

Church History

ANCIENT PERIOD – AGE OF APOSTLES

I. THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

A. Definition of the Period

1. A name given to the time of almost 400 years between the completion of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament story
2. Began with the completion of Malachi about 397BC
3. Ended with the births of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ

B. Jewish History

1. Persian Period

- a. From 430 to 332BC
- b. The Persians had conquered the Babylonian Empire and were ruling at the time of the Jewish Return from Captivity and the rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel.
- c. Their rule of Israel was for the most part tolerant

2. Greek Period

- a. From 331 to 167BC
- b. Began with Alexander the Great's conquest of Israel in 332BC
 - (1) He showed great kindness to the Jews
 - (2) He spared Jerusalem any destruction
- c. After Alexander's death in 323BC, the empire was divided among four of his generals. Israel sat on the border between two of these sections.
 - (1) Syria to the north was ruled by Seleucus and his house.
 - (2) Egypt to the south was ruled by Ptolemy and his house.
- d. Israel was first claimed by Syria but passed to Egypt in 301BC.
 - (1) The rule of the Ptolemies over the Jews was mostly peaceful.
 - (2) During this time, Alexandria, Egypt, became a major center of Jewish culture
- e. In 198BC, Antiochus the Great re-conquered Israel and the Jews came under the rule of the Seleucids
 - (1) From 175 to 164BC, Syria was ruled by Antiochus Epiphanes
 - (2) Antiochus attempted to destroy the Jews and root out their religion
 - (a) In 168BC, he devastated Jerusalem and defiled the Temple by offering a pig on its altar and erecting an altar to Jupiter.

- (b) He prohibited Temple worship.
- (c) He made a law against circumcision with the death penalty for those who disobeyed.
- (d) He destroyed all the copies of scripture he could find and killed anyone discovered with copies.
- (e) He sold thousands of Jews and their families into slavery.
- f. In response to the treachery of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Jews rose up in what is known as the Maccabean revolt.

3. Maccabean Period

- a. General information
 - (1) From 167 to 63BC
 - (2) A period of independent Jewish rule brought on by the Maccabean revolt.
 - (3) Also called the Hasmonaean Period.
- b. Maccabean revolt
 - (1) Led by the Jewish priest Mattathias and his five sons: Judas, Jonathan, Simon, John, and Eleazar.
 - (2) Mattathias died in 166BC, but his son, Judas, turned out to be a brilliant general and he won battle after battle against the Seleucids.
 - (3) They took Jerusalem in 165BC and purified and rededicated the Temple. This was the beginning of the Feast of the Dedication (John 10:22), also known as Hanukkah.
- c. The Maccabean family joined the priesthood with the secular rule of the nation and ruled the independent nation of Israel for a hundred years.
- d. In later years, the Maccabean rulers were less worthy of the honorable name. Forced conversion of the Idumeans and others weakened the Jewish base. Two sides both claiming to be the rightful rulers fought with one another with both sides making appeals to Rome for help. This opened the way for the Roman conquest of Israel.

4. Roman Period

- a. Began in 63BC when the Roman general Pompey conquered the land
- b. Antipater, an Idumean (that is, an Edomite descendant of Esau) was appointed ruler of Judaea.
- c. Antipater's son, Herod the Great, ruled the region from 37 to 3BC.
 - (1) Herod and his family were of the Idumeans who were forced in earlier years to convert to Judaism. Although he appealed to the Jews in ways, he was also known to be quite heathen in practice.
 - (2) Herod was a great builder and he rebuilt the Temple in order to gain favor of the Jews
 - (3) Herod was also a cruel man who committed many atrocities against foes, friends and even family members.

C. Developments of this Period

1. The fourteen books of the Apocrypha, rejected by Jews and Christians alike as inspired scripture, were written during this time.
2. Languages spoken in Israel
 - a. Greek was the universal language of the Empire at this time
 - b. Latin was the language of the Roman government
 - c. Hebrew was the religious language of the Jewish people
 - d. Aramaic was the common language of the people of the east, including the land of Israel.
 - (1) Aramaic was evidently the language Jesus used in Mark 5:41 and probably in Matthew 27:46.
 - (2) However, Aramaic was similar to Hebrew in the way that Italian is similar to Spanish. Therefore, the languages may have been mixed in daily use.
 - (3) The Jews of Judaea were also very familiar with Hebrew and used it for religious and national purposes.

