

**Subject of Course: History of Church**

- First three centuries or so
- Emphasis on Church doctrine and structure

**“Why should we study it?”**

- Story of redemption doesn't stop with Rev. 22; it has continued for another 2,000+ years
- Remind ourselves that ours is an historic faith – especially important in post-modern era, one of whose main characteristics is disdain for history
- Explain origins and affirmations of certain doctrines and Church practices
  - Strengthen us for defending our confession
  - Equip us to discern the “City of God” from the “City of Man” (Augustine)
- Encouragement from God's provision for His people through the ages (especially in persecution)
- Helps us better understand the development of Western civilization

**Format**

- “Mini-lectures”
- Mostly dialogue and discussion
- Some visual aids (PowerPoint)

**Resources**

- Outlines, including suggested additional readings (hard copy and on TGC website)
- Timeline
- Maps

**Background: Scripture on Church-Building (highlights)**

- (Is. 55:10-11) “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven/and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”
- (Matt. 16:18) “...and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”
- (John 18:36) “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”
- (Matt. 28:18-20) “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
- (2 Tim. 4:2) “Preach the word...”
- Appoint elders/deacons (Acts 14: 21-23 – Paul/Barnabas, and Titus 1:5 – Paul to Titus)
- (I Pet. 5:1-2) “Shepherd the flock of God...”

- Plurality of elders (vs. one person's authority), i.e. the precedent of council (Acts 15 – gathering, debate, collective letter, 16:4 – council's letter delivered, 20 – Paul with the assembly of Ephesian elders, 21:17-23 -- “Do therefore what we tell you...”, and many direct and indirect references to “we/us/them”)
- Defend the pure faith (Gal. 1:6-9 – “If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”; Jude 3 – “...I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”)
- (Luke 22:25-26) “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.”
- You are the light of the world
- You are the salt of the earth

Why should we keep these principles in mind when studying Church history?

- Help us to see where and when Church has gone **off** course in the past
- Help us keep **on** course in the present and future

### **Background: Cultural/Historical**

Hellenistic (Greek)

- History
  - Culture since c. 2,800 BC
  - City-states since at least 1,600 BC (Bronze Age civilization: Mycenae, Troy, etc.)
  - Greeks had colonized many islands and coastal areas of the Mediterranean
  - Greek culture/language spread further through movements of Greeks in campaigns involving Philip II of Macedon and his son, Alexander the Great
  - Philosophical heritage included Socrates, Plato, Aristotle (tutor of Alexander)
- Current
  - Kingdoms in E. Mediterranean area – remnants of Macedonian (i.e. Alexander's) Empire
  - Greek was closest thing to a universal language at that time
  - Greek-speaking people lived throughout Mediterranean area including Palestine
  - Philosophy had declined and become more individualistic – could be argued that there was at least a partial philosophical vacuum – what would fill it?

Roman Empire (eagle made of gold was one of its symbols)

- History
  - Rome founded c. 753 BC
  - Republic from c. 509 to 27 BC
  - Conquered Macedonian-Greek kingdoms between 167 and 30 BC -- last being Egypt, when Queen Cleopatra VII committed suicide
  - Caius Julius, aka Octavian, aka Augustus – nephew of Julius Caesar -- became first Roman Emperor 27 BC following great power struggle with Mark Antony et al. (Note: Augustus' right-hand man, Marcus Agrippa, was friend of King Herod the Great of Judea.)

- Augustus appointed Quirinius, aka Cyrenius, former Senator and Consul of Rome, as provincial governor over Syria and Judea (see Luke 2:1-2)
    - God used census -- presided over by Cyrenius in Judea – to bring Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem to help fulfill Micah 5:2-5
  - Several factors led to end of Roman Republic and associated tyranny – with direct impact on the Church -- including but not limited to
    - Weakness in checks and balances – enabled individuals to seize power
    - Past precedent of dictators in times of national emergencies
    - Deep class divisions of Roman society
- Church was born in a Roman world that spoke Greek
- Roman Influences on Church – mixed
  - Pax Romana
    - Positive -- *relative* political stability
    - Positive – religious vacuum after old national gods defeated in war
  - Infrastructure, esp. commerce/transportation (ships and roads) – positive
    - Gospel – “Dynamite on the Roman Road”
    - Rome literally paved the way for spread of Gospel throughout the world
  - Persecution by despotic emperors – negative and positive (why?)
  - Political organization
    - Power structure – negative (led to abuses as Church imitated worldly empires)
    - Laws
      - positive -- forged sense of unity among Mediterranean peoples
      - positive – enabled non-Romans to become citizens
    - Military campaigns -- Christianized soldiers spread the Gospel

#### Suggested reading...

- Lucius Flavius Arrianus, a.k.a. Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander* – written in 2<sup>nd</sup> century, reads more quickly than you might think.
- Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* and *Wars of the Jews* -- written around 100, detailed account of Jewish history with scattered references to Christ and the Apostles.
- Titus Livius, a.k.a. Livy, *History of Rome* – written between roughly 27 BC and 10 AD, multi-volume set beginning with Rome’s mythical origins and covering just about every major figure in the Roman Republic as well as major events. In Livy’s narrative one can see many common threads connecting Rome with the U.S. and other modern nations.
- Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* – written 1776-1788, the classic modern history; many of us read at least parts of this in school.
- Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries* (textbook)
- Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (textbook)