

9-1-1947

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Recommended Citation

Peters, Paul (1947) "Luther's Text-Critical Study of 2 Samuel 23:8," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 18, Article 55.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol18/iss1/55>

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Concordia Theological Monthly

Vol. XVIII

SEPTEMBER, 1947

No. 9

Luther's Text-Critical Study of 2 Samuel 23:8

By PAUL PETERS

On the 8th of April, 1546, the Council of Trent, in its Fourth Session, passed the *Decree Concerning the Edition and the Use of the Sacred Books* and declared that the "old and vulgate edition . . . be . . . held as authentic" and that "it be printed in the most correct manner possible."¹

With this decree the Council of Trent rejected both Luther's translation of the Bible from the Hebrew and Greek original and his revision of the Vulgate. While Luther had finished translating the greater part of the Bible two decades prior to the Fourth Session of the Council of Trent, and while he had published a revision of the Vulgate in 1529,² it took the Romanists more than four decades after the Fourth Session of their Council to publish a revised Vulgate edition.

Even this revision was far from being correct, as later editions, including that of our own day, amply prove. Luther's revision of the Vulgate was of great value to the Lutheran pastors and professors of the Reformation period, not only because it provided them with a better translation of the text but also with corrections of corrupt Masoretic readings of the original text. Luther's text-critical study of 2 Samuel 23:8 and his translation of this passage, both in his revision of the Vulgate and in his German Bible, is a good case in point.

¹ J. Waterworth, *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, pp. 19—20. Chicago, 1848.

² *Die Deutsche Bibel*, 5. Bd. Weimar, 1914.

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Today Protestants and Romanists are vying with one another in their critical study of the Biblical text, with far more adequate means at their disposal than Luther had. The revisions of the King James Version by English and American scholars, of Luther's Bible by German scholars, and of the Vulgate by the Papal committees of the Biblical Institute in Rome have not only been made possible but necessary by the discovery of new manuscripts of both the Old and the New Testament and by a marked development in Biblical studies.

As to the Old Testament, we have today Paul Kahle's studies of the Babylonian text of the Hebrew Scriptures and the recovery of the ancient Canaanite tongue and literature, due to the decipherment and interpretation of the Ras Shamrah Tablets. Certainly, Luther would have made ample use of these means and finds, had they been at his disposal. Despite the comparative lack of means and of time in the crowded workday of the Reformer, he undertook the work of gaining access to the original text, which ultimately demands both a knowledge of the Biblical and cognate languages and a competence in textual criticism. A review of Luther's text-critical study of 2 Samuel 23:8, compared with 1 Chronicles 11:11, will give us an insight into the work of this pioneer of modern textual criticism.

We find Luther's textual criticism of 2 Samuel 23:8 in a letter to Roerer, which has been preserved for us by Flacius Illyricus in his *Regulae et tractatus quidam de sermone sacrarum literarum, Magdeburgi 1551*.³ This conservative Lutheran scholar with his learning and indefatigable capacity for work valued Luther's textual observations on 2 Samuel 23:8 to such an extent that he added a commentary to them, which begins with the significant words: *Coniectura mihi probatur*. In other words it was his aim to examine and to evaluate Luther's conjectures.

Luther's letter written in Weimar on the 2d of July, 1540,⁴ is addressed to the venerable Magister George Roerer, a well-known friend of Luther, who, in Wittenberg since 1522, be-

³ P. 161 ff. Cf. J. A. Goetz, *Luthers Vorschule, Meisterschaft und vollendete Reife in der Dolmetschung der Heiligen Schrift*. Nuernberg, 1824, Ste. 107 ff.

