

Church History

Acts 9:31

Established

As seen in Acts class The Church was established in the last days. - **Hebrews 1:2; Acts 2:17**
In the time of "these kings" of **Daniel 2**

Lesson in August spoke of this time and followed rise and fall of kingdoms 'between' the testaments.

John preached "kingdom at hand" in the days of Roman kingdom - **Luke 3:1-2**

Jesus preached "kingdom is near" **Luke 10:9**

Kingdom and church "went forth" from Jerusalem **Acts**

Kingdom and church in existence following Pentecost of **Acts 2**

Revelation 1:9; Colossians 1:13-14

Seen in Acts the growth of church as Gospel spread across the nations

3000 **Acts 2:47**; Multitudes **Acts 5:14; 8:6**; Great number **Acts 11:21; Colossians 1:23**

Apostasy

Apostasy began even during this time of growth - **Acts 20:28-30; 2Peter 2:1-3; Galatians 1:6-7**

Several false doctrines arose during this time.

Ebionism

Jewish

Held to Old Testament, considered Jews still special chosen people.

2 parties - one accepted Gentiles as members of church, other more rigid would have no fellowship with Gentiles

Christ was a prophet but not the Son of God

Bound circumcision and other parts of Law

Gave Paul much trouble

Gnosticism

Combined Christianity and paganism

Attempt to explain existence of good and evil

All matter is evil, thus opposed to God

Body could sin, while mind remained true to God

John deals with these teachings in his epistles

Asceticism

Suffering and denial lead one closer to God

Gave rise to monasteries, monks

Would include fasting, poverty, and later, celibacy

Montanism - 2nd and 3rd centuries

Tertullian said to be a leader

Possibility of miracles, revelations, prophecies, etc.

Among first to teach 1000-year reign on earth

Strong believers in asceticism

Persecution

Jewish attitudes of superiority lead to much persecution as seen in our study of Acts

Judaizing Christians contributed to these persecutions

Persecution also came from Rome

Nero blamed Christians for burning Rome (65-68)

Many convicted and cruelly murdered

Persecution continued under Domitian (89-96)

Various other emperors continued until 260 AD

About 40 years without persecution allowed churches opportunity to increase

Lead to expensive, ornate buildings

Members became worldly and contentious

Diocletian determined to exterminate Christianity ~303 and reinstate ancient worship (George P. Fisher, History of the Christian Church)

Churches were burnt with worshipers inside

Constantine issued Edict of Toleration in 313

"By this law Christianity was sanctioned, its worship was made lawful, and all persecution ceased, not to be renewed while the Roman Empire endured." (Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, The Story of the Christian Church, p. 57)

Roman life was filled with idolatry

Emperor worship was required

Christians meeting in secret aroused suspicion

Roman society based on classes, Christianity considered all equal

Christianity interfered with selling idols

First Great Change

2nd century distinction among elders

Instead of co-equal plurality, one set above others as Bishop, rest were Presbyters

Later this greater elder, bishop, in city church given authority over rural, country church elderships. Eventually bishops in capital cities given authority over all others

By 3rd century were 5 leading bishops, called Patriarchs - Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Constantinople

Gradual changes lead to this apostasy

Gave some more authority than others

Brought distinction between clergy and laity

Lead to council and creed

Early 4th century brought a great conflict

Arius taught Christ was created being, not eternal

Athanasius taught Christ was Divine, eternal, just as the Father

Roman Emperor Constantine friendly to Christianity (baptized before his death)

Troubled by conflict called council of Bishops to Nicea June 325

~318 Bishops and number of other 'church leaders, Constantine presided

Decided Christ was eternal with the Father

Wrote official creed so stating

These men decided official 'church doctrine' and others expected to accept it

This carried more weight than God's written Word

History Can Repeat

Learn from past brings caution now

Time of peace in church now

Seen many problems

Must we have persecution to remain faithful to God?

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