

3

# Luther Starts the Reformation

## TERMS & NAMES

- indulgence
- Reformation
- Lutheran
- Protestant
- Peace of Augsburg
- annul
- Anglican

### MAIN IDEA

Martin Luther's protest over abuses in the Catholic Church led to the founding of Protestant churches.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Nearly one-fourth of the Christians in today's world are Protestants.

**SETTING THE STAGE** By the tenth century, the church in Rome had come to dominate religious life in northern and western Europe. However, the Roman Catholic Church had not won universal approval. Over the centuries, rulers, scholars, and members of the clergy criticized church practices. Even though church leaders made several important reforms during the Middle Ages, the problems lingered.

## Causes of the Reformation

By 1500, additional forces weakened the Church. The Renaissance emphasis on the secular and the individual challenged Church authority. The printing press spread these secular ideas. In addition, rulers resented the popes' attempts to control them. In Germany—divided into many competing states—it was difficult for the pope or the emperor to impose central authority. Finally, northern merchants resented paying church taxes to Rome. Spurred by political and social forces, a new movement for religious reform began in Germany. It then swept much of Europe.

**Problems in the Catholic Church** Critics of the Church claimed that its leaders were corrupt. The popes who ruled during the Renaissance patronized the arts, spent extravagantly on personal pleasure, and fought wars. Pope Pius II admitted, "If the truth be confessed, the luxury and pomp of our courts is too great." Another pope, Alexander VI, publicly admitted that he had several children. These popes were too busy pursuing worldly affairs to have much time for spiritual duties.

The lower clergy had problems as well. Many priests and monks were so poorly educated that they could scarcely read, let alone teach people. Others broke their priestly vows by marrying, or by gambling or drinking to excess.

**Early Calls for Reform** Influenced by reformers, people had come to expect higher standards of conduct from priests and church leaders. In the late 1300s and early 1400s, John Wycliffe of England and Jan Hus of Bohemia had advocated church reform. They denied that the pope had the right to worldly power. They also taught that the Bible had more authority than Church leaders. In the 1500s, Christian humanists like Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More added their voices to the chorus of criticism.

In the 1490s, an Italian friar named Girolamo Savonarola (jih-RAHL-uh-MOH SAV-uh-nuh-ROH-luh) came to Florence. He preached fiery sermons calling for reform. In 1497, the people of Florence responded to Savonarola by burning their worldly possessions, such as gambling equipment, in a giant bonfire. Only a year later, the Florentines turned against Savonarola, and he was executed for heresy.

As this portrait shows, the friar Girolamo Savonarola was a serious-minded man. Disapproving of the worldly values of his time, he urged the people of Florence to give up their luxuries.



### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

#### A. Analyzing

**Causes** How did political, social, and economic forces weaken the Church?



## Luther Challenges the Church

Although some reformers died for their beliefs, their calls for change lived on. In addition, many Europeans were reading religious works for themselves and forming their own opinions about the Church. The atmosphere in Europe was ripe for reform by the early 1500s.

**Martin Luther** The son of a miner, Martin Luther became a monk in 1505. From 1512 until his death he taught scripture at the University of Wittenberg in the German state of Saxony. All he wanted was to be a good Christian, not to lead a religious revolution.

In 1517 Luther decided to take a public stand against the actions of a friar named Johann Tetzel. Tetzel was raising money to rebuild St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome. He did this by selling indulgences. An **indulgence** was a pardon. It released a sinner from performing the penalty—such as saying certain prayers—that a priest imposed for sins. Indulgences were not supposed to affect God's right to judge. Unfortunately, Tetzel gave people the impression that by buying indulgences, they could buy their way into heaven.

**The 95 Theses** Luther was troubled by Tetzel's tactics. He wrote 95 Theses, or formal statements, attacking the "pardon-merchants." On October 31, 1517, he posted his theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg and invited other scholars to debate him. Someone copied Luther's words and took them to a printer. Quickly, Luther's name became known all over Germany. His actions began the **Reformation**, a movement for religious reform. It led to the founding of Christian churches that did not accept the pope's authority.

Soon Luther went far beyond criticizing indulgences. He wanted a full reform of the Church. His teachings rested on three main ideas:

- People could win salvation only by faith in God's gift of forgiveness. The Church taught that faith and "good works" were needed for salvation.
- All Church teachings should be clearly based on the words of the Bible. The pope and church traditions were false authorities.
- All people with faith were equal. Therefore, people did not need priests to interpret the Bible for them.

