

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH ERA



I. THE FULLNESS OF TIME

Galatians 4:4 “But when the fulness of the time] was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.”

Jesus Christ appeared on the scene at precisely the exact time that God had planned. It was the perfect time; the time best suited for the propagation of the gospel. Why was this the “fulness of the time?” What contributed to this being the ideal time for the founding and multiplication of Christ’s church?

A. *The Roman Empire*

1. The Romans, as no other people up to their time, developed a sense of the unity of mankind; this made a favorable environment for the reception of the Gospel.
2. Rome had instituted *Pax Romana* (_____). Roman law prevailed and citizens in all parts of the Empire were subject to the impartial justice of the Roman courts – peace, political/economic stability, and security followed.
3. Free _____ about the Mediterranean world– would have been most difficult for the messengers of the Gospel before the reign of Augustus Caesar (27 B.C.-AD 14).
 - a. Prior – ancient world divided into small jealous city states or tribes. Travel was hindered, as was the spread of new ideas.
 - b. Pompey had swept the pirates from the Mediterranean, and Roman soldiers kept peace upon the roads of Asia, Africa, and Europe.
 - c. The Romans developed an excellent system of roads.
 - d. Easy for the gospel to spread throughout the empire.
4. Roman conquests led to a loss of belief by many peoples in their gods who could not protect them – a spiritual _____ existed.

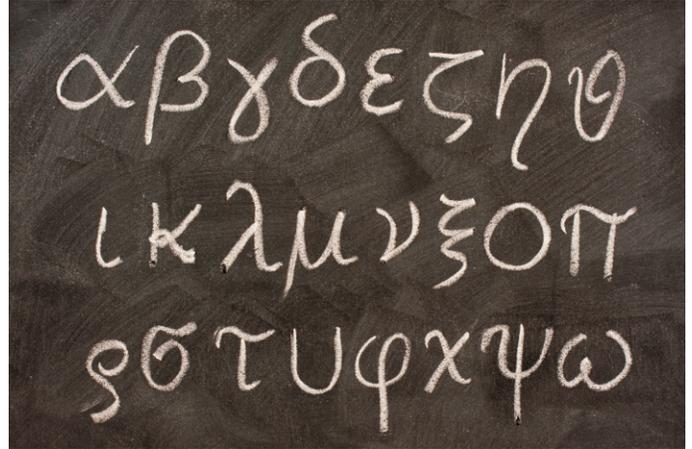


- I. The Fullness Of Time
- II. To The Jew First
- III. Also To The Greek
- IV. Tracing The Spread Of The New Testament Church

Pax Romana (Latin for “Roman peace”) was the long period of relative peace and minimal expansion by military force experienced by the Roman Empire in the first and second centuries AD. Since it was established by the Caesar Augustus it is sometimes called *Pax Augustus*. Its timing was approximately 200 years (27 BC to 180 AD).

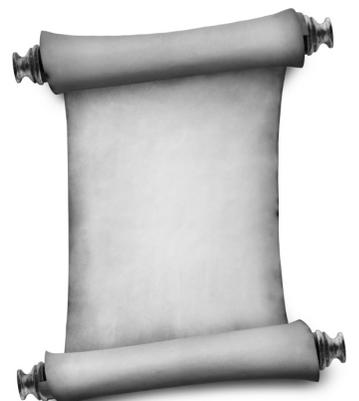
B. The Greek Culture

1. The Romans may have provided the political environment, but the Greeks provided the intellectual and cultural environment for the budding Church. The Romans conquered the Greeks politically, but the Greeks conquered the Romans _____.
2. Greek had become the _____ language of the region due to the influence of Alexander the Great. This universal language continued long into the Roman Empire.
3. The Greeks intellectual/ philosophical approach to life made their polytheistic religion appear so irrational that many turned away from it to philosophy. But philosophy failed to satisfy their spiritual needs – leaving them in a spiritual vacuum.
4. When Christ came, men realized, as never before, the insufficiency of human _____ and polytheism. Christianity came with the offer of a personal relationship with God – it found many hungry hearts.



