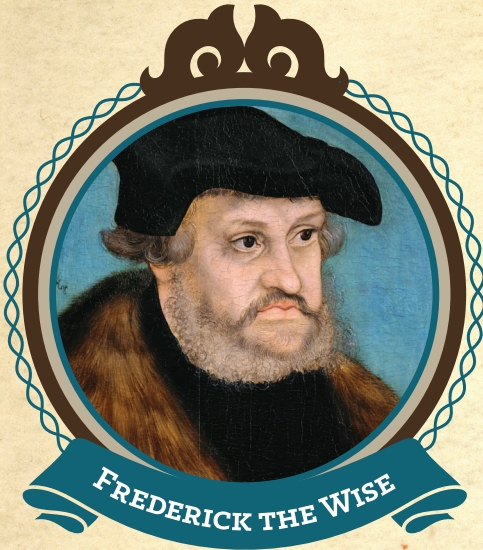


### FREDERICK THE WISE

**Born:** Jan. 17, 1463 | Torgau, Germany

**Died:** May 5, 1525 | Lochau, Germany



**REFORMATION**  
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## Luther's Prince and Protector

**FREDERICK THE WISE WAS THE SON OF ERNEST OF WETTIN.** Only a year before Ernest's death in 1486, the land of the House of Wettin was divided between Ernest and his younger brother, Albert. Albert took the title of "duke" and ruled over his half (Ducal Saxony, or Albertine Saxony). Ernest, who adopted the title of "elector," had the larger but poorer area of Saxony that would be known as Electoral Saxony, or Ernestine. At the age of 22, Frederick assumed his father's title of elector of Saxony. The chief castle was in Torgau, but Frederick had other castles in Saxony, including Wittenberg, Coburg and Wartburg. These would be important landmarks in Luther's life.

Frederick was a devout Catholic with an extensive relic collection. His relics included fragments of the cross, the cradle, the swaddling cloths and others. At the end of his life, Frederick had more than 19,000 relics. He had been taught that venerating relics would aid in getting to heaven. He made his relics available to the public for this purpose. They served another use, though: They were a tourist attraction and moneymaker. He also believed in indulgences, the practice of purchasing remission of sins. The idea was that Christ and the saints had accrued more good works than were necessary for their entrance into heaven. You could purchase an indulgence that would move some of the saints' line of credit to your account and thus take some of the years off your sentence in purgatory. Frederick used some of the money from indulgences to build a bridge near Torgau and to fund the building of his university at Wittenberg. He employed a monk named Johann Tetzel to sell indulgences.

Tetzel came around again in 1517 selling indulgences for the building of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. It was here that Frederick drew the line. It was one thing to "tax" the citizens for internal usage, but it was quite another to let good German money leave the area for Rome! Nevertheless, Tetzel could conduct business just over the border. The parishioners of Luther's church in Wittenberg queried their priest about Tetzel's practice, prompting Luther to post his 95 Theses. His theses were an invitation to debate the practice of selling indulgences, among other theological concerns. The theses were posted Oct. 31, 1517, the day before Frederick put his relics on display for All Saints' Day.

Frederick kept an open mind and listened to Luther's thoughts, which were based on Scripture. His motives may not have been purely theological, but instead more political. Luther's ideas fit well into Frederick's ideas of German nationalism, and protecting his young monk/professor was beneficial to both parties. To ensure his safety, Frederick arranged to have Luther "kidnapped" and hidden in the Wartburg castle after the Diet of Worms, at which Luther refused to recant. Frederick was respected amongst princes and popes for his wisdom. This respect was possibly a reason that other nobility listened to and supported Luther's ideas at the Diet of Augsburg.

Although there is no evidence that Luther and Frederick ever met face to face, the two had a symbiotic relationship. At the end of his life, Frederick, who never openly renounced his Catholic faith, received the Lord's Supper in the manner of the Reformation, in two kinds (the body and blood of Christ in, with and under the bread and wine of the altar).