

Chapter 3

God truly honoured them highly by circumcision, speaking to them above all other nations on earth and entrusting his word to them. And in order to preserve this word among them, he gave them a special country; he performed great wonders through them, ordained kings and government, and lavished prophets upon them who not only apprised them of the best things pertaining to the present but also promised them the future Messiah, the Saviour of the world. It was for his sake that God accorded them all of this, bidding them look for his coming, to expect him confidently and without delay. For God did all of this solely for his sake: for his sake Abraham was called, circumcision was instituted, and the people were thus exalted so that all the world might know from which people, from which country, at which time, yes, from which tribe, family, city, and person, he would come, lest he be reproached by devils and by men for coming from a dark corner or from unknown ancestors. No, his ancestors had to be great patriarchs, excellent kings, and outstanding prophets, who bear witness to him.

We have already stated how the unbelieving Jews, with few exceptions, viewed such promises and prophets. They were never able to tolerate a prophet, and always persecuted God's word and declined to give ear to God. That is the complaint and lament of all the prophets. And as their fathers did, so they still do today, nor will they ever mend their ways. If Isaiah, Jeremiah, or other prophets went about among them today and proclaimed what they proclaimed in their day, or declared that their circumcision and hope for the Messiah are futile, they would again have to die at their hands as happened then. Let him who is endowed with reason, to say nothing of Christian understanding, note how arbitrarily they pervert and twist the prophets' books with their confounded glosses, in violation of their own conscience (on which we can perhaps say more later). For now that they can no longer stone or kill the prophets physically or personally, they torment them spiritually mutilate, strangle, and maltreat their beautiful verses so that the human heart is vexed and pained. For this forces us to see how, because of God's wrath, they are wholly delivered into the devil's hands. In brief, they are a prophet-murdering people; since they can

no longer murder the living ones, they must murder and torment the ones that are dead.

Subsequently, after they have scourged, crucified, spat upon, blasphemed, and cursed God in his word, as Isaiah 8 prophesies, they pretentiously trot out their circumcision and other vain, blasphemous, invented, and meaningless works. They presume to be God's only people, to condemn all the world, and they expect that their arrogance and boasting will please God, that he should repay them with a Messiah of their own choosing and prescription. Therefore, dear Christian, be on your guard against such accursed, incorrigible people, from whom you can learn no more than to give God and his word the lie, to blaspheme, to pervert, to murder prophets, and haughtily and proudly to despise all people on earth. Even if God would be willing to disregard all their other sins which, of course, is impossible he could not condone such ineffable (although poor and wretched) pride. For he is called a God of the humble, as Isaiah 66:2 states: "But this is the man to whom I will look. he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." I have said enough about the second false boast of the unbelieving Jews, namely, their false and futile circumcision, which did not avail them when they were taken to task by Moses and by Jeremiah because of their uncircumcised heart. How much less is it useful now when it is nothing more than the devil's trickery with which he mocks and fools them, as he also does the Turks. For wherever God's word is no longer present, circumcision is null and void.

In the third place, they are very conceited because God spoke with them and issued them the law of Moses on Mount Sinai. Here we arrive at the right spot, here God really has to let himself be tortured, here he must listen as they tire him with their songs and praises because he hallowed them with his holy law, set them apart from other nations, and led them out of Egypt. Here we poor Goyim are really despised, and are mere ciphers compared to the holy, chosen, noble, and highly exalted people which is in possession of God's word! They state, as I myself heard: "Indeed, what do you have to say to this - that God himself spoke with us on Mount Sinai and that he did this with no other people?" We have nothing with which to refute that, for we cannot deny them this glory. The books of Moses are ready to give proof of it, and

David, too, testifies to it, saying in Psalm 147:19: "He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances." And in Psalm 103:7: "He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel."

They relate that the chiefs of the people wore wreaths at Mount Sinai at that time as a symbol that they had contracted a marriage with God through the law, that they had become his bride, and that the two had wedded one another. Later we read in all the prophets how God appears and talks with the children of Israel as a husband with his wife. From this also sprang the peculiar worship of Baal; for "Baal" denotes a man of the house or a master of the house, "Beulah" denotes a housewife. The latter also has taken a German form, as when we say "My dear *Buhle*" [sweetheart], and "I must have a *Buhle*." Formerly this was an inoffensive term, designating a young lass. It was said that a young man courted [*buhlte*] a young girl with a view to marriage. Now the word has assumed a different connotation.

