

“Jared Kennedy brings the great Reformer Martin Luther to life—haunted by thunder and lightning, hunted by kings and popes, humbled by our Lord Jesus and his word! But Kennedy does more than retell Luther’s full and fascinating story. Like Luther himself, he points readers to Luther’s first love: the strong and mighty word of God that does what it says—creating, forgiving, making holy, and giving true life in Jesus Christ. An excellent book for first meeting the boisterous pastor, preacher, and professor of Wittenberg!”

Todd R. Hains, author, *Martin Luther and the Rule of Faith* and *Who Is Our King?*; editor, FatCat Books

“*The Story of Martin Luther* is a lively tale about a lively man. Jared Kennedy recounts the complexities of Luther’s life in a way that is understandable, interesting, and relatable, without oversimplification or condescension. I can think of no better way to introduce children to the Protestant Reformation than by giving them this biography.”

Betsy Childs Howard, Editor, The Gospel Coalition; author, *Arlo and the Great Big Cover-Up*

“Phenomenal. *The Story of Martin Luther* is so much more than a biography. It is perfectly aimed at engaging young readers with exceptional storytelling and compelling narrative, and it is artfully and thoughtfully organized with points of visual interest, compelling illustrations, maps, recap sections, study questions, and a timeline. The young people who engage with this work will not soon forget the rich theology, church history, and maybe even the Latin they’re encouraged to scribble in the book itself. But more importantly, they will most certainly be shaped by the beauty and power of the gospel on display and will (Lord willing) begin to see God at work in their own stories as part of their own timeline.”

Abbey Wedgeworth, classical home educator; author, Training Young Hearts series

“Jared Kennedy has crafted a fast-paced, fact-based guide to the life of Martin Luther, suitable for children yet worthwhile for any age. Luther is depicted as a man dependent on divine grace whose life was marked by both faith and failures.”

Timothy Paul Jones, C. Edwin Gheens Professor of Christian Family Ministry, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Jared Kennedy’s *The Story of Martin Luther* is perfect for young theologians and will be enjoyed by adults as well. Kennedy writes about Luther in a way that simultaneously informs and inspires readers to treasure Jesus and to have confidence in the word.”

Jamaal Williams, Lead Pastor, Sojourn Midtown, Louisville, Kentucky; President, Harbor Network; coauthor, *In Church as It Is in Heaven*

“There are few figures in church history who are more colorful than the Reformer Martin Luther. In this volume, Jared Kennedy does a marvelous job of painting Luther with a glorious palette—showing us his persistent faith, his rigorous theological mind, and his endearing humanness. Kids and adults alike will laugh at Luther’s antics and thank God for his courage. The world could use some young Luthers today, and I pray this book will be the instrument God uses to raise up gospel-emboldened boys and girls.”

Megan Hill, Managing Editor, The Gospel Coalition; author; pastor’s wife; mother of four

“Whenever I see a new children’s book by Jared Kennedy, it jumps to the top of my list of books to recommend to parents. This skillful retelling of Martin Luther’s life is no exception.”

Robert L. Plummer, Collin and Evelyn Aikman
Professor of Biblical Studies, The Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary

“This book checks all the boxes: interesting characters, well-told history, and rich theology explained so anyone can understand. Best of all, it makes Jesus and his free grace the hero of the story.”

Jack Klumpenhower, author, *Show Them Jesus*

“As young people mature they need to know the centrality of the gospel and the Bible, both in our theology and our day-to-day lives. This accessible, entertaining, and relatable biography of Martin Luther illustrates the fundamentals of these two precepts extremely well. My children will be reading this book as an essential part of their Christian formation and education.”

Cameron Cole, Founding Chairman, Rooted Ministry;
author, *Therefore I Have Hope* and *Heavenward*

The Story of Martin Luther

Lives of Faith and Grace

Edited by Champ Thornton

The Story of Katie Luther: The Nun Who Escaped to True Freedom

The Story of Martin Luther: The Monk Who Changed the World

The Story of Martin Luther

The Monk Who Changed the World

Jared Kennedy

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For

*Friedrich, Mary Ellen, Fritz, Olivia, and Felix Honay,
and all the families of Leipzig Projekt.*

