

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2020-

---

2021

## Hermeneutics of Hate: How Martin Luther's Rhetorical Manipulation of the Greek Bible Led to His Anti-Judaic Treatise On The Jews and Their Lies

Michael Parrish  
*University of Central Florida*

 Part of the Religion Commons

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd2020>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Masters Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2020- by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### STARS Citation

Parrish, Michael, "Hermeneutics of Hate: How Martin Luther's Rhetorical Manipulation of the Greek Bible Led to His Anti-Judaic Treatise On The Jews and Their Lies" (2021). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2020-*. 913.

<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd2020/913>

HERMENEUTICS OF HATE: HOW MARTIN LUTHER'S RHETORICAL  
MANIPULATION OF THE GREEK BIBLE LED TO HIS ANTI-JUDAIC  
TREATISE *ON THE JEWS AND THEIR LIES*

by

MICHAEL PARRISH  
University of Central Florida, 2021

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of English  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term  
2021

Major Professor: James Campbell

© 2021 Michael Parrish

## ABSTRACT

Though lauded as a Protestant hero, it is impossible to read Martin Luther's *On the Jews and Their Lies* and not think about the numerous acts of violence inspired by his commentary. Luther argues that his anti-Judaic treatise is simply reiterating the Greek Bible (the New Testament) and anyone who reads the Greek Bible would come to the same conclusion. This thesis argues that Luther adopted a hermeneutical Jew from theologians and the Greek Bible before him to create his own hermeneutics that demonized the European Jewish population with devastating consequence. Though much of the Greek Bible was part of a larger intra-Jewish conflict, it is a solidly Christian text for Luther, and Luther believes that Paul, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John created foundationally anti-Judaic texts that created the basis for his treatise. Despite Luther's focus on the Greek Bible, Luther, through typology and rhetorical manipulation, believes that the Hebrew Bible is part of a larger Christian Bible, and Luther uses the Hebrew Bible to vilify the Jews as well. This thesis traces Luther's application of the Greek Bible chronologically and illustrates how Luther, through hermeneutics and a rhetorical manipulation, created an anti-Judaic treatise that has not gone away with time.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have received a great deal of support and counsel throughout the writing of this thesis.

I would like to first express my deepest appreciation to my thesis director, Dr. James Campbell, and my thesis committee members, Dr. Tison Pugh and Dr. Stephen Hopkins, whose expertise was critical in the formulation of this thesis. Your honest feedback and helpful advice not only made me a better writer but a better, more critical thinker.

To my friends and my parents: thank you for your patience and understanding. I am forever grateful for your wise counsel, stimulating discussions, and willingness to listen.

Finally, to my wife, Alicia, who I married while writing this thesis: your love and support helped me through the difficult moments and dark times we are all experiencing. You have been amazing, and we both share this accomplishment.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	1
Hermeneutics.....	1
Hermeneutic Theorists .....	7
Paul and the Greek Bible.....	12
Formulation of Thesis .....	15
Conclusion.....	18
PAULINE EPISTLES: GENTILES VS JEWS .....	20
MATTHEW AND MARK: THE FALSE BELIEF KNOWN AS BLOOD LIBEL .....	43
LUKE AND ACTS: THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY .....	60
THE GOSPEL OF JOHN AND THE CREATION OF THE CHRISTIAN’S JEWS .....	81
CONCLUSION.....	103
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	107

## INTRODUCTION

### Hermeneutics

The Christian Bible is a unique piece of literature. Essentially—and somewhat reductively—the Christian Bible is an anthology written over thirteen hundred years. It is problematically split between an Old and New Testament, and a version of the New Testament was not first canonized until the fourth century by Athanasius.<sup>1</sup> Books were written during the composition of the New Testament, or Greek Bible, that were not added to the modern Protestant and Catholic canons, and they have been lost to time or are considered apocryphal. Though the Christian Bible in its entirety is a sacred text to Christians—and the Hebrew Bible is sacred to Jews—it has impacted the world of secular literary interpretation. As is true for both religion and secular interpretation or criticism, interpretations—that is revealing what was seemingly hidden—can often be more pervasive than the text itself in certain interpretive communities.<sup>2</sup> The process of interpretation and community acceptance is the essence of religious hermeneutics, and, though we understand its religious function, hermeneutics is simply the science of interpretation. For example, Martin Luther’s hermeneutical basis for interpretation is *sola fide* (justification by faith alone), which, according to Jeffrey L. Morrow, means Luther’s “idea of ‘promise’ replaces the traditional role of typology” (6). Though we often take popular

---

<sup>1</sup> Though Athanasius did not single-handedly canonize the Greek Bible, he was the first to suggest the canon that exists today.

<sup>2</sup> As Stanley Fish writes in “Interpreting the Variorum,” “Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies...this, then, is the explanation both for the stability of interpretation among different readers (they belong to the same community) and for the regularity with which a single reader will employ different interpretive strategies and thus make different texts (he belongs to a different community)” (483).

interpretations and criticisms for granted within literary communities, biblical interpretations by the most popular thinkers have permeated Western thought.

The methodology of interpretation is foundationally philosophical (primarily by way of Aristotle), but “hermeneutics” was—and still is somewhat—used religiously.<sup>3</sup> Jean Grondin, for example, writes that, originally, hermeneutics “[had] a sacred or religious function,” and, also, hermeneutics “means not only utterance but also language generally, translation, interpretation, and also style and rhetoric” (21-2). Hermeneutics—or early interpretation—held both religious and literary importance. Furthermore, J. Edwin Hartill writes in his *Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics*, “Biblically, hermeneutics is a science of interpreting the Bible,” and Harthill argues that biblical hermeneutics covers everything from grammar to “biblical ethnicities” (1-4).<sup>4</sup> Despite Hartill’s argument that hermeneutics is a science, hermeneutics, especially Luther’s hermeneutics, are admittedly not scientific at all; in fact, Luther admits to relying completely on faith alone. Contemporarily, Peter Szondi and Timothy Bahti write in their article “Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics,” that, “the hermeneutician is an interpreter, a mediator, who on the basis of his knowledge of a language makes understandable that which is not understood, that which is no longer understandable. This occurs when in the place of the word which is longer understood, he puts another which belongs to the stage of the language” (21). In other words, the interpreter’s role is to make texts understandable for a contemporary audience, and interpretation—by its very nature—is a retrospective form of criticism. Though it can be argued that all literary criticism and theoretical formulations are retrospective, for hermeneutical

---

<sup>3</sup> Hermeneutics comes from the Greek ἐρμηνεύς (*hermeneus*), and Aristotle wrote Περὶ Ἑρμηνείας (*Peri Hermeneias*), which was translated into Latin as *De Interpretatione* (*On Interpretation*).

<sup>4</sup> Biblical Ethnicities includes Jews, Gentiles, and “Early Christians” (or the early Church).



interpretation to be applicable, the text must be fundamentally past its time of common understanding. Therefore, when Luther is interpreting the Bible in *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543), he is interpreting the Bible to make it understandable for a sixteenth century audience.

Luther uses two primary tactics of interpretations: *sensus literalis* and typology. *Sensus literalis* translates to “literal sense” which means, according to Peter Szondi and Timothy Bahti, that Luther “asserted the clarity of the Scriptures which therefore interpret themselves and do not need any interpretive authority from outside themselves” (“Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics” 25). Despite the claim that the scriptures interpret themselves, it is an interpretive tactic to convince the reader to believe that no other interpretation can be garnered from a particular passage. Luther calls this literal meaning of the Bible *schriftprinzip*, which is more commonly known as *sola scriptura* today. Luther claims as much in his introduction to *On the Jews and Their Lies* when he writes, “They may interpret this as they will; we will see the facts before our eyes, and these do not deceive us” (2). Typology, on the other hand, is the doctrine that the Hebrew Bible contains characters and events that are “types” for the Greek Bible. Simply put, the Hebrew Bible’s purpose, for Luther, was to prophesy or allegorize the Greek Bible and even later Christian interpretation. For example, Luther tells his readers, “Do not engage in much debate with Jews...there is no hope until they reach the point where their misery finally makes them pliable...Moses was unable to reform the Pharaoh by means of plagues, miracles, pleas, or threats; he had to let him drown in the sea” (3-4). Though Moses is Jewish and he is the most important prophet of Judaism, Luther interprets that Moses is the Christian of

the story while the Pharaoh is the Jew.<sup>5</sup> Luther is working with a version of the Bible which he translated into contemporary German himself, and when he is reading the Bible, his understanding is a literal meaning of the various writers of the Christian Bible. Luther believed that the writers of the Greek Bible created an anti-Judaic text that he could then reiterate and extrapolate in his treatise *On the Jews and Their Lies*. I then argue, despite much of the Greek Bible being part of an intra-Jewish conflict, Luther regards the Greek Bible as a foundational anti-Judaic text that is predicated in part by the revelations Luther interprets in the Hebrew Bible.

Continuing the retrospective interpretive tactic of hermeneutics, Luther's text deals with anti-Judaism, and, though Luther's treatise was later incorporated among antisemitic texts, it was not written as such. Luther was, for obvious reasons, unfamiliar with race-based Darwinian biology, and it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that humanity began differentiating groups of people based on race.<sup>6</sup> The term "antisemitism," for example, was coined in a German pamphlet, *The Way to Victory of Judaism over Germanism*, in 1879, where Wilhelm Marr argued that the Semitic race was a threat to the German race (Bein 595).<sup>7</sup> There were, however, several conflicts between European Christians and Jews prior to the coinage of "antisemitism." For example, 2,500 Jewish men, women, and children were killed in Germany during the Rhineland massacres by the People's Crusade in 1096, and Christian chroniclers "unanimously refrained from condemning [it] or even sympathized with it" (Levy 154). The German Christian mobs of

---

<sup>5</sup> Louis Ginzberg writes of Moses in *Legends of the Jews*, "Moses is regarded not only as the greatest religious guide Israel, but as its first national leader" (545).

<sup>6</sup> It was not until the nineteenth century that humanity began differentiating people based on race rather than culturally or genealogically, the latter of which holds great importance to biblical texts. However, Robert Chazan argues in his *From Anti-Judaism to Anti-Semitism* that "the present-day Jewish incapacity is merely a continuation of a historic disability. Jews over the ages have not changed" (128).

<sup>7</sup> Marr, who founded the League of Antisemites in 1879, argued that the problem between Semitic and German people could only be solved with the death of the other.

the People's Crusade were not inspired by racial superiority but by the First Crusade and the interpretation that the Jewish people were solely responsible for the death of Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, most of the writers of the Greek Bible would have likely considered themselves to be part of a fledgling Jewish sect (later called Christianity), and it was not until the first Jewish-Roman war—when large portions of Greek Bible were complete—that Christianity gained more independence from Judaism. Historically, much of the Greek Bible can be considered part of an intra-Jewish conflict. This thesis deals with textual anti-Judaism, and, though these texts have caused atrocities, the authors of the Greek Bible inadvertently influenced Martin Luther's hermeneutics in *On the Jews and Their Lies*.

The use of the term “Greek Bible” is commonplace amongst scholars today, but Bibles are problematically split between an Old and New Testament (rather than between a Greek and Hebrew Bible). The splitting of the Bible is the fundamental part of Luther's interpretation and a primary concern of supersessionism. Similar to the term “antisemitism,” “supersessionism” was not used until the end of nineteenth century, and it certainly was not considered to be problematic by Christians who created the terms.<sup>9</sup> However, unlike “antisemitism,” Luther fully believed in the idea of supersessionism (even if he was unaware of the doctrine as it is used today). Supersession, or Replacement Theology, is the religious doctrine that the New Covenant supersedes the Old Covenant, or, in other words, that the New Testament supersedes the Old. The titles “Old” and “New” are even superficially problematic as well. For example, John Barton notes in his *History of the Bible*, “the problem with ‘Old Testament’ is that the word ‘old’ can

---

<sup>8</sup> The idea of “Blood libel” is introduced in Matthew 27:25, and it is made even more prevalent by hermeneutists, theologians, and translators long before the eleventh century.

<sup>9</sup> “Supersessionism” was first used by Sydney Thelwall in his translation of Tertullian's *Adversus Judaeos* in 1870.

be...negative or pejorative—‘these are the old Scriptures, but in the New Testament we now have better ones’” (34). The Greek Bible is the problematic foundation of supersessionism. Paul writes in Hebrews, “For this reason he [Christ] is the mediator of the new covenant...because [Jesus’] death has occurred that redeems [the people] from the transgressions under the first covenant” (9:15).<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Luther writes in *On the Jews and Their Lies* that the New Covenant came to the “rescue” to create “a new and different birth, quite different from the old, first birth” (4). Luther argues that the Greek Bible makes the Hebrew Bible less believable when he writes, “we...have our New Testament, which furnishes us reliable and adequate testimony concerning the Messiah. That the Jews do not believe it does not concern us; we believe their accursed glosses still less” (22). In other words, the Jews do not believe the Greek Bible—which Luther believes to be accurate—but Luther does not believe the entirety of the Hebrew Bible to be useful (unless it can be used typologically). Supersessionism is the underlying hermeneutical tactic of Luther’s interpretation, and, therefore, it is the foundation for his anti-Judaic treatise. Luther’s interpretations and characterization of Judaism contain descendent hermeneutics and literary tactics from commenters, interpreters, and critics prior to *On the Jews and Their Lies*, many of which were prolific shortly after the composition of the Greek Bible therefore lending them the title of hermeneutic innovators.

---

<sup>10</sup> It was believed that Paul was the writer of the book of Hebrews since the second century (*Encountering the Manuscripts* 36). However, today, it is commonly believed to be written by an unknown author despite being listed among Paul’s Epistles.

### Hermeneutic Theorists

Several hermeneutists influenced the creation of Western Jewish characterization and Christian hermeneutics. Two hermeneutists stand out for their overwhelming influence on Martin Luther: Justin Martyr (100-165 CE) and Tertullian (155-240 CE). Martin Luther and his interpretive antecedents were not speaking of actual Jewish people in their texts, especially at the height of the political power of the Church (though their interpretations certainly impacted the actual Jewish population). In other words, as Jeremy Cohen writes, “throughout much of its history, in various manners and to differing extents, Christianity has accorded Jews and Judaism a singular place in a properly ordered Christian society,” and “Jews have had distinctive tasks in Christian visions of salvation history” (1-2). The Jews described in Luther and his antecedents’ various texts are not actual Jews but, rather, who these writers thought Jews should be or, worse, who they thought the Jews were, which Cohen calls the “hermeneutical Jew” (5). Justin Martyr and Tertullian were the first to give “rise to a genre of Christian literary expression unto itself,” and the hermeneutical Jew created by these writers encompasses more than Jewish characters themselves (Cohen 9).

Justin Martyr wrote his seminal *Dialogue with Trypho* sometime in the latter half of the second century, and in his *Dialogue* Justin deploys the literary device of a conversation between himself and Trypho who is a Jew.<sup>11</sup> Justin Martyr writes to his interlocutor Trypho, “your sinfulness was the reason why God first issued those [commandments], so now because of your

---

<sup>11</sup> Whether or not a Jew named Trypho existed is debated. Claudia Setzer argues in *Jewish Responses to Early Christians* (1994) that some believe Trypho to be a real person with a different name, but she concludes that no such person existed (215). Similarly, Larry R. Helyer concludes in *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period* (2002) that Trypho was created by Justin (493).

enslavement to sin, or rather your greater inclination to it, by means of the same [commandments], he calls you to remember and know him. But you are ruthless, stupid, blind, and lame people, children of whom there is no faith” (42). The purpose of Justin’s attack on Trypho is to disparage Trypho as an example of all Jewish people including their laws (or old covenant) because, though the Hebrew and Greek Bible were part of the same book for Justin, the Hebrew Bible contained discontinuities for early Christians namely Jewish law. The commandments, according to Justin, serve as evidence of God’s punishment of Jews for their sinfulness, and, based on Justin’s use of scornful terms such as, “ruthless,” “stupid,” “blind,” and “faithless,” he blames them for everything from their idolatry to the crucifixion of Jesus and their alleged persecution of Christians. Again, attacking Jewish doctrine, Justin writes to Trypho concerning circumcision, “the custom of circumcising the flesh...was given to you as distinguishing mark, to set you off from other nations and from us Christians. The purpose of this was that you and only you might suffer the afflictions that are now justly yours; that only your land be desolate, and your cities ruined by fire; that the fruits of your land be eaten by strangers before your very eyes; that not one of you be permitted to enter Jerusalem” (27). Like the commandments, circumcision was given to the Jews, according to Justin, as evidence of their sin and the symbol of their godly affliction and punishment, and circumcision is only a symbol of Jewish failure to Justin. Justin says as much when he writes to Trypho, “The law promulgated at Horeb [Mount Sinai] is already obsolete, and was intended for you Jews only...now a later law in opposition to an older law abrogates the older; so, too, does a later covenant void an earlier one” (20). Justin’s supersessionist argument claims that the old law—or Jewish law—is obsolete and has been replaced by a new covenant, which holds doctrinal importance to Justin. Because

Justin connects the commandments, circumcision, and the old law to Jews—which he also connects to their denial of Jesus—Justin is essentially interpretively claiming ownership of both the Hebrew and Greek Bible where the Hebrew Bible serves as justification for the Jewish action in the Greek Bible (and, therefore, connecting them forever as a single text). Justin shields his interpretive tactic through the guise of a fictitious dialogue, and he persistently claims the invalidity of the old law in place of a new one by his own interpretation of the Bible, which, in turn, becomes an influential interpretive tactic for later hermeneutists.

Tertullian, like Justin Martyr, desired to keep the Hebrew and Greek Bibles together thus he wrote *Adversus Marcionem* near the beginning of third century to counter Marcion of Sinope (85-160 CE) (who was condemned by Justin Martyr and excommunicated by the church of Rome).<sup>12</sup> Marcion argued that Jews and Christians followed two separate gods (with the Jewish god being the lesser of the two), and he believed that Jesus’s physical body was an illusion that resembled a physical body (Docetism).<sup>13</sup> Tertullian writes, “let the heretic now give up borrowing poison from the Jew,—the asp, as they say, from the viper: let him from now on belch forth the slime of his own particular devices, as he maintains that Christ was a phantasm” (192). Tertullian’s comparison between Judaism and Marcion’s argument is fundamentally flawed. Marcion, who believes the Hebrew Bible to be worthless and that Jesus was the son of God (though without a physical body), is, according to Tertullian, somehow borrowing poison from

---

<sup>12</sup> Marcion’s teaching “made a radical distinction between the God of Old Testament (the Creator) and the Father of Jesus Christ (the God of Love),” and he believed “that distinction had been obscured at the very earliest stages of the Christian movement, and, among the Apostles, only Paul understood it.” Marcion edited his own version of biblical books, and “his collection of those books that he regarded as authoritative seems to have had influence on the formation of the Church’s canon of the New Testament” (Britannica).

<sup>13</sup> Marcion did publish the first known canon of the New Testament (Bruce 134).

the Jew, who believes wholeheartedly in the Hebrew Bible and denies that Jesus is the literal son of God. The only similarity between them is that they both do not interpret the Bible—as complete as it was in the third century—in the same light as Tertullian and the church of Rome, or, as Jeremy Cohen writes, “each understood...the old law in its literal sense: one accepted it...the other rejected it outright” (12). Therefore, Tertullian is not blaming the hermeneutical Jew for the same heretical argument Marcion has made. Tertullian is using the Jew to encompass something far greater: that both Marcion and the Jewish people (according to Tertullian) share a misunderstanding of the biblical text according to his interpretation. Tertullian’s use of the Jew is influential to Martin Luther who compares the hermeneutical Jew to Muslims and, more personally, to Catholics.<sup>14</sup>

Considering that a fundamental aspect of hermeneutics is constant reinterpretation for a contemporary audience, several interpreters that serve as gateways between hermeneutical innovators and Martin Luther. For instance, Augustine (354-430 CE) not only influenced biblical hermeneutics but Western philosophy. Jerome (the translator of the Vulgate) wrote to Augustine saying, “you are known throughout the world...as the one who has establish[ed] anew the ancient faith” (*Jerome Letter 195*). According to Jerome, Augustine was able to reinterpret the Bible for a contemporary audience and “establish anew the ancient faith.” More importantly, Augustine presents a hermeneutical Jew—through a typological interpretation—in his texts that he essentially updates from Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and the Bible itself:

---

<sup>14</sup> Luther praises Tertullian, for example, in his “Twenty-third Sunday after Trinity” sermon where he says, “The blood of Christians, as Tertulian [sic] says, is the seed from which Christians grow. Satan must be drowned in the blood of Christians” (*The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther* 299). Luther is referencing Tertullian’s *Defense of the Christians Against the Heathen* where, interestingly, Tertullian spends a chapter blaming the Jews for Jesus’s death.



But the Jews who slew Him [Jesus], and would not believe in Him, because it behoved Him to die and rise again, were yet more miserably wasted by the Romans, and utterly rooted out from their kingdom, where aliens had already ruled over them, and were dispersed through the lands, and are thus by their own Scriptures a testimony to us that we have not forged the prophecies about Christ. (*City of God* 891)

Augustine's text is far less violent than interpreters before him, but his hermeneutical Jew has become far more popular. Essentially, Augustine writes that the Jews live in turmoil for the benefit of Christians, and Jewish suffering is proof that the Bible is a divine text. Furthermore, Augustine writes that "the [Jews] are blinded to the Greek Bible," and he concludes his denunciation of Jews by writing, "therefore He [God] has not slain them [the Jews], that is, He has not let the knowledge that they are the Jews be lost in them...lest they forget the law of God, and their testimony should be of no avail in this matter of which we treat" furthering his argument that Jews live for the sake of theological necessity (or, typologically) (891-92). Though interpretations are sometimes contemporized, they are simultaneously built upon interpretations before them, and, just as Justin Martyr and Tertullian used the hermeneutical Jew for their interpretive needs, Augustine and, later, Martin Luther do the same. Moreover, the conclusion that the Jew lives typologically is one interpretive tactic that is constant between the hermeneutical fathers, Augustine, Martin Luther, and from the writers of the Greek Bible themselves.

