

History of the Church

5 Part Study

Jim Lay



In this session we will cover about 40 years of Early Church History. As you might guess, the topic of Church History and books written about it are huge. I have taken this topic and decided to divide it up by meaningful sections and try to hit the highlights of each time period.

Have to ask this question

- Why Study Church History at all ?
- Who cares about Church History anyway?
 - We are where we are and the past does not matter

Many of you are probably wondering, “**Why study church history at all?**”.

This is a fair question considering you have lived many years without any more than a cursory understanding of key events. I will address this question again in a few minutes, but I want you to think about what the answer might be if I were to ask you.

Class Information

- **I cannot possibly cover all the material that is available and important**
 - **I will select those topics that I believe give you a sense of the reasons and background issues that triggered changes within the church**
- **We will cover in 5 sessions a whole semester of material**
- **I suggest if you are interested in this subject you purchase and read the resources listed at the end of this discussion. I have used these for my information.**

I cannot possibly cover all the material that is available for this topic; so I will select the topics in each section that I believe are most relevant to our discussion, with special emphasis on the background happenings that triggered some of the events.

This topic is a major subject in Seminaries and would be a 1 or 2 semester study. If your passions and interests are stirred by church history, I would recommend studying the books in the reference section of the presentation.

Schedule of Lessons

Topic	Date
Part 1- Beginnings	5/5/2010
The Age of Jesus and the Apostles (30ad-70ad)	
Part 2 – Early Church	5/12/2010
The Age of the Universal Church (70ad – 312ad)	
Part 3 – Institutions Formed	5/19/2010
The Age of the Christian Roman Empire (312ad-590ad)	
Part 4 – Religion and the State	5/26/2010
The Christian Middle Ages (590ad-1517ad)	
The Age of Reformation (1517ad – 1648ad)	
Part 5 – Challenged by Expansion and Ideas	6/2/2010
The Age of Reason, Revival, and Progress (1648ad – 1914ad)	
The Age of Ideology (1925ad to Present)	

Today our study will be Beginnings – The Age of Jesus and the Apostles, and it will cover the period from approximately 30ad to 70 ad. We will discuss Part 2 at the end of this session.

In general there are 8 Ages to the church. We will group them into 5 for this study

Part 1 – Beginnings

The Age of Jesus & the Apostles (30ad to 70ad)



What's in this lesson?

- **We will discuss ...**

- The nature of the beginnings of the new Christian movement
- How the new movement was viewed by other parties in the area
- How the church practiced its faith in the beginning and how it changed the face of Christianity
- The affects of both the burning of Rome in 64ad and the destruction of the temple in 70ad

We will discuss some key elements of this period as it relates to the church, namely the beginnings of the movement, how it was viewed by others that lived in the area, the practices of the church and how it's services were conducted. We will look at the evolving problems and how two events in the time period shaped both the nature and character of the church in the following 200 years.

Have to ask this question

- Why Study Church History at all ?
- Who cares about Church History anyway?
 - We are where we are and the past does not matter
- Thoughts:
 - Did the “church” have a beginning?
 - More importantly, does it have an end?
 - If it has an end, what difference does it make?

I asked this question earlier, “**Why study church history at all?**”.

What would you say about why it is needed ?

Other questions that deserve a look and an answer:

Did the church have a beginning? When do you think it was? Do you think it depends on what we mean by church? I do, but there was a movement of believers that happened right after Pentecost.

If the church had a beginning, does it have an end? Wow, think about that. We call the time period we are in today as the Church Age. This means that the church is active and functioning with the Holy Spirit guiding it.

Does the Church have an end? If it has an end, what difference does that make to you and to me? ...and does that provide any clues as to why Church History is an important topic for Christians to understand?

Church History Importance

- For many Christians today, the time between the Apostles and today is a complete blank. In being unaware of our Christian History, we become vulnerable to the appeals of the cultists, and distortions of Christianity can be mistaken for the real thing.
- In this study, my hope is that you will come to understand how the church evolved, and how distortions in the faith caused splits and serious movements within the church family, many of which are still persistent today.
- Why so many traditions, or denominations evolved, and why there are such different views of the ways to worship God, and such different views on fundamental Christian tenets. You will find out where Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, Roman Catholics, and Greek/Russian Orthodox churches originated, and learn about some of the very historic names of pioneers in Church History. At the end, we will talk about many of the movements we see today in religion in the U.S.
- Finally, I believe we are close to the end of the Church Age, as we know it. This means it has never been more important to come back to the historic faith of the early church and the Apostles plus believe what they believed and focus on what they believed.

Read the slide –

Two items jump out at me when I think of this whole subject. One is a discussion about “movements” which I will talk about next week and the other is a Peanuts cartoon about Church History. As many of you probably know, Charles Schultz was a devout Christian, and many of his stories about Charlie Brown are parallels to Christianity.

There was a comic strip in 1975 where Charlie Brown is checking on Lucy Van Pelt who is writing an essay on Church History.

Peanuts Cartoon on Church History



She starts off her essay with the thought “ **In studying Church History, we must go back to the very beginning....our Pastor was born in 1930**”. While funny, it also dramatizes what most Christians think and know about their faith and the events that bring us to today.

Is this where we begin and end our discussion about Church History? I hope after these sessions you will have a deeper understanding of the subject and its importance than Lucy had.

Picture this...

What was Palestine like in 30ad?

- Mixed group of people with very different heritages and beliefs
 - **Pagans** – these people made up about 50% of the population and included the Romans
 - **Hellenistic Jews** and learned men
 - **5 distinct groups of Jews**...all hated Roman occupation but the difference was what they did about it
 - Jews who followed Law scrupulously and provided discipline within the Synagogue – **Pharisees**
 - Jews who were comfortable with Roman laws and Greek influence because they were the wealthy aristocrats of Jewish culture and held High Priest position – **Sadducees**
 - Jews who hated Rome and dreamed of overthrowing them. Also were the guerilla fighters who struck the Romans and then hid – **Zealots**
 - Jews who despised politics and just wanted to be left alone. They lived monastic lives in the desert mountains - **Essenes**
- *All competing for allegiances of the people*

Background information about Palestine in the time period around 30ad

Each of these competing ideas and groups of people were constantly trying to gain the loyalty of others to support their positions. It was a tumultuous time in history, and a caldron to start a new Movement...a Jesus Movement

Add another group

- The Jesus movement
 - Began at Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist
 - 3 short years until the trial and crucifixion of Jesus
 - At the loss of the shepherd the sheep scatter
- From the Resurrection to Pentecost the movement solidified
- At Pentecost it broke out. See Acts 2
- The crucifixion of Jesus set in motion a chain of events that has changed the world and peoples lives *forever*

Jesus came on the scene and was part of these ideas. He saw them, and dealt with people in them as he went through His life. He decided to join the small group of people that John the Baptist was baptizing and preparing for his own coming. He was baptized and began his ministry in the small towns in and around Jerusalem and Galilee.

We know the story in the Gospels of His ministry and all the events leading up to the recruitment of his disciples, His arrest, and His crucifixion. We know the story of the Resurrection and His appearances thereafter to the disciples and others in the area. This "Jesus Movement" started small, gained a following, and had a setback when Jesus, its leader, was crucified like a common criminal. The shepherd is lost and the sheep scatter. This is what happened until His Resurrection. He gathered the sheep and restored their confidence in Him, by reminding them of what He had said before and how it had come to pass...just as He had said. He also gave His disciples, as individuals, the Holy Spirit.

At Pentecost, the coming of the Spirit in such a dramatic way to all the gathered believers set the movement on fire and took away their fears. They were not only believers, but they were witnesses to the Lord, and the coming of the Holy Spirit. They were convinced and 3000 new converts came to the movement. (See Acts 2 for the discussion of Pentecost and the Revival that broke out.)

