

History of the Churches from a Baptist Perspective

Volume 1

*From the Apostolic Era to the
Roman Catholic Inquisition*

David W. Cloud

History of the Churches from a Baptist Perspective

Volume 1 of 2

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Resources on Baptist Church History

The following history is based upon a wide variety of resources. A list of some of the church history books in my personal library is contained in the Bibliography. Further, I have done research at many important theological libraries, including the British Library, Oxford University, Cambridge University, Regent College Library, Cambridge University Library, the Southern Baptist Historical Library, and Spurgeon Library at the William Jewel College, and have traveled on church history research trips to England, Wales, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Israel, Greece, Turkey, and many other places.

To provide access to materials that are out of print or otherwise difficult to obtain, we have published many rare Baptist histories in the *Fundamental Baptist Digital Library*. These include the following:

- A History of the Baptists* by Thomas Armitage (1890)
- History of the English Baptists* by Joseph Ivimey (1811)
- Early History of Welsh Baptists* by Jonathan Davis (1835)
- Bye-Paths of Baptist History* by J.J. Goadby (1871)
- A History of the Baptists* by John Christian (1922)
- General History of the Baptists in America* by David Benedict (1813)
- A History of the Christian Church (Waldenses)* by William Jones (1819)
- History of the German Baptist Brethren* by Martin Brumbaugh (1899)
- History of the Donatists* by David Benedict (1875)
- Bogomils of Bulgaria and Bosnia* by L. Brockett (1879)
- Early English Baptists* by Benjamin Evans (1862)
- Evils of Infant Baptism* by Robert Howell (1852)
- A Concise Baptist History* by G.H. Orchard (1855)
- Did They Dip: An Examination of the Practice of Baptism by English and American Baptists before 1641* by John Christian (1896)
- History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont and Albigenses* by Allix (1690, 92)
- Church History* by Andrew Miller (1900)
- History of the Papacy* by J.A. Wylie (1888)
- A History of the Waldenses* by J.A. Wylie (1860)
- A History of Protestantism* by J.A. Wylie (1899)
- History of the Inquisition in Spain* by Thomas McCrie (1829)

History of Romanism by John Dowling (1853)

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SAMPLE

Introduction

1. The interpretation of church history

We measure church history by the Bible, which is the sole authority for faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16-17). (It is able to make the man of God perfect, which means that nothing else is necessary.) The Bible is the key to understanding church history properly. For example, we know the difference between true and false Christianity and can rightly measure events such as the Crusades and the Protestant Reformation.

2. The value of church history.

Following are some of the benefits of studying church history:

- a. It is spiritually challenging. Studying the faith and sufferings of the saints of old can be challenging to one's spiritual life. For example, we see the great price that has been paid to preserve the true faith and the Bible. We see this in 2 Cor. 9:2, where the example of the Corinthians in giving stirred up others to do the same.
- b. It encourages faith in God. In history, we see the hand of God (Dan. 2:20-21). He preserves the Scriptures, preserves the true Christian faith, helps His people, controls the events of history. He is working all things together for His glory toward His objective of putting Christ on the throne of the universe (Eph. 1:9-10).
- c. It helps us understand our times. It is impossible to understand the present unless one understands the past. For example, we cannot understand the Roman Catholic Church, Protestantism, Pentecostalism, Baptists, Evangelicalism, or Fundamentalism unless we know history.
- d. It helps protect us from doctrinal error. There are no new heresies, just old ones revived and revised. As we become familiar with old heresies, we can better discern the nature of modern heresies.
- e. It helps us understand Biblical prophecy. Prophecy is best understood as it unfolds, and we see the unfolding of prophecy throughout the Church Age. For

example, we see the development of apostasy, the Roman Catholic Church, and the revived Roman Empire.

f. It provides a wealth of material for sermon and teaching illustrations.

g. It fosters analytical thinking and the development of keen spiritual discernment. Good church histories help the student learn to analyze statements and situations from a biblical standpoint. The student of history learns that deception is put forth under the guise of truth and that only through the exercise of keen discernment can one be protected (Heb. 5:14). Consider David Benedict's evaluation of the charges commonly brought against the Donatists or William Jones' evaluation of the charges against the Waldenses by the Catholics. These men reveal the truth about these people and redeem their history from the slanders of their enemies.

h. It encourages balance in thinking. As we study history, we see the things that are most important and the things that are less so. All of the churches of history have had imperfections and faults, as have all of the influential leaders, but we must judge them by the more important characteristics of truth. Is that not how God judges the Old Testament saints? He includes them in His "faith hall of fame" in Hebrews 11 and holds them forth as our examples, but each of the individuals in this hall of fame had flaws. This is not to say that we are to overlook sin and error. It is simply to say that we need to be careful that we do not become focused on some relatively minor issue and thus lose sight of the bigger picture. "[The study of church history] tends to elevate and enlarge our views beyond the petty bounds of personal, sectarian and local interests; to discourage bigotry, and moderate controversial bitterness, without impairing our attachment to the truth itself; and to suppress crude innovations and absurdities, both in theory and in practice, by showing that the same, in substance if not in form, have been canvassed and exploded centuries ago" (Prof. J. A. Alexander, cited in *History of the Church of God from the Creation to A.D. 1885*, Preface, p. viii).

