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## Apostolic History of the Early Church

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# History and Survey of Missions

ICST 355

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Dr. Don Fanning

There is no more dramatic history than how the Church, against all odds, could exist, much less expand worldwide, over the past 2000 years. This study seeks to honor and discover the significant contributions of the men and women, not unlike ourselves, yet in different circumstances, who made an impact in their generation. It can be said of them like David, who “served his own generation by the will of God...” (Acts 13:36).

**1****Apostolic History of the Early Church****A.D. 33-100**

Every science and philosophy attempts to learn from the past. Much of the study of the past becomes difficult, primarily because no living witness was there. Often the tendency is to read into the past our present circumstances in order to make them relevant. A classic illustration of this is Leonardo da Vinci's 1498 painting of the *Last Supper*, in which the twelve Apostles and Jesus are seated on chairs behind a table served with plates and silverware. This practice was not developed for centuries after Christ. In fact, it is clear in the Gospel narrative that they are reclined in a semi-circle with their heads towards the center, such that John could be leaning on Jesus' chest at supper (John 21:20).

It is hard to imagine a world lacking every convenience that today is considered essential technology for life. Their life was void of indoor plumbing, running water on demand, electricity, plastics, vehicles, airplanes, radio, TV, computers, books, paper, glass windows, anything automated, and a thousand other advancements that we take for granted. Their world was primitive in comparison to ours today yet the gospel was spread with greater participation and acceptance than in all of the history of the church. Everything was against them, yet they changed the world.

Rome ruled her empire with an iron hand. In matters pertaining to internal security she was exceedingly strict. She collected taxes from all the provinces and punished anyone who tried to evade the universal tribute. At the same time she gave the provinces as much autonomy as she could without jeopardizing the security of the empire. She was especially tolerant in the matter of religion. Judaism was accorded preferential treatment with the designation *religio licita*; and for a time the Christians were able to capitalize on their association with Judaism. Paul was a roman citizen, and on more than one occasion he invoked his rights as a citizen to secure for the gospel the hearing it deserved (Kane, 1978, 6).

Much of what we know of the early history of the Church outside of the Bible record is legend and tradition. Even the selection of the sacred sites of biblical history was not formally indicated until the Fourth century by the wife of the emperor. Oral tradition can be very accurate, but must be sustained with caution.

Many of the numbers that will be cited in this text are the records of these traditional numbers that church historians have continued to believe. An example of such would be at the time of the Ascension there may have been about 4,000 disciples out of an estimated population of Palestine of 800,000. Many of these statistics cited in this text come from David Barrett and Todd Johnson's monumental work, *World Christian Trends AD 30-AD 2200*, published by the William Carey Library.

## Beginnings

Can you imagine standing on that hill side outside Jerusalem, along with several hundred others, listening to Jesus give His final command: "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations...", then suddenly begin rising up into the air disappearing in the clouds? Here were some of the most despised people on earth, who despised everyone else on earth, being told that they were now responsible to make Jesus followers among every people group on earth.

These were conservative Jews (though not Pharisees) who had no notion of being a Jesus Follower without being also a Jew. They met in the Temple, as well as in their homes. They continued to offered animal sacrifices, circumcise their male children, kept the Sabbath Day free from work and followed the rituals and delighted in the reading of the old Books of the Law. Their uniqueness was their identification of Jesus as the Messiah, the Suffering Servant, who was God incarnate and made Himself the perfect sacrifice for all mankind. The beginnings of Christianity were very Jewish as Kane describes.

More closely connected with Christianity than either the Greek or Roman civilizations was the Hebrew civilization. The dispersion of the Jewish people was the greatest single factor in preparing the world for the coming of the Messiah and the preaching of the gospel. Scattered throughout the Roman Empire, the Jews were particularly numerous in Egypt, Syria and Babylonia. In AD 70 Stabo reported: "It is hard to find a single place on the habitable earth that has not admitted to this tribe of men, and is not possessed by it" (Kane, 1978, 6).

They immediately dedicated themselves to the evangelization of the Jews throughout the whole of Jerusalem and the province of Judea and Galilee. The opposition turned on Stephen in AD 36, for being too vocal about the crucified Messiah. This resulted in these Jewish believers being scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. A point to watch in history will be how often different persecutions will be the means for scattering believers.

Christianity is the only truly universal religion in the world. Yet its Founder was born in a stable, lived in obscurity, and died on a wooden cross in a remote province of the Roman Empire about half-way between the time of Buddha and that of Mohammed. Although His untimely death at the age of thirty-three sent His disciples into confusion, His resurrection on the third day revived their Messianic hopes, rejuvenated their flagging spirits, and sent them out to win the world.

Their task was formidable; their chances of success almost nil. They had no central organization, no financial resources, no influential friends, no political machine. Arrayed against them was the ecclesiastical power of the Sanhedrin, the political and military might of the Roman Empire, and the religious fanaticism of the Jews. Moreover, their Leader, whose life and teachings were to constitute their message, was unknown outside His small circle of friends. He had written no books, erected no monuments, endowed no institutions. The task looked hopeless (Kane, 1978, 7).

During this same year an Ethiopian eunuch was won to Christ before returning to his home country by Philip. Tradition indicates the news of Christ was carried back to Ethiopia and modern day Sudan and Nubia.

Philip carried the gospel to Samaria. Meanwhile, a Pharisaical fanatic named Saul was converted en route to imprison Christ followers in Damascus of Syria. Saul would stay in Arabia for three years before returning to Jerusalem briefly then on to his hometown, Tarsus by AD 40,

where he would stay until Barnabas came searching for him to join the leadership team in the church at Antioch.

Controversy over Jesus the Messiah and meaning of His sacrifice erupted in an expanding persecution in AD 37, especially targeting the Hellenistic Jewish Christians. As they fled, they evangelized down to Egypt, north to Antioch and Cyprus, along the Old Silk Road to the Jewish *diaspora* in Babylon and Persia.

## Gentile Beginnings

Somewhere between AD 38 and 40 Peter was ordered to go to Caesarea (Acts 10:48) to preach the gospel to Gentile, a Roman Centurion and his family. Through the supernatural manifestation of a recognized language being spoken at their conversion, Peter and the six witnesses with him, understood what these Italian Gentiles and Cornelius spoke in an unknown a dialect known only by the Jews who were present. They later testified that this “same” gift of tongues was identical to the manifestation of tongues years earlier at Pentecost (Acts 11:17), where the 120 disciples spoke in 14 dialects that the Hellenist Jews recognized. This confirmed that Gentiles could be saved by faith, as well as Jews who trusted in Jesus as their Messiah.

This transition would take a while to accept throughout the Jewish Christian Church. As late as Acts 11:19, when the Jews were fleeing persecution, the Jewish Christians “went as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.”

Eventually the apostles began to evangelize the Gentiles in all directions from Jerusalem. Matthew would head toward Egypt, Bartholomew went to Armenia and Thomas, tradition states, carried the gospel to India.

All of the Twelve Apostles would die as Martyrs. Later the Apostle Paul would describe the Apostleship as “men condemned [appointed] to death” (1 Cor 4:9). Leadership held a high price in the beginning, which most were willing to pay.

Mark, the Evangelist (est. AD 10-68) worked in Egypt by AD 42, going to Alexandria in AD 61, where tradition states he organized the Coptic Church. However, in the process he irritates the population who drug him to death through the streets. Through the years several million Coptic Christians would be martyred.

In AD 36 Saul (soon to become “Paul”) was converted on the road to Damascus where he was en route to persecuted Christians. Though born in Greek city, he was schooled in Jerusalem in the Jewish scriptures and religious law under the famous rabbi Gamaliel (“the Elder”). He was a member of the Jewish ruling council (the Sanhedrin) and grandson of the famous rabbi Hillel.

Gamaliel had been gracious to the apostles of this Jesus sect earlier but Saul did not adapt his teacher’s moderation. We do not know how severe Paul was to these early Christians, but he was as committed to stamping them out as the Romans would later become.

After his miraculous conversion and personal theophany Saul spent three years in Damascus and the eastern deserts where evidently Paul received other appearances of Jesus that he makes reference to in his epistles, where Jesus taught to him directly, then he then passed through Jerusalem, returning to Tarsus in AD 40 where he would remain until AD 43. In Paul’s later writings he made it clear that his doctrines of the church and salvation did not come from the disciples, but from Jesus Himself.

