or thistles. That is true, we say, and if we were angelic beings, without weaknesses in our vision and understanding, as unclouded in our intellect and as pure and holy as Adam was when he issued from the hand of God, we should find the Bible such a book. That at times the road we travel when we read the Scriptures seems rough and narrow is due to our being sinful and hence weakened in our powers of comprehension and especially in our willingness humbly to receive divine truth. Hence, if we think that we detect imperfections in the Scriptures, that is caused not by the actual presence of such imperfections in the divine Volume, but by our faulty vision and lack of proper approach.

A little analysis of the situation might be helpful. The Bible is intended to set forth the way of salvation which God in great love has prepared for fallen mankind. What an indescribably glorious way it is! Paul, quoting the Prophet Isaiah, speaks of it in holy ecstasy, saying that eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, and into the heart of man there have not entered the things which God has prepared for those that love Him, but that to His Apostles He has revealed these matters through His Spirit. We see that we are here dealing with something that is supernatural, divine, far above human ken and understanding. But to the unenlightened, carnal, human mind these things are obnoxious. The same

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Apostle, in the same connection, namely, in the opening chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, declares that to the Jews God's method of saving man is an offense, a stumbling block, a scandal, and to the Greeks foolishness, something ridiculous. Let us remember that we still have a large area in our being which is not enlightened by the Holy Spirit. To the extent that we, as it were, have this dust on our lenses our sight is imperfect, and we find difficulties in God's revelation.

Nor should we forget that in the Bible there are revealed to us the deep things of God. Of course, they lie beyond our powers of comprehension. We cannot even satisfactorily understand such matters as space and time; much less can we grasp the first cause of everything, the personal cause, our great God. The difficulty here is not created by the Bible, it is inherent in the subject that is spoken of. The simple Bible Christian, as long as he reads the Book with the trusting eyes of a child of God, is not worried. He reads, for instance, that God is one. He adores this great, omnipresent, all-wise God. Then he reads that the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. That, too, makes him bow in adoration and thanksgiving as he thinks of what we owe to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But by and by old Madame Reason, who occupies one or two or even more rooms in his inner self, pays him a visit and after several polite, flattering bows tells him that he is a great fool for accepting with such a simple mind everything the Bible says. She upbraids him for forgetting everything he has learned in arithmetic, for instance, that one, plus one, plus one, makes three. And if our simple Bible Christian is not on his guard, the old madame will actually floor him.

II

In addition, there are difficulties of language. The Bible comes to us in our human speech. It is the only way in which it could come with any prospect of benefiting us. If it had been written in some other than the human tongue, in the language of the cherubim and seraphim, supposing we can ascribe use of a special language to them, what would have been the use? God condescended to speak to us in our own way, in writings representing articulate sounds that we can reproduce. But, owing to our imperfections, our human lan-

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guage has its difficulties. I am not now thinking of the many instances when we ourselves failed to be as perspicuous as we should have been. No doubt you have often noticed that in spite of utmost clarity one or the other of your hearers misunderstood you. The fault was not yours. The hearer did not perceive your emphasis or some conjunction or pronoun which you quite dexterously employed, or in the crucial moment his attention was suddenly deflected, let us say, by a fly or some other insect that settled on your forehead, and he missed three or four sentences that you spoke, and as a result he received a distorted picture of what you quite faultlessly presented. Alas! Alas! We always come back to human imperfections.

On the matter of language old Nathanael Burton, a New England divine, in a lecture delivered about sixty years ago before theological students, made these interesting remarks: "Such is language, young gentlemen, the instrument we are all using so fully and looking intelligent while we use it; the instrument you will do your preaching with and draw up creeds with and wreak yourself upon with great enthusiasm some time. Well, wreak on. I have no objection. I myself have been wreaking on it for the last hour or more. But let us not pretend that these dice we play with are perfect. If only they were, some questions would have been settled thousands of years ago. But how can they be settled when the coin of interchange is of indeterminate value? How much are those dimes and half dollars and dollars that are flying about in such helter skelter fashion? Nobody quite knows. Often when a speaker passes a dollar, as he supposes, the man in the pew sees but ten cents in it. Occasionally the speaker's ten cents is worth a hundred dollars. The fact is, language, as used, is a semichaotic flux of uncertainties, wherein we are exercised most wholesomely for something better yet to come; beatific visions and other visions. Of course, here and there in the welter there emerges a limited spot of solid land; the ascertainable and ascertained; and on those spots we sit down and have a dear good time. Not because such unsizable and stingy spots are so much in themselves, but, being all that we have, they are valuable, and besides, they show that spots emerged are possible in our case. If they are, we may hope for more of them gradually. At any rate, they are good spots

