Week 2 Mr. Telles

*Monday 4/27- Michelangelo*

Read Article  
How does Michelangelo differ from Leonardo de Vinci? Write a short paragraph explaining your answer

## Early Life

Painter, sculptor, architect and poet Michelangelo was one of the most famous artists of the Italian Renaissance, a period of great artistic and scientific change. He was born on March 6, 1475, in Caprese, Italy. As a young man, he was less interested in schooling than in watching the painters at nearby churches, and drawing what he saw there. Michelangelo's father realized early on that his son had no interest in the family banking business. He agreed to let Michelangelo work as an apprentice, at the age of 13, at the workshop of painter Domenico Ghirlandaio.

After a year at the workshop, Michelangelo moved into the palace of Lorenzo the Magnificent, of the powerful Medici family, to study classical sculpture in the Medici gardens. This was an important time of growth for Michelangelo. His years with the Medici family, 1489 to 1492, exposed him to the work of various poets, scholars and philosophers.

These influences helped shape Michelangelo's distinctive style, a combination of precision and emotional expression.

## Early Success And Influences

Michelangelo began working as a sculptor in Florence in 1495. He modeled his style after classical masterpieces.

One of his early works was a sculpture of Cupid. After Michelangelo completed it, it was artificially "aged" to make it look like an artifact from the past. Cardinal Riario of San Giorgio bought the sculpture, but demanded his money back when he discovered it was not an antique. Strangely, in the end, Riario was so impressed with Michelangelo's work that he let the artist keep the money. The cardinal even invited the artist to Rome, where Michelangelo would live and work for the rest of his life.

## The Pietà And The David

Not long after Michelangelo's relocation to Rome in 1498, his career was helped along by another cardinal, Jean Bilhères de Lagraulas. Michelangelo's Pietà, a sculpture of Mary holding the dead Jesus across her lap, was created in the church of the cardinal's tomb. Michelangelo was only 25 years old when he carved it. The fluidity of the fabric, positions of the subjects, and "movement" of their skin inspired awe in its early spectators. Today, the statue remains an incredibly revered work.

By the time Michelangelo returned to Florence, he had become something of an art star. He was hired to complete a statue of the Biblical hero David, and turned a 17-foot piece of marble into a dominating figure. The vulnerability of the statue's nakedness and humanity of his expression made the David a prized work.

## Art And Architecture

Several projects followed, including an ambitious tomb for Pope Julius II. However, the project was interrupted when the pope asked Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

The project fueled Michelangelo's imagination. His original plan for 12 apostles morphed into more than 300 figures on the ceiling of the sacred space. Michelangelo completed the 65-foot ceiling alone, spending endless hours lying on his back atop a tall scaffold. He tried to keep his work secret until finally revealing the finished ceiling in 1512.

The resulting masterpiece is a superb example of Renaissance art. It includes one of Michelangelo's most famous images, the Creation of Adam, a portrayal of God touching the finger of man.

## Conflict

Though Michelangelo's talents earned him the respect of the wealthy and powerful men of Italy, there were some who criticized him. He had a difficult personality and quick temper, which led to troubled relationships. Michelangelo constantly strived for perfection but was unable to compromise.

He sometimes fell into spells of sadness, which were recorded in many of his literary works. "I am here in great distress and with great physical strain, and have no friends of any kind," he once wrote.

## Literary Works And Personal Life

Michelangelo's poetic impulse, which had been expressed in his artwork, began taking literary form in his later years.

Although he never married, Michelangelo was devoted to a noble widow named Vittoria Colonna, the subject of many of his poems. Their friendship remained a great comfort to Michelangelo until her death in 1547.

## Death And Legacy

Following a brief illness, Michelangelo died on February 18, 1564, just weeks before his 89th birthday, at his home in Rome. A nephew brought his body back to Florence, where he was celebrated as the "father and master of all the arts." He was laid to rest at the Basilica di Santa Croce, his chosen place of burial.

