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3558 S. Jefferson Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
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Manufactured in the United States of America

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LUTHER

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

By Susan K. Leigh



Illustrated by
Dave Hill

Echoes
of the Hammer

Castle Church
+ Wittenberg



Birch House
+ Eisleben



Wartburg Castle
+ Eisenach



Augustinerkloster
+ Erfurt



Worms
Cathedral

Augsburg
Confession





This is the story of Martin Luther, a hero of the church.

The reformer Martin Luther was an influential man who launched widespread change in the Christian Church and consequently laid a new foundation for society. But what he wanted more than anything was peace with God.

As a young monk, Luther searched the Bible to ease his anxieties about sin and salvation. As he studied the Scriptures, he became convinced that the Roman Catholic Church had lost sight of its central teachings. He challenged the church to return to the roots of the Christian faith by posting his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, an act that guaranteed attention.

The church leaders liked things the way they were, however, and tried to stop Martin Luther. But despite its best efforts, the hierarchy of the church could not suppress him. Luther stood his ground, and his tireless work led to the reformation of the church and to far-reaching changes in society.

Here is the story of adventure, courage, and faith. Here is the story of a hero of the church.

“ Grant that I may not pray alone with the
mouth; help me that I may pray from the depths
of my heart. ”

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❖ Luther's Early Years

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Eisleben, Germany—1483

Another son,
Margaret! Praise
God for your health
and his!



The next day, Hans Luther takes his new son to the
Church of Saints Peter and Paul to be baptized.



The day is November 11, the festival of St. Martin of Tours. As was the custom, children were named for the saint day they were born on.

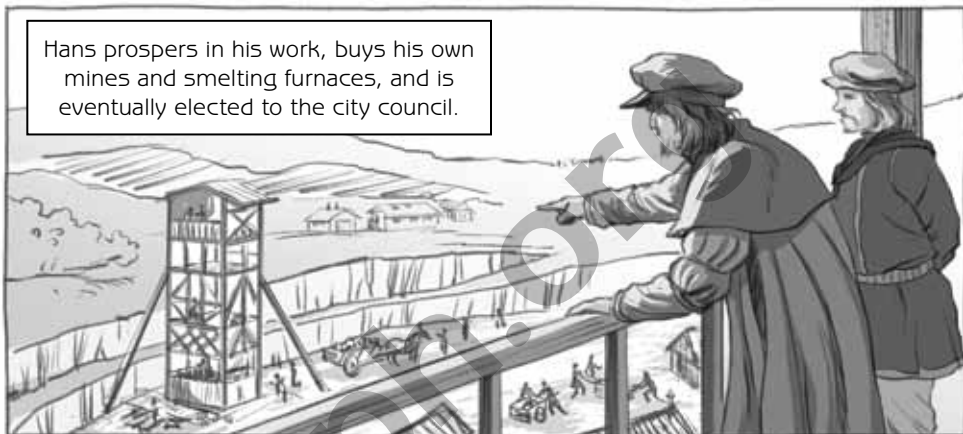
I baptize you
in the name of the
Father, and of the
Son, and of the
Holy Ghost.

St. Martin of Tours was a fourth-century Christian who traveled throughout Europe to spread the Gospel. November 11 is observed as the day of his burial. The historical Feast of St. Martin lasted 40 days and is the forerunner to the season of Advent.

The Luther family moves to Mansfeld, where Hans works in a copper mine.



Hans prospers in his work, buys his own mines and smelting furnaces, and is eventually elected to the city council.



Like other German Catholic families in Mansfeld, the Luthers attend Mass at St. George's Church. The priest chants the Mass in Latin, which would have confused young Martin, who knew only German.