II. THE JEWS AND THEIR TRADITION

A. General Characteristics

1. People of ritual; traditional practices
2. Legalistic minds; straining at gnats
3. Extremely nationalistic
 - a. Led to constant uprisings
 - b. Led to destruction of Jerusalem (70AD)
4. Special privileges under the Roman empire
 - a. Given complete liberty as compared to other peoples
 - b. Many were allowed to become Roman citizens (Acts 21:39; 22:25-28)
 - c. Given complete freedom of worship, including observance of Sabbaths and feast days
 - d. Freed from military service because they refused to march or fight on the Sabbath
 - e. Not obliged to appear in courts on holy days
5. Exclusive attitude (Romans 2:17-20)
 - a. Separate from other peoples; no intermarriage
 - b. Would not join in the worship of the Roman gods or the Roman Emperor
 - c. Their privileges plus attitude led to resentment from the general populace
 - d. Often received blame for natural disasters

B. Political Parties

1. Pharisees (Matthew 23)
 - a. Considered the spiritual leaders of the time
 - b. The most popular religious group among the masses of the people
 - c. Extremely legalistic in practice

- (1) Literal in interpretation to the extent of believing in the resurrection and angels
 - (2) Traditionalists who added to the word by accepting many traditions and writings as authoritative in addition to scripture
 - d. Providential – believed that God had a part in the affairs of men
 - e. Proud (Luke 18:9-13)
 - f. Type of Roman Catholics (Matthew 15:1-9)
 - (1) Transgressing the word (Matthew 15:3)
 - (2) Neutralizing the word (Matthew 15:6)
 - (3) Replacing the word (Matthew 15:9)
2. Sadducees (Acts 23:6-9)
- a. Spiritual modernists
 - (1) Rejected angels; resurrection; final judgment (Matthew 22:23); they claimed that these doctrines were not found in the Bible.
 - (2) Practiced free (not literal) interpretation
 - (3) Rejected the traditional teachings of the Pharisees
 - b. Aristocrats
 - (1) Drawn from the wealthier level of society
 - (2) Cooperated with the Romans
 - (3) Controlled the high priesthood most of the time
 - (4) Greatly feared any messianic enthusiasm because of the danger it would bring to their privileged position (John 11:47-50)
 - c. Deistic – believed that God existed but did not concern Himself with the affairs of mankind
3. Essenes
- a. Lived a communal, monastic life
 - b. Extremely pious in their external life – emphasized brotherly love
 - c. Extremely ascetic; they renounced marriage
 - d. Denied a physical resurrection
 - e. Rejected animal sacrifice
 - f. Lived in separate and isolated communities
 - g. Their *Manual of Discipline* emphasized the two ways of light and darkness. They were looking for the end of the world and considered Rome as the worst of world empires.
 - h. Said by some to have influenced John the Baptist and Christ. This is false.
 - i. Copied and preserved written works; many of them were discovered as the Dead Sea scrolls.
 - j. May have influenced later monasticism
4. Zealots
- a. Simon called Zelotes (one of the twelve) probably came from this group (Luke 6:15)
 - b. Very pro-Jewish
 - c. Hated Roman control

- d. Wanted independence
 - e. It must be remembered that the memory of the cruelties of Antiochus Epiphanes and the knowledge of a hundred years of freedom under the Hasmoneans was still very much in the mind and heart of many of the Jews. There was real messianic expectation, but the Messiah they looked for would be one who delivered them from Roman rule and led them into a golden age (John 6:14-15).
 - f. Had much to do with inciting the wars against Rome
 - (1) The Great Revolt of the Jews (66-73AD) ended with the destruction of Jerusalem by General Titus in 70AD and the taking of Masada in 73AD
 - (2) The Revolt of Bar Kokhba (132-135AD) who claimed to be the Jewish Messiah resulted in temporary decrees prohibiting circumcision and the teaching of the Torah
5. Herodians
- a. Found in Matthew 22:16; Mark 3:6; 12:13
 - b. A small group supportive of King Herod
 - c. Pro-government and pro-Roman
 - d. Satisfied to follow Greek ways (often called Hellenistic culture) and were in many ways assimilated into the Greek culture that still pervaded the eastern portion of the Roman Empire.
 - e. The more religious Jews considered them godless.
6. Samaritans
- a. Made up a sizable population in the area of Israel between Judaea and Galilee
 - b. Considered themselves to be direct descendants of the ancient Israelites and did not consider themselves to be defective in any way
 - c. Biblically, they are identified as partial Jews who were the result of intermarriage of the ten tribes with foreign races after the captivity of Israel (2Kings 17:24-41). As such, they were not recognized by the Jewish purists (John 4:9).
 - d. Beliefs
 - (1) Claimed that Mt. Gerizim was the true sanctuary (John 4:19-22)
 - (2) Accepted only the Pentateuch as scripture
 - (3) Looked for a future day of judgment
 - e. In modern times, the Samaritans are down to a couple of very small communities and may soon die out entirely.
- C. Institutions
1. Temple
- a. The Temple Ages
 - (1) First Temple Age – Solomon’s Temple (2Samuel 7)
 - (2) Second Temple Age
 - (a) Began with Zerubbabel’s Temple (Ezra 6)
 - (b) Continued through the rebuilding of the temple by Herod (Mark 13)

