

Martin Luther, the Reformation, and the Study of the Hebrew Language

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The Inspiration for studying Martin Luther

When I experienced a Call to Ministry in June, 1965 it came it words which I found out later to be biblical words: "Go Out in the world to Preach the Gospel" With the use of the concordance I found that these words had a place in history before I heard them. They are found at Mark 16:15 and are Jesus' words to his disciples.

I have always felt a special calling towards the World aspect of that Call. The Internet affords yet another place in which the Call can be addressed. When I first learned about "Justification by Grace" - the leading theme of the Reformation, I could not leave it alone after that. I read Luther's description of his 'break-through experience' in "Here I Stand" by Roland Bainton:

I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the justice of God," because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by his faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.... (Bainton, "Here I Stand", p. 58)

This experience was a connecting point with some of my own experiences. It was as if the four hundred years had vanished and I could experience again what Luther experienced. That is, if I could understand it!

I chose the topic for my Thesis at Union College in 1968, based upon my thirst to understand Luther's Experience. A patient advisor suggested that I not try something on Luther himself, but to choose someone writing on Justification whose works were fairly small in number and therefore accomplishable. He suggested the writing of Professor Hans Küng. I included in my thesis a quotation of Luther's Tower experience, and compared it with similar experiences of John Wesley. That was as far as I could go at that time.

However I was never free from the desire to learn more. In fact when I applied for a scholarship to do post-graduate work in Germany I wrote:

I am filled with a desire to understand more fully biblical documents. My study so far leads me towards the work of Martin Luther. He discovered something very profound in his translation of the scriptures from Hebrew, Greek and Latin into the written German language - something of which the mere exposure to the world caused revolution. I would like to more completely understand the reason for this. My basic purpose is to enhance my understanding and practice of preaching. I would expect to return to the pastoral ministry when complete, but it would be a question of call...

In 1973 I travelled to Germany with my family in a Quest to see and understand the works of Dr. Martin Luther, especially that part that related to "Justification by Grace". I entered the world of the Reformation, on its home ground.

Chapter 1 - Finding My Topic

I think the Reformation was misnamed. Re-form suggests to me to cast something back into the form it once was. And, indeed, the Reformers often referred to the early church as a model for what they were trying to build. But in fact it was impossible to re-build the early Church in the 16th Century. So what in fact happened was a tremendous TRANS-formation of almost every aspect of life.

In this regard it may be similar to what has been going on in our recent lifetime. Beginning in 1960's - particularly with Vietnam, the Beatles, drugs, turn-on, tune-out - the complete rejection of old authority systems. The consequences continue even today.

These are the topics I would like to address in connection with the Reformation period: i.e. the first half of the 16th century:

The place of the Bible in the lives of the Reformers, for example: Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and Martin Bucer.

The challenges to the Reformers in biblical study. After rejecting the Latin Vulgate, how did they approach their biblical studies in Old Testament and New Testament? Which versions of the Bible were available to them, in which languages. How did they arrive at "the plain meaning of scripture"?

The role that Hebrew writings played in the hands of the Reformers.

Mystical Jewish writings.

The need for newly-translated Bibles. Where did the impetus come from, what techniques were used? The challenge of producing a Bible in an indigenous language.

The splintering of Churches after the Reformation - how did it happen that those who became "Protestants" so often disagreed with each other. How does this relate to their different methods of interpreting scripture? Was this the only possible outcome or could it have been avoided? What part did personality

clashes or other non-biblical factors play in the splintering of the Protestant Church?

I began my studies in the University of Tübingen in October, 1973. I had been accepted as a full student in the Doctoral Program, having passed, by the slimmest of margins, the German entrance requirements.

I started my investigation at the date of 1517 - the nailing of the 95 theses by Luther on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church and worked both ways from there. I searched back to about c. 1200 AD and ahead to c. 1611 - the writing of the Authorized Version of the English Bible. In fact it was necessary to go back to the time of Saint Augustine and early Jewish writings, so it is hard to state the limits in terms of years.

My method was to use a "microscope method" - this seems to have been my pattern all through theological studies - to concentrate all my attention on some seemingly small aspect or event - so as to not get lost in the topic - and to get to know at least something about something. I choose to follow one string of the topic through, but also with my eyes open to see connecting points to the general times and issues.

So the "small thing" I decided to study was Luther's relationship to the Hebrew language.

The connecting point for me, why I would choose such a topic, is that I had found the most exciting moments to be in the Hebrew class in Union College (1967-68) - the most Ahahs! per minute.

My Thesis: "Justification by Grace"

I left Union College (which is now amalgamated into the Vancouver School of Theology) with two passionate interests:

- ◆ The Doctrine of Justification - focusing on Romans 1: 17 and
- ◆ Excitement with the Hebrew Language.

When I planned my thesis at Union College I tried to bring those two topics into it. I considered both for a while, but found that at crunch time I had to choose

between two professors from two separate disciplines under whose guidance to write my thesis. Either the Professor of Doctrine - therefore the Justification topic, or the Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew - therefore the Hebrew topic. I wanted to write it under both, and to try to harmonize my two loves by finding some topic which involved both.

