

hearing before the princes of the realm. Charles V felt he had already done this but to unite and placate the German princes, he summoned Luther, under a safe-conduct, to meet the Reichstag at Worms the following April. Although there were some doubts about the value of an imperial safe-conduct, Charles and Frederick were agreed and Luther was determined to speak so the stage was set for one of the most interesting meetings in this period.

The Diet of Worms, 17 April 1521

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Worms

It was, no doubt, a traumatic moment. The gathering of the Reichstag was always a dramatic moment and there was great excitement in the populace. We might safely say that all of northern Germany knew of the Lutheran issue and was keenly interested in the outcome. Luther at the onset found himself in a quandary. We do not think his faith or courage failed him but the enormous responsibility he felt for truth may have weighted his mind enormously. At any rate, when called to account for his views and beliefs he asked for one more day to reconsider. The anticlimactic moment caused Charles V to note that such a man would never make a heretic of him.

But on the following day Luther reaffirmed his belief and his utterance that even a council could err. He refused to recant and his "here I stand" emphasis, although historians are not agreed on the exact words and setting, became the historic position for which he is justly famous. He was placed under a ban by Charles, his arrest was ordered, and his books sentenced to be burned. But Charles did honor the safe-conduct. Luther was permitted to leave under his own power. His stance at Worms somehow not only cemented his own expression of faith but also turned him into a popular German hero for the time. With the skillful assistance of Frederick he was never apprehended and the Romanists moaned of his release. The least we can say for Charles V is that the young man honored his word...more than can be said for many emperors and, in particular, the popes of his day.

En route home, Luther was "kidnapped" by a group of "ruffians" and spirited off to a castle of Frederick's, the Wartburg. He did not seem to know of the plot in advance and in the Wartburg he was known as Knight George. For many months no one knew of his whereabouts save a small elite corps of