

Overview of Church History

▶ DR. SHAWN NELSON

▶ TODAY EARLY CHURCH FATHERS TO CONSTANTINE
NEXT EVENTS OF THE REFORMATION
UPCOMING SHARED BELIEFS BETWEEN ROMAN CATHOLICS AND PROTESTANTS
UPCOMING OVERVIEW OF KEY DIFFERENCES
UPCOMING ORIGIN OF DENOMINATIONS SINCE THE REFORMATION

CHURCH HISTORY

This class will briefly touch on the major events in church history that explain how we went from the first-century church to today, with all of the different denominations.

Topics covered:

- Early church fathers & councils
- Early shared beliefs between Catholics and protestants
- Late medieval developments leading to differences
- Events leading to Reformation
- Origin of Denominations Since the Reformation.

Meeting Mondays

6:30 pm

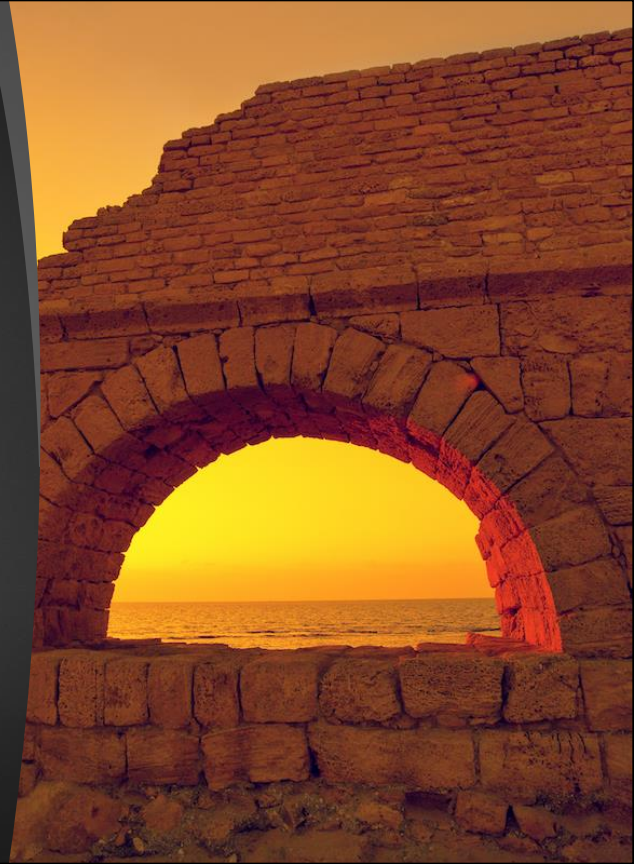
Light Church Chapel

831 3rd St, Encinitas

Outline

The First 5 Centuries:

- ▶ **The Apostolic Fathers.**
- ▶ Form Persecution to Empire's official religion.
- ▶ Heresies help clarify Christian beliefs.



We will start our look at church history by looking at the first five centuries AD.

From New Testament to our starting point

(scholars debate the dates)

- Gospels start with Jesus's birth (4-6 BC?)
- Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection: 30-33 AD
- Book of Acts events: up to mid 60s AD.
- Peter/Paul martyrdom: AD 64-67
- John's death: late 1st century, around AD 98.

The First 5 Centuries:

- The Apostolic Fathers.
- Form Persecution to Empire's official religion.
- Heresies help clarify Christian beliefs.



Apostolic Fathers

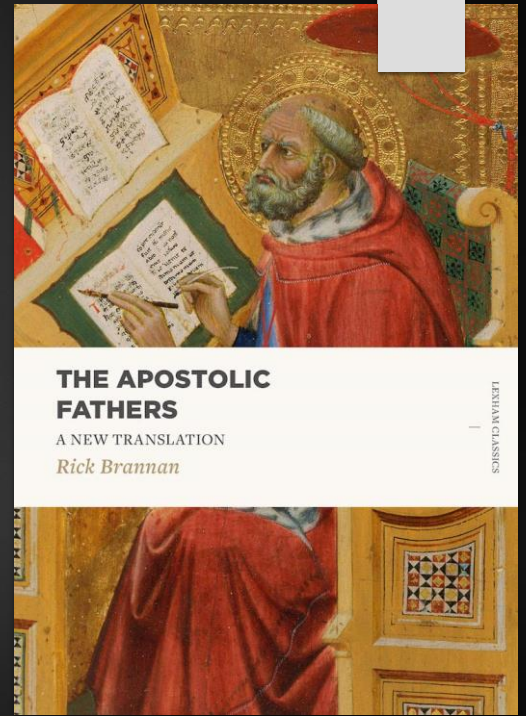
THE GENERATION OF BELIEVERS WHO HAD CONTACT WITH THE APOSTLES.

