

# Martin Luther's Life



## Parents:

Hans Luder

Margarethe nee Lindemann

Born **10 November 1483** in Eisleben

Baptized **11 November 1483** in Eisleben

At birth, Martin Luther's name was Martin **Luder**. He later changed it to the more academically respectable **Luther**.

1484 The family moved to Mansfeld.

Luther probably had as many as eight siblings, yet only one of Luther's brothers (Jacob) and only three of his sisters survived to adulthood.

1488 – 1497 He attended Latin school in Mansfeld. He called it a "Trivialschule" because he did not appreciate time spent on things that he did not appreciate.

As a schoolboy, Luther preferred music to any other subject, and he became proficient at playing the lute.

Christopher Columbus set sail (1492) when Luther was in grammar school.

1497 – 1498 He attended the "Domschule" (the Cathedral School) which was run by the "Nullbrueder" (the Brethren of the Common Life), in Magdeburg. They made use of the Bible in their instruction and taught Luther how to pray.

1498-1501 He attended St. George school in Eisenach. This school helped to prepare Luther for entrance into the university. He stayed in the home of the Cotta family and served as a tutor in the home of a wealthy family.

17 May 1501 Martinus Ludher de Mansfeld  
entered University at Erfurt

Luther once said he had not even seen a Bible until he was 20 years old.

September 1502 took exams for BA

Luther almost died at age 19. On his way home from school, a small sword ( more likely a dagger which he was allowed to wear as a graduate) pierced his leg, cutting an artery. Only because he was with a friend, who fetched a doctor, was his life saved. Lying at the edge of the road till the doctor came, he cried to the mother of Jesus, "O, Mary, help!" His Wittenberg friends later criticized him for appealing to Mary instead of Jesus.



January 1505 took exams for MA

He earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees in the shortest time possible.

May 1505 began law studies because his father wanted him to become a lawyer.

2 July 1505 While walking back to law school in 1505, Luther encountered a frightening thunderstorm. During the storm he cried out in fear, "Help me, St. Anna! I will become a monk." He kept his vow.

17 July 1505 entered Order of Observants of the Augustinian Friars at Erfurt

He gave away his lute when he entered the monastic cloister at age 21.

3 April 1507 Luther was ordained as a priest.

2 May 1507 He said first mass. This celebration was delayed so his father and other invited guests could attend. His father was still not happy with his son's decision, but he did give a gift to the monastery in Luther's honor.

When Luther celebrated his first Mass, he trembled so much he nearly dropped the bread and cup. He became so terrified of the presence of Christ in the sacrament that he tried to run from the altar.

November 1510 – March 1511 Trip to Rome

April 1511 – Luther was transferred to the Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg

18 October 1512 – He received his Doctor of the Holy Scriptures degree and was appointed *lectura in Biblia* at Wittenberg. He would spend the rest of his life as a professor at this university.

Michelangelo was completing his Sistine Chapel ceiling as Luther began teaching theology.

Early on as a reformer, Luther publicly concluded that penance (the church sacrament involving confession of sin) wasn't a sacrament at all. Yet he continued to daily confess his sins to another person for most of his life.

1514 He began to preach in Town Church as a substitute for the pastor who was suffering from a throat ailment. He continued to preach there regularly for the rest of his life. In some years, he preached 160 times.

Luther publicly criticized the abuse of indulgences more than three years before he published his 95 Theses on the topic.

**31 October 1517** – posted *95 Theses*



Luther once supervised 10 monasteries. As a district vicar, he held administrative authority for 10 Augustinian monasteries in Thuringia and Saxony.

26 April 1518 – **Heidelberg Disputation**. At this triennial gathering of German Augustinians Luther was allowed to explain his teachings.

August 1518 – published *Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses*

27 June – 16 July 1519 –The **Leipzig Debate** was a theological debate that took place in the courtroom of the Pleißenburg Castle in Leipzig . The debate was between Martin Luther and Johann Eck, and was a key event in the Lutheran Reformation. The debate was initiated by Eck, who published a set of theses in 1518. The debate covered topics such as the sale of indulgences, papal authority, and the existence of purgatory. Luther argued that Christ is the true head of the church on earth, and that the Lord governs his church through his word. Eck argued that the welfare of the church depended on the dignity of the pope. The debate was a significant part of Luther's reformational turn from the papacy to Christ. The debate helped shape Luther's theological development and the course of the Reformation.

24 June 1520 Pope Leo X issued the papal bull *Exsurge Domine*, which censored Luther's views and threatened him with excommunication.

18 August 1520 *To the Christian Nobility* published. Luther directly appealed to the German nobility to reform the Catholic Church, criticizing the Pope's authority and advocating for a more accessible form of Christianity based on the Bible alone.

6 October 1520 *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* published. Luther accused the Roman church and the papacy of holding the church in captivity. As Babylon held Israel captive, now the papacy was holding Christians in bondage by Rome's theology and use of the sacramental system. Rome's sacramental system had (and still has) seven sacraments. Luther considers each one in turn. Luther concluded that only the Lord's Supper and Baptism were truly sacraments according to Scripture's definition of a sacrament.

11 November 1520 *The Freedom of the Christian* published. Luther developed the concept that as fully forgiven children of God, Christians are no longer compelled to keep God's law to obtain salvation. However, they freely and willingly serve God and their neighbors. Luther also further developed the concept of justification by faith. In the treatise, Luther stated, "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone."

10 December 1520 Luther burned the papal bull outside the walls of Wittenberg.

In 1520 and 1521, Luther was all the rage in Germany. Posters of Luther (single sheet woodcuts) sold out as soon as they went on sale, and many were pinned up in public places.

