

**A Terrible History and Judgment of God on Thomas Müntzer,
in which God clearly Punishes his Lies and Damns him.**

*Eyn Schrecklich geschicht und gericht Gotes über Thomas Müntzer,
darynn Gott öffentlich desselbigen geyst lügen strafft und verdamnet*

May 1525

To all dear Germans, from Martin Luther.

Grace and peace be with you. I have published this terrible history and the clear judgement of Eternal God which He passed against the doctrines and writings and rebellion of Thomas Müntzer, that murderous and bloodthirsty prophet, to warn all those who strive for rebellion and uproar, and to make them fearful; and also to comfort and strengthen those who had to witness and suffer the misery, so that they understand and feel how God damns the rebellious spirits and those who cause tumult, and how He intends to punish them with His wrath. For here you can see how this murderous spirit boasted that God spoke with him and that he fulfilled the will of God and acted as if he would gain everything. And yet, before he could turn around, he lay there with several thousand others in the mud. But if God had really spoken through him, such a thing would never have happened, for God never lies, but always stays true to His word. But now that Thomas Müntzer has failed, it is as clear as day that he used God's name to conceal that he spoke for and worked with the Devil. But in order that you can see better just how he became a liar and suffered God's judgement, I will now start by printing some of his letters, in which he so defied God and slandered His name, so that you finally understand how God could no longer tolerate it. May God's mercy be with us. Amen. ¹

May the pure fear of God be with you, dear brothers. How much longer will you sleep, how much longer will you resist God's Will because you think He has forsaken you? Oh, how often have I told you how it must be: God cannot reveal himself unless you stand in tranquillity. If you do not do so, then your sacrifice, your heart-saddening suffering of the heart, is all in vain: you will have to start all over again and recommence your suffering. I tell you: if you are not willing to suffer for the sake of God, then you will become martyrs of the Devil. So take good care, do not be so downcast or

¹ The text of Müntzer's letter to Allstedt (and 'the Miners') now follows.

neglectful, and stop flattering those perverted fantasists, those godless evil-doers, but rather begin now and fight the Lord's fight! It is high time, make sure all your brothers do not mock God's testimony, or else they will be lost. The whole German, French and Italian lands ² are up in arms, the master will have his game, the evil-doers will have to take care. In Fulda in Easter week, four abbeys were laid waste, the peasants of Klettgau and Hegau in the Black Forest have risen, three times one hundred thousand strong ³, and the army is growing ever greater. My only worry is that the foolish people will accept some false peace-treaty, because they cannot recognise the harm that could be done.

Even if there are only three of you who stand tranquil in God and seek only his name and honour, then you will not fear a hundred thousand. So: on, on, onwards! It is time, the evil-doers are running scared like dogs. Alert your brothers so that they may be at peace and give testimony of their change of heart. It is utterly and completely necessary. On, on, onwards! Do not show pity, even though Esau comes to you speaking with kind words, Genesis 33. Take no heed of the cries of the godless, for they will come to you amicably, entreating, whining and begging like children. Do not let yourselves show pity, as God commanded us through Moses, Deuteronomy 7 (and he has revealed these things to us as well.) Stir it up in the villages and especially amongst the miners and other good fellows who will be useful. We must sleep no longer.

Look, just as I was writing these words, a messenger came to me from Salza, saying that the people there wanted to lay hands on the administrator of Duke Georg ⁴ because he had secretly wanted to kill three of them. The peasants of the Eichsfeld have taken hostile action against their Junkers and wish to show them no mercy. There are many things like that which should give you an idea what to do. You must set to it, onwards, for it is time. Balthasar and Barthel Krump, Valentin and Bischoff all lead the way in the dance ⁵. Get this letter out to the miners. I have been told that my printer is expected here in the next few days. ⁶ There is nothing else I can do just now, otherwise I should really want to instruct the brothers so thoroughly that their hearts would grow far bigger than all the castles and defences on earth belonging to the godless evil-doers.

