

A Chronology of Events Affecting the Church of Christ from the First Century to the Restoration

2. Apostasy, Falling Away, and the Decline of the Roman Empire: 100-400

These notes draw dates and events from timelines at the following websites: www.therestorationmovement.com, www.churchtimeline.com, and www.wikipedia.com. The interpretation of events and the application of scripture to these events, as they affect the church of Christ, which was built by the Lord (Matt 16:18), remain the responsibility of this writer.

Apostasy Is Forecast

Acts 20:28-31: 28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard!

Gal 1:6-9: 6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

2 Peter 2:1-3: 2 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

1 John 2:18-19: 18 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

2 John 7: 7 Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

Dates	Events Affecting the Church	Significance
	The Post Apostolic Period to the Beginning of the Medieval Period	The 2nd Century through the 4th Century
98	Trajan became Emperor and instituted a policy toward Christians that stayed in effect until the time of Aurelius.	He did not to seek out Christians, but if they were brought before the authorities, they were to be punished, and/or executed for being Christians
130	Conversion of Justin Martyr, who taught that the seeds of truth (<i>logos</i>) could be found in all religions, but that only Christianity taught the whole	For the church, the path began away from the scriptures toward pagan philosophies. One might see hints of modern ecumenicalism in this development. Contrary, the scriptures place salvation in Christ alone. Acts 4:12 specifically teaches:

- truth. He was heavily influenced by the Greek philosophers and the Stoics. He was allegedly martyred in Rome. "12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."
- 144 Marcion excommunicated for rejecting the Old Testament, rejecting most of the New Testament, and teaching that Christ only appeared to be human (Docetism). His challenge helped the church realize the necessity of formally recognizing the canon. Marcion appears to be a full-fledged antichrist (2 John 7). Many today who adopt a new *hermeneutic* teach that the epistles of the New Testament are mere advice. Many also believe that Christ was no more than a good man. Although the church acting as a corporate body larger than the local church appears to have done a good thing in establishing the canon of scriptures, the end was to deny local churches autonomy, paving the way for the church universal to dictate doctrine. Acts 14:23; Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:2-4
- 150 b. Clement of Alexandria was an apologist who used Plato to support Christianity, and tried to reach gnostics by showing that only Christians had real "gnosis." His works make up a large proportion of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. II*, subtitled "The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325", the time of the first council of Nicea in 325. An apologist is one who defends Christianity against intellectual objections. In early church history, the Greek apologists were Christian leaders from approximately 130 to 180 AD who wrote treatises in Greek defending Christianity against attacks by pagan philosophers.
- 155 Polycarp was martyred; parts of letters he wrote to the Philippians survived him.
- 156 This is the possible date of the beginning of the Montanist movement. They were an ascetic movement with apocalyptic visions. They claimed the Spirit spoke directly through their prophets and prophetesses. Once again, false prophets arise, claiming inspiration for those other than the apostles and prophets. See 2 Peter 2:1-2 above.
- 160 b. Tertullian. He objected to Justin's use of philosophy to defend Christianity, saying "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Late in life he became a Montanist and wrote *Against Praxeas*, which helped the church understand the Trinity. Prophecy from personal construction and the introduction of the trinity as a church doctrine developed into the church prescribed dogma. "Since the beginning of the third century the doctrine of the Trinity has been stated as 'the one God exists in three Persons and one substance, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.' *Trinitarianism*, belief in the Trinity, is a mark of Roman Catholicism, Eastern and Oriental Orthodoxy as well as of the 'mainstream traditions' arising from the Protestant Reformation, such as Anglicanism, Baptist,

Methodism, Lutheranism and Presbyterianism. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* describes the Trinity as "the central dogma of Christian theology" [Wikipedia].

The Bible teaches that the Godhead are one in purpose but exist in separate will, personality, and capacity: John 16:13-15

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you."

Phil 2:5-8

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

161 **Marcus Aurelius** becomes emperor. He abandoned Trajan's passive approach and actively sought Christians to persecute them throughout the empire.