Appreciation of Michelangelo's artistic mastery has endured for centuries. He is remembered as one of the best artists of the Italian Renaissance.

# Tuesday 4/28- William Shakespeare

Read article  
Shakespeare’s plays were written more than 400 years ago. Why do they continue to be popular today?

## Mysterious Origins

Over the course of 20 years, Shakespeare wrote plays that capture the complete range of human feelings. Known throughout the world, the works of William Shakespeare have been performed countless times for more than 400 years. And yet, the personal history of William Shakespeare is somewhat of a mystery. Historians know about his life from his work and church and court records. However, these only provide brief sketches of specific events in his life and provide little information about the actual person.

## Early Life

No birth records exist for Shakespeare. However, church records indicate that a William Shakespeare was baptized at Holy Trinity Church in England on April 26, 1564. Based on this, scholars believe his birthday is April 23, 1564.

William was the third child of John Shakespeare, a leather merchant, and Mary Arden, a local heiress. He had two older sisters and three younger brothers.

There is very little information about Shakespeare's childhood and virtually none about his education. Scholars say he most likely attended the King's New School in his hometown of Stratford. This school taught reading and writing, as well as Greek and Latin languages.

## Married Life

William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway on November 28, 1582. Their first child, a daughter, was born in 1583. Two years later, they had twins.

After the birth of the twins, there are seven years of Shakespeare's life where no records exist. Scholars call this period the "lost years." There is much speculation about what he was doing during this time, but no one is sure.

## Theatrical Beginnings

By 1592, there is evidence that Shakespeare was working as an actor and a playwright in London. By the early 1590s, he was managing an acting company in London called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which later became known as the King's Men. From all accounts, the King's Men was very popular.

## Establishing Himself

By 1597, 15 of the 37 plays written by William Shakespeare were published. By 1599, Shakespeare and his business partners built their own theater, which they called the Globe. He also purchased real estate that earned him a lot of money. This money gave him the time to write his plays without having to do other work.

## Writing Style

Shakespeare's early plays were written in the typical style of the day. However, Shakespeare was very innovative, adapting this style to his own purposes. He primarily used a metrical pattern consisting of lines of unrhymed iambic pentameter. That meant that each line had five pairs of syllables, the first one short and the second one longer.

## Early Works: Histories And Comedies

With the exception of "Romeo and Juliet," William Shakespeare's first plays were mostly histories written in the early 1590s. "Richard II," "Henry VI" and "Henry V" dramatize the destructive results of weak rulers.

During his early period, Shakespeare also wrote several comedies that were witty, romantic and charming. Some examples are "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Merchant of Venice" and "Much Ado About Nothing."

## Later Works: Tragedies And Tragicomedies

It was in Shakespeare's later period, after 1600, that he wrote the tragedies "Hamlet," "King Lear," "Othello" and "Macbeth." Tragedies are plays with unhappy endings. Possibly the best known of these is "Hamlet," which explores betrayal, punishment and moral failure.

In Shakespeare's final period, he wrote several tragicomedies. These were graver than the comedies, but unlike tragedies they ended with reconciliation.

Tradition has it that Shakespeare died on his birthday, April 23, 1616, though many scholars believe this is a myth. Church records show he was buried at Trinity Church on April 25, 1616.

## Controversy And Literary Legacy

About 150 years after his death, questions arose about the authorship of William Shakespeare's plays. Scholars began to claim someone else had written them. Much of this doubt stemmed from the sketchy details of Shakespeare's life. Official records indicate the existence of a William Shakespeare, but none of these mention him being an actor or a playwright.

Skeptics also questioned how someone could write so well with so little education.

The most serious and intense skepticism began in the 19th century when adoration for Shakespeare was at its greatest. Some said that a man named Edward de Vere was the true author, pointing to his extensive knowledge of aristocratic society, his education and the similarities between his poetry and the works attributed to Shakespeare.

