

HISTORY of CHRISTIANITY

Part I - Early Church (A.D. 33 - 476)

Significant Events and Landmarks of the Era

		64 - 303	Severe persecution Roman Emperors.
	B.C.	272:	Emperor Constantine is born.
427:	Plato is born.	Oct. 28, 312:	Battle of Milvian Bridge near Rome.
366:	Plato dies in Athens.	312:	Constantine rules as Emperor of the West.
384:	Aristotle is born.	313:	Eusebius is made bishop of Caesarea in Palestine.
356:	Alexander the Great is born.		Constantine gives Christians freedom to worship Jesus Christ.
335 - 323:	Conquests of Alexander the Great.	321:	Sunday is declared as official holy day by Constantine.
322:	Aristotle dies.	325:	Council of Nicea.
44:	Julius Caesar is assassinated.	330:	Constantine moves capital from Rome to ancient Byzantium, which becomes Constantinople.
31:	Battle of Actium - The Roman Empire is born.	337:	Constantine dies.
	A.D.	339:	Eusebius dies.
26:	Pontius Pilate comes to power.	354:	Augustine is born in Tagaste.
35:	Pauls makes his life-changing trip to Damascus.	380:	Christianity becomes the state religion.
46 - 48:	Paul's first missionary journey.	430:	Augustine dies.
49 - 52:	Paul's second missionary journey.		
53 - 57:	Paul's third missionary journey.		
60 - 61:	Paul is imprisoned in Rome.		

Who's Who of the Era

Alexander The Great - The son of Philip of Macedon, Alexander (356-323 B.C.) was born at Pella, Macedonia. As a teenager, he studied under Aristotle. At 20, already an able soldier and organizer, Alexander became king of Macedonia. To receive recognition as the supreme ruler of the world, he required his provinces to worship him as a god. Before his death on June 13, 323 B.C., Alexander had militarily conquered the civilized world, bringing to it Greek ideas and culture.

Emperor Constantine - Constantine I, the Great, lived A.D. 272?- 337. His full name was Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus. He was proclaimed emperor when his father, one of the emperors of the West Roman Empire, died in A.D. 306. An able soldier at the battle of Milvian Bridge in 312, Constantine saw a vision of the Christian cross before the battle. Written on the cross was, "By this sign thou shalt conquer." Constantine chose the cross as his battle symbol. From 312 to 324, Constantine ruled as Emperor of the West. In 324, after he defeated Licinius, Emperor of the East, he became sole ruler of the Roman Empire. In the following year, he convened the famous Council of Nicea. In 330, he moved his capital from Rome to ancient Byzantium, which became Constantinople. When Constantine died, his empire was divided among his three sons, Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans. Constantine described himself as "defender of the church." Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea, wrote a glowing biography of Constantine, describing him as "the thirteenth apostle."

St. Augustine - Augustine stood with one foot in the closing era of Latin Christianity and the other in the beginning era of Reformation. Born in Tagaste in 354, Augustine's spiritual search lead him to Manicheism, Epicureanism, and Neoplatonism. His turning point came as he sat in a garden in Milan and read Romans 13:13-14: "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (NIV). Augustine returned to Tagaste in 388 after his mother, Monica, died. By 391, he was a priest at Hippo, and by 396, he was the Catholic bishop. He wrote the Confessions early in his life, and The City of God as a mature man. He died in 430, as the Arian Vandal invaders were besieging Hippo. His influence on the future church reformers would be great.

Historical Creeds and Confessions

The Apostles Creed

A creed is a concise statement of Christian faith and belief. The word 'creed' derives from the Latin word *credo*, 'I believe', which is the first word of many Latin creeds.

Most true creeds have three articles: God, the Father; Jesus Christ, the Lord; and the Holy Spirit (with other doctrines often added to the third article). Creeds originated in the administration of baptism. The oldest form of creeds was probably interrogatory: the one administering baptism asked for a confession of faith. The Apostles' Creed is one of the many variant forms of the Roman baptismal creed, often called the Old Roman Creed (which was probably first formulated in Greek).

The oldest record of the Old Roman Creed is Hippolytus's *Apostolic Tradition* 21 (c. 220), which has a three-part interrogatory creed to be used at baptism. It reads:

Do you believe in God the Father almighty?

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, died, was raised up alive on the third day from among the dead, went up to heaven, and is seated at the Father's right hand?

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit in the holy Church?

The name 'Apostles' Creed' derives from the legend, reported by Rufinus of Aquileia, that the twelve apostles composed the creed before they set out on their missions of evangelization. (Later forms of the legend have each apostle contributing one article.) The Apostles' Creed reads:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty; thence he will come to judge the living and the dead;

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh, and eternal life. Amen.

Hart, T. A. (2000). *The dictionary of historical theology* (21–22). Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster Press.

Reflection and Review Questions

1. The history of Christianity is inextricably woven with the person and work of _____.
(Gal 4:4)
2. What is the Christian faith based on? (John 1:14.) What exactly is Christianity?
3. What are the three civilisations that influenced the early development of Christianity? and how?
4. What was decided at the Council of Nicea in 325? Did the Council of Nicea stop the controversy over Trinity?

The Martyrdom of Perpetua

From *The Martyrdom of Perpetua*. Perpetua, a new convert, was martyred March 7, 203 in the arena at Carthage, Africa. The previous year Emperor Septimius Severus had outlawed conversion to Christianity. Some believe that Tertullian was the editor of her story.

"While," says she, "we were still with the persecutors, and my father, for the sake of his affliction for me, was persisting in seeking to turn me away, and to cast me down from the faith, — 'Father,' said I, 'do you see, let us say, this vessel lying here to be a little pitcher, or something else?' And he said, 'I see it to be so.' And I replied to him, 'Can it be called by any other name than what it is?' And he said, 'No.' 'Neither can I call myself anything else than what I am, a Christian.' Then my father, provoked at this saying, threw himself upon me, as if he would tear my eyes out. But he only distressed me, and went away overcome by the devil's arguments. Then, in a few days after I had been without my father, I gave thanks to the Lord; and his absence became a source of consolation to me. In that same interval of a few days we were baptized, and to me the Spirit prescribed that in the water of baptism nothing else was to be sought for than bodily endurance. After a few days we are taken into the dungeon, and I was very much afraid, because I had never felt such darkness. O terrible day! O the fierce heat of the shock of the soldiery, because of the crowds! I was very unusually distressed by my anxiety for my infant. There were present there Tertius and Pomponius,



Figure 1 - Artist's representation of the martyrdom of Perpetua and her servant girl Felicitas.

the blessed deacons who ministered to us, and had arranged by means of a gratuity that we might be refreshed by being sent out for a few hours into a pleasanter part of the prison. Then going out of the dungeon, all attended to their own wants. I suckled my child, which was now enfeebled with hunger. In my anxiety for it, I addressed my mother and comforted my brother, and commended to their care my son. I was languishing because I had seen them languishing on my account. Such solicitude I suffered for many days, and I obtained leave for my infant to remain in the dungeon with me; and forthwith I grew strong and was relieved from distress and anxiety about my infant; and the dungeon became to me as it were a palace, so that I preferred being there to being elsewhere."