

Jesus Christ Is a Jew by Birth

Martin Luther

(1523)

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Preface

The following text is a new translation of Luther's seminal 1523 treatise *That Jesus Christ Is a Born Jew*. It is based on the German text found in the St. Louis Edition of Luther's Works, volume 20, pages 1792-1825. An alternative English translation is found in volume 45 of the American Edition of Luther's Works.

Luther wrote this treatise in the same year he completed his treatise on government, which is also available in volume 45 of the American Edition. An alternative translation of this important text is available from Lutheran Press under the title *Christians and Government*.

Luther's treatise on Jesus the Jew responded to allegations that he had denied the virginity of Mary before and after Christ's birth. In the course of this refutation, Luther addressed key messianic prophecies found in the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis 3, and defended their interpretation as being fulfilled in the Jew Jesus of Nazareth.

Luther also gave practical advice designed to foster the conversion of Jews to the newly rediscovered gospel on how to live with them. He rejected the confrontational, exclusionary approach that often had been practiced by Christians in prior times. Instead, Luther argued, Jews should be made part of society, should be dealt with in Christian love, and should be taught the gospel patiently. In later years, Luther deviated from this tolerant practical advice, recommending instead a harsher approach that included expulsion of the Jews from Christian countries and the burning of synagogues.

As discussed further in the postscript, the 19th and 20th centuries saw a resurgence in interest in Luther's late writings that advocated harsh measures of dealing with the Jews, while some—such as famed Old Testament scholar Franz Delitzsch—continued to take their cues from the Luther of 1523. The “late” Luther was instrumentalized in the 1930s to make Germans willing or even enthusiastic participants in the race war instigated by Adolf Hitler against Jews (and Slavs). In the process, Luther's own concern—the promotion of Christian doctrine centered in the gospel of Jesus, the Jewish Savior of Jews and Gentiles alike—became irrelevant. In fact, some openly challenged what was the key teaching of Luther's 1523 treatise—that Jesus is Jewish by birth.

Following the Holocaust and the end of the Second World War, Luther's attitude toward the Jews has come under critical scrutiny, some even going so far as to see in him an important source of Hitler's antisemitism. It is hoped that this translation fosters a deeper understanding of Luther's attitude toward Jews who do not believe in Christ and of how Christians can live in peace with Jews (and others who do not believe in Christ), while at the same time not surrendering key tenets of Christian doctrine.

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Introduction

A new lie has again been spread about me. I am supposed to have preached and written that Mary, the Mother of God, was not a virgin before and after Christ's birth but that she had Christ from Joseph and that she had other children later on. Additionally, I am supposed to have preached a new heresy, namely, that Christ was the seed of Abraham. But this is such a poor, pitiful lie that I despise it and would not respond to it. But because I must respond to this lie for the sake of others, I thought that I would add to my response something useful, lest I deprive my readers of their time for nothing by discussing such rotten, incoherent talk.

This is why I will recount from Scripture the reasons that move me to believe that Christ is a Jew born of a virgin. In this way, I might perhaps entice some Jews to believe in Christ. For our fools—the popes, the bishops, the theologians, and the monks—those crude donkey heads, they have until now treated the Jews in such a terrible way that, even if you had been a good Christian, you may as well have become a Jew. And if I had been a Jew and had seen how these inept bullies govern and teach the Christian faith, I would have become a sow before becoming a Christian.

For they have treated the Jews as if they were dogs, not human beings. All they could do was rebuke the Jews and take their property from them when they baptized the Jews. They did not show Christian doctrine or life to the Jews. Rather, they only subjected the Jews to popery and monkery. When these baptized Jews later realized that the Jewish religion seemingly has so much support in Scripture, while Christianity appeared to be nothing but idle talk, completely unsupported by Scripture, how would they then have calmed their heart and become truly good Christians? I have heard it myself from pious baptized Jews that, if they had not heard the gospel in our age, they would have remained Jews under a Christian cover all their lives. For they confess that they never heard anything about Christ from those who had baptized and taught them.

I hope that, if we deal kindly with the Jews and instruct them clearly from Holy Scripture, many of them should become true Christians and return to the faith of their fathers, that is, the prophets and patriarchs.¹ If their religion is utterly rejected and reduced to nothing, and if they are treated with arrogance and are despised, they will only be deterred more from this faith. When the apostles, who were Jews as well, had treated us Gentiles in this way, no Gentile would have become a Christian. But as they treated us Gentiles in a fraternal manner, we too should deal with the Jews in a fraternal manner in return, so that we might convert some. For we too have not all come up yet, much less overcome.

And even if we boast greatly, we are nonetheless Gentiles, while the Jews are Christ's blood relatives. We are in-laws and strangers; they are the relatives, cousins, and brothers of our Lord (Ephesians 2:12, 19). Therefore, if one were to boast of blood and flesh, the Jews would be closer to Christ than we, as St. Paul says in Romans 9:4-5. God has proved this by his actions. For God has honored no people among the Gentiles more than the Jews. For no patriarch, no

¹ The Old Testament fathers of the Christian faith such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and David. See, e.g., Acts 2:29; 7:8-9; Hebrews 7:4.

apostle, no prophet has come from the Gentiles—and only a few true Christians have arisen among the Gentiles. And although the gospel has been made known to the whole world, God has commended Holy Scripture—the law and the prophets—to no people but the Jews, as St. Paul says in Romans 3:2, and as it says in Psalm 147:19-20: “He proclaims his word to Jacob, and his statutes and laws to Israel. He has not dealt with any people in this way or revealed his statutes to them.”

Genesis 3—the Messiah Is the Seed of a Woman yet Able to Crush the Power of the Devil

In the first place, then, Christ was promised soon after Adam’s fall when God said to the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will bite his heel.” Genesis 3:15. I will not prove at this time that the serpent spoke as it was possessed by the devil, because no irrational animal is so intelligent as to be able to speak and understand a human language. Much less is an animal able to speak and ask about such lofty matters as God’s commandment, as the serpent does here (Genesis 3:1). This is why it certainly must have been an intelligent, highly rational and powerful spirit who can utter human language, who can handle God’s commandments so masterfully, and who can captivate and lead human reason.²

Thus, because it is certain that a spirit is higher than man, it is also certain that this is an evil spirit and enemy of God, because he breaks God’s commandment and acts against God’s will. This why this spirit certainly is the devil. This is why God’s word concerning the crushing of the serpent’s head must refer to the devil’s head, as well as the physical serpent’s head. Because he uses one term to refer both to the devil and the serpent, as one thing. This is why he refers to the head of both. The devil’s head, however, is his power by which he rules, that is, sin and death, by which he brought Adam and all of Adam’s children under his control (John 8:44; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8).

This is also why the woman’s seed cannot be a common human being because he is to crush the power of the devil—sin and death. And as all humans are subject to the devil by means of sin and death, this seed must be without sin (Hebrews 4:5; 1 John 3:5). Now, human nature does not bear such seed or fruit, as has been said, because they are all under the devil on account of sin (Genesis 8:21; Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12). So, how is this supposed to work then? The seed must be a natural child of a woman. Otherwise, it could not be called (or be) the woman’s seed. Yet human nature and birth do not bear such seed, as has been said. Thus, there must be something in the middle—this seed must be a true natural son of the woman, but it may not come from the woman in a natural manner but by a special work of God. This is how what Scripture says stands—it is the seed of only a woman, not of a man, as the text clearly says that he will be a woman’s seed.

This then is the first verse wherein the mother of this child is described as a virgin. She will truly be a natural mother who is to become pregnant and give birth in a supernatural way by God, without a man. In this way, this seed will be a special human without sin while still having

² In his lectures on Genesis, Luther uses “the light of the Gospel” in John 8:44 to conclude that the devil was here “hidden in the natural serpent.” AE 1:219.

common flesh and blood, like other humans. This could not have happened if he had been begotten by a man, as other humans, because the flesh is burned and corrupted by evil lust; because the flesh's natural work and procreation may not be carried out without sin; and because what is begotten and impregnated by the work of the flesh also bears a carnal and sinful fruit (Psalm 51:5). This is why St. Paul says in Ephesians 2:3 that we all are children of wrath by nature.

Thus, this verse from Genesis 3 was the very first proclamation of the gospel on earth. For when Adam with Eve, seduced by the devil, had fallen and had been summoned to judgment by God in Genesis 3:9, they were confronted with death and feared hell when they realized that God was against them and condemned them. They would have liked to run away from him but were unable to do so. And if God had left them in this fear, they would have soon despaired and died. But when God, after this horrible punishment, let this comforting word sound forth that he would awaken the woman's seed to crush the serpent's head, their spirit was refreshed and they drew comfort from this word, firmly believing in this coming blessed seed of the woman, who was to crush the head of the serpent—sin and death—by which they had been crushed and corrupted.

