

# Revelation 10:1-4. The Epoch Of The Reformation



Martin Luther At The Diet Of Worms.

This is the continuation of [The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's Horae Apocalypticæ.](#)

## **Discovery Of Christ The Saviour. Discovery Of Antichrist The Usurper, A.D. 1513 – 1521.**

[1] ¶ And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire:

[2] And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth,

[3] And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.

[4] And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not. (Rev 10:1-4)

[II] IT HAS BEEN well remarked that “the Reformation passed from the mind of Luther into the mind of Western Europe,” and that its “different phases succeeded each other in the soul of Luther, its instrumental originator, before its accomplishment in the world.” Hence the importance of tracing its development in the history of the Reformer himself, the master-spirit, under God, of that great revolution.

Of these phases, the two which gave rise to all the rest were, the discovery of Christ in the fullness of his grace and truth, and the discovery of the predicted Antichrist in the Papal apostasy. These two appear to have a distinct and direct prefigurement in that portion of the vision which we have already in part considered, and which is repeated as the heading of this Lecture.

[1] Luther, the son of a poor miner of Mansfield, was born A.D. 1483. In his early boyhood, when at school both at Magdeburg and at Eisenach, he had often to beg his daily food, with the pitiful cry, “Bread for the love of God;” and was indebted to a burgher’s wife for the means of pursuing his studies –

almost for his preservation. Grown to manhood, he passed four years at the University of Erfurt, where his intellectual powers and learning excited general admiration. But just as the honors and emoluments of the world seemed about to be opened to his attainment, he suddenly, to the dismay of his friends, renounced the world and its brilliant prospects, and betook himself to the solitude of an Augustine monastery. Thoughts deeper and mightier than affected others around him were then pressing on his soul and induced this strange step.

Luther had found a Bible hid in the shelves of the University library. Till then he had known no more of the Scriptures than what were given in the Breviary or by the preachers. He was at once riveted by what he read. It increased, even to intenseness, the desire of his heart to know God. At the same time he found therein descriptions of man's sinfulness and of God's holiness which awed and alarmed him. Providential occurrences following soon after confirmed and deepened the work on his conscience. An illness which had nearly proved fatal brought death to his view. He saw a beloved friend cut off with scarce a moment's warning. He was overtaken in a journey by a terrific lightning storm; and he associated it with the judgment of an angry God, whom he felt unprepared to meet. How shall I stand justified before God? What will it profit me if I gain the whole world and lose my own soul? These were now the absorbing thoughts of his mind. Thenceforth the world was to him as nothing. But while he longed to know God, neither his own understanding nor the philosophy and learning of the University yielded him the light he needed. He longed to propitiate him, but his conscience told him how inadequate for the purpose were his best performances. It had long been a notion that the convent was the place where, by penances and prayers, the favor of God was most surely to be attained. He gathered his friends around him, ate his farewell meal with them, then sought the monastery. Its gate opened and closed on him. He was an Augustinian monk.

But was his object gained? Did he find the holiness or the peace with God that he longed for? Far from it. In vain he practiced all the strictest rules of the monkish life; in vain he multiplied prayers, and penances, and self-mortifications. He found that in changing his dress he had not changed his heart. The consciousness of sin remained, its indwelling power, its guilt, its danger. "O my sin! my sin!" he was often heard to exclaim. Pale and emaciated, behold him at one time fallen down in his cell, apparently dead, from the exhaustion of the mental anguish, yet more than of sleeplessness and fasting.

There was a copy of the Bible chained in the monastery. With eagerness he renewed his intense study of it, but still found no consolation. Even the Gospel seemed but to increase his terrors, inasmuch as he found the wrath of God therein revealed against the ungodly.

