



# Church History Timeline

## Evolution of the Trinity

100 to 400 A.D.

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by Scott Lynn

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### *Welcome*

I created this outline as part of a Church History class I have taught. I combined numerous notes and previous lessons to pack as much historical information as possible into one booklet. I've seen other outlines, but their bias left something to be desired. Some seem pro-Catholic and others seem pro-Protestant. I have never seen one that was pro-Scriptures. This outline doesn't take sides between Catholics and Protestants, but attempts to look at doctrinal developments and historical events purely from the stand point of God's word. It's likely impossible to totally remove bias, but that is my intention going-in. You can be the judge in determining how successful I have been.

I have (at times) included a few fun comments, possibly related Bible verses and trivia in the timeline. A couple have told me that these entries don't really add to the timeline but I prefer my version to a more sterile and soul-less document. These same Christians are often a source of longsuffering for me, so I intend to keep the fun stuff here as a form a minor and enjoyable revenge. I feel it would be petty and selfish to deny them the opportunity to be on the receiving end of a little longsuffering.

**NOTE: This is actually a shorter version of my larger Church History Timeline. I am focusing here on the early years and development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the first few centuries. Quite a bit has been deleted to fit this in 12 pages.**

I have tried my best to be accurate and cautious in my research. If you find any errors, please contact me, I would love to know and correct them.

In His Service,  
*Scott Lynn*

**~33 A.D. Christ dies on the cross**

**70 A.D. Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem**

by Roman forces led by Titus (eventually Roman Emperor 79-81).

**98 A.D. New Testament Completed**

Matthew, Mark & Luke	41-65 A.D.
Acts	62 A.D.
Paul's Epistles	50-65 A.D.
Revelation	96 A.D.
Gospel of John	98 A.D.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16-17 KJV**

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:  
17That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

**90-140 A.D. Early leaders use language similar to scripture to describe the incarnation.**

**Clement, bishop of Rome:** *“Jesus Christ is the Sceptre of the Majesty of God.” “...attending to [God’s] words, you were inwardly filled with the doctrine, and His sufferings were before your eyes.”*

**Ignatius, bishop of Antioch:** *“We have received the knowledge of God, which is Jesus Christ. “*

*“Our God, Jesus Christ, was according to the appointment of God, conceived in the womb of Mary...”*

**2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:19 KJV**

...God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself...

**Colossians 1:15 KJV**

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.

**John 20:28 KJV**

And Thomas answered and said unto him, ‘My LORD and my God.’

**130-180 A.D. Greek Apologists influence church teachings with their philosophy.** Believing that the supreme perfect God could not descend to corrupt earth, Justin Martyr believed God must have sent another being, the Logos, which he called another God.

Justin Martyr also taught that, just as Jesus was the second Adam, Mary was the second Eve, in that her obedience and submission to the angel is in contrast to the rebellion of Eve in the garden.

**1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:5 KJV**

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

**Deuteronomy 6:4 KJV**

Hear, O Israel:  
The Lord our God is one Lord.

**John 1:1 Literal**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word.

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**~160 A.D. Justin's Dialogue with Trypho:**

*"There is ... another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things; who is also called an Angel, because He announces to men whatsoever the Maker of all things – above whom there is no God – wishes to announce to them... He who is said to have appeared to Abraham, and to Jacob, and to Moses, and who is called God, is distinct from Him who made all things – numerically, I mean, not distinct in will."*

**Exodus 20:2-3 KJV**

I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.  
³Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

**Isaiah 9:6 KJV**

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

**Isaiah 43:10 KJV**

...understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.

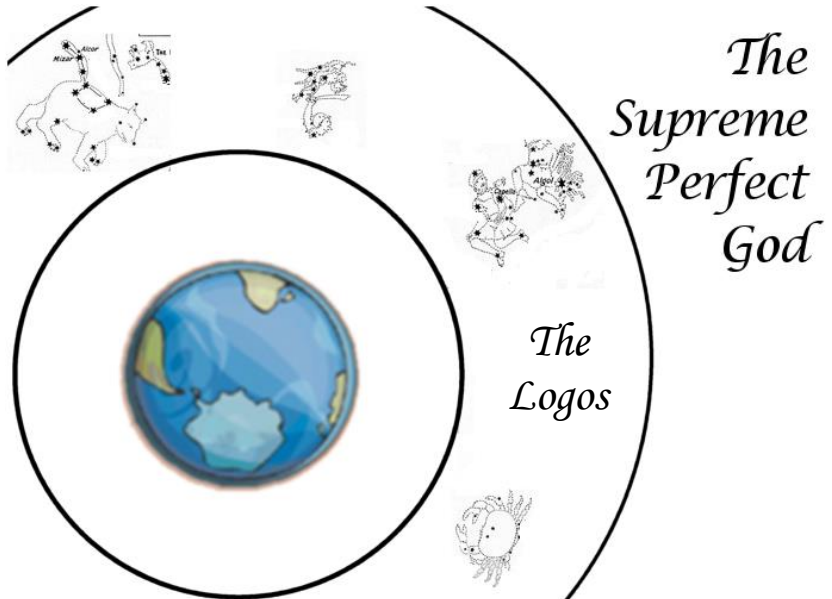
**Isaiah 44:6 KJV**

Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.

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**Greek Worldview of God and the Logos**

The Logos, to the Greeks, was the plan of God, representing the pattern of perfect things in the Heavens. The supreme and perfect creator could not descend to our corrupt and filthy planet (alert: gnostic teaching), but the lesser gods could travel back and forth. So if the Logos was a lesser god, than it could bridge the gap between the perfect creator and imperfect earth.



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**170 to 325 A.D. The Old Catholic Age:** Several generations after the Apostles, the original Apostolic doctrine was still common and even dominant throughout the churches. Changes in doctrine were introduced by North African church leaders and rejected by most churches but led to the later acceptance of the Trinity during the church councils.

Oneness belief was still the majority belief of this time. Tertullian described Oneness understanding as *“the majority of believers”* and Origen described Oneness believers as *“the great multitude of those who are counted believers”*.

Tertullian was the first to claim God is a Trinity of three persons with the Son subordinate to the Father. Origen was the first to teach they are co-equal.

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**~213 A.D. Tertullian in *Against Praxeas*:**

*“The Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole.”* The Son is merely *“a portion of the whole Godhead.”*

Tertullian was kicked out of the church for his teachings. Many years later, he was sainted back into the church.

*“In not a few areas of theology, Tertullian’s views are, of course, completely unacceptable. Thus, for example, his teaching on the Trinity reveals a subordination of Son to Father that in the later crass form of Arianism the Church rejected as heretical.”*

- New Catholic Encyclopedia

**Colossians 2:8-9 KJV**

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. <sup>9</sup>For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

**John 8:58 KJV**

Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

**Hebrews 1:3 KJV**

Who [the Son] being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his [God’s] person.

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**~230 A.D. *On the Principles* by Origen**

First to teach the Son was eternal and co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. *“..nothing in the Trinity can be called greater or less.”*

Origen had many strange beliefs include Satan’s ultimate salvation. He also castrated himself based on Matthew 19:12. This is somewhat ironic, as Origen was famous for allegorizing scripture, but he decided to take this verse literally.

He was kicked out the church for his beliefs.

**John 14:28 KJV**

Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

**Matthew 19:12 KJV**

...and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

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**323 A.D. Christianity becomes official religion of the Roman Empire when Emperor Constantine converts to Christianity.**

Constantine takes over the church while continuing a life of sin.

**Proverbs 29:2 KJV**

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.

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**325 A.D. Council of Nicea I**

Ordered by Emperor Constantine to end controversy in the church. Had nothing directly to do with Oneness and Trinity. The council rejected Arianism, the belief that the Son was not God, but something different.

**Matthew 16:13 KJV**

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

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**366-384 A.D. Damasus 1<sup>st</sup> rules as Pope.**

His supporters attacked and killed the supporters of his rival for the office.

Accusations of adultery, infidelity and murder tarnish his reign. Encouraged the veneration (worship) of martyrs. Damasus was nicknamed the "Lady's Ear Scratcher".

Commissioned Jerome to begin work on the Vulgate Translation.

**1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:1-2,7 KJV**

This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. <sup>2</sup>A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach... <sup>7</sup>Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

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**381 A.D. Council of Constantinople I**

First council to affirm the son as eternally begotten of the father. **Historically the first council to affirm the basic tenets of the Trinity.**

*"We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made..."*

**Galatians 4:4 KJV**

But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law

**Luke 1:35 KJV**

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

### **Some compelling quotes about the Trinity**

It should surprise no one that a church history pamphlet created by an Apostolic author would be biased against the Trinity. Although I am trying to be objective, I clearly see the Trinity as a 4<sup>th</sup> century doctrine borrowed and refined from Greek philosophy. I see it as clearly extra-Biblical and foreign to the language and wording of the scriptures. I'm not the only one; you will find quotes below representing a broad cross-section of scholarship that agree with my position. I don't believe any of these are statements by Apostolic authors, yet any Trinitarian would be hard-pressed to explain these quotes. If you happen to find this pamphlet and feel there is a reasonable counter-argument, I would love it if you would email me your thoughts (scott@onlinesolutions.com).