During this time the 12 Disciples became Apostles. They changed from learners to "sent ones", trained by Jesus and called to a mission and sent forth to do it. We think of the Apostles as a station or office in the early church, but it was the ones singled out by our Lord to be "Sent Out" to do His Will.

A Key Development

- Jews in power decided against persecuting the followers of Jesus for a while because:
 - They still kept the Mosaic Laws
 - They were almost exclusively Jews
 - They had their meetings on Sunday, what they called the Lord's day, but kept Saturday the Sabbath and respected the traditions
 - The Jews viewed them as a sect of the Jews
 - The Jews thought they would die off now that Jesus was dead

One little problem- All they talked about was Jesus and were recruiting others to join them, many Greek Jews and the movement had at least 5000 men at this time.

In the early days after the Resurrection the town was teeming with activity, and the Jews, the Apostles especially Peter and John, were preaching everywhere about Jesus and His Resurrection. The Jews were incensed and had them arrested several times. At the encouragement of Gamaliel, a very learned Pharisee, the Jews left them alone; because if it was not of God, it would die out, and if it was of God, they dare not oppose it.

After Pentecost

- Peter boldly preaches and 3000 come to the new movement...they called it “The Way”
- Many new converts were non-Jewish heritage, and mostly the Greek cultured Jews or Greek pagans.
- Church gets imbalanced and the issue of taking care of the widows of the Jews and Greeks arises
- In Acts we see the appointment of Deacons, or Diakonos which means Servant or Minister to take care of the ministry

As the church grows, both Jewish heritage converts and Greek heritage converts were added; but the vast majority were the Greek Heritage. Knowing the cultural bias the Jews had and the hate for the Roman occupiers, it was not surprising that tensions arose. God has a plan though and the movement begins to add some structure. In Acts 6, we see this play out and the Apostles (Sent ones) name another group of men to minister to the church widows. Deacon means Servant or Minister and denotes a place of Service to the flock on behalf of the Apostles or leaders.

Movement Grows

- In the period of 30ad to 40ad much happens
 - Movement grows dramatically
 - Cannot be ignored by Jewish leaders any longer
 - Caldron of mixed population is beginning to boil over with violence taking its toll
 - Zealots killing Romans and stirring up anger everywhere
 - Stephen stoned after Kangaroo court trial while Saul of Tarsus eggs the Jews on
 - Other Movement leaders caught and put in prison or beaten
 - James the brother of John was killed by the Jews(44ad)
 - Saul goes to Damascus in 38ad to find and persecute more Christians

But a little thing happened on the way – He met Jesus

The early church was an exciting place to be. Just think how exciting it would be to be there when Jesus was there, and see him Resurrected, and hear Him give you instructions. Then to be empowered and indwelt by the Holy Spirit to do the tasks given. My personal opinion is that another wonderful time to be a Christian and be in service to the Lord will be when He comes back for the Rapture and calls us home. What a glorious day to be living in the close of the Church Age.

Back to the early church...people getting saved, people getting baptized, people getting the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and people getting the empowering gifts of the spirit, and people witnessing boldly proclaiming Jesus is Lord, and preaching His Resurrection.

The Jews can't take it much longer. Meanwhile the situation with the Romans was getting worse. The Zealots were terrorizing Roman troops on highways and hiding in the hills. They were attacking small garrisons and making themselves painful thorns in the Roman sides.

Stephen is boldly preaching as well as being a Deacon, and having great effect. So much so that the Jews arrest him and have him stoned. Saul of Tarsus watches and encourages the Jewish leaders and the mob to stone Stephen. (Stephanos= EARNED Crown)

Others in the Jesus Movement were also caught and beaten, but not killed...yet. The effect on the believers was immediate, and they began to scatter out for protection from the Jews.

