

in the government, down to the days of the Maccabees, for we nowhere find either the names or the actions of these rulers. It is certain that the civil power became vested in the high priests, and of these there were sixteen from the captivity to the Maccabees. The Maccabees or Asmoneans, as they are sometimes called, who were of the tribe of Levi, became kings and high priests, and continued to exercise those functions until the year 34, B.C., when Herod the Great ascended the throne of Judea, so that the regal authority ended about 500 years before Christ. Those commentators, however, who have advanced this as an argument that Christ cannot be the Messiah, have entirely been misled by the English term *sceptre*, which with us is a mark of sovereignty, whilst the Hebrew term שֵׁבֶט (shevet), denotes a *staff* or *sceptre*, which was not only borne by kings, but likewise by generals and other dignitaries, and therefore the expression, "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah," does not necessarily imply that *the regal authority* shall not depart from Judah, but may mean such as was exercised by a king, leader, or any other person invested with chief authority. Indeed, the whole blessing of Judah would be altogether stripped of its greatness, were we to interpret the Hebrew term שֵׁבֶט (shevet) as merely expressive of regal authority; for what would it amount to? Simply to this, that during the period of 1689 years, which elapsed between the delivery of this oracle and the coming of Christ, the posterity of Judah should furnish kings for the space of 468 years, as David the first king of Judah, only began to reign 1056 B.C., and Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, was carried to Babylon, in fetters of brass, 588 B.C. Will it be said, that this is all that is intended to be conveyed by the blessing? Most assuredly not. The patriarch rather foretells, that the tribe of Judah should possess a *pre-eminence* above all the other tribes, which should not cease until Shiloh come. This pre-eminence might indeed vary in its character according to the times; but still, it should always be a distinctive mark of that tribe and elevate it above the rest. Now, it can easily be shown from history that Judah enjoyed such a pre-eminence until

* The name of the Asmoneans is derived from Asmonæus, the great grandfather of Mattathias. They afterwards obtained the name Maccabees, from Judas Maccabeo, who obtained the latter appellation מַכַּבִּי (makkabi), i.e., *the hammerer*, from his heroic deeds. Compare in modern history the name of Charles Martel, i.e., *the hammer*.