



CELEBRATE  
MESSIAH

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In Partnership with Chosen  
People Global Ministries

# LUTHER AND THE JEWS



**LUTHER AND THE  
JEWISH PEOPLE** |  
LUTHER'S LASTING  
LEGACY IN GERMANY |  
JEWISH EVANGELISM  
IN GERMANY TODAY

**The 500th Anniversary of the  
Protestant Reformation**



# DID LUTHER HATE THE JEWS?



Dr. Mitch Glaser  
President, Chosen People Ministries

Dear friend,

The festivities in Germany and around the globe celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation have begun! These great festivities will culminate on October 31, 2017 as this was the exact date when Martin Luther hammered the *95 Theses* to the door at the Wittenberg Chapel. Of course, there is some discussion about the historical accuracy of this event

as he may have simply sent the *95 Theses* to the Archbishop of Mainz (in today's Germany), which were in reality arguments against the system of indulgences practiced by the medieval Catholic church.

This event caused a spiritual revolution that transformed what followers of Jesus believed, and the ways in which we practice our faith. There will be a lot to read and view about these events in the months ahead and it would be enriching for believers to better understand the role of Martin Luther and the impact of the Reformation.

But, may I let my hair and my guard down a little bit and tell you how I really feel about Martin Luther – especially during this 500th anniversary? The truth is, Luther has always fascinated me, even before I became a believer in Jesus.

Last year I even visited Wittenberg, along with some staff and friends, and a theologian on our German Beit Sar Shalom Board gave us a tour of the charming little city which became the epicentre of a spiritual earthquake that continues to shape the way millions of Christians view their faith.

I must admit, I was uneasy during the tour as I grew up in a Jewish home where Martin Luther was well known, but not for his spiritual leadership! We were raised to believe that Luther was an antisemite and that he even influenced Hitler! I know this sounds harsh and perhaps unfair, but still, this is how I was raised.

One of the reasons I felt I could not believe in Jesus is because I would then be linked to Luther and others of his ilk whom we believed hated the Jews and laid a theological foundation for the persecution of my people.

Well, many years have gone by and I have studied the life of Luther and come to love many Christians who have a high regard for Luther. I have read some of Luther's writings (he was prolific!) and especially focused on his mention of the Jewish people. I wondered how a man who was brave enough to withstand the church leadership of his day on issues he believed were unethical and unbiblical, and then to call Christians to a deeper commitment and understanding of the Scriptures, could also say the things he said about my people?

To this day, I am still perplexed, but Luther was a very complex and perplexing man! I realise now that there were "extenuating circumstances" and that Luther needs to be viewed in the context of his culture and time he

lived. Yet, there is really no way we can excuse what he did say that was ultimately so harmful and destructive to the Jewish people. What is most concerning for me is that Luther and others who had harsh and derogatory words to say about the Jewish people is part of what keeps my people from discovering the Jewish Messiah who loves them and died for their sins.

I recognise that we are all sinners and need to love the person and hate the sin. I also realise that Luther did a lot of good for mankind by refocusing believers on the Bible, and the message that faith alone is what enables us to take the Gospel to heart and be saved. For these things and more we should be grateful to Martin Luther. But we

Harsh words keep  
Jewish people from  
discovering the  
Jewish Messiah for  
themselves.

WITTENBERG MARKET SQUARE, WITH ANCIENT TOWN HALL, STATUE OF MARTIN LUTHER AND STADTKIRCHE





# THE CHURCH IN GERMANY:

## APPROACHING THE ANNIVERSARY

by Vladimir Pikman  
Executive director  
Beit Sar Shalom, Germany

do not honor the man by ignoring his sin and the ways in which he spoke about God's chosen people. He understood what it meant to be truthful and we should do the same.

I will not try to clarify these issues any further but will leave that up to a Lutheran theologian who has studied the life and writings of Martin Luther in great depth and recently co-authored a book entitled *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career*. Hans Wiersma teaches at Augsburg College in Minneapolis and comes from a family that has always loved the Jewish people. I hope you enjoy this guest article!

