

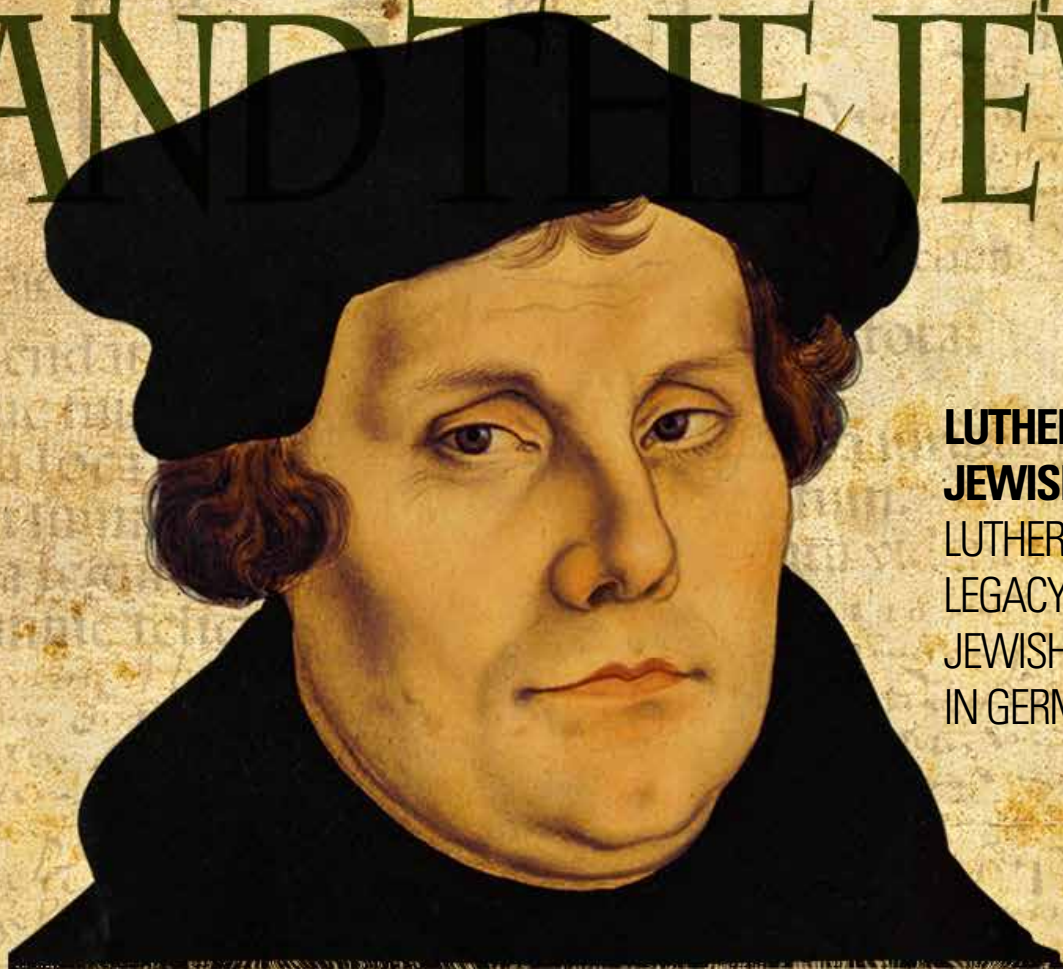
# THE CHOSEN PEOPLE



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June 2017

## 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

# FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dr. Mitch Glaser  
President, Chosen People Ministries

## DID LUTHER HATE THE JEWS?

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

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 his *95 Theses* on the door of 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. The were in reality arguments against the system of indulgences practiced by the medieval Catholic Church.

This event ignited a spiritual revolution that transformed what followers of Jesus believe 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 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 visited Wittenberg, along with some staff, friends, and a theologian who serves on our German Beit Sar Shalom

Board who gave us a tour of the charming little city which was the epicenter of a spiritual earthquake that continues to shape the way millions of Christians view their faith today.

I must admit I was uneasy during the tour, because 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 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—those 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 have 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 stand up to the church leadership on issues he believed were unethical and, and faithful enough to call Christians into 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 realize now that there were “extenuating circumstances” and that Luther needs to be viewed in the context of his culture and the time in which he lived. Yet, there really is no way we can excuse the things he said which were 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 still keeps my people from discovering the Jewish Messiah who loves them and died for their sins.

I recognize that we are all sinners and we need to love the person and hate the sin. I also realize that Luther did a lot of good

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





## THE CHURCH IN GERMANY:

### APPROACHING THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE REFORMATION

by Vladimir Pikman

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 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! Your encouragement is a blessing to us!