The Apostolic Fathers

- The generation of believers who had **contact with the apostles**.
- Lived in the **1st and 2nd centuries AD**.
- Jesus told the 12 (and Paul) to make disciples. They did!
- Some of them were **disciples of Peter, John, or Paul**.
- **They give us valuable insight into the life, practice, and theology of early Christianity.**
- Writings **not part of the New Testament canon** but are still valuable.
- Part of the “Early Church Fathers” group
 - Apostolic fathers
 - Ante-Nicene church fathers (Before Nicea 325AD)
 - Post-Nicene church fathers

List of Writings

- ▶ 2 letters of Clement to Corinthians
- ▶ 7 letters of Ignatius
- ▶ 1 from Polycarp
- ▶ The Didache (church manual)
- ▶ Letter of Barnabas
- ▶ Shepherd of Hermas

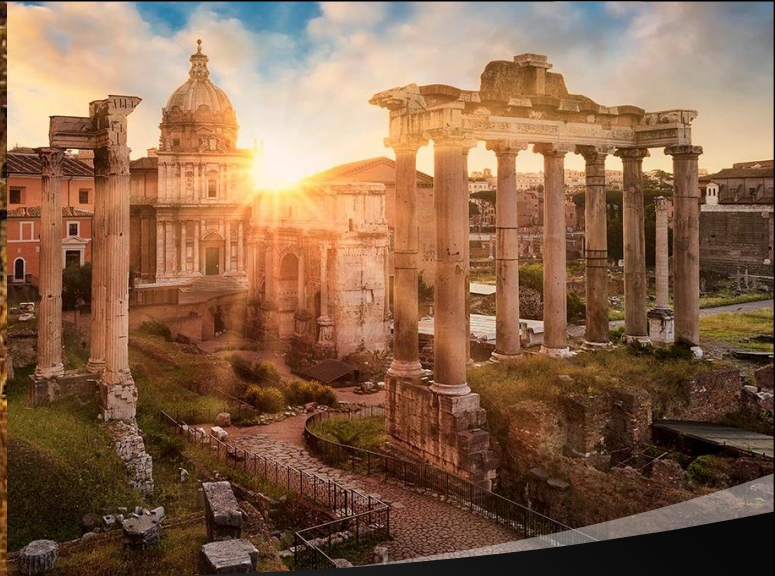
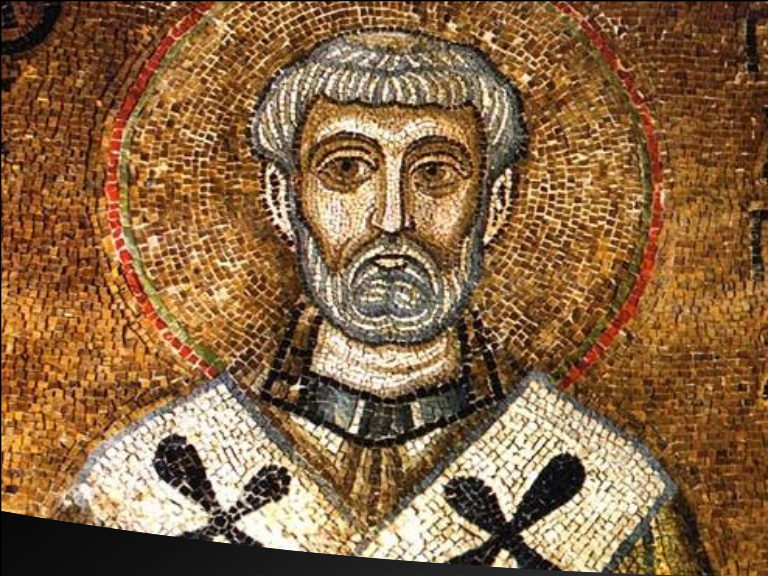