## Paul and the Greek Bible

The Greek Bible serves as a narrative text, an interpretive text, and hermeneutical instruction, and the first Christian hermeneutist is really Paul (the Apostle). A majority of the Greek Bible is about Paul (a majority of Acts) or written by Paul (Paul's epistles), and Paul's textual aim is to interpret theological ideas and parts of the gospels—because the gospels did not exist for him as they do today—to an audience that was mostly unfamiliar with the Greek Bible.<sup>15</sup> Paul's epistles are essentially interpreting the narrative of the gospels and the theological instruction contained elsewhere in the Greek Bible and sometimes the Hebrew Bible. Paul uses the Hebrew Bible because, as he writes in Romans 11:13, "I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles." Therefore, like the hermeneutists that Paul influenced, Paul is not directing his interpretive texts towards the people he is essentially interpreting, and in most instances they would be unfamiliar with the Hebrew Bible. For example, Paul preceded Romans 11:13 by asking and answering, "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite" (Rom 11:1). Later in the same chapter Paul clarifies, "I want you [the Gentiles] to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom 11:25). Essentially, Paul argues in Romans 11 that he is only writing to Gentiles, and, considering Jews are "hardened" until the "full number of Gentiles" have "come in," Paul has no reason to speak to Jews at all. However, that does not stop Paul from creating a hermeneutical Jew for his Gentile audience. Paul writes in Romans 11 that the Jews "failed to obtain what [they] were seeking," and,

---

<sup>15</sup> 14 books of the Greek Bible are attributed to Paul, but at least 7 of these books' authorship is debatable (Aune 9, Dunn 1274, Perkins 4-9).

consequently, “salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make [the Jews] jealous” because the Jews have “stumbled” (11:7, 11:11). Paul continues to write that the Stumbling Jew means “riches for the world,” and “their defeat means riches for the Gentiles, but if the Jews were to somehow “accept,” according to Paul, it would be synonymous with receiving “life from the dead” (11:12, 11:15).

Though Paul is part of the biblical narrative of the Greek Bible, Paul serves more as a foundational hermeneutist for Martin Luther. For example, Luther writes in *On the Jews and Their Lies*, “St. Paul teaches us in Romans 3 that when circumcision is performed as a kind of work it cannot make holy or save, nor was it meant to do so,” and, later, Luther refers to Romans 3 as Paul’s “statement” on circumcision (13). Moreover, on several occasions Luther cites his interpretation by writing “as St. Paul says.” Luther’s hermeneutical connection with Paul exists for several reasons: Paul is a prominent figure in the Greek Bible, he wrote a large portion of the Greek Bible, and he is essentially an interpreter himself. The same cannot be said for the writers of gospels or Acts (in which Paul is the narrative focal point). Furthermore, even though the gospels are tied to authors (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), they were not given authorial titles until long after they were written.<sup>16</sup> Though Luther refers to the author by the names of the gospel in one instance (as in “Luke writes...”), he does not have the same hermeneutical lineage to them as he does with Paul.

---

<sup>16</sup> David Oliver Smith writes in *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul: The Influence of the Epistles on the Synoptic Gospels*, “The first mention of the gospels in Christian literature was sometime about 120 CE – 150 CE. The Christian apologists Justin Martyr had no specific names for them and called them simply “Memoirs of the Apostles” (7).

Luther does not write “Matthew writes...” in the entirety of *On the Jews and Their Lies*, and Matthew, nor Mark or Luke, according to Luther, give a “statement” or “teach” a lesson. Similarly, Luther does not directly cite Mark either. Luke is both cited and mentioned as an author in a single instance because of the book of Acts. The author of Luke also wrote Acts as he dedicates both to the same patron, Theophilus, and he begins Acts by writing, “In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught...” (Acts 1:1). Therefore, Luther writes, “Luke writes in Acts” (35). Though Luther references the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and Acts, he is less concerned with their authors. Luther’s primary focus within the synoptics is the narrative of Jesus, but Paul is Luther’s focus when writing he writes about Paul’s epistles.

The gospel of John, on the other hand, surpassed the synoptic gospels’ importance for Martin Luther. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, for example, writes, “although [Luther] is usually regarded primarily an expositor of St. Paul’s epistles, Luther valued the Fourth Gospel most highly and devoted himself to the interpretation of it throughout his career” (*Luther’s Works* 1). It is one verse that Luther gravitates towards and continually repeats throughout his anti-Judaic treatise: John 8:44. John writes that Jesus says to the Jews, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here...you [Jews] cannot accept my word. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was murdering from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.” (8:42-44). John’s words serve as Luther’s thesis statement nearly 1500 years later, and, because Luther is a hermeneutist, Luther’s purpose is to contemporize John. Luther writes, “It was intolerable to them [the Jews] to hear that they were not Abraham’s but the devil’s children, nor can they bear

to hear this today” (4-5). Luther continues to write that the verse proves that if “their Messiah, for whom they hope, should come and do away with their boast and its basis they [the Jews] would crucify and blaspheme him seven times worse than they did our Messiah” (5). According to Luther, not only are John’s words applicable to his sixteenth-century audience, but, at the same time, they should be expanded to become harsher.

Not only have the writers of the Greek Bible, according to Martin Luther, created a foundation for his treatise, but Luther capitalizes on any first-century misconception, arguments, and hermeneutics and modernizes it through interpretation for his 16th century German audience. Luther focuses on the words in the Greek Bible, but, perhaps even more importantly, Luther is building his hermeneutical key from Paul, the synoptics, and the Gospel of John. Luther is both reiterating the content of the Greek Bible while deploying new biblical hermeneutics. For example, Jesus’ words in John (that the Jews are from the devil) harshly condemn Jews, and, to modernize it, Luther reiterates the point and adds that the Jews would do it again seven times worse contemporarily. Luther deploys similar literary devices for Paul’s epistles, the synoptics, and even Acts.

### Formulation of Thesis

This thesis is split into four chapters outside of this introduction and the conclusion, and it will begin with Martin Luther’s hermeneutic exploration and adaptation of Paul’s epistles. After Paul’s epistles, the thesis will follow Luther’s interpretation of Matthew and Mark

followed by Luke and Acts. Finally, the thesis will end with a chapter on Luther's interaction with the Gospel of John. Rather than follow the books of the Bible canonically, the thesis covers the books of the Bible chronologically (though Luther accepts the chronological canon of the Greek Bible). For instance, Paul's epistles were certainly written prior to the gospels, and Matthew and Luke are derived from Mark, which was most likely the first gospel to be written. John, however, was written after the synoptic gospels, and it was written after the conclusion of the First Jewish-Roman War and the destruction of the Second Jewish Temple.

Neither the Bible nor *On the Jews and Their Lies* were written in English, and the Bible has been translated into English numerous times throughout history. I will use both the *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)* and the *King James Version (KJV)* of the Bible where applicable, but I will rely more broadly on the *NRSV*. According to the *Bible Gateway*, the *NRSV* "has received the widest acclaim and broadest support from academics and church leaders of any modern English Translations." On the other hand, the *KJV* has been the English biblical standard for over 400 years. It has not only influenced every aspect of English hermeneutics during its publication, but it has, more broadly, influenced literature over that time. Whereas the *KJV*'s translational accuracy is arguable, its influence certainly is not.

*On the Jews and Their Lies* has only been broadly translated into English twice, and both have been within the last century. *On the Jews and Their Lies* was first published in English in 1948 by the Christian Nationalist Crusade (CNC). The goal of the CNC was to "preserve America as a Christian nation being conscious of a highly organized campaign to substitute Jewish tradition for Christian tradition" (*Cross and the Flag 1947*). Therefore, the CNC version of *On the Jews and Their Lies* is especially antisemitic. For example, the publisher, much like

Luther, writes in the introduction, “[this translation] will serve one fundamental purpose; namely, this generation is not the first generation which faced a Jewish problem” (4-5).

Moreover, the CNC version does not feature a translator or even an editor, and the writers of the introduction are simply named “The Publishers.” The only other version of *On the Jews and Their Lies* published in English was by Martin H. Bertram. Bertram spent his entire career as a Lutheran clergyman, a scholar, and a professor translating many of Luther’s texts including multiple volumes of Luther’s sermons on the gospel of John. Furthermore, because of the lack of translations of *On the Jews and Their Lies*, Bertram’s version has been republished hundreds of times throughout various texts. Bertram’s approach to Luther’s text is far different from the CNC’s. For example, Bertram writes in his introduction, “It is impossible for modern people to read the horrible passages below and not to think of the burning of synagogues in November 1938 on *Kristallnacht*. Nor would one wish to excuse Luther for this text” (1). Bertram does not fix any errors on Luther’s behalf, and as Bertram jests, “[Luther] was not a man to say ‘manure’ when he meant ‘shit’” (1). Additionally, the CNC’s translation relies heavily on the *KJV* of the Bible while Bertram’s version relies on a translation that closely resembles the *NRSV* (but is not a specific version of the Bible). When Luther quotes a verse, they are referencing their respective versions of the Bible. When the CNC version quotes John 8:39 and 44 they write, “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham...ye are of your father, the devil.” On the other hand, when Bertram quotes the same verse, he writes, “If you were Abraham’s children you would do what Abraham did...you are of your father the devil.” Despite the purpose of both translations and their use of different biblical versions, the actual translations do, in fact, broadly resemble each other. For instance, the CNC version begins, “I have received a treatise of a Jew

carrying on a conversation with a Christian in which the Jew has the audacity to pervert and misconstrue the passages of Scripture” (9), and Bertram’s version begins, “I have received a treatise in which a Jew engages in dialog with a Christian. He dares to pervert the scriptural passages” (2). However, because of the overt racism of the CNC version of *On the Jews and Their Lies*, I will rely mostly on Bertram’s version except where noted in appropriate circumstances.

Despite neither of the primary texts were written English, the connection between the translation of *On the Jews and Their Lies* and their respective biblical versions remain the same. In other words, the translations are still interpreting the same version of its biblical counterpart through their respective hermeneutical lens. Translations are intrinsically hermeneutic simply because one must update a text to make it understandable for a contemporary audience. A connection through translation does not necessarily diminish a text’s ability to be influential. On the contrary, as translations are created its influence is dispersed through evolving and different interpretive communities. Moreover, a new translation of both Luther’s treatise and the Bible add to the development of hermeneutics that evolves with the current era.

### Conclusion

The writers of the Greek Bible, according to Luther’s interpretation, created a foundation for Luther’s anti-Judaic treatise. However, Luther’s interpretation is not solely a product of his era, it is also part of a hermeneutic lineage dating back to the composition of the Greek Bible,



which also takes cues from Greek and Hebrew hermeneutics prior to the first century AD. Not only has the Bible and its various translations impacted how literature is written, but hermeneutists have transformed—and really created—how one is to criticize, comment on, and interpret all literature. Today, it is impossible to separate the German Reformationist from the Nazi's atrocities during World War II. The Nazi party did, of course, display *On the Jews and Their Lies* during their Nuremberg rallies, and the Völkischer Beobachter, the Nazi Party newspaper, quoted Hitler's Education Minister, Bernhard Rust, as saying, "Since Martin Luther closed his eyes, no such son of our people has appeared again. It has been decided that we shall be the first to witness his reappearance...I think the time is past when one may not say the names of Hitler and Luther in the same breath. They belong together" (Steigmann-Gall 136-7). However, because of Luther's obvious ignorance of race-based Darwinism—but his disdain of the Jewish religion—the Nazi's use of *On the Jews and Their Lies* is part of the reinterpretation and contemporizing of a piece of literature for a more modern audience. Unfortunately, as the Greek Bible was for Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies* was for the Nazi Party, and, no matter how their respective authors intended their text to be used, they both exploited and misread their sources with devastating results.

## PAULINE EPISTLES: GENTILES VS JEWS

Paul and his epistles, especially when taken as part of the biblical narrative, are a distinct part of the Greek Bible. Paul is a character in the Greek Bible in Acts—which he did not write—as well as a writer of a large portion of the Greek Bible. Paul’s epistles are essentially hermeneutic guides and ecclesiastical discourse (especially concerning the role of gentiles in the Church). Paul’s epistles make up thirteen books of the Greek Bible, and they have been historically tied to Paul. The authors of twelve of the thirteen books claim to be Paul (with the single exception being Hebrews, which the Catholic canon does not attribute to Paul anyway). Jacques Savoy writes in, “Authorship of Pauline Epistles Revisited,” “According to different biblical scholars, the number of letters attributed to Paul varies from 4 to 13” (70). For Martin Luther, they were all written by Paul with no exception, and Luther’s *On the Jews and Their Lies* can be interpreted as a discourse between himself and Paul. How did Paul, who vehemently claimed to still be an Israelite in Romans 11:1, not only create a foundation for Luther’s hermeneutics but also his anti-Judaic treatise?

Martin Luther directly mentions Paul ten times in his treatise, and eight of those times are references to the book of Romans. Scholars such as John Gager, Clark William, and Norman Beck have argued that despite Paul’s “ambivalent feelings towards Judaism, Paul saw the ‘old’ law valid for Jews, but the ‘new’ Law valid for Christians,” and Gager concludes that Paul “did not entail repudiation of the legitimacy of Israel or the Torah” (Michael 29; Gager 260). Inversely, Robert Michael writes in *Holy Hatred*, “many of the writings attributed to Paul discounted much that was essential in Judaism and introjected a high level of emotional polemic

into the controversy between Jews and Christians” (29). Despite Paul’s vision of himself as an Israelite or his immediate opinion of Christianity as an evolution of Judaism during the middle of the first century, by the end of the first century—less than 30 years after the composition of Paul’s epistles and the gospels—Christianity and Judaism were separate entities (even in the eyes of the Roman authorities). Therefore, when Paul is attempting to bridge a gap in Romans 11:16 by writing “if the root is holy, then the branches are also holy,” the damage is already done for a later hermeneutist who interprets Paul as a solely Christian figure.

Despite Paul’s claim that he himself is an Israelite in Romans 11:11, Paul writes that he is solely an “apostle to the Gentiles” in Romans 11:13. Paul is creating the foundation for Christian hermeneutists, and Martin Luther deploys a similar tactic in his treatise. As Paul does, Luther must display an authority over Jews, and then he can create a hermeneutical Jew for non-Jews. Unlike Paul, Luther is not Jewish, yet Luther states that he has an intimate understanding of Jews when he writes, “I learned that those miserable and accursed people [Jews] do not cease to lure to themselves even us, that is, the Christians [*sic*]” (1). Luther believes that Jews are tempting Christians because he has “received a treatise in which a Jew engages in dialog with a Christian” (2). Luther continues, “It is not my purpose to quarrel with Jews, nor learn from them how they interpret and understand Scripture; I know all of that very well already” (2). Therefore, for Luther’s audience, Luther is knowledgeable on Jews and can, accordingly, be an authority on Jews.

Paul is an Israelite, but it seems peculiar that he would not afford his people the same information he has given to Gentiles. Paul is an apostle to the Gentiles “in order to make [his] own people jealous,” and their jealousy, according to Paul, would “save some of them” (Rom.

11:14). Paul, however, is not writing about actual, living Jews, and, instead, he is creating a hermeneutical Jew (that, at the very least, is an excuse to speak directly to gentiles). Paul writes to the gentiles, “so that you may be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon Israel, until the full number of Gentiles has come in. And so all of Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:25-6). Paul argues that Jews will abandon their Jewishness in favor of Christianity because Christianity supersedes Judaism, but Jews’ denunciation of Judaism will occur only after the “full number of gentiles” have converted to Christianity. Robert Michael writes about Romans 11:25, “Paul posited that Judaism was not as ‘valid’ as Christianity, for in the last days the Jews would reject the religion of their fathers and allow themselves to be converted to Christianity” (18). Paul’s words in Romans 11 lay the foundation for hermeneutical supersessionism.

Martin Luther undoubtedly believes that Christianity supersedes Judaism. However, Luther seems even less concerned with Jewish conversion, and, yet Luther’s argument does little to invalidate Paul’s. Luther writes that one should not attempt to “convert the Jews, for that is impossible” because “the Jews have grown steadily worse. They have failed to learn any lesson from the terrible distress that had been theirs for over fourteen hundred years in exile...therefore, a Christian should be content and not argue with the Jews” (2). Because Paul adds the stipulation that 1) a hardening has come upon Israel and 2) Jews will convert only when the full number of gentiles have converted, then nothing Luther has written runs counter to Paul’s foundation of the hermeneutical Jew. According to Paul and Luther, it is impossible to convert the Jews, they are hardened—they have not learned their lesson—and, therefore, there is little point in arguing with Jews, which is why Paul is an apostle to the gentiles and Luther reiterates his instruction to avoid

Jews. Thus, neither of these hermeneutists have any intention of addressing actual Jews even by their own textual admission, and both hermeneutists are creating a Jew for a non-Jewish audience that, according to Jeremy Cohen, fits into “properly ordered Christian society” (1).

Paul begins formulating his hermeneutical Jew by separating God, faith, and religious salvation from Jewish law, and all that is left is to denigrate Jewish law and Jewish adherence to that law. Paul, for example, writes in Romans 3:19-30:

Now, we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For “no human being will be justified in his sight” by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed...then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By what works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

Paul separates Judaism between Jewish faith and Jewish Law, and he claims that Judaism is defined by its excessive adherence to the Law. Jewish Law is synonymous with the Written Torah and could be used to mean the totality of Jewish teachings and rabbinic writings. Paul writes as much in 2 Corinthians 3 when he writes, “what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory” (3:10). Not only does Paul hold the position that the Law has lost its glory, but also that his New Covenant—as he calls it—supersedes the Old Law. Paul continues to writes in 2 Corinthians 3 that the Torah “kills,” it is the “ministry of death,” and, whenever Jews read the Torah, “a veil lies over their minds.” Aside from Paul’s claim that he is an Israelite, Paul admits in Romans 2 that the Torah is the basis for Jewish behavior, and that

circumcision is the physical embodiment of the Torah. At times when Paul seems to be criticizing the Torah or circumcision, Paul argues that one is the basis for the other. Even so, Paul writes that circumcision is “the mutilation” in Philippians 3:2, and that the Torah is a “curse” in Galatians 3:13. Paul does not simply equate one to the other, and he simply writes that Jews are “dogs” and “evil workers” and he regards Jews and Judaism “as rubbish” (Phil 3:2; 3:8). The most damning moment in the epistles is Paul’s condemnation of Jews when he writes that the Jews “are enemies of God” (Rom 11:28). Paul continues his condemnation in 1 Thessalonians writing that the Jews “killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone” (2:15). Therefore, Paul’s hermeneutical Jew is not only the enemy of everyone and God, but they have been labeled by Paul as the sole murderers of Christ.

More than physical enemies, Paul’s hermeneutical Jew is the theological enemy of gentile Christians. Paul gives a lengthy account of how the Antichrist is the fault of Jews:

Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God...for the mystery of the lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming. The coming lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying, wonders, and every kind of wicked deception of those who are perishing because they refused to love the

truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false, so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned. (2 Thess 2:1-12)

Paul most likely did not write 2 Thessalonians, and, as Ernest Best writes in his *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, “If we only possessed 2 Th. few scholars would doubt that Paul wrote it; but when 2 Th. is put alongside 1 Th. then doubts appear. There is a great dissimilarity between the two” (37). Luther, however, never doubts the authenticity of the canonical Greek Bible, and, regardless of the stylistic difference in 2 Thessalonians, Luther ties them together despite problems doing so (and for the sake of Luther’s argument the author of all of Paul’s epistles is referred to as Paul). It is not immediately apparent who Paul is directing his theological condemnation towards in 2 Thessalonians, but Paul makes it clear through his analogies and repetition. For example, Paul’s antichrist will “take his seat in the temple of God.” The antichrist, according to Paul, has a seat in a temple that was made for God, and, therefore, the people of the temple were expecting a messiah. The work of the antichrist had already begun in the first century, and the antichrist will only deceive those who have been shown the “truth” and refused to believe it. Therefore, the lawless one is really the false Jewish Messiah who, for some unknown reason, is sent by God but has all the power of Satan, and he is sent to the Jews specifically because they refused to believe the “truth” that Jesus Christ is the true Messiah.

Paul creates a hermeneutical Jew who fits neatly within his text as the antithesis, antagonist, and reminder to gentile Christians. First, Paul separates Jewish faith from Jewish law with Jewish legalism being the ultimate downfall of Judaism as a whole. Secondly, while Paul clearly values the Torah for gentiles, Paul writes that the Torah ultimately kills, and its physical

manifestation, circumcision, is a mutilation of the flesh for Jews. Third, Paul regards his Jewish creation as the enemy of God and everybody (Gentile Greeks and Romans included), and, moreover, he regards them as rubbish (or dung in the *KJV*). Finally, Paul writes that his hermeneutical Jew is the theological adversary and creator of the enemy of God outside of Satan himself due to their disbelief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Though Paul has created a Jew that is clearly the rival to Gentile Christianity, it is Paul's claim—considering it is the first claim—that Jews are solely responsible for Jesus' death that is most often rearticulated.

Paul writes that his hermeneutical Jews are solely responsible for the death of Jesus Christ in 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16, and, as Jeffrey S. Lamp writes in his article "Is Paul Anti-Jewish," "1 Thessalonians 2:13-16 is a passage that has generated much interest among scholars, primarily because Paul's seemingly harsh indictment of the Jews in these verses" (408). Paul writes:

We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers. For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same thing from you own compatriots as they did from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they might be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measures of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last.



