THE QUESTION

At what age did girls in the early church begin wearing a head covering?

Asked by a THF member on August 18, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 5 numbered quotations · the 12 early Christian passages and 39 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/at-what-age-did-girls-in-the-early-church-begin-wearing-a-head-covering

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

These passages name no set age. Tertullian argued that Paul's words about women covering their heads applied to unmarried virgins too, and to every age of woman. But he wrote because churches disagreed, and some let virgins go unveiled. Nothing here speaks of little children wearing coverings.

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IN THIS STUDY

1	Churches disagreed about veiling unmarried virgins	**2**
2	Tertullian: woman names the whole sex	**2**
3	Every woman means every age, he argued	**2**
4	Paul's reasons apply to virgins too	**3**
5	Clement tied the veil to modesty	**3**
	What these passages don't tell us	**4**
	The Sources: 12 early Christian passages and 39 Bible verses, with links	**4**

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POINT 1 OF 5

Churches disagreed about veiling unmarried virgins

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian says whether virgins should be veiled was an open question in the churches. Those who let virgins go uncovered argued that Paul named women, not virgins, in his teaching on head coverings.

1

"But we must deal with this point, which is commonly observed throughout the churches: whether virgins should be veiled or not."

later in the same passage

"For those who allow virgins to be free from head-covering seem to base their view on this: that the apostle did not specifically name virgins, but women, in 1 Corinthians 11:5, as those who are to be veiled."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Prayer* 21 **Source 6, page 4** Read it in the library ›
(c. 196–220 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 5

Tertullian: woman names the whole sex

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian answers that the Bible calls Eve a woman before she was married. So, he says, the word woman covers unmarried virgins as well as wives.

2

"So, since Eve, though not yet married, was called woman at that time, that word has been made common even to a virgin."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Prayer* 22 **Source 3, page 4** Read it in the library ›
(c. 196–220 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 5

Every woman means every age, he argued

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Tertullian reads Paul's word every as leaving no group out. He compares it to the way the word man includes boys. This is the closest these passages come to the question of age, but he names no starting point.

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3 “He intended the virgin to be understood in the woman, for the same reason that he did not name the boy separately, but allowed him to be implied in the man.”

later in the same passage

“And what is "every," except every class, every order, every condition, every dignity, every age?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Veiling of Virgins* 8 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 4, page 4** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 5

Paul's reasons apply to virgins too

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian goes through Paul's reasons for covering, such as shame at a shorn head and the sign of authority on the head. He argues each one fits the virgin as much as the married woman, or even more.

4 “If it is shameful for a woman to be shaved or shorn, then of course it is so for a virgin as well.”

later in the same passage

“If the woman ought to have power upon the head, then all the more rightly should the virgin have it, since the very essence of the reason applies even more to her.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Veiling of Virgins* 7 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 7, page 4** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 5

Clement tied the veil to modesty

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement of Alexandria speaks of chaste women covering their heads as part of modest dress, so that beauty does not become a trap for men. He does not say at what age this began.

5 “This is true not only because it is forbidden to expose the ankle, but also because it has been commanded that the head be veiled and the face covered. For it is an evil thing when beauty becomes a trap for men.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 2.11 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 2, page 4** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- None of these passages names an age when girls began to cover their heads.
- Nothing here speaks of small children wearing coverings, and Tertullian's argument shows churches did not all agree about unmarried girls.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 12 early Christian passages and 39 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–12, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 13–35, in Bible order), then 16 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *12 passages from 5 writers*

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · source 1*

1 *Shepherd* (1885 English) “virgin meets me, adorned as if she were proceeding from the bridal chamber, clothed entirely in white, and with white sandals, and veiled up to her forehead, and her head… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · source 2*

2 *Instructor* 2.11 **Quote 5, page 3** in wearing them. Clothes should not be above the knee, as they say was the case with the Spartan virgins. And it is not proper for any part of a… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 3–8*