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to jump from and take with us when we are called to go out of this 'seeing in a glass, darkly' and knowing 'but in part.'" (*In Pulpit and Parish*, reprinted by the Macmillan Co., 1925; p. 215.) If these words were intended to demonstrate that the Bible is not a clear Book, we should have to disavow them. But if, as it seems to me, they were spoken to draw attention to the difficulties we meet when we endeavor to convey our thoughts to other people, they stand, and every one of us has one or several stories to tell which would confirm these sentiments.

We come back to the Bible. It is given us in human language, and this medium of communicating thought, as I tried to show through the quotation from Burton, causes us difficulty; that is true even when the speaker is God Himself: to such an extent our human powers of perception and comprehension have deteriorated. We need not stress now that the Bible comes to us in foreign languages, the Hebrew and the Greek, and that it was written over a fifteen-hundred-year period, which was terminated some eighteen hundred and fifty years ago — matters with which this group is thoroughly familiar and which enormously increase our difficulties as we endeavor to understand the Scriptures.

III

The things that become troublesome, in some instances to many, in other instances to but few people, are of various kinds. There is one class of texts which merely baffle our attempts at getting at the meaning and hence do nothing to us except that they try our intellectual capacity. There are others that give some people pause on doctrinal grounds. Then there is a class which is under attack for moral considerations. And, finally, there is a large group of texts which present difficulties from the point of view of history or archaeology or science. In various ones of these classes so-called contradictions between texts play a role.

What must be our attitude when we meet difficulties in the Scriptures? I reply, We must deal with them patiently, reverently, in holy awe, never forgetting that we are confronted with a word of the great God. Study the passage in the original tongue, and often the whole difficulty will at once disappear. Let me here give an example. The King James Version makes Paul say, Col. 3:12, "Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies." That

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sounds very strange to a modern ear. I wonder whether the people of the age of James I understood it? A little study of the original will show you that what is meant by bowels of mercy is simply the affection, the feeling, or emotion, of mercy. The King James scholars translated literally, too literally.

Next, study your passage in systematic fashion. The hermeneutical rules can be summarized in these brief words: Interpret your text, first, lexically; secondly, syntactically; thirdly, contextually; fourthly, historically; fifthly, according to the analogy of the Scriptures and the analogy of faith. "Lexically" — that means, studying the Scripture words with the help of good dictionaries, looking both at the etymology of words and at their current usage. "Syntactically," of course, refers to the study of words in their relation in the sentence. "Contextually" points to the study of the text in its connection. "Historically" means that you look at whatever historical factors are involved either in the background of your passage or in the passage itself. And, finally, the directive about the analogy of the Scriptures and the analogy of faith tells you to obtain from parallel passages such light as you can and to let your interpretation of obscure passages be guided by the clear passages speaking of the same subject. Usually when one approaches a passage along these five avenues, the difficulty that hovered over it disappears.

IV

Now I should like to take up some passages that are known to contain difficulties. Let me begin with Gal. 3:20, one of the famous *cruces interpretum* ("300 different explanations"); besides, one that occurs in an Epistle Lesson of the church year. "Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one." (A. V.) The lexical study will not help you much; every word is of crystal clearness. The syntactical study of the text is interesting. Your grammatical conscience rejoices to find a construction which is sufficiently rare to be fascinating and sufficiently frequent to make for easy solution: the possessive genitive in the predicate position. The translation is: A mediator is not (a property or agent) of one, but God is one. The translation with a sharp look at the syntax of the sentence obviously does not furnish us the key we are seeking. Next we study the passage contextually, and

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here we are given a flood of light, so that the text becomes luminous and points to an important truth.

We observe that Paul is speaking of the relation between the Mosaic Law and the Gospel. While both are divine, the Gospel is superior: this is his thesis. The Gospel was given by God to Abraham in a solemn covenant. When the Sinaitic legislation came, four hundred and thirty years later, it surely could not overthrow the duly confirmed Gospel covenant. Besides, Abraham was given the inheritance not on the basis of the Law and obedience to it, but in a pure Gospel promise. Did the Law, then, have any function at all to perform? Certainly. It was given on account of the transgressions. However, it was a temporary institution, to last merely till the coming of the promised Seed. It had a high dignity, it was ordained through the instrumentality of angels, and a mediator, Moses, conveyed it to Israel. But now mark well what is implied in the last-named fact. A mediator belongs to two parties, in this case the giving and the receiving parties. That means that He who does the giving deals with the beneficiary of His action *indirectly*. He does not go to him in person, He sends somebody else. That was the way God dealt when He gave the Law: He used a messenger. Altogether different was His method when He gave the Gospel. There He dealt directly with the beneficiary. On the side of God there was but one party involved — God Himself, no intermediary, no messenger. This helps to emphasize the superiority of the Gospel. God Himself brought it to Abraham, while in the case of the Law He employed a subordinate to take it to Israel. When the president sends us a letter through his secretary, we feel honored. But when he steps into our house in person to convey some information or bestow a medal, that feeling of being honored is much enhanced.

There is a fourth approach to the text, that of historical study. It will help. It draws attention to the circumstances in which the Letter to the Galatians was written — that turmoil, confusion, distress, and defection caused by the Judaizers among the young congregations of Galatia which made Paul unsheathe his sword and rush forward against the false teachers in holy wrath. Seeing the issue that was involved in the controversy, the freedom of the Gentile Christians from the yoke of the Law, will aid us to understand the text.

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Finally, the analogy of the Scriptures, that is, of the parallel passages that treat of the matter touched on in the text, and the analogy of faith, that is, the clear passages of Scripture that contain doctrine, must be considered. In this case the analogy of the Scripture confirms that the Law was given to Israel through Moses, who was with God on Mount Sinai for forty days, hence that God gave the Law unto Israel indirectly, while to Abraham He appeared and spoke directly, there being no mediator whom He employed. The analogy of faith upholds what we arrive at as the legitimate meaning of our passage — the superiority of the Gospel. I need merely point to such clear passages as Col. 2:17, which speaks of the Mosaic regulations as having been a shadow of things to come, while the body is of Christ. Thus ends a somewhat lengthy study, which, however, I trust illustrates somewhat the application of the chief hermeneutical principles.

V

Let me now take you to a passage which has some significance for present-day discussions in the field of Lutheran union, Rev. 20:4-6. It may well be called one of the, alas! rather numerous martyrs of wrong exegetical procedure. The Authorized Version renders it: "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Engaging in a little lexical study of these words, we note that souls are spoken of — *psychas*. The holy seer beholds not bodies, bodies raised from the graves, but souls — a fact which is often overlooked. The bodies of the people spoken of were in the tombs, but their souls were in heaven. The soul is that part of our being which survives after death, which is immortal. Other words of the passage might profitably be studied, but time will not permit now.

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If we look at the passage syntactically, we are struck especially with the aorist *ezeesan*, vv. 4 and 5. The connection demands that we translate it as the inchoative aorist — "they became alive."

We come to the context, which is most important and whose consideration will give us an opportunity of studying the passage as a whole. John records one of the many marvelous visions he speaks of in the Book of Revelation. He there sees and depicts something that is to happen in the future or, as some think, in part had happened. Conditions in the invisible world are portrayed as if this world were visible, material, tangible. An angel descends from heaven; in his hand he holds the key of the abyss of hell and a large chain. He sees Satan, the dragon, the old serpent, and binds him and locks him up in the abyss for a period of a thousand years. It was a gracious measure of God to restrain Satan from carrying on his nefarious work during this period of time. At the end of the thousand years the door is opened, and for a little while Satan is loosed and permitted to roam freely.