Professor Hans Küng

I believed at that time it was impossible to achieve such an ambitious goal. I acceded to the suggestion of the Professor of Doctrine - a good suggestion - that I pursue the doctrine of Justification in the writings of a new writer, and one whose works would not be so extensive that it was impossible to write about. Therefore not Martin Luther, nor Karl Barth, but in the writings of someone with a manageable output - and his suggestion was - Hans Küng! This was a terrific suggestion. Hans Küng had been very active at the Second Vatican Council, was becoming well known - had not yet, as I recall, been silenced by the Church.

It was to be thesis, not a dissertation. Still I put in a lot of time to try to understand Küng's writings, which I still do not find easy to assimilate.

I concentrated on the book, ***Justification***, by Hans Küng. This book was printed first in Germany as ***Rechtfertigung*** - the German word for Justification.

One of the fascinating aspects of ***Justification*** by Hans Küng is that it was written to and with Karl Barth. And the letters from one to the other, of these old friends, makes the book quite charming. Karl Barth was at that time in Basle, Switzerland, and Hans Küng was in a town in southern Germany which I had never heard of before:

TÜBINGEN

It was in the beginning of Küng's book that I heard the word Tübingen for the first time - the town which my wife, Marilyn, I and my children called home for 2 ½ years!

In 1968 I finished my thesis: ***the Doctrine of Justification in some writings of Hans Küng*** - and felt this was a difficult, yet worthy accomplishment.

It was an accomplishment, however, which left me unfulfilled, because I

remembered that I had had to leave one thing behind in my original wish - the desire to meld the topics of justification and the Hebrew language.

We travel to Tübingen

When we moved to Germany and I was finally enrolled as a full graduate student in the fall of 1973, I started in again on that elusive topic. It did not take me long to realize that a thesis on "Luther and Justification" was not needed, nor was a thesis on "Luther on the Hebrew Language".

There are reputedly 500,000 dissertations on file at the University of Tübingen, and as regards Martin Luther, you almost have to chose one day of his life to find yourself a new topic. Luther has been under the microscopes of so many scholars that it is hard to edge yours in, without finding that your microscope is overlapping with three or four more.

I had done very little study on the history of the Reformation before I left Canada. I had read "Here I Stand" by Roland Bainton - and scanned some of the works of Luther in English, but I had no idea of the breadth and scope of the Reformation, nor how it worked.

So here I was, in October of 1973, having just found a place to live in Lustnau, a suburb of Tübingen. We enrolled five children in German Schools and I had taken two courses in German from a language school in Tübingen.

I visited the office of the ***Akademischesauslandsamt*** (Office for Foreign Students) and was told by the Secretary that I would not get into the University officially this term. But I persisted and had taken a University course to upgrade my German. I passed and was accepted into full-time accredited study with the lowest possible passing grade for my competence in German, particularly my spoken German.

How was I to chose my courses? Did it matter to anyone? Who should I ask, and what level of German will they require of me just to talk about this?

I decided to enter the History of the Reformation at almost any point, and joined an Advanced Level class in Reformation History - yes, an Advanced Level Seminar without the prerequisite of much Church History, almost non-functional German and having concurrently started my first course in Latin.

The Reformation in Nuremberg - 1525

The first course was entitled, ***Die Einführung der Reformation in Nürnberg*** (Introduction or Importation of the Reformation into Nuremberg.)

You mean that the Reformation had some discreet role to play in different German cities? I couldn't just study something like, "The Introduction of the Reformation in Germany"? RIGHT!!

Because the Reformation did develop at different times in different places - for example it was in the early 1520's in Nuremberg, but in the mid 1530's in Tübingen. And because so much had happened between one and the other and because of accidents of geography and history it was much different (more 'Zwinglian') in Tübingen.

Each town had its own "Reformer" and his supporters. And there were scores of them, not just Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, but people like Martin Bucer in Strasbourg, and Andreas Osiander in Nuremberg.

The Seminar focused on the events in the town of Nuremberg in the early 1520's. We looked at the events in the cathedrals in that town, and looked also at the various players in the drama which worked out in that town.

Finding my topic

On January 28, 1974 I presented to my seminar class a paper on an aspect of the history of the Reformation in Nuremberg. It was while researching background material for this presentation that I discovered my dissertation topic!

As I look through my archival materials from those days I see that I have class notes on various activities in Nuremberg during the critical period of 1520-1530 including the actual order of the service of worship in St. Lorenz Church as it changed to the evangelical form.

It was extremely difficult for me to read the old texts. Even the German was medieval German, and my Latin was only beginning to be functional, as I progressed with my concurrent Latin course.

But I understood enough to find that Osiander [who later wrote an introduction to

Copernicus' book - 1543] was very interested in the Hebrew language.

I found that he was interested in the cabalistic work of Johannes Reuchlin **de verbo mirifico**, ("The miracle-working word") 1494. Osiander had learned the Hebrew Language using the Hebrew grammar and lexicon which Johannes Reuchlin also wrote called **de Rudimentis Hebraicis**, (Pforzheim, 1506).

I had got hold of a "string" and I was going to follow it where ever it led!