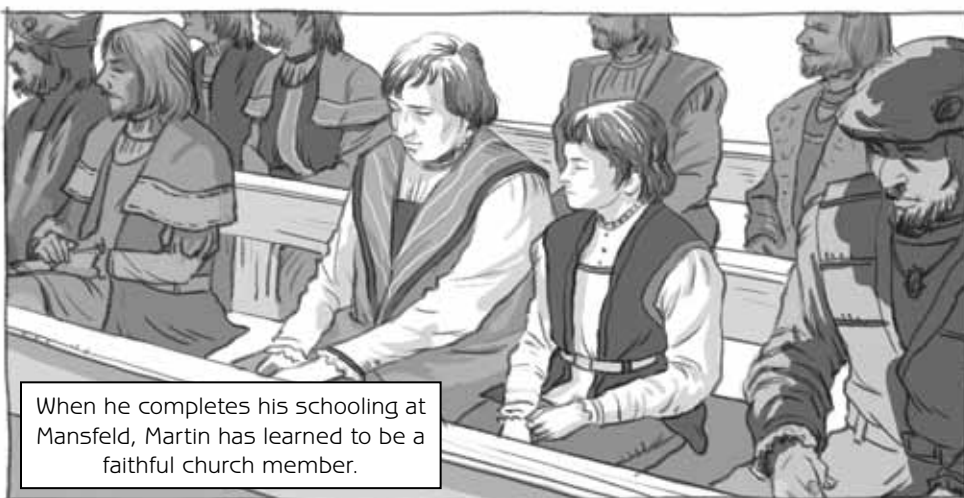
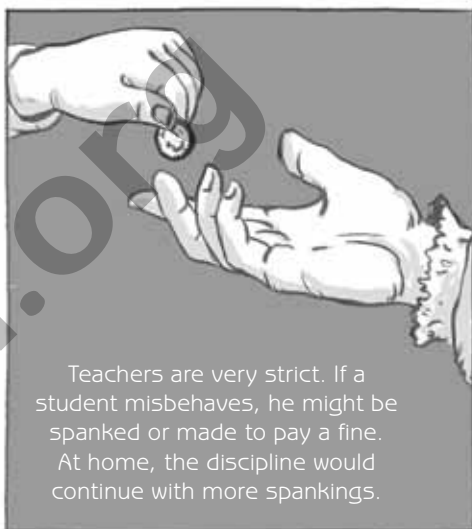


Because they didn't know otherwise, and because the Bible was not available to them in their own language to read,

**people viewed God as a
harsh judge.**

They believed that Jesus was distant and unavailable to them. Paintings of Jesus frightened young Martin.

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When he is 14, Martin goes to Magdeburg, 60 miles from home, to attend the highly respected cathedral schools.

Look at the spires of the cathedral, Martin! Have you ever seen such a sight?

Martin and his friend John Reinecke, along with other students, beg for coins on the city streets. This is a common practice and people willingly give small coins to the boys.

Singing for your supper, boys? Here's a coin for your effort!

It is at Cathedral School where Martin sees a Bible for the first time.

Handle it carefully. You hold the very Word of God in your hands!

Look, John! It's a Bible! I've never seen one before.

Bibles were very expensive and were seldom found outside of libraries or homes of the wealthy.

A year later, Martin transfers to the Latin school of St. George's Church in Eisenach to prepare for university. These were among the happiest years of his young life.



In May 1501, Martin enrolls at the university in Erfurt—the best university in all of Germany. He graduates in September 1502, at 18, with a bachelor of arts degree. Then, in 1505, he earns a master of arts degree, also from Erfurt.

I'm proud of you, son. You will continue your studies. And one day, you will be a fine lawyer.



With his father's blessing, Martin stays at Erfurt to study law.

But one day, something happens to cause Martin Luther to suddenly and surprisingly change his mind about becoming a lawyer.

**Help me,
St. Anne!**





As he walked back to Erfurt after a visit with his family, a sudden storm frightened him. He vowed that if he were to live through the storm, he would become a monk.





For the next year, Luther studied, prayed, and worshiped in chapel seven times a day. He was allowed to speak only at certain times. He vowed to never marry, and he gave up all of his personal possessions.

Soon after he became a monk, Luther was chosen to become a priest. He spent the next two years preparing for the priesthood, and on April 3, 1507, he was ordained. Among the worshipers at his first Communion service (or Mass) on May 2 was his father. Although Hans Luther was still not convinced that Martin had made a wise career move, he gave a generous gift for the cloister.

Despite his studies, despite long hours of reading the Bible, Brother Luther struggled with the problem of sin and worried about

earning forgiveness
from God.