Lamp notes that “what puzzles interpreters is the transparently harsh tone” (411). Paul’s harsh indictment is self-evident in the verses. Paul is angry at “the Jews” who he claims have “driven them out” and “who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets,” or, as Lamp writes, “the actual list of offenses of which ‘the Jews’ are guilty is relatively straightforward, as is the summary statement of the habitual disposition (‘they have constantly been filling up the measures of their sins’)” (424). What is most puzzling is the final statement that “God’s wrath has overtaken them [the Jews] at last.” Lamp typologically argues that Paul’s words—considering Paul’s knowledge of the Hebrew Bible—are the culmination of God’s punishment of Jews (as written in the Hebrew Bible), and he writes, “this opposition has reached the point where God’s wrath in judgment has come upon the Jews finally and decisively” (427). Because of Paul’s self-identification as an apostle to the gentiles and his proclivity to create hermeneutical Jews to counter Judaism for gentiles, Paul is “God’s wrath” as he, quite literally, desires gentiles to overtake “them.”

According to Luther, the Jews “deserve nothing but God’s wrath” (11). Furthermore, Luther describes what Paul means by “filling up the measures of their sin” by writing, “it cannot be anything but the terrible wrath of God which permits anyone to sink into such abysmal, devilish, hellish, insane baseness, and arrogance” (61). It should come as no surprise that Luther would continue where Paul finished (within the context of the Greek Bible); Paul is the most cited writer in Luther’s *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Luther’s Pauline influence goes beyond hermeneutical influence, and Luther borrows Paul’s words directly. For example, as Jonathan A. Linebaugh notes,” “Whereas Augustine referred to Christ as *sacramentum* and *exemplum*, Luther reaches for Pauline language and Christ as *exemplum* and Christ as *donum*—as gift” (49). In

other words, Luther takes from Paul that before one can use God as an example, one must receive God as a gift. Paul's idea and differentiator are not part of hermeneutical lineage, and, instead, Luther is willing to reach directly to Paul for hermeneutical instruction.

Neither Luther nor Paul are speaking about actual Jewish people or authentic Judaism, and their primary goal is to hermeneutically create Judaism as part of a Christian lineage while simultaneously being Christianity's primary antagonist (especially considering Luther's affinity for comparing Satan to Jewish people). Part of their hermeneutical concoction is the repetitive argument that they are in fact speaking of actual, real Jewish people and real Judaism. Their ruse is a fundamental part of hermeneutics and interpretations of Scripture. For example, Karl P. Donfried answers the titular question of his article "Paul and the Revisionists: Did Luther Really Get it All Wrong?", "Paul got the Judaisms of his own era right and Luther got Paul right" (31). In fact, Donfried ends his essay by writing, "Yes, Luther got the essence of Paul's theology right—indeed, very right!" (39). Luther gets Judaism(s) right, even if it is not from his own era. Considering that the book of Acts—and the narrative of Paul's life—was written after Paul's epistles, Donfried might be mistaken. Paul, a self-proclaimed apostle to the gentiles, was using Jewish legalisms to convert gentiles to a form of Jewish faith by hermeneutically creating fictitious Jewish legalists. On the other hand, Donfried is correct about Luther: Luther got Paul right on two accounts. First, Luther assumes he has a deep understanding of Paul (and Paul's hermeneutics), and second, Luther "loved Romans above all" (39).

Nearly all of Luther's direct Pauline citations in *On the Jews and Their Lies* are from Paul's book of Romans because, according to Donfried, Romans was where "Paul's theology of justification was most compellingly articulated" (39). Romans is where Paul best conveys the

role of the hermeneutical Jew within Christian interpretation and theology, and, when Luther cites Paul, he is essentially citing his hermeneutical source. For example, Luther writes, “There is one thing about which [the Jews] boast and pride themselves beyond measure, and that is their descent from the foremost people on earth, from Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and from the twelve patriarchs, and thus from the holy people of Israel. St. Paul himself admits this...in Romans 9:5” (3). Paul writes in Romans 9:5, “to them [the Jews] belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all.” There is a tonal difference between Luther and Paul, but Paul certainly adds credence to Luther’s text. Luther continues, “Therefore, God has to endure [the Jews’ boasting] in their synagogues, their prayers, songs, and doctrines, and their whole life, they come and stand before him and plague him grievously” (3). Luther and Paul’s dialogue about Romans 9 illustrates Luther’s use of scripture, especially of Paul’s epistles (despite Paul’s own harsh examples). Essentially, Paul claims that patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.) are Jewish, and, therefore, Jesus is genealogically Jewish. Ignoring the fact that Romans 9:5 is Paul’s attempt at arguing that Christianity is simply a better Judaism, Luther hermeneutically advances Paul’s argument. The biblical patriarchs are genealogically Jewish, and the Hebrew Bible constantly repeats genealogical tables; and, because Paul mentions it yet again in Romans, Luther assumes the repetition of Jewish genealogy is evidence of Jewish boasting. Therefore, Luther adds that God suffers the Jews’ boasting because they are essentially important to the biblical narrative. The Jews, according to Luther, lost their ties to their genealogy—though they still boast—to gentiles later (especially in Matthew and John) (4-5).

Luther writes that Jewish boasting should “merit that thunder and lightning strike down from heaven and that sulfur and hellfire strike from below.” Luther continues, “That would be just punishment; for flesh and blood must not boast before God. For as Moses says, whoever is born even from holy patriarchs and from Abraham stands condemned before God and must not boast before him. St. Paul says the same thing in Romans 3:27” (5). Paul writes in Romans 3:27, “Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith.” Essentially, Paul writes that boasting is excluded in post-Hebrew Christianity because of Jewish legalisms. Considering the law is the Torah and “the works” is the Hebrew Bible, boasting is only excluded by faith, which is a uniquely Christian doctrine.

Hermeneutically, boasting is a sign of Paul’s Jew, and, more importantly, boasting should be avoided by gentiles as it is a spiritual impediment. However, Luther writes that Paul “says the same thing” as he does, but the texts are superficially different. Paul is not the arbiter nor describer of punishment in Romans 3:27, and, when parsed, the verse is simply telling gentiles to not boast because Jews boast. Luther hermeneutically furthers Paul’s argument by both being the arbiter of punishment and the authority on Judaism. Therefore, as a citation for Luther, Paul says the same thing—the Jews boast and Christians nor gentiles should boast. As with all Luther’s biblical citations and hermeneutical tactics there is both an advancement in interpretation and an escalation of violence. Luther’s text is written for gentiles—primarily German Christians—but it is about a hermeneutical Jew that Luther has adopted, in this instance, from Paul. Therefore, Luther, especially given the accessibility of the Bible, can choose which parts of Paul to reveal. For example, Luther in the same segment writes, “whoever is born even from holy patriarchs and from Abraham stands condemned before God.” Four verses before Romans 3:27, Paul writes,

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). These two texts are not opposed to each other. Paul writes that Jew and gentiles are both condemned, and Luther writes that only the Jews are condemned. Therefore, Luther, though he specifies Jews, is never opposed to Paul, or, as Donfried writes, “Luther gets the essence of Paul.”

Circumcision is the physical manifestation of Jewish genealogy, and, more importantly, the relationship between God and the Jews within the Hebrew Bible. It is a key topic in Paul’s Romans and the Hebrew Bible, and, therefore, circumcision becomes a primary topic for Luther as well. Circumcision is first mentioned in Genesis 17 when God says to Abraham, “As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you” (17:9-11). God tells Abraham that every one of his offspring—which is essentially Judaism—must be circumcised as it is the manifestation of God’s covenant. God is not simply speaking about Abraham’s literal offspring, and God says to Abraham that it also includes “slave[s] born in your house...and one[s] bought with your money” (17:13). If someone is not circumcised “in the flesh of his foreskin [he] shall be cut off from his people” (17:14). Though Paul, and later Luther, view the Bible as a complete piece of spiritual literature, both writers agree that circumcision is solely a Jewish tradition at best. Luther asks the question, “Of what use then is circumcision? Or why did God command it so strictly?” Luther answers, “Let the Jews fret about that! What does that matter to us Gentiles? It was not imposed on us...we can be God’s people without it” (12). Furthermore, Luther argues that the act of circumcision is useless by citing Paul when he writes, “St. Paul teaches us in

Romans 3 that when circumcision is performed as a kind of work it cannot make holy or save, nor was it meant to do so” (13).

Paul’s polemic on circumcision concludes in Romans 3, but his argument begins in Romans 2:17. Paul directly addresses a Jew in Romans 2:17-29 (or, at least, he claims to be in dialogue with a Jew), and he, through circumcision, completely redefines Jewishness. First, Paul repeats all the thing his Jewish interlocutor claims in Romans 2:17-20:

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God and know his will and determine what is best because you are instructed in the law, and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth.

Paul then argues in Romans 2:21-27 that his Jewish interlocutor cannot boast about his observance to the law and circumcision because he does keep the entirety of the law:

You, then, that teach others, will not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You that forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You that abhor idols, do you rob temples? You that boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcised. So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you that have written code and circumcised but break the law.

Finally, Paul concludes in Romans 2:28-29 that real circumcision is internal rather than genital circumcision: “For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God.” Paul redefines Jewishness in Romans 2:17-29 by redefining what circumcision means in Genesis. Essentially, as Matthew Thiessen points out in his article “Paul’s Argument against Gentile Circumcision,” Paul is “claiming that failure in law observance in one area that leads to one being considered a lawbreaker in every area” (384). Therefore, Paul writes that if a Jew cannot obey all Jewish law perfectly, then they should not follow any aspect of the law.

Paul is writing to gentiles, and, because he claims to be speaking to a Jew, he is creating an argument where the basis is that he is an authority on the Jewish ceremony (or law) of circumcision. More than creating an argument, Paul is also formulating hermeneutical Jewishness for his gentile audience. Essentially, Paul is writing that Judaism—as a whole—cannot keep all Jewish law, and, therefore, he wonders, why be circumcised at all? Paul continues, if a gentile is to follow that same law, then their “uncircumcision [is] regarded as circumcision.” In a prophetic moment, Paul concludes that a gentile who is not circumcised but “keeps the law” will condemn those who are circumcised but break the law. Paul’s implication is that gentiles can keep the law, but Jews cannot. Matthew Thiessen argues that what Paul is really saying is that “he does not believe that a gentile can actually become a Jew,” and “gentiles profited nothing from the adoption” of physical circumcision (390-91). Paul, however, is not only saying that gentiles profit nothing from physical circumcision, but that their ability to avoid

physical circumcision somehow gives them moral superiority over Jews and Judaism (in which Paul has hermeneutically created for them anyway).

Martin Luther summarizes Paul's discussion on circumcision into a single sentence: "It was not imposed on us, as you have heard, nor do we stand in it, but we can be God's people without it" (12). However, Paul's polemic is predicated on a dialectical opposition between Paul and Paul's hermeneutical Jew in which the Jew believes physical circumcision is part of the law of God. Therefore, the same hermeneutical tactic—that Jews are somehow enforcing physical circumcision (and other Jewish laws) on gentiles—is carried into the 16th century by Luther:

They [Jews] should not harass us with their lies and idolatry. If they claim to be so smart and wise as to instruct and circumcise us gentiles, let them first tell us what purpose circumcision holds...this they owe us; but they will not do it until they return to their home in Jerusalem again—that is to say, when the devil ascends into heaven. For when they assert that God enjoined circumcision for the purpose of sanctifying them, saving them, making them God's people, they are lying atrociously, as you have heard...circumcision did help even those for whom it was commanded, since they were of uncircumcised hearts. How, then, should it help us for whom it was not commanded? (12)

Because Paul writes that one can be circumcised internally through actions—and that circumcision is a matter of the heart—Luther invokes Paul's hermeneutical tactic that: 1) physical circumcision is not for gentiles (or, Christians in Luther's case), 2) physical circumcision is inferior to internal circumcision, 3) the Jews are attempting to instruct, force, boast, and perform circumcisions on gentiles and, later, Christians, and 4) God has abandoned



his covenant with Jews in which circumcision was meant to be the manifestation of (along with other Judaic rituals abandoned by Paul and early Christians). Paul also uses a similar hermeneutical theory outside of circumcision, and, when removed specifically from physical circumcision, it reads: Jewish laws are not for gentiles, Jewish law is inferior to gentile tradition, Jews are trying to force themselves—even physically—onto gentiles (and, therefore, are a threat), and, theologically, God has abandoned the Jews in favor of gentiles and Christians (which is the primary reason for their misfortune). Therefore, Paul’s polemic attack on physical circumcision—and his creation of a fictitious Jewish interlocutor—exemplifies not only Paul’s hermeneutical foundation but also how Luther adopts Paul into *On the Jews and Their Lies*.

After Paul’s polemic attack on physical circumcision, Paul begins the next chapter by writing, “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way” (3:1-2). Even after both of their harsh criticisms, Luther concurs by writing, “Now we can readily gather from all this that circumcision was very useful and good, as St. Paul declares” because of God’s promise in Genesis 17:7 that he will be “God to you and your offspring” (14). Luther continues, “the Jews, as they grew old, ruined their good circumcision performed on the eighth day, separated the word from the sign, and made human or even a swinish work out of it. In this way they lost God and his word and now no longer have any understanding of it” (14-5). Though Luther momentarily agrees with Paul’s change in tone, Luther immediately returns to his and Paul’s attack on the Jews. Luther writes that the Jews have “grown old” and, therefore, they have ruined their good circumcision. In other words, Paul attacks physical circumcision and later admits that it still has some use, but there has been nearly 1500 years between Paul’s composition of Romans and *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Considering

a key aspect of hermeneutics is contemporizing, Luther is indeed obligated to bring Paul 1500 years to his present where Luther believes that Paul's polemic attack supersedes his single sentence rebuttal in the following chapter.

Luther argues that physical circumcision has been superseded by baptism, and he writes, "our children receive the complete, true, and full baptism, the worth with the sign, and do not separate one from the other; they receive the kernel in the shell. God is present; he baptizes and speaks with them, and thereby saves them" (14). In other words, the Jews had physical circumcision—which they have ruined—and the Christians and gentiles have baptism, which Luther writes that it saves. One supersedes the other. Paul introduces a similar concept in Galatians while simultaneously changing, once again, what is essential Judaism, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to their promise" (Gal 3:26-9). Considering both Paul and Luther claim that the Jews boast that they are from the patriarchs more than anything else, they, at the very least, recognize the importance of Jewish genealogy to Judaism. Conversely, by Paul writing that one needs only to be baptized to be an heir of Abraham, he is essentially writing that Jewish genealogy is irrelevant for Judaism; and, by doing so, Paul hermeneutically removes Abraham from Judaism. Similarly, Luther writes, "if birth counts before God, I can claim to be as noble as any Jew, yes, just as noble as Abraham himself...if God refuses to acknowledge my nobility and birth as equal to that of Isaac, Abraham, David...I maintain he is doing me an injustice" (7-8). Whereas Paul argues that one becomes an heir of Abraham after baptism, the ritual of baptism means less to Luther in

terms of genealogy, and, instead, Luther takes a realist approach. For example, Luther writes, “Noah, so far as physical birth is concerned or flesh and blood is concerned, is my true, natural ancestor...I could go back to the beginning of the world and trace our common ancestry from Adam and Eve” (7). Considering Luther, Paul, and Judaism believe the literature of the Bible has realistically taken place, the world was destroyed by a flood, and, therefore, both Jews and gentiles come from Noah and his children. Luther’s concludes much like Paul, “We are their flesh and blood just the same as Abraham and all his seed are” (7). Despite their interpretive tactic differentiating, their hermeneutical goal was the same: remove Abraham’s exclusivity to Judaism.

Many of Paul’s attacks on Judaism begin with taking Jewish traditions from Jews and giving them to his audience of gentiles using typology and hermeneutics. Much of Paul’s work is predicated on the creation of a hermeneutical Jew as a point of comparison for gentiles. Paul writes, “I can testify that they [the Jews] have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened” (Rom 10:2). Luther interprets Paul by writing, “St. Paul was right when of he said of them [Rom 10:2]. They claim to be God’s people by reason of their deeds...and not because of sheer grace and mercy...Therefore they are beyond counsel and help” (21). Luther writes that it is hopeless for the Jews because of the hermeneutics that Paul laid 1500 years earlier. Luther then applies the same hermeneutics to a multitude of different people who he considered to be radicalized:

In the same way as our papists, bishops, monks, and priests, together with their following, who insists that they are God’s people and church; they believe that God should esteem them because they are baptized, because they have the name, and because

they rule the roost...The Turks [Muslims] follow the same pattern with their worship, as do all fanatics. Jews, Turks, papists, radicals abound everywhere. (21)

Even though Jews, Catholics, and Muslims have very little in common, Luther ironically applies the same interpretation to all of them. They all share a zeal for God, but their zeal is not enlightened (Rom 10:2). Paul obviously predated Catholicism or Islam, but Luther, on the other hand, was not only an adversary of Catholicism but he was also a catalyst for the Thirty Years' War between German Catholics and Protestants. Moreover, Luther wrote *On the War Against the Turk* in 1528 in which he urged Germans to resist the Ottoman invasion of Germany (though Daniel Goffman notes, "Even Martin Luther himself...wrote with relative moderation about the Ottomans" (109).). Therefore, because Luther views Jews, Catholics, and Muslims as enemies, they are vulnerable to the same scathing hermeneutical attack. Luther's collective attack against all enemies—as he frames as having the same "problem" as Jews—means that the existence of a physical Jew is much less important than the hermeneutical Jew that Luther creates to group all his adversaries (Muslim and Catholic alike) as just being part of a collective Jewish threat. For instance, Luther writes, "[Jews, Turks, and papists] claim to be the church and God's people...[they] all have the same intent and ultimate goal...but as we noted earlier, that us beyond the comprehension of the Jews, as well as the Turks and papists as St. Paul says [in I Corinthians 2]" (21). Luther deploys three interpretive tactics here: Luther writes Jews, Muslims, and Catholics have the same goal, Jews are still the primary adversary of *On the Jews and Their Lies*, and Paul presents evidence that the Jews, Muslims, and Catholics are collectively attacking and perverting Christianity. Luther's Pauline reference reads, "Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to

understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). According to Luther, Paul presents evidence that Jews, Muslims, and Catholics are collectively unspiritual, and, therefore, “they do not know what they hear, see, say, or do (And yet they do not concede that they are blind and deaf)” (21). Writing they are all the same is a bit of a misnomer as Luther hermeneutically argues that Muslims and Catholics are as bad as Jews. Luther ultimately concludes that Jews and Judaism are the epitomic low of not only Abrahamic religion but of all people (particularly those living in 16th century Germany).

The purpose of Luther’s treatise is not to help Jews or Muslims and Catholics. In fact, Luther writes, “I do not wish to have anything more to do with any Jew” (29). Instead, Luther’s purpose is to convince Germans (and only Germans) that his interpretive theory—if we can separate Abrahamic and, more specifically, Christian sects by interpretive and theological theories—is not only superior but that all others are a physical and spiritual threat (which, for the character of Paul, is more in line with the Greek book of Acts). Even when Luther argues that he has attempted to show his own hermeneutical Jew mercy, Luther writes they are too mindless to accept it:

Three Jews came to me, hoping to discover a new Jew in me because we were beginning to read Hebrew here in Wittenberg, and remarking matters would soon improve since we Christians were starting to read their books. When I debated them, they gave me their glosses, as they usually do. But when I forced them back to the text, they soon fled from it, saying that they were obliged to believe their rabbis as we do the pope and the doctors, etc. I took pity on them and give them a letter of recommendation to the authorities, asking for Christ’s sake they let them freely go their way. But later, I found out that they

called Christ a tola, that is, a hanged highwayman...as St. Paul says, they are consigned to wrath...Leave them to their own devices. (29-30)

Luther writes that his hermeneutical Jews thought they were going to join a fellow Jew in reading the Hebrew Bible, but, instead, it was Luther. They debated, and neither one of them changed their minds. Luther, out of the kindness of his heart, gave them a “pass” so they would not be captured or killed by “authorities.” Luther somehow hears that they called Jesus a hanged highwayman (as a tola has no actual meaning), and Luther is convinced—and desires to convince his readers—that all Jews deserve whatever physical punishment they might receive from the authorities. Though Luther advocates for the persecution of actual Jewish people, he justifies himself by repeating Romans 11:32 which reads that “they are consigned to wrath.”

Luther nearly admits that he uses his hermeneutical attack on Jews for the sake of German readers. For example, after arguing that Jews abuse the Bible, he writes:

For their treatment of these texts parallels their treatment of all other especially those that are in favor of us and our Messiah. These, of course, must be accounted as lies...but for us Christians they stand as a terrifying example of God’s wrath. As St. Paul declares in Romans 11, we must fear God and honor his word as long as the time of grace remains, so that we do not meet with a similar or worse fate. (57-8)

Luther writes that the Jews abuse the Bible like they abuse the people around them, and Jewish hardships both biblically and historically results from their abuse of others. According to Luther, the Jewish plight serves as warning for Christians, and, in other words, if one is to act like a Jew then they still suffer like a Jew. Luther continues, “the example of the Jews demonstrates clearly how easily the devil can mislead people” (59). As Jeremy Cohen writes in *Living Letters of the*

*Law*, Luther “has accorded Jews and Judaism a singular place in a properly ordered Christian society” (1). In other words, the Jews have a distinct place in Luther’s view of Christianity, which is both as the enemy and a typological warning. However, Luther is an interpreter, his goal—by using the science of hermeneutics—is to “make understandable that which is not understood, that which is no longer understandable” (Szondi 21). Assumedly, Luther is referring to Israel’s hardening because of their transgression, and, in the meantime, the gentiles will supersede the Jews. Luther, through his modernization of hermeneutics, assumes that the same will happen to German Christians if they begin to act like Jews (which is far different than committing the same act as the Jews described by Paul in Romans 11). Luther is essentially updating Paul for his German Christian audience, and, though Paul attempts to write that his religion is an evolution of Judaism, Luther, because of time and hermeneutics, disregards any plan for Jewish salvation. Instead, Luther creates a hermeneutical Jew that Luther argues is as bad as their historical and biblical plight has been.

