

Martin Luther

by Simonetta Carr

with Illustrations by Troy Howell



REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Martin Luther

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Cover artwork by Troy Howell

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Reformation Heritage Books

2965 Leonard St. NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49525

616-977-0889 / Fax: 616-285-3246

e-mail: orders@heritagebooks.org

website: www.heritagebooks.org

Printed in the United States of America

16 17 18 19 20 21/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Carr, Simonetta, author. | Howell, Troy, illustrator.

Title: *Martin Luther* / by Simonetta Carr ; with illustrations by Troy Howell.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Reformation Heritage Books, 2016. |

Series: Christian biographies for young readers

Identifiers: LCCN 2016038487 | ISBN 9781601784544 (hardcover : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Luther, Martin, 1483-1546—Juvenile literature. |

Reformation—Germany—Biography—Juvenile literature.

Classification: LCC BR325 .C27 2016 | DDC 284.1092 [B] —dc23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016038487>

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MAP CREATED BY TOM CARROLL

A map of Europe during Luther's life. You may want to use it to follow his travels. At that time, Germany was part of the Holy Roman Empire and was composed of about 350 small provinces, each with its own ruler. The map shows only the borders of the Holy Roman Empire and the cities that are mentioned in this story.

Introduction



It took only a few months for ninety-five troubling questions to stir a nation, and only a few years for them to shake a continent, changing the course not only of the Western church but also of world history. Yet when Martin Luther wrote them, he wanted to discuss some matters about sin and repentance with only his students and other professors. To his surprise, his questions were quickly copied, translated, and distributed from city to city, awakening similar concerns in many other people.

Today, Martin Luther is considered one of the most influential leaders of the Protestant Reformation, and his words are still impacting Christians all over the world.



Martin Luther

COURTESY NATIONAL ART GALLERY, ROSENWALD COLLECTION

CHAPTER ONE

From Law Student to Monk



Martin was born on November 10, 1483, in the small town of Eisleben in central Germany. His father, Hans, was a farmer's son. Soon after Martin's birth, Hans moved his family to nearby Mansfeld so he could work in the copper mines. Extracting metal from under the ground was a hard job, but Hans worked diligently and soon became a supervisor. Martin always considered Mansfeld his hometown.



Hans Luther



Margaritha Luther

Martin had seven siblings, but only four lived to be adults: three sisters and his favorite brother Jacob, who was seven years younger. As a child, Jacob always asked to sit next to Martin at meals and was happy to play with other children only when Martin was there. Hans and his wife, Margaritha, were strict by today's standards. Later in life, Martin understood they had meant well.

PAINTINGS BY LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER, HELD AT WARTBURG-STIFTUNG EISENACH. PHOTO BY ULRICH KNEISE.

Since Martin liked to study, Hans decided to prepare him to be a lawyer, which was a respectable job and not as exhausting as working in a mine. Hans was willing to make many sacrifices to reach that goal. At age fourteen, when Martin finished his basic studies at the local school, Hans sent him to study in nearby towns, arranging for his stay with relatives or other families. Martin returned home only for short visits.

School rules were harsh. If the children misbehaved, didn't study, or spoke German instead of Latin, the teachers would beat them with a rod. The worst student had to wear a sign around his neck. Students had to learn Latin because it was an important language. It was used for legal documents and was spoken by educated people all over Europe.



Seventeenth-century Mansfeld, engraving by Matthäus Merian, 1690

Sometimes students sang door-to-door to ask people to support their studies, usually by donating food. The stern school rules, however, had made Martin and his friends so fearful that when a man called “in a boorish voice” to offer them sausages, the boys ran away in fright and hid until the man managed to reassure them. Much later, Martin explained that we often act in a similar way when we don’t believe God’s loving promises. “We are afraid of a sausage, and we even fear those who wish us the best.”

In 1501 Martin was admitted into the University of Erfurt, one of the best in the coun-



FRIZZTEXT, FLICKR

try. He studied hard and graduated with excellence in four years, the shortest time possible. In his free time, he liked to sing and play music with his friends, who were an important part of his life. He learned to sing very well and to play both the lute and the flute.

An ancient lute



Martin and his friends ran away in fright from a man who wanted to offer them sausages.

