

# Church History - Twenty Centuries

This page is not a discussion of this topic but is to make you aware of an excellent and relatively succinct study of church history over her first centuries. The **Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible** (freely available at [archive.org](http://archive.org)) has an excellent discussion of this topic and it is very readable. The index is listed below and following that is one example from the third century. The full study can be accessed beginning on [page 4200 of the The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible](#) or click links below for each century. Enjoy!

## TWENTY CENTURIES OF CHURCH HISTORY

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17. [The Seventeenth Century: Reforming the Church in England](#)
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19. [The Nineteenth Century: Beginnings of Modern Theology and Kingdom Builders](#)
20. [The Twentieth Century: The Age of Paradoxes](#)

[The Third Century: Persecution and Heresy; Origen and Tertullian](#) - How should we respond to persecution and to false teaching? This was the great question facing the third-century church. Theologians who became known as "the Christian apologists" sought to answer this question. The word apologist or apology relates to 1 Peter 3:15, where Peter says we must be ready to give a "reason" (Greek: apologia) for the hope of the gospel that is in us. From the second century, apologists such as Justin Martyr defended the truth of the Christian gospel by expounding Scripture and refuting false accusations regarding the Christian faith. The church also responded to false teaching by quarrying out the true teaching of the Bible.

Two noteworthy figures help us understand how Christ was building the church, yet also show how even the best of Christ's servants stumble and fall. The first of these was Origen. One of the leading thinkers and apologists of the third century, Origen exercised his ministry in the great Egyptian city of Alexandria. At age eighteen, he began to teach in the theological academy of Alexandria. Through his various writings, Origen made important contributions to the understanding of Scripture, not all of which were positive. Being influenced by the Greek philosophical tradition derived from Plato, Origen tended to posit a dichotomy between heavenly things (good) and earthly things (bad). He also believed that there were many layers of meaning in the biblical text, sometimes to the neglect of a plain and literal reading. His method of interpretation would have a profound effect on the way in which Christians would read and understand the Bible.

A second individual who had an enormous influence on the church in the third century was a North African named Tertullian. Born into a pagan family, Tertullian was converted to Christianity later in life. In his ministry, Tertullian wrestled with two important things. First, he confronted the false teaching called modalism, an error concerning the persons of the Trinity. Modalists teach that there is one God who has appeared in different ways, or modes—as Father, Son, or Holy Spirit—thus confounding or confusing the persons of the Godhead by denying any real distinction between or among them. This teaching rejects everything Scripture has to say about the communion God enjoys within Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Also, it denies the reality of what the Bible has to say about the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ as the God-man. Tertullian vehemently fought against modalism and, as far as we know, was the first person in church history to use the word Trinity.

Tertullian's second problem was the growing moral indifference of professing Christians. Even though people were still being martyred for their faith, Tertullian perceived that unreserved consecration to Jesus Christ was beginning to disappear. He joined a

charismatic sect outside the church known as the Montanists, rigorists and ascetics interested in new revelations and prophecies. He felt he had found in the Montanists what he had been looking for in the church at large. Though a zealous defender of the faith, Tertullian tended to divide the Word of God from the Spirit of God, and the Spirit from the Word. He did not grasp the principle so evident in the way Jesus Himself lived His life in obedience to God in the Spirit's power—that to do so, a believer must constantly submit to the teaching God has given in Scripture. A very important lesson arises from the third-century church: we should never separate the Spirit of God from the Word of God, or the Word of God from our dependence on the Spirit of God. If men of ability and dedication such as Origen and Tertullian found it a tremendous challenge to grasp and apply this principle, we too must take care to study and apply the Scriptures under the Holy Spirit's guidance and illumination.

## SOME OTHER HELPFUL ARTICLES

### The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible

**CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS** - includes brief history of each creed.

- [Apostles' Creed](#)
- [Nicene Creed](#)
- [Athanasian Creed](#)
- [Belgic Confession](#) - Note this confession has multiple pages with 37 Articles all extensively referenced to Scripture.
- [Heidelberg Catechism](#) - Includes 52 "Lord's Day" topics for a total of 129 Question/Answers on assorted topics.
- [Canons of Dort](#) - Includes 1-5 "Head of Doctrine" topics, each with several "Articles."
- [Westminster Confession \(1647\)](#) - Includes 33 Chapters
- [Westminster Shorter Catechism](#) - 107 Questions and Answers
- [Westminster Larger Catechism](#) (1648) - 196 Questions and Answers

**[A NICE CONCORDANCE](#) - 210 PAGES**

**EXAMPLE** - Here is the last concordance entry:

**zeal** 2Ki. 10.16 see my z. for the Lorn; 19.31 the z. of the Lorn of hosts shall do this, Is. 9.7; 37.32; Ps. 69.9 the z. of thine house hath eaten me up, Jn. 2.17; Ro. 10.2 that they have a z. of God; 2Co. 7.11 yea, what z. + Ps. 119.139; Col. 4.13.

**zealous** Ac. 21.20 they are all z. of the law; 22.3 z. toward God, Ga. 1.14; Tit. 2.14 z. of good works + Nu. 25.13.

**zealously** Ga. 4.17.