ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY

The Birth, Diversification, and Consolidation of the Christian Movement, c. 30–500 CE

A Dissertation on the Chronological Development of Christianity, Its Competing Philosophies of Jesus, the Roles of Rome, Constantinople, and Antioch, the Formation of the New Testament Canon, the Ancient Sources and Customs, and Jewish Perceptions of Christians during the Revolts

Prepared for Bocharmer, Independent Scholar
Cedar Mountain, North Carolina
November 2026

Abstract

This dissertation traces the history of Christianity from its origins as a Jewish messianic movement in the early first century to the eve of the sixth century. It follows a chronological structure while addressing five thematic questions: the competing interpretations of Jesus, from Ebionite and Gnostic to Arian, Nicene, and Chalcedonian; the relationship between Jews and Christians, particularly during the First Revolt (66–73), the Diaspora Revolt (115–117), and the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–135); the roles of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem as centers of ecclesiastical authority; the stages by which the twenty-seven-book New Testament canon was defined; and the surviving ancient sources and the customs they reveal. The study draws on primary texts (Josephus, Pliny, Tacitus, Justin, Irenaeus, Eusebius, Athanasius, the rabbinic corpus, conciliar acts) and on the archaeological evidence of Dura-Europos, Megiddo, the catacombs, and the papyri, and engages current peer-reviewed scholarship, including debates over the Bauer thesis, the category of Gnosticism, the birkat ha-minim, the flight to Pella, the Neronian persecution, the dating of the Muratorian Fragment, and the "parting of the ways." It argues that the Christianity of 500 CE, with its creeds, canon, sacraments, institutions, and divisions, was the product of a long process of argument and consensus rather than either a pristine original or a late imposition.

Each chapter includes an "In Plain Language" summary for general readers, and textual notes compare key New Testament passages with the Nestle–Aland 28th edition (NA28) and, where relevant, the Masoretic Text and Septuagint. A detailed chronology (Chapter 13), a reference table of sects (Chapter 12), a glossary, and a bibliography with online links are provided.

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Chapter 1. Introduction: The Problem of Christian Origins

Christianity began as a small Jewish renewal movement gathered around a Galilean teacher who was executed by Roman authority in Jerusalem around 30 CE. Within five centuries it had become the official religion of the Roman Empire, possessed a defined body of scripture, an episcopal hierarchy organized around great metropolitan sees, a liturgical calendar, a monastic movement stretching from Egypt to Gaul, and a series of conciliar creeds that defined, in technical philosophical vocabulary, how God is one and three and how Jesus Christ is both divine and human. This dissertation traces that transformation chronologically, from the Jewish matrix of the early first century to the eve of the sixth century, with particular attention to five questions: (1) what different groups believed about Jesus; (2) how the Jewish world regarded the followers of Jesus, especially during the revolts against Rome; (3) how Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, and the other great sees shaped the Church; (4) how the New Testament canon was defined; and (5) what ancient sources survive and what they reveal about Christian customs.

1.1 Three Ways of Telling the Story

For most of Christian history the dominant narrative was the one written by **Eusebius of Caesarea** (c. 260–339) in his *Ecclesiastical History*. In Eusebius's model, the apostles received a single, complete truth from Christ and passed it through an unbroken succession of bishops; heresies were later corruptions introduced by ambitious or demonically inspired individuals, beginning with Simon Magus. Orthodoxy, in this telling, is always prior and heresy always secondary.

In 1934 the German lexicographer **Walter Bauer** inverted this model in *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (English translation 1971, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*). Studying Edessa, Egypt, Asia Minor, and Rome, Bauer argued that in many regions forms of Christianity later labeled heretical were actually the earliest local expressions, and that the eventual "orthodoxy" was largely the Roman form that prevailed through organizational strength. Bauer's thesis was criticized from its first appearance (Walter Völker's 1935 review; H. E. W. Turner's *The Pattern of Christian Truth*, 1954) and has been substantially qualified since, yet it permanently changed the field: few historians now assume a uniform original Christianity from which all variants deviated.

A third approach, dominant today, treats early Christianity as a field of overlapping communities that shared scriptures, practices, and a core devotion to Jesus while disagreeing, sometimes fiercely, about how to interpret them. Scholars such as **Larry Hurtado** (*Lord Jesus Christ*, 2003) have emphasized that worship of Jesus alongside God appeared remarkably early, within

Jewish circles of the first two decades, rather than evolving slowly under Gentile influence as Wilhelm Bousset had argued in *Kyrios Christos* (1913). Others, such as **Michael Williams** (*Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, 1996) and **Karen King** (*What Is Gnosticism?*, 2003), have shown how the categories used to sort ancient groups were themselves constructed by ancient polemicists and modern scholars. The present study adopts this third approach: it takes the ancient categories seriously as the terms people actually fought over, while recognizing that the boundaries were more porous than the heresiologists admitted.

> **In Plain Language**
>
> There are three main ways historians tell this story. The old church view says the true faith came first and errors came later. A 1934 challenge said the reverse: many "heresies" were actually first in their regions. Most scholars now say both are too simple. Early Christians shared a lot, especially worship of Jesus, but argued about what it meant, and the lines between groups were blurrier than ancient writers claimed.

1.2 Sources and Method

The evidence falls into five classes, discussed in detail in Chapter 10: (1) the writings that became the New Testament; (2) other Christian literature, both that which became normative (the Apostolic Fathers, apologists, theologians, historians, conciliar acts) and that which was later rejected (the Nag Hammadi codices, apocryphal gospels and acts); (3) Jewish sources (Josephus, the Mishnah, Tosefta, the two Talmuds, liturgical texts from the Cairo Genizah); (4) Greek and Roman outsiders (Pliny, Tacitus, Suetonius, Lucian, Celsus, Porphyry, Julian); and (5) material evidence (papyri, inscriptions, buildings, catacomb art). Each class has characteristic biases. Christian heresiologists described opponents in order to refute them; rabbinic texts were redacted centuries after the events they describe; Roman authors wrote with disdain and often secondhand. A historian's task is to read each against the others.

Dates follow the conventions of current scholarship and are given as approximations (c.) where disputed. Biblical quotations in English follow the New International Version (NIV) or the Legacy Standard Bible (LSB). Where a passage's wording matters, the English is compared with the Greek critical text (Nestle–Aland, 28th edition, NA28; United Bible Societies, 5th edition, UBS5), and for the Old Testament with the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX). Translations of patristic texts are adapted from the public-domain *Ante-Nicene Fathers* and *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* series unless otherwise noted. Citations are given in author–date form and correspond to the bibliography, which includes links wherever a stable online source exists.

Chapter 2. The Jewish Matrix and Jesus of Nazareth (c. 4 BCE – 30 CE)

2.1 Second Temple Judaism

Christianity was born inside the Judaism of the Second Temple period (515 BCE – 70 CE), a world of remarkable diversity. Josephus (*Jewish War* 2.119–166; *Antiquities* 18.11–25) describes four "philosophies": the **Pharisees**, lay experts in the Law who taught resurrection and an oral tradition of interpretation; the **Sadducees**, associated with the priestly aristocracy, who accepted only the written Torah and denied resurrection; the **Essenes**, a communal and ascetic movement often associated with the Qumran community and the Dead Sea Scrolls; and a "fourth philosophy" of militant resistance to Roman rule, ancestor of the later Zealots and Sicarii. Beyond these named groups lay the great majority of ordinary Jews, the ʿam ha-ʾarets, along with apocalyptic visionaries, baptizing movements such as that of John the Baptist, and charismatic healers.

Several features of this world proved decisive for the later Church. First, monotheism expressed in exclusive worship of the God of Israel, which made the early Christian practice of praying to and through Jesus both striking and controversial. Second, a widely shared but varied messianic hope: some texts expect a royal Davidic messiah (Psalms of Solomon 17), others a priestly and royal pair (the Qumran Community Rule, 1QS 9.11), others a heavenly figure like the "Son of Man" of Daniel 7 and the Similitudes of Enoch (1 Enoch 37–71). Third, a vast **Diaspora**: by the first century more Jews lived outside Judea than within it, in Alexandria, Antioch, Asia Minor, and Rome, reading their scriptures in Greek. Fourth, that Greek translation itself, the **Septuagint (LXX)**, which became the Old Testament of the early Church and supplied much of the vocabulary of Christian theology (*kyrios* for the divine name, *christos* for the anointed one, *ekklēsia* for the assembly).

2.2 The Historical Jesus

Modern historical-critical scholarship, despite wide disagreement on details, has reached a broad consensus on a core of facts about Jesus. **E. P. Sanders** (*Jesus and Judaism*, 1985) listed as virtually certain: Jesus was baptized by John; he was a Galilean who preached and healed; he called disciples and spoke of there being twelve; he confined his activity largely to Israel; he engaged in controversy about the Temple; he was crucified outside Jerusalem by the Roman authorities; and after his death his followers continued as an identifiable movement. **John P. Meier** (*A Marginal Jew*, 1991–2016) and **Paula Fredriksen** (*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*, 1999) add that Jesus proclaimed the imminent "Kingdom of God," that he was

remembered as a miracle-worker, and that his execution under the charge "King of the Jews" indicates that Roman authorities regarded his movement as a potential messianic threat.

Jesus was probably born shortly before the death of Herod the Great (4 BCE) and crucified under the prefect Pontius Pilate (26–36 CE), most likely on 7 April 30 or 3 April 33. Outside the New Testament, the earliest references are in Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.63–64, the so-called *Testimonium Flavianum*, which most scholars regard as an authentic passage later expanded by Christian copyists; and 20.200, an undisputed reference to "James, the brother of Jesus who was called Christ") and in Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44, c. 116), who states that "Christus" was executed under Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate.

In Plain Language

Jesus was a Jewish teacher and healer from Galilee who preached that God's kingdom was arriving soon. He was executed by the Romans around 30 CE as a would-be "King of the Jews." Both Christian and non-Christian ancient writers confirm the basic outline.

Chapter 3. From Jesus Movement to Church (30–70 CE)

3.1 The Jerusalem Community and the Resurrection Proclamation

The decisive event for the birth of Christianity, from the historian's point of view, is not the resurrection itself, which lies beyond historical verification, but the conviction of Jesus's followers that God had raised him from the dead. The earliest written formulation is a tradition Paul says he "received" and "passed on," probably within a few years of the crucifixion:

> "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve." (1 Corinthians 15:3–5, NIV)

Textual Note: 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 against NA28

The NIV accurately renders the NA28 text: ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφάς ... καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾷ εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα. The Aramaic name *Kēphas* (Κηφᾶς, from Aramaic *kêpāʾ*, "rock") rather than Greek *Petros* is one of several signs that the formula predates Paul and originated in an Aramaic-speaking community. The only significant variant is in verse 5, where the Western witnesses (D*, F, G, and the Latin tradition) read ἕνδεκα ("the Eleven") instead of δώδεκα ("the Twelve"), an evident scribal correction to account for the absence of Judas. NA28 and UBS5 rightly print δώδεκα as the harder and better-attested reading (𝔓46, ℵ, A, B). The phrase "according to the Scriptures" points to the Septuagint and Hebrew scriptures (commonly Isaiah 53 and Hosea 6:2 MT/LXX) as the interpretive frame within which the earliest believers understood Jesus's death and vindication.

According to Acts, the first community gathered in Jerusalem under the leadership of Peter, John, and later **James the brother of Jesus**, whom Paul calls one of the three "pillars" (Galatians 2:9). This community continued to worship in the Temple, observe the Torah, and regard itself as the faithful remnant of Israel awaiting the return of the Messiah. Its distinctive practices were baptism "in the name of Jesus," a communal meal recalling his last supper, prayer in Aramaic (preserved in the cry *Marana tha*, "Our Lord, come!", 1 Corinthians 16:22), and a strong sense that the Spirit of God had been poured out in the last days.

3.2 Hellenists, Stephen, and the First Expansion

From very early, the Jerusalem community contained two linguistic groups: "Hebrews" (Aramaic speakers) and "Hellenists" (Greek-speaking Diaspora Jews; Acts 6:1). The Hellenist leader

Stephen was killed after a speech critical of the Temple, and the resulting persecution scattered Hellenist believers to Samaria, the coast, Damascus, and Antioch. In Antioch, the third-largest city of the empire, some began preaching directly to Gentiles. There, according to Acts 11:26, "the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (NIV).

Textual Note: Acts 11:26 and the Name "Christian"

NA28 reads χρηματίσαι τε πρώτως ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ τοὺς μαθητὰς Χριστιανούς. The adverb πρώτως ("first," "for the first time") is the reading of ℵ, B, and D*; the Byzantine tradition has the more common πρῶτον with no change of meaning. The verb χρηματίζω in the active with a personal object normally means "to bear a name" or "to be publicly designated," which suggests that outsiders, not the believers themselves, coined the term. The form* Christianoi*, with the Latin suffix* -ianus *used for partisans of a leader (compare* Herodianoi*, Mark 3:6), implies that the Antiochene authorities viewed the group as followers of a certain "Christus." The NIV's "were called" correctly conveys the passive sense; the LSB's "were first called Christians" is equivalent. The term appears only twice more in the New Testament (Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16), both times in contexts of outside hostility, consistent with an origin as a label applied by others.

3.3 Paul and the Gentile Question

Paul of Tarsus, a Pharisee who had persecuted the movement, experienced a revelation of the risen Jesus around 33–35 CE and became its most influential missionary. His authentic letters (Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon; written c. 50–58) are the earliest surviving Christian documents. The central controversy of Paul's career was whether Gentile believers had to become Jews, that is, be circumcised and keep the Torah, in order to belong to God's people. Paul insisted they did not: Gentiles were saved as Gentiles, through faith in Christ and the gift of the Spirit. **Paula Fredriksen** (*Paul: The Pagans' Apostle*, 2017) has emphasized that Paul's position was itself grounded in Jewish eschatology, in which the nations would turn to Israel's God at the end of days without becoming Jews.

A meeting in Jerusalem around 48–49 CE (Galatians 2; Acts 15) reached a compromise: Gentiles would not be circumcised, but would be asked to avoid idolatry, sexual immorality, and certain foods (the "Apostolic Decree," Acts 15:29). The subsequent "Antioch incident" (Galatians 2:11–14), in which Peter withdrew from table fellowship with Gentiles under pressure from "men from James," shows the compromise was fragile. This tension, between a Torah-observant Jewish Christianity centered on Jerusalem and a Torah-free Gentile Christianity spreading through the Pauline mission, is the first great fault line in Christian history.

3.4 First Encounters with Rome

The Roman historian Suetonius (*Claudius* 25.4) records that Claudius "expelled the Jews from Rome, since they were constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus" (*impulsore Chresto*), an event usually dated to 49 CE and connected with Acts 18:2. Most scholars take "Chrestus" as a garbled form of "Christus," indicating conflict within the Roman synagogues over the claims about Jesus. In 64 CE, after the great fire of Rome, Tacitus reports that Nero blamed "those whom the populace called Christians" and executed "an immense multitude" by crucifixion, by wild beasts, and by burning as living torches (*Annals* 15.44). Christian tradition from the late first century onward (1 Clement 5–6) associates the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul with this period.

In a provocative 2015 article in the *Journal of Roman Studies*, **Brent Shaw** argued that the Tacitean account retrojects the conditions of Tacitus's own day (c. 115) onto 64 CE and that there was no Neronian persecution of "Christians" as such. **Christopher Jones** replied in *New Testament Studies* (2017) that the name could well have been known in Rome by the 60s, and most specialists continue to accept the historicity of a Neronian action against Christians, while acknowledging that Tacitus's language reflects later attitudes. The episode illustrates a recurring point: Roman sources on early Christianity are few, late, and hostile, and must be weighed carefully.