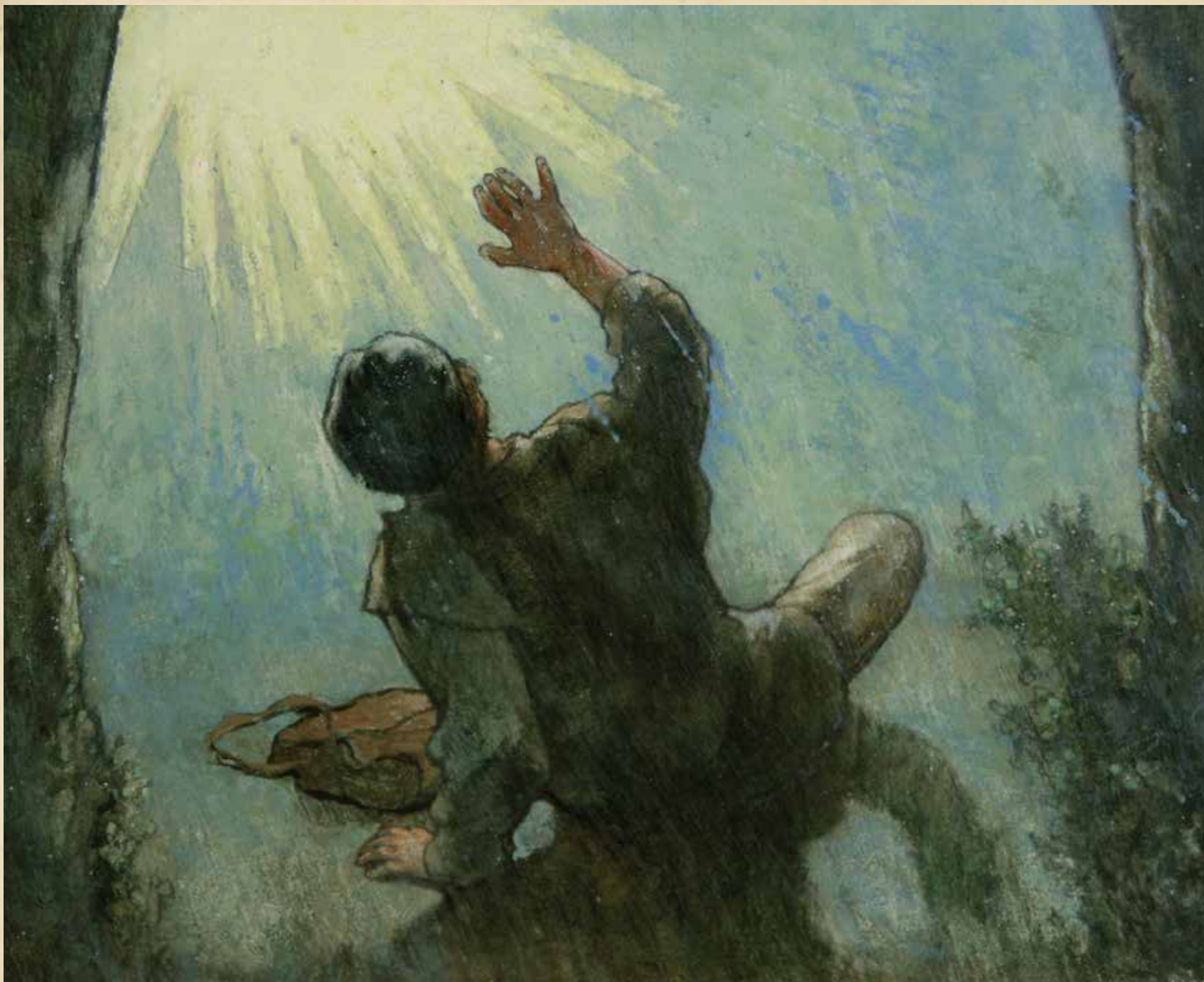
In the summer of 1505, just before entering his final course of studies, Martin paid a visit to his family. It was a difficult time for the region. Erfurt had been struck by the plague, a serious illness that had killed so many people that entire cities were left empty. Even some of Martin's friends and teachers had died. Martin was worried about death because he thought he had not done enough to please God.

On his way back to college, he was caught in a massive thunderstorm that filled him with terror. Fearful at the thought of having to face God, he cried, "Help me, St. Anne! I will become a monk." At that time, Jesus and God were both seen as angry judges of sinners, so people looked for protection from saints—godly people who had died. It was also common to add a promise to do something good in return for the saint's protection.

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Fifteenth-Century Erfurt



On his way back to the college, Martin was caught in a massive thunderstorm that filled him with terror.