

Paul's Chains

The chains that held the Apostle Paul were real chains.

Paul arrived in Rome in 61AD for the trial that sentenced him to death for being a Christian.

He was beheaded sometime between 65 to 67AD. The chains believed to have been used to join Paul to the Roman soldier who guarded him have become an important relic. Other relics belonging to the church are displayed in the Chapel of Relics.

Below ground, under the altar that displays the chains, is a marble tombstone bearing the inscription PAULO APOSTOLO MART or Apostle Paul martyr. The tombstone sits above a huge sarcophagus. Recently, an opening was made below the Papal Altar to allow the tomb to be seen.

It is amazing how many times “chains” in the sense of wrist bands are mentioned in the New Testament—over 20 times. For example, Peter was in put in “chains” and Paul mentions his chains many times! I have listed some of the many references below.

Peter was held in “chains”:

Acts 12:6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, **bound with two chains**, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the **chains fell off** Peter’s wrists.

Acts 16:26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s **chains came loose**.

Paul in Jerusalem was held in chain in the “protective custody” of the Roman soldiers in the Antonia Fortress:

Acts 21:33 The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with **two chains**. Then he asked who he was and what he had done.

Acts 22:29 Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, **in chains**.

Paul before Festus and Agrippa II mentions his “chains”:

Acts 26:29 Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, **except for these chains.**”

Acts 28:20 For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that **I am bound with this chain.**”

And Paul referred to his “chains” in connection with his various Roman imprisonments:

Eph. 6:20 for which I am an ambassador in **chains**. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Phil. 1:7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in **chains** or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me.

Phil. 1:13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 Because of my **chains**, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

Phil. 1:17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in **chains**.

Col. 4:3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in **chains**.

Col. 4:18 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my **chains**. Grace be with you.

2Tim. 1:16 May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of **my chains**.

2Tim. 2:9 for which I am suffering even to the point of being **chained** like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained.

Philemon 10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while **I was in chains**.

Philemon 13 I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while **I am in chains** for the gospel.