Now we challenge you, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the prophets, and whoever will, to come and to be bold enough to say that such a noble nation with whom God himself converses and with whom he himself enters into marriage through the law, and to whom he joins himself as to a bride, is not God's people. Anyone doing that, I know, would make himself ridiculous and come to grief. In default of any other weapons, they would tear and bite him to pieces with their teeth for trying to dispossess them of such glory, praise, and honour. One can neither express nor understand the obstinate, unbridled, incorrigible arrogance of this people, springing from this advantage - that God himself spoke to them. No prophet has ever been able to raise his voice in protest or stand up against them, not even Moses. For in Numbers 16, Korah arose and asserted that they were all holy people of God, and asked why Moses alone should rule and teach. Since that time, the majority of them have been genuine Korahites; there have been very few true Israelites. For just as Korah persecuted Moses, they have never subsequently left a prophet alive or unpersecuted, much less have they obeyed him.

So it became apparent that they were a defiled bride, yes, an incorrigible whore and an evil slut with whom God ever had to

wrangle, scuffle, and fight. If he chastised and struck them with his word through the prophets, they contradicted him, killed his prophets, or, like a mad dog, bit the stick with which they were struck.. Thus Psalm 95:10 declares: "For forty years I loathed that generation and said, 'They are a people who err in heart, and they do not regard my ways.'" And Moses himself says in Deuteronomy 31:27: "For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are; behold, while I am yet alive with you, today you have been rebellious against the Lord; how much more after my death!" And Isaiah 48:4: "Because I know that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew and your forehead brass... ." And so on; anyone who is interested may read more of this. The unbelieving Jews are well aware that the prophets upbraided the children of Israel from beginning to end as a disobedient, evil people and as the vilest whore, although they boasted so much of the law of Moses, or circumcision, and of their ancestry.

But it might be objected: Surely, this is said about the wicked unbelieving Jews, not about the pious ones as they are today. Well and good, for the present I will be content if they confess, as they must confess, that the wicked unbelieving Jews cannot be God's people, and that their lineage, circumcision, and law of Moses cannot help them. Why, then, do they all, the most wicked as well as the pious, boast of circumcision, lineage, and law? The worse a Jew is, the more arrogant he is, solely because he is a Jew - that is, a person descended from Abraham's seed, circumcised, and under the law of Moses. David and other pious Jews were not as conceited as the present-day, incorrigible unbelieving Jews. However wicked they may be, they presume to be the noblest lords over against us Gentiles, just by virtue of their lineage and law. Yet the law rebukes them as the vilest whores and rogues under the sun.

Furthermore, if they are pious Jews and not the whoring people, as the prophets call them, how does it happen that their piety is so concealed that God himself is not aware of it, and they are not aware of it either? For they have, as we said, prayed, cried, and suffered almost fifteen hundred years already, and yet God refuses to listen to them. We know from Scripture that God will hear the prayers or sighing of the righteous, as the Psalter says [Ps. 145:19]: "He fulfills the desire of all who fear him, he also hears their cry." And Psalm

34:17: "When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears." As he promised in Psalm 50:15: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you." The same is found in many more verses of the Scripture. If it were not for these, who would or could pray? In brief, he says in the first commandment that he will be their God. Then, how do you explain that he will not listen to these unbelieving Jews? They must assuredly be the base, whoring people, that is, no people of God, and their boast of lineage, circumcision, and law must be accounted as filth. If there were a single pious Jew among them who observed these, he would have to be heard; for God cannot let his saints pray in vain, as Scripture demonstrates by many examples. This is conclusive evidence that they cannot be pious Jews, but must be the multitude of the whoring and murderous people.

Such piety is, as already has been said, so concealed among them that they themselves also can know nothing of it. How then shall God know of it? For they are full of malice, greed, envy, hatred toward one another, pride, usury, conceit, and curses against us Gentiles. Therefore, a Jew would have to have very sharp eyes to recognize a pious Jew, to say nothing of the fact that they all should be God's people as they claim. For they surely hide their piety effectively under their manifest vices; and yet they all, without exception, claim to be Abraham's blood, the people of the circumcision and of Moses, that is, God's nation, compared with whom the Gentiles must surely be sheer stench. Although they know that God cannot tolerate this, nor did he tolerate it among the angels, yet he should and must listen to their lies and blasphemies to the effect that they are his people by virtue of the law he gave them and because he conversed with their forefathers at Mount Sinai.

