

# **Volume 1: Apostolic Christianity**

## **A.D. 1-100**

### ***PERIODS OF CHURCH HISTORY***

There are nine periods of church history.

#### **FIRST PERIOD:**

The Life of Christ, and the Apostolic church. From the Incarnation to the death of St. John. A.D. 1-100.

#### **SECOND PERIOD:**

Christianity under persecution in the Roman empire. From the death of St. John to Constantine, the first Christian emperor. A.D. 100-311.

#### **THIRD PERIOD:**

Christianity in union with the Greco-Roman empire, and amidst the storms of the great migration of nations. From Constantine the Great to Pope Gregory I. A.D. 311-590.

#### **FOURTH PERIOD:**

Christianity planted among the Teutonic, Celtic, and Slavonic nations. From Gregory I to Hildebrand, or Gregory VII. A.D. 590-1049.

#### **FIFTH PERIOD:**

The Church under the papal hierarchy, and the scholastic theology. From Gregory VII to Boniface VIII. A.D. 1049-1294.

#### **SIXTH PERIOD:**

The decay of medieval Catholicism, and the preparatory movements for the Reformation. From Boniface VIII to Luther. A.D. 1294-1517.

#### **SEVENTH PERIOD:**

The evangelical Reformation and the Roman Catholic reaction. From Luther to the Treaty of Westphalia. A.D. 1517-1648.

#### EIGHTH PERIOD:

The age of polemic orthodoxy and exclusive confessionalism, with reactionary and progressive movements. From the Treaty of Westphalia to the French Revolution. A.D. 1648-1790.

#### NINTH PERIOD:

The spread of infidelity, and the revival of Christianity in Europe and America, with missionary efforts encircling the globe. From the French Revolution to the present time. A.D. 1790-1880.

### ***BACKGROUND OF THE NATION OF ISRAEL***

The nation of Israel arose with the calling of Abraham and the covenant of Yahweh with him in Canaan, the land of promise. Israel grew into a nation in Egypt, the land of bondage, was delivered and organized into a theocratic state on the basis of the law of Sinai by Moses in the wilderness, and was led back into Palestine by Joshua. After the Judges, Israel became a monarchy, reaching the height of its glory in David and Solomon, split into two hostile kingdoms, and, in punishment for internal discord and growing apostasy to idolatry, was carried away captive by heathen conquerors. It was restored after seventy years' humiliation to the land of its fathers, but fell again under the yoke of heathen foes, yet in its deepest abasement fulfilled its highest mission by giving birth to the Savior of the world.

After the time of the Maccabees, 150 B.C., the Jews fell into three mutually hostile sects or parties, which respectively represented the three tendencies of formalism, skepticism, and mysticism, all indicating the approaching dissolution of the old religion and the dawn of the new.

The Pharisees represented the traditional orthodoxy and stiff formalism, the legal self-righteousness and the fanatical bigotry of Judaism.

The Sadducees, less numerous, were skeptical, rationalistic, and worldly-minded, and held about the same position in Judaism as the Epicureans and the followers of the New Academy in Greek and Roman heathendom.

The Essenes were not a party but a mystic and ascetic order or brotherhood, and lived mostly in monkish seclusion in villages in the desert Engedi on the Dead Sea. They numbered about 4,000 members. With an arbitrary, allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, they combined some foreign theosophic elements. They were the forerunners of Christian monasticism.

Jerusalem was conquered by Pompey in 63 B.C., and the Jews were then subject to the heathen Romans, who heartlessly governed them by the Idumean Herod and his sons, and afterwards by procurators.

The most probable dates in the earthly life of Christ are as follows.

Birth	B.C. 4 or 5
Baptism	A.D. 27
Length of Public Ministry (3 yrs and 3 or 4 mos)	A.D. 27-30
Crucifixion	April 7, A.D. 30

The apostolic period extends from the Day of Pentecost, A.D. 30, to the death of St. John in the year 100, and the nationalities reached by the gospel were Jews, Greeks, and Romans. The field of action was Palestine and gradually extended over Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy with the most prominent centers being Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome followed by Ephesus and Corinth. Peter, Paul, and John stand out most prominently as the chosen three who accomplished the great work of the apostolic age. After the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul in the mid-60's and the following destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the remaining 30 years of this first century are involved in mysterious darkness illuminated only by the writing of John.

