

Introduction to Church History

On Sunday we go to church, don't we? Going to church has been a tradition for many centuries. In the time before cars, people used to walk to church. The church bell would ring, heralding the start of the church service. Often, people didn't hear just one bell, but the delightful sound of various bells ringing together. One group of people went to one church and another group went to a different church. They were welcomed with open doors.



Church in Antarctica

There are so many different churches: Roman Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal and more. Today it seems quite reasonable to us, even normal, that there are so many different churches.

Yet, there are millions of people who don't attend church. Instead, they use Sunday, the Lord's Day, for their own pleasure, such as participating in or attending sporting games or spending the day at the beach. The Lord's Day is disregarded and treated with contempt.

Thankfully though, in almost all cities and towns throughout the world, we still see some people going to church on Sunday.

Have you ever thought about the history of all the churches? Do you know how come there are so many different types? To learn about this, we need to study the history of these churches.

PENTECOST

To understand the beginnings of and the differences between churches today, we'll begin our story at Pentecost. That's when the Holy Spirit was poured out and when 3000 people were converted and added to the church at Jerusalem.

Prior to Pentecost the church was made up of the Jewish nation or the Israelites. God sent His prophets to this special people and for centuries the people, led by the priests, served the Lord. Initially, there was a tabernacle in Shiloh and later on they worshipped at the temple in Jerusalem.

Occasionally, Gentiles were converted and added to the Jewish nation. For example, Rahab the harlot, Ruth the Moabitess, or Naaman the Syrian.

However, the service of the Lord was found only among the Jewish people. All the other nations were heathens who believed in different gods and worshipped idols. And so God's promises were for Israel alone. God promised that one day the Messiah would be born from the people of Israel.

And God fulfilled this promise in His time. The baby Jesus was born in Bethlehem in a stable for cattle. He, the eternal Son of God, descended voluntarily into this world, which was cursed by sin. He died the shameful death on the cross to save His people. He bore the wrath of God against sin, to eternally deliver His people from the wrath of God.

After the day of Pentecost, the church of God spread out over the whole earth. From the time of Pentecost onward, the gospel was proclaimed not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles.

The Jewish people had rejected Christ by hanging Him on a cross of curse and shame.

Now the time had come when God would also give His Word to the Gentiles.

Noah had said: “May God enlarge Japheth, and may He dwell in the tents of Shem.” Now the time had come when that prophecy would be fulfilled.

At the time of Pentecost, many Gentiles were converted by God. And in the years following Pentecost, millions more from among the Gentiles – men, women, and children – in faith, embraced the Lord Jesus as their Surety and Saviour. By God’s Spirit, millions from among the Gentiles were, from death, made alive.

And so, we begin our Church History at Pentecost, because it was at this time that God removed the wall which stood between the Jews and Gentiles.

NOT WELL KNOWN

It is a pity that many of the stories from church history are not well-known. Some young people think that church history is boring; that it’s all about dates and facts, but that is not true. Church history is fascinating and we can learn a lot from the way our forefathers lived, fought and often suffered so that they could be faithful to the Bible and the God of the Bible.

On the following pages, we’ll hear terrible stories about persecutions, about people being tortured and burned at the stake. We’ll read about deformations and reformations and missions to faraway countries.

Please come along as we walk through past centuries. You’ll be amazed at God’s sovereign grace, mercy and longsuffering, and also tremble at His anger and wrath as He punishes the wicked for their sins.

QUESTIONS:

1. How come the church of Christ is always involved in battles? Identify some of her enemies.

2. Explain the meaning of the parable of the tares in the field. Mat 13: 18-30.
3. Explain the fulfillment of Noah's prophesy: “May God enlarge Japheth, and may He dwell in the tents of Shem.”