

LESSONS FROM CHURCH HISTORY



Week 1: Apostles, Martyrs, and Early Church Fathers

WHY STUDY CHURCH HISTORY?

1. Because God is at work in history.
2. Because church history is our history.
3. Because sound doctrine has been handed down by faithful generations.
4. Because we can learn from the successes and failures of the past.
5. Because we have much to learn from those who walked with God.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE APOSTLES?



PETER

- Peter ministered in Rome (1 Pet 5:13)
- Nero starts fire in Rome in 64 AD
- Nero blames Christians, begins persecution. Tacitus' description:

“The confessed members of the sect were arrested...vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed, were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his Gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus, mixing with the crowd in the habit of a charioteer, or mounted on his [racing chariot]. Hence, in spite of a guilt which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man.”

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE APOSTLES?



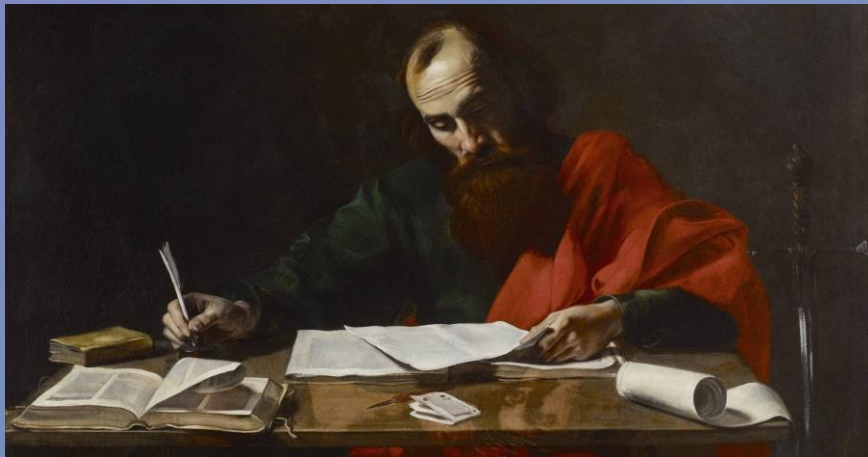
PETER



- Peter crucified by Nero in 65 AD
- Martyred in Nero's Circus
- In 160 AD Christians erected monument where Peter was martyred and buried.
- Constantine built Basilica on the site in the early 4th c.
- Renaissance Popes rebuilt St Peter's which remains to this day.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE APOSTLES?

PAUL



- After first imprisonment in Rome, he likely went to Spain around 63 AD
- Returned to Rome around 64 AD
- Wrote pastoral letters. 2 Timothy was his last (see 2 Tim. 4:6-8)
- Arrested by Nero likely for treason and was tried as Roman citizen. This crime was punishable by beheading
- Martyred on Ostian Road near Rome
- Constantine build church over tomb

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE APOSTLES?

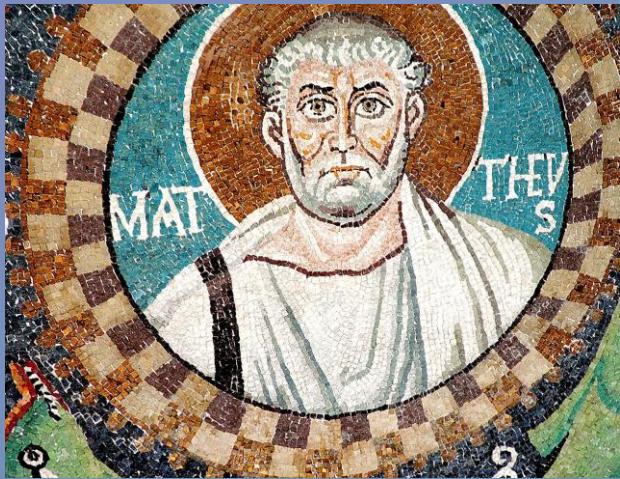
JOHN



- Pastored church in Ephesus
- Exiled to Patmos by Domitian in 96
- Wrote Revelation + 7 letters to churches in Asia Minor
- Returned to Ephesus by Nerva in 98
- Knew Papias (60-130); Polycarp (69-155)

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE APOSTLES?