So I sought out a history of the life of Johannes Reuchlin by Ludwig Geiger, who introduced me to one of the true heroes of the early 16th Century. Because Johannes Reuchlin found so much for his Christian soul in the Jewish writings which were available to him, and he did not end up, as many of the Reformers did, despising the people while using their insights. Johannes Reuchlin was the protagonist on behalf of saving Jewish Literature from being burnt over against the Jacob Hoogstraaten and the Cologne Dominicans. This episode has been called "The Battle of the Books" (1514-1516).

In the history by L. Geiger I found reference to **de Rudimentis Hebraicis**, as well as the fact that this Hebrew grammar-lexicon had been used by many of the Reformers to teach themselves the Hebrew language. The fact that Luther used it some 2 years after its publication (in 1508) to study Hebrew was beginning to connect me to reasons why I had come to Germany!

But how did Johannes Reuchlin, a Christian Renaissance scholar who had taught the Greek language, obtain the knowledge he required to write this very early Hebrew primer for the Reformers?

Geiger gave the answer - Reuchlin had drawn largely on the grammatical-lexical works of **Rabbi David Kimhi** - (born in Provence, France in 1160)

Still pulling the "string" I plunged into the Tübingen University library, frantically searching the card catalogue. The card catalogues are arranged only by authors, although there is a very limited topical index. I was searching for works by David Kimhi. I was immediately disappointed.

I found nothing under the K's at all.

But persisting, using any English or German information I had I looked under Q -

because the Hebrew letter Quf can be variously transliterated in other languages.

Nothing under Qui - damn!

But then I looked more closely. I needed to look under Qimhi or Qimchi.

Notice that it is Qi - which NEVER happens in English or in German.

There they were, the works of **Rabbis David, Moses and Joseph Kimhi!** (Q and K being interchangeable when transliterating Hebrew)

Their location was shown as in the **Sonderlesesaal**.

A visit to the Sonderlesesaal, the Library of the University of Tübingen

The **Sonderlesesaal** (the Special Reading Room) is a wonderful room any visitor to the University of Tübingen Library must see. Anyone who loves old books, that is. You must gain entrance passed a person guarding the door, who inspects your library card and any carrying cases or parcels you have with you must be checked at the door.

On each side of the room, above the racks of old books, there are staircases which lead you to further racks of old books. I loved the Sonderlesesaal, in spite of the poor lighting. Europeans do not make such a thing of good lighting, preferring natural window light in situations I found ridiculous. I sometimes could hardly see! But the room and its contents were delightful!

I took careful notes of a number of books by Rabbis Joseph, Moses and David Kimhi from the card catalogue and set out to see those books with my own eyes.

I now needed to learn more about the Library system for delivery of books. The person sitting at a desk told me that those books could be ordered, and would be delivered to me some hours later, but could only be used in the Sonderlesesaal. At the door you had your books looked over by an attendant who sat there and checked you in and out. It was also very possible to order photostatic copies of most books, unless damage to the binding was a possibility, in which case you could order microfilms.

I ordered the books I wanted by filling out slips and putting them in a box directing them to the Sonderlesesaal.

I see the SEFER MIKLOL "the Book of Completion"

After the requisite wait I was given the books I had ordered, the centerpiece being the Sefer Miklol of David Kimhi. This book was ALL IN HEBREW and RABBINIC HEBREW. I ran my fingers and my eyes over this small book, printed right to left, back to front, not one word of English in it, all in this strange tongue, with its beautiful "colophon" - a picture of what seemed to be the arches of an ancient building, between which were words in Hebrew.

My Hebrew knowledge was not extensive, and certainly not up to the demands of reading a whole book in Hebrew, and especially not those squiggly little characters of what I found out was Rabbinic Hebrew - the Hebrew in which Rabbis wrote their personal comments and interpretations.

Nonetheless, with the help of various Hebrew lexicons, either brought with me or found on the open shelves of the Sonderlesesaal, I could begin to see the outlines of this strange book - **Sefer Miklol** - "the Book of Completion". The version I was reading had been printed in Venice - "In Venice" was there in non-pointed Hebrew characters and could be transliterated from the Hebrew with some help. The year of this edition I found out to be 1544.

I painstakingly copied individual words from **Sefer Miklol**, and found I could translate a few words into English.

In between this painful attempt to do an impossible translation I scoured anything I could find in English or German about the book and its author. I also found a reference catalogue to the titles of dissertations at Tübingen and other German Universities to see if this topic had been exhausted by someone else.

I still have the note I wrote, when my AHAH! came. On December 19, 1973, 1 p.m., sitting in the Sonderlesesaal of the University of Tübingen I wrote:

***What about a thesis topic
the relation of QIMHI --> LUTHER?***

Rabbi David Kimhi of Narbonne - 1160-1235

Chapter 2 - Researching the Kimhi Family

The thesis topic was arrived at before knowing what fund of information was available, without any kind of collegiality I can remember (some of that came later) - without having discussed it with anyone in official position to tell me whether that was a good, or adequate, or possible dissertation topic for the University of Tübingen. All I knew is that I was committed to it - I was intrigued by it, and in fear and trembling I was promising myself to doing it. I had been in Germany 6 months, and officially in the University a little over 2 months. I picked my dissertation topic by myself, in isolation. The most dramatic aspect of my isolation was my lack of the German language, which was gradually being overcome. Building a sense of collegiality was a slow process and contained more obstacles than I have could have imagined.