3. There is no perfection in church history.

Because man is a fallen sinner, moral perfection cannot be found anywhere in human history, apart from the life of Jesus Christ.

Every group, every movement was imperfect.

We see this in Israel's history, and we see it in the first churches. In the apostolic reproofs in the Epistles and in Christ's messages in Revelation 2-3 we see that the early churches were far from perfect.

4. The record of most Bible-believing Christians does not exist. We don't know everything we would like to know, but God has preserved for us what we need to know.

a. In many cases the record was never recorded. The churches that are the busiest in the Lord's work have the least time to make a record of their activities.

b. Much that once did exist has been destroyed. The Roman Catholic Church ruled Europe for 1000 years and she made every effort to obliterate the record of her enemies. Thus, very little exists by way of a literary record of New Testament Christians of the first 1500 years of church history.

c. The true record has often been fogged over by Rome's legends, so that it is difficult to discern truth from legend. As historian James Wylie observed: "Not only are all contemporary records, such as the men of their own day would have given, wanting, but there hangs between us and these remote evangelists a cloud of fables and prodigies, the creation of men who lived long after these early labourers had gone to their graves, and who neither sympathized with their pure spiritual aims nor were able to rise to the conception of the simple greatness of their characters. The men and the events of those days look out upon us from a legendary fog" (Wylie, *The History of the Scottish Nation*, 1896, chapter 15).

5. Many Christian groups are known by the names of their leaders, but that does not mean that they followed a man. Names such as Hussites or Wycliffites were usually given to them by their enemies and were not what they called themselves.

6. The various groups of Christians known in history were not necessarily organized movements. When we read of the Novatians, the Paulicians, the Waldensians, the Lollards, etc., this does not mean that the churches known by those names were actually yoked together in some sort of denominational structure. Those are simply general terms by which various Christian groups were known, usually by their enemies. We have the same situation today. Terms such as Baptist or

fundamentalist or *evangelical* or *charismatic* are general terms that encompass a wide variety of churches that often have no organizational association.

7. There was much variety within various groups of Christians. Terms such as *Waldensian*, *Albigensian*, and *Lollard* were broad names that encompassed many types of churches. There were Waldensian churches, for example, that practiced believer's baptism, while others were pedobaptists. Even today, terms such as *Baptist* encompass all sorts of doctrine and practice. There are seventh-day Baptists, Reformed Baptists, charismatic Baptists, modernistic Baptists, denominational Baptists, associational Baptists, and independent Baptists, to name a few. There are even Baptists who don't require believer's baptism for membership.

8. The term "heretic" in church history can refer to false teachers or to true believers. A heretic by the Scriptural definition is one who teaches doctrine contrary to the Bible, but according to the Roman Catholic Church, a heretic is one who teaches doctrine contrary to Rome. The Catholic Church condemned multitudes of Bible-believing Christians as "heretics" and persecuted them.

9. The story of church history is the story of a continual process of apostasy and separation, decline and revival.

Those who think it is wrong to judge doctrine and separate from error do not know their Bibles and have not learned the lesson of church history. Had it not been for those who judged doctrine and separated from error, there would be no true churches today. Praise God for the true heresy fighters and separatists of history by whatever name they were called!

Churches do not remain sound from generation to generation into perpetuity. They descend into apostasy, sometimes within one generation. We see this even in the churches founded by the apostles. Before the apostles died, some of the early churches were deeply corrupted, including Sardis and Laodicea (Rev. 2-3), and within 200 years, most of the apostolic churches were totally apostate. The apostle Paul taught that false teachers will increase throughout church history (2 Timothy 3:13).

10. Two major programs are operating throughout church history: God's program and the devil's, Christ's Great Commission and the devil's Mystery of Iniquity.

This can be illustrated with the first two parables in Matthew 13. These parables describe “the mystery of the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 13:11), which is the peculiar form of the kingdom of God in the church age. The New Testament term “mystery” refers to truth not revealed in the Old Testament but revealed in the New (Eph. 3:4-5).

The first parable, the Parable of the Sower, describes God’s plan for the church age, which is the sowing of the gospel (Mat. 13:18-23). God’s main work in the church age is the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth and the building of sound churches as the pillar and ground of the truth (Mat. 28:19-20; 1 Tim. 3:15). God’s work consists of a pure gospel, right doctrine, faith, hope, holiness, righteousness, love, humility, and justice.

The second parable, the Parable of the Tares, describes the devil’s plan for the church age, which is the sowing of error (Mat. 13:24-30). The devil’s work consists of lies, false gospels, false teaching, apostasy, witchcraft, rebellion, sensuality, pride, doubt, agnosticism, and atheism.

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The Apostolic Churches

AD 30–100

Outline

- Characteristics
- Apostasy
- End of the Apostolic Age

(A.D. refers to the years since Christ's birth. It means *Anno Domini*, which is Latin for "the Lord's Year." This usage began with Dionysius Exiguus in the sixth century. It was used in the Gregorian Calendar of 1582, which is the most widely used calendar in the world.)