Brother Martin goes back to the University of Erfurt to continue his schooling. A year later, he accepts a teaching post at the University of Wittenberg. There, in addition to teaching, Luther also continues his studies of the Bible and the Early Church.

His worries about sin linger. And nothing, not even the comforting words of his advisor, eases his mind.

Remember the Creed, Brother Martin: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."



Luther earned a bachelor's degree at Wittenberg in 1509 and returned to Erfurt, this time to teach at the university. And he continued to study, earning two more degrees.

When he was chosen to go to Rome on church business, Martin was thrilled! In Rome, he hoped to finally find answers to the

questions that still
troubled him.

Brother Martin and another priest go to Rome as representatives of the German Augustinian monks to protest a constitution that was soft on rules and standards.

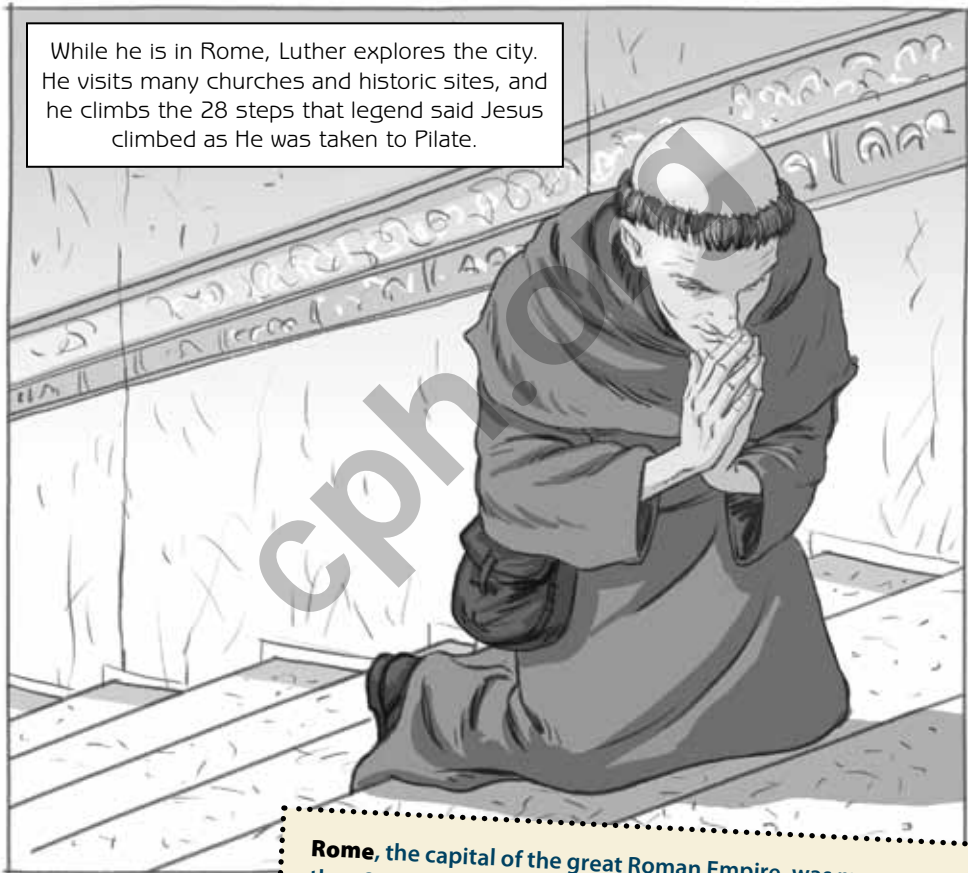
They walk for 40 days over 850 miles across Germany, through the Swiss Alps, and into Italy.

This pass is the shortest route through Switzerland and on to Rome.

But, Brother Martin, this climb is difficult. Perhaps we should have taken an easier route.



While he is in Rome, Luther explores the city. He visits many churches and historic sites, and he climbs the 28 steps that legend said Jesus climbed as He was taken to Pilate.



Rome, the capital of the great Roman Empire, was more than 2,000 years old at the time of Luther's visit. There were 70 monasteries and dozens of churches in the city in those days. There were caves, called *catacombs*, where people were buried. And, because Rome was the cultural and religious capital of Europe, there were many artists, poets, and priests.