C. The Jewish Religion

1. The Jewish people in contrast to the Greeks did not seek to discover God by the process of human reason; they assumed the existence of God and granted Him worship.
2. The religion of the Jews, Judaism, enjoyed the status of being a legal religion of the empire. Christianity enjoyed protection by Judaism as a parent shelters a child.
3. Judaism as a monotheistic religion existed in stark contrast to the pagan religions (after the Babylonian captivity the Jews never again lapsed into idolatry).
4. Judaism offered to the world hope of a coming Messiah who would bring righteousness to this earth.
5. Judaism offered to the world the purest _____ system in existence.
6. Judaism provided the infant church with a sacred book, the Old Testament.
7. Judaism provided a useful teaching institution, the _____, that helped the rise and development of Christianity.



CONCLUSION – at no other time in the history of mankind was such a large region under one law and one government, with a common language, easy travel, and spiritual hunger. God had prepared the world for the rise of Christianity and its propagation through His Church. The political-spiritual climate was ideal for the Church to _____ itself.

II. TO THE JEW FIRST (THE SPREAD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH)

Acts 1:8 “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

A. The Church at Jerusalem

1. Christ’s plan – to the Jew first
 - a. Proclaimed in Acts 1:8.
 - b. A casual study of Acts reveals that the early church followed this. From AD 30-44 the church in Jerusalem held a leading position in the early Christian community.
2. On Pentecost, when the church was empowered for service, Jews were present from all parts of the Mediterranean.

Acts 2:8-11 “And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? {9} Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, {10} Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, {11} Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.”

- a. 3000 were saved and joined the church.
- b. Growth was rapid and people were added to the church daily.
- c. Many of these were _____ Jews (Jews that had adopted the Greek culture) of the dispersion who were in Jerusalem to celebrate the great festivals associated with the Passover and Pentecost.

Acts 6:1 “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.”

3. Opposition accompanied the growth of the church.
 - a. Ecclesiastical authorities realized that Christianity was a threat to their power over the people as interpreters and priests of the law.
 - b. Persecution came first from the _____, the Jewish Supreme Court, who supervised the civil and religious life of the state. Peter and John were hauled before that court and forbidden to preach the gospel. Stephen was stoned.
 - c. Later persecution became primarily _____. Herod killed James and imprisoned Peter.
 - d. Persecution was so severe that the infant church was scattered thus carrying the gospel message to other parts of the country.

Acts 8:4 “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.”

4. The early church brought spiritual and social change, such as:
 - a. Regeneration (the New Birth).
 - b. Spiritual _____ of the sexes and consideration to women in the church.
5. Creation of a group of men to take care of the needy.
6. The decision at the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15) not to bind the Gentiles to obedience to the law opened the way for spiritual emancipation of the Gentile churches from Jewish control.
7. Titus Flavius Vespasianus, Roman army general, and his son, Titus Flavius Sabinus Vespasianus, besieged Jerusalem. Jerusalem fell in AD _____ after a horrible famine when mothers roasted and ate their children. Jerusalem was completely destroyed. The Christians had fled across Jordan. Jerusalem was no longer looked upon as the center of Christianity.
8. The spiritual leadership of the Christian Church had been transferred to other churches such as the one at Antioch.