However, the majority of Shakespearean scholars say that William Shakespeare wrote all his own plays. They point out that other playwrights of the time also had sketchy histories and came from modest backgrounds. They argue that the King's New School in Stratford could have provided a good foundation for writers.

What seems to be true is that William Shakespeare was a respected man of the dramatic arts who wrote plays, and acted in some, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Yet his reputation as a dramatic genius was not recognized until the 19th century.

Today, his plays are very popular and constantly studied and reinterpreted. The genius of Shakespeare's characters and plots are that they present real people with a wide range of feelings who experience conflicts that go beyond their origins in Elizabethan England

# *Wednesday 4/29- The Printing Press*

Order the seven ways the Printing press changed the world from least important to most important. Provide an explanation on why you placed each way in the place you did.

Knowledge is power, as the saying goes, and the invention of the mechanical movable type printing press helped disseminate knowledge wider and faster than ever before.

German goldsmith Johannes Gutenberg is credited with inventing the printing press around 1436, although he was far from the first to automate the book-printing process. Woodblock printing in China dates back to the 9th century and Korean bookmakers were printing with moveable metal type a century before Gutenberg.

But most historians believe Gutenberg’s adaptation, which employed a screw-type wine press to squeeze down evenly on the inked metal type, was the key to unlocking the modern age. With the newfound ability to inexpensively mass-produce books on every imaginable topic, revolutionary ideas and priceless ancient knowledge were placed in the hands of every literate European, whose numbers doubled every century.

Here are just some of the ways the printing press helped pull Europe out of the [Dark Ages](https://www.history.com/news/6-reasons-the-dark-ages-werent-so-dark) and accelerate human progress.

## **1. A Global News Network Was Launched**

Johannes Gutenberg’s first printing press.

Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

Gutenberg didn’t live to see the immense impact of his invention. His greatest accomplishment was the first print run of the [Bible](https://www.history.com/topics/religion/bible) in Latin, which took three years to print around 200 copies, a miraculously speedy achievement in the day of hand-copied manuscripts.

But as historian Ada Palmer explains, Gutenberg’s invention wasn’t profitable until there was a distribution network for books. Palmer, a professor of early modern European history at the University of Chicago, compares early printed books like the [Gutenberg Bible](https://www.history.com/news/7-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-gutenberg-bible) to how e-books struggled to find a market before Amazon introduced the Kindle.

“Congratulations, you’ve printed 200 copies of the Bible; there are about three people in your town who can read the Bible in Latin,” says Palmer. “What are you going to do with the other 197 copies?”

Gutenberg died penniless, his presses impounded by his creditors. Other German printers fled for greener pastures, eventually arriving in Venice, which was the central shipping hub of the Mediterranean in the late 15th century.

“If you printed 200 copies of a book in Venice, you could sell five to the captain of each ship leaving port,” says Palmer, which created the first mass-distribution mechanism for printed books.

The ships left Venice carrying religious texts and literature, but also breaking news from across the known world. Printers in Venice sold four-page news pamphlets to sailors, and when their ships arrived in distant ports, local printers would copy the pamphlets and hand them off to riders who would race them off to dozens of towns.

Since literacy rates were still very low in the 1490s, locals would gather at the pub to hear a paid reader recite the latest news, which was everything from bawdy scandals to war reports.

“This radically changed the consumption of news,” says Palmer. “It made it normal to go check the news every day.”

## **2. The Renaissance Kicked Into High Gear**

Sketch of a printing press taken from a notebook by Leonardo Da Vinci.

SSPL/Getty Images

The [Italian Renaissance](https://www.history.com/topics/renaissance/italian-renaissance) began nearly a century before Gutenberg invented his printing press when 14th-century political leaders in Italian city-states like Rome and Florence set out to revive the Ancient Roman educational system that had produced giants like Caesar, Cicero and Seneca.

