**WEEK 2: Lessons from Early Church Fathers**

**Origen (185 – 253 AD)** – Alexandria, Egypt

* Born into a wealthy Christian family. Father was imprisoned and martyred.
* One of the most prolific writers in all ancient history.
* His work *On First Principles* is the earliest systematic theology.
* He established a Christian school in Caesarea in 231.
* Origen was not without controversy however…
* Origen was persecuted under Decius. He died at the age of 69.

**Constantine (272-337 AD)** – Roman Emperor

* Born to Constantius and Helena.  Came to power in 306.
* Won the battle of Milvian Bridge after a vision, “In this conquer.”
* Edict of Milan in 313 granted “full authority to follow whatever worship each man has desired.”
* Rebuilt churches. Called the Councils in Arles and Nicaea. Founded Constantinople.
* The church passed from persecution to privilege in an amazingly short time.
* The Chi Rho symbol is one of the earliest forms of the Christogram.
* He declared himself a Christian. Introduced tax-exempt status for churches, built basilicas, and legislated Sunday as a day of rest.

**Athanasius (298-373 AD)** – Bishop of Alexandria

* Discipled by Alexander. Bishop of Alexandria at age 30. Fought errors of Arianism.
* Note *Athanasius contra mundum* (‘against the world’). He called the Arians “Ariomaniacs.”
* Spent 17 of his 46 years as bishop in exile. Wrote *On the Incarnation of Christ*.
* Gregory of Nazianzus said he “meditated on every book of the OT and NT with a depth that no one else had applied to even one book.”

**Arianism**

* Arius (256-336) taught the Son was (1) a created being, (2) not eternal, and (3) a sub-deity.
* Doctrine of Trinity not well-articulated prior to this crisis.
* Constantine called Council of Nicaea in 325. 318 bishops attended.
* Key statement: Christ is “of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, consubstantial [“of the same substance’] (*homoousios*) with the Father.”
* Nicaea did not end the controversy. Athanasius’ Arian enemies issued false charges.
* Unofficial councils were set up to continue the debate.
* Others rose to defend Nicene orthodoxy: Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea and, Gregory of Nyssa.
* First Council of Constantinople (381) saw the triumph of Nicene orthodoxy.

**Jerome (342-420 AD)** – Scholar, Bethlehem

* Baptized at age 19, educated in Rome. One of the greatest scholars of his age.
* In 382, began a new Latin translation of Bible known as the *Vulgate*.
* "Only the original text is free from error" was his guiding philosophy.
* Wrote commentaries on almost every book of the Bible, fought theological battles, and served as a spiritual counselor.