

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY  
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## ***“THY KINGDOM COME: THE WITNESS OF CHURCH HISTORY”***

### ***“Beginnings” part 2***

## **II. The Coming of Christ and the Apostolic Age (5 BC–70 AD) cont.**

**A. The Fullness of Time** – Why did Jesus come when He did? **Galatians 4:4-5**: *“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”* **Heb. 1:8**: *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...”*

### **B. The Jewish Context (see last study)**

**6. The Septuagint (literally “70” in Greek)** – title given to the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) that were translated by 70 scribes into the Greek language from c. 240-175 BC in Alexandria, Egypt. This enabled Jews living throughout the Mediterranean world to have the Holy Scriptures in a language that was fast becoming the language of the Roman world. It enabled the spread of the gospel both to Jews dispersed throughout the empire as well as to Gentiles. Recall that our Old Testament was the Bible of the early church. The apostles and writers of the New Testament quote from the Septuagint more than any other version of the Old Testament. Recall that in Jerusalem and the Holy Land Aramaic and Hebrew were the primary local languages. While the various people groups retained their local languages in the various provinces, Greek became the primary language of commerce and official communication. Thus, the conquests of Alexander the Great and the spread of Greek culture prepared the way for the spread of the gospel just over three centuries later! Note: The Septuagint contained additional books that were known as the Apocrypha. However, these were never accepted by the Jews as having the same authority as their older Hebrew Scriptures.

### **C. The Roman Context (see last study)**

**3. Caesar Augustus** – Rome’s first and probably greatest emperor. After defeating archrival Mark Antony at the battle of Actium in 31 BC during the civil wars of the Republic, Octavian (Julius Caesar’s grandnephew) achieved sole power and was named Augustus by the Roman Senate in 27 BC. Augustus became Emperor (Caesar). His rule led to a long era of peace and prosperity and is often called the *Pax Augusta*. During his forty-year reign (27 BC – 14 AD) he reshaped the form of Roman government that would endure for the next three centuries. He added Egypt as well as all unconquered lands up to the Rhine-Danube frontier and used those river system as a natural boundary. He cooperated with the Senate and conducted extensive rebuilding of Rome and the cities in the Empire which led credence to his claim, *“I found Rome brick and left her marble.”* Regarding his religious policy, he felt that the public’s neglect of the Greco-Roman gods was demoralizing Roman society so he tried to stimulate religious revival by restoring and erecting temples and inspiring moral renewal in society. How ironic that the one who would really inspire true lasting moral revival and change (Jesus) was only a teenager when Augustus died in the month named after him – August 19, 14 AD!

**Note the Edict of Augustus on Jewish Rights, 1 B.C.:** *Caesar Augustus, pontifex maximus, holding the tribunician power, proclaims: Since the nation of the Jews and Hyrcanus, their high priest, have been found grateful to the people of the Romans, not only in the present but also in the past, and particularly in the time of my father, Caesar, imperator, it seems good to me and to my advisory council, according to the oaths, by the*

*will of the people of the Romans, that the Jews shall use their own customs in accordance with their ancestral law, just as they used to use them in the time of Hyrcanus, the high priest of their highest god; and that their sacred offerings shall be inviolable and shall be sent to Jerusalem and shall be paid to the financial officials of Jerusalem; and that they shall not give sureties for appearance in court on the Sabbath or on the day of preparation before it after the ninth hour. But if anyone is detected stealing their sacred books or their sacred monies, either from a synagogue or from a mens' apartment, he shall be considered sacrilegious and his property shall be brought into the public treasury of the Romans.* (Source: Tacitus, The Histories of Tacitus)

**D. Three years that changed history** – (Christ’s Crucifixion took place either in 30 AD or 33 AD since **John 19:13** says that His death occurred on the “day of Preparation,” the day before the Sabbath (**Mk. 15:42**). Since Passover was always on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the Jewish month of Nissan, the only time the Passover fell on a Friday was either in 30 or 33 AD. Most scholars believe based on how the events are chronicled in the four Gospels that Jesus’ official ministry was around three years in length and that Jesus was crucified on April 3, 33 AD.