² 'Das gantze deutsche, frantzosisch und welsch land' – the 'welsch' refers generally to Italian Switzerland. But there were no peasant uprisings outside of German territory at this time.

³ In the handwritten original (but not in Müntzer's own handwriting), the number is set out as 'three times one thousand. The actual number may have been around 100,000.

⁴ Sittich von Berlepsch.

⁵ Bartel Krumpfe, Bartel Zimmermann, Valentin Krump - in his 'Confession' of May 1525, these people are mentioned as the ring-leaders of the Allstedt League. Bischoff was a preacher in the small nearby town of Wolferode.

⁶ This could possibly be the man who had printed Müntzer's Allstedt pamphlets, Nikolaus Widemar. But that is by no means certain. The printer probably did arrive in Mühlhausen, but he never printed anything that has survived.

On, on, onwards, for the fire is hot! Do not let your sword grow cold with blood,⁷ do not let it hang loose in your hands! Smite cling clang on the anvil of Nimrod; cast down their towers! As long as they live, it is not possible to be emptied of the fear of man. You can be told nothing about God as long as they rule over you. On, onwards, while you have daylight. God marches before you, so follow, follow! The story is already written in Matthew 24, Ezekiel 34, Daniel 7, Ezra 16, Revelations 6, and all these are explained in Romans 15.

So do not let yourself be daunted. God is with you, as is written in 2 Chronicles 20, where God says: 'You should not be afraid. You should not shrink back from this great host, for it is not your fight but the Lord's. It is not you who fight, so stand firm like men. You will behold the help of God.' When Jehoshaphat heard these words, he fell to the ground. Thus must you also, with the help of God who will strengthen you in the true belief without the fear of Man. Amen.

Written at Mühlhausen in the XXV year.

Thomas Müntzer, a servant of God against the godless.

Open letter to brother Ernst at Heldrungen, that he might change his ways.⁸

The wide-ranging power, and the firm fear of God and the solid ground of his righteous will be with you, brother Ernst. I, Thomas Müntzer, sometime preacher at Allstedt, give you warning – even though it may be unnecessary – that, for the sake of the living God, you should abandon your tyrannical raging. You must not let the wrath of God hang over you any longer. It was you who began to martyr Christians, it was you who slandered the holy Christian faith as villainy, it was you who had the impudence to uproot Christians. Now tell us, you miserable, wretched sack of maggots – who made you into a prince over the people whom God redeemed with his own precious blood? You should and you must prove whether you are a true Christian; you should and you must demonstrate your faith, as 1 Peter 3 commands. I give you my honest word that you will have a genuine safe-conduct to allow you to publicly confirm your faith: our whole community, standing in a ring, has promised you this. You must also repent of your blatant tyranny, you must tell us who made you so audacious that you became such a wicked heathen to the disadvantage of all Christians, all the while claiming to be Christian yourself. But if you stay away and will not do as we have urged you to do, then I will denounce you before the whole world with upraised voice, and every brother will be prepared to spill their own

⁷ The handwritten version of this letter does not have the words "with blood".

⁸ In Luther's pamphlet, this explanatory text line comes at the end of the letter which follows. I have placed it at the start, to clearly separate each text.

blood to fight you, as if you were the Turk. Then you will be hunted down and rooted out, for every man will be far keener to gain an indulgence at your expense than any indulgence that the Pope ever offered. We do not know how we can otherwise bring you to justice. You have no sense of shame; God has made you obdurate like the King Pharaoh, and like those kings which God himself wanted to obliterate, Joshua 5 and 11. Let us lament to God for evermore that the world did not recognise your crude tyranny before now, when you raged like a bull. How was it possible for you to inflict such a staggering amount of damage? How can anyone but God himself have mercy on you? In short, you will be destroyed by God's mighty power. If you will not humble yourself before those of low standing, then you will be eternally shamed in the eyes of all Christendom, and you will become a martyr for the devil.

