

## THE EARLY CHURCH FROM CHRIST TO CONSTANTINE I

1. **BEGINNINGS.** Since Christ born 4-5BC (Herod died 4BC), Crucifixion/Resurrection were about 30AD. **Pentecost** is birthday of Church; 3000 saved that day and gospel goes out, but apostles stay close to Jerusalem. **James**, brother of Jesus, is chosen as 1<sup>st</sup> leader of Church. **Stephen** is first martyr. When **Herod Agrippa** kills **James** the apostle and **Peter** is arrested, persecution causes Church to slowly spread. With Peter's call to preach to the Roman Cornelius, the conversion of **Saul** of Tarsus on the Road to Damascus, and the **Council of Jerusalem** (48) door slowly opens to Gentile Christians. Paul goes on 3 missionary journeys throughout Asia and Greece (46-58). While in Jerusalem he is arrested by Jews, but as a Roman citizen appeals to Caesar and is taken by ship to Rome. Paul writes epistles to churches; then come Synoptic Gospels: **Matthew** writes in Hebrew for Jewish converts, **Mark** writes for Romans, getting his info from Peter, **Luke** (who accompanied Paul) writes Gospel-Acts; **John** writes Gospel, 1 John, Revelation in 90's.
2. **ROMAN PERSECUTION.** **Tiberius** Emperor at Crucifixion. **Caligula** nearly defiles Temple; **Claudius** expels Jews from Rome. **Nero** first Emperor to persecute Christians after Great Fire in Rome (64). Paul beheaded; Peter crucified upside down. **Vespasian** sends his son **Titus** to destroy Jerusalem/Temple in 70. Titus' brother, **Domitian** (81-96), starts 2<sup>nd</sup> Persecution of Church; he exiles John to Patmos, but he is released under Nerva and dies in Ephesus. 3<sup>d</sup> Persecution under **Trajan** (98-117) is partial: Christians not hunted down but would be executed if refused to sacrifice to idols; **Hadrian** (117-38) tries to cut down on frivolous charges against Christians and things improve even more under **Antoninus Pius** (138-61). But 4<sup>th</sup> Persecution begins under **Marcus Aurelius** (161-80). Persecution is always worse in Asia than in more orderly Rome. 3<sup>rd</sup> century is fairly calm, though briefer 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Persecutions break out under **Severus** (202) and **Maximinus** (235). 7<sup>th</sup> Persecution under **Decius** (250) is worst and most empire wide. 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> under **Valerian** (257) and **Aurelian** (275). Crowds generally worse than gov't!
3. **MARTYRS.** Christians truly turn other cheek: they are tortured, burned, beheaded, and fed to wild animals, but most (including women/youths and wealthy/educated) refuse to recant. In 110, **Ignatius**, Bishop of Antioch, travels to Rome to be martyred, writing epistles on the way that ask churches NOT to rescue him: "I am the wheat of God and am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of God." Most famous and documented martyrdom is that of **Polycarp**, Bishop of Smyrna in 155 or 165 ("86 years have I served him and he has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior."). **Justin** the apologist (who, along with others, had written letters to Emperors defending Christians) is martyred in 165. Under Severus, **Perpetua** is martyred, after having a vision of heaven and her own defeat of Satan. Origen's father also killed. Persecution of Decius so extreme that many Christians begin to recant. Church faces schism when **Novatus** says those who recant cannot be forgiven and taken back into Church; **Cyprian**, Bishop of Carthage (who is later martyred) calls for mercy. Early Church took baptism very seriously; one should not commit major sins afterwards.

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