

# EARLY CHURCH TIMELINE

**CLEMENT** writes his letter to Corinth.

**CLEMENT** (or elder) of Rome (AD 88–99), Clement writes the first surviving Christian document outside of the Bible, his letter to Christians in the city of Corinth in AD 96. Clement drew heavily from Old Testament and the apostle Paul.



**EMPEROR**

**EMPEROR NERVA** (AD 96–98), Trajan and annexed territories, greatly expanding the reach of the Roman Empire. Nerva was not tolerant of Christians.

**EVARISTUS** becomes bishop of Rome.

Evaristus led the church in Rome until his death for nearly a decade (about AD 99–108).

98

99

**JOHN** dies in Patmos.

John the Apostle, one of the twelve apostles, died on the island of Patmos in AD 94. He was exiled there for his part in the persecution of Christians. He wrote the Book of Revelation, which describes the end of the world and the return of Christ.

**THE DIDACHE**

The Didache, an anonymous collection of teachings developed in the early 1st century, is one of the earliest Christian documents. It includes instructions on how to join the church, how to live as a Christian, and provides instructions on the Lord's Supper (Communion) and fellowship meals.



Ignatius of Antioch

**IGNATIUS**, bishop of Syrian Antioch, is martyred in Rome.

On his way to Rome, Ignatius wrote seven letters to Christians. From these letters, it appears he was being sent to Rome to be executed for his faith. His letters exhort Christians to avoid false teachings, especially the belief that Jesus was not fully human but merely appeared as a human. (This heresy was later known as Docetism.)



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**PLINY** becomes governor of Bithynia.

Pliny the Younger, a Roman lawyer and writer, was appointed governor of Bithynia in AD 110. He wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan detailing the persecution of Christians in his province.



Pliny in Nicene, Bithynia

Pliny's letter to Trajan provides a valuable insight into the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. He describes how authorities viewed Christians as a problem. They surmised that Christians were guilty of no crimes, but their refusal to worship the emperor was an affront to Rome's authority. Pliny did not actively seek out Christians, but if they were brought to him, he would give them a chance to deny their faith and pray to the gods. If they refused, they were subject to execution. The emperor agreed with this approach.

**HADRIAN** is made emperor after Trajan's death.

Within a few years of his reign, Hadrian became concerned about the growing population of Christians, and he began to persecute them in AD 124.

**ROMAN HISTORIAN TACITUS** writes about Jesus's execution under Pilate and describes Christianity a superstitious evil.

The Roman Empire permitted most religions within their borders, if the people worshipped the gods of Rome and participated in public worship. Because Christians refused to worship the gods of Rome and the pantheon of gods, they were often described as "atheists." Christians were accused of "superstitious" practices, ranging from being a subversive political group to being cannibals who practiced infanticide. What most often led to their death was their refusal to worship any of the emperor's gods besides his.



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**JUSTIN** converts to Christianity. Justin became a Christian teacher in Ephesus and Rome.

**HADRIAN** is made emperor after Trajan's death. Within a few years of his reign, Hadrian became concerned about the growing population of Christians, and he began to persecute them in AD 124.



JUSTIN



## CLEMENT OF ROME writes his letter to Corinth.

While serving as bishop (or elder) of Rome (AD 88–99), Clement wrote the oldest surviving Christian document outside of the New Testament. His letter to Christians in Corinth urges them to follow the “way of truth” in unity with one another and without strife. Clement drew heavily from Old Testament imagery and the writings of the apostle Paul.



## TRAJAN becomes emperor.

Trajan conquered and annexed territories, greatly expanding the Roman Empire. Unlike his predecessor, Emperor Nerva (AD 96–98), Trajan was not as tolerant of Christians.



Trajan

Most dates are approximate.

YEAR

97

98

99

100

## THE APOSTLE JOHN dies.

John, the last of the twelve disciples, died of natural causes in Ephesus. John had been exiled on the island of Patmos where he received divine visions that became the book of Revelation. Two of his disciples in the early church were Ignatius and Polycarp.

## THE DIDACHE is written.

*The Didache* (“Teaching”) is an anonymous collection of Christian writings developed in the second century. It is a guide for those wanting to join the church, explaining the “way” of Christianity. It includes liturgies, prayers, and instructions for baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and *agape* meals (fellowship meals or “love feasts”).