So that you know also that we have been given our orders, I say this to you: the eternal living God has commanded that you be cast down from your throne by the power that has been given to us; for you are of no use to Christianity, you are a pernicious scourge of the friends of God. God has spoken of you and your like, Ezekiel 14 and 39, Daniel 7, Micah 3. Obadiah the prophet says that your nest must be ripped apart and destroyed utterly.

We must have your answer by this evening, or else we will hunt you down in the name of the God of hosts. So you know what to expect. We will not hesitate to carry out what God has commanded us to do. So do your best, too. I am coming for you.

Written at Frankenhausen, Friday after Jubilate, Anno Domini 1525.

Thomas Müntzer with the Sword of Gideon.

A letter to brother Albrecht at Heldrungen, written that he might change his ways.⁹

Fear and trembling be with those who do evil, Romans 2. I am sorry that you have so evilly misused the epistle of Paul. You wish to excuse the wicked lords in anything they do, just as the Pope used both Peter and Paul as jailers. Do you think that the Lord God cannot stir up the uncomprehending people to overthrow the tyrants in his wrath, Hosea 13 and 8? Did not the mother of Christ speak about you and your like through the holy spirit, prophesying in Luke 1: "He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and raised up the lowly (whom you despised)?" Have you not been able to spoon up from your Lutheran gruel, your Wittenberg soup, that which Ezekiel prophesied in his 37th chapter? And have you not been able to

⁹ In Luther's pamphlet, this explanatory text line comes at the end of the letter which follows. I have placed it at the start, to clearly separate each text.

taste in your Martin's peasant gruel what the same prophet further said in the 39th chapter, that God would command all the birds of the air to feast on the flesh of the princes and commanded the unthinking beasts to lap up the blood of the bigwigs, as is described in the secret book of revelations 18 and 19? Do you really think that God has less interest in his people than in you tyrants? You wish to remain a heathen, although you call on the name of Christ and cover yourself with the words of Paul. But you can be sure that your way will be blocked. If you will admit, Daniel 7, that God has given power to the common people, and if you will appear before us and give an account of your faith, then we will be glad to allow this and to accept you as a common brother. But if you refuse, then we will not pay any attention to your lame, insipid mug: we will fight against you as against an arch-enemy of the Christian faith: you know what to expect now.

Written at Frankenhausen, Friday after Jubilate, Anno Domini 1525.

Thomas Müntzer with the Sword of Gideon.

To the noble Count and lord Albrecht of Mansfeld, Christian ruler etc, our lord and amicable brother in Christ.¹⁰

Mercy and peace in Christ our saviour. Noble count and lord, we, the Christian assembly, have read your letter and thank you for it, and we offer our good faith, as you have done, even though you stole from the poor people of Odersleben and Pfiffell etc.¹¹ However, we invite you and your men to a Christian meeting, with around thirty horsemen, to appear at Mertens Rita¹² just before the bridge, at twelve o'clock tomorrow, Friday. There we will give you, in Christian loyalty and with our attached seal, safe passage and allow you to come without danger and to and from your own place of safety. And we will ask you and your household in the meantime to keep the peace in respect of the poor and the Christian assembly, and grant us safe passage, just the same as we will do for you. We are pleased to prove to you our Christian loyalty. Please reply in writing.

Dated Thursday after Jubilate, Anno 25.¹³

The Christian Assembly at Frankenhausen.

¹⁰ In Luther's pamphlet, this explanatory text line comes at the end of the letter which follows. I have placed it at the start, to clearly separate each text.

¹¹ These places are probably the villages of Udersleben and Hackpfüffel, which lie within 9 kms to the north-east of Frankenhausen. Quite what Albrecht is accused of here, is uncertain. He is known to have attacked (and killed) peasants at Osterhausen around 5 May, but that village lies about 20 kms east of the area cited.

¹² This is the village of Martinsrieth, about 14 kms north-east of Frankenhausen.

