

THE REFORMATION
AND
REFORMATION DAY

BY
HERSHEL LEE HARVELL JR.

www.reformedontheweb.com/home/.html

(Reformed on the Web)

THE REFORMATION AND REFORMATION DAY

Why celebrate Reformation day?

Some might say that this is not a God ordained day of celebration, so we should not celebrate it.

My answer is this: The Jewish *Feast of Lots* or the *Feast of Purim* that the Jews celebrated, after the hand of God delivered them from being destroyed by Haman's plot against them, was not a God ordained feast, yet the Jews keep it. Also the *Feast of Lights* or *Hanukkah* is celebrated as a Jewish holiday by the Jews because the temple was delivered from Antiochus Epiphanes during the time between Malachi and Jesus. Jesus actually went up to Jerusalem to keep this later feast also known as the *Feast of Dedications* in the Gospel of John.

Thus neither feast was condemned by Christ. Christians today keep feast or holidays that were not specifically ordained by God. They recognize the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving as being a holiday because of God's providential dealings with men.

This much said, Why keep Reformation Day as a Christian holiday? Well as the CBN network of the 700 club has so graciously posted it, we need to redeem the day. Paul told us to redeem the time. The secular world has taken Oct. 31 over and made it a day of paganism. The schools can no longer celebrate Easter or Christmas, so if you will notice, they make a big deal now concerning the holiday called *Halloween*. We as Christians should not stand by and let this day be overtaken as a pagan day. We should rise up and reclaim this day for Christ.

This day has been celebrated as a holiday in the Lutheran church and many other denominations of Protestantism for years. This is because of the fact that Luther nailed his 95 theses against the selling of indulgences to the church door on Oct 31, 1517. This was the eve of *All Saints Day* and he done this not as an act of defiance, but this was the day for posting and he wanted to discuss the selling of indulgences. The 95 theses against indulgences was

written in Latin and the common people could not read Latin. So Luther was not trying to desecrate the church, nor was he trying to start a new movement called Protestantism. This is where the community bulletin board was. If one had a matter that he wanted to discuss, he would post it on the church door.

How can one celebrate this day?

There are many ways to celebrate this day. One could have a Reformation Day party and have individuals come dressed like their favorite Reformer. They could play such games as “pin the 95 theses to the Wittenberg church door” as they are blindfolded or one could make a cake and call it the *Diet of Worms*. One could have a gummy worm eating contest. One could have a power point presentation and feature one life through the history of the church and show how they helped to progress Christianity. This may be the only way most will ever learn the history of the Christian church or how their Bible was put into their hands. Also one could show the movie “Luther” and let everyone see how and why the *Reformation* came about.

One could only wonder at the numbers that might come in and hear the Gospel, if we begin to explaining what this day means and why we are celebrating it.

What was the Reformation all about?

To give a brief review it is the name commonly given to the religious and ecclesiastical movement of the 16th century which resulted in the overthrow of the then all powerful authority of the Roman popes in a large portion of the Christian world, and in the construction of a number of new religious organizations. The name itself is highly significant, and points to the importance of the new departure in the history of Christianity which then began. It has come into quite general use even among Roman Catholic writers, although the theologians of that Church have attempted to substitute for it other terms, like the “so-called Reformation,” and the “separation of the Church.”

Thus the church split and the portion that came away from the Roman Catholic Church became known as Protestantism.

What is Protestantism?

This is taken from J. A Wyle’s *History of Protestantism*:

“The History of Protestantism, which we propose to write, is no mere history of dogmas. The teachings of Christ are the seeds; the modern Christendom, with its new life, is the goodly tree which has sprung from them. We shall speak of the seed and then of the tree, so small at its beginning, but destined one day to cover the earth.

How that seed was deposited in the soil; how the tree grew up and flourished despite the furious tempests that warred around it; how, century after century, it lifted its top higher in heaven, and spread its boughs wider around, sheltering liberty, nursing letters, fostering art, and gathering a fraternity of prosperous and powerful nations around it, it will be our business in the following pages to show. Meanwhile we wish it to be noted that this is what we understand by the Protestantism on the history of which we are now entering. Viewed thus — and any narrower view would be untrue alike to philosophy and to fact — the History of Protestantism is the record of one of the grandest dramas of all time.

