

Chapter 8

I must break off here and leave the last part of Haggai to others, the section in which he prophesies that the Lord, as he says, "will give peace in this place" [cf. Hag. 2:9b]. Can it be possible that this applies to the time from Antiochus up to the present during which the Jews have experienced every misfortune and are still in exile? For there shall be peace in this place, says the Lord. The place is still there; the temple and peace have vanished. No doubt the Jews will be able to interpret this. The history books inform me that there was but little peace prior to Antiochus for about three hundred years, and subsequent to that time none at all down to the present hour, except for the peace that reigned at the time of the Maccabees. As I have already said, I shall leave this to others.

Finally we must lend ear to the great prophet Daniel. A special angel with a proper name Gabriel talks with him. The like of this is not found elsewhere in the Old Testament. The fact that the angel is mentioned by name marks it as something extraordinary. This is what he tells Daniel: "Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place" [Dan. 9:24].

We cannot now discuss this rich text, which actually is one of the foremost in all of Scripture. And, as is only natural, everybody has reflected on it; for it not only fixes the time of Christ's advent but also foretells what he will do, namely, take away sin, bring righteousness, and do this by means of his death. It establishes Christ as the Priest who bears the sin of the whole world. This, I say, we must now set aside and deal only with the question of the time, as we determined to do, whether such a Messiah or Priest has already come or is still to come. [This we do] for the strengthening of our faith, against all devils and men.

In the first place, there is complete agreement on this: that the seventy weeks are not weeks of days but of years; that one week comprises seven years, which produces a sum total

of four hundred and ninety years. That is the first point. Second, it is also agreed that these seventy weeks had ended when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. There is no difference of opinion on these two points, although many are in the dark when it comes to the matter of knowing the precise time of which these seventy weeks began and when they terminated. It is not necessary for us to settle this question here, since it is generally assumed that they were fulfilled about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. This will suffice us for the present.

If this is true, as it must be true, since after the destruction of Jerusalem none of the seventy weeks was left, then the Messiah must have come before the destruction of Jerusalem, while something of those seventy weeks still remained: namely, the last week, as the text later clearly and convincingly attests. After the seven and sixty-two weeks (that is, after sixty-nine weeks), namely, in the last or seventieth week, Christ will be killed, in such a way, however, that he will become alive again. For the angel says that "he shall make a strong covenant with many in the last week" [Dan. 9:27]. This he cannot do while dead; he must be alive. "To make a covenant" can have no other meaning than to fulfill God's promise given to the fathers, namely, to disseminate the blessing promised in Abraham's seed to all the Gentiles. As the angel states earlier [v. 24], the visions and prophecies shall be sealed or fulfilled. This requires a live Messiah, who, however, has previously been killed. But the Jews will have none of this. Therefore we shall let it rest at that and hold to our opinion that the Messiah must have appeared during these seventy weeks; this the Jews cannot refute.

For in their books as well as in certain histories we learn that not just a few Jews but all of Jewry at that time assumed that the Messiah must have come or must be present at that very moment. This is what we want to hear! When Herod was forcibly made king of Judah and Israel by the Romans, the Jews surely realized that the scepter would thus depart from them. They resisted this move vigorously, and in the thirty years of their resistance many thousand Jews were slain and much blood was shed, until they finally surrendered in exhaustion. In the meantime the Jews looked about for the Messiah. Thus a hue and cry arose that the Messiah had been

born as, in truth, he had been. For our Lord Christ was born in the thirtieth year of Herod's reign. But Herod forcibly suppressed this report, slaying all the young children in the region of Bethlehem, so that our Lord had to be taken for refuge to Egypt. Herod even killed his own son because he was born of a Jewish mother. He was worried that through this son the scepter might revert to the Jews and that he might gain the Jews' loyalty, since, as Philo records, the rumor of the birth of Christ had been spread abroad.

As our evangelists relate, more than thirty years later John the Baptist comes out of the wilderness and proclaims that the Lord had not only been born but also was already among them and would reign shortly after him. Suddenly thereafter Christ himself appears, preaches, and performs great miracles, so that the Jews hoped that now, after the loss of the scepter, Shiloh had come. But the chief priests, the rulers, and their followers took offense at the person, since he did not appear as a mighty king but wandered about as a poor beggar. They had made up their mind that the Messiah would unite the Jews and not only wrest the scepter from the foreign king but also subdue the Romans and all the world under himself with the sword, installing them as mighty princes over all the Gentiles. When they were disappointed in these expectations, the noble blood and circumcised saints were vexed, as people who had the promise of the kingdom and could not attain it through this beggar. Therefore they despised him and did not accept him.

