



THE LEGACY OF LUTHER

Edited by R.C. SPROUL *and* STEPHEN J. NICHOLS



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The Legacy of Luther

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“I did nothing; the Word did everything.”

—MARTIN LUTHER

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CHRONOLOGY

- 1483 Born in Eisleben, Nov. 10
- 1492–98 Attends school at Mansfield, Magdeburg, and Eisenach
- 1501–5 Attends University of Erfurt; receives BA (1502), MA (1505)
- 1505 Makes vow during thunderstorm, July 2; enters Augustinian monastery
- 1507 Ordained
- 1509 Receives BA in Bible; begins lecturing at Erfurt on the arts
- 1510 Makes pilgrimage to Rome
- 1511 Transfers to Augustinian monastery at Wittenberg
- 1512 Receives doctorate in theology; appointed to faculty of theology at Wittenberg
- 1513–17 Lectures on Psalms, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews
- 1517 Posts Ninety-Five Theses on church door, Oct. 31
- 1518 Heidelberg Disputation, April 25
- 1518 Examined by Cardinal Thomas Cajetan at Augsburg
- 1518–19 Possible date of conversion
- 1519 Debates Johann Eck at Leipzig, July 4–14
- 1520 Writes *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *On the Freedom of a Christian*
- 1520 Receives *Exsurge Domine*, papal bull excommunicating him
- 1521 Appears before Diet of Worms, April 17–18

- 1521 Placed under imperial ban, condemned as a heretic and an outlaw, May
- 1521–22 In exile at Wartburg Castle; translates New Testament into German
- 1522 Returns to Wittenberg
- 1524 Publishes first hymnal
- 1525 German Peasants' War
- 1525 Marries Katharina von Bora, June 13
- 1525 Writes *On the Bondage of the Will*
- 1527 Plague strikes Wittenberg; Luther's house becomes a hospital
- 1527 Writes "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"
- 1529 Attends Marburg Colloquy, Oct. 1–4
- 1529 Writes Small Catechism
- 1530 Diet of Augsburg; Luther is unable to attend
- 1530 Augsburg Confession written by Philip Melancthon
- 1534 Publishes complete German Bible
- 1537 Writes Smalcald Articles
- 1543 Writes *On the Jews and Their Lies*
- 1545 Writes *Against the Papacy at Rome, Founded by the Devil*
- 1546 Preaches last sermon at Wittenberg, Jan. 17
- 1546 Dies in Eisleben, Feb. 18; buried at Wittenberg

PART ONE

LUTHER'S LIFE

Chapter One

A GRACIOUS GOD AND A NEUROTIC MONK

STEPHEN J. NICHOLS

On January 17, 1546, Martin Luther preached what would be his last sermon from the pulpit of the Castle Church (*Schlosskirche*) in Wittenberg. That same day, he wrote to a friend. He complained of the infirmities of his age: “I am writing, my James, as an old man, decrepit, sluggish, tired, cold, and now also one-eyed.” He then sighs, “. . . and as a man who now that he has died would be given the highly deserved rest (as it seems to me) he was hoping for.”¹ He would not be left in peace, however.

Luther’s hometown of Eisleben faced a crisis. A dispute threatened the civil order and even the ecclesiastical order. Worn out as he was, Luther decided to travel to his hometown to settle the dispute. He set out from Wittenberg with his three sons and a few servants. They first made it as far as Halle. Ice and storms made crossing the rivers a challenge. Luther imaginatively named the chunks of ice that floated threateningly toward their ferry, alternating between Anabaptist opponents and Roman Catholic bishops and popes. He might have been half-dead, but his humor was fully intact.

1 To Jacob Probst, January 1546, in *Luther’s Works, Vol. 50: Letters III*, eds. Gottfried G. Krodel and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 284–85. All references hereafter to *Luther’s Works*, American edition, are abbreviated *LW*.

Halle was the home of Luther's longtime associate Dr. Justus Jonas. Since the debate at Leipzig in 1519, Jonas had been one of Luther's closest disciples. Jonas stood by him at the Diet of Worms. While Luther was in exile at Wartburg Castle, Jonas moved the Reformation forward at Wittenberg. Now, Jonas would accompany Luther on his final trip.

Luther and his enlarged traveling party made a triumphal entry into Eisenach. The hometown hero was welcomed with cheering crowds and escorted by a cavalcade. He preached that Sunday, January 31.

But the journey had taken its toll. Luther wrote to his beloved Katie of bitter winds and freezing rains, not to mention all those threatening chunks of ice. Luther was severely ill. An out-of-control fire, right outside of Luther's room, also threatened his life. His room itself was precarious. Plaster fell from the walls, which loosened a few of the stones from the wall. One stone, reported to be the size of a pillow, came rather close to falling on his head. These misadventures gave reason for Katie to grow anxious back at home. She fired off letters full of worry. So Luther wrote back, letting her know he missed her and adding, "I have a caretaker who is better than you and all the angels; he lies in the cradle and rests on a virgin's bosom, and yet, nevertheless, he sits at the right hand of God, the almighty Father."²

Luther wrote those words on February 7. Eleven days later, he died. Eisenach, the town of his birth, became also the town of his death. Justus Jonas preached his funeral sermon. The crowd spilled out of the church and filled the square. Luther's three sons would accompany their father's body back to Wittenberg, where more crowds would gather to pay their final respects.