It is true, no doubt, that Protestantism, strictly viewed, is simply a principle. It is not a policy. It is not an empire, having its fleets and armies, its officers and tribunals, wherewith to extend its dominion and make its authority be obeyed. It is not even a Church with its hierarchies, and synods and edicts; it is simply a principle. But it is the greatest of all principles. It is a creative power. Its plastic influence is all-embracing. It penetrates into the heart and renews the individual. It goes down to the depths and, by its omnipotent but noiseless energy, vivifies and regenerates society. It thus becomes the creator of all that is true, and lovely, and great; the founder of free kingdoms, and the mother of pure churches. The globe itself it claims as a stage not too wide for the manifestation of its beneficent action; and the whole domain of terrestrial affairs it deems a sphere not too vast to fill with its spirit, and rule by its law.

Whence came this principle? The name Protestantism is very recent: the thing itself is very ancient. The term Protestantism is scarcely older than 350 years. It dates from the protest which the Lutheran princes gave in to the Diet of Spires in 1529. Restricted to its historical signification, Protestantism is purely negative. It only defines the attitude taken up, at

a great historical era, by one party in Christendom with reference to another party. But had this been all, Protestantism would have had no history. Had it been purely negative, it would have begun and ended with the men who assembled at the German town in the year already specified. The new world that has come out of it is the proof that at the bottom of this protest was a great principle which it has pleased Providence to fertilize, and make the seed of those grand, beneficent, and enduring achievements which have made the past three centuries in many respects the most eventful and wonderful in history. The men who handed in this protest did not wish to create a mere void. If they disowned the creed and threw off the yoke of Rome, it was that they might plant a purer faith and restore the government of a higher Law. They replaced the authority of the Infallibility with the authority of the Word of God. The long and dismal obscurations of centuries they dispelled, that the twin stars of liberty and knowledge might shine forth, and that, conscience being unbound, the intellect might awake from its deep somnolency, and human society, renewing its youth, might, after its halt of a thousand years, resume its march towards its high goal.

We repeat the question — whence came this principle? And we ask our readers to mark well the answer, for it is the key-note to the whole of our vast subject, and places us, at the very outset, at the springs of that long narration on which we are now entering.

Protestantism is not solely the outcome of human progress; it is no mere principle of perfectibility inherent in humanity, and ranking as one of its native powers, in virtue of which when society becomes corrupt it can purify itself, and when it is arrested in its course by some external force, or stops from exhaustion, it can recruit its energies and set forward anew on its path. It is neither the product of the individual reason, nor the result of the joint thought and energies of the species. Protestantism is a principle which has its origin outside human society: it is a Divine graft on the intellectual and moral nature of man, whereby new vitalities and forces are introduced into it, and the human stem yields henceforth a nobler fruit. It is the descent of a heaven-born influence which allies itself with all the instincts and powers of the individual, with all the laws and cravings of society, and which, quickening both the individual and the social being into a new life, and directing their

efforts to nobler objects, permits the highest development of which humanity is capable, and the fullest possible accomplishment of all its grand ends. In a word, Protestantism is revived Christianity.”^[1]

Thus from 500 AD to 1500 AD the church was in a period called the dark ages. It was desolate. The Roman Catholics ruled with all their abuses and pomp. The Bibles were chained to the pulpits in the later half of this time. No knowledge of God’s word was being given to the people. Thus the Gospel seemed lost to the world. During this time of spiritual darkness a man steps on the scene of the world named John Wycliffe.

John Wycliffe

Wycliffe was born north of Yorkshire in 1324. Wycliffe was the first man ever to translate the scriptures into English, around 1378-1382. It is believed that the New Testament was finished by 1378. This was a time when a lot of debating was going on concerning, political, ecclesiastical, and social concerns. He was not the first man to ever translate any scripture into English, but was the first to give us a complete Bible in English.

Wycliffe had questioned the Transubstantiation doctrine of the Catholic Church and thus was considered a heretic. He also stood upon the principle of *Sola Scriptura* or *scripture alone*. In other words, Wycliffe believed in the principle of the *analogy of faith* or that scripture should interpret scripture; instead of using the church fathers to interpret scripture. *Sola Scriptura* was the authority to which he himself so implicitly bowed and he called on all men to submit to it. His aim was to bring men back to the Bible. This Reformer restored to the Church, first of all, the principle of authority. There must be a Divine and infallible authority in the Church. That authority cannot be the Church herself, for the guide and those whom he guides, cannot be the same. The Divine infallible authority which Wycliffe restored for the guidance of men was the Bible or God speaking in His Word. And by setting up this Divine authority he displaced that human and fallible authority which the corruption of the ages had imposed upon the Church. He turned the eyes of men from Popes and Councils to the inspired oracles of God.

He died from palsy as he was attacked by this sickness for the third time and fell in the floor on December 31, 1384.