And there is more to come as well from Vladimir Pikman, who leads the work of Chosen People Ministries, called Beit Sar Shalom, in Germany. He will bring us up to date on what the Church in Germany is saying about these issues.

Thank you for praying for Chosen People Ministries and our partner in Australia, Celebrate Messiah. Your encouragement is a blessing to us!

In our Messiah,

Mitch Glaser  
President Chosen People  
Ministries

**I**N 2014, in preparation to celebrate the 500 year anniversary of the Reformation, the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD, lit. translation "Evangelical Church in Germany"), which is formed of Lutheran, Reformed and United churches, officially distanced itself from Martin Luther's antisemitism and emphasised that Luther's attacks against Jewish people are incompatible with God's fidelity to His people. In 2015, the synod mentioned the need for further steps of repentance and renewal in its position regarding Jewish people, and in November 2016 it was expressed in dealing with the issue of mission to the Jews. The synod emphasised that the Church did not replace the people of Israel, with whom God remained faithful in covenant. The synod emphasised the necessity to fight against antisemitism and distortion of Judaism. The dialogue with Jewish communities in mutual respect is encouraged. At the same time, the synod stated that Jewish evangelism contradicts the divine faithfulness to the people of Israel. According to EKD's leaders, especially, considering the history of antisemitism and the Holocaust, the Church should rethink its commission regarding the Jewish people. While Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, it is for God to bring the Jewish people to Himself in His way and at His timing.

Although the Messianic Jewish movement and Jewish outreach ministries in Germany welcome the desire of the EKD to break with Luther's antisemitic legacy and to emphasise the covenantal fidelity of God to the people of Israel, it is disturbing to observe the Church leadership opposing any attempts of Jewish evangelism and actively segregating Jewish believers in Jesus. The Gospel is treated as the "Good News" for everybody except its original receivers, the Jewish people. By officially disassociating with Jewish believers in Jesus and disinviting them from Christian events that are open for everybody, the Church commits (hopefully unintentionally) discrimination of these Jewish people based on their belief in Jesus. It is as if they were disassociating with and disinviting the Apostles themselves, who were Jewish.

Thus, 500 years later, the Church of the Reformation needs another "reformation" regarding its view on the Jewishness of the Gospel, understanding of Jesus' heart for the salvation of His people, Israel, and appreciation of the apostolic Jewish belief in Jesus. Prayer for revival is needed, while any support for Jewish believers and missions in Germany in the circumstances of growing segregation is appreciated.





## MARTIN LUTHER: "CONCERNING THE JEWS"

BY DR. HANS WIERSMA

AUGSBURG UNIVERSITY, MINNEAPOLIS, MN



**MY** parents immigrated from The Netherlands to the U.S.A. in 1958; I was born in 1961, making me a first generation American. Growing up, my parents would tell many stories about the old country, about our diverse European ancestry, about life in Holland, about surviving the Nazi occupation, and about the difficult years of rebuilding after the Second World War.

One story about my ancestry involves how my maternal line went from Jewish to Catholic to Protestant in just three generations. My great-grandmother's Jewish family was converted to Catholicism under persecutions in the eastern part of Poland. When my great-grandmother grew up, she married a Catholic man and moved westward, ending up in The Netherlands and giving birth to a daughter – my grandmother. Because of the early death of my great-grandmother, my grandmother was placed in a convent. My grandmother, therefore, was raised to become a nun. However, a copy of Martin Luther's Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans had been smuggled into the convent. As the story goes, my grandmother read Luther's work in secret and, on the day she finished, walked out of the convent never to return. She later married an Amsterdam banker, a Protestant (my grandfather) and eventually, I became a Lutheran pastor who went on to get a PhD in Church History with a specialty in the Reformation and Martin Luther.

Luther's original intent with the *95 Theses* was to arrange an academic debate regarding the effectiveness

of "indulgences." Luther's critique of the Church's practice of selling what amounted to a "fastpass" to heaven struck a chord all over the Holy Roman Empire. Within weeks of their initial appearance, the 95 Theses were printed and reprinted all over Europe. Over the next three years, Luther's criticisms of the Church's official teachings expanded to other, more central subjects. Consequently, Luther was called on the carpet. He was given several opportunities to renounce his writings and recant his teachings but he would not. Luther's teachings, centered on the notion that "a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Romans 3:28), inspired other reform-oriented teachers and political leaders. The Protestant Reformation was on!

