

LutherFacts #22

In less than four years, Martin Luther took the crucial steps that resulted in the coming of the Protestant Reformation. From his posting of the Ninety-Five Theses on October 31, 1517, to his defiant statement at the Diet of Worms on April 18, 1521, Luther personally framed the major arguments that would shape the larger resistance to the Papacy and the established order of Christianity. Rarely in human history has one individual's views had such an immediate and far-reaching impact. After the debates between Luther and Johann Eck, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V invited the rebellious monk to defend his views before him and the Diet. Luther accepted. At the assembly, he used the opportunity to argue forcefully that scripture did not grant the authority that the Pope had long claimed to rule the medieval church. Luther also called for extensive theological and institutional reforms. Standing before the Emperor and a large gathering of distinguished church officials, he clarified his views point-by-point. When told he must recant them, Luther boldly declared: "I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. God help me." The next day, the Emperor labelled him "a notorious heretic" and condemned his followers. He did, however, give Luther safe passage back to Wittenberg as a gesture to Luther's patron, Frederick of Saxony. On April 26, Luther left Worms, traveling with a contingent of guards but also fearful for his safety. He did not know that an astonishing event was about to befall him.