⁴ Cf. *Luthers Saemmtliche Schriften*, Bd. XXI b, No. 2685. St. Louis.

came the corrector of the many editions of Luther's German Bible. In his letter Luther calls Roerer's attention to 2 Samuel 23:8 and adds: "We want to know how this passage was changed into its present form." Then he also advises him to confer with Dr. Aurogallus (Goldschmid) and show this Wittenberg Hebraist his "divinationes" on 2 Samuel 23:8. Luther takes for granted that the Bible manuscript itself must have been marred and defaced, either through the inexperience of the copyist or—and this seems to be more probable to him—through the deformity of the letters ("deformatate litterarum"). To illustrate this, Luther presents a Latin translation of both passages, 2 Samuel 23:8 and 1 Chronicles 11:11, in a manner which shows us wherein these two passages agree and wherein they disagree. This presentation is as follows:⁵

2 Reg. 23 Haec sunt nomina	}	fortium David				
1 Par. 11 Hic est numerus	}					
{ Yoseb Basebeth Thachmoni	}	caput inter				
{ Yasabeam filius Hazmoni	}					
{ tres	}	Ipse	{	Adino Haezniv	}	super
{ triginta				leuavit hastam suam		
{ octingentos	}	caesos vice una.				
{ trecentos						

To this presentation Luther adds the following commentary: The meaning of the sentence is clear in Chronicles but not at all in 2 Samuel. In Samuel we have *Adino Haezniv* instead of *levavit hastam suam* in Chronicles, even as we have *Yoseb Basebeth Thachmoni* in Samuel instead of *Yasabeam filius Hazmoni* in Chronicles. In view of these differences Luther wants Roerer to encourage Aurogallus to write the Hebrew wording for *levavit hastam suam*, as we find it in 1 Chronicles 11, and to do this without using the vowel signs. Since the letters and the whole sentence in 2 Samuel have been distorted, Luther goes on to say, also transposed and mutilated, as also hastily written, Aurogallus should endeavor, if it is at all possible, to bring about a certain likeness of the passage in 2 Samuel 23, which reads in the Hebrew: *Hu adino haezniv*, with that of 1 Chronicles 11, with its *Hu orer eth-*

⁵ Luther's and Flacius' method of transliterating the Hebrew words has been retained wherever they are being quoted.

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hanitho. Luther then adds that it is not doubtful that the passage *Yasabeam filius Hazmoni* has been corrupted into *Yoseb Basebeth Thachmoni* by the same rudimentariness and deformity of the letters. This comment is followed by the following illustration:

hastam suam	leuauit
העצנו	ערינו
אח חיתו	עורר
B	A

By means of this illustration Luther wants to show how the correct reading in Chronicles took on the corrupt form in 2 Samuel. Under A and B he has this to say:

A. If you transpose the *vau* (of עורר) after the *resh*, you first of all have the likeness of *Adi* (in ערינו). Then the second *resh*, in consequence of an error, will have taken on the form of *nun*, the more so, since the letters have been deformed and mutilated so that the defective *resh* is finally the same as *nun*.

B. Here *aleph* (of אח) can be the *vau* of the preceding *Adino*, if the incompetent scribe joined the words together, as it can happen to the inexperienced. Then the *tav* (of אח) has been changed into *he* (of העצניי) and the *ha* (of חיתו) into the *ayin* (of העצניי). After that the whole of *nitho* was altered into *zeniv*, the letters having been transposed, joined together, confused, and mutilated after the manner of a hasty and inefficient copyist.

Luther now turns to the old codices and affirms that it is not contradictory that the old codices are in harmony with the unknown words of 2 Samuel 23. For it is nothing new, Luther asserts, to copy disfigured and badly written letters. He then refers to the Septuagint and says: "We see that the age of the Seventy was a very illiterate one and rude in writing and understanding. Therefore they often transcribe a letter for a letter, a word for a word, even a phrase for a phrase."

In concluding, Luther advises: "Even if Aurogallus agrees with everything, we shall also consult the Hebraists Cigler⁶

⁶ Cigler or Ziegler, Bernhard, whom Luther encouraged to purge the Masoretic text of the *Peres* of the Jews, was professor of Hebrew in Leipzig.

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and Fuerster ⁷ and record such things at the close of our Bibles in the interest of the reader that he may be warned by them in whatever manner these or similar expressions may occur."

Having studied Luther's "divinations" on 2 Samuel 23:8, we want to know how they compare with those of the Masoretes, the Ancient Versions, and those of modern textual critics. Luther proceeds from the premise that 2 Samuel 23:8 is a corrupt text. Does this premise find the support of the text critics prior to and after Luther's time? Many of the oldest text critics have sought to retain the letters and words and phrases of 2 Samuel 23:8.