175 Some of the writers of the time had written that a bishop was different from an elder - one elder was selected bishop to be head over the other elders.

This is the beginning of the fulfillment of Paul's prophecy to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20 (quoted above). Three scriptures use overseer (bishop), shepherd (pastor), and elder interchangeably.

Acts 20:17:

17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church.

Acts 20:28:

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Titus 1:5-7:

5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you . . . appoint **elders** in every town, as I directed you. 6 An **elder** must

be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. 7 Since an **overseer** is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless. . .

1 Peter 5:1-3

5 To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow **elder**, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be **shepherds** of God's flock that is under your care, serving as **overseers** – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

202 **Clement of Alexandria** united Greek philosophical traditions with Christian doctrine and valued *gnosis* (from one of the Greek words for knowledge, γνῶσις, *gnosis* is the spiritual knowledge of a saint or mystically enlightened human being. In the common culture (Byzantine and Hellenic) *Gnosis* was a knowledge or insight into the infinite, divine and uncreated in all and above all, rather than knowledge strictly into the finite, natural or material world that with communion for all people could be held by common Christians specially chosen by God. This teaching diminished the role of the scriptures as the sole revelation of God’s mystery and allowed others to claim knowledge and special insight into the divine. The result was an elite in the church who could define its own truth – a false principle that is with us until this day. The scriptures stand firmly and specifically against this false idea.

Col 2:8:

“8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.”

2 Tim 3:16-17:

“16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

250 One man from each of those bishops from around an area was selected to be head over that area (diocese). The progression was that where God had placed elders as shepherds to oversee the local churches, man gradually made the three terms label distinctive offices in hierarchy, which reached across the entire church. This hierarchy, which continued in the Roman Catholic Church, spread into the major protestant denominations.

C 250 Bishop of Alexandria Pope: O.E. papa, from M.L. papa "bishop, pope" (in classical L., "tutor"), from Gk. papas "patriarch, bishop," originally "father." Applied to bishops of Asia Minor and taken as a title by the Bishop of Alexandria c.250. <http://www.etymonline.com/>

311 **Galarius** repented on his This date marks the early beginning of the influence of

- deathbed, saying that he was sorry he had mistreated Christians and signing a law ceasing persecution of Christians.
- 306-363 The reign of **Constantine I**, the first Christian Emperor, marked the separation of the Roman Empire into the Eastern (Byzantine) and Western (Catholic) Empires.
- 313 **Constantine** signed a law that the Roman government would never persecute Christians again.
- 325 The **First Council of Nicaea** was a council of Christian bishops convened in Nicaea in Bithynia (present-day İznik in Turkey) by the Roman Emperor Constantine I in A.D. 325. The Council was the first effort to attain consensus in the church through an assembly representing all of Christendom.
- the church rising as the influence of the emperor diminished.
- The separation created a dynamic that led to the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches. The church recognized the Eastern Roman Emperor as the Roman Emperor until 800 when Leo III crowned Charlemagne , King of the Franks, as the Roman Emperor, which led to the Holy Roman Empire.
- This act further diminished the power of the Roman government over Christians, who had now departed from the New Testament as the only rule of faith and conduct. The merger of church and state is on the way with the Western Empire controlled by the Roman Catholic Church.
- The council constructed the first part of the Nicene Creed which settled the Christological issue of the relationship of Jesus to God the Father. The decision that Jesus was the same substance as the Father secured the doctrine of the Trinity, described above as the central doctrine of the catholic and protestant churches. The scriptures teach a plurality in the Godhead with distinctively personal representation. See notes on the advent of the doctrine in the year 160.
- This ability to develop binding theology on the nature of divinity gave rise to the changing stature and nature of Mary to the Catholic Church [See notes on 1200 below].
- They settled the calculation of the date of Easter. Easter is not mentioned in the New Testament where every first day of the week observes Lord's Supper and the Ressurrection (Acts 20:7; I Cor 11:13-27). or
- They promulgated the early version of canon law: 20 new and binding laws (Rev 22:18-19).

Paul's Prophecy of These Events

2 Thess 2:1-11

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of

lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.