List of Writings

- About a **dozen** short letters.
- **Scholars dispute authorship/authenticity** of some.
- Very much like reading **Peter, James, and Paul's letters** in the NT.
- Apostolic Father letters are **much shorter** (maybe 1/2 or 1/3 as long)

Include:

- 2 letters of Clement to Corinthians:
 - Exhortations to unity and order within the Church
- 7 letters of Ignatius
 - Advice on Christian living, ecclesiology, and Christology
- 1 letter from Polycarp
 - Exhortations to faithfulness, humility, and good works
- Didache (church manual):
 - Instructions on baptism, fasting, prayer, and the Eucharist, among other topics
- Letter of Barnabas
 - Traditionally attributed to Barnabas who worked with Paul in Acts
 - Exhortations to Christian living, drawing heavily on Old Testament imagery and typology
- Shepherd of Hermas
 - Collection of visions, parables, and commandments on Christian living, repentance, and the nature of the Church



Clement of Rome

C. AD 30 – C. AD 99

Clement of Rome (c. AD 30 – c. AD 99; martyred)

- Tradition says was the 3rd bishop of Rome.
- Believed to have been a **disciple of the Apostle Peter**
- Could be one Paul mentioned in **Philippians 4:3**: “Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, **along with Clement** and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.”
- He wrote a letter to the Corinthians, known as 1 Clement, which is **one of the earliest Christian writings** outside of the New Testament.
- Emphasizes the **importance of unity and harmony** within the church (Corinth was a mess!).
- **VERY FAMILIAR WITH SCRIPTURE**. He quotes from both the Old and New Testaments.

Interesting: Corinth was a mess when this was written (AD 95-96)! Seems to have been unhealthy and stayed unhealthy.

Clement Sample

Clement to the Corinthians

- ▶ 1 Clement 5:1 – 6:4
- ▶ Talking about jealousy in the church.

More Recent Examples: Peter and Paul

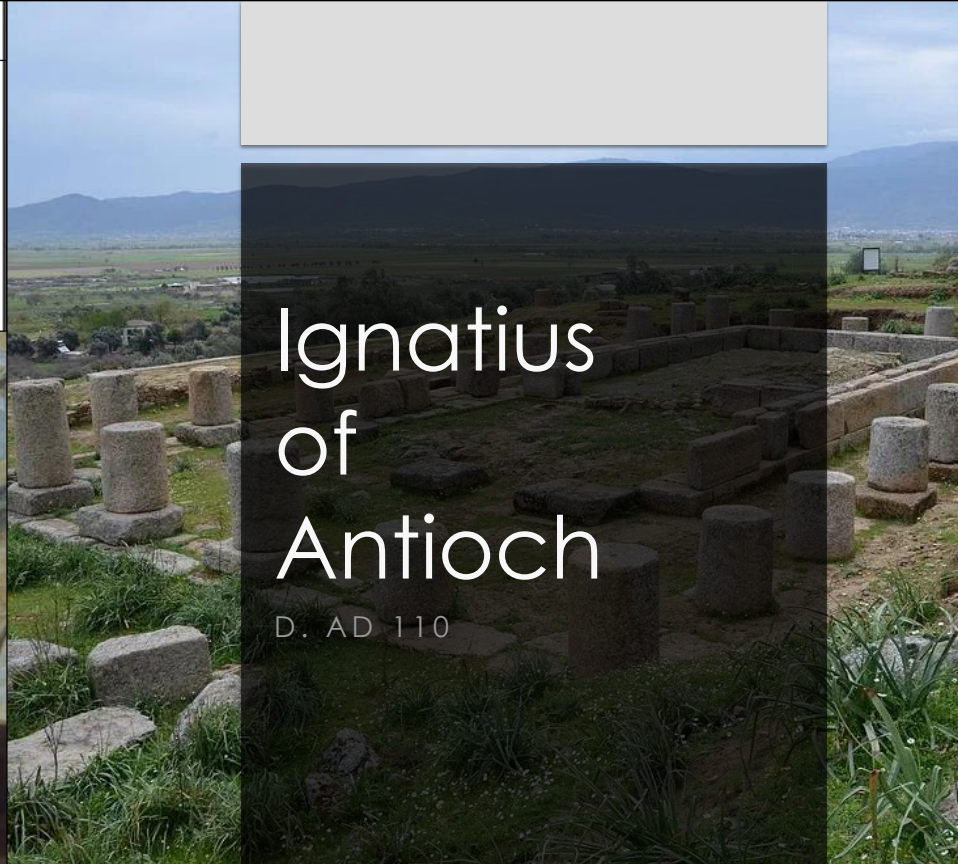
⁵⁻¹ But that we may cease from the ancient examples, let us come to those who became athletes near to *our own time*; ¹ let us take the noble examples from our generation. ² Because of jealousy and envy, the greatest and most righteous pillars of the church ² were persecuted and they competed until death ³. ³ Let us set before our eyes the good apostles: ⁴ Peter, who because of unrighteous jealousy, not once or twice but many times endured hardship and thus having given his testimony ³ he went to the place of glory he deserved. ⁵ Because of jealousy and strife, Paul pointed the way to ⁴ the prize of endurance. ⁶ Having borne chains seven times, ⁵ having been exiled, having been stoned, ⁶ having been a preacher ⁷ in both the east and in the west, he received the noble fame of his faith ⁸. ⁷ Having taught righteousness to the whole world and having come to the limits of the west and having given his testimony before the rulers, thus he was set free from the world and was taken up to the holy place, having become the greatest example of endurance. ⁸

