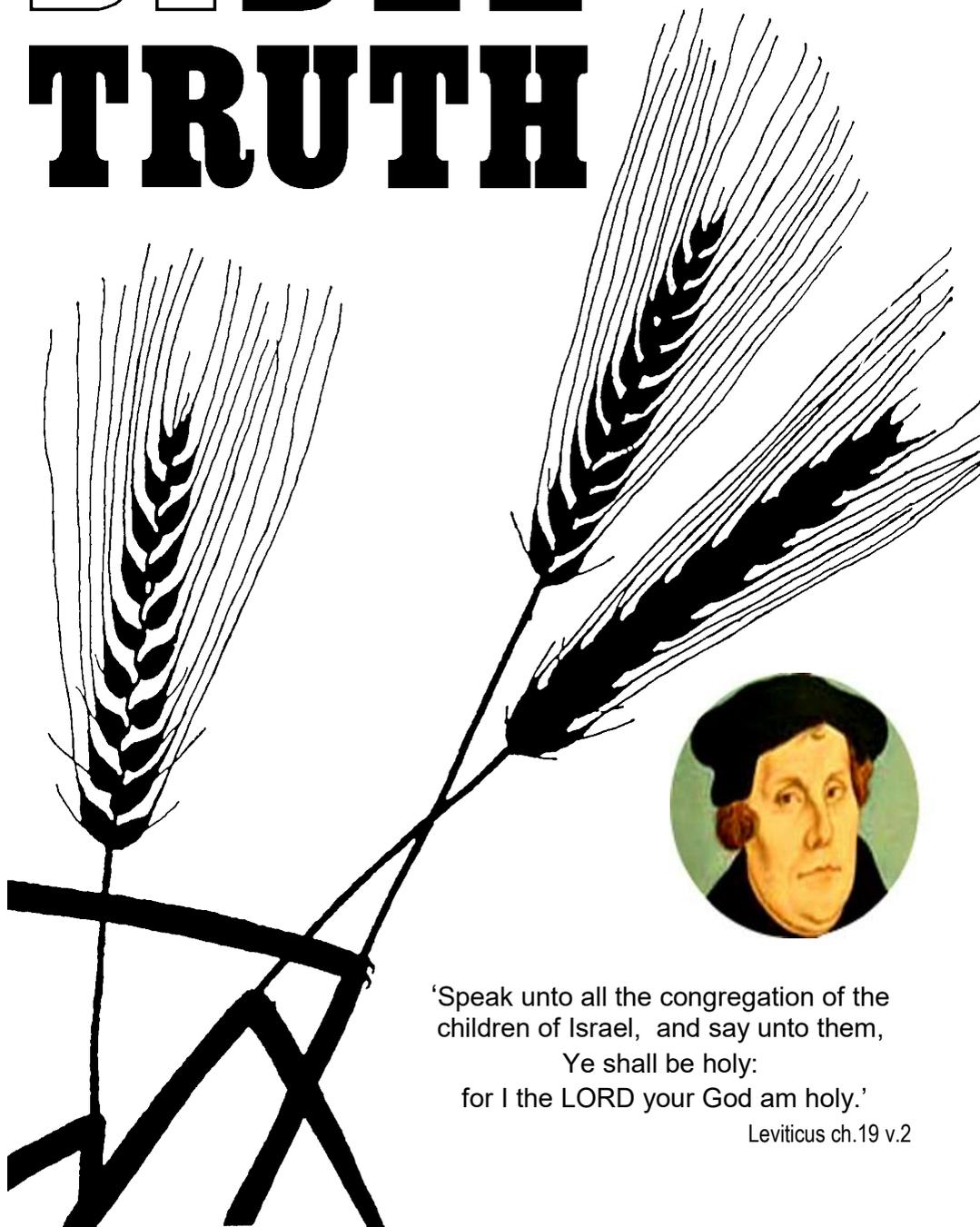


# BIBLE TRUTH

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'Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.'