It was at this time he met with Staupitz, Vicargeneral of the Augustins, who at once distinguished from the rest the young monk of Mansfield, with his eyes sunk in their sockets, his countenance stamped with melancholy, his body emaciated by study, watchings, and fastings, so that they might have counted his bones. Staupitz could almost divine the cause of such suffering, having himself in secret gone through somewhat of the same conflicts, until in the

Gospel, rightly understood, he had found a Saviour. He sought and gained the confidence of Luther. He entered with him on the subjects of his anxiety. The Bible lay open before them; Staupitz unfolded to him from it the love and mercy of God to man as exhibited in Christ crucified. He spoke of his death as the expiation for penitent sinners; his righteousness and perfect justice of life as their plea and trust – that perfect and inherent righteousness being accepted by God vicariously, and so called “God’s righteousness,” in place of the imperfect and defiled performance of penitent sinners; just as his death was also vicarious and expiatory of the guilt of their sins.

When Luther still objected his sinfulness, it was answered by Staupitz, Would you have merely the semblance of a sinner and the semblance of a Saviour? And when he objected again that it was to penitent sinners only that Christ’s salvation belonged, and that how to obtain this he had, with all his self-mortifications, sought in vain, Staupitz replied, “It is from the love of God alone that true repentance has its origin. Seek it not in those macerations and mortifications of the body! Seek it in contemplating God’s love in Christ Jesus! Love him who has thus first loved you!”

Luther heard the words, and received them, not as the voice of the Vicargeneral, but as the Divine Spirit speaking by him. It opened the Gospel to him and showed him the two things he sought – the principle of justification before God and the principle of godly penitence and sanctification within. The light of the glory of God in Christ began now to shine upon him. With the eye of faith he beheld the Sun of righteousness shining on a lost world; and the dark clouds of mental conflict which he had passed through served but to reflect, as it were, the rainbow of covenant mercy. In the sunshine of this forgiving love he found sweet sensations. “O happy sin, which has found such a Saviour!” The subject of repentance was now a delight to him. He sought out in a Bible, given him by Staupitz, all that related to it; and these passages, he said, seemed as if they danced round his emancipated soul. He was no longer inactive; the love of Christ constrained him. From the view of Jesus he drew strength as well as forgiveness. Inward and outward variations and some severe illnesses confirmed his faith. On one occasion indeed, being sent on a mission to Rome, he had yielded to the influence of early associations, and for a while returned to superstitious observances. He made the round of the churches, celebrating masses in them, as that which might yield a blessing. He even climbed on his knees the Pilate staircase, near the Lateran, brought, it was said, from Jerusalem, to which penance was attached an indulgence and remission of sin. But while in the act a voice as from heaven seemed to him to sound in his ears, “The justified by faith shall live; they, and they only.” He started up, and from that time the superstitions of his old education had never power to obscure his view of the Sun of righteousness. Thus was Luther inwardly prepared to enter upon the work designed for him, as God’s chosen minister, of showing to others what he had himself experienced. And the way was soon opened. He was nominated, by Staupitz to a professorship in the university at Wittenberg, recently founded by the Elector of Saxony. There, in A.D. 1512, being appointed doctor of divinity ad Biblia, and having to vow on his appointment to defend the Bible doctrines, he received his vocation as a Reformer. Forthwith, in his lectures to the students and in his

sermons to the people, he began to preach the Gospel that had been opened to him, and to set forth the glory of JESUS, mighty to save. His letters and conversations were imbued with the same subject. "Learn," he would say, "to sing the new song, Thou, Jesus, art my righteousness: I am thy sin; thou hast taken on thyself, what was mine; thou hast given me what was thine!" Against the doctrine of man's ability and strength to attain to righteousness he published theses, and offered to sustain them. Thus, as has been well said, he attacked rationalism before he attacked superstition, and proclaimed the righteousness of God before he retrenched the additions of man.

Multitudes crowded to hear a doctrine so new, and maintained with eloquence so convincing. "It seemed," said Melancthon, "as if a new day had risen after a long and dark night."

Hitherto all had gone on without disturbance, the revelation of Jesus being confined to the few at Wittenberg; but now the conflict between Christ and Antichrist was about to commence. Tetzel came with his sale of indulgences near to Wittenberg, and the spirit of the Reformer was kindled. He published his celebrated ninety-five theses against indulgences, affixing them, as was customary, on the door of the principal church, and offering to maintain them against all opposers. The truths put forward most prominently were – the Pope's insufficiency to forgive sin or to confer salvation; Christ's all-sufficiency, and the true penitent's participation by God's free gift, not merely in the blessing of forgiveness, but in all the riches of Christ, irrespective of Papal absolution or indulgence. To these he added other declarations also, as to the Gospel of the grace of God, and not the merits of saints, being the true treasure of the Church, and against the avarice of the priestly traffickers in indulgences; and, moreover, an exhortation to real Christians to follow Christ as their chief, even through crosses and tribulation to the heavenly kingdom.