The Lord Jesus Christ promised to establish His church so that it would overcome all obstacles (Mat. 16:15-18). He promised that He would be with His church unto the end of the world. See Mat. 28:18-20. The same passage teaches that the churches are to train the next generations. This is how the churches keep the truth. The first churches did this (2 Tim. 2:2). The principles of the New Testament faith are to be kept until Christ returns (1 Tim. 6:13-16). The one true Christian faith is called the "faith once delivered to the saints," and we are to fight for it (Jude 3).

Some of the characteristics of the New Testament faith are as follows:

1. *The Scriptures are the sole authority for faith and practice* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Paul taught that the Scriptures are able to make the believer "perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." This means that the Bible is sufficient. It has the ability to bring perfection, what else could be needed? God's people need teachers of the Bible, but they don't need priests or church tradition or "church fathers" or new prophecies such as those of Ellen G. White (Seventh-day Adventism) or new revelations like the Book of Mormon or visions and dreams as per the Pentecostal/Charismatic movements.

2. *Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone by the work of Christ alone.* We see this taught in Acts 16:30-31. We see it in Paul's Epistles (Rom. 4:1-6; 11:6). This doctrine is summarized in Ephesians 2:8-10. Salvation is by grace without works, and works follow as the evidence and fruit of salvation. The works in the Christian

life are God's works. Christ did everything that is necessary to save us from our sins, and our good works are merely the evidence and fruit of salvation.

3. *A born again church membership.* Only those who profess Jesus Christ and give evidence of salvation are qualified to be church members (Acts 2:41). Churches need to be as careful as possible to see that people are truly born again before they are brought into the membership. The new birth produces a changed life (2 Cor. 5:17). False churches do not exhibit the new life of obedience (Titus 1:16; 1 John 2:3-5).

4. *The eternal security of the believer.* There are some companion doctrines that must be understood.

a. The doctrine of eternal life. The term "eternal security" is not used in Scripture, but the terms "eternal life" (Jn. 3:16) and "everlasting consolation" (2 Th. 2:16) are used. The believer has eternal life, which means it has no end.

b. The doctrine of gift (Eph. 2:8-10). Salvation is a free gift that was purchased in its entirety by the Son of God on Calvary. By its very nature, a gift is free and without obligation. To lose one's salvation would mean that it was partly earned by the recipient. It is said that Henry Ford would give favored employees a gift of a Ford automobile, but if they fell out of favor he would take back the automobile. That isn't a true gift, and that isn't God!

c. The doctrine of evidence (John 10:27-28; 1 John 3:1-3). The doctrine of evidence teaches us that eternal security is for the true believer, for the one who is born again, the one who gives evidence of his salvation. In John 10:27-28, the one who has eternal life and will never perish is the one who hears Christ's voice and follows Him. To claim that anyone who professes Christ has eternal security is wrong; the Bible warns about empty professions (Mat. 7:21-23; Titus 1:16).

d. The doctrine of chastisement (Heb. 12:4-10). The true believer is the one who is chastened when he sins. Christ keeps His own and chastens them when they go astray. The one who professes Christ and turns away and is not chastened is not a true believer.

5. *The church has two ordinances: believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper.*

a. Scriptural baptism is for believers and is by immersion in water (Acts 8:36-38). Philip would not baptize the Eunuch until he had a profession of saving faith in Christ, having believed in Christ with *all* his heart. When Philip baptized him, they both went down *into the water*, which is necessary only for immersion. The mode of scriptural baptism is immersion because it depicts the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:3-4).

b. The Lord's Supper is a simple memorial meal (1 Cor. 11:24-26). It is not a sacrifice, and it is not a sacrament that is part of one's salvation.

6. *The independence and autonomy of the church.* The apostles established autonomous churches that fellowshipped with likeminded churches but were not under the authority of other churches or of some ecclesiastical headquarters. The church is autonomous under its one Head Jesus Christ. The apostles established no hierarchical organizations over the churches. The apostolic churches had their own leaders, maintained their own discipline, sent out their own missionaries.

a. We see this in the first missionary journey in Acts 13-14. When God called Paul and Barnabas, the church at Antioch ordained them and did not have to ask permission from the "mother church" at Jerusalem (Acts 13:1-4). After Paul and Barnabas started new churches, they ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23). Neither Jerusalem nor Antioch operated as any sort of ecclesiastical headquarters over other churches.

b. See the independence and autonomy of the church in Revelation 2-3. When Jesus addressed the churches of that day, He addressed each church directly and individually (Rev. 2-3).

7. *The priesthood of the believers.* The New Testament knows of only one priesthood and that is the general priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:5, 9) and Jesus Christ as the great High Priest (Heb. 3:1). There was no other priesthood in the early churches. The apostles were not called priests or ordained as priests. While there are instructions for selecting pastors and deacons, there are no instructions for selecting priests.

8. *Separation of church and state.* God has given different spheres of authority to the government and to the church. The government is the keeper of law and order in society (Rom. 13:1-7). The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim.