Taking the Sonderzug to Nuremberg

In my seminar on Nuremberg, there was a gradual thawing of relationship when a number of us took the Sonderzug (special train) to the Krisskringlemarkt in Nuremberg. I was the only non-German in the class, which was more or less always the case. This special train was scheduled especially for the annual Christmas Fair in Nuremberg. A number of us used this trip to wander the streets of Nuremberg and visit some of the cathedrals of the Reformation, and various other buildings, including a former monastery.

The 'sub-theme' of the trip for me was to get to know my classmates a little better, and to practise my German, which was getting more fluent, particularly with some good German wine. 'Better' is a relative term. Fluency for me meant throwing the niceties of German grammar to the wind, and simply launching into long discussions in my German language, which sounded atrocious to those around me who had pride in their German language. But I could make myself understood.

Johannes Reuchlin of Pforzheim - 1455-1522

My trip to Pforzheim, the birthplace of Johannes Reuchlin, was instigated by a classmate who wanted some of his furniture moved and asked me to help with

the use of our van. On the way we visited the Reuchlin Library in Pforzheim, the birthplace of Johannes Reuchlin, which was not far from Tübingen.

Johannes Reuchlin concluded his teaching career teaching Hebrew in Tübingen, before he died in 1522. The story of Johannes Reuchlin, the humanist who provided the tools for so many of the Reformers to study the Hebrew language, was filled with many interesting twists and ironies for me. I love the twists and ironies of history! They reveal the characters as real people!

Reuchlin never left the Roman Catholic Church. He was at enmity with Martin Luther, who had sent the occasional letter to him. He was also the uncle of Philip Melanchthon, and was against Philip going to Wittenberg to join Luther. Melanchthon remained in Wittenberg as the successor of Luther in his aspect of the Reformation.

de Rudimentis Hebraicis

One of the legacies for me from Johannes Reuchlin was **de Rudimentis Hebraicis** (Pforzheim: Thomas Anselm, 1506). I was able to handle original copies of this most fascinating book. Before I left Germany I had ordered a full microfilm of this book, which is 620 pages long.

Some of the amazing aspects of this book:

- ◆ It is written mainly in Latin, but with about 10% of its content in Hebrew.
- ◆ When you open it you are greeted with a verse in Latin which tells you that you are beginning at the wrong end, because, you must know, the Hebrew language is written from the other end and right to left. So even though the book is in Latin, which runs left to right, front to back, just as English does, this book is written in "Hebrew word order". But only in the fact that it starts at the other end, there was no way of making Latin run right to left. The Hebrew examples do!
- ◆ It is a beautifully printed book, by any standards. More the remarkable because it is only 50 years since the Gutenberg Bible was printed - "modern" printing was only 50 years old!

It was not the only Hebrew grammar for Christians or even the earliest. It was,

for many reasons, the best. Konrad Pellican had produced a primer in 1504, but in comparison with **de Rudimentis Hebraicis** Pellican's grammar was primitive and rude. Reuchlin's was a fine document with sufficient explanation for a person working on his own to become proficient in Hebrew to a fairly advanced level, using mainly the universal fluency of intellectuals in the Latin language.

Martin Luther taught himself the Hebrew language from this book. This fact is proven in this way: The great collection of the works of Martin Luther is called the "Weimar" edition. The whole Weimar collection was sitting in the Sonderlesesaal in the University of Tübingen and also in various other places within the University. And in the Weimar edition there is a section devoted to Luther's marginal notes on the Latin Vulgate Bible and these include references to words in **de Rudimentis Hebraicis**.

Exploring Judaica at the University of Tübingen.

My work began to centre around various places on the campus (which is intermingled with stores and ordinary houses in Tübingen). Some of my classes were in the building called the Theologicum. My seminar on Nuremberg was not in a classroom setting at all, but was in a seminar room of one of the many Institutes in Tübingen. This Institute is called:

Das Institut für Spätmittelalter und Reformationsgeschichte (the Institute for late middle ages and Reformation History)

At the same time I was taking an exegetical course in Hebrew. I asked my instructor about David Kimhi. He said he knew nothing about Kimhi, but I might consider asking a certain lecturer in Church History who had published a book in this area.

This lecturer and author had focused his attention on Martin Luther's lectures on the psalms beginning in 1513 and continuing successively to 1521. His work was done chronologically, showing the progressively greater use by Luther of references to the Hebrew Scriptures each time Luther renewed his study of the Psalms. He was interested in my topic, and began to help me in many ways with my work.

Early Hebrew Grammars

The scope of my topic was growing at an increasing rate. I was interested in a lot of other aspects which were being turned up by my search. For example I wondered which other Hebrew grammars and lexicons were available to Christian Scholars in the early 16th Century. I wanted not only to know the names and authorship of those grammars but also to lay eyes on them myself. So one of the many 'sub-themes' of my Quest was to compile as complete a list of Hebrew grammars as was possible and to note on that list whether or not I had seen the book itself.

There were a few Hebrew grammars in use in the late 1400's in manuscript form. With the advent of moveable-type printing and as the Renaissance took hold in the early 1500's a few more Hebrew Grammars were published. With the advent of the Reformation a flood of Hebrew grammars appeared. Reuchlin's **de Rudimentis Hebraicis** stands out from the approximately two dozen Hebrew grammars for Christians before the year 1520.

