

Foundations of Biblical History  
Rev. David Seeley  
Lesson 9  
Martin Luther-Father of Protestant Reformation

Words to know:

**Excommunicate:** to expel from the fellowship and communion of a church.

**Indulgences:** canceling or reducing punishment for sin, granted by the Pope or church, supposed to save the sinner from purgatory. Indulgences were sold for money by the Catholic Church.

**Martyr:** One who suffers death for the cause of his faith.

**Protestant:** Refers to those who “protested” against the Roman Catholic Church during the reformations. Protestant churches today are non-Catholic churches that trace their history back to the Reformation Age when churches all across Europe left the Catholic church.

**Purgatory:** Among Catholics, a supposed place after death, in which the souls of persons are purified from impurities of sin before they can enter heaven.

**Recant:** to retract, or take back a statement, to change ones beliefs

**Relics:** In Catholicism, items supposedly owned or used by saints from ancient times. These were held in collections by the church and were supposed to contain special power available to those who would pay money to the church to view them.

**VERSE to memorize for the test:** Romans 1:17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

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Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483, in a little town of Eisleben, Germany. His father had migrated to Eisleben and became wealthy from his investments in copper mines.

Luther was raised by very strict parents. They would punish him severely for even a small wrongdoing. As an adult, these memories would sometime haunt him as he was trying to seek salvation.

From 1498 to 1501, Luther was sent to school in Eisenach. Here he received a good education in Latin, which helped him later when he went on to a university.

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Luther's father wanted him to become a lawyer, but in 1505, Luther was severely frightened by a strong thunderstorm as he was traveling down the road. He promised that if he was spared, he would become a monk.

He entered a monastery (boarding school for monks) at Erfurt.

During the winter of 1510 and 1511, he was sent on business to Rome. He was excited to go to Rome. Luther had a deep fear in his heart that God's judgement would fall on him because of his sin. He hoped that in Rome he would be able to find peace with God.

In Rome, he found church leaders selling "**indulgences**" for forgiveness of sin. The churches of Rome had collections of ancient **relics** that were declared to be able to reduce time spent in **purgatory** for anyone who would view these **relics**.

The greatest storehouse of **relics** was in Rome. In the storehouse were the bones of forty Popes and 76,000 **martyrs**. They claimed to have a coin paid to Judas for betraying Christ.

In **Wittenberg**, Germany, was another collection of **relics** that claimed to have a genuine thorn from the Christ's crown of thorns, a tooth of St. Jerome, a piece of the cloth baby Jesus was wrapped in, a piece of straw from Jesus' manger, a piece of gold from the wise men, a strand from Jesus beard, a twig from Moses' burning bush, and many other items.

Luther arrived in Rome with a tormented heart, trying to find a way to please God and find forgiveness of sin. He was shocked to see how careless the priests of Rome were.

They would pray with people, then hurry them on. Luther was instructed to climb Pilates stairs to find relief. He climbed them on his hands and knees, kissing each step, in hopes of delivering his soul from **purgatory**.

Luther returned to Germany, disappointed and still tormented by fear of **God's judgment**. He tried everything the Catholic church told him to do. He tried good works, praying to saints, viewing **relic**, buying **indulgences**, but nothing would soothe his burning conscience. He would confess his sins to a priest for hours at a time, worrying that he may miss a sin and forget to confess it.

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Luther tried everything the Catholic church had to offer but could not find peace in his heart and forgiveness of sin. He discovered he could never do enough good works to save himself.

Upon his return to Germany he relocated from Erfurt and moved to **Wittenberg**. Wittenberg was a small village that was home to a newly founded university. Luther was invited by Frederick the Wise to teach in the university at Wittenberg.

There he continued to search for peace in his heart. Growing up in the Catholic church he had spent his life hearing about an angry God who sits on the throne of judgement casting people into the flames of hell. He was taught that the only way of escaping God's wrath was through **obedience to the church**, good works, confession to a priest, buying **indulgences**, viewing **relics**, and so on. He could not understand how he could love an angry God.

While teaching in the university of **Wittenberg**, Luther began lecturing on the Psalms.