One of the chief projects of the early [Renaissance](https://www.history.com/topics/renaissance/renaissance) was to find long-lost works by figures like [Plato](https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/plato) and [Aristotle](https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/aristotle) and republish them. Wealthy patrons funded expensive expeditions across the Alps in search of isolated monasteries. Italian emissaries spent years in the [Ottoman Empire](https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/ottoman-empire) learning enough Ancient Greek and Arabic to translate and copy rare texts into Latin.

The operation to retrieve classic texts was in action long before the printing press, but publishing the texts had been arduously slow and prohibitively expensive for anyone other than the richest of the rich. Palmer says that one hand-copied book in the 14th century cost as much as a house and libraries cost a small fortune. The largest European library in 1300 was the university library of Paris, which had 300 total manuscripts.

By the 1490s, when Venice was the book-printing capital of Europe, a printed copy of a great work by Cicero only cost a month’s salary for a school teacher. The printing press didn’t launch the Renaissance, but it vastly accelerated the rediscovery and sharing of knowledge.

“Suddenly, what had been a project to educate only the few wealthiest elite in this society could now become a project to put a library in every medium-sized town, and a library in the house of every reasonably wealthy merchant family,” says Palmer.

## **3. Martin Luther Becomes the First Best-Selling Author**

Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses on the door of Wittenberg castle church.

Ipsumpix/Corbis/Getty Images

There’s a famous quote attributed to German religious reformer [Martin Luther](https://www.history.com/topics/reformation/martin-luther-and-the-95-theses) that sums up the role of the printing press in the Protestant Reformation: “Printing is the ultimate gift of God and the greatest one.”

Luther wasn’t the first theologian to question the Church, but he was the first to widely publish his message. Other “heretics” saw their movements quickly quashed by Church authorities and the few copies of their writings easily destroyed. But the timing of Luther’s crusade against the selling of indulgences coincided with an explosion of printing presses across Europe.

As [the legend](https://www.history.com/news/martin-luther-might-not-have-nailed-his-95-theses-to-the-church-door) goes, Luther nailed his “95 Theses” to the church door in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. Palmer says that broadsheet copies of Luther’s document were being printed in London as quickly as 17 days later.

Thanks to the printing press and the timely power of his message, Luther became the world’s first best-selling author. Luther’s translation of the New Testament into German sold 5,000 copies in just two weeks. From 1518 to 1525, Luther’s writings accounted for a third of all books sold in Germany and his German Bible went through more than 430 editions.

## **4. Printing Powers the Scientific Revolution**

Tables from Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus' pioneering text “De revolutionibus orbium caelestium” (On the revolution of heavenly spheres), 1543, which represents his complete work.

SSPL/Getty Images

The English philosopher Francis Bacon, who’s credited with developing the scientific method, wrote in 1620 that the three inventions that forever changed the world were [gunpowder](https://www.history.com/topics/inventions/firearms), the nautical compass and the printing press.

For millennia, science was a largely solitary pursuit. Great mathematicians and natural philosophers were separated by geography, language and the sloth-like pace of hand-written publishing. Not only were handwritten copies of scientific data expensive and hard to come by, they were also prone to human error.

With the newfound ability to publish and share scientific findings and experimental data with a wide audience, science took great leaps forward in the 16th and 17th centuries. When developing his sun-centric model of the galaxy in the early 1500s, for example, Polish astronomer [Nicolaus Copernicus](https://www.history.com/topics/inventions/nicolaus-copernicus) relied not only on his own heavenly observations, but on printed astronomical tables of planetary movements.

When historian Elizabeth Eisenstein wrote her [1980 book](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2779560?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents) about the impact of the printing press, she said that its biggest gift to science wasn’t necessarily the speed at which ideas could spread with printed books, but the accuracy with which the original data were copied. With printed formulas and mathematical tables in hand, scientists could trust the fidelity of existing data and devote more energy to breaking new ground.

## **5. Fringe Voices Get a Platform**

A printing press being used to make books during the 16th century.