B. The Church at Palestine

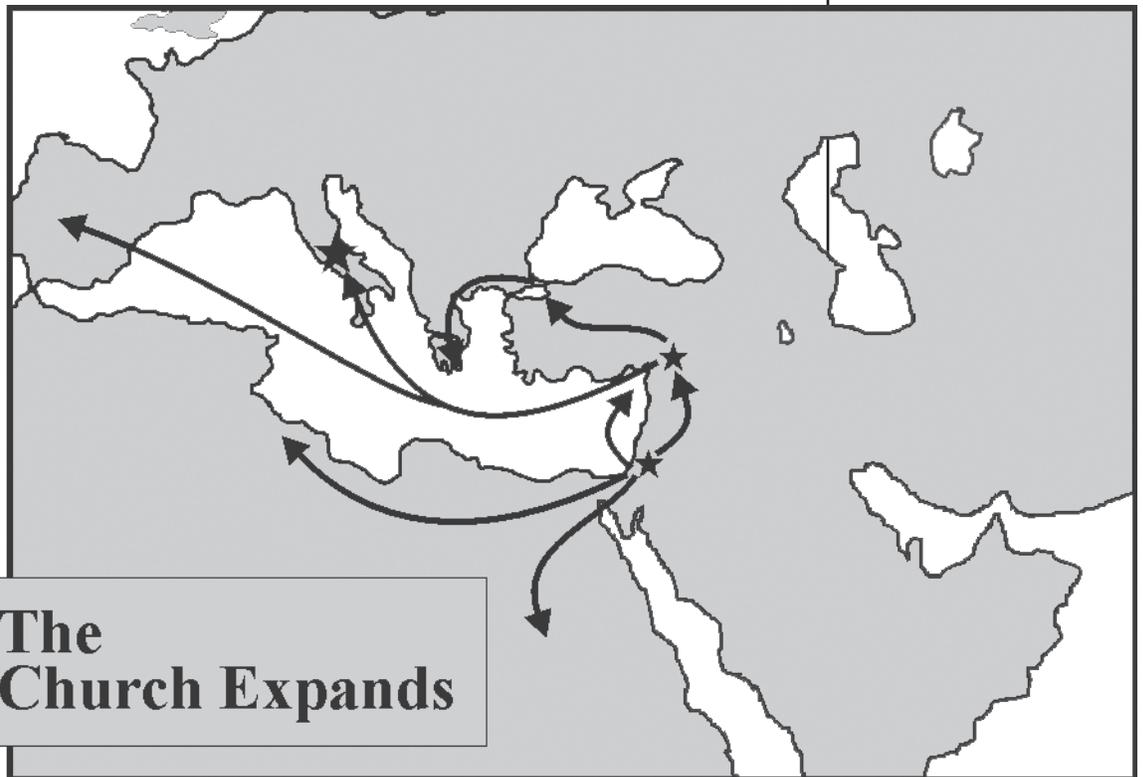
1. Philip took the gospel to Samaria, to a people who were not of pure Jewish blood (Acts 8).

“Palestine” means Philistine’s land. Roman Emperor Hadrian renamed the area Palestine after the Bar Kochba Rebellion in an attempt to reduce the Jews’ nationalistic feelings.

- a. Peter and John come down from Jerusalem to assist Philip with the demands of the revival.
- b. At the laying on of the hands of Peter and John, the Samaritan Christians received the Holy Ghost. The Samaritans were already saved and baptized.

Acts 8:12 “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”

Why did God not give the Holy Ghost to the Samaritan Christians upon their salvation as normal? Normally



the Spirit is given at the moment of faith (Acts 10:44; 19:2). In this instance, however, it was imperative that the Samaritans be identified with the apostles and the Jerusalem church so that there would be no rival _____ Christian church.

2. Philip took the gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch in the Gaza desert. The gospel travels to Ethiopia.
3. Peter was the first to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Peter goes to a Roman centurion, Cornelius, in Caesarea.

4. The eunuch and Cornelius were the first Gentile converts.
5. The Christians who had been forced out of Jerusalem traveled as far as Phenice (Phoenicia), Cyprus, and Antioch. They preached to the Jews only.

Acts 11:19 “Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.”

- a. The converts from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and a church sprung up there.

Acts 11:20 “And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.”

Grecians were _____-speaking Jews.

- b. Barnabus was dispatched by the Jerusalem church to investigate and instruct the Antiochian church. The task was too great – he retrieved Saul from Tarsus to help.
- c. The Antiochians were the first ones to refer to the disciples (followers) of Christ as Christians.
- d. The church at Antioch became the home base for the first missionary activities of the Apostle Paul. The gospel spread to the Gentiles.

II. ALSO TO THE GREEKS (THE SPREAD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH).

Paul was the principle character responsible for the spreading of the gospel and the founding of the Church among the Gentiles. He was specially chosen by God.

Acts 9:15 “But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.”