3.5 The Death of James and the Eve of Revolt

In 62 CE, during an interval between Roman governors, the high priest Ananus son of Ananus convened a Sanhedrin and had "James, the brother of Jesus who was called Christ" stoned (Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.200). Josephus notes that "those who were considered the most fair-minded" in Jerusalem, apparently including Pharisees, protested to King Agrippa II and the incoming governor Albinus, and Ananus was deposed. The episode is significant evidence that, on the eve of the war, the Jerusalem Christians under James were regarded by many Jews as pious members of the community, and that hostility came primarily from the Sadducean priestly leadership rather than from Judaism as a whole. Second-century tradition preserved by Hegesippus (via Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23) remembered James as "the Just," a man of extraordinary Torah piety who prayed so often in the Temple that his knees grew hard "like a camel's."

In Plain Language

In its first forty years, the movement went from a group of Aramaic-speaking Jews in Jerusalem to a network of mixed Jewish and Gentile communities across the eastern Mediterranean. The big argument was whether non-Jews had to follow the Jewish Law; Paul said no, and that view eventually won among Gentile believers. Roman authorities first noticed the group in the 40s and

60s, sometimes violently.

Chapter 4. The Jewish Revolts and Jewish Perceptions of Christians (66–135 CE)

Three wars between Jews and Rome, the First Revolt (66–73/74), the Diaspora Revolt (115–117), and the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–135/136), reshaped both Judaism and Christianity. They destroyed the Temple, ended the priestly aristocracy, devastated the Jewish population of Judea, and barred Jews from Jerusalem. They also forced both communities to define themselves more sharply. This chapter asks how Jews regarded followers of Jesus during and after these crises, and how Christians positioned themselves in relation to the Jewish nation.

4.1 The First Revolt (66–73 CE) and the Flight to Pella

The revolt began in 66 with the cessation of sacrifices for the emperor and escalated into full war. Vespasian, and then his son Titus, reconquered Galilee and Judea; Jerusalem fell in August 70 and the Temple was burned. Masada fell in 73 or 74. Josephus, who changed sides during the war, is our primary narrator, and he never mentions Christians in his account of it.

According to Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.5.3), writing in the early fourth century, "the people of the church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella." Epiphanius (*Panarion* 29.7.7–8; 30.2.7; *On Weights and Measures* 15) repeats the tradition. Since **S. G. F. Brandon** (*The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church*, 1951) challenged it as a later "foundation legend" for the Gentile church of Aelia Capitolina, its historicity has been debated. Brandon noted that Josephus (*War* 2.458) reports Pella being sacked by Jewish rebels in 66, making it an unlikely refuge. Defenders such as **Ray Pritz** (*Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, 1988), and more recently **Jonathan Bourgel**, argue that a move to a Gentile city of the Decapolis would have been a pragmatic choice for a community that did not share the rebels' messianic expectations, and that the tradition may derive from the second-century writer Aristo of Pella. The balance of current scholarship regards some movement of Jerusalem believers out of the city as plausible, while doubting the details of an organized, oracle-directed exodus.

Whether or not the flight occurred as described, the tradition points to an important social reality: the Jerusalem Christians apparently did not join the revolt. To nationalist Jews, refusal to fight in a war for the liberation of Jerusalem would have appeared as desertion. This is likely the beginning of Jewish suspicion of Christians as politically disloyal, a suspicion that intensified sixty years later.

4.2 After 70: Yavneh, the Rabbis, and the Birkat ha-Minim

With the Temple gone, leadership of Jewish life gradually passed to the sages associated with the academy at **Yavneh** (Jamnia) under Yohanan ben Zakkai and later Gamaliel II. The Babylonian Talmud (*Berakhot* 28b–29a) relates that at Yavneh, Gamaliel asked for someone to compose a "blessing concerning the *minim*" (heretics or sectarians), and Samuel the Small composed it. This became the twelfth of the Eighteen Benedictions (*Shemoneh Esreh* or *Amidah*), the central prayer recited three times daily. Medieval versions from the Cairo Genizah, first published by Solomon Schechter in 1898, include a curse on the *notsrim* (Nazarenes, i.e., Christians) alongside the *minim*.

For much of the twentieth century, New Testament scholars, following **J. Louis Martyn** (*History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 1968), connected this benediction directly to passages in John's Gospel that speak of believers being made *aposynagōgos*, "put out of the synagogue" (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), and argued that around 85–90 CE the rabbis formally expelled Jewish Christians. This reconstruction has been substantially revised. **Reuven Kimelman** ("Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," 1981) argued that *minim* in the early period referred to Jewish sectarians generally and that the word *notsrim* was a later addition. **Ruth Langer** (*Cursing the Christians? A History of the Birkat HaMinim*, Oxford, 2012) traced the prayer's textual history and concluded that, while the benediction was clearly understood as a curse on Christians in the medieval period, we cannot document that understanding in the earliest period. **Joel Marcus** ("Birkat Ha-Minim Revisited," *New Testament Studies*, 2009) offered a partial defense of the older view while acknowledging the challenges. Recent scholarship also stresses that the rabbis did not control most synagogues in the late first century, so a "decree of Yavneh" could not have been enforced universally.

Christian sources nevertheless show that by the mid-second century believers *felt* cursed in synagogues. Justin Martyr, writing his *Dialogue with Trypho* around 155–160, repeatedly accuses Jews of "cursing in your synagogues those who believe in Christ" (*Dialogue* 16.4; compare 47.4, 96.2, 137.2). In the late fourth century, Epiphanius (*Panarion* 29.9.2) and Jerome (*Commentary on Isaiah* 5.18–19) report that Jews curse the "Nazarenes" three times a day. The most cautious conclusion is that a benediction against sectarians existed from the late first century; that some congregations understood or applied it to believers in Jesus; and that this became more explicit over time.

In Plain Language

After the Temple was destroyed, Jewish leaders added a prayer against "heretics" to the daily service. Scholars once thought this was a deliberate act to throw Christians out of synagogues around 85 CE.

Most now think the early prayer was aimed at many kinds of dissenters, and that it was applied to Christians gradually. By the 150s, Christians were complaining that they were being cursed in synagogues.

4.3 The Fiscus Judaicus and Roman Definitions

After 70, Vespasian redirected the half-shekel Temple tax that Jews had paid to Jerusalem into a new Roman treasury, the *fiscus Judaicus*, payable to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. Under Domitian (81–96) the tax was enforced harshly, including against those who "lived a Jewish life without professing it" (Suetonius, *Domitian* 12.2). This may have caught Gentile Christians who kept Jewish practices, or Jewish Christians whom Jewish communities no longer recognized. Nerva (96–98) issued coins proclaiming *FISCI IVDAICI CALVMNIA SVBLATA*, "the false accusation of the Jewish tax removed," implying a narrower definition of who counted as a Jew. **Martin Goodman** has argued that this administrative redefinition, based on self-declared religious practice rather than ethnicity, contributed to the legal distinction between Jews and Christians in Roman eyes, and with it to Christians' loss of the protection Judaism enjoyed as an ancestral religion.

4.4 The Diaspora Revolt (115–117 CE)

Under Trajan, Jewish communities in Cyrenaica, Egypt, Cyprus, and Mesopotamia rose against Rome and their Greek neighbors, in a war sometimes called the Kitos War (from the general Lusius Quietus). The revolt was crushed with great loss of life, and the ancient Jewish community of Alexandria, home of Philo and the Septuagint, was virtually annihilated. There is no direct evidence of Christian involvement. Its indirect effect was enormous: Alexandrian Christianity, which had likely grown from within the Jewish community, now developed largely in a Gentile and philosophical environment. Some scholars connect the appearance of Basilides, Valentinus, and other speculative teachers in Alexandria in the following decades with this rupture.

4.5 The Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–135/136 CE)

The final revolt, led by **Shimon bar Kosiba**, broke out in 132, probably provoked by Hadrian's plans to refound Jerusalem as a Roman colony, *Aelia Capitolina*, and possibly by a ban on circumcision. According to the Jerusalem Talmud (*Taʿanit* 4:5, 68d), Rabbi Akiva hailed him as the messiah, applying to him Numbers 24:17, "a star shall come out of Jacob," and the name *Bar Kokhba*, "son of the star." Another sage, Yohanan ben Torta, replied, "Akiva, grass will grow from your cheeks and still the son of David will not have come." After the defeat, rabbinic tradition renamed him *Bar Koziba*, "son of the lie." Letters from the leader himself, found in the

Judean Desert caves in 1951–1961, show an organized administration with the title *Nasi Yisraʾel*, "Prince of Israel."

For relations between Jews and Christians, this revolt was decisive. A messianic war under a messiah who was not Jesus forced Jewish followers of Jesus to choose. Justin Martyr, a native of Flavia Neapolis (Nablus) in Samaria and a contemporary, writes:

> "For in the Jewish war which lately raged, Barchochebas, the leader of the revolt of the Jews, gave orders that Christians alone should be led to cruel punishments, unless they would deny Jesus Christ and utter blasphemy." (Justin, *First Apology* 31.6, ANF translation)

Eusebius, citing a now-lost source (perhaps Aristo of Pella), repeats the report (*Chronicle*, Hadrian year 17; *Ecclesiastical History* 4.8.4). **Richard Bauckham** has argued that the *Apocalypse of Peter*, an early second-century Christian text, contains a warning against a false messiah who will kill those who refuse to follow him, which he reads as a reference to Bar Kokhba. Whether the persecution was systematic or local, Christians' refusal to recognize Bar Kokhba as messiah would have seemed to the rebels both theological apostasy and political treason.

The consequences were permanent. Hadrian expelled Jews from Jerusalem and its district on pain of death, renamed the province *Syria Palaestina*, and built Aelia Capitolina with a temple to Jupiter. Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 4.5.1–4; 4.6.4) records a list of fifteen bishops of Jerusalem, all "of the circumcision," down to the revolt, after which the church of Aelia was led by Gentiles, the first being Marcus. Whatever the reliability of the list, the change marks the effective end of a Jewish-Christian leadership at the movement's historic center. Jewish Christians continued to exist, especially east of the Jordan and in Syria, but increasingly as minority sects regarded as heretical by Gentile Christians and as *minim* by the rabbis.

In Plain Language

In the last great revolt (132–135), Jewish rebels followed a leader many hailed as the messiah. Christians, who believed Jesus was the Messiah, refused to support him, and Justin Martyr says the rebel leader punished them for it. After Rome crushed the revolt, Jews were banned from Jerusalem, and the church there was led by non-Jews from then on. This was a turning point in the separation of the two communities.

4.6 How Jewish Sources Viewed Jesus and His Followers

Rabbinic literature rarely names Christians directly, but several passages are widely recognized as referring to Jesus or his followers. The Tosefta (*Ḥullin* 2:22–24), redacted c. 250 CE, tells of

Rabbi Eleazar ben Dama, bitten by a snake, whom "Jacob of Kefar Sama" offered to heal "in the name of Yeshu ben Pantera"; Rabbi Ishmael forbade it, and Ben Dama died. The same passage tells of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus being arrested for *minut* (heresy) and recalling that he had once enjoyed a teaching of "Yeshu ben Pantera" in Sepphoris. These stories reveal a world in which followers of Jesus were known as healers and teachers in Galilean towns, and in which rabbis regarded contact with them as dangerous precisely because it was attractive.

The Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 43a, in uncensored manuscripts) states that "on the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu," that a herald went before him for forty days, and that he was executed for sorcery and leading Israel astray. **Peter Schäfer** (*Jesus in the Talmud*, Princeton, 2007) has argued that these passages, mostly Babylonian and late (fourth to sixth centuries), are not independent historical memories but deliberate counter-narratives that parody the Gospels, especially Matthew and John, and that they reflect the freedom of Jews living under Persian rather than Christian Roman rule to answer Christian claims. The later, medieval *Toledot Yeshu* develops these polemics into a full counter-gospel.

Christian sources, meanwhile, describe Jewish participation in persecution. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (12.2; 13.1), describing events in Smyrna c. 155–160, says that Jews joined the crowd demanding Polycarp's death and gathered wood for the pyre "as was their custom." Tertullian (*Scorpiace* 10, c. 213) called the synagogues "sources of persecution." Modern scholars such as **Judith Lieu** (*Image and Reality*, 1996) caution that such statements are partly a literary pattern modeled on the Passion narratives. They do show, however, that the perception of Jewish hostility was a significant part of Christian self-understanding by the second century.

4.7 "The Ways That Never Parted"

The phrase "parting of the ways" was popularized by **James D. G. Dunn** (*The Partings of the Ways*, 1991). It suggests a decisive split, usually placed after 70 or after 135. A volume edited by **Adam Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed**, *The Ways That Never Parted* (2003), together with **Daniel Boyarin's** *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (2004), challenged this model, arguing that the separation was long, uneven, and in some regions incomplete until the fourth century or later, and that it was driven as much by bishops and rabbis drawing boundaries as by popular practice. **Shaye J. D. Cohen**, by contrast, maintains that a real social parting had occurred by about 150 in most places, even though contact and argument continued.

The evidence from late antiquity supports the view that contact persisted. In 386–387 John Chrysostom, then a presbyter in Antioch, preached eight sermons *Against the Judaizers* (often titled *Adversus Judaeos*) precisely because members of his congregation attended synagogue on the Sabbath and the High Holy Days, kept Jewish fasts, and sought healing from Jewish practitioners. The Council of Laodicea (c. 363) forbade Christians to rest on the Sabbath or to

receive festival gifts from Jews (canons 29, 37–38). Such prohibitions only make sense if the practices were common. The ways had parted at the level of institutions and leadership well before 500; at the level of neighbors and families, they continued to cross.

In Plain Language

Scholars used to say Jews and Christians split cleanly around 70 or 135 CE. Today most see a long, gradual separation. Leaders on both sides drew sharper lines, but ordinary Christians in cities like Antioch were still visiting synagogues and keeping Jewish customs as late as the 380s.

Chapter 5. The Second Century: Identity, Diversity, and Self-Definition (c. 100–200)

5.1 The Apostolic Fathers

The earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament are traditionally grouped as the "Apostolic Fathers": the *Didache* (a church manual, c. 50–120), *1 Clement* (a letter from the Roman church to Corinth, c. 96), the seven letters of **Ignatius of Antioch** (written on his way to martyrdom in Rome, traditionally c. 110), Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the *Epistle to Diognetus*, and fragments of Papias. These texts show communities wrestling with leadership, discipline, and the relationship between the Jewish scriptures and the new faith.

Ignatius is the first writer to insist on a single bishop (*episkopos*) presiding over presbyters and deacons in each city: "Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church" (*To the Smyrnaeans* 8.2), the first known use of the word *katholikē* for the Church. His letters also attack two errors: "Judaizing" (*To the Magnesians* 8–10) and Docetism, the view that Christ only seemed to suffer (*To the Trallians* 10). That Ignatius must argue so strongly suggests that a single bishop was not yet universal. **Peter Lampe** (*From Paul to Valentinus*, 2003) has argued that Rome was governed collectively by presbyters until the mid-second century, with a single presiding bishop emerging only around the time of Anicetus (c. 155–166).