The Masoretes head the list in this endeavor by pointing the corrupt reading, ישב בשבח, as if it were no name, and the next corrupt reading, ערינו העצני, as if it were a name. The *qere* does change the ע of העצני into an א and the ו into an י, thus making it read as an ethnic designation, namely, the *Eznite*. The Septuagint has transliterated the two words ערינו העצני into Ἀδειῶν ὁ Ἀσωναῖος. This induced Luther to say of the Seventy: "They often transcribe a letter for a letter, a word for a word, even a phrase for a phrase." Still Luther would have been repaid by a closer study of the Greek rendering of ישב בשבח, by Ἰεβόσθε. The Vulgate endeavored to give a literal translation of all the corrupt forms of the Masoretic text as follows: *Sedens in cathedra sapientissimus . . . tenerri-mus ligni vermiculus*. Our King James Version has taken over the first phrase of this translation and renders it: "that sat in the seat." Happily it did not follow the Vulgate any farther, as has been done by the Douay Version with the following translation: "Jesbaham sitting in the chair was the wisest chief among the three, he was like the most tender little worm of the wood, who killed eight hundred men at one onset."

Turning to the endeavors of more modern scholars, we see that Gesenius and Dietrich endeavor to retain ערינו העצני and to find some meaning in the words by assuming the existence of a verb עָרַן and of a noun עֵצֶן, meaning a spear. Modern textual critics have come much nearer to ערינו העצני by following Lucian's οὗτος διακόσμηι ἡν διασασυῆν αὐτῶν, which, according to Klostermann, must be the Hebrew עֵרַר סְעָרְכִם, and

⁷ Fuerster or Foerster or Foster, John, was a pupil of Reuchlin and professor of Hebrew in Tuebingen and Wittenberg.

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which actually occurs in 1 Chronicles 12: 38. A mere change of \daleth into \aleph and we have the \aleph of Chronicles, which Marquardt joins up with \aleph עצור. The combination \aleph עצור has the same meaning as \aleph עצור אמת-חניתי in 1 Chronicles 11:11. This example of textual criticism is noteworthy, because it succeeds in retaining most of the consonants of a corrupt text. Attempts to retain the consonants of any and every Masoretic text is always laudable and should find the support of every scholar. Still, in this case we have a parallel text which cannot be ignored, and which, above all, should guide the text critic in correcting a corrupt text. Luther's attempt, therefore, to correct 2 Samuel 23: 8 and with the help of 1 Chronicles 11:11 finds the approval of the majority of the textual critics. It is the second premise from which he proceeds in his approach to 2 Samuel 23: 8.

This premise presupposes that 1 Chronicles 11:11 contains the original text without a corrupt reading. If this presupposition is correct, we can more readily correct 2 Samuel 23:8. There are textual critics who question the reading of a few words in 1 Chronicles 11:11. Even Delitzsch says in regard to both lists in 2 Samuel 23: 8-39 and 1 Chronicles 11:10-47: "The two lists agree with each other, except that there are a considerable number of errors of the text, more especially in the names, which are frequently corrupt in both texts, so that the true reading cannot be determined with certainty." But after all has been said, we can safely follow Marti's judgment in his commentary on 1 Chronicles 11:11, that apart from one word, \aleph עצור, for which the Masoretic text has three versions, Chronicles represents the original text. Comparing this text with that in 2 Samuel, we find that even apart from the corrupt passages in the latter, Chronicles still contains words which are not found in the parallel passage of Samuel. In place of \aleph עצור in Chronicles, we have \aleph עצור in Samuel; instead of \aleph עצור אמת in Chronicles, we meet with \aleph עצור אמת in Samuel; and then we have the \aleph עצור in Chronicles and the \aleph עצור in Samuel, while the *qere* has \aleph עצור. In calling 1 Chronicles 11:11 a parallel passage to 2 Samuel 23: 8 we must keep in mind that this is permissible only in a limited sense of the word. Still, as we shall yet see, it suffices to correct at least three of the corrupt phrases in 2 Samuel.