## The Response to Luther

Luther himself was astonished at how rapidly his ideas spread and attracted followers. Many rulers and merchants had been unhappy with the Church for political and economic reasons. They saw Luther's protests as an excuse to throw off Church control.

**The Pope's Threat** Initially, the Church officials in Rome viewed Luther simply as a rebellious monk who needed to be punished by his superiors. However, as Luther's ideas became increasingly radical, the pope realized that the monk was a serious threat. In one angry reply to Church criticism, Luther actually suggested that Christians drive the pope from the Church by force.

In 1520, Pope Leo X issued a decree threatening Luther with excommunication unless he took back his statements. Luther did not take back a word. Instead, his students at Wittenberg gathered around a bonfire and cheered as he threw the pope's decree into the flames. Leo excommunicated Luther.

**The Emperor's Opposition** A devout Catholic, the Holy Roman emperor also opposed Luther's teaching. Although only 20 years old, Emperor Charles V controlled

### HISTORY MAKERS



**Martin Luther**  
1483–1546

Martin Luther was sometimes unhappy as a child. Like many parents of that time, his father and mother were very strict. Luther later told stories of their beating him.

In one way, fear led Luther to become a monk. His father wanted him to go to law school, but at the age of 21, Luther was caught in a terrible thunderstorm. Lightning struck close to him. Convinced he would die, he cried out, "Saint Anne, help me! I will become a monk."

Even as a monk, Luther felt sinful, lost, and rejected by God. He confessed his sins regularly, fasted, and did penance. However, by studying the Bible, Luther came to the conclusion that faith alone was the key to salvation. Only then did he experience peace.

#### Background

The door of the church served as a type of bulletin board for the University of Wittenberg. If scholars wanted to debate a subject, they would post their opinions on the door.

#### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

##### B. Synthesizing

Review the list of Luther's teachings above. Which of these points help you to understand why he felt it was all right to defy the pope?



a vast empire, including Germany. He summoned Luther to the town of Worms in 1521 to stand trial. German princes and bishops crowded into the hall to witness the testimony. Told to recant, or take back his statements, Luther refused.

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen.

LUTHER, quoted in *The Protestant Reformation* by Lewis W. Spitz

A month after Luther made that speech, Charles issued an imperial order, the Edict of Worms. It declared Luther an outlaw and a heretic. According to this edict, no one in the empire was to give Luther food or shelter. All his books were to be burned. However, the ruler of the state where Luther lived disobeyed the emperor. For almost a year after the trial, Prince Frederick the Wise of Saxony sheltered Luther in one of his castles. While there, Luther translated the New Testament into German.

Luther returned to Wittenberg in 1522. There he discovered that many of his ideas were already being put into practice. Priests dressed in ordinary clothes and called themselves ministers. They led services in German instead of in Latin. Some ministers had married, because Luther taught that the clergy should be free to wed. Instead of continuing to seek reforms in the Catholic Church, Luther and his followers had become a separate religious group, called **Lutherans**.

**The Peasants' Revolt** Some people began to apply Luther's revolutionary ideas to society. In 1524, German peasants, excited by reformers' talk of Christian freedom,

demanded an end to serfdom. Bands of angry peasants went about the countryside raiding monasteries, pillaging, and burning.

The revolt horrified Luther. He wrote a pamphlet urging the German princes to show the peasants no mercy. With brutal thoroughness, the princes' armies crushed the revolt. They massacred as many as 100,000 people. Feeling betrayed by Luther, many peasants rejected his religious leadership. However, through writings and lectures, Luther remained influential until the end of his life.



### SPOTLIGHT ON

#### Witch Hunts

Soon after the Reformation began, the number of people executed for being witches rose dramatically. From 1561 to 1670 in Germany, 3,229 people accused of witchcraft were burned at the stake, as the engraving above shows. Between 1559 and 1736 in England, almost 1,000 witches were put to death. Eighty percent of the people accused of witchcraft were women.

Some historians think that people felt so frightened by the ongoing religious conflicts they blamed them on witches. Other historians believe that religious reformers stirred up negative feelings about women that had long been part of Western culture. All agree that those executed for witchcraft were innocent victims.

**Germany at War** In contrast to the bitter peasants, many northern German princes supported Lutheranism. While some princes genuinely shared Luther's beliefs, others liked Luther's ideas for selfish reasons. They saw his teachings as a good excuse to seize Church property and to assert their independence from Charles V.

In 1529, German princes who remained loyal to the pope agreed to join forces against Luther's ideas. Princes who supported Luther signed a protest against that agreement. These protesting princes came to be known as Protestants. Eventually, the term **Protestant** was applied to Christians who belonged to non-Catholic churches.