John Huss

It wasn't long till another man rose up named John Huss or rather known as *Huss the heretic*. Because he had this name does not mean that he was a true heretic against the truth of scripture. No, this man held the views of Wycliffe. It was in the year 1400 AD that Jerome of Prague returned from England with the writings of Wycliffe, thus linking Bohemia and England together.

John Huss was born on the 6th of July, 1373, in the market town of Hussinetz, on the edge of the Bohemian Forest near the source of the Moldau River, and the Bavarian boundary. He took his name from the place of his birth. He went to college and became Bachelor of Theology and Master of Arts. He was an affirming follower of the Papacy even though he had studied Wycliffe's writings. Later he gave himself to the study of the scriptures and Wycliffe's writings and began to see the clear theological teachings therein. Thus he started affirming the doctrine of the scriptures being above the Pope. This is what put him on the Protestant road and was one doctrine he never recanted.

He was given safe passage to come and discuss these views on October 18, 1414. But 26 days after he arrived he was arrested on charges of heresy. He was put on trial for heresy on June 5, 1415. His books were brought forth and he was asked if he was the writer of them. He admitted that he was the writer of those books that they mentioned. Next they read the articles of crimination and brought forth the charges against him. Some of the charges were fair statements of his opinion, others were false or totally exaggerated. Every time he tried to defend himself, a tumult would break out behind him and he could not speak over the noise of those shouting out accusations against him. He finally said that he could not defend himself for all the noise. Since order could not be restored, the assembly broke up.

The council took a day off and on June 7 they decided to reassemble, but an eclipse covered the land with darkness until noon, to the surprise and fear of those who were charging Huss. At noon they reassembled and after trying Huss realized that he was not one of them. The two leading principles which he had embraced were subversive of their whole jurisdiction in both its branches, spiritual and temporal. The first and great authority with him was Holy Scripture; this struck at the foundation of the spiritual power of the hierarchy; and as regards their temporal power he undermined it by his

doctrine touching ecclesiastical revenues and possessions.

They put him back into prison and drew up a paper trying to get him to sign it, renouncing his views. He would not. On July 6, 1415 he was taken to Mass, but made to stand outside while it was being performed. They brought him in and arrayed him in the sacerdotal clothes and put the cup in his hands as if he were to say Mass. They asked him if he would recant. He said he would not. They then cut off his hair and placed a pointed cap on his head which read arch-heretic. They removed the clothes and took him to a meadow to burn him. On the way they passed a fire where his books were being burned.

At the meadow he prayed. He sang hymns to God as he was being burned. The first fire burned only his lower body, yet he gave up the ghost. The second fire burned everything but his heart. Thus a third fire was lit. Right before he died he prophesied and told them: "It is thus," said he, "that you silence the goose, but a hundred years hence there will arise a swan whose singing you shall not be able to silence."^[2]

Martin Luther

Luther is born in a lowly house to a father who is a miner. He was born on November 10, 1483 on the eve of St Martin's Day, thus he was named Martin.

As he grew up and was sent to school he had to sing for his food. He eventually gets a place to stay and continues his studies in Eisenach. In 1501 he enters the University of Erfurt. There he spends time in the library and discovers the Bible. He had never heard of most of the books in it, nor much of the scriptures which it contained. During this time the church would read portions of scripture on certain holy-days or other occasions and he thought that was the whole Bible. So he starts going to the library and spending all his time studying this book.

At this university he becomes a scholar. He graduates as the first scholar and with wide recognition. His father wants him to become a lawyer, so he devoted himself to the bar and spends his time lecturing on physics and Aristotle.

Two events occur that shake him up and awaken the scriptures in his heart and awakens the conviction of sin in his life. First his friend Alexius dies

suddenly and violently. Secondly he visits his family in Mansfield. On his return to Erfurt a huge black cloud appears and a lightning bolt hits the ground at his feet, knocking him down. He makes a vow to God. He promises God that he will serve him and devote his life to him if he spare him. So upon his return he goes to an Augustinian Convent, on the 17th of August, 1505. He knocks at the gate; the door is opened, and he enters. To Luther, groaning under sin, and seeking deliverance by the works of the law, that monastery — so quiet, so holy, so near to heaven, as he thought — it seemed a very Paradise. Soon as he had crossed its threshold the world would be shut out; sin, too, would be shut out; and that sore trouble of soul which he was enduring would be at an end. At this closed door the “Avenger” would be stayed. So Luther thought, as he crossed its threshold.

