

THE CLAIM THAT JESUS' DISCIPLES WERE MARTYRED IS PURE HEARSAY

No early source claims that the disciples who were appointed as official spokesmen for the faith were martyred for their faith in the resurrection of Jesus. Acts 12 just mentions the murder of James son of Zebedee in passing. It is telling that if James died for Jesus that we get no detail. The truth is he was killed only to please his Jewish enemies and it was not about Jesus as such.

The narrative that they died because they saw that Jesus was alive after he was crucified and put to death is too simplistic. Nothing says they died for that or just that. If the apostles died for faith in the resurrection of Jesus, it could be they were unsure of their own experience and their faith was more about what others told them than anything else. Maybe, "The women said they seen the Lord. I think I did. I believe in the way my own converts do. Blessed are they who have not seen for themselves or as good as have not seen for themselves and yet believe."

MARTYRDOMS OF PETER AND PAUL – MERE LEGEND

The Catholic Church would have you believe that the apostle Peter died in Rome by being crucified upside down and that the apostle Paul was beheaded there. It makes out that they sealed their testimony for the truth of Christianity in their own blood.

Clement of Rome speaks of Peter being pestered until death but does not clearly say he was a martyr in the sense of one who dies merely for his faith.

Tertullian was the first ever to state that Peter was crucified but he gives us no reason to believe him or any evidence. He wrote too long after the event, about 140 years, to be worth paying attention to. The absurdity about John miraculously surviving a boiling in oil is in the same account in Against Marcion which further undermines what Tertullian wrote for it shows he was ignoring evidence and focusing on legend.

The Second Letter of Timothy has Paul saying in chapter 4 that his life is nearly over. He says it is already being poured away like a libation. You don't really talk that way if you are in jail awaiting execution. You talk that way if you are dying of some sickness or old age. He went on to say that the first time he had to present his defence nobody came to witness in his favour. He said that because of his message he was rescued by God from the lion's mouth for God inspired him what to say. So he escaped execution then. Then armed with this evidence he confidently says, "The Lord will save me from all evil attempts on me and bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom." The letter shows that Paul was confident he would never undergo a blood martyrdom and was living in such a way that it couldn't happen or too close to death for it to happen. The letter is suspected by most of having been written after Paul's death. If so, Paul was never a blood martyr.

The argument that Rome was the only place to claim that it was the scene of Peter's martyrdom proves nothing because Peter could have had an obscure martyrdom elsewhere and the Rome claim was late in origin. It was made up by the papacy which wanted to claim to be the leader of the Church and successor to Peter.

The story of Peter and Paul dying as blood martyrs is mere legend. Local gossip would be more reliable.

APOSTLE MARTYRDOM CLAIMS ARE LIES

Tertullian was one of many in the early Church who pleaded with people faced with possible death for their faith to make no effort to escape but to welcome this death. This movement needed the lie about the sainted apostles nearly all dying for the faith to encourage this so it invented the lie. It was noticed that if people died for the faith that more people were drawn to the faith and so martyrs were a great advertisement. Christians believe this evil man when he declared the apostles to be martyrs of blood.

The Epistle to the Hebrews may be from 70AD or shortly before the Temple was destroyed. It was written to Jewish Christians because the argumentation against priests and Temples and sacrifices in it and its extensive use of the Old Testament would not have been deployed for Gentile Christians who were unfamiliar with this ritualism. It would have been written to Jewish Christians in Palestine for that is where most of them were and the letter was known as the Epistle to the Hebrews from the first meaning it would have been sent to Jerusalem the HQ of the Jewish Christians for it was for all of them. It was written to Jewish Christians in Palestine but meant for Jewish Christians everywhere and there were some of them in Rome. Hebrews 12:3 tells them to think of Jesus who endured a lot of abuse from sinners so that they may feel stronger knowing Jesus went through worse than they did at the hands of hostile people. Verse 12:4 tells us something very

