

# EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

## THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH



The Romans united many peoples with a system of roads and even a postal system.

The Romans were tolerant towards the various religions in areas under their control as long as they didn't interfere with Roman objectives.

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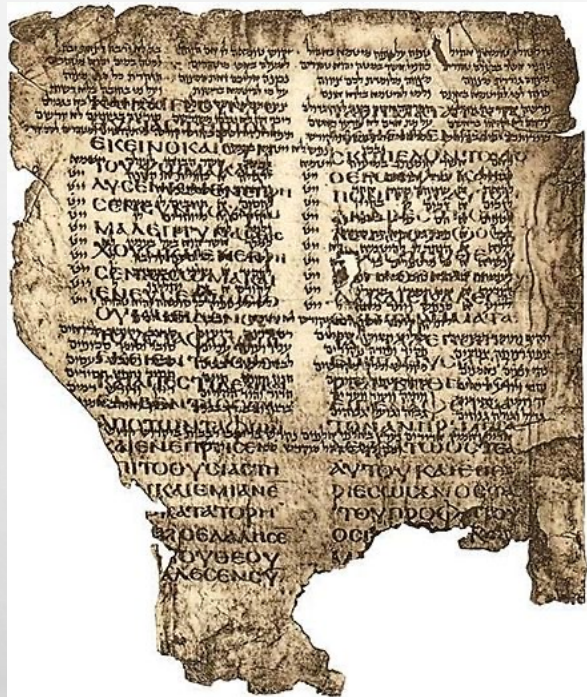
## THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH



The Greek language was spread throughout the empire. Amid the myriad of languages in the various regions, Greek supplied a common way to communicate.

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Around 250 BC the *Torah* was translated into Greek by 70-72 Jewish elders and scribes. This translation is called the *Septuagint* which means “seventy” and is often referred to as LXX. The rest of Hebrew scriptures were translated over the course of decades.

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The *synagogue* insured that the Jews, scattered far from Judea, maintained their distinct culture and religion. Unable to take part in the temple sacrifices and rituals, *Diaspora* Jews turned to the *synagogue* to participate in communal prayer and worship.

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- **Proselytes** were gentiles who converted to Judaism by worshipping God, living by his moral code, undergoing circumcision and experiencing a ritual washing.
- **God-fearers** were gentile worshippers of the God of Israel who remained uncircumcised. God-fearers observed the Sabbath and biblical moral teachings. Because they refused circumcision, God-fearers were not accepted as full participants in ritual worship.

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**Tacitus** wrote, “proselytes to Jewry adopt the same practices [avoiding intermarriage and accepting circumcision], and the very first lesson they learn is to despise the gods, shed all feelings of patriotism, and consider parents, children and brothers as readily expendable.”

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Four major areas of influence in the earliest congregations:

- Sectarian Judaism
- Paganism brought in by gentile converts
- Early gnostic influences like Simon the Sorcerer
- Greek and Roman culture and philosophy

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**Rome burned in 64 AD.** This terrible fire burned for days destroying 10 of Rome's 14 precincts. Many people blamed **Nero** for setting the fire, or for at least not doing enough to stop it. Hundreds of people died and looting was rampant, even by soldiers.



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**Tacitus:** “**Nero** fabricated scapegoats—and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called). Their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius’ reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilatus. But in spite of this temporary setback the deadly superstition had broken out afresh, not only in Judea (where the mischief had started) but even in Rome. All degraded and shameful practices collect and flourish in the capital.”

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Unrest in Judea motivated the Romans to invade in 66 AD.

**Jerusalem** was subjected to a horrendous siege and finally sacked in **70 AD**.

During the siege the Christians fled to the small town of Pella some miles from Jerusalem.

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- Ephesus had withstood false teachers, but lost their “first love.”
- Smyrna, while suffering poverty and persecution, remained loyal to Christian teachings.
- Pergamos and Thyatira suffered from heresies and immorality.
- Sardis was a “dead” church.
- Philadelphia was praised for being a faithful church.
- Laodicea contained a congregation that was condemned as “lukewarm.”

# HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

## THE SECOND CENTURY

*Ante-Nicene Fathers:* A multi-volume collection of Christian writers from the second century to around 325 AD. Some important writers include **Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origin and Tertullian.**

# HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

## THE SECOND CENTURY

Pliny the Younger wrote to Trajan about Christians: “but they declare their guilt or error was simply this—on a fixed day they used to meet before dawn and recite a hymn among themselves to Christ, as though he were a god. So far from binding themselves by oath to commit any crime, they swore to keep from theft, robbery, adultery, breach of faith, and not to deny any trust money deposited with them when called upon to deliver it. This ceremony over, they used to depart and meet again to take food—but it was of no special character, and entirely harmless.”

# HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

## THE SECOND CENTURY

**Lucius Cassius Dio** (155 AD-235 AD). Roman politician who wrote 80 volumes on the history of Rome.

The picture at the right is of the central gardens common to many affluent Roman houses.



# HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

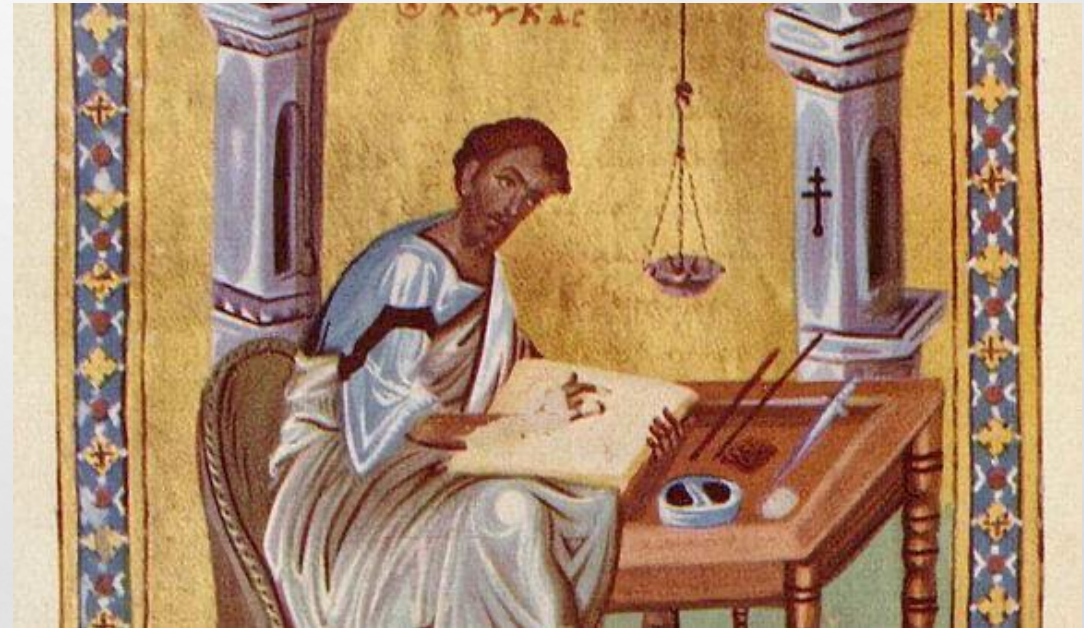
## THE SECOND CENTURY

**Ebionites:** A Jewish Christian group who tried to maintain practices found in the Old Testament. They kept the seventh-day Sabbath, laws concerning clean and unclean meats, and circumcision. They accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but denied his divinity. Jesus was seen as a created human being, although he was accepted as a unique man in his relationship with God. They saw in his death the perfect sacrifice for sin, and taught that there was no longer a need for animal sacrifices.

# HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

## THE SECOND CENTURY

One of the most influential **Gnostic** leaders of the second century was **Marcion**. **Marcion** arrived in Rome around 140 AD and was excommunicated in 144 AD. The dominant Roman church by this time worshipped on Sunday.





# HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

## THE SECOND CENTURY

For **Marcion** the differences between the God revealed in the Old Testament and the God revealed in the New Testament were so contradictory that he concluded they must be two different gods. He taught that the God of the Old Testament was the Creator God who emphasized justice and war, while Jesus came to reveal the Supreme God, who was a being of love and grace.

# HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

## THE SECOND CENTURY

For **Marcion** the Old Testament was non-applicable for Christians, as was most of the New Testament. His **canon** included a highly edited version of Luke's gospel and 10 of Paul's letters. Marcion believed that everything Jewish was a product of the inferior Creator God and had to be eliminated from Christian teachings. He declared that the followers of the Old Testament God, including Noah and Abraham, were excluded from salvation through Christ.