

# MEMORABLE DAY

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Historians, both Protestant and Roman Catholic agree that it was on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1521 that Martin Luther was tried at Worms in Germany in accordance with the directives of Pope Leo X and Charles V the Holy Roman Emperor. The Emperor had summoned Luther to appear for a trial before the Diet of Worms, an assembly of the Holy Roman Empire in deference to the wishes of the Pope. Ever since 31 October 1517, the day on which Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the Cathedral of Wittenberg questioning the sale of Indulgences in order to raise funds for the construction of the St. Peter's Basilica at Rome, the Pope had been persuading the Emperor to take action against Luther for writing books and pamphlets criticizing the teachings of the Church. The Emperor was disinclined to arrest and put Luther to trial as he apprehended unwelcome consequences. He knew that the Church of Rome would like to brand Luther a heretic and burn him at the stake as it had done earlier in its attempt to suppress dissent. [John Huss of Bohemia was burnt at the stake on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1415 at Konstanz for upholding the view that the Church had no authority to teach anything unsupported by the Holy Scriptures. And Jerome of Prague was burnt at the Stake on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1416 for holding similar views as John Huss]. The Emperor was aware that there were many people in Germany who supported the views of Luther and believed that the authorities of the Church were deceiving people by selling them Indulgences

and making money. So he was not eager to arrest and punish Luther and thus make himself an unpopular ruler. But as pressure from Rome mounted, he yielded to the wishes of the Pope and summoned Luther to the Diet of Worms. Thus Martin Luther accompanied by some friends reached Worms on 16<sup>th</sup> April 1521. Though Luther appeared before the Diet next day, the actual trial was held on 18<sup>th</sup>, the day after.

In the presence of a large audience including several dignitaries of the Church and the State, Bishop John Eck permitted Luther to make it clear whether he agreed to recant his teachings or reaffirmed them. In reply Luther stated that he believed all the main ideas in his books and pamphlets were fully in agreement with the Holy Scriptures which was the sole basis of all teachings of Christianity and therefore his conscience did not permit him to recant them. Concluding his statement he said, "Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me, Amen". Since the bishop wanted him to repeat his concluding words in Latin also he did so and reaffirmed his statement.

The Emperor in his verdict declared that Luther was a heretic and therefore no one had any right to propagate his ideas in his empire; but as he was aware of the people's sympathy for Luther and his ideas, instead of imprisoning him, he permitted him to go back home and Luther went back to his native place with a feeling of immense relief and joy. The news of Luther's declaratory statement before the Diet of Worms affirming the infallibility of the Holy Scriptures and its status as the sole basis of all Christian teachings spread far and wide. It inspired courageous men like William Tyndale of England to do everything in their capacity to translate and print the Holy Scriptures in as many languages as possible. Soon after, Tyndale's translation of the New Testament from original Greek was printed in Worms, brought into England secretly and distributed there widely.

This translation along with Tyndale's translation of some books of the Old Testament from original Hebrew which was supplemented by Miles Coverdale's translation of the other books of the Old Testament resulted in the publication of the complete Bible in English in 1535.

The subsequent events – the printing of the King James Version of the Bible in 1611, the establishment of the first Bible Society in England in 1779, the formation of the French Bible Society in 1792, the establishment of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804 and the formation of the various Bible Societies in the different parts of the world that followed – all have to be considered the direct results of the bold and emphatic assertion of Martin Luther on that historic day-- that the Bible is the sole basis of all Christian teachings. The great inspiration that the lovers of the Bible derived from Luther's fearless assertion about its inestimable value and greatness as the sole basis of the Christian faith has been responsible for the world wide missionary activities of the next few centuries resulting in the unprecedented social and cultural progress that our world witnessed. It is quite true to say that the words uttered by Martin Luther at Worms on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1521 changed and enlightened our world miraculously, in countless ways.

As we Christians living in 2021 look back into history and see what the Holy Spirit of God has accomplished in our world during the past 500 years we cannot but feel immensely grateful to martyrs like William Tyndale who sacrificed everything they had, for enlightening men's hearts by the glorious light of the Gospel. And we cannot but thank God and praise Him for letting us see the marvelous light of His Word, which millions who lived in the Dark Ages before the Reformation were unable to see. It will be most appropriate on our part to observe 18 April 2021-- the day that marks the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Martin

Luther's declaration of the supremacy of the Word of God at Worms in Germany, the country that deserves to be called The Second Holy Land of Christians—as a day of prayer and thanksgiving. On this day we ought to remember gratefully the sacrificial accomplishments of the known and unknown servants of our Lord who risked their lives to uphold the sanctity and authority of the Word of God. Their memory continues inspiring us to go forward spreading the Light of the Gospel everywhere by every means until our Lord comes again.

Would the Bible Societies in the different countries of the world be willing to exhort Christian believers and Churches to observe 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2021 as a day of prayer and meditation on the Word of God in the context of the strenuous and sacrificial deeds of people like Thomas Charles of Bala in Wales who played a crucial role in the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804 and the determination of the little girl Mary Jones, who at the age of 9 began earning money to buy a Bible and at 15, in the year 1800 walked 26 miles barefoot, traversing a mountainous terrain in Wales to reach the house of Thomas Charles to buy a copy of the Bible and walked back all the way keeping the precious gem close to her heart? If they did something that would induce the peoples of the world to think of the civilizing influence and inestimable worth of the Book of books on human culture, it would hasten the thorough evangelization of the world and the second coming of our Lord. God bless all who sincerely love Him and strive to take His Word of Life to millions in our world remaining dead in sins and ignorant of invaluable truths.

**N.B. Everyone who reads this message is requested to share it with others who may be interested.**