Then in 38ad Saul goes to Damascus to find and persecute more believers of the Way, but on the way He met Jesus. Jesus confronted Him

And asked him why he was persecuting Him, and Saul asked who he was, and was told Jesus. Paul was a believer in God, His sovereignty, and when faced with Jesus being God, he submitted and believed.

Movement spreads out

- Due to the persecution by the Jews and the strain of living in Jerusalem, many Jews as well as Movement people left for other, safer regions
- All the area of major populations around the Mediterranean Sea were touched and seeds planted
- Saul became Paul and after some mistrust by the early church, became the Apostle to the Gentiles
- We know through the letters of Paul, what happened and where he went.
- The movement was still operating out of Synagogues where there were some and house meetings where there were not.

As the movement spread out due to persecution, the believers started their work in the synagogues in the Mediterranean area. New congregations of believers were spreading in Jewish synagogues, meeting in houses, fellowshiping over meals, and helping each other day by day.

Saul became Paul, and was suspected of being a plant by the early church leaders and was not trusted. Paul eventually won over these leaders as they were impressed by the Lord to accept Paul, and Paul was called out, and sent by God to the Gentiles. He was an Apostle to the Gentiles. It was a good thing too because he was definitely not welcome in Jerusalem by the Jews. He was a traitor to them and not one of the uneducated fishermen that were the normal Apostles...Paul was more dangerous to the Jewish system.

Paul made several journeys to Asia Minor as an Evangelist and church planter. He started churches, he encouraged small churches, he taught them to depend on Grace and the Holy Spirit and not the old system of Law, and he was a powerful speaker to the educated Romans and Greeks.

What were they doing on the Lord's Day?

- Typical service consisted of
 - Scripture Reading
 - Singing and Praising God
 - Message from an Apostle or Leader
 - Time for coming to the Lord
- Two other things they did from the beginning
 - Baptism for new converts
 - Lords Supper Celebration

We know something about the church worship from the letters of Paul and others, and we know what the focus items were for them.

Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, and the fact that He was the fulfillment of the long awaited Messiah

The early church preached Jesus as God, and His Resurrection from the Dead to save us from our sins. This is a simple message the church today needs to get back to and preach the power in the blood and resurrection story of Jesus. As eyewitnesses to it, they were particularly powerful and passionate. This wasn't "I think" to them, it was "I know, because I was there."

Normal meetings had Scripture reading (mostly OT prophecy of the Messiah at first), Singing of psalms, chants, and praises to God. Then the leader, usually an Apostle, would rise and speak, and there would be a time for decision to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.

In addition to these, the church practiced baptism, usually immediately after acceptance, and communion, Eucharist (Latin), or Lord's Supper). These two ordinances were cornerstones to the church to demonstrate death and new birth as a Christian, and the atonement and forgiveness of sin by the shed blood. We still read the Lord's supper message from Corinthians as we celebrate it today.

Like all good fellowships, they also ate meals together and called them the Agape Love Feast, which would get them in some trouble later...

From 50-70ad Things Changed

- Zealots were increasingly bold and killing high ranking Roman Generals
- Herod finished the Temple and lots of working class Jews now out of work
- Roman provincial governors tried to quell the problems but tensions and violence continued.
- Romans got fed up with the Jews and sent Titus, the son of Caesar to take care of the Jerusalem problem, which he did...
- Jewish Temple destroyed, records burned, and temple treasure looted or taken to Rome.
- The Zealots got the fight they wanted but a great number of Jews and other people in the area were killed and arrested
- The followers of Jesus were considered Jews by the Romans and they were persecuted and killed. Both Peter and Paul are martyred in Rome about 64ad
- Bitterness developed by the Jews because the movement leaders in the church had a vision of problems, and Jesus had predicted the destruction of the temple, and they had fled the city before the battle.
- Jews considered them traitors and never allowed them in the synagogues again.
- *All the Apostles except John are dead, and the new movement is on its own forever separated from its beginning roots... The real church begins*