When Barnabas came to recruit Saul for the church in Antioch, which probably had about 500 members (Acts 11:25-26) Saul had preached in Damascus and Jerusalem, and presumably around Tarsus. After a two-year ministry (?) in Antioch, with an est. population of 130,000 people, the church became the new center for the Hellenistic Jews and Gentiles.

It might be worth noting that at least seven of Paul's relatives will be mentioned in the New Testament as part of the ministry. For example, in Romans Paul greets his "relatives" Andronicus and Junia, Jason, Sosipater, and Lucius. Some authors think that Lucias refers to Luke, the author of a Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Perhaps Paul headed to Troas on his Second Journey, because he knew a relative he could stay with in that town (Acts 16:8, 11).

In the same year the Roman emperor Caligula (AD 12-41) attempted to set up a statue of himself in the Temple in Jerusalem, gaining the first accusation by the Christians as being the Antichrist. He was murdered soon thereafter.

At this time the Romans began the conquest of Britain (a population of about 1.5 million) and founded London, preparing for a future expansion of the gospel through soldiers and merchants.

## Evangelistic Missionary Journeys and Jewish Persecutions

Paul and Barnabas' **first evangelistic journey** took place between AD 45-48. They targeted major cities in central Asia, not far from Paul's hometown. Paul's strategy for urban evangelism was to target strategic cities where Jewish synagogues were located. Gentile "God-fearers" were seeking the truth of the monotheistic God of the Jews in these synagogues. These "seekers" were open to discussing the OT prophecies of the Messiah and listen to eye-witnesses to His life and resurrection as fulfillment of these prophecies. When ejected from the synagogue those who accompanied him were Hellenistic, as noted by their names and special interest ("the Gentiles [people] were urging them to speak about these things on the next Sabbath...Jews and God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas..." – Acts 13:42-43).

It is not clear how Paul supported himself and his band of disciples on his evangelistic journeys. Luke described Paul as a "tentmaker" (*skenopoios*), which could be a weaver of tent cloth from goats' hair or a "leatherworker." Some early documents call him a "maker of leather thongs" and a "shoemaker" (Wilson, 1995, n/a).

Paul's strategy was to proclaim the gospel where there was an open door and where the import of the Messianic Savior would be understood. By initially targeting the synagogues he could find such an audience. In the first century there were some four to five million Jews living throughout the Roman Empire. Every major city had at least one synagogue, and Rome is reported to have had eleven at this time. The Jewish population in Rome was estimated to have been between 40,000 and 50,000. This does not include the Gentile seekers who had not yet become proselytes.

With these early disciples who were versed in the OT, Paul began his chain of churches across Asia and into Europe. This strategy for planting the churches through the converts from the Jewish synagogues was unique to the Jewish apostolic band who could gain a hearing in the synagogues. Obviously Gentile evangelists would not have this advantage or opportunity.



### *Gentile paradigm shift*

A major paradigm shift was being created by the adapting approach of the Apostle Paul toward the Gentiles. His freedom to allow the Gentiles to be Gentiles without having to become Jewish in customs, dress and practice created considerable controversy, which would end with the destruction of Jerusalem. The interpretation and application of this Pauline model would forever shape the expansion of the church around the world.

Paul based his work on the radical biblical principle (unaccepted by many Jews to this day) that it is circumcision of the "heart" that counts (Jer 9), and that the new believers of a new culture did not have to speak the language, wear the clothes, or follow all the customs of the sending church. This meant that for Greeks the cultural details of the Jewish law were no longer to be considered mandatory. Therefore, to the Jews, Paul continued as on "under the law of Moses," but to those unfamiliar with the Mosaic law, he preached the "law of Christ" in such a way that it could be fulfilled dynamically and authentically in the new circumstances. While to some he appeared to be "without law," he maintained that he was not without law toward God (Winter, 1999, 200).

At the "Jerusalem Council" of AD 49 James, the brother of Jesus and spokesman (head pastor) of the church concluded, "It is my judgment that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God." He made only four requirements: that they abstain from food sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, meat from strangled animals and blood from meat. Two delegates from Jerusalem, Judas and Silas, were sent to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch and deliver this conclusion. In spite of its clarity, Paul would battle this conflict for his whole ministry.

Meanwhile tradition states that the early Assyrian Christians were won by the Apostle Judas (Lebbaeus) and Simon Zelotes overcoming Zoroastrian opposition in the early AD 40's. It is said that their numbers would reach over 100,000 from 12 provinces in Persia, with 60,000 from Babylonia.