There is a city of refuge to which the sinner may flee when death and hell are on his track, but it is not that into which Luther had now entered. The next day, men from the university gathered outside the convent to try to persuade Luther to change his mind. They waited two whole days and yet Luther did not appear. It was a month before he finally saw anyone.

His father got the message that he had become a monk and was infuriated. He stated that Luther would not inherit anything he owned. Later Luther told him about the storm and thunderbolt and his father told him, “Beware lest you have been imposed upon by an illusion of the devil.”

Upon entering the convent, Luther changed his name to Augustine. The terrible struggle in his soul did not stay outside the gates, but followed him in. He could not figure out how he could find peace if he couldn't find it in a convent. The other monks thought it great that a well known Doctor had come to dwell among them, but were resentful because now they were thrown into the shadows. So they put Luther to doing all the odd chores around the convent, which consisted of: sweeping, winding the clock and such. When he would want to retire to study, they would tell him, “O no, the best way to be a monk is not to study, but to go to town and beg for food for the convent. So off he would go and spend his time collecting food for the convent.

At night the rest of the monks would be resting or enjoying the food that he went and gathered, while he would retire to his cell and read the church fathers, but especially Augustine. He would stay up into the early hours of the

morning in this endeavor. He also would spend time reading the Bible, but had no copy of it. The copy available in the convent could not be taken to ones cell, but was chained to the pulpit in the chapel of the convent. Yet he would memorize a scripture and spend all day meditating on that one verse.

Also during this time, he began to study the original languages of Hebrew and Greek that the scriptures were written in; so he could understand the scriptures better. During this time he would forget to say the daily prayers of the monks and would feel convicted and so he would stay up all night in prayers and study, so that it was said at one interval of his life that he did not close his eyes for seven weeks.

The deprivation of sleep, the forsaking of himself food left him weak and close to the point of being a corpse. One morning he did not come out of his cell. So the other monks burst in and found him lying on the floor. One began to play on his flute a favorite song of Luther and Luther revived. Yet, he could not do enough or forsake enough to make the troubles and anguish of his sinful soul go away.

Listen to Wyle's *History of Protestantism*:

“It was indeed a bitter cup that Luther was now drinking, but it could by no means pass from him. He must drink yet deeper; he must drain it to its dregs. Those works which he did in such bondage of spirit were the price with which he thought to buy pardon. The poor monk came again and again with this goodly sum to the door of heaven, only to find it closed. Was it not enough? “I shall make it more,” thought Luther. He goes back, resumes his sweat of soul, and in a little return with a richer price in his hand. He is again rejected. Alas, the poor monk! What shall he do? He can think but of longer fasts, of severer penances, of more numerous prayers. He returns a third time. Surely he will now be admitted? Alas, no! The sum is yet too small; the door is still shut; justice demands a still larger price. He returns again and again, and always with a bigger sum in his hand; but the door is not opened. God is teaching him that heaven is not to be bought by any sum, however great: that eternal life is the free gift of God. “I was indeed a pious monk,” wrote he to Duke George of Saxony, at a future period of his life, “and followed the rules of my order more strictly than I can express. If ever monk could obtain heaven by his monkish works, I

should certainly have been entitled to it. Of this all the friars who have known me can testify. If I had continued much longer I should have carried my mortifications even to death, by means of my watching, prayers, readings, and other labors.”^[3]

Luther would go from cell to cell trying to find peace. He even asked the one to whom he would go and confess his sins to, how he could get peace. This aged man had never dealt with a situation as this before and knew not what to tell him. Luther could not understand how God could save him in his righteousness. He knew God could condemn him in his righteousness, but save him, this he did not understand.

Luther stayed in anguish of soul. One day a man named John Staupitz came to the convent. He was Vicar-General of the Augustine’s of Germany. He saw the anguish in Luther’s soul and talked with him. Luther told him that he done his best. He fasted and prayed, yet the anguish of the law was upon him. As scripture states: “Who may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeared?” John Staupitz had gone through this struggle and he answered Luther. “Why do you torture yourself with these thoughts? Look at the wounds of Christ,” said Staupitz, anxious to turn away the monk’s eye from his own wounds — his stripes, macerations, fasting — by which he hoped to move God to pity.