3:15). It is not the government's business to decide and enforce Bible doctrine or to meddle with church government and practice. Jesus expressed this truth as follows: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Mat. 22:21). Caesar or secular government has its place in God's plan, but Caesar must not extend his authority beyond that which God has granted. The apostolic churches were not united with or supported by the secular government. They obeyed the government, except when a secular law directly contradicted the Scriptures (Acts 5:29), but they did not yoke together with the government.

9. *Liberty of conscience.* The first churches did not persecute anyone or try to force anyone to submit to their teaching (Mk. 9:38-40; Lk. 9:54-56). We can preach against what others teach if their teaching is wrong, but we cannot use physical force against them. Churches have the authority to enforce sound doctrine and practice within their membership (1 Cor. 5; Titus 3:10-11), but they do not have authority over those who are outside. Even within the congregation, leaders do not have the authority to compel someone to believe a certain way by the use of physical force or other carnal means of coercion. There is always liberty for a person to leave if he so wills.

10. *Separation from false teaching and apostasy.* One of the themes of the New Testament epistles is the danger of false teaching and the necessity of separating from it (i.e., Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 6:14; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 3:5; 2 John 7-9). A New Testament church does not overlook error and apostasy.

The Apostasy

The New Testament describes the course of the church age and warns that there will be two streams of churches: sound churches and apostate ones.

We have already seen that Christ promised that true churches will continue to the end of the age, because He will be with them (Mat. 28:18-20).

But the Bible also teaches that there will be an apostasy and that multitudes of churches will turn from the New Testament faith. The apostate churches will far outnumber the true churches.

1. The meaning of apostasy

Apostasy means to turn away from the true New Testament faith. The English word “apostasy” is derived from the Greek word *apostasia*, which means a falling away. The definition of apostasy is found in 2 Timothy 4:3-4.

2. An overview of the apostasy

The Bible teaches that apostasy among professing Christians will increase as the age progresses and the coming of Christ draws nigh (2 Tim. 3:13).

This apostasy will culminate in a worldwide apostate religious “whore” described in Revelation 17.

3. General warnings about apostasy

The following are some other Scriptures that warn about apostasy and the coming of false teachers. The doctrine of apostasy is a major theme of Scripture. Acts 20:28-31; 1 Cor. 15:12; 2 Cor. 11:1-4, 12-15; Gal. 1:6-8; Eph. 4:14; Phil. 3:17-21; Col. 2:4-23; 1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Tim. 3:1-5, 13; 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 2:1-22; 1 John 2:18-19; 4:1; Jude 3-4.

4. The apostasy described in the parables of Matthew 13

a. The background

(1) Jesus presented Himself to Israel as the promised Messiah and King (Mat. 1-10). We know that Jesus did not come to establish the Messianic kingdom; He came to die for man’s sin. But He did show Himself as Israel’s Messiah and performed the miracles to prove that He was the Messiah. His rejection was necessary for the fulfillment of prophecy (Isa. 53:3).

(2) He was publicly rejected by Israel’s leaders and representatives (Mat. 11-12; see especially Mat. 12:22-28).

(3) Christ then offered Himself to anyone who would come--Jew or Gentile. It was not until Matthew 11:28-30 that Christ made this offer.

(4) Having turned to the Gentiles, Christ now reveals the “mystery” period of the kingdom (Mat. 13:11). This mystery refers to the course of the church age. It is called a “mystery” because it was not foretold in Old Testament prophecy. Compare Mat. 23:34-39; Hos. 3:4-5; Rom. 11:25-26. The Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom revealed that Christ would suffer (Isa.

53) and would reign (Isa. 9:6-7). Nothing is revealed in Old Testament prophecy about a period in between these two great events in which God would temporarily set aside the nation Israel and would build the church composed of both Jews and Gentiles.

b. The teaching of the parables

The Parable of the Sower (Mat. 13:3-8, 18-23). The gospel begins to be preached worldwide and falls upon every kind of soil, which signifies people and nations. Only a small part of the seed of the gospel falls on good soil. Satan fights against this work.

The Parable of the Tares (Mat. 13:24-30). Satan sows false Christians and false churches in the world among true churches and true Christians.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mat. 13:31-32). The “church” experiences abnormal growth and becomes the home of evil things. A seed intended to produce an insignificant vegetable becomes an impressive tree. We see from verse 4 that the birds are symbolic of evil. They signify demons and professing Christians and teachers controlled by demons. Compare 1 Timothy 4:1 and 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. This is exactly what has happened in Christianity. The simple church that Christ established has become one of the largest religions in the world; it is largely apostate and filled with demonic teachings and activities.

The Parable of the Hidden Leaven (Mat. 13:33). Christianity will gradually increase in error until it is entirely apostate. “Till the whole was leavened.” The final apostate “church” is pictured in Revelation 17 as the Great Harlot. That which professes to be the pure and faithful bride of Christ is actually a prostitute with the world and the devil.

After the fulfillment of these things, Christ will return to earth and destroy the apostate religious system. This is emphasized in Jesus’ explanation of the parable of the tares (Mat. 13:36-43).