Paul and his epistles are a distinct part of the Greek Bible. Unlike the traditional narrative of the gospels or much the Hebrew Bible, Paul’s texts serve as a hermeneutical guide for future interpreters, commenters, and theologians. Despite the facts that many of Paul’s epistles are most likely pseudepigrapha, Luther universally accepts the Greek Bible canon that Paul is the sole author of the Pauline epistles. Therefore, even when Paul seems to be arguing with or criticizing himself, Luther will hermeneutically make the texts fit. However, that is a part of hermeneutics—make that which is unknowable known. Despite Paul’s move to interpret Jewish text to a gentile audience, Luther takes Paul’s texts further by interpreting a gentile interpretation for a specifically European (or even more specifically German) audience; and, by doing so,

Luther creates a hermeneutical Jew that becomes the enemy of Protestant Europeans. Luther does not need to argue his knowledge on Judaism, and, for the most part, Luther states he is an authority on Judaism. Similarly, Paul uses his genealogical ties to Judaism as the basis for his polemic on Judaism. Both Luther and Paul, most importantly, attack a Judaism that they not only have created, but that fits within the parameters of their hermeneutics and typology.



## MATTHEW AND MARK: THE FALSE BELIEF KNOWN AS BLOOD LIBEL

No book of the Bible has done more damage over a longer period to Jews and Judaism than the gospel of Matthew. Matthew's Blood Curse is not only a significant part of Martin Luther's attack on Judaism, but Luther uses Matthew as the major revelation of his anti-Jewish narrative, where the Jews of the Hebrew Bible become the Jews of the Greek Bible (and, according to Luther, the Jews of his era as well) whose sole purpose is to serve Luther's own hermeneutical end. Still, Matthew is often called the Jewish gospel (though Luther did not differentiate between Jewish and gentile gospels). Matthew's text tells us that the writer of Matthew is familiar with Israelite customs. However, Matthew is written in Greek, and the author used and knew the Greek version of Mark and the Greek Q source.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Dennis C. Duling writes in his "The Gospel of Matthew" that "the author wrote very good Greek. This Greek betrays the influence of Semitic languages...internal analysis suggests that the author had intimate familiarity with technical legal issues of the Torah that were debated in his day" (302). However, Matthew is not as critical of Pharisees as his synoptic counterparts, and he is not consistent with his criticism of Jewish authority. For example, Matthew's Jesus says six times in the book, "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" (23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29), but, on the other hand, Matthew's Jesus also says, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow" (23:2). Matthew—and Mark to a lesser

---

<sup>17</sup> Delbert Burkett writes that "in writing the Gospel, Matthew drew three primary sources: material shared with Luke (Q), material unique to Matthew (M), and material shared with Mark. These sources represent at least three distinctive Jewish-Christian communities where the material took form" (Burkett 175).

extent—is known as the Jewish gospel because of the author’s knowledge of Jewish customs and inconstant polemics towards Judaism(s). Though Matthew has an intimate knowledge of Judaism, he consistently fabricates his own hermeneutical Jew that culminates in a lust for blood that Luther repurposes for sixteenth-century Europe, and labeling Matthew as the “Jewish gospel” is simply misleading.

Martin Luther does not cite or quote Mark in *On the Jews and Their Lies*, but it is not because Luther disliked Mark or had a theological or interpretive issue with the book. In fact, Pheme Perkins writes in her *Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels*, “Mark’s awkward attempt to explain purification rules in Mark 7:3-4 suggest that neither he nor the readers he envisages have any personal experience of Jewish observance” (156). Mark 7:18-23 implies that Jesus has no interest in Kosher laws, and, therefore, he does away with them. Though Mark implies that the Temple is “doomed by the actions of the Jewish leaders,” Jesus says in Mark 7:9-10 that the Ten Commandments are more important than “rules and pious practices of Pharisees and scribes” (Perkins 156). Mark employs an “argument from popular philosophical ethics that would be unfamiliar to non-Jews” in Mark 11:22-25 where Mark writes, “For if deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day” (Perkins 156). In other words, goodness is on the inside—where salvation happens—rather than with exterior traditions. Luther, instead, viewed the gospel of John as more complete, and during a Christmas sermon in 1521, Luther called John 1:1-14 “the most important of the Gospels” (*At the Pulpits* 200). The synoptics share similar stories, usually in the same sequence, and from a similar perspective. Considering both Matthew and Luke draw from Mark, and Luther’s intimate knowledge of the gospels, Mark certainly impacted Luther’s hermeneutical lens when writing *On the Jews and*

*Their Lies*.<sup>18</sup> Mark is the first gospel to pit all of the Jewish groups collectively against Jesus, and Luther, on occasion, was one to think about the Bible chronologically rather than canonically.<sup>19</sup> Mark serves two purposes for Martin Luther: 1) Mark is one of the sources of Matthew and Luke and 2) Luther hermeneutically presents an interpretation of Mark to a sixteenth-century European audience without directly citing it.

Despite being the shortest gospel, Mark is more obvious when it comes to the formulation of its hermeneutical Jew, and Mark's polemic argument against Judaism comes from a hermeneutical disagreement with Pharisees and Sadducees.<sup>20</sup> Mark begins chapter 7 simply stating that Pharisees and scribes had come from Jerusalem to see Jesus, and Jesus says to them, "You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition...you have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition" (7:8-9). Jesus tells the Pharisees that their scribal traditions are purely superficial when, in fact, they should be spiritual. T. A. Burkill writes, "In [Mark's] judgment, therefore, it is really the scribes and Pharisees who make void the word of God by maintaining a tradition of purely human invention" (36). Similarly, "some Sadducees" visit Jesus in Mark 12 to ask him questions about resurrection, and Jesus responds by saying, "He is God not of the dead, but of the living, you are quite wrong"

---

<sup>18</sup> Marcan priority is part of the Two-Source Theory, and Mark Goodacre writes in *The Synoptic Problem*, "The Two-Source Theory has two facets: The Priority of Mark and Q hypothesis. It solves the Synoptic Problem by postulating independent use of Mark's Gospel by both Matthew and Luke, who are also held to have access to a now lost document scholars call 'Q'" (20). For Matthew and Luke to use Mark as source, Mark, of course, would have to be written first.

<sup>19</sup> Luther wrote a brief manuscript titled "Notes on Two Chronological Difficulties in the Old Testament in 151 (2 years prior to his publication of *On the Jews and Their Lies*) where he argued about the accuracy of his own chronological table in reference to the "Years of the World" about Abraham and the Hebrew Bible (*Manuscript on Old Testament Chronology* (MSS 090)).

<sup>20</sup> According to Flavius Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* (93 or 94 CE), there were only about 6,000 Pharisees in 70CE.

(12:27). Jesus' arguments in Mark 7 and 12 are interpretive arguments presented by Mark, and, according to Mark's Jesus, there is a gap between Jesus and the Jewish authority and Pharisees. Fundamentally, Mark, through his Jesus, hermeneutically disagrees with the traditional Jewish interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. Mark reiterates that his disagreement is with Jewish Pharisees and Jewish authorities, and he only uses the term "the Jews" in a single instance (where Mark explains the Jewish tradition of washing before eating [7:3]). As T. A. Burkill notes, "it's important to bear in mind that the mutual relations between Judaism and Christianity tended to deteriorate with the passage of time" as between the compositions of the gospels (35).

Mark makes a clear distinction between the Jewish people and Jews in authority. Luther, alternatively, interprets that the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes (whom Luther believes to be politically powerful) are representations of all Jewish people. For example, Luther writes that "the Jews rage against" any insinuation that they are not of noble lineage, and their prayers are "as though a king, a prince, a lord, or a rich, handsome, smart, pious, virtuous person among us Christians were to pray thus to God: 'Lord God, see what a great king I am! See how rich smart and pious I am! See what a handsome lad or lass I am in comparison to others! Be gracious to me, help me, and in view of all this save me! The other people are not as deserving, because they are not so handsome, rich, smart, pious, noble, and high-born as I am'" (4-5). Luther writes that such a prayer should "merit that thunder and lightning strike down from heaven and that sulfur and hellfire strike from below" (5). In other words, the Jewish people—even by Luther's early admission—have some theological favor, but they reiterate and boast about their favor incessantly and, considering their near constant boasts, they deserve to die. Luther writes that the Jewish people learned their boast from the Pharisees: "such a prayer was also spoken by the

Pharisee in the Gospel as he boasted about all his blessings” (5). Luther believes because the Pharisee boasts, “thunder and lightning from heaven cast [the Pharisee] to hell’s abyss,” and his prayer should be: “what do we poor muck-worms, maggots, stench, and filth presume to boast of before [God]...we are but dirt and nothing in [God’s] eyes” (5). Hermeneutically, sixteenth-century Jews are in the same hypothetical position as biblical pharisees. Historically, the 6,000 Pharisees represent the future of the hundreds of thousands of Jews living in sixteenth-century Europe, and, moreover, they share the same hermeneutical space for Luther.<sup>21</sup>

Mark certainly pits *all* Jewish authorities against Jesus (both Rabbinic and Hellenistic), and the “chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus and kill him” (14:1). Eventually, Jesus is taken to a council made up of chief priests, the elders, and the scribes, and they refuse to hear witnesses (14:63). Mark’s refusal to incorporate Jewish citizens as witnesses—and his creation of a secretive council made up of Jewish authorities—is certainly an attempt to separate the Jewish authority from the average Jewish citizen. Mark writes that it is the Jewish authority that turns Jesus over to Pontius Pilate, and Pilate allows “the crowd” to decide if Jesus will go free because “he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over” (15:10). However, the chief priests “stirred up the crowd,” and, even when Pilate attempts to dissuade the crowd, they begin shouting more “crucify him!” (15:14). Given that the crowd is gathered because of Passover, the crowd is most certainly Jewish. Mark places the blame on the chief priest who encourages the crowd rather than the crowd itself. Jesus’s trial becomes more elaborate in Matthew, Luke, and John, but, in Mark, Pilate does not wash his

---

<sup>21</sup> Cherie Woodworth notes in her essay “Where Did the East European Jews come from?” that a mid-eighteenth-century census “reported 590,000 Jewish inhabitants” in the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, and “the census did not count children under the age of one year” (115).

hands of Jesus, and the Jewish citizens do not take sole responsibility for Jesus's death. Perhaps Mark's unwillingness to condemn all Jews outright is a reason Luther fails to cite or mention the gospel of Mark in *On the Jews and Their Lies* or it is simply because Mark's stories are typically more fleshed out in Matthew and Luke. Paul H. Jones argues that "although Mark depicts all of the Jewish groups in their opposition to Jesus, his passion narratives are not 'overtly' anti-Jewish, since they can be interpreted as falling within the range of 'acceptable' intra-Jewish disputes...it is an in-house interpretation and, therefore, not anti-Jewish" (188-9). Luther would not have claimed Mark to be a Jewish gospel, but Luther spent little time with Mark in general.<sup>22</sup> Matthew becomes Luther's preferred synoptic, and he even preached more on Matthew than his self-described favorite gospel of John.

Contemporarily, according to Daniel J. Harrington, "Matthew is often described as the most 'Jewish' of the four Gospels. More than any other Gospel, Matthew is unintelligible without reference to the Hebrew Bible" (*The Gospel of Matthew* 20). However, if we were to view the Bible as a complete book—as Luther does—then it is simply a self-referential, and self-justifying, book of the Bible; and considering Matthew is written from Mark, Matthew can self-interpret the gospel narrative, set a hermeneutical foundation, and create typologies from the Hebrew Bible. Matthew's formulation of his hermeneutical Jew ends in abuse, and, as Samuel Sandmel puts it, "one senses in reading Matthew that his anger and hatred of Jews increases as he writes, especially against Pharisees, until in chapter 23 it boils over into a unique, unparalleled specimen of invective" (*Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?* 68). Matthew's Jesus, for

---

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Hinlicky Wilson writes in her "Luther by Means of Mark" that, "Luther preached infrequently on Mark, partly because the lectionary in use at his time gave so little space to this Gospel; Synoptic parallels were more likely to turn up in Matthew or Luke" (8).

example, refers to Pharisees and scribes as “hypocrites” six times in his polemical “woes” in Matthew 23, and he concludes to the Pharisees, “you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets...you snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell?” (23:31-33). Jesus begins Matthew 23 by saying, “the scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they preach” (23:1-2). Matthew writes that the Pharisees do not, literally, practice what they preach, or, interpretively speaking, there is no discernable difference between early Christians and Jews except for how those in authority interpreted Hebrew scripture (and viewed each other’s hermeneutics). Ian K. Duffield writes that in Matthew 23 “whatever is said...must not be interpreted as if Jesus were a Christian stigmatizing Jews. This was part of a vigorous intra-Jewish debate” (“Difficult texts: Matthew 23” 17). Matthew, however, does not make his argument clear—most likely because he did not have to—but, for Martin Luther, Jesus’ polemic was not only aimed at Jews, but it also characterized Jews for the next fifteen centuries.

There are two aspects of Matthew 23—that Jews are descended from prophet murderers and snakes—that Luther updates and expands for his treatise. For example, Luther writes that “the entire course of the history of Israel and Judah is pervaded by blasphemy of God’s word, by persecution, derision, and murder of the prophets. Judging them by history, these people must be called wanton murderers of the prophets and enemies of God’s word. Whoever reads the Bible cannot draw any other conclusion” (13). Luther contemporizes Matthew by writing that all of Israel is responsible for the murder of the prophets, and that all of Israel—that is to say Jews—are enemies of God. Luther does something that he rarely does by writing that anyone who “reads the Bible cannot draw any other conclusion.” To put it simply, Luther insists that he is not

interpretating anything, and, in fact, readers of the Bible cannot draw any other conclusion—the Jews are simply murderers according to Luther. Luther’s interpretation of Matthew 23 is also a component of his creation of a hermeneutical Jew from the characterization in Matthew nearly fifteen hundred years earlier, but there is no other interpretive conclusion. Luther refers to the Jews as “prophet murderers” an additional fourteen times throughout his anti-Judaic treatise creating a sort-of ongoing pejorative norm that would be the conclusion of anyone who read the Bible. Contrapuntally to Matthew 23 regarding snakes, Luther writes, “where you see or hear a Jew teaching, remember that you are hearing nothing but a venomous basilisk who poisons and kills people” (20). Though Matthew calls the Pharisees snakes and murderers, he also writes that the crowd should “do whatever [the Pharisees] teach you” but “do not do as they do.” (23:3). Luther writes that Jews are poisonous snakes, and he warns his readers that Jewish teaching is the equivalent of a venom. Luther connects all Jews to Pharisees by sarcastically asserting, “how well they [the Jews] take after their father [their antecedents]” (5).

Though Samuel Sandmel writes that Matthews hatred of the Jews “boils over” in chapter 23, it is really chapter 27 that has fueled anti-Judaism through the canard known as Blood Libel. Jesus is arrested and taken to Pontius Pilate, a Roman governor, for his trial. The Roman governor believes Jesus to be innocent, and he says to the angry Jewish crowd, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” The Jews collectively respond to Pilate, “his blood be upon us and on our children” (Matt 27:11-25). Matthew 27 is the source of a popular false belief known as Blood Libel which purports that the Jews use Christian blood as part of Jewish rituals



and cooking.<sup>23</sup> To illustrate how quickly Matthew 27 impacted the Jewish community, Apion, during the first century had “charged that the Jews annually kidnap a Greek, fatten him for a year, and then convey him to a forest where they offer his body as sacrifice and eat his internal organs” (Ehrman 83).<sup>24</sup> Later, in the thirteenth century, Thomas of Cantimpré writes in his popular *Bonum universale de Apibus* that ever since the “godless Jews cried out: ‘His blood be upon us, and our children! (Matthew 27:25)...that in consequence of the curses upon their fathers, the criminal disposition is even now transmitted to the children by the taint in the blood, so that the godless posterity suffers torment inexpiably through its violent coursing through their veins” (Strack 175). In other words, Jews were afflicted with a male menstruation, and to recover, the Jews, Thomas writes, “hit upon the plan that every year Christian blood should be shed in every province, so that they might be healed by such blood” (Strack 175). According to Thomas, for Jews, particularly Jewish men, to be relieved of their curse from Matthew (over a millennium later), they must continuously kill Christians.<sup>25</sup> Regardless of Jesus’ Jewishness, hermeneutists were quick to cast Jesus as a Christian, and Matthew pitted all of Judaism against him. Catherine Sider Hamilton writes in her article “Innocent Blood and the Death of Jesus” that

---

<sup>23</sup> Blood Libel is still a fringe belief in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For instance, Magda Teter notes “In 2014, the Anti-Defamation League appealed to Facebook to take down a page titled ‘Jewish Ritual Murder’” (1). The following year, members of the British Movement gathered in the English town of Lincoln to “honor ‘Little Hugh of Lincoln’ who was allegedly murdered by a Jew in 1255. The antisemitic group prayed, ‘We are here today in memory of Little Saint Hugh, who was murdered...by Jews...A Jew named Jopin confessed to the murder and implicated the wider Jewish community of the time...Jopin suggested that the killing of Hugh was a ritual religious sacrifice’” (2).

<sup>24</sup> The earliest record of Blood Libel is reported by Titus Flavius Josephus.

<sup>25</sup> There were a number of reasons that Thomas chose male menstruation for his anti-Judaic canard. For example, David S. Katz writes in his “Schylock’s Gender Jewish Male Menstruation in Early Modern England” that “according to Hippocrates, women’s bodies were colder, and they were sedentary. Whereas men could sweat to purge their bodies, this was not possible for women” (442). Or, according to Galen, “men were able to transform all they ate into life giving blood,” but “women...were less efficient machines” (442). Moreover, Katz argues that it could be because of the “numerous superstitions associated with menstruating women” (444).

“innocent blood haunts the passion narrative in the Gospel of Matthew” (85). Matthew makes it a point to cast Jesus as completely innocent. Judas realizes that he made a mistake by betraying Jesus in the beginning of Matthew 27, and before returning the silver and committing suicide he says, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood”; the Jewish priests refuse to accept the silver back because it is “blood money” (27:3-6). Instead, the priests take the money to buy a cemetery for foreigners that, Matthew claims, is still called the “Field of Blood” to this day (27:8). Even the Roman governor claims Jesus to be innocent by asking “what evil hath he done?” before washing his hands and saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it” (*KJV* 27:23-24). Therefore, when the Jewish crowd asks that Jesus’ blood “be on us and our children,” they are, according to Matthew, asking that the blood of an innocent man be on them and their descendants.

Matthew and the hermeneutical history of the Blood Curse in Matthew 27 is profoundly impactful to Luther’s treatise and the formulation of his hermeneutical Jew, and, though Robert Weinberg argues in his “The Blood Libel in Eastern Europe” that “the rise of Protestantism ...weakened the appeal of blood libel,” Luther maintained the canard of blood libel in his anti-Judaic treatise (276). Luther constructs a teleology for Jews where the end of the Jews in the Hebrew Bible is the Blood Curse in Matthew, which serves Luther’s narrative function (rather than the actual crucifixion of Jesus). For example, Luther describes his hermeneutical Jew, whom he crafted the narrative for, as “bloodthirsty, vengeful, murderous yearning...The sun has never shone on a more bloodthirsty and vengeful people than they” (11). Furthermore, according to Luther, the Jews are always preoccupied with blood (whether it is their own or others), and, because Jesus was innocent in Matthew 27 (even by Judas who betrayed him), the Jews have a

desire to murder innocent, defenseless gentiles (though Jesus is a not gentile himself). According to Luther, the Jews “have been commissioned and commanded to murder and to slay the Gentiles” (12). Luther reiterates the Jews’ obsession with blood over sixty times in *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Like his predecessors, Luther concludes that it is not simply gentiles that Jews are targeting with their “bloodthirst” but Christians; Luther writes, “[The Jews] have been blood thirsty bloodhounds and murderers of all Christendom for more than fourteen hundred years in their intentions and would undoubtedly prefer to be such with their deeds” (64). In other words, Luther writes that since Matthew, the Jews have not only been seeking out the blood of Christians but have enjoyed doing so since the trial of Jesus. According to James A. Arieti’s “Magical Thinking in Medieval Anti-Semitism,” blood libel only became “widespread in Europe after an infamous case in 1144” where it was alleged in Norwich, England that “Jews purchased a Christian Child before easter and tortured him” and, eventually crucified him (196).<sup>26</sup> Though blood libel was a fringe belief prior to the Luther’s treatise (relative compared to the composition of Matthew), Luther argues that the rituals of blood libel have been a constant attack since Matthew 27, and that “they have been accused of poisoning wells, of kidnapping children, of piercing them through with an awl, of hacking them in pieces” (64). Luther, considering his citation of first and second century texts, is contemporizing Apion, through Josephus, as evidence that the Jews have been accused of committing atrocities for the sake of their

---

<sup>26</sup> The 1144 case’s popularity cannot go understated. It is even featured in “The Prioress’s Tale” in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* where Chaucer writes that Satan “hath built in Jewes’ heart his waspe’s nest.” Moreover, according to James A. Arieti, “the child had actually been found by his relatives in a cataleptic fit, and they buried him alive” (196).

bloodthirst.<sup>27</sup> Luther, evoking Thomas of Cantimpré's thirteenth century text, writes that the Jews "cool their wrath with the blood of Christians" (64). Therefore, in hermeneutic totality, because of the Blood Curse—really one verse—in Matthew 27, the Jews are forever condemned by their own blood thirst to kill Christian in order to relieve themselves of violence. Simply put, Luther's hermeneutical Jew needs to cause violence to prevent violence. The use of blood is even more important to Luther's hermeneutics because God, according to Luther, "does not care to see or have anything to do either with them or with their pious conduct, which is so thickly, heavily, heavily coated with the blood of the Messiah and his Christians" (64).