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The third premise from which Luther proceeded pertains to the Greek Versions. According to Luther they offer no help in correcting the corrupt text of 2 Samuel. This premise cannot be upheld. Even Flacius did not agree with Luther in this instance, but took recourse to the Greek Versions in order to reconstruct the text in 2 Samuel. His comments on Luther's letter to Roerer read: "Luther's conjecture has been examined by me. In the oldest manuscripts by means of glosses on 1 Chronicles 11 we have *Josbbaam* instead of *Josbasam*. Now, it is more probable," he continues, "that *Joseb Basebet*, as we have it in 2 Samuel 23, originated from *Josbasam*. Mention is also made," he reminds us, "of *Hachmoni*, the father of *Josabeam*, and of his son *Jechiel* in 1 Chronicles 27:32. In addition to this it must also be observed that he who is called *Josab* is named *Job* in another passage, as, for instance, the son of *Isaschar*, who is called *Job* in Genesis 46:13; in Chronicles 7:1, however, *Jasub*. Referring to the Septuagint, he says: "The LXX has *Ἰεσοβόσθα Χαναβαῖος* in 2 Samuel 23, which comes nearer to the reading in Chronicles than to the *Joseb Basebet* in 2 Samuel. Besides the fact that the two are similar as to their pronunciation, the form is also more acceptable as a proper name. Finally, Flacius even considers the translation of the Vulgate 2 Samuel 23: *David sedet in cathedra sapientissimus* and concludes from it that Jerome preferred to read *Ben Hachmoni*, as we have it in 1 Chronicles 11:11, to *Tachmoni*, which is to be regarded as a corrupt reading of the Book of Kings or Samuel. In short, Flacius made much greater use of the Versions in his approach to 2 Samuel 23:8 than Luther had done.

Modern textual critics have, of course, extended their search of the Greek Versions and with their help have at last come much nearer to the correct reading of the corrupt forms עדינו העעניו, השלשי, תחכמי, ישב בשבה. Therefore the modern textual critics do not have to resort to more or less guesswork in trying to show how a copyist could have blundered in copying the original. Luther endeavored to show it on the basis of the similarity of Hebrew letters to one another. Kennicott conjectures that the spurious reading of ישב בשבה arose from the circumstance that the last two letters of ישבעם were written in one of the Hebrew manuscripts under בשבה.

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which is found in verse 7 in the line directly above. A copyist then took **בשבת** from that line by mistake for the original wording **עם** of **ישבעם** and consequently read **ישב בשבת**. But whatever the reason for the mistake of the copyist may have been, the **ישב בשבת**, for instance, is not any longer a *crux criticorum* when holding it up in the light of the Greek Versions and finally discovering in it the **ישבעל** or **אשבעל** of Lucian's **Ιεσβααλ**. Today we can truly say that the field on which the text critic can do his work has been widened over against that of Luther's day. Yet Luther is to be regarded as the pioneer of modern textual criticism. The Romanists cannot claim this honor for themselves, Trent or no Trent. Therefore it is not surprising that Delitzsch in his commentary on the Books of Samuel (p. 493) and Caspari in his commentary on *Die Samuelbuecher* (Leipzig 1926, p. 656) refer to Luther as one who had already sought to correct the **ישב בשבת** in 2 Samuel 23:8, using his remarks as preserved by Roerer on the margin in the German Bible. But this is not the only instance of Luther's text-critical efforts in the field of textual criticism. More could be added. This one example, however, puts us into a position to draw the necessary conclusions for our own work in the field of textual criticism.

Luther himself draws one far-reaching conclusion from his textual criticism of 2 Samuel 23:8 in advising Roerer to add to the correction which he has made and similar ones as an addendum of his German Bible. His advice was never carried out. Roerer did enter Luther's criticism of 2 Samuel 23 as a marginal gloss to *Josabeam* in the German Bible of 1545 as follows: "An diesem ort stehets im Ebreischen also, Dis sind die Namen der Helden David, *Joseb Basebeth*, Thachmoni, der furnemest unter dreien. Ipse *adino*, Ha Eznib, und schlug achthundert auff ein mal, Da achten wir, der Text sey durch einen Schreiber verderbet, etwa aus einem Buch unkendlicher schrift und von boesen buchstaben. Und sey also Adino fur Orer, und Ha Eznib fur ethhanitho gemacht. Denn die Ebrei wol wissen, wie man in boeser Handschrift kann Daleth fur Res, Vau fur Nun, He fur Thau und wiederumb lesen. Darum haben wirs nach dem Text 1. Paralipomenorum 11. corrigiert, Denn der Text an diesem ort nichts gibt. Des gleichen kan auch geschehen sein in dem woertlin