I was 25 years old when I read my first Luther biography: *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career*, by James M. Kittelson. The book had been recommended to me by a friend. I read it as a recent college graduate who had little to no idea what he wanted to do with his life.

Fast-forward twelve years. I found myself returning to school to begin doctoral studies in Church History under the tutelage of – wait for it – James M. Kittelson, the man who wrote the Luther biography that had so influenced me more than a decade earlier. I co-authored the second edition of the book.

One of the many major amendments of the second edition involves Chapter 16's subsection titled, "Concerning the Jews." The second edition devoted

twice as many words to the topic as did the first edition. Thirty years ago, there was less awareness of Luther's anti-Jewish writings and attitudes than there is today. An internet search for "anti-Semitism Luther" turns up hundreds of sites that deal with the issue. Luther's "dirty little secret" about his regard for "the Jews" is no longer little or a secret. However, it is still quite foul.

Here's the sordid story:

Early in his public career, Luther had written a treatise that showed great favor toward Medieval Europe's Jewish population. In *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* (1523), Luther extolled the Jewish people, the Torah, and the patriarchs and prophets, the heroes of Ancient Israel. Luther urged Europe's princes to treat the Jews within their territories with kindness and forbearance. Luther understood that if he had been a Jew, and treated as badly as Christian Europe had treated the Jews, he would have "become a pig" before he'd convert to Christianity. The irony of using the non-kosher pig demonstrates Luther's penchant for cutting irony – an irony that often cut both ways. In any case, in this treatise, Luther also wrote, "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." Here Luther demonstrated his belief at the time that (a) Christians had been guilty of mistreatment of the Jews, and (b) that given the return of the true Gospel (as taught by Luther), the Jews would eventually "come around."

Twenty years later, Luther wrote a lengthy screed titled, *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies* (1543). Most of *Concerning the Jews* represents Luther's attempt to contradict the teachings of the medieval rabbis and to show them from Scripture that Jesus is the Messiah. However, in the last section, he addressed what he thought should be the political response to perceived public blasphemies against Christ emanating from certain synagogues. "Set fire to their synagogues...and bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn." In addition, he recommended that Jewish books be confiscated, that Jews be forced from their homes, and that they be made to give up all commercial activities, and instead work the land as day laborers.

Luther's proposed measures against the Jewish citizenry of German lands, well exceeded anything that he had previously proposed in regard to other enemies. Even Luther's own colleagues and supporters were

dismayed by the vehemence of Luther's writing *Concerning the Jews*.

There have been several strategies for arriving at an understanding of (without sugarcoating) Luther's awful words about his Jewish neighbors. One strategy is to chalk it up to the fact that Luther was in his last years at

this time. He was in bad health, used up, disillusioned, cranky.

Another strategy involves pointing out the fact that everyone was anti-Jewish at the time, from Erasmus to Shakespeare. A third strategy is to point out that Luther was not anti-Semitic in the racial sense; instead, Luther counted several baptised Jews as friends and correspondents – his complaint was not against the Jewish bloodline but against medieval Jewish religion. The three strategies help us understand Luther's context and circumstances. However, I'm with those who believe that *Concerning the Jews* was the result of two main factors: (1) a simmering disappointment with the rabbis' failure to recognise Jesus as Moshiah, and (2) a desire to avoid divine punishment for failing to speak out against rumored Jewish blasphemies concerning



MARTIN LUTHER'S BOOK, "ON THE JEWS AND THEIR LIES" PUBLISHED IN 1543

Jesus and Mary.

One more question remains: to what extent were Luther's writings against the Jews used by Germany's leaders between 1933 and 1945? The general consensus seems to be that these writings did not come to light until later in the Third Reich's evil age. And when they did come to light, they were "merely" used to reinforce policies and crimes already in place. Today, of course, from a historical perspective that includes the deaths of six million Jews in concentration camps during the 1940s, Luther's counsel is reprehensible, indefensible, and tragic.