Leviticus ch.19 v.2

# 500th Anniversary of the Reformation and its meaning today

by Helena Lavers

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation (when the German Martin Luther 1483-1546 produced his 95 Theses disputing with the Roman Church, particularly the sale of Indulgences) is fast looming ahead of us on October 31st 2017. So It is worth delving into this significant event in greater detail.



John Wycliffe

Some historians say that this was the beginning of the Reformation in Europe. However two centuries earlier **John Wycliffe** (1300s) an English philosopher was christened 'The Morning Star of the Reformation' because of his ministry in this field. He was also named 'the father of English prose' due to the popularity of his writings which in turn helped to shape the English language. His followers were those known as 'Lollards' and they were persecuted greatly for their beliefs, many in fact fleeing the country. Although Wycliffe himself did not succumb to this fate he was certainly attacked on all fronts by those who opposed his beliefs. Subsequently, Martin Luther was accused of renewing the errors of Wycliffe two centuries later when he nailed his theses to a Roman Catholic church.



John Wesley Statue, Wesley Chapel, Bristol

In this article I would also like to include the activities of another famous reformist that lived during the 18th century in England, namely '**John Wesley**' who was responsible for preventing a French like revolution here in the British Isles at a time of great poverty, civil unrest and corruption. He was inspired and encouraged by the endeavours of Martin Luther and the religious freedom that came with the Reformation.

Could it be that in an extraordinary and unparalleled way these great men had come to terms with what it was, before the ages that they had been created for? These men had had an encounter with their Maker who had shared with them the great secrets of the past, of what was in their DNA and how they were to be set apart. Perhaps they were aware of their ancestry and tribal destiny that had for many centuries been forgotten and discarded as heresy.

God works in individuals, tribes and nations and I believe that we can see this throughout history. He not only touches individual lives and of course the salvation offered through Jesus Christ as a personal and distinct salvation, but He also works through countries and peoples. For example, He saved the entire city of Nineveh when they repented and turned to Him and countless times in the Bible He saved the Israelites, one incident of which was in the Exodus. This was an example of His saving hand towards a nation with a purpose to be set apart. Thus he used men like Luther and Wesley as a light to their nations in their respective lifetimes.

The actions and life of these great servants of God can also be recognised as His hand through His servant nation Israel, many of whom arrived in the British Isles some centuries after their Assyrian captivity. Others would have been left as pockets of people in parts of mainland Europe such as Spain, Switzerland and Germany. All of the tribes held equal importance and value in the ancient world as well as today but here I want to focus on the present day Germans and British as well as their possible heritage.

There are a number of theories that many from the tribe of Simeon ended up in Germany. Although at first glance Simeon could be considered a tribe with very negative attributes because it is described as 'gevurah' in Hebrew. Fierce anger can come as a result of an unrestrained 'gevurah'. We can see this is a common trait of certain war generals and leaders throughout history. The main attribute of this tribe is 'aggressor' which has perhaps negative attributes. Nonetheless, this could in turn be reversed to become a very positive characteristic. How so? Well, the Simeonites had much strength and they were an extremely aggressive people, a force to be reckoned with and a very powerful one at that.

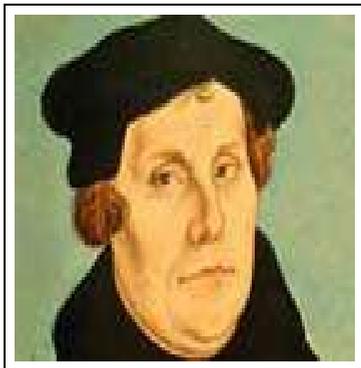
This can be tremendously advantageous as long as they are fighting against and not for the enemy. They were also known to be 'doers' rather than 'thinkers'. This can have both positive and negative characteristics because, although it is necessary first to be a thinker, being a doer can lead to action and when our thoughts are good, so will our deeds be. This is especially when they come from spending time with Father God. Though the Simeonites had great strength, sadly we see that in many situations they used this power for ill rather than for good.