The Effect of Jealousy

⁶⁻¹ To these men who live devoutly a great multitude of the elect was gathered, who, having suffered many mistreatments and tortures because of jealousy, have become the best example among us. ² Because of jealousy ⁸ women were being persecuted as Danaids and Dirce ⁹, ¹ suffering severe and unholy mistreatments; they finished steadfastly the race of faith and the weak ³ in body received a noble prize. ³ Jealousy has estranged wives from husbands and has nullified what was spoken by our father Adam, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh ⁸." ³ ⁴ Jealousy and strife ⁴ have overthrown great cities and have uprooted great nations.

DISCUSSION

1. How do the examples of Peter and Paul in this text reflect the idea of enduring hardship and persecution for the sake of faith? Can you think of any other New Testament passages that speak to this idea? (e.g. Romans 5:3-5, 1 Peter 4:12-13)
2. The text talks about jealousy as a source of persecution and suffering for Christians. How do you think jealousy can be a hindrance to one's spiritual growth and relationship with God? Are there any biblical examples that come to mind that illustrate the negative effects of jealousy? (e.g. Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:1-16)
3. The text suggests that jealousy and strife have the power to uproot great nations. How do you think this idea can be applied to modern-day society? In what ways do you think jealousy and strife contribute to conflict and division in our communities? Are there any biblical passages that address the issue of conflict resolution? (e.g. Matthew 5:23-24, James 3:16-18)



Ignatius of Antioch

D. AD 110

Ignatius of Antioch (d. AD 110; martyred)

- Tradition says Ignatius was **one of the young children Jesus** held in his arms and said: “Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:4)
- Was a **disciple of John**; knew other apostles.
- Wrote 7 letters on his way to Rome to die as a **martyr**.
- **Joyfully anticipated** his being torn apart by the beasts!
- See sample (NEXT)

Ignatius Sample

Ignatius to the Romans

- ▶ 4:1 - 5:3
- ▶ Talking about his imminent martyrdom.

Becoming a Disciple

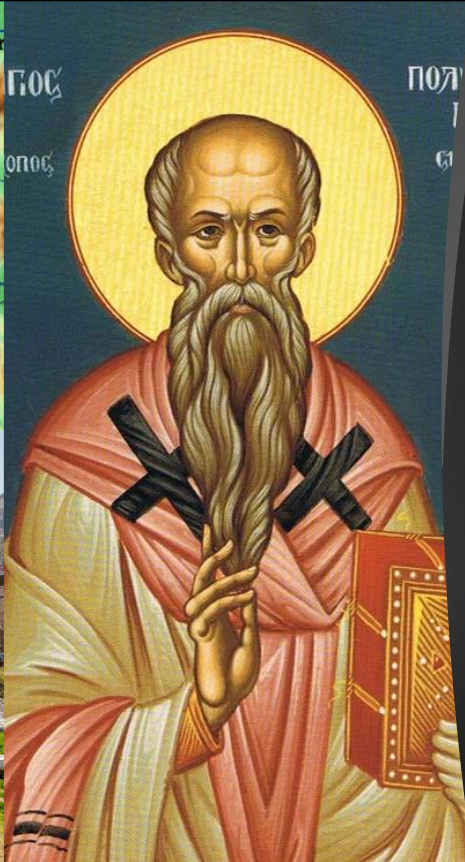
⁴ I am writing to all the churches and giving instructions to everyone that I die willingly for God, if indeed you do not hinder me. I urge you do not be an ill-timed kindness to me. ¹ Allow me to be food for beasts, through whom it is possible to reach God. I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of beasts, that I may be found pure bread of Christ. ² Instead, coax the beasts that they may become a tomb for me and leave nothing of my body, that I may not be a burden to anyone when I die. ³ Then I will truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world will not even see my body. ³ Petition Christ on my behalf that through these tools, I may be found a sacrifice. ³ I give orders to you, not as Peter and Paul, they were apostles, I am a convict, they were free but I until now am a slave. ⁴ But if I suffer I will be a freedperson ⁴ of Jesus Christ, and I will rise up free in him. For now, being imprisoned, I am learning to desire nothing ⁴.

