

79. CHARLES V's DREAM TO UNITE FAILS

There is a saying: 'Wherever the Lord builds His Church, there the devil builds his chapel!' Satan constantly tries to destroy the work of the Lord. The Reformation was God's work! Irresistibly, the light of the Reformation penetrated Germany, Switzerland, and France, yes, into *all* of Europe. The Roman Catholic Church rocked on her foundations.

But the devil didn't rest either! The previous chapter showed how the powers of hell were unchained in the Counter-Reformation.

A HORRIFIC STRUGGLE DEVELOPED.

The powerful Emperor Charles V ruled over a large part of Europe. He was emperor of



Charles V 1519-1556.
a 1548 portrait by Titian and Lambert Sustris

Germany, Lord of the Netherlands and king of Spain, including its extensive colonies. When Christopher Columbus' discovered the Americas in 1492, Spain became a world empire. Indeed, he had much power, and great responsibilities rested on his young shoulders. At fifteen, he became ruler of the Netherlands. At sixteen, he became king of the Spanish world empire. At nineteen, Germany placed the emperor's crown on his head! The overarching aim of Charles V was: 'To unite all these countries and territories into one powerful empire, with one law and religion.' To promote peace and harmony, all those millions of subjects must belong to one Church! And that Church must be the Roman Catholic Church! That was his global vision. However, above Charles' vision, God, the most powerful Monarch and King of kings, had His *eternal* plan!

The *heavenly* Monarch had determined from eternity that his Church would exist in Germany during the reign of Charles V, that powerful *earthly* monarch.

But those two plans clashed. The earthly monarch failed to understand the plan of the heavenly Monarch. Because of this failure, Charles V fought against God's plan his entire life. From Scripture, we know that whoever fights against God must choose between 'bending!' or 'breaking!'

Charles V did not want to 'bend ', so God 'broke' him! His eternal council stands unmovable, as wand then God has broken him! God shall never yield! That firmly established determination proceeds! We shall discuss that with each other.

CIVIL WAR

Charles V assembles an army. Finally, *finally*, he will strike. He waited for years for an opportunity to crush and eliminate Protestantism in Germany. But he never could because every time he tried, something happened which forced him to postpone his plans. One time it would be a French attack that frustrated his carefully laid plans to eliminate the German Reformation. Another time,

the dangerous and intrusive Turks forced him to delay his plans. For those wars, he needed the support of the German protestant electors. He required their troops to defeat the French and the Turks.

But now it is the right time; everything has fallen into place. Charles has made peace with France and repulsed the Turks. For now, they will not trouble him; this is the moment he has been waiting for! But the Protestants see the threatening danger and prepare for war. As agreed in the Schmalkaldic alliance in 1531: when under attack, all electors would unite and fight the enemy. Now danger threatens, and they get ready.

The emperor soon has an army of ten thousand soldiers under his command, with more troops on the way. Spanish, Italian, and Dutch soldiers march toward Germany to join Charles' army. It will take weeks for them to cover those long distances and arrive. The emperor has no option but to wait.

At this point, the protestant army is much stronger than the emperor's army. It is the perfect opportunity for the protestants to attack and defeat!

If only they had!

However, the Protestant electors hesitate as there was no unity. To make things worse, one of the Protestant electors, Maurice of Saxony, deserts to the emperor. That is dirty treason! Maurice suddenly invades his cousin John Frederick's territory next door to his; this forces his cousin to leave the allied troops to defend and retake his territory; this seriously divides the protestant armies.

In the meantime, the Dutch (10 000 soldiers), Italian (12 000), and Spanish (10 000) troops arrive in Germany and join the army of the emperor (20 000).

Charles V makes good use of this disunity among the protestant electors. He and his army swiftly march on towards the German town of Muhlberg, where he meets up with John Frederick, who is there to fight Maurice. John Frederick suffers a



Charles V Empire (inside the red boundary line)

crushing defeat with the other electors too far away to help.

This happened in 1547.

It is a massive blow to German Protestantism. The elector of Saxony, John Frederick, is taken prisoner, and the traitor Maurice receives John Frederick's territory as a gift of 'gratitude' from the emperor. He accepts that Judas' reward!

Victoriously, the emperor advances with his army. He even captures the little city of Wittenberg, where Luther lived and worked for many years. All these defeats result from the internal division and jealousy of the Protestants.