Now, beginning with Adam, the fathers preached and urged this gospel. By this gospel, they knew, and believed in, the coming seed of this woman. This is how they were preserved by faith in Christ, just as we. They also were true Christians, just as we. The only difference was that, at their time, the gospel was not being publicly preached in all the world, as it was to be done after Christ's coming into the world. Thus, the gospel remained only with the holy fathers and their descendants, until Abraham.

Genesis 22—the Messiah Is Abraham's Blessed Seed Born of a Virgin

The second promise of Christ was to Abraham in Genesis 22:18, where God says: "In your seed all the Gentiles are to be blessed." But if all Gentiles are to be blessed, it is certain that, outside of this seed of Abraham, they are all not blessed and cursed. But from this follows that human nature has nothing but cursed seed and bears un-blessed fruit. Otherwise, it would not be necessary that they all would be blessed by this seed of Abraham. If you say "all," you do not exclude anyone. This is why, outside of Christ, all who are born of humans must be cursed in sin and death under the devil (Galatians 3:10-14).

This text is another proof that the Mother of God is a pure virgin. For because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), it had to come to pass that Christ was Abraham's seed, that is, his natural flesh and blood, just as all of Abraham's children. Yet because he was to be the blessed seed who was to bless all others, he could not be begotten by a man. For such children, as we have said, may not be conceived without sin due to the corrupted and poisoned flesh, which cannot carry out its work without poison and sin.

Thus, the word promising Christ to Abraham's seed requires that Christ had to be born from a woman and become her natural child. For he did not come from the earth like Adam (Genesis 2:7) or from Adam like Eve (Genesis 2:21-22). Rather, like a woman's child, he comes from her seed. For the earth was not natural seed for Adam's body, just as Adam's rib was not natural seed for Eve's body. But the virgin's flesh and blood, from which children are regularly fashioned in

all women, was the natural seed for Christ's body. In the same way, she had come from Abraham's seed.³

Yet God's word promising the blessing for all Gentiles in Christ requires that Christ could not come from a man or the work of a man. For the accursed work of flesh is not suited for that which is utter blessing and blessed. Accordingly, this blessed fruit had to be the fruit of a female body only, not of a man, although this female body comes from man, even from Abraham and Adam—this mother was to be both a virgin and yet a true natural mother, but not by natural ability or power, but by the Holy Spirit and God's power alone (Luke 1:35).

Now, this verse was the gospel from Abraham until David, as well as until Christ. And while it is a short verse, it is a rich proclamation of the gospel. The fathers marvelously urged and practiced it, both in their writings and in their sermons. Thousands of sermons were preached based on this verse, and countless souls were preserved in the faith by it. For it is a living word of God, in which Abraham with his progeny believed and by which they were redeemed and preserved from sin and death and all the power of the devil. This is true even though this word had not been made public before the whole world, as happened after Christ's arrival, but remained only among the fathers with their progeny.

Here consider those who praise the Mother of God wrongly. If you ask them why they cling so firmly to the virginity of Mary, they cannot really answer. For these ignorant idolaters do so for no reason other than to honor the Mother of God, to raise her up for the sake of her virginity, and to turn her straight into an idol. But Scripture does not praise this virginity for the sake of the mother. She was also not kept a virgin for her own sake. Indeed, this and every virginity would be accursed if it existed for its own sake and if it brought about nothing better than benefit and praise for itself.

This, however, is the real reason why the Holy Spirit praises this virginity: It was necessary to conceive and give birth to this blessed fruit. For given the corrupted flesh, this blessed fruit could not arrive except by a virgin. Thus, this delicate virginity served God's glory, not its own. Indeed, if it had been possible for him to come from a woman, he would not have used a virgin for this task, because virginity is against the ordained nature and was previously condemned in the law. Thus, virginity is now praised only because the flesh is poisoned, and because the flesh's ordained nature cannot bear its fruit without cursed works.

This is also why we see that St. Paul nowhere calls the Mother of God a virgin. Instead, he calls her a woman when he says in Galatians 4:4: "The Son of God was born of a woman." Paul says this, not to deny that she was a virgin, but to praise her virginity in the best way with true praise, as if to say: In this birth, only a woman was involved, not a man. Thus, everything remained that pertains to giving birth in a woman—a child was conceived, born, breast-fed, and nourished. No

³ Elsewhere, Luther deduced Mary's descent from Abraham and David from texts like Genesis 18 and Genesis 49 (discussed below), as well as Matthew 1: Because the promised Messiah descended from Abraham and David through a virgin, Mary—the Messiah's virgin mother—must be descended from Abraham and David as well, so that the Messiah's promised origin proves the mother's origin, not the other way around. AE 61:477. Yet Luther also explained that Mary is the cousin of Joseph which ties the Messiah's NT genealogies to Abraham and David in the person of Matthan / Matthes, referenced in Matthew 1:15 and Luke 3:24. AE 61:477-488.

male can do these works. Therefore, as long as this child is the child of a woman, the woman certainly must be a virgin. While a male can be a virgin, only a female can be a mother.

This is also why Scripture does not argue or say anything about Mary's virginity after the birth. Meanwhile, the hypocrites are highly concerned about it, as if they were serious about it and all our salvation depended on it, even though it should be enough for us to maintain that she remained a virgin after the birth, because Scripture neither says nor shows that she lost her virginity. No doubt, no one is so greatly to be feared that he may show from his own head that she did not remain a virgin. But Scripture maintains that she was a virgin before and during the birth because God needed her virginity up to that point to give us the blessed promised without any sin.

2 Samuel 7—the Messiah Is God's Son from David's Body

The third passage is addressed to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-14: "When this time has passed and you sleep with your fathers, I will awaken your seed after you. He will come from your body. I will confirm his kingdom forever. He is to build a house for my name, and I will confirm the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he will be my Son."

These words may not be referred to Solomon. For Solomon did not come from David and was not raised after David's death. Likewise, after Solomon (who was born and became king at the time of David), God never called anybody his Son, gave anybody an eternal kingdom, or let anybody build a house. This is why all this is said about Christ. But, because this saying is too far reaching, and because it would take great effort to interpret it, we will let it go for now. For one would have to show here how Christ would be the son of a woman in order to be called God's Child, who neither could nor should come from a cursed work.

Isaiah 7—the Messiah Is the Son of a Maid Who Is a Virgin

The fourth saying in Isaiah 7:14: "God himself will give you a sign. See, a virgin is pregnant and will give birth to a son." This may not be said of a virgin who may yet become a bride. For what great sign would it be for a virgin to be with child within a year, as this is the common course of nature, as we see daily? Therefore, if this is to be a sign of God, it must be something special and grand, which the common course of nature cannot give, as all signs of God usually are.

It is of no avail to the Jews to try to escape from this interpretation by making up the following subterfuge: It is a sign that Isaiah plainly says that the child is to be a son, not a daughter. For this would mean that no sign would happen in the virgin but in the prophet Isaiah—he was the one who guessed that it would not be a daughter. But then the text would have to refer to Isaiah: See, God himself will give you a sign, namely, that I, Isaiah, will guess that a young woman is pregnant with a son, not a daughter. But this interpretation is shameful and childish.

But the text mightily urges to connect the sign and the woman, stating clearly: This is to be a sign when a woman bears a son. Now, it is not a sign when a woman who lost her virginity bears a child—be it Hezekiah's mother or whatever other woman the Jews may point to—but it must be something new and different, a particularly great work of God, that this woman is pregnant. The impregnation itself is to be the sign. I do not think any Jew will be so crude to attribute to

God not enough power to make a child from a virgin, especially because they must confess that he made Adam from the earth and Eve from Adam, which does not require any less power.

Their next subterfuge is to allege the Hebrew text does not say: A virgin is pregnant, but: See, an *alma* is pregnant—and *alma* does not mean a virgin, *bethula* does, while *alma* means a young woman. A young woman, however, may well have lost her virginity and be called the mother of a child.

Among Christians, the answer is easy from St. Matthew (1:22-23) and Luke (1:31), both of whom refer the verse from Isaiah 7 to Mary and translate the word *alma* as virgin. St. Matthew and Luke are to be believed more than the entire world, let alone the Jews. And even if an angel from heaven said that *alma* does not mean virgin, we are still not to believe it (Galatians 1:8). For God the Holy Spirit speaks through St. Matthew and Lukas. We certainly maintain that the Holy Spirit understands the Hebrew language and words well.

But because the Jews do not accept the evangelists, we must counter their arguments differently. First, as previously said, we must say that it may not be called a miracle or sign when a young woman becomes pregnant. One would otherwise justly make fun of the prophet Isaiah and say: Which women should become pregnant if not the young ones? Are you drunk? Or is it so strange to you that a young woman bears a son? This is why the forced answer of the Jews is a futile defense, adduced only so they do not have to remain silent.

A second argument is the following. Granted that *bethula*, not *alma*, means virgin, and that Isaiah here does not use *bethula* but *alma*. Still, this is a futile defense because they pretend that they did not know—although they know it in their hearts—that, in all of Scripture, *alma* does not mean a woman who has lost her virginity. Rather, in all places it means a young woman who has not lost her virginity and who has never known a man. But such a young woman is called a virgin, as St. Matthew and Luke translate Isaiah here.

And if they insist on arguing about words by clinging so firmly to the letters, we concede that *bethula* is a different word than *alma*. But by this concession they have gained no more than that this woman is here not called a virgin but is called differently, which also does not mean anything but a woman who is young and who has not lost her virginity. Call her however you like, this person is a virgin. But it is childish and shameful to argue about words when the meaning is the same.

To be of service to the Jews, let us then translate Isaiah, not as “see, a virgin is pregnant” (so they are not irritated by the word “virgin”), but as “See, a maid is pregnant.” For just as the word “maid” means a woman who is still young and honorably wears her bridal wreath as a sign of her virginity, so that it is said: She is still a maid, and not a woman, although it is a different word than the word virgin. In the same way, the Hebrew word *elem* means a young man who does not have a woman (1 Samuel 17:56; 20:22), and *alma* means a maid who does not yet have a husband—not in the sense of a maidservant but in the sense of the maid who still wears a wreath. Accordingly, the sister of Moses is called an *alma* in Exodus 2:8, as is Rebecca in Genesis 24:43, when they were still virgins (Genesis 24:16).

If I were to say in plain English: John married a maid, and someone were to say: So he did not marry a virgin, everybody would laugh at him as a useless word warrior, who would not let “virgin” and “maid” be the same thing because they are two words. This is how it sounds in Hebrew, if the Jews try to defend their position and say: Isaiah did not say *bethula* but *alma*. I call upon their own conscience among themselves that it is so. Thus, let them say whatever they want—*bethula* or *alma*—Isaiah means such a young woman who is nubile and still wears a wreath, which we properly call a maid. This is why one properly calls the Mother of God “the pure maid,” that is, the pure *alma*.⁴

And if I had to tell Isaiah how to express himself here, I would have told him to use the words he used—to use *alma*, not *bethula*. For *alma* works better in this context than *bethula*. It is also clearer when I say: See, a maid is pregnant. For “virgin” has a broad meaning, including women who are fifty, sixty years old, who are infertile. But “maid” properly refers to a young woman who is nubile, fertile, and who has not lost her virginity. This word therefore denotes not only the virginity but also her youth and her fertile body. This is why a group of young women are commonly referred to as a group of maids, not a group of virgins.

Thus, the most proper translation of Isaiah’s text here is: “See, a maid is pregnant.” No Jew who speaks Hebrew and English will deny that this is so. We do not say “she has conceived,” as the preachers say it based on the Latin translation. Rather, the common person says in their mother tongue: The woman is pregnant, is heavy (or great) with child.

But here in the Hebrew text it does not say: See, a maid will become pregnant, as if she were not pregnant already. Rather, it says: “See, a maid is pregnant,” as the one who has the fruit already in the womb, while still being a maid. Here you must contemplate the prophet how he marvels that a maid stands before him bearing a child before she knows a man—she should have a husband, would be ready for him and old enough. But before this happens, she is a mother. That is a strange marvel.

This is how St. Matthew deals with this verse, saying: “When Mary, the mother of Jesus, was engaged to be married, before they came together, it came to be that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit” (1:18). Put differently, Mary was a young maid who had not known a man, while being able to do so; but before she knew a man, she was pregnant. That was a marvelous thing, because no maid is pregnant before she knows a man. Thus, the evangelist looked at her just like the prophet, presenting her as a sign and miracle.

This is also the answer to the wrong understanding some have drawn from Matthew’s words where he says: “Before they came together, it came to be that she was pregnant.” They take this to mean that the evangelist wanted to say: Afterwards, she came together with Joseph as any other woman, and had intercourse; but before this happened, she had become pregnant without Joseph, etc. Likewise, when Matthew says in verse 25: “And Joseph did not know her until she

⁴ E.g., in the second stanza of the 16th century Catholic hymn, *Es ist ein Ros’ entsprungen*: “The little rose I mean / About whom Isaiah speaks / Is Mary, the pure one. / She brought us the little flower. / Out of God’s eternal counsel, / She gave birth to a child / And remained a pure maid.” See W. G. Polack, *The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal*, 3d rev. ed. (1958), # 645.

had her first son.” They take this to mean that the evangelist wanted to say that Joseph did know her but not until she had given birth to her first son. This was the opinion of Helvidius (4th century A.D.), who was rebuked by St. Jerome (c. 342-420).⁵

For such carnal minds do not consider the meaning and purpose of the evangelist. As has been said, the evangelist, like Isaiah, wants to put this great miracle before everybody’s eyes, how this is such a remarkable thing that a maid becomes pregnant before a man takes her home and has intercourse with her and that he does not know her until she has a son who she was to have before she was known by him.

Accordingly, the evangelist’s words do not refer to that which happened after the birth but to that which happened before the birth. For the prophet and evangelist, as well as St. Paul, deal with this virgin only until they have obtained her fruit of the womb. For the sake of this fruit, she is a virgin and everything. After obtaining this fruit, they let go of the mother and do not say anything about her, how things went for her; they only talk about the fruit. This is why it does not follow from these words that Mary lost her virginity after Christ’s birth. One may therefore neither say nor believe it. For all these words only point to the miracle that she was pregnant and gave birth before she had intercourse.

This is also a common way of speaking, as if I were to say: Pharaoh did not believe Moses, until he drowned in the Red Sea. It does not follow that Pharaoh believed after drowning. The opposite follows—he never believed. Thus, when Matthew said that Joseph did not know Mary until she gave birth to her first son, it does not follow that he knew her after she gave birth. Rather, the opposite follows, that he never knew her afterwards.

Likewise, the Red Sea overcame Pharaoh before he got out of it. It does not follow that Pharaoh came out of the Red Sea after it had overcome him. Rather, he never came out of it. Thus, it does not follow that Mary had intercourse afterwards, as Matthew says: “It came about that she was pregnant before they came together” (Matthew 1:18). Rather, she never had intercourse.

This is also how Scripture speaks, for instance in Psalm 110:1: “God said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I turn your enemies into your footstool.” It does not follow from this that Christ no longer sits at God’s right hand after God has laid his enemies before his feet. Likewise, Genesis 28:15: “I will not leave you, until I have fulfilled everything I have promised.” But God did not leave him after the fulfillment happened. Likewise, Isaiah 42:4: “He will not falter or be discouraged, until he establishes justice on earth.” There are many more verses like these, showing that Helvidius’s babbling is unfounded. What is more, he did not pay attention or perceive Scripture or common ways of speaking.

Let this be enough for now. These verses sufficiently demonstrate that Mary is a pure maid and that Christ is a true Jew from the seed of Abraham. For although more verses could be adduced, these verses are the clearest ones. Moreover, it is safe to assume that those who do not believe one clear saying of the divine Majesty will also not believe another, darker saying.

⁵ Jerome, *The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary*.

No one can therefore doubt that it is possible for God to make a maid pregnant without a man, because he has made all things out of nothing. This is why the Jews have no reason to deny this, because they confess God's omnipotence and here have Isaiah's clear words.

How to Convert The Jews

But we do not just wish to answer the useless liars who spread falsehoods about me in these matters. We also would like to serve the Jews by bringing some of them to their own true faith, that is, the faith of their fathers. We therefore want to continue to deal with the Jews and provide to those who want to do likewise a method and Scripture passages they are to use when interacting with the Jews. To be sure, many theologians in the past have attempted this. But because they undertook this in their own name, nothing came of it, because they wanted to drive out the devil by means of the devil instead of by the finger of God (Luke 11:20).

Genesis 49—the Messiah Must Come Before the Destruction of Jerusalem

First, the present faith of the Jews and their waiting for the coming of the Messiah is not right. This is proved by Genesis 49:10-12, where the holy patriarch Jacob says: "The scepter is not to be taken from Judah, nor a teacher from those at his feet, before Shiloh comes. The nations will cling to him. He will tie his colt to the vine, his female donkey to the choice vine. He will wash his garment in wine, and his coat in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be redder than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk."

This verse is a divine promise that cannot lie. It must be fulfilled, or else heaven and earth must perish (Matthew 24:35). Thus, the Jews cannot deny that they, since the destruction of Jerusalem, have not had a scepter—that is, a king or kingdom—for the past 1500 years. Thus, Shiloh, or the Messiah, must have come, before these 1500 years started, and before the destruction of Jerusalem.

And if they wanted to say the scepter had been taken away from Judah at the time of the Babylonian captivity when the Jews had been brought to Babylon and had been captives there for seventy years—but the Messiah did not come during that time—then the answer is that this is not so. For the royal line continued in King Jeconiah, Zerubbabel, and many other princes, until Herod became king (2 Kings 24:8-16; 25:27-30; Matthew 1:11-12). For scepter does not only refer to kingdom but also to principality, as the Jews know well. They also still always had prophets. Thus, the kingdom or principality did not perish—nor had all Jews been driven out of their land—as was the case during the past 1500 years when they had neither princes nor prophets.

This is why God raised up for them the prophets Jeremiah, Ezechiel, Haggai, Zechariah at that time. They proclaimed to them how they should again become free of Babylon, lest they thought that this saying of the patriarch Jacob was false or that the Messiah had already come. But during the last 1500 years, they did not have a prophet to tell them that they would be free. God would not have let their unfreedom last for such a long time because he did not let it happen for a short time during the Babylonian exile. By this, God sufficiently indicates that this verse has been fulfilled.

What is more, when Jacob says here: “The scepter is to last until the Messiah comes,” it follows that such scepter may not only not perish but that it must be much more glorious than it ever was, that is, before the coming of the Messiah. For all Jews know well that the kingdom of the Messiah is to be the most glorious and greatest that has ever existed on earth, as Psalms 2, 72, and 89 say. For it has also been promised to David that his throne is to last forever (2 Samuel 7:13). The Jews must now confess that their scepter has not amounted to anything for the past 1500 years, much less that it has become more glorious than before.

This is why no one may understand this verse as referring to anyone other than Jesus Christ, our Lord, who is a descendent of the tribe of Judah, from the royal house of David. He entered when the scepter came to Herod, the foreign-born king of the Jews.⁶ Christ has been King for the past 1500 years and remains so forever. For his kingdom reaches to the ends of the world, as the prophets said it would (e.g., Isaiah 11:10-12). And the nations have come to him, as Jacob says here. And it is impossible for there to be a greater king on earth, of whose name more nations boast than of the name of this Jesus Christ.

It is certainly true that some Jews truly feel the impact of this passage, how mightily it urges and argues against them. This is why they look for many wild interpretive aids and subterfuges. If you pay close attention, these defenses actually catch the Jews themselves. For instance, they say that Shiloh is not called Messiah or Christ; this is why this verse does not urge them to become Christians. But regardless of whether this individual is called Shiloh or Messiah, we do not argue about names but about the person: This person is to enter when the scepter is turned away from Judah. Only Jesus Christ fits this description—or the verse is false. Shiloh does not refer to a shoemaker or tailor; it refers to a lord to whom nations will come, so that his kingdom will be more glorious than the scepter has ever been, as has been said.

The following gloss they use also fails: The nations that come to him may well refer to the Jewish nation alone, and Shiloh means a lord. But let this be as it may, I do not want to argue much about the translation of Shiloh. I think Shiloh refers to a man who is blessed, who is well, who has enough, and who is generous. The Latin word *salve* expresses this notion, as it means plenty, happiness, abundance, having plenty of all goods. Psalm 122:7 says along these lines: “and abundance is in your towers”—there is plenty of everything and everything goes well. I could therefore translate Shiloh as “prosperity.”⁷

But regardless of whether he is called Lord or Welfare, Success or Happiness—it does not mean that Shiloh refers to one of the previous kings, princes, or teachers. For the scepter of Judah certain refers to all of were kings or princes from the tribe of Judah, except this one Shiloh who

⁶ Herod the Great was king when Christ was born (Matthew 2). According to Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* XIV,1.3, Herod was an Idumean (descendant of the biblical Edomites), although Herod himself might have claimed that he was an ethnic Jew. According to Josephus, after high priest John Hyrcanus (164-104 BCE) had conquered their country, the Idumeans chose to be circumcised and adopt Jewish customs, thereby converting to Judaism, instead of being driven out of their homeland. *Antiquities* XIII,9.1. Importantly, John and the other members of the Hasmonean/Maccabean dynasty preceding the Herodian dynasty were of Davidic ancestry. AE 47:223.

⁷ Luther concluded in his Genesis lectures that Shiloh referred to the “child of the womb.” This word therefore connects Genesis 49 with the two verses discussed earlier in this treatise, Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 7:14. AE 8:242-243.

is set apart here and is preferred above all who had held the scepter of Judah, as someone special, because Jacob says: “The scepter of Judah is to last until Shiloh.” What manner of speaking would it be if I were to turn this Shiloh into one of those who had held the scepter of Judah and who had ruled over nations, although this passage wants that this Shiloh is to follow all of those, as a glorious and great king who will have no successor? Unless this is the meaning, why did Jacob not say instead: The scepter of Judah is to last forever without waiting for Shiloh?

It is therefore certain that Jacob here masterfully describes the kingdom of Christ: Many kings were to have the scepter of Judah before him until he would appear himself and take the scepter for himself forever, without any successor, without any other kings from the tribe of Judah. This indicates that his kingdom was to be a spiritual one that would follow the physical one. For no person can have an eternal kingdom if that person is mortal and governs in a physical way.

This is why the scepter of Judah lasted from David until Shiloh as one that was physical in nature and had mortal kings who succeeded one another. But after the coming of Shiloh it remains with one person forever and no longer has a succession of kings.

From this it follows that this Shiloh must first die and then rise again from the dead. For because he is to come from the tribe of Judah, he must be a true natural man, mortal as all the descendants of Judah. But because he is to be a special king before all others who had held the scepter of Judah until his appearance, and because he is to reign forever and ever, he cannot be a mortal man but must be an immortal man. Thus, he must leave this mortal life behind through death and take up an immortal life through the resurrection to satisfy this passage, to become a Shiloh whom all the world follows, to be a true living human being, and king of the tribe of David while yet being immortal, eternal, invisible and thus govern spiritually in faith. But these lovely words are still too lofty and too difficult for the Jews.

But they may say: Well, this Jesus never did any of the things Jacob later on says about this Shiloh, namely, “he will tie his colt to the vine, and his female donkey to the noble vine; he will wash his garment in wine, and his coat in the blood of grapes.” The response is this: Only a silly person would understand this to mean that this Shiloh should become king so wealthy that wine would be as cheap as water, to be used for washing clothes, etc.

But we observed from the previous part that this Shiloh is to rule forever, a single person, who would not be followed by any heirs. All the prophets also say this. This is why this is not about a physical kingdom, consisting of perishable goods and having a perishable existence.

And even though this interpretation does not require that this wine and vine are spiritual in nature, the manner and nature of the expression and words used here do require it. For what kind of praise would it be, to praise such a kingdom that is glorious above all other kingdoms by pointing to these four physical things—tying a colt to a vine and a female donkey to a noble vine, and washing his garment in wine and his coat in the blood of grapes? Was he unable to come up with a praise that was unrelated to drinking? Must such a king have nothing but wine? Is there nothing praiseworthy about him except that his eyes are redder than wine and his teeth whiter than milk, so that all he had were white teeth, red eyes, and a colt tied to a vine?

Assuming these words refer to material wealth, why does he not rather talk about how he would wash his clothes in balsam and myrrh? That would be even more precious! Who has ever heard the wish to wash clothes in wine? Likewise, why does he not say that he would tie down his horses in a wheatfield? Who has ever heard the wish to tie a donkey to a vine? What are the donkeys to do with the vines—what are garments to do in wine? Everything said is counter to what makes sense: Wine ruins clothes. A donkey prefers thistles over vines, while sheep would eat the leaves of vine. This improper way of speaking therefore powerfully requires a spiritual interpretation.

Similarly, why does he praise him for his red eyes and white teeth? Does he not have any other physical beauty than red eyes and white teeth? What kind of praise is this when applied to such a glorious great king? Kings are usually praised for their strong, beautiful body, but mostly for their great mind, intelligence, grace, assertiveness, might, and their glorious actions and virtues. But here only his eyes and teeth are praised, which is more appropriate when praising a woman than a king.

It is therefore not doubtful that the Holy Spirit through Moses's words here depicts this person in a spiritual kingdom, showing how this kingdom is to function and be governed. But there is no time now to deal with this in detail. For now, it is enough to show that this text strongly militates against the Jews, because it shows that the true Shiloh or Christ must have come a long time ago, as the Jews have been deprived of the kingship and principality, as well as of the prophets, for such a long time. This clear text here testifies that the scepter is to remain with the tribe of Judah, until the righteous king is to come. It is at that time that the rule of this scepter will begin in earnest.

The kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ beautifully agrees with these verses from Genesis 49. For the Jews were governed by a prince until he came. But after his arrival, this arrangement was destroyed, even as he instituted the eternal kingdom, which he still rules forever, while he is irrefutably of the tribe of Judah. But because he was to be an eternal king in his person alone, it was impossible that he should rule in a temporal and worldly manner, as whatever is temporal perishes. But because he had to be David's natural seed, it was impossible that he could not be a natural, mortal, temporal, perishable human being.

These two properties are opposed to each other—being temporal and ruling eternally. This is why it had to come to pass that he would die and leave this life in a temporal manner and also rise again from the dead and become alive again in order to become an eternal king. For he had to live if he was to rule, because a dead man cannot rule. But he also had to die if he was to change this mortal life into which he had to be born by necessity so that Scripture may stand, which had promised him to David and Abraham as a natural human being.

Now he is enthroned and rules and exercises the noble office of tying his cold to the vine and washing his clothes in red wine, that is, he rules the consciences by means of the holy gospel. This gospel is a proclamation of God's mercy, rich in grace, concerning the forgiveness of sin, the redemption from death and hell. It comforts and makes joyful all who believe it. It also

makes them drunk in God on the exceeding comfort of his grace.⁸ But the Jews will not accept this interpretation until they draw near and recognize that Christ must have come, as foretold in this passage. This is why we leave this for another day.

This passage is also reasonable proof that this Shiloh had to have come at the time when our Jesus Christ did come, so that Shiloh can be none other than this Jesus. This proof works as follows: The passage says that the nations are to follow or cling to this Shilo. I therefore ask the Jews: When has there ever been such a man from the Jewish tribe who had so many nations as his followers than this Jesus Christ? David was a great king, and so was Solomon. But their kingdom reached never farther than a small portion of Syria.

But this Jesus has been accepted as a Lord and king throughout the entire world. One can therefore see that this verse from the second psalm has been fulfilled in him: “If will give you the gentiles as a possession and as your inheritance throughout the world” (Psalm 2:8). This came true in our Jesus at the time when the scepter was taken from the Jews, as is obvious. This has never happened to any other Jew. Thus, because Shiloh was to come at the end of the scepter of Judah, and as no one else has fulfilled these verses since that time, this Jesus must certainly be the true Shiloh, about whom Jacob was talking.

Furthermore, the Jews must confess that the Gentiles have never so willingly surrendered to a Jewish man as their lord and king than to this Jesus. For although Joseph was a great man in Egypt, he was not the lord or king in Egypt (Genesis 41:42-44). And even if he had been lord and king in Egypt, this would have been something insignificant compared to the kingdom the whole world gives to this Jesus. Similarly, neither Daniel nor Mordecai were kings over Babylon or Persia, although they held important offices in the respective governments of these countries (Daniel 5:29; Esther 10:1-3).

And it is amazing that it does not move the Jews to believe in this Jesus—their own blood and flesh, who is so well and so plainly reflected in Scripture—when they see that we, the Gentiles, cling so much, so strongly, and so firmly to him that thousands of us have shed their blood on his account.

The Jews know well that the Gentiles by nature had never been more hostile to a nation than to the Jews. The Gentiles never wanted to put up with the Jews’ rule, laws, or government. How is it then possible that this is totally changed, so that they now willingly and with constancy submit themselves to this Jew and confess him as a king over all kings and a lord over all lords with their bodies and lives? This is only possible if he is the true Messiah, as God—according to this passage in Genesis 49 and other passages—makes the Gentiles favorably disposed and subject to this Jew.

⁸ In his Genesis lectures, Luther explained that—to avoid the absurd meaning of physical donkeys, vines, eyes, and garments—the reference to wine has to be taken as an allegorical, spiritual meaning as denoting the benefits the Holy Spirit bestows on those who are in Christ’s kingdom by faith: He makes them “drunk with the richest knowledge of the Son of God” and daily cleanses them from their sin. AE 8:266-267.

Daniel 9—Seventy Weeks Between the Rebuilding of the Second Temple and the Death of the Messiah

The other passage is Daniel 9:24-27, where the angel Gabriel talks to Daniel most clearly about Christ, saying: “Seventy weeks have been decreed over your people and over your holy city, to restrain transgression, seal forgiveness, atone for sin, to have eternal righteousness come, to fulfill prophecy and vision, and to anoint the Most Holy One. Know, then, and hear. From the time the word goes out that Jerusalem is to be rebuilt it will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks until Messiah, the prince. Then the alley and the wall will be rebuilt in a time of fear. And the Messiah will be killed after sixty-two weeks; and they will not be his. But the people of the prince who comes will destroy the city and the holy place; and the end will be tempestuous. And when the war is over, all that is left will certainly be desolation. But he will confirm the covenant among many in one week. And in the middle of the week, sacrifice and food offerings will come to an end,” etc.

Lord, have mercy—this passage has been given so many interpretations among Jews and Christians that one might lose hope of ever finding any interpretation that is certain! Regardless, we want to conclude from it at least that the true Messiah had to come 1500 years ago, as we believe about our Jesus Christ. We will leave the calculation and the interpretation of these verses for the end of this treatise. First, however, we want to say this: Neither Jew nor anybody may deny that the angel Gabriel is here talking about the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. This happened under Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:5-8).

Second, Gabriel therefore cannot be talking about any other destruction than the one that later happened by the Roman Emperor Titus, about 40 years after the ascension of our Lord (Luke 21:20-24).⁹ For after Jerusalem had been rebuilt by Nehemiah, it had never been destroyed, although it had been captured, at the time of the Maccabees. From this we conclude powerfully that the Messiah, whom Gabriel here mentions, must have come before this destruction by Titus. This much, I think, is certain and clear.

It is true that the Jews have long since felt this mighty conclusion. As a result, they have fearfully defended themselves with many a wild gloss, turning this messiah into someone other than the true Messiah, namely, King Cyrus of Persia, whom Isaiah calls a messiah in chapter 45:1, and whom Queen Tomyris of Scythia killed, etc.¹⁰ But this and similar defensive interpretations and wanton subterfuges to escape the true meaning of the text are unfounded. This is why this gloss regarding Cyrus is quickly refuted, as follows.

These seventy weeks, Gabriel says, are to culminate in such a Messiah that—at his time, when the weeks have passed—sin and misdeeds will be restrained, forgiveness and eternal righteousness will come, and prophecy and vision will be fulfilled. I now ask both Jews and everyone else whether this happened during the time of Cyrus. For during the time of Cyrus, and

⁹ Josephus, *The Jewish War* VI.6.1, stated that the Romans, after conquering Jerusalem and the temple, brought their military ensigns to the temple area and worshiped them there before proclaiming Titus emperor. See Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15-16.

¹⁰ Herodotus, *Histories* I:214, calls this version of Cyrus’s death the most credible.

after his time, no special righteousness came to earth that would be different from the righteousness that existed among other kings before and after Cyrus. In fact, at the time of David and Solomon, there was a righteousness that was much greater than that at the time of Cyrus. Still, Scripture does not call it an eternal righteousness. This is why this righteousness must be much loftier than the one that existed during the time of the most holy King David. The Gentile Cyrus certainly did not have such righteousness at his time.

Furthermore, because Gabriel says here that the city of Jerusalem is to be rebuilt in seven weeks and then the Messiah is to be killed after sixty-two weeks, how can this refer to King Cyrus, who was killed before the seven weeks even started to run or, if their calculation is correct, who was killed at least before Jerusalem had been rebuilt? How can the one messiah who was killed before the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the other Messiah who was killed sixty-two weeks after the rebuilding of Jerusalem be one person?

We therefore see that their defensive argument is wrong. This passage may not be understood as referring to Cyrus. Thus, because Scripture does not call anyone after Cyrus “messiah” besides the true one—and because such lofty, great things may not fairly be attributed to a temporal king—we, powerfully overcoming the error of the Jews, conclude that the true Messiah came after the rebuilding of Jerusalem and before Jerusalem’s destruction. For no messiah was killed before the destruction of Jerusalem except our Lord Jesus Christ, whom we call Messiah, that is, Christ or the Anointed One. This is why we now want to examine this text, how mightily it matches our Lord Jesus Christ.

Calculation of the Weeks of Daniel

I must now speak before those who know the history of the kingdoms.¹¹ For those who do not know this history will not be able to understand me well. The most certain approach to interpreting this text in Daniel 9 is to calculate backwards by beginning at the time when Jesus had been baptized and had begun to preach. Gabriel refers to this time when he said “until the prince Messiah,” as if he wanted to say: I do not calculate until the birth of Christ but until the time when Christ became a prince, when he began to rule, to teach, to instruct, and to behave like a leader whom the people were to follow. This corresponds to how the evangelists, and especially Mark (1:14) and Peter in Acts (1:22), let Christ’s active life begin after he had been baptized by John. Luke (3:23) does the same. And this is how it was. Christ was about thirty years old at that time.

Now, all who know Scripture have no doubt that Gabriel does not here talk about weeks of days, weeks consisting of seven days. Rather, he speaks of weeks of years, where a week consists of seven years, as Scripture regularly expresses itself. Accordingly, seventy weeks are 490 years.

¹¹ In the preface to his lectures on Haggai, delivered a few years after this treatise was published, Luther sounded a cautionary note regarding the genealogy of the Persian kings. AE 18:368. Based on Ezra 4 and 6, Luther operates with the following sequence of kings: Cyrus—Artaxerxes/Cambyses/Ahasverus—Darius Longimanus. AE 20:159-161. Thus, while the chronological end and beginning of the seventy weeks are certain (490 years before Christ’s baptism at age 30), Luther considered his correlation of the seventy weeks to certain kings to be tentative.

Now, if you calculate 490 years backwards from the thirtieth year of Christ, through Greek and Persian kingdoms, you will arrive at the twentieth (and last) year of Cambyses, the third king, or the king after Cyrus of Persia. This Cyrus had allowed to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4). But 46 years later (John 2:20), Cambyses and then Darius Longimanus, who had sworn an oath to this effect, allowed the city of Jerusalem to be rebuilt, which happened by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:1-9). All this is demonstrated in the books of Nehemiah and Ezra. Thus, the seventy weeks begin with Nehemiah's journey from Persia to Jerusalem, that is, in about the seventh year of Darius Longimanus. Then they will coincide with our Christ.

Gabriel now says: "Seventy weeks (that is, 490 years) are decreed over the people and your holy city," by which he means to say: Your people of the Jews and the holy city of Jerusalem still have 490 years left; then both will be finished. He then explains how this was to come about, saying: "that transgression is controlled, and forgiveness is sealed, and sin atoned for, and eternal righteousness may come, and prophecy and vision may be fulfilled." This means that satisfaction is provided for all sin; that forgiveness of sin is proclaimed; and that the righteousness of faith is preached that avails before God forever, about which all prophets and all of Scripture speak, as Paul (Romans 1:17) and Peter (Acts 2:17) testify. Before then, there was only sin and works righteousness, which is temporal and does not avail before God. I know well that some translate the Hebrew word *hatuth* here as "sin," while I have, not without reason, translated it as "forgiveness," just as Moses uses this word at times (e.g., Exodus 29:36; Leviticus 8:15; 14:49, 52) and as Psalm 51:[7] does.

Next, he shows when the seventy weeks begin, saying: "from the time when word goes out to rebuild Jerusalem (that is, at the time of Nehemiah, in the twentieth year of Cambyses), until Messiah, the prince (that is, until the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan), it will be seven weeks (that is, 49 years during which Jerusalem was rebuilt in a fearful time, as Nehemiah teaches in his book) and sixty-two weeks (that is, 434 years after the rebuilding of Jerusalem)," for a grand total of sixty-nine weeks, that is, 483 years. One week—seven years—is missing to complete the seventy weeks or 490 years.

He shows next what is to happen in the last week, saying: "And after sixty-two weeks (note: in addition to the anxious rebuilding during the first seven weeks), the Messiah will be killed." This did not happen at the beginning of the last week, but in the middle of that week because Christ preached for three and a half years. And he says "killed," that is, taken from this life into the immortal life, by his death and resurrection. "And they will not be his," meaning that those who crucify and drive him out of this world, will no longer belong to him and be his people. Rather, he will receive a different nation. He explains this and says how they will not remain unpunished for these actions, saying: "And the people of a prince who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary (this is Titus, the Roman Emperor), and they will come to an end in a tempest (that is, they will be destroyed with storm and violence, as by a flood). And when the war is over, there be left a certain desolation."

This is how all this happened. For Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed with cruel seriousness. To this day, they are not under the control of the Jews; nor have they been restored

to its former power, no matter how much it was tried to restore it. It has been desolate to this day. One cannot deny that this passage and these obvious events are one and the same.

“But in the one week, he will confirm the covenant among many.” This refers to the three and a half years during which Christ himself preached and to the three and a half years during which the apostles preached. During these seven years, the gospel (which is God’s covenant with us, that he wants to be gracious to us through Christ) proceeded most powerfully. And since that time, it has never been as pure and mighty as during those seven years. For soon after that time, heresy and error started to insert themselves in the preaching of the gospel. “And in the middle of the week, sacrifice and food offering will cease,” that is, the law of Moses will no longer be in force, because Christ, after preaching for three and a half years, will fulfill all things by his suffering (Luke 24:44; Acts 3:18; 13:26-33). Afterwards, he will have new sacrifices preached etc. (Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15-16; 1 Peter 2:5).

So tell me: Where do you find a prince, or Messiah, or king, with whom all this agrees, other than our Lord Jesus Christ? Thus, because Scripture and history so powerfully agree with each other, the Jews have not been able to say anything against it. For they certainly feel their destruction which is greater than anything they have ever experienced. They cannot point to any sin that is so great by which they would have deserved this, as they do not consider it a sin that they crucified Jesus. Before this, they did commit greater sin but suffered less punishment. It is also impossible that God would have left them without prophets for such a long time, if they were not finished and all of Scripture had been fulfilled.

There are more passages like this one. For example, in Haggai 2:9, God says about the rebuilt temple: “The glory of this last house will be greater than that of the first,” which is also a powerful proof against the Jews.¹² Likewise, in Zechariah 8:23, it says: “At that time, ten people from all the languages of the Gentiles will grasp the hem of a Jewish man and say: We want to go with you, because we have heard that the Lord is with you.”¹³ There are many more passages like these. But it would take too long to explain all of them clearly and in detail. For now, the previous two passages are enough to make a beginning.

Concluding Advice—Integrate Jews into Society, Teach Them Patiently, Ignore the Common Lies About Them, and Deal with Them According to the Law of Christian Love

But even if it offends the Jews that we confess our Jesus to be human and true God at the same time, we will strongly demonstrate this from Scripture in due course. But it is too difficult at first. Let them first drink milk and first recognize that this man Jesus is the true Messiah. Later they are to drink wine and also learn how he is true God. For they have been deceived too deeply and for too long. One must therefore deal with them considerately, as it has been drilled into them that God may not be a human being.

¹² A fuller explanation of this verse as fulfilled in Christ—not a third physical temple built in Jerusalem—is found in AE 18:383.

¹³ A fuller explanation of this verse as fulfilled in the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles by the Jewish apostles (or Christ)—not their physical robes—is found in AE 20:87-88.

This is why it would be my request and advice to deal with them considerately and instruct them from Scripture. Then some of them might draw near. But now that we only treat them violently and deal in lies about them, accusing them that they need the blood of Christians lest they smell of sulfur, and other such foolish fabrications. Because of these lies, they are seen as dogs—how can we accomplish anything good with them? Likewise, they are forbidden to work, trade, and have any other human interactions with us, thereby driving them to rely on usury—how should this make them better?

If we are to help them, we must apply the law of Christian love to them, not the law of the pope.¹⁴ One must receive them kindly and allow them to interact with us and work among us. In this way, they will have cause and opportunity to be with us and among us to hear and see our Christian teaching and life. Even if some are stiff-necked—what does it matter? We Gentiles are also not all good Christians.

For now, I want to leave it at this until I see what I have accomplished. May God give his grace to all of us. Amen.

¹⁴ E.g., Canons 67-70 of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) required Jews to pay the tithes for Christians from whom they had taken too much money by usury; required them to wear distinctive clothes; prohibited them from leaving their homes during Holy Week; and prohibited Jews from holding public offices. At the same time, papal and imperial decrees protected, within limits, the exercise of the Jewish religion and prohibited conversions to Christianity by force. J. Cohen, “Christian Theology and Papal Policy in the Middle Ages,” in S. T. Katz (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Antisemitism* 176-193 (2022); P. H. Wilson, *Heart of Europe: A History of the Holy Roman Empire* 100-108 (2016).

Postscript

The Holocaust and Luther

Eighty-one years after the end of the Second World War, we now live in an age when the Holocaust—over six million Jews were murdered by Germans and their allies—is denied or distorted in various way. Especially social media spread this unjustified attack on a historical reality.

Of course, as every historical event, the Holocaust is not just subject to denial. The Holocaust is also subject to interpretation: What were its causes? What are its lessons? What is the proper assessment of this event? Is it unique, and if so, how?

Even among Jews, the interpretation of the Holocaust, as well as its meaning and lessons, is controversial. Some, typically known as Zionists, see it as the last straw that convinced Jews and their Western political allies that a sovereign “Jewish state” had to be founded somewhere—the modern state of Israel was founded in the former province of Palestine in 1948—because the Holocaust proved that Jews could not safely live anywhere else in the world, at least not without a nation of their own as a backup.

Other Jews, however, see it as a sign of God’s punishment for integrating too readily with the nations among whom Jews have been living for centuries. For them, the modern state of Israel is not the inevitable “next step” after 1945.

Christian responses to the Holocaust are also varied. Some see it as a call to radically rethink the relationship of Jews and Christians “after Auschwitz.” For them, the notion (prominently featured in the New Testament, for instance in Romans 9 or Galatians 3) that those who believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah—Jews and Gentiles—are the *true* Israel is a key cause of secular, “scientific” (i.e., race-based) antisemitism that arose in the 19th century and culminated in the Holocaust. Some therefore advocate for a “two-covenant” theology that teaches that Jesus is the way to the one true God only for the Gentiles, while the Jews have a more or less direct access to the one true God since Abraham.

