

Diet of Worms

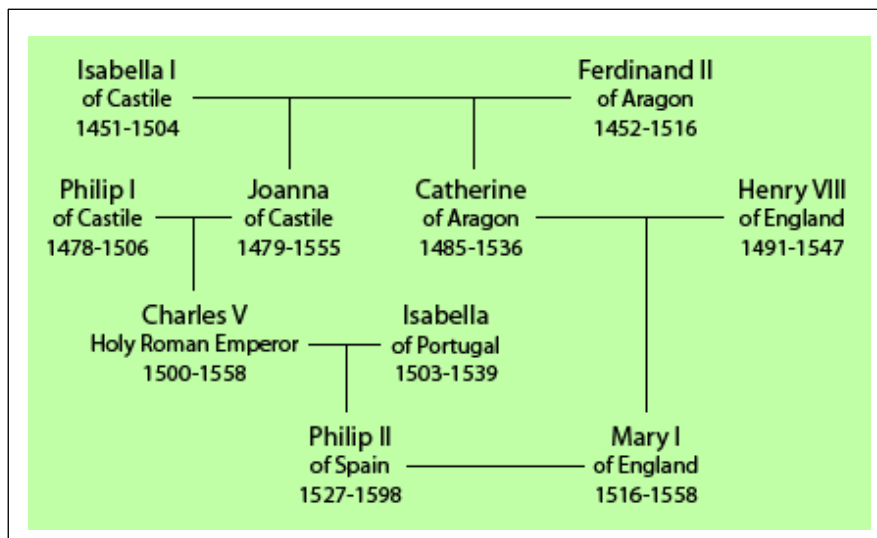


Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor

Pope Leo X had failed to overpower Martin Luther who, back in Germany, had rallied the support of many people and created a rebellion against the Church. Leo was not going to let Martin get away with this, and he reached out to Charles V, the leader of Germany, for help.

Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, ruled lands that stretched from Germany to the Americas and it was said that the sun never set on his empire, because it spanned such a huge part of the world that some part of the empire was always in the sun.

This same man was Charles I, the King of Spain, who granted Magellan his armada of ships to sail around the world. His grandparents were Isabella and Ferdinand, the King and Queen of Spain who supported Columbus in his voyage to America.



Here is a family tree of some of our characters in today's story

KEY: A horizontal line from one person to another shows they are married. A vertical line shows leads to the children they have.

You can see Queen Isabella and Ferdinand at the top.

They had daughters, Joanna and Catherine.

Each of them took husbands: Philip I and Henry.

Charles is the son of Philip I and Joanna.

Mary is the daughter of Catherine and Henry.

Charles and Isabella of Portugal marry and have a son – Philip II who marries Mary. (We aren't told anything about the parents of Philip I, Henry or Isabella of Portugal in this family tree – they 'marry into' this family.)

This mighty ruler, Emperor Charles V, was asked by Pope Leo to deal with Martin, this German monk who was under Charles' rule. The Emperor was a reasonable man and thought it only fair that he gave Martin a chance to explain himself. Charles was a clever man – he knew that many powerful people in Germany were sympathetic towards Martin. He did not want to upset these great lords and learned men, nor the many many peasants and soldiers who supported Martin.

So, Charles called a meeting of all the powerful people of Germany – cardinals, bishops, princes and noblemen. Luther was told to appear before these people to defend his actions. His safety was assured; he was told he would be able to return to his hometown of Wittenberg after being questioned. So off went Martin Luther to meet before these most powerful people. It takes a special kind of courage to go alone into such a meeting – to be ready to defend yourself before the mighty people of a country.

A great assembly of this nature is called a 'diet', and the city in which this meeting took place is called Worms, a city in Germany. So, although it sounds funny, the name for this meeting is *The Diet of Worms*.

Luther approached the entry and one of the soldiers patted him on the back and gave him these not-so-encouraging words, "I've gone into battle before without fear, but I would not like to be in your shoes, little monk."

The doors to the great hall opened and at the back of the hall sat Charles V on a high throne. The Roman cardinal sat to one side, in his crimson robe. There were also lords and knights in their colourful clothes. There were lawyers, dressed in black, and also present were bishops, priests and monks. When Luther walked in, this great crowd grew silent and all eyes looked to Martin in his dark brown habit.



Martin walked through the crowd of thousands and faced the Roman cardinal, who was there as the pope's ambassador or representative. The questions began. And the questions were fired by the cardinal who was hoping to trip Luther up, or embarrass him in some way.

For two days the questions went on and on with short breaks for meals. During this time Martin refused to recant any of his writings, and at the end, when the cardinal had no more questions, Luther said these words which have become famous: "I will not take back anything I have said for this would be against my conscience. I stand by my words, I cannot do otherwise, so help me God. Amen."



Wartburg Castle

Just as Charles V had promised, now Luther was free to leave. He set out on his journey back to Wittenberg. While Luther was on his way home, Charles V made it known that he had made a decision – that Luther was in the wrong, that he was a heretic, and he was now considered an outlaw. This meant that Luther was not protected by any law. Anyone could kill Luther without fear of punishment. This meant that Luther was no longer safe.

But Martin had friends and supporters who helped him go into hiding. A man called Frederick the Wise faked a highway attack on Luther as he travelled back to Wittenberg, abducting and then hiding Luther at Wartburg Castle, after the Diet of Worms.

Once in hiding, Luther began the mammoth task of translating the bible from Latin into German. Up to this point, a person had to know Latin in order to read the bible, and to know Latin, you needed an education. Translation into another language had not happened yet because the Church did not want ordinary people to access the bible themselves.

Martin Luther had a very different view – he wanted everyone to be able to read the bible. So, he used his time in hiding at Wartburg Castle to do this difficult task. Even today people educated in this area do not necessarily agree on how parts of the bible should be translated.

After a year Charles V had bigger problems than a troublesome monk – there was a war against France. Now Luther could return to his friends in Wittenberg. And he took up the task of working on a new kind of church that was independent of the pope. This Church was called Protestant, for the people who joined it protested against the practices of the Roman Church.

Luther claimed there was nothing in the bible that said a priest could not marry. This was a rule originally made up by the pope, Gregory the Great. So now that Martin had a faith that was separate to the Roman Church, he put away his monk's habit and took a wife, Katharina von Bora, who used to be a nun. Katharina was a self-confident, strong-willed and independent woman, which, at the time, were not considered desirable qualities in a woman. But now Luther found a peaceful life with Katharina. Together they had six children and created a lively and happy home. It was always busy, with not only their own children but also Katharina's relatives and Luther's sister's six children.



Katharina von Bora

Luther spent his time preaching, teaching and writing while Katharina ran the three-storey home – a former monastery. The house became a busy hub of activity – a kind of conference centre and hotel. Local students and professors would board there, coming to hear Luther's ideas. Katharina spent her time investing the family income in creating a large farm, many gardens, fishponds and fruit orchards. She also ran the most cows and pigs of anyone in Wittenberg as well as a household brewery.

The Reformation movement spread across Europe and the household became the epicentre. After dinner Luther and Katharina and their guests would discuss theology and politics in Latin, nutting out great ideas for the framework of the Reformation.

Throughout his life it was Martin Luther's wish that the great movement he started would not lead to bloodshed. Unfortunately, there were violent massacres and wars, which continued on for a long time after Martin Luther's death at the age of sixty-three.