The evening of their publication – the 31st of October, All Hallow Eve – has been remembered ever since as the epoch of the Reformation. With a rapidity, power, and effect unparalleled, unexpected, unintended – even as the voice of one mightier than Luther, and so felt by him – the report echoed throughout Christendom. It was felt by friends and foes to be a mortal shock to that whole fabric of error and imposition which had been built up during ten centuries of apostasy, and a mortal blow too, though unperceived by him who struck it, to the Papal supremacy. The minds of men were prepared to recognize Christ's headship and rights in the Church; and it was soon seen that the overthrow of Papal dominion, and the erection of the Gospel standard (already by the contemporary teaching of Zwingle and other Reformers accomplished in some of the Swiss cantons) would be accomplished in England and some of the Continental kingdoms. Thus was the Angel's placing one foot on land and the other on the sea, and uttering his voice as when a lion roareth, fulfilled. From that time the light increased to the full exhibition of Christian truth, and more especially by the thousands in our own favored land, to the full discovery of Christ the Saviour.

[2] We have now to consider that which formed the second great movement of the Reformation – the discovery by the Church of Antichrist in the Papal usurper; and this we find prefigured also in the vision before us. "And when

he had cried, the seven thunders uttered their own voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their own voices I was about to write. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not."

What mean these seven thunders? The difficulty in the way of most commentators is the command that they should be sealed, as if it were the intention that no mortal should know their import. But had this been so, why were they named at all? It is clear that some intimation was by the revelation to be conveyed to the Church, of which John, who heard the sounds, was the representative. Certain points are here very observable: –

First, these thunders are said to utter voices and to speak, evidently in a manner intelligible to the Apostle. This peculiarity distinguishes them from those which are elsewhere mentioned as proceeding from before the throne, and appearing to be the echoes of judgments passing on earth.

Secondly, they uttered (lit) their own voices – not the voice of God, nor of the Angel of the covenant, whose word had just preceded them, but in dissonance with, and opposed to the voice of Christ. Does not this suggest the voice of Antichrist?

Thirdly, the prohibition "Write them not." Three times was the Apostle desired to write the words spoken on other occasions. But in every such instance the reason is annexed. The words to be written are "true and faithful;" they are "the sayings of the Spirit" – "the true sayings of God." (Rev. 14:13; 19:9; 21:5) The inference, therefore, to be drawn in this place from "Write not," is that the voices of these thunders are not true; they utter their own voices; they are not from heaven, but rather self-called thunders. Doubtless St. John was but too familiar with the imperial decrees or fulmina (thunders), for he was then suffering banishment in Patmos by reason of one of them. May it not be from the same quarter that these will proceed? he might naturally conclude. May they not be Roman thunders pretending to inspiration, terrific in their threatening and effects? Again, why seven thunders? Like the two-topped lightning of the Grecian poets, because issuing from the two summits of Parnassus, do not these also point to the locality whence they proceed? And are not the seven famed hills of Rome directly alluded to in the seventeenth chapter of this Revelation? The very expression, "A septenary of voices," has been used by Roman poets when speaking of a voice from that city. -Clearly, then, we are to regard these seven thunders as fulminated from the mock heaven of the Papal Antichrist's supremacy – "The seven thrones of the Supreme Pontificate."

And, lastly, the use of the definite article, the seven thunders, denotes their notoriety and pro-eminence. The Papal anathemas were emphatically the thunders, and the Pope the thunderer. Invested with which terrors by the prevailing superstition throughout the long Middle Ages, where was the prince or the kingdom that had not trembled before them?