But when they disdained John and his [Christ's] message and miracles, reviling them as the deeds of Beelzebub, he spoiled and ruined matters entirely. He rebuked and chided them severely something he should not, of course, have done for being greedy, evil, and disobedient children, false teachers, seducers of the people, etc.; in brief, a brood of serpents and children of the devil. On the other hand, he was friendly to sinners and tax collectors, to Gentiles and to Romans, giving the impression that he was the foe of the people of Israel and the friend of Gentiles and villains. Now the fat was really in the fire; they grew wrathful, bitter, and hateful, and ranted against him; finally they contrived the plot to kill him. And that is what they did; they crucified him as ignominiously as possible. They gave free rein to their anger, so that even the Gentile Pilate noticed this and testified that they were

condemning and killing him out of hatred and envy, innocently and without cause.

When they had executed this false Messiah (that is the conception they wanted to convey of him), they still did not abandon the delusion that the Messiah had to be at hand or nearby. They constantly murmured against the Romans because of the scepter. Soon, too, the rumor circulated that Jesus, whom they had killed, had again arisen and that he was now really being proclaimed openly and freely as the Messiah. The people in the city of Jerusalem were adhering to him, as well as the Gentiles in Antioch and everywhere in the country. Now they really had their hands full. They had to oppose this dead Messiah and his followers, lest he be accepted as resurrected and as the Messiah. They also had to oppose the Romans, lest their hoped-for Messiah be forever bereft of the scepter. At one place a slaughter of the Christians was initiated, at another an uprising against the Romans. To these tactics they devoted themselves for approximately forty years, until the Romans finally were constrained to lay waste country and city. This delusion regarding their false Christ and their persecution of the true Christ cost them eleven times one hundred thousand men, as Josephus reports, together with the most horrible devastation of country and city, as well as the forfeiture of scepter, temple, priesthood, and all that they possessed.

This deep and cruel humiliation, which is terrible to read and to hear about, surely should have made them pliable and humble. Alas, they became seven times more stubborn, viler, and prouder than before. This was due in part to the fact that in their dispersion they had to witness how the Christians daily grew and increased with their Messiah. The saying of Moses found in Deuteronomy 32:21 was now completely fulfilled in them: "They have stirred me to jealousy with what is no god; so I will stir them to jealousy with those who are no people." Likewise, as Hosea says: "I will say to Not my people, 'You are my people,' but you are not my people and I am not your God" (Hosea 2:23, l:9). They stubbornly insisted on having their own Messiah in whom the Gentiles should not claim a share, and they persisted in trying to exterminate this Messiah in whom both Jews and Gentiles gloried. Everywhere throughout the Roman Empire they intervened and wherever they could ferret out a Christian in any corner they dragged

him out before the judges and accused him (they themselves could not pass sentence on him, since they had neither legal authority nor power) until they had him killed. Thus they shed very much Christian blood and made innumerable martyrs, also outside the Roman Empire, in Persia and wherever they could.

Still they clung to the delusion that the Messiah must have appeared, since the seventy weeks of Daniel had expired and the temple of Haggai had been destroyed. However, they disliked the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and therefore they went ahead and elevated one of their own number to be the Messiah. This came about as follows: They had a rabbi, or Talmudist, named Akiba, a very learned man, esteemed by them more highly than all other rabbis, a venerable, honorable, gray-haired man. He taught the verses of Haggai and of Daniel, also of Jacob in Genesis 49, with ardor, saying that there had to be a Messiah among the people of God since the time fixed by Scripture was at hand. Then he chose one, surnamed Kokhba, which means "a star." According to Burgensis his right name was Heutoliba. He is well known in all the history books, where he is called Ben Koziba or Bar Koziban. This man had to be their Messiah; and he gladly complied. All the people and the rabbis rallied about him and armed themselves thoroughly with the intention of doing away with both Christians and Romans. Now they had the Messiah fashioned to their liking and their mind, who was proclaimed by the aforementioned passages of Scripture.

This unrest began approximately thirty years after the destruction of Jerusalem, under the reign of the emperor Trajan. Rabbi Akiba was Kokhba's prophet and spirit who inflamed and incited him and vehemently urged him on, applying all the verses of Scripture that deal with the Messiah to him before all the people and proclaiming: "You are the Messiah!" He applied to him especially the saying of Balaam recorded in Numbers 24:17-19, by reason of his surname Kokhba ("star"). For in that passage Balaam says in a vision: "A star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab, and break down all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be dispossessed, Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed, while Israel does valiantly. By Jacob shall dominion be exercised, and the survivors of cities be destroyed!"