The miracle of Pentecost in A.D. 30 was the starting point of the apostolic church and of that new spiritual life in humanity which proceeded from Christ. The congregation of Jerusalem became the mother church of Jewish Christianity and thus of all Christendom. It grew both inwardly and outwardly under the personal direction of the apostles, chiefly of Peter.

Peter preached no subtle theological doctrines, but a few great facts and truths: the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, already known to his hearers for his mighty signs and wonders, his exaltation to the right hand of Almighty God, the descent and power of the Holy Spirit, the fulfillment of prophecy, the approaching judgment and glorious restitution of all things, the paramount importance of conversion and faith in Jesus as the only name whereby we can be saved.

At first Christianity found favor with the people. Soon after, however, it had to encounter the same persecution as its divine founder had undergone, but only, as before, to transform it into a blessing and a means of growth.

The persecution was begun by the skeptical sect of the Sadducees, who took offense at the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ, the center of all the apostolic preaching. The stoning of Stephen followed, and this was the signal for a general persecution of the church, but at the same time for the spread of Christianity.

After some years of repose the church at Jerusalem suffered a new persecution under King Herod Agrippa (A.D. 44). James the elder, the brother of John, was beheaded. Peter was imprisoned and condemned to the same fate, but was miraculously liberated. He then forsook Jerusalem leaving the church to the care of James the "brother of the Lord."

The planting of the church among the Gentiles was mainly the work of Paul, but Providence prepared the way for it by several steps before he entered upon it.

1. By the conversion of the Samaritans, bitter enemies of the Jews, under the preaching and baptism of Philip the evangelist.
2. By the conversion of the noble centurion, Cornelius of Caesarea, between the years 37 and 40. This event marked a revolution in Peter's mind and his emancipation from the narrow prejudices of Judaism.
3. By the rise of the church at Antioch, the capital of Syria. This congregation, formed under the influence of Barnabas and Paul, seems to have consisted of not only Jews but the first of converted Gentiles. It thus became the mother of Gentile Christendom as Jerusalem was the mother and center of Jewish Christendom.

Paul was of strictly Jewish parentage, born a few years after Christ in the renowned Grecian commercial and literary city of Tarsus, in the province of Cilicia, and inherited the rights of a Roman citizen. He was the only scholar among the apostles. His public life, from the third year after his conversion to his martyrdom, A.D. 40-64, may be divided into five or six periods as follows.

1. A.D. 40-44. The period of preparatory labors in Syria and his native Cilicia, partly alone, partly in connection with Barnabas, his senior fellow-apostle among the Gentiles.
2. A.D. 45-50. First missionary journey in company with Barnabas and Mark. He traversed the island of Cyprus and several provinces of Asia Minor. This period closes with the

important apostolic conference at Jerusalem.

3. A.D. 51-54. Second missionary journey with Silas and Timothy, which decided the Christianization of Greece.
4. A.D. 54-58. Third missionary tour where Ephesus was the center of his work for three years.
5. A.D. 58-63. The period of his two imprisonments with the intervening winter voyage from Caesarea to Rome.
6. A.D. 63 and 64. What became of Paul after the termination of his second year of imprisonment in Rome is a question still unsettled among scholars.

The martyrdom of Paul under Nero is established by the unanimous testimony of antiquity. As a Roman citizen he was put to death by the sword. As to the year of his death, the views vary from A.D. 64 to 69.

The precise origin of the church of Rome is involved in impenetrable mystery. It is not impossible that the first tidings of the gospel were brought to Rome soon after the birthday of the church by witnesses of the pentecostal miracle in Jerusalem, among whom were "sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes."

The number of Jews in Rome during the apostolic age is estimated at twenty or thirty thousand. They all spoke Hellenistic Greek with a strong Hebrew accent. They were mostly descendants of slaves and captives of Pompey, Cassius, and Antony.

The strange manners and institutions of the Jews, such as circumcision, Sabbath observance, abstinence from pork and meat sacrificed to the gods whom they abhorred as evil spirits, excited the mingled amazement, contempt, and ridicule of the Roman historians and satirists. They were regarded as enemies of the human race. But this, after all, was a superficial judgment. The Jews also had their friends. Their indomitable industry and persistence, their sobriety, earnestness, fidelity, and benevolence, their strict obedience to law, their disregard of death in war, their unshaken trust in God, their hope of a glorious future of humanity, the simplicity and purity of their worship, the sublimity and majesty of the idea of one omnipotent, holy, and merciful God, made a deep impression upon thoughtful and serious persons, especially females (who escaped the odium of circumcision). Hence the large number of proselytes in Rome and elsewhere.