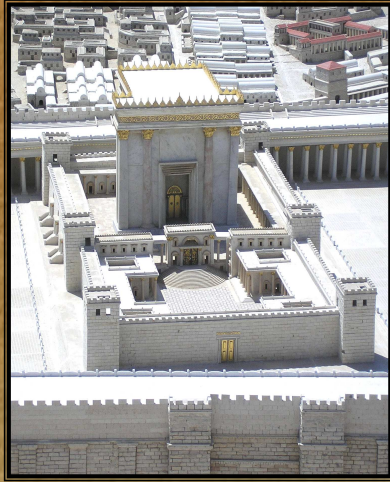
The pressure in the caldron was boiling over. James, the brother of John was killed by the Jews in 44ad, and the Zealots were turning up the attacks on the Romans. Herod has begun to build the temple and had finished it in 54ad, and now the workers were all out of work. People being idle and having nothing to do, they became easy recruits for the Zealots and the Zealots took control of Jerusalem. The Romans fought them but to no avail.

Finally Titus, the son of the Emperor came with his army and recaptured the city and destroyed the temple, burned the records, and hauled off any remaining artifacts. The temple was desecrated and no stone was left except the western wall that is still there in Jerusalem today known as "The Wailing Wall."

The Zealots wanted the war, and they thought all the inhabitants of Jerusalem would stand and fight with them, but the Christians anticipated the problem and left the city. Many Jews and innocents were killed by the Romans. Our notion of a "just war" was not part of their world. They crushed the Jews and arrested many and carted them off.

As a result, the Jews now turned on this sect of followers of Jesus and banished them forever from the temples. This fledgling movement has some serious problems, but they have the Lord and His power.

Destruction of Temple—AD 70



*Model of the temple that
the Romans destroyed in
AD 70*

- Emperor Vespasian sent his son Titus to retake the rebel provinces.
- In AD 70, Titus destroyed the Jewish temple.
- Jesus predicted this event ([Mark 13:1–2](#)).

Image: © Boris Diakovsky

Romans move against Jews and Believers



*Coin with image of
Emperor Claudius*

- In AD 54, Emperor Claudius expelled from Rome all persons practicing the Jewish religion.
- This edict of Claudius included Jewish believers in Jesus ([Acts 18:2](#)).
- In 64ad 10 districts of Rome burned and Nero blamed the Christians. Many think Nero started the fire himself

[Click Here for Map](#)

At the same time in 54ad the Romans kicked the Jews out of Rome. This was for all the Jews and the sect of Jesus Jews as well. All over the empire problems were occurring. Roman emperors were looking for a scapegoat for the problems in the empire and the Christians were the lucky ones.

In 64ad, Rome burned, and Nero was emperor.

The Fire in Rome—AD 64



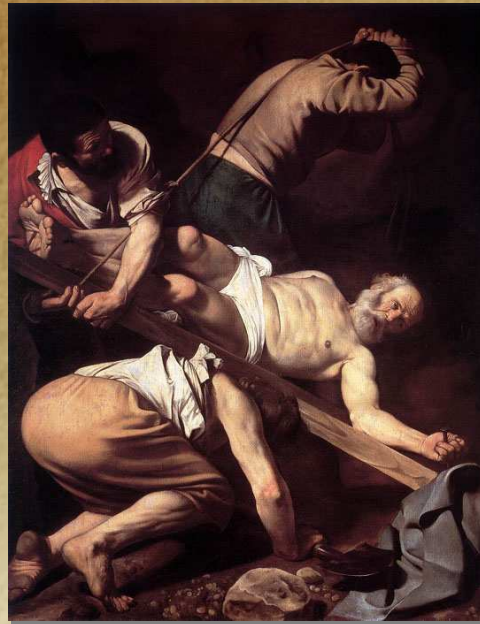
Emperor Nero

- The fire probably began by accident in an oil warehouse.
- Many Romans claimed that Emperor Nero started the fire.
- To stop the rumors, Nero blamed the Christians.

If the Tiber floods, the Christians are to blame. The Christians became a target in the empire for focused anger,

The Fire in Rome—AD 64

- The Apostles Peter and Paul were probably martyred during Nero's persecution of Christians.



Crucifixion of Peter

“Crucifixion of Saint Peter” by Caravaggio (1600)

During this time, the Apostles Peter and Paul are both executed in Rome. Peter was crucified upside down, and because Paul was a Roman he could not be crucified, which was only for non Romans, but was most likely beheaded

Destruction of Temple—AD 70



- The final group of Jewish rebels chose mass-suicide instead of surrender.
- They died at Masada, a desert fortress that Herod the Great had built near the Dead Sea.

Masada- Hebrew for Fortress

These Zealots who were driven from Rome put up a valiant struggle but committed mass suicide in the area called Masada. To this day this is a point of pride for the Jews and is on most of the tours of the area

Recap of where we are

- We have seen several important things in Church History by 70ad
 - Movement changes from Jewish sect to Ekklesia, or "called ones" which in English is "church"...assembly of the called ones"
 - Term "Christian" was used as a derisive term meaning "little Christ" but the church adopted it and wore it as a badge of honor
 - Persecution continued by Romans of both Jews and Christians until around 300ad
 - All the Apostles except John are martyred. John is revered
 - Basic structure of church was set. The church was one body with many congregations. Form of worship was pretty standard across the churches, with more structure in the Jewish dominated churches and less in the Gentile dominated churches.
 - Ordinances of Baptism and Lord's Supper are practiced universally
 - Church leaders were episcopos, presbyteros, and poimaino which are overseer, elder, and pastor/shepherd. All are the same position within the church as leader of the flock. The other officers were Deacons and all are ordained by the church.

We are finished with part 1, but lets take a look at what we have learned about Church History so far

Read chart

Finally, it is 70 ad and church is spread out all over the Mediterranean area. There are several leadership positions in the churches, since all the Apostles except John are gone. The same position for leader of the flock is described by 3 terms with slightly different characteristics

Episcopos- overseer, also translated Bishop

Presbyteros – Elder

Poimaino – Shepherd, also translated Pastor

You can see the roots of modern church structure in the Greek words. In addition there were Deacons in all the churches.

They met in homes, rooms, and structures. They practiced the worship order we discussed earlier and have the ordinances of baptism and Lord's Supper universally practiced. Each church reached out to others, but they practiced congregational style organization and discipline. Paul addressed leaders, elders, and churches as a whole with his prescriptions for their ailments in his letters. We see Peter, John and others do the same thing. All these letters are in circulation in various parts of the area in the churches. Communication is slow and poor, so it takes years for it all to get everywhere. Their leaders exhort them at the meetings to follow the Lord, as best they can given the circumstances.

We are ready for the next Part

Next Weeks Study

Topic	Date
Part 1- Beginnings	√ 5/5/2010
The Age of Jesus and the Apostles (30ad-70ad)	
Part 2 – Early Church	5/12/2010
The Age of the Universal Church (70ad – 312ad)	
Part 3 – Institutions Formed	5/19/2010
The Age of the Christian Roman Empire (312ad-590ad)	
Part 4 – Religion and the State	5/26/2010
The Christian Middle Ages (590ad-1517ad)	
The Age of Reformation (1517ad – 1648ad)	
Part 5 – Challenged by Expansion and Ideas	6/2/2010
The Age of Reason, Revival, and Progress (1648ad – 1914ad)	
The Age of Ideology (1925ad to Present)	

As the church is spread out and following similar guides, we see the development of the Age of the Universal Church. We will discuss that next time.

Resources

- NIV Study Bible
- Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity
by Tim Dowley editor
- Church History in Plain Language
by Bruce L Shelley (3rd Edition)