5.2 Rome's First Legal Policy: Pliny and Trajan

Around 111–112, Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia-Pontus, wrote to Trajan (*Letters* 10.96) asking how to handle accusations against Christians. He reports that he executed those who persisted in confessing the name, and released those who denied it, invoked the gods, offered incense to the emperor's image, and cursed Christ. Under questioning, ex-Christians told him that they met on a fixed day before dawn and sang a hymn "to Christ as to a god" (*carmen Christo quasi deo*), bound themselves by oath not to commit theft, adultery, or fraud, and later reassembled to eat ordinary, harmless food. Pliny tortured two slave women called *ministrae* (deaconesses) and found nothing but "depraved, excessive superstition." Trajan's reply (*Letters* 10.97) set the policy that lasted until 250: Christians were not to be sought out, anonymous accusations were to be ignored, but those duly accused and convicted who refused to sacrifice were to be punished. Being a Christian was in itself a capital offense, yet the state did not hunt Christians systematically.

5.3 The Apologists

From the 120s onward, educated converts addressed defenses (*apologiai*) to emperors and the public: Quadratus and Aristides (to Hadrian), **Justin Martyr** (*First* and *Second Apology*, c. 150–155), Tatian, Athenagoras (*Plea for the Christians*, c. 177), Theophilus of Antioch, and Melito of Sardis. They rebutted charges of atheism (refusal to worship the gods), cannibalism (a misunderstanding of the Eucharist), and incest (from the language of "brothers and sisters" and the kiss of peace). Justin's great intellectual contribution was the doctrine of the *Logos spermatikos*, the "seminal Word": the divine Reason that became incarnate in Jesus had been partially present in all who lived by reason, so that Socrates and Heraclitus could be called "Christians before Christ" (*First Apology* 46). This opened the door to the use of Greek philosophy in Christian theology.

5.4 Rival Teachers and the Problem of Diversity

The second century saw an explosion of teachers offering competing interpretations of Jesus: Basilides and Valentinus in Alexandria and Rome, Marcion from Pontus, the Phrygian prophet Montanus, the Ebionites and other Jewish-Christian groups, and the encratite (radically ascetic) movement associated with Tatian. These are discussed in Chapters 6 and 12. The response of the communities that later called themselves "catholic" or "orthodox" crystallized in three instruments, often called the "threefold norm": (1) the **rule of faith** (*regula fidei*), a summary of belief in one God, Creator of heaven and earth, his Son Jesus Christ who was born, suffered, and rose, and the Holy Spirit (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.10.1; Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics* 13); (2) a **list of authoritative apostolic writings**, the nucleus of the New Testament (Chapter 9); and (3) **apostolic succession**, the claim that bishops in major churches could trace their office back to the apostles, guaranteeing public rather than secret tradition (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.1–3; Hegesippus in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.22).

Irenaeus of Lyons, whose five books *Against Heresies* (c. 180) are the most important anti-heretical work of the period, articulated a powerful theology of *recapitulation* (*anakephalaiōsis*): Christ sums up and restores all of human history, undoing Adam's disobedience by his obedience. For Irenaeus, the Creator God of Genesis and the Father of Jesus are one and the same, matter is good, and salvation includes the resurrection of the body, each point aimed directly against Valentinian and Marcionite teachings.

5.5 The Easter Controversy

A dispute over the date of Easter illustrates both early diversity and the developing authority of Rome. The churches of Asia Minor, claiming the tradition of John and Philip, kept the Christian Pascha on the 14th of the Jewish month Nisan, whatever the day of the week (hence

"Quartodecimans," from Latin *quartodecima*, "fourteenth"). Rome and most other churches kept it on the following Sunday. When Polycarp of Smyrna visited Bishop Anicetus in Rome around 155, the two agreed to differ and shared the Eucharist. Around 190, however, Bishop **Victor of Rome** attempted to excommunicate the Asian churches; Irenaeus rebuked him, recalling the earlier peace (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.23–25). The Council of Nicaea in 325 finally established a common Sunday observance calculated independently of the Jewish calendar.

In Plain Language

In the 100s, Christians faced both Roman suspicion and internal disagreement. They answered Rome with written defenses, and answered rival teachers by stressing three things: a short summary of core beliefs, a list of trusted apostolic writings, and bishops who could trace their office back to the apostles. These three became the backbone of what later was called orthodoxy.

Chapter 6. The Philosophies of Jesus: From Earliest Devotion to Chalcedon

The central intellectual problem of the first five centuries was how to speak of Jesus in relation to the one God of Israel. Every position discussed below began from shared data, the Jewish scriptures, the remembered teaching of Jesus, the apostolic writings, and the practice of worship, but each resolved the tension between monotheism and devotion to Jesus differently. The positions can be arranged along two axes: how *divine* Jesus is, and how *human* he is. Chapter 12 gives a reference table of the groups; this chapter traces the ideas.

6.1 Earliest Christ-Devotion

The earliest Christian texts already place Jesus in roles reserved for God. Paul, writing c. 55, adapts the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4 ("The LORD our God, the LORD is one") to include Jesus: "for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came ... and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came" (1 Corinthians 8:6, NIV). The hymn of Philippians 2:6–11 applies to Jesus the words of Isaiah 45:23, where every knee bows to YHWH. Larry Hurtado and **Richard Bauckham** (*Jesus and the God of Israel*, 2008) argue that this "binitarian" devotion, prayer to Jesus, invocation of his name in baptism and healing, hymns to him, and the confession "Jesus is Lord," was a novel "mutation" within Jewish monotheism that appeared within the first two decades. Critics such as **Maurice Casey** and **James McGrath** prefer a more gradual development, but there is wide agreement that devotion to Jesus was intense and very early. The later controversies were not about *whether* to worship Jesus, but about how to explain that worship coherently.

6.2 "Low" Christologies: Ebionites and Adoptionists

At one end of the spectrum stood those who emphasized Jesus's full humanity and denied his pre-existence or divine nature. **Ebionites** (from Hebrew *ʾevyonim*, "the poor"), first named by Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 1.26.2), were Jewish believers who kept the Torah, used a form of Matthew's Gospel, rejected Paul as an apostate from the Law, and regarded Jesus as the human son of Joseph and Mary, chosen and anointed by God at his baptism. Origen (*Against Celsus* 5.61) and Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.27) distinguish two kinds: some denied the virgin birth, others accepted it but still denied pre-existence. The **Nazarenes** (*Nazoraioi*), described by Epiphanius (*Panarion* 29) and Jerome, were Torah-observant Jewish Christians whose Christology appears to have been close to that of the Gentile churches; they were condemned primarily for continuing to keep the Law.

In Gentile circles, **adoptionism** or **dynamic monarchianism** held that Jesus was a man upon whom the power (*dynamis*) of God descended. **Theodotus the Cobbler** of Byzantium taught this in Rome and was excommunicated by Victor around 190; a second Theodotus (the Banker) and Artemon continued the tradition. The most famous proponent was **Paul of Samosata**, bishop of Antioch, who taught that the divine Word dwelt in the man Jesus "as in a temple." He was condemned by synods at Antioch (264–268); when he refused to vacate the church building, the emperor Aurelian ruled in 272 that it belonged to those in communion with the bishops of Italy and Rome, the first imperial intervention in an internal church dispute.

6.3 Docetism

At the opposite end stood **Docetism** (from Greek *dokein*, "to seem"), the view that Christ only appeared to have a human body and only appeared to suffer. It was an attempt to protect divine impassibility (the philosophical axiom that God cannot suffer or change). It was not a single sect but a tendency found in many groups. It is opposed already in 1 John 4:2–3 and 2 John 7 ("many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh," NIV), and fiercely by Ignatius: "if, as some who are godless ... say, he suffered only in appearance, ... then why am I in chains?" (*To the Trallians* 10). Serapion, bishop of Antioch around 200, first permitted and then forbade the reading of the *Gospel of Peter* at Rhossus when he found docetic elements in it (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.12).

6.4 Gnostic Christologies

"Gnosticism" (from *gnōsis*, "knowledge") is a modern umbrella term for a range of second- and third-century movements that shared certain features: a distinction between the supreme, unknowable God and a lower, often ignorant or malevolent creator (the *demiurge*, frequently identified with the God of Genesis); a cosmic myth explaining how divine sparks became trapped in matter; and salvation through revealed knowledge of one's true origin. Michael Williams has argued that the category is so broad it obscures more than it reveals, and **David Brakke** (*The Gnostics*, 2010) proposes reserving the term for the specific group that called itself "the Gnostics," now usually identified with the **Sethian** tradition attested in texts such as the *Apocryphon of John*.

Several distinct systems can be identified:

- **Sethian** texts (*Apocryphon of John*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*) describe a heavenly realm (the *Pleroma*, "fullness") of divine emanations, the fall of the aeon Sophia ("Wisdom"), and the birth of the arrogant creator Yaldabaoth. The heavenly Seth, or Christ, descends to awaken the elect "seed of Seth."

- **Valentinian** Christianity, founded by **Valentinus** (active in Rome c. 136–160) and developed by Ptolemy, Heracleon, and Theodotus, was the most sophisticated and the most ecclesially integrated. Valentinians often participated in ordinary churches while forming a spiritual inner circle. They distinguished three kinds of people: *pneumatics* (spiritual), *psychics* (ensouled; ordinary Christians), and *hylics* (material). Their Christ united with the man Jesus at baptism and departed before the crucifixion, or alternatively possessed a special "psychic" body. The *Gospel of Truth* (Nag Hammadi Codex I and XII), probably by Valentinus himself, is a meditation on salvation as the awakening from ignorance. **Einar Thomassen** (*The Spiritual Seed*, 2006) is the standard modern study.
- **Basilides** (Alexandria, c. 120–140) taught a complex system of 365 heavens; according to Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 1.24.4), he claimed that Simon of Cyrene was crucified in Jesus's place while Jesus stood by laughing, though Hippolytus's report of Basilides differs considerably.
- The **Gospel of Thomas**, preserved complete in Coptic at Nag Hammadi and in Greek fragments from Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. 1, 654, 655), is a collection of 114 sayings of Jesus. It emphasizes discovering the kingdom within and the interpretation of secret words. Its relationship to Gnosticism is disputed; many scholars now classify it as an early wisdom or mystical text rather than fully "Gnostic," and its date ranges from the late first to the mid-second century.

Elaine Pagels (*The Gnostic Gospels*, 1979) popularized the view that Gnostic Christians represented a suppressed alternative, more open to women's leadership and individual spiritual experience. Later scholarship has nuanced this: some Gnostic texts are as patriarchal in imagery as orthodox ones, and many Valentinians understood themselves as Christians within the larger Church rather than as a rival religion.

> **In Plain Language**
>
> "Gnostic" groups believed the world was made by a lesser god, not the highest God, and that Jesus came to give secret knowledge that would free the divine spark inside certain people. They usually thought Christ was not truly a physical, suffering human. There were several different Gnostic schools, and modern scholars debate whether the label even fits them all.

6.5 Marcion

Marcion of Sinope (c. 85–160), a wealthy shipowner, came to Rome around 140, gave the church a large donation, and was expelled in 144, when the money was returned. He taught that the God of the Jewish scriptures, a just but harsh Creator, was a different and inferior being from the good, previously unknown Father revealed by Jesus. Christ appeared suddenly in the

fifteenth year of Tiberius with a body that only appeared fleshly. Marcion rejected the Jewish scriptures entirely and compiled the first known Christian canon: a shortened version of Luke (the *Evangelion*) and ten letters of Paul (the *Apostolikon*), edited to remove what he regarded as Judaizing interpolations. His church, with its own bishops and martyrs, spread widely and survived in Syria into the fifth century. Tertullian's five books *Against Marcion* (c. 207–212) are our main source. **Adolf von Harnack** (*Marcion*, 1921) famously admired him; **Judith Lieu** (*Marcion and the Making of a Heretic*, 2015) provides the most careful recent reconstruction.

6.6 Logos Theology and the Beginnings of Trinitarian Language

The mainstream response, beginning with the Apologists, drew on the prologue of John's Gospel ("In the beginning was the Word [*Logos*] ... and the Word was God," John 1:1) and on Hellenistic Jewish wisdom speculation, especially Philo of Alexandria. Justin described the Logos as "another God" (*heteros theos*) "numerically distinct" from the Father but one with him in will (*Dialogue* 56; 128). The Logos was generated from the Father like a fire kindled from a fire, without diminishing the source. Theophilus of Antioch (c. 180) is the first to use the Greek *trias* ("triad") of God, his Word, and his Wisdom (*To Autolycus* 2.15).

In Latin, **Tertullian** of Carthage (c. 160–225) coined much of the technical vocabulary that the West would use for centuries. In *Against Praxeas* (c. 213) he wrote of one *substantia* in three *personae* and first used the Latin word *trinitas*. Tertullian's theology was nonetheless subordinationist by later standards: the Son is "a portion of the whole substance" and there was a time when the Son, as Son, did not exist.

Origen of Alexandria (c. 185–254) produced the first systematic Christian theology, *On First Principles* (*Peri Archōn*). He taught the *eternal generation* of the Son: since God is eternally Father, the Son has always existed, and "there was no when when he was not." Yet Origen also described the Son as a "second God," the image of the Father's goodness rather than goodness itself, and spoke of three distinct *hypostases*. Origen's legacy was therefore double: his doctrine of eternal generation underpinned Nicene orthodoxy, while his subordinationism was claimed by Arius's supporters. His speculations about the pre-existence of souls and the final restoration of all things (*apokatastasis*) were later condemned (543 and 553, under Justinian, after our period).

6.7 Modalism (Sabellianism)

In reaction against what seemed to be belief in two or three Gods, **modalist monarchianism** taught that Father, Son, and Spirit are three successive modes, roles, or names of the one God. Noetus of Smyrna (c. 190), Praxeas (known only through Tertullian), and especially **Sabellius** (in Rome c. 215–220) taught that the Father himself became incarnate and suffered, a view opponents called *patripassianism* ("the Father suffered"). Callixtus of Rome excommunicated

Sabellius around 220, while Hippolytus accused Callixtus himself of modalist sympathies (*Refutation of All Heresies* 9.11–12), illustrating how unsettled the language still was. "Sabellianism" became the standard label for any theology that seemed to collapse the distinctions among Father, Son, and Spirit.

In Plain Language

By 250, Christians had two opposite problems to avoid. If you said the Son was a separate divine being, you seemed to have two gods. If you said Father and Son were just one God wearing different masks, you lost the real relationship between them that the Gospels describe. The great fourth-century debates were attempts to find language that avoided both errors.

6.8 The Arian Controversy and Nicaea (318–381)

Around 318, **Arius**, a respected presbyter in charge of the Baucalis church in Alexandria, objected to the teaching of his bishop **Alexander** that the Son was eternally generated. Arius argued that only the Father is truly unbegotten (*agennētos*) and without beginning; the Son, though created before all ages and through whom all else was made, is a creature (*ktisma*) brought into being from nothing by the Father's will. His slogans, preserved by opponents, included: "there was when he was not" (*ēn pote hote ouk ēn*) and "before he was begotten, he was not." For Arius, this preserved the absolute uniqueness of God and allowed the Son to genuinely suffer and grow, which an impassible God could not do. **Rowan Williams** (*Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 1987; rev. 2001) presents Arius as a conservative theologian deeply rooted in Alexandrian scholarship, not a radical innovator.

Alexander deposed Arius around 320–321, but Arius found support from **Eusebius of Nicomedia** and other students of Lucian of Antioch. The newly sole emperor **Constantine**, wanting a united Church, summoned the first "ecumenical" (empire-wide) council at **Nicaea** in May–June 325, with around 250 to 300 bishops (tradition later fixed the number at 318). The creed it issued declared the Son "true God from true God, begotten not made, *homoousios* (of one substance) with the Father," and anathematized those who say "there was when he was not" or that the Son is "from another *hypostasis* or *ousia*." Arius and two bishops who refused to sign were exiled.

The word *homoousios* was controversial precisely because it was not scriptural and had previously been associated with Paul of Samosata and with materialist ideas of divine substance. The half-century after Nicaea was therefore not a straightforward battle between "Nicenes" and "Arians." **R. P. C. Hanson** (*The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 1988) and **Lewis Ayres** (*Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 2004) have shown that there were several theological trajectories,

and that "Arianism" as a unified movement is largely a construction of Athanasius's polemic. The main parties were:

- **Homoousians** (Nicenes): Son "of the same substance" as the Father. Led by **Athanasius**, bishop of Alexandria 328–373, who was exiled five times, and in the West by Hilary of Poitiers.
- **Homoiousians**: Son "of like substance" (*homoiousios*) with the Father. Led by Basil of Ancyra (c. 358); they feared that *homoousios* implied modalism. Many eventually reconciled with the Nicenes.
- **Homoians**: Son simply "like" (*homoios*) the Father "according to the Scriptures," with substance language banned. This was the imperial position under **Constantius II** (337–361) and **Valens** (364–378), formalized at the councils of Ariminum (Rimini) and Seleucia (359) and Constantinople (360). Jerome later wrote that "the whole world groaned and was astonished to find itself Arian" (*Dialogue against the Luciferians* 19).
- **Anomoeans** (also called Heterousians or Eunomians): Son "unlike" (*anomoios*) the Father in substance. **Aetius** and **Eunomius** argued that "unbegotten" is the very definition of God's essence, so the begotten Son must be of a different essence.

The decisive theological resolution came from the **Cappadocian Fathers**: **Basil of Caesarea** (c. 330–379), his brother **Gregory of Nyssa** (c. 335–395), and their friend **Gregory of Nazianzus** (c. 329–390). They distinguished *ousia* (essence, what God is, which is one) from *hypostasis* (concrete subsistence, who God is, which is three), terms that had previously been nearly synonymous. Each *hypostasis* is distinguished only by its relation of origin: the Father is unbegotten, the Son begotten, the Spirit proceeding. Gregory of Nyssa argued that God's essence is infinite and therefore incomprehensible, directly answering Eunomius's claim to know God's essence.

The emperor **Theodosius I**, a Nicene from Spain, issued the edict *Cunctos populos* (27 February 380) requiring all subjects to follow the faith of Damasus of Rome and Peter of Alexandria, and summoned the **Council of Constantinople** in 381. That council reaffirmed Nicaea, condemned Arians, Eunomians, and the *Pneumatomachians* ("Spirit-fighters," also called Macedonians, who denied the full divinity of the Holy Spirit), and is traditionally credited with the expanded creed now called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, which adds that the Holy Spirit is "the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified." (The Western addition *filioque*, "and the Son," came later, first at Toledo in 589.)

Homoian Christianity did not disappear in 381. It had been carried to the Goths by **Ulfilas** (c. 311–383), consecrated bishop around 341 by Eusebius of Nicomedia, who translated the Bible into Gothic. As a result, the Germanic peoples who took over the western provinces in the fifth

century, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Vandals, Burgundians, and Lombards, were largely homoian ("Arian") Christians. At the close of our period, Theodoric the Great ruled Italy (493–526) as an Arian king over a Nicene population, while the Frankish king **Clovis** (baptized c. 496–508) chose Nicene Catholicism, a decision of great long-term consequence.

> **In Plain Language**
>
> Arius said the Son of God was the first and greatest creature, not eternal like the Father. The Council of Nicaea (325) disagreed, saying the Son is "of the same substance" as the Father. For fifty years emperors and bishops fought over this, often switching sides. Three theologians from Cappadocia finally offered clearer language: God is one in essence and three in persons. The Council of Constantinople (381) made this official, and added that the Holy Spirit is fully God too.

6.9 Augustine and the Western Synthesis

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) wrote *On the Trinity* (c. 399–419), the most influential Latin treatment. He began from the unity of the divine essence and understood the persons as subsistent relations, illustrating the Trinity with "psychological analogies" in the human mind (memory, understanding, will; or the mind, its knowledge, and its love). His teaching that the Spirit proceeds from the Father "and from the Son" as from one principle laid the groundwork for the later *filioque*. Lewis Ayres and Michel René Barnes have argued that the old textbook contrast between a "Western" Trinity starting from unity and an "Eastern" one starting from the persons is largely a nineteenth-century construct (associated with Théodore de Régnon), and that late fourth-century pro-Nicene theology was fundamentally one culture across Greek and Latin.

6.10 The Christological Controversies of the Fifth Century

Once the Son's full divinity was settled, the question became how that divine Son is related to the human Jesus. Two traditions approached it differently. The **Alexandrian** tradition emphasized the *unity* of Christ: the divine Word is the single subject of everything Jesus did and suffered. The **Antiochene** tradition emphasized the *integrity* of the two natures: Christ had a complete human mind and will, and the divine Word could not be said to suffer or be born.

- **Apollinaris** of Laodicea (c. 310–390), a Nicene ally of Athanasius, proposed that in Christ the divine Logos replaced the human rational soul (*nous*). Gregory of Nazianzus answered with the principle: "what has not been assumed has not been healed" (*Letter* 101), meaning that if Christ lacked a human mind, the human mind is not saved. Apollinarianism was condemned at Rome (377) and Constantinople (381).
- **Nestorius**, an Antiochene monk who became bishop of Constantinople in 428, objected to calling Mary *Theotokos* ("God-bearer"), proposing *Christotokos* ("Christ-bearer")

instead, because God cannot be born. **Cyril of Alexandria** (bishop 412–444) attacked him as dividing Christ into two sons. The **Council of Ephesus** (431), opened by Cyril before the Antiochene bishops arrived, deposed Nestorius and affirmed *Theotokos*; the Antiochenes held a rival council and deposed Cyril. The emperor eventually upheld Nestorius's deposition, and the **Formula of Reunion** (433) brought Cyril and John of Antioch to an agreement that confessed "a union of two natures."

- **Eutyches**, an elderly archimandrite in Constantinople, taught that after the union there was only "one nature" in Christ, his humanity being absorbed or not consubstantial with ours. Condemned by Flavian of Constantinople in 448, he was rehabilitated by the **Second Council of Ephesus** (449), dominated by Dioscorus of Alexandria. Pope **Leo I** called it a *latrocinium*, a "robber council."
- The **Council of Chalcedon** (451), summoned by the emperor Marcian, with about 500 to 600 bishops, accepted Leo's *Tome* (his letter to Flavian) together with Cyril's letters and defined that Christ is "one and the same Son ... acknowledged *in two natures* (*en dyo physesin*) without confusion, without change, without division, without separation," the two natures concurring "into one person (*prosōpon*) and one *hypostasis*." The bishops reportedly acclaimed, "Peter has spoken through Leo."

Chalcedon did not bring peace. Much of Egypt and Syria rejected it as a betrayal of Cyril's formula "one incarnate nature of God the Word" (*mia physis tou theou logou sesarkōmenē*). Those who rejected it, often called **Miaphysites** (from *mia physis*, "one nature"; older literature says "Monophysites"), did not teach Eutyches's absorption of the humanity, but insisted that "in two natures" implied two subjects. Leaders included Timothy Aelurus and Peter Mongus in Alexandria and, around 500, Philoxenus of Mabbug and Severus of Antioch. The emperor Zeno's **Henotikon** (482) tried to reconcile them by condemning Nestorius and Eutyches while passing over Chalcedon in silence; Rome regarded this as abandonment of Chalcedon and excommunicated Acacius of Constantinople, beginning the **Acacian Schism** (484–519), the first prolonged break between Rome and Constantinople. The Miaphysite churches survive today as the Coptic, Syriac Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Ethiopian, and Eritrean Orthodox churches.

Meanwhile, the Christians of the Persian Empire, organized at the Synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (410), adopted the Antiochene theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia and became the **Church of the East**, often misleadingly called "Nestorian." At the synods of Beth Lapat (484) and of Acacius (486) it formally embraced a two-nature Christology. After the closure of the Antiochene-leaning "School of the Persians" at Edessa in 489, its scholars moved to Nisibis in Persia. By 500, therefore, Christianity had divided into three communions on Christology, all of which accepted Nicaea and the Trinity: the Chalcedonian (Rome and Constantinople), the Miaphysite (Egypt, much of Syria, Armenia), and the Church of the East (Persia).

In Plain Language

In the 400s, the fight moved from "Is Jesus fully God?" to "How can one person be both God and man?" Alexandria stressed that Jesus is one person; Antioch stressed that he has two complete natures. The Council of Chalcedon (451) said: one person in two natures. Many churches in Egypt and Syria refused this wording, and the Persian church went its own way. These splits still exist today.

Table 6.1. Positions on the Person of Jesus, c. 50–500 CE

Position	Period	Key figures	Jesus's divinity	Jesus's humanity	Outcome
Ebionite	1st–5th c.	Unnamed Jewish-Christian teachers	Denied (a chosen man)	Fully human	Faded by 5th c.
Adoptionist	c. 190–270	Theodotus, Paul of Samosata	Power of God rests on a man	Fully human	Condemned 190, 268
Docetist	c. 90–200+	Opponents in 1 John, Ignatius	Fully divine	Only apparent	Rejected
Valentinian	c. 140–400	Valentinus, Ptolemy, Heracleon	Divine aeon joined to Jesus	Special or partial	Rejected; declined
Sethian	2nd–4th c.	Apocryphon of John authors	Heavenly Seth/Christ	Minimal	Rejected
Marcionite	c. 144–450	Marcion	Son of an alien good God	Apparent only	Separate church; faded
Logos theology	c. 150–300	Justin, Tertullian, Origen	Divine, often subordinate	Fully human	Basis of orthodoxy
Modalist	c. 190–260	Noetus, Sabellius	Same as the Father	Fully human	Condemned
Arian/Homoian	318–6th c.	Arius, Eunomius, Ulfilas	First creature; not eternal	Body; Logos in place of soul	Condemned 325, 381
Nicene	325 onward	Athanasius, Cappadocians	Same substance as Father	Fully human	Orthodox 381
Apollinarian	c. 360–390	Apollinaris	Fully divine	Lacks human mind	Condemned 381
Antiochene/East Syrian	c. 380 onward	Theodore, Nestorius	Fully divine	Complete; two natures stressed	Church of the East
Chalcedonian	451 onward	Leo I, Cyril (as read)	Fully divine	Fully human; two natures	Rome and Constantinople
Miaphysite	451 onward	Dioscorus, Severus	Fully divine	Fully human; one united nature	Oriental Orthodox

Chapter 7. Rome: From Persecuting Empire to Christian Empire

7.1 The Legal Position of Christians, 64–249

For its first two centuries Christianity was an illegal but rarely hunted religion. Persecution was local, sporadic, and usually initiated by popular hostility rather than imperial policy. Romans valued religion as the ancestral cult (*mos maiorum*) that secured the "peace of the gods" (*pax deorum*). Jews were tolerated as practitioners of an ancient national religion; Christians, once distinguished from Jews, had neither antiquity nor nationality, and their refusal to honor the gods appeared both impious and dangerous. Tertullian complained that "if the Tiber rises to the walls, if the Nile does not rise to the fields, ... the cry at once is: 'The Christians to the lion!'" (*Apology* 40.2).

Major episodes include: Nero's action in Rome (64); possible pressure under Domitian (c. 95), reflected in Revelation and 1 Clement, though modern scholars such as **Leonard Thompson** doubt a formal persecution; Pliny's trials in Bithynia (c. 112); the martyrdoms of Ignatius (c. 110), Polycarp at Smyrna (c. 155–160), and Justin in Rome (c. 165); the pogrom at Lyons and Vienne (177), described in a letter preserved by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 5.1); the Scillitan martyrs of North Africa (180), whose trial record is the earliest dated Latin Christian document; and **Perpetua and Felicity** at Carthage (203), whose *Passion* includes what appears to be Perpetua's own prison diary, the earliest surviving writing by a Christian woman.

7.2 Empire-Wide Persecution, 249–311

The third-century crisis, with its plagues, invasions, and rapid turnover of emperors, transformed policy. In 249–250 **Decius** ordered all inhabitants of the empire to sacrifice to the gods and obtain a certificate (*libellus*) witnessed by local commissioners. Several dozen such certificates survive on papyrus from Egypt. The edict was not aimed only at Christians, but it caught them inescapably. Many complied ("the lapsed," *lapsi*), some bought false certificates (*libellatici*), and some were martyred, including Fabian of Rome. The question of whether and how to readmit the lapsed split the churches: in Rome, the presbyter **Novatian** formed a rigorist church (251) that lasted for centuries, while **Cyprian** of Carthage (martyred 258) developed a middle path of penance under episcopal authority.

Valerian (257–258) targeted clergy and confiscated church property; Cyprian and Pope Sixtus II were executed. His son **Gallienus** (260) issued a rescript restoring property, inaugurating some forty years of peace in which Christianity grew rapidly and built public church buildings. The **Great Persecution** began under **Diocletian** and Galerius in February 303 with a series of four

edicts ordering the destruction of churches and scriptures, the arrest of clergy, and finally universal sacrifice. It was enforced fiercely in the East and barely in Gaul and Britain. The surrender of scriptures by some clergy (*traditores*, "handers-over") produced the **Donatist** schism in North Africa (311–312), which divided the African church for a century. In April 311 the dying Galerius issued an edict of toleration, conceding that Christians might "exist again and hold their meetings, provided they do nothing contrary to order" (Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* 34).

The number of martyrs is uncertain. **Candida Moss** (*The Myth of Persecution*, 2013) argues that the period of genuine, state-directed persecution was relatively brief and that martyr literature was heavily shaped by later concerns. Most historians accept that while martyrdom was rarer than later tradition supposed, the threat of it was real and formative for Christian identity throughout the period.

7.3 Growth

How fast did Christianity grow? Sociologist **Rodney Stark** (*The Rise of Christianity*, 1996) proposed a growth rate of about 40 percent per decade, which would yield roughly 1,000 believers in 40 CE, about 200,000 by 200, and about 6 million, around 10 percent of the empire's population, by 300. **Keith Hopkins** ("Christian Number and Its Implications," *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 1998) reached similar orders of magnitude. These figures are models rather than counts, but they explain why a movement that was tiny in the second century had become a substantial minority by Constantine's reign. Stark attributed growth not to mass conversion but to social networks, higher fertility (from rejection of infanticide and abortion), care for the sick during epidemics such as the "Plague of Cyprian" (c. 249–262), and the attraction of Christian communities to women.

7.4 Constantine and the Christian Empire

On 28 October 312, **Constantine** defeated his rival Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge outside Rome, after a vision or dream that Lactantius and Eusebius describe in different forms, leading him to place the Chi-Rho sign on his soldiers' shields. In February 313 he and Licinius agreed at Milan on a policy, conventionally called the "Edict of Milan," granting freedom of worship to all and restoring confiscated Christian property. Constantine then lavished patronage on the Church: the Lateran basilica in Rome, St. Peter's on the Vatican hill, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (dedicated 335), exemptions for clergy, episcopal courts, and Sunday as a legal day of rest (321). He summoned the Council of Nicaea (325), founded **Constantinople** on the site of Byzantium (dedicated 11 May 330), and was baptized on his deathbed in 337 by Eusebius of Nicomedia.