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drey, Item acht hundert, So in der Chronika dreyssig. Item drey hundert stehen, Doch kan das ein ander meinung haben, *ut infra 1. Paralipomenorum 11.*"⁸

Thus Roerer added a textual gloss on the strength of Luther's letter and advice. Would that he had added many more of the same nature. However, what has been left undone by Luther's co-workers can still be made up by us. A comparison of Luther's translation with the Masoretic text and the translation of the King James Version will demonstrate wherein this work consists.

To begin with the latter, the translation of 2 Samuel 23:8 in the Authorized Version reads as follows: "These be the names of the mighty men whom David had: The Tachmonite that sat in the seat, chief among the captains; the same was Adino the Eznite, *he lift up his spear* against eight hundred, whom he slew at one time." The reader of the English Bible will at once see the expression *he lift up his spear*, because it is in italics, is not in the original text of Samuel. He will also want to inquire into the meaning of the words: "The Tachmonite . . . was Adino the Eznite." Kennicott says of this translation that it is "nearly as absurd to say that Jeshobeam the Hachmonite was the same as Adino the Eznite as that David the Bethlehemite was the same as Elijah the Tishbite." The Old Testament scholar who reads and studies the ancient Versions knows that the King James Version has followed the Septuagint and the Vulgate in translating יָשָׁב בַּשֵּׂבִי with "that sat in the seat." He is also in a position to know why it translates: "chief among the captains" and not: chief among the three.

Both of Luther's translations of 2 Samuel 23:8 in his revision of the Vulgate and in his German Bible are identical. The former reads "Haec sunt nomina fortium David, *Iasabeam filius Hachmoni princeps inter tres, qui levavit hastam suam, et octingentos interfecit semel.*"⁹ By distinguishing certain words by italics Luther shows the reader that he has not translated 2 Samuel 23:8 word for word, but has inserted certain words and expressions in his translation. His German translation reads: "Diss sind die namen der helden Dauid, Jasabeam der son Hachmoni. der furnempst vnder dreyen. der

⁸ *Die Deutsche Bibel*, 3. Bd., p. 414, Anmk. 1. Weimar, 1911.

⁹ *Ibid.* 5. Bd., 393, 8.

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seyenen spies auffhub vnd erschluæg achthundert auff ey mal." ¹⁰ In these two translations we find 1 Chronicles 11:11 with the exception of the three words which are characteristic of Chronicles, of which we already have made mention. 1 Chronicles 11:11 reads in Luther's German Bible: "Vnd dis ist die zal der gewaltigen Daud. Jasabeam der son Hachmoni der furnemest unter dreyysigen. Er hub seyenen spies auff vnd schlug dreyhundert auff ey mal."¹¹ Comparing the two translations, we observe that Luther took over the words *Jasabeam, der Son Hachmonis* and *er hob seinen spiess auf* and thus replaced the corrupt reading in 2 Samuel. He did not do this without writing the corrupt form *Joseb Basebeth* on the margin and adding: "qui sedet in populo idem nomen hic et paralyppo sed diverse sonat."¹² Luther made a third change in translating "der furnempst vnder dreyen," while our English Version has "chief among the captains." In other words, he did not follow the *qere*, which in Chronicles wants us to read the form דַּבְּרֵי הַיְּהוּדִים, "the captains," and which our King James Version has preferred to the דַּבְּרֵי in 2 Samuel. Luther translated this as Lucian had done before him (τῶν τοιῶν) with *dreyen*. At first he also wanted to alter the text in accordance with Chronicles and translated *der furnempst unter dreyysigen*. This translation, however, he deleted and wrote above the line: *dreyen*.¹³ Thus we see how Luther's translation of a text was preceded by no small amount of text-critical work.

