

70. MARTIN LUTHER (5). THE DIET AND THE WARTBURG

On Tuesday, April 2, 1521, a horse-drawn wagon leaves Wittenberg. Dr Martin Luther and some friends are going on a journey. A large group of friends see them off. They are on their way to Worms, a city near the banks of the Rhine River.

It had just been Easter, and Luther preached the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection on those festive days.

Now he leaves his beloved city where he has so many fond memories. He hopes to be back in a few weeks. Luther starts his journey cheerfully, but his friends do not share his optimism. Shaking their heads, they watch him disappear into the distance, and then they return home, deeply concerned. Anxiety fills their hearts. Will they ever see their beloved Dr Martin back again? They fear the worst.

THE DIET OF WORMS

The Diet of Worms is in progress. The young, twenty-one-year-old German Emperor, Charles V, holds his first Diet (meeting) with the electors and other German government officials. They have been in session for some months, having started on January 28, 1521.



Frederik the Wise

Frederik the Wise, the elector of Saxony, is also there.

There are many items on the agenda, including the current ecclesiastical disputes.

The disagreements are upsetting all of Germany and much of Europe. Above all else, the Emperor desires peace and rest in his realm, including peace in the church! Therefore, the Emperor commanded Frederik the Wise to take Martin Luther along. The elector of Saxony refused to do this, and he left for Worms without Luther. In their discussions, Frederik gives his reason for this.

Does the Emperor want Luther to appear at the Diet?

OK, Frederik is happy to tell him to come. But he demands that the Emperor first gives a signed guarantee of safe passage. The other electors also wish the 'Luther case' to be examined at the Diet. This matter concerns all of Germany.

The pope's representative, Aleander, disagrees! "What? ... Must Luther's case be *examined*? Out of the question!"

Aleander becomes angry and addresses the Emperor: "Nothing needs to be investigated! The pope, the highest power on earth, has excommunicated Luther, that dangerous heretic. That

monk from Wittenberg has the curse of Christ on him! The case is closed, and the Diet has no right to open it for discussion again!"

The Emperor smiles astutely and answers: "You tell *that* to the electors!"

Aleander has no problem with that. He thinks he can easily sort out those German electors. He addresses the assembly for three hours. He points out the dangers to which they expose the Roman Catholic Church and explains how these disputes disturb the peace in Germany. Enough reason to keep this matter off the table!



Girolamo Aleander.



City of Worms.

But he is mistaken if he thinks he has talked the assembly out of it. The electors allow him to finish his speech, but they have plenty to say when he finally finishes speaking! Even the *Roman Catholic* electors attack him! They accuse him that Rome silently permitted the wicked indulgence traffic and even supported it! This way, they had transferred a lot of German money to Italy. They remind him of the sinful life of many Roman clergymen and demand that the monk Luther receive a hearing at the Diet.

"All right then," Emperor Charles decides, "Let it be so."

LUTHER TRAVELS TO WORMS

They invite Luther to appear at the Diet, and the Emperor promises him safe passage. An imperial messenger called Caspar Sturm delivers the sealed safe-passage document to Wittenberg. He will also escort Luther to and from Worms. When Luther receives that invitation, he immediately decides to go.

"Don't do it! Remain here! We will protect you!" beg his friends. Luther answers:

"I have a safe passage, don't I?"

"A safe passage?" they scoff, "so what! John Huss had one too, but they imprisoned and burned him! Don't trust that so-called safe-passage document! Your enemies will not rest until they have killed you!"

They try everything to stop him from going to Worms. But Luther has made up his mind.

"God will help me," he says decisively and full of courage, he embarks on the long journey to Worms. His friends are not so sure; they are

worried about his safety.

That journey of Luther to Worms is like a triumphal tour. People come from everywhere in every village he travels through to see that famous, notorious monk. Everywhere they welcome him with much



Caspar Sturm,
imperial escort



The journey to Worms was like a triumphal tour...
<https://www.pg-winschoten.nl/>

kindness. In Leipzig, the city council even offer him a cup of special 'wine of honour'.

When Aleander, the papal representative, hears that Luther is on his way, he tries to scare him off. He uses all sorts of tactics to stop Luther from coming to Worms. He organises public burnings of Luther's books in some villages where Luther will travel. That is a bad sign. His plan is glaringly obvious. Once again, his friends try to persuade Luther to return. They remain fully convinced that he is heading for disaster. And what does that brave monk reply?

"Even though there be as many devils in Worms as tiles on the roofs, I will still go!"

He feels that he *must* go to Worms! He will publicly speak of his faith in Jesus Christ before the rulers of the earth. He believes it is his calling to stand up for the name and cause of the Lord. The cunning plan of Aleander to stop Luther from coming to Worms fails.

