

Bio for
Origen of Alexandria¹
(AD ~185 – ~254)

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- Origen was perhaps the first modern Bible scholar, as well as a preacher and philosopher, who, like Tertullian, was later condemned as a heretic.
 - He is thought to have been a native Egyptian.²
 - He was taught by his father, but the latter was martyred when Origen was young.
 - He may have been strongly influenced by Clement of Alexandria³, a Platonian philosopher and Christian who had founded a school in Alexandria.
 - He was also influenced by the preaching of Hippolytus of Rome.
- When his father was killed, he wanted to be killed also, so his mother stole all his clothes so that he would be too embarrassed to go outside.
- His mother and six siblings had their possessions confiscated, so he went to live with a rich Christian woman for a few years, where he continued to study.
- He reinstated Clement's Catechetical School of Alexandria at the age of eighteen!
- Origen was a strong ascetic. It was rumored that he even castrated himself so as to be able to teach women without being tempted to sin, but this may have been a rumor started by the Bishop of Alexandria (See below), and in his writings he argues against such literal interpretations of Scripture (See below).
- Epiphanius claimed that Origen wrote in Greek about 6,000 works (but "works" may have meant chapters or volumes) on many different topics, but most of them have been lost (See below).
 - Some of his most well known books are:
 - *Hexapla* — a compilation of six translations of the Old Testament side by side
 - *Stromateis* — brief summaries of the meanings of difficult passages in Scripture
 - *On First Principles* — a book of philosophy that presented Christianity as a complete philosophy
 - *On Prayer*
 - *On Martyrdom*
 - *Against Celsus* — written against those philosophers who argued against Christianity
 - He wrote huge multi-volume commentaries on most of the books of the Bible.
 - Origen was a scholar of Hebrew. As a translator, he was very conscious about the differences in both Old Testament and New Testament manuscripts and often made note of such variants.
 - He considered the Septuagint to be more authoritative than the Masoretic Text.

Sources:

<http://www.earlychurch.org.uk>

<http://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.html>

http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/history/church_fathers.htm

¹ The Church of Alexandria, in Egypt, is said to have been founded by John Mark, the evangelist and traditional writer of the Gospel of Mark.

² "Origen" may mean "born of Horus".

³ Clement of Alexandria was considered a Saint by the Catholic Church for hundreds of years, until it was decided — and probably rightfully so — that he had mixed too much pagan philosophy with his theology, and he was no longer regarded as a Saint.

- He held *1 Clement* and *The Shepherd of Hermas* to be canonical.
 - He tended to interpret Scripture allegorically, not literally.
 - He went out of his way to refute Gnosticism in his writings.
 - He supported every statement of philosophy or theology in his works with Scripture.
 - He argued that Paul wrote the letter of Hebrews or, more specifically, that some unknown person wrote Paul's thoughts down for him.
 - Unlike most of the early Church writers up to his time, Origen did not believe in a literal millennial reign of Christ.
 - He believed in a cyclical history, that there was a universe before this one.
 - He believed that the sun, moon, and stars, are conscious beings.
 - He often wrote about the free will of humans and the supreme goodness of God.
 - He believed in the preexistence of souls, ultimate universal salvation/redemption, and possibly a hierarchical view of the Trinity. In 553, the Church ordered the destruction or modification of some of Origen's writings, because it was determined that his views on these things were heretical.⁴
- Eusebius claimed to have had a collection of over a hundred letters written by Origen. Only a few remain today, but one of them is noteworthy because it defends the authenticity of the Greek portions of Daniel.
 - In addition to the works he wrote himself, other unknown authors wrote down a vast collection of his sermons, which cover a large portion of the Bible.
 - Upon visiting Rome during the headship of Bishop Zephyrinus, he, like Hippolytus, was disgusted by the moral compromise in the Church that he found there.
 - He became close friends with a rich man named Ambrose, whom he converted from Gnosticism, and he dedicated all of his later books to him, because the latter funded the publication of the books.
 - For a few years, Origen lived in Caesarea, where he preached and taught from the Scripture there.
 - On a second visit there, he was ordained as an elder.
 - This — and his past preaching there without permission — angered the bishop of Alexandria, who called a meeting of bishops and elders.
 - They banished Origen from Alexandria and declared his eldership to be void.
 - Those in Alexandria and Rome accepted this judgment, while all the other churches in the world seem to have ignored it.
 - Origen's character continued to be attacked for many years.
 - He continued to be sent on missions against heresies by the Church, despite the rumors against him.
 - Origen died after being severely tortured in ~254 during the persecution started by Emperor Decius, who blamed the Christians refusal to worship him as the cause of the Antonine Plague.

⁴ Since the writings about these beliefs were destroyed, it is hard to verify if he really believed them.