We have the first historic trace of Christianity in Rome in a notice of the heathen historian Suetonius, confirmed by Luke. He states that Claudius, about A.D. 52, banished the Jews from Rome because of their insurrectionary disposition and commotion under the instigation of Christ. This commotion in all probability refers to Messianic controversies between Jews and Christians, who were not yet clearly distinguished at that time.

In the early part of Nero's reign (54-68) the Roman congregation was already well known throughout Christendom, had several meeting places and a considerable number of teachers. Paul's arrival in Rome, early in the year 61, which two years later was probably followed by that of Peter, naturally gave a great impulse to the growth of the congregation. The Christians were scattered all over the immense city and held their devotional meetings in different localities. The Jewish and the Gentile converts may have formed distinct communities, or rather two sections of one Christian community.

Paul and Peter, if they met together in Rome (after 63), would naturally, in accordance with the Jerusalem compact, divide the field of supervision between them as far as practicable, and at the same time promote union and harmony. This may be the truth which underlies the early and general tradition that they were the joint founders of the Roman church. No doubt their presence and martyrdom cemented the Jewish and Gentile sections. But the final consolidation into one organic corporation was probably not effected till after the destruction of Jerusalem, this being chiefly the work of Clement who appears as the first presiding presbyter of the one Roman church.

The preaching of Paul and Peter in Rome was an epoch in the history of the church. It gave an impulse to the growth of Christianity. But the change was effected at the sacrifice of precious blood. The Roman empire was at first, by its laws of justice, the protector of Christianity. But now it rushed into deadly conflict with the new religion and opened a series of intermittent persecutions.

The first of these imperial persecutions with which the martyrdom of Peter and Paul is connected by ecclesiastical tradition took place in the tenth year of Nero's reign, A.D. 64. A fearful fire broke out in Rome on the night of July 17. It raged unabated for seven nights and six days and then burst out again in another part near the field of Mars, and in three more days laid waste two other districts of the city.

The calamity was incalculable. Only four of the fourteen regions into which the city was divided

remained undamaged. Venerable temples, monumental buildings of the royal, republican, and imperial times, the richest creations of Greek art which had been collected for centuries, were turned into dust and ashes. Men and beasts perished in the flames, and the metropolis of the world assumed the aspect of a graveyard with a million mourners over the loss of irreparable treasures.

The cause of the conflagration is involved in mystery. Public rumor traced it to Nero who wished to enjoy the lurid spectacle of burning Troy and to gratify his ambition to rebuild Rome on a more magnificent scale and to call it Neropolis.

To divert from himself the general suspicion of incendiarism and at the same time to furnish new entertainment for his diabolical cruelty, Nero wickedly cast the blame upon the hated Christians. The police and people, under the influence of the panic created by the awful calamity, were ready to believe the worst slanders and demanded victims. A vast multitude of Christians was put to death in the most shocking manner. None of the leading apostles remained to record the horrible massacre except John.

There is scarcely another period in history so full of vice, corruption, and disaster as the six years between the Neronian persecution and the destruction of Jerusalem. Tacitus begins his history of Rome after the death of Nero with these words:

I proceed to a work rich in disasters, full of atrocious battles, of discord and rebellion, yea, horrible even in peace. Four princes [Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Domitian] killed by the sword; three civil wars, several foreign wars; and mostly raging at the same time. Favorable events in the East [the subjugation of the Jews], unfortunate ones in the West...Rome laid waste by conflagrations, the old temples burned up, even the capital set on fire by citizens; sanctuaries desecrated; adultery rampant in high places. The sea filled with exiles; the rocky islands contaminated with murder. Still more horrible the fury in the city. Nobility, riches, places of honor, whether declined or occupied, counted as crimes, and virtue sure of destruction.

The most unfortunate country in that period was Palestine. Under the last governors, Felix, Festus, Albinus, and Florus, moral corruption and the dissolution of all social ties increased every year as did the oppressiveness of the Roman yoke. At last, in the month of May, A.D. 66, under the last procurator Florus, an organized rebellion broke out against the Romans. To defy Rome in that age, without a single ally, was to defy the world in arms, but religious fanaticism blinded the Jews against the inevitable failure of this mad and desperate revolt.

The emperor Nero, informed of the rebellion, sent his most famous general, Vespasian, with a large force to Palestine. Vespasian opened the campaign in the year 67 with an army of 60,000 men but events in Rome hindered him from completing the victory and required him to return. Nero had killed himself.

Titus, Vespasians' son, then undertook the prosecution of the Jewish war and became the instrument in the hand of God for destroying the holy city and the temple. In April, A.D. 70, immediately after the Passover, when Jerusalem was filled with strangers, the siege began. The zealots rejected with sneering defiance the repeated proposals of Titus and the prayers of Josephus, who accompanied him as interpreter and mediator, and struck down every one who spoke of surrender. The siege lasted until July during which time many thousands died by crucifixion and famine. On the 17th of July the daily sacrifice ceased because all men were needed for defense. The last and the bloodiest sacrifice at the altar of burnt offerings was the slaughter of thousands of Jews who had crowded around it. The temple itself was burned on the 10th day of August. The hill on which it stood was seething hot and seemed enveloped to its base in one sheet of flame. Those killed were more in number than those that killed them. The ground was nowhere visible, all was covered with corpses and over these heaps the soldiers pursued the fugitives.

Jerusalem was razed to the ground. Only three towers of the palace of Herod together with a portion of the western wall were left as monuments of the strength of the conquered city, once the center of the Jewish theocracy and the cradle of the Christian church. The number of the Jews killed during the siege, including all those who had crowded into the city from the country, is stated by Josephus at the enormous and probably exaggerated figure of one million one-hundred thousand. Eleven thousand perished from starvation shortly after the close of the siege. Ninety-seven thousand were carried away captive and either sold into slavery, sent to the mines, or sacrificed in the gladiatorial shows. The strongest and most handsome men were selected for the triumphal procession in Rome, among them the chief defenders and leaders of the revolt, Simon Bar-giora and John of Gischala.

The awful catastrophe of the destruction of the Jewish theocracy must have produced the profoundest sensation among the Christians, of which we now, in the absence of all particular information respecting it, can hardly form a true conception. It was the greatest calamity of Judaism and a great benefit to Christianity; a refutation of the one, a vindication and emancipation of the other. It not only gave a mighty impulse to faith but at the same time formed a proper epoch in the history of the relation between the two religious bodies. It



separated them forever. Henceforth the heathen could no longer look upon Christianity as a mere sect of Judaism but must regard and treat it as a new, peculiar religion. The destruction of Jerusalem, therefore, marks that momentous crisis at which the Christian church as a whole burst forth forever from the chrysalis of Judaism, awoke to a sense of its maturity, and in government and worship at once took its independent stand before the world.

This breaking away from hardened Judaism and its religious forms, however, involved no departure from the spirit of the Old Testament revelation. The church, on the contrary, entered into the inheritance of Israel. It now only remained to complete the consolidation of the church.

Peter and Paul had done their work on earth before the destruction of Jerusalem. Both were master-builders, the one in laying the foundation, the other in rearing the superstructure, of the church of Christ. But there remained a most important additional work to be done, a work of union and consolidation. This was reserved for the apostle of love, the bosom-friend of Jesus who had become his most perfect reflection so far as any human being can reflect the ideal of divine-human purity and holiness.

John was not a missionary or a man of action like Peter and Paul. He did little, so far as we know, for the outward spread of Christianity, but all the more for the inner life and growth of Christianity where it was already established.

The later and most important labors of John are contained in his writings. They exhibit to us a history that is almost exclusively inward and spiritual, but of immeasurable reach and import. They make no allusion to the time and place of residence and composition but the Apocalypse implies that he stood at the head of the churches of Asia Minor.

We do not know when John removed to Asia Minor, but he cannot have done so before the year 63 for Paul makes no allusion to John in his Epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, or his second letter to Timothy. It was probably the martyrdom of Peter and Paul that induced John to take charge of the orphan churches exposed to serious dangers and trials.

Ephesus, by the labors of both Paul and John, became the chief theater of church history in the second half of the first century and during the greater part of the second. John alone could complete the work of Paul and Peter and give the church that compact unity which she needed for her self-preservation against persecution from without and heresy and corruption from within.

