

LutherFacts #23

On April 26, 1521, as Martin Luther began his return from Worms to Wittenberg, he harbored one great fear. Would Charles V take steps to capture and put him on trial for heresy, even though the Emperor had promised him 21 days of safe passage? Luther began the journey with a large contingent of supporters but by May 2, only a handful remained. Two days later, in Eisenach where historic Wartburg Castle was located, a group of men suddenly appeared on horseback and forced Luther to accompany them into the castle. There he was placed in a room. Was this the end for the outspoken Luther? As the day progressed, however, a very different fate unfolded. Details on all these events are scarce. One source notes that Frederick, Elector of Saxony, "allowed" Luther to be placed there in protective custody. In this way, Frederick was not directly implicated with Luther's "disappearance." For the next ten months, Martin Luther lived in disguise--his hair grown out and called "Knight Georg"--in Wartburg Castle. While there, he wrote and published more pamphlets in defense of his controversial views. Most importantly, Luther decided to translate Erasmus' Greek-based version of the New Testament into the German language. This effort proved significant for not just increasing access to the Bible in the vernacular but also for its impact on the emergence of the modern German language. For Martin Luther, contrary to expectations, the Diet of Worms led to new freedom and an even greater role in the Reformation.