**1. An itinerant teaching ministry** – Jesus a teacher from Galilee who transformed the religious landscape of the holy land creating a large following which became a worldwide movement. Luke tells us that Jesus began his ministry around the age of 30 (Lk. 3:23). After being baptized by John the Baptist, He fasting for 40 days in the wilderness, was tempted by the devil, and then began His ministry with the words, **“Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.”** His message of the Kingdom of God, what it is and what it entails, His miracles of healing and deliverance, His attestation as the prophesied Messiah, as well as His unique relationship with God as His Father and His identifying with the God of the Old Testament, set Jesus apart from everyone else at that time and for all of history. He didn’t write any books and left no structured organization. He died in apparent failure of his goal. Rejected by His own people, the Jews, and executed by the power of Rome, it seemed all was lost. And yet, what emerged was a movement that captured one of the major centers of civilization, and has continued and grown until the present day. What happened to change the outlook and lives of many of his disciples? The only explanation is the resurrection of their Lord. The same men and women who forsook Jesus and fled now proclaimed him alive. And they even put their lives on the line for such a testimony. In addition, during the Jewish Feast of Pentecost the disciples were empowered supernaturally with the Holy Spirit, spoke in other tongues and the tens of thousands of Jews who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast heard the gospel and came to Christ. The Church of Jesus Christ had been born!

**2. The words of Flavius Josephus (37 - 101 AD)** – was a Jewish priest at the time of the Jewish Revolt of A.D. 66. He was captured by the Romans, imprisoned, set free, and then retired to Rome where he wrote a history of the Jewish Revolt called *the Jewish War*. Later he wrote *Antiquities* as a history of the Jews. His works were revered in Rome and including the main library of the great city. A statue was even erected in his honor! It is in *Antiquities* that he mentions Christ. It is referred to as the “Testimonium Flavianum” (Ant. 18.63-64; see below).

*“About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man [if indeed one ought to call him a man.] For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. [He was the Christ.] When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. [On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him.] And the tribe of the Christians, so-called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.”*

An Arabic version (10th Century) of the “Testimonium” (translated into English) is in basic agreement with the existing Josephus account and does not contain what many scholars believe are later Christian interpolations:

*“At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.”*

**The significance of Josephus’ history is that it is a nonbiblical account of the historicity of Jesus’ existence, the presence of many followers, and their belief that He did in fact rise from the dead.**

**3. The implications of Jesus’ ministry** – While Jesus’ ministry fulfilled God’s prophetic word, He ultimately revealed the nature and will of God (the Kingdom), and taught and empowered followers to be devoted to the one true God through His (Christ’s) ministry. He revealed the way of salvation (abundant and eternal life) and made His followers a “kingdom people” – the Body of Christ. His death and resurrection became the foundation of the central message of this new movement called the Church. **“Repent and believe the Gospel”** (the good news of Jesus) became the main requirement for entrance into this new body of believers. With the advent of Pentecost and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, the first Jewish believers could now bear witness of God’s saving work in Christ. This was done first under the leadership of the Apostles Peter and James, James the Lord’s brother, and then under the leadership of the Apostle Paul as the gospel message was expanded to Gentiles. Of course, the followers of Jesus did not believe they were forming a new religion. They simply were being better Jews, following the promised Messiah in fulfillment of the promises God made to Israel! Recall again the covenants -study #1.

#### **E. The Christian Movement – the Apostolic Age (33-70 AD)**

**1. Caesar Tiberius (15-37 AD)** – it was during his reign that Jesus would minister, be crucified, and be risen from the dead. He appointed Pontius Pilate in 26 AD as prefect/procurator (Roman governor) of the province of Judea. Pilate would hold that position until 36 AD. The archaeological discovery of the “Pilate Stone” where the ancient city Caesarea Maritima (Pilate’s headquarters) is located on the coast of Israel confirms the above details of his rule. 4th century church historian Eusebius mentions that Tertullian (distinguished expert on Roman Law) in his *Defense 5* (c. 200 AD) wrote this about Tiberias and the Roman Senate upon receiving a report by Pilate of the death of Christ and that belief in his resurrection of Jesus was spreading:

*“To say a word about the origin of laws of the kind to which we now refer, there was an old decree that no god should be consecrated by the emperor till first approved by the senate. Marcus Aemilius had experience of this in reference to his god Alburnus. And this, too, makes for our case, that among you divinity is allotted at the judgment of human beings. Unless gods give satisfaction to men, there will be no deification for them: the god will have to propitiate the man. Tiberius accordingly, in whose days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligence from Palestine of events which had clearly shown the truth of Christ’s divinity, brought the matter before the senate, with his own decision in favour of Christ. The senate, because it had not given the approval itself, rejected his proposal. Caesar held to his opinion, threatening wrath against all accusers of the Christians. Consult your histories; you will there find that Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect, making profess then especially at Rome.”*

Eusebius writes that because Tiberias was favorably disposed to Christianity, it allowed for the rapid expansion of the gospel and growth of the church.