Imperial sponsorship transformed the Church. Bishops became public figures with legal powers; councils were convened and enforced by emperors; dissenters could now be exiled by the state. The brief reign of **Julian** "the Apostate" (361–363), a nephew of Constantine raised Christian who returned to the old gods, attempted to reverse the trend, banning Christians from teaching classical literature and planning to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple, a project abandoned after fires broke out at the site in 363. Julian's letter to Arsacius, high priest of Galatia, admitted with frustration that "the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well" (*Letter* 22), a revealing outsider's testimony to Christian charity.

Under **Theodosius I** (379–395), Nicene Christianity became the official religion. The edict *Cunctos populos* (380) defined the true faith; laws of 391–392 prohibited public pagan sacrifice and closed temples. The great Serapeum of Alexandria was destroyed in 391 or 392. Persecution now ran the other way: the Spanish ascetic **Priscillian** was executed at Trier in 385, the first person put to death by a Christian government for heresy, an act protested by Martin of Tours and Ambrose. The murder of the philosopher **Hypatia** by a Christian mob in Alexandria (415) shows the violence that could accompany the new order.

7.5 The Bishop of Rome

The church of Rome held a unique prestige from the beginning: it was the church of the imperial capital, the church to which Paul wrote his longest letter, and the place where tradition held that both Peter and Paul were martyred and buried. Excavations beneath St. Peter's (1940–1949) uncovered a second-century monument, the "Tropaion of Gaius," which the Roman presbyter Gaius mentioned around 200 (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.25.7). Already c. 96, *1 Clement* intervened in a dispute at Corinth. Ignatius addressed the Roman church as "presiding in love" (*To the Romans*, preface). Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.3.2) wrote that "every church must agree with this church on account of its more excellent origin" (*propter potentiorem principalitatem*), and listed its succession of bishops from Linus.

Through the third and fourth centuries, Roman bishops increasingly asserted authority: Victor in the Easter dispute (c. 190); Stephen I against Cyprian on the rebaptism of heretics (256); Julius I (337–352) receiving appeals from Athanasius; the Council of Serdica (343) granting deposed bishops a right of appeal to Rome. **Damasus I** (366–384) styled Rome the "apostolic see," commissioned Jerome's revision of the Latin Bible, and grounded Roman primacy explicitly in Christ's words to Peter (Matthew 16:18), not in conciliar decisions or the city's political rank. **Leo I** (440–461) developed the classic theory: the Roman bishop is the heir of Peter, and Peter speaks through him. Leo personally met Attila near Mantua (452) and negotiated with the Vandal Gaiseric (455), enhancing papal prestige as imperial power in the West collapsed. **Gelasius I** (492–496), in his letter *Famuli vestrae pietatis* (494) to the emperor Anastasius,

articulated the "two powers" doctrine: the world is ruled by the sacred authority of bishops (*auctoritas sacrata pontificum*) and royal power (*regalis potestas*), with the former weightier in matters of salvation.

The deposition of the last western emperor, Romulus Augustulus, by Odoacer in 476 left the bishop of Rome as the most important Roman authority in Italy, though Rome remained politically within the orbit of the eastern emperor in Constantinople. Rome's claims were accepted in the West but understood more modestly in the East, where primacy was seen as one of honor rather than jurisdiction, a difference crystallized in the disputes over the canons of Constantinople (381) and Chalcedon (451).

In Plain Language

Rome went from killing Christians to making Christianity its official religion in under eighty years. Constantine (312) was the turning point; Theodosius (380) completed it. Meanwhile, the bishop of Rome built up authority as Peter's successor, and after the western empire fell in 476 he became the most important leader left in Italy.

Chapter 8. The Great Sees: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople

The Church organized itself along the lines of the empire. Bishops of provincial capitals (*metropolitans*) presided over the bishops of their provinces, and the bishops of the greatest cities acquired authority over wider regions. By the sixth century, under Justinian, this was theorized as the "Pentarchy," the rule of five patriarchs: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. The path to that arrangement ran through three conciliar canons.

- **Nicaea (325), canon 6**: confirms the "ancient customs" by which the bishop of Alexandria has authority over Egypt, Libya, and the Pentapolis, "since a like custom exists with reference to the bishop of Rome," and preserves the privileges of Antioch and the other provinces. **Canon 7**: the bishop of Aelia (Jerusalem) is to receive honor, but the metropolitan dignity of Caesarea is preserved.
- **Constantinople (381), canon 3**: "The bishop of Constantinople shall have the prerogative of honor after the bishop of Rome, because Constantinople is New Rome." This placed the new capital ahead of Alexandria and Antioch, which Alexandria deeply resented.
- **Chalcedon (451), canon 28**: adopted in a session from which the papal legates were absent, it grants Constantinople "equal privileges" (*isa presbeia*) with Old Rome, second in rank, and jurisdiction over the dioceses of Pontus, Asia, and Thrace, on the ground that the fathers gave Rome its privileges "because it was the imperial city." Leo I rejected the canon, objecting that Rome's primacy rested on Peter and that the canon violated Nicaea (*Letters* 104–106). In the East it remained in force. The same council made Jerusalem a patriarchate over the three Palestinian provinces, by agreement between Juvenal of Jerusalem and Maximus of Antioch.

8.1 Alexandria

Tradition traced the Alexandrian church to Mark the Evangelist (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.16). Its early history is obscure, a silence Bauer interpreted as evidence that early Alexandrian Christianity was "heterodox." From the late second century it hosted the **catechetical school** associated with Pantaenus, **Clement of Alexandria** (c. 150–215), and **Origen**, which fused Christian faith with Platonic philosophy and pioneered allegorical interpretation of scripture in the tradition of Philo. In the fourth and fifth centuries Alexandria's bishops, Alexander, Athanasius, Theophilus, Cyril, and Dioscorus, were the most powerful prelates in the East, commanding the Egyptian monks and controlling the grain supply to Constantinople. Its rivalry with Constantinople drove much of the conflict from 381 to 451. After

Chalcedon, the majority of Egyptian Christians became Miaphysite, forming what is today the Coptic Orthodox Church. Egypt was also the birthplace of monasticism (Chapter 11).

8.2 Antioch

Antioch on the Orontes, capital of the province of Syria, was where Gentiles were first evangelized in numbers and where believers were first called "Christians" (Acts 11:19–26). Peter was traditionally remembered as its first bishop before Rome. It was the base of Paul's missionary journeys, the city of Ignatius, and the see of Theophilus and of Paul of Samosata. In the fourth century Antioch was a theological battlefield: the **Meletian schism** (c. 360–415) left the city with two and sometimes three rival bishops, a dispute that complicated relations among Rome, Alexandria, and the East.

Antioch also gave its name to a school of biblical interpretation. **Diodore of Tarsus** (d. c. 390), **Theodore of Mopsuestia** (c. 350–428), **John Chrysostom** (c. 347–407), and **Theodoret of Cyrus** (c. 393–466) emphasized the historical and grammatical sense of scripture and rejected what they saw as the arbitrary allegory of Alexandria, while allowing a disciplined *theōria* (insight) by which historical events could also point to Christ. Theodore complained that such interpreters invent fables out of their own heads and then "give their folly the name of allegory." Recent scholarship, including **Frances Young** (*Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*, 1997) and **Mark Edwards**, has softened the old contrast: both schools recognized literal and spiritual senses, but differed on how the spiritual sense was controlled. The Antiochene emphasis on the full humanity of Christ shaped the Christology of Nestorius and the Church of the East; Theodore's writings were condemned in 553 and survive largely in Syriac.

8.3 Jerusalem

Jerusalem was the mother church of the first generation but declined after 70 and especially after 135, when it became the Roman colony of Aelia Capitolina, its bishop subordinate to the metropolitan of Caesarea. Its revival came with Constantine's building program: the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (dedicated 335) and the pilgrimage of Constantine's mother Helena (c. 326–328) made Jerusalem the center of Christian pilgrimage. The *Catechetical Lectures* of **Cyril of Jerusalem** (c. 350) and the travel diary of the pilgrim **Egeria** (c. 381–384) describe a rich liturgy of stations at the holy places that influenced worship throughout Christendom, especially the observance of Holy Week. Bishop Juvenal (422–458) secured patriarchal status at Chalcedon in 451.

8.4 Constantinople

Founded as a Christian capital, Constantinople had no apostolic origin; later legend made the apostle Andrew the founder of the church at Byzantium. Its importance rested entirely on its

status as "New Rome," the residence of the emperor. Its bishops included the Cappadocian **Gregory of Nazianzus**, who presided over part of the council of 381 before resigning; **John Chrysostom** (398–404), whose fiery preaching against the luxury of the court led to his deposition by a synod under Theophilus of Alexandria and his death in exile (407); and **Nestorius** (428–431). By the end of the fifth century the bishop of Constantinople had become the leading figure of the Eastern Church, a status reflected in the later title "Ecumenical Patriarch." Its relationship with Rome, alternating between alliance (at Chalcedon) and schism (484–519), foreshadowed the eventual division of Eastern and Western Christianity.

8.5 Other Centers

Several centers outside the five sees were equally important for the story. **Carthage** was the center of Latin Christianity before Rome, producing Tertullian, Cyprian, and the councils that defined the Western canon; it fell to the Arian Vandals in 439. **Edessa** (modern Şanlıurfa) in Osrhoene was the center of Syriac Christianity, with legends of King Abgar's correspondence with Jesus, the poet-theologian **Ephrem the Syrian** (c. 306–373), and the Syriac Bible. **Armenia** became the first kingdom to adopt Christianity officially under Tiridates III, converted by Gregory the Illuminator (traditionally 301, possibly c. 314). **Aksum** in Ethiopia was converted under King Ezana in the 330s–340s through Frumentius, consecrated by Athanasius. **Milan** became an imperial residence and, under **Ambrose** (bishop 374–397), the most powerful Western see after Rome; Ambrose famously forced Theodosius to do public penance for the massacre at Thessalonica (390).

Table 8.1. The Great Sees and Their Claims to Authority

See	Traditional founder	Basis of authority	Key figures (to 500)	Christological position after 451
Rome	Peter and Paul	Petrine succession; imperial capital	Clement, Victor, Damasus, Leo I, Gelasius I	Chalcedonian
Alexandria	Mark	Apostolic foundation; Nicaea canon 6	Origen, Athanasius, Cyril, Dioscorus	Majority Miaphysite
Antioch	Peter	Apostolic foundation; Nicaea canon 6	Ignatius, Chrysostom, Theodore, Severus	Divided
Jerusalem	James the brother of Jesus	Mother church; holy places	James, Cyril, Juvenal	Chalcedonian
Constantinople	Andrew (later legend)	New Rome; canons of 381 and 451	Gregory Nazianzen, Chrysostom, Nestorius	Chalcedonian

In Plain Language

The Church's leadership followed the map of the Roman Empire. Rome claimed first place because of Peter. Alexandria and Antioch were ancient apostolic churches. Jerusalem was honored as the mother church. Constantinople, the new capital, rose to second place because the emperor lived there,

and its rise caused tension with both Rome and Alexandria.

Chapter 9. How the New Testament Canon Was Defined

The word *canon* (Greek *kanōn*, "measuring rod, rule") was applied to a list of authoritative books only in the fourth century; earlier writers spoke of the "rule of faith" and of books "acknowledged" or "read in church." Scholars therefore distinguish between *scripture* (writings treated as authoritative) and *canon* (a closed, defined list). **Bruce Metzger** (*The Canon of the New Testament*, 1987), **Harry Gamble** (*The New Testament Canon*, 1985), **Lee Martin McDonald** (*The Formation of the Biblical Canon*, 2017), **Michael Kruger** (*Canon Revisited*, 2012), and **Edmon Gallagher and John Meade** (*The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity*, 2017) offer the standard accounts. The process unfolded in roughly seven stages.

9.1 Stage One: The Scriptures of Israel (30–100)

The first Christians already had a Bible: the Jewish scriptures, usually read in the Septuagint. When New Testament writers say "Scripture," they mean these books. Alongside them, the "words of the Lord" (sayings of Jesus, e.g., 1 Corinthians 7:10; 11:23) carried supreme authority, first orally and then in written collections.

9.2 Stage Two: Collections of Paul and the Gospels (c. 90–150)

Paul's letters circulated beyond their original addressees (Colossians 4:16) and were collected early. The author of 2 Peter (3:15–16) already refers to "all his letters" and places them alongside "the other Scriptures." The oldest surviving Pauline codex, **𝔓46** (Chester Beatty Papyrus II, c. 200), contains Romans, Hebrews (placed after Romans, showing that Hebrews was accepted as Pauline in Egypt), 1–2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 Thessalonians. Ignatius, Polycarp, and 1 Clement quote or echo Pauline letters. Papias of Hierapolis (c. 110–130), quoted by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39), knew traditions about Mark and Matthew and famously preferred "a living and abiding voice" to books. Justin Martyr (c. 150) reports that the "memoirs of the apostles, which are called gospels" were read in Sunday worship alongside the prophets (*First Apology* 67).

9.3 Stage Three: Marcion and the Catalyst of Crisis (c. 144)

Marcion's edition, one Gospel (an edited Luke) and ten Pauline letters, is the first known closed Christian canon. Harnack and Hans von Campenhausen (*The Formation of the Christian Bible*, 1968; English 1972) argued that the Great Church formed its canon largely in reaction to Marcion. Most scholars now regard Marcion as an accelerant rather than a cause: the use of multiple Gospels and Pauline letters predates him, but his challenge forced the Church to articulate why it kept the Jewish scriptures and four Gospels rather than one.

9.4 Stage Four: The Four-Gospel Canon and the Core (c. 170–200)

By about 180, **Irenaeus** argued that there could be neither more nor fewer than four Gospels, just as there are four winds and four zones of the world (*Against Heresies* 3.11.8), an argument that presupposes a settled practice he is defending, not creating. Around 170, **Tatian** combined the four into a single harmonized narrative, the *Diatessaron* ("through four"), which became the standard Gospel text in Syriac churches until the fifth century. By 200, a core of about twenty books, the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen Pauline letters, 1 Peter, and 1 John, was accepted almost everywhere. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian quote these as scripture.

The **Muratorian Fragment**, a Latin list preserved in a seventh- or eighth-century manuscript in Milan and published by Ludovico Muratori in 1740, accepts the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen Pauline letters, Jude, two (or three) letters of John, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the Apocalypses of John and Peter (noting that some refuse to read the latter in church). It rejects the *Shepherd of Hermas* for public reading because it was written "very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while Pius, his brother, was occupying the bishop's chair" (Pius was bishop c. 140–154), and rejects Marcionite forgeries. On that basis it has traditionally been dated c. 170–200. **Albert Sundberg** ("Canon Muratori: A Fourth-Century List," *Harvard Theological Review*, 1973) and **Geoffrey Hahneman** (*The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, Oxford, 1992) argued for a fourth-century Eastern origin, which would make it one of many canon lists from that period. **Everett Ferguson** and **Charles Hill** (*Westminster Theological Journal*, 1995) defended the traditional date. The question remains genuinely open, though the majority still favors a late second- or early third-century date.

9.5 Stage Five: The Disputed Books (c. 200–325)

Seven books remained disputed for a long time: **Hebrews** (accepted in the East as Pauline; doubted in the West because its authorship was uncertain), **James**, **2 Peter**, **2 and 3 John**, **Jude**, and **Revelation** (widely accepted in the West; doubted in the East after Dionysius of Alexandria, c. 250, argued on stylistic grounds that its author was not the author of the Fourth Gospel). Meanwhile, several books that were later excluded were read in some churches: the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, *1 Clement*, the *Didache*, and the *Apocalypse of Peter*. Origen, as summarized by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 6.25), accepted the four Gospels, the Pauline letters, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation, while noting doubts about 2 Peter, 2–3 John, and the authorship of Hebrews ("who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows").