On April 16, Luther arrives at Worms. The streets are packed with people; they all want to see the man about whom everyone is talking. Slowly and with difficulty, the procession moves on. Luther has only just entered his lodgings when people start coming, wanting to speak with him. Princes, dukes, counts, bishops, and others enter the house.

He must listen to friend and foe. Through it all, Luther remains calm.

LUTHER AT THE DIET AT WORMS

At four o'clock the next afternoon, Caspar Sturm, the Emperor's messenger, comes to escort him to the Diet. Large crowds jostle in the streets to catch a glimpse of him. By taking some back roads, they manage to get to the building where the Diet is meeting.

When Martin Luther is about to enter the hall, an aged army general taps him on the shoulder.

"My monk, my good monk," he said, "you will now face greater danger than any of us have ever encountered in the heat of battle; but if you are right, God will fight for you."

Luther cannot respond as the door is already open for him to enter the hall.

For a moment, Luther is overwhelmed when he sees all the rulers and men of high positions in the room. And no wonder! Emperor Charles V is present, and Archduke Ferdinand, Alexander, 6 electors, 24 dukes, 8 margraves, 30 archbishops, bishops, several counts, princes and chancellors and many more.



Charles V

Everybody is looking at him.

A pile of books is on the table.

The Emperor asks him if he wrote those books.

Luther glances at them and recognising some is about to say 'yes', but his lawyer friend cuts in and calls out:

"First, let someone read all the titles!"

His enemies are cunning; they might have added some books Luther did not write. Luther had not thought of that. They check the titles, and all the books are Luther's writings. Then Luther answers: "Yes".

The Emperor asks him to retract the contents of those books.

It becomes breathlessly quiet in the large hall.

The suspense is enormous and visible on every face.

So much depends on Luther's answer.

Luther is very conscious of the importance of this moment.

The eyes of everyone present are on him, as are the eyes of all Europe!

He does not want to answer rashly and hastily, so he asks for 24 hours to consider his response.

The Emperor, who is in a good mood, grants him that request.

Luther leaves the building.

The Roman Catholics are sure that, now it is

coming to the crunch, the monk from Wittenberg will indeed retract; otherwise, he would not have requested thinking time.

SATAN ATTACKS

It is the night between the 17th and 18th of April 1521. It is dark, and the people of Worms are asleep. Only in Luther's room light is still burning. Luther cannot sleep.

He is kneeling near his chair.

He knows that he cannot travel this road by himself.

The weight of responsibility presses heavily on him.

That night Luther wrestles in prayer with God.

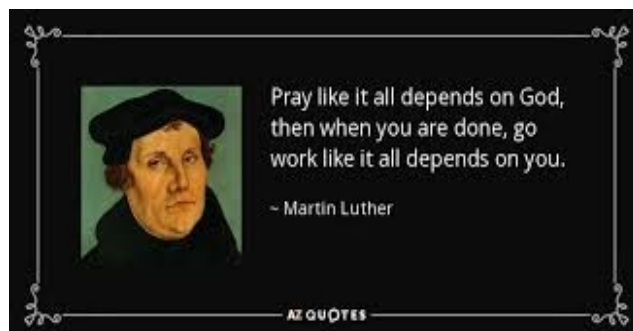
Satan is not sleeping, either!

He shoots his darts, dipped in the poison of unbelief and doubt, into Luther's anxious heart. Luther fights a severe battle.

He prays: "O God, help me! Please do not forsake me! Lord, it is not *my* cause but *Yours*! Please help me, Lord, because it concerns Your honour!" All night Luther prays and petitions the throne of grace.

And the Father, the Hearer of prayer, comforts Luther with His presence and favour.

Heavenly peace fills his heart.



Satan must withdraw. There is no room for him where God is present. When finally, morning dawns, the battle is over!

Quietly and calmly, firmly trusting that God will not leave him, the Reformer waits for Caspar Sturm to take him to the meeting room.

TRIUMPH AT THE DIET

At the appointed hour, Caspar comes to escort him to the hall where the leaders of Germany are waiting for him.

The excitement on the street is even greater than the previous day.

Luther and Sturm cannot get through the crowd. They have no option but to find their way through

people's backyards! With great difficulty, they reach the building.

Again, Luther enters the hall. For the second time, he stands before the dignitaries of the Empire.

But no dread or fear fills his heart. The Emperor again asks if he will retract the contents of his writings.

In response, Luther now delivers his speech.

Here is a summary.

He is more than willing to take back where he has been too sharp towards certain persons.

Concerning the truth, however, he cannot and may not retract anything. He rejects the decisions of popes and councils because it has become evident that they have often erred.

He will only retract when they prove to him from God's Word that he has erred.