Luther, through his interpretation of the Greek Bible, uses the Hebrew Bible to criticize Jews, and, though Luther's use of foundational Judaism to vilify Judaism seems paradoxical, Luther views the Hebrew Bible typologically; he simply interprets that the Jews of the Hebrew Bible are superseded by non-Jew antitypes. Narratively for Luther, the Jews have not met their teleological end in Matthew 27. Luther writes that the Jews of the Hebrew Bible "did not curse" and they "did not secretly shed the blood of children, nor poison the water," but rather they "prayed for their captors [Jer 29:7]" (64). Luther writes that the Jews of the Hebrew Bible would be "torn to shreds by the teeth of today's Jews" (64). Luther's hermeneutical interpretation is that "fourteen hundred years" ago "we Christians were harassed and persecuted by the Jews throughout the world," and Luther's source for when Jews went from the Jews of the Hebrew Bible to the bloodthirsty Jews of the Greek Bible is Matthew 27 (and, of course, the crucifixion of Jesus therein). Though Luther's hermeneutical Jew is based on his interpretation of the Bible

---

<sup>27</sup> Kirk Essary notes in his article "Jewish Antiquity in the Sixteenth Century" that Luther "cites Josephus...twenty-one times" (423). Therefore, Luther would have knowledge of Josephus' texts and Apion's claim that the Jews capture, sacrifice, and eat Greeks. Moreover, Luther cites Josephus in *On the Jews and Their Lies* (44).

as a complete doctrinal piece, his solution—which is his way of combating the Jewish blood libel—is to remove the actual Jews from Germany:

Now behold what a fine, thick, fat lie they pronounce [that] they are held captive by us... We do not know to the present day which devil brought them into our country. We surely did not bring them from Jerusalem. In addition, no one is holding them here now. The country roads are open for them to proceed to their land whenever they wish. If they did so, we would be glad...it would be good riddance. For they are a heavy burden, a plague, a pestilence, a sheer misfortune for our country. (64-5)

Luther desires the removal of Jews from Germany, and, though little interpretation goes into his removal of the Jews, Luther continues:

We are even at fault in not avenging this innocent blood of our Lord and of the Christians which they shed for three hundred years after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the blood of the children they have shed since then (which still shines forth from their eyes and skin). We are at fault in not slaying them. Rather we allow them to live freely in our midst despite their murdering, cursing, blaspheming, lying, and defaming. (65)

Luther argues that Germans, specifically, are at fault for letting the Jews live among them because they, the Jews, are responsible for the murder of innocent Christians including Jesus (whose blood, in turn, has caused the Jews to be even more bloodthirsty because of the Blood Curse). Luther does not only regret the Jews living in Germany, but Luther also writes that the Germans are at fault for not slaying the Jews, and, though Luther does not direct his readers to murder the Jews, it is obviously Luther's intention. In other words, Luther's hermeneutic goal is real violence against Jews.

Though Luther's preferred solution seems farfetched compared to Matthew, Matthew is an example of a teleology for Christians even though many have argued for Matthew's intra-Jewish stance. Paul H. Jones, for instance, writes in his "From Intra-Jewish Polemics to Persecution" that "Matthew 'invented' this verse [Matt. 27:25] to address the fate of Jerusalem as punishment for the rejection of Jesus" (190). Considering Matthew was written after the destruction of the Temple in the First Jewish-Roman War in 70 CE, the Jewish rejection of Jesus that Matthew claims is the cause of the destruction of Jerusalem is applied retrospectively, and, for Matthew, the destruction of the Temple must have happened because the Jews rejected Jesus. Luther, through hermeneutical contemporizing, is simply continuing the teleological stance in Matthew. Catherine Sider Hamilton, for example, calls Matthew the "saga of innocent blood" though she argues Matthew sounds like "his Jewish contemporaries" (95). Similarly, Judy Yates Siker argues that "a close study of Matthew...reveals the intra-Jewish rivalry in Matthew's community" while, simultaneously, recognizing that Matthew could be "the most anti-Jewish of synoptics" (306-7). For Luther, Matthew is not part of an intra-Jewish conflict, and, though the Blood Curse is the basis for much of Luther's *On the Jews and Their Lies*, it is not the only instance of Matthew that impacted Luther's treatise.

The crowd that asks for Jesus' blood to be on them and their descendants is undoubtedly Jewish—the festival takes place during the Jewish holiday of Passover in Judea. Matthew does not refer to the crowd as "Jews," but Matthew does, in a single instance, refer to those who deny Christ and the Resurrection as "Jews" near the end of his text. Jesus is resurrected, and the event is witnessed by guards. The guards go to the city and inform the chief priests of the event, and they assemble the elders. The elders and priests bribe the guards, telling them, "You must say,

‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’” The guards take the money, and Matthew writes, “this story is still told among Jews to this day” (Matt 28:11-15). In other words, the Jews deny Jesus’ resurrection and biblical divinity. More importantly, if the Jews do not believe that Jesus was resurrected but Matthew does believe (Matt 28:1-10), then Matthew is writing that he is not Jewish. Matthew allows his verse to be ever present by writing that this story is told to this day among Jews, and Martin Luther takes note in his introduction by writing, “do not debate with Jews...there is no hope until they reach the point where...they are forced to confess the Messiah has come” (2-3). Even if the Jewish Messiah were to come, the Jews would “crucify and blaspheme him seven times worse than they did our Messiah” (4). Though Luther contemporizes Matthew for his sixteenth century audience, Matthew has contemporized his book himself by writing that Jews have always lied about Jesus’s resurrection.

More than contemporizing itself, Matthew is written to seem as though it has predicted the future of Jews and Jerusalem. For instance, Jesus says while lamenting over Jerusalem, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it...see, your house is left to you, desolate” (Matt 23:37-8). Jesus begins the following chapter by prophesying the Siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple: “as Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. Then he asked them, ‘You see all these do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down’” (Matt 24:1-2). The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE during the Siege of Jerusalem, and, therefore, Jesus’s prophecy would seem to have come true. However, Matthew was written closer to the end of the first century after the Second Temple had already been destroyed, and the verses in Matthew

could certainly be interpreted as Matthew's view of supersessionism in which Christianity will supersede Judaism. For Martin Luther, Jesus's prophecy is teleological proof for his narrative of the degeneration of the Jews. For instance, Luther writes that the temple "was not only less splendid than Solomon's," but it was also "violated in many ways more than Solomon's temple." The desecration of the temple was not the result of the Jews at first, and Martin Luther writes that it "happened against the will of the Jews." Luther continues, "such ignominy and disgrace were not experienced by Solomon's temple at the hands of Gentiles and foreigners" (45). In other words, the Jews allowed gentiles and foreigners to desecrate the temple, as it never would have happened at Solomon's temple. Later, "the Jews themselves also desecrated the temple more viciously than the other one ever was desecrated" (45). Furthermore, Luther writes that no temple was "ever disgraced more than" the Second Temple "by such vile sows as the Sadducees and the Pharisees" (47). Considering Jesus' prophetic lamentations, Luther interprets that the destruction of the temple was the fault of the Jews themselves, and, considering the goal of the hermeneutist is to contemporize and make that which is secret knowable, Luther argues that Jesus prophesized the destruction of the temple because of the Jewish desecration of it. Luther's teleology presupposes that the Jews have ultimately degenerated themselves through Matthew's Blood Curse with the natural end being the destruction of the temple.

Mark and Matthew laid the foundation for much of Luther's anti-Judaic treatise, especially Matthew's Blood Curse and the continuation of the anti-Judaic false belief of Blood Libel. Though Mark's gospel is left out of much of *On the Jews and Their Lies*, its influence is still felt throughout the text. Matthew, on the other hand, fills much of the treatise, and, outside of the gospel of John, it is the most influential text in creating Luther's hermeneutical Jew.



Unfortunately, Luther's application of Matthew's Blood Curse is only a step of the history of the falsity known as blood libel and it is still a fringe belief in the twenty-first century. However, the writers of Mark and more so Matthew were still writing for a Jewish audience, and their anti-Judaism is arguably inadvertent. Luke and Acts, however, were not only written by the same author, but they are written for a specific gentile Christian audience. Acts is not a gospel, and, instead, it is a complete Christian narrative that tells the story of the founding and spreading of the Christian church in which Luther draws from.

## LUKE AND ACTS: THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY

The Book of Luke is the longest book of the Greek Bible, and, when Luke is combined with Acts as a complete narrative of the birth of Christianity, the two books make up over a quarter of the Greek Bible. Though Luke is a synoptic along with Mark and Matthew, the writer of Luke presents their book differently to its readers. First, both Luke and Acts are addressed to Theophilus (which is both a name and title meaning “friend of God” in Greek), and second, the writer does not claim to have witnessed the events contained in his book. In fact, the writer begins by addressing his patron and writing, “after investigating everything carefully from the very first [account], [I have decided] to write an orderly account for you...so that you may know the truth concerning the things you have been instructed” (Luke 1:3). Luke’s address to his patron displays an even greater differentiator to the other synoptics—Luke, and his subsequent book Acts, are completely Christian texts. For instance, Joel B. Green writes in his book *The Gospel of Luke* that Luke’s purpose was “not to provide an historical foundation for the Christian message,” instead “an ‘orderly account’ is concerned above all with his persuasion” (36). Luke’s writer claims to be writing a historical account rather than convince their reader to follow the message in the gospel. Green later writes that Luke “has ‘ordered’ the events of his narrative to bring out their significance” for Theophilus “who is not so much concerned with the issue, Did it happen? as with queries, What happened? By providing a more complete accounting of Jesus in his significance, Luke hopes to encourage active faith” (36). In other words, considering Luke’s patron’s title, Luke is meant for a gentile Greek reader whose faith is solidly Christian, and rather than persuade his patron to be a follower of Christ (or Christian), Luke is simply writing about

why his patron is a Christian in the first place. Rather than argue that Jesus and his narrative is the natural extension of the Hebrew Bible (or that it is to supersede the Hebrew Bible) like Mark and Matthew, the creation of Christianity (whether it is to be argued as an evolution of Judaism or not) is to be assumed from the beginning of Luke to the first use of “Christian” in Acts. For Martin Luther, the religious significance of the basis of the synoptics is simply unimportant—they are all Christian New Testament texts to him. However, perhaps even unintentionally, the religious basis and quasihistorical account (reported by Luke’s introduction) written in Luke impacts Luther’s *On the Jews and Their Lies* and his hermeneutical outlook on Luke and Acts. Luther directly cites Acts in one instance in his treatise, but, like Mark, Acts still plays a direct role in Luther’s text. Acts along with Paul’s letters are the basis for Luther’s argument that the Jewish hatred of Jesus became a Jewish hatred of gentile Christians after the death of Jesus.

Luke is a foundational citation for Martin Luther’s treatise, and Luther uses Luke to justify his anti-Judiac stance through his own hermeneutics. Luther writes in his introduction to “let the Jews regard our Lord Jesus as they will,” which, at this point in his treatise, is simply as not the Messiah (2). Luther concludes that his readers should ignore the Jews because they, the readers, can “behold the fulfillment of the words spoken by [Jesus] in Luke 21:20” of which his treatise is a part. Luke 21:20 reads, “when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near...for these are the days of vengeance. For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people [the Jews]” (21:20-23). Luther interprets that because Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, then the Jews must be “nurtured with venom and rancor” (2). The Jewish punishment is not exclusive to the Jewish-Roman War, and, Luther continues, “there is no hope until they reach the point where their misery finally makes

them pliable” (2). Luther interprets that the Jews are still in the “days of vengeance”, and, therefore, they are still not “pliable.” Luther writes that he is quoting Luke 21:20, but he really quotes Luke 21:20-23. Interestingly, Luther fails to quote or cite Luke 21:24 (the final verse in the same section) directly, though he certainly believes it to be true. Luke 21:24 reads, “they [the Jews] will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of Gentiles are fulfilled.” Paralleling Romans 11:25, Luke 21:24 essentially gives Luther permission to “trample” on Jerusalem and attack the Jews as he is, of course, a gentile, and, according to Luther’s interpretation, the Jews are still within the “days of vengeance.”

Luke 21 is the first chapter of the Greek Bible that Luther mentions in *On the Jews and Their Lies*, and it is the first Greek biblical reference to the Jews in the treatise. Much of his work is predicated on this chapter in Luke, and it is foundationally important to his general argument. Luther interprets Luke 21 by writing:

In short...do not engage in debate with the Jew about the articles of our faith. From their youth they have been nurtured with venom and rancor against our Lord that there is no hope until they reach the point where their misery finally makes them pliable and they are forced to confess that the Messiah has come...Until then it is much too early to argue with them about how God is triune, how he became man, and how Mary is the mother of God. No human reason nor any human heart will ever grant these things, much less the embittered, venomous, blind heart of the Jews...what God cannot reform with such cruel blows, we will be unable to change with words and works. Moses was unable to reform

the Pharaoh by means of plagues, miracles, please, or threats; he had to let him drown in the sea. (2-3)

Though there are not many direct similarities between Luke 21 and Luther's text, Luther's text featured here is, in fact, an interpretation of Luke 21. However, interpretation is not a reiteration of text; hermeneutically, it is a clarification as to why Luke 21 reads as it does. Luther creates a typology of Luke 21 where the destruction of the temple is the type and the sixteenth-century Jews are the antitype. Because, as Luke writes, when Jerusalem is "being surrounded by armies," you will know "that it's desolation is near." Luther believes the Jews are being surrounded and, they will become "pliable" once they become miserable enough. In the meantime, it is the duty of gentiles to deal this wrath "until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." Luther's hermeneutical goal here is to answer the question as to why the Jewish people deserve this wrath in the first place. Luke 21 is violent, and Luther interprets that there is no point in engaging the Jews in theological debate; these are the days of vengeance. Luther argues that debate would be useless because the Jews were born and raised with hate for Christianity and, more importantly, with hate for God. As is written in Luke, Luther reiterates that they, the Jewish people, will be "forced to confess that the Messiah has come" eventually. However, until the time of the gentiles, there is no point in debating with the "embittered, venomous, blind heart of the Jews." Luther reiterates this point by writing that if God could not convince the Jews, then his audience could not do it either.

Luther ends his interpretation of Luke 21 by creating a typology of Moses, and Luther's use of Moses shows how Luther viewed the Bible through types and antitypes. Though Moses did not write the first five books of the Bible—as was believed for centuries—the first five books

of the Bible (the Torah) are still known as the five books of Moses by many Jews. Moses, in Hebrew, is called *Moshe Rabbenu* (Moses our teacher), and he is considered the link between God and the Jewish people as a representation of how to live as God's people. With the belief that Moses is the author of the Torah and the receiver of the law, Moses is the originator of a structured Judaism. Luther's analogy to Moses is undoubtedly the most offensive take in his interpretation of Luke 21. Gentiles are an antitype of Moses in Luther's typology, and the Jews are represented by the Pharaoh. Moses could not convince the Pharaoh, and Moses "had to let him drown in the sea." Biblically, the Pharaoh is the Jewish captor, their slaveholder, and Moses leads the Jewish people out of Egyptian captivity. Luther flips the Exodus story, and Luther places the Jews in the role of the slaveholder (type) while biblically replacing them—superseding them—with Christian gentiles. By doing so, Luther is commandeering Moses—*Moshe Rabbenu*. In other words, by creating the typology, Luther is giving an exegesis where Moses was a Christian type or, at least, a proto-Christian; regardless, Luther is stripping Moses of his Judaism, and, in turn, stripping Moses from the Jews. Luther sees Moses not as a Jewish figure but as a typological Christian one, and he references Moses 68 times, which is more than Jesus, Lord, God, or Christ or any other biblical figure in *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Luther ends his metaphor by writing that he must let the Jews "drown in the sea" while simultaneously being the arbiter of their harm.

Furthering Luther's point to avoid debate with Jews, Luther interprets Luke 6:39 when he writes, "Learn from this dear Christian what are you doing if you permit the blind Jews to mislead you. Then the saying will truly apply, 'When a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into the pit'" (19). The verse Luther is quoting is Jesus in Luke 6:39, and Luke writes in the

verse, “Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into the pit?” Ironically, the verse preceding it reads, “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned” (Luke 6:37). Luther mischaracterizes the verse as the purpose of the section in Luke is to remove “the log in your own eye” before you can “take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye” (Luke 6:42). Luther’s entire treatise is established on his unique and prominent hermeneutical perspective of the Bible, and, though Luke and the rest of the Greek Bible established a basis for anti-Judaic thought, without a historical context it is impossible to interpret the Greek Bible from anything other than a European Christian perspective for Luther. Luther continues his interpretation of Luke 6:39 writing:

You cannot learn anything from them [the Jews] except how to misunderstand the divine commandments, and, despite this, boast haughtily over against the Gentiles—who really are much better before God and they, since they do not have such pride of holiness and yet keep far from more of the law than these arrogant saints and damned blasphemers and liars. (19)

Luther’s interpretation does not consider the context of Luke 6:39. This is not singularly true for Luke 6:39—though it is extraordinarily obvious for this particular verse. Luther’s hermeneutical assessment on the Bible comes in both a verse-by-verse pattern or an overwhelming narrative stance. Therefore, when Jesus says *Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into the pit?* Luke is writing about Jews and Gentiles according to Luther regardless of the verses surrounding it. Luther uses the verse to reiterate his argument that gentiles should not speak to Jews because Jews fundamentally misunderstand the Bible. In other words, gentiles can *only* be negatively impacted by communicating with Jews, or as is in Luke, Jews can *only* drag gentiles

“into the pit.” Once again, Luther interprets as to *why* this is true, and he writes that it is because gentiles “are much better before God” because Jews have “pride of holiness” and are “arrogant saints,” “damned blasphemers,” and “liars.”

Part of Luther’s hermeneutics is to interpret the Bible in such a way as for the interpretation to inspire action through revealing that which is unknown—as does most of the Bible and most interpretive texts—and Luther’s interpretation of Luke 6:39 includes a more direct order. First, Luther tells his readers to avoid Jewish people, and, later, Luther concludes, “therefore be on your guard against the Jews, knowing that where they have their synagogues, nothing is found but a den of devils” (19). According to Luther, nothing happens in synagogues except the “defaming of God and men are practiced most maliciously” (19). Luther continues, “where you see or hear a Jew teaching, remember that you are hearing nothing but a venomous basilisk who poisons and kills people merrily...Be on your guard against them!” (19). Luther’s words seem to contradict his treatise *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* (1523) in which he criticized the Catholic church for failing to convert Jews to Christians. Many of Luther’s contemporaries, “both allies and critics, regarded *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* as proposing a new direction for Christians’ interactions with Jews” (Evener 205). Luther’s instruction in *On the Jews and Their Lies*—and previously in *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*—is not directed at Jews, but, rather, it is directed at his German readers. Caspar Güttel, a contemporary theologian and former Augustinian, dedicated “the final two decades of his relatively long life of 71 years to the promotion and dissemination of Luther’s teaching, and, in doing so, he enjoyed a considerable amount of publication success” (Evener 206). Güttel is extraordinarily familiar with Luther’s texts, and, though Güttel’s work never displays the same level of anti-Judaism, Güttel’s



texts show how comfortable Luther's audience is with using Luther's hermeneutical Jew. Güttel tells the story of a Jew in his *Punishments and Plagues* that is conflicted about his Jewishness, and a Christian character agrees to speak to the Jew in "friendly manner, according to the divine Word and Promise" (Evener 215). At the end of the dialogue, the Jew says that the Jews are "poor, comfortless people, who strive to be pious with the law and with our works," and the Christian responds, "it accomplishes nothing that you Jews, the Turks, and also we Christians come to God through ourselves...or through all the angels and the saints" (Evener 216-7). Nearly all Güttel's text include these dialogues between a confused Jew and a kind Christian, and, though it seems like a tool (or instruction) to convert Jews, it is meant to show the kindness of Protestant Christians—a kindness that Luther and Güttel argue papal Christianity does not have. It may seem that Güttel's text plays contrapuntally to Luther's instruction; the Christian in Güttel's story does not seem to "be on [his] guard against" the Jew. However, there is no Jew in either text. Güttel uses a hermeneutical Jew for an intra-Christian argument just as Luke uses a literary Jew as part of an intra-Jewish conflict. Similarly, Luther uses his own hermeneutical Jew that he argues worships in a "den of devils" and spits venom like a basilisk, but, as in Güttel's text and in Luke, there is no Jew.