Why should one make many words about this? If the boast that God spoke with them and that they possess his word or commandment were sufficient so that God would on this basis regard them as his people, then the devils in hell would be much worthier of being God's people than the Unbelieving Jews, yes, than any people. For the devils have God's word and know far better than the Unbelieving Jews that there is a God who created them, whom they are obliged to love with all their heart, to honour, fear, and serve, whose name they dare not misuse, whose word they must hear on the Sabbath

and at all times; they know that they are forbidden to murder or to inflict harm on any creature. But what good does it do them to know and to possess God's commandment? Let them boast that this makes them God's own special, dear angels, in comparison with whom other angels are nothing! How much better off they would be if they did not have God's commandment or if they were ignorant of it. For if they did not have it, they would not be condemned. The very reason for their condemnation is that they possess his commandment and yet do not keep it, but violate it constantly.

In the same manner murderers and whores, thieves and rogues and all evil men might boast that they are God's holy, peculiar people; for they, too, have his word and know that they must fear and obey him, love and serve him, honour his name, refrain from murder, adultery, theft, and every other evil deed. If they did not have God's holy and true word, they could not sin. But since they do sin and are condemned, it is certain that they do have the holy, true word of God, against which they sin. Let them boast, like the Unbelieving Jews, that God has sanctified them through his law and chosen them above all other men as a peculiar people!

It is the same kind of boasting when the Unbelieving Jews boast in their synagogues, praising and thanking God for sanctifying them through his law and setting them apart as a peculiar people, although they know full well that they are not at all observing this law, that they are full of conceit, envy, usury, greed, and all sorts of malice. The worst offenders are those who pretend to be very devout and holy in their prayers. They are so blind that they not only practice usury not to mention the other vices but they teach that it is a right which God conferred on them through Moses. Thereby, as in all the other matters, they slander God most infamously. However, we lack the time to dwell on that now.

But when they declare that even if they are not holy because of the Ten Commandments (since all Gentiles and devils are also duty-bound to keep these, or else are polluted and condemned on account of them) they still have the other laws of Moses, besides the Ten Commandments, which were given exclusively to them and not also to the Gentiles, and by which they are sanctified and singled out from all other nations - O Lord God, what a lame, loose, and vain excuse and pretext this is! If the Ten Commandments are not

obeyed, what does the keeping of the other laws amount to other than mere jugglery and mummery, indeed, a veritable mockery which treats God as a fool. It is just as if an evil, devilish fellow among us were to parade about in the garb of a pope, cardinal, bishop, or pastor and observe all the precepts and the ways of these persons, but underneath this spiritual dress would be a genuine devil, a wolf, an enemy of the church, a blasphemer who trampled both the gospel and the Ten Commandments under foot and cursed and damned them. What a fine saint he would be in God's sight!

Or let us suppose that somewhere a pretty girl came along, adorned with a wreath, and observed all the manners, the duties, the deportment and discipline of a chaste virgin, but underneath was a vile, shameful whore, violating the Ten Commandments. What good would her fine obedience in observing outwardly all the duties and customs of a virgin's station do her? It would help her this much - that one would be seven times more hostile to her than to an impudent, public whore. Thus God constantly chided the children of Israel through the prophets, calling them a vile whore because, under the guise and decor of external laws and sanctity, they practiced all sorts of idolatry and villainy, as especially Hosea laments in chapter 2.

To be sure, it is commendable when a pious virgin or woman is decently and cleanly dressed and adorned and outwardly conducts herself with modesty. But if she is a whore, her garments, adornments, wreath, and jewels would better befit a sow that wallows in the mire. As Solomon says [Prov. 11:22]: "Like a gold ring in a swine's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion." That is to say, she is a whore. Therefore, this boast about the external laws of Moses, apart from obedience to the Ten Commandments, should be silenced; indeed, this boast makes the Unbelieving Jews seven times more unworthy to be God's people than the Gentiles are. For the external laws were not given to make a nation the people of God, but to adorn and enhance God's people externally. Just as the Ten Commandments were not given that any might boast of them and haughtily despise all the world because of them, as if they were holy and God's people because of them; rather they were given to be observed, and that obedience to God might be shown in them, as Moses and all the prophets most earnestly teach.

Not he who has them shall glory, as we saw in the instance of the devils and of evil men, but he who keeps them. He who has them and fails to keep them must be ashamed and terrified because he will surely be condemned by them.

