

# Martin Luther and Hitler's Anti-Semitism

In his early career [Martin Luther](#) held tolerant views towards the [Jews](#). He believed their rejection of the Gospel was due to their recognition of the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church.

Luther was confident that his writings would convert Jews to Christianity. This had not happened and in 1542 he wrote *On the Jews and Their Lies*. The greater part of the work was a careful analysis of the Old Testament. However, in the final section of the book, Luther addressed himself to the question of how Christian rulers should treat their Jewish subjects.

## Primary Sources

### (Source 2) [Martin Luther](#), speech (1519)

Absurd theologians defend hatred for the Jews... What Jew would consent to enter our ranks when he sees the cruelty and enmity we wreak on them - that in our behavior towards them we less resemble Christians than beasts?

### (Source 3) [Martin Luther](#), *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* (1523)

I hope that if one deals in a kindly way with the Jews and instructs them carefully from Holy Scripture, many of them will become genuine Christians and turn again to the faith of their fathers, the prophets and patriarchs. They will only be frightened further away from it if their Judaism is so utterly rejected that nothing is allowed to remain, and they are treated only with arrogance and scorn. If the apostles, who also were Jews, had dealt with us Gentiles as we Gentiles deal with the Jews, there would never have been a Christian among the Gentiles. Since they dealt with us Gentiles in such brotherly fashion, we in our turn ought to treat the Jews in a brotherly manner in order that we might convert some of them. For even we ourselves are not yet all very far along, not to speak of having arrived.

### (Source 4) [Martin Luther](#), *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543)

Learn from this, dear Christian, what you are 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" (Luke 6:39). You cannot learn anything from them except how to misunderstand the divine commandments...

Therefore be on your guard against the Jews, knowing that wherever they have their synagogues, nothing is found but a den of devils in which sheer selfglory, conceit, lies, blasphemy, and defaming of God and men are practiced most maliciously and vehemingly on them.

Moreover, they are nothing but thieves and robbers who daily eat no morsel and wear no thread of clothing which they have not stolen and pilfered from us by means of their accursed usury. Thus they live from day to day, together with wife and child, by theft and robbery, as archthieves and robbers, in the most impenitent security...

What shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews? Since they live among us, we dare not tolerate their conduct, now that we are aware of their lying and reviling and blaspheming. If we do, we become sharers in their lies, cursing and blasphemy...

First to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of

Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians, and do not condone or knowingly tolerate such public lying, cursing, and blaspheming of his Son and of his Christians. For whatever we tolerated in the past unknowingly and I myself was unaware of it will be pardoned by God. But if we, now that we are informed, were to protect and shield such a house for the Jews, existing right before our very nose, in which they lie about, blaspheme, curse, vilify, and defame Christ and us (as was heard above), it would be the same as if we were doing all this and even worse ourselves, as we very well know.

Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed. For they pursue in them the same aims as in their synagogues. Instead they might be lodged under a roof or in a barn, like the gypsies. This will bring home to them that they are not masters in our country, as they boast, but that they are living in exile and in captivity, as they incessantly wail and lament about us before God.

Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them.

Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb. For they have justly forfeited the right to such an office by holding the poor Jews captive with the saying of Moses in which he commands them to obey their teachers on penalty of death, although Moses clearly adds: "what they teach you in accord with the law of the Lord." Those villains ignore that. They wantonly employ the poor people's obedience contrary to the law of the Lord and infuse them with this poison, cursing, and blasphemy.

**(Source 5) [David R. Reagan](#), *Anti-Semitism: Its Roots and Perseverance* (1996)**

In 1543 he wrote a pamphlet entitled "Concerning The Jews and Their Lies." The document was an anti-Semitic diatribe.... Having dehumanized and demonized them, Luther then proceeded to make some startling proposals for dealing with them: Their synagogues and schools should be burned. Their houses should be destroyed. Their Talmudic writings should be confiscated. Their Rabbis should be forbidden to teach. Their money should be taken from them. They should be compelled into forced labour.

**(Source 6) [Derek Wilson](#), *Out of the Storm: The Life and Legacy of Martin Luther* (2007)**

Martin Luther wrote *On the Jews and Their Lives*... The immediate occasion for this diatribe seems to have been the news that proselytising Jews had succeeded in converting some Christian men, who had denied Christ and submitted to circumcision...

Attitudes to his harsh and uncompromising advice have inevitably been coloured by the appalling events of later centuries and predominately by the Holocaust... In 1523 he had been an assimilationist; now he had become an exclusionist. No longer were the Jews to be won over by kindness... Luther did not advocate extermination. And he was not a racist. His objection was entirely to the Jews' religious beliefs and the behaviour that stemmed from those beliefs. He did not support inquisitorial methods to obtain conversions - use of informers, third-degree interrogation, torture and the threat of the stake... To individual Jews (of whom he met very few) he was his usual open, generous self.

**(Source 7) [Hans J. Hillerbrand](#), *Martin Luther: Encyclopædia Britannica* (2014)**

Biographies of Luther accordingly have a tendency to end their story with his marriage in 1525. Such accounts gallantly omit the last 20 years of his life, during which much happened.... Repeatedly drawn into fierce controversies during the last decade of his life, Luther emerges as a different figure - irascible, dogmatic, and insecure. His tone became strident and shrill, whether in comments about the Anabaptists, the pope, or the Jews. In each instance his pronouncements were virulent: the Anabaptists should be hanged as seditionists, the pope was the Antichrist, the Jews should be expelled and their synagogues burned. Such were hardly irenic words from a minister of the gospel, and none of the explanations that have been offered - his deteriorating health and chronic pain, his expectation of the imminent end of the world, his deep disappointment over the failure of true religious reform - seem satisfactory.

**(Source 8) [Adolf Hitler](#), speech in [Berlin](#) (December, 1924)**

Martin Luther has been the greatest encouragement of my life. Luther was a great man. He was a giant. With one blow he heralded the coming of the new dawn and the new age. He saw clearly that the Jews need to be destroyed, and we're only beginning to see that we need to carry this work on....

I believe that today I am acting in accordance with the will of Almighty God as I announce the most important work that Christians could undertake - and that is to be against the Jews and get rid of them once and for all.

**(Source 9) [Daphne M. Olsen](#), *Luther and Hitler* (2012)**

Two of the most notoriously unshakable Anti-Semites were the Protestant reformer Martin Luther and German Chancellor-turned dictator Adolf Hitler.... Although four centuries apart, both Martin Luther and Adolf Hitler had a remarkable impact on both Germany and the world. Luther is renowned still today as the initiator and leader of the Protestant Reformation. Centuries later, Lutherans and Germans alike admire and honor him for his bold and daring actions against the Catholic Church in the 1500s. Hitler remains one of the most hated men in history. The similarities shared between Luther and Hitler were not limited to their hatred for anything Jewish, however. Both men were led by a strong sense of German nationalism and a yearning for unity among their fellow Germans.

What exactly was it about these two men that allowed them to start a rebellion and garner support from their fellow Germans? More importantly, what led them to live a life filled with rage and hatred, and why was it directed toward the Jews? Was there something about the German people in particular that allowed them to be susceptible to the leadership of Luther and Hitler? Martin Luther and Adolf Hitler are inseparably linked with their extreme anti-Semitism and nationalism. It is impossible to assume that Luther did not have any influence on Hitler and his views, for it cannot be mere coincidence that Hitler's anti-Jewish sentiment of the 1930s and 1940s mirrors that of Luther's anti-Semitism of the 1500s.