Though Güttel argues that his readers should approach Jews in a friendly manner, Luther gives his readers much more dramatic instruction. Luther does not want his audience to approach Jews let alone greet them as friends:

Whoever has a desire to lodge, nurse, and honor such poisonous serpents and young Devils; that is the worst enemies of Christ our Lord and of us all; and permit himself to be abused, plundered, robbed, spit upon, cursed and suffer all evil, let the Jews be

commended to him. If this not be sufficient, let him also be put into his mug or crawl and worship such a sanctuary, and afterward boast that he had been merciful, had strengthened the Devil and his young devils to blaspheme our dear Lord and precious blood with which He has bought us. In that way he will be a perfect Christian, filled with deeds of mercy, for which Christ will reward him on Judgment Day with the Jews and eternal hell fire! (CNC 54)

Luther offers this section using subterfuge by quoting Luke 10:16, “He that despiseth you, despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me.” As stated by Luther, whoever hates Christians also hates Jesus and, more importantly, God. Therefore, whoever decides to be kind to Jews will be “abused, plundered, robbed, spit upon, and cursed,” and the Jews will get the “eternal hell fire” in the end. Luther considers what Jesus says in Luke 10:16 to be a form of Jewish blasphemy because, according to Luke and Luther, the Jews had the opportunity to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. However, because they despise Jesus and, in turn God, they are committing blasphemy. Luther reiterates this point by writing, “we Christians know that they openly blaspheme God the Father when they blaspheme and curse Jesus” (55). Luther believes Christians should protect themselves from Jewish blasphemy, and he gives his Christian readers four instructions to protect themselves from the Jews that Jesus describes in Luke:

1. We refuse them the right to have synagogues, so the world may know that we do not permit a house to remain in which the Jews have for so long a time blasphemed our dear Creator and Father, together with his Son... (56).

2. That all of their books be taken away; prayer books, Talmuds, and not one page of it be left...for they use all of that only to blaspheme God (57).
3. They be forbidden openly to praise and thank God, to pray and to teach. Let them do that in their own country or wherever we Christians do not hear or know about it (57).
4. That they be forbidden to mention the name of God before our ears...whoever hears it mentioned by the Jews should report it...and let no one be merciful or kind in this respect. (58)

Luther argues that Christians should react so harshly because “God has caused this to be preached for almost 1500 years,” and the Jews should know the truth because, once again, it has been almost 1500 years (58). Luther uses Luke 10:16 to create a list to protect Christians from Jewish hatred, and, though Luther does not call for murder of Jews, he certainly argues for the removal of Jews; though Luther and Luke create a hermeneutical Jewish character in their respective texts, Luther’s instructions validate action against actual Jews.

Luther, of course, claims that he is writing about actual, flesh and blood Jewish people, and he interjects history to add credence to his argument. For instance, Luther writes:

Therefore, the present-day Jews are very ignorant teachers and indolent pupils of Scripture when they allege that Israel has not yet returned, as though all of Israel would have to return, ...the majority of the Israelites remained in Media, though they perhaps traveled to Jerusalem for the high festivals and then returned to their homes again, as Luke writes in Acts [2:5]. (35)

Though vague, Luther is really criticizing the Jews here. Essentially, Luther is arguing that if Jews wanted Israel to return, then 1) they should have returned to Jerusalem and 2) God never

promised that Israel would return to all Jews. Luther assumes that Jews only returned for religious festivals. Luke writes in Acts 2:5, “Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.” This particular verse in Acts is set during Pentecost, and it ends with Peter addressing the Jews. However, Luther uses the verse to facilitate his argument that he is speaking about actual Jews. Once again, Luther writes to “the present-day,” and he is attempting to prove the timeless nature of the Bible and, simultaneously, make his own work timeless. Luther’s argument is unassuming—it appears a simple fact that is assisted with evidence from Acts. He supplements his facts by writing that the Jews “are very ignorant teachers and indolent pupils of Scripture” because they believe “Israel has not yet returned.” Luther argues that it has returned, but they do not live there—as they were not promised it (only Judah was promised).

Luther takes the Greek Bible as both fact and metaphor, and, of course, the metaphor needs interpretation. Luther facilitates his facts through interpretation in which he needs the Jew to be a caricature. Luther seems particularly interested in Luke 11:21-23 for its violence:

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

This verse comes from Luke’s Jesus just after he has exorcised a demon. Those watching Jesus claim that he casts out demons using the power of Satan, and Jesus tells his audience that he uses the power of God not Satan. Jesus then says, “Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house” (Luke 11:17). In the context of Luke, Jesus uses his exorcism to

create a parable that concludes with “whoever is not with me is against me.” In other words, Jews and gentiles should stand together with Jesus (and, therefore, God), which could facilitate Luther’s overwhelming argument. However, that is not what Luther derives from Jesus’ parable. Luther writes that with Jesus comes “strife and discord,” and Luke 11:22 is Jesus’s way of saying that God’s gentile Christians—the stronger ones—will overpower and plunder the “strong man.” The strong man—and not the stronger man—are the Jews in Luther’s interpretation as they were once the strongest, but they are now no longer.

Luther begins his conclusion of *On the Jews and Their Lies* by using Luke 11 for a completely different reason later in his treatise. Luther writes, “In the first place, they defame our Lord Jesus Christ, calling him a sorcerer and tool of the devil. This they do because they cannot deny his miracles. Thus, they imitate their forefathers, who said, ‘He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons’” (Luke 11:15) (60). Luther argues that contemporary Jews defame Jesus just as the Jews in Luke did. However, they do not defame Jesus because they do not believe in him or his miracles, but, rather, they defame Jesus because they “cannot deny his miracles.” Luther then goes into very specific Jewish references in his interpretation of Luke in his next sequel text: *Vom Schem Hamphoras* or *Of the Unknowable Name* (1543). Luther interprets Luke 11:15:

They invent many lies about the name of God, the tetragrammaton, saying our Lord was able to define the name—which they call *Schem Hamphoras*—and whoever is able to do that, they say, is also able to perform all sorts of miracles. However, they cannot cite a single instance of any men who worked a miracle worth a gnat by means of this *Schem Hamphoras*. It is evident that as consummate liars they fabricate this about our Lord. For

if such a rule of *Schem Hamphoras* were true, someone else would have employed it before or afterward. Otherwise, how could one know that such a power inhered in the *Schem Hamphoras*? But this is too big a subject; after this booklet is finished, I plan to issue a special essay and relate what Porchetus writes on this subject. (60)

The tetragrammaton is the Greek word—meaning “four letters”—for the Hebrew word for YHWH (יהוה), which is the name of the God of Israel in the Hebrew Bible. Today, it is usually phonetically spelled as *Yahweh* among Christians and Jews alike. However, for some Jews and Christians, *Yahweh* is an ineffable name, and, therefore, *Shem HaMephorash* is often times used in rabbinic literature (*Schem Hamphoras* is Luther’s unique spelling). *Shem HaMephorash* translate to “the explicit name” from Hebrew, and it was not used until the first two centuries CE. However, this is niche Judaism even for Luther in the sixteenth century, and the term is more ubiquitous with Luther’s text than Jewish thought.

Luther continues *On the Jews and Their Lies* in his follow up text *Vom Schem Hamphora*, and Luther seems particularly interested in continuing his anti-Judaic treatise with a strong focus on the gospel of Luke. For example, Jesus says in Luke 21:24, “they [the Jews] will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” Luther adds to the verse in *Vom Schem Hamphoras* that the “times of the Gentiles” really means “until the end of world,” because “Christ will remain forever, and no other Messiah will come: that is why I must believe that a few remnants of Jews will remain in the world without ever having their own sovereignty” (196). Luther interprets Jesus as saying that the Jewish people will always be “trampled by the Gentiles” because Jesus already came, and another Messiah will not come for

the Jews. Therefore, the Jews missed their chance to save themselves from the gentiles. The “remnants” of Jews must remain so that they will always be “trampled by Gentiles,” and, if Jews do not exist, then Jesus’s words cannot be true.

Jesus’s ancestry plays an important role in Luke (as well as in Matthew), and, therefore, it interests Luther as well in *Vom Schem Hamphoras*. According to Luther, Luke “talks about the fraternal and paternal line” of Jesus (207). Jesus’s ancestry is not inherently anti-Judaic, and, in fact, it may seem to be in support of Judaism. Luther writes that Jesus’s ancestry is misunderstood. Matthew gives the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham and moving on to David and ending with Joseph, Mary’s husband. Joseph is not Jesus’s father if Jesus is born of a virgin, and, therefore, the Jewish genealogy is irrelevant to Jesus. Luke points out about Jesus, “[he] was thirty years old when he began his work. He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph...” (3:23). Luke writes “as was thought” at the time, but Jesus is not narratively the son of Joseph. Luther writes, “one can see how the Lord’s closest relatives forced themselves on him according to the human manner, and still he conducts himself in a friendly way” (*Vom Schem Hamphoras* 209). To clarify, Jesus’s Jewish relatives forced themselves on him because it was impossible for the “stubborn” Jews to believe “Jesus is Messiah and Mary is a virgin” (*Vom Schem Hamphoras* 209). Though Luke points out that Joseph is not Jesus’s father—though the general populace believed it in the Luke narrative—Matthew plays a more significant role in Jesus’s genealogy. Luther ends his section in *Vom Schem Hamphoras* on Jesus’s genealogy by writing, “Let us conclude, the Jews, as mentioned, will easily believe that the line...reaches from Abraham to Jesus. Matthew...introduces the prophet Isaiah to coax them in a friendly way through their own scriptures. But what good is it among the stubborn, gnarled, stiff necked, damned Jews?” (211).

Jesus's genealogy, according to Luther, is a ploy to drive Jews to Jesus. Considering Matthew and Luke's genealogies are for Joseph—and Joseph is not truly Jesus's father—then Jesus's genealogy should be irrelevant to Christians (as Luther does not consider Mary's genealogy).

Though Luke, like the other gospels, follows the narrative of Jesus, Acts is more formally known as the Acts of the Apostles, and, whereas the gospels and some of the epistles create foundational faith-based arguments, Acts is based on the creation of a Christian church in Rome. Acts is not directly about Jesus's narrative or written by Paul (though half of the book is about Paul), and Luther only cites Acts once. Like most of the Greek Bible, Acts still serves as inspiration for Luther's texts. Acts, for instance, reiterates that the Jews are to blame for the death of Jesus (2:14-24, 3:12-16, 4:10-1, 5:29-30, 10:39, 13:26-28), and, in one example, Luke writes:

“...let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, the man standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.’” (4:10-11)

Acts is a continuation of Luke, and it should come as no surprise that Acts reiterated the Jewish narrative role in Jesus's death. Acts continually reiterates the point by multiple speakers (Paul, Peter, Stephen, etc.). The Jews, according to Acts, are not just violent towards Jesus, but to the prophets as well. For example, Stephen says to a group of Jews who were going to stone him, “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute?” (7:51-52). Though Luther does not admit to quoting Acts 7, he writes in *On the Jews*



*and Their Lies*, “They are the noble blood, the circumcised saints who have God’s commandments and do not keep them, [they] are stiff-necked, disobedient, prophet-murderers, arrogant, usurers, and filled with every vice, as the whole of Scripture and their present conduct bears out” (38). Luther seems to be quoting Stephen from Acts. They both mention circumcision, and, despite it seeming that they mean something different, they are writing the same thing. Stephen writes that the Jews are not circumcised of hearts and ears because they are physically circumcised, which, according to Greek biblical writers, is less important than circumcision of the heart. Similarly, Luther mentions physical Jewish circumcision as well because, like Stephen, he believes it is unimportant (or even a spiritual detriment). Circumcision is customary for Jews, and, therefore, a different form of circumcision is used to demean Judaism. Both Stephen and Luther make their respective words timeless as well. Stephen says to the Jews, “you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit,” and Luther writes that the Jews are all of these terrible things “as the whole of Scripture and their present conduct bears out.” Stephen’s words are clear, and, because Luther is covering what he believes to be at least 1500 years (from the Greek Bible to the sixteenth century), Luther essentially means that the Jews are enemies forever as well. Moreover, Luther feels the need to reiterate Stephen’s insult of the Jews being stiff-necked, which Luther reiterates six times in *On the Jews and Their Lies*.

The Jews created in Acts are not only the enemy of Jesus and the prophets, but they are also the enemy of the earliest versions of the Christian church. Acts 4 begins, “While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, much annoyed because they were teaching people and proclaiming that in Jesus there was resurrection of the dead” (4:1-2). Peter and John were having the earliest form of a Christian

church gathering, and the Jewish authority wanted them to stop. Following that verse, they arrest Peter and John, and “the next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the High priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of a high priestly family” (4:5-6). It was not simply the Jewish authority that witnessed Peter and John, but “the council” and all “the chief priests and elders” wanted Peter and John to stop proselytizing (4:15, 23). The council members even say that they need to “keep it from spreading further” (4:17). Peter is arrested again in the following chapter by a high priest and “all who were with him” for, once again, having a Christian church gathering (5:17-18). Peter manages to escape and returns to the temple. When the high priest finds Peter, the high priest calls “together the council and the whole body of elders of Israel” including the “temple police” (5:21-22). The sole enemy of all of Christendom in Acts are Jews in power—not Satan nor Rome. According to Luther, “They [the Jews] treated us Christians in this manner at the very beginning...they would still like to do this if they had the power, and often enough have made the attempt” (12). Luther, without referencing Acts, explains the narrative power dynamic. He also admits that he is composing *On the Jews and Their Lies* when the Jewish people have no power. Furthermore, they had little actual power during the composition of Acts as well. If Acts was composed prior to 66 AD, then the Jews living in Jerusalem were under Roman rule; if Acts was composed after 66 AD (more likely), then Jews in Jerusalem were living under Roman subjugation. Either way, the Jewish people enjoyed very little actual power. Acts’ power dynamic serves only a narrative purpose. Luther takes the Greek Bible to be a collection of historical events, and, therefore, when he is writing *On the Jews and Their Lies*, he is asking actual German Christians to believe these “facts” about actual European Jews. The power dynamic of Christians has also changed. When

Acts was being composed, Christians had little power as well, even less than Jews (hence their propensity to attack upwards). However, when Luther wrote *On the Jews and Their Lies*, Christianity was the dominant Western religion and political power, and, even by Luther's admission, he is very much attacking a minority.

Though the Jews, according to Acts and Luther, were against the church from the beginning, they were also against the Greek Bible's greatest contributor and Christianity's ultimate tradition-maker, Paul. Acts is partially about him (as his epistles were known before the composition of Acts or Luke). Acts 9, for example, is about the conversion of Paul from Saul. Paul, while as Saul, was "against the disciples of the Lord" (9:1). Shortly after Paul converts to Christianity "the Jews plotted to kill him" (9:24). Later, Paul attempts to speak to Hellenized Jews, "but they were attempting to kill him" too (9:29). Even after Paul managed to draw crowds in Acts, the Jews "were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, [and] they contradicted what was spoken by Paul" (13:45). Paul would not leave, and "the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city and stirred up persecution against Paul...and drove [him] out of their region" (13:50). Even after Paul converts "both Jews and Greeks," "the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against their brothers" (14:2). The author of Acts makes it clear that there were only two sides for Paul, and he writes, "the residents of the city [in which the Jews stirred up the Gentiles] were divided: some sided with the Jews, and some with [Paul]" (14:4). The Jews did not just disagree with Paul; instead, they "stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing he was dead" (14:19). Later, Paul wants Timothy to accompany him, but Paul is forced to have Timothy circumcised "because of the Jews" and not for any holy reason (16:3). When Paul moves from place to place, the Jews seem

to follow him. For example, when Paul is in Thessalonica, “the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar” (17:5). Paul then goes to Corinth, and “the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before a tribunal” (18:12). After Corinth, Paul decides to stay in Greece, but “a plot was made against him by the Jews” (20:2). Paul bemoans that he must endure “the trials that came to [him] through the plots of the Jews” (20:19). When Paul goes to Jerusalem, he encounters a prophet named Agabus, and the prophet takes off his belt, binds himself, and says to Paul, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘This is the way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles’” (21:11). Paul is captured in Jerusalem by “the Jews from Asia” (21:27), and he is put in front of a council as he was “being accused by the Jews” (22:30). The Jews wanted to kill Paul so badly that they “joined in a conspiracy and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat or drink until they had killed Paul” (23:12). Paul is sent to court, and the procurator, Festus, tells the King, “you see this man about whom the whole Jewish community petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer” (25:24). Paul is freed, but “the Jews objected” (28:19). Finally, Paul’s last words in Acts is a message to both Jews and Gentiles: “Let be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen” (28:28). Interpretively speaking, the Jews would not listen, therefore, the gentiles will.

The Jews are Paul’s only enemy while he is proselytizing, and, moreover, the Jews seem to move as a singular entity. The Jews in Thessalonica are the same as the Jews in Corinth which are the same as the Jews from Asia and the Jews in Rome. No matter where Paul goes the Jews react with crazed violence, anger, and jealousy, and, though the author describes Jewish action,

the Jewish characters in Acts (and Luke) have no agency; outside of accusing Paul (and the apostles and Jesus) of lying, they have no religion, argument, or purpose. Therefore, when Luther interprets Jewish characters for his texts, he is not basing it on Jews he has interacted with, but with the Jews that the author of Acts has created with the sole purpose of being barriers for Paul. For example, Luther writes, “[The Jews] have been blood thirsty bloodhounds and murderers of all Christendom for more than fourteen hundred years in their intentions and would undoubtedly prefer to be such with their deeds” (64). If Luther was deriving his entire definition of Jewishness from Acts—especially the Jewish resistance to Paul—then Luther’s interpretation not only seems plausible, but it also fits within the narrative of the Greek Bible. Luther continues, “Thus [the Jews] have been accused of poisoning water and wells, of kidnapping children, of piercing them through with an awl, of hacking them in pieces, and in that way secretly cooling their wrath with the blood of Christians, for all of which they have often been condemned to death and fire” (64). Luther’s claims here might strike the reader as outlandish, but, when the Jews in Acts are willing to starve themselves until Paul is dead, there is no telling how far the Jews are willing to go to soothe their bloodlust.

Though Luke is often overlooked for its anti-Judaism, Luke serves as one of the most important sources for Luther, and, according to Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies* was partially prophesied by Luke. Unlike any of the other gospels or books of the Greek Bible, Luther finds self-fulfilling credence in the gospel. Luther even bases his follow up text, *Vom Schem Hamphoras*, on fringe Judaism and genealogy that he extrapolates from Luke and Luke’s Jesus. Luther desires to simultaneously remove Judaism from Jesus while keeping Jesus as part of prophesy in the Hebrew Bible. Conversely, Acts seems to hold very little importance to Luther,

and he only mentions Acts by name once. However, Acts did more than inspire Luther. Acts maps out the first Jewish attacks against the church, which Luther uses as the basis for *On the Jews and Their Lies*—a defense for Christians against the Jews. More than even the gospels, Acts describes the Jewish people as a singular beast whose singular goal is stop Christianity while, simultaneously, being everywhere at once. No matter how many miles—from Asia Minor to Greece to Rome—the same Jews with the same goals with the same violent tendencies were always there to stop Paul. Luther believed that the same held true 1500 years later for Christians, and *On the Jews and Their Lies* became his extrapolation of the Greek Bible on how to stop them. Though Luther finds credence in Luke and historical basis for his texts in Acts, Luther's favorite book of the Greek bible, John, establishes an anti-Judaism that has grown even more popular with time.

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN AND THE CREATION OF THE CHRISTIAN'S JEWS

The gospel of John, unlike Matthew and Luke, was not written directly from Mark, and the author of the text uses far different language from the synoptic writers. Unlike Paul and the synoptic writers, who were building Christianity from Judaism, John formulates a Christian identity that does not define itself as the next evolution of Judaism, but, rather, he defines Judaism as the antithesis to Christianity. Paul—by way of Luke—keeps to Jewish traditions like Yom Kippur (Acts 28:9) and Passover (Acts 18). However, John refers to these traditions as being uniquely Jewish, and he even calls Passover “the Passover of the Jews” (John 2:13, 11:55) and certain other festivities as being “of the Jew” (John 5:1, 6:4, 7:2). John refers to “the Jew” 71 times while the synoptic gospels refer to “the Jew” a combined 16 times. Not only was John’s gospel written after the synoptics—after growing tension between Rome and Jews—but it also narratively covers distinct topics, formulates a different Jesus, and is a more traditional narrative than the synoptics. Moreover, John formulates his own hermeneutics, or, in other words, John—primarily because of his “we” or “us” narrator—interprets as he writes through interjection and explanation. John writes in his first chapter, “we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). However, because John creates a “we” or “us” narrator, there must be an “other” participant—those who have not seen the “glory” of Jesus—the opposition to “us.” The opposition also speaks in a collective “we-voice” as well, and, for example, Jesus tells a group of Jews that believed in him that they “will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” The Jews respond, “we are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone” (John 8:31-32). Martin Luther, undoubtedly inspired by John, creates an

us-verses-them text in *On the Jews and Their Lies*; and, though the synoptics and even Paul's anti-Judaism is part of a larger intra-Jewish conflict given the Greek Bible's historicity, the gospel of John's anti-Judaism is not.

John's Jesus is particularly important to Martin Luther. Unlike Mark's Jesus, who is a secretive character throughout Mark and, therefore, in *On the Jews and Their Lies* as well, John's Jesus proudly proclaims he is son of God throughout John. Jesus is first introduced in John by John the Baptist loudly proclaiming, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29), but it is John's Jesus's acrimony that Luther seems to gravitate towards the most. Luther continually returns to one verse, a quote from Jesus to the Jews, in particular:

If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does...If God were your father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. (John 8:39-44)

Larry R. Helyer writes of these verses, "the portrayal of Jews in John's Gospel as children of the devil has been particularly devastating, fueling anti-Semitic attitudes throughout the church history and in the modern era" (*The Witness* 324). Jesus's words in John attack both Jewish genealogy and Jewish spirituality while, simultaneously, claiming that the Jews are from the devil. Jesus claims that the Jewish people could not be from Abraham, and, therefore, they must



be from the devil. Jesus claims that the Jewish people imitate the devil, and they do not believe in God. Jesus's words do several things for Christian readers. First, Jesus separates Abraham from Jews, and makes him a part of a Christian narrative (typology). Secondly, by Jesus demeaning Jewish genealogy, he is taking away the part of the biblical narrative that would supersede Judaism from Christianity. Thirdly, Jesus is claiming that true belief in God only comes from believing that Jesus is the son of God, and, considering Jews do not believe Jesus is the literal son of God, then they, in turn, do not believe in God. Luther seems most concerned with the importance of Jewish genealogy, and Luther writes on John 8, "It was intolerable to them [the Jews] to hear that they were not Abraham's but the devil's children, nor can they bear to hear this today. If they should surrender this boast and argument, their whole system which is built on it would topple and change" (3). Luther contemporizes John by writing "nor can they bear to hear this today," and, by doing so, Luther is taking the character of the Jew in John and placing Jesus's words on actual Jewish people in sixteenth century Europe.