*"Fourth Century Trinitarianism did not reflect accurately early Christian teaching regarding the nature of God; it was, on the contrary, a deviation from this teaching."*

**Encyclopedia Americana**

*"[many historians believe that the Trinity] is a corruption borrowed from the heathen religions, and ingrafted on the Christian faith."*

**Dictionary of Religious Knowledge**

*"Theologians today are in agreement that the Hebrew Bible does not contain a doctrine of the Trinity... Theologians agree that the New Testament also does not contain an explicit doctrine of the Trinity."*

**Encyclopedia of Religion**

*"At first the Christian Faith was not Trinitarian... It was not so in the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic ages, as reflected in the New Testament and other early Christian writings."*

**Encyclopedia of Religion And Ethics**

*"Neither the word Trinity nor the explicit doctrine appears in the New Testament, nor did Jesus and his followers intend to contradict the Shema in the Hebrew Scriptures: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord (Deuteronomy 6:4)."*

**Encyclopedia Britannica**

*"To Jesus and Paul the doctrine of the trinity was apparently unknown... they say nothing about it."*

**Edward Hopkins**

Yale Professor

*"...There is no evidence that any sacred writer even suspected the existence of a Trinity within the Godhead... Even to see in the Old Testament suggestions or foreshadowings or 'veiled signs' of the trinity of persons, is to go beyond the words and intent of the sacred writers... The New Testament writers... give us no formal or formulated doctrine of the Trinity, no explicit teaching that in one God there are three co-equal divine persons... Nowhere do we find any trinitarian doctrine of three distinct subjects of divine life and activity in the same Godhead."*

**Edmund Fortman, Jesuit**

Author of *The Triune God*

*“If Paganism was conquered by Christianity, it is equally true that Christianity was corrupted by Paganism. The pure Deism of the first Christians... was changed, by the Church of Rome, into the incomprehensible dogma of the trinity. Many of the pagan tenets, invented by the Egyptians and idealized by Plato, were retained as being worthy of belief.”*

**Edward Gibbons**

*History of Christianity*

*“[Church doctrine became] firmly rooted in the soil of Hellenism [pagan Greek thought]. Thereby it became a mystery to the great majority of Christians.”*

**Adolf Harnack**

*Author of History of Dogma*

*“The Old Testament is strictly monotheistic. God is a single personal being. The idea that a trinity is to be found there... is utterly without foundation... The Christian dogma did not start from a polytheistic or pantheistic ground, but from Jewish monotheism; but the development from one God to a trinity was just as completely a historical evolution as any other.”*

**L. L. Paine**

*Professor of Ecclesiastical History  
The Ethnic Trinities, page 219*

*“The word Trinity is not found in the Bible... It did not find a place formally in the theology of the church till the 4<sup>th</sup> century.”*

**Illustrated Bible Dictionary**

*“The Platonic Trinity, itself merely a rearrangement of older trinities dating back to earlier peoples, appears to be the rational philosophic trinity attributes that gave birth to the three hypostases or divine persons taught by the Christian Churches.... Thus Greek philosophers conception of the divine trinity ... can be found in all the ancient pagan religions.”*

**French New Universal Dictionary**

*“The doctrine of the Trinity ... must be interpreted in a manner that would be consistent with this a priori definition of the deity of God (One essence, three persons). Neoplatonic elements were unmistakably present in this definition.”*

**Jaroslav Pelikan**

*The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition*

*“Jesus Christ never mentioned such a phenomenon, and nowhere in the New Testament does the word ‘Trinity’ appear. The idea was only adopted by the Church three hundred years after the death of our Lord.”*

**Arthur Weigall**

*Author of The Paganism in Our Christianity*

*“The New Testament does not contain the developed doctrine of the Trinity... Primitive Christianity did not have an explicit doctrine of the Trinity such as was subsequently elaborated in the creeds.”*

**New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology**



*“The doctrine of the Trinity was of gradual and comparatively late formation... it had its origin in a source entirely foreign from that of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures; ...it grew up, and was ingrafted on Christianity, through the hands of the Platonizing Fathers... The Platonizing Fathers were the Greek Philosophers that became Christian but continued to follow the teachings of Plato. These Philosophers mixed Christians Ideas with Pagan Greek Philosophy to formulate the concept of a three person Godhead. The apostle Paul warned the Greek Colossian city, ‘Beware lest any man cheat you through philosophy and vain deceit. . .(Colossians 2:8)’ What kind of philosophy was Paul warning about? Since Paul was addressing a Greek city, he must have been warning about the entrance of Greek Philosophical Thought. The Platonic Fathers also known as Greek Apologists were the first to introduce Pagan Trinitarian Thought into Christianity.”*