There is constant growth and development in the Christian Church during the Apostolic period which progresses outwardly and inwardly in proportion to the degree of its vitality and zeal. But it is also a progression of apprehension and appropriation by man, not of communication or revelation by God.

Four different types of apostolic teaching emerge according to the peculiar character, education, and sphere of the several sacred writers. Irenaeus speaks of a fourfold "Gospel." In like manner we may distinguish a fourfold "Apostle," or four corresponding types of apostolic doctrine. The Epistle of James corresponds to the Gospel of Matthew; the Epistles of Peter and his addresses in the Acts to that of Mark; the Epistles of Paul to the Gospel of Luke and his Acts; the Epistles of John to the Gospel of the same apostle.

This division, however, both as regards the Gospels and the Epistles, is subordinate to a broader difference between Jewish and Gentile Christianity which runs through the entire history of the apostolic period and affects even the doctrine, polity, worship, and practical life of the church. The Jews naturally took the Christian faith into intimate association with the divinely revealed religion of the old covenant and adhered as far as possible to the sacred institutions and rites. The heathen converts, not having known the law of Moses, passed at once from the state of nature to the state of grace. The former represented the historical, traditional, conservative principle; the latter the principle of freedom, independence, and progress.

Accordingly we have two classes of teachers: apostles of the Jews or of the circumcision, and the apostles of the Gentiles or of the uncircumcision. If we make the difference between Jewish and Gentile Christianity the basis of classification, we may reduce the books of the New Testament to three types of doctrine: the Jewish Christian, the Gentile Christian, and the ideal or unionistic Christian. The first is chiefly represented by Peter, the second by Paul, and the third by John. As to James, he must be ranked under the first type as the local head of the Jerusalem wing of the conservative school, while Peter was the ecumenical head of the whole church of the circumcision.

The Jewish Christian theology embraces the Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude, the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and to some extent the Revelation of John; for John is placed by Paul among the "pillars" of the church of the circumcision, though in his later writings he took an independent position above the distinction of Jew and Gentile. In these books, originally designed mainly, though not exclusively, for Jewish Christian readers, Christianity is exhibited in its unity with the Old Testament as the fulfillment of the same.

The Gentile Christian theology is embodied in the writings of Paul and Luke, and in the anonymous Epistle to the Hebrews. Paul is the emancipator of the Christian consciousness from the oppressive bondage of legalism and bigotry, and the champion of freedom and catholicity. Paul's gospel is emphatically the gospel of saving faith, the gospel of evangelical freedom, the gospel of universalism centering in the person and work of Christ and conditioned by union with him.

The unity of Jewish Christian and Gentile Christian theology meets us in the writings of John, who, in the closing decades of the first century, summed up the final results of the preceding struggles of the apostolic age. John's theology is marked by artless simplicity and spiritual depth. The central truth in his writings and the central fact in Christianity itself is the incarnation of the eternal Logos as the highest manifestation of God's love to the world. John's Christianity centers in the idea of love and life. God first loved us, therefore let us love Him and the brethren. He is justly called the apostle of love.

The three types of doctrine which we have briefly unfolded exhibit Christianity in the whole fullness of its life. But this heavenly body of apostolic truth is confronted with the ghost of heresy.

The heresies of the apostolic age are, respectively, the caricatures of the several types of the true doctrine. Accordingly we distinguish three fundamental forms of heresy, which reappear with various modifications, in almost every subsequent period.

1. The JUDAIZING tendency is the heretical counterpart of Jewish Christianity. It so insists on the unity of Christianity with Judaism as to sink the former to the level of the latter and to make the gospel no more than an improvement of a perfected law. It regards Christ as a mere prophet, a second Moses, and denies, or at least wholly overlooks, his divine nature and his priestly and kingly offices. The Judaizers were Jews in fact and Christians only in appearance and in name. They held circumcision and the whole moral and ceremonial law of Moses to be still binding and the observance of these necessary to salvation.
2. The opposite extreme is a false Gentile Christianity which may be called the PAGANIZING or GNOSTIC heresy. It violently breaks away from the past while the Judaizing heresies tenaciously and stubbornly cling to it as permanently binding. It exaggerates the Pauline view of the distinction of Christianity from Judaism, sunders Christianity from its historical basis, resolves the real humanity of the Savior into a

Doketistic<sup>1</sup> illusion, and perverts the freedom of the gospel into antinomian licentiousness.<sup>2</sup> The author, or first representative of this baptized heathenism, according to the uniform testimony of Christian antiquity, is Simon Magus. In the second century this heresy spread over the whole church, east and west, in the various schools of Gnosticism.

