

CHURCH HISTORY: FROM PENTECOST TO THE GREAT SCHISM

WEEK 1: THE TIME OF THE APOSTLES AND EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS

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Sources of Early Christian History

Jewish Writers: Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, Philo of Alexandria

Roman Historians: Suetonius, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger

Christian Writings: Acts of the Apostles, Pauline Letters, Apostolic Fathers

Oral Tradition

The Mission of the Apostles and the Spread of Christianity

Peter – First Bishop of Rome (martyred upside-down on a cross in Rome in 64)

James the Lesser – First Bishop of Jerusalem (martyred by being beaten to death in Jerusalem in 62)

John – Ephesus and Patmos (died of natural causes in Ephesus c. 101)

Paul – Four Missionary Journeys (martyred by beheading outside Rome in 64)

Philip – Greece, Phrygia? (martyred by crucifixion)

Thomas – Persia and India? (martyred by a spear in India?)

Andrew – Asia Minor, Greece, and Scythia? (martyred on an x-shaped cross)

James the Greater – Spain? (first apostle to be martyred, by sword, ordered by Herod Agrippa in 44)

Jude – Syria, Mesopotamia, Edessa? (martyred by being beaten to death, then beheaded)

Matthew – Judea and Ethiopia? (martyred by a spear, depicted with a winged man or angel)

Bartholomew – Asia Minor, Armenia? (martyred by being flayed alive)

Simon – Mesopotamia, Egypt? (martyred by crucifixion or being sawn in half)

Matthias – Cappadocia, Egypt, Ethiopia? (martyred by stoning)

Developing a Christian Identity

Jewish Christians – starting in Jerusalem and Judea, then spreading to the Jewish *Diaspora* in the major cities of the Empire; location of Jewish settlements initially guided the travels of the apostles (Alexandria, Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, etc.); followers of “the Way” seen as one movement within Judaism like Pharisees or Sadducees

Gentile Christians – Cornelius becomes first Gentile to be baptized (Acts 10.44-49); formal preaching to Gentiles began in Antioch (Acts 11.19-26), then spread throughout the Roman Empire; most often the apostles preached to the Gentiles only after being rejected by the Jews (see Acts 13.44-47, 19.8-10)

The Council of Jerusalem – Acts 15.1-21 – is it necessary for Gentile Christians to observe Jewish law? Gradually led to a separation of Christianity from Judaism

Ebionites – “the poor” – Jewish Christians who retained Jewish practices; separated from orthodox Jews because of their belief in Jesus, separated from Gentile Christians because of their insistence on following Jewish law; considered heretics or a non-Christian sect by Christians from Irenaeus (d. 202) onward

Temple of Jerusalem destroyed by Romans in 70 (end of Sadducees); City of Jerusalem destroyed by Hadrian in 135 – Jews expelled from Judea, Jerusalem rebuilt as a pagan city, Aelia Capitolina; Rome secured as center of Christianity

Condemnation by the Jews (85): “May the Nazarenes and the heretics be suddenly destroyed and removed from the Book of Life.” (*The Eighteen Benedictions*); Jews needed unity of belief after destruction of the Temple – Pharisees emerged as dominant movement

Identity within the Roman Empire – first as a sect of Judaism (tolerated), then as a separate movement (suspected)

Persecutions of Christians under Nero (54-68) and Domitian (81-96)

Nero – blamed Christians for fire of Rome (64), incest, and cannibalism

Domitian – required oath to emperor

Early persecutions often limited in scope and sporadic; few widespread persecutions

Early centers of Christianity: Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome; followed by Corinth, Alexandria, and Ephesus

The Apostolic Fathers and other Early Christian Writings

The First Letter of Clement to the Corinthians

Date – c. 81-96 (reign of Domitian)

Setting – Rome

Author – Roman Christians (by tradition, Pope St. Clement)

Purpose – re-establish order and peace in the divided church at Corinth; early example of looking to the church in Rome as an authority to settle disputes and bring unity

The Didache

Date – c. 90-120 (known by many early Christian writers, full text rediscovered in 1873)

Setting – Syria

Author – Unknown Jewish Christian (many parallels with Matthew)

Purpose – to provide specific Christian instruction, most likely prior to baptism

The Apology of St. Justin Martyr

Date – c. 150

Setting – Rome

Author – Justin Martyr (d. 165), Palestinian philosopher and convert to Christianity

Purpose – provide a defense of Christianity for non-Christians