Oxford Science Archive/Print Collector/Getty Images

“Whenever a new information technology comes along, and this includes the printing press, among the very first groups to be ‘loud’ in it are the people who were silenced in the earlier system, which means radical voices,” says Palmer.

It takes effort to adopt a new information technology, whether it’s the ham radio, an internet bulletin board, or Instagram. The people most willing to take risks and make the effort to be early adopters are those who had no voice before that technology existed.

“In the print revolution, that meant radical heresies, radical Christian splinter groups, radical egalitarian groups, critics of the government,” says Palmer. “The Protestant [Reformation](https://www.history.com/topics/reformation/reformation) is only one of many symptoms of print enabling these voices to be heard.”

As critical and alternative opinions entered the public discourse, those in power tried to censor it. Before the printing press, censorship was easy. All it required was killing the “heretic” and burning his or her handful of notebooks.

But after the printing press, Palmer says it became nearly impossible to destroy all copies of a dangerous idea. And the more dangerous a book was claimed to be, the more the people wanted to read it. Every time the Church published a list of banned books, the booksellers knew exactly what they should print next.

## **6. From Public Opinion to Popular Revolution**

"Common Sense" by Thomas Paine at the Museum of the American Revolution.

Joy of Museums/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 4.0

During the Enlightenment era, philosophers like [John Locke](https://www.history.com/topics/british-history/john-locke), [Voltaire](https://www.history.com/news/10-things-you-should-know-about-voltaire) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau were widely read among an increasingly literate populace. Their elevation of critical reasoning above custom and tradition encouraged people to question religious authority and prize personal liberty.

Increasing democratization of knowledge in the [Enlightenment](https://www.history.com/topics/british-history/enlightenment) era led to the development of public opinion and its power to topple the ruling elite. Writing in pre-Revolution France, Louis-Sebástien Mercier declared:

“A great and momentous revolution in our ideas has taken place within the last thirty years. Public opinion has now become a preponderant power in Europe, one that cannot be resisted… one may hope that enlightened ideas will bring about the greatest good on Earth and that tyrants of all kinds will tremble before the universal cry that echoes everywhere, awakening Europe from its slumbers.”

“[Printing] is the most beautiful gift from heaven,” continues Mercier. “It soon will change the countenance of the universe… Printing was only born a short while ago, and already everything is heading toward perfection… Tremble, therefore, tyrants of the world! Tremble before the virtuous writer!”

Even the illiterate couldn’t resist the attraction of revolutionary Enlightenment authors, Palmer says. When [Thomas Paine](https://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/thomas-paine) published “Common Sense” in 1776, the literacy rate in the [American colonies](https://www.history.com/topics/colonial-america/thirteen-colonies) was around 15 percent, yet there were more copies printed and sold of the revolutionary tract than the entire population of the colonies.

## **7. Machines ‘Steal Jobs’ From Workers**

Benjamin Franklin and associates at Franklin's printing press in 1732.

GraphicaArtis/Getty Images

The [Industrial Revolution](https://www.history.com/topics/industrial-revolution/industrial-revolution) didn’t get into full swing in Europe until the mid-18th century, but you can make the argument that the printing press introduced the world to the idea of machines “stealing jobs” from workers.

Before Gutenberg’s paradigm-shifting invention, scribes were in high demand. Bookmakers would employ dozens of trained artisans to painstakingly hand-copy and illuminate manuscripts. But by the late 15th century, the printing press had rendered their unique skillset all but obsolete.

On the flip side, the huge demand for printed material spawned the creation of an entirely new industry of printers, brick-and-mortar booksellers and enterprising street peddlers. Among those who got his start as a printer's apprentice was future Founding Father, Benjamin Franklin.

