

## 79. CHARLES V'S DREAM TO UNITE EUROPE FAILS

There is a saying: 'Wherever the Lord builds His Church, there the devil builds his chapel!' Time and again, Satan tries to destroy the work of the Lord. The Reformation was God's work! Irresistibly, the light of the Reformation penetrated Germany, Switzerland, 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.



Charles V

He was emperor of 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; 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 one 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 with each other. The earthly monarch failed to understand the plan of the heavenly Monarch. Because of this failure, Charles V fought against God's plan for 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 we will see...

### CIVIL WAR

Charles V assembles an army. Finally, *finally* he will strike. He has 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 was a French attack which 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 needed 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 the time being, they



Charles V's Empire

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 troops 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 which is next to his; this forces his cousin to leave the allied troops to defend and retake his territory and seriously divides the protestant armies.

In the meantime, the Dutch (10 000 soldiers), Italian (12 000) and Spanish (10 0000) 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 swiftly marches ahead with his army towards the German town of Muhlberg where he meets up with John Frederick, who is there to fight Maurice. With the other electors too far away to help, John Frederick suffers a crushing defeat.

This happened in 1547.

It is a massive blow for German Protestantism. The elector of Saxony, John Frederick, is taken prisoner, and the traitor Maurice receives John



*Charles V, enthroned over his defeated enemies (from left): Suleiman, Pope Clement VII, Francis I, the Duke of Cleves, the Duke of Saxony and the Landgrave of Hesse.*

Frederick's territory as a gift of 'gratitude' from the emperor. He accepts that Judas reward, too.

Victoriously, the emperor advances with his army. He even captures the little city of Wittenberg, where Luther lived and worked for so many years. All these defeats are the result of 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 next to him with a heart full of bitterness. The Iron Duke says: "Emperor, you should exhume and burn the bones of that heretic."

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 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.

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



*Alva, the Iron Duke*

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 he 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?

### CHARLES V AND MAURICE OF SAXONY

A small company hastily leaves the Austrian city of Innsbruck.

Some strong men are carrying 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 run 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 till the pain has subsided a little?... Why does he, sick and miserable from a severe attack of gout, undertake that dangerous journey?

Couldn't it be postponed?

No, it cannot wait at all, because Charles V flees!

What?

Flees?

From whom?

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 that Charles V has fled, he stamps his feet in anger and disappointment.



Maurice of Saxony



Charles V flees

"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 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 so 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. Evading Charles' troops, he quickly marched with his army to the Austrian city of Innsbruck.

Too late!

Someone warned Charles V, giving him a chance 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! The roles had completely reversed!

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

This turn of events dashed the emperor's vision for 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, and 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 would decide what religion would be allowed in their electorate. From now on, the people in the protestant electorates could freely go to the Protestant Church, and the people in the Roman Catholic electorates could remain loyal to the pope. In the following years, many people moved to live in electorates in line with their religion.

The Lord watched over His church in Germany. He saved His work of Reformation there. True, at times it had been dark and extremely critical, but every time God delivered them. 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 years old was walking there. He was a broken man. He went to live in a monastery in Spain to enjoy a peaceful retirement. But that didn't last for long. He died three years later at the age of 58.

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 V's 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 smoked throughout the country. Thousands of martyrs died because of him. We'll tell you more about this later.

## FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

### *Jan van Leiden*

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 where he crowned himself 'King of Zion'.



*Jan van Leiden 1509-1536*

He was to be the king of the perfect state.

His people believed that one could only come to the 'Kingdom of Heaven' by willingly being baptized as an adult.

They were also against war and conscription and believed in freedom of conscience and the separation of church and state.

He believed in polygamy which means you can have more than one wife. Some authors say that Jan van Leiden had 18 wives. (In those days Munster had many more women than men.)

He also outlawed money and forbade owning property. Gruesome things

happened there. Instead of a perfect state, it was a state where the most disgusting

wickedness abounded, too terrible to describe.

Finally, with some



*'Their corpses were locked in iron cages and displayed to his foolish followers.'*

help, the bishop of Munster recaptured the city and put an end to the terrible rule of the Anabaptists.

Jan van Leiden and some of his co-leaders, were tortured to death most horrifically. Their corpses were locked in iron cages and displayed 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. But some things Luther still didn't see clearly, like the doctrine of consubstantiation. Calvin and Luther disagreed on this doctrine, and Calvin's views also spread to Germany.

Many people agreed with Calvin on this, they called themselves *Reformed*.

This disagreement created a schism between Lutherans and Calvinists.

An intense controversy developed between those parties.



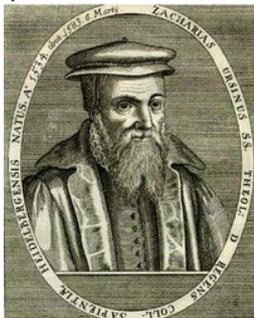
Frederick III

They could not agree.

In the year 1559, Frederick III became the elector of the Palatinate, which is 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 Reformed.

He saw it as his calling to make sure that both youth and adults were properly instructed in the doctrine of salvation. For this a good guideline was necessary.



Zacharias Ursinus,  
1534-1583

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 Melancthon, the friend and successor of Martin Luther. He became a professor at the university in Heidelberg, the capital of The



Caspar Olevianus, 1536-1587

Palatinate. Caspar Olevianus studied at the university in Geneva. The great reformer Calvin was his teacher. After he completed his studies, he also became a professor at the university at Heidelberg. Both those theologians were still young, 28 and 26 years old. They were God-fearing men.

Both these theologians agreed to Frederik III's request. They wrote the 52 Lords Days of the Catechism and did this so scripturally and accurately that to this day 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!

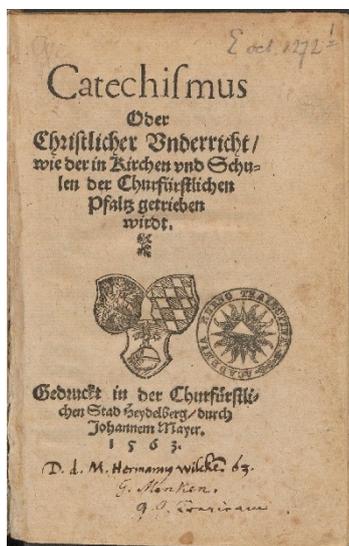
These days, many people treat this confession with contempt. They say it has become outdated and must be updated. However, the truth *never* becomes outdated. Those who promote this way of thinking *lack* the same Spirit Who led Ursinus and Olevianus!

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 had it printed in two languages: German for the ordinary people and Latin for the scholars. The impact was enormous, with both friend and foe. The Roman Catholics, as well as the Lutherans, tried everything to make that Catechism disappear.

In it, the authors refute the 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



1563 edition of the Heidelberg Catechism

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.

The Lord has richly blessed that work!

It has been a source of comfort for many millions of faithful believers.

This Heidelberg Catechism has become one of the most well-known confessions.

It is one of the three forms of unity.

We will come back to that later.

## QUESTIONS

1. How extensive was the empire of Charles V?
2. What was his plan?
3. What does the author mean when he says, 'Whoever fights against God must 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 Agreement of Augsburg"?

11. How did the King of kings conquer in the war?

12. Identify the following:

a. Anabaptists b. Jan van 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?