

Beginnings to AD303: Expansion and Persecution

“...and on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria... Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.” Acts 8: 1, 4

Roman Persecutions of Early Christians

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Emperor</u>	<u>Famous Martyrs, Other Comments</u>
AD 64	Nero	Paul, Peter
c.90-96	Domitian (81-96)	Clement of Rome, John (exiled to Patmos)
98-117	Trajan	Ignatius, Symeon, Zozimus, Rufus
161-180	Marcus Aurelius	Polycarp; Justin Martyr
202-211	Septimus Severus	Irenaeus
235-236	Maximus the Thracian	
249-251	Decius (249-251)	<i>libelli</i> issued to those who sacrificed to Roman gods
257-260	Valerian (253-260)	Origen, Cyprian
303-311	Diocletian (284-305)	perhaps the most vicious of the persecutions

I. WHAT IS CHURCH HISTORY – AND WHY STUDY IT?

1) Two Kinds of History:

a) Redemptive

b) Natural

2) The Lord of History, and the Limits of History

- a) our sovereign God is in control.
- b) His purposes are “true and righteous altogether.”
- c) He has not revealed to us precisely how He works out His purposes.
- d) our faith in redemptive history and our knowledge of natural history can give us insights into the past; though we “see through a glass, darkly,” we still see.
- e) He has revealed to us how the story will end – in the “blessed hope” of our Lord’s certain return, when we see the New Jerusalem, when history becomes eternity.

3) Reasons to study church history

- a) because God commands it

- b) History can instruct us
- c) History should humble us
- d) History should encourage us

II. THE POLITICAL, CULTURAL, AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

- 1. Political – Begins in the Roman Empire.
- 2. Cultural-Religious: Pluralism
- 3. Christianity's Roots in Judaism

III. THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTIANITY

- 1. Growth in numbers, and area
- 2. Who converted, and why did they convert?
- 3. Beneficial Providences in the Expansion

IV. OFFICIAL ROMAN PERSECUTIONS

- 1. Martyrdom of the Apostles
- 2. Nero's brutality, and persecution's causes
- 3. Other Persecutions:
 - a. Trajan
 - b. Marcus Aurelius (martyrdom of Polycarp)
 - c. Decius
 - d. Valerian
 - e. Diocletian
- 4. Galerius recants; the Church survives persecution. Can it survive acceptance?