# *Thursday 4/30- The Reformation*

Read Article  
1) What is the Reformation?  
2) What Impact might the reformation have on the Catholic Church's control on Europe?  
3) Why is the event described in the article taught in schools today? What are the lasting lessons that we can learn from studying this event? Support your response with evidence from the text

The Protestant Reformation was a 16th-century religious and political movement. It splintered Catholic Europe and changed the continent in many important ways. In northern and central Europe, reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin and Henry VIII challenged the authority of the pope and the Catholic Church that he led. They argued that Bible-reading ministers and princes should be the leaders of the faithful. The disruption triggered bloody wars. It also led to the so-called Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church’s forceful response to the Protestants.

**Dating the Reformation**

Historians usually date the start of the Protestant Reformation to the 1517 issuing of Martin Luther’s “95 Theses.” Some say it ended with the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, an agreement that allowed for the coexistence of Catholicism and Lutheranism in Germany. Others claim it only drew to a close with the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years’ War.

**Germany and Lutheranism**

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was an Augustinian monk in Wittenberg, Germany, when he wrote his “95 Theses.” The theses were a protest against the pope’s sale of indulgences. These allowed the buyer to be cleared of guilt for his or her sins without having to go through the normal self-punishments. They also believed they wouldn't be punished by God for their sins after they died.

Luther's goal was to spur reform from within the church. However, in 1521 he was excommunicated — or officially and permanently kicked out of the church. Luther's ideas won out over time, however. By the Reformation’s end, Lutheranism had become the state religion throughout much of Germany, Scandinavia and the Baltics.

**Switzerland and Calvinism**

The Swiss Reformation began in 1519 with the sermons of Ulrich Zwingli, whose teachings were close to Luther’s. In 1541, the French Protestant John Calvin was invited to settle in Geneva, Switzerland. Calvin stressed God’s power and man’s predestined fate. He won over the city's leaders and soon his strict and severe ideas about proper behavior were enforced.

Calvinism then quickly spread to Scotland, France and other countries like Belgium and the Netherlands.

**The Church of England**

In England, the Reformation began with Henry VIII’s desire for a son. When Pope Clement VII refused to allow Henry to leave his wife so he could remarry, the English king was furious. In 1534, he declared that he alone should be the final authority in matters relating to the English church. Henry dissolved England’s Catholic religious orders and seized their wealth. He also worked to place the Bible in the hands of the people.

For some years after Henry’s death, England swung between Protestantism and Catholicism. The country tilted toward Calvinist-influenced Protestantism during Edward VI’s six-year reign. Catholicism then made a strong comeback during the five-year reign of Mary I.

In 1559, Elizabeth I took the throne. During her 44-year reign, she cast the Church of England as a “middle way” between Calvinism and Catholicism. The Church of England conducted services in English rather than Latin. It also used a revised Book of Common Prayer.

**The Counter-Reformation**

The Catholic Church was slow to respond to the changes brought about by Luther and the other reformers. Between 1545 and 1563, the Council of Trent laid out the church’s answers to the problems that had triggered the Reformation. It also worked out a response to the reformers themselves.

During the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church did much to reform itself. It also set out to punish Protestant reformers who went too far. In both Spain and Rome, Inquisitions were established. These groups investigated the ideas and practices of Protestant reformers. A reformer whose ideas were declared heretical — or contrary to proper Christian belief — could face severe punishment.

**The Reformation's legacy**

The Reformation and Counter-Reformation did not only lead to religious changes. They also led to deep and lasting political shifts. Northern Europe won many new religious and political freedoms. These came at a great cost, however. There were years of bloody wars between Catholics and Protestants. The Thirty Years’ War alone may have cost Germany 40 percent of its population.

However, the Reformation also inspired many great artists and thinkers. Among them were the composer Johann Sebastian Bach and the artist Peter Paul Rubens. The universities of Europe grew stronger because of changes brought about by the Reformation. Dutch Calvinist merchants even came up with new ideas about banking and business.

# *Friday 5/1- Martin Luther*

Read Article  
1) Define the word- INDULGENCES  
2) How might the thought of indulgences effect Martin Luther. Why might he protest against that?