interesting. It says that none of them have resisted this abuse until their blood was shed. This tells us that the account in Josephus about James dying at the hands of a lynch mob over religious differences in 64 AD and the Book of Acts saying about the other James dying in 42AD by the sword of Herod's emissary are both lies. It also indicates that the stories in Acts about the murderous persecution of the Church and its claim that Paul was a murderer of Christians is fiction. Basically it means that some Christian inserted in Josephus the entire stuff about James the brother of Jesus being persecuted to death. That means that Josephus never mentioned Jesus at all for the other place where he says that Jesus was the Messiah and rose from the dead etc was something a man in his position could not write gives us no reason to think that any of it was really written by Josephus.

Luke 21 says Jesus told the apostles that some of them would be put to death. (Matthew 24 tells us that Jesus said what was in Luke 21 to the disciples.) But Jesus says the enemies of those who will not be, will be unable to contradict their wisdom and they will survive and not a hair of their heads will be harmed. Christians say he means they will be preserved for the resurrection but there is no need for that interpretation and it is too much for the context. Luke is saying that only a few of the apostles will be killed and he does not make it clear if they will be really martyrs or not which indicates that they will be lynched or something meaning that they do not mean to die. The impression given is that since the apostles defended themselves so well that they did not mean to get killed so the murdered ones died against their wills and not as demonstrations that what they said was true.

We know very little about the ultimate fate of the apostles. One reason for this is that "there are hardly any Christian writings dating between the years 100-150" (page 231, Asking them Questions). Only Peter, James and John are more than names to us of the apostles and everything else is legend (page 17, The Early Church, Henry Chadwick). So there are only three witnesses, Peter, James and John who are worth thinking about. We don't know if the apostles stuck together and agreed with one another all the time in matters of faith and morals. Only Peter, James and John were the nearest to being witnesses that we can consider and yet they were far from acceptable to us. Even if they were honest we have no reason to take them seriously. Two seemingly reliable people lying about the resurrection say of Buddha would have more right to be believed. The evidence for the resurrection is too feeble.

A Church of Ireland booklet, St Peter and Rome, quotes a Professor Lipsius with approval when he said that the truth about the lives and deaths of the apostles was lost with all the fantastical and pious make-believe that was manufactured in the early centuries of the Church (page 29).

St Andrew was allegedly crucified on a cross in an X shape. This is a late and untrustworthy tradition (page 344, The History of the Church).

Acts 12:2 says that the apostle James the brother of John was slain by the sword or beheaded but we are not told why except that it pleased the Jews. Herod who was to blame didn't even know it would please the Jews until it was done, we are told. We are not told that he died because he got the chance to recant his claims about Jesus and refused to so there is no reason to consider him a true martyr. James may not have seen the swordsman coming. Yet Christian lie that all the apostles but John were martyrs. Acts comes closer to presenting Stephen as a martyr which suggests that James was not one for it would be delighted to say that he was. We know that Jesus allegedly chastised James for being too anxious for religious power. He may have only said he saw the risen Lord to get power over the lives of others.

Jesus told the apostles that they would be thrown out of synagogues and executed but he did not add the crucial words "for your belief" (Matthew 24:9; John 16:2). Even if none of the disciples had been put to death this would have led people to say they were.

Did the gospels put in the story of Jesus predicting that the apostles would be martyred because they were martyred? Maybe or maybe not.

Some think that because James and John agreed to accept the cup Jesus agreed to drink from and to be baptised in the same baptism as him (Mark 10:35-40) that Jesus is saying they will be martyred like him. But Jesus was not a martyr but a suicide. And the story says that James and John were worldly and cocky so they knew that the baptism was suffering to get glory not death. Jesus would not have tricked them into saying they wanted to be martyred. The cup could be suffering but the baptism is the life of God. Then Jesus lectures them all on the need for humility and not looking for power.

