**When Christianity was Official**

**A Church Synopsis from Nicea I to Ephesus (325-431 A.D.)**

325 A.D. was a watershed year in the church for two reasons. First, the Roman Emperor Constantine I made Christianity the one official religion of the Roman Empire. Christians within the Roman Empire received this as wonderful news, but life got hard for Christians living in Persia, Rome’s adversary.

Second, the Council of Nicea I excommunicated Arians, and started to standardize church structure, with four “Metropolitan” bishops elevated above the others: the bishops of Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome, and Constantinople. After reviewing the Council of Nicea, and how the church became powerful, we will ask two questions. How well did the Church continue with what Scripture taught and the early Christians practiced? Also, how did it start to change?

# The Council of Nicea May-June 325 A.D.

Everyone in the church worshipped Jesus as God, but exactly how was Jesus God? 318 bishops at the Council of Nicea would iron that out. There were three groups who attended the Council of Nicea. 22 bishops declared as Arians, who believed in various degrees that Jesus was of a different substance than the Father, or else a similar but lesser substance. Second was the Orthodox group, that said they are the same substance, and equal in nature, honor, glory, and our worship. A third group, perhaps the majority, was not necessarily clear on what the issue was.

Constantine was insistent on having the council in order to have peace within the church, but other than that he did not have any role. Bishop and historian Eusebius of Caesarea presided over the Council, and he had taught Arian doctrines. But the hero was Athanasius, who crystallized the differences, and at the end everyone subscribed to the creed except for seven bishops, who were exiled by the Emperor. Eusebius of Caesarea continued as a bishop, never writing of Arian doctrines again.

After the Arians got the upper hand again, and after orthodoxy return, the Second Ecumenical Council, at Constantinople, condemned Arianism again.

# Timeline of the Nicea I to Ephesus Church

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| **Year AD** | **Nicea I to Ephesus Event (325-431 A.D.)** |
| 325 | Council of Nicea I: 318 bishops, against Arius |
| 315-381 | Persian Shapur II persecutes Christians |
| 328 | Roman Emperor Constantine restores Arius |
| 346-348 | Formicus Maternus 1st to say God rewards persecuting pagans |
| >350? | Mandaeans claimed Jesus a false prophet |
| 325-350 | Constantine ordered 50 Bible manuscripts |
| 325-350 | Vaticanus & Sinaiticus almost complete Bible |
| 4th cent. | 23 other Bible manuscripts & fragments |
| 4th cent. | Manichaean heresy. Augustine was one |
| 335-357 | 4 Arian councils:Tyre,Antioch,Arles 3,Sirmium |
| 337-361 | Arian Emperor Constantius banishes bishops |
| 320-340 | Nino of Cappadocia, a nun, evangelizes Georgia |
| 341-358 | 7 Councils/Creeds, 1st is Antioch Encaeniis |
| 325-360 | Christianity in Ethiopia, Sudan, Yemen |
| 325-361 | Constantine forbids Jews in Jerusalem |
| 342-379 | Patriarch Macedonius tortures orthodox & Novatianists, digs up Constantine I’s corpse |
| 342-395 | Macedonian heresy denied a personal H.S. |
| 361-363 | Julian makes paganism official religion. Christians killed in Alexandria & Gaza |
| 370 | Arian emperor Valens kills Christians in east |
| 318-373 | Athanasius of Alexandria, wrote 468 pages |
| 354-379 | Rival Roman bishop violently battle |
| 381-402 | Christians persecuted in Persia |
| 379-382 | Councils of Antioch, Laodicea, Gangra, Constantinople I, and Rome |
| 360-383 | Ufilas converts Goths from pagan to Arians |
| 385 | Priscillian denies the Trinity. killed 385 A.D. |
| 391 | Christians burn all temples in Alexandria |
| 397 | Ninian. Missionary to Picts in Scotland |
| 361-370 | Lucifer of Cagliari schism: never accept back repentant Arian clergy |
| 384-399 | Siricius first to call himself Pope in Rome |
| by 400 | an estimated 10 million Christians |
| c.400 | 24 Bible manuscripts. Freer Gospels, etc. |
| 4/5 cent. | Maximus of Turin: supremacy of Peter |
| 4/5 cent. | Caelestine of Ireland. Semi-Pelagian monk |
| 381-402 | Christians persecuted in Persia |
| 360-403 | Epiphanius of Salamis wrote on 80 heresies |
| 391-403 | Coptic patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria kills 1,000’s of orthodox monks |
| 392-407 | Armenian & Ethiopic Bible translations |
| 370-390 | Ambrose of Milan. Against Arianism |
| 350-403 | 7 spurious works. Acts of Andrew, etc. |
| -407 | John Chrysostom wrote c.3,000 pages |
| 410 | Proto-Nestorian synod Seleucia-Ctesiphon |
| 411 | Violent persecution of and by Donatists |
| 415 | Council of Lydda excommunicates Pelagius |
| 373-420 | Jerome translates Latin Vulgate, Later, he rejected the apocrypha as scripture. |
| 419-430 | Mazdeans persecute Christians in Persia |
| 420 | Proto-Nestorian synod Yahallaha I |
| 388-430 | Augustine of Hippo wrote c.4,500 pages |
| 419-430 | John Cassian, found of Semi-Pelagianism |
| 325-431 | ~123 Christians wrote over 12,700 pages |
| 431 | Council of Ephesus expels Nestorians |

