

Background to Martin Luther.

1. In the year 311 AD Christianity had become the dominant faith of the Roman Empire. (The Edict of Toleration)
2. In the year 410 AD the Roman Empire fell to the tribes to their north.
3. From 410 to 800 Europe and the Mediterranean world was in chaos.
4. Local princes and kings fought continuously, many died as the result of these wars and the plagues that they caused due to the rotting bodies of men and animals from the wars.
5. The stability of the Roman Empire was necessary to keep the small kings and rulers from warring with each other.
6. Mohammed invented the Moslem (Islam) religion. He wrote the Koran from December 609 AD when Muhammad was 40, and concluding in 632 AD, the year of his death.
7. There had been five patriarchal (Papa) Bishops in the Roman Empire. They were from the cities of Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Rome. By about 700 AD Islam had destroyed or dominated 4 or these 5 church centers leaving only the Bishop of Rome. Without the counterbalance of the other 4 Papa Bishops the Bishop of Rome became the sole authority in Christianity, the Pope.
8. On December 25, 800 AD. a king from the area of what is now France and Germany followed his father by conquering many other princes. His name was Charles The Great, Charlemagne in French. He made a deal with the Bishop of Rome in which they would always support each other. Together they formed "The Holy Roman Empire."
9. After Charlemagne the Holy Roman Emperor was elected by the other kings and princes. All princes wore a 'chain of office' around his neck. Before long a few especially powerful princes were named hereditary 'Electors' of the Empire. They wore their chain of office and an ermine cape. This cape was of white fur with black specs in it.
10. By Martin Luther's time the Roman Catholic Church had become very corrupt. The biggest errors of the Roman Catholic Church were Indulgences, Relics, and only a Latin Bible. The Pope and his bishops had invented a place called "Purgatory." This was the place that souls went after the body died. It was neither heaven nor hell. It was a waiting room for heaven. People could buy an indulgence for any departed relative and get so many years off their 'sentence' in purgatory. But no one knew how long an individual's sentence was.
11. The sale of indulgences was how the Roman Catholic Church financed the building of elaborate cathedrals. A cathedral was the home church of the area bishops. Relics were supposed fragments of the bodies of saints, a finger bone, a skull, or even a piece of the cross that Christ died on, or nails from the cross. They were collected as holy objects. And worst of all, no one had a Bible that was written in his own language.
12. In 1517 Luther started coming against these things. His words were spread far and wide because the printing press had been invented in 1450.
13. Martin Luther's home prince was King Frederick of Saxony, a German state. He was an elector. His nephew was elected Holy Roman Emperor. Frederick narrowly missed being elected. Luther influenced King Frederick to give up his relics, to not believe in indulgences and to sponsor Luther's translation of the Bible in German. Before long other translations including English translations of the Bible followed. Many princes became Protestants (followers of Luther.) Even the Emperor was afraid to go against the princes and especially the Electors. Luther taught salvation by faith alone from the book of Romans.
14. As a result of these great changes in religion politics also fell apart. This caused the peasants rebellion and many were killed. Luther deeply regretted this suffering on the part of the people.