Other Christians take a more nuanced approach to the causes of the Holocaust and therefore see no need to make such drastic theological changes. This nuanced view is in keeping with contemporary historical research into the causes of “Hitler and the Holocaust” that locates these causes in the economic, scientific, political, and philosophical developments of the 19th century, not in the 1st century or the 16th century.

How does Luther fit into these larger discussions? Luther is frequently mentioned among the causes of the Holocaust, even by those who recognize that Luther did not advocate for the physical eradication of all Jews, because leading Nazis and German Christians—e.g., Julius Streicher—pointed to the late Luther’s writings against the Jews as their personal motivation for signing up for Hitler’s race-based, genocidal antisemitism. Other Christians pointed to Christ’s own antagonism to “the Jews” of his day as a motivation to join forces with Hitler.

While this is sadly true—Christians and others have pointed to Christ and/or Luther to justify their participation in atrocities, in 1930s and 1940s Germany as well as in other places and at other times (e.g., the members of the “Second Klan” in the U.S.)—the question is: What does the reference back to Christ and Luther by these individuals mean? Does it fatally discredit Christianity or at least Lutheranism as a whole? Does it fatally discredit all religions? Or does it only discredit a specific form of Christianity and Lutheranism?

While I can certainly understand those who say that they cannot be Christians (or Lutherans) because of the atrocities committed by those who invoked Christ (or Luther) as motivator for these atrocities, it’s important to distinguish between invoking Christ’s name and being a Christian. That’s what Christ himself does in Matthew 7:21-23. And 1 John 2:19 distinguishes between those who “went out from us” but did not “continue with us” and those who are truly “of us” because they do “continue with us,” that is, the apostles and their teachings (1 John 1:1-4). Indeed, those who use the Christian faith to justify and cover up their own immoral actions do so against God’s Word and cause God to be dishonored among unbelievers, as it says in Romans 2:17-29, Galatians 5:13, and elsewhere.

The problem of legitimate and illegitimate interpretations of God’s Word is therefore as old as the Bible. Indeed, the proper understanding of God’s Word is the central problem of humanity that is almost as old as the world itself (Genesis 3:1-7). Otherwise, there would have been no need for God to send the prophets—and finally his Son and the apostles—to call fallen sinners back to his Word.

Accordingly, it does make a big difference whether those who invoked Christ and Luther to participate in the Holocaust did so legitimately. What I mean is this: It’s easy to pick bits and pieces out of some writing and cite it to support whatever. That is certainly true for the Bible. This was the reason why the bible was branded as a “book of heretics” by those who opposed Luther: It seems to justify anything and everything.

But not every appeal to the authority of the Bible is correct or valid because that, as Luther wittily observed, would mean that a text is a “wax nose” whose meaning can be manipulated at will by those who have the power to enforce their interpretations.

To make a broader point, then, not every interpretation of a given text—including Luther’s writings against the Jews—is valid just because one or more people have arrived at it. Interpretation, moreover, is not a democratic process where the majority rules: Just because many in Germany believed that Christ (or Luther) would have endorsed their genocidal actions against the Jews and others whom their perceived to be “inferior races” does not make it so.

The question then is: what did Luther mean, and what does that mean for us, when he advised the political leaders of his day to practice “sharp mercy” when it came to dealing with the Jews?

Luther and the Jews

There is no doubt that Luther believed that Jesus Christ is the one Savior for Jews and Gentiles alike. As can be seen in his seminal 1523 treatise *Jesus Is a Jew by Birth*—translated above—Luther was an ardent defender of the “Christological meaning” of the Old Testament. In other

words, Luther—who served as a professor of the bible at Wittenberg University and who regularly lectured on Old Testament books—believed and taught that, simply put, the many promises of a future savior (the Messiah) found in the Old Testament had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary.

That’s why the bulk of Luther’s 1523 treatise on Jesus the Jew seeks to demonstrate that key texts of the Old Testament—Genesis 3, Genesis 22, Genesis 49, 2 Samuel 7, Isaiah 7, and Daniel 9—only make sense when read as predicting a Savior who is both human AND divine, i.e., Jesus of Nazareth. Luther never wavered from this meaning. Because this is the position the New Testament—and therefore the Holy Spirit himself—had taken on this meaning (e.g., Matthew 1:23).

This “Christological interpretation” of the Old Testament was common among Christian theologians all the way back to Christ and his apostles. Christ clearly taught that the Scriptures—the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms—were fulfilled in him (e.g., Luke 24:44; John 5:39). And the apostle Paul told King Agrippa that he was “saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that he would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23; see Romans 1:1-7, etc.).

However, beginning already in the Middle Ages and increasing in number in the 16th century, some Christian interpreters of the Old Testament began to take more seriously the Jewish-Rabbinical exegetical tradition, even when it came to texts that had almost unanimously been regarded as foretelling the incarnation, birth, life, ministry, death, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth.

Evidently, these Jewish exegetes did not believe that Jesus of Nazareth had been promised anywhere in the Old Testament. Continuing the tradition of the Talmud (and, in fact, the tradition of those contemporaries of Jesus who rejected his messianic claims and viewed him as in league with the devil, see, e.g., John 10:19-21), these exegetes and the Judaism they represented had a very negative attitude about Jesus: He was born to an adulterous mother. He healed by magic. He died by stoning and hanging. And he ended up being punished in hell.

Luther sharply criticized the Christian interpreters who desired to “learn” from scholars who knew Hebrew but had such a negative attitude about Jesus. Why? Because with the meaning of the Old Testament the truth of the New Testament and of Christianity was at stake. To put it bluntly, if the Old Testament—beginning in Genesis 3—does not foretell that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, then Christianity is not just a waste of everybody’s time. Then it is a lie.

As I said, Luther never changed his position on the relationship between the Old Testament and Jesus of Nazareth. What does change is the practical advice Luther gives for how to deal with—live with—those who, like the Jews who were living in Europe—including Saxony—at the time—did not believe in Jesus: In his 1523 treatise, Luther recommended that unbelieving Jews should be treated in love, that they should be integrated into society, that they should be taught patiently. Twenty years later—even in his last sermon—he recommended that they should be

driven out of the land, as had been done, e.g., in England in 1290, in France in 1306, and in Spain in 1492.¹⁵

Importantly, Luther was not dogmatic about his practical advice. Other early Lutherans (e.g., John Brenz and Justus Jonas) continued Luther's earlier stance that emphasized peaceful coexistence and exemplary Christian living as offering opportunities for the patient evangelism of Jews.

Yet this is the key point: Luther's recommendation of "sharp mercy" is a *practical* recommendation driven by prudential considerations, i.e., considerations of how and when to do things to achieve legitimate goals. It is not a doctrine that is required for church fellowship.

In other words, Luther's relation to the Jews (and others with whom he vehemently disagreed such as Catholics and Anabaptists) fits neatly into his important and fundamental distinction of doctrine and life which I discuss in my book on *God's Masks*.¹⁶

According to this distinction, Luther taught that there can be no compromises or changes when it comes to doctrine, i.e., the teaching going on in the church. This is because doctrine is given by God in his Word, the Bible. Because God and his Word do not change, the church's doctrine does not change either. Because God and his Word are one, the church's doctrine is one, like a golden ring. One cannot agree with God in one area but disagree with him elsewhere.

Life, on the other hand, is ours to live on earth. In this life, compromising on the law's demands guided by prudence might be necessary to preserve outward peace so that the proclamation of the gospel might proceed. Or, as Luther explained in his sermon on Romans 13:8-10 incorporated in his *Church Postil*,¹⁷ love must always be the supreme law over all laws—and love always seeks what is best for the neighbor.

In 1523, Luther believed that tolerating the Jews among Christians was the prudent thing to do to persuade them of the truth of the Christian faith. By the late 1530s or early 1540s, Luther's assessment of the practical necessities had changed: Because he feared that the toleration of those whose teachings blasphemed Christ would cause the government to share the sins of others (1 Tim. 5:22), he advocated for the expulsion of the Jews to non-Christian lands, in keeping with earlier practices in other European countries.

Scholars have offered various explanations for this practical change. Was it Luther's disappointment that there were no mass conversions of Jews now that the gospel in its truth and purity had come to light again? Was it Luther's concern about the spread of judaizing tendencies among Christian scholars and groups such as the Anabaptists moving about in Germany in a dynamic situation in the late 1520s and 1530s, where it was not clear at all that the newly

¹⁵ The Protestants (Huguenots) in France in 1685—and my Lutheran ancestors in the archbishopric of Salzburg in 1731—would meet the same fate of expulsion. Indeed, in response to the rebellious peasants, Luther counseled Christians to be prepared to leave a country where the gospel was not permitted to be preached.