To Reach Jesus Christ

⁵ From Syria to Rome I am fighting with wild beasts, by land and sea, night and day, being imprisoned by ten leopards (that is, a company of soldiers) who also, being treated kindly, ¹ become even worse. But in their mistreatments I am becoming more of a disciple, but I have not been justified by these mistreatments. ² ³ May I enjoy the beasts that have been made ready for me, and I pray they might deal with me speedily. ⁴ I will also entice them to devour me quickly, not as with some who were so cowardly they have not touched. But even if they are themselves unwilling I will force them myself. ³ Grant me this favor. I know what is best for me. Now I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing visible or invisible envy me, so that I may reach Jesus Christ. Fire and cross and battles with beasts, mutilation, being torn apart, scattering of bones, mangling of limbs, grinding of the whole body, cruel tortures of the devil; let these come upon me, only that I may reach Jesus Christ. ⁴

DISCUSSION

1. What do you think about the author's willingness to be food for beasts and desire to become a sacrifice for Christ? Do you think this is an extreme form of devotion, or do you see it as a normal expression of faith?
2. Do you think suffering is necessary for spiritual growth?



Polycarp of Smyrna

C. 69-160

Polycarp of Smyrna (c. 69-160; martyred)

- **Disciple of the Apostle John**
- **VERY FAMILIAR WITH NT LETTERS** – Has loose quotations of gospels and Pauline letters.
- His short **Letter to the Philippians** has **more allusions to NT** than any other Apostolic writing.
 - **100 allusions to NT writings**; dozen to the OT.
 - Well **acquainted** with Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, and 2 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 Peter, 1 John
- **Shows 3 primary authorities: Jesus, apostles and OT prophets.**
 - “So then ‘let us serve **him [Christ]** with fear and all reverence’, as he himself commanded us, as did the **apostles**, who preached the gospel to us, and **the prophets**, who proclaimed beforehand the coming of our Lord (vi. 3).”

Polycarp Sample

Polycarp to the Philippians

- ▶ 7:1 - 8:4
- ▶ Very much like NT letters.
- ▶ Very familiar with NT Scripture.

Confess Christ

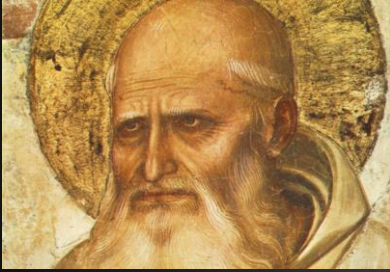
7:1 For everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an antichrist,¹ and whoever does not confess the testimony of the cross is from the devil², and whoever twists the sayings of the Lord for one's own sinful passions, and says that there is neither resurrection³ nor judgment, this one is the firstborn of Satan⁴.² Therefore, leaving behind the idle speculation⁴ of the crowd and their false teachings, let us turn back to the word which was delivered to us from the beginning,⁵ being self-controlled with regard to prayer⁶ and being persistent in fasts⁷, making petitions of the all-seeing God to lead us not into temptation,⁷ just as the Lord said, "The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak."⁸

Be Imitators of Christ

8:1 Therefore we should persevere unceasingly in our hope and down payment¹ of our righteousness, which is Christ Jesus, who bore our sins in his own body on the tree,² who committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth,³ but because of us, in order that we might live in him, endured all things.² Therefore let us be imitators of his endurance, and if we should suffer⁴ because of his name, we should glorify him. For this is the example he set for us in himself, and this we have believed.