### *Second journey*

After teaching and preaching in their home church for nearly a year, Paul "got the idea" to return to Asia and revisit the young believers to "see how they do" (Acts 15:36). Strategic moves become the basis of decisions rather than direct divine direction. The exception was when Paul made a decision to go into Asia (SW direction), the Spirit "forbade" them (Acts 16:6). Then he decided to go to Bithynia (N direction), but again the Spirit stopped them (v. 7). Only then they made another decision to go to Troas (home of a relative?), which received no prohibition. At that point Paul was given a vision of a Macedonian man. This type of involvement in Paul's decisions was rare (it does not happen again).

In AD 50-52 Paul started his **second evangelistic missionary journey** of Eastern provinces of the empire: Phrygia, Galatia, Greece, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia (Acts 16:6). During this trip a severe famine swept across the Roman empire (AD 51) as was foretold by the prophet Agabus (Acts 11:28), obligating Paul to raise relief funds for the church in Jerusalem.



This need provoked the Apostle to write the principles of giving for the whole of the Church. Since the Gospels had not been written before Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians at about AD 50, this was the first information written about Jesus.

As Paul was moving the gospel to the West in Asia and Eastern Europe by AD 52, the first missionaries had reached the South of India. Traditionally, this was the Apostle Thomas and his followers. A new strategy was implemented in Ephesus.

### *Third journey*

While Paul was on his **third evangelistic missionary journey** (AD 53-57) after three months of “reasoning and persuading” in the Ephesian synagogue “concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8), Paul “left them and took the disciples with him, addressing [*disputing, reasoning, discussing with*] them every day in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, and this went on for two years, so that all who lived in the province of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:9-10<sup>NET</sup>). This tactic of training or duplicating ones self became a new strategy. It is estimated that Asia had 500 cities that were reached in two years!



In AD 57 Paul wrote his classic epistle or letter to the Romans from Corinth to approximately 3,000 Roman Christians in at least five congregations. Rome is estimated to have had a population of 800,000 at this time.

Much of the expansion of the gospel during this period seems to be more through unorganized, voluntary and marginally trained, unofficial evangelists who were sharing more from their personal experience than from biblical doctrine. Winters explains a possibility of how the gospel spread from Asia through Europe to the Isles through a people group that Paul encountered in Asia, but had ties all the way to the Isles. This could be another model to glean principles from for developing strategies today.

One intriguing possibility of the natural transfer of the gospel within a given social unit is the case of the Celts. Historical studies clarify for us that the province of Galatia in Asia Minor was called so because it was settled by *Galatoi* from Western Europe (who as late as the fourth century still spoke both their original Celtic tongue and also the Greek of that part of the Roman Empire). Whether or not Paul's Galatians were merely Jewish traders living in the province of Galatia, or were from the beginning Celtic *Galatoi* who were attracted to synagogues as "God fearers," we note in any case that Paul's letter to the Galatians is especially wary of anyone pushing over on his readers the mere "outward customs" of the Jewish culture and confusing such customs with "essential biblical faith" which he preached to both Jew and Greek (Rom 1:16). A matter of high missionary interest is the fact that Paul's preaching had tapped into a cultural vein of Celtic humanity that may soon have included friends, relatives and trade contacts reaching a great distance to the west. Thus Paul's efforts in Galatia may give us one clue to the surprising Celtic areas of Europe, comprising a belt running across southern Europe clear over into Galicia



in Spain, Brittany in France and up into the western and northern parts of the British Isles (Winter, 1999, 201).

Many of these efforts preceded the advance of formal missionary advance into modern France and England. Winter writes, "One piece of evidence is the fact that the earliest Irish mission compounds (distinguished from the Latin-Roman type by a central chapel) followed a ground plan derived from Christian centers in Egypt. And Greek, not Latin, was the language of the early churches in Gaul [France]" (Winter, 1999, 201). For several hundred years these traditions would conflict until finally the Roman tradition would overcome the early Celtic tradition.

Paul wrote that the Eastern half of the empire "From Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ" (Rom 15:19), which is a distance of 1,800 miles ... on foot! Most of these regions are mountainous rugged terrains with isolated villages scattered throughout the valleys, yet the gospel was "fully preached." Paul was satisfied to move on to new territory having evangelized this area, leaving tiny groups of disciples in key areas to continue the task of persuading the rest to accept the gospel.

Paul has been able to raise significant funds that warrant an entourage of men to accompany Paul with the funds on his trip to Jerusalem. Paul is arrested in AD 58, and then spends two years imprisoned in Caesarea where he is tried under the procurators Antonius Felix and the Procius Festus. In AD 60 he is sent to Rome for the conclusion of his trial.

While Paul is en route to Rome the Apostle Philip (one of the Twelve) is crucified in Hierapolis, Turkey, according to tradition.

When Paul arrives in Rome in AD 61 for a 2-3 year imprisonment before his trial, the first Celtic Christian church is already founded in Glastonbury, England. Meanwhile the Apostle Simon Zelotes, one of the Twelve, was martyred by being sawn in two then crucified in Persia and Barnabas was killed in Cyprus. The older leaders of the Christian movement seldom died of a natural death, rather were killed for their faith in Christ, a price they were all too willing to pay.

In AD 62 James the Just, the brother of the Lord, bishop of the Jerusalem church, was thrown from the Temple parapet and murdered by stoning in the Kedron valley. His successor, Symeon (a first cousin of Jesus) was crucified in AD 108. There would be 13 successor bishops of the Jerusalem church that were all Jewish Christians up to AD 135 in the final destruction of Jerusalem.

In AD 63 Paul is freed in Rome after witnessing faithfully in the highest realm of the empire, only to return to his evangelistic travels going to Spain, before returning to Greece and Asia Minor. The model for the NT evangelist is forever etched in history. If he was born about AD 6 and died about AD 64, then he was 58 when he was beheaded. Some later art depicts him with a sword and a book, the sword symbolizes his means of beheading and the book, which became the "sword of the Spirit."

His three missionary journeys, which lasted less than fifteen years, took him into four populous provinces of the empire: Galatia and Asia in Asia, and Macedonia and Achaia in Europe. Following the great Roman roads, he planted churches in all the important cities along the way...."Having no more place in these parts," he set his sights on Spain. On his way he proposed to visit Rome to make that city his base for evangelizing the western half of the empire. He reached Rome in due time, but his missionary days were over (Kane, 1978, 9).

## ***Pax Romana* and roads and challenges of travel**

Oddly enough until relative recent times, the safest and most efficient time in Church History to travel was in the first few centuries. Yamauchi wrote, “The Roman roads were probably at their best during the first century after Augustus had put an end to war and disorder...Thus St. Paul traveled in the best and safest period” (Yamauchi, 1995).

By the time of Diocletian (AD 300), the Romans had built a network of over 53,000 miles of roads throughout the Empire. They were approximately 10-12 feet wide of flattened stones. The Roman mile (from *mille passus*, “thousand paces”) was one thousand five-foot paces, or about 95 yards shorter than our mile.

On such roads soldiers could march 4 miles per hour, and on forced marches up to five miles per hour. The average traveler would walk three miles per hour for about seven hours a day or about 20 miles per day. For example, Peter’s trip from Joppa to Caesarea (Acts 10:23-24), a distance of 40 miles, took two days.

Since one is walking, all personal effects, bedding, tents and provisions had to be carried. Travel during the winter months could face cold weather, and rains in October and May could cause the rivers to flood. In isolated areas there was dangers from robbers and wild animals. Paul referred to the risks of travel in 2 Cor 11:26, “I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits...in danger in the country.”

Special messengers or couriers (*Cursus Publicus*) by changing horses every 10 miles could travel 50 miles a day. A courier from Rome to Palestine would take 46 days, from Rome to Egypt, 64 days.

Traveling that required an overnight en route would either be spent in the open air (in a tent), an inn or at a home of a believer or relative. If inns were available they were usually avoided since they were filthy, bug infested, and inhabited by gamblers, thieves, and prostitutes. At the end of the century John gave instructions for how to treat traveling missionaries: “You are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers even though they are strangers to you... You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God” (3 John 5,6).

Paul made mention of the hospitality of Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:15, of Jason in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5) and of Gaius in Corinth (Rom 16:23). However, the *Didache* (an early collection of Christian instructions) indicated that Christian hospitality could be abused:

Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as if he were the Lord. But he is not to stay for more than one day, unless there is need, in which case he may stay another. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle leaves, he is to take nothing except bread until he finds his next night’s lodging. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet.



