



The  
Church  
in  
History



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part one

# When the Christian Church Was Young

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS BORN

THE CHURCH IS TEMPERED

THE CHURCH GROWS INWARDLY

THE CHURCH IS VICTORIOUS

THE CHURCH CONSOLIDATES

THE CHURCH DETERIORATES

THE CHURCH SURVIVES AND GROWS AGAIN



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# *The New Testament Church Is Born*

- 1. The Background of the Church*
- 2. The Nature of the Church*
- 3. The Physical Preparation for the Church*
- 4. The Spiritual Preparation for the Church*
- 5. The Expansion of the Church*
- 6. The Character of the Church*

## **1. The Background of the Church •**

Those who know the Old Testament story, the promise of the Messiah, the account of the life of Jesus, and the records of the acts of the apostles have had the finest possible introduction to the history of the Christian Church.

Originally God's revelation was to all men. Only with Abraham, the first Hebrew, did He limit the scope of His promised redemption to the Old Testament

people, and even then He assured this father of all faithful that in him all nations of the earth would be blessed. When the New Testament Church was founded, this promise was fulfilled (Galatians 3:8) by the extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Now, as at the beginning, all men would come under the preaching of the true religion.

The Hebrew people were the recipients of the Old Testament Truth, and to them

Jesus came as the great final revelation of God (Hebrews 1:1-2). But they rejected their own kinsman as the Messiah. Following their rejection of Him, the Gospel was sent by direction of God to the Gentiles.

Our Christian faith, therefore, has its ancestry in the Hebrew religion. Jesus is the Messiah who is the fulfillment of the promises made to the Old Testament people. Time and again this relation is brought to mind by Matthew. Often when recording some incident in the life of Jesus, he says, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets."

## 2. The Nature of the Church •

When through His preaching, His atoning death, and His resurrection Jesus transformed the Old Testament national "Church" to the Church of the New Testament, He distinctly indicated the spiritual nature of this new institution. He did not arrange for an organization; He taught the principles upon which it should be built. He did not tell His disciples what the mechanical structure of the Church was to be; He sent them out to preach a salvation by faith in His name. Even when He warned about the opposition which they were to experience, He talked not about Roman emperors, but about the "gates of hell."

When He was ready to leave this earth, Jesus promised the Spirit of Truth who would lead the disciples into all truth. Jesus stated that the coming of this Spirit was to be the prearranged sign that His followers should now go out from Jerusalem to the "uttermost parts of the earth." All of these teachings are evidences of the fact that this new Church was to be a

spiritual entity—one founded and directed by the Holy Ghost.

## 3. The Physical Preparation for the Church •

Scripture says, "When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son." (Galatians 4:4). Such a statement is a clear indication that the world was prepared by God for the arrival of Jesus to do His redeeming work. In what way was it prepared? What were the conditions in the world when the New Testament Church began and when it first spread out from Jerusalem?

Rome ruled the "world." (See map page 26.) That this fact was of significance to the coming of Christ is evident from Luke's frequent references to the historical events of the Empire. He makes such statements as these: "There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus" and "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar."

This great Empire prepared the physical scene for the spread of the Gospel. It gave peace in place of constant tribal warfare; it built a great network of roads and bridges that made travel possible all over the then-known world; it cleared the sea of pirates so that trade by sea and travel by ship became common practice; it protected its citizens from robbers and rioting. All of these conditions favored the easy movement of the messengers of Christ so that along the many roads which Rome had set up for her military purposes the Gospel of peace went out to the world.

## 4. The Spiritual Preparation for the Church •

Not only did these physical conditions help the cause of the new missionaries, but the spiritual and intellectual climate was also readied for their

work. Greece had spread her culture throughout the Near East and had "conquered" Rome with her civilization.

The Greek language had become the world language, one that would enable Paul to communicate with all his hearers in that part of the Roman Empire where he did most of his work. When Paul quoted the Old Testament to the Jews whom he met on his journeys, his quotations were from the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament made as early as two hundred years before Christ.

Greek philosophy had made many people doubt their gods whose strange activities now began to fade into myth and legend. The Roman gods came into disrepute, and many officials of the Empire continued to encourage religion only because such belief served to curtail revolt among the common people. The Roman state religion was clearly a political affair that offered no peace of mind to a disturbed soul. All this left a moral vacuum that boded no good for the world.

Under such conditions the Gospel came

with its promise of peace, pardon from sin, rest for the heavy laden. Here was assurance, forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ. This was the message that struck home, and the fullness of time made the rapid spread of this Word possible.

#### 5. The Expansion of the Church •

Many factors caused the Church to be extended. Direct revelation to Peter indicated that Gentiles also were to be included in the Church. The stoning of Stephen and the persecutions by Saul and others scattered the early Christians. Jews of the Dispersion, who had witnessed the events of Pentecost, carried the message of salvation when they returned to their homes.

Official missionaries, such as Paul, brought the Gospel to many pagan communities. Unofficial missionaries, the early converts, were themselves enthusiastic witnesses.

#### 6. The Character of the Church •

In the beginning the Church of Jerusa-

Remains of an  
Ancient Synagogue  
at Kfar Nachum  
(Capernaum)

*Courtesy  
Israel Office  
of Information*