DISCUSSION

1. In 8:2, Polycarp says that suffering for Christ's name is an opportunity to glorify him. What are some ways that we can glorify God in the midst of difficult circumstances or suffering? How can we help others to see the opportunity for growth and transformation in the midst of trials?
2. In 7:1, Polycarp also says that whoever twists the sayings of the Lord for their own sinful passions is the firstborn of Satan. What are some examples of how people might twist the sayings of the Lord for their own sinful purposes? How can we guard against this in our own lives?
3. In 7:2, Polycarp encourages the readers to turn back to the word which was delivered to them from the beginning. What does it mean to turn back to the word, and how can we apply this message in our own lives today?



Papias of Hierapolis

C. AD 70-140

Papias of Hierapolis (c. AD 70-140)

- Was **disciple of John**
- Was **Polycarp's friend**
- **Knew daughters of Philip** the Evangelist (Acts 21: 8-9)
Acts 21:8–9—On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. Now **this man had four virgin daughters** who prophesied."
- Valued written gospels but preferred "the utterances of a living and surviving voice"
(Quoted by Eusebius, Hist. eccl. III. xxxix. 4.)
- Don't have any surviving letters from him. But he's **quoted by Eusebius**.
- **Papias was the scribe for John's gospel:**
"[Papias] wrote down the gospel accurately **at John's dictation.**"
(**Tertullian** in Anti-Marcionite Prologue c. AD 180)
- Papias said **Mark's gospel** was based on **Peter's words:**
"The Elder [John] used to say: Mark became Peter's interpreter and **wrote accurately** all that he [Peter] remembered..."

Overall Focus

- ▶ Some theology but not main concern.
- ▶ Holy Living.
- ▶ Reflections on teachings of Jesus and apostles.
- ▶ Martyrdom.



Example of their theology:

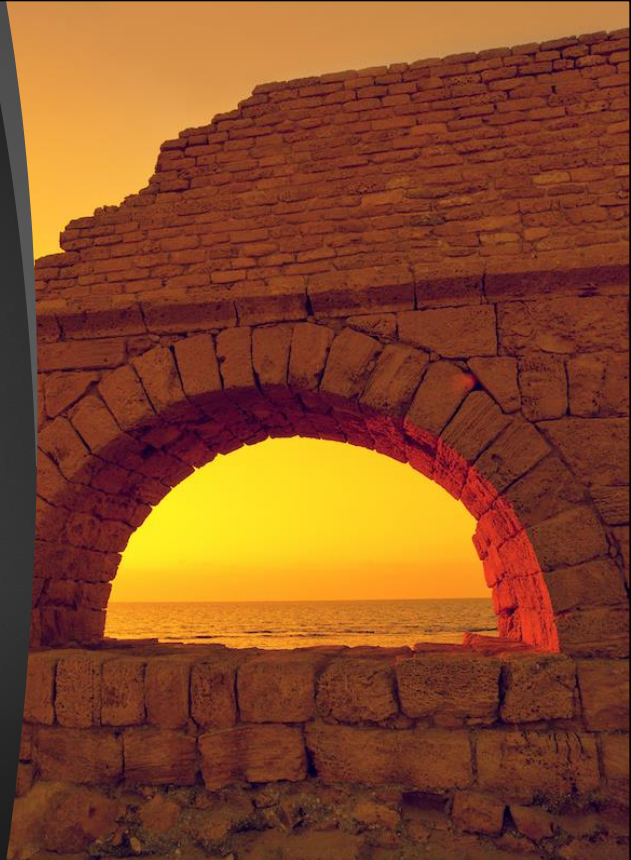
- *Polycarp said:*
 - “...**believe in our Lord and God Jesus Christ and in his Father who raised him from the dead.**” (Letter to Ephesians, 1.1)
- *Ignatius said:*
 - “For **our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary** according to God’s plan, both from the seed of David and of the Holy Spirit.” (Letter to the Ephesians, 18.2)
 - “Being as you are imitators of God, once you took on new life **through the blood of God** you completed perfectly the task so natural to you.” (Letter to the Ephesians, 1.1)

IMPORTANT because we can see that the disciples of the Peter, John, Paul **believed Jesus was fully God and fully human from the START.**
It was **not a belief that crept in over time!**

Outline

The First 5 Centuries:

- ▶ The Apostolic Fathers.
- ▶ From Persecution to Empire's official religion.
- ▶ Heresies help clarify Christian beliefs.