“Look at the blood Christ shed for you,” continued his skillful counselor; “it is there the grace of God will appear to you.”^[4]

“I cannot and dare not come to God,” replied Luther, in effect, “till I am a better man; I have not yet repented sufficiently.” “A better man!” would the Vicar-General say in effect; “Christ came to save not good men, but sinners. Love God and you will have repented; there is no real repentance that does not begin in the love of God; and there is no love to God that does not take its rise in all apprehension of that mercy which offers to sinners’ freedom from sin through the blood of Christ.” “Faith in the mercies of God! This is the star that goeth before the face of Repentance, the pillar of fire that guided her in the night of her sorrows, and giveth her light,” and sheweth her the way to the throne of God.”^[5]

He then gave Luther a Bible and told him to make the study of scripture his chief occupation. After John Staupitz left, Luther again fell into sickness on his bed and almost died. His self mortification almost took his life.

One of the aged monks of the convent came to his bed side and began to recite the Apostles Creed and he asked Luther to recite it with him. "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." "Nay," said the monk, "you are to believe not merely in the forgiveness of David's sins, and of Peter's sins; you must believe in the forgiveness of your own sins." The decisive words had been spoken. A ray of light had penetrated the darkness that encompassed Luther. He saw it all: the whole Gospel in a single phrase, the forgiveness of sins — not the payment, but the forgiveness."^[6]

Thus at that moment the hold of the Pope on Luther's soul fell off. It was there that Luther died. Jesus said, "That except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die; it abideth alone." Christianity could not come about except our Saviour die and resurrect from the dead. It was his resurrection that brought life. It started the church and the whole of Christianity is centered round it. So it is was with Luther. Luther met his greatest enemy in this little cell. He fought with principalities and powers of darkness and triumphed over them through the grace of God. Later he would stand before the principalities and powers of this earth, which could do nothing but kill the body.

We might note that the Reformation did not begin in a King's court, nor did it begin in the theological or scholarly arena, no it began in the heart of a man who wrestled within himself, of how he could become righteous before a just God. Forgiveness of sins was not found in visiting the huge churches and saying mass, it was not found in the gazing upon relics of saints of old, nor was it found in the buying of indulgences, no it was found in the cross of Jesus Christ. Thus Luther's search was over. He had found his Saviour.

Luther was two years in the monastery when on May 2, 1507 he was ordained into the priesthood. His father even came to see his son being ordained. Remember the prophecy of Huss. "You might cook this goose, but a hundred years from hence there will come a swan that you will not silence." Thus Luther was ordained over the grave of the Bishop that condemned Huss.

At this time the University of Wittenberg had been founded by Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony. As he was looking around trying to find good men to fill the chairs there, John Staupitz recommended Luther. Luther came willingly and at first became professor of "dialectics and physics," a position

Luther would have cherished a few years earlier. He did not say anything, but took the task on himself humbly. Later the department of “theology” came vacant and so Luther moved there. Now he was in his right place.

Luther opened the book of Romans and began there. That book that shines with the glorious truths of the grace of God. Luther did not speak as any ordinary professor, O no, Luther spoke with such passion and fire that his teaching began to draw men from all over and his fame spread wide and far. It was later suggested by Staupitz that Luther preach in public to the common people. He at first refused, but after much pressure from Staupitz, he conceded. He chose the most humble church in Wittenberg. It was so old and worn that it was ready to fall apart. Thus it pleased God the first time to let the proclaiming of his Son be from a stable, thus the second time the proclaiming of his Son was from this old rugged worn out church building.

It was during this time that preaching had sunken to a low. No one was doing any preaching. This office had been abandoned to the Friars of the day who possessed no human or divine knowledge. So they would resort to trying to amuse the audience or to telling tales of the saints. With Luther this was not the case. He spoke with authority, so much so that he convinced his audience that heaven was not something that might be one day, if one followed priest or the church, but no, forgiveness of sins put one on the road to heaven immediately. Luther attracted people from all over. He was elected the official preacher of the town of Wittenberg by the town council.

It wasn't long after that a quarrel broke out between seven Augustinian convents and their Vicar-General. Some have said that this was in 1510 others having said 1512. It was suggested that Luther go to Rome and submit the matter to the Pope. We could only imagine how Luther felt as he neared this city. This was deemed the holiest place on earth. It was here that the Bishops lived and the Pope himself.

Luther on his way to Rome fell sick in the city of Bologna. This sickness was so sever that he nearly died. He thought that he heard someone calling him and saying, “The just shall live by faith.” He finally awoke and was well in mind and soul.