Eusebius of Caesarea (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.25, c. 325) gave the most important classification of the period, in four groups:

- *Homologoumena* ("acknowledged"): the four Gospels, Acts, the letters of Paul (including Hebrews, which he elsewhere notes some dispute), 1 John, 1 Peter, and "if it really seems proper," Revelation.
- *Antilegomena* ("disputed," but known to most): James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John.
- *Notha* ("spurious," not canonical but not heretical): the *Acts of Paul*, the *Shepherd*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Barnabas*, the *Didache*, and "if it seems proper," Revelation again, as well as the *Gospel of the Hebrews*.
- Heretical forgeries, "to be cast aside as absurd and impious": the Gospels of Peter, Thomas, and Matthias, and the Acts of Andrew and John.

Eusebius's double placement of Revelation reflects real division in the Greek East. **Francis Watson** ("Eusebius and the Biographical Logic of the New Testament Canon," *New Testament Studies*, 2024) has argued that Eusebius's criteria, centered on authentic authorship by apostles and their companions, drew on Greco-Roman conventions for authenticating philosophers' works.

9.6 Stage Six: Fourth-Century Lists and Bibles (325–400)

Around 331 Constantine ordered fifty Bibles from Eusebius for the churches of Constantinople (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 4.36). The two greatest surviving fourth-century Greek Bibles, **Codex Vaticanus** (B, c. 325–350) and **Codex Sinaiticus** (א, c. 330–360), give physical form to the emerging canon. Sinaiticus contains the complete New Testament of twenty-seven books followed by the *Epistle of Barnabas* and part of the *Shepherd of Hermas*, showing that the boundary was still fluid in practice. Vaticanus breaks off in Hebrews 9:14, so its contents after that point are unknown.

A series of fourth-century lists then appeared. **Cyril of Jerusalem** (*Catechetical Lectures* 4.36, c. 350) lists twenty-six books, omitting Revelation. **Canon 60 of the Council of Laodicea** (c. 363; its authenticity as an original part of the canons is doubted) does the same. **Gregory of Nazianzus** (*Poems* 1.1.12) omits Revelation. **Amphilochius of Iconium** (*Iambics to Seleucus*, c. 380) lists the books but notes that some reject 2 Peter, 2–3 John, and Jude, and that "most" consider Revelation spurious.

The decisive landmark is the **Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter of Athanasius** of Alexandria, written for Easter 367. In it Athanasius lists the twenty-seven books of the present New Testament, the first surviving list to contain exactly those books and no others (though in a different order: Gospels, Acts, the seven Catholic Letters, fourteen letters of Paul with Hebrews among them, and Revelation). He calls them "the springs of salvation," and adds: "in these alone the teaching of godliness is proclaimed. Let no one add to these; let nothing be taken away from them." He

also lists books "not included in the canon" but useful for catechumens, including the *Didache* and the *Shepherd*, and condemns the "apocrypha" fabricated by heretics. **James Robinson** suggested that the Nag Hammadi codices may have been buried by monks of the nearby Pachomian monastery in response to this letter, a hypothesis developed further by **Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott** (*The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, 2015).

In the West, a Roman synod under **Damasus** (382) is often credited with a list of the twenty-seven books, but the document usually cited, the *Decretum Gelasianum*, is a sixth-century compilation of uncertain relationship to Damasus. Firmer evidence comes from North Africa: the **Synod of Hippo** (393), whose canons survive in the *Breviarium Hipponense*, and the **Third Council of Carthage** (397) both listed the twenty-seven books, with Hebrews counted alongside Paul's thirteen letters. Carthage in 419 reaffirmed the list. Pope **Innocent I**, writing to Exsuperius of Toulouse in 405, gave the same list. **Augustine** (*On Christian Doctrine* 2.8.13, c. 397) lists the twenty-seven and argues that books accepted by "the greater number and the weightier" churches should be preferred. **Jerome**'s Latin Vulgate (gospels revised from 383/384; the whole completed c. 405) carried this canon through the medieval West.

9.7 Stage Seven: Eastern Diversity Beyond 400

In the Greek East, Revelation remained disputed into the Byzantine period; it is not read in the Eastern Orthodox lectionary to this day. The **Syriac** churches used a shorter canon: the *Peshitta* New Testament, standardized in the early fifth century (often associated with Rabbula of Edessa, bishop c. 411–435), contained twenty-two books, omitting 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. The **Philoxenian** version (508), commissioned by Philoxenus of Mabbug, added the five missing books. Some Syriac and Armenian churches long accepted a *Third Epistle to the Corinthians*, on which Ephrem wrote a commentary. The Ethiopian church eventually developed a broader canon. No ecumenical council of the first five centuries ever issued a binding, empire-wide list. The canon emerged by **consensus in use**, confirmed by local councils and influential bishops, rather than by a single decree.

9.8 The Criteria

Ancient writers appealed to four criteria, usually in combination:

- **Apostolicity**: written by an apostle or a close associate (Mark for Peter, Luke for Paul). This was the most frequently invoked criterion and the reason Hebrews and Revelation were debated.
- **Orthodoxy**: consistency with the rule of faith. Serapion rejected the *Gospel of Peter* not for its authorship but for its docetic content.
- **Catholicity**: wide and long-standing use across many churches, not just one region.

- **Antiquity**: origin in the apostolic period. The Muratorian Fragment's rejection of the *Shepherd* because it was written "recently" illustrates this criterion.

In Plain Language

There was no single moment when "the Church" voted on the New Testament. By about 200, most Christians used the four Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, 1 Peter, and 1 John. Seven other books (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2–3 John, Jude, Revelation) were debated for two more centuries, and some other books (like the Shepherd of Hermas) were read in some churches. In 367, Athanasius gave the first list exactly matching today's 27 books; African councils in 393 and 397 confirmed it in the West. Some eastern churches used shorter lists for centuries.

Textual Note: Canon versus Text

A closed list of books did not mean a fixed wording. Two examples show the difference. (1) **Mark 16:9–20**: NA28 prints the "Longer Ending" in double brackets, indicating that it is regarded as a very early addition. It is absent from ℵ and B, the two oldest complete manuscripts, and Eusebius and Jerome report that it was missing from most Greek copies they knew; yet it is present in the vast majority of later manuscripts and was known to Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.10.5). The NIV prints it with a note that "the earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have verses 9–20." (2) **1 John 5:7–8**, the *Comma Johanneum* ("the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one"): this Trinitarian expansion appears in no Greek manuscript before the medieval period and in no Greek writer of our period. It arose in Latin, first attested in the Spanish *Liber Apologeticus* (late fourth century, possibly by Priscillian). NA28 and UBS5 omit it, as do the NIV and LSB. Its absence is significant for our subject: the fourth-century Trinitarian debates were conducted without it, since neither Athanasius nor the Cappadocians knew it.

Table 9.1. Key Canon Witnesses, c. 144–508

Witness	Date	Region	Status of disputed books
Marcion	c. 144	Rome	Edited Luke + 10 Pauline letters only
Irenaeus, Against Heresies	c. 180	Gaul	Four Gospels fixed; Revelation, 1 John, 1 Peter used
Muratorian Fragment	c. 180–200? or 4th c.	Rome? or East	Includes Wisdom, Apoc. of Peter; omits Hebrews, James, 1–2 Peter
Origen (via Eusebius 6.25)	c. 230–250	Alexandria/Caesarea	Notes doubts on 2 Peter, 2–3 John, Hebrews' author
Eusebius, Hist. Eccl. 3.25	c. 325	Caesarea	James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2–3 John disputed; Revelation uncertain
Codex Sinaiticus	c. 330–360	Palestine or Egypt	27 books + Barnabas + Shepherd
Cyril of Jerusalem	c. 350	Jerusalem	26 books; no Revelation
Athanasius, Festal Letter 39	367	Alexandria	Exactly 27 books
Synod of Hippo / Carthage III	393 / 397	North Africa	Exactly 27 books

Witness	Date	Region	Status of disputed books
Innocent I to Exsuperius	405	Rome	Exactly 27 books
Syriac Peshitta	early 5th c.	Edessa	22 books; no 2 Peter, 2–3 John, Jude, Revelation
Philoxenian Syriac	508	Mabbug	Adds the five missing books

Chapter 10. The Ancient Sources Preserved

What we know of ancient Christianity depends on what has survived. Much has been lost: Papias's five books, Hegesippus's *Memoirs*, most of Marcion and the Gnostic teachers in their own words, the anti-Christian works of Celsus and Porphyry except as quoted by opponents. Yet the surviving evidence is far richer than for any comparable ancient religious movement. This chapter surveys it by type.

10.1 New Testament Manuscripts

Over 5,800 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament are catalogued by the Institute for New Testament Textual Research in Münster, together with thousands of early translations (Latin, Syriac, Coptic) and patristic quotations. The earliest are papyrus fragments from Egypt:

- **𝔓52** (P.Rylands 457), a scrap of John 18 in Manchester, traditionally dated c. 125–150 and often called the oldest New Testament manuscript. **Brent Nongbri** ("The Use and Abuse of P52," *Harvard Theological Review*, 2005; *New Testament Studies*, 2020) has shown that palaeographic comparison allows a range extending into the third century, so it should not be used to fix the date of John.
- **𝔓46** (Pauline letters), **𝔓66** and **𝔓75** (John and Luke–John, Bodmer Papyri), and **𝔓45** (Gospels and Acts, Chester Beatty), generally dated c. 200–250, though Nongbri has argued for later dates for some of the Bodmer codices.
- The great fourth- and fifth-century parchment codices: **Vaticanus** (B), **Sinaiticus** (א), **Alexandrinus** (A, fifth century, which includes 1–2 Clement), **Bezae** (D, c. 400, Greek–Latin bilingual with a distinctive "Western" text of Luke–Acts), and **Washingtonianus** (W).

Two physical features of early Christian books are themselves evidence of Christian practice, as Larry Hurtado stressed in *The Earliest Christian Artifacts* (2006). First, Christians overwhelmingly preferred the **codex** (the bound book) to the scroll, centuries before the rest of society. Second, scribes used **nomina sacra**, contracted forms of sacred names (ΘΣ for *theos*, ΙΣ for *Iēsous*, ΧΣ for *Christos*, ΚΣ for *kyrios*) marked with a line above, a distinctively Christian scribal convention that implies a degree of shared practice across communities.

10.2 Christian Literature That Became Normative

- **Apostolic Fathers** (c. 50–150): *Didache*, *1 Clement*, Ignatius, Polycarp, *Barnabas*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, *To Diognetus*, Papias fragments.
- **Apologists** (c. 120–200): Aristides, Justin, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Melito of Sardis (*On Pascha*, rediscovered on papyrus in 1940), Minucius Felix (*Octavius*).

- **Heresiologists**: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (c. 180; complete only in Latin); Hippolytus (attributed), *Refutation of All Heresies* (early third century; rediscovered 1842); Tertullian; Epiphanius, *Panarion* ("medicine chest," c. 374–377), cataloguing eighty heresies.
- **Theologians and exegetes**: Clement of Alexandria, Origen (much of his work survives only in Latin translation by Rufinus), Cyprian, Lactantius, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Ephrem, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine (over five million words survive), Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret, Leo I.
- **Church histories**: Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, ten books, completed c. 325); his continuators Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen, and Theodoret (fifth century); Rufinus's Latin translation and continuation; the anti-Nicene historian Philostorgius (fragments).
- **Conciliar acts and canons**: the creeds and canons of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon; the extensive minutes of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), edited by Eduard Schwartz in the *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* and translated by Richard Price and Michael Gaddis (2005).
- **Church orders**: the *Didache*; the *Apostolic Tradition* (traditionally attributed to Hippolytus of Rome, c. 215, but argued by **Paul Bradshaw, Maxwell Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips** in their Hermeneia commentary, 2002, to be a composite of material from different periods and places); the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Syria, third century); the *Apostolic Constitutions* (Antioch, c. 380).

10.3 Christian Literature Later Rejected or Lost

- **The Nag Hammadi Library**: twelve leather-bound papyrus codices plus leaves of a thirteenth, discovered near Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt in 1945, containing fifty-two tractates in Coptic, translated from Greek originals mostly of the second and third centuries, copied in the mid-fourth century. They include the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Philip*, *Gospel of Truth*, *Apocryphon of John*, and *Gospel of the Egyptians*. They are held in the Coptic Museum in Cairo; the Claremont Colleges archive preserves the photographic record of the edition project led by James M. Robinson.
- **Berlin Codex** (BG 8502, acquired 1896): the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Apocryphon of John*, and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*.
- **Codex Tchacos** (published 2006): the *Gospel of Judas*, which presents Judas as the disciple who understands Jesus's true identity.
- **Oxyrhynchus Papyri**: Greek fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Mary*, the *Shepherd*, and many New Testament books, from the rubbish dumps of an Egyptian town excavated by Grenfell and Hunt from 1896.

- **Other apocrypha**: the *Gospel of Peter* (Akhmim fragment, found 1886–1887), the *Egerton Gospel*, the *Protevangelium of James* (on Mary's birth and childhood, second century; enormously influential on Marian devotion), the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, *Acts of Thomas*, and Jewish-Christian gospel fragments (of the Hebrews, Nazarenes, Ebionites) quoted by the Fathers.

10.4 Jewish Sources

Josephus (*Jewish War*, c. 75; *Antiquities*, 93/94) is indispensable for the Jewish background and contains the passages on Jesus, John the Baptist, and James. **Philo of Alexandria** (c. 20 BCE – 50 CE) illuminates Logos theology and allegorical exegesis. The **Dead Sea Scrolls** (discovered 1947–1956) transformed understanding of Second Temple sectarianism and messianic expectation, though they do not mention Jesus or Christians. Rabbinic literature, the Mishnah (c. 200), Tosefta (c. 250), Jerusalem Talmud (c. 400), and Babylonian Talmud (c. 500–600), contains the references to *minim*, Yeshu, and the birkat ha-minim discussed in Chapter 4.

10.5 Greek and Roman Outsiders

- **Pliny the Younger**, *Letters* 10.96–97 (c. 112): the earliest outside description of Christian worship and the first record of Christian trials.
- **Tacitus**, *Annals* 15.44 (c. 116): Nero and the Christians; the execution of Christ under Pilate.
- **Suetonius**, *Claudius* 25.4 and *Nero* 16.2 (c. 120).
- **Lucian of Samosata**, *The Passing of Peregrinus* (c. 165): a satirical portrait of a charlatan who exploited Christian generosity, revealing Christian practices of visiting prisoners and sharing property.
- **Galen** (c. 129–216): the physician admired Christians' self-control and courage in death while criticizing their faith without demonstration.
- **Celsus**, *The True Word* (c. 170–180): the first systematic pagan critique, preserved extensively in Origen's *Against Celsus* (c. 248).
- **Porphyry**, *Against the Christians* (late third century): a learned critique, including the argument that Daniel was written in the Maccabean period; survives only in fragments.
- **Julian**, *Against the Galileans* (363): reconstructed from Cyril of Alexandria's refutation.

10.6 Material Evidence

- **The Christian building at Dura-Europos** (Syria), a private house renovated for worship c. 232–233 and buried in 256 when the Romans reinforced the city wall against the Persians. It contains the oldest securely dated Christian baptistery, with wall paintings of

the Good Shepherd, Adam and Eve, the paralytic, Peter walking on water, and a woman at a well who may be the earliest depiction of Mary (Michael Peppard, *The World's Oldest Church*, Yale, 2016). A 2024 Yale study has questioned whether it should be classed as a "house church" at all, rather than a purpose-adapted building.