5. Examples of the seeds of apostasy in the early churches

The seeds of apostasy were already at work in the lifetime of the apostles.

Legalism (Acts 15:1-2; Gal. 1:6). These false teachers wanted to add works and law to grace for salvation. This has been a trademark of false teachers ever since.

They say that they believe in salvation by grace, but actually they believe in salvation by grace *plus* works.

Antinomianism (Rom. 6:1-2). Antinomianism is the philosophy that since the Christian is saved by grace without works, he is free to live as he pleases. He is not obligated to obey God's laws. It is moral license masquerading as liberty.

Charismaticism (1 Cor. 12-14). The Corinthians were corrupting the gifts of the Spirit by incorporating pagan practices from their past (1 Cor. 12:1-2). They were letting carnal enthusiasm run rampant without submission to apostolic instruction (1 Cor. 14:23-33). Thus, Paul had to warn them that God is not the author of confusion but of peace. They falsely believed that the Spirit overcame a prophet so that he had no control over his tongue (1 Cor. 14:29-32). Similar errors have cropped up throughout church history.

Rationalism (1 Cor. 15:12, 35-36; 2 Pet. 3:3-4). This exalts human reason above biblical faith. The rationalist accepts only that which makes sense to his human thinking. Theological modernism or theological liberalism, which arose in France and Germany in the 1800s, is a recent form of this error. Today Christianity is filled with rationalism. The scholars who participated in the Jesus Seminar are an example. They do not believe that Jesus was born of a virgin or walked on water or healed the blind or rose from the dead.

Gnosticism (Col. 2:8-10). The essence of ancient gnosticism was to intermingle human philosophy with the Christian faith. It has been a problem throughout the church age. In the days of the apostles, gnosticism mixed the Christian faith with Greek philosophy, but the principle is the same when Bible doctrine is mixed with any human philosophy.

Asceticism (Col. 2:20-23; 1 Tim. 4:1-5). Closely associated with gnosticism, asceticism is the belief that salvation and/or holiness are achieved by means of abusing the body and neglecting the common pleasures of life. The Roman Catholic Church was filled with asceticism throughout the Dark Ages. Monks and nuns isolated themselves from society in monasteries and convents and attempted to gain holiness through vain rituals, extreme fasting, abuse of their bodies, sleep deprivation, isolation, etc. Some made vows of silence. They abstained from marriage. Today we see this in the contemplative prayer movement.

Allegoricalism. Paul warned that some were spiritualizing Scripture truths (2 Tim. 2:17-18). This became a method of Bible interpretation in the days of Origen and Augustine and is a popular heresy today.

Arianism (1 John 4:1-3; compare 1 Tim. 3:16). This is the teaching that denies the full divinity of Jesus Christ. It has taken many forms. Unitarians and Jehovah's Witnesses are modern examples.

Nicolaitanism (Rev. 2:6, 15; 3 John 9). *Nicolaitan* means "to conquer the people" or "to rule the laity" (from *nikao*, to conquer, and *laos*, people). It is one of the heresies that produced the Roman Catholic Church. It is the exercise of unscriptural authority by church leaders. Not content to fulfill the humble role God has assigned to them, these men expanded their authority beyond the bounds of the assembly and ruled over entire regions, and in the case of the pope, the entire world.

These heresies grew and increased and are still in churches today.

The End of the Apostolic Age

The following are important facts about how the apostolic age ended:

1. They preached the gospel throughout the world (Acts 17:6; Rom. 1:8; 16:26). This refers to the habitable part of the world. We know the gospel went throughout the Middle East, to Africa (the Ethiopian eunuch), throughout Europe via Paul's journeys, and to Asia (tradition says Thomas preached in India). We find much of this history in the book of Acts, which we study in a separate course in the *Advanced Bible Studies Series*.

2. They witnessed the advance of apostasy (Rev. 2-3). Before the end of the apostolic generation some of the churches were already apostate. Of the seven churches that Christ addressed in Revelation 2-3, one had lost its first love (Ephesus), two were infected with false teaching (Pergamos, Thyatira), one was dead (Sardis), and one was lukewarm (Laodicea).

3. They completed the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). The foundation is Christ as revealed in the New Testament Scriptures. By God's Spirit, the New Testament was completed and canonized.

4. They did not appoint successors. While Paul taught the churches how to select elders and deacons, he said nothing about how to select apostles. There are only 12 apostles in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14). No one today meets the standards of an apostle, which required seeing the risen Christ (1 Cor. 9:1).

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES

1. How does 2 Timothy 3:16-17 teach that the Scripture is the sole authority for faith and practice?
2. What verse says if salvation is by grace it is not of works, and if it is of works it is not of grace?
3. How is the salvation of the members of the first church described?
4. What are three doctrines that are necessary in order to understand eternal security?
5. What verse in the Gospels says that no one can pluck the believer out of the hand of Christ?
6. What book and chapter in the Epistles tells us that the Lord's Supper is a memorial?
7. How does Acts 13:1-4 teach that each church is independent?
8. How does Revelation 2-3 teach that each church is independent?
9. What book and chapter says that all believers are priests?
10. What is the meaning of "separation of church and state"?
11. What is the main New Testament passage (book and chapter) that teaches the duty of secular government?
12. According to 1 Timothy 3:15, what is the duty of the church?
13. What is the meaning of "liberty of conscience"?
14. What verse says to mark and avoid them that cause divisions with false teaching?
15. What is the meaning of apostasy?
16. What is a passage that teaches the meaning of apostasy?
17. What are three passages that warn about apostasy?
18. What verse says that false teaching will increase more and more throughout the church age?
19. What is the meaning of the word "mystery" in the New Testament?

