4 B

Persecutions
Persecutions under Nero

- Nero, approximately 64 AD. Rome burns and Nero blames the Christians (Note: Coliseum in Rome not yet built, but were other amphitheaters). Peter and Paul believed killed.
But all human efforts, all the emperor's gifts and propitiations of the gods, were not enough to remove the scandal or banish the belief that the fire [summer, 64 AD] had been ordered. And so, to get rid of this rumor Nero set up as culprits and punished with the utmost cruelty a class hated for their abominations, who are commonly called Christians. Christus, from whom their name is derived, was executed at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. Checked for the moment this pernicious superstition broke out again, not only in Judea, the source of the evil, but even in Rome, the place where everything that is sordid and degrading from every quarter of the globe finds a following. Thus those who confessed (i.e., to being Christians) were first arrested, then ... a large multitude was convicted, not so much for the charge of arson as for their hatred of the human race. Besides being put to death they were made objects of amusement; they were clothed in hides of beasts and torn to death by dogs; others were crucified, others were set on fire to illuminate the night after sunset. ... All this gave rise to a feeling of pity, even towards these men who deserved the most exemplary punishment since it was felt they were being killed, not for the public good but to gratify the cruelty of an individual.

Tacitus, *Annals*, xv. 44
Destruction of Temple and Jerusalem in 70 AD

- Herod’s Temple completed A.D. 63
- The Revolt Against the Roman Empire, A.D. 66-70
- Led by Jewish nationalists
- Masada, A.D. 73
- Josephus, Jewish Historian
- Destruction of Temple and End of Sacrificial System

Emperor Titus
Triumphant Arch of Titus
Celebrating Destruction of Jerusalem, 70 AD.
“While the national status of the Jews, dependant though it had been, was now completely destroyed, the privileges that they had enjoyed in both the city (Rome) and throughout the Empire were not diminished. The only significant change was the transformation of the Temple tax, which the Jews had paid annually for the Temple at Jerusalem, into a poll tax called the fiscus Iudaicus, which was to go instead to the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.”

— *The Jews of Ancient Rome.*

- Christians do not take part in the revolt.
- ~85 Jews include an anathema against the "Nazarenes" in their synagogue liturgy.
- The Jews at Jamnia in 90 AD confirm the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures.
• Domitian, approximately 95 AD.
• Emperor Domitian demands to be worshiped as "Lord and God."
• During his reign the book of Revelation is written and believers cannot miss the reference when it proclaims Christ as the one worthy of our worship.
• Both John and Jude Persecuted.
For this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread through the villages and rural districts; it seems possible, however, to check and cure it. It appears now that the temples, which had been almost deserted, will be frequented and the sacred festivals, after a long general demand for sacrificial animals, which for some time past have met with few purchasers.
Roman Spread of Christianity
First 100 Years (to 140 AD)
Early Church Developments
Outside the Roman Empire

Map 8.5  Major Trade Routes, A.D. 200

End of First Century
Edessa (just east of Roman Empire becomes first Christian state.)
It was then that he [Perigrinus] learned the wondrous lore of the Christians by associating with their priests and scribes in Palestine. [Christ] whom they still worship, the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world. ... The poor wretches have convinced themselves first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody, most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another, after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods, and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws. Therefore they ... [are] receiving such doctrines traditionally without any definite evidence. So if any charlatan or trickster able to profit from them comes along and gets among them, he quickly acquires sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk.

Another view of Early Christians

• Celsus:
• “Far from us, say the Christians, be any man possessed of any culture, wisdom or judgment; their aim is to convince only worthless and contemptible people, idiots, slaves, poor women and children... These are the only ones whom they
The method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those denounced to you as Christians is extremely proper. It is not possible to lay down any general rule which can be applied as the fixed standard in all cases of this nature. No search should be made for these people; when they are denounced and found guilty they must be punished; with the restriction, however, that when the party denies himself to be a Christian, and shall give proof that he is not by worshipping the gods he shall be pardoned on the ground of repentance even though he may have formerly incurred suspicion. Information without the accuser's name inscribed must not be admitted in evidence against anyone, as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and by no means agreeable to the spirit of the age.
The Second Jewish War

• Second revolt in 132-35 AD led by *bar Kochba* (some believed him to be the Messiah)

• Hadrian’s City: Aelia Capitolina, Temple of Jupiter constructed.

• The Elimination of Jewry in Palestine and Alexandria. Estimated 1 Million Jews Killed

Emperor Hadrian
Description of Early Christians

"For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. . . . following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all others; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. . . .“

— The Letter to Diognetus Chap 5:
'Eighty and six years have I served him, and he hath done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my king who saved me?'