3 *On Prayer* 22 **Quote 2, page 2** of the angels," 1 Corinthians 11:10 that he says women must be veiled, because on account of the daughters of men angels revolted from God. Who then would argue… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *On the Veiling of Virgins* 8 **Quote 3, page 3** “all these opposite points, the result is that a man is not to cover his head. That is because nature has not given him excess of hair, because it is… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *On the Veiling of Virgins* 17 “do not quite reach to the ears. If they are so weak in hearing that they cannot hear through a covering, I pity them. Let them know that the whole… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *On Prayer* 21 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** “they who allow to virgins immunity from head-covering, appear to rest on this… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *On the Veiling of Virgins* 7 **Quote 4, page 3** they were fair, took to themselves wives from all whom they chose." For here the Greek word for women seems to mean wives, since marriage is mentioned. When, then, it… [continues online] **read ›**

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8 *On the Veiling of Virgins* 12 (1885 English; on point 3) “a veil externally upon her who has (already) a covering internally… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 9–10*

9 *Treatises* (1885 English) “Timothy 2:9-10 Also Peter consents to these same precepts, and says, Let there be in the woman not the outward adorning of array, or gold, or apparel, but… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Treatises* “disgraceful clothing and immodest adornment accuse you. Nor can you now be counted among Christ's maidens and virgins, since you live in such a way as to make yourselves… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 11–12*

11 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 5) “downward when you walk abroad, veiling yourself as becomes women… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Apostolic Constitutions* “the women approach with their heads covered, as is… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *23 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

13 **Genesis 2:23** And Adam said, “This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of her husband.” **read ›**

14 **Susanna 1:32** And the lawless men ordered her to be unveiled, for she was veiled, so that they might feast their eyes on her beauty. **read ›**

15 **Susanna 1:34** And the two elders stood up in the midst of the people and laid their hands on her head. **read ›**

16 **Luke 3:5** Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked places shall become straight, and the rough ways shall become smooth roads. **read ›**

17 **Acts 3:17** Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your rulers. **read ›**

18 **Acts 4:1** As they spoke to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came to them, **read ›**

19 **Acts 7:20** At that time Moses was born, and he was beautiful before God. He was brought up for three months in his father’s house. **read ›**

20 **Acts 21:9** Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. **read ›**

21 **Romans 9:19** You will say then to me, “Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?” **read ›**

22 **1 Corinthians 5:2** And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, so that the one who did this deed might be removed from among you. **read ›**

23 **1 Corinthians 7:34** There is also a distinction between the wife and the virgin. The unmarried woman cares for the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But the married woman cares for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. **read ›**

24 **1 Corinthians 11:4** Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. **read ›**

25 **1 Corinthians 11:5** But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered dishonors her head. For it is one and the same thing as if she were shaved. **read ›**

26 **1 Corinthians 11:6** For if a woman is not covered, let her hair also be cut off. But if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or be shaved, let her be covered. **read ›**

27 **1 Corinthians 11:7** For a man indeed ought not to have his head covered, because he is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man. **read ›**

28 **1 Corinthians 11:10** For this reason the woman ought to have authority on her head, because of the angels. **read ›**

29 **1 Corinthians 11:13** Judge for yourselves: is it fitting for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? **read ›**

30 **1 Corinthians 11:15** But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her, because her hair is given as a covering. **read ›**

31 **2 Corinthians 2:10** Now I also forgive anyone to whom you forgive anything. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, **read ›**

32 **2 Corinthians 5:11** Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are revealed to God, and I hope that we are revealed also in your consciences. **read ›**

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33 **1 Timothy 2:9** Likewise, I desire that women adorn themselves in orderly clothing, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothing, **read ›**

34 **1 Peter 3:5** For this is how in the past the holy women who hoped in God also adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands. **read ›**

35 **Revelation 14:4** These are those who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were redeemed by Jesus from among men, the first fruits to God and to the Lamb. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *16 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Genesis 6:1

Isaiah 27:1

Matthew 6:5 · 12:36 · 14:31

Acts 4:12 · 20:28

1 Corinthians 4:7 · 11:3 · 11:14 · 11:16

2 Corinthians 10:13

1 Thessalonians 5:20

1 Peter 1:19 · 2:9 · 5:7

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “At what age did girls in the early church begin wearing a head covering?” on August 18, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY