

Chapter 5

Some twist the word *donec* ("until") and try to make "because" (*quia*) out of it. So they read: "The scepter of Judah will not depart *donec*; that is, because (*quia*) the Messiah will come." He who perpetrated this is a precious master, worthy of being crowned with thistles. He reverses the correct order of things in this manner: The Messiah will come, therefore the scepter will remain. Jacob, however, first makes Judah a prince and a lion to whom the scepter is assigned prior to the coming of the Messiah; he then, in turn, will give it to the Messiah. Thus Judah retains neither the principality nor the role of lion nor the scepter, which Jacob assigned to him. Furthermore, the fool arbitrarily makes out of the term "until" a new term, "because." This, of course, the language does not permit.

And finally there is a rabbi who twists the word "come" and claims that it means "to set," just as the Hebrew uses the word "to come" for the setting of the sun. This fellow is given to such nonsense that I am at a loss to know whether he is trying to walk on his head or on his ears. For I fail to understand the purport of his words when he says that the scepter will not depart from Judah until Shiloh (the city) goes down (sets). Then David, the Messiah, will come. Where, to repeat what was said above, was the scepter of Judah prior to Shiloh or Saul? But they who rage against their own conscience and patent truth must needs speak such nonsense. In brief, Lyra is right when he says that even if they invent these and many other similar glosses, the Chaldaean text topples all of them and convicts them of being willful liars, blasphemers, and perverters of God's word. However, I wanted to present this to us Germans so that we might see what rascals the blind Jews are and how powerfully the truth of God in our midst stands with us and against them.

And now that some have noticed that such evasions and silly glosses are null and void, they admit that the Messiah came at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem; but, they say, he is in the world secretly, sitting in Rome among the beggars and doing penance for the Jews until the time for his public appearance is at hand. These are not the words of Jews or of men but those of the arrogant, jeering devil, who most

bitterly and venomously mocks us Christians and our Christ through the Jews, as if to say: "The Christians glory much in their Christ, but they have to submit to the yoke of the Romans; they must suffer and be beggars in the world, not only in the days of the emperors, but also in those of the pope. After all, they are impotent in my kingdom, the world, and I will surely remain their master." Yes, vile devil, just mock and laugh your fill over this now; you will still tremble enough for it.

Thus the words of Jacob fared very much the same as did these words of Christ in our day: "This is my body which is given for you." The enthusiasts distorted each word singly and collectively, putting the last things first, rather than accept the true meaning of the text, as we have observed. It is clear in this instance too that Christians such as Lyra, Raymund, Burgensis, and others certainly went to great lengths in an effort to convert the Jews. They hounded them from one word to another, just as foxes are hunted down. But after having been hounded a long time, they still persisted in their obstinacy and now set to erring consciously, and would not depart from their rabbis. Thus we must let them go their way and ignore their malicious blasphemy and lying.

I once experienced this myself. Three learned Jews came to me, hoping to discover a new Jew in me because we were beginning to read Hebrew here in Wittenberg, and remarking that matters would soon improve since we Christians were starting to read their books. When I debated with them, they gave me their glosses, as they usually do. But when I forced them back to the text, they soon fled from it, saying that they were obliged to believe their rabbis as we do the pope and the doctors, etc. I took pity on them and give them a letter of recommendation to the authorities, asking that for Christ's sake they let them freely go their way. But later, I found out that they called Christ a tola, that is, a hanged highwayman. Therefore I do not wish to have anything more to do with any Jew. As St. Paul says, they are consigned to wrath; the more one tries to help them the baser and more stubborn they become. Leave them to their own devices.

We Christians, however, can greatly strengthen our faith with this statement of Jacob, assuring us that Christ is now present and that he has been present for almost fifteen hundred years -- but not, as the devil jeers, as a beggar in Rome; rather, as

a ruling Messiah. If this were not so, then God's word and promise would be a lie. If the Jews would only let Holy Scripture be God's word, they would also have to admit that there has been a Messiah since the time of Herod (no matter where), rather than awaiting another. But before doing this, they will rather tear and pervert Scripture until it is no longer Scripture. And this is in fact their situation: They have neither Messiah nor Scripture, just as Isaiah 28 prophesied of them.

But may this suffice on the saying of Jacob. Let us take another saying which the Jews did not and cannot twist and distort in this way. In the last words of David, we find him saying (II Samuel 23:2): "The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me, his word is upon my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel" And a little later [in v. 5]: "Does not my house stand so with God?" Or, to translate it literally from the Hebrew: "My house is of course not thus," etc. That is to say: "My house is, after all, not worthy; this is too glorious a thing and it is too much that God does all of this for a poor man like me." "For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure." Note well how David exults with so numerous and seemingly superfluous words that the Spirit of God has spoken through him and that God's word is upon his tongue. Thus he says: "The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel," etc. It is as if he were to say: "My dear people, give ear. Whoever can hear, let him hear. Here is God, who is speaking and saying, 'Listen,'" etc. What is it, then, that you exhort us to listen to? What is God saying through you? What does he wish to say to you? What shall we hear?

This is what you are to hear: that God made an everlasting, firm, and sure covenant with me and my house, a covenant of which my house is not worthy. Indeed, my house is nothing compared to God; and yet he did this. What is this everlasting covenant? Oh, open your ears and listen! My house and God have bound themselves together forever through an oath. This is a covenant, a promise which must exist and endure forever. For it is God's covenant and pledge, which no one shall or can break or hinder. My house shall stand eternally; it is "ordered in all things and secure." The word aruk ("ordered") conveys the meaning that it will not disappoint or fail one in the least. Have you heard this? And do you believe

that God is truthful? Yes, without doubt. My dear people, do you also believe that he can and will keep his word?

Well and good, if God is truthful and almighty and spoke these words through David which no Jew dares to deny then David's house and government (which are the same thing) must have endured since the time he spoke these words, and must still endure and will endure forever that is, eternally. Otherwise, God would be a liar. In brief, either we must have David's house or heir, who reigns from the time of David to the present and in eternity, or David died as a flagrant liar to his last day, uttering these words (as it seems) as so much idle chitchat: "God speaks, God says, God promises." It is futile to join the Jews in giving God the lie, saying that he did not keep these precious words and promises. We must, I say, have an heir of David from his time onward, in proof of the fact that his house has never stood empty no matter where this heir may be. For his house must have been continuous and must ever remain so. Here we find God's word that this is an everlasting, firm, and sure covenant, without a flaw. but everything in it must be aruk, magnificently ordered, as God orders all his work. Psalm 111:3: "Full of honor and majesty in his work."

Now let the Jews produce such an heir of David. For they must do so, since we read here that David's house is everlasting, a house that no one will destroy or hinder, but rather as we also read here [II Sam. 23:4], it shall be like the sun shining forth, which no cloud can hinder. If they are unable to present such an heir or house of David, then they stand fully condemned by this verse, and they show that they are surely without God, without David, without Messiah, without everything, that they are lost and eternally condemned. Of course, they cannot deny that the kingdom or house of David endured uninterruptedly until the Babylonian captivity, even throughout the Babylonian captivity, and following this to the days of Herod. It endured, I say, not by its own power and merit but by virtue of this everlasting covenant made with the house of David. For most of their kings and rulers were evil, practicing idolatry, killing the prophets, and living shamefully. For example, Rehoboam, Joram, Joash, Ahaz, Manasseh, etc., surpassed all the Gentiles or the kings of Israel in vileness. Because of them, the house and tribe of David fully deserved to be

exterminated. That was what finally happened to the kingdom of Israel. However, the covenant made with David remained in effect. The books of the kings and of the prophets exultantly declare that God preserved a lamp or a light to the house of David which he would not permit to be extinguished. Thus we read in II Kings 8:19 and in II Chronicles 21:7: "Yet the Lord would not destroy the house of David because of the covenant which he had made with David, since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever." The same thought is expressed in II Samuel 7:12.

By way of contrast, look at the kingdom of Israel, where the rule never remained with the same tribe or family beyond the second generation, with the exception of Jehu [65] who by reason of a special promise carried it into the fourth generation of his house. Otherwise it always passed from one tribe to another, and at times scarcely survived for one generation; moreover, it was not long until the kingdom died out completely. But through the wondrous deeds of God the kingdom of Judah remained within the tribe of Judah and the house of David. It withstood strong opposition on the part of the Gentiles round about, from Israel itself, from uprisings within, and from gross idolatries and sins, so that it would not have been surprising if it had perished in the third generation under Rehoboam, or at least under Joram, Ahaz, and Manasseh. But it had a strong Protector who did not let it die or let its light become extinguished. The promise was given that it would remain firm, eternally firm and secure. And so it has remained and must remain down to the present and forever; for God does not and cannot lie.

The Jews drivel that the kingdom perished with the Babylonian captivity. As we said earlier, this is empty talk; for this constituted but a short punishment, definitely confined to a period of seventy years. God had pledged his word for that. Moreover, he preserved them during this time through splendid prophets. Furthermore, King Jehoiachin was exalted above all the kings in Babylon, and Daniel and his companions ruled not only over Judah and Israel but also over the Babylonian Empire. [66] Even if their seat of government was not in Jerusalem for a short span of time, they nonetheless ruled elsewhere much more gloriously than in Jerusalem. Thus we may say that the house of David did not become extinct in Babylon but shone more resplendently

than in Jerusalem. They only had to vacate their homeland for a while by way of punishment. For when a king takes the field of a foreign country he cannot be regarded as an ex-king because he is not in his home land, especially if he is attended by great victory and good fortune against many nations. Rather one should say that he is more illustrious abroad than at home.

If God kept his covenant from the time of David to that of Herod, preserving his house from extinction, he must have kept it from that time on to the present, and he will keep it eternally, so that David's house has not died and cannot die eternally. For we dare not rebuke God as half truthful and half untruthful, saying that he kept his covenant and preserved David's house faithfully from David's time to that of Herod, but that after the time of Herod he began to lie and to become deceitful, ignoring and altering his covenant. No, for as the house of David remained and shone up to Herod's time, thus it had to remain under Herod and after Herod, shining to eternity.

Now we note how nicely this saying of David harmonizes with that of the patriarch Jacob: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the mehoqeq from his feet until Messiah comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" [Gen. 49:10]. How can it be expressed more clearly or differently that David's house will shine forth until the Messiah comes? Then, through him, the house of David will shine not only over Judah and Israel but also over the Gentiles, or over other and more numerous countries. This indeed does not mean that it will become extinct, but that it will shine farther and more lustrosly than before his advent. And thus, as David says, this is an eternal kingdom and an eternal covenant. Therefore it follows most cogently from this that the Messiah came when the scepter departed from Judah _ unless we want to revile God by saying that he did not keep his covenant and oath. Even if the stiff-necked, stubborn Jews refuse to accept this, at least our faith has been confirmed and strengthened by it. We do not give a fig for their crazy glosses, which they have spun out of their own heads. We have the clear text.

These last words of David to revert to them once more are founded on God's own word, where he says to him, as he here boasts at his end: "Would you build me a house to dwell in?"

(II Sam. 7 [:5]). You can read what follows there _ how God continues to relate that until now he has lived in no house, but that he had chosen him [i.e., David] to be a prince over his people, to whom he would assign a fixed place and grant him rest, concluding, "I will make you a house" [cf. II Sam. 7:11]. That is to say: Neither ,you nor anyone else will build me a house to dwell in; I am far, far too great for that, as we read also in Isaiah 66. No, I will build you a house. For thus says the Lord, as Nathan asserts: "The Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house" [II Sam. 7:11]. Everyone is familiar with a house built by man_ a very perishable structure fashioned of stone and wood. But a house built by God means the establishing of the father of a family who would ever after have heirs and descendants of his blood and lineage. Thus Moses says in Exodus 1 [:21] that God built houses for the midwives because they did not obey the king's command, but let the infants live and did not kill them. On the other hand, he breaks down and extinguishes the houses of the kings of Israel in the second generation.

Thus David has here a secure house, built by God, which is to have heirs forever. It is not a plain house; no, he says, "You shall be prince over my people Israel" [II Sam. 7:8]. Therefore it shall be called a princely, a royal house -- that is, the house of Prince David or King David, in which your children shall reign forever and be princes such as you are. The books and histories of the kings prove this true, tracing it down to the time of Herod. Until that time the scepter and saphra are in the tribe of Judah.

Now follows the second theme, concerning Shiloh. How long shall my house thus stand and how long shall my descendants rule? He answers thus [II Sam. 7:12-16]: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come forth from your body (utero -- that is, from your flesh and blood), and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chastise him with the rod of men (as one whips children), with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be

established for ever." This statement is found almost verbatim also in I Chronicles 18 [17:11-14], where you may read it.

Whoever would refer these verses to Solomon would indeed be an arbitrary interpreter. For although Solomon was not yet born at this time, indeed the adultery with his mother Bathsheba had not yet even been committed, he is nonetheless not the seed of David born after David's death, of whom the text says, "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you." For Solomon was born during David's lifetime. It would be foolish, yes, ridiculous, to say that the term "raised up" here means that Solomon should be raised up after David's death to become king or to build the house; for three other chapters (I Kings 1, I Chronicles 24 [28], and I Chronicles 29) attest that Solomon was not only instated as king during his father's lifetime, but that he also received command from his father David, as well as the entire plan of the temple, of all the rooms, its detailed equipment, and the organization of the whole kingdom. It is obvious that Solomon did not build the temple or order the kingdom or the priesthood according to his own plans but according to those of David, who prescribed everything, in fact, already arranged it during his lifetime.

There is also a great discrepancy and a difference in words between II Samuel 7 and I Chronicles 24 [28] and 29. The former states that God will build David an eternal house, the latter that Solomon shall build a house in God's name. The former passage states without any condition or qualification that it shall stand forever and be hindered by no sin. The latter passage conditions its continuance on Solomon's and his descendants' continued piety. Since he did not remain pious, he not only lost the ten tribes of Israel but was also exterminated in the seventh generation. The former is a *promissio gratiae* ["a promise of grace"], the latter a *promissio legis* ["a promise of law"]. In the former passage David thanks God that his house will stand forever, in the latter he does not thank God that Solomon's temple will stand forever. In other words, the two passages refer to different times and to different things and houses. And although God does call Solomon his son in the latter also and says that he will be his father, this promise is dependent on the condition that Solomon will remain pious. Such a condition is not found in

the former passage. It is not at all rare that God calls his saints, as well as the angels, his children. But the son mentioned in II Samuel 7:14 is a different and special son who will retain the kingdom unconditionally and be hindered by no sin.

Also the prophets and the psalms quote II Samuel 7, which speaks of David's seed after his death, whereas they pay no attention to I Chronicles 24 [28] and 29, which speak of Solomon. In Psalm 89 [:1-4] we read: "I will sing of thy steadfast love, O Lord, for ever; with my mouth I will proclaim thy faithfulness to all generations. For thy steadfast love was established for ever, thy faithfulness is firm as the heavens. Thou hast said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: "I will establish your descendants for ever, and build your throne for all generations.'" These too are clear words. God vows and swears an oath to grant David his grace forever, and to build and preserve his house, seed, and throne eternally.

Later, in verse 19, we have an express reference to the true David. This verse contains the most beautiful prophecies of the Messiah, which cannot apply to Solomon. For he was not the sovereign of all kings on earth, nor did his rule extend over land and sea. These facts cannot be glossed over. Furthermore, the kingdom did not remain with Solomon's house. He had no absolute promise with regard to this, but only a promise conditional on his piety. But it was the house of David that had the promise, and he had more sons than Solomon. And as the history books report, the scepter of Judah at times passed from brother to brother, from cousin to cousin, but always remained in the house of David. For instance, Ahaziah left no son, and Ahaz left none, so according to the custom of Holy Scripture the nephews had to be heirs and sons.

Anyone who would venture to contradict such clear and convincing statements of Scripture regarding the eternal house of David, which are borne out by the histories, showing that there were always kings or princes down to the Messiah, must be either the devil himself or whoever is his follower. For I can readily believe that the devil, or whoever it may be, would be unwilling to acknowledge a Messiah, but still he would have to acknowledge David's eternal house and throne. For he cannot deny the clear words of God in his oath vowing

that his word would not be changed and that he would not lie to David, not even by reason of any sin, as the aforementioned psalm [Ps. 89] impressively and clearly states.

Now such an eternal house of David is nowhere to be found unless we place the scepter before the Messiah and the Messiah after the scepter, and then join the two together: namely, by asserting that the Messiah appeared when the scepter departed and that David's house was thus preserved forever. In that way God is found truthful and faithful in his word, covenant, and oath. For it is obvious that the scepter of Judah completely collapsed at the time of Herod, but much more so when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the scepter of Judah. Now if David's house is eternal and God truthful, then the true King of Judah, the Messiah, must have come at that time. No barking, interpreting, or glossing will change this. The text is too authoritative and too clear. If the Jews refuse to admit it, we do not care.

For us it is enough that, first of all, our Christian faith finds here most substantial proof, and that such verses afford me very great joy and comfort that we have such strong testimony also in the Old Testament. Second, we are certain that even the devil and the Jews themselves cannot refute this in their hearts and that in their own consciences they are convinced. This can surely and certainly be noted by the fact that they twist this saying of Jacob concerning the scepter (as they do all of Scripture) in so many ways betraying that they are convinced and won over, and yet refuse to admit it. They are like the devil, who knows very well that God's word is the truth and yet with deliberate malice contradicts and blasphemes it. The Jews feel distinctly that these verses are solid rock and their interpretation nothing but straw or spiderweb. But with willful and malicious resolve they will not admit this; yet they insist on being and on being known as God's people, solely because they are of the blood of the patriarchs. Otherwise they have nothing of which to boast. As to what lineage alone can effect, we have spoken above. It is just as if the devil were to boast that he was of angelic stock, and by reason of this was the only angel and child of God, even though he is really God's foe.

Now that we have considered these verses, let us hear what Jeremiah says. His words sound very strange. For we know

that he was a prophet long after the kingdom of Israel had been destroyed and exiled, when only the kingdom of Judah still existed, which itself was soon to go into captivity in Babylon, as he foretold to them and even experienced during his lifetime. Yet despite this, he dares to say in chapter 33:17: "For thus says the Lord: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn cereal offerings, and to make sacrifices for ever.'

"The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: 'Thus says the Lord: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers....'

"The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: 'Have you not observed what these people are saying, "The Lord has rejected the two families which he chose"? Thus they have despised my people so that they are no longer a nation in their sight. Thus says the Lord: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his descendants to rule over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes, and will have mercy upon them.'"

What can we say to this? Whoever can interpret it, let him do so. Here we read that not only David but also the Levites will endure forever; and the same for Israel, the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is emphasized that David will have a son who will sit on his throne eternally, just as surely as day and night continue forever. On the other hand, we hear that Israel will be led away into captivity, and also Judah after her, but that Israel will not be brought home again as Judah will be. Tell me, how does all this fit together? God's word cannot lie. Just as God watches over the course of the heavens, so that day and night follow in endless succession, so too David (that is, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), must have a son on his throne uninterruptedly. God himself draws this comparison. It is impossible for the Jews to make sense of it; for they see with their very eyes that neither Israel nor Judah has had a

government for nearly fifteen hundred years; in fact Israel has not had one for over two thousand years. Yet God must be truthful, do what we will. The kingdom of David must rule over the seed of Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham, as Jeremiah states here, or Jeremiah is not a prophet but a liar.

We shall let the Jews reconcile and interpret this as they will or can. For us this passage leaves no doubt; it affirms that David's house will endure forever, also the Levites, and Abraham's, Isaac's, and Jacob's seed under the son of David, as long as day and night or as it is otherwise expressed, as long as sun and moon endure. If this is true, then the Messiah must have come when David's house and rule ceased to exist. Thus David's throne assumed more splendor through the Messiah, as we read in Isaiah 9:6: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called Pele, Joets, El, Gibbor, Abi-gad, Sar shalom. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore." We may revert to this later, but here we shall refrain from discussing how the blind Jews twist these six names of the Messiah. They accept this verse and admit as they must admit that it speaks of the Messiah. We quote it because Jeremiah states that David's house will rule forever: first through the scepter up to the time of the Messiah, and after that much more gloriously through the Messiah. So it must be true that David's house has not ceased up to this hour and that it will not cease to eternity. But since the scepter of Judah departed fifteen hundred years ago, the Messiah must have come that long ago, or, as we have said above, 1,468 years ago. All of this is convincingly established by Jeremiah.