The late first century Book of Revelation speaks of martyrs by blood and the apostles and never mentions the apostles having gone through the same. When the saints call for vengeance on those who killed them for their faith one would expect the apostles to be mentioned. Revelation shows anger against persecutors and with its loyalty to the apostles it would be inevitable for it to have raged against the killers of the apostles if the apostles had really been murdered.

A book by Dr William Steuart McBirnie, The Search for The Twelve Apostles, concluded that the story that John the apostle was boiled in oil and survived is dubious for it came from Tertullian who gave no hint that there was any evidence

for it and that John died an old man safe and sound in Ephesus according to the best sources. He found so many ridiculous legends about Matthew that where Matthew died by martyrdom could not be worked out for sure. Heracleon and Clement of Alexandria say the only probable thing about Matthew, which was that he died naturally. McBirnie argued that since Bartholomew was supposedly martyred in Armenia and in India according to other accounts that India may have meant Armenia for the ancients might have been using the India loosely. This is wishful thinking for he was desperate to believe in martyred apostles but all he found was excessive legend and incoherence and deception in the stories so nobody knows the truth. As Henry Chadwick stated only Peter, James and John are more than names (page 17, *The Early Church*).

The apostles were made the special witnesses of Jesus. If they died for their faith in Jesus that would be their supreme witness, when this supreme testimony cannot be verified it makes us sure that the apostles were charlatans and unlikely to have died for their faith for God would not have let the evidence slip away. We don't even know if they all remained true to the faith. Peter departed from the faith according to Galatians and Paul never says he reformed when he reprimanded him. Peter was accused by Paul of living like a Gentile and hypocritically imposed Jewish Law on the Gentiles. In essence, Peter had created a distorted religion, a new religion.

OTHER DISCIPLES WHO WERE SUPPOSEDLY MARTYRED

Stephen the first martyr never died for testifying to Jesus but for criticising the Jews for not keeping the law (Acts 7). Jesus may have been a part of his faith but there is no hint that he died for Jesus. He does not qualify as a Christian martyr.

Acts 12 says that James the apostle was beheaded by Herod Agrippa in Jerusalem in what is probably 42 AD. Many would have seen that this should please the Jews so we cannot say James chose death rather than renounce Christianity. We don't know the reason so we cannot say he was a martyr. But when Luke did not tell us he was a martyr then he probably was not one.

There is another James who Paul calls an apostle (Galatians 1:19) but grammatically it could be that he is excepted according to *Biblical Dictionary and Concordance*, NAB page 95) but who was not one of the Twelve. It is baffling that he was not chosen to replace Judas. He was much better suited than the mysterious and obscure Matthias. It must have taken the apostles a long time to trust him.

Eusebius says that Hegesippus (who wrote about 170 AD) wrote that this James the brother of Jesus was martyred for the same reason as Jesus (*The History of the Church*, page 129). That is all he says. But at least it shows that James did not die for the resurrection or the miracles of Jesus. Hegesippus said that James was asked by the Jews who respected him to stop the people believing in Jesus. They thought years after James' work in the Temple and listening to him that he did not believe himself. Evidently, they must have been right. The Jews looked on his religious teachings as having authority. But James let them think he was going to do as he said and instead testified to Jesus as the Christ. Then they threw him down and stoned him though he was dying from the fall and one of them killed him by hitting him over the head with a club as he prayed that God would pardon them. James clearly did not expect this to happen. We are not told that he had the chance to retract so we cannot be sure he really was a witness to Jesus by his death. And who would want to save their own lives by abjuring Jesus so as to live with such terrible injuries? Josephus said that James was tried for breaking the Law but Hegesippus says that James was lynched. Eusebius interestingly says that since nobody mentioned Josephus' version before his time that some doubted if it were authentic (*The History of the Church*, page 61). Jesus was killed for claiming to be a Messiah. Did James do the same? We know he was not killed for changing Judaism for he would not have been in the Temple if he had been. We know he was not killed for miracles for none are mentioned and the Jews would have welcomed his.

