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Martin Luther
based on several biographies
but basically fictional
by Ralph Milton

It was a hot, sultry late afternoon in July. The year was 1505.

21 year old Martin Luther saw the thunder clouds roll in overhead. He shuddered in fear each time another bolt of lightning detonated across the sky. “St. Anne, preserve me!” he prayed under his breath.

Then the lightning struck closer, and each time the prayer was louder, “St. Anne, preserve me!” A bolt of lightning shattered a tree within a few feet of where he walked, smoke billowed, his hair literally stood on end, and young Martin screamed, “St. Anne, preserve me. Spare my life and I will give myself to God. I will become a monk.”

But the life of a monk brought no peace. In the darkness of the night, young Martin fought the bitter depression, the *Anfechtungen* he called those times of blackness.

God was punishing him for his sin, he was sure, so Martin prayed harder and fasted longer and mortified his body and became the best, most pious monk in his order. He was told to study and enter the priesthood, and obediently he went, but as brother Martin became Fr. Martin and celebrated his first mass, he stood there terrified at the thought that he, a sinner, would dare address himself to God. It was all he could do to quell the fear enough to finish the mass.

Martin Luther studied harder. He worked harder. He was brilliant and successful and famous, but his nights were full of dark despair and fear as the *Anfechtungen* refused to set him free.

He lectured at the prestigious university in Wittenberg, lectured on Paul’s Letter to the Romans, and there a single verse caught his attention. “The just shall live by faith.”

He ignored the verse at first, then found it there at the front of the mind in his midnight battles with depression. “The just shall live by faith,” said the verse but Martin rebelled. “We earn our way into the love of God,” he shouted.

But the word from St. Paul would not go away, till one day he said it to himself at first, then to God, and finally to a world waiting for this freedom.

“The just shall live by faith!”

And with that word Martin Luther heard the words of the risen Christ to his disciples. “Don’t be afraid. Reach out and touch me. Don’t be afraid.” Then now the words became more personal. “Do not be afraid, Martin.”

A song began to form, first in Martin’s heart then on his lips and years later on paper. “*Ein Feste Berg ist unser Gott*. A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing. Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing. Were not the right man on our side, a man of God’s own choosing...”

With that holy word, Luther became the challenger of doctrine, then a questioner of doctrine. From there it was a short step to being heretic, rebel.

Soon, in his sermons and his writings, Martin described a whole new way of thinking about God, of talking about God, of living the life of God.

And soon the established church wanted him dead.

Sixteen years after the thunderclap frightened Martin Luther into the monastery, he stood before the assembled rulers of his country and his church, and in a clear, steady, quiet and courageous voice he put his life, his future, his soul on the line.

“Here I stand,” he said. “I can do no other. God help me.”

And with those words, the Protestant Reformation began.

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,
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