**2. The Acts of the Apostles** – by Luke a convert of the Apostle Paul and author of the Gospel called by his name. Luke, the physician, provides us with a good overview and history of the early Church in the book of Acts. The Apostle Paul in **Gal. 2:9** identifies Peter, James *the Lord's brother*, and John as the pillars of the church. The Apostle James was murdered by King Herod Agrippa 1 (37-44 AD). Herod wanted to endear himself to the Jews and had Peter arrested as well. However, he died soon afterward by disease. Luke tells us in **Acts 12:20-23** that it was an angel of the Lord who struck Herod. Why? *“Because he did not give glory to God.”* According to ancient Jewish historian Josephus, Herod endured terrible pain for five days before he died.

### a. Peter and the early church

#### 1) Peter's preaching

a) first sermon at Pentecost over 3000 saved. The Church had been born! The new Church devoted itself to four main functions – **Acts 2:41-47**: *“So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. 42They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

*43Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

b) note that at Pentecost there were Jews from all over the Empire present in Jerusalem **Acts 2:5-13**: *“Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. 7They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8“And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? 9“Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”*

**2) Peter's revelation** – God showed Peter in a dream that Gentiles should not be excluded from the promises given to Israel and that they did not have to follow the Jewish dietary, ceremonial, or sacrificial laws to be children of Abraham (true believers) (**Acts 10:9-16**). Conversion of Cornelius (a God fearer) the Roman centurion and his household follows in rest of **Acts 10**.

#### 3) Peter's imprisonment **Acts 12:3-19**

**4) Peter's epistles** – the authenticity of Peter's first letter contained in the New Testament was never disputed by the early Church. His second letter however, was not universally accepted as authentic until later in the second century.

**5) Peter's ministry in Rome** – according to Eusebius, while in Rome the Apostle Peter was encouraged to have the teachings and miracles of Jesus put in writing. John Mark, a convert and close associate of Peter was given the task of writing the Gospel bearing his name - Mark. It is believed that Mark also started and oversaw the church in Alexandria, Egypt.

**b. Stephen and the deacons**

**1) seven Hellenist deacons chosen - Acts 6:1-7:** *“Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3“Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4“But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” 5The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. 7The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”* Two important points to note: 1) all the new deacons are Hellenistic Jews with Greek names and 2) Jewish priests were even coming to the faith!

**2) Stephen martyred** – after Stephen had performed great miracles and was able to refute many of the Jewish leadership’s objections with great wisdom and the Holy Spirit, they conspired to kill him. **Acts 7:54-60** tells us: *“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. 55But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” 57But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. 58When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” 60Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” Having said this, he fell asleep.”* Note who was present at Stephen’s execution – **Acts 8:1-3:** Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. *And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. 3But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.*

**c. Philip’s witness to non-Jews - the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:4-40)** – the significance of Philip’s ministry is twofold. First, he is a deacon not an apostle and yet after the church is established in Samaria, authority is yielded to the apostles. It affirms both the final authority of the apostles as well as foreshadowing the authority and ministry of bishops. Second, the Ethiopian eunuch represents how the gospel first came to black Africans. The Greek word that is translated “Ethiopian” literally means dark skinned. It is not a reference to the modern-day nation of Ethiopia. The eunuch was most likely Nubian from the region just south of Egypt. He is the first Gentile mentioned in Acts to receive the gospel and is a “God-fearer” – Gentiles who followed the Jewish faith but were not circumcised or followers of the entire Mosaic Law.

**d. Paul and his ministry**

**1) the conversion of Saul/Paul (Acts 9:1-31)** – Saul was a leading Pharisee, student of the Gamaliel school, and persecutor of early Jewish believers until the Lord appeared to him in a vision and called on him to follow. The Lord had Saul change his name to Paul to highlight his conversion and his calling to the Gentiles (non-Jews). Paul had three important characteristics that would make his work effective: he was 1) a Jew well-steeped in Jewish religion and tradition

2) a Roman citizen 3) familiar with the Greek language and culture. Thus, Paul was in a perfect position to be able to take the gospel throughout the empire.

**2) Paul's missionary journeys – three main journeys mentioned in Acts**

**a. first** (Acts 13:1-14:28) - visited island of Cyprus & main cities in province of Galatia.

**b. second** (Acts 15:36-18:22) – travelled from congregations he had already established through western Asia Minor to Troas. He sailed to Macedonia and began congregations in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. He then went to Athens and finally Corinth. He returned to Antioch, Syria.

**c. third** (Acts 18:23-20:38) – went and founded a church in Ephesus where he spent two years. He returned to Jerusalem where he was arrested by Jewish authorities.

**3) Paul's arrests and trials** - He spent two years under house arrest in Caesarea of Judaea before exercising his right as a Roman citizen and appealing his case to the emperor.

**a. before Felix** – procurator during the reign of Nero – (Acts 24:1-27) – noteworthy historical point: v.5 *“For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”* The first Christians were considered to be a Jewish sect who followed Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was a common name and it is why Christ is also referred to as “Jesus of Nazareth”

**b. appeals to Caesar** (Acts 25:1-12) vv. 9-12: *But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?” 10But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know. 11“If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.” 12Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, “You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go.”*

**c. before Festus** (who succeeded Felix in 59 or 60 AD) **and King Agrippa II**– (Acts 25:13- 26:32)

**d. witnesses to Agrippa II** (Acts 25:23-26:32)

**e. witness in Rome** (Acts 27:1-28:31) - note how Luke ends his narrative in **28:30-31**: *“And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, 31preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.”* It is believed that Paul eventually was brought before Nero but found guilty and executed by the sword. Why Luke does not include such details is not known except that maybe he finished His Gospel and the book of Acts before Paul's death in 66 or 67 AD. Note that Luke was an eyewitness of Paul's ministry and a companion of Paul's (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24).

**e. leadership and death of James the Lord's brother**

**1) Jerusalem Council meeting – Acts 15:1-29** – when certain Jews were requiring that Gentiles be circumcised the Church gathered a council of Apostles and Elders to address the issue. This served as a model to deal with future disagreements and promote unity within the Church. We will see how many Church Councils were convened later in Church history to deal with the challenges of heresy and differences of opinion. After the Apostle Peter speaking of Gentiles affirms in v. 11, *“But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”* And James the brother of Jesus says in vv. 19-20, *“Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, 20but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and*

from blood.” The apostles and elders agreed and sent a letter to the churches in Antioch and beyond with the above points.

**2) Josephus writes about James death in his book Antiquities:** *“And now [Claudius] Cæsar, upon hearing of the death of Festus, sent Albinus into Judæa as procurator. But the king deprived Joseph of the high-priesthood, and bestowed the succession to that dignity on the son of Ananus, who was also himself called Ananus.... But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high-priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed: when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought them the brother of Jesus who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others [or some of his companions]. And when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the King [Agrippa] desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified; nay, some of them went also to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a sanhedrim without his consent. Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on which account King Agrippa took the high-priesthood from him when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus the son of Damneus high priest.”*

### 3. Persecution, heresy, and martyrdom

**a. Jewish opposition and persecution** – until the fire in Rome (see below) most persecution came from Jews who opposed the new sect of what would soon be called Christians. They perceived these “false brethren” to be a threat not only to the Jewish faith but would place Jews under “the wrath of God.” and Peter and the others were often harassed. James, the brother of John, and in the inner circle of Jesus’ apostles was murdered by King Herod Agrippa I.

**b. Jewish and Greek heresies** – just as Jesus warned that there would be false prophets and teaches, the early church had to deal with their fair share.

**1. Judaizers** – Jewish believers who believed Gentiles must become Jewish first (circumcised and follow the dietary laws and customs) before they can be saved. Paul condemns such teaching in his epistle to the **Galatians**. See **Gal. 1-2** for history of Paul and why the Judaizers are presenting a false gospel.