The best way to travel a long distance was by sea, but this was not easy. There were not passenger ships, only cargo ships. The wheat of Egypt supplied a third of the grain necessary to feed the growing population of Rome of a million. This required them to import between

200,000 and 400,000 tons of grain. One huge ship (180 feet long, forty five feet wide, and forty five feet deep) could carry about 1,200 tons of grain.

Safe traveling was between June and September, and winter season, November to March, was avoided, except for emergencies. Paul mentions being shipwrecked three times (2 Cor 11), while once spending a day and night in the open sea. Acts 27 is a narrative of first century travel by sea. Yamauchi reports that underwater archaeologists have plotted 538 Roman shipwrecks in the Mediterranean, and eight of these are off the island of Malta where Paul shipwrecked.

With all this risks travel was much better than before the Roman improvements. Irenaeus, bishop in Lyons, Gaul (France), wrote, "The Romans have given the world peace, and we travel without fear along the roads and across the sea whenever we will."

## Imperial Persecutions

Tradition declares that both Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome by Nero, along with thousands of other Christians being burned, impaled, crucified or fed to the lions in the Coliseum. In AD 64 the city of Rome is in flames and Nero blames the Christians to justify a mass slaughter.

One thing is certain; the Acts of the Apostles does not tell the whole story. There are hints in Paul's epistles that the gospel had a much wider proclamation than that describe by Luke. He states that the gospel had been "preached to every creature which is under heaven" (Col. 1:23); that the faith of the Roman church was "spoken of throughout the whole world" (Rom 1:8); that the faith of the Thessalonian believers "...has gone forth everywhere..." (1 Thess 1:8) (Kane, 1978, 9).

By AD 66 the Apostles Judas Thaddaeus by a mob in Ardaze, Armenia, and Bartholomew (Nathanael) was flayed and crucified in Albana, Armenia with a thousand believers.

In AD 67 Vespasian along with 60,000 soldiers quench a Jewish insurrection, reconquers Galilee, then the Antonian fortress in Jerusalem.

It appears that the mission of evangelizing all 4 million Jews throughout the *diaspora* was accomplished before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

In AD 69 John Mark was killed in Baucalis, near Alexandria, Egypt and the Apostle Andrew (one of the Twelve) was crucified at Patras, Achaia.

In AD 70 Titus with four legions destroyed Jerusalem, killing 600,000 in Judea, 10,000 Jews crucified, and 90,000 Jews taken to Rome as slaves. The Jerusalem church ceases to exist as does the Jewish Temple practice. Jews and Jewish Christians are scattered abroad. No longer is there a threat from the Judaizers that threatened the early Jewish Christian believers. The major center for Christianity shifts to Antioch.

Later [the apostles] extended their ministry to over four hundred synagogues in Jerusalem. Their message was distinctly Jewish in flavor. It centered around a suffering Messiah, called for repentance, and promised forgiveness and restoration. The church that emerged was more Jewish than Christian. A generation after Pentecost its members were still frequenting the temple, keeping the Mosaic Law, taking vows and offering sacrifices (Acts 22:1-24). The church in Jerusalem never managed to throw off the swaddling clothes of Judaism. With the destruction of the city in AD 70 the church there ceased to exist. This was not an unmitigated tragedy, for had Jerusalem continued to be the center of Christian worship Christianity might never have become a world religion. With the destruction of Jerusalem the church was free to become what its Founder intended it to be -- spiritual and not temporal, universal and not provincial. Otherwise,

Jerusalem might have become the Mecca of the Christian world, and the Jordan River might have become to Christians what the Ganges River is to Hindus (Kane, 1978, 8). The Apostle Matthew (Levi, the tax collector?), one of the Twelve, was burned at the stake in Ethiopia. Most of the early Jewish Christian leadership had been killed or eliminated by the destruction of Jerusalem. Few survivors who had been direct witnesses of Jesus' ministry and resurrection would remain. The churches were entering into a new era of second generation leadership that would begin to alter the clarity of some doctrines (i.e. infant baptism), but not lose the passion for sharing the good news of Christ.

In AD 79 the Roman Colosseum was completed for 50,000 spectators to watch gladiators, races and the slaughter of Christians by animals and other cruel means. The demand for demonstrations of killing and hunting skills were initially pitting Gladiators against wild animals like leopards, panthers, bears, lions, tigers, elephants, ostriches, and gazelles. At the dedication of the Colosseum by Emperor Titus, 9,000 animals were killed in a hundred days.