Christians who identify as "Lutheran" – Christians like me – have struggled deeply with what it means to be associated with a tradition of a man who wrote such horrible, hateful words. Many of us have wondered and discussed Luther's failure to apply his own well-developed understandings of God's grace, mercy, and might on behalf of all, including his Jewish neighbors at the time.

Speaking for myself, Luther's anti-Jewish sentiments represent the deepest flaws of a deeply gifted man. In the end, we Christians can and should regret and condemn the errant words of this long-dead sinner, while at the same time recognise and lift up Luther's good words when and where they help proclaim Christ crucified and risen.



# NEWS BRIEFS

## EXCITING NEW MINISTRIES IN LAND

Louise and Lawrence Hirsch have recently returned from Israel where they were involved with several ministry events: a retreat sponsored by Chosen People Ministries to mentor and encourage young Israeli believers, a conference called Jerusalem Encounter designed to engage the next generation of believers with mission and ministry in Israel, and a board meeting with our own partner ministry in Israel, Beit Sar Shalom. As well a new messianic outreach centre was opened in Ramat Gan, a popular suburb east of Tel Aviv with a high concentration of younger people. "I believe we are witnessing a growing move of God here in Israel as the new generation of believers are stepping forward to serve the Lord in the Land," Lawrence said. "It is exciting times and it is such a privilege to be a part of what God is doing in Israel."

## HELP FOR NEW IMMIGRANTS

Israel has had a recent influx of refugees, including people from Eastern Ukraine. Imagine what it is like to be in a new country under duress. In addition to not knowing the language or culture, no friends, no relatives and only a few shekels in your pocket. Two elderly women met on the way to Israel, and on arrival rented a room together to save money. But on the day they were to move in, the former tenants hadn't removed their belongings or returned the keys. Our staff members Sergey and Rita helped resolve the situation, and bought the women a mattress since they didn't have enough money to buy one. It was a joy to see the look on their faces. Our ministry partners in Israel are thrilled to help Jewish immigrants settle into life in their new country and historic homeland.

## PRIVILEGE TO SERVE NEWCOMERS

During the hectic season of Passover, our outreach worker Barry noticed more refugees in the churches. After speaking at a service, a young Iranian man aged around 25 came up to

the book table. Barry greeted him with Shalom Aleichem (peace be upon you), and the young man said it was the first time he'd met a Jewish follower of Jesus. His journey to Australia had started in Iran and then he lived in refugee camps in Jordan, which was a very harrowing experience. Eventually he sought asylum in Australia. Barry considers it a great privilege to meet with these extraordinary, newly-arrived people here in Australia.

## MESSIAH IS ULTIMATE DESTINATION

Robert drove from Canberra to Sydney with a Jewish friend to help pick up a car. On the road they were able to talk about why Jerusalem is the centre of world politics. This led to a discussion about the prophets such as Zechariah and Joel, and how world politics would continue to get worse and worse until the Messiah returns. "While this is only a seed to show that Adonai is God, we are praying that God's Spirit will soften the heart so that the seed will be on good soil," said Robert.

## CHILDREN SPARK ETERNITY LINK

Jay took his 7-year-old daughter to a friend's birthday party and got chatting with a couple who'd also brought their daughter along. After a brief conversation they asked Jay what he did and he shared that he was part of the leadership of a local Messianic community. The wife of the couple told him about her friend at work who kept on sharing about Yeshua. He was an amazing man who shone with love and gave her lots of material about Yeshua. Then she made the most amazing statement: "I have started believing that Jesus is the Messiah". This was quickly followed by: "How can I learn more about Jesus?" After being so surprised by these statements, Jay shared with her about the Brit Hadashah, the New Testament. She was excited to learn more.