That was a proper sermon for thoroughly misleading such a foolish, angry, restive mob—which is exactly what happened. To insure the success of this venture and guard against its going awry, that exalted and precious Rabbi Akiba, the old fool and simpleton, made himself Kokhba's guardsman or armor-bearer, his *armiger*, as the history books have it; if I am not translating the term correctly, let some one else improve on it. The person is meant who is positioned beside the king or prince and whose chief duty it is to defend him on the battlefield or in combat, either on horse or on foot. To be sure, something more is implied here, since he is also a prophet, a Monzer (to use contemporary terms). So this is where the scepter of Judah and the Messiah now resided; they are sure of it. They carried on like this for some thirty years. Kokhba always had himself addressed as King Messiah, and butchered throngs of Christians who refused to deny our Messiah Jesus Christ. His captains also harassed the Romans where they could. Especially in Egypt they at one time defeated the Roman captain during the reign of Trajan. Now their heart, brain, and belly began to swell with conceit. God, they inferred, had to be for them and with them. They occupied a town near Jerusalem, called Bittir; in the Bible it is known as Beth-horon [Josh. 10:10].

At this point they were convinced that their Messiah, King Kokhba, was the lord of the world and had vanquished the Christians and the Romans and had carried the day. But Emperor Hadrian sent his army against them, laid siege to Bittir, conquered it, and slew Messiah and prophet, star and darkness, lord and armor-bearer. Their own books lament that there were twice eighty thousand men at Bittir who blew the trumpets, who were captains over vast hosts of men, and that forty times one hundred thousand men were slain, not including those slain at Alexandria. The latter are said to have numbered twelve times one hundred thousand. However, it seems to me that they are exaggerating enormously. I interpret this to mean that the two times eighty thousand trumpeters represent that many valiant and able-bodied men equipped for battle, each of whom would have been able to lead large bodies of soldiers in battle. Otherwise this sounds too devilishly mendacious.

After this formidable defeat they themselves called Kokhba, their lost Messiah, "Kozba," which rhymes with it and has a

similar ring. For thus write their Talmudists: You must not read "Kokhba," but "Kozba." Therefore all history books now refer to him as Koziban. "Kozba" means "false." His attempt had miscarried, and he had proved a false and not a true Messiah. Just as we Germans might say by way of rhyme: You are not a Deutscher but a Taoscher ["not a German but a deceiver"]; not a Welscher but a Felscher ["not a foreigner of Romance origin but a falsifier"]. Of a usurer I may say: You are not a Borger, but a Worger ["not a citizen but a slayer"]. Such rhyming is customary in all languages. Our Eusebius reports this story in his Ecclesiastical History, Book 4, chapter 6. Here he uses the name Barcochabas, saying that this was an extremely cruel battle in which the Jews "were driven so far from their country that their impious eyes were no longer able to see their fatherland even if they ascended the highest mountains.

Such horrible stories are sufficient witness that all of Jewry understood that this had to be the time of the Messiah, since the seventy weeks had elapsed, Haggai's temple had been destroyed, and the scepter had been wrested from Judah, as the statements of Jacob in Genesis 49, of Haggai 2, and of Daniel 9 clearly indicated and announced. God be praised that we Christians are certain and confident of our belief that the true Messiah, Jesus Christ, did come at that time. To prove this, we have not only his miraculous deeds, which the Jews themselves cannot deny, but also the gruesome downfall and misfortune, because of the name of the Messiah, of his enemies who wanted to exterminate him together with all his adherents. How could they otherwise have brought such misery upon their heads if they had not been convinced that the time of the Messiah was at hand? And I think this does surely constitute coming to grief and running their heads (now for the second time) against "the stone of offence and the rock of stumbling," to quote Isaiah 8:14. So many hundreds of thousands attempted to devour Jesus of Nazareth, but over this they themselves "stumbled and fell and were broken, snared, and taken," as Isaiah says [8:15].