By AD 80 the center of Christianity shifted to Ephesus under the Apostle John until his capture and exile.

The first Christians appear in Tunisia, France, and Croatia by AD 80.

This year the Christians adapted a new form of the biblical text, called the Codex, leaves bound into a book, on papyrus instead of a scroll. The Jewish scholars continued to use scrolls for Hebrew and LXX copies until AD 600.

The Apostle Thomas (Didymus, one of the Twelve) was murdered in Mylapore, India in AD 82.

The imperial persecutions would be localized and irregular until 312, when they would finally be prohibited by imperial decree.

## Apologists and Scriptures

By AD 85 the writings of the Apostolic Fathers became the chief means of defending and explaining the Christian faith. Some of the early writers from 85-150 were Barnabas, Clement, Hermas, Ignatius, Papias and Polycarp.

The Canon of Hebrew Scriptures was finally fixed through the Jewish elders at Jamnia. By 170 the term "Old Testament" was used by Melito of Sardis, a Bishop, near Smyrna in Asia Minor. His "apology" was sent to Marcus Aurelius and provided the Church with the earliest known Christian canon of the Old Testament.

By AD 90 a number of "amateur" scripture translations in Old Latin appeared.

This same year the rise of Gnosticism, a dualistic rationalistic heresy grew to influence even the Christian communities, as they would for centuries.

The bishop of Rome, Clement, in AD 94 wrote that the entire Roman Empire became evangelized through the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

While persecution and martyrdom drew many unbelievers to Christianity through their emotions, the reasoned and well-developed arguments of the early apologists won still others through their intellects. Christians, beginning the apostle Paul in Athens, realized that this factor alone could be a drawing card in witnessing to the learned pagan philosophers. These defenders of the faith, including Origen, Tertullian, and Justin



Martyr, had a powerful influence in making Christianity more reasonable to the educated, a number of whom were converted (Tucker, 1983, 24).

By the early or mid-90's the Apostle John is exiled to the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea where he received the final revelations of the NT and is martyred (?) by being lowered into boiling oil. His apocalyptic visions of the end of time are seen as the conclusion of the revelation of God for the Church. His Gospel, epistles and the Book of Revelation become the last divine revelation for completion of the canon of the NT. The total collection of the revelations made through the Apostles and prophets became the inspired text that would be transmitted into hundreds of cultures as the means of knowing God's truth.

In AD 98 the Roman emperor Trajan (AD 53-117) extended the Roman Empire to include Arabia, Iraq, Armenia, Romania, and Hungary. This began the Antonine dynasty, which was the third major Roman dynasty, and will continue until Marcus Aurelius and Comodus in AD 192. This period is called the golden age of the Roman Empire.

### Conclusion of the period

By the end of the first century we are two generations into the Church Age. Barrett and Johnson estimate that the world is 0.4% Christian, 5.9% is evangelized and Scriptures have been translated into 6 languages. The estimates are that there had been 53,000 martyrs by the turn of the century, which may have been 4.9% of all Christians at that time.

By 100 Rome became the first metropolis in the world to reach 1 million in population and was not superseded until 1770. Demographic estimates show that there were approximately 60% slaves. It is interesting that Rome's population later falls to 250,000 by 450, and then is decimated by the Black Plague to approximately 19,000 by 1360. The population returns to 1 million by 1930.

Evidence of early Christians appears across N. Africa, from Morocco to Egypt to Saudi Arabia, which will flourish for 500 years until the rise of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Kane writes, "We know nothing of the origin of the church in Egypt except that tradition ascribes it to the work of John Mark. We do know that Christians were reported in Alexandria in the reign of Hadrian (125) and that by the end of the century there was a strong church there. Also in Alexandria there was a famous catechetical school, founded about 180 by Pantaeus, who later took the gospel to India. Pantaeus was followed by Clement, and Clement by the brilliant Origen. These individuals can be credited with bringing Egyptian Christianity into the mainstream of the Christian tradition" (Kane, 1978, 10). By the time of Augustine in the fourth-century, every town and most villages had a bishop with a infrastructure of presbyters, deacons and lay leaders under his leadership.



**Roman Empire under Trajan AD 117**

Christianity spread as far as Sri Lanka (or Ceylon) and would continue westward by the adventurous Nestorians.