- **The Kefar ʿOthnay (Megiddo) prayer hall**, excavated by the Israel Antiquities Authority in 2005 within the grounds of Megiddo Prison. Its mosaic floor, paid for by a Roman centurion named Gaianus, includes the inscription, "The God-loving Akeptous has offered the table to God Jesus Christ as a memorial," one of the earliest inscriptions calling Jesus "God." The excavators dated it c. 230; Glen Bowersock and others argue for the late third or early fourth century.
- **The Roman catacombs** (Callixtus, Priscilla, Domitilla, and others, from c. 200): underground cemeteries with frescoes of Jonah, Daniel, the Good Shepherd, praying figures (*orantes*), and the Eucharistic meal.
- **The Alexamenos graffito** (Palatine Hill, Rome, c. 200): a mocking drawing of a man worshiping a crucified figure with a donkey's head, captioned "Alexamenos worships his god," evidence of pagan ridicule and one of the earliest images of the crucifixion.
- **The Inscription of Abercius** (Hierapolis in Phrygia, before 216): a bishop's epitaph describing his journey to Rome and the Eucharist in coded language ("the Fish from the spring").
- **"Christians for Christians" inscriptions** (third-century Phrygia): open declarations of faith on tombstones before legalization.
- **The Tropaion of Gaius** under St. Peter's Basilica (c. 160): the monument venerated as Peter's tomb.
- **The Chronograph of 354**: an illustrated calendar for a wealthy Roman Christian, containing the earliest list of Roman bishops, a list of martyrs' feasts (*Depositio Martyrum*, compiled 336), and the first record of 25 December as Christ's birth.

In Plain Language

We have thousands of New Testament manuscripts, a large body of early Christian writings, the buried "Gnostic" library from Nag Hammadi, Jewish texts like Josephus and the Talmud, a handful of Roman writers who mention Christians, and archaeological finds such as a church in Syria from about 233 and a mosaic in Israel calling Jesus God. Each source has its own bias, but together they let historians cross-check the story.

Chapter 11. Christian Customs and Daily Life

11.1 Initiation: Catechumenate and Baptism

The *Didache* (7) gives the earliest baptismal instructions outside the New Testament: baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" in "living" (running) water; if none is available, in other water, cold or warm; if neither, pour water on the head three times. Both the baptizer and the candidate should fast beforehand. By the third century, initiation had become an extended process. Candidates (*catechumens*) underwent instruction that could last up to three years (*Apostolic Tradition* 17, in the form we have it), during which their lives were examined. Certain occupations (gladiator, actor, astrologer, maker of idols) were incompatible with baptism. Baptism itself, usually at Easter, involved renunciation of Satan facing west, a threefold immersion with a threefold confession of faith, anointing with oil, the laying on of hands, and the first reception of the Eucharist, sometimes followed by a cup of milk and honey symbolizing entry into the promised land.

Infant baptism is first explicitly debated by Tertullian (*On Baptism* 18, c. 200), who advises delay; Origen (*Commentary on Romans* 5.9) calls it a tradition from the apostles; Cyprian's council (c. 253) rules that infants need not wait until the eighth day. In the fourth century many, including Constantine, Ambrose, and Augustine, postponed baptism to adulthood or deathbed because of the seriousness of post-baptismal sin. The mystagogical lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia explained the rites to the newly baptized only after the fact, reflecting a practice later called the *disciplina arcani*, the "discipline of the secret."

11.2 The Lord's Day and the Eucharist

Christians gathered on the first day of the week, "the Lord's Day" (*kyriakē hēmera*, Revelation 1:10; *Didache* 14), the day of the resurrection. Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (65–67) gives the first full description of Sunday worship, around 150:

> "On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things." (Justin, *First Apology* 67, ANF translation)

There followed common prayer, the kiss of peace, the bringing of bread and wine mixed with water, the president's thanksgiving "according to his ability," the people's "Amen," and distribution by deacons, who also carried portions to the absent. A collection was taken for orphans, widows, the sick, prisoners, and strangers. Justin insists that the food is not "common bread and common drink" but "the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh" (66). The

earliest Eucharistic prayers outside the New Testament appear in *Didache* 9–10. In the first generation the Eucharist was part of a full communal meal (the *agapē*, 1 Corinthians 11:17–34; Jude 12); by the second century the sacramental rite had generally been separated from the meal, which survived as a charitable supper. After Constantine, liturgy became public and ceremonial in great basilicas, and distinct families of rites developed: Roman, Alexandrian, Antiochene (West Syrian), East Syrian, Gallican, and Byzantine (which absorbed the liturgies attributed to Basil and Chrysostom).

11.3 Prayer and Fasting

The *Didache* (8) instructs Christians to pray the Lord's Prayer three times a day and to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, "not with the hypocrites" (meaning Jews, who fasted on Mondays and Thursdays), a revealing example of identity formed by deliberate difference within a shared framework. Tertullian and Cyprian speak of prayer at the third, sixth, and ninth hours, plus morning and evening, and at midnight. Christians prayed standing, with arms outstretched (the *orans* posture seen in catacomb art), facing east toward the rising sun as a symbol of Christ's return. Tertullian (*On the Crown* 3) describes the sign of the cross traced on the forehead "at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table."

11.4 The Christian Year

- **Easter (Pascha)** was the oldest annual feast, kept from at least the second century, with a preceding fast. Its date was disputed (Chapter 5.5). The fifty days after Easter, **Pentecost**, were a season of rejoicing in which kneeling and fasting were forbidden (Nicaea, canon 20).
- **Lent** developed in the fourth century as a forty-day period (*tessarakostē*) of preparation, first mentioned at Nicaea (canon 5) and described by Athanasius's Festal Letters and by Egeria.
- **Christmas** on 25 December is first attested in Rome in the *Chronograph of 354*, in a calendar compiled in 336. Two explanations are debated: the "history of religions" hypothesis that it Christianized the festival of *Sol Invictus* ("the unconquered sun"), promoted by Aurelian in 274; and the "calculation" hypothesis, associated with Louis Duchesne and developed by **Thomas Talley** (*The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 1986), that it was derived from a belief that Christ was conceived on the same date as his death (25 March). The East celebrated Christ's birth and baptism together on **Epiphany** (6 January) and adopted 25 December gradually; in a sermon of 386 Chrysostom said the feast had been known at Antioch for less than ten years.

- **Martyrs' anniversaries** were celebrated as their "birthdays" into heaven at their tombs from at least the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (18), which speaks of gathering "to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom."

11.5 Martyrs, Relics, and the Dead

Christians buried rather than cremated their dead, in expectation of bodily resurrection, and early on organized common cemeteries. They held commemorative meals (*refrigeria*) at graves, a custom inherited from Roman practice that Ambrose and Augustine later tried to restrict. Veneration of martyrs grew into a cult of saints. **Peter Brown** (*The Cult of the Saints*, 1981) showed how the presence of holy bodies reorganized the geography of late Roman cities, bringing the dead into the heart of the community. In 386 Ambrose discovered the bodies of Gervasius and Protasius in Milan and placed them beneath the altar of his new basilica; translations of relics and the building of martyr shrines (*martyria*) became common across the empire.

11.6 Ethics and Community

Early Christian moral teaching was distinctive in several respects. The *Didache* (2.2) forbids abortion and infanticide, and Christians were known for rescuing exposed infants. Sexual ethics emphasized marital fidelity for both sexes and honored lifelong celibacy. Christians were famous, even among critics, for mutual aid: the common fund described by Justin and Tertullian (*Apology* 39) supported widows, orphans, the sick, prisoners, shipwrecked sailors, and the burial of the poor; the church of Rome around 250 supported more than 1,500 widows and needy persons (Cornelius in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.43.11). Attitudes to military service and public office varied: Tertullian and the *Apostolic Tradition* discouraged them, yet Christian soldiers are attested from the late second century, like the centurion Gaianus at Megiddo.

11.7 Women in the Early Church

Women appear prominently in the earliest sources: Mary Magdalene as first witness to the resurrection; Phoebe, a deacon (*diakonos*) of the church at Cenchreae and Paul's patron (Romans 16:1–2); Prisca, a co-worker with her husband Aquila; Junia, "outstanding among the apostles" (Romans 16:7, NIV). Pliny tortured two *ministrae*. Perpetua's prison diary survives. Women hosted house churches and, as widows and virgins, formed recognized orders. The office of deaconess is described in the *Didascalia* and *Apostolic Constitutions* and regulated by Chalcedon (canon 15). At the same time, leadership by women was restricted in mainstream churches and became a point of polemic against groups like the Montanists, who honored the prophetesses Priscilla and Maximilla. Wealthy ascetic women such as Melania the Elder, Melania the

Younger, Paula, and Olympias were major patrons and scholars in the fourth and fifth centuries. **Elizabeth Clark** and **Kate Cooper** (*Band of Angels*, 2013) have reconstructed these roles.

11.8 Asceticism and Monasticism

Ascetic renunciation, celibacy, fasting, and voluntary poverty, was valued from the beginning, and some groups (the Encratites) required it of all. Organized monasticism emerged in Egypt around 270–320. **Antony** (c. 251–356) withdrew to the desert after hearing Matthew 19:21 read in church; Athanasius's *Life of Antony* (c. 357) made him the model hermit and spread the ideal throughout the empire. **Pachomius** (c. 292–348) founded the first communal (*cenobitic*) monasteries at Tabennisi in Upper Egypt from about 320, with a written rule. In Cappadocia, **Basil of Caesarea** integrated monasticism into church life with his *Asketikon*, emphasizing community, work, and service to the poor; his complex outside Caesarea (the *Basileias*) included a hospital. The sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers (*Apophthegmata Patrum*) preserve the spirituality of the Egyptian desert. In Syria, ascetics took extreme forms, culminating in **Simeon the Stylite** (c. 390–459), who lived on a pillar near Aleppo for more than thirty years. In the West, Martin of Tours (d. 397), John Cassian (*Institutes* and *Conferences*, c. 420s, at Marseilles), and the island monastery of Lérins carried the movement to Gaul. Benedict of Nursia, whose Rule shaped Western monasticism, belongs just after our period (c. 480–547).

11.9 Clergy and Church Order

By the third century, a threefold ministry of **bishop**, **presbyter**, and **deacon** was standard, along with minor orders (subdeacons, readers, acolytes, exorcists, doorkeepers). In 251 the Roman church had one bishop, 46 presbyters, 7 deacons, 7 subdeacons, 42 acolytes, and 52 exorcists, readers, and doorkeepers (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.43.11). Bishops were elected by the clergy and people with the consent of neighboring bishops, who performed the consecration. Clerical celibacy was encouraged in the West from the Council of Elvira (c. 306) and papal letters of the late fourth century, while the East allowed married priests. A public system of **penance** for serious sins (apostasy, murder, adultery) developed, with penitents excluded from communion for long periods and readmitted by the bishop, usually once in a lifetime.

11.10 Art, Architecture, and Pilgrimage

The earliest Christian art, from around 200, used symbols already familiar in Roman culture: the fish (*ichthys*, an acrostic for "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior"), the anchor, the dove, the shepherd carrying a sheep, and biblical scenes of deliverance (Jonah, Noah, Daniel, the three youths in the furnace). Explicit images of the crucifixion are rare before the fifth century; the wooden doors of Santa Sabina in Rome (c. 430) contain one of the earliest. After 313, Christians adopted the Roman **basilica**, a long hall with an apse, for worship. **Pilgrimage** to the holy

places, to the tombs of Peter and Paul, and to living holy men became a major religious and economic activity. Egeria's account, the Bordeaux Pilgrim (333), and Jerome's letters describe it.

In Plain Language

Early Christians were known for weekly Sunday worship with readings, preaching, and a shared sacred meal; for baptism after long preparation; for praying several times a day and fasting twice a week; for caring for the poor, widows, and the sick; for honoring martyrs at their tombs; and, from the late 200s, for a growing movement of monks and nuns. Christmas on December 25 is first recorded in Rome in 336.

Chapter 12. The Sects Known in Antiquity

Ancient writers, especially the heresiologists Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Epiphanius, and Theodoret (*Compendium of Heretical Fables*, c. 453), catalogued dozens of groups. Their descriptions are polemical and sometimes contradictory, and some "sects" may be little more than the followers of a single teacher. The following table summarizes the groups most frequently mentioned, in roughly chronological order of appearance. For the sake of clarity, the table uses the ancient names, many of which were applied by opponents rather than chosen by the groups themselves.

Table 12.1. Sects and Movements of the First Five Centuries

Group	Period	Region	Founders / leaders	Distinctive teaching	Main sources
Nazarenes	1st–5th c.	Syria, Transjordan	Jerusalem successors	Torah-observant; Jesus divine Messiah	Epiphanius, Jerome
Ebionites	1st–5th c.	Transjordan, Syria, Cyprus	Unknown (later 'Ebion' invented)	Torah; Jesus a chosen man; anti-Pauline	Irenaeus, Origen, Epiphanius
Elkesaites	c. 100–300+	Transjordan, Mesopotamia	Elchasai	New revelation book; repeated washings	Hippolytus, Epiphanius
Simonians	1st–3rd c.	Samaria, Rome	Simon Magus, Menander	Simon as divine power; Helen as Thought	Acts 8; Justin; Irenaeus
Cerinthians	c. 100	Asia Minor	Cerinthus	Christ descended on Jesus; lower creator	Irenaeus 1.26
Nicolaitans	late 1st c.	Asia Minor	Unknown	Laxity on idol food and sexuality	Revelation 2; Irenaeus
Docetists	c. 90–200	Syria, Asia	Various	Christ's body only apparent	1 John; Ignatius; Serapion
Basilideans	c. 120–250	Alexandria	Basilides, Isidore	Elaborate cosmology; 365 heavens	Irenaeus, Clement, Hippolytus
Carpocratians	2nd c.	Alexandria	Carpocrates, Epiphanes	Jesus a man who recalled the divine	Irenaeus, Clement
Sethians	2nd–4th c.	Egypt, Syria	Unknown	Yaldabaoth myth; heavenly Seth	Nag Hammadi; Irenaeus 1.29–30
Valentinians	c. 140–400	Rome, Alexandria, wide	Valentinus, Ptolemy, Heracleon	Pleroma of aeons; three human types	Gospel of Truth; Irenaeus
Marcionites	c. 144–450	Rome, Asia, Syria	Marcion	Two Gods; own canon; anti-Old Testament	Tertullian; Ephrem
Encratites	2nd–4th c.	Syria, Asia Minor	Tatian	Required celibacy, no meat or wine	Irenaeus, Epiphanius
Montanists ('New Prophecy')	c. 156–6th c.	Phrygia, Africa	Montanus, Priscilla, Maximilla	Ongoing prophecy of the Paraclete; rigor	Eusebius 5.16–19; Tertullian
Quartodecimans	2nd–5th c.	Asia Minor	Polycrates, Melito	Pascha on 14 Nisan	Eusebius 5.23–25
Monarchians (dynamic)	c. 190–270	Rome, Antioch	Theodotus, Paul of Samosata	Jesus a man empowered by God	Hippolytus; Eusebius 7.27–30
Modalists / Sabellians	c. 190–4th c.	Asia, Rome, Libya	Noetus, Praxeas, Sabellius	Father, Son, Spirit as modes	Tertullian, Hippolytus

