

JTB XV. CHURCH HISTORY

Scripture: Acts 20:29,30; 2Thessalonians 2:1-12; 1Timothy 4:1-3

Historical Era: From 60 A.D. to the 2nd Coming

Preparations for the Church Age [from 63 B.C. to 100 A.D.]

(1) The "Pax Romana" (Roman Peace) - Rome consolidated all nations around the Mediterranean Sea, safe roads, postal system

(2) The Jewish "Diaspora" - those with OT background and hope for Messiah were scattered around the known world. The Gospel could reach "prepared" listeners everywhere!

(3) Jesus provided both message and a real space-time object of faith. The NT apostles and prophets laid the Christ-given foundation for the church to follow (Ephesians 2:19-21)

(4) Jewish persecution - from 30 - 65 A.D. the Jewish leaders persecuted the church as a "false messianic sect"

The Struggle with Rome [from 100 to 395 A.D.]

(1) Rome and Religion - Rome tolerated all decent religions in captured areas so that "local deities" would allow Rome to rule. It was the duty of Roman citizens to tolerate all other legal religions and worship Rome, focused in the emperor.

(2) Roman persecution - following Nero's blaming of the fire of Rome on "Christians," the church became distinct from Judaism in Rome's view and an illegal religion. Between 65-313 A.D., there were 10 persecutions of Christianity and 2 of these were empire-wide.

An "Edict of Toleration" was issued by Constantine in 313 A.D. and, by 395 A.D., Theodosius would make Christianity the "state church" and new "official religion" of the Roman Empire. Thus, within a century, the persecuted minority would become the ruling majority, with a developing hierarchy modeled on the Roman political system to oversee it.



(3) *Apologists* wrote during the persecution era to defend the church against erroneous and vicious attacks and explain its true nature to outsiders.

(4) Theologians and Councils wrestled with doctrinal issues from 325 A.D. onward. Sometimes, "orthodoxy/heresy" came to be a matter of argumentation, popularity, and majority opinion at the councils (not to mention "politics").

(5) As the church began to move into institutionalism and politics, the monastic movement began as individuals sought the "spiritual life"

Transition to the Middle Ages [from 395 to 600 A.D.]

(1) In 395 A.D., the Roman Empire split into a west and east empire (along old cultural lines), with Rome and Constantinople as respective capitals.

(2) From the 2nd century A.D. onward, Rome had begun showing serious signs of political and economic decay as more and more people tried to live off the strength of past victories.

(3) The third and fourth centuries A.D. saw increasing pressure on the northern border as barbarians tried to move west ahead of the Mongols who were also moving west.

(4) As the empire fell, so did the general culture. Learning became a privilege of the few and dependence on authority increased. As the political system declined, the church increasingly moved into the power vacuum.

The Rise of the Papacy and Islam [from 600 to 1054 A.D.]

(1) Gregory the Great (590-604 A.D.) begins to make the Roman bishop into a political figure.

(2) The rise of Islam (630-1492 A.D.) removed Christian control of Spain, north Africa, the Middle East, and Asia Minor. Prior to the rise of Islam, powerful church centers existed at Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, and Rome – afterwards, only the last two remained!

(3) The Carolingian Dynasty (the Franks – later “France”) gave military muscle to the Papacy and halted an Islamic raiding party from entering Europe in 732 A.D.

(4) The Carolingian rulers of central Europe, with Papal blessing, created the "Holy Roman Empire" in what is now central Europe and it lasted from Charlemagne’s coronation (800) until 1800. Education began to revive and the Greek philosophers were blended with Scripture by the *Scholastics*.

(5) Alexander the Great and Rome were unable to permanently fuse the east and west, so it is no surprise that the political church couldn't hold them together either. Doctrinal differences (and other things) led to split between the eastern and western church in 1054 A.D. and it remains so to this day. Rome and Constantinople were the two capitals of two “state-Church” empires - Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

Prelude to Reformation [from 1054 to 1500 A.D.]