But this subject is beyond the ken of the blind and hardened Unbelieving Jews. Speaking to them about it is much the same as preaching the gospel to a sow. They cannot know what God's commandment really is, much less do they know how to keep it. After all, they could not listen to Moses, nor look into his face; he had to cover it with a veil. This veil is there to the present day, and they still do not behold Moses' face, that is, his doctrine. It is still veiled to them [cf. II Cor. 3:13 ff.; Exod. 34:33 ff.]. Thus they could not hear God's word on Mount Sinai when he talked to them, but they retreated, saying to Moses: "You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die" [Exod. 20:19]. To know God's commandment and to know how to keep it requires a high prophetic understanding.

Moses was well aware of that when he said in Exodus 34 that God forgives sin and that no one is guiltless before him, which is to say that no one keeps his commandments but he whose sins God forgives. As David also testifies in Psalm 32:1, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, ... to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity." And in the same psalm [cf. v. 6]: "Therefore let every one who is godly offer prayer to thee for forgiveness," which means that no saint keeps God's commandments. But if the saints fail to keep them, how will the ungodly, the unbelievers, the evil people keep them? Again we read in Psalm 143:2: "O Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant; for no man living is righteous before thee." That attests clearly enough that even the holy servants of God are not justified before him unless he sets aside his judgment and deals with them in his mercy; that is, they do not keep his commandments and stand in need of forgiveness of sins.

This calls for a Man who will assist us in this, who bears our sin for us, as Isaiah 53:6 says: "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Indeed, that is truly to understand God's law and its observance - when we know, recognize, yes, and feel that we have it, but do not keep it and cannot keep it; that in view of this, we are poor sinners and guilty before God; and that it is only out of pure grace and mercy that we

receive forgiveness for such guilt and disobedience through the Man on whom God has laid this sin. Of this we Christians speak and this we teach, and of this the prophets and apostles speak to us and teach us. They are the ones who were and still are our God's bride and pure virgin; and yet they boast of no law or holiness as the Unbelieving Jews do in their synagogues. They rather wail over the law and cry for mercy and forgiveness of sins. The Unbelieving Jews, on the other hand, are as holy as the barefoot friars who possess so much excess holiness that they can use it to help others to get to heaven, and still retain a rich and abundant supply to sell. It is of no use to speak to any of them about these matters, for their blindness arrogance are as solid as an iron mountain. They are in the right; God is in the wrong. Let them go their way, and let us remain with those who pray the *Miserere*, Psalm 51, that is, with those who know and understand what the law is, and what it means to keep and not to keep it.

Learn from this dear Christian, what you are doing if you permit the blind Unbelieving Jews to mislead you. Then the saying will truly apply, 'When a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into the pit' [cf. Luke 6:39]. You cannot learn anything from them except how to misunderstand the divine commandments, and, despite this, boast haughtily over against the Gentiles - who really are much better before God than they, since they do not have such pride of holiness and yet keep far more of the law than these arrogant saints and damned blasphemers and liars.

Therefore be on your guard against the Unbelieving Jews, knowing that wherever they have their synagogues, nothing is found but a den of devils in-which sheer self-glory, conceit, lies, blasphemy, and defaming of God and men are practiced most maliciously and veiling his eyes on them. God's wrath has consigned them to the presumption that their boasting, their conceit, their slander of God, their cursing of all people are a true and a great service rendered to God - all of which is very fitting and becoming to such noble blood of the fathers and circumcised saints. This they believe despite the fact that they know they are steeped in manifest vices mentally, just as the devils themselves do. And where you see or hear a Jew teaching, remember that you are hearing nothing but a venomous basilisk who poisons and kills people merrily by

fasten- And with all this, they claim to be doing right. Be on your guard against them!

In the fourth place, 34 they pride themselves tremendously on having received the land of Canaan, the city of Jerusalem, and the temple from God. God has often squashed such boasting and arrogance, especially through the king of Babylon, who led them away into captivity and destroyed everything (just as the king of Assyria earlier had led all of Israel away and had laid everything low). Finally they were exterminated and devastated by the Romans over fourteen hundred years ago - so that they might well perceive that God did not regard, nor will regard, their country, city, temple, priesthood, or principality, and view them on account of these as his own peculiar people. Yet their iron neck, as Isaiah calls it [Isa. 48:4] is not bent, nor is their brass forehead red with shame. They remain stone-blind, obdurate, immovable, ever hoping that God will restore their homeland to them and give everything back to them.