# The Church became Powerful

Constantine only persecuted non-Christians non-violently, except for executing some priests of Apollo who advised the previous emperor to kill Christians. He closed synagogues and pagan temples, and encouraged people to attend churches instead. Churches swelled in their numbers; some think that Christianity has never fully recovered from that. It has been said that Christianity has more to fear from her supposed friends than from her avowed enemies. Constantine called the Council of Nicea to attain harmony within the church, which expelled Arians.

But after Constantine died, Arian bishops were installed, and orthodox bishops were exiled and persecuted. The next Emperor, Julian, tried to revive paganism. But Under Emperor Theodosius the Arian bishops were exiled, and orthodoxy returned to power.

In 380 A.D. after a riot in Thessalonica, Theodosius decided to punish the city by having his troops massacre 7,000 men, women, and children. Bishop Ambrose of Milan stopped the Emperor from coming to church, until he repented of that. Bishops had great power, and talked about their “thrones”. The church did not persecute heretics, but both Arian and orthodox emperors did, and the church, including Augustine of Hippo, supported that, when the heretic Priscillian was executed. Some Christians were against using the sword for the gospel, but Augustine’s view won out.

Before 407 A.D., the Emperor had statues made honoring himself and his Empress, and John Chrysostom, patriarch of Constantinople, and a good expository preacher, wrote against them castigating the use of statues. He died as a prisoner for that. To this day eastern orthodox churches have lots of pictures or icons, but no statues. Roman Catholic churches have statues and pictures.

# Similarities with the early church and us

There are at least 1,047 teachings in the Bible that Christians believe today, and four or more pre-Nicene Christians taught and none denied. At least one Nicea I to Ephesus writer taught all but 13 of them.

# How they differ from churches today

While many bishops were unmarried, they never agreed that all clergy should be unmarried. Today, all except Roman Catholic clergy can be celibate or married once.

Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, and most others after them taught that baptized babies who die go to heaven, and unbaptized ones go to Hell. For some reason, infant baptism was very popular! But today even Catholic and eastern orthodox churches do not categorically say unbaptized babies all go to Hell.

They differed among themselves on whether Mary had more children after Jesus. Jerome was the first to teach that Jesus brothers and sisters in the Bible were really cousins. Christians differed on what apocryphal books were scripture. Jerome first thought the orthodox apocrypha was scripture, but later believed otherwise. However, Augustine overruled him on that.

# Where they went wrong

Augustine started the process of “objectifying” Christianity. If you join the right group, believe the right stuff, do the right stuff, and don’t do the wrong stuff, then you are good; what could go wrong? What went wrong was that they lost their relationship with Christ. They lost their simplicity in Christ, and salvation was all about baptism in the church, not Christ. Instead of just going to the scriptures, they relied on their superior bishops, up to the metropolitans of the four most prominent churches.

Christians of that time assented in the government using a tool to spread the faith that should not have every been picked up: persecuting non-Christians. Augustine said that if the Emperor had the right to torture and kill traitors to the Empire, how much more should they torture and kill traitors to God.

**Verses to Remember Them By**

2 Corinthians 11:2-3 “For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy. For I promised you in marriage to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve in his craftiness, so your minds might be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” (World English Bible)