3 January 1521 *Decet pontificem romanum*. This papal bull excommunicated Luther.



17 – 18 April 1521 Before Charles V at Worms. Luther made his stand on Scripture alone.

Luther raised so much hostility that it was rumored—and taken seriously for a time by some respected intellectuals of the day—that he was the product of a bathhouse liaison between his mother and the Devil. At the Diet of Worms, he was condemned as a “demon in the appearance of a man.”

4 May 1521 – 2 March 1522 At the Wartburg

The Edict of Worms declared Luther an outlaw without any legal protection. As a result, he could have been killed on sight. To protect his life, plans were carried out to put him under protective custody at one of Elector Frederick’s castles. After 1521, Luther spent the rest of his life as an outlaw. As long as he was in territories which had joined the Reformation, he was safe.

December 1521 – March 1522 translates the New Testament.

Luther translated Erasmus’s Greek New Testament into German at the headlong rate of more than 1,500 words per **day**.

**21 September 1522** – “September Testament” published, Luther’s New Testament translation.

**13 June 1525** married Katherine von Bora

When Martin Luther married, neither he nor his bride, Katherine von Bora, felt “in love.” Katherine was still getting over a broken engagement to a man she truly loved. And Martin admitted, “I am not ‘in love’ or burning with desire.” Yet their love for each other blossomed throughout their 20-year marriage.

Luther was so generous he was sometimes taken advantage of. In 1541, a transient woman, allegedly a runaway nun, came to their home. Martin and Katherine fed and housed her, only to discover she had lied and stolen. Yet Luther believed no one would become poor by practicing charity. “God divided the hand into fingers so that money would slip through,” he said.

Even on his wedding night, Luther couldn’t refuse a person in need. At 11 p.m., after all the guests had left, radical reformer Andreas Karlstadt knocked at the door. Largely because Luther fiercely opposed him, Karlstadt had fled town. But now, when Karlstadt was fleeing the Peasants’ War and needed shelter, Luther took him in.

Luther made singing a central part of his worship service. In his German Mass of 1526, he dispensed with the choir and assigned all singing to the congregation. He would often call congregational rehearsals during the week so the people could learn new hymns.

In 1527, a terrible plague struck Wittenberg, and virtually all of Luther’s students fled for their lives. The Elector begged Luther to leave town also, but Luther felt pastors should stay and help the afflicted. Because he and Katherine took in so many sick and dying people, their house had to be quarantined even after the plague ended.

23 April 1529 *Large Catechism* published. Covering in greater depth the same doctrines and subjects as the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism was really a series of edited sermons of



Martin Luther. It was intended primarily as a tool that could be used by pastors and teachers to broaden their knowledge of the teachings of the Bible.

Luther's passion to put the catechisms in writing was ignited by a visit he made to Saxon churches at the urging of its Elector. Luther was horrified to see how bad things were in the Saxon churches. He realized how essential it was for him to get to work on his catechisms.

16 May 1529 *Small Catechism* published. It was written by Luther for the training of children. The father, as head of the house, was to teach his children these truths. Luther carried this out in his own family and he quizzed his family on the Catechism regularly.

1 – 4 October 1529 The **Marburg Colloquy** was an attempt to unite the reforms of Luther and Ulrich Zwingli. Zwingli's refusal to accept Christ's body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine caused Luther to reject the idea of fellowship between the two movements.

Martin Luther has been called "one of the greatest preachers of all time," yet he became deeply discouraged with his congregation. Despite his admonitions and instruction, Luther felt, his people remained godless. "It annoys me to keep preaching to you," he said, and in 1530, he actually went on strike and refused to preach for a time.

Luther and his fellow reformers in Wittenberg took religious education seriously. Here, for example, are worship services and sermon texts during one week:

Sunday, 5 a.m.—Pauline Epistles

Sunday, 9 a.m.—The Gospels

Sunday afternoon—The Catechism

Monday and Tuesday—The Catechism

Wednesday—The Gospel of Matthew

Thursday and Friday—The Epistles

Saturday—The Gospel of John

Though the preaching load was shared, Luther often spoke at all Sunday services.

Luther enjoyed beer and wine as God's good gifts. He had a mug with three rings. The first, he said, represented the Ten Commandments, the second the Apostles' Creed, and the third the Lord's Prayer. Luther was amused he could drain the mug of wine through the Lord's Prayer though a friend could not get beyond the Ten Commandments. But Luther is never recorded to have gotten drunk.

Luther was convinced he lived in the last days. In the foreword to his translation of Daniel, he identified the Antichrist of Daniel 11 as the papacy; the "small horn" of Daniel 7 was the invading Turks.

**September 1534** entire Bible published

Luther's German translation of the Bible had more influence upon the German language than the King James Version had on English. Though almost 460 years old, Luther's translation is still sold and read widely.



December 1536 Luther finished *Smalcald Articles*. At the time he did not think he would live much longer. He viewed this document as his Last Will and Testament.

Luther knew most of the New Testament and large sections of the Old Testament by memory.

Nearly everyone noticed Luther's remarkable eyes. One of his students described Martin Luther's "deep black eyes and brows, sparkling and burning like stars, so that one could hardly bear looking at them." One of Luther's enemies said his eyes were "unusually penetrating and unbelievably sparkling, as one finds them now and then in those that are possessed."

**18 February 1546** Luther died at Eisleben, the town of his birth.

By the end of his life, Martin Luther had written 60,000 pages. Yet he said he would be glad for all his works to perish except "On the Bondage of the Will," which emphasizes people's inability to save themselves, and his "Small Catechism," which explains the faith to children and "the Holy Scriptures alone be read."