While at Rome Luther saw the hypocrisy of those who called themselves Bishops, how they admitted that they did not believe in the mass and all their duties, as he sat with them at dinner one night. Another event happened,

while he was there, to finish converting him to scripture and faith in Christ. It is here that I will quote from J. A. Wylie's *History of Protestantism*:

“One day he went, under the influence of these feelings, to the Church of the Lateran. There is the Scala Sancta, or Holy Stairs, which tradition says Christ descended on retiring from the hall of judgment, where Pilate had passed sentence upon him. These stairs are of marble, and the work of conveying them from Jerusalem to Rome was reported to have been undertaken and executed by the angels, who have so often rendered similar services to the Church — Our Lady's House at Loreto for example. The stairs so transported were enshrined in the Palace of the Lateran, and every one who climbs them on his knees merits an indulgence of fifteen years for each ascent. Luther, who doubted neither the legend touching the stairs, nor the merit attached by the bulls of the Popes to the act of climbing them, went thither one day to engage in this holy act. He was climbing the steps in the appointed way, on his knees namely, earning at every step a year's indulgence, when he was startled by a sudden voice, which seemed as if it spoke from heaven, and said, “The just shall live by faith.” Luther started to his feet in amazement. This was the third time these same words had been conveyed into his mind with such emphasis, that it was as if a voice of thunder had uttered them. It seemed louder than before, and he grasped more fully the great truth which it announced. What folly, thought he, to seek an indulgence from the Church, which can last me but a few years, when God sends me in his Word an indulgence that will last me for ever! How idle to toil at these performances, when God is willing to acquit me of all my sins not as so much wages for so much service, but freely, in the way of believing upon his Son! “The just shall live by faith.”^[7]

It was at this moment that Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone stood out as the supreme doctrine in the Word of God. He later stated that it was upon this doctrine that the church would raise or fall. This is so true. Today we see a descent backwards into superstition bondage and a fall backwards into Roman Catholicism within the Church.

Luther only stayed two weeks in Rome and then left to return to the city of Wittenberg. This was 1512 A.D., five years before the beginning of the

Reformation. Upon his return he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity. He vowed then to defend the Word of God with his whole life and turned all his attention towards that endeavor. He turned his back on Rome and his face towards the Bible.

It wasn't too long after Luther departed Rome that Pope Julius II died. Leo X took his chair. He was a man of sensual pleasures and delighted in the arts and every form of pleasure and amusement was allowed in his courts. His own statement showed that he had no affection for Christ or the Church. He said, "What a profitable affair this fable of Christ has been to us!" He set about to restore the Church of St. Peter to its previous splendor. He only did this because he loved art and wanted to beautify the city of Rome. This church of St. Peter had fallen into ruins because of the lack of upkeep and the wars of various times had been hard upon it. The problem was the lack of funds. It would take millions and they knew not where to get the money.

There was devised a plan to sell special indulgences to the people in order to bring in all the money for this new project. The license to sell indulgences was auctioned out to the highest bidder and the indulgences in Germany were farmed out to Albert, Archbishop of Mainz and Magdeburg. He was like Leo X. He liked to surround himself with splendor and wealth, yet at this time he owed the Pope for his pall, some say 26,000; others said 30,000 florins. This would be a good way to get money to flow his way and quickly pay off the Pope. So he sought out a man suitable to sell these indulgences. There was a man suited for the job named John Diezel, or Tetzel. He was a Dominican monk and son of a goldsmith named Leipsic. He had a lot of experience with the selling of indulgences, but was convicted of a crime in Innsbruck and was sentenced to being put into a sack and drowned. Powerful intercession was made for him and he was released. He ended up unconsciously overthrowing the very system that nourished him.

When Tetzel arrived in a town he would go straight to the church. He had a long procession with him of mules carrying a strong box and a bale of pardons, not for the repentant, but for those who had money in hand. Tetzel himself carried a big red cross, on which had the outstretched hands of the Pope. At the church Tetzel would set the cross up beside the pulpit and proclaim his message: "Press in now: come and buy while the market lasts," shouted the Dominican; "should that cross be taken down the market will

close, heaven will depart, and then you will begin to knock, and to bewail your folly in neglecting to avail yourselves of blessings which shall then have gone beyond your reach.”^[8] Never before until this day had the people been given such privilege; never before had the gates of heaven been opened so widely. Again Tetzel stated: “Indulgences are the most precious and the most noble of God’s gifts,” then pointing to the Red Cross, which stood full in view of the multitude, he would exclaim, “This cross has as much efficacy as the very cross of Christ. Come, and I will give you letters all properly sealed, by which even the sins which you intend to commit may be pardoned. I would not change my privileges for those of St. Peter in heaven, for I have saved more souls by my indulgences than the apostle did by his sermons.”^[9]

“But more than this,” said Tetzel, for he had not as yet disclosed the whole wonderful virtues of his merchandise, “indulgences avail not only for the living but for the dead.” Thus had Boniface VIII enacted two centuries before; and Tetzel goes on to the particular application of the dogma. “Priest, noble, merchant, wife, youth, maiden, do you not hear your parents and your other friends who are dead, and who cry from the bottom of the abyss: ‘We are suffering horrible torments! Trifling alms would deliver us; you can give it, and you will not?’”^[10]

Thus Tetzel would conclude with running down from the pulpit and throwing a coin into the iron box. He stated: “When a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs.”