Christianity stood out from other ancient religions in its exclusivist stance. While the knowledge of doctrine was often shallow for most new converts, there was no ambiguity about the uniqueness of the new religion. Christianity alone demanded that followers deny all gods but the one true God. ... Urgency, evangelism, and the demand that the believer deny the title of god to all but one, made up the force that alternative beliefs could not match. The growth of the new faith was remarkable: on the order of half a million in each generation from the end of the first century up to the proclaiming of toleration (AD 326] (Tucker, 1983, 22).

The strategy was largely urban, taking advantage of either Latin or Greek populations, following along the trade routes and taking advantage of market places where people gathered to communicate in a public forum the news of the Gospel message.

Tucker describes how Christianity penetrated the Roman world through five main avenues: the preaching and teaching of evangelists, the personal witness of believers, acts of kindness and charity, the faith shown in persecution and death, and the intellectual reasoning of the early apologists.

From contemporary accounts we learn that the Christians of the early centuries were very eager to share their faith with others. When the synagogues closed their doors to them, teaching and preaching was done in private homes, usually by itinerant lay ministers. Eusebius of Caesarea tells of the dedication of some of these traveling evangelists in the early second century (*Ecclesiastical History*):

"At that time many Christians felt their souls inspired by the holy word with a passionate desire for perfection. Their first action, in obedience to the instructions of the Savior, was to sell their goods and to distribute them to the poor. Then, leaving their homes, they set out to fulfill the work of an evangelist, making it their ambition to preach the word of the faith to those who as yet had heard nothing of it, and to commit to them the book of the divine Gospels. They were content simply to lay the foundations of the faith among these foreign peoples: they then appointed other pastors and committed to them the responsibility for building up those whom they had merely brought to the faith. Then they passed on to other countries and nations with the grace and help of God." (Tucker, 1983, 22-23)

During this same century the Buddhists spread from India throughout China and in the Americas Teotihuacan (Mexico) is established as the first urban civilization. Their centers were built around large pyramids of the Sun and Moon. The population estimates are 45,000 in 100; 90,000 in 350; and 160,000 at the height of their civilization in 590. Their empire covered most of modern Central America. It would be nearly a thousand years before the first Christians reached their land.

The model of ministry left by the Apostles would mark the leadership over the next few hundred years until the Church became institutionalized by the Roman government. The whole church paradigm would change again for over a thousand years until the Reformation sought to return to these Apostolic days as much as they could and understood.

The next two hundred years were some of the bloodiest and riskiest of all history to be identified with Jesus Christ. Superficial or nominal ("in name only") followers were soon flushed out. As a Chinese Christian who had been tortured to recant his Christianity responded to me when I asked him if he prayed for the liberation of persecution in China, "Never," he responded immediately, "we can only know the genuine believers when they are willing to suffer for His name."

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**REFLEXIVE QUESTION**

What do you think would be the most important requirement to be in the leadership of a church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century?

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What was the greatest factor in preparing the world for the understanding and acceptance of the Messiah?
2. What was the sequence of great religious leaders between Christ, Mohammad, and Buddha?
3. What does tradition say happened to the Ethiopian eunuch?
4. Where did Mark evangelize?
5. Who was Paul's Jewish mentor?
6. Where did Paul receive his Christian doctrine?
7. Who were the Hellenists?
8. What is a "tent-maker"?
9. What was Paul's strategy of evangelism and church planting?
10. What was the paradigm Paul initiated?
11. What was decided at Jerusalem Council? How did it effect evangelism?
12. What event provoked Paul to raise funds for poor on 2<sup>nd</sup> Journey?
13. What was the new strategy Paul implemented in Ephesus on 3<sup>rd</sup> journey?
14. Where did Celtic Christianity begin?
15. Who was killed in Turkey while Paul was in Rome?
16. Who was James the Just killed?
17. What is the symbol of the sword and the book with Paul mean?
18. How long was Paul's missionary career?
19. What was normal walking pace?
20. What was the "best" way to travel?
21. When was the Roman Coliseum built?
22. What is the Codex?
23. When and where was Tomas killed?
24. What was the task of the apologists?
25. What was the percentage of Rom that was slaves?
26. What were the 5 reasons Tucker gave for the growth of the church?
27. What is a nominal Christian?