Then John is shown something else that happens. Thrones are placed, and the souls of those that had died for their testimony of Christ and of their brethren who had not bowed to the beast are put on them. These persons had been put to death or had died as true believers, but they became alive and entered heaven. They were given places of honor and ruled with Christ. The other dead did not become alive and enter heaven. This entering of heaven is the first resurrection. Blessed is every one that experiences it. He is saved beyond all danger, and he is a priest of God and Christ in the holy temple of heaven.

Before entering upon the controversial features and aspects of the passage, we may ask whether the fourth avenue of approach, that of historical considerations, will help. I think it does. The Book of Revelation was written in an era of persecution, as the opening chapters show. John himself, the writer, was a prisoner on the island of Patmos, confined there on account of his testimony of the Savior. On one of the congregations addressed by John, the one at Pergamos, and perhaps on others, bloody persecution had descended; one Christian martyr is mentioned by name, Antipas (Rev. 2:13). The

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congregations needed strengthening and comfort. So John is given the grand visions which begin in chapter 4 of the book and which show what struggles and what glorious final victory lie ahead for the Church. With this background we can understand our passage still better. A number of Christians have been beheaded, that is, slaughtered, as witnesses of Christ. Then an angel descends and binds Satan. There comes an era of comparative quiet and peace, lasting one thousand years, and the souls of those that died as martyrs and faithful disciples are received into heaven and shown high honors.

Another point we must not forget as we look upon the book as a whole is that it is full of apocalyptic imagery, symbols, drapery, ornamentation, and conveys its prophecies in this picturesque, striking fashion. It would be a sad error to overlook this character of the book and to interpret it literally, to think, for instance, that the thousand years must necessarily refer to one thousand calendar years, as we reckon time today.

Let us likewise cast a hurried look at our fifth avenue of approach—the analogy of Scripture and the analogy of faith. Are there parallel Scripture passages in which the New Testament times are spoken of, especially the times of persecution? Yes, many of them. In an eminent way our heavenly Lord Himself speaks of these times in His eschatological discourse, dispensing warning and comfort. And since His instruction is not couched in figurative, symbolical language, but in clear, definite terms, it must be normative for us in our interpretation. We say it belongs to the analogy of faith. He, too, tells us of persecution, both spiritual and bodily, coming for His followers. In this discourse He speaks the well known words Matt. 24:14: "And this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come," from which we gather that there will be an opportunity for the proclamation of the Word in all parts of the world, which may imply that there would come a period of comparative calm, when Satan would not be able to do his worst.—As to the understanding of the term "the first resurrection," the analogy of faith can guide us. The statements of Christ in John 5 and John 6 are an indication to us that the term cannot be understood to refer to a resurrection of the body (cf. John 5:28; 6:39, 40, 44).

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I have been making a few statements which you will like to see investigated a little further, I am sure. I hold that the scene of what is placed before us in this vision of John is heaven. The text, I must admit, does not say so. But since in the Book of Revelation otherwise the throne of God and the Lamb is in heaven, and since the saints spoken of will reign with Christ, we are justified in saying that what John beholds here takes place in heaven itself. Another point refers to the becoming alive of the martyrs, which I interpreted as designating their entrance into heaven. An explanation which is heard quite often refers this term, as well as the expression "the first resurrection," to conversion. If anybody thinks that this explanation is the best that can be presented, let him hold to it; he is not violating any teaching of the Scriptures. But I should like to set forth briefly why I prefer the interpretation I gave and which, as far as the term "the first resurrection" is concerned, is shared, for instance, by Lenski. (*Commentary on Rev., ad loc.*) John does not seem to be speaking of the conversion of people. Conversion is presupposed. The people whom he views were believers in Jesus, have remained faithful, some have died as martyrs. Then they became alive, and that is called the first resurrection. Furthermore John says: The second death, that is, eternal damnation, will have no power, no authority, over these people. It is implied that they suffered the first death, physical death. The becoming alive occurred at the time of their physical death, not before. But how can, so somebody may ask, the entrance into heaven be called a "becoming alive"? It seems to me such terminology is not at all strange. Whoever enters heaven enters upon true life. Hence at times, when reporting the death of a Christian, we say he or she entered life.