But even if Hegesippus said James was a martyr in blood for Jesus this writer was one of those people who just go after what they want to hear (page 18, *St Peter and Rome*).

We know too little about the apostles. We have no right to say they were honest men for men we know more about and trust have been found dishonest. You cannot glean sincerity from what somebody wrote. You need a face to face assessment. We don't know enough about the apostles and the martyrdom stories are unreliable and can be refuted. Accordingly, we cannot say their visions of Jesus raised from the dead really took place on the basis that they died for them.

WORKS CONSULTED

- A Concise History of the Catholic Church, Thomas Bokenkotter, Image Books, New York, 1979
- Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, John W Haley, Whitaker House, Pennsylvania, undated
- Asking them Questions, Various, Oxford University Press, London, 1936
- Belief and Make-Believe, GA Wells, Open Court, La Salle, Illinois, 1991
- Concise Guide to Today's Religions, Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, Scripture Press, Bucks, 1983
- Conspiracies and the Cross, Timothy Paul Jones, Front Line, A Strang Company, Florida, 2008

Did Jesus Exist? GA Wells, Pemberton, London, 1988

Did Jesus Exist? John Redford, Catholic Truth Society, London, 1986

Documents of the Christian Church, edited by Henry Bettenson, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979

Early Christian Writings, Maxwell Staniforth Editor, Penguin, London, 1988

Encyclopaedia of Heresies and Heretics, Leonard George, Robson Books, London, 1995

Encyclopaedia of Unbelief, Volume 1, Ed Gordon Stein, (Ed) Prometheus Books, New York, 1985

Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Vol 1, Josh McDowell, Alpha, Scripture Press Foundation, Bucks, 1995

Handbook to the Controversy With Rome, Volume 1, Karl Von Hase, The Religious Tract Society, London, 1906

He Walked Among Us, Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson, Alpha Cumbria, 2000

In Defence of the Faith, Dave Hunt, Harvest House, Eugene, Oregon, 1996

Introduction to the New Testament, Roderick A F MacKenzie, SJ, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1965

Jesus, AN Wilson, Flamingo, London, 1993

Jesus and the Goddess, The Secret Teachings of the Original Christians, Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, Thorsons, London, 2001

Jesus – God the Son or Son of God? Fred Pearce Christadelphian Publishing Office, Birmingham, undated

Jesus – One Hundred Years Before Christ, Professor Alvar Ellegard Century, London, 1999

Jesus and Early Christianity in the Gospels, Daniel J Grolin, George Ronald, Oxford, 2002

Jesus and the Four Gospels, John Drane, Lion, Herts, 1984

Jesus Hypotheses, V Messori, St Paul Publications, Slough, 1977

Jesus Lived in India by Holger Kersten, Element, Dorset, 1994

Jesus, Qumran and the Vatican, Otto Betz and Rainer Riesner, SCM Press Ltd, London, 1994

Jesus the Evidence, Ian Wilson, Pan, London, 1985

Jesus the Magician, Morton Smith, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1978

Jesus under Fire, Edited by Michael F Wilkins and JP Moreland, Zondervan Publishing House, Michigan, 1995

Lectures and Replies, Thomas Carr, Archbishop of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1907

Let's Weigh the Evidence, Barry Burton, Chick Publications, Chino, CA, 1983

Miracles in Dispute, Ernst and Marie-Luise Keller, SCM Press Ltd, London, 1969

Nag Hammadi Library, Ed James M Robinson HarperCollins New York 1990

On the True Doctrine, Celsus, Translated by R Joseph Hoffmann, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1987

Putting Away Childish Things, Uta Ranke-Heinemann, HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1994

Runaway World, Michael Green, IVP, London, 1974

St Peter and Rome, JBS, Irish Church Missions, Dublin, undated

Saint Saul, Donald Harman Akenson, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000

The Bible Fact or Fantasy, John Drane, Lion, Oxford, 1989

The Bible Unearthed, Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, Touchstone Books, New York, 2002.