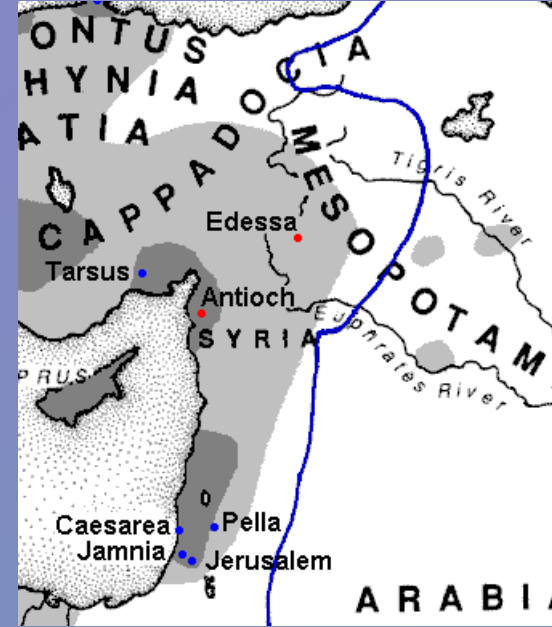
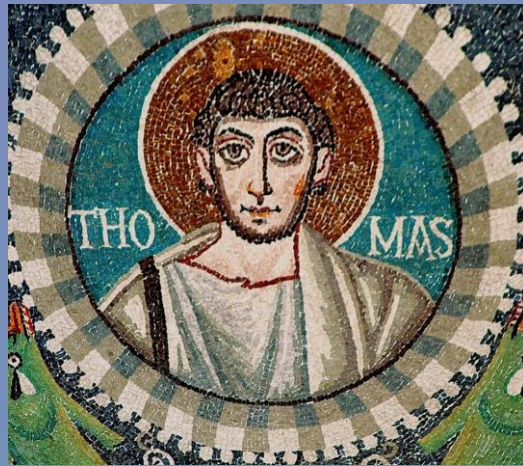
MATTHEW



- Wrote gospel in Hebrew for Jewish Christians. Then it was translated into Greek.
- Probably pastored the church in Antioch.
- Maybe traveled to Ethiopia.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE APOSTLES?

THOMAS



- Doubted resurrection (John 20:28)
- Established Assyrian Church (Edessa)
- Brought gospel to India via ancient Silk Road. Many churches in the region trace their origins to Thomas



WHAT HAPPENED TO THE APOSTLES?

JAMES



Inscription: "James,
the son of Joseph,
the brother of Jesus"

- Half brother of Jesus. Pastor of church at Jerusalem. Wrote letter of James
- Martyred by Sanhedrin in 62 AD
- Josephus writes that they:
"brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned."
- Ossuary discovered in Jerusalem in 2002 that many believe is authentic

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE APOSTLES?

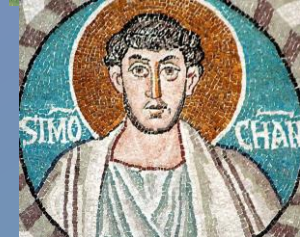
ANDREW



- Pastor in Patras, Greece, but brought gospel to Scythia, north of Black Sea
- Martyred in Patras after he refused the governor's orders to worship idols
- Beaten and then crucified. Continue to preach gospel from cross
- Cross possibly 'X' shaped & basis for St. Andrew's cross on Union Jack

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE APOSTLES?

OTHER APOSTLES



James, brother of John

- First apostle martyred in 44 AD (Acts 12:1-3). His guard possibly converted

Philip

- Martyred in Hierapolis. Empty tomb found under 4th c. church in 2011

Bartholomew (aka Nathanael) &

Thaddeus (aka Judas)

- Connected to Thomas' ministry in Persia and possibly as far as India

James, son of Alphaeus,

Simon the Zealot, & Matthias

- Nothing known of these Apostles after the NT era.

LESSONS FROM THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS



Map of Early Church Fathers

LESSONS FROM THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

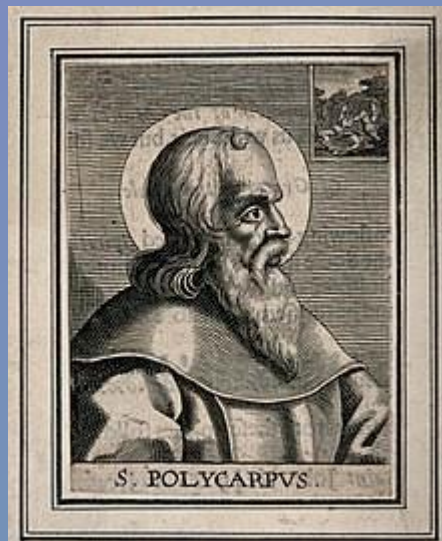
WHO ARE THE FATHERS?

As the Apostles passed from the scene, others arose to shepherd the church. These leaders are referred to as early church Fathers, generally during a period from AD 95 to the late 400s. They can be divided into four groups:

1. **Post-Apostolic Fathers (95-150).**
Edified, built up, strengthened the church.
2. **Apologists (140-200).**
Defended against attacks on Christianity.
3. **Polemicists (180-225).**
Defended attacks from within the church, against heresy.
4. **Scientific Theologians (225-460).**
Applied modes of thought to theological investigation.