In our Messiah,

Mitch

In 2014, in preparation for the 500-year anniversary of the Reformation, Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD, lit. translation “Evangelical Church in Germany”), which consists of Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches, officially distanced itself from Martin Luther’s antisemitism and emphasized 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 the synod clarified its position on the issue of mission to the Jews. The synod emphasized that the Church did not replace the people of Israel, with whom God remained faithful in covenant. The synod emphasized the necessity to fight against antisemitism and the 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. They believe that even though Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, it is for God to bring the Jewish people to Himself in His way and in 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 emphasize 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, as is any and all support for Jewish believers and missions in Germany, especially in the current climate of growing segregation.



## MARTIN LUTHER: "CONCERNING THE JEWS"

BY DR. HANS WIERSMA

AUGSBURG UNIVERSITY, MINNEAPOLIS, MN



**M**y 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 pre-

viously 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 (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 baptized 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 recognize Jesus as Messiah, and (2) a desire to avoid divine punishment for failing to speak out against rumored Jewish blasphemies concerning 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 recognize and lift up Luther's good words when and where they help proclaim Christ crucified and risen.



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

## Hebrews 7:1-10

# The Significance of Melchizedek



Dr. Rich Freeman, D. Min. serves as the Vice President for Church Ministries and Conferences with Chosen People Ministries and lives in South Florida with his wife, Julia. Dr. Freeman works with churches throughout the country and abroad, helping to equip God's people to share the Gospel with their Jewish neighbors, friends and co-workers and grow in their understanding of the Scriptures.

Chapter 6 ended with the statement that Jesus was “a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Now, in chapter 7, the writer of Hebrews returns to the subject he described earlier as “solid food,” the subject of the significance of Melchizedek. Why was Melchizedek significant? Because an understanding of Melchizedek’s High Priestly ministry would be helpful in understanding Jesus’ High Priestly ministry and its superiority to the Levitical priesthood.

There is very little written about Melchizedek in the Old Testament. He is mentioned in only two passages, Genesis 14 and Psalm 110, a Messianic prophecy. The Messianic prophecy in Psalm 110 speaks of the Messiah’s priesthood as being forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. The Genesis 14 passage is an historical account of the successful rescue of Lot from a number of different kings, and following that battle Abraham meets Melchizedek, King of Salem, described as priest of God Most High. So, notice that Melchizedek is both priest and king as is Jesus, the Messiah. Also, notice the significance of his name. His name means King of Righteousness, and he is also called King of Salem, which is King of Peace. The Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7 also clearly mentions these characteristics, righteousness and peace, as part of the future reign of Messiah.

Is Melchizedek Jesus in the Old Testament as some say? A theophany? The Scripture does not support that conclusion. Hebrews 7:4 says, “observe how great this man was.” Melchizedek was a man so he must have had a mother and a father. But there is no evidence in the Old Testament of Melchizedek’s genealogy. Hebrews 7:3 says, “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the son of God he remains a priest perpetually.” Because there is no record of his genealogy, Melchizedek, though a real man, is

seen as a type of Messiah. His priesthood, unlike the Levitical priesthood, did not depend on genealogy and because it had no beginning and no end, “he remains a priest perpetually.”

Since a major theme of Hebrews is the superiority of Jesus, we see here in chapter 7 the superiority of His priesthood, by showing the superiority of Melchizedek over Aaron. The supremacy of Melchizedek is seen in the fact that Abraham gave him tithes. Abraham acknowledged the authority of Melchizedek and his priesthood. Additionally, Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and the writer of Hebrews tells us, “the lesser is blessed by the greater.” In giving Melchizedek tithes and in receiving his blessing, Abraham asserts the greatness of this king-priest, who is indeed a type of Christ.

So how then does this relate to Aaron? Aaron and the tribe of Levi were “in the loins” of Abraham, yet unborn! So, when their father, Abraham, acknowledged the greatness and authority of Melchizedek, the tribe of

Levi was also involved. The writer of Hebrews states, “through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes.” The sons of Levi, who received tithes from their brethren, died, but Melchizedek, who received tithes from Abraham, lived on. Melchizedek was immortal as far as the specific revelation of Scripture states. In contrast, Moses wrote that Abraham, Levi, and the Aaronic priests all died.