By 1519 some Christian scholars were interested enough to want to see actual Hebrew grammars in Hebrew. For my work the most interesting of these was the publishing in 1519 and 1520 of the introductory grammar - in Hebrew - of Moses Kimhi, the brother of David Kimhi.

It should be noted that the key work during this period for me was Reuchlin's **de Rudimentis Hebraicis**. The work which I considered Reuchlin's work to be based upon was **Sefer Miklol** by David Kimhi. I came to this opinion from my own observations and comparisons, but also noted the opinion of the biographer of Reuchlin, Ludwig Geiger, and also William Gesenius (the 'father' of the great Hebrew lexicons used today).

There is this similarity to the **Sefer Miklol** of David Kimhi and **de Rudimentis Hebraicis** of Johannes Reuchlin: Each of them seemed to render other books unnecessary. They were so comprehensive in their time that the reader needed only that book. So it was not on the basis of their originality that they took prominence, but on the basis of their comprehensive overview of the topic.

Sefer Miklol was found often in the form of two books. The Lexical portion was separated off and had a separate existence as **Sefer Hashorashim** - the book of roots. The grammar was usually called **Sefer Miklol** - and contained only the

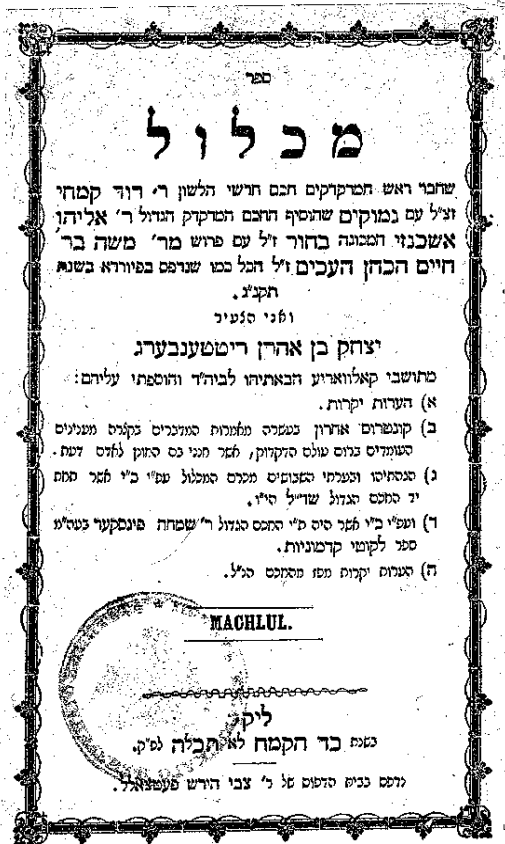
grammar portion.

David Kimhi was not the first Hebrew grammarian by any means. He drew on Spanish sources from previous centuries. But by producing such a comprehensive book, he made the reference to his predecessors unnecessary.

David Kimhi and Johannes Reuchlin

I became interested in how manuscripts written by David Kimhi - a Jewish Rabbi in Narbonne, France in the early 1200's - could be circulated and printed, and how they would get into the hands of Johannes Reuchlin as a source for his 1506 work. I searched reference books for many European libraries for manuscripts and early printings of Miklol and Hashorashim. Many references turned up. Later I visited many of the libraries on the continent and searched their catalogues myself.

Johannes Reuchlin had collected manuscripts in Rome and by 1498 had a number of works of David and Moses Kimhi in manuscript form. There had also been some Jewish printings of the



Kimhi's Miklol

Kimhi works in Hebrew beginning in the 1470's.

I was beginning to assemble my own collection of Kimhi works and references to those works. My next task was to try to read, assess and understand these works.

On February 4, 1974 I presented my first paper to a seminar - it was my paper on Andreas Osiander and it was presented in the Seminar Room of the Institut für Spätmittelalter und Reformationsgeschichte. I had help, not with the content of

the paper, but with the flow of the German from a German friend who was a linguist. I wrote in my journal the next day,

"My speaking was OK considering the natural nervousness. I understood all the questions and my hesitations were to do with considering the problems. Altogether a very good experience."

One way of describing the feeling of being an ***Auslander*** (foreigner) is that you have lost all your power. It sometimes feels as if you have lost more than that - I felt like I had lost my sense of humour as well. I also felt I had lost a sense of intelligence - I had "become as a child" but not in a positive way. And this mostly relates to the lack of fluency in the language and a naiveté about the culture.

Note from my journal April 4, 1974:

"The essence of speaking in someone else's language is vulnerability."

I realized that a number of the people with me in the advanced seminar on reformation also worked as researchers in the ***Institut für Spätmittelalter und Reformationsgeschichte***.

It is amazing to me the extent and detail of the work which is going on today regarding the works of Martin Luther. It is now some 450 years since the nailing of the 95 Theses, yet the scholarship and interest in Luther continues unabated - not only by Protestants but also by Catholics. Some of my colleagues were working on a new edition of Luther's ***Operationes in Psalmos*** from 1519-21.