Another question refers to the thousand years. I said that it would be wrong to think that the term must be taken literally. But it seems altogether proper to hold that it signifies a rather long period of time, because one thousand is a large number. You know that a number of believing exegetes begin the period with the birth or the death of Christ. Others hold that its beginning must be fixed at the time when the cruel persecutions of the Christians by the Roman government ceased. The latter view I consider more likely to be correct. There has been, so it strikes me, a period of perse-

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cution; there have been martyrs; others have passed through the fire of minor tribulations and remained faithful to the end. Then there comes a season of comparative tranquillity. Whether the period of calm is still on, nobody can say with certainty. Owing to the onslaughts of unbelief, Modernism, and atheistic evolutionism, on the one hand, and the definite resurgence of papal presumptions, on the other, many of us hold that the thousand years lie in the past and that the little period which John speaks of, during which Satan will be loosed (Rev. 20:3), is upon us. Here everyone must speak with restraint.

Dr. Lenski, I must not fail to mention, holds the thousand years began with the birth of Christ and are still in progress; they simply represent the New Testament period. It is true, says he, that in this period there is the coming of the beast and of the false prophet, and there occur all the other terrifying phenomena described by John, but Satan's power is definitely curtailed since Christ came and bore our sins. To me that interpretation does not appeal. John, as I said a moment ago, impresses me as distinguishing in the history of the Church between an era of persecution and one of calm, and it appears arbitrary procedure to identify the New Testament era with the thousand years of peace.

A more serious question is whether the chiliasts do not, after all, seem to have a good foothold here. Does not John teach such a period of earthly bliss as the millennialists picture in glowing colors? My reply is: Not at all. According to the imagery of the Apocalypse we have to hold that the scene where the reigning of the faithful witnesses occurs is in heaven. The throne of God and the Lamb is in heaven, and the saints will reign with God and Christ. The chiliastic notion of a reign of Christ with the saints here on earth has no justification in the text. It rests on a sheer assumption.

That the first resurrection, pointed to with insistence by millennialists, does not refer to a bodily resurrection seems to be borne out by the description of the final Judgment in vv. 11-15 and following. The dead were raised, says the holy writer, the great and the small, without exception. Does he here speak of unbelievers only? There is nothing to warrant that view. The saints must be included. The Book of Life was opened, and whosoever name was not found in it was

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cast into the lake of fire, which implies that those whose names were recorded in that divine register were received into everlasting life. The description is so comprehensive that it must include the raising of the bodies of the saints mentioned vv. 4-6. Hence the bodily resurrection of the saints did not occur at the beginning of the thousand years.

But why, then, somebody may ask, does the Holy Spirit at all speak of the becoming alive of the martyrs and other faithful witnesses? The reason is quite apparent. We have the same consideration operating here which makes Jesus say to the church in Smyrna: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life," Rev. 2:10. The Lord is giving comfort and cheer to the suffering, persecuted believers. Here, on earth, their lot may appear unenviable; but when they die, they will enter life—if they remain faithful to Him who called them to be His own. The passage just quoted may be called an excellent commentary on the difficult text we have been considering: In the world beyond the grave the crown of life is given the loyal disciples. God be praised for this gracious assurance.

VI

And now let me take you to a difficult passage of an altogether different kind—one found in the Old Testament and which is said to contradict a sister passage. Both are found in the Prophet Ezekiel. The charge is made that in chapter 26 Ezekiel, as spokesman of God, definitely predicts the utter destruction of Tyre in Phoenicia through Nebuchadrezzar, but when we come to chapter 29, we find that Nebuchadrezzar is said not to have been successful in his undertaking against Tyre, to have worked, but to have received no wages, and his army is said not to have received any either, wherefore as a compensation God promises him the riches of Egypt as spoils. Ch. 26:7 ff. we read: "For thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses, and with chariots, and with horsemen, and companies, and much people. . . . They shall make a spoil of thy riches and make a prey of thy merchandise; and they shall break down thy walls and destroy thy pleasant houses; and they shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water. . . . And I will make thee like the top

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of a rock; thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more; for I the Lord have spoken it, saith the Lord God." These words were spoken in the eleventh year (ch. 26:1), that is, the eleventh year of King Jehoiachin's captivity (ch. 1:2).