**Martin Luther** was a monk living in Germany in the 15th Century. He exhibited many traits similar to the Simeonites in his often brash, critical and harsh manner but he was also very noteworthy due to the fact that he inspired the Protestant Reformation which impacted the entire globe. This is because he had great influence bequeathed upon him by our ever mighty and all powerful God.

Martin Luther wrote the hymn which included the line,

*'We dare not blame ... the band of Jews; ours is the shame'.*

Moreover, in 1523 he notably condemned the Catholic Church for its maltreatment of Jews. However, there are many who state that Luther eventually became an anti-Semite and a hater of non-Nordic races. This was as a result of some of his writings and the harsh words that he employed in them. Notwithstanding, Luther was but an exasperated biblical scholar who became a slave to his own conjectures presuming his own superior knowledge many times. A good explanation is that



Martin Luther

Luther was often described as being coarse tongued, and intemperate by those around him. In fact he often regretted his own speech and actions at times. He wrote in one of his books, 'I was born to go to war..., that is why my books are stormy and war-like'. We can see the characteristic of someone as a 'doer' who perhaps on various occasions took to action before thinking about the consequences. One thing however that I admire about Martin Luther is that he was neither afraid nor satisfied until he had waged war against the evils of his day. He continued on despite death threats and considerable opposition.

This is shown when Martin Luther in 1517 pinned his document named his '95 Theses' to Wittenberg Castle Church attacking and challenging the Roman Catholic Church on many of their practices. It was mainly because he was committed to the idea that salvation could be reached through faith and by divine grace, a concept that was wholly contradicted by the Roman Catholic Church at that time. He thus sparked the Protestant Reformation and arranged these ideas, already brought forward in part by Wycliffe, at a moment in history ripe for religious reformation.

There is evidence that England has many descendants from the tribe of Manasseh. This tribe is referred to as 'a community or company of nations' (see Genesis ch.35 v.11) which is very curious seeing that England is one of the most diverse nations on the planet. Manasseh, like the Simeonites, has both negative and positive traits.

A most prominent characteristic is 'faith'. This again can be both positive and negative depending on where you place it. We can see that as a nation, England has had moments of great faith in God which brought prosperity and blessing to much of the world. However, it has also had those of great unbelief where the nation has placed their faith in other things.

**John Wesley** (1703-1791) was an Englishman who was influenced greatly by the works of Martin Luther and the Reformation.



John Wesley

He was the son of a clergyman and lived his life in discipline and thorough religious practice much like Luther himself. He was converted at the age of 35 in 1738 in part due to his contact with a group of German Moravians on a ship. Wesley recalled them to be people of 'great peace and joy', and after his own transformation he met with some Moravians in Germany. A little later Peter Bohler (also German) convinced Wesley of Luther's 'Justification by faith alone' and it

was then that 'he saw the light' and trusted in Christ alone for his salvation. It was through the inspiration of Martin Luther that Wesley and his brother Charles became Protestant reformers.

He was a man of humility who lived out a life of faithfulness and brought a great revival to the individuals living in the British Isles. This certainly benefited the British people and its society but also as a result of this restoration, the UK sent out more missionaries than ever before to bless and extol the other nations all over the world.

‘Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves’.

Luke ch 10 v.3

People like David Livingstone and Hudson Taylor were some of these overseas evangelists. Likewise, many from the famous ‘Clapham Sect’ in London took their teaching from Wesley and in due course succeeded in the abolition of the slave trade. Furthermore, Methodism was born out of the teachings of John Wesley and his brother Charles Wesley. It spread to Ireland and by 1791 there were over 14,000 members there.

The two following verses from the Bible show the promises that God has in store for his servants which can be applied to our nations as well as us individuals.

‘Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name;’

Ezekiel ch 39 v.25

‘Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.’