Luther in his letter to Roerer speaks of similar corrections in his German Bible, which should also be listed and indexed. An Old Testament scholar reading the Prophets, for instance, and comparing Luther's translation with the original and with the King James Version, will find that his translation is based at times on textual corrections. The difference between the German and the English Version does not only consist in the latter being more literal than the former, but also in being less text-critical. Luther the translator was also and necessarily a textual critic.

In presenting his "divinationes" to Roerer, Aurogallus,

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 1. Bd., 137, 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 253, 1.

¹² *Ibid.* 3. Bd., 414, Anmk. 1.

¹³ *Ibid.* 1. Bd., 137, 8.

Cigler, and Fuerster for a critical review, Luther made it quite clear that he wanted his co-workers and students and all future Hebraists to continue his work on the Masoretic text. Above all he paved the way for us by stating clearly and definitely that certain passages in the Old Testament have been "distorted, also transposed, and mutilated, as also hastily written," that a manuscript itself must in certain instances "have been marred and defaced, either through the inexperience of the copyist or through the deformity of the letters"; in short, that there are corrupt passages in the Old Testament manuscripts. Luther spoke thus from a long and strenuous study of the Hebrew text and from a resultant knowledge of the text. We cannot think of carrying on textual criticism today, even though we have better means and helps at our disposal than Luther had, without having studied the text even as Luther had done. We shall then experience that there are passages in the Old Testament which cry out — not primarily for some interpretation at all costs — but for some correction. We therefore agree with the conservative scholar Wm. Green that "there are indeed some manifest errors which may in part be corrected by parallel passages; the rest must be left to critical conjectures."¹⁴ While we also agree with Green that critical conjectures "should be only sparingly used, and should be restricted to cases of actual necessity,"¹⁵ still we must not fail to see and find these "cases of actual necessity," as Luther, for instance, did, and not close our eyes to them when we do run up against them.

While the reader of a Bible translation does not grow conscious of these errors unless his attention is called to them by the translator in footnotes, while the pastor who is studying a sermon text in the original does not always find time to follow up a textual error, especially if it does not involve great difficulties for the interpretation of his text, the translator and the commentator of the Bible must practice textual criticism wherever and whenever a scribal error demands it. In the matter of a scholarly Old Testament commentary and of an interlinear translation of the Old Testament full justice should be done by us to the art of textual criticism. Since this

¹⁴ William Henry Green, *General Introduction to the Old Testament, "The Text,"* p. 180.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

year marks the fourth centenary of Luther's death, we have an added incentive to do this very thing. In the *Leichenprogramm of 1546* our attention is called to the fact that Luther, when he edited his translation of the Old and the New Testament, was even summoned by his co-workers to pass judgment on certain Hebrew phrases. The words pertaining to this interesting bit of news read: "Cum Rev. vir D. Martinus Lutherus edidit Germanicam interpretationem scripturae Propheticae et Apostolicae, adhibitus est et ipse, ut de phrasi hebraea iudicaret." The Luther who entered the *collegium biblicum*, as it was called either by Luther himself or more likely by Mathesius, was armed not only with his Latin and his new German Bibles, but invariably with His Hebrew Bible and with a new store of Hebrew vocables. Thus armed, he was called in and consulted by the Hebraists of this *collegium biblicum* in order to gain his advice both in regard to the reading and the meaning of Hebrew phrases. Let us also not fail to seek Luther's advice in applying the art of textual criticism to the Masoretic text. As Lutheran theologians and scholars we emphasize with Luther not only the "buchstaebische Sinn" of a passage, but as a very necessary premise the "Buchstabe," the original letter, word, and phrase of every text.

(EDITORIAL NOTE: This essay is an elaboration of a paper on the same subject, read at the Lutheran Academy Convention in Chicago on August 13, 1946, and published in *The Lutheran Scholar*, January, 1947.)

The Blessed Results of Justification

ROM. 5:1-5

By H. J. BOUMAN

In human affairs the results often are not in proportion to the preparations. There the old saying "The mountain labors and brings forth a ridiculous mouse" is frequently true. It is never thus in divine affairs. There the results always are commensurate with preparations, even though our limited vision and understanding fails to see it. Let us remember this as we study the blessed results of justification according to Rom. 5:1-5.