ISRAEL'S 70<sup>th</sup>

## HOLY LAND TOUR & CONFERENCE

5-13 JULY 2018



The modern nation of Israel was founded on May 14, 1948. Next year we will be celebrating Israel's 70th birthday and it is our hope to gather in Jerusalem for a very special birthday celebration. We are planning tours, a Bible conference, times of worship and celebration, as well as opportunities to learn more about the work God is doing in Israel today through Celebrate Messiah and Chosen People Global Ministries. **Next year in Jerusalem!**

### DAILY TOURS OF THE LAND

For those who have not been to Israel multiple times, we have an excellent basic tour that will be a wonderful refresher to remind you of the beauty and majesty of the land. An advanced tour will be led by Dr. Randall Price of Liberty University. He will take you to a variety of archaeological sites "off the beaten tour path." Experienced Bible teachers will teach the Scriptures at many of the sites. The core tour program includes a full roster of biblical and modern sites including Mt. of Olives, the Western Wall, Ein Gedi, Temple Mount, Capernaum, Yad Vashem, View of the Knesset, Garden Tomb, and much more.

### BIBLE CONFERENCE

**Most evenings from 7:30-9:00pm**

An evening Bible conference will be held at the hotel after dinner. The speakers include:



**DR. DARRELL BOCK**  
Chosen People Ministries U.S.  
Board member and Professor  
of New Testament at Dallas  
Theological Seminary



**DR. MARK YARBROUGH**  
Dean of Dallas Theological  
Seminary



**DR. RICHARD AVERBECK**  
U.S. Board member and  
Professor of Old Testament  
and Semitic Studies at Trinity  
Evangelical Divinity School



**DR. GREG THORNBURY**  
President of The King's  
College in New York City



**DR. RANDALL PRICE**  
Research Professor of Biblical and Judaic  
Studies at Liberty University, archaeologist,  
and founder of World of the Bible Ministries

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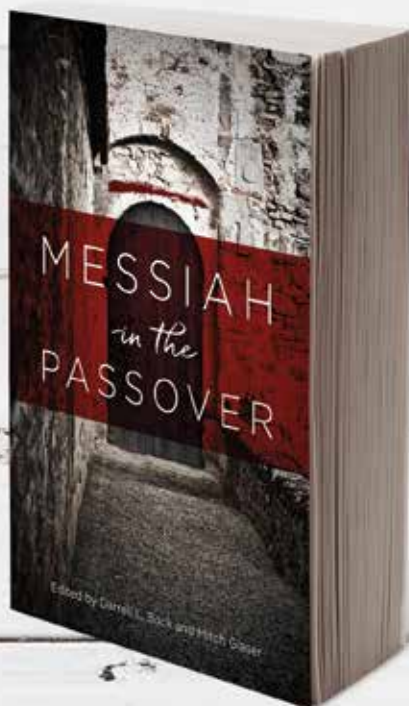
**Evening of July 11, All Day July 12, 2018**



At the end of our tour, we will join thousands of other believers celebrating Israel's 70th birthday by attending a special prayer summit sponsored by Joel C. Rosenberg and The Joshua Fund on the evening of Wednesday, July 11 and all day Thursday, July 12. Summit registration fees will be the responsibility of the individual participants. Cost for the Summit is \$129 (US dollars) and includes lunch. To register, go to [inspirationcruises.com/tjfs Summit](http://inspirationcruises.com/tjfs Summit)



*Messiah in the Passover* is for everyone. This Passover reference book discusses biblical and theological issues, Jewish and church history, and rabbinic traditions. It also includes a Messianic Family Haggadah (Passover guidebook) as well as Passover recipes and lessons for your children. Plus you'll find many more helps in the back of the book. *Messiah in the Passover* will give you a deeper appreciation for the Passover celebration within the Jewish community and enable you to share the message of the Lamb of God through the Passover with your Jewish Friends.



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Israel, Jerusalem and the Nations

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THE PROPHET SPEAKS TODAY!



Lawrence Hirsch



Paul Cohen



Dr Ashley Crane



**SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER**

**Dr Erez Soref**  
*President of One for Israel and President of Israel College of the Bible*



**WORSHIP BY**

**Phil Plotnek**  
and the  
*Beit HaMashiach Band*



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