Since two such terrible and awesome attempts had most miserably failed, the first at Jerusalem under Vespasian, the other at Bittir under Hadrian, they surely should have come to their senses, have become pliable and humble, and concluded: God help us! How does this happen? The time of

the Messiah's advent has, in accord with the prophets' words and promises, come and gone, and we are beaten so terribly and cruelly over it! What if our ideas regarding the Messiah that he should be a secular Kokhba have deceived us, and he came in a different manner and form? Is it possible that the Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth, to whom so many Jews and Gentiles adhere, who daily perform so many wondrous signs? Alas, they became seven times more stubborn and baser than before. Their conception of a worldly Messiah must be right and cannot fail; there must be a mistake about the designated time. The prophets must be lying and fail rather than they. They will have nothing of this Jesus, even if they must pervert all of Scripture, have no god, and never get a Messiah. That's the way they want it.

Since they were beaten into defenseless impotence by the Romans, from that time on they have turned against Scripture, and have boldly tried to take it from us and to pervert it with strange and different interpretations. They have digressed from the understanding of all their forefathers and prophets, and furthermore from their own reason. Because of this they have lost so many hundreds of thousands of men, land, and city, and have fallen prey to every misery. They have done nothing these fourteen hundred years but take any verse which we Christians apply to our Messiah and violate it, tear it to bits, crucify it, and twist it in order to give it a different nose and mask. They deal with it as their fathers dealt with our Lord Christ on Good Friday, making God appear as the liar but themselves as the truthful ones, as you heard before. They assign practically ten different interpretations to Jacob's saying in Genesis 49. Likewise they know how to twist the nose of Haggai's statement. Here you have two good illustrations which show you how masterfully the Jews exegete the Scriptures, in such a way that they do not arrive at any definite meaning.

They have also distorted in this way the passage from Daniel. I cannot enumerate all their shameful glosses, but shall submit just one -- the one which Lyra and Burgensis consider to be the most famous and widespread among the Jews, from which they dare not depart on pain of losing their souls. It reads as follows. Gabriel says to Daniel: "Seventy weeks of years are decreed concerning your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone

for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place, ..." [Dan. 9:24]. This is the text. Now their beautiful commentary follows:

"It will still be seventy weeks before Jerusalem will be destroyed and the Jews are led into exile by the Romans. This will happen so that they may be induced by this exile to depart from their sins, that they may be punished for them, pay for them, render satisfaction, atone for them, and thus become pious eternally and merit the fulfillment of the messianic promises, the reconstruction of the holy temple," etc.

Here you perceive, in the first place, that the Jews' immeasurable holiness presumes that God will fulfill his promise regarding the Messiah not because of his sheer grace and mercy but because of their merit and repentance and their extraordinary piety. And how could or should God, that poor fellow, do otherwise? For when he promised the Messiah to Jacob, David, and Haggai out of sheer grace, he neither thought nor knew that such great saints whose merits would exact the Messiah from his would appear after seventy weeks and after the destruction of Jerusalem, that he would have to grant the Messiah not out of grace but would be obliged to send him by reason of their great purity and holiness, when, where, and in the way that they desired. Such is the imposing story of the Jews, who repented after the seventy weeks and became so pious.

You can easily infer that they did not repent, nor were they pious before and during the seventy weeks. As a result the priests in Jerusalem all starved to death because there was no penance, no sin or guilt offerings (which the priests needed for sustenance). All this was postponed and saved for the penance and holiness which were to begin after the seventy weeks. Where there is no repentance, or anything to repent for, there is no sin. But where then, we wonder, did the sin come from for which they have to repent after the seventy weeks, since they had atoned daily through so many sacrifices of the priests, ordained by Moses for this purpose, for all previous sin? Why do they have to begin to do penance now after the seventy weeks, when temple, office, sacrifice for sins no longer exist?

But the following even surpasses this. Gabriel says, according to their gloss, that the Jews will repent and become pious after the seventy weeks, so that the Messiah will come on account of their merit. Well and good, here we have it! If Gabriel is speaking the truth and not lying, then the Jews have now repented, they have become pious, they have merited the Messiah ever since the passing of those seventy weeks. For he says that all of this will be done by the Jews subsequent to the seventy weeks. What follows now? They confess, indeed they wail, that the Messiah has not come since the end of those seventy weeks, that he has not come to date, approximately 1468 years later; nor do they know when he will come. So they will also have to confess that they have not done penance for any sin nor become pious during these 1468 years following the seventy weeks, nor merited the Messiah. It follows that the angel Gabriel must be lying when he promises in God's behalf that the Jews will repent, be pious, and merit the Messiah after the seventy weeks.