LESSONS FROM THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

POLYCARP



Polycarp (69-155 AD) – Smyrna, Asia Minor (modern Turkey)

- He was a disciple of the Apostle John and was ordained by him as Bishop of Smyrna.
- Wrote the *Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians*, which was addressed to the early church in Philippi. In it Polycarp quoted from thirteen New Testament books. He wrote many other letters, but only this survived.
- Martyred for his faith in AD 155 or 156, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* was written by his church within a year after his death and is the first Christian account of martyrdom.
- A peer to Polycarp, Papias, was a bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, wrote *Interpretations and Sayings of the Lord* in about 125. This work is now lost, but parts survive in the writings of Irenaeus and Eusebius. From his writings we learned Mark received the information for his gospel letter from Peter. Papias also penned one of the earliest statements on a literal early millennial kingdom ruled by Christ. He was a “hearer of John” and some records indicate he transcribed the *Gospel of John* from John’s dictation.

LESSONS FROM THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

JUSTIN MARTYR

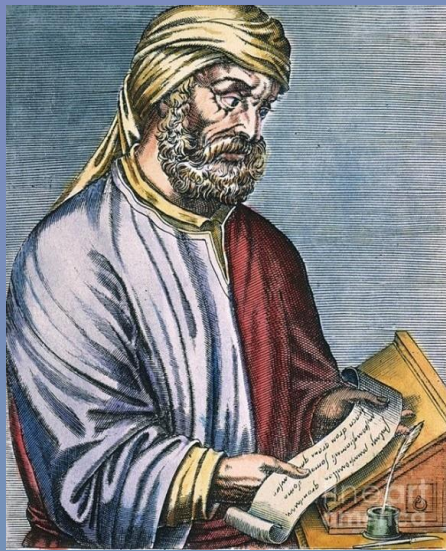


Justin Martyr (100-165 AD) – Born in Samaria, Palestine

- One of the best-known Apologists, he was a great literary defender of the faith.
- Greek by birth, his early educational studies in philosophy left him unfulfilled and disillusioned. In 132 in Ephesus, he was converted to Christ by an old man, possibly a Syrian Christian.
- His writings to Antonius Pius and Marcus Aurelius defended Christianity against accusations of atheism and immorality, also demonstrated Christians were loyal citizens.
- Justin was tried, along with six friends and fellow Christians, and beheaded around 165.

LESSONS FROM THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

TERTULLIAN

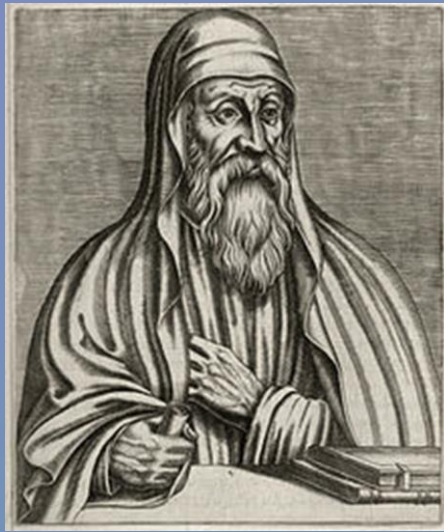


Tertullian (AD 155 – 220) – Carthage, North Africa

- He was likely a lawyer and converted to Christianity late in the second century. A scholar with an excellent education, he wrote a long list of apologetic and theological works in both Latin and Greek.
- In *Apologeticus* (c. 197), addressed to the Roman governor in Carthage, he refuted the common charges against Christians and showed persecution was foolish because it caused the faith to spread.
- Around 207 he became attracted to the error of Montanism (New Prophecy), but historians today debate to degree of his straying from orthodoxy. His writings influenced both Cyprian and Augustine.
- Tertullian is also credited with working to overthrow Gnosticism (personal special knowledge), holding the true church alone possessed the message of Christ and the correct interpretation of Scripture.

LESSONS FROM THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

ORIGEN



Origen (185-253 AD) – Alexandria, Egypt

- Born into a wealthy Christian family, his father was arrested and imprisoned when Origen was 16. His mother thwarted his attempt to join his father in martyrdom, leaving him to care for her and the 8 remaining children. Rome confiscated all of their property, leaving them impoverished.
- One of the most prolific writers in all ancient history, Origen produced thousands of works, from apologetics to practical commentaries across almost the entire Bible.
- His work *On First Principles* is the earliest systematic theology which has come down through the church.
- He established a Christian school in Caesarea in 231 after which he reached the peak of influence. Origen was not without controversy however...
- Origen endured 2 years of imprisonment and torture from 249 to 251, refusing to renounce his faith in Christ. When Decius, the Roman Emperor who ordered the persecution was killed in battle, Origen was released from prison. He died less than a year later at the age of 69.