



# KATOOMBA

— BAPTIST CHURCH —

## CHRIST'S CHURCH THROUGH THE AGES

### LESSON 12: THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS (PART 3) POLYCARP OF SMYRNA



## **BIOGRAPHY**

- Born AD 69 in Smyrna (Asia Minor)
- Polycarp became a disciple of the Apostle John as a young man, and was eventually appointed Bishop of Smyrna in John's final years.
- He was a contemporary and friend of other Apostolic Fathers, such as Ignatius of Antioch and Papias of Hierapolis.
- Was the teacher/mentor of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon.
- The primary sources of historical information about Polycarp come from:
  - *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* (unknown, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century)
  - *Against Heresies* (Irenaeus of Lyon, 2<sup>nd</sup> Century)
  - *Epistle to Polycarp* (Ignatius of Antioch, c. AD 108)
  - *Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* (c. early 2<sup>nd</sup> Century)

"I could tell you the place where the blessed Polycarp sat to preach the Word of God. It is yet present to my mind with what gravity he everywhere came in and went out; what was the sanctity of his deportment, the majesty of his countenance; and what were his holy exhortations to the people. I seem to hear him now relate how he conversed with John and many others who had seen Jesus Christ – the words he had heard from their mouths."

- *Irenaeus' Epistle to Florinus* (Eusebius)

## **VISIT TO ROME**

- According to Irenaeus, Polycarp was friends with Anicetus, Bishop of Rome.
- Polycarp visited the Church of Rome - primarily to discuss the difference in custom that existed between the churches of Asia and Rome with regard to Easter.
- This occurs during the early days of what is known as the 'Quartodeciman Controversy' - concerning a dispute as to when Easter should be celebrated.
- In the Eastern churches, the custom was to celebrate Easter on 14 Nisan (the Feast of Passover).
- In the Western churches, the custom was to celebrate Easter on Sunday (the day of Christ's Resurrection).
- DATE vs DAY

“Neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe what he had always observed with John, the disciple of our Lord, and the other Apostles with whom he had associated; neither could Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe it, as he said that he ought to follow the customs of the Apostles and Presbyters that had preceded him... But though matters were in this shape, they communed together, and Anicetus gifted the administration of the Eucharist in the church to Polycarp, manifestly as a mark of respect. And they parted from each other in peace, both those who observed, and those who did not, maintaining the peace of the whole church.”

- Irenaeus in *Book V, Church History* (Eusebius)

## **MARTYRDOM**

- Like his fellow Apostolic Fathers, Polycarp was martyred.
- He was murdered in AD 155, in Smyrna.
- Arrested on Holy Saturday, he was charged by Roman authorities for failing to pay homage to the Emperor.
- He was condemned, and sentenced to death by being burned at the stake.
- The details of Polycarp’s martyrdom are recorded in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (c. late 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD).

“Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong... How then can I blaspheme my King and Saviour? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked.”

- *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (c. late 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD)