

THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. PAUL

How did St. Paul die? Christians have often wondered what happened to the Apostle Paul since we don't have any information about his death. Tradition says that he was beheaded during the reign of the Emperor Nero between 64 and 68 A.D. let us see some historical information coming from the Fathers of the Church in the early christianity.

1. Paul in the New Testament: We have in the New Testament thirteen letters of the Apostle Paul. Besides, approximately half of the Acts of the Apostles is devoted to tracing the conversion and the subsequent missionary activities of Paul. The New Testament does not record anything about Paul's death, However, the Acts of the Apostles end, somewhat abruptly, with Paul living under house arrest at Rome for two years, and preaching the gospel to all who come to him. In the second letter to Timothy 4:6-8 we find some words which speak of Paul's suffering and awaiting death

"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. For I am already on the point of being sacrificed. The time to set sail has come"

2. Clement of Rome (97 A.D.) was the bishop of the church in Rome towards the end of the first century A.D. He was known to the Apostle Paul, and is actually mentioned in Phil 4:3. In his letter 1 Clement (chapter 5) to the church at Corinth, he says,

"Through envy and jealousy the greatest and most righteous pillars [of the church] have been persecuted and put to death. Let us set before our eyes the illustrious apostles. Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labors; and when he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him. Owing to envy, Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects"

Clement does not here give us any details of how Peter and Paul were martyred , presumably the details were well known to his readers but does confirm for us that they were martyred.

3.) Ignatius of Antioch (died probably A.D. 107): St. Ignatius was the bishop of the church at Antioch in the early part of the second century. He was himself martyred. condemned as

a Christian and was taken in chains to Rome, he died facing wild beasts in the arena, probably in A.D. 107. It is likely he knew the Apostle John personally and may have been converted by him.

In his (Ignatius) Letter to the Ephesians, chapter 12, Ignatius mentions the martyrdom of Paul:

"You are initiated into the mysteries of the gospel with Paul, the holy, the martyred, the deservedly most happy – at whose feet may I be found, when I shall attain to God! – who in all his letters makes mention of you in Christ Jesus".

4. Dionysius of Corinth (171 A.D.) He was the bishop of Corinth. In his letter no 3, he writes to the church at Rome:

"Therefore you also have by such admonition joined in close union the churches that were planted by Peter and Paul, that of the Romans and that of the Corinthians: for both of them went to our Corinth, and taught us in the same way as they taught you when they went to Italy; and having taught you, they suffered martyrdom at the same time"

Dionysius here furnishes us with a number of interesting details:— That both Peter and Paul were martyred having taught the church at Rome. They were apparently martyred soon after having taught at Rome at the same time.

5. The Acts of Paul (160 A.D.) It is an apocryphal work written around A.D. 160. It is the first surviving text to make the claim that Paul was beheaded under the Emperor Nero:

"Then Paul stood with his face to the east and lifted up his hands to heaven and prayed a long time, and in his prayer he conversed in the Hebrew tongue with the fathers, and then stretched forth his neck without speaking. And when the executioner struck off his head, milk spurted upon the cloak of the soldier. And the soldier and all that were there present when they saw it marveled and glorified God which had given such glory to Paul: and they went and told Caesar what was done.

And when he heard it, while he marveled long and was in perplexity, Paul came about the ninth hour, when many philosophers and the centurion were standing with Caesar [= the Emperor Nero], and stood before them all and said: "Caesar, behold, I, Paul, the soldier of God, am not dead, but live in my God. But to you shall many evils befall and great punishment, you wretched man, because you have shed unjustly the blood of the righteous, not many days from now." And

having so said Paul departed from him. But Nero hearing it and being greatly troubled commanded the prisoners to be set free"

6. Tertullian (145–220 A.D.) He was the north African theologian. He writes in his *Prescription Against Heretics*:

"How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! — where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's! — where Paul wins his crown in a death like John's! According to this excerpt, Paul won the crown of glory by enduring "a death like John's," i.e., John the Baptist, who was beheaded"

Conclusion: We have listed out a few earliest evidence regarding the death of Paul. From this evidence, we can possibly draw some conclusions. Paul was certainly martyred as per the writings of Clement, Ignatius and Dionysius. Paul himself wrote in *Philippians 1:18-21*

"Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain".

Jesus gives us the strength to be content in every circumstance. This means that we can have a sense of peace that comes from being reconciled to God through Christ and knowing that He is in control of our life. what we can truly learn from St. Paul is his zeal and enthusiasm. Paul sacrificed a lot to follow Jesus. Not only did he eventually lay down his life, but he also suffered: Flogging, Beating with rods, Stoning, Imprisonment, Shipwrecks, Hunger, Cold and Sleeplessness. He was willing to suffer because he knew that in Jesus was the most important message ever delivered to mankind: the offer of eternal life and forgiveness of sins by God himself. Paul looked at a perishing world, and knew that he had the message that was able to save those who believed it. He was willing to suffer, to give himself up to death, if only Jesus Christ might be proclaimed. But no matter how he met his death, Paul's life laid a crucial foundation for the christian faith. St. Paul's life, teachings and martyrdom have been always an incentive for the reinforcement of the christian identity of each one of us and for the rejuvenation of the entire church. God captured this misguided man's heart and used it to change the world. Paul was never outside of God's reach and neither are we!