Luther delivers this speech in German so everyone present, except the Emperor, can understand it. He has a dislike for the German language and has trouble following Luther. The Emperor asks for a repeat, but this time in Latin. When Luther has finished speaking, all present are deeply impressed. The Reformer has asked them to prove from God's Word that he is wrong!

Prove from God's Word?

No way! The Roman Catholic clergy neither can nor want to do that! The Roman Catholic spokesman tells him they are not interested in a debate; they only want a short and sharp response: yes or no.

The audience waits in breathless suspense. Then everyone hears the Reformer calmly and firmly declare:

"If you fail to convince me, based on God's Word, that I have erred, then I neither can nor will retract. Here I stand, I can do no other. May God help me. Amen!"

These words cause an uproar in the hall. The

Roman Catholics angrily gnash their teeth, but Luther's friends rejoice. Here Satan suffered a massive defeat. Luther leaves the assembly hall. Looks full of hatred follow

him but also looks of respect and appreciation.

Luther's enemies try to persuade the Emperor to withdraw the safe passage promise.

"We do not need to keep our word given to a heretic!"

But Emperor Charles V does not give in. The promise of safe passage remains in force. Maybe he wants to keep his promise, maybe he fears the consequences, for if he breaks his promise, he will

"If you fail to convince me, based on God's Word, that I have erred, then I neither can, nor will retract. Here I stand, I can do no other. May God help me. Amen!"



"Here I stand, I can do no other." Wikipedia

have a civil war on his hands. Whatever the case, Luther can go in safety.

God watches over His faithful servant, and He inclines the heart of the Emperor so that he keeps the given promise.

His friends advise Luther to leave Worms as soon as possible. He leaves the city on April 26. He has just left when the Emperor pronounces the ban on him. He is declared to be an 'outlaw'. That means that anyone may kill him without fear of punishment. No one may offer him lodgings. All books written by Luther must be burned.

This law is known in history as the 'Edict of Worms'. It clearly shows that Charles V was very hostile toward Luther. But we also see God's providence in this. The heavenly King prevents the earthly monarch from harming the Reformer. But from then on, the life of the brave monk is in great danger. His enemies will not stop until they have eliminated him.

Will they succeed?

LUTHER RESCUED

On the evening of May 4, a wagon drawn by three horses rides quietly through the dense forest of Thuringia. Luther is on his way home. He left Worms eight days ago. He was forbidden to preach, but Luther ignores that command. Wherever the opportunity arises, he openly preaches the Word.

He is exhausted, understandably so. The stress from the Diet of Worms has demanded much from him. However, despite his fatigue, the outlawed monk cannot stop preaching.

He travels on and makes good progress. Wittenberg is getting close. Caspar Sturm, his escort, is no longer with him. Luther has sent him back as they are almost home.



Luther 'kidnapped' by his friends. <https://www.welt.de/geschichte/kalenderblatt>

On this quiet evening in May, he has only a few companions: among them, his brother Jacob and his friend Amsdorff. While travelling, they are quietly chatting. The sun is setting slowly in the West, and the shadows of the trees become longer. Everything is peaceful.

Suddenly the peace is rudely shattered! Some masked horsemen force their way through the bush to the middle of the road.

"Halt!"

A strong hand grabs the horses' reins and forces the wagon to stop. Frightened, Jacob Luther quickly jumps out of the wagon and runs away as fast as he can without looking back!

One of the masked horsemen harshly commands Luther to get out of the wagon. Amsdorff protests vehemently, trying to protect his friend.

They ignore him.

Luther realises that resistance will not help at all. He climbs out of the wagon.

The men put him on a horse and disappear into the darkness.

Where are they going?

Luther does not know. Who are those horsemen? The masks they are wearing make it impossible to see who they are.

Amsdorff and the coachman are left behind, terrified.

What will happen to their beloved Luther?

Meanwhile, the kidnappers ride hurriedly through the night.

Luther, not used to riding horseback, soon gets tired and uncomfortable. But his kidnappers do not allow him any rest.

Go, go, go!!

For hours they gallop through the dark woods. They stop only once for a short break at a little spring.

Luther can quickly refresh himself but must immediately mount again to continue their flight. This nightly escapade is awfully hard on the monk. They approach a castle close to midnight on top of a mountain. The bridge is down, and the gate creaks open; the sound of horses crossing the wooden drawbridge echoes through the quiet night. They ride into the castle grounds. The bridge is quickly drawn up, and the gate is locked.

Luther is a prisoner of*his friends!*

These horsemen are following the orders of Frederik the Wise, the elector of Saxony. That wise nobleman knew the ban had been pronounced on Dr Martin Luther, and he feared for his life. He realised that Rome would try everything to arrest and kill that hated monk! That's why he decided to be a step ahead of the enemy. While still in Worms, Luther received a



Wartburg Castle.

tip-off that he should not get too frightened if something happened to him on the road.