Much of the Greek Bible is concerned with Jewish genealogy, and Luther is ultimately concerned with it as well. For example, Paul writes in Romans 9:5, "to them [the Jews] belongs the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah..." The book of Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus that goes from Abraham to David to Jesus (Matt. 1:1-17), and, despite what Jesus says in John 8, Jesus says in John 4, "salvation is from the Jews" (4:22). Luther recognizes this when he writes:

There is one thing about which they boast and pride themselves beyond measure, and that is their descent from the foremost people on earth, from Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and from the twelve patriarchs, and thus from the holy people of Israel. St Paul admits

this himself [in Romans 9:5]. And Christ himself declares in John 4:22, “Salvation is from the Jews.” (3)

Though it seems Luther is not degrading the Jewish people here—as he recognizes both Paul and Jesus’s acknowledgment of Jewish genealogy—Jewish “pride” seems to be his primary reason for writing *On the Jews and Their Lies*, and, though Luther admits both Paul and Jesus find favoritism among Jewish genealogy, Luther is not pleased with the idea. Luther continues:

Therefore, they boast of being the noblest, yes, the only people on earth. In comparison with them and in their eyes we Gentiles (Goyim) are not human; in fact, we hardly deserve to be considered poor worms by them. For we are not of that high and noble blood, lineage, birth, and descent. This is their argument, and indeed I think it is the greatest and strongest reason for their pride and boasting. (3)

Luther deploys sarcasm and satire to create a Jewish character who believes so highly of themselves that they believe that all Goyim are less than human—an argument that Luther desires to flip onto the Jews.<sup>28</sup> Luther is attacking Jewish pride, and Luther wants to cut the Jew down, which is the purpose of his treatise. Luther even humanizes God by writing, “God has to endure that in their synagogues, their prayers, songs, doctrines, their whole life, they come and stand before him and plague him grievously” (3). Luther believes that listening to the Jews has become a chore for God. Furthermore, Luther continues, “Thus he [God] must listen to their boast...for letting them be descended from holy patriarchs, and for selecting them to be his holy and peculiar people” (3). Not only does Luther write that listening to Jews is a chore for God, but

---

<sup>28</sup> “Goyim” is a Hebrew name for non-Jews, and it literally translates to *nations*. However, it can have a negative connotation depending on its use.

he believes God may have made a mistake picking the Jews as his favored people (a mistake God must now endure). Luther, who is theologically literate, is willing to humanize God for the sake of condemning the Jew.

Though Luther recognizes the biblical importance of Jewish genealogy from Paul and John, Jewish genealogy—that they are from the patriarchs—is the one biblical import that, in the eyes of Luther, gives the Jews superiority over Goyim. Luther takes it upon himself to diminish the Jew, and rather than equating Goyim to Jews, he supersedes the Jew. For example, when Jews thank God for being human, Jewish, and male, they “did not learn such tomfoolery from Israel but from the Goyim” (3). More specifically, “the Greek Plato accorded God with such praise...this man, too, praised his gods for these three items,” and, Luther continues, “the Italians fancy themselves the only human beings...they imagine other people in the world as nonhumans” (3). Therefore, according to Luther, even Jewish boasting is unoriginal; they learned from the Greeks and Italians. Once again, Luther points out that Jesus in John calls the Jewish people the devil’s children. Therefore, with the help of John, Luther believes that the Jews are unoriginal children of the devil. Luther concludes that “if their [the Jewish] Messiah...should come and do away with their boast...they would crucify him seven times worse than they did our Messiah” (4), and, “even if they Jews were as holy as their fathers...they would have to be hurled into the abyss of hell” (4).

Luther’s genealogical argument is predicated on Jewish pride and boasting through genealogy.<sup>29</sup> Luther writes that such people should suffer “thunder and lightning strikes from

---

<sup>29</sup> When Luther is discussing pride, he means in the negative, biblical sense: “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov 16:18).

heaven and Sulphur and hellfire strikes from below” because “whoever is born from holy patriarchs and from Abraham himself stands condemned before God and must not boast before him. John 3:6 says the same thing” (5). John writes in John 3:5-8, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit...So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”<sup>30</sup> What John’s Jesus is saying, and what Luther is interpreting, is that there is the flesh and the Spirit, but the flesh is more fallible than the Spirit. Genealogy is part of the flesh, but we are all born of the Spirit including Jews and Goyim alike. However, Jesus does not mention that flesh is the pathway to heaven, but, rather, it is through the Spirit. Therefore, Luther interprets that the flesh is a detriment to the Spirit because flesh alone is not a pathway to heaven. Luther takes his interpretation of John further by sarcastically arguing:

Now you can see what fine children of Abraham the Jews really are, how well they take after their father, yes, what a fine people of God they are. They boast before God of their physical birth and of the noble blood inherited from their fathers, despising all other people, although God regards them in all these respects as dust and ashes damned by birth the same as all other heathen. And yet they give God the lie; they insist on being in the right, and with such blasphemous and damnable prayer they purpose to rest God’s grace from him and to regain Jerusalem. (6-7)

Luther deploys sarcasm and condescends to the literary Jew that he has created through his own interpretation of John and the rest of the Greek Bible. He argues at the end—not unlike modern conspiracy—that the only reason Jews claim to be God’s chosen is because they want to “regain

---

<sup>30</sup> It is common for Luther to cite one verse but reference the surrounding verses.

Jerusalem,” and, in this way, they are giving “God the lie.” Though Luther claims that God regards Jews as no better than heathens, Luther seems confused—and at worst contradictory—about whether genealogy matters to God:

After all, if birth counts before God, I can claim to be just as noble as any Jew, yes, just as noble as Abraham himself, as David, as all the holy prophets and apostles...And if God refuses to acknowledge my nobility and birth the equal to that of Isaac, Abraham, David, and all of the saints, I maintain he is doing me an injustice and that he is not a fair judge. For I will not give it up and neither Abraham, David, prophets, apostles nor even an angel in heaven shall deny me the right to boast that Noah, so far as physical birth or flesh is concerned, is my true, natural ancestor.

[...]

I could go back to the beginning of the world and trace our common ancestry from Adam and Eve, later from Shem, Enoch, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech; for all of these are our ancestors just as well as the Jews’, and we share equally in the honor, nobility, and fame of descent from them as do the Jews. We are their flesh and blood just as the same as Abraham and all his seed are.

[...]

There, Jew, you have your boast, and we Gentiles have ours together with you, as well as with us. Now go ahead and pray that God might respect your race, your flesh and blood (6-7).

Luther is self-contradicting with the importance he lays on Jewish genealogy. On one hand, Luther views Jewish genealogy as the source of pride, and pride based on genealogy is of the

flesh and is not of the Spirit (as John writes). It is important enough for Luther to claim that he is of equal nobility to that of Jews, and, moreover, it can be a source of his pride. Luther furthers his argument by writing that if God does not acknowledge his claim to Jewish genealogy, then he is “not a fair judge.” Luther, by Christian theological standards, is approaching blasphemy, or, at the very least, he is mischaracterizing God (as written about by Paul and the rest of the Greek Bible authors). For example, Luther quotes John 4:22 where Jesus says, “salvation is from the Jews” (as in the lineage of Jesus is from Jewish ancestry), yet Luther writes that their lineage is the same. Therefore, he is either being purposefully obtuse, or John has confused him; or, worse, Luther is coming strikingly close to revealing the arbitrary nature of Judaic religion. Jesus is narratively a descendent of Jews, and, on the other hand, flesh is superseded by the Spirit, which everyone has according to John as well. When taking his audience in to account, Luther’s argument of genealogy can be more revealing. Luther is not writing for a Jewish audience, and, in fact, Luther has no interactions with Jewish populations. Luther simply needs to please a European Protestant Christian audience for them to believe his treatise. Luther can write that Europeans have the same claim to the Jewish patriarchy as the Jews themselves, and no Protestant Christian, especially in Germany, is going to deny it.

Luther’s hatred of the Jews is fueled by the gospel of John. Whereas the synoptics refer to Sadducees wanting to kill Jesus—and only through interpretation and assumption does Luther equate Sadducees to all Jews—John writes that the Jewish people, as a collective, want to kill Jesus; or, as Larry R. Helyer writes, “John’s Gospel has provided anti-Semites with grist for their mill” (324). John writes in the beginning of John 7, “After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him”

(7:1). However, Jesus goes to Judea anyway, and the Jews were “complaining about him...while some were saying ‘He is a good man,’ others were saying, ‘No, he is deceiving the crowd.’ Yet no one would speak openly about him for fears of the Jews” (John 7:10-13). John creates a violent Jew who will kill Jesus on sight, and even the mere mention of Jesus is enough to incite violence. Luther interprets, “the most important thing that they [the Jews] expect of their Messiah is that he will murder and kill the entire world with their sword” (12). Furthermore, the violence they have for Jesus, according to Luther, they now have for Christians. Luther writes, “They treated us Christians in this manner at the very beginning throughout all the world. They would still like to do this if they had the power, and often enough have made the attempt, for which they got their snouts boxed lustily” (12). The only thing that is stopping the Jews from enacting violence against Christians, according to Luther, is their lack of power. Luther admits that Jews have no power, especially in Germany, and, yet, he is still writing *On the Jews and Their Lies*, a treatise against them.

Critics, who have claimed John’s anti-Judaism has been overblown, have argued that John’s use of “the Jews” is meant to signify those in power, and rather than use the terms Pharisees or Sadducees, John uses a universal form of Jew to signify only those in power.<sup>31</sup> John is quick to point out Pharisees and Jews in power:

---

<sup>31</sup> D. G. Dunn writes in his book *Jews and Christians*, “[John] is still operating within a context of intra-Jewish factional dispute...it is clear beyond a doubt that once [John] is removed from that context, and the constraints of that context, it was all too easily read as an anti-Jewish polemic...but it is highly questionable whether [John] himself can fairly be indicted for either anti-Judaism” (203). Lars Kierspel cites in his book *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel: Parallelism, Function, and Context*, “The last twenty years have seen a host of studies that use a variety of methods for understanding reference and function of the term ‘the Jews.’ In his [von Wahlde] review of more recent research...von Wahled witnessed significant changes when he stated that ‘the majority of scholars have concluded that the term [“the Jews”] refers exclusively to religious authorities,’ a new consensus displayed in various modern English and German Bible translations” (13-14).

Then the temple police went back to the chief priest and Pharisees, who asked them, ‘Why did you not arrest him [Jesus]?’ The police answered, ‘Never has anyone spoken like this!’ Then the Pharisees replied, ‘Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? Has any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd [the Jews], which do not know the law—they are accursed.’” (John 7: 45-52)

There is certainly a difference between the Jewish people and the Pharisees according to John. Moreover, their differences are based on knowledge, and, according to the Pharisees in John, the Jewish people do not know the law and are accursed (though their goal of Jesus’s demise is the same). Luther separates Sadducees and Pharisees from Jews—though, according to Luther, the former are the personification of Jewish leadership anyway. For example, Luther writes of Haggai’s temple, “it is certain that no house was ever disgraced more than this holy house of God by such vile sows as the Sadducees and Pharisees” (47). In another instance, Luther writes, “such prayers [of boasts] was also spoken by the Pharisee in the Gospel as he boasted about all his blessings, saying, ‘I am not like the other men.’ Moreover, his prayer was beautifully adorned...he fancied that he was sitting on God’s lap as his pet child” (5). Luther perceived a difference between Jews and Pharisees, but it was based on time, and for Luther, Pharisees were the Jewish leadership of the Greek Bible and were a representation of all Jews then and now.

The Greek Bible relies on the provocation of empathy through persecution. For example, Jesus suffered for all people, and, therefore, Christians should acknowledge that 1) God allowed himself to feel pain as we do and 2) that he would go through pain for humanity. Paul is often persecuted, and John the Baptist is beheaded. However, a persecution narrative must also have a persecutor, which, in the Greek Bible, more than even Satan, are the Jews (especially in John).



Luther wishes to spark a similar emotion within his work, and he wishes to be a victim.

However, Luther was never persecuted by contemporary Jews (most Jews lived in Poland during the 16th century), but he was persecuted by the Catholic church. Luther compares his own disagreements with the Catholic church to the Christian “oppression” and “lies” by Jews in the narrative of the Greek Bible:

We want to examine their [the Jews] lies against persons, which, after all, do not make the doctrine either worse or better, whether the persons are pious or base. Specifically, we want to look at their lies about the person of our Lord, as well as those about his dear mother and about ourselves and all Christians. These lies are such as the devil resorts to when he cannot assail the doctrine. Then he turns against the person lying, maligning, cursing, and ranting against him. That he is what the papists’ Beelzebub did to me. When he was unable to refute my gospel, he wrote that I was possessed of the devil, that I was a changeling, that my dear mother was a whore and a bathhouse attendant. Of course, no sooner had he written this than my gospel was destroyed and the papists carried the day! Similarly, John the Baptist and Christ himself were charged with having a devil in John 8:20 and were called Samaritans and shortly thereafter John’s and Christ’s doctrine was shown to be false, and that of the Pharisees true. (59)

Luther’s words are often complicated by his own sarcasm. Essentially, Luther writes when the Jews cannot argue against Christian doctrine, they resort to lying about the writers (or the characters in the narrative). Luther refers to the Jews as the universal “devil” because he wishes to also include the Catholic church with them. When the Catholic church could no longer argue with Luther’s doctrine, the Catholic church instead argued that he was possessed. Luther then

sarcastically writes that the Catholic church won by claiming Luther had the devil just as the Jews won by doing something similar to Jesus and John the Baptist. John writes in John 8:48, “The Jews answered [Jesus], ‘Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?’” Samaritanism is a sect of Judaism that inhabited Samaria during the time of the composition of the Greek Bible. Samaritans are not spoken about in the same vein as Jews in the New Testament, and, for the most part, they are often spoken of as morally superior.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, it makes sense for the Jews to ask Jesus if he has a demon and is a Samaritan. Because the Greek Bible lasted—and Judaism has collectively lost its political power in Europe—Luther believes that their claims of Jesus’s possession had the opposite effect, and the same will be true of the Catholic church in the future. Though the Jews have created lies about Jesus in John’s narrative, according to Luther, Jesus gave the Jews ample time to follow Jesus (and become Christians).

The Jews repeatedly reject Jesus’s advances in the gospel of John. Not only do the Jews reject Jesus in John 7:1-9 and 8:48-59, but they also reject Jesus in John 10:22-42 and John 12:37 as well. The Jews approach Jesus in John 10, and they say to him, “If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Jesus responds, “I have told you and you do not believe...The Father and I are one” (10:22-29). John then writes, “The Jews took up stones...to stone him...Then they [the Jews] tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands” (10:31-39). Not only are the Jews

---

<sup>32</sup> This is partially due to mainstream Judaism’s disdain for Samaritans that are referenced in the Hebrew Bible. For example, King Omri “bought a hill of Samaria” and “he fortified that hill,” and he ruled over half of Israel (1 Kings 16:24). Later, it is written, “Omri did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; he did more evil than all who were before him” (1 Kings 16:25). After Omri’s rule, his son, Ahab, was even more “evil” than his father (King 16:30). When the Jews returned from exile, they decided to build a temple, and the Samaritans said to them, “Let us build with you, for we worship the same God as you do.” However, the Jews said to them, “You shall have no part with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the Lord” (Ezra 4:1-3). Therefore, the disdain between mainstream Judaism and Samaritans existed for centuries before the composition of the Greek Bible, and, because of the rift between them, early Christians sided with Samaritans (as mainstream Jews were John’s primary antagonist).

inherently violent, but they cannot even handle the truth that they ask for. When they get the answer they ask for, they attempt to kill Jesus, and, when they cannot kill Jesus, they try to arrest Jesus; and, when they try to arrest Jesus, Jesus escapes. Narratively, the Jews are failures. Unlike the synoptics, John is willing to interpret his own stories, and John creates a typological of John 10 in John 12:

Although [Jesus] had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word spoken by Isaiah:

Lord, who has believed our message,  
and to whom has the arm of Lord been revealed?

And so they [the Jews] could not believe, because Isaiah also said,

He has blinded their eyes  
and hardened their heart,  
so that they might not look with their eyes,  
and understand with their heart and turn—  
and I would heal them.

Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him. Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God. (12:37-43)

John writes that Jew's rejection of Jesus was prophesied by the book of Isaiah, or that Isaiah's type predicts the Jew's future in the Greek Bible from their past in the Isaiah. John's interpretation of the Jews' rejection of Jesus revolves around his interpretation of Isaiah. Isaiah is

a book of prophecy, and, therefore, it is often used by Christians to interpret prophecy for the Greek Bible (primarily through typology). For example, Luther writes, “So many hundreds of thousands attempted to devour Jesus, but over this they themselves ‘stumbled and fell and were broken, snared, and, taken,’ as Isaiah says [8:15]” (51). John, however, writes that the Jews’ rejection of Jesus had been prophesized since about the 8th century BCE when Isaiah was composed. John goes even further and writes that many Jews—even those in authority—believed in Jesus, but they refused to say anything because they were afraid of repercussions from the Pharisees. In this way, according to John, they have chosen the physical world over God. Similarly—but much more crudely—Luther writes, “It serves [the Jews] right that, rejecting the truth of God, they have to believe instead such abominable, stupid, inane lies, and that instead of the beautiful face of the divine word, they have to look into the devil’s black, dark, lying behind, and worship his stench” (60). Furthermore, the Jewish rejection of Jesus plays an integral part of *On the Jews and Their Lies*, and, more than reject God, according to Luther, they accept the devil and darkness in his stead, which Luther derives from John 8:44 as well.

Luther’s harsh words against the Jews—that they believe in and worship the devil—is meant to strike fear, and many of the disciples and people in John feared the Jews (even when Jesus is not there). Jews who believed in Jesus, for example, kept quiet out of fear of other Jews. Furthermore, after Jesus is crucified, John writes, “When it was the evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you’” (20:19). John’s verse expresses several different ideas, especially in hindsight. The verse takes place after Jesus’s crucifixion, and, therefore, within the context of the narrative, the Jews have won. The verse is

about the moment Jesus presents himself to his disciples, and, thus, the disciples are fearful of Jews in a world without Jesus. Consequently, John's verse implies that the disciples had something to be afraid of, and the Jews must have been threatening death to Jesus's disciples. These disciples are essentially the first Christians, especially for biblical interpreters, and, accordingly, we can assume that the Jews target Christians. Considering John's singular verse implies a wealth of surface-level interpretation, especially about the dangers of the Jews, it should not come as a surprise that Luther interprets the verse multiple times in his treatise (12, 15, 16, 20, 40, 45, 46, 49, 63, 64, 65), and in one example Luther writes:

That is to say that he [the Jews] is to kill and exterminate all of us Goyim [Gentiles] through their Messiah, so that they can lay their hands on the land, the goods, and the government of the whole world...They wish that sword and war, distress and every misfortune may overtake us accursed Goyim. (64)

According to Luther, the primary adversary of Judaism is Christianity, and the Jewish people are inherently violent. Even Luther admits that the Jewish people no longer have power. Therefore, Luther admits that he is attacking a minority that has no political presence, and he is complaining about their mere existence in Germany. Luther certainly never experienced violence from a Jewish individual, which prompts the question: why does Luther believe every Jewish person desires to kill, murder, and crucify every Christian? Considering Luther has no realistic foundation for his belief, Luther derives his hermeneutical Jew from the Greek Bible including the gospel of John. Like the disciples in John who feared Jews for one verse and simply forgot, Luther is not actually frightened of murderous Jews, and, by his own admission, they do not have the power to kill anyway (though he goes back and forth on this). Luther says as much in his

follow-up text, *Vom Schem Hamphoras* (1543), when talking about *On the Jews and Their Lies* (which Luther sometimes referred to as *Against the Jews and Their Lies*):

This I have done herewith, in honor of our belief, and in opposition to the devilish lies of the Jews...For as I plainly stipulated in that pamphlet, it is not my opinion that I can write against the Jews in the hope of converting them. That is why I did not call the pamphlet *Against the Jews*, but *Against the Jews and Their Lies*, so that we Germans may know from historical evidence what a Jew is so that we can warn our Christians...(Unknowable Name 166)

In other words, Luther is obviously not writing to Jews or German Jews, but to German Christians, and Luther is not writing about things he knows. By his own admission, Luther's *On the Jews and Their Lies* is based on "historical evidence." Luther's historical evidence is not a traditional historical narrative. Instead, Luther is writing about the Christian Bible and interpretations of that Bible by other Christians. In other words, John 20:19, where Jesus's disciples have hidden from the Jews who mean them harm, is historical evidence for Martin Luther, and, in turn, Luther believes his *On the Jews and Their Lies* is a culmination of historical evidence (or, at least, that is what he wants his readers to believe).

