

Search for Truth

12. History of the Church

1. The Early Church Ablaze!

Mark 16:20; Acts 4:31-33; 5:12-16; 8:4

Following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the church was infused with a new power and fervour that propelled them into action! The Book of Acts records the first thirty-three years of the church's existence.

Signs and wonders . . .

John 14:12; Acts 2:43

At first the disciples could not comprehend, but then they were infused with power and so are we today. Compelled by the words of their Master, the disciples ministered to the needs of everyone they met.

Lame man

Acts 3:1-11; 4:1-7, 16-17

Angered at Peter's message, the authorities sent guards to arrest Peter and John. After being detained overnight in prison, they were strictly commanded not to speak to any man in this name. They had crucified Jesus, but His name seemed more powerful than the man Himself!

Stephen is stoned

Acts 6:7-8; 7:54-60; 8:4

Stephen's death signalled an immediate, all-out campaign against the Jerusalem church. Christians fled the holy city to remote areas of Judea and Samaria. Through persecution, the church expanded at an increasing rate and Christianity was best served.

Peter imprisoned

Acts 12:1-19 tell story

In answer to the young church's united prayers in a nearby home, another miracle had occurred! It was an era of excitement, boldness, and unrestrained fervour. The Word, the name of Jesus, and the Spirit set the church ablaze. The fiery message of Pentecost spread throughout the entire region!

2. Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles

Saul, the Persecutor

Acts 9:1-2

The early church was victorious even through crisis and tragedy. While the frantic mob hurled stones at Stephen, a young Jewish rabbi, Saul stood beside the pile of garments. Soon this Saul would be thrust into the foreground. His education began in Tarsus, the third university center of the world. Later, he received education in Jerusalem from Gamaliel, a leading Pharisean rabbi. Magnificent plans had been in Saul's head—but they certainly did not include spreading the gospel of the new church. He planned to exterminate it! Saul aggressively arrested and prosecuted believers.

Saul, the converted

Acts 9:3-6; 17-20

After fasting three days, Saul's blindness was healed and a humble disciple, Ananias, whom Saul had been persecuting, baptized him. Testimonials reveal that Saul was also filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke with other tongues (Acts 9:17-18; I Corinthians 14:18). The haughty, self-righteous, raging Pharisee was transformed into a humble, penitent, loving servant of Christ. The

One whom he had formerly persecuted was the One he now wished to serve.

Paul, the Missionary

Acts 13:2-3

Paul's personal preaching ministry consisted primarily of three missionary campaigns, each beginning from the church in Antioch.

1. First to the island of Cyprus and several provinces of Asia Minor.

2. Second they visited and encouraged the churches established on their first trip, then extended the mission to several other provinces.

3. Paul's third missionary trip was to Ephesus. In this idolatrous Asian capitol, he preached three years. He also revisited churches in Macedonia and Achaia.

Paul, the Prisoner

II Corinthians 11:23-28

Paul which at one time was the persecutor became the target of much persecution. He spent years of his life in prison where he personally evangelized all those that came to visit him as well as the jailers. Perhaps his most valuable endeavour was achieved during his imprisonment were the letters that have instructed and enhanced Christians of all times. Thirteen of the twenty-one New Testament epistles appear under Paul's name.

3. Destruction of Jerusalem

Luke 19:41-44; 21:24

About A.D. 66 the Jews broke into open rebellion. In A.D. 70, Titus, Roman general, devastated the holy city and dispersed the Jewish people around the globe.

4. The Church in Persecution

Persecution spreads the gospel

At the close of the first century, few of the original Twelve were still living. James, the brother of John, was the first to be martyred. James, a younger brother of Jesus, was slain in the Temple about A.D. 62. Tradition indicates that Peter was crucified upside down and Paul was beheaded. The other apostles, with the exception of John, experienced horrible deaths of stoning, beatings, stabbings and various forms of torturous executions. John is believed to have died a natural death at Ephesus about A.D. 100.

In the years following the apostolic era, every Christian seemed to be a missionary. The soldier tried to win converts from his ranks; the prisoner sought to introduce his guards to Christ; the slave girl whispered the good news in the ears of her mistress. Everyone who had experienced the joy of faith in Christ tried to bring others to conversion.

Persecution of Nero - A.D. 64

Until the reign of Nero, Christianity was opposed, but tolerated. However, the great fire of A.D. 64 in Rome changed that. Although the actual cause was probably an accident, Nero for political reasons, blamed the Christians. A terrible persecution ensued as thousands were tortured and executed.

Catacombs of Rome - A.D. 257

In A.D. 253, Valerian became emperor. At first, he appeared favourable to the Christians, but he later forbade Christians to hold ordinary public meetings. A further edict specified severe penalties from even professing Christianity.

This forced believers into the "catacombs" of Rome, which were deep underground passageways. If placed end to end, these tunnels would stretch some five hundred miles in length.

At night, Christians secretly entered the dark openings in the rock and passed along the darkened galleries. Soon they heard sweet music. In a brightly lit vaulted chamber, they found men and women gathered together, singing a psalm of worship.

Diocletian burns Bibles— A.D. 303

In A.D. 303, new persecution came in three phases:

- 1. The first phase was an edict, ordering the destruction of all church buildings and copies of Scripture.*
- 2. A second edict ordered the arrest of clergy.*
- 3. The following year, another edict ordered that failure of Christians to sacrifice to the state gods was punishable by death.*

The Decline and Rise of Christendom

From the start of the church it could not be stop from without; so after the Apostles passed away, many started trying to change it from within. While they did have a great affect for many centuries, there was a rebirth at the start of the 1900s.

5. The latter-day outpouring

Joel 2:28

28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh

1901—Topeka, Kansas,
On New Year's Day, 1901, Agnes Ozman was filled this the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues at a small Bible school in Topeka, Kansas.

1906—Azusa Street
William Joseph Seymour a black holiness preacher, a student of the Bible school was ask to come preach in Los Angeles, California. As the Holy Ghost

begin to fall, people begin to come from all over the city, state, country and around the world.

1913-1914—Formation of a movement
More light . . . more truth . . . more revelation! Filled with the fresh experience of the Holy Ghost, men began searching the Word with new fervor. R. E. McAlister began studying about New Testament water baptism. His discovery sent shock waves across the new Pentecostal movement! Acts 2:38

1940s—Instruction about the Gifts of the Spirit

Once they had been filled with God's Spirit and had began to operate in it, they started to have more and more supernatural experiences and to read and understand why Paul would say, "Covet earnestly the best gifts . . . and desire spiritual gifts." (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1) The Gifts of the Spirit are still in operation today!

The same God

Heb 13:8

8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

Jesus said I will build my church. He is returning for a church that is just like the one he started in the book of Acts. Jesus always saves the best for last and his word says the later rain shall be greater than the former rain. This is the church's finest hour and we get to be a part of it!