

John Foxe Book of Martyrs

HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MARTYRS TO THE FIRST GENERAL PERSECUTION UNDER NERO.

The history of the church may almost be said to be a history of the trials and sufferings of its members, as experienced at the hands of wicked men. At one time, persecution, as waged against the friends of Christ, was confined to those without; at another, schisms and divisions have arrayed brethren of the same name against each other, and scenes of cruelty and woe have been exhibited within the sanctuary, rivalling in horror the direst cruelties ever inflicted by pagan or barbarian fanaticism. This, however, instead of implying any defect in the gospel system, which breathes peace and love; only portrays in darker colours the deep and universal depravity of the human heart. Pure and unsophisticated morality, especially when attempted to be inculcated on mankind, as essential to their preserving an interest with their Creator, have constantly met with opposition. It was this which produced the premature death of John the Baptist. It was the cutting charge of adultery and incest, which excited the resentment of Herodias, who never ceased to persecute him, until she had accomplished his destruction. The same observation is equally applicable to the Jewish doctors, in their treatment of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In the sudden martyrdom of John the Baptist, and the crucifixion of our Lord, the history of christian martyrdom must be admitted to commence; and from these, as a basis for the subsequent occurrences, we may fairly trace the origin of that hostility, which produced so lavish an effusion of christian blood, and led to so much slaughter in the progressive state of christianity.

As it is not our business to enlarge upon our Saviour's history, either before or after his crucifixion, we shall only find it necessary to remind our readers of the discomfiture of the Jews by his subsequent resurrection. Though one apostle had betrayed him; though another had denied him, under the solemn sanction of an oath; and though the rest had forsaken him, unless we may except "the disciple who was known unto the high-priest;" the history of his resurrection gave a new direction to all their hearts, and, after the mission of the Holy Spirit, imparted new confidence to their minds. The powers^[16] with which they were endued emboldened them to proclaim his name, to the confusion of the Jewish rulers, and the astonishment of Gentile proselytes.

1. *St. Stephen*

St. Stephen suffered the next in order. His death was occasioned by the faithful manner in which he preached the gospel to the betrayers and murderers of Christ. To such a degree of madness were they excited, that they cast him out of the city and stoned him to death. The time when he suffered is generally supposed to have been at the passover which succeeded to that of our Lord's crucifixion, and to the æra of his ascension, in the following spring.

Upon this a great persecution was raised against all who professed their belief in Christ as the Messiah, or as a prophet. We are immediately told by St. Luke, that "there was a great persecution against the church, which was at Jerusalem;" and that "they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

About two thousand christians, with Nicanor, one of the seven deacons, suffered martyrdom during the "persecution which arose about Stephen."

1. *James the Great.*

The next martyr we meet with, according to St. Luke, in the History of the Apostles' Acts, was James the son of Zebedee, the elder brother of John, and a relative of our Lord; for his mother Salome was cousin-german to the Virgin Mary. It was not until ten years after the death of Stephen, that the second martyrdom took place; for no sooner had Herod Agrippa been appointed governor of Judea, than, with a view to ingratiate himself with them, he raised a sharp persecution against the christians, and determined to make an effectual blow, by striking at their leaders. The account given us by an eminent primitive writer, Clemens Alexandrinus, ought not to be overlooked; that, as James was led to the place of martyrdom, his accuser was brought to repent of his conduct by the apostle's extraordinary courage and undauntedness, and fell down at his feet to request his pardon, professing himself a christian, and resolving that James should not receive the crown of martyrdom alone. Hence they were both beheaded at the same time. Thus did the first apostolic martyr cheerfully and resolutely receive that cup, which he had told our Saviour he was ready to drink. Timon and Parmenas suffered martyrdom about the same time; the one at Phillippi, and the other in Macedonia. These events took place A. D. 44.

III. Philip.

Was born at Bethsaida, in Galilee, and was the first called by the name of "Disciple." He laboured diligently in Upper Asia, and[17] suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis, in Phrygia. He was scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards crucified, A. D. 54.

1. *Matthew,*

Whose occupation was that of a toll-gatherer, was born at Nazareth. He wrote his gospel in Hebrew, which was afterwards translated into Greek by James the Less. The scene of his labors was Parthia, and Ethiopia, in which latter country he suffered martyrdom, being slain with a halberd in the city of Nadabah, A. D. 60.

1. *James the Less,*

Is supposed by some to have been the brother of our Lord, by a former wife of Joseph. This is very doubtful, and accords too much with the catholic superstition, that Mary never had any other children except our Saviour. He was elected to the oversight of the churches of Jerusalem; and was the author of the epistle ascribed to James in the sacred canon. At the age of ninety-four, he was beat and stoned by the Jews; and finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club.

1. *Matthias,*

Of whom less is known than of most of the other disciples, was elected to fill the vacant place of Judas. He was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.

VII. Andrew,

Was the brother of Peter. He preached the gospel to many Asiatic nations; but on his arrival at Edessa, he was taken and crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground. Hence the derivation of the term, St. Andrew's Cross.

VIII. St. Mark,

Was born of Jewish parents of the tribe of Levi. He is supposed to have been converted to christianity by Peter, whom he served as an amanuensis, and under whose inspection he wrote his gospel in the Greek language. Mark was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria, at the great solemnity of Serapis their idol, ending his life under their merciless hands.

1. *Peter,*

Was born at Bethsaida, in Galilee. He was by occupation a fisherman. Christ gave him a name which in Syriac implies a rock. Peter is supposed to have suffered martyrdom at Rome, during the reign of the emperor Nero, being crucified with his head downward, at his own request.

[It is, however, very uncertain, whether Peter ever visited Rome at all. The evidence rather favouring the supposition that he ended his days in some other country.—*Ed.*][18]

1. *Paul,*

The great apostle of the Gentiles, was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, a native of Tarsus in Cilicia, and before his conversion was called Saul. After suffering various persecutions at Jerusalem, Iconium, Lystra, Phillippi and Thessalonica, he was carried prisoner to Rome, where he continued for two years, and was then released. He afterwards visited the churches of Greece and Rome, and preached the gospel in Spain and France, but returning to Rome, he was apprehended by order of Nero, and beheaded.

1. *Jude,*

The brother of James, was commonly called Thaddeus. He was crucified at Edessa, A. D. 72.

XII. Bartholomew,

Preached in several countries, and having translated the gospel of Matthew into the language of India, he propagated it in that country. He was at length cruelly beaten and then crucified by the impatient idolaters.

XIII. Thomas,

Called Didymus, preached the gospel in Parthia and India, where exciting the rage of the pagan priests, he was martyred by being thrust through with a spear.

XIV. Luke,

The evangelist, was the author of the gospel which goes under his name. He travelled with Paul through various countries, and is supposed to have been hanged on an olive tree, by the idolatrous priests of Greece.

1. *Simon,*

Surnamed Zelotes, preached the gospel in Mauritania, Africa, and even in Britain, which latter country he was crucified, A. D. 74.

XVI. John,

The "beloved disciple," was brother to James the Great. The churches of Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira, were founded by him. From Ephesus he was ordered to be sent to Rome, where it is affirmed he was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. He escaped by miracle, without injury. Domitian afterwards banished him to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. Nerva, the successor of Domitian, recalled him. He was the only apostle who escaped a violent death.

(The apostle John was never martyred, and died of old age at 99 or 100 years old, but soon to be martyred according to Mark 10:38-39, Revelation 11:7)