I discovered a special Judaica reading room in the Theologicum, and was thrilled to study at times in that small room, which was surrounded by wonderful Judaica materials.

I now had a quite good collection of references to materials about Kimhi - but I needed also to begin delving into the content.

I was discovering many fascinating aspects of the Kimhis - they were not only involved in grammars and lexicons, but also in exegetical works. These works were available for some of the prophetic books, and some of the historical books of the Old Testament.

Peshat - the Plain Meaning of Scripture

And there was an appealing style to the works. They mainly followed the Peshat method of interpretation - the "Plain Meaning" of scripture. When David Kimhi interpreted a passage of scripture he tended to derive its meaning from its historical situation and in context of the whole Old Testament. As much as I could read of them, I found them fascinating.

Some of the reformers, especially Martin Bucer, quoted from David Kimhi, because his spare style of interpretation made it helpful for the reformers.

Paradoxically, David Kimhi was often providing, in his exegesis, arguments for Jews against Christian interpretations. He would say:

"Here is how Christians interpret these passages, and here is how you should interpret them, and here are some answers to the Christians. When they say this, you say...."

For the Reformers it was no problem to deal with what they read as "anti-Christian" materials. It was usually at the end of the regular interpretation and could simply be excised, ignored or edited out!

I was led to choose one particular Psalm to concentrate my attention on: Psalm 110.

Rabbinic Hebrew

In discussion with a lecturer from whom I asked advice I realized I needed to be able to read David Kimhi's words for myself. They were in Rabbinic Hebrew and my advisor was not familiar with Rabbinic Hebrew. He knew of only one person who was, and he was a very high ranking Faculty member from whom I happened to be taking a course in Hebrew.

I found this Professor to be interested in my project and wonderfully supportive. He volunteered to give me one hour per week one-on-one of special study of Rabbinic Hebrew.

In my first hour with of this tutorial I translated one sentence We were translating Psalm 110 by David Kimhi. And I loved it. I needed guidance, not only in the

actual Rabbinic Hebrew, but also in understanding the background in the Hebrew culture to give significance to what we were reading.

Psalm 110 by David Kimhi

I would like to give you some of the flavour of David Kimhi's exegesis of psalm 110.

My own comments are marked in square brackets [].

ABOUT DAVID A PSALM, THE LORD SAID UNTO MY LORD - SIT THOU AT MY RIGHT HAND UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES THY FOOTSTOOL

Kimhi:

This psalm our Teachers of blessed memory explained as referring to Abraham our Father as he went out to battle against the four kings [he goes on to explain why]---

But the right way, according to the peshat, is to interpret the psalm as referring to David. One of the psalmists said it about him, and the Lamed in 'ledavid' its interpretation is "about", like the Lamed in [here he is talking about the Hebrew letter Lamed, which is usually translated "for" but can also be translated "about" he gives two biblical references for this, Genesis 20:13, Psalm 20: 1,2 - in fact he gives only the text of the reference, expecting his readers to know chapters and verse]

And the wise Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra interpreted that this psalm was composed in the beginning of his reign when the Philistines hear that David was anointed a king and all the Philistines went up to seek after David, and God, blessed be He, assure him that He would give them into his hand, and He gave them into his hand at Baalperazim and in the valley of Rephaim. [it goes on]

[So he goes on, verse by verse through the ten verses of this psalm. But then comes the comments for Jews against Christian interpretation:]

And the Christians interpret this psalm as referring to Jesus. And they say that in the first verse there is explained the Father and the Son. For they read THE LORD SAID TO THE LORD with the Nun in Qames. And they say how will the Lord speak to the Lord except that they are two and the Spirit is the third. And furthermore there is another mistake: they read in this psalm: WITH THEE WILLING with the Ayin in Hireq. And they are saying: IN ADORNMENTS OF THE HOLY ONE, that is the Holy One Who is born from the womb.

And you shall tell them about the mistake of their reading. Jerome, their

translator, made a mistake. For 'ladoni' has the Nun in Hireq. And it is said about David, as we interpreted it. And how are they able to hold onto the mistake of one man against many? For from the rising of the sun even to its setting it is found in all the writings with the Nun in Hireq.

My Comments (GL)

OK, there is a small sample. There are five Hebrew letters named in the above, Lamed - the Hebrew "L"; Nun - the Hebrew "N" ; Ayin - a non-sounded letter which takes a vowel; and two vocalizations Qames - an "aw" sound, and Hireq - an "ee" sound.

Hebrew is usually found in its consonantal form, without the vocalizations which are put over and below the consonantal forms, sometimes at a later date. The consonantal versions without vocalization are more ancient. How a person vocalizes the text can make tremendous difference to the meaning.

Kimhi is saying that the Church Father Jerome (400 A.D.) - who was also called Hieronymus and who made the translation for the Church from the Hebrew, tinkered with the text by altering the vocalization to support a view that this is a Christological psalm, which also infers the Trinity. Kimhi argues that by the Peshat (Plain Meaning) the psalm refers to King David, not Abraham, as his tradition had taught.

Now that I was getting a flavour of the content of David Kimhi, I was wondering in what ways his commentaries were getting into the hands of the Reformers.

My greatest hope was, of course, that Martin Luther had read the commentaries of David Kimhi, and in my wildest dreams, Luther had made some mention of them as being influential in his own interpretation and translation work. This was not so, at least not in way which is easily proven, and also is probably an incorrect supposition.

In the next chapter I will describe a thrilling experience in the **Sonderlesesaal** of the University Library in Munich.

THE FIRST RABBINIC BIBLE - 1517

Chapter 3 - Our European Adventure Draws to a Conclusion

Our time in Germany was beginning to come to a close. I had been getting strong signals from home, particularly from my Father, who was weakening every day, that we had been away long enough. "Two years over there is enough. Come home and finish it in Canada." This was a very troubling message from someone I loved very much. It disturbed us for days.

We had another severe problem. Each of our children had been making the best of it in German schools. The schools were prepared to have foreign students with them for a year - and in most cases in the U. S. and Canada if a student has been having a "foreign experience" for one year they could fit back into their grade without much disturbance, and with a few catch-up courses.

But we had been away already two years. In some cases their teachers wanted them put back one year, feeling they hadn't learned much because of their lack of German. I think that did not happen, but they were all making progress at varying rates depending upon age and inclinations.

If they were doing well, as some were, we were bothered by the fact that they would be so accustomed to the German school system that they might have trouble being fitting into the Canadian system again. If they weren't doing well, we were worried about the level in Canadian schools when they returned.

All in all we felt that two and one-half years was maximum. When we announced that to our kids we all had a goal within our reach. We needed only to hang on and do what we had to do for the remaining months.

I was given advanced warning of my Father's failing health and I flew home for one week. In fact my Father died when we were in Germany. That was the only return flight during our time in Germany, and I was the only one of seven who had that experience.

The push was on to finish the work which would absolutely require the continental libraries and collegial resources.

Finding the First Rabbinic Bible

I wanted to be able to demonstrate ways that the commentaries of David Kimhi could have been read by Reformers in the 1520's and 1530's.

My attention became focused upon a very particular Bible called the First Rabbinic Bible. This Bible has virtually disappeared from history - it was so strange and had such an odd purpose.

Felix Pratensis had been a Jew, and was baptized as a Christian. He used his Jewish scholarship to provide a Bible for Christians in the form and with the features of a Jewish Bible. The First Rabbinic Bible was published by Daniel Bomberg in Venice in 1517. It was dedicated to Pope Leo X and was clearly intended for Christians. Few copies of this bible are available to be seen today.

C. D. Ginsburg, the author of a book published in 1897, informed the reader that he knew of only two copies of this bible in existence - one was in the British Museum and the other he possessed himself.

What drew my interest was Ginsburg's translation of the table of contents of this book - "The Psalms with the Targum of Rabi Joseph and with the Commentary by R. David Kimchi.." It appeared that David Kimhi's commentaries on the psalms were included. I wanted to see those commentaries, particularly to see how Felix Pratensis handled Kimhi's "anti-christian" comments.

But how was I to see this Bible? By correspondence with the British Museum I found they had the Bible. I was able to order a microfilm of the psalm commentary. From another source I hunched that there might be a copy of the Bible in the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. I wrote a letter to them, telling them of the critical nature of this for my dissertation. They sent back a photocopy of the psalms with David Kimhi's commentary. In neither case did it seem to me that the anti-christian materials were included. It seemed that the commentary stopped short.

But I wanted to see that Bible for myself.

I enlisted the assistance of one of my Professors who was involved in the Bible Society in Stuttgart. He thought he remembered seeing a copy there. So with the help of the supervisor in the Tübingen Library and who had become a personal friend of Marilyn, my wife, [for books on weaving and lace] and me - a trip was

arranged to the provincial library in Stuttgart. This was only a day trip and Marilyn came to help me make the most of it. The Stuttgart Library had been forewarned by the supervisor in the Tübingen Library. We were treated as visiting scholars and given first class treatment by the Head Librarian. He gave us our own room in the stacks and brought cartloads of books as we ordered them.

It was wonderful; but they had no First Rabbinic Bible!

It was now November and we were leaving in December. I still wanted to see that Bible before returning to Canada.

I enlisted the help of another colleague who had a collection of early Hebrew Grammars. He suggested I write to four libraries - The University of Zürich, the University of Geneva, the Provincial Library in Munich, and the University Library.

Within days I received the first letter back - from the University Library in Munich. "Yes, we have it. Yes, you may see it in our special reading room any weekday after 8 am."

A cold, early morning trip to Munich

Munich was a five hour drive from Tübingen, and our car had lost its heater. But we had to go to Munich - the seven of us! It was a very cold November day, so we took our sleeping bags and bundled everyone up in our 9 passenger Volkswagen van, and headed out at 3 a.m. for Munich.

I can't quite remember why we took the whole family to Munich, except that they would have come home to an empty house otherwise. I remember a sense of excitement, and realizing the urgency of the trip and the short time remaining for us in Germany we felt it was best to keep them out of school and take them with us. It considered a VERY bad thing to do in Germany, to take children out of school, even for one day.

We arrived in Munich shortly before 8 a.m. and the family was to look around Munich especially the fine Museums and Art Galleries while I was in the Library. The family found out that everything was closed on Mondays so walked around the town. The boys were accosted by policemen for being out of school. Then we had a great treat: Whimpy's hamburgers paid by money from home.