Still determined that his subjects remain Catholic, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V went to war against the Protestant princes of Germany. Even though he defeated them in 1547, he failed to force them back into the Catholic Church.

Weary of fighting, Charles ordered all German princes, both Protestant and Catholic, to assemble in the city of Augsburg. At that meeting, the princes agreed that the religion of each German state was to be decided by its ruler. This famous religious settlement, signed in 1555, was known as the **Peace of Augsburg**.

#### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

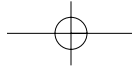
##### C. Drawing

**Conclusions** Why would Luther and his followers want the Bible and sermons to be in German?

#### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

##### D. Analyzing

**Motives** Explain the different motives that German princes had for becoming Lutheran.



## England Becomes Protestant

The Catholic Church soon faced another great challenge to its authority. Unlike Luther, the man who broke England's ties to the Roman Catholic Church did so for political and personal, not religious, reasons.

**Henry VIII Wants a Son** When Henry became king of England, he was a devout Catholic. Political needs soon tested his religious loyalty. He needed a male heir. Henry's father had become king after a long civil war. Henry feared that a similar war would start if he died without a son as his heir. He and his wife, Catherine of Aragon, had one living child—a daughter, Mary—but no woman had ever successfully claimed the English throne.

By 1527, Henry was convinced that the 42-year-old Catherine would have no more children. He wanted to divorce her and take a younger queen. Church law did not allow divorce. However, the pope could **annul**, or set aside, Henry's marriage if he could find proof that it had never been legal in the first place. Excuses were frequently found to annul royal marriages if they produced no heirs. In 1527, King Henry asked the pope to annul his marriage, but the pope turned him down. The pope did not want to offend Catherine's powerful nephew, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.

**The Reformation Parliament** Henry solved his marriage problem himself. In 1529, he called Parliament into session and asked it to pass a set of laws that ended the pope's power in England. This Parliament is known as the Reformation Parliament.

In 1533, Henry secretly married Anne Boleyn (BUL·ihn), who was in her twenties. Parliament legalized Henry's divorce from Catherine. In 1534, Henry's break with the pope was made complete when Parliament voted to approve the Act of Supremacy. This act made the English king, not the pope, the official head of England's Church.

**Consequences of Henry's Changes** Soon after making himself supreme head of the Church of England, Henry closed all English monasteries. He seized their wealth and lands. The monasteries had owned perhaps 20 percent of the land in England, so this act vastly increased royal power and enriched Henry's treasury.

Henry did not get the male heir he sought immediately. After Anne Boleyn gave birth to a girl, she fell out of Henry's favor. Eventually, he ordered her imprisoned in the Tower of London and later beheaded in 1536. Before his death, Henry married four more times. His third wife gave him a son named Edward.

### Background

The pope had taken the losing side in a war against Emperor Charles V, who was now holding him prisoner. The pope did not dare annul Henry's marriage to Charles's aunt.

## HISTORY MAKERS

### Henry VIII 1491–1547

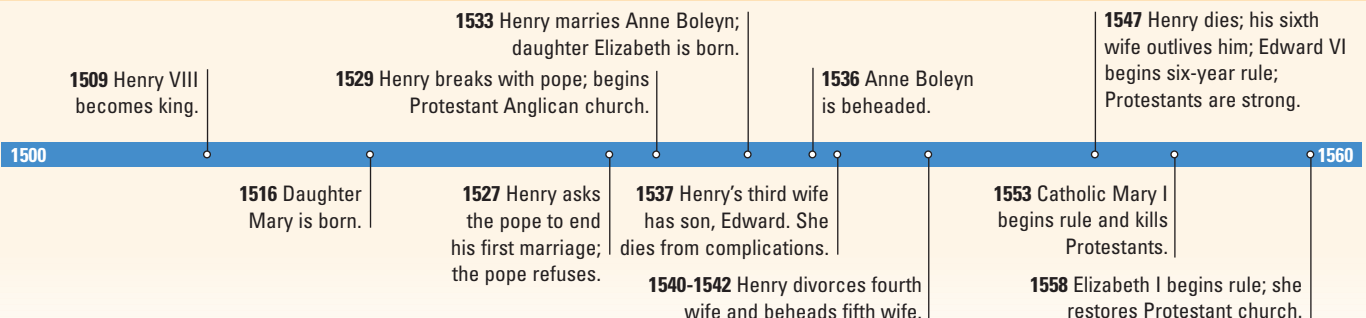
When Henry became king in 1509, he was young, strong, handsome, and intelligent. He loved sports, literature, music, and food. He also loved his Roman Catholic faith.