A. Paul’s Environment

1. Paul had three significant preparations for the ministry:
 - a. He trained at the feet of the great Jewish teacher, Gamaliel. An _____ far surpassing the average man.
 - b. He was a citizen of a leading city, Tarsus of Cilicia.

- c. He was a freeborn Roman citizen with great Roman privileges.
2. The political environment. Rome was ruled by:
- a. Caesar Augustus (27 BC to AD 14). The power of the imperial state was firmly established. He became the first citizen of the land. He became the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.
 - b. Tiberius (AD 14-37). A suspicious and cruel ruler.
 - c. Caligula (AD 37-41). Insane during part of his rule. Demanded worship as a god – alienate the Jews. Ordered the erection of a statue of himself in the temple at Jerusalem. Died before it was carried out – never occurred.
 - d. Claudius (AD 41-54). Expelled the Jews from Rome because of some riots that had taken place “at the instigation of one Chrestus.” The empire was fairly stable during his reign. Paul made most of his missionary journeys during Claudius’ reign.
 - e. Nero (AD 54-68). Careless and extravagant. Murdered his mother. Emptied the public treasury. Suspected of burning Rome to make room for a new palace he wanted. Accused the Christians on the burning of Rome. Intense persecution. Paul was _____.
3. The religious environment. A variety of philosophical and religious systems evidenced the confusion of the people. Paul faced it with the simple redemptive gospel of the death of Christ.

B. Paul’s Work

- 1. A propagator of the gospel
 - a. A devoted missionary.
 - b. Spread the gospel to the West.
 - c. He started in _____ cities and used the converts to carry the message to the surrounding towns and countryside.
 - d. In strategic Gentile centers Paul started spreading the gospel by going to the synagogue first. When Jewish opposition arose he turned to the Gentiles.
 - e. Paul would organize his converts into a church with elders and deacons so that the work might continue after his departure.
 - f. He assumed the responsibility of supporting himself – _____.

2. A publisher
 - a. Under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote over half of the New Testament.
 - b. Paul's letters (epistles) grew out of definite historical crises in his beloved churches.
3. A proponent of theology
 - a. Christ died, rose again for our justification.
 - b. The just shall live by faith.
 - c. Death to self, separation from defilement unto God.
 - d. Result – happiness and usefulness
4. A polemicist (one who is engaged in controversy, arguments).
 - a. Paul refuted false doctrine.
 - b. Refuted the Judiazers who wanted the church to mix the Law with salvation by grace. Paul helped free Christianity from becoming only a sect of Judaism.
 - c. Refuted the Gnostics. Gnosticism held to the following: The spirit is good, matter is evil. The link between pure spirit and evil matter is a hierarchy of celestial beings (of which Christ was one). Angels are to receive worship because they have a part in this hierarchy. Salvation is to be achieved mainly by ascetic acts to deny the desires of the material and evil body and by a special *gnosis* or _____ accessible only to the elite among Christians. Faith has low value. Colossians was written to refute Gnosticism.

III. TRACING THE SPREAD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The church at Antioch became the _____ of missionary activity. From the founding of the church in the Gospels to the martyr of the first church's first pastor, James, the center of the Christianity is the church at Jerusalem (Gospels – Acts 12). From Acts 13 through Paul's missionary journeys the church at Antioch captures our attention.

A. *Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1 – 14:27)*

1. Principle characters – Barnabus, Saul, John Mark
2. Places they went:
 - a. Seleucia – port city
 - b. Cyprus island – from Salamis to Paphos. Picked up John Mark, the cousin of Barnabus. *Colossians*

4:10 “And Marcus, sister’s son to Barnabas....”

Sorcerer Elymas blinded, Sergius Paulus, deputy of the country believed.

- c. Perga in Pamphylia – John Mark deserted.
- d. Antioch of Pisidia – to the Jew first in the synagogue. After rejection, went to the Gentiles. Fruitful ministry. Expelled from the region by the Jews.
- e. Iconium – after bearing fruit some Jews and Gentiles purposed to stone them. Fled to Lystra.
- f. Lystra – lame man healed. Paul and Barnabus restrained the people from worshipping them as gods. Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived and persuaded the people to stone Paul.
- g. Derbe.
- h. Backtracked through Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, – ordained elders in the churches.
- i. Returned through Perga to Attalia to board ship for Antioch of Syria.
- j. Reported to the church at Antioch.

B. Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36 – 18:22)

- 1. Principle characters – Paul and Silas. Barnabus and John Mark went to Cyprus.
- 2. Places they went:
 - a. Syria and Cilicia – passed through
 - b. Derbe then Lystra – joined by Timothy
 - c. Iconium then Antioch of Pisidia (throughout the regions of Galatia and Phrygia).
 - d. Forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go to Asia.
 - e. Mysia
 - f. Forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go to Bithynia.
 - g. Troas – Macedonian call
 - h. Samothracia (island lay-over), Neapolis (port city)
 - i. Philippi – Lydia saved, church started in her house. Demon possessed girl healed, men were beaten and imprisoned. Philippian jailer saved. Men released quietly.
 - j. Amphipolis and Apollonia
 - k. Thessalonica – fruitful ministry. Jason saved. Paul, Silas, and Timothy escaped by night.
 - l. Berea – fruitful ministry. Jews from Thessalonica came and stirred up the Bereans. Paul departed. Silas and Timothy remained.
 - m. Athens – upon arrival to Athens Paul sent for

- Silas and Timothy. Paul encounters the Greek philosophers.
- n. Corinth – worked with Aquila and Priscilla. Silas and Timothy rejoin Paul. Crispus, chief ruler of the synagogue, was saved. Fruitful ministry.
- o. Ephesus – sailed from Cenchrea (port city) with Aquila and Priscilla. Left them and sailed for Jerusalem to attend Passover.
- p. Caesarea – (port city), went up to Jerusalem
- q. Antioch – reported to the church at Antioch.

C. *Paul's Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23 – 21:17)*

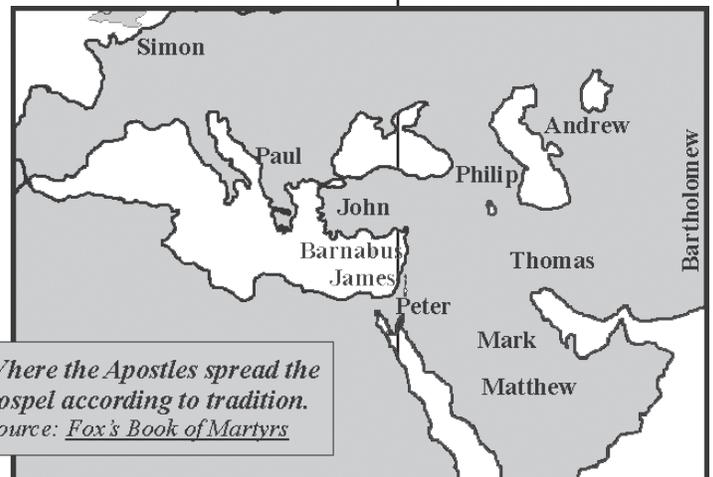
1. Principle characters – Paul
2. Places they went:
 - a. Throughout Galatia and Phrygia – strengthening the disciples
 - b. Ephesus – remained 2+ years. All Asia heard the gospel.
 - c. Passed throughout Macedonia, Achaia, and returned to Ephesus. Sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia. Stayed in Asia
 - d. Macedonia and Greece – almost sailed to Syria from Greece but returned through Macedonia to escape an assassination plot.
 - e. Berea, Thessalonica, Philippi, to Troas – Eutychus died and was healed.
 - f. Assos – Paul walked from Troas to Assos and joined his party who sailed from Troas to Assos. Party = Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, Trophimus, Luke
 - g. Mitylene, Chios, Samos, Trogyllium, Miletus – short island stops. Elders from Ephesus came to Paul at Miletus – sorrowful departing
 - h. Coos, Rhodes, Patara, Tyre
 - i. Tyre – disciples attempted to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem
 - j. Ptolemais to Caesarea
 - k. Caesarea – Philip the evangelist, Agabus, and others attempt to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem
 - l. Jerusalem – apprehended by Roman authorities and imprisoned