Luther also sees many relics, but they don't provide assurance. In fact, his questions only increase.

Do I really receive God's grace by looking at this relic?

Relics are objects (even the physical remains of saints) that are venerated because of their supposed religious significance. Roman churches and shrines held thousands of relics, including what people believed were the rope used to drag Jesus to the cross, thorns from His crown, blood from His side, the Virgin Mary's hair, twigs from the burning bush, and one of the thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas. Some people believed that these relics could bring them closer to God.

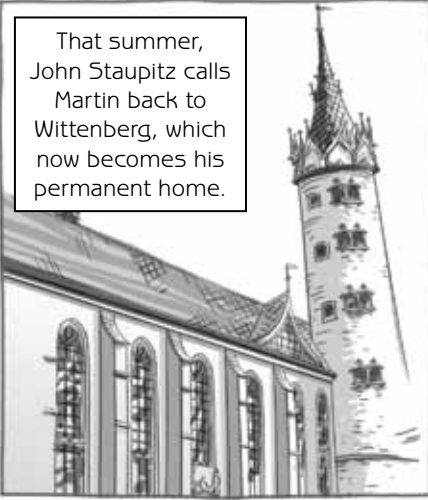


After a month of on-and-off discussions with the leader of the Augustinian order, their request for a strict constitution was not approved. Discouraged, Luther and the other monk left Rome and walked back through the Alps to Germany.

Back in Erfurt, in March 1511, Luther resumed studying and teaching. But he is troubled by memories of

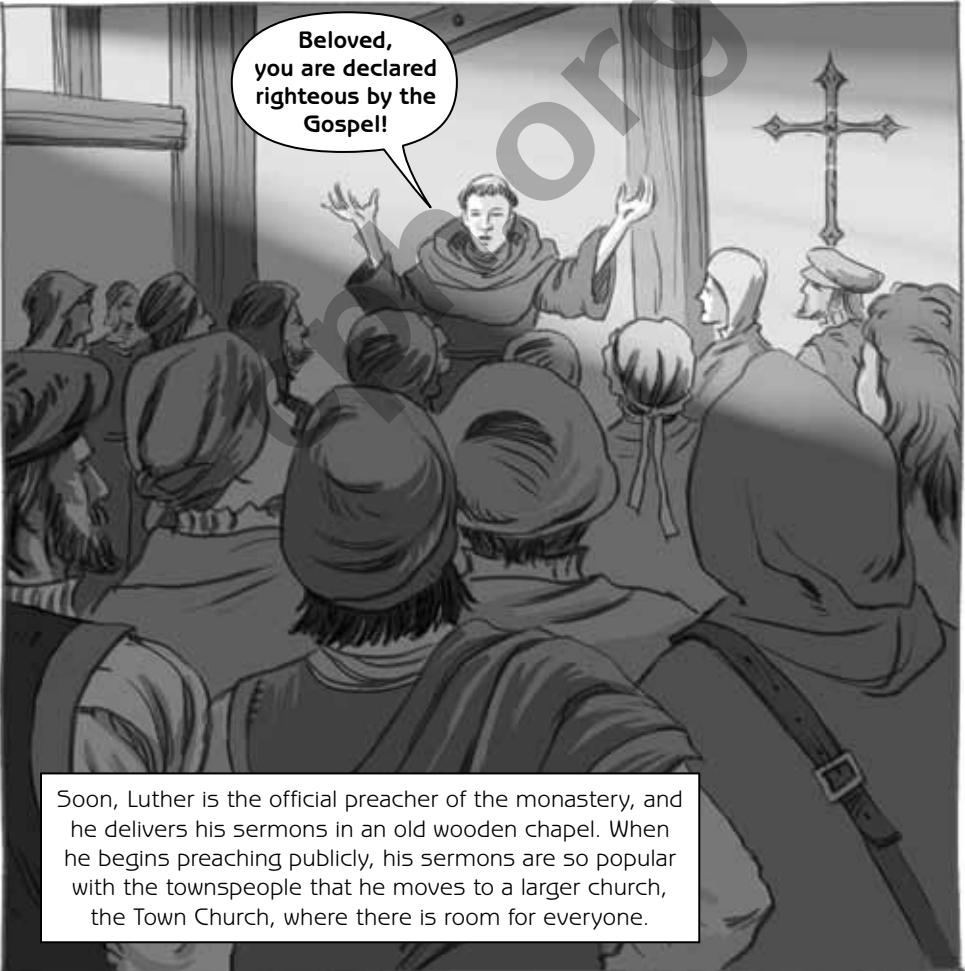
what he saw and heard
in Rome.