Someone shows Charles the place where the great Reformer, Martin Luther, was buried. Deep in thought, the powerful emperor stands silently at that grave. Alva, also known as the iron duke for his cruelty, stands beside him with a heart full of bitterness. The iron duke Alva says: "Emperor, you should exhume and burn the bones of that heretic."



*Alva, The Iron Duke.
Painted by Antonis Mor.*



*Maurice of Saxony. Painted by
Lucas Cranach the Younger.*

For a moment, Charles stares at the last resting place of that simple monk. But then he shakes his head.

"No," he decides, "no! I will not do that! I fight the living, not the dead!"

He then turns around and walks away and leaves, to the great disappointment of Alva. God is watching over Luther's grave. He inclines the hearts of emperors and kings to whatever pleases Him.



A miniature of a scene from the Triumphs of Emperor Charles V: the Emperor enthroned among his enemies: Suleiman the Magnificent, Pope Clement VII, Francis I, the dukes of Cleves and Saxony, and the landgrave of Hesse. <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts>

In the meantime, the cause of the Protestants is critical. The emperor conquered and will now suppress the Reformation by force. It seems that all is lost. Will God's work perish after all?

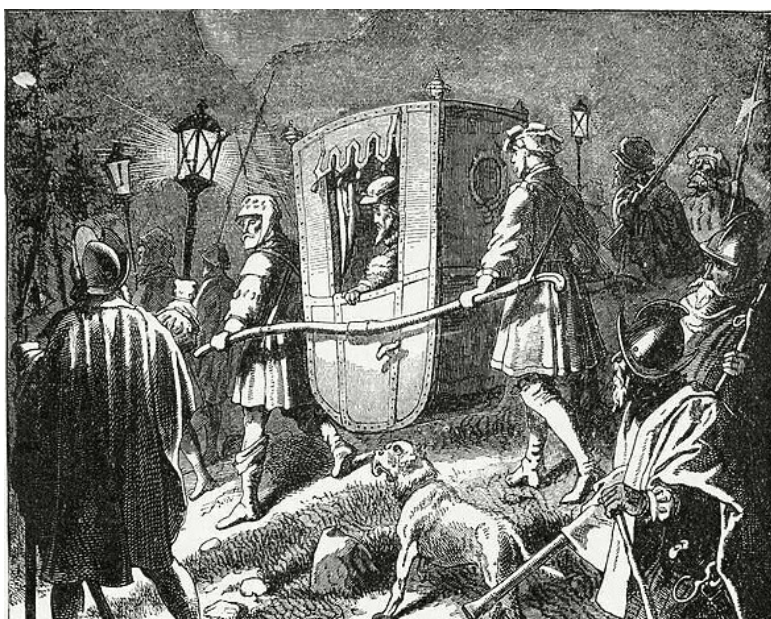
The emperor commands that all must return to the Roman Catholic Church. If they refuse, he will do anything to compel them. Now he has the opportunity and will push hard for unity of religion. The German Protestants tremble. They fear the emperor, who is at the pinnacle of his power. Is no deliverance possible?

A small company hastily leaves the Austrian city of Innsbruck.

Some strong men carry a litter with a seriously ill man in it. His face is distorted from the pain. Leaning back into the cushions, he moans softly. The litter bearers are heading for the Alps and running as fast as they can. They climb up and up... An icy wind whips around them as they struggle up the mountain. It's tough going.

Shivering, the man in the litter pulls his cloak tightly around himself. With every jolt the men make, he utters a smothered cry of pain.

That man is ... Charles V, the powerful emperor of Germany! Why doesn't he stay in Innsbruck, in a warm room, until the pain subsides a little?... Why does he, sick and miserable from a severe attack of gout, undertake that dangerous journey?



Charles V flees. <https://www.mediastorehouse.com/>

Couldn't it be postponed?

No, he couldn't wait at all because Charles V flees!

What?

Flees?

From who? He was at the peak of his power! He had never been so close to achieving his ideal of *one* empire, *one* law, and *one* religion.

Look.

The emperor has barely left Innsbruck when some horsemen gallop into the city, followed by a large troop of swiftly marching soldiers. Maurice of Saxony is leading the horsemen. They enter Innsbruck and head straight for the emperor's lodgings.

When Maurice hears Charles V has fled, he stamps his feet in anger and disappointment.

"Too late after all," he mutters. He had wanted to capture the emperor. That's why he had rushed to Innsbruck with his soldiers. But the bird had flown.

This is puzzling!

Maurice of Saxony, the traitor who abandoned his Protestant fellow countrymen and allies by defecting to the emperor, now wants to capture that same emperor?