# Martin Luther and the 95 Theses

Born in Eisleben, Germany, in 1483, Martin Luther went on to become one of Western history’s most significant figures. Luther spent his early years in relative anonymity as a monk and scholar. But in 1517 Luther penned a document attacking the Catholic Church’s corrupt practice of selling “indulgences” to absolve sin. His “95 Theses,” which propounded two central beliefs—that the Bible is the central religious authority and that humans may reach salvation only by their faith and not by their deeds—was to spark the Protestant Reformation. Although these ideas had been advanced before, Martin Luther codified them at a moment in history ripe for religious reformation. The Catholic Church was ever after divided, and the Protestantism that soon emerged was shaped by Luther’s ideas. His writings changed the course of religious and cultural history in the West.

## **Early Life**

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was born in Eisleben, Saxony (now Germany), part of the Holy Roman Empire, to parents Hans and Margaretta. Luther’s father was a prosperous businessman, and when Luther was young, his father moved the family of 10 to Mansfeld. At age five, Luther began his education at a local school where he learned reading, writing and Latin. At 13, Luther began to attend a school run by the Brethren of the Common Life in Magdeburg. The Brethren’s teachings focused on personal piety, and while there Luther developed an early interest in monastic life.

Did you know? Legend says Martin Luther was inspired to launch the Protestant Reformation while seated comfortably on the chamber pot. That cannot be confirmed, but in 2004 archeologists discovered Luther's lavatory, which was remarkably modern for its day, featuring a heated-floor system and a primitive drain.

## **Martin Luther Enters the Monastery**

But Hans Luther had other plans for young Martin—he wanted him to become a lawyer—so he withdrew him from the school in Magdeburg and sent him to new school in Eisenach. Then, in 1501, Luther enrolled at the University of Erfurt, the premiere university in Germany at the time. There, he studied the typical curriculum of the day: arithmetic, astronomy, geometry and philosophy and he attained a Master’s degree from the school in 1505. In July of that year, Luther got caught in a violent thunderstorm, in which a bolt of lightning nearly struck him down. He considered the incident a sign from God and vowed to become a monk if he survived the storm. The storm subsided, Luther emerged unscathed and, true to his promise, Luther turned his back on his study of the law days later on July 17, 1505. Instead, he entered an Augustinian monastery.

Luther began to live the spartan and rigorous life of a monk but did not abandon his studies. Between 1507 and 1510, Luther studied at the University of Erfurt and at a university in Wittenberg. In 1510–1511, he took a break from his education to serve as a representative in Rome for the German Augustinian monasteries. In 1512, Luther received his doctorate and became a professor of biblical studies. Over the next five years Luther’s continuing theological studies would lead him to insights that would have implications for Christian thought for centuries to come.

## **Martin Luther Questions the Catholic Church**

In early 16th-century Europe, some theologians and scholars were beginning to question the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. It was also around this time that translations of original texts—namely, the Bible and the writings of the early church philosopher Augustine—became more widely available.

Augustine (340–430) had emphasized the primacy of the Bible rather than Church officials as the ultimate religious authority. He also believed that humans could not reach salvation by their own acts, but that only God could bestow salvation by his divine grace. In the [Middle Ages](https://www.history.com/topics/middle-ages) the Catholic Church taught that salvation was possible through “good works,” or works of righteousness, that pleased God. Luther came to share Augustine’s two central beliefs, which would later form the basis of Protestantism.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church’s practice of granting “indulgences” to provide absolution to sinners became increasingly corrupt. Indulgence-selling had been banned in Germany, but the practice continued unabated. In 1517, a friar named Johann Tetzel began to sell indulgences in Germany to raise funds to renovate St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.