Ephesus, Turkey



Ignatius of Antioch

**IGNATIUS is martyred.**

Ignatius, bishop of Syrian Antioch, wrote seven letters to Christians while he was being sent to Rome to be executed for his faith. His letters exhort Christians to avoid false teachings, especially the belief that Jesus was not fully human but merely appeared as a human, a heresy later known as Docetism.

*“When I suffer, I shall be free in Jesus Christ, and with him shall rise again in freedom.”  
—Ignatius of Antioch*

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**PLINY THE YOUNGER becomes governor of Bithynia.**

Finding so many Christians living in Bithynia, Pliny wrote to Emperor Trajan detailing his concerns about “obstinate” Christians. In their correspondence, Pliny and Trajan surmise that Christians are guilty of no crimes, but Christians’ refusal to worship the emperor and Roman gods is an affront to Rome’s authority. Pliny did not actively seek out Christians, but if they were brought to him, he would give them a chance to burn incense and pray to the gods. If they refused, they were subject to torture and execution. The emperor agreed with this approach.

*“Now this is the way of life: first, you shall love God who made you. Second, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”  
—The Didache*

111



Ruins in Nicaea, Bithynia (Turkey)

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**ROMAN HISTORIAN TACITUS writes about Jesus’s execution under Pilate and calls Christianity a superstitious evil.**

The Roman Empire permitted most religions, as long as the people also accepted the gods of Rome and participated in emperor worship. Because Christians rejected idols and the gods, they were described as “atheists.” They were accused of “superstitions,” ranging from being a subversive political group to being depraved cannibals who practiced incest. Whatever the charge, the one that most often sent them to their death was their refusal to worship any other god besides the one true God.



Tacitus

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**HADRIAN is made emperor after Trajan’s death.**

Within a few years of his reign, Hadrian became concerned about the growing population of Christians, and he began to persecute them in AD 124.

Elements of the **APOSTLES' CREED** begin — to develop in the mid-second century.

Christian creeds were used first in baptisms, often taking the form of questions to which the baptismal candidate responded.

**JUSTIN** converts to Christianity.

Justin, an aspiring philosopher, became a Christian teacher in Ephesus and Rome.



**HADRIAN** attempts to rebuild Jerusalem as a Roman colony.

Emperor Hadrian desecrated Jewish and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and built a temple to Roman deities over the place where many believed Christ was crucified and entombed. (In the fourth century, this location became the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.)



Church of the Holy Sepulchre

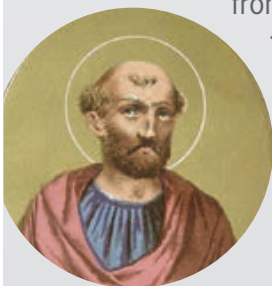
130

137

140

**TELESPHORUS** is martyred.

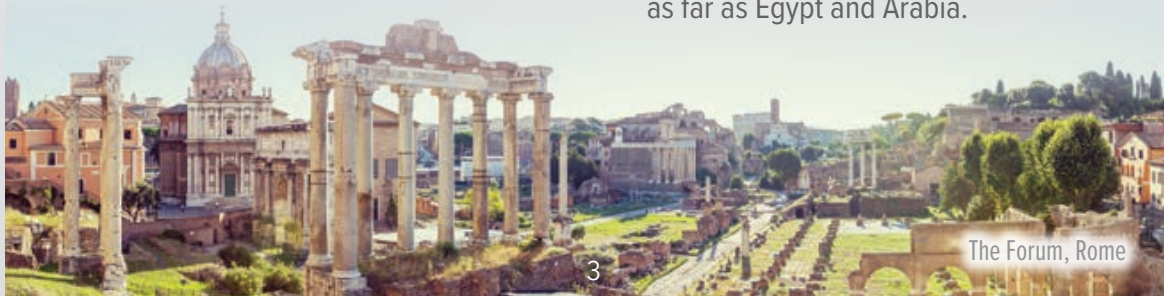
Telesphorus led the church in Rome from about AD 126 to the year 137, when he was executed during Emperor Hadrian's persecution of Christians.



Telesphorus

**MARCION** arrives in Rome.

Marcion sought to detach Christianity from its Jewish roots. He rejected the Old Testament, asserting that the loving God and Father of Jesus in the New Testament was not the same as the wrathful God of the Old Testament. He dismissed the books of Matthew, Mark, Acts, and Hebrews as being too Jewish. He was excommunicated from the church in Rome (AD 144), so he established his own church. His teachings eventually spread as far as Egypt and Arabia.



The Forum, Rome