(1) Seven *Crusades* (1095-1270 A.D.) were fought to free the Holy Land from Islamic control, as well as some other things of a less "spiritual" nature.

(2) Early reformers (Waldo, Wycliffe, Huss, Savonarola) tried to make a turn back to the Scripture and away from the growing mass of Roman tradition and hunger for power (1300-1400's).



(3) Medieval Catholicism demonstrated the danger of mixing politics and religion - power and corruption. The *Inquisition* (1231-1800 A.D.) included three phases: persecuting doctrinal heresies, witchcraft, and insincere Jewish converts to Catholicism in Spain. The peak of papal power came in *Innocent III* (1198-1216 A.D.). The *Avignon Papacy* (1305-1378 A.D.) was a period when the Papal Court moved to the French border for 70 years so as to have more influence over an increasing self-willed French monarchy. Following this was the *Great Papal Schism* (1378-1417) in which two and then three concurrent rival Popes struggled for control until the Emperor and the Council of Constance (1414-1418) could rein them in.

(4) The *Renaissance* built on the Scholastic movement's rediscovery of the Greek philosophers by exalting ancient Greco-Roman culture in general. Beginning in Italy as a very humanistic movement, as the Renaissance moved north into Switzerland and Germany it became more "religious" and contributed to the 16th century "Reformation."

From this era, we have a look at the medieval worldview in Dante Alegheri's (1265-1321 A.D.) "Divine Comedy" in which Dante and the Roman Poet Virgil take a trip to Purgatory, Hell, and then Heaven. Lorenzo Valla (1406-1457 A.D.) employed literary criticism to discover that the "Donation of Constantine" (part of the Isidorian Decretals that claimed the Papal States were a gift from the Roman Emperor Constantine) that appeared in the 9th century were fraudulent works written long after Constantine's time.

There was a trend away from Christianity rooted in Hebrew/Biblical concepts to one rooted more in Classical Greek philosophy concepts.

The Great Reformation [from 1500 to 1650 A.D.]

(1) Men searching for truth and God:

- Martin Luther (1483-1546 A.D.) in Germany, aided by Philip Melancthon
- Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531 A.D.) in Zurich, Switzerland
- Menno Simons (1496-1561 A.D.), an Anabaptist preacher in Germany/Netherlands
- John Calvin (1510-1572 A.D.) in Geneva, Switzerland, his views spread into

Holland/Scotland

- The English Reformation (1500 - 1600 A.D.) - remodeled Romanism without the Pope

(2) European Religious Wars (1530 - 1648 A.D.) fought between Catholic/Protestant armies

(3) The Peace of Westphalia (1648) ended the wars and drew boundary lines that have shaped modern Catholic/Protestant Europe

G. A New World to Win [1650 A.D. to the Present]

- (1) New Horizons west - Columbus "discovers" what the natives and Vikings already knew
– a new continent lay to the west, between Europe and the Orient

- (2) European rivalries come to the Americas
 - Spanish colonies in South, Central, & southwest North America (Florida & Caribbean)
 - French colonies in Canada and New Orleans
 - English colonies on North America's east coast

- (3) The "Great Awakening" introduced new religious life and movements to 19th century religious life in England (the Wesleys) and the American Colonies (charismatic revivalism, New Testament Restorationism, Adventism, the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, inter-denominational "faith-only" revivalism)

- (4) Liberalism, Modernism, and Neo-orthodoxy (1700 - 1987) offered non-traditional "interpretations" of Christian thought, expressing Enlightenment presuppositions

- (5) Conservative Revival (1900 to present)
 - 1962 & 1963 saw the Supreme Court officially "separating" Christianity from the Government and Public arena. America became, officially, a "secular" state.

- (6) Electronic church and "celebrity" TV and Arena preachers (1970's & 80's)

- (7) Grassroots revival of interest in spiritual things (1990's)

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