In Leviticus 26:40 and in Deuteronomy 4:29 and 30:1, Moses, too, proves very clearly that they have never sincerely done penance for sin since the seventy weeks. In many beautiful words he promises that God will return them to their fatherland, even if they are dispersed to the end of the heavens, etc., if they turn to God with all their heart and confess their sin. Moses utters these words as the spokesman of God, whom one must not accuse of lying. Since the Jews have not been returned to their country to date, it is proved that they have never repented for sin with all their heart since the seventy weeks. So it must be falsehood when they incorrectly interpret Gabriel as speaking about their repentance.

We also know that God is so gracious by nature that he forgives man his sin in every hour in which man sincerely repents and is sorry for it, as David says in Psalm 32:5: "I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord: then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin." We also read that when the prophet Nathan rebuked David for his sin and the latter thereupon declared, "I have sinned against the Lord," he was immediately absolved by Nathan, who replied, "The Lord has put away your sin" [II Sam. 12:13]. Even if God in many instances does not remove the punishment as promptly as he did with David, he nonetheless assures man of the remission

of his sin. And if neither prophet nor priest were available, an angel would have to appear instead and announce, "Your sins are forgiven you," so that a sinner in his sorrow and punishment might not lose heart and despair. We observe also how during the Babylonian captivity God graciously and paternally consoles the people who confess their sins, enabling them to bear the punishment. Nor can the punishment endure forever; it must have its definite time, measure, and end wherever genuine contrition and repentance are found.

But there is no remission of sin for these Jews, no prophet to console them with the assurance of such forgiveness, no definite time limit for their punishment, but only interminable wrath and disfavor, devoid of any mercy. So it is not only an unmitigated lie but also an impossibility to understand Gabriel's promises in terms of their repentance, much less of their merit and righteousness.

But why should we waste so many words and so much time! The land of Canaan was hardly as big as a beggar's alms or as a crust of bread in comparison with the empire of the whole world. Yet they did not merit even this land through their repentance, or righteousness. Thus Moses declares in Deuteronomy 9:4 that they were not granted the possession of the land because of their righteousness, but it was given to them, a stiff-necked and disobedient people, that is, very sinful and unworthy people, solely by reason of God's gracious promise, although Hosea [Hos. 11:1 ff.] and Balaam (Numbers 24:5) praise them for being at their peak of piety at that time. They still had Moses, Aaron, the divine worship, prophets, God himself with his miracles, bread from heaven, water from the rock, clouds by day, pillars of fire by night, indestructible shoes and garments, etc. And these dreary dregs, this stinking scum, this dried-up froth, this moldy leaven and boggy morass of Jewry should merit, on the strength of their repentance and righteousness, the empires of the whole world—that is, the Messiah and the fulfillment of the prophecies—though they possess none of the aforementioned items and are nothing but rotten, stinking, rejected dregs of their fathers' lineage!

In brief, Moses and all true Israelites understood these verses regarding the Messiah [as signifying that all this would be given them] out of sheer grace and mercy and not because of

penitence and merit. This we gathered from the cited verses of Jacob, David, and Haggai. Likewise Daniel does not ask, desire, or think that such a glorious promise of the seventy weeks should be revealed to him, but it is granted him out of grace, far, far beyond his asking.

From this you can learn that fine repentance the Jews practiced, and still practice, after those seventy weeks. They began it with lies and blasphemies, in which they continued and still persist. Whoever wishes may imitate the Jews' example of repentance and say: "God and his angels are liars, they speak about things that are not." Then you will merit grace as they merit the Messiah.

If they weren't so stone-blind, their own vile external life would indeed convince them of the true nature of their penitence. For it abounds with witchcraft, conjuring signs, figures, and the tetragrammaton of the name, that is, with idolatry, envy, and conceit. Moreover, they are nothing but thieves and robbers who daily eat no morsel and wear no thread of clothing which they have not stolen and pilfered from us by means of their accursed usury. Thus they live from day to day, together with wife and child, by theft and robbery, as arch-thieves and robbers, in the most impenitent security. For a usurer is an arch-thief and a robber who should rightly be hanged on the gallows seven times higher than other thieves. Indeed, God should prophesy about such beautiful penitence and merit from heaven through his holy angel and become a flagrant, blasphemous liar for the sake of the noble blood and circumcised saints who boast of being hallowed by God's commandments, although they trample all of them under foot and do not keep one of them.

The passage in Daniel continues: "Know therefore and understand that from the time when the order goes forth to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of the Messiah, the prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. It shall be built again with streets and walls, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, the Messiah shall be killed, and shall have nothing" [Dan. 9:25 f.].