One final thought. Since Jesus is said to be of the “seed of Abraham,” does that imply as a descendant of Abraham, Jesus would have also been part of this experience of paying tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham? Jesus as the eternal Son of God existed before Abraham, and therefore unlike the Levitical priests, like Aaron and his family, He could not have been in Abraham’s loins. Jesus Himself, speaking to the religious leaders in John 8:58 said, “Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”

### Read Hebrews 7:1-3 NASB

1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. 3 Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually.

## HELPING ELDERLY JEWISH PEOPLE IN RUSSIA

It is not easy to live in Russia now. Due to the economic crisis, many social programs have closed and many of the elderly and disabled are in need of help. It is very sad to see these helpless people, many of whom have been left alone in old age. Chosen People Ministries will continue to give them all the support we possibly can. Recently, staff members Kirill and Vera visited Jewish residents with disabilities at a retirement home in Sevastopol, Ukraine. One of them, Velvl,\* suffers from Parkinson's disease. Chosen People Ministries' Messianic congregation constantly visits this nursing home and brings them medicine and food. This time the Messianic congregation gave a small concert in which Velvl sang old Jewish songs from their youth; at the end, all the elderly people were asked to sing the Jewish song Hava Nagila. Our Jewish friend Velvl started dancing as though he had no disability!

## NEW IMMIGRANTS STRUGGLE IN ISRAEL

Recently, Israel has had an 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, you have no friends, no relatives and only a few dollars in your pocket. The situations these people face vary greatly. For example, two elderly women who met each other on the way to Israel decided to rent a room together for the sake of saving money. But on the day they were to move in, it turned out that the former tenants had not removed their belongings and had not returned the keys. Staff members Sergey and Rita helped resolve the situation, and bought the women a mattress since they did not have enough money to buy one. It was a joy to see the look



## CAMPUS MINISTRY IN NEW JERSEY

Our New Jersey university campus outreach team is committed and growing! This semester may be nearing its end, but our outreach team is just warming up! The students want to continue the monthly Shabbat dinners through the summer since many of them will be in New Jersey. Further, our team is excited to do summer outreach in parks and on beaches in Jewish areas of New Jersey. This is awesome and an answer to prayer! Please pray for divine appointments in our summer outreach and please continue to pray for the students we talk with on campus. The Spirit of the Lord is stirring hearts and this is exciting!

on their faces! Chosen People Ministries is thrilled to help Jewish immigrants settle into life in Israel, their new country and historic homeland!

## CONVERSATION AT THE CAR WASH

After a relatively fruitless morning of door-to-door work, our worker in the UK, Simon, saw an Orthodox man cleaning his car. Having a hunch he was about to sell it, Simon asked him if he was selling the car. "Yes," the man replied, and what followed was a long conversation about God, Messiah, and Jesus! Erez\* gave Simon his contact information and they look forward to continuing the conversation. When Simon told Erez his name he laughed, "That's funny...that's my uncle's name and as we were talking, I was thinking that you reminded me of him!" Moments

later Erez closed his car door and drove away. Simon believes these and many other opportunities are occurring as a result of prayer.

## EVANGELISM IN THE AIR

On a return trip from Israel to the United States, our veteran evangelist, Doug, was seated next to Yitzack,\* a young Hassidic man. Yitzack was curious about Doug's book, *What the Rabbonim say about Moshiach*, and they fell into a deep discussion of the Scriptures. Doug was not only able to look at some of the Messianic prophecies with Yitzack, but also to open up the New Testament and read of their fulfillment, and how the Apostles and Jesus applied these prophecies to Himself. A doubly strong picture of Messiah!

\*names have been changed



# CHOSEN PEOPLE MINISTRIES' ANNIVERSARY HOLY LAND TOUR

## JULY 5-13, 2018

Next year in Jerusalem! Join Chosen People Ministries for a very special six days to celebrate the 70th birthday of the modern state of Israel. The days will be packed with tours of Biblical and archaeological sites and opportunities to learn more about the work God is doing in Israel today through Chosen People Ministries. In evening meetings, acclaimed Bible conference speakers will teach you more about the Bible, Israel, and God's Chosen People.

**For details and more information about this tour and the BONUS ONE-DAY EPI-CENTER CONFERENCE with Joel Rosenberg fill out the enclosed card or visit [chosenpeople.com](http://chosenpeople.com).**



## DALLAS, TEXAS / October 10-14, 2017



**The Gospel in the Middle East: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the Uttermost Parts** is a conference that will offer profound insight into the purpose and critical role Israel and her neighbors play in the unfolding of prophetic events. Renowned conference speakers, including special speaker, Joel Rosenberg, will give you insight, through the lens of scripture, into the current and future conditions in the Middle East.



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