Just before he died, Luther preached from his deathbed what would be his last sermon. The "sermon" consisted of simply quoting two texts, one from the Psalms and one from the Gospels. Luther cited Psalm 68:19: "Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; God is our salvation." Then he cited John 3:16. Our God is indeed a God of salvation, and that salvation comes through the work of His Son. Luther could be at peace, though he was physically racked and surrounded by conflict.

Luther was not always at peace, and he didn't always think of God as the God of salvation. He initially feared God, at one point even muttering that he hated God. He was anxious throughout the early decades of his life. During these years, his life was far more struggle than rest. Prior to his "Reformation

² To Mrs. Martin Luther, Halle, January 25, 1546, in *LW*, 50:302.

breakthrough” and his conversion, which likely took place in 1519, he was deeply troubled. Luther’s life began in Eisleben in darkness. His life came to an end in Eisleben in the full light of the gospel. But this journey and this story are so much greater than one man. This singular story affected the whole of human history.

When Luther was born in Eisleben on November 10, 1483, there were only two options: a person either followed the ways of the Roman Catholic Church or was a pagan. When Luther died, on February 18, 1546, there was a new church in England. There was a new church in the Swiss city-states. And there was a new church in his own German lands. Two principles distinguished these churches from the church in Rome. The first principle concerned Scripture, while the second concerned the doctrine of salvation, specifically, the doctrine of justification. These two ideas express the essence of Reformation theology.

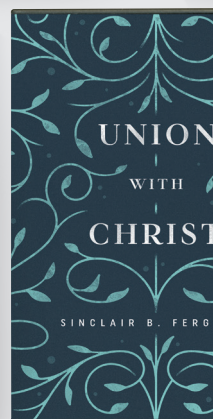
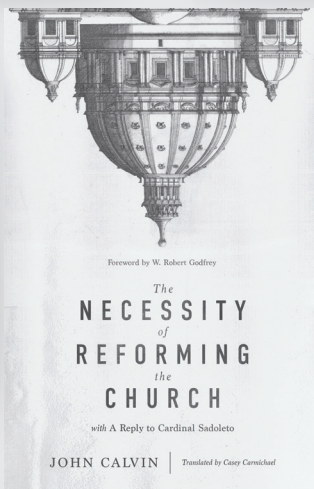
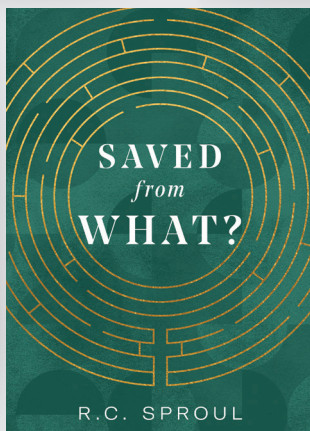
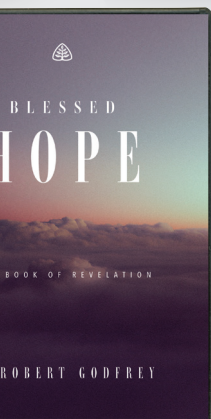
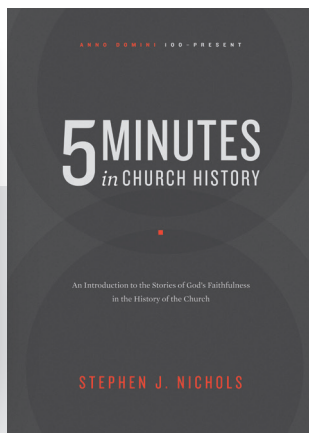
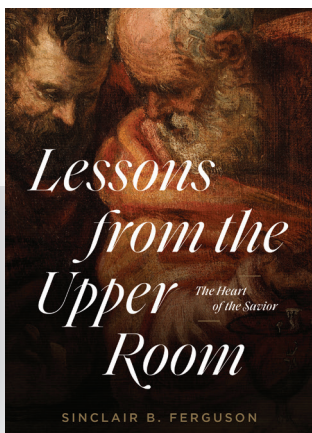
This essay tells the story of Luther’s journey from darkness to light, a journey that took him from Eisleben to his heroic stand at Worms. It is a theological journey, a journey toward the Reformation planks of *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*. It is also a literal journey, with a few key stops along the way. Six places in particular stand out during these early years of Martin Luther, from his birth in 1483 until his stand at the Diet of Worms in 1521: Eisleben, Erfurt, Rome, Wittenberg, Heidelberg, and Leipzig. Each one represents a milestone not only in Luther’s journey out of darkness, but also in the history of the Reformation itself.

Eisleben: Hometown

Hans and Margarethe Luder welcomed their first child, a son, into the world on November 10, 1483. The next day, they took him to the church to be baptized. November 11 was the feast day of St. Martin of Tours, the fourth-century Roman soldier turned monk and bishop. So this young couple left the church with their baby baptized and named Martin Luder.

Hans Luder left the farmlands of his family to make what he hoped to be his fortune at the booming business of copper mining. He was what we would today call an entrepreneur. He risked what little money they had in acquiring rights for a mine and then labored relentlessly in attempts to pull profits from it. He even took on what amounted to a second job by managing another mine. His industry and tenacity paid off, gaining him a certain level of esteem in the town. Meanwhile, Margarethe managed the home. Without

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