

CHAPTER 14

MARTYRDOM AND SIGNIFICANCE OF PAUL

According to all available evidence Paul was put to death in Rome by Nero sometime during A.D. 64-67. It appears that he died by a common form of execution for Roman citizens, beheading. This evidence includes, in addition to the early church fathers, traditions about the place of Paul's execution and burial (see Bruce, *Paul*, pp. 446-54).

Significance of Paul

It is impossible to summarize Paul's importance to the church, to human history, and even to us as individual Christians. God raised up a unique man, and gave him a unique ministry, "a steward of the mysteries of God." He certainly fulfilled the prophecy God gave Ananias concerning him, "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (Acts 9:15-16).

Paul did not start a new religion, or fundamentally alter the apostolic faith. Rather, he continued in the "Way" of the true faith of Israel and of her Messiah, Jesus Christ. J. Gresham Machen's classic work *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (1921) has never been refuted. The origin of his religion was none other than Jesus himself.

For the vision and dedication of Paul, we see the fruit of Christianity established firmly in the heart of the Roman Empire, and the continuing fruit of his epistles throughout the whole church. We see a united Christianity, not Jewish and Gentile branches, and we see an example of love and service for us all.