**Alvan Lamson, D. D.**

*The Church of the First Three Centuries*

*“The doctrine of the Logos and the Trinity received their shape from Greek Fathers, who... were much influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Platonic philosophy ... That errors and corruptions crept into the Church from this source can not be denied.”*

**New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge**

*“We can trace the history of this doctrine, and discover its source, not in the Christian revelation, but in the Platonic philosophy ... The Trinity is not a doctrine of Christ and his Apostles, but a fiction of the school of the later Platonists.”*

**Andrew Norton**

*A Statement of Reasons*

*“The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not taught in the Old Testament... [it] is not directly and immediately the word of God.”*

*“The formulation ‘one god in three Persons’ was not solidly established, certainly not fully assimilated into Christian life and its profession of faith, prior to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century... Among the Apostolic Fathers, there had been nothing even remotely approaching such a mentality or perspective.”*

*“From the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century onward, however, Christian thought was strongly influenced by Neo-platonic philosophy and mysticism.”*

**New Catholic Encyclopedia** (v10, p335)

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## Quick Summary of the Remaining Major Councils and History in this Era

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### 431 A.D. Council of Ephesus I

Affirmed that Christ had two natures, human and divine. Officially adopted the recently popular doctrine that Mary is "the Mother of God" or the God-bearer (the theotokos).

First doctrinal time travel attempt: Ephesus I declared the 381 A.D. creed is officially the 325 A.D. Nicean Creed. Nice trick!

Interesting note: the council was hosted at the Church of Mary in Ephesus, Asia Minor.

### Matt 12:47;49-50 KJV

..."Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee"...

<sup>49</sup>And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples..."Behold my mother and my brethren! <sup>50</sup>...[who] shall do the will of my Father ... the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

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**451 A.D. Council of Chalcedon**, in Asia Minor, affirms that Christ still had two natures. Apparently the Council of Ephesus I wasn't enough. This is the last council that most Anglicans and Protestants consider ecumenical and binding.

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### 517 A.D. Council of Epaone, France

This was a national council (not a recognized ecumenical church council), but it was the first official recognition that punishment from sin could be reduced by prayer, alms, fasts or payments of fixed sums of money.

Fun Trivia: this council also banned altars made of wood, attendance at Jewish banquets and forbid the clergy to hunt.

### 1<sup>st</sup> John 1:9 KJV

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

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**553 A.D. Council of Constantinople II** again confirms that Christ had two natures but was only one person. Apparently the doctrine of Nestorianism kept creeping up in the church. In this version, it was taught that Jesus and Christ were (loosely) two persons joined together. This council officially rejected this teaching (again).

### John 8:58 KJV

Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

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**680 A.D. Council of Constantinople III** affirmed Christ had two wills, human and divine.

It's almost strange that this stuff keeps popping up. Maybe if they stopped chanting in Latin and just read the Bible for themselves, this nonsense would stop!

### John 14:8-9 KJV

Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

<sup>9</sup>Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?

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## 787 A.D. Council of Nicea II

Veneration of icons had grown in popularity and grown controversial among church leadership. The Council of Hieria (a palace outside of Constantinople) abolished the practice of worshipping icons in 754. New leadership in the Constantinople church in 784 felt differently, and they attempted to meet in 786 to reintroduce Veneration of Icons officially. Facing armed opposition, they created a false campaign to move armed elements of the church away from the capital then declared and held a very quick council from **Sept 24 to Oct 13 of 787 A.D. where the Veneration of Holy Images was officially declared as endorsed and encouraged.**

### From the Creed of Nicea II:

"As the sacred and life-giving cross is everywhere set up as a symbol, so also should the images of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the holy angels, as well as those of the saints and other pious and holy men be embodied in the manufacture of sacred vessels, tapestries, vestments, etc., and exhibited on the walls of churches, in the homes, and in all conspicuous places, by the roadside and everywhere, to be revered by all who might see them. For the more they are contemplated, the more they move to fervent memory of their prototypes. Therefore, it is proper to accord to them a fervent and reverent adoration, not, however, the veritable worship which, according to our faith, belongs to the Divine Being alone."

## Leviticus 26:1 KJV

Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the Lord your God.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 17:15 NIV

They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors and the statutes he had warned them to keep. They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. They imitated the nations around them although the Lord had ordered them, "Do not do as they do."

## 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12:1-2 KJV

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. <sup>2</sup>Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.

## 1<sup>st</sup> John 5:21 KJV

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:14

Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

Beware lest any man spoil  
you through philosophy  
and vain deceit, after the  
tradition of men, after the  
rudiments of the world, and  
not after Christ.

<sup>9</sup> For in him dwelleth  
all the fulness of the  
Godhead bodily.

Colossians 2:8-9