Meanwhile I was sitting in the Special Reading Room of the University of Munich,

waiting for them to deliver to me the First Rabbinic Bible.

Touching pages 450 years old

When it arrived I had the wonderful sensation I have always had in actually touching the pages of a book over 450 years old. But this particular Bible was more precious because of the scarcity of the copies today.

The First Rabbinic Bible is all in Hebrew and Rabbinic Hebrew. The psalms are arranged with the Hebrew text on the page, and under it the commentary of David Kimhi, all in Rabbinic Hebrew.

With the help of the texts I had brought with me I could follow through the various Psalms and see that the Commentary was indeed, David Kimhi's commentary. It appeared true what the few authorities had said about this Bible, that the "anti-Christian polemics" of David Kimhi were omitted.

This made sense, of course. Felix Pratensis as a baptized Jew was preparing this Bible for Christians to learn Jewish lore. Why would he also want them to have to read "anti-christian" materials? Still, I had hoped, in the interest of scholarship and truth, that he might have left them in.

Once I flipped through the pages of all the Bible and then examined the psalms as carefully as I could, I was assessing what kind of microfilms to order for myself.

And then it happened:

For reasons I cannot explain, I scanned the whole of the psalm commentary to the end of Psalm 150 looking for the transition into the next book, which in the Hebrew Bible is Proverbs. And I saw an intervening page which I could not understand. Printed both sides, all in Rabbinic Hebrew, it was very strange. It taxed every ability I had at that moment to read any of it. It gradually emerged for me that it said something about David Kimhi on the Psalms.

And then in large print it said The Christians - (the nozrim - - like Nazarines - the same word I had remembered from translating psalm 110)

And then I saw what followed was the excerpted "anti-Christian polemics" from each of the psalms "In Psalm 2 (and there followed the complete text of the

"polemic") - and in Psalm 19 --- and in psalm 110: there was the whole text of the "polemic"!

In other words there was nothing excised from the text. The reader simply had to read the commentary on Psalm 110 as it surrounded the Psalm and the balance of it on the page between Psalms and Proverbs.

When we arrived back in Tübingen I received the letters back from the other Libraries I had selected. Zürich and Geneva both reported to have the Bible as well. So now began another collection - a collection of the libraries who have a copy of the First Rabbinic Bible.

A further Mystery!

In the process another unusual fact became clear. Not every Bible had the strange page between Psalms and Proverbs! In some of the Bibles the page was missing, and showed no signs of being extracted.

In some cases the page seemed to be a slightly smaller size. It was almost seeming as if you could order this Bible bound 'with' or 'without' the page of "anti-christian polemics" of David Kimhi!

I sent letters to a number of continental University libraries, asking them if they had the Bible, and also whether their copy had the page or not!

So far I have found 22 Bibles, including a few in North America, and the number that have "the page" is about equal to the number which do not have the page.

What I have just told you appears to be a small historical glitch which was my own discovery. None of the "authorities" who have written about the First Rabbinic Bible have mentioned this fact. They have only reported that the "anti-Christian polemics" were omitted.

There is some significance to this discovery, which I will explore as my work continues to be added in HTML form. The significance has to do with whether the Reformers had at their disposal the complete text of David Kimhi's commentaries on the Psalms.

Epilogue

It is now 29 years since we returned from Germany, and this subject still intrigues me. The years 1976 to 1983 were filled with pastoral experiences and duties as a Chaplain to United Church students at the Vancouver School of Theology.

1976-1978: Regarding my studies, the first few months saw all the boxes of photocopied materials arrive by mail from Germany and the filing of them in Leitz folders for reference purposes. As I continued to write about the topic I noticed a deficit of information about what was available in various European libraries about the Kimhis and about the First Rabbinic Bible, and I began to plan a further trip to Europe.

1979: June 1 I flew by myself to Europe, staying for one month in Tübingen, and traveling by train throughout many parts of Europe visiting Libraries in: Germany, Italy, France, Austria and Great Britain.

1983: I purchased a personal computer to index and file all the materials I had now accumulated and to commit to digital files what I had written to date.

1984: I became part of a group who advocated the use of computer communication in the United Church of Canada. This group went on to become part of a "consortium" from a number of Churches in the U.S.A. and Canada. We founded an ecumenical computer network, "Ecunet", a computer network which continues to this day. I was one of the Founders and the first Treasurer of Ecunet, Inc. (The story about this is shown in detail on my home page: www.glaird.com under:

"COMPUTERS IN THE CHURCH" and "ORGANIZING AND MAINTAINING ONLINE DENOMINATIONAL NETWORKS".)

1996: I started my own home page, and began, over the next number of years, to enter my research writings about the Kimhi family and the Reformers.

2003: I arranged for my own domain name for my home page: www.glaird.com and arranged for Google and some other "Search Engines" to be aware of it. Today (February, 2004) when I search on Google for "David Kimhi" my home page scores the first two results.

2004: I am now retired as a pastoral minister for over seven years and I continue my research.

In the last few years I wrote the history of Eli Levita, and now plan to write about Sebastian Münster.

Gordon Laird, Vancouver, B. C. Canada, March 13, 2004