3. As attempts had already been made before Christ to blend the Jewish religion with heathen philosophy, especially that of Pythagoras and Plato, so now, under the Christian name, there appeared confused combinations of these opposite systems forming either a PAGANIZING JUDAISM or a JUDAIZING PAGANISM. This SYNCRETISTIC heresy was the caricature of John's theology which truly reconciled Jewish and Gentile Christianity in the highest conception of the person and work of Christ.

Whatever their differences, however, all three of these fundamental heresies amount at last to a more-or-less distinct denial of the central truth of the gospel, that is, the incarnation of the Son of God for the salvation of the world. They make Christ either a mere man or a mere superhuman phantom. They allow no real and abiding union of the divine and human in the person of the Redeemer.

After the days of the Apostles no names of great missionaries are mentioned until the opening of the middle ages. During this second period of church history called the Ante-Nicene age, from 100 to 325, there were no missionary societies, institutions, or organized efforts. Yet in less than 300 years from the death of St. John the whole population of the Roman empire which then represented the civilized world was nominally Christianized.

Christianity once established was its own best missionary. It grew naturally from within. It attracted people by its very presence, it was a light shining in darkness and illuminating that darkness. Every congregation was a missionary society and every Christian believer a missionary inflamed by the love of Christ to convert his fellowman. The example had been set by Jerusalem and Antioch and by those brethren who, after the martyrdom of Stephen, "were scattered abroad and went about preaching the Word."

The particular mode, as well as the precise time, of the introduction of Christianity into the several countries during this period is for the most part uncertain. No doubt much more was

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1 An alternate spelling from docetism, a view associated with the Gnostics that Jesus had no human body and only appeared to have died on the cross.

2 Antinomianism is the belief that the gospel frees the Christian from the Old Testament law, even the moral law.

done by the apostles and their immediate disciples than the New Testament informs us of. About the middle of the second century we have these words from Justin Martyr concerning the extent of Christianity in the Roman Empire: "There is no people, Greek, or barbarian, or of any other race, by whatsoever appellation of manners they may be distinguished, however ignorant of arts or agriculture, whether they dwell in tents or wander about in covered wagons--among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered in the name of the crucified Jesus to the Father and Creator of all things."

We find Christianity in Asia, the cradle of Christianity as it was of humanity and civilization. The apostles themselves had spread the new religion over Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor. In Africa Christianity gained firm foothold first in Egypt and there probably as early as the apostolic age. It was the home of Joseph and his brethren and the cradle of Israel. In Egypt the Jewish scriptures were translated into Greek, and this Greek version was used even by Christ and the apostles.

From Jerusalem the march of the apostolic church was westward, to Rome. The church of Rome was by far the most important one for all the West. From there the church spread to all the cities of Italy. The first Roman provincial synod, of which we have information, numbered twelve bishops under the presidency of Telesphorus (142-154).

The persecution of the year 177 shows the church already planted in the south of Gaul in the second century. Spain probably became acquainted with Christianity likewise in the second century. According to Tertullian Britain also was brought under the power of the cross towards the end of the second century.

The spread of Christianity during the first three centuries was accompanied by much tragedy. First, foreboding signs, then a succession of bloody assaults of heathenism. Amidst the dark scenes of hatred and cruelty there were bright exhibitions of suffering virtue. Now and then a short pause and at last a fearful and desperate struggle of the old pagan empire for life and death ending in the abiding victory of the Christian religion.

The persecutions proceeded first from the Jews, afterwards from the Gentiles, and continued, with interruptions, for nearly three hundred years. History reports no mightier, longer and deadlier conflict than this war of extermination waged by heathen Rome against defenseless Christianity. The future of the world's history depended on the downfall of heathenism and the triumph of Christianity.