Group	Period	Region	Founders / leaders	Distinctive teaching	Main sources
Novatianists	251–7th c.	Rome, Constantinople, wide	Novatian	No readmission of apostates	Cyprian; Socrates
Manichaeans	c. 240–6th c.+	Persia to Africa	Mani	Cosmic dualism of light and dark; Jesus as one of many prophets	Augustine; Coptic and Iranian texts
Melitians	c. 305–8th c.	Egypt	Melitius of Lycopolis	Rigorist schism over the lapsed	Athanasius; Epiphanius
Donatists	311–7th c.	North Africa	Donatus	Sacraments of traitor clergy invalid	Optatus; Augustine
Arians / Homoians	318–7th c.	Empire; Germanic peoples	Arius, Eusebius of Nicomedia, Ulfilas	Son a creature, unlike or merely 'like' the Father	Athanasius; Philostorgius
Anomoeans / Eunomians	c. 355–5th c.	Antioch, Constantinople	Aetius, Eunomius	Son unlike the Father in essence	Basil; Gregory of Nyssa
Pneumatomachians	c. 360–400	Asia Minor, Thrace	Macedonius, Eustathius of Sebaste	Holy Spirit not fully God	Basil, On the Holy Spirit
Apollinarians	c. 360–420	Syria, Constantinople	Apollinaris	Logos replaces Christ's human mind	Gregory Nazianzen; Gregory of Nyssa
Priscillianists	c. 370–6th c.	Spain, Gaul	Priscillian	Ascetic, esoteric reading of apocrypha	Sulpicius Severus; Würzburg tractates
Messalians	c. 360–5th c.	Syria, Asia Minor	Unknown	Constant prayer over sacraments	Ephesus 431; Theodoret
Pelagians	c. 400–5th c.	Rome, Africa, Palestine	Pelagius, Caelestius, Julian of Eclanum	Human freedom to avoid sin; no inherited guilt	Augustine; Carthage 418
Nestorians (Church of the East)	431 onward	Persia, Mesopotamia	Nestorius; Theodore (as teacher)	Two natures strongly distinguished; no Theotokos	Acts of Ephesus; Syriac synods
Miaphysites	451 onward	Egypt, Syria, Armenia	Dioscorus, Timothy Aelurus, Severus	One incarnate nature of God the Word	Severus; Zacharias Rhetor

A few notes on these groups are necessary. **Montanism**, the "New Prophecy," arose in Phrygia around 156–172 when Montanus and two prophetesses claimed that the Paraclete promised in John 14–16 spoke through them, demanding stricter fasting, refusal to flee persecution, and preparation for the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem at the Phrygian village of Pepuza. Its most famous convert was Tertullian. **Manichaeism**, founded by the Persian prophet **Mani** (216–274/277), was a distinct religion that incorporated Jesus as a prophet within a cosmic dualism of light and darkness; it is included here because Christian writers treated it as a heresy and because Augustine was a Manichaean "hearer" for nine years. **Pelagianism**, named for the British monk Pelagius, debated with Augustine about grace, free will, and original sin; it was condemned at Carthage (418) and Ephesus (431), and its moderate successors in Gaul ("Semi-Pelagians," a later term) were addressed at the Council of Orange in 529.

In Plain Language

Ancient writers named dozens of Christian groups. Some were Jewish-Christian (Nazarenes, Ebionites), some Gnostic (Valentinians, Sethians), some rigorist (Montanists, Novatianists, Donatists), and some were parties in the great debates about the Trinity and Christ (Arians, Apollinarians, Nestorians, Miaphysites). Most of what we know about them comes from their opponents.

Chapter 13. A Chronology of Ancient Christianity, c. 4 BCE – 500 CE

The following chronology gathers the events discussed in this study into a single sequence. Dates marked "c." are approximate or disputed.

Period I: Jesus and the Apostolic Generation (c. 4 BCE – 70 CE)

Date	Event
c. 6–4 BCE	Birth of Jesus, before the death of Herod the Great (4 BCE)
c. 28–29	Ministry of John the Baptist; baptism of Jesus
c. 30 or 33	Crucifixion of Jesus under Pontius Pilate; resurrection proclamation in Jerusalem
c. 33–35	Death of Stephen; dispersion of the Hellenists; conversion of Paul
c. 35–45	Mission to Gentiles at Antioch; believers first called 'Christians'
c. 41–44	Herod Agrippa I executes James son of Zebedee
c. 46–58	Paul's missionary journeys; authentic letters written (c. 50–58)
c. 48–49	Jerusalem meeting on Gentile admission (Galatians 2; Acts 15)
c. 49	Claudius expels Jews from Rome over 'Chrestus'
62	James the brother of Jesus stoned in Jerusalem (Josephus, Ant. 20.200)
64	Fire of Rome; Nero punishes Christians; traditional period of martyrdom of Peter and Paul
c. 65–75	Gospel of Mark written
66–73/74	First Jewish Revolt; Temple destroyed August 70; reported flight to Pella

Period II: Separation and Self-Definition (70–200)

Date	Event
c. 75–100	Gospels of Matthew, Luke, Acts, and John; Yavneh academy forms
c. 85–100	Birkat ha-minim traditionally composed at Yavneh
c. 95–96	Revelation; 1 Clement; Domitian's enforcement of the fiscus Judaicus; Nerva's reform
c. 50–120	Didache composed
c. 110	Ignatius of Antioch writes seven letters en route to martyrdom in Rome
c. 111–112	Pliny's correspondence with Trajan on Christian trials
115–117	Diaspora Revolt in Egypt, Cyrene, Cyprus, Mesopotamia
c. 116	Tacitus, Annals 15.44
c. 120–140	Basilides in Alexandria; Aristides' Apology
132–135/136	Bar Kokhba Revolt; Christians punished for refusing to join (Justin, 1 Apol. 31.6); Jerusalem refounded as Aelia Capitolina; Gentile bishops thereafter

Date	Event
c. 136–160	Valentinus teaching in Rome
c. 140–144	Marcion in Rome; excommunicated 144; first closed canon
c. 150–160	Justin's Apologies and Dialogue with Trypho
c. 155	Polycarp visits Anicetus of Rome; agree to differ on Easter
c. 155–160	Martyrdom of Polycarp at Smyrna
c. 156–172	Rise of Montanism in Phrygia
c. 165	Martyrdom of Justin in Rome
c. 170	Tatian's Diatessaron; Melito of Sardis, On Pascha
177	Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne
c. 180	Irenaeus, Against Heresies; Scillitan martyrs (180)
c. 170–200	Muratorian Fragment (traditional date)
c. 190	Victor of Rome's Easter controversy; Theodotus the Cobbler excommunicated
c. 200	𝔓46 and other early papyri; Alexamenos graffito

Period III: Growth and Persecution (200–312)

Date	Event
203	Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity at Carthage
c. 200–225	Tertullian's major works; 'trinitas' coined (Against Praxeas, c. 213)
c. 215–220	Sabellius in Rome; excommunicated by Callixtus
c. 220–250	Origen in Alexandria and Caesarea; On First Principles
c. 230	Megiddo prayer hall (excavators' date; others later)
c. 232–233	Christian building at Dura-Europos adapted for worship
c. 240	Mani begins preaching in Persia
249–251	Decian persecution; libelli
251	Novatianist schism in Rome
257–258	Valerian's persecution; martyrdom of Cyprian and Sixtus II
260	Gallienus restores church property; forty years of peace
264–268	Synods of Antioch condemn Paul of Samosata
c. 270	Antony withdraws to the desert
272	Aurelian rules on the church property at Antioch
c. 301–314	Armenia adopts Christianity under Tiridates III
303–311	Great Persecution under Diocletian and Galerius
c. 306	Council of Elvira (Spain)
311	Galerius' edict of toleration; Donatist schism begins

Period IV: The Imperial Church and the Trinitarian Settlement (312–381)

Date	Event
312	Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge (28 October)
313	'Edict of Milan' (Constantine and Licinius)
c. 318	Arius disputes with Bishop Alexander in Alexandria
c. 320	Pachomius founds cenobitic monasticism at Tabennisi
321	Sunday made a legal day of rest
325	Council of Nicaea: homoousios; Easter calculation; canons 6–7 on the sees
c. 325	Eusebius completes the Ecclesiastical History (HE 3.25 canon categories)
328–373	Athanasius bishop of Alexandria (five exiles)
330	Dedication of Constantinople (11 May)
c. 330–360	Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus copied
335	Dedication of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem
336	Earliest Roman record of 25 December as Christ's birth (Chronograph of 354)
337	Constantine baptized and dies
c. 341	Ulfilas consecrated bishop to the Goths
c. 350	Cyril of Jerusalem's Catechetical Lectures
359–360	Homoian creeds at Ariminum, Seleucia, Constantinople
361–363	Julian's pagan restoration; failed Temple rebuilding (363)
c. 363	Council of Laodicea
367	Athanasius' Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter: first list of exactly 27 NT books
c. 370–379	Basil of Caesarea; Cappadocian theology of one ousia, three hypostaseis
378	Battle of Adrianople; death of the homoian emperor Valens
380	Edict Cunctos populos establishes Nicene faith
381	Council of Constantinople: Nicene faith reaffirmed; Spirit's divinity; canon 3 on New Rome

Period V: Christological Division and the Western Transition (381–500)

Date	Event
c. 381–384	Egeria's pilgrimage to the Holy Land
382	Roman synod under Damasus; Jerome begins revising the Latin Bible
385	Execution of Priscillian at Trier
386–387	Chrysostom's sermons against Judaizing Christians in Antioch; Augustine's conversion and baptism

Date	Event
390	Ambrose imposes penance on Theodosius
391–392	Theodosian laws against pagan sacrifice; Serapeum destroyed
393, 397	Synod of Hippo and Third Council of Carthage list the 27 NT books
398–404	John Chrysostom bishop of Constantinople; exiled; dies 407
405	Innocent I's canon list; Vulgate substantially complete
410	Alaric's Goths sack Rome; Synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon organizes the Persian church
411	Conference of Carthage against the Donatists
415	Murder of Hypatia in Alexandria
418	Council of Carthage condemns Pelagianism
413–426	Augustine writes The City of God
c. 423	Simeon the Stylite ascends his pillar
428–431	Nestorius bishop of Constantinople
430	Death of Augustine during the Vandal siege of Hippo
431	Council of Ephesus: Theotokos affirmed; Nestorius deposed
433	Formula of Reunion between Cyril and John of Antioch
439	Vandals take Carthage
440–461	Leo I bishop of Rome
449	Second Council of Ephesus ('Robber Council'); Leo's Tome
451	Council of Chalcedon: one person in two natures; canon 28; Jerusalem a patriarchate
452, 455	Leo meets Attila and Gaiseric
476	Odoacer deposes Romulus Augustulus; end of the western emperors
482	Zeno's Henotikon
484	Acacian Schism begins (to 519); Synod of Beth Lapat in Persia
486	Synod of Acacius: Church of the East adopts two-nature Christology
489	School of the Persians at Edessa closed; scholars move to Nisibis
493	Theodoric the Ostrogoth (homoian) rules Italy
494	Gelasius I's letter on the 'two powers'
c. 496–508	Baptism of Clovis, king of the Franks, as a Nicene Catholic
c. 500	Severus and Philoxenus lead Miaphysite theology; Christianity divided into Chalcedonian, Miaphysite, and East Syrian communions

Chapter 14. Conclusion

The history traced here can be summarized as a sequence of five transformations. First, a **Jewish messianic movement** became a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles, as the conviction that Jesus had been raised led his followers to worship him alongside God and to offer membership in Israel's hope to the nations without requiring circumcision. Second, under the pressure of three Jewish revolts and the emergence of rabbinic Judaism, **the Jesus movement and the synagogue gradually separated**, with the Bar Kokhba war marking a decisive break in Judea, although contact between Jews and Christians persisted in cities like Antioch into the late fourth century. Jewish views of Christians in this period ranged from tolerance of pious Jewish believers like James, through suspicion of their political disloyalty during the wars, to liturgical exclusion of *minim* and literary counter-narratives about Jesus.

Third, in the second century, **a diverse field of Christian groups**, Jewish-Christian, Valentinian, Sethian, Marcionite, Montanist, and proto-orthodox, competed to define the movement. The proto-orthodox churches prevailed through three tools: the rule of faith, a core collection of apostolic writings, and the episcopal succession of the great churches. Fourth, after a century of sporadic and then systematic persecution, **the Roman state embraced Christianity** under Constantine and Theodosius, transforming bishops into public authorities, councils into instruments of imperial policy, and doctrinal disputes into questions of state. The **Trinitarian settlement** of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) and the defined **New Testament canon** of twenty-seven books (Athanasius, 367; Hippo and Carthage, 393–397) were products of this period, the canon emerging by consensus in use rather than by a single decree.

Fifth, the attempt to define the person of Christ in the fifth century **fractured the imperial Church** into three communions, Chalcedonian, Miaphysite, and the Church of the East, while the collapse of Roman power in the West left the bishop of Rome as the leading figure in Italy and increasingly the arbiter of Western Christianity, his claims grounded in Peter and contested by a Constantinople grounded in empire. By 500 the essential shape of later Christianity, its creeds, its scripture, its sacraments and calendar, its monastic and episcopal institutions, and its divisions, was in place.

The study of this history has itself changed profoundly in the last century. Discoveries at Nag Hammadi, Dura-Europos, Megiddo, and among the papyri, together with critical rereadings of the heresiologists and rabbinic texts, have replaced the simple Eusebian story of pure origins and later corruption with a more complex and more interesting picture. Scholars still disagree on many questions examined here: the date of the Muratorian Fragment, the original target of the birkat ha-minim, the historicity of the flight to Pella, the reality of Nero's persecution, and the

usefulness of the category "Gnosticism." What is not disputed is that the Christianity that emerged in 500 was the result of five centuries of argument, devotion, suffering, and creativity among communities that all claimed to be faithful to the same Jesus.

Glossary

Adoptionism. The view that Jesus was a man adopted as God's Son, usually at his baptism.

Aeon. In Gnostic systems, one of the divine emanations constituting the Pleroma.

Anathema. A formal curse or exclusion from the Church.

Antilegomena. Eusebius's term for disputed books (James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2–3 John).

Apologist. A second-century writer defending Christianity to outsiders.

Birkat ha-minim. The twelfth benediction of the Amidah, a prayer against heretics.

Catechumen. A person under instruction preparing for baptism.

Codex. A bound book with pages, preferred by early Christians over the scroll.

Demiurge. The craftsman god who made the material world; in Gnostic myth, a lower being.

Docetism. The view that Christ only seemed to have a body and to suffer.

Hypostasis. A concrete individual subsistence; after the Cappadocians, a divine person.

Homoousios. 'Of the same substance'; the Nicene term for the Son's relation to the Father.

Homoiousios. 'Of like substance'; a fourth-century mediating term.

Libellus. A certificate of sacrifice issued under Decius.

Logos. 'Word' or 'Reason'; the divine Word who became incarnate (John 1:1–14).

Minim. Rabbinic term for heretics or sectarians, sometimes including Christians.

Miaphysite. One who confesses 'one incarnate nature of God the Word' and rejects Chalcedon's 'in two natures.'

Modalism. The view that Father, Son, and Spirit are modes of one person; also Sabellianism.

Nomina sacra. Abbreviated sacred names in Christian manuscripts.

Ousia. Essence or substance; what God is.

Pleroma. 'Fullness'; the divine realm in Gnostic thought.

Regula fidei. The 'rule of faith,' a summary of core Christian belief.

Theotokos. 'God-bearer'; title for Mary affirmed at Ephesus (431).

Traditor. One who handed over scriptures during persecution.

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