

Chapter 1

Grace and peace in the Lord. Dear sir and good friend, I have received a treatise in which a Jew engages in dialog with a Christian. He dares to pervert the scriptural passages which we cite in testimony to our faith, concerning our Lord Christ and Mary his mother, and to interpret them quite differently. With this argument he thinks he can destroy the basis of our faith.

This is my reply to you and to him. It is not my purpose to quarrel with the Jews, nor to learn from them how they interpret or understand Scripture; I know all of that very well already. Much less do I propose to convert the Jews, for that is impossible. Those two excellent men, Lyra and Burgensis, together with others, truthfully described the Jews' vile interpretation for us two hundred and one hundred years ago respectively. Indeed they refuted it thoroughly. However, this was no help at all to the Jews, and they have grown steadily worse.

They have failed to learn any lesson from the terrible distress that has been theirs for over fourteen hundred years in exile. Nor can they obtain any end or definite terminus of this, as they suppose, by means of the vehement cries and laments to God. If these blows do not help, it is reasonable to assume that our talking and explaining will help even less.

Therefore a Christian should be content and not argue with the Jews. But if you have to or want to talk with them, do not say any more than this: "Listen, Jew, are you aware that Jerusalem and your sovereignty, together with your temple and priesthood, have been destroyed for over 1,460 years?" For this year, which we Christians write as the year 1542 since the birth of Christ, is exactly 1,468 years, going on fifteen hundred years, since Vespasian and Titus destroyed Jerusalem and expelled the Jews from the city. Let the Jews bite on this nut and dispute this question as long as they wish.

For such ruthless wrath of God is sufficient evidence that they assuredly have erred and gone astray. Even a child can comprehend

this. For one dare not regard God as so cruel that he would punish his own people so long, so terribly, so unmercifully, and in addition keep silent, comforting them neither with words nor with deeds, and fixing no time limit and no end to it. Who would have faith, hope, or love toward such a God? Therefore this work of wrath is proof that the Jews, surely rejected by God, are no longer his people, and neither is he any longer their God. This is in accord with Hosea 1:9, "Call his name Not my people, for you are not my people and I am not your God." Yes, unfortunately, this is their lot, truly a terrible one. They may interpret this as they will; we see the facts before our eyes, and these do not deceive us.

If there were but a spark of reason or understanding in them, they would surely say to themselves: "O Lord God, something has gone wrong with us. Our misery is too great, too long, too severe; God has forgotten us!" etc. To be sure, I am not a Jew, but I really do not like to contemplate God's awful wrath toward this people. It sends a shudder of fear through body and soul, for I ask, What will the eternal wrath of God in hell be like toward false Christians and all unbelievers? Well, let the Jews regard our Lord Jesus as they will. We behold the fulfillment of the words spoken by him in Luke 21:20: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near ... for these are days of vengeance. For great distress shall be upon the earth and wrath upon this people.

In short, as has already been said, do not engage much in debate with Jews about the articles of our faith. From their youth they have been so nurtured with venom and rancor against our Lord that there is no hope until they reach the point where their misery finally makes them pliable and they are forced to confess that the Messiah has come, and that he is our Jesus. Until such a time it is much too early, yes, it is useless to argue with them about how God is triune, how he became man, and how Mary is the mother of God. No human reason nor any human heart will ever grant these things, much less the embittered, venomous, blind heart of the Jews. As has already been said, what God cannot reform with such cruel blows, we will be unable to change with words and works. Moses was unable to reform the Pharaoh by means of plagues, miracles, pleas, or threats; he had to let him drown in the sea.

Now, in order to strengthen our faith, we want to deal with a few crass follies of the Jews in their belief and their exegesis of the Scriptures, since they so maliciously revile our faith. If this should move any Jew to reform and repent, so much the better. We are now not talking with the Jews but about the Jews and their dealings, so that our Germans, too, might be informed.

There is one thing about which they boast and pride them selves beyond measure, and that is their descent from the foremost people on earth, from Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and from the twelve patriarchs, and thus from the holy people of Israel. St. Paul himself admits this when he says in Romans 9:5: *Quorum patres*, that is, "To them belong the patriarchs, and of their race is the Christ," etc. And Christ himself declares in John 4:22, "Salvation is from the Jews." Therefore they boast of being the noblest, yes, the only noble people on earth. In comparison with them and in their eyes we Gentiles (Goyim) are not human; in fact we hardly deserve to be considered poor worms by them. For we are not of that high and noble blood, lineage, birth, and descent. This is their argument, and indeed I think it is the greatest and strongest reason for their pride and boasting.

Therefore, God has to endure that in their synagogues, their prayers, songs, doctrines, and their whole life, they come and stand before him and plague him grievously (if I may speak of God in such a human fashion). Thus he must listen to their boasts and their praises to him for setting them apart from the Gentiles, for letting them be descended from the holy patriarchs, and for selecting them to be his holy and peculiar people, etc. And there is no limit and no end to this boasting about their descent and their physical birth from the fathers.

And to fill the measure of their raving, mad, and stupid folly, they boast and they thank God, in the first place, because they were created as human beings and not as animals; in the second place, because they are Israelites and not Goyim (Gentiles); in the third place because they were created as males and not as females. They did not learn such tomfoolery from Israel but from the Goyim. For history records that the Greek Plato daily accorded God such praise and thanksgiving—if such arrogance and blasphemy may be termed praise of God. This man, too, praised his gods for these three items: that he was a human being and not an animal; a male and not a

female; a Greek and not a non-Greek or barbarian. This is a fool's boast, the gratitude of a barbarian who blasphemes God! Similarly, the Italians fancy themselves the only human beings; they imagine that all other people in the world are nonhumans, mere ducks or mice by comparison.

No one can take away from them their pride concerning their blood and their descent from Israel. In the Old Testament they lost many a battle in wars over this matter, though no Jew understands this. All the prophets censured them for it, for it betrays an arrogant, carnal presumption devoid of spirit and of faith. They were also slain and persecuted for this reason. St. John the Baptist took them to task severely because of it, saying, "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" [Matt. 3:9]. He did not call them Abraham's children but a "brood of vipers" [Matt. 3:7]. Oh, that was too insulting for the noble blood and race of Israel, and they declared, "He has a demon" [Matt. 11:18] Our Lord also calls them a "brood of vipers"; furthermore, in John' 3:39 he states: "If you were Abraham's children would do what Abraham did.... You are of your father the devil." It was intolerable to them to hear that they were not Abraham's but the devil's children, nor can they bear to hear this today. If they should surrender this boast and argument, their whole system which is built on it would topple and change.

I hold that if their Messiah, for whom they hope, should come and do away with their boast and its basis they would crucify and blaspheme him seven times worse than they did our Messiah; and they would also say that he was not the true Messiah, but a deceiving devil. For they have portrayed their Messiah to themselves as one who would strengthen and increase such carnal and arrogant error regarding nobility of blood and lineage. That is the same as saying that he should assist them in blaspheming God and in viewing his creatures with disdain, including the women, who are also human beings and the image of God as well as we; more over, they are our own flesh and blood, such as mother, sister, daughter, housewives, etc. For in accordance with the aforementioned threefold song of praise, they do not hold Sarah (as a woman) to be as noble as Abraham (as a man). Perhaps they wish to honor themselves for being born half noble, of a noble father, and half ignoble, of an ignoble mother. But enough of this tomfoolery and trickery.

We propose to discuss their argument and boast and prove convincingly before God and the world not before the Jews, for, as already said, they would accept this neither from Moses nor from their Messiah himself that their argument is quite empty and stands condemned. To this end we quote Moses in Genesis 17, whom they surely ought to believe if they are true Israelites. When God instituted circumcision, he said, among other things, "Any uncircumcised male shall be cut off from his people" [Gen. 17:14]. With these words God consigns to condemnation all who are born of flesh, no matter how noble, high, or how low their birth may have been. He does not even exempt from this judgment the seed of Abraham, although Abraham was not merely of high and noble birth from Noah, but was also adjudged holy (Genesis 15) and became Abraham instead of Abram (Genesis 17). Yet none of his children shall be numbered among God's people, but rather shall he be rooted out, and God will not be his God, unless he, over and above his birth, is also circumcised and accepted into the covenant of God.

To be sure, before the world one person is properly accounted nobler than another by reason of his birth, or smarter than another because of his intelligence, or stronger and more handsome than another because of his body, or richer and mightier than another in view of his possessions, or better than another on account of his special virtues. For this miserable, sinful, and mortal life must be marked by such differentiation and inequality; the requirements of daily life and the preservation of government make it indispensable.

But to strut before God and boast about being so noble, so exalted, and so rich compared to other people—that is devilish arrogance, since every birth according to the flesh is condemned before him without exception in the aforementioned verse, if his covenant and word do not come to the rescue once again and create a new and different birth, quite different from the old, first birth. So if the Jews boast in their prayer before God and glory in the fact that they are the patriarchs' noble blood, lineage, and children, and that he should regard them and be gracious to them in view of this, while they condemn the Gentiles as ignoble and not of their blood, my dear man, what do you suppose such a prayer will achieve? This is what it will achieve: Even if the Jews were as holy as their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob themselves, yes, even if they were angels in heaven, on account of such a prayer they would have

to be hurled into the abyss of hell. How much less will such prayers deliver them from their exile and return them to Jerusalem!

For what does such devilish, arrogant prayer do other than to give God's word the lie, for God declares: Whoever is born and not circumcised shall not only be ignoble and worthless but shall also be damned and shall not be a part of my people, and I will not be his God. The Jews rage against this with their blasphemous prayer as if to say: "No, no, Lord God, that is not true; you must hear us, because we are of the noble lineage of the holy fathers. By reason of such noble birth you must establish us as lords over all the earth and in heaven too. If you fail to do this, you break your word and do us an injustice, since you have sworn to our fathers that you will accept their seed as your people forever."

This is just as though a king, a prince, a lord, or a rich, handsome, smart, pious, virtuous person among us Christians were to pray thus to God: "Lord God, see what a great king and lord I am! See how rich, smart, and pious I am! See what a handsome lad or lass I am in comparison to others! Be gracious to me, help me, and in view of all of this save me! The other people are not as deserving, because they are not so handsome, rich, smart, pious, noble, and high-born as I am." What, do you suppose, should such a prayer merit? It would merit that thunder and lightning strike down from heaven and that sulphur and hellfire strike from below. That would be just punishment; for flesh and blood must not boast before God. For as Moses says, whoever is born even from holy patriarchs and from Abraham himself stands condemned before God and must not boast before him. St. Paul says the same thing in Romans 3:27, as does John 3:6.

Such a prayer was also spoken by the Pharisee in the Gospel as he boasted about all his blessings, saying, "I am not like other men." Moreover, his prayer was beautifully adorned, since he said it with thanksgiving and fancied that he was sitting on God's lap as his pet child. But thunder and lightning from heaven cast him down to hell's abyss, as Christ himself declared, saying that the publican was justified but the Pharisee condemned. Oh, what do we poor muckworms, maggots, stench, and filth presume to boast of before him who is the God and Creator of heaven and earth, who made us out of dirt and out of nothing! And as far as our nature, birth, and

essence are concerned, we are but dirt and nothing in his eyes; all that we are and have comes from his grace and his rich mercy.

Abraham was no doubt even nobler than the Jews, since as we pointed out above, he was descended from the noblest patriarch, Noah who in his day was the greatest and oldest lord, priest, and father of the entire world and from the other nine succeeding patriarchs. Abraham saw, heard, and lived with all of them, and some of them (as for instance Shem, Shelah, Eber) outlived him by many years. So Abraham obviously was not lacking in nobility of blood and birth; and yet this did not in the least aid him in being numbered among God's people. No, he was idolatrous, and he would have remained under condemnation if God's word had not called him, as Joshua in chapter 24:2 informs us out of God's own mouth: "Your fathers lived of old beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him," etc.

Even later, after he had been called and sanctified through God's word and through faith, according to Genesis 15, Abraham did not boast of his birth or of his virtues. When he spoke with God (Genesis 18) he did not say: "Look how noble I am, born from Noah and the holy patriarchs, and descended from your holy nation," nor did he say, "How pious and holy I am in comparison with other people!" No, he said, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes" [Gen. 18:27]. This is, indeed, how a creature must speak to its Creator, not for getting what it is before him and how it is regarded by him. For that is what God said of Adam and of all his children (Genesis 3:19), "You are dust, and to dust you shall return," as death itself persuades us visibly and experientially, to counteract, if need be, any such foolish, vain, and vexatious presumption.

Now you can see what fine children of Abraham the Jews really are, how well they take after their father, yes, what a fine people of God they are. They boast before God of their physical birth and of the noble blood inherited from their fathers, despising all other people, although God regards them in all these respects as dust and ashes and damned by birth the same as all other heathen. And yet they give God the lie; they insist on being in the right, and with such blasphemous and damnable prayer they purpose to wrest God's grace from him and to regain Jerusalem.

Furthermore, even if the Jews were seven times blinder than they are if that were possible they would still have to see that Esau or Edom, as far as his physical birth is concerned, was as noble as Jacob, since he was not only the son of the same father, Isaac, and of the same mother, Rebekah, but he was also the firstborn; and primogeniture at that time conferred the highest nobility over against the other children. But what did his equal birth or even his primogeniture by virtue of which he was far nobler than Jacob benefit him? He was still not numbered among God's people, although he called Abraham his grandfather and Sarah his grandmother just as Jacob did, indeed, as has already been said, even more validly than did Jacob. Conversely,

Abraham himself as well as Sarah had to regard him as their grandson, the son of Isaac and Rebekah; they even had to regard him as the firstborn and the nobler, and Jacob as the lesser. But tell me, what good did his physical birth and his noble blood inherited from Abraham do him?

Someone may interpose that Esau forfeited his honor because he became evil, etc. We must rejoin, first of all, that the question at issue is whether nobility of blood in itself is so valid before God that one could thereby be or become God's people. If it is not, why then do the Jews exalt this birth so highly before other children of men! But if it is valid, why then does God not guard it from falling? For if God regards physical birth as adequate for making the descendants of the holy patriarchs his people, he dare not let them become evil, thereby losing his people and becoming a non God. If he does, however, let them become evil, it is certain that he does not regard birth as a means of yielding or producing a people for him.

In the second place, Esau was not ejected from the people of God because he became evil later on, nor was Jacob counted among the people of God in view of his subsequent good life. No, while they were both still in their mother's womb the word of God distinguished between the two: Jacob was called Esau was not, in accordance with the words, "The elder shall serve the younger" [Gen. 25:23]. This was not at all affected by the fact that they were both carried under the same mother's heart; that they were both nourished with the same milk and blood of one and the same mother, Rebekah; that they were born of her at the same time. So one must say that no matter how identical flesh, blood, milkbody, and mother were in

this instance, they could not help Esau, nor could they hinder Jacob from acquiring the grace by which people become God's children or his people; decisive here are the word and calling, which ignore the birth.

Ishmael, too, can say that he is equally a true and natural son of Abraham. But what does his physical birth avail him? Despite this, he has to yield up the home and heritage of Abraham and leave it to his brother Isaac. You may say that Ishmael was born of Hagar while Isaac was born of Sarah. If anything, this strengthens our argument. For Isaac's birth from Sarah was effected by the word of God and not by flesh and blood, since Sarah was past the natural age for bearing children. To discuss the question of birth a bit further, although Ishmael is Abraham's flesh and blood and his natural son, still the flesh and blood of such a holy father does not help him. It rather harms him, because he has no more than flesh and blood from Abraham and does not also have God's word in his favor. The fact that Isaac is descended from the blood of Abraham does not handicap him even though it was useless to Ishmael because he has the word of God which distinguishes him from his brother Ishmael, who is of the flesh and blood of the same Abraham.

Why should so much ado be made of this? After all, if birth counts before God, I can claim to be just as noble as any Jew, yes, just as noble as Abraham himself, as David, as all the holy prophets and apostles. Nor will I owe them any thanks if they consider me just as noble as themselves before God by reason of my birth. And if God refuses to acknowledge my nobility and birth as the equal to that of Isaac, Abraham, David, and all the saints, I maintain that he is doing me an injustice and that he is not a fair judge. For I will not give it up and neither Abraham, David, prophets, apostles nor even an angel in heaven, shall deny me the right to boast that Noah, so far as physical birth or flesh and blood is concerned, is my true, natural ancestor, and that his wife (whoever she may have been) is my true, natural ancestress; for we are all descended, since the Deluge, from that one Noah. We did not descend from Cain, for his family perished forever in the flood together with many of the cousins, brothers-in-law, and friends of Noah.

I also boast that Japheth, Noah's firstborn son, is my true, natural ancestor and his wife (whoever she may have been) is my true, natural ancestress; for as Moses informs us in Genesis 10, he is the

progenitor of all of us Gentiles. Thus Shem, the second son of Noah, and all of his descendants have no grounds to boast over against his older brother Japheth because of their birth. Indeed, if birth is to play a role, then Japheth as the oldest son and the true heir has reason for boasting over against Shem, his younger brother, and Shem's descendants, whether these be called Jews or Ishmaelites or Edomites. But what does physical primogeniture help the good Japheth, our ancestor? Nothing at all. Shem enjoys precedence—not by reason of birth, which would accord precedence to Japheth, but because God's word and calling are the arbiter here.

I could go back to the beginning of the world and trace our common ancestry from Adam and Eve, later from Shem, Enoch, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech; for all of these are our ancestors just as well as the Jews', and we share equally in the honor, nobility, and fame of descent from them as do the Jews. We are their flesh and blood just the same as Abraham and all his seed are. For we were in the loins of the same holy fathers in the same measure as they were, and there is no difference whatsoever with regard to birth or flesh and blood, as reason must tell us. Therefore the blind Jews are truly stupid fools, much more absurd than the Gentiles, to boast so before God of their physical birth, though they are by reason of it no better than the Gentiles, since we both partake of one birth, one flesh and blood, from the very first, best, and holiest ancestors. Neither one can reproach or upbraid the other about some peculiarity without implicating himself at the same time.

But let us move on. David lumps us all together nicely and convincingly when he declares in Psalm 51:5: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Now go, whether you are Jew or Gentile, born of Adam or Abraham, of Enoch or David, and boast before God of your fine nobility, of your exalted lineage, your ancient ancestry! Here you learn that we all are conceived and born in sin, by father and mother, and no human being is excluded.

But what does it mean to be born in sin other than to be born under God's wrath and condemnation, so that by nature or birth we are unable to be God's people or children, and our birth, glory, and nobility, our honor and praise denote nothing more and can denote nothing else than that, in default of anything to our credit other

than our physical birth, we are condemned sinners, enemies of God, and in his disfavor? There, Jew, you have your boast, and we Gentiles have ours together with you, as well as you with us. Now go ahead and pray that God might respect your nobility, your race, your flesh and blood.

This I wanted to say for the strengthening of our faith; for the Jews will not give up their pride and boasting about their nobility and lineage. As was said above, their hearts are hardened. Our people, however, must be on their guard against them, lest they be misled by this impenitent, accursed people who give God the lie and haughtily despise all the world. For the Jews' would like to entice us Christians to their faith, and they do this wherever they can. If God is to become gracious also to them, the Jews, they must first of all banish such blasphemous prayers and songs, that boast so arrogantly about their lineage, from their synagogues, from their hearts, and from their lips, for such prayers ever increase and sharpen God's wrath toward them. However, they will not do this, nor will they humble themselves abjectly, except for a few individuals whom God draws unto himself particularly and delivers from their terrible ruin.

The other boast and nobility over which the Jews gloat and because of which they haughtily and vainly despise all mankind is their circumcision, which they received from Abraham. My God, what we Gentiles have to put up with in their synagogues, prayers, songs, and doctrines! What a stench we poor people are in their nostrils because we are not circumcised! Indeed, God himself must again submit to miserable torment if I may put it thus as they confront him with inexpressible presumption, and boast: "Praised be Thou, King of the world, who singled us out from all the nations and sanctified us by the covenant of circumcision!" And similarly with many other words, the tenor of all of which is that God should esteem them above the rest of the world because they in compliance with his decree are circumcised, and that he should condemn all other people, just as they do and wish to do.

In this boast of nobility they glory as much as they do in their physical birth. Consequently I believe that if Moses himself would appear together with Elijah and their Messiah and would try to deprive them of this boast or forbid such prayers and doctrine, they would probably consider all three of them to be the three worst

devils in hell, and they would be at a loss to know how to curse and damn them adequately, to say nothing of believing them. For they have decided among themselves that Moses, together with Elijah and the Messiah, should endorse circumcision, yes, rather that they should help to strengthen and praise such arrogance and pride in circumcision, that these should, like themselves, look upon all Gentiles as awful filth and stench because they are not circumcised. Moses, Elijah, and the Messiah must do an that they prescribe, think, and wish. They insist that they are right, and if God himself were to do other than they think, he would be in the wrong.