The Call to Heresy, Robert Van Weyer, Lamp Books, London, 1989

The Case For Christ, Lee Strobel, HarperCollins and Zondervan, Michigan, 1998

The Case for Jesus the Messiah, John Ankerberg Harvest House, Eugene, Oregon, 1989

The Early Church, Henry Chadwick, Pelican, Middlesex, 1967

The Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics, Leonard George, Robson Books, London, 1995

The First Christian, Karen Armstrong, Pan, London, 1983

The Gnostic Gospels, Elaine Pagels, Penguin, London, 1990

The Gnostic Paul, Elaine Pagels, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1975

The History of Christianity, Lion, Herts 1982

The History of the Church, Eusebius, Penguin, London, 1989

The House of the Messiah, Ahmed Osman, Grafton, London, 1993

The Jesus Event and Our Response, Martin R Tripole SJ, Alba House, New York, 1980

The Jesus Hoax, Phyllis Graham, Leslie Frewin, London, 1974

The Jesus Inquest, Charles Foster, Monarch Books, Oxford, 2006

The Jesus Mysteries, Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, Thorsons, London, 1999

The MythMaker, St Paul and the Invention of Christianity, Hyam Maccoby, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1986

The Reconstruction of Belief, Charles Gore DD, John Murray, London, 1930

The Search for the Twelve Apostles, William Steuart McBirnie, Tyndale House, 1997

The Secret Gospel Morton Smith Aquarian Press, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1985

The Truth of Christianity, WH Turton, Wells Gardner, Darton & Co Ltd, London, 1905

The Unauthorised Version, Robin Lane Fox, Penguin, Middlesex, 1992

The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus, Raymond E Brown, Paulist Press, New York, 1973

Theodore Parker's Discourses, Theodore Parker, Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, London, 1876

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Kittel Gerhard and Friedrich Gerhard, Eerdmans Publishing Co, Grand Rapids, MI, 1976

Those Incredible Christians, Hugh Schonfield, Hutchinson, London, 1968

Who Was Jesus? A Conspiracy in Jerusalem, by Kamal Salabi, I.B. Taurus and Co Ltd., London, 1992

Who Was Jesus? NT Wright, SPCK, London, 1993
Why I Believe Jesus Lived, C G Colly Caldwell, Guardian of Truth, Kentucky

The WWW

Who is GA Wells? Rev Dr Gregory S. Neal
www.errantskeptics.org/G_A_Wells.htm

The Silent Jesus
www.askwhy.co.uk/awcnotes/cn4/0325SilentJesus.html#Justin

Apollonius the Nazarene, The Historical Apollonius versus the Historical Jesus
www.apollonius.net/bernard1e.html

Why Did the Apostles Die? Dave Matson,
www.infidels.org/library/magazines/tsr/1997/4Why97.html

The “Historical” Jesus by Acharya S
www.truthbeknown.com/historicaljc.htm

How Did the Apostles Die?
www.infidels.org/library/magazines/tsr/1997/4/4front97.html

History’s Troubling Silence About Jesus, Lee Salisbury
www.secweb.org/asset.asp?AssetID=102

Steven Carr discusses the Christian and apostolic martyrs
www.bowness.demon.co.uk/martyrs.htm
www.bowness.demon.co.uk/martyrs2.htm

Challenging the Verdict
A Cross-Examination of Lee Strobel’s The Case for Christ
<http://human.st/jesuspuzzle/CTVExcerptsOne.htm>
<http://human.st/jesuspuzzle/CTVExcerptsTwo.htm>
<http://human.st/jesuspuzzle/CTVExcerptsThree.htm#Twelve>

The Martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, Peter Kirby
<http://home.earthlink.net/~kirby/>

The Martyrdoms: A Response, Peter Kirby
www.bowness.demon.co.uk/martyrs3.htm

BIBLE VERSION USED

The Amplified Bible
The King James Version