

Justin Martyr – Defender of the Truth

His Early Life:

- 1) Justin was born in the year 100 AD in Flavia Neopolis, located in Samaria and formerly known in Biblical times as the town of Shechem. His father's name was Priscus, and he along with his wife and a large number of other Roman citizens, were relocated by the Roman Emperor Vespasian, to settle in this area. Despite being born in Samaria, Justin had little to no acquaintance with the Jewish religion or Christianity.
- 2) Justin was an exceptionally brilliant young man. It was early in his teenage years that the Spirit of God began to create in his heart a deep longing for answers to the most important questions relating to man's relation to God. What is man's relation to God? How is it established? What must one expect from it? These and many others troubled him deeply and thus he traveled widely throughout the Roman Empire for many years in search of the answers.
- 3) He searched in vain for answers among the Stoics (a school of philosophy that is mainly concerned with ethics). Concerning his teacher he wrote later that he "knew nothing of God and did not think knowledge of Him to be necessary."
- 4) He then went to the Peripatetics (a school of philosophy founded by Aristotle and taught by traveling teachers which based its philosophy upon scientific fact and its aim was to recognize the "why" in everything. They endeavored to attain to the ultimate ground of all things by induction.) One of his teachers would not continue his teaching until Justin could assure him that he would pay his tuition. Justin concluded that if the teacher was more interested in money than teaching, he could have nothing to say that would ease the ache in his soul.
- 5) He then joined the Pythagoreans (an ancient school of philosophy that taught that one could only come to the knowledge of the truth through the mastery of music, astronomy and geometry.)
- 6) Finally he turned to Platonism (founded by Plato and teaches that the reality around us is only a reflection of higher truth.) He later wrote of his hopes as he entered this school by saying "Here I shall soon have the intuition of God, for is not this the aim of Platonic philosophy? Under the influence of this notion it occurred to me that I would withdraw to some solitary place, far from the turmoil of the world, and there, in perfect self-collection, give myself to my own contemplations. I chose a spot by the seaside."
- 7) The seaside place that he chose to meditate was in the city of Ephesus, and it was here, where a church had been established by Paul years earlier, that he would come in contact with the Gospel. It was while meditating by the seaside that an elderly Christian man met him and conversed with him concerning Christ. Justin argued vehemently with the man in defense of his philosophy, receiving very little argument in return. Finally the old man cut him off and said "You are a mere dealer in words, but no lover of action and truth; your aim is not to be a practiser of good, but a clever disputant, a cunning sophist (one skilled in rhetoric, argument and debate using reasoning that appears to be true but is actually false)." Justin responded by asking the old man, "Where then is truth?" The old man replied, "Search the Scriptures and pray that the gates of light may be opened to thee, for none can perceive and comprehend these things except God and His Christ grant them understanding." Justin later wrote that it was after conversing with this elderly man that his life was transformed. "A fire was suddenly kindled in my soul. I fell in love with the prophets and these men who had loved Christ; I reflected on all their words and found that this philosophy alone was true and profitable. That is how and why I became a philosopher. I wish that everyone felt the same way that I do."
- 8) This was not his first contact with Christians, he later revealed in one of his writings. He had witnessed on a few occasions prior to meeting this old man the firm faith of Christians who had been tortured and put to death because they confessed Christ. He was deeply impressed by the steadfast courage of these men and women and wondered in his heart what was the source of their strength to enable them to be faithful under such circumstances.
- 9) Justin was converted in the year 130 AD.

His Life's Work:

- 1) Following Justin's conversion, he used his knowledge and abilities of reason to instruct others in the truths of God's Word, and when the opportunity presented itself, he would engage in public debate with those defenders of pagan religions and philosophies. This practice ultimately led to his martyrdom.
- 2) His teaching ministry began in Ephesus, where a famous disputation was held with a Jewish man named Trypho concerning the matter of the true interpretation of scripture. Later he moved to Rome where he founded a Christian school, and spent a great deal of time writing. Much of his writing ability was used to answer the critics and those who opposed the Christian religion. So effective were they that he became known in church history as one of the first Christian apologists (defender of the faith).
- 3) He spoke out against the paganism and worship of multiple gods and the rampant immorality that prevailed in his day. The pagans at this time, who were wary and fearful of Christianity because of its rapid spread throughout the empire, began to attack it fiercely. Believers were accused of atheism for refusing to worship Caesar, of treason for believing that there was a King greater than Caesar, of cannibalism for "eating and drinking the body and blood of the Lord" during the Lord's table and for immorality because of their "love feasts" which merely were occasions of fellowship and communion and giving material aid to those who possessed little. Justin carefully and plainly answered these false charges.
- 4) He set about to prove the authenticity of the Christian religion and he did so by showing that all of the prophecies spoken by the Old Testament prophets were exactly fulfilled in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He referred to the many miracles that had been performed as authenticating the truth of the Christian faith as well.
- 5) Most notably, he wrote two bold apologies, the first being addressed to Emperor Antoninus Pius, his sons and the Roman Senate explaining to them the Christian faith. In it he sought to convince these rulers that the Christian faith was in no way a threat to the state, that believers are the Emperor's "best helpers and allies in securing good order", and therefore should be protected and treated as a legal religion in the empire. These things he wrote "on behalf of men of every nation who are unjustly hated and reviled". He further argued the superiority of Christianity to paganism.
- 6) His second apology was written as a supplement to the first, addressed specifically to the Roman Senate and spoke of the behavior of Christians under persecution of which the "demons" are spoken of as the instigators of this persecution.

His Martyrdom:

- 1) Following a debate with a pagan philosopher in the city of Rome, his opponent, being unable to argue successfully against Justin, determined to have him killed. Thus he reported Justin to the Roman authorities as being a Christian who was guilty of numerous horrible crimes. Justin was then summoned before the magistrates and tried. Rusticus, being the chief magistrate, finally pronounced sentence against Justin saying, "Let those who have refused to sacrifice to the gods and to yield to the command of the Emperor, be scourged and led away to suffer the punishment of decapitation, according to the laws."
- 2) Following his execution, a group of believers secretly removed his body and buried it in a suitable place and manner.
- 3) Justin has been referred to throughout church history as Justin Martyr because of the fact that he died a martyr's death. He died in Rome in the year 165 AD.