Tetzel’s sell of indulgences became the talk of Germany. It seemed unjust to offer to the worst of criminal’s forgiveness just for a few coins. This was an attack on the foundation of society, that the vile and wicked should be made equal with the orderly and obedient. Men trembled at the thought of the iniquity that would rush on the land. Also they wondered at the arrogance of the Pope, who claimed to forgive sins, when only God could do this.

Others took a different approach and wondered why the Pope, for the want of a penny, would leave souls burning in purgatory to begin with. Even Luther in his 95 theses stated in number 82 that the Pope, if he has the power to free souls from purgatory, then why doesn’t he do it out of holy love?

Those who sold indulgences lived a life of wickedness. They stopped in the taverns and consorted to drinking, gambling, and so forth. Even Tetzel himself made servants out of other men to carry his supplies. He would give

them a paper of pardon for their service. The Elector Fredrick was shocked at this man's trade and forbade him to enter Saxony. Tetzel set up his market a hour and a half walking distance from Saxony at Juterbock.

When Luther first heard of Tetzel, which was only a little while before, he said, "By the help of God, I will make a hole in his drum."^[11] Luther at this time was a preacher and a confessor. In other words he sat and listened to confessions during the day. He believed that the church ought to be obeyed in all things. He finally heard how the selling of these indulgences was wreaking moral havoc through the land.

"One day, as he sat in the confessional, some citizens of Wittenberg came before him, and confessed having committed thefts, adulteries, and other heinous sins. "You must abandon your evil courses," said Luther, "otherwise I cannot absolve you." To his surprise and grief, they replied that they had no thought of leaving off their sins; that this was not in the least necessary, inasmuch as these sins were already pardoned, and they themselves secured against the punishment of them. The deluded people would thereupon pull out the indulgence papers of Tetzel, and show them in testimony of their innocence. Luther could only tell them that these papers were worthless, that they must repent, and be forgiven of God, otherwise they should perish everlastingly."^[12]

Tetzel heard of Luther's condemnation, of his selling of indulgences, through these men, who returned and told Tetzel about what Luther said. Tetzel told everyone at Juterbock that he had been given permission to burn anyone as a heretic who came against him. This fueled Luther's fight against these selling of indulgences. He condemned the sell of indulgences in his university and wrote to the Archbishop of Mainz asking him to stop this abuse in the church. Luther did not realize that this was the very man who had ordered the selling of the indulgences. Luther told everyone in his university and town to repent. That if you trust in these indulgences, you will die in your sins.

Luther took and put together 95 theses against indulgences and posted them on the church door of Wittenberg. This was done on October 31, 1517. Thus began that glorious Reformation that brought the Word of God into our hands. Luther, however, had not only attacked the selling of indulgences, but also the Pope himself. Thus we have the Pope's way of Salvation and God's way of salvation. We see that it was God's way of salvation that ended up

being victorious.

I will end with a dream that was given to Fredrick of Saxony the night before October 31, 1517 and was recounted in J. A. Wylie's *History of Protestantism*:

“We step a moment out of the domain of history, to narrate a dream which the Elector Frederick of Saxony had on the night preceding the memorable day on which Luther affixed his “Theses” to the door of the castle-church. The elector told it the next morning to his brother, Duke John, who was then residing with him at his palace of Schweinitz, six leagues from Wittenberg. The dream is recorded by all the chroniclers of the time. Of its truth there is no doubt, however we may interpret it. We cite it here as a compendious and dramatic epitome of the affair of the “Theses,” and the movement which grew out of them.

On the morning of the 31st October, 1517, the elector said to Duke John, “Brother, I must tell you a dream which I had last night, and the meaning of which I should like much to know. It is so deeply impressed on my mind, that I will never forget it, were I to live a thousand years. For I dreamed it thrice, and each time with new circumstances.”

Duke John: “Is it a good or a bad dream?”

The Elector: “I know not; God knows.”

Duke John: “Don’t be uneasy at it; but be so good as tell it to me.”

