

STUDY PAK 7

THE HEROIC AGE THE FIRST THREE HUNDRED YEARS OF CHURCH HISTORY

“Blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

~~Tertullian~~

I. THE PERSECUTIONS

The first 300 years of church history is often called the _____. Persecution was more common than peace.

II. THE JEWISH PERSECUTION

The leaders of the Jewish Sanhedrin began the first persecution of Christians. They killed Stephen. Herod killed James in order to please the Jewish leaders; then, they imprisoned Peter and John and harassed the entire church. Under a leader named Saul of Tarsus, they viciously persecuted the entire church in Jerusalem, beating, imprisoning, and killing the members of the first church. After Saul was converted, he became the great missionary leader, Paul. All through his ministry he was persecuted by the Jewish leaders.

III. SPORADIC LOCAL PERSECUTIONS

Local persecutions arose which led to the killings of many prominent leaders like Ignatius, Polycarp and Justin Martyr.

IV. THE PERSECUTION OF NERO

The crazed Emperor Nero (64 A.D.) blamed the Christians for burning Rome. Actually he had the city set on fire _____. He ordered all the Christians in Rome to be killed. According to the earliest records of church history, both Paul and Peter were killed during this persecution.

V. THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

In A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed. This included many Christian Jews.

VI. EMPIRE WIDE PERSECUTIONS

Some of the most significant persecutions are listed below. In all of these empire wide persecutions _____ were killed, _____ were burnt and _____ that the Romans could seize was burnt.

A. Marcus Aurelius 161-180 A.D.

The property of Christians was to be given to their accusers. Convicted Christians were fed to the lions in the Coliseum.

B. Septimus Severus 200-211 A.D.

The great apologist Irenaeus was killed. The word severe came into the Latin from this persecution.

C. Decius 249-251 A.D.

The word decimate came into the Latin language from this persecution.

D. Valerian 258-263 A.D.

E. Diocletian 303-311 A.D.

This was the most severe persecution of all. This was the era of the catacombs.

Christians moved into 500 miles of tunnels under the city of Rome. Origen and

Cyprian were killed during this persecution. Diocletian claimed credit for _____.

VII. REASONS FOR PERSECUTION

Christians persecuted for four primary reasons:

A. Political

Christians were considered “religio illicita”. They refused to accept licensure

from the state because they felt that such licensure conflicted with _____.

B. Religious

1. _____ they were considered atheists. Polycarp was fed to the lions with a cry of “away with the atheists”.
2. Those who misunderstood the Lord’s Supper accused the Christians of being cannibals.
3. Christians were often falsely accused of preaching ritual immorality.

C. Social

Christian teaching about _____ threatened the whole social structure of the Roman Empire.

D. Economic

In times of peace, the Christian work ethic made believers prosperous, II Thessalonians 3:10. Non-believers coveted the production of their labor.

VIII. EARLY CHURCH LEADERSHIP

A. The Apostolic Fathers

The Apostolic Fathers were the first generation of church preachers. They knew the apostles and were the extension of their ministry. Even with their first hand familiarity, they differed greatly among themselves about doctrine and polity. These included Clement of Rome, Hermas of Rome, Polycarp of Smyrna and Ignatius of Antioch.

B. The Church Fathers

This term refers to the second, third and fourth generation of church leaders. Serious heresy developed among some of them and it has been suggested that they should be known as the “church babes”. These included relatively sound preachers like Tertullian and Irenaeus and heretics like Origen and Clement of Alexandria.

C. The Apologists

The apologists wrote and spoke _____ to a heathen and pagan world. They included Justin the Martyr and Athenagoras.

IX. THE GNOSTICS

The Gnostics tried to _____.

They used Christian terminology but gave the terms pagan meanings. They tried to profit from the growing popularity of Christianity without changing any of their ideas or practices.