How is that possible?

What is going on?

Well, Maurice of Saxony was sorry for his treason.

The protestant people of Saxony had taken great offence at his stand. They treated him with contempt. They even printed cartoons picturing

Maurice as Judas, who betrayed his Master.

Besides, the emperor had not kept his promise to release the two electors, cousin John Frederick and his father-in-law, still languishing in prison.

Maurice of Saxony was not happy about this and suddenly decided to join the protestants again.

Maurice of Saxony knew that Charles V was staying in Innsbruck. He decided to take him by surprise and arrest him. He quickly marched with his army to the Austrian city of Innsbruck.

Too late!

Someone warned Charles V, allowing him to flee immediately, even though he was sick and miserable. There was no way he wanted to be arrested and become a prisoner of Maurice. This reversed the roles completely!

The emperor fell from his pinnacle of power and became a poor fugitive.
How humiliating for that proud and haughty monarch!

This turn of events dashed the emperor's vision of a united Germany with one religion under his rule. *God* saved Protestantism in Germany!

This setback was too much for the ambitious emperor. He was so close to his dream, yet all failed! This was more than he could bear. In 1555 the electors united in the Schmalkaldic League, and Charles V (Roman Empire) signed the Religious Peace Agreement of Augsburg.

This agreement broke the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church. It also stipulated that the electors could decide what religion would be allowed in their electorate. From then on, the Protestant electorates could freely go to the Protestant Church, and the Roman Catholic electorates were allowed to remain loyal to the pope. In the following years, many people swapped electorates in line with their religion.

The Lord watched over His Church in Germany. He protected His work of Reformation there. True, it had been dark and extremely critical at times, but God delivered them every time.

Charles V's vision for Germany failed. He was so disillusioned that he abdicated in that same year, 1555.

He was only fifty-five years old, but whoever saw him leaning heavily on the shoulder of one of his courtiers would think that an aged man of at least ninety was walking there. He was a broken man. He went to live in a monastery in Spain to enjoy a peaceful retirement. He died three years later at the age of 58. To find the darkness of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

He had hoped that his son, Philip II, who had succeeded him in Spain and The Netherlands, would also become emperor of Germany. But this wish was not fulfilled. The Germans didn't like Philip II and chose Charles' brother to be their emperor.

The King of kings had conquered and not the mighty Charles V. He was an enemy of God's people and abused his enormous power. Although he failed in Germany, he did succeed in the Netherlands. At his command, persecution raged, and stakes burned throughout the country. Thousands of martyrs died because of him. We'll tell you more about this later.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS: ANABAPTISTS

Jan van Leiden was a leader of the Anabaptists. He established what he called the Heavenly Kingdom in the marketplace of the German city of Munster. There he crowned himself "King of Zion". He was to be the king of the perfect state.



Jan van Leiden. Wikipedia

Gruesome things happened there. Instead of a perfect state, it was a state where the most disgusting wickedness abounded, too terrible to describe. He also outlawed money and forbade owning property. Finally, with some help, the bishop of Munster recaptured the city and ended the terrible rule of the Anabaptists.



Jan van Leiden baptises a girl during the Anabaptist kingdom in Munster. Painter: Johann Karl Bähr, 1840



Their corpses were locked in iron gages and exhibited to his foolish followers. Wikipedia.

Jan and some of his co-leaders were tortured to death most horrifically. Their corpses were locked in iron cages and exhibited to his foolish followers.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM.

Both during and after the days of Luther, a disagreement developed among the German Protestants. Germany had been the birthplace of the Reformation; Luther had worked there for many years. God had used him to point out the many errors of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther still didn't see some things clearly, for instance, the doctrine of consubstantiation. Calvin disagreed with Luther on this doctrine, and his views also became known in Germany.

Many Germans agreed with Calvin on this. Calvin's followers called themselves *reformed*. This created a schism between Lutherans and Calvinists. An intense controversy developed between those parties. They could not agree. In 1559, Frederick III became the elector of the Palatinate, an electorate on the banks of The Rhine River.

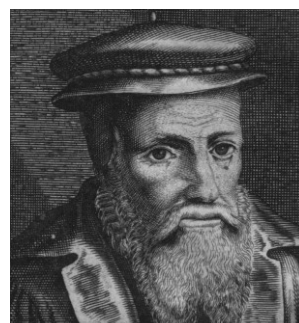
Frederick III was a God-fearing man. He was a follower of Calvin and belonged to the party of the Reformed.