20. What is the mystery of the kingdom that Jesus described in the parables in Matthew 13?
21. What is the main message of the Parable of the Sower?
22. What is the main message of the Parable of the Tares?
23. What is the main message of the Parable of the Mustard Seed?
24. What is the main message of the Parable of the Hidden Leaven?
25. What was Antinomianism?
26. What was Arianism?
27. What was Nicolaitanism?

SAMPLE

The Budding of Apostasy

Rome's Beginning (AD 100-700)

For illustrations, see the PowerPoint presentation “Budding of Apostasy” on the CD accompanying the *History of the Churches* course.

Outline

- The Development of the Apostate Church
- The Church Fathers
- Examples of True Churches
- Persecutions by Pagan Emperors
- Doctrinal Controversies

In the parables of Matthew 13, Christ warned that false churches would increase, and this is exactly what happened after the death of the apostles. The corruption spread rapidly. The churches that resisted the tide of apostasy were comparatively few. Thus, within 100 years the situation was already wretched, as one writer in the middle of the second century observed:

“Customs have become worldly; discipline is relaxed; rulers and ruled are all languishing, and many among them are corrupt, covetous, greedy, hypocritical, contentious, slanderers, blasphemers, libertines, spies, renegades, schismatics. Worthy teachers are not wanting, but there are also many false prophets ... for whom the greatest thing in life is not the practice of piety and justice, but the strife for the post of command” (*Shepherd of Hermas*).

Within two and three centuries there were large numbers of churches that were entirely out of the way of the New Testament faith, that were filled with people who had not been born again, that prayed to the dead and revered the bones of the dead and bowed before images and other such errors.

Persecutions by the Pagan Emperors

In the early days of the churches, the persecution came largely from the Jews. Stephen, the first martyr, was stoned by the Jews (Acts 7). James was put to death by Herod Agrippa I with the support of the Jews (Acts 12:1-3). The Jewish leader Saul,

before his conversion, persecuted Christians and had them put to death (Acts 26:10; 1 Tim. 1:13).

As time passed and the churches increased across the Roman Empire and beyond, the Christians were persecuted by the emperors. Nero began persecuting Christians beginning in AD 64, and there were persecutions against Christians under most of the Roman emperors until Constantine.

1. Causes of the persecutions

a. Slander. Lies were spread about the Christians to make them appear odious. It was said, for example, that they ate their own children.

b. Idolatry. Social life was permeated with idolatry, and the Christians could not participate. Even during athletic games, festivals, and dramas, it was common for sacrifices to be made to the various gods, and the participants were expected to join in with this idolatry. The Olympic Games in Greece were held in honor of Zeus, and the Isthmian Games at Corinth were held in honor of Poseidon. In Rome, public events were held in honor of various idols, such as the goddess Roma, as well as in honor of the Caesars themselves, who were considered gods. When believers refused to participate in the state-sponsored idolatry, they were persecuted.

c. Yoking together of state and religion. There was a union of religion and state in ancient Rome, and those who refused to bow to the state's gods were considered traitors. Christians were charged with disturbing the peace of the nation; all other citizens were content to worship the national idols, but the believers refused. We see an example of this type of thing in Daniel 3.

d. The exclusive claims of the Christians. Christians were not content merely to live godly lives. They preached that there is only one way of salvation, and they preached against the sin and idolatry of the people (Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:2). This brought upon them the hatred of unbelievers.

e. Superstition. When trouble came upon the nation, Christians were blamed for it. "Every awakening providence, as earthquake, famine, drought, plague, &c., was by pagans attributed to the anger of their gods against the followers of the Cross; this view of things being impressed on the minds of the multitude, often

occasioned the rabble to demand the blood and lives of valuable men” (Orchard, *A Concise Baptist History*, 1855).

2. An overview of the persecutions

Most of the apostles were put to death by Roman emperors. Paul was beheaded. Philip, Andrew, Peter, Jude, and Bartholomew were crucified. Matthias was stoned; Thomas was killed by a spear; Luke was hanged.

NERO (60-68). “The Bible makes no mention of Nero’s persecution of Christians, though it happened in Bible times, and is the direct background of at least two New Testament books, 1 Peter and 2 Timothy, and was the persecution that brought Paul to his martyrdom. ... In and around Rome multitudes of Christians were arrested and put to death in the most cruel ways, crucified, or tied in skins of animals and thrown into the arena to be worried to death by dogs, for the entertainment of the people. Or thrown to the wild beasts. Or tied to stakes in Nero’s gardens, pitch poured over their bodies, and their burning bodies used as torches to light Nero’s gardens at night, while he drove around in his chariot naked, indulging himself in his midnight revels, gloating over the dying agonies of his victims” (*Halley’s Bible Handbook*).