- (c) Ended with the destruction of the temple in 70AD when the entire Temple complex was destroyed.
 - b. Herod's Temple
 - (1) Although its basic form was completed before the birth of Christ, it continued to be worked on until about 66AD when revolt broke out against the Romans. At the time of the ministry of Jesus, work had been going on for 46 years (John 2:20).
 - (2) Herod essentially doubled the foundational platform on which the Temple was built. The Temple Mount platform takes up approximately the equivalent of 35 football fields. This foundation still survives today.
 - (3) It was a magnificent structure rivaling other great buildings in the Roman Empire (Mark 13:1-2). A recommended book on the Temple mount and its appearance during this time is *Secrets of Jerusalem's Temple Mount* by Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer. The drawings in this book bring the ancient buildings to life.
 - c. Although the Temple worship was based on the teachings of the Mosaic Law, its particular practices had developed over the years. An excellent source of information concerning the Temple worship in the time of Christ is *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* by Alfred Edersheim.
 - d. Much of what developed in later years as Roman Catholic practice goes back to the Old Testament and the Temple worship.
 - (1) Ceremony – formal ceremonies, garments, etc.
 - (2) Sacrifice – the Eucharist
 - (3) Mediator – the priest
 - (4) Temple – Cathedrals
- 2. Synagogue
 - a. Mentioned once in the Old Testament (Psalm 74:8) but its complete service seems to have developed in the time between the testaments
 - b. A local place of assembly for times of prayer and worship
 - c. The synagogue would be led by a “chief ruler of the synagogue” (Mark 5:36, 38; Acts 18:8, 17) and by other “rulers” (Mark 5:22; Acts 13:15). This is very similar to the New Testament pattern of bishop and elders.
 - d. Service included:
 - (1) Singing
 - (2) Sermon
 - (3) Offering
 - (4) Prayer
 - (5) Scripture reading (Luke 4:16-21)
 - (6) This became a pattern for New Testament church services
- 3. Sanhedrin
 - a. Scripturally called the council (Mark 14:55; Acts 5:21; 23:1-10)
 - b. Jewish supreme court of law
 - (1) Higher court had 71 members, composed of chief priests, scribes, other priests, and members of the nobility.

- (a) The high priest was always the president of the Sanhedrin.
- (b) Second in rank was the captain of the temple (Acts 4:1)
- (2) Theoretically, its authority extended over the spiritual, legal and political affairs of the Jewish people.
- (3) However, its authority was limited by the controls placed on it by the Roman Empire. For instance, it could pronounce but could not impose the death penalty during the time of Christ (John 18:31-32)
- c. Appearance before the council
 - (1) Christ (John 19)
 - (2) Peter & John (Acts 4-5)
 - (3) Stephen (Acts 6-7)
 - (4) Paul (Acts 23)

III. THE ROMANS AND THEIR GOVERNMENT

A. General Characteristics

- 1. People of action
- 2. Practical minds
- 3. Very organized
- 4. Not considered creative (in comparison to the Greeks)
- 5. Assimilated the cultures of those they conquered\

B. Rome's Unifying Factors

- 1. A universal Roman law
- 2. An extensive Roman army
 - a. Kept order throughout the empire
 - b. Highly respected; an army career was a distinguished career; consider the honor given to centurions in the Bible
- 3. A common Roman coinage
- 4. A complete network of roads
 - a. Established for the movement of armies
 - b. Aided commerce
 - c. Aided evangelism
- 5. A universal language
 - a. Not Latin, but Greek
 - b. Even in Rome, one-half of the inhabitants spoke Greek; the church in Rome spoke Greek until the third century
 - c. A remaining influence of Greek civilization

C. Social Conditions

- 1. Much travel and trade
- 2. A great deal of intermarriage
- 3. A tendency to merge cultures

4. Frequent wars
5. Frequent suicides
6. Infidelity was very common
7. Divorce rate was very high

D. The State Religion

1. Emperor worship; the emperor was worshipped as a god
2. Explains the origin of Caesar (Roman, Czar or Tsar (Russian) and Kaiser (German))
3. All other religions were accepted in Rome as long as the other religions accepted the emperor as god. NOTE: This is similar to the Roman Catholic attitude toward the pope.

