

Selections from Luther's Writings on the Jews

That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew (1523):

I hope that if one deals in a kindly way with the Jews and instructs them carefully from Holy Scripture, many of them will become genuine Christians and turn again to the faith of their fathers, the prophets and patriarchs. They will only be frightened further away from it if their Judaism is so utterly rejected that nothing is allowed to remain, and they are treated only with arrogance and scorn. If the apostles, who also were Jews, had dealt with us Gentiles as we Gentiles deal with the Jews, there would never have been a Christian among the Gentiles. Since they dealt with us Gentiles in such brotherly fashion, we in our turn ought to treat the Jews in a brotherly manner in order that we might convert some of them. For even we ourselves are not yet very far along, not to speak of having arrived. When we are inclined to boast of our position we should remember that we are but Gentiles, while the Jews are of the lineage of Christ. We are aliens and in-laws; they are blood relatives, cousins, and brothers of our Lord. (LW 45:200–201)

I would request and advise that one deal gently with them [the Jews] and instruct them from Scripture; then some of them may come along. Instead of this we are trying only to drive them by force, slandering them, accusing them of having Christian blood if they don't stink, and I know not whatever foolishness. So long as we thus treat them like dogs, how can we expect them to work any good among them? Again, when we forbid them to labor and do business and have any human fellowship with us, thereby forcing them into usury, how is that supposed to do them any good? If we really want to help them, we must be guided in our dealings with them not by papal law but by the law of Christian love. We must receive them cordially, and permit them to trade and work with us, that they may have occasion and opportunity to associate with us, hear our Christian teaching, and witness our Christian life. If some of them should prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either. (LW 45:229)

How Christians Should Regard Moses (1525):

In the third place we read Moses for the beautiful examples of faith, of love, and of the cross, as shown in the fathers, Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and all the rest. From them we should learn to trust in God and love him. In turn there are also examples of the godless, how God does not pardon the unfaith of the unbelieving; how he can punish Cain, Ishmael, Esau, the whole world in the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc. Examples like these are necessary. For although I am not Cain, yet if I should act like Cain, I will receive the same punishment as Cain. Nowhere else do we find such fine examples of both faith and unfaith. Therefore we should not

sweep Moses under the rug. Moreover the Old Testament is thus properly understood when we retain from the prophets the beautiful texts about Christ, when we take note of and thoroughly grasp the fine examples, and when we use the laws as we please to our advantage. (LW 35:173)

Deuteronomy Commentary (1525):

For first of all Moses teaches godliness. He preaches faith amply and richly. He attaches the most beautiful ceremonies, by which the common people must be grasped and held, to keep them from making up their own, which God hates. Then he busies himself with the ordering of civil government and the nurture of mutual love, and he directs and arranges everything with the most suitable and just laws. Nothing here is foolish or useless, but everything is necessary and useful. (LW 9:6–7)

When [Moses] says: “You shall love the Lord,” he arouses joyous and free service to God. For when I love God truly, I want everything God wants; nor is anything sweeter than to hear and to do what God wants, as also human love does with its beloved. Thus through oneness with God in faith we receive everything freely from God; through love, we do everything freely toward God. (LW 9:68)

The two wives of one man are that double and yet single church consisting of Jews and Gentiles. The hated one is the synagog, because it killed the prophets and crucified Christ, etc.; the beloved one is the Gentile church, because it received the Word with joy. Nevertheless, the synagog has the birthright, because from it, and not from the Gentiles, came Christ, the apostles, and the Word. For salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22); therefore the Jews are not to be despised nowadays either, because from them, not from us, comes all glory, as Paul says in Rom. 9:3ff. For they were the first Christians, and to them were promised and entrusted the oracles of God (Rom. 3:2). (LW 9:214–215)

On the Councils and the Church (1539):

[W]e Gentiles must not value the writings of our fathers as highly as Holy Scripture, but as worth a little less; for they [the Jews] are the children and heirs, while we [the Gentiles] are the guests and strangers who have come to the children’s table by grace and without any promise. We should, indeed, humbly thank God and, like the Gentile woman, have no higher wish than to be the little dogs that gather the crumbs falling from their masters’ table [Matt. 15:27]. As it is, we proceed arrogantly and put our fathers and ourselves on a level with the apostles, never thinking that God could break us to pieces more easily, since he did not spare the natural branches and Abraham’s seed or heirs for their unbelief, Romans 11 [:21]. (LW 41:51)

[I]f you can keep the Ten Commandments more easily than the Mosaic ceremonies, go ahead and be holier than St. Peter and St. Paul! I am so weak in keeping

the Ten Commandments that it seems to me Mosaic ceremonies would be far easier for me to observe, if the Ten Commandments would not press me so hard. (LW 41:71)

On the Jews and Their Lies (1545):

I shall give you my sincere advice: First to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them... Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed... Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them... Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb... Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews... Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping... Seventh, I commend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow, as was imposed on the children of Adam (Gen 3[:19]). (LW 47, passim)