Frederik's scheme worked brilliantly!

The news of Luther's kidnapping in the forest of Thuringia spread like wildfire through all of Germany. His enemies cheer. They assume Roman Catholic knights have made Luther a prisoner and would surely settle accounts with him. His friends get a terrible shock, not doubting that the Reformer has fallen into the hands of his enemies.

AT WARTBURG CASTLE

Meanwhile, Luther lives safely at Wartburg Castle and is well cared for. He can relax after the strain of the last few months.

Unhindered, he wanders through the vast forests and enjoys the beautiful scenery. The quiet solitude is good for him.

Isn't that dangerous?

Hasn't he been declared an outlaw?

What if one of his enemies recognises him?

No, they won't!

We wouldn't have recognised Luther either. He has removed his monk's robes and dressed up as a knight. He has grown a beard so that even his closest friends would not have recognised him. He also had a name change.



Luther as Knight George.

As 'Knight George', he is perfectly safe at Wartburg. The Lord gives His weary servant some reprieve.

However, Luther is not the type to sit idle. When his energy returns, he wants something to do. His friends arrange this for him. A spacious study is set up where he can work undisturbed. God is watching over His child.

LUTHER'S STRUGGLE

Luther still experiences some severe spiritual struggles at Wartburg. Satan is not ready to give up yet, and sows doubt into his heart.

Has he done the right thing?

Has he *really* spoken the truth at the Diet?

These and other doubts burden his heart and make him anxious and distressed, but then he kneels and wrestles with God in prayer. God answers those prayers and takes his doubts away. He is again convinced that he could not have acted any differently than he had. Then he feels richly blessed.

Although Luther lives in Wartburg, he does not forget his friends at Wittenberg. Soon his friends start receiving letters from '*The Realm of the Birds*' and '*Patmos*'. His friends soon understand who wrote those letters and realise he is safe.



First Luther Bible
completed in 1534

Luther writes several booklets at Wartburg. But his most remarkable and significant work there is translating the Bible into German. He starts with the New Testament and completes it within 12 weeks. After that, he also translates the Old Testament. He finishes translating the whole

Bible in 1534. This 'Luther Bible' is printed, purchased, and read by thousands, but by then, Luther has already left Wartburg. He only stayed there for ten months and then returns to Wittenberg.

Isn't that dangerous?

He *is* still an outlaw!

Indeed, it *is* dangerous because anyone can legally kill him. He risks his life by returning to Wittenberg. But Luther has no choice; he *must* return and face the battle again. He goes in the full confidence that not a hair will fall from his head without the will of his heavenly Father.

Why does he need to return?

That is for the next chapter.

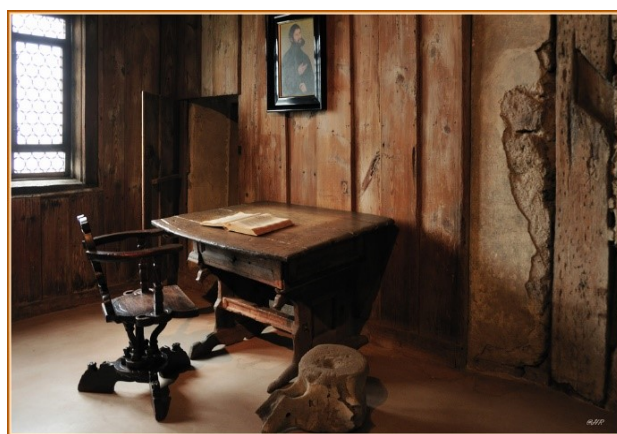
QUESTIONS

1. Why did the Emperor command Frederik to bring Martin Luther to the Diet?

2. Why did Aleander oppose the examination of Luther?
3. Identify Caspar Sturm.
4. Why did Luther feel he must go to Worms?
5. Why did Luther ask for a delay of twenty-four hours before he gave his answer?
6. What happened during these twenty-four hours?
7. List the main points of Luther's address.
8. On what condition would Luther retract?
9. What did the Emperor's ban mean? What was this ruling called?
10. Why did Frederik use this method to get Luther to safety?
11. Describe Luther's life at Wartburg; what was his main achievement?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Do you believe Luther's appearance at the Diet of Worms helped or hindered the cause of the Reformation in Germany? Explain.
2. Was Luther's faith wavering when he asked for an extension of time? What evidence do we have to show that this extra time was essential for him?
3. Explain Luther's wrestling in prayer. Find two examples in the Bible where people wrestle in prayer. Does the Lord answer these prayers because His people wrestled so sincerely, or is there another reason why the Lord is pleased to grant an answer on prayer? Explain.



Luther's study on the Wartburg. Wikimedia Commons