D. *Paul's Journey To Rome (Acts 21:27 – 28:31)*

1. Paul was greeted by Christians along the way on his journey to Rome to stand trial before Caesar.
2. Paul spent two years in Rome living in a house with limited freedom. He continued spreading the gospel.
3. Probably no charges were filed in Rome against Paul for the Jews would know they had no case against him outside of Judea and so would be reluctant to argue their cause in Rome.
 - a. During this two-year period Paul wrote what are commonly called his “Prison Epistles” – Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians.
 - b. Paul may have returned to the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia and then turned west to Spain according to his original plans (Romans 15:22-28); then ministered once more in the Aegean area where he was taken prisoner, removed to Rome, and executed.

E. The Efforts Of The Apostles

1. Their ministry. Traditions from the third century report the following concerning the Apostles:
 - a. James, the son of Zebedee – ministered in Jerusalem
 - b. Philip – labored diligently in Upper Asia
 - c. Matthew – labored in Parthia and Ethiopia; wrote the Gospel of Matthew
 - d. Andrew – preached in Scythia (southern Russia and upper Mesopotamia)
 - e. Bartholomew – preached in India; translated the Gospel of Matthew into the language of India
 - f. Thomas – evangelized Parthia (modern Iran)
 - g. Mark – founded the church in Alexandria, Egypt; he served as an amanuensis to Peter; he wrote the Gospel of Mark.
 - h. James, the Less – he was elected to the oversight of the churches of Jerusalem and was the author



- of the Epistle ascribed to James.
- i. Peter – ministered throughout Palestine
 - j. Luke – traveled with Paul
 - k. Simon Zelotes – preached the Gospel in Mauritania, Africa, and then later in Britain
 - l. John – believed to have founded the churches of Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira
 - m. Barnabus – ministered on Cyprus
2. Their martyrdom (according to tradition as recorded in *Fox's Book of Martyrs*).
- a. Stephen – stoned in Jerusalem; the time of his stoning is generally supposed to have been at the Passover which succeeded the Lord's crucifixion
 - b. James, the son of Zebedee – beheaded with a sword in Jerusalem by Herod Agrippa
 - c. Philip – suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis, in Phrygia. He was scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards crucified, AD 54
 - d. Matthew – slain with a halberd (an axlike blade with a steel spike mounted on the end of a shaft) in the city of Nadebah, Ethiopia, AD 60
 - e. James, the Less – at age 94 he was beat and stoned by the Jews; he finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club.
 - f. Matthias – stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.
 - g. Andrew – upon his arrival at Edessa, Macedonia, he was taken and crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground. Hence the term, St. Andrew's Cross Mark – dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria, Egypt, at the time of worship of Serapis, their idol.
 - h. Peter – tradition is split as to where Peter died. Some say Rome. "Hegesippus said that Nero sought matter against Peter to put him to death; which, when the people perceived, they entreated Peter with much ado that he would fly the city. Peter, through their importunity at length persuaded, prepared himself to avoid. But, coming to the gate, he was the Lord Christ come to meet him, to whom he, worshipping, said, 'Lord,



John Foxe (1517–1587), martyrologist, is remembered as the author of *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, an account of Christian martyrs throughout history but especially emphasizing the sufferings of English Protestants from the fourteenth century through the reign of Mary I. Widely owned and read by English Puritans, the book helped mould British popular opinion about Catholicism for several centuries.

whither dost Thou go?’ To whom He answered and said, ‘I am come again to be crucified.’ By this, Peter, perceiving his suffering to be understood, returned into the city.” Jerome said that he was crucified, his head being down and his feet upward, himself so requiring, because he was (he said) unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as the Lord was.

- j. Paul – beheaded with a sword by Nero
- k. Jude – crucified at Edessa
- l. Thomas – exciting the rage of pagan priests of India, he was martyred by being thrust through with a spear
- m. Luke – hanged on an olive tree to idolatrous priests of Greece
- n. Simon – crucified in Britain, AD 74