

How did Timothy die?

Timothy's death is not recorded in the Bible. According to extrabiblical church tradition, Timothy remained in Ephesus for the rest of his life, until he was martyred for his faith. Some of this does seem to correlate with a detail found in Paul's final letters to Timothy. In 1 Timothy, Paul urged his young protégé to stay in Ephesus and battle the false teaching that was occurring there (1 Timothy 1:3).

Infamous for its idolatry and temple to Diana, Ephesus is the traditional burial place of Timothy. In spite of the consensus that Timothy was martyred in Ephesus, there are different accounts regarding his martyrdom. Foxe's Book of Martyrs states that Timothy's death occurred in AD 97 during the reign of Domitian (Claxton, 1881, p. 20). This would place Timothy's martyrdom shortly after the exile of the apostle John to the island of Patmos, which occurred around AD 95. According to Foxe's Book of Martyrs, "as the pagans were about to celebrate a feast called Catagogion, Timothy, meeting the procession, severely reproved them for their ridiculous idolatry, which so exasperated the people, that they fell upon him with their clubs, and beat him in so dreadful a manner, that he expired of the bruises two days after" (op. cit., p. 20).

Another source, the apocryphal Acts of Timothy, gives a similar account, except it records that Timothy's martyrdom happened under the reign of Nerva instead of Domitian. According to this source, Timothy tried to put an end to a pagan festival in honor of Dionysus called Katagogion, in which the participants would dress in costumes, masks, and partake in sexual immorality and murder. It is recorded that Timothy exhorted them, saying, "Men of Ephesus, do not be mad for idols, but acknowledge the one who truly is God." Instead of listening to Timothy, the revelers attacked and beat him. While Timothy was still barely alive, some fellow Christians took him away from the mob, and when he

died, they buried him in a place called Pion in Ephesus. Although both accounts are similar in their description of Timothy's death, and both show the disciple standing firm for his faith, it is not known with certainty how Timothy died.

The Bible does not record the happenings of Timothy's later life and death, but it does include some of Paul's final exhortations to his friend. Paul urged Timothy to "fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:11). We can be confident that Timothy took this to heart and proclaimed the gospel boldly in Ephesus, spreading the good news of Christ's death and resurrection, and it is likely that Timothy, like the apostles, suffered for his faith.