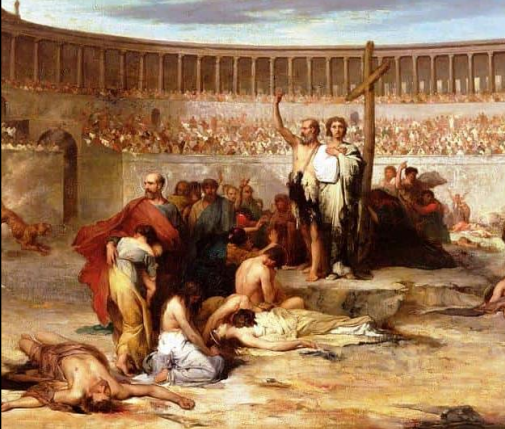


RECAP

- Who were the apostolic fathers?
- List of writings
- Clement
- Ignatius of Antioch
- Polycarp
- Papias

NEXT we'll move on to the **waves of persecution in the early church.**

Q. How did the church go from martyrs to becoming the religion of Empire?



Nero

AD67

Nero - AD67

- Blamed Christians for AD64 Great Fire of Rome.
 - There was a fire in 64 AD that **destroyed two-thirds of Rome**.
 - Rome was one of the **largest cities in the world (around one million people)**.
 - The fire started in merchant shops near the Circus Maximus.
 - There were rumors Nero played his fiddle while Rome burned, and he **started the fire to rebuild the city in his name**.
 - Nero **blamed the Christians for the fire**, leading to their torture, persecution, and death.
- **Paul appealed to Nero** in Acts
 - Acts 25:11–12—For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying... **I appeal to Caesar.**” Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, “You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!”
 - No direct evidence Nero was involved in Paul’s martyrdom
 - But **his reign and policies** played a significant role in Christian martyrdoms.
- **Paul** was beheaded his reign.
- **Peter** was crucified under his reign upside down.

Domitian

AD 89-96



Domitian - AD 89-96

- The church historian Eusebius gives the first reference to Domitian persecuting the church, writing around 313 to 325.
- He quotes Melito of Sardis saying he intensely persecuted Christians and Jews.
- But this is debated today.
 - **Revelation 2:13** might be referring to Domitian's persecution ("Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you...")
- There is a belief that **Domitian banished John to the Island of Patmos in 94 AD.**
 - Revelation 1:9: "I, John, both your brother and companion in tribulation ... was on the **island that is called Patmos** for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ"



Trajan

AD 109-111

Trajan - AD 109-111

- There was **no official persecution** during Trajan's reign
- He **did not actively seek out** and punish Christians.
 - Said: *"They are not to be sought out"*
- But if anyone was found confessing Christianity, it was **considered a crime punishable by death**
- **Forced Christians under torture to curse Christ and worship Roman gods by offering incense** to idols. SEE BELOW
- Those who refused were **executed**
- Christian leaders were executed, including **Ignatius**

Pliny: "I ask them if they are Christians. If they admit it I repeat the question a second and a third time, threatening capital punishment; if they persist I sentence them to death... All who denied that they were or had been Christians I considered should be discharged, because **they called upon the gods at my dictation and did reverence, with incense and wine, to your image** which I had ordered to be brought forward for this purpose, together with the statues of the deities; and especially because **they cursed Christ**, a thing which, it is said, genuine Christians cannot be induced to do." (Letters of Pliny 10.96)

Emperor Trajan: "You have taken the right line... **they are not to be sought out...** if any one denies that he is a Christian, and **actually proves it, that is by worshipping our gods, he shall be pardoned** as a result of his recantation..."



Hadrian

RULED 117-138

Hadrian (ruled 117-138)

- Hadrian was more tolerant of Christians
- Being a Christian wasn't enough for them to be executed: they **must have done something illegal** too.



