



Luther & the Reformation



The Lutheran Reformation was a series of events that led to not only the formation of the Lutheran and other Protestant churches, but consequently to the salvation of many souls.

Your job is to take one event from the Reformation and present it to the class, either as a skit, “radio interview”, etc. to tell them what happened.

The 95 Theses: October 31, 1517

Martin Luther (not to be confused with Martin Luther King, Jr., a racial reformer in the 1960's), born in 1483 (He was 13 when Columbus sailed to America.), was the son of a German miner. While attending Law School, he decided in 1505 to leave and become a monk. He hoped that, by doing good works and dedicating his life to the work of the church, he could find peace for his troubled soul, as he knew he had sinned much.

While doing his work as a monk and priest, he learned of a priest named “Tetzel” who was selling “indulgences.” Indulgences were certificates that, supposedly, allowed a person to buy his way directly into heaven, instead of having to stop in “purgatory” (a mythical place where people suffer for the sins Jesus didn't die for) for thousands of years on the way to heaven. The money was being used by Pope Leo X to build the St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, including paying artists like Michaelangelo and Raphael.

Luther was horrified that anyone could suggest buying their way into heaven, much less saying that Jesus didn't die for all of our sins, so he wrote up 95 statements, or “Theses,” mainly on the topic of indulgences, to discuss with fellow professors and clergy.

While the 95 Theses were written in Latin, the language known only by scholars, someone translated them into German and began distributing copies, until soon the whole country was reading them. Since the Theses challenged the authority of the Pope, Luther was about to get into lot of trouble. The last guy to challenge the Pope was Jan Hus, and he was burned at the stake for it.



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The Diet of Worms: 1521

Between 1517 and 1520, Martin Luther became more bold and more vocal about sticking to the teachings of Scripture instead of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. He insisted that if the Pope says something that contradicts God’s Word, that we must follow God’s Word instead.

He participated in a series of debates to explain this teaching, and he not only had a great following among the people, but his prince was convinced by him and offered to help him as well.

On June 15, 1520, Luther received a Papal Bull (a letter from the Pope) telling him he had 60 days to take back his teachings, or he’d be excommunicated (kicked out of the church). Luther burned the Papal Bull and kept on writing.

In January 1521, the Roman church had a Diet (Pronounced “Deé-ut”) at Worms (Pronounced “Vorms”). This was a long series of meetings in the city of Worms, Germany, to discuss Luther’s teachings. He was invited to appear there in March, and when he appeared there in April, ready to discuss his teachings, he found, instead of a debate, a courtroom. Presented with all the various articles he’d written, he was told to recant (take back) everything he’d taught. His response was simply, “Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning—and my conscience is captive to the Word of God—then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen.” Luther remained for 3 more days of negotiations, but after that, he left with a warning from the emperor that he’d be protected for 21 days as long as he did no more preaching or writing, after which time, he’d be an outlaw.



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“Knight George”: 1521

Having left Worms on April 26, 1521, Luther, against the orders of the Emperor, preached in 3 more places. While traveling, he was kidnapped by 4 or 5 armed horsemen, but it turned out that these kidnappers were taking him to safety in hiding. They took him to Wartburg, the castle of Prince Frederick. He was put in a tower with a retractable staircase, and he grew his hair and beard out so he wouldn't be recognized. They took his monk's robe and gave him a knight's clothes, calling him “Knight George.”

While there (for 10 months), he wrote a dozen books and translated the entire New Testament from its original Greek into German. Up to this point, the Bible was only available in Latin, and since most people didn't know Latin, they couldn't read the Bible and had to believe everything the priests told them.

At this time, Luther also renounced his monastic vows (promise to be a monk), since those vows had no place in Scripture.



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The Augsburg Confession: June 25, 1530

For the rest of his life, Luther remained an outlaw, and anyone who saw him could murder him without facing any penalty, so he had to remain out of the public eye. He continued to write, including translating the rest of the Bible into German, preach, and teach, but his dealings with the Roman church had to be done through his friends.

Soon, his supporters were also turning against the Roman Church within their own congregations. On Christmas Day, 1521, Rev. Carlstadt had a Communion service without wearing the traditional robes, conducted the service in German instead of Latin (so people could actually understand what was going on!), and gave *both* bread & wine to the worshippers. None of these things had been done before, and within a month, priests started getting married. On June 13, 1525, Luther himself married an ex-nun, Katharina Von Bora, or “Katie,” as Luther called her.

In 1529, Luther began writing the Small and Large Catechisms, which he called his “daggers”: something you could always have handy when going into spiritual battle.

Finally, in 1530, another Diet was called, this time in Augsburg. Luther’s closest friend, Phillip Melancthon, wrote *The Augsburg Confession*, which consists of a series of points where the Lutherans disagreed with the Roman Church. The point was not to “declare independence” and form a new church, but to point out the problems in the Roman Church and fix them. On June 25, 1530, the *Confession* was submitted to the Emperor, complete with the signatures of many princes and other officials who supported them. The *Confession* begins with areas of agreement, how the two were alike, and then continued with a discussion of the differences, the Lutheran position backed by Scripture. They were pointing out that this was not a new teaching, but that the Lutherans were teaching what the Christian church has taught from the beginning, and that the Roman Church was presenting new teachings.

The Roman Church rejected the *Augsburg Confession*, and Melancthon wrote a follow-up article called *The Apology to the Augsburg Confession*. “Apology” in this sense was not, “I’m sorry,” but, “This is what we believe,” where he went into more detail about their teachings and offered further support.

The *Augsburg Confession* is still one of the most respected writings in the Lutheran Church, besides the Bible, and it and the *Apology* and the Catechisms are among the documents that define what a Lutheran is. If you reject these writings, you can’t truly call yourself Lutheran.



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The Formula of Concord: 1577

Throughout the next half-century, the Lutheran Church, now an independent organization from the Roman Catholic Church, continued to grow. With support from the princes, they were protected from being imprisoned or killed for their faith to some degree, and until his death in 1546, Luther continued to preach, write, and teach.

Luther wrote the *Smalcald Articles* in 1537 to clarify several points of doctrine (teachings) against the Roman Church, and he continued to debate, but now more with other Protestant groups who had also left the Roman Church, but differed from Luther in their teachings, including Calvin, the founder of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, and Zwingli, the founder of the Baptist Church.

But as the Lutheran Church grew, controversy arose over various teachings, and the Church began to split. A misunderstanding of some of Phillip Melancthon’s writings split the Church into two groups: the “Gnesio-Lutherans” and the “Crypto-Phillipists,” who had been influenced by Calvinism.

So in 1574, Jakob Andreä wrote a document that was revised by Martin Chemnitz and other pastors and theologians, and then it was distributed to various churches around the area for discussion. This document, called the *Formula of Concord* (Outline of Agreement), was completed in 1577 and settled the various disagreements and reunited the Lutheran Church.

Then in 1580, the *Formula of Concord*, along with the *Augsburg Confession*, *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*, *Smalcald Articles*, *Treatise on the Power & Primacy of the Pope*, Luther’s two Catechisms, and the three catholic (universal Christian) creeds (Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian), were assembled into the *Book of Concord*, a collection of teachings that explain the beliefs of the Lutheran Church. To this day, every Lutheran pastor promises to uphold these teachings because they agree fully with the Word of God.

Here we stand. We can do no other. God help us! Amen.