

**Series: Early Christians Speak**  
**By Bill Lockwood**  
**2016**  
**Justin Martyr (d. 160-165 A.D.)**

Justin was born at Flavia Neapolis (modern Nablus) in Samaria into a pagan family. His father's name was Priscus and his grandfather was Bacchius. Although born in Samaria, he identified himself as a Gentile.

Justin is best remembered as an early Christian apologist, giving answer to the pagans of his day in defense of Christianity. Noted as "one of the most important witnesses of the life, faith, and worship of second-century Christianity," Justin contended "with great zeal on various fronts, against the Roman state, pagan philosophy, Judaism, and heretical Christianity" (Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 514).

In his younger life, Justin conducted a vigorous search for truth. He became a Stoic philosopher; later he followed the Peripatetic school of thought, then the Pythagorean; still later he became a student of the Platonic philosophy. He would write that according to Plato's philosophy he thought he would "look upon the face of God; for this is the end of Plato's philosophy."

As he cast about for truth, he finally met a Christian man on the shores of the Mediterranean who told him about the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets by Jesus Christ. Justin was fascinated and explored Christianity and the preparatory work laid by God in the Old Testament. He converted to Christ and became an outspoken defender of the new faith in Christ. He explained: "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" (Quoted on Christian History website).

Much of Justin's work is dedicated to an explanation of the prophets which find their fulfillment in Jesus the Christ. His surviving works include *First Apology* which he addresses to the 15<sup>th</sup> Roman Emperor Antonius Pius (ruled 138-161 A.D.). His *Second Apology* is written to the Roman Senate and his most well-remembered work, *Dialogue with Trypho, the Jew*, is a vigorous and reasoned defense as well as explanation of Christianity in which he proves that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

Justin finally traveled to Rome after his conversion teaching Christianity in a school. Tatian, who would later become a noted Church Father himself, was a pupil of Justin. During the reign of Marcus Aurelius Justin frequented the marketplace in Rome and debated the various philosophers. After disputing with a Cynic philosopher by the name of Crescens, Justin was denounced by authorities and condemned to death.

According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1910), Justin and six companions were tried by the Roman prefect Rusticus who demanded that they approach an altar and sacrifice to the gods. Justin refused, saying, "No one in his right mind gives up piety for impiety." After further threatening from Rusticus, the Christians responded: "Do as you wish: for we are Christians, and we do not sacrifice to idols." They were all beheaded.