

# Church History

## An Overview of Church History & Apostasy

### Lesson One: Pentecost to the Middle Ages

**Introduction.** The Bible teaches that Jesus came to build His church, and died to purchase it with His own blood (**Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28**). Something so precious that it was bought with Christ's blood should provoke an interest in its history.

#### I. The New Testament church.

A. Following Jesus' ascension the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to teach the gospel (**Acts 2:1-4**).

1. The church in Jerusalem was established when 3000 souls obeyed the gospel. Many who accepted the gospel while in Jerusalem took the gospel into their homelands (**Acts 2:41-47**).
2. Persecution led to the dispersion of many Christians from the church in Jerusalem into Samaria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syria (**Acts 8:1-4; 11:19,20**).

B. A Pharisee named Saul (Paul) obeyed the gospel and was made the "apostle to the Gentiles" (**Romans 11:13,14**).

1. The Lord indicated acceptance of the Gentiles by the conversion of a Roman centurion named Cornelius (**Acts 11:15-18**).



Ancient inscription showing the "Chi Rho"—the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ.



Ancient mosaic of 5 loaves and 2 fish from the feeding of the 5000 (**Matthew 14:14-21**)

2. Paul traveled into Cilicia, Pisidia, Galatia, Asia Minor, Mysia, Thrace, Macedonia, and Achaia establishing churches.
- C. The apostles and prophets who were given miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit composed accounts of Jesus' life and letters of instruction to the churches.
1. Near the end of the first century a final "revelation" was given to the apostle John concerning the persecution and victory of the church (**Revelation 1:1,2**).

## II. Apostasy.

- A. The church faced persecution at times from both Jews and Gentiles.
- B. Very early on many began to depart from from sound doctrine and New Testament simplicity (**Acts 20:29,30; II Timothy 4:3,4**).
  - 1. Some churches selected one man from among the elders to serve as bishop over the church (**Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5**).
  - 2. Controversies developed over the nature and divinity of Christ leading to the desire for some authoritative statement of orthodox doctrine.
  - 3. The emperor Constantine called the council of Nicea in 325 AD, publishing the Nicene Creed and establishing an organization connecting together various congregations patterned after Roman government (**Philippians 1:1**).
  - 4. The bishop of Rome presumed to assert himself as the earthly head of all churches, leading to the establishment of Roman Catholicism (**Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18**).
- C. Some Christians opposed these efforts and continued to worship God in simplicity and truth even in the face of opposition from Roman Catholics.

## III. The Great Schism.

- A. In 1095 AD. many churches in the east formally rejected the authority of Rome, creating the Eastern Orthodox Church.
  - 1. Orthodox churches rejected many false doctrines held by Roman Catholics such as sprinkling, instrumental music, “original sin,” and purgatory.
  - 2. Orthodox churches did accept unscriptural organization of their churches looking to Constantinople rather than Rome (**I Peter 3:22**).
- B. There remained Christians who maintained New Testament faith accepting neither Roman Catholicism nor Eastern Orthodoxy.
- C. Today Orthodox churches have national rather than world-wide leadership.



Eastern Orthodox icon intended to portray Joseph, the husband of Mary

**Conclusion.** God established the Church, thus His word must always be the standard to govern and lead it. Although man may turn away from truth, God’s word remains the ever sure basis upon which faithful Christians must determine what they teach and practice.