**2. Gnostics** – various groups who claimed “secret knowledge” from Jesus and who believed that Jesus never really died on the cross. We see this type of belief system refuted by the Apostle John in **1 John 4:1-3**: *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.”*

#### c. Nero’s persecution of Christians (64-6? AD)

**1. fire in Rome** – a great fire broke out in the capital city of Rome in July of 64 AD and lasted six days.. Ten of the fourteen sections of the city burned, three in their entirety and seven severely. Christians and Jews mainly lived in sections that had not burned. While there is debate on whether Nero started the fire so he could rebuild parts of the city, eventually public sentiment began to turn against Nero and many thought he was responsible. It’s why we today have the saying from Cassio Dio, Roman senator and historian of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, *“Nero fiddles while Rome burns.”* Nero

decided to use the “newest” minority as a “scapegoat.” Public sentiment already had a negative view of Christians as “atheists” and neighbors who did things in secret. Accusations of cannibalism, incest, and orgies were leveled against Christians due to the terms they used to describe their worship – “body and blood,” “brother and sister,” “love feast” etc. So, Nero declared Christians guilty and had many rounded up, arrested, tortured and executed. Ancient Roman historian and senator Tacitus writes (c. 116 AD) the following in 15.44 of his masterful work, *The Annals of Rome* about the fire and the persecution that followed:

*“But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.”*

He then adds this about the torture and killing of Christians:

*“Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.”*

The significance of this ancient history cannot be overstated. It is a secular independent verification that Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate, that there was a sizeable Christian community in Rome by 64 AD, that Christians were distinguishable from Jews, and that the Christian faith was recognized as having originated from Judaea.

**2. martyrdom of Peter and Paul** – early church Eusebius confirms that both Paul and Peter died in Rome for their faith. According to Eusebius Peter was crucified upside down probably following the fire in Rome when Nero pursued believers. Note the words of Jesus and then John’s explanation in **John 21:18-19** – *“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.”* *19* Now this He said, *signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God.*” This is a clear reference to crucifixion. Sometime earlier, before his death Peter wrote his first epistle and note how he closes the letter. He writes *“she who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings as does Mark, my son”* (**I Peter 5:13**) *“Babylon”* is a veiled reference to being in Rome. According to Eusebius, it was while in Rome that Peter directed John Mark to put together the Gospel that bears Mark’s name. John Mark was an early convert who was close to Peter. Note how Peter calls Mark his *“son”* also in **1 Peter 5:13**. Peter knew him from the early days when the church met in his mother’s home (**Acts 12:12**).



**d. Nero's death – 68 AD** - Nero committed suicide when he was ousted by the Roman Senate and members of the Praetorian Guard were closing in to arrest him. What followed in 69 AD was the year of four emperors as factions vied for control. Finally, Roman General Vespasian who had been in Judea attempting to put down the Jewish rebellion prevailed and returned back to Rome to become the new Caesar while he left his son, Titus, take command in Judaea and finish the job of putting down the Jewish rebellion (see below).

#### **4. The enduring split between the Jewish and Christian Faiths**

**a. Gentile converts** – many of the first Gentile converts were “God-fearers.” Recall the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 and the Roman centurion in Cornelius in Acts 10. That was the term given to those Gentiles who believed in Yahweh and read and studied the Hebrew Scriptures but did not become circumcised or follow the dietary laws. However, as more and more Gentiles with no Jewish affiliation became believers the Jewish nature of the Church became less significant.

**b. Jewish rebellion against Rome** –There had been a number of revolts since the time of Christ but the one that began in 66 AD was like never before in its intensity and breadth. Many Jewish believers recalled Jesus' warning to flee the city in **Lk. 20:20-21**: “...when you see *Jerusalem surrounded by armies*” and fled to Pella. This abandonment of the city and its eventual defeat and destruction of the temple in 70 AD sealed the separation of the Church from Judaism once and for all. Josephus describes the horror of the final months that the Jews suffered in his work, *the Jewish War*. Lawlessness, murder, famine, cannibalism became the norm during the siege. It is estimated that nearly one million people died during the siege. Upon finally defeating the Jews, the Roman general Titus torched the city and leveled the Temple. The Arch of Titus celebrating the Roman victory can still be seen in Rome to this day.

**c. Christian refusal to worship Caesar** – as the distinction and division between Jews and Christians became more acute, and the hostility between Jews with Rome increased, the state protections for Christians became virtually nonexistent. Thus, the stage was set for Christians to be considered to be enemies of the state. Why? They did not recognize the authority of the Roman gods and refused to pay homage to them or to burn incense to the Caesar. Such refusal was viewed by Rome more as an act of disloyalty to the state than a failure of worship. Christians tried to show their loyalty to the emperor by telling him that they prayed for him and government officials, but if a ruling official wanted to make an example of believers, he could. And this in fact did happen empire-wide during the final years of the reign of Domitian (96-98 AD). We will look at this persecution and others, as well as the growth and development of the Church in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries next study.