

# His-Story

Church history and why it matters to me

TO THE UTMOST  
PARTS OF THE EARTH

*An introduction to  
and the beginnings of  
the early church*

## I. What is History?

- A. **Dictionary definition:** The chronological record and study of past events (Merriam-Webster)
- B. **A Christian's definition:** The purposes and actions of God being sovereignly orchestrated by the works of His providence
  1. Biblical basis
    - a. Eccl 3:11: *He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.*
    - b. Is 46:9-10: *...remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose."*
  2. "His story": God as the author, the artist, etc.
  3. God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions. [WSC Q. 11]

## II. Why study History (in our case, church history)?

- A. **We're commanded by God to "remember," therefore learning history becomes an act of worship and obedience**
  1. Deut 32:7: *Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you.*
  2. Remembering is an act of worship and that can only happen when we share a history. –Beth Hassenfritz
- B. **Remembering keeps us trusting in the Lord** (serves to strengthen our faith):
  1. Deut 8:2: *And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.*
  2. Ps 77: a psalm of Asaph whereby he reflects on past history to strengthen his present and wavering faith
  3. Heb 11: a whole chapter remembering those who lived by faith
- C. **We learn from history** (or we should)
  1. Winston Churchill once said: If there's one thing we've learned from history is that we haven't learned from history.
  2. Jer 26:7-24 (esp. 17-19): the wise rationale of the elders
  3. 1 Corin 10:11: *Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.*

## Notes



### III. Early church history

- A. **The command and promise:** Acts 1:8: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*
- B. **Churches formed by the power of the Spirit and the preaching of the Gospel**
1. The Church of Jerusalem
    - a. Founded by Peter and the Apostles around 33 AD
    - b. Acts 2:41: *So those who received his [Peter's] word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*
    - c. Persecution and dispersion: Acts 8:1: *And there arose on that day [the day Stephen was martyred] a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*
  2. The Church of Antioch (in Syria)
    - a. Founded by scattered disciples around 37 AD
    - b. Strengthened by Paul and Barnabas: Acts 11:19-26 (selected): *Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch... And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.*
- C. **Missions endeavors**
1. First missionary journey: Paul & Barnabas (and John Mark): Acts 13:1-14:28 (about 48 AD)
    - a. The Church at Antioch (in Galatia)
    - b. The Church at Iconium
    - c. The Church at Lystra
    - d. The Church at Derbe
  2. Second missionary journey: Paul & Silas (and Timothy): Acts 16:1-18:22 (about 50-53 AD)
    - a. The Church of Philippi
    - b. The Church of Thessalonica
    - c. The Church of Corinth
    - d. The church-plant at Ephesus (established through the help of Aquila and Priscilla, and Apollos)
  3. Third Missionary Journey: Paul: Acts 18:23-21:16 (about 53-57 AD)
    - a. The (established) Church of Ephesus
    - b. First Christian Seminary (so to speak)
      - Lecture Hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus (Acts 19:9-10)
      - For two years Paul taught, and people came far and wide to hear
- D. **Church plants from the Apostles' influence**
1. The Church of Colossae (planted by a disciple named Epaphras): Col 1:7
  2. The Church at Laodicea (presumably by Epaphras)
  3. The Church at Hierapolis (also presumably by Epaphras)

### Notes



- The Church in Cenchrea: possibly a church plant from the Church in Corinth
- The Church in Rome (seems to have been established with the help of Aquila and Priscilla: see Rom 16:3-5)

#### E. Additional churches

- Churches formed in Asia that we read about in Revelation 2-3
  - Churches already established: Ephesus and Laodicea
  - Subsequent churches: Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia
- Possible church in Babylon planted by Peter: 1 Pet. 5:13
  - While Paul was the "Apostle to the Gentiles" Peter was the "Apostle to the Jews"
  - There's a strong possibility that Peter went to minister to the Jews who had stayed in Babylon and had not returned with the exiles

#### IV. Why this segment of history matters (or *should matter*) to me

- How does this lesson enhance your knowledge of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)?
- In what new ways are you challenged in your own walk with Christ?
- How might knowing this information help you to flourish further in the grace of God?

#### Notes

Luke has left us two books, the first on the deeds of Jesus [*The Gospel According to Luke*], and the second on the deeds of the Spirit [*Acts of the Apostles*]. But Luke's second book does not seem to have a conclusion. At the end, Paul is still preaching in Rome, and the book does not tell us what became of him or of the rest of the church. Luke had a theological reason for this, for the story he was telling shall not come to an end before the end of all history.

What this means for those who share in Luke's faith is that the history of the church, while showing all the characteristics of human history, is much more than the history of an institution or of a movement. It is a history of the deeds of the Spirit in and through the men and women who have gone before in the faith. —Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1*