*Christ will build his church, and the gates
of hell cannot stand against it.*

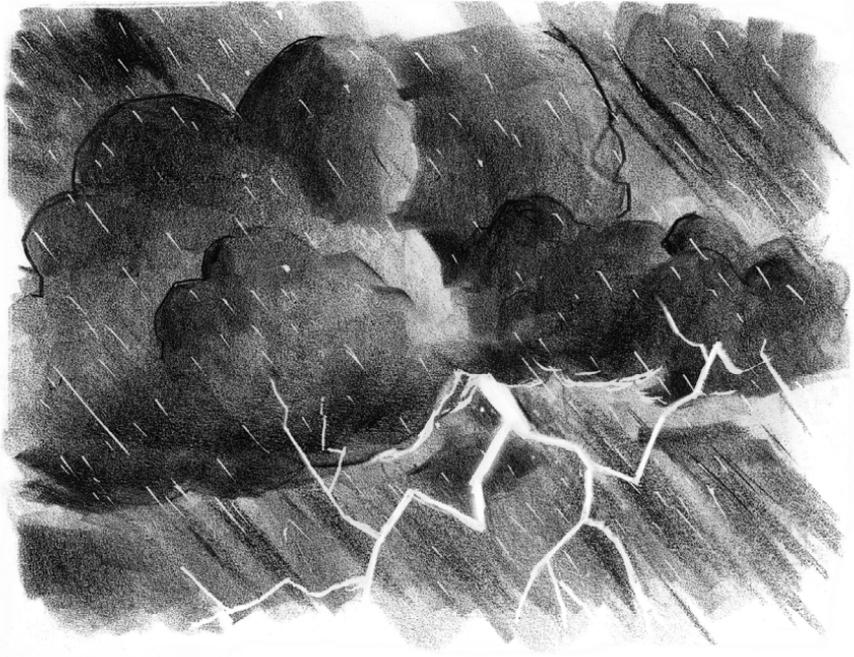
“I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s word.

. . . I did nothing. The word did everything.”

MARTIN LUTHER

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1

Thunder and a Vow

July 1505

CRACK! A BOLT OF LIGHTNING strikes the earth. Its flash knocks Martin Luther on his back. His bag and belongings fly across the rain-soaked road. *Boom!* Thunder crashes again.

This will be my death, Martin thought.

It was Sunday, July 2, 1505. A day that would



— GERMAN CITY PRONUNCIATION —

Augsburg: OWGZ-boork
Eisleben: EYES-leh-ben
Erfurt: AIR-foort
Heidelberg: HIGH-dell-berg
Leipzig: LY-ptsyk

Magdeburg: MAHK-duh-boork
Mansfeld: MAHNS-felt
Marburg: MAHR-boork
Orlamünde: OR-lah-moon-duh
Stotternheim: SHTOT-ern-hyme

Wartburg: VART-boorg
Wittenberg: VIT-ten-berg
Worms: VORMS
Zwickau: TSVIK-ow

Germany's borders have changed since Martin's day. This map shows Germany's present-day borders.

change his life. The week before, the twenty-one-year-old law student had been visiting his parents in Mansfeld, Germany. But as Martin traveled back to the university, he was caught in a deadly storm. The University of Erfurt was only six miles ahead, but Martin wasn't thinking about school.

If Martin had graduated, he'd have been an amazing lawyer. He was smart and good with words, but he wasn't thinking about the money he'd make in a successful law career. He couldn't argue his way out of the storm. There was only one way out. Martin knew his parents wouldn't like it, but in his panic, he bargained with God. *What if I pledge my whole life to serve the church? Will you spare my life if I become a monk?*

Martin knew what becoming a monk would mean. Years before, while at boarding school in Magdeburg, he'd watched what happened when Prince William of Anhalt decided to become a monk. The prince had left his palace, entered the monastery, and taken a vow of poverty. He had been reduced to begging on the streets. "With my own eyes I saw him," Martin

later wrote. “I saw him carrying the sack like a donkey. He had so worn himself down by fasting . . . that he looked like death, mere bone and skin.”

Why would Martin want to live such a hard life? What could tempt the young man to defy his parents, give away the expensive legal textbook his father had bought him, and forsake a promising career as a lawyer to become a beggar? It wasn't just his fear of lightning and thunder. Other fears raged in Martin Luther's soul.

Martin's father, Hans, was a miner and demanded much of his son. His mother, Margarethe, terrified Martin with the fear of God. She had told him about devils that gather in the dark forest at night. She had warned him about witches that cast spells on cows to dry up their milk. On top of the fears Martin had learned in his family, everyone around Martin thought about death and God's coming judgment all the time. In the 1300s, Europe had faced a massive outbreak of the bubonic plague, the “black death.” Nearly a third of the continent's population died.

— Artistic Judgment —

Two woodcut prints, popular at Martin's time, give us a window into the people's fears. One, called the *Dance of Death*, features skeletons summoning people from all walks of life (pope, emperor, prince, child, and laborer) to the grave. Another portrays Christ the Judge sitting on his throne above a rainbow. Lilies extend from his head to the faithful on his right, and a sword extends to the wicked at his left. The message of these images is clear: *Be prepared. Death and judgment can come at any moment.*



Without modern medical advances, people didn't count on living long.

All alone on the road, the warning flashed in Martin's heart like the lightning around him. Psalm 29 says, "The God of glory thunders, . . . The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire" (29:3, 7). Afraid that God the Judge had come for him in the storm, Martin called to the patron saint of faithful miners like his father. Fearing devils might spring from the wood and drag him to hell by his curly hair, Martin cried out, "Saint Anne, help me! I will become a monk."

With those words, Martin committed himself to the only life he believed would guarantee him peace and assurance of final salvation. But what if it didn't? What if becoming a monk couldn't calm the storm in Martin's soul?