¹³ 11 May 1525

Martin Luther.¹⁴

These two letters to Count Albrecht, lord of Mansfeld were written because that same count, from Christian charity, had written to the peasants at Frankenhausen, proposing to reach an amicable agreement and so help them avoid bloodshed. Whereupon they, as their letter shows, named the Friday, on the promise of safe conduct. But because this same count and lord had business to undertake on that same Friday, he wrote back to them and suggested the following Sunday. And then God ordained that Thomas Müntzer should come from Mühlhausen to Frankenhausen. And he was of the opinion that Count Albrecht perhaps delayed out of fear and trepidation. And he made sure that the peasants sent no reply to the count, and so the agreement was left as it was. But Müntzer himself then wrote that letter which we printed above.

At these arrogant words of Müntzer, the poor people abandoned their senses and said that the Holy Ghost spoke through Müntzer, and were thus led astray and unfortunately more than 5 thousand of them lost body and soul in a brief moment. O what a wretched misery! That is exactly what the Devil wanted, and what he still seeks among all the other rebellious peasantry. And it would be lamentable enough that their souls should be in danger. But because they were clearly disobedient, disloyal and broke their oaths, and persisted in blasphemy against God until the very end, it is to be expected that they are now lost for all eternity.

Dear God! You miserable rebellious spirits, where now are those words with which you excited and stirred up the poor people? When you said that they were God's people and that God would fight for them, that one person would slay a hundred, aye, even that they could strike five dead with nothing but a felt hat, and that the bullets would turn back in flight and slay the enemy? Where now is Müntzer's sleeve, in which he promised to catch all the bullets which were fired against his people? Where now is the God who, for almost a whole year now, made such promises through the mouth of Müntzer?

Whoever now neither repents or learns from this clear judgment of God, who has shown his anger to the whole world because of how these rebellious spirits stood against God and simply told self-seeking lies, that person will always be wanton and be knowingly led astray and be damned. How should sermons and admonishment help, if physical acts and experience have not helped so far?

¹⁴ Placing his own name here, Luther now begins his commentary on the preceding letters.

I write all of this and will have it printed not because I am joyful at the misfortunes of others, for what good would that do me? For I do not know what God has also decided about me. I only really want to warn all other rebels that they should avoid suffering from the same judgement and anger of God, and should turn away from the harmful false prophets and give themselves up to peace and obedience. As God ordains and wants. For however sad it is to me that the poor people have been so pitifully misled, and have lost both body and soul, all the same I must rejoice that God has passed judgement and has so arranged matters that we now know and can recognise how the rebellious spirits taught errors and falsehoods, and that their preaching was against God and was condemned by Him. That all tells is that we should henceforward avoid these things and better preserve our bodies and souls in the true word of God.

To conclude, I ask all pious Christians who really want to help, that they should beseech God for His divine mercy to protect us against the Devil and turn His anger away from us. For the peasants have become so deeply and utterly stubborn and mad that they neither see nor hear, and no preaching or writing will help them. God alone can help them, for there will be no end to the sorrow just through our own actions and advice. There is no more time for preaching or pleading, for the wrath has been poured out. Only with prayer can we protect ourselves, like Aaron who defended against fire with his censer.¹⁵ I beg the lords and the nobility for two things: firstly, when they have won and taken control, then they should not think too much of themselves, but should fear God, by whom they too are liable to be punished. For if God gives them victory, He does not do because they are so just and pious, but it is as Moses when he spoke to the children of Israel about the godless, so that God punishes the peasants for their disobedience and their blasphemy and all their misdeeds. And secondly, that they should be merciful to their prisoners and those who give themselves up, just as God is merciful to everyone who surrenders and humbles themselves before Him. Do this, so that the weather does not change again, and God then hands victory to the peasants. May God bring us soon to a holy peace. Amen.

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¹⁵ See Leviticus, chapters 9 and 10