Martin Luther could not fit the culmination of his "historical archive" in *On the Jews and Their Lies*, and, therefore, his follow-up text, *Vom Schem Hamphoras*, is a continuation, and Luther makes it clear that he was running out of room in *On the Jews and Their Lies*. *Vom Schem Hamphoras* is a direct continuation with the additional anger of a man who has been riled up. *Vom Schem Hamphoras* derives much of its framework from Luther's favorite gospel, the gospel of John, and the rest of the Greek Bible. As an example of Luther's anger and progression from

*On the Jews and Their Lies* into *Vom Schem Hamphoras*, Luther writes in reference to John 8:39-44, when Jesus tells the Jews that they are from the devil, “In sum, they [the Jews] are the devil’s children damned to hell; if, however, something human still remains in them, for him this essay maybe of use...I have no hope there anymore and know of no writings concerning such hope...it is less possible to convert these children of the devil!” (167). Luther begins to dehumanize the Jews, and, according to Luther, the only Jews with humanity left are the ones willing to become Christian; as Jesus said in John, they are from the devil after all. Not only does Luther believe converting Jews is more or less impossible, but he also writes that it is even too difficult to convert some Christians (though not specific, this most likely is in reference to other Christian sects). However, Luther has fallen so deep into his own interpretation of the Greek Bible that he has begun to ignore parts of the Greek Bible that he has deemed too Jewish; for instance, Luther writes, “Although there are many who derive the crazy notion from the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans that all Jews must be converted, that is not so. St. Paul meant something quite different” (*Vom Schem Hamphoras* 167). Paul writes in Romans 11:25-26, “a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved...” Of course, Paul’s verse is problematic, but, eventually, according to Paul, all of Israel will be saved. However, Luther believes Paul meant something “quite different,” but what Luther believes Paul meant is unknown (as he does not mention this verse or interpretation again). What is known, however, is that any semblance of mercy for the Jews that Luther interpreted in the Greek Bible is gone in *Vom Schem Hamphoras*.

John 8 was problematic for Jews leading up to Luther, but, because of Luther, the chapter became even more problematic leading into the 20th century and beyond. Luther uses John 8 to

great effect in *On the Jews and Their Lies*, but he continues and amplifies the verse in *Vom Schem Hamphoras*. Luther continues to drive the point home—that Jews are from the devil, they are the inherent enemy, and they, like the devil, are constantly on the attack. For example, Luther writes, “The Jews deride themselves the most in that they obey the devil, their God, in this derision and thereby become raging fools...they don’t do it in error...they learn from the devil” (*Vom Schem Hamphoras* 174). According to Luther not only do the Jews learn from the devil, but they do so on purpose. The Jews were given a chance to follow Jesus, and they did not. Therefore, their foolishness and their relationship with the devil must be intentional. The Jews, according to Luther, even pray to “so many devils” (185). Luther later continues, “For the devil has possessed and caught the Jews, so that they must act according to his will, (as St. Paul said) to fool around, to lie, to blaspheme and to curse God and everything that belongs to God” (183). Though Luther writes that the Jewish relationship with the devil is intentional, later he writes that the devil “caught” the Jewish people. Even so, according to Luther, the Jewish people act according to the will of the devil, which, naturally, makes them enemies of Christendom. Even when Luther is not writing about the Jewish and devil relationship, he never fails to remind his reader that it exists. For example, he writes, “In sum, a Jew is so full of superstition and magic as nine cows have hair, that is, untold and infinite, like the devil their God, full of lies” (184). The implication that the Jews and the devil have a relationship is that they are both the enemy of Christendom, and, though that is the implication, it is rarely directly stated. However, Luther writes in the *Vom Schem Hamphoras* to God, “Oh my God, my dear creator and father, you will credit me graciously that I must speak of your eternal majesty in so shameful a manner with distaste against your damnable enemies and devils and Jews” (186). Essentially, because Luther



is reporting the “Jewish lie,” he is presenting what he considers to be a bad interpretation, but he does so with the purpose of attacking his enemies. Luther’s advice to his readers—and all Christians—is to ignore the Jew because “the devil riots in them” (212). However, Christians should only avoid Jews on theological matters. Considering the Jews are not only equivalent to the devil, but they come from and worship the devil; Luther gives seven steps in *On the Jews and Their Lies* on how to deal with Jews:

1. First, that we avoid their synagogues and schools and warn people against them...[they] should be entirely destroyed with fire and leave nothing. If [Moses] were living today he would be the first to put fire to the Jew schools and houses. (40)
2. Secondly, that you also refuse to let them own houses among us. (40)
3. Thirdly, that you take away from them all their prayer books and Talmuds wherein such lying, cursing, and blaspheming is taught. (41)
4. Fourthly, that you prohibit their Rabbis to teach...under threat of losing body and soul. (41)
5. Fifthly, that protection for Jews on highways be revoked. For they have no right to be in the land. (41)
6. Sixthly, that their usury be prohibited...and take away all the currency and silver and gold and put it away for safe-keeping. (42)
7. Finally, that young, strong Jews be given flail, ax, spade, spindle, and let them earn their bread in the sweat of their noses...should we be concerned, however, that they might do us bodily harm...let us apply the ordinary wisdom of other

nations like France, Spain, Bohemia, et al., who made them give an account of what they had taken from them by usury...[and] expel them from their country.

Despite Jews being a small portion of Europe during the 16th century, they were the enemy according to Luther. Luther did not conclude that Jews were from the Devil; instead, Jesus did by way of John. Neither Muslims nor Catholics (obvious to us) were mentioned by name, but the Jews were. Therefore, no matter what enemies of Christendom Luther had gained, none were directed there by Jesus's mouth except for the Jews. Luther concocted a seven-step list to deal with his enemy that, unfortunately, is not new to a twenty-first-century audience, but most likely not by way of Martin Luther.

Though John 8 serves as the primary driving force behind Luther's texts, it is not the only verse in John to inspire him. For instance, Jesus says to the Jews in John 5, "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him" (5:43). Of course, the "other," according to Luther is the devil, and, because the Jews want to "slander incessantly," they "must listen to all the devils and pray to them just as our Lord Christ says in John 5:43" (*Vom Schem Hamphoras* 183). However, not all of Luther's criticisms of Judaism based on John are related to the devil. For instance, Luther writes in *Vom Schem Hamphoras*, "the miserable Jews have not known all their lives what the least law even is, let alone what the fulfillment of the law is, and cannot (as long as they are Jews) ever understand it" (199). Luther basis his words of John 1:17 where John writes, "the law indeed was given to Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." According to Luther the Jews cannot understand "such great words," and, therefore, do not know what it means for the law to be fulfilled. Moreover, Jesus says in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world," and, considering the

Jews do not believe Jesus is the son of God, Luther asks, “what else can there be except only darkness?” (202). However, with darkness comes death, and Jesus says when prophesying his death, “I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin” (John 8:21). Luther writes that Jesus’s words in John 8:21 is “what drives St. Paul in all his letters,” and “that he curses the Jew dogs, and circumcision as totally blinded and calloused” (222). In other words, the Jews live in sin and, in turn, die from sin, but Paul was driven to avoid it (though John was written after Paul’s epistles). The Jews’ demise is based on their inability to believe in Jesus (or to become Christians), which Luther believed was the fault of the Catholic church before the Ninety-Five Theses. When the Jews did not flock to Jesus, according to Luther, they became ignorant, lying people of the devil. In other words, Luther builds a hermeneutical Jew that he can dehumanize.

Martin Luther misinterpreted and misused texts that were originally part intra-Jewish debate, but due to John’s language, Luther may not have misinterpreted John very much. John 8 not only fueled Martin Luther, but also centuries of anti-Judaism and, later, antisemitism. Even John’s use of “Jew” at a much higher frequency than the synoptics is early cause for concern, but is John’s self-referential and philosophical nature that has caused it to resonate with readers, especially with Luther. John not only writes about Jesus’s miracles, but he also explains the narrative importance of those miracles. Moreover, John’s Jesus is more upfront with his own disdain of Judaism. Luther’s *On the Jews and Their Lies* and *Vom Schem Hamphoras* were part of genealogy of hermeneutist and commenters who created a hermeneutical Jew for their interpretations while, simultaneously, normalizing typology for their Christian audience—namely that the Hebrew Bible was created primarily for the Greek Bible. Even today, John’s

popularity among Luther and its audience is not despite its strict separation of Jews and followers of Christ but because of it.

## CONCLUSION

This research aimed to identify Luther's application of the Greek Bible through rhetoric and hermeneutics to write his anti-Judaic treatise while paradoxically claiming the Greek Bible is self-interpreting. Regardless of Luther's claim, Luther's interpretation of the Greek Bible has found an audience that unfortunately thrives to this day. Though Luther adds to the extensive history of biblical interpretation, he certainly was not the first hermeneutist to write against the Jews, and several of his methods of interpretations were not his either. In fact, many of Luther's arguments were an appeal to biblical tradition. An argument could certainly be made that the Greek Bible—however inadvertent—laid the foundation for much of Luther's treatise, but, if we consider that much of the Greek Bible is part of an intra-Jewish conflict, then we would be blaming those in which Luther wishes to persecute for their own persecution. Luther, however, does not believe that 1) the Greek Bible was written by those of the Jewish faith or 2) their anti-Judaism is inadvertent. For Luther, the Greek Bible along with many interpreters after the composition and canonization of the Greek Bible *did* lay the foundation for *On the Jews and Lies*.

Chronologically, Paul's epistles were written before the versions of the gospels that exists today in most Christian versions of the Bible—obviously Paul knew the story of the gospels. Paul outside of Jesus is really the main character of the Greek Bible, and in many ways, Paul is more influential character in terms of Christian tradition. More than half of the books of the Greek Bible are attributed to Paul, and half of the Book of Acts is about Paul. For Luther and the many interpreters before Luther, Paul serves as the first Christian hermeneutist, and Paul gives

several examples as to how gentiles can become and act like Christians. Perhaps most importantly, Paul is really the writer that allows gentiles to be involved at all giving Luther the position to write his treatise from a seat of religious authority. Luther cannot only cite Paul when writing for his German audience—mainly to avoid Jewish tradition—but Luther’s relationship with Paul is simply more personal.

The common conception is that John is the anti-Judaic gospel, Matthew and Mark are the Jewish gospels, and Luke is the Greek gospel. Though common conception of the gospels is arguably true, it is terribly reductive. All the Greek Bible was written in Koine Greek—many Jews wrote in a variety of Koine Greek. Though John uses “the Jews” 63 times—many of which are used with hostility—and John does not differentiate between Jewish groups, Matthew’s blood curse has done far more damage to the Jewish community. Matthew’s Blood Curse is the central point of this thesis, and it is a perfect example of how Luther can take a part of a single verse (Matt 27:24) and base his entire treatise around it—his argument that the Jewish people are violent for blood specifically. There are several reasons that Luther gravitates to the Blood Curse in Matthew: 1) it is, according to Luther, self-incriminating, 2) it has been a staple of anti-Judaic interpretation since it was written, and 3) it fits within a Luther’s typological view of the Bible. The spilling of innocent blood is a key component of the Bible. After Cain kills Abel, God says to Cain, “your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground” (Gen 4:10-11). If Luther’s views the Hebrew Bible for types, then the blood curse could be interpreted as the Cain and Abel antitype. The Blood Curse has impacted the Jewish community with such rancor that prominent Christians have tried to counter it. For instance, Pope Benedict XVI wrote in 2011 that in Matthew 27 when the “whole people” say:

“His blood be on us and on our children” “the Christian will remember that Jesus’ blood speaks a different language from the blood of Abel: it does not cry out for vengeance...it brings reconciliation” (187). However, modern commenters and popular Christian figures are still addressing the antisemitic canard because interpretations like Luther’s have lasted into the twenty-first century.

Luther’s rhetorical manipulation of the Bible and his faulty hermeneutics can give larger insights into general modes of reading, which is the underlying theme of this thesis. Though Luther wrote terrible things in his treatise, the purpose of this thesis is to answer how he could come to these arguments and conclusions. Hermeneutics, or exegesis, is really the method of interpretation, and the interpreter approaches the text with hermeneutical presuppositions to give an “accurate” interpretation. Hermeneutics presumes that the text must need interpretation, and, in fact, the text must contain a secret that the interpreter must reveal. Literary criticism works in a similar mode. Broadly, the theorist or critic approaches a text with a critical presupposition—sometimes religious—to search for something in the text that needs further explanation (sometimes with outside resources). However, there is one glaring difference: the audience. Theorists or students of theorists usually read the work of other theorists. Interpretations are meant for a general audience, and many people receive some sort of interpretation once a week; neither the interpreter nor the audience must prove any mastery over the text. Though literary criticism has become popular outside the universal classroom, hermeneutics have simply become part of Christianity (amongst other religions) even if it is not recognized. Still, they desire the same specific conclusion: to reveal that which is unknowable (or not recognized yet). Considering theorists typically read other theorists, if something is glaringly wrong, it could be

questioned. Hermeneutics and interpretations can sometimes reach a large group of people before it is ever critically examined, and, worse, it sometimes simply becomes part of a larger religious norm (at least within a given sect). Luther's treatise is the most obvious example of the capacity of hermeneutics and interpretation, but the same argument is applicable for other hermeneutists, commenters, and interpreters outside of Christianity or religion. We should not underestimate the power of misinformation on the masses.

There are several interpreters and figures after Luther that contributed to the modern view of the Jewish community, and while this thesis is solely about Luther, there is certainly a next logical step in the research prior to *Kristallnacht* and after it (both literarily and religiously). Though Luther is still seen for his heroics—he was even featured on a German €50 gold coin in 2017—he is only one man among nearly two-thousand years of Christian interpreters who should be noted for their role in creating a hermeneutical Jew that many people believe to be real. Antisemitism is undoubtedly on the rise across the world—particularly in the United States and Eastern Europe—during the composition of this thesis, and though I do not expect this thesis to cure the minds of anti-Semites, it is helpful to know why.



## LIST OF REFERENCES

- “About the NRSV.” Bible Gateway, [www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-Revised-Standard-Version-NRSV-Bible](http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-Revised-Standard-Version-NRSV-Bible). Accessed 23 August 2021.
- Augustine of Hippo. *City of God*. Translated by Henry Bettenson, Penguin Classics, 2004.
- Aune, David E. *The Blackwell Companion to The New Testament*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Arieti, James A. “Magical Thinking in Medieval Anti-Semitism: Usury and the Blood Libel.” *Mediterranean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2016, pp. 193-218.
- Barton, John. *A History of the Bible: The Story of the World's Most Influential Book*. Allen Lane, 2019.
- Bein, Alex. *The Jewish Question: Biography of a World Problem*. Fairleigh UP, 1990.
- Bertram, Martin H. *Luther's Works, Volume 22*. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Concordia Publishing House, 1968.
- Best, Ernest. *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*. Hendrickson Publishers, 1996.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Canon of Scripture*. IVP Academic, 1988.
- Burkett, Delbert. *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity*. Cambridge UP, 2019.
- Burkill, T. A. “Anti-Semitism in St. Mark's Gospel.” *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1959, pp. 34-53.
- Chazan, Robert. *From Anti-Judaism to Anti-Semitism*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Cohen, Jeremy. *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity*. University of California Press, 1999.

- Comfort, Philip. *Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Paleography & Textual Criticism*. B&H Academic, 2005.
- Cross and the Flag*. Temple UP, 1947.
- Donfried, Karl P. "Paul and the Revisionists: Did Luther Really Get it All Wrong?." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2007, pp. 31-40.
- Duffield, Ian K. "Difficult texts: Matthew 23." *Theology (Norwich)*, vol. 123, no. 1, 2020, pp. 16-19.
- Duling, Dennis C. "The Gospel of Matthew." *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, edited by Dave E. Aune, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp. 296-318.
- Dunn, James D. G., and John Rogerson. *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. Eerdmans, 2003.
- . *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A. D. 70 to 135*. Eerdmans, 1999.
- Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Marcion of Pontus." *Britannica*, 15 November 2009, [www.britannica.com/biography/Marcion-of-Pontus](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Marcion-of-Pontus). Accessed 23 August 2021.
- Ehrman, Albert. "The Origins of the Ritual Murder Accusation and Blood Libel." *Tradition*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1976, pp. 83-90.
- Evener, Vincent M. "Jewishness as an Explanation for Rejection of the Word: Caspar Güttel's Reception of Martin Luther's Anti-Judaism." *Church History and Religious Culture*, vol. 95, no. 2, 2015, pp. 203-221.
- Fish, Stanley E. "Interpreting the Variorum." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1976, pp. 465-485.
- Flavius, Josephus. *The Antiquities of the Jews*. Translated by William Whiston, Wilder Publications, 2018.
- Gager, John G. *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian*

- Antiquity*. Oxford UP, 1985.
- Ginzberg, Louis. *Legends of the Jews*. The Jewish Publication Society, 2003.
- Goffman, Daniel. *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge UP, 2002.
- Goodacre, Mark. *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze*. Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004.
- Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. Eerdmans, 1997.
- Grondin, Jean. *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer, Yale UP, 1997.
- Hamilton, Catherine Sider. ““His Blood Be upon Us”: Innocent Blood and the Death of Jesus In Matthew.” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 1, 2008, pp. 82-100.
- Harrington, Daniel J. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Liturgical Press, 2007.
- Hartill, J. Edwin. *Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics*. Zondervan Academic, 2007.
- Helyer, Larry R. *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period: A Guide for New Testament Students*. IVP Academic, 2002.
- . *The Witness of Jesus, Paul and John: An Exploration in Biblical Theology*. IVP Academic, 2008.
- Jerome. “Jerome Letter 195.” *Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana*, [www.augustinus.it/latino/lettere/lettera\\_200\\_testo.htm](http://www.augustinus.it/latino/lettere/lettera_200_testo.htm). Accessed 23 August 2021.
- Jones, Paul H. “From Intra-Jewish Polemics to Persecution: The Christian Formation of the Jew as Religious Other.” *Encounter*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2006, pp. 161-197.
- Justin Martyr. *Dialogue with Trypho (Selections from the Fathers of the Church, Volume 3)*. Translated by Thomas B. Falls, Catholic University of America Press, 2003.

- Katz, David S. "Shylock's Gender Jewish Male Menstruation In Early Modern England." *Review of English Studies*, vol. 50, no. 200, 1999, pp. 440-462.
- Kierspel, Lars. *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel: Parallelism, Function, and Context*. Mohr Siebeck, 2006.
- Lamp, Jeffrey S. "Is Paul Anti-Jewish? Testament of Levi 6 in the Interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16." *Catholic Bible Quarterly*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2003, pp. 408-427.
- Lenker, John Nicholas. *The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther*. Forgotten Books, 2018.
- Levy, Richard S., and Dean Philip Bell, William Collins Donahue, Kevin Madigan, Jonathan Morse, Amy Hill Shevitz, Norman A. Stillman, editors. *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*. ABC-CLIO, 2005.
- Luther, Martin. *At the Pulpits of Wittenberg: The Sermons of Martin Luther*. Fig, 2012.
- . "Martin Luther, Manuscript on Old Testament Chronology (MSS 090)." *Emory University*, [pitts.emory.edu/collections/digitalcollections/mss090.cfm](https://pitts.emory.edu/collections/digitalcollections/mss090.cfm). Accessed 10 September 2021.
- . *On the Jews and Their Lies*. Translated by Martin H. Bertram, Fortress Press, 1971.
- . *The Jews and Their Lies*. Edited and Translated by Christian Nationalist Crusade, Christian Nationalist Crusade, 1948.
- . *Vom Schem Hamphoras*. Translated by Gerhard Falk, McFarland, 2013.
- Michael, Robert. *Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Morrow, Jeffrey L. *Theology, Politics, and Exegesis : Essays on the History of Modern Biblical Criticism*. Pickwick Publication, 2017.

- Perkins, Pheme. *Reading the New Testament: An Introduction*. Paulist Press, 1988.
- . *Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels*. Eerdmans, 2009.
- Pope Benedict XVI. *Jesus of Nazareth*. Ignatius Press, 2011.
- Sandmel, Samuel. *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?*. Fortress Press, 1978.
- Setzer, Claudia J. *Jewish Responses to Early Christians: History and Polemics, 30-150 C.E.* Fortress Press, 1994.
- Siker, Judy Yates. "Anti-Judaism in the Gospels According to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Mel." *Pastoral Psychology*, vol. 53, no. 4, 2005, pp. 303-312.
- Smith, David Oliver. *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul: The Influence of the Epistles on the Synoptic Gospels*. Resource Publications, 2011.
- Steigmann-Gall, Richard. *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
- Strack, Hermann Leberecht. *The Jew and Human Sacrifice: Human Blood and Jewish Ritual, an Historical and Sociological Inquiry*. B Blom, 1971.
- Szondi, Peter, and Timothy Bahti. "Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics." *New Literary History*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1978, pp. 17-29.
- Tertullian. *Adversus Iudaeos*. Translated by Roger Pearse, Tertullian Project, 4 July 2002, [www.tertullian.org/latin/adversus\\_iudaeos.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/latin/adversus_iudaeos.htm). Accessed 23 August 2021.
- . *Adversus Marcionem*. Translated by Ernest Evans, Tertullian Project, 8 December 2001, [www.tertullian.org/articles/evans\\_marc/evans\\_marc\\_00index.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/articles/evans_marc/evans_marc_00index.htm). Accessed 23 August 2021.
- Teter, Magda. *Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth*. Harvard UP, 2020.

*The Bible*. Authorized King James Version. Oxford UP, 2008.

*The Bible*. The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version  
5th Edition. Oxford UP, 2018.

Thiessen, Matthew. "Paul's Argument against Gentile Circumcision in Romans 2:17-29." *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 56, no. 4, 2014, pp. 373-391.

Weinberg, Robert. "The Blood Libel in Eastern Europe." *Jewish History*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2012,  
pp. 275-285.

Wilson, Sarah Hinlicky. "Luther by Means of Mark." *Lutheran Forum*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2016, pp.  
5-8.

Woodworth, Cherie. "Where Did the East European Jews Come From?: An Explosive Debate  
Erupts from Old Footnotes." *Kritika*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2010, pp. 107-125.