"The reference to Christ was unmistakable when he came to the twenty-second psalm, the first verse of which was recited by Christ as he expired upon the cross. 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' What could be the meaning of this? Christ evidently felt himself to be forsaken abandoned by God, deserted...the utter desolation which Luther said he could not endure...had been experienced by Christ himself as he died...

...Why should Christ have known such desperation? Luther knew perfectly well why he himself had [felt desperation]. He was weak...and impure... Christ was not weak; Christ was not impure....Why then should he have been so overwhelmed with desolation? The only answer must be that Christ took to himself the iniquity of us all." ---*Here I Stand*, Roland H. Bainton, Abingdon Press, 1950, pg. 47.

Luther realized that the All Terrible God of Judgement is also the All Merciful. **Wrath and love** join together on the cross.

In Luther's lectures, he also studied and taught from Romans and Galatians where he discovered these words, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, **The just shall live by faith.**"- Romans 1:17.

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In Luther's own words, "the justice of God had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love."

The Cross had resolved the conflict between the wrath and mercy of God.

Through studying the Word of God, Luther's eyes were opened to the fact that the God who judges us also suffered through the judgement with us. Wrath and love joined together on the Cross.

Luther realized that the **indulgences**, confessions, good deeds, and all the other things demanded by the church could do nothing for his Salvation. He saw for the first time in his life that Salvation is through **faith alone** in the work that Jesus Christ did on the cross.

With his new found experience and understanding of Salvation, Luther soon began to preach and teach against **indulgences**, abusive priests, and the Pope claiming to be able to rescue souls from **purgatory**.

On October 31, 1517, Luther nailed a list of Ninety-Five Thesis to the door of the **Wittenberg** Castle Church. This list contained ninety-five criticism against the abuses of the Catholic Church, especially the practice of selling **indulgences**.

This event was the beginning of the **Protestant Reformation**. The Catholic church did everything they could do to silence Luther. Although his Ninety-Five Thesis were written in Latin, they were translated into German, and because of the recent invention of the printing press, they were published throughout Germany.

He began to have many supporters including a faculty member at Wittenberg University by the name of Melanchthon.

By 1518, Luther was insisting that his only authority in this debate would not be the church, nor the Pope, but the Bible.

He denied the **Pope** as final authority. He denied the power of ceremonies performed without faith in Christ.

The church claimed that only the Pope could interpret the Scripture. Luther published pamphlets against this teaching and spread them through Germany.

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In 1520, the church **excommunicated** Luther and burned his books.

In 1521, the new Emperor, Charles V, summoned Luther to the city of Worms, to stand before him and answer for his views.

At Worms, Luther was questioned and asked to **recant** from his views. Luther declared that he would only change his views if he could be convinced by Scripture that he was wrong.

On the way home to **Wittenberg**, Luther was kidnapped by his friends, and taken into hiding at Wartburg Castle.

From May, 1521 to March, 1522, Luther remained in hiding in Wartburg Castle. During this time Luther made use of the Greek Textus Receptus, recently published by Erasmus. In less than a year, he translated the entire New Testament from the Textus Receptus into German. By 1534, Luther published an entire Bible in the German Language.

Luther's Bible helped set the standard for the German Language. Germany had many dialects at this time. From village to village people often did not understand one another. Luther's German Bible united the dialects of Germany into one common language, making it possible for the common people to read God's Word for themselves.

Martin Luther's influence was powerful in his day, and in later times as well.

"The national Lutheran churches of Germany and the Scandinavian countries were a result of his work." –*Christianity Through the Centuries*, Earle E. Cairns

His German Bible helped standardize the German language. He wrote many songs to be sung in public worship services. His most well-known song is "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."

He influenced Melancthon to setup an elementary education system where people throughout Germany could be taught to read the Bible.

Luther restored preaching to its rightful place in the church and awakened Germany to the truth that Salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

"In the place of an authoritative church he put an authoritative Bible as the infallible rule of faith and practice that each believer...should use for

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guidance in matters of faith and morals." --*Christianity Through the Centuries*, Earle E. Cairns

God promised to preserve His Word to every generation. Down through history He has raised up men and women to help fulfill that promise.