Ezekiel ch 39 v.29

John Wesley had an extraordinary heart for people and really digested the words ‘your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven’ into his soul. It would indeed be fascinating to speculate what Wesley’s thoughts were concerning his Israelitish heritage but we can have an idea by regarding the following hymn that was written by his brother Charles Wesley and published in 1762. John Wesley actually included it in his 1780 hymn-book, *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists*, and for that reason is mistakenly referred to as John Wesley’s hymn. We therefore know that John Wesley himself must have agreed with and endorsed this hymn.

*From Abraham's favour'd seed  
Thy new Apostles chuse,  
In isles and continents to spread  
The dead reviving news.  
We know, it must be done,  
For God hath spoke the word,  
All Israel shall their Saviour own,  
To their first state restor'd:  
Re-built by his command,  
Jerusalem shall rise,  
Her temple on Moriah stand  
Again, and touch the skies.*

(Taken from the Wesley fellowship 2011 by Dr Herbert McGonigle)

This hymn, which is said to represent the views of both John and Charles Wesley, is well worth studying relative to how the Wesleys read scripture in terms of Israel's future in God's plans. However, can we also assume that they are talking about Israel's purpose on the earth now (or in the 18th century)?

Charles based the hymn on Isaiah chapter 65 verse 19, a passage that speaks about the re-gathering of Israel to Mount Zion and from there the Gospel will go out to all the nations of the world. It paints a beautiful, dazzling picture of the Israelites finally coming before their Saviour and being his own special possession 'All Israel shall their Saviour own'. However, the verse which stands out the loudest is the first verse. which I will attempt to explain further. It is extremely curious that Charles states, 'From Abraham's favour'd seed'. Charles may be making a reference to himself, and many of the other great apostles in our country and in Europe at the time of the Reformation and thereafter.

It is particularly thought-provoking that Charles makes the allusion to 'isles' when the only islands which are part of the State of Israel are the Achziv Islands and The Rosh HaNikra Islands. Of course he could be mentioning those islands further afield in the Mediterranean Sea like Cyprus which were blessed by the many journeys of Paul the Apostle. Still, he also makes reference to 'continents' specifically 'the continent of Europe' where the Gospel had been proclaimed and

where Luther himself was born. Maybe he could be referencing both the islands in the Mediterranean and the British Isles themselves. We are blessed and proud to have such a rich heritage based on the Judeo-Christian faith. The ancient Celtic people many of whom worshipped the Christian God were greatly persecuted and mercilessly attacked for their faith especially in AD 927 when Athelstan evicted the remaining Cornish Celts from the city of Exeter supposedly to 'cleanse it'. In fact, after Martin Luther nailed his theses to the church door the Church of England distanced itself from the pope, but many writers claimed that it was not forming a new institution, but rather casting off the shackles of Rome and returning to its true roots as the indigenous national church of Britain. The Reformation brought much freedom to the British and those living in Europe at that time. It also brought greater religious independence, something the Roman church would not allow.

As can be seen there are many wonderful and notable things that came as a result of the Reformation, Wycliffe's teachings and Wesley's sermons. We have seen the results of Luther's challenge to the Roman Catholic Church and how this impacted the sale of indulgences and the control of the Roman Catholic Church. It also paved the way for the Church of England which gave way to more religious freedom in England and the forming of new denominations such as the Baptists and later, Methodism for example. There have been many blessings as a result of these faithful and courageous men of God. They were willing to step into the role that God had chosen for them. They said, 'Yes'. We saw how before the Reformation Europe and the British Isles were very much going through dark times with a lot of oppression and tyranny which was rife among those in authority. Even today there are still many evils around us and it may seem that society is ever slipping into a black hole, nevertheless we serve a God who wants to pull us out of this chaos. Just like in the year 1517 when Martin Luther confronted the Roman Catholic Church and God had his own timeline. We also need to be willing to go with the transformation and embrace it with our souls, being diligent and cautious along the way. We also need to reflect and see what it is that needs changing in our society today in order for a new Reformation to take place.

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