Persecution began with the Jews. They had displayed their obstinate unbelief and bitter hatred of the gospel in the crucifixion of Christ, the stoning of Stephen, the execution of James the Elder, the repeated incarcerations of Peter and John, the wild rage against Paul, and the murder of James the Just. The fearful judgment of God was at last visited upon this ingratitude in the destruction of the holy city and the temple. But this tragedy could break only the national power of the Jews, not their hatred of Christianity. They caused the death of Symeon, bishop of Jerusalem (107), and were particularly active in the burning of Polycarp of Smyrna.

Because of their severe oppression under Trajan and Hadrian, the prohibition of circumcision, and the desecration of Jerusalem by the idolatry of the pagans, the Jews were provoked to a new and powerful insurrection in the years 132-135. A pseudo-Messiah, Bar-Cochba, put himself at the head of the rebels and caused all the Christians who would not join him to be most cruelly murdered. But he was defeated by Hadrian's general in 135 and more than a half-million Jews were slaughtered after a desperate resistance, immense numbers sold into slavery, 985 villages and 50 fortresses leveled to the ground, nearly all Palestine laid waste, and Jerusalem again destroyed. After this the Jews had no opportunity for any further independent persecution of the Christians.

The policy of imperial Rome was in a measure tolerant. It was repressive but not preventive. The ancient religions of the conquered races were tolerated as far as they did not interfere with the interests of the state. The Jews had enjoyed special protection since the time of Julius Caesar.

Now as long as Christianity was regarded by the Romans as a mere sect of Judaism, it shared the hatred and contempt indeed, but also the legal protection bestowed on that ancient national religion. But Christianity was far too important a phenomenon and made far too rapid progress to be ignored any longer. So as soon as it was understood as a new religion, and as, in fact, claiming universal validity and acceptance, it was set down by Rome as unlawful and treasonable.

This should be no surprise for with all its professed and actual tolerance the Roman state was thoroughly interwoven with heathen idolatry and made religion a tool of its policy. The piety of Romulus<sup>3</sup> and Numa<sup>4</sup> was believed to have laid the foundation of the power of Rome. The

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3 The founder of Rome, by tradition is 753 B.C., and its first king. According to Roman mythology. Romulus and Remus were twin sons of Mars and Rhea Silvia but were abandoned by them and raised by a wolf. Romulus killed Remus in an argument over the building of Rome.

4 The second king of Rome.

priests and Vestal virgins were supported out of the public treasury. The emperor was an object of divine worship. The gods were national. The senate and emperor, by special edicts, usually allowed conquered nations the free practice of their worship but with the express prohibition of making proselytes from the state religion.

With Christianity appearing not as a national religion but claiming to be the only true universal one, and making its converts among every people and sect, attracting Greeks and Romans in much larger numbers than Jews, refusing to compromise with any form of idolatry and threatening in fact the very existence of the Roman state religion, even this limited toleration could not be granted. Christ stood as the founder of a spiritual universal empire, a rival not to be endured. The Christians drew upon themselves the suspicion of hostility to the Caesars and the Roman people and the unpardonable crime of conspiracy against the state.

After the Neronian persecution the church suffered no serious persecution during the rapidly succeeding reigns of Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, and Titus. But Domitian (81-96) treated the embracing of Christianity as a crime against the state and condemned to death many Christians, even his own cousin, the consul Flavius Clemens, on the charge of atheism. Others were sent into exile. Following his reign, Nerva (96-98) recalled the banished and refused to treat the confession of Christianity as a political crime.

## ***APPENDIX***

The following men are important during the last of the apostolic age and the ante-Nicene period.

- Clement of Rome - born in Italy and died around the year 98; a bishop of Rome.
- Ignatius - born around 50 in Syria; bishop of Antioch; died a martyr in 107.
- Polycarp - born 69; disciple of John; friend of Ignatius; died a martyr in 155.
- Justin Martyr - born 100 in Palestine; died in Rome 166 as a martyr.
- Irenaeus - born 130; a Greek from Smyrna; bishop in Gaul; died in 202 possibly a martyr.
- Tertullian - born 155; lived and died in Carthage 220-230.

- Clement of Alexandria - born the middle of the second century; Greek theologian; died around 215.
- Origen - born 182 in Alexandria; died a martyr in 251 in Caesarea.
- Cyprian - bishop of Carthage; died a martyr there in 258.
- Eusebius of Caesarea - died in 339-340.
- Jerome - born around 340 and died in 420.