DOMITIAN (95). The persecution under Domitian was short, but extremely violent. Many thousands of Christians were killed in Rome and Italy.

TRAJAN (98-117). Christians were not sought out, but when they were accused by someone, they were punished. Christianity was regarded as an illegal religion, because Christians refused to take part in emperor worship, and the churches were regarded as secret societies, which was forbidden. Though not as aggressive as previous persecutions, many Christians died for their faith in cruel ways. Many suffered death, and numbers, even females, were tortured in an attempt to force them to incriminate others.

ADRIAN (117-138). His persecution against Christians was “in moderation,” but many died.

ANTONIUS PIUS (139-161). Though it is said that Antonius favored Christians, he allowed the laws against them to be enforced and many died. Polycarp of Smyrna, who was supposedly a disciple of John the apostle, was put to death around 160. For refusing to burn incense to the emperor, he was

burned at the stake. Before he died, he said, “Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched, but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked.”

MARCUS AURELIUS (161-179). This emperor was very cruel and instigated severe persecutions. Thousands were tormented and brutally killed, being thrown to wild beasts and beheaded. For refusing to sacrifice to the pagan idols, Justin Martyr was beaten and beheaded in 165. Some of his students died with him. Many have acclaimed Aurelius’s stoic *Meditations*, but stoic philosophy didn’t lead him to righteousness and truth.

SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS (193-211). Especially in Egypt and northern Africa many Christians suffered. In Alexandria, Egypt, martyrs were burned, crucified, and beheaded daily. In 203, Perpetua and Felicity were put to death. Perpetua was a married noblewoman, and Felicity was a slave who was imprisoned and martyred with her. Perpetua had trusted Christ and received baptism in spite of her father’s strong opposition. She was soon imprisoned and had a child during her confinement. Perpetua and Felicity and others were executed at the military games in Carthage in celebration of the emperor’s birthday. They were beaten and then killed by wild beasts.

MAXIMINUS (235-238). Many prominent Christian leaders were put to death.

DECIUS (249-251). The persecutions of Decius extended to all parts of the empire and were very severe. He wanted to exterminate Christianity. “In 249, Decius, coming to the throne, required all without exception to embrace the pagan worship on pain of death. Professors were not in a state to meet sufferings, and apostasy to an alarming extent ensued, as measures of the severest kinds were adopted to bring all to acknowledge pagan rites. Many realized cruel martyrdoms. Varied circumstances attended the churches through the remainder of the century. At the close of this age we may discover the expiring order of gospel worship, and the extinction of that simplicity which characterized apostolic institutions” (Orchard, *A Concise Baptist History*, 1855).

VALERIAN (253-260). The persecutions under this emperor were even more severe than under Decius.

DIOCLETIAN (284-305). “The pagan priests wrought so effectually on the fears of Diocletian, as to obtain from him, in 303, an edict to pull down the sanctuaries of Christians, to burn their books and writings, and to take from them all their civil rights and privileges, to render them incapable of any honors or civil promotion. Other orders were issued of a more sanguinary character; the magistrates employed all kinds of tortures, and the most unsupportable punishments were invented, to force Christians to apostatize—and the ministers of religion were in particular the objects of the emperor’s aversion” (Orchard, *A Concise Baptist History*, 1855). For ten years during the reign of Diocletian, Christians were hunted in cave and forest; they were burned, thrown to wild beasts, put to death by every torture cruelty could devise. It was a resolute, determined, systematic effort to abolish the Christian name (Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe*, pp. 47, 73). During the persecutions that occurred under Diocletian “the sacred Scriptures were sought with more care and destroyed with more fury than any preceding persecution” (Frederic Nolan, *Inquiry into the Integrity of the Greek Vulgate*, 1815, p. 143).

In spite of the strenuous efforts of the world’s most powerful kings, Christianity survived the persecutions, and we still have the gospel and the Bible that the Roman emperors tried to destroy from the face of the earth.

Development of the Apostate “Church”

We will trace some of the elements of the apostasy in this early period of church history. This is the history of how the simple New Testament Christian faith of the church at Antioch became the Christian religion of the Church of Rome.

1. Tradition was exalted to the same authority as Scripture.
2. There was a corruption of baptism and the gospel.
3. There was a corruption of church government.
4. There was a union of church and state.
5. The priesthood was developed.
6. Pagan practices were Christianized.
7. Bible prophecy was interpreted allegorically.

1. Tradition was exalted to the same level of authority as Scripture.

The apostles taught that the Scripture alone is the sole authority for faith and practice. Paul exalted all Scripture as divinely inspired and able to “make the man of God perfect, throughly furnished to all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). That clearly means that nothing but Scripture is necessary. Peter exalted Scripture above visions and spiritual experiences (2 Peter 1:16-21).

The rejection of the principle of “Scripture alone” is the foundational error of the Roman Catholic Church. It is the error that allows Rome to interpret Scripture by its popes and councils and thus render the literal meaning of Scripture void.