Thus, then, is the signification evident. No sooner had the voice of Christ been heard declaring the great truths of the Gospel, and speaking by the lion-like mouth of the great reformer, than the Vatican uttered its bulls

condemning the bold movement; which, said John, "I was about to write."

And here, in tracing the historical fulfillment, we must bear in mind that the Evangelist witnessed these Apocalyptic visions in a symbolic character; not as an individual man. What was seen and heard by him appeared to be that which would be seen and heard by the faithful who should be in existence at the very time of the evolving of each successive scene of the advancing drama. Hence the inference follows that each particular seen or done by the Evangelist in vision must be taken to symbolize something correspondent in the views and actions of those Reformers, re-awakened at the crisis before us, by the apostolical spirit outpoured again upon the Church. Luther was now the leader of the Reformation. We will give his own account of what he felt at this time. "When I began the affair of the indulgences, I was a monk and a most mad Papist. I would have been ready to murder anyone who should have said a word against the duty of obedience to the Pope... The popes, cardinals, bishops, monks, and priests were the objects of my confidence... If I had then braved the Pope, as I now do, I should have expected the earth to swallow me up alive like Korah and Abiram." It was in this state of mind, A.D. 1518, that he thus wrote to the Pope: "Most blessed father! prostrate at the feet of thy Blessedness, I offer myself to thee with all I am and all I have. Kill me or make me live, call or recall, approve or reprove, as shall please thee. I will acknowledge thy voice as the voice of Christ presiding and speaking in thee." Thus when the seven thunders uttered their own voices, "I was about to write," i.e., recognize, publish, submit to them, even as if they had been what they pretended to be, an oracle from heaven.

But at this critical point, a real message from heaven was conveyed to his mind and preserved him. Summoned to appear before the Papal Legate, when the Pope's judgment was pronounced in favor of indulgences and of the efficacy of the sacraments irrespective of faith in the recipient, he saw its opposition to the word and spirit of the Gospel, and resisted it. It was the Spirit's whisper, "Write not!" Yet more; when, in preparing for a public disputation, he had been under the necessity of examining into the origin and character of the Papal supremacy, the true character of the whole system began to open to his view. Thus he wrote to a friend about the close of 1518, - "My pen is ready to give birth to something greater. I know not whence these thoughts come to me. I will send you what I write, that you may see if I have well conjectured in believing that the Antichrist, of whom St. Paul speaks, now reigns in the court of Rome." The thought was fearful, and some time after he wrote again, "To separate myself from the Apostolic See of Rome has not entered my mind." But still the scruples returned. The Elector of Saxony who befriended him was startled with hearing, "I have been turning over the decretals of the Popes, and would whisper it into thine ears that I begin to entertain doubt (so foully is Christ dishonored in them) whether the Pope be not the very Antichrist of Scripture." Further study of Scripture, and further teaching of the Holy Spirit helped forward the suspicion; and when, in A.D. 1520, the Papal thunders of excommunication were issued against him, accordantly with that monitory voice which had bade St. John "seal them up" (the very phrase of the times for rejecting Papal bulls), Luther electrified Europe. Having summoned a vast concourse of all ranks, he kindled a fire outside the walls of Wittenberg; and by the hands of the hangman, the hull,

with the Papal decretals and canons accompanying, was committed to the flames. In his public answer to the bull he poured contempt on the Papal thunders, calling them the infernal voices of Antichrist.

Once convinced, no earthly power could induce Luther to a recantation. When summoned before the Emperor, the Legate, the Germanic princes and nobles at the Diet of Worms, he strengthened the cause by a bold confession. A goodly company had now joined him; – Melanchthon, Carlstadt, Bugenhagen, Justus Jonas, and many others, fathers of the Reformation. In the German towns and universities, by priests, monks, students, and people, the new doctrines were enthusiastically received. The work was fast progressing in Switzerland. The effect was confessed by the astonished Legate, when, in traveling through Germany to Worms, instead of the wonted honors and reverence of his high office, he found himself disregarded and shunned as an agent of ANTICHRIST. A mighty revolution had begun, and who could foresee its issue?

Continued in [Revelation 10:5-7. The Angel's Oath](#)

## **All chapters of The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's *Horae Apocalypticæ***

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