Now in the 27th year, the 27th year of the captivity of King Jehoiachin, another remarkable statement in which Tyre plays a role is uttered by the Prophet (ch. 29:17 ff.): "And it came to pass in the seven and twentieth year, in the first month, in the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus; every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled; yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it; therefore thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon; and he shall take her multitude, and take her spoil, and take her prey; and it shall be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt for his labor wherewith he served against it, because they wrought for me, saith the Lord God." You see, says the critic, that Ezekiel is here either contradicting himself or admitting a serious error in his former prophecy. The campaign against Tyre did not succeed, the prophecy was not fulfilled. Tyre remained, Nebuchadrezzar was baffled, and that is acknowledged by the manner in which Egypt is promised to the king of Babylon as a compensation.

The difficulty is less known than many others, and the casual Bible reader never notices it. But it will be well for us who are theologians to wrestle with it. Tyre, as we learn from history, was besieged by Nebuchadrezzar for thirteen years. The whole science of warfare, as far as it was then known, was employed to capture and destroy the city. Did the great king succeed? Before we answer that question, let us recall that in our school days we learned that Alexander the Great several hundred years later attacked Tyre, which resisted him with great obstinacy, and that only after a siege of a number of months did he succeed in taking the city by storm. The student will say that apparently Nebuchadrezzar did not succeed, that it took Alexander the Great to carry out the prophecy against the city, and that hence it seems that the prophecy of Ezekiel failed of fulfillment.

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In going into our examination of the question we shall dispense with our five avenues of study, the material being too vast. The respective texts have to be carefully read. It may have struck you as you listened to the reading of the passage from Ezekiel 29 that nothing is said there about lack of success on the part of Nebuchadrezzar in his undertaking against Tyre. The only thing that is asserted is that the king and his army worked hard and received no wages. That leads at once to the view that Tyre was actually taken and destroyed, but that for some reason Nebuchadrezzar did not receive rich spoils in this expedition. The explanation which is offered by way of conjecture is that when the king was about to capture the city, the inhabitants put their treasures on vessels and simply withdrew, leaving a comparatively empty shell for the invaders. That seems a perfectly tenable explanation. Nothing can be said against it. The Babylonians may be assumed to have destroyed as much of the city as they could and to have left it in ruins.

It is true that ch. 26:12 prophesies, "And they shall make a spoil of thy riches and make a prey of thy merchandise," but that would naturally refer to such goods and possessions as the inhabitants were unable to take along. It would have been difficult for them to put everything valuable on their vessels.

There remains one more thought. It might appear that in view of the later flourishing condition of Tyre the prophecy of Ezekiel foreshadowing the complete destruction of the city and its desolate condition was not fulfilled. Keil replies that Nebuchadrezzar began and that later conquerors concluded the work, so that today Tyre is a comparatively desolate place, a site of ruins and devastation. I might add that the text of Ezekiel by no means compels us to hold that all the destruction prophesied was to be caused by Nebuchadrezzar. If the history of the fulfillment shows that much of what was predicted occurred at a later period, this would not prove the prophecy inaccurate. Parts of it are general enough to allow for ultimate fulfillment in a remote future. Cf. vv. 13 f.

I should mention, too, that old exegetes have solved the difficulty by pointing to the fact that there were two Tyruses, or Tyres, one, the old city, located on the mainland, and the other, the new city, located on an island which was separated

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from the old city by a narrow strait. Nebuchadrezzar took the old city, these exegetes held, but failed in his efforts to capture the new Tyre. This, too, I consider a possible explanation.

The more we study this sacred Word, the greater must become our humility, because we see all the time how limited our knowledge is and how, when we reverently study the so-called difficulties of the Holy Scriptures, these difficulties disappear. At the same time a feeling of triumph should fill us as we see the truthfulness of our good old Bible vindicated, and we should exclaim: "Verily, *Verbum Dei manet in aeternum!*"

St. Louis, Mo.