Augustine and other “church fathers” prepared the way for this error. Augustine exalted the authority of the church over that of the Bible, declaring, “I should not believe the gospel unless I were moved to do so by the authority of the Catholic Church” (quoted by John Paul II, *Augustineum Hyponensem*, Apostolic Letter, Aug. 28, 1986, www.cin.org/jp2.ency/augustin.html). Augustine believed that the true interpretation of Scripture is derived from the declaration of church councils (*De Vera Religione*, xxiv, p. 45).

The exaltation of tradition to an authority equal to Scripture remains the official doctrine of the Catholic Church. Consider the following quote from the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s:

“Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal ... Thus it comes about that the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Hence, both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal feelings of devotion and reverence” (“Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” Chap. 2, 9, p. 682).

The Lord Jesus Christ reproved the Pharisees for this same error (Matthew 15:3-9).

2. There was a corruption of baptism and the gospel.

The baptism that Jesus and the apostles established was believer’s baptism, but this was gradually corrupted into infant baptism.

a. The road to infant baptism began as baptism was changed from a *sign* of repentance and faith to a *means* of becoming a Christian. Instead of requiring that pagans be born again before being baptized, apostate church leaders converted pagans by means of a baptismal ceremony. They baptized unconverted people. Consider quotes from some of the early “church fathers” (so-called):

Justin Martyr (d. 165) said men are “regenerated” by baptism.

Irenaeus (d. 202) called baptism “illumination” and “regeneration.”

Tertullian (d. 255) called baptism “the laver of regeneration.”

Following is the doctrine of the Catholic Church today: “By the sacrament of Baptism, whenever it is properly conferred in the way the Lord determined and received with the proper dispositions of soul, man becomes truly incorporated into the crucified and glorified Christ and is reborn to a sharing of the divine life” (Vatican II Council, “Decree on Ecumenism,” chap. 3, II, 22, p. 427).

Changing the doctrine of baptism into a means of salvation rather than a symbol of salvation was the fundamental error that led to increasingly greater apostasy. Once churches cease to require that members be born again in a Scriptural way, they are on the road to apostasy. An unregenerate church is a church without spiritual power and wisdom.

b. Once baptism was considered a means of salvation, some began to ask, “What about the children who die without baptism?” They reasoned that since baptism provides salvation, if a child dies without baptism, perhaps he will not be saved.

c. Augustine (AD 353-430) developed the theological argument for infant baptism and fought against those who held to the apostolic doctrine of baptism. The so-called Council of Mela (AD 416), decreed that whoever taught against infant baptism or whoever taught that baptism does not wash away sins BE ACCURSED (Wall, *The History of Infant Baptism*, I, p. 265). Augustine’s error of infant baptism is a fatal error that has resulted in countless multitudes dying with a false hope of salvation because they trusted that they were Christians simply because they were baptized as infants.

d. At first, only infants who were in danger of dying were baptized, but by about the sixth century all infants were baptized.

e. The Emperor Charlemagne, in AD 789, issued the first law in Europe for baptizing infants. He required that the Saxons baptize their children within one year of birth. If they refused, they were charged heavy fines and persecuted.

f. Infant baptism was resisted by most churches for hundreds of years. The Roman Catholic Church forced churches to practice infant baptism by persecuting those who refused.

g. Even after infant baptism was introduced, immersion remained the *mode* of baptism for 1300 years.

(1) The descriptions of baptism prove this. “Six elaborate descriptions or rituals of baptism have come down to us. They were all well known in the churches and all of them prescribe immersion. They are the so-called Egyptian Acts (Gebhardt and Harnack, *Texts and Researches*, VI. c 4 (28); the Canon Hipolyte, the third century (Hipolyte, Bk. VII, 29); the Apostolic Constitutions or Canons, in the Greek, the Coptic, and the Latin versions, AD 350-400; Cyril of Jerusalem (Migne XXXIII. 48); Ambrose of Milan, AD 397 (Bunsen, *Analecta*, II. 465), and Dionysius Areopagita, AD 450. These rituals represent the universal practice of immersion” (John Christian, *History of the Christian Church*).

(2) The testimonies of ancient baptistries prove this. Consider the ancient baptistery at the Lateran Church in Rome. Called the Baptistery of St. John, it is said to be the oldest baptistery in Rome. It was first constructed in the days of Constantine and is a large pool. I walked down into it in April 2005, and it is about waist high on me. The practice of immersion is the only mode of baptism that requires such a deep pool of water. Today there is a small infant baptismal font in the center of the empty pool. This illustrates the apostasy of baptism as there was a transition from adult baptism to pedobaptism (infant baptism), from immersion to sprinkling and pouring. Scriptural baptism depicts dying and being buried with Jesus Christ positionally and raised to newness of life in Him (Romans 6:1-4). Neither pouring nor sprinkling depicts burial and resurrection.

(3) The practice in England proves this. “In England, immersion was the practice for sixteen hundred years” (John Christian, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1). Even long after the establishment of the Church of England, the mode of baptism was immersion.