## **The 95 Theses**

Committed to the idea that salvation could be reached through faith and by divine grace only, Luther vigorously objected to the corrupt practice of selling indulgences. Acting on this belief, he wrote the “Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences,” also known as “The 95 Theses,” a list of questions and propositions for debate. Popular legend has it that on October 31, 1517 Luther defiantly nailed a copy of his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle church. The reality was probably not so dramatic; Luther more likely hung the document on the door of the church matter-of-factly to announce the ensuing academic discussion around it that he was organizing.

The 95 Theses, which would later become the foundation of the Protestant Reformation, were written in a remarkably humble and academic tone, questioning rather than accusing. The overall thrust of the document was nonetheless quite provocative. The first two of the theses contained Luther’s central idea, that God intended believers to seek repentance and that faith alone, and not deeds, would lead to salvation. The other 93 theses, a number of them directly criticizing the practice of indulgences, supported these first two.

In addition to his criticisms of indulgences, Luther also reflected popular sentiment about the “St. Peter’s scandal” in the 95 Theses:

Why does not the pope, whose wealth today is greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build the basilica of St. Peter with his own money rather than with the money of poor believers?

The 95 Theses were quickly distributed throughout Germany and then made their way to Rome. In 1518, Luther was summoned to Augsburg, a city in southern Germany, to defend his opinions before an imperial diet (assembly). A debate lasting three days between Luther and Cardinal Thomas Cajetan produced no agreement. Cajetan defended the church’s use of indulgences, but Luther refused to recant and returned to Wittenberg.

## **Luther the Heretic**

On November 9, 1518 the pope condemned Luther’s writings as conflicting with the teachings of the Church. One year later a series of commissions were convened to examine Luther’s teachings. The first papal commission found them to be heretical, but the second merely stated that Luther’s writings were “scandalous and offensive to pious ears.” Finally, in July 1520 Pope Leo X issued a papal bull (public decree) that concluded that Luther’s propositions were heretical and gave Luther 120 days to recant in Rome. Luther refused to recant, and on January 3, 1521 Pope Leo excommunicated Martin Luther from the Catholic Church.

On April 17, 1521 Luther appeared before the Diet of Worms in Germany. Refusing again to recant, Luther concluded his testimony with the defiant statement: “Here I stand. God help me. I can do no other.” On May 25, the Holy Roman emperor Charles V signed an edict against Luther, ordering his writings to be burned. Luther hid in the town of Eisenach for the next year, where he began work on one of his major life projects, the translation of the New Testament into German, which took him 10 years to complete.

## **Martin Luther's Later Years**

Luther returned to Wittenberg in 1521, where the reform movement initiated by his writings had grown beyond his influence. It was no longer a purely theological cause; it had become political. Other leaders stepped up to lead the reform, and concurrently, the rebellion known as the Peasants’ War was making its way across Germany.

Luther had previously written against the Church’s adherence to clerical celibacy, and in 1525 he married Katherine of Bora, a former nun. They had five children. Although Luther’s early writings had sparked the Reformation, he was hardly involved in it during his later years. At the end of his life, Luther turned strident in his views, and pronounced the pope the Antichrist, advocated for the expulsion of Jews from the empire and condoned polygamy based on the practice of the patriarchs in the Old Testament.

Luther died on February 18, 1546.

## **Significance of Martin Luther’s Work**

Martin Luther is one of the most influential figures in Western history. His writings were responsible for fractionalizing the Catholic Church and sparking the Protestant Reformation. His central teachings, that the Bible is the central source of religious authority and that salvation is reached through faith and not deeds, shaped the core of Protestantism. Although Luther was critical of the Catholic Church, he distanced himself from the radical successors who took up his mantle. Luther is remembered as a controversial figure, not only because his writings led to significant religious reform and division, but also because in later life he took on radical positions on other questions, including his pronouncements against Jews, which some have said may have portended German anti-Semitism; others dismiss them as just one man’s vitriol that did not gain a following. Some of Luther’s most significant contributions to theological history, however, such as his insistence that as the sole source of religious authority the Bible be translated and made available to everyone, were truly revolutionary in his day.