Moses had informed them a great many times, first, that they were not occupying the land because their righteousness exceeded that of other heathen for they were a stubborn, evil disobedient people and second, that they would soon be expelled from the land and perish if they did not keep God's commandments. And when God chose the city of Jerusalem he added very clearly in the writings of all the prophets that he would utterly destroy this city of Jerusalem, his seat and throne, if they would not keep his commandments. Furthermore, when Solomon had built the temple, had sacrificed and prayed to God, God said to him (I Kings 9:3), "I have heard your prayer and your supplications ... I have consecrated this house," etc.; but then he added shortly thereafter: "But if you turn aside from following me ... and do not keep my commandments ... then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and the house which I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight; and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples." With an utter disregard for this, they stood and still stand, firm as a rock or as an inert stone image, insisting that God gave them country, city, and temple, and that therefore they have to be God's people or church.

They neither hear nor see that God gave them all of this that they might keep his commandments, that is, regard him as

their God, and thus be his people and church. They boast of their race and of their descent from the fathers, but they neither see nor pay attention to the fact that he chose their race that they should keep his commandments. They boast of their circumcision; but why they are circumcised namely, that they should keep God's commandments counts for nought. They are quick to boast of their law, temple, worship, city, land and government; but why they possess all of this, they disregard.

The devil with all his angels has taken possession of this people, so that they always exalt external things their gifts, their deeds, their works before God, which is tantamount to offering God the empty shells without the kernels. These they expect God to esteem and by reason of them accept them as his people, and exalt and bless them above all Gentiles. But that he wants his laws observed and wants to be honoured by them as God, this they do not want to consider. Thus the words of Moses are fulfilled when he says [Deut. 32:21] that God will not regard them as his people, since they do not regard him as their God. Hosea 2 [cf. 1:9] expresses the same thought.

Indeed, if God had not allowed the city of Jerusalem to be destroyed and had them driven out of their country, but had permitted them to remain there, no one could have convinced them that they are not God's people, since they would still be in possession of temple, city, and country regardless of how base, disobedient, and stubborn they were. [They would not have believed it] even if it had snowed nothing but prophets daily and even if a thousand Moseses had stood up and shouted: "You are not God's people, because you are disobedient and rebellious to God." Why, even today they cannot refrain from their nonsensical, insane boasting that they are God's people, although they have been cast out, dispersed, and utterly rejected for almost fifteen hundred years. By virtue of their own merits they still hope to return there again. But they have no such promise with which they could console themselves other than what their false imagination smuggles into Scripture.

Our apostle St. Paul was right when he said of them that "they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened," etc. [Rom. 10:2]. They claim to be God's people by reason of their deeds, works, and external show, and not because of sheer

grace and mercy, as all prophets and all true children of God have to be, as was said. Therefore they are beyond counsel and help. In the same way as our papists, bishops, monks, and priests, together with their following, who insist that they are God's people and church; they believe that God should esteem them because they are baptized, because they have the name, and because they rule the roost. There they stand like a rock. If a hundred thousand apostles came along and said: "You are not the church because of your behavior or your many doings and divine services, even though these were your best efforts; no, you must despair of all this and adhere simply and solely to the grace and mercy of Christ, etc. If you fail to do this, you are the devil's whore or a school of knaves and not the church," they would wish to murder, burn at the stake, or banish such apostles. As for believing them and abandoning their own devices, of this there is no hope; it will not happen.

The Turks follow the same pattern with their worship, as do all fanatics. Unbelieving Jews, Turks, papists, radicals abound everywhere. All of them claim to be the church and God's people in accord with their conceit and boast, regardless of the one true faith and the obedience to God's commandments through which alone people become and remain God's children. Even if they do not all pursue the same course, but one chooses this way, another that way, resulting in a variety of forms, they nonetheless all have the same intent and ultimate goal, namely, by means of their own deeds they want to manage to become God's people. And thus they boast and brag that they are the ones whom God will esteem. They are the foxes of Samson which are tied together tail to tail but whose heads turn away in different directions [cf. Judg. 15:4].

But as we noted earlier, that is beyond the comprehension of the Unbelieving Jews, as well as of the Turks and papists. As St. Paul says in [I Corinthians 1, "The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned" [I Cor. 2:14]. Thus the words of Isaiah 6:9 come true: "Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive." For they do not know what they hear, see, say, or do. And yet they do not concede that they are blind and deaf.