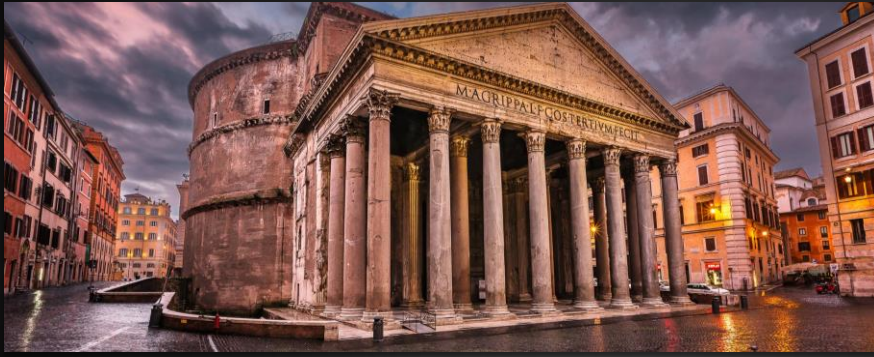
Decius

AD 249



Decius – AD 249

- In **AD 249**, the Roman Emperor **Decius issued an edict** requiring all inhabitants of the empire to **perform a sacrifice to the gods** and obtain a certificate, known as a **libellus**, as proof of compliance.
- This edict was part of Decius's efforts to **revive traditional Roman religion** and **restore unity** to the empire.
- It was the **first empire-wide persecution** and was the **most violent and widespread persecution** the church had yet faced.
- **Christians refused** and suffered persecution, including leaders.
- Many Christians **apostatized** or hid to avoid punishment.
- After persecution was over church struggled with **how to receive back** those who apostatized.



Valerian

AD 257



Valerian – AD 257

- Persecution under Valerian's reign was **severe**, and **many suffered** greatly
- Valerian a letter to the Senate in AD 257 **requiring Christian clergy to perform sacrifices to the Roman gods** or be banished.
- When they didn't, he sent another letter **ordering them to be executed**.
- He **confiscated their properties** and **took away their titles** if they were in the government.
- Many Christians were also **enslaved**.



Diocletian and Galerius

AD 303

Emperors Diocletian and Galerius – AD 303

- The **last** and **most severe persecution** in the Roman Empire.
- Called the Great Persecution
- In 303, the emperors **issued an edict taking away Christians' legal rights**
- They demanded that they comply with the Roman religion.
- Demanded clergy **sacrifice to the gods**.
- Christians were **hunted**, stripped of their rights, **brutalized**, and killed during this time.

- Ordered **church to be razed** at Nicomedia.
- Ordered collection and **destruction of Scripture**.



Persecution ends with... Constantine

RULED 306 - 337

Persecution ends with Constantine

Story of Constantine

- Constantine's **father, the Emperor, just died** in 306 AD.
- But **there was a rival to the throne**. Constantine went out to fight him.
- The **night before the big battle** (October 26, 312) saw a **vision of a flaming cross** in the sky with: **"In this Sign Conquer."**
- This was **followed by a dream** where Constantine was told by Christ to **mark shields with letters chi and rho** (first two letters of Christ).
- **He did this, won the battle**, and became a Christian.
- **Mother also became a Christian** and helped spread the faith in the empire.
- Many around them **"converted"** to find favor.

Religion of Empire

- Constantine met with Emperor of East to **change policies** towards Christian.
- Granted Christianity **legal status** (Edict of Milan, AD 313).
- **Theodosius I** later makes **Christianity official religion of Roman Empire** (AD 380).

Discussion

- ▶ What are some examples of persecution that Christians faced in the New Testament? (see, for example, Matthew 10:22; 2 Timothy 3:12; Acts 4, 7, 8, 12, 14)
- ▶ What does the New Testament say about how Christians should relate to non-Christian authorities who persecute them, in light of Jesus' example? (see, for example, Matthew 10:16-23; 1 Peter 2:13-17)
- ▶ How does the New Testament instruct Christians to respond to non-Christian neighbors who are hostile towards them, in light of Jesus' teachings? (see, for example, Matthew 5:44-48; Romans 12:17-21)

DISCUSSION

- What are some examples of persecution that Christians faced in the New Testament? (see, for example, Matthew 10:22; 2 Timothy 3:12; Acts 4, 7, 8, 12, 14)
- What does the New Testament say about how Christians should relate to non-Christian authorities who persecute them, in light of Jesus' example? (see, for example, Matthew 10:16-23; 1 Peter 2:13-17)
- How does the New Testament instruct Christians to respond to non-Christian neighbors who are hostile towards them, in light of Jesus' teachings? (see, for example, Matthew 5:44-48; Romans 12:17-21)