That summer, John Staupitz calls Martin back to Wittenberg, which now becomes his permanent home.



At the university, Luther continues to teach and to study. In 1512, he earns a doctor of theology degree.

Beloved,
you are declared
righteous by the
Gospel!



Soon, Luther is the official preacher of the monastery, and he delivers his sermons in an old wooden chapel. When he begins preaching publicly, his sermons are so popular with the townspeople that he moves to a larger church, the Town Church, where there is room for everyone.



And so began Luther's career as a professor of the Bible at the widely respected University of Wittenberg.


These were formative years for young

Professor Luther.

In addition to his lectures, he was responsible for supervising the monastery's beginning students, called novices. He was also responsible for overseeing eleven Augustinian monasteries throughout the region. And he continued to study the Bible.

To be well prepared for his lectures, Luther read closely, being careful to get the right meaning of God's Word. As is so often the case, the teacher learns along with the student. And for Luther, the turning point came as . . .

... he studied Romans 1:16–17.



For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Martin Luther had, for years, been tormented by the question, "How can I be sure that God forgives my sin and loves me?" Now he knew the answer to that question.

In the pages of his Bible, he discovered the Gospel message that Jesus took the punishment for our sins in our place.

This was Martin Luther's great

"Tower Experience."

That moment of understanding gave him the peace and assurance of God's forgiveness he had been searching for.





At this time in German history, the church was led by Joachim, an elector from Brandenburg, and his brother, Albert, who was bishop of Halberstadt and archbishop of both Magdeburg and Mainz. To get these jobs, these men contributed millions of dollars to the church in Rome.

But because neither Albert nor Joachim had this much money, they borrowed it from a family of bankers. Loans must be paid back, of course, and Pope Leo allowed Albert to raise money to pay this loan by selling **indulgences**. Half of the money they received from selling indulgences went to pay their debt to the bankers, and the rest went to Rome to help pay for the building of the Basilica of St. Peter.



Electors were powerful men, second only to the emperor. There were seven electors who either inherited their position or were appointed by the pope. Electors chose who would be the next Holy Roman Emperor, and the pope made this choice official when he crowned the emperor.



■ Indulgences

The simple definition of *penance* is repentance from sin. A Christian who does penance is truly sorry for his sin, confesses it, and is forgiven by faith in Jesus Christ. In the Catholic Church, penance includes absolution by a priest, prayer, doing good works, and indulgences. A person can do penance to reduce or remove punishment for sins while he lives on earth and in purgatory after death.

Sometimes people can do penance by contributing money to build a church or a hospital, for example. Beginning in the eleventh century, this contribution took the form of indulgence letters that people could purchase. In Luther's time, Pope Leo allowed the sale of indulgences to raise money for, among other things, an army to defend the church from its enemies within the church and without (namely, the Ottoman Empire).

Purgatory is a Catholic belief that faithful people who die may not be ready for heaven, so they spend time in a "between place" of temporary punishment for their sins.



Albert couldn't go door-to-door to sell indulgences himself. So, with Pope Leo's approval, Albert chose a monk named John Tetzel to do the selling to the German people for him. This would give Albert the money he needed to repay his large debts, it would give the pope the money he needed to build his magnificent church in Rome, and in the mind of the people, it would give them the indulgences they thought they needed to

buy forgiveness.

It would seem that this would make everyone happy. But that was not the case. Like Joachim, Frederick the Wise was also an elector in Germany, and he was very influential. Frederick did not want Tetzel coming into his country to sell indulgences because he was selling them there himself. Frederick wanted people to keep their money in Germany and not send it to Rome.