IV. APOSTOLIC EVANGELIZATION

A. The Twelve

1. Their commission (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8)
 - a. Its content
 - (1) Salvation
 - (2) Baptism
 - (3) Teaching
 - b. Its extent (Acts 1:8)
 - (1) Jerusalem
 - (2) Judaea
 - (3) Samaria
 - (4) Uttermost part of the earth
2. Their disobedience
 - a. Blessings (Acts 2:41-47)
 - b. Contentment (Acts 5:28; cp.17:6)
3. The first major persecution
 - a. At the time of Stephen's death (Acts 8:1-3)
 - b. Beginning of world evangelism (Acts 8:4)
 - c. Beginning of church at Antioch and Gentile conversion (Acts 11:19-21)

B. The Apostle Paul

1. First missionary journey
 - a. Begins at Antioch (Acts 13:1-4)
 - b. Travels through Cyprus and Asia Minor with Barnabas
 - c. Returned to Antioch (Acts 14:26-28)
 - d. Followed by meeting in Jerusalem (Acts 15)

2. Second missionary journey
 - a. Begins at Antioch (Acts 15:36-41)
 - b. Separated from Barnabas who went to Cyprus with Mark
 - c. Took Silas and later picked up Timothy
 - d. Strengthened and established the churches in Asia Minor
 - e. Took the gospel to Europe by way of Macedonia
 - f. Returned to Antioch

3. Third missionary journey
 - a. Begins at Antioch (Acts 18:22-23)
 - b. Confirms the established churches in Asia Minor and Europe
 - c. Travels to Jerusalem and is arrested there
 - d. Held in Casarea for two years
 - e. Taken to Rome

4. Fourth missionary journey
 - a. Disputed by many but fits the facts of scripture
 - b. Occasion of Paul's journey into Spain (Romans 15:24, 28); notice the statements of fact: "whenever" (v.24) and "I will come by you into Spain" (v.28).
 - c. This journey was possible after the first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30-31) and Paul's first deliverance (2Timothy 4:16-17)
 - d. Occurred before Paul's final departure (2Timothy 4:6; subscript at the end of II Timothy)
 - e. Consider the things Paul left behind
 - (1) Cloak, books and parchments which Paul needed before winter (2Timothy 4:13,21)
 - (2) Trophimus left at Miletum sick (2Timothy 4:20)
 - f. By the end of Acts, Paul had been in prison over four years [2 years in Caesarea (Acts 24:27) and 2 years in Rome (Acts 28:30)]. When he wrote II Timothy, he was preparing to die (4:6). The above statements do not make any sense if he did not have a time of freedom between the end of Acts and II Timothy. This provides time for a fourth missionary journey.
 - g. Quotation from Clement of Rome
 - (1) Written about 95AD
 - (2) "Paul...having come to the limit of the West, and borne witness before the magistrates, departed from the world and went to the holy place, having furnished the sublimest model of endurance."
 - (3) The limit of the West would be Spain and/or Britain

V. THE COMPLETED CANON

- A. Definition – a rule or standard; hence, the books which make up the scriptures (Romans 1:2; 2Peter 3:16)

B. Scriptural Evidence

1. Testimony of the Old Testament (Psalm 119:89; Isaiah 40:8)
2. Testimony of Christ
 - a. Gospels (John 14:26; 15:26-27) – “bring all things to your remembrance”
 - b. Epistles (John 14:26; 16:13) – “shall teach you all things”; “all truth”
 - c. Revelation (John 16:13) – “shew you things to come”
3. Testimony of Paul
 - a. Given by revelation (Galatians 1:11-12; 1Thessalonians 2:13)
 - b. Given by inspiration (2Timothy 3:16)
 - c. When completed will be “that which is perfect” (1Corinthians 13:8-13)
4. Testimony of Peter (2Peter 3:15-16)
 - a. Paul’s epistles
 - b. Other scriptures
5. Testimony of John
 - a. Selectivity of canon (John 20:30-31; 21:19-25)
 - b. Completion of canon (Revelation 22:18-19)

C. Evidence of Early Use

1. Evidence supports the acceptance and use of all the New Testament books as scripture by about 150AD
2. Irenaus (c.175) quotes from all the New Testament books except Philemon, II Peter and Jude
3. Clement of Alexandria (c.200) quotes from all 27 of the New Testament books
4. The Old Latin Vulgate and Old Syrian Versions were translated by 200AD and have all the books of the New Testament