He saw it as his calling to ensure that young and old were properly instructed in the doctrine of salvation. For this, a good guideline was necessary.

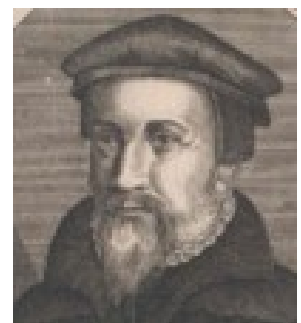
He commissioned two young ministers to write a Catechism. We should never forget their names: *Zacharias Ursinus* and *Caspar Olevianus*.

Zacharias Ursinus had studied at Wittenberg under Melanchthon, the friend and successor of Martin Luther. He became a professor at the university in Heidelberg, the capital of The Palatinate. Caspar Olevianus studied at the University of Geneva. The great reformer Calvin was his teacher. After he completed his studies, he also became a professor at the University of Heidelberg. Both those theologians were still young, 28 and 26 years old. They were God-fearing men.

Both these theologians agreed to Frederick III's kind request. They wrote the 52 Lords Days of the Catechism, so scriptural and precise that even now it must fill us with amazement that such young people had such deep insight in the doctrines of the Bible. God's Spirit directed them. These days, many people treat this confession with contempt. They say it has become outdated and must be updated. However, the truth *never* becomes outdated! Those who promote this way of thinking lack the Spirit Who led Ursinus and Olevianus!



Zacharias Ursinus carried out the commissioned work
<https://www.schloss-heidelberg>.



Caspar Olevianus.
1536 – 1587 Wikipedia

Because both writers lived in Heidelberg, this Catechism became known as the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Frederick III wrote the preface and published it in 1563. He printed it in German for ordinary people and Latin for scholars. The impact was enormous with friend and foe. The Roman Catholics, as well as the Lutherans, tried everything to make that Catechism disappear.

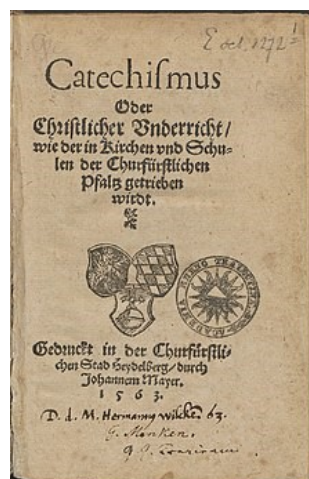
In it, the authors refute Roman Catholic teachings clearly and simply. No wonder Rome hated it! However, all their attempts failed.

The Lutherans also tried to have it condemned by the ecclesiastical assemblies. Thankfully, without success.

The Heidelberg Catechism was translated into many other languages, including English.

Since then, this Catechism has been used to instruct the youth of the Church.

In many reformed churches, the minister preaches one sermon from the Catechism every Sunday. Since it is divided into 52 Lord's Days, that whole confession is taught in one year.



1563 edition of the Heidelberg Catechism. Wikipedia

The Lord has richly blessed that work! It has been a source of comfort for many. Only God knows how many. This Heidelberg Catechism has become one of the most well-known Doctrinal Standards. It is one of the Three Forms of Unity. We shall come back to that later.

3. What does the author mean when he says, 'Whoever fights against God has to choose between bending or breaking'?
4. What prevented Charles from attempting to crush Protestantism in Germany years earlier?
5. Describe the army of Charles and the army opposing Charles.
6. Identify Maurice of Saxony.
7. Compare Maurice with Judas.
8. How did divisions among the Protestants help Charles V?
9. Why did Maurice reverse his position and attempt to capture Charles? Give two reasons.
10. What was decided in The Religious Peace of Augsburg document?
11. How did the King of kings conquer in the war?
12. Identify the following:
 - a. Anabaptists
 - b. John of Leiden
13. How did the Reformed differ from the Lutherans?
14. Identify Frederick III. What was his goal?
15. Identify Zacharias Ursinus.
16. Identify Caspar Olevianus.
17. Why was the Catechism given the name of Heidelberg Catechism?
18. How was this Catechism opposed?
19. How does the Church use the Catechism today?
20. What is meant by a doctrinal standard?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Find one Biblical text to show that God breaks the power of ambitious rulers who refuse to obey Him.
2. List two prominent emperors or rulers in history who controlled a large empire and desired to unify it by persecuting those within the realm who held different views. How did God break the power of these rulers?

QUESTIONS

1. How extensive was the empire of Charles V?
2. What was his plan?