

SAINT MARTIN

(Adapted from Martin Luther by Eric Metaxas)

St. Martin lived in the fourth century. He was born in what is today Hungary, grew up in what is today Italy, but spent most of his adult life in France. He became a Christian at an early age, and over the objections of his father enlisted in the Roman army. Martin was ordered to fight in a battle at the Roman town of Borberomagus which was located in what today is central Germany. He declined to fight and bravely declared: "I am a soldier of Christ, I cannot fight". For this shocking insubordination he was placed in prison and accused of cowardice. Martin, however, insisted that he was not afraid to die, but that he refused to kill another human being. To prove his point he volunteered to go to the front lines unarmed. (p. 8)

Fortunately, the battle at Borbetomagus did not take place. Martin then left the army and became a monk. His courage, however, placed him on the pathway to sainthood. As an interesting historical note, the Roman city of Borbetomagus where, the soldier Martin dared to take his stand, was later known as the German city of Worms. It was here that Martin Luther would also take his stand eleven centuries later.

According to his mother, Martin Luther was born November 10 just past midnight. The year of his birth, however, is debated. Metaxas concludes that it was 1484. November 11th was the feast day honoring St. Martin of Tours. Thus, on Nov. 11th, the day after his birth, Luther's mother carried him to the majestic Church of St. Peter, and St. Paul. It was less than 100 yards from the house where he was born. It was here, on St. Martin's day, that the one day old infant was baptized and given the name Martin.

During his teen age years Luther lived with the family of Heinrich Schalbe while he went to school. Heinrich was not only the mayor of Eisenach, but also a leading patron of the local Franciscan monastery. He was a great encouragement to Luther, and his wife shared with him this bit of wisdom that he never forgot: "*To whom it can be given, there is no dearer a thing on earth than a woman's love*".

During his four years in Eisenach Luther also came under the spiritual influence of a local vicar, Father Johannes Braun. The Schalbe family not only introduced Luther to spiritual giants, but also warned him about a dark side to the church. They were painfully aware of the daylight between what God wanted the church to be and the sad reality of what it was. It was also through the Schalbe family that Luther became acquainted with an elderly Franciscan monk, Johannes Hilten. At that time Hilten was imprisoned in the monastery at Eisenach for daring to be critical of the church.

Just as St. Martin's stand at Worms (Borvetomagus) in the fourth century provided a strange "coincidence" with the life of Martin Luther a thousand years later, so also this aged prisoner made prophetic statements about the future. Hilten predicted in his apocalyptic writings that a man would arise in the year 1516 who would fight to reform the church, and would succeed. He also predicted that within 100 years the Muslims would have overtaken Christianity (p. 19).

Hilten died of starvation as a prisoner in 1,500 at the age of 75. Whether this starvation was self imposed we do not know. It planted in Luther's mind, however, that godly men stand against corruption wherever it is found.

Someone said that those who praised Moses persecuted the prophets. Those who praised the prophets persecuted John the Baptist. Those who praised John the Baptist persecuted Jesus. Those who praised Jesus persecuted his apostles. Those who praised the apostles persecuted as heretics those who preached the apostle's doctrine. There has never been a time however, when Christ was a king without subjects, a Head without a Body, or a Shepherd without sheep.