

Amphibalus and Alban

The British

Foundation

In the previous unit we thought about how Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus, eventually obeyed the command of Jesus to take the message about Him to other nations. Judea was part of the Roman Empire and the Bible mostly tells us about how the gospel spread in the east of the Empire in places like modern Turkey, Greece, Judea, Samaria, Cyprus and Macedonia. Acts ends with Paul in Rome. But far to the west lay the British Isles inhabited by various tribes of Britons, Celts and Picts. The Romans first invaded Britain 50 years before the birth of Christ. But it was not until about the same time that Paul, Thomas and the others began preaching that the south of Britain was conquered and made part of the Roman empire.

“Go and make disciples of all nations...”

We don't know much about how the gospel spread to the British isles though we can imagine that as people elsewhere became Christians and some travelled to Britain to trade or with the Roman armies, others began to hear the message too. By 200AD Tertullian, writing miles away in North Africa, indicates that many, including of the tribes never conquered by the Romans, had become Christians. The 6th century British monk, Gildas, wrote “these islands, stiff with cold and frost, and in a distant region of the world, remote from the visible sun, received the light, that is the message of Christ, the true Sun”. Though he also suggests that people were only lukewarm in their faith at first. But, by 314BC, the British church was able to send three Bishops to a gathering of Bishops in southern France.



Fourth century fresco from a Roman Villa in Lullingstone showing the Greek letters Chi and Rho used as a symbol for Christ, and Alpha and Omega (Rev 1.8) etc

Eventually there were many Christians amongst the tribes in Britain, and amongst the Romans, but at various times the Roman empire tried to suppress Christianity. The first British Christian we know of who died for their faith was Alban. Later the Roman city of Verulamen was therefore renamed St. Albans.

Amphibalus (possibly not his original name) was a Roman Christian who came to Britain and was telling people about Jesus around 300AD. Because of this the Romans tried to catch him and kill him but Alban, who was not a Christian, hid Amphibalus in his house. As a result Alban heard more about Jesus and trusted in Him, despite the danger. Then he swapped clothes with Amphibalus and enabling the latter to escape, whilst Alban was captured and when he admitted to being a Christian he was put to death. Amphibalus continued to tell others about Jesus and was apparently later captured and killed too.

Alban is counted as the first British martyr, dying for his faith in Christ and many others followed him. But the gospel continued to spread and more and more people believed in Jesus.



Alban is remembered as the first British martyr, risking his life for Amphibalus and dying because of his faith in Jesus.