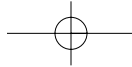
In 1521, he wrote a pamphlet attacking Martin Luther and his teachings. Impressed by Henry's loyalty, the pope gave him a special title, "Defender of the Faith."

Even Henry's religious actions were driven by political ambition. One of his motives for defending Catholicism was to keep up with his fellow European monarchs. Earlier popes had granted Spanish monarchs the title "Catholic Sovereigns" and French monarchs the title "Most Christian." Although Henry was proud of his papal honor, eventually his political needs drove him to break with the Church.



## Henry VIII's Family Causes Religious Turmoil





After Henry's death in 1547, each of his three children eventually ruled. This created religious turmoil. Edward VI became king at age nine and ruled only six years. During his reign, the Protestants gained power. Edward's half-sister Mary ruled next.

She was a Catholic who returned the English Church to the rule of the pope. Mary had many Protestants killed. England's next ruler was Anne Boleyn's daughter, Elizabeth.

## HISTORYMAKERS



**Elizabeth I**  
1533–1603

Elizabeth I was the third of Henry VIII's children to rule England. Like her father, Elizabeth had a fierce temper and a robust nature. Athletic as a girl, she showed amazing energy and strength into her sixties.

When the Spanish Armada threatened England, Elizabeth rode into the camp of soldiers preparing to defend their country. For this occasion, she wore her brightest red wig adorned with two white plumes that were easy for all to see above the soldier's long pikes.

From her horse, Elizabeth gave encouragement to her soldiers:

I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a king of England, too, and I think foul scorn [of] . . . any prince of Europe [who] should dare invade the borders of my realm.

**Elizabeth Restores Protestantism** Inheriting the throne in 1558, Elizabeth I returned her kingdom to Protestantism. In 1559, Parliament followed Elizabeth's request and set up a national church much like the one under Henry VIII. This was to be the only legal church in England. People were required to attend its services or pay a fine. Parliament declared that Elizabeth was head of the Church of England, or **Anglican** Church.

Elizabeth decided to establish a state church that moderate Catholics and moderate Protestants might both accept. As a concession to Protestants, priests in the Church of England were allowed to marry. They could deliver sermons in English, not Latin. As a concession to Catholics, the Church of England kept some of the trappings of the Catholic service such as rich robes and golden crucifixes. Under Elizabeth, the Book of Common Prayer was revised to be somewhat more acceptable to Catholics.

**The Spanish Armada** While Elizabeth was able to restore religious peace to her country, she soon faced the threat of invasion from the king of Catholic Spain. Philip II planned to attack England for several reasons. One reason was that Elizabeth had supported Protestant subjects who rebelled against him. In 1588, Philip assembled an invasion force of 130 ships, 8,000 sailors, and 19,000 soldiers. This force—known as the Spanish Armada—reached the southwest coast of England on July 29. However, bad weather and the English fleet defeated the Spanish completely.

Although Elizabeth's reign was triumphant, she had some difficulties. Money was one problem. In the late 1500s, the English began to think about building an American empire as a new source of income. (See Chapter 19.) While colonies strengthened England economically, they did not enrich the queen directly. The queen's constant need for money would carry over into the next reign and lead to bitter conflict between the monarch and Parliament. In the meantime, other countries experienced bloody religious conflicts.

### THINK THROUGH HISTORY

**E. Recognizing Effects** How did Henry VIII and his three children cause religious turmoil in England?

## Section 3 Assessment

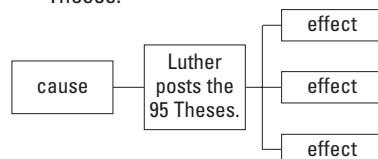
### 1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- indulgence
- Reformation
- Lutheran
- Protestant
- Peace of Augsburg
- annul
- Anglican

### 2. TAKING NOTES

Using a cause-and-effect graphic like the one below, show the main cause and several effects of Luther's action in posting the 95 Theses.



Which effect do you think had the most permanent impact? Explain.

### 3. SUPPORTING OPINIONS

Who do you think had a better reason to break with the Church, Luther or Henry VIII? Support your answer with details from the text.

#### THINK ABOUT

- why Luther criticized the Church
- what Henry asked the pope to do for him
- the Church's response to Luther
- the pope's response to Henry

### 4. ANALYZING THEMES

**Revolution** Which of Luther's ideas do you think might have motivated the peasants to revolt in 1524? Explain.

#### THINK ABOUT

- Luther's criticisms of the Church
- what change the peasants demanded
- the actions the peasants took