The Elector: “Having gone to bed last night, fatigued and out of spirits, I fell asleep shortly after my prayer, and slept calmly for about two hours and a half; I then awoke, and continued awake to midnight, all sorts of thoughts passing through my mind. Among other things, I thought how I was to observe the Feast of All Saints. I prayed for the poor souls in purgatory; and supplicated God to guide me, my counsels, and my people according to truth. I again fell asleep, and then dreamed that Almighty God sent me a monk, who was a true son of the Apostle Paul. All the saints accompanied him by order of God, in order to bear testimony before me, and to declare that he did not come to contrive any plot, but that all that he did was according to the will of God. They asked me to have the goodness graciously to permit him to write something on the door of the church of the Castle of Wittenberg. This I

granted through my chancellor. Thereupon the monk went to the church, and began to write in such large characters that I could read the writing at Schweinitz. The pen which he used was so large that its end reached as far as Rome, where it pierced the ears of a lion that was crouching there, and caused the Triple Crown upon the head of the Pope to shake. All the cardinals and princes, running hastily up, tried to prevent it from falling. You and I, brother, wished also to assist, and I stretched out my arm; — but at this moment I awoke, with my arm in the air, quite amazed, and very much enraged at the monk for not managing his pen better. I recollected myself a little; it was only a dream.

“I was still half asleep, and once more closed my eyes. The dream returned. The lion, still annoyed by the pen, began to roar with all his might, so much so that the whole city of Rome, and all the States of the Holy Empire, ran to see what the matter was. The Pope requested them to oppose this monk, and applied particularly to me, on account of his being in my country. I again awoke, repeated the Lord’s Prayer, entreated God to preserve his Holiness, and once more fell asleep.”

“Then I dreamed that all the princes of the Empire, and we among them, hastened to Rome, and strove, one after another, to break the pen; but the more we tried the stiffer it became, sounding as if it had been made of iron. We at length desisted. I then asked the monk (for I was sometimes at Rome, and sometimes at Wittenberg) where he got this pen, and why it was so strong. ‘The pen,’ replied he, ‘belonged to an old goose of Bohemia, a hundred years old. I got it from one of my old schoolmasters. As to its strength, it is owing to the impossibility of depriving it of its pith or marrow; and I am quite astonished at it myself.’ Suddenly I heard a loud noise — a large number of other pens had sprung out of the long pen of the monk. I awoke a third time: it was daylight.”

Duke John: “Chancellor, what is your opinion? Would we had a Joseph, or a Daniel, enlightened by God!”

Chancellor: “Your highness knows the common proverb, that the dreams of young girls, learned men, and great lords have usually some hidden meaning. The meaning of this dream, however, we shall not be

able to know for some time — not till the things to which it relates have taken place. Wherefore, leave the accomplishment to God, and place it fully in his hand.”

Duke John: “I am of your opinion, Chancellor; ‘tis not fit for us to annoy ourselves in attempting to discover the meaning. God will overrule all for his glory.”

Elector: “May our faithful God do so; yet I shall never forget, this dream. I have, indeed, thought of an interpretation, but I keep it to myself. Time, perhaps, will show if I have been a good diviner.” So it passed the morning of the 31st October, 1517, in the royal castle of Schweinitz. The events of the evening at Wittenberg we have already detailed. The elector has hardly made an end of telling his dream when the monk comes with his hammer to interpret it.^[13]

FOOTNOTES:

- [1] J. A. Wyle “*History of Protestantism*” Book one; Chapter one; Protestantism; Published 1878 by Cassell & Company, Limited: London, Paris & New York.
- [2] *Ibid.* Book 3; Chapter 7, Condemnation and Martyrdom of Huss.
- [3] *Ibid.* Book 5; Chapter 3; Luther’s Life in the Convent.
- [4] *Ibid.* Book 5; Chapter 4; Luther the Monk becomes Luther the Reformer.
- [5] *Ibid.* Book 5; Chapter 4; Luther the Monk becomes Luther the Reformer.
- [6] *Ibid.* Book 5; Chapter 4; Luther the Monk becomes Luther the Reformer.
- [7] *Ibid.* Book 5; Chapter 7; Luther in Rome.
- [8] *Ibid.* Book 5; Chapter 8; Tetzal Preaches Indulgences.
- [9] *Ibid.* Book 5; Chapter 8; Tetzal Preaches Indulgences.
- [10] *Ibid.* Book 5; Chapter 8; Tetzal Preaches Indulgences.
- [11] *Ibid.* Book 5; Chapter 9; The Theses.
- [12] *Ibid.* Book 5; Chapter 9; The Theses.
- [13] *Ibid.* Book 5; Chapter 9; The Theses.