D. Verification of Their Acceptance

1. The 27 books of the New Testament canon were accepted by the great bulk of Christians and churches (cp.Isaiah 8:16), long before they were verified by councils
2. The books of the canon were formed without interference from any authority other than their own weight
3. They were accepted because of their own merit and because of the witness of the Spirit with regard to any official recognition
4. Several books were questioned by the scholars and writers of the first three or four centuries
 - a. These books are called the *antilegomena*, meaning “spoken against”.
 - b. They consisted of seven books
 - (1) Hebrews
 - (2) James
 - (3) II Peter
 - (4) II John
 - (5) III John
 - (6) Jude

- (7) Revelation
- c. However, these books were accepted as true scripture by the majority of believers
- 5. Several councils late in the fourth century verified the canon
 - a. Hippo, Africa (393)
 - b. Carthage, Africa (397)

VI. APOSTOLIC WRITERS

A. Introduction

- 1. Called *apostolic* because their lives overlapped the lives of the apostles
- 2. Normally called the *Apostolic Fathers*. However, Christ spoke against using *father* as a spiritual title (Matthew 23:9). Therefore, this Catholic tradition will not be followed in these notes.

B. Clement of Rome

- 1. 30-100AD
- 2. Bishop (i.e., pastor) at Rome
- 3. Later writers identify him as the Clement spoken of by Paul (Philippians 4:3)
- 4. Wrote an epistle to the Corinthians
 - a. Written about 97AD from the church of Rome to the church of Corinth
 - b. First Christian literature after the completion of the New Testament books
 - c. Written to deal with a problem in the church of Corinth. A group of the elders of the church had been removed and Clement thinks it wrong that men who were chosen by the Lord and placed in their position by the apostles should be removed for minor reasons.
 - d. Quotes from several New Testament books, including the disputed books of Hebrews and James. Also accepted the Old Testament books as completely authoritative.
 - e. Writing obviously not on the same level with the canonical books of the New Testament
 - f. Sometimes quotes from the Apocrypha—something no New Testament book does
 - g. Speaks of the myth of the phoenix (a bird that dies and resurrects every 500 years) as a fact (chapter 25)
 - h. Bears strong testimony to the doctrines of:
 - (1) The trinity
 - (2) Blood redemption
 - (3) Justification by faith

C. Ignatius

- 1. From about 35-107AD
- 2. Bishop at Antioch, Syria

3. Knew the Apostle John and Polycarp
4. Wrote seven letters on the way to Roman imprisonment. From Smyrna, he wrote letters to Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, and Rome. From Troas, he wrote letters to Philadelphia, Smyrna, and to Polycarp of Smyrna.
5. Spoke of Christ as the “God-man”
6. First to speak of the “catholic church”; however, he meant *catholic* only in the sense of universal
7. His letter oppose the main heresies of the time
 - a. Judaizing forms of Christianity; that is, Christianity that tried to retain the Jewish law and tradition
 - b. Ebionites: those who taught that Jesus was just a good man
 - c. Docetism: teaching that Jesus just appeared to be human (see 1John 4:3-4)
8. Enthusiastically approached martyrdom (He was later criticized for this enthusiasm)
 - a. “I would rather die for Christ, than rule the whole earth.”
 - b. “It is glorious to go down in the world, in order to go up into God.”
 - c. “I am a grain of the wheat of God, and I would be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread of God.”
 - d. Thrown to wild beasts in the Roman arena

D. Polycarp

1. Before 69-155AD
2. Bishop of Smyrna, Asia Minor
3. Knew the Apostle John, Ignatius and Papias
4. Teacher of Irenaeus
5. Wrote an epistle to the Philippians in which he deals with an elder in the church who had to be disciplined for the improper use of funds (possibly embezzlement). He also deals with some who are teaching the heresy of Docetism. In this epistle, Polycarp quotes several New Testament books as authoritative.
6. Taught justification by grace
7. Burned at the stake. A martyrology was written describing his death and the death of many others who were killed in a persecution in the city of Smyrna (see Revelation 2:8-10).
8. Said when given an opportunity to curse Jesus and not be killed, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?”

E. Papias

1. 60-130AD
2. Bishop at Hierapolis, Phrygia
3. Knew the Apostle John and Polycarp
4. Held strong millenarian views holding to a literal view of the future millennial reign of Christ
 - a. He was a premillennialist

- b. He held to the teachings of Christ and Paul on this subject
 - c. Criticized by Eusebius because of this belief, who called Papias “a man of exceedingly small intelligence”
 - d. Chiliasm, which is the belief in a thousand year reign of Christ, is called “the prevailing view in the second century” by Philip Schaff, a man who denied the kingdom reign of Christ
5. Taught that Christ was born in a cave