¹⁶ It is available online at LutherChurchState.org.

¹⁷ AE 76:267.

discovered faith would survive? Was it reading the 1530 book *The Whole Jewish Faith* by the Jewish convert to Lutheranism Anton Margaritha?

I think that the second and third factors probably changed Luther's practical advice. But for our purposes, the key thing to know is this: Luther viewed how the government should treat the Jews (and other deviating from the true faith, such as Catholics and Anabaptists) as a practical question that should be decided based on prudential considerations in furtherance of peace and the proclamation of the gospel. Changing circumstances—and new information (e.g., Margaritha's book)—might result in a reassessment of what is prudent in a given situation.

On the other hand, the doctrine that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised and expected in the Old Testament is not subject to any prudential considerations. Either it is true at all times, in all places, and for all people. Or it is not true at all.

Luther, the Jews, and Us

When considering what all this means for us today, it is important to analyze what happened to Luther and his teachings on the Jews in the 19th and 20th century and to perform this analysis in Luther's own relevant categories—doctrine and life. As outlined in my above-referenced book on *God's Masks*, the cultural and theological earthquake that was rationalism and the Enlightenment—it became the dominant intellectual framework in the 18th and 19th century—caused a reassessment of Luther.

While there had always been an interest in Luther's life among his followers, his theology had been the dominant interest for the first 200 years. Then, at the end of the age of Lutheran Orthodoxy, the interest definitely, and irreversibly, shifted to “the man Luther.” This means that instead of viewing him as a faithful teacher of God's Word, he came to be lauded (or condemned) as an advocate for freedom of conscience and individualism against overbearing authorities in church and state: Luther not only talked the talk but also walked the walk and was, like many advocates for freedom in the 18th and 19th centuries, punished and persecuted by the repressive authorities of his day, especially the papacy.

“The man Luther”—his actions divorced from his doctrine—also became of interest to the conservative response to the emerging political and philosophical liberalism (embodied in the French Revolution) that sought to find its footing in speculations about race and nature. In due course, Luther's *theological* opposition to the Jews—grounded in the Old Testament—was transformed into a cultural and racial antagonism that even disposed of the Old Testament and parts of the New as “Jewish.” While there is a non-deadly solution to a cultural antisemitism—“conversion” to the dominant culture—there is no such solution for racial antisemitism. Because one's race was perceived as unchanging and determinative of one's actions—causing, e.g., irreconcilable enmity between “the Jewish race” and “the Aryan race”—a race war became necessary to decide the matter once and for all in the “final solution” that was the Holocaust.

Importantly, with the devaluation of what mattered most to Luther—doctrine, especially the doctrine concerning Christ, i.e., the gospel (promised in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New)—came the focus on Luther's practical advice regarding the Jews. What Luther considered

to be prudential advice—by definition, eminently changeable and subject to attenuation—became effectively an unchangeable, *scientific* law that had to be enforced by mortal combat in the context of social/racial Darwinism: Either us or them.

This is where leading Lutheran theologians in 19th/20th century Germany—e.g., Paul Althaus and Werner Elert—failed. Instead of focusing on what mattered most to Luther—the defense of doctrine, including the integrity of the Scriptures and the distinction of doctrine and life—they mostly became passive bystanders or willing servants of a system that had the extermination of millions of Jews as its stated goal. Blinded by the racial ideology of their time, they did this instead of defending innocent life and peace in the “kingdom of the world” for the sake of the proclamation of the gospel. They could have done so by showing that any attempt to put Luther’s advice into practice in the 20th century—if it ever was prudent—would be highly impudent as it would have catastrophic consequences for the lives and property of Jews and Christians, believers and unbelievers alike.

Their failure did have catastrophic consequences. Six million Jews were killed by Germans and their allies. Millions of Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Chinese, Americans, Japanese, Germans, and others were killed as well. Many more were displaced, including my own parents and grandparents.

Would any intervention have made a difference? It is hard to tell, especially when considering the factor of time.

By 1933, when Hitler rose to power, his racial antisemitism was no longer something new in Germany, as prior propagandists (including Hitler himself) had already prepared the ground. At the same time, the Nazis—in church and state—understood that they had to mobilize Germans for the impending race war not just on a military level but also on an intellectual and spiritual level.

The 450th anniversary of Luther’s birth in 1933 was part of this effort, as it celebrated Luther as Hitler’s forerunner: Luther is the prophet and epitome of Germanness. Hitler’s rise to power completed the German nation’s self-realization. Part of this “spiritual rearmament” was also the publication of various digests of the “relevant” writings by Luther. In keeping with those dark times, they were short on doctrine and focused on the harsh “late Luther,” not the tolerant Luther of 1523.

In the process, these treatises supported the denial what Luther’s 1523 treatise emphatically affirmed—that Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior of the world, was a Jew by birth! These treatises therefore have a dual purpose: Rearm Germans for the race war. And thereby meet the apologetic need of showing the Nazis that “the real” Christ and Luther are not at all like what the Nazis think of Christianity: a Jewish sect that had sapped Germans of their vitality and was therefore a disadvantage in the impending race war.

In hindsight, this enthusiasm that uncritically melds into one National Socialism, Germany, Christianity, and Luther seems almost inevitable. Even someone like Dietrich Bonhoeffer had a limited command of Luther as a resource in the struggle against a deadly tyranny. Luther simply

hadn't been researched, understood, and taught in a way that questioned the culture and politics of the day. Instead, as noted, he had come to be seen over the past century as the incarnation of Germanness that was full of nationalist pathos but devoid of Christian doctrine.

Luther had also come to be seen as devoid of love and prudence. The Luther that was popular at the time—in keeping with the emphasis on a social Darwinist “struggle for survival”—was the Luther who advised harsh measures in the exceptional situation of the uprising of the peasants in the 1520s. Not the Luther who advised government leaders, as a rule, to practice prudence and restraint to avoid rebellion and bloodshed in the first place.

By the 1930s, Luther had also come to be seen devoid of understanding the government as God's *servant* (Romans 13:4), instituted by God and subject to God's law. Instead, just like the self-confident princes in Luther's day, government had come to understand itself as having boundless, *autonomous* authority, even if it was affirmed as given by God. The Luther who courageously held government leaders to the standard of God's law of love and selfless service, the Luther who advocated for virtuous government in service to all, especially the poor and needy, had become lost in time.

We today can learn from the past 500 years, especially when it comes to the peaceful life together of Jews and Christians, but also when it comes to the peaceful coexistence of Christians and the members of other religions, including Muslims. We can also learn from the past when it comes to the peaceful coexistence of the various Christian denominations in this world. And we can learn to do that without becoming agnostics or otherwise changing Christian doctrine by distinguishing, with Luther, between doctrine and life.

Thus, the key lesson should be that the gospel is proclaimed best when the government does what it can to preserve outward peace instead of imprudently executing abstract laws or ideologies—no matter how “true” or “godly” those rules or ideologies might appear to its proponents. Luther saw the *appropriate* moderation of necessarily imperfect laws in love to preserve life and peace at home and abroad as the government's biggest task and challenge.

Arguably, the “late” Luther's advice regarding the treatment of Jews fell short of this fundamental insight, set forth, e.g., in his treatise on government which he also published in 1523, the same year as his early treatise on the Jesus the Jew. This is because Luther understood that giving practical advice in a difficult political situation is itself very difficult, which is why he gave the general rule to err on the side of counseling the government to exercise grace and mercy, not strict justice.

This restrained, prudent understanding of all government action at home and abroad, in war and peace, is consistent with the biblical anthropology that teaches that *all* humans are equally created in the image of God. Luther understood that the most important part of that image was lost when humanity fell into sin—our ability to know God and his will perfectly and live perfectly according to his will. Yet part of this image was not lost—our ability to speak, our ability to produce culture and the arts, our reason, our ability to know God's law *to some extent*. There is therefore still something divine in every human being which allows us to live together peacefully with other humans, even after the fall.

What's more, the image of God in us is to be brought back to its fullness by faith in Christ. The government has a key role to play when it comes to *preventing* humans from killing each other so that the image of God may be restored fully in all by Christ. That is God's fundamental purpose for the government in service of the gospel, whether this goal will be reached for all people or not. The government must therefore not become a merciless mass executioner or instigator of unrest or violence at home or abroad, thereby preventing humans from reaching their ultimate goal—the full restoration of God's image in all by faith in Christ.

In sum, properly understanding Luther's advocacy of "harsh" practical measures against the Jews (and others) in the late 1530s and early 1540s in the context of his theology leads to the conclusion that it would *not* be prudent to follow his practical advice on this point. Instead, we should live peacefully in a religiously and culturally diverse society by patiently teaching the gospel and humbly serving all neighbors in love as God's masks.

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