

Your student has been instructed to fill in the blanks in the following narrative about the life and beliefs of Martin Luther. Some answers and amount of detail may vary.

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany on November 10, 1483. In 1501, Luther entered the University of Erfurt to study law. While returning from a visit with family, Martin was struck down by lightning. He cried out to a saint to save him and pledged he would become a monk. After he returned safely, he kept his promise and entered the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt.

From Erfurt, Luther was sent to be a professor at Wittenberg. He slowly became aware of the worldly and sinful behavior of many church officials. He began to oppose the buying and selling of indulgences, which the church taught could free people from the punishment of their sins. Luther believed this teaching was corrupt and not found in the Bible. When Luther found out that a priest named (Johann) Tetzel was selling indulgences near Wittenberg, Martin wrote a letter that criticized this practice. Luther's list of concerns is called the Ninety-Five Theses. On October 31, 1517, Luther nailed this list to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. Luther had no intention at this time of breaking with the church; instead, he sought to encourage reform within it.

Luther tried very hard to be good and holy. He faithfully fasted, prayed, and read the Bible in order to make himself acceptable to God. However, it seemed to Luther that the harder he tried to obey God perfectly, the more he was aware of his sins. How could he be sure that his efforts to be righteous would be acceptable to God? While studying the Bible, particularly the book of Romans, Luther realized that he did not have to earn God's forgiveness by working hard to be holy. Christ had earned it for him by dying on the cross for his sins. Luther realized that salvation does not come through works but through faith in Christ and His work.

The pope and some princes opposed Luther's understanding of salvation. At the Diet of Worms in 1521, Emperor Charles V and important church leaders demanded that Luther recant (take back) what he had written. If he did not, he would be called a heretic and killed. With God-given courage and humility, Luther said he could not take back what he had written because his conscience was ruled by the Word of God. As a result, the emperor declared him an outlaw and put him under the Ban of the Empire. Luther's life was in danger.

Luther fled back to Wittenberg, but on the way there he was kidnapped by men who served Frederick the Wise. These men took him to a fortress called Wartburg; they intended to protect Luther. Luther remained at Wartburg for a year. While there, he translated the New Testament into German so that the common people could read it.

Luther remained under the Ban of the Empire for the rest of his life, but he continued to preach the gospel, teach, and write. In 1525, he married Katherine von Bora, a former nun, and they had six children. Luther's friend and fellow reformer, Philipp Melanchthon, presented a formal statement of what the Reformers believed, called the Augsburg Confession, to Emperor Charles V in 1530. Sadly, in the later years of his life, Luther issued many unkind attacks against those he thought were the enemies of Christ. In 1546, he died peacefully among his loved ones and friends in Eisleben, Germany, where he had been born.