**Persecutions Under Marcus Aurelius**

- Marcus Aurelius was the “old emperor” in the beginning of the movie, “Gladiator”
- His son Commodus had a Christian mistress
- Meditations

Polycarp
Why the persecutions?

- "... they think the Christians the cause of every public disaster, of every affliction with which the people are visited. If the Tiber rises as high as the city walls, if the Nile does not send its waters up over the fields, if the heavens give no rain, if there is an earthquake, if there is famine or pestilence, straightway the cry is, 'Away with the Christians to the lion!'"
END OF SECOND CENTURY AD
(200 AD)
Persecutions under Septimus Severus

Emperor Septimus Severus (202-211) persecutes; forbids conversion to Christianity.

“We do not seek to flatter you, ... but request that you judge on the basis of proper and thorough examination.”

Justin Martyr, “Apologist”
Perpetua is Martyred

And so, stripped and clothed with nets, they were led forth. The populace shuddered as they saw one young woman of delicate frame, and another with breasts still dropping from her recent childbirth. So, being recalled, they are unbound. Perpetua is first led in. She was tossed, and fell on her loins; and when she saw her tunic torn from her side, she drew it over her as a veil for her middle, rather mindful of her modesty than her suffering. Then she was called for again, and bound up her disheveled hair; for it was not becoming for a martyr to suffer with disheveled hair, lest she should appear to be mourning in her glory. So she rose up; and when she saw Felicitas crushed, she approached and gave her her hand and lifted her up. And both of them stood together; and the brutality of the populace being appeased, they were recalled to the Sanavivarian gate. … But Perpetua, that she might taste some pain, being pierced between the ribs, cried out loudly, and she herself placed the wavering right hand of the youthful gladiator to her throat.
Periods In Between Persecutions

• During the time between the persecutions, Christianity grew large and prosperous.
• First Churches were built publicly. One was visible from Diocletian's palace.
• The church continues its amazing spread reaching all classes, particularly the lower. Callistus--a former slave--actually becomes bishop of Rome and makes claims for special importance of the Roman bishop.

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church”

Tertullian
Persecutions under Decius, AD 250

- Commanded all Romans to sacrifice to the gods before a magistrate and to obtain certificates certifying that they had done so.
- Many professing Christians rushed to obtain their certificates, some by sacrificing and others by bribing officials or obtaining forged certificates.
- The bishops of Rome (Fabian), Antioch (Babylas) and Alexandria (Alexander) all lost their lives in this persecution.
- This persecution basically ended with Decius' death in 251 at the hands of the Goths.
Flavian Amphitheater: Location of Gladiator Games and Christian Martyrdoms

“If the Tiber floods the city, if the Nile refuses to rise, if the sky withholds its rain, if there is an earthquake, famine or pestilence, at once the cry is raised, “Christians to the lions.”

Tertullian
Emperor Diocletian

- Restores peace and safety to empire
- Divided the empire into Eastern and Western regions so it would be easier to govern, created *dioceses*
- Fixed the prices of goods and services so people could afford them
- Declared himself the living god, incarnate (vs. *apotheosis* and *genius* of before)
- Ruled as an Oriental Monarch, extremely imperial (crawl in his presence and kiss hem of his robe)
END OF THIRD CENTURY, AD
(300 AD)
The Great Persecution
(303-311 AD)

• Empire-Wide
• Focused on Church Leadership--Bishops were rounded up, imprisoned, tortured, and many put to death.
• Self Destructive because many government officials had become Christians.
• His wife and daughter were known to be Christians
• Distraction of church buildings, prohibited Christian worship, and burnings of the Scriptures.
• Diocletian “retired” in 305. The persecution in the West basically ends at this point. But the new Eastern emperor, Galerius, kept up the heat.
• Upon his deathbed in 311, Galerius reluctantly issued an edict of toleration. His effort to wipe out Christianity had failed.
When that day dawned...suddenly, while it was hardly light, the prefect, together with the military commanders, tribunes, and treasury officers, came to the church [in Nicomedia] and when the doors had been broken down they sought for an image of God. Scriptures were found and burnt; spoil was given to all. Rapine, confusion, and tumult reigned...On the following day an edict was published providing that men of that religion should be deprived of all honors and rank; that they should be subjected to torture, from whatever rank and station they might come; that every legal action should be pressed against them...that they should be accorded no freedom and no voice.”
THE EXTENT OF CHRISTIANITY BY 300 CE

MAP OF WESTERN EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN IN THE 4TH CENTURY CE

- Majority Christian
- Minority Christian
- Few people Christian
- Province of Roman Empire
- Boundary of Roman Empire

Scale: 0 - 500 km (0 - 300 miles)
Christian Churches in the Mediterranean known to have been founded before the persecution by Diocletian, 304 A.D.