Church History
By Steffanie Howard
Week One

Day One: Introduction to Church History

What is Church History?

Church history studies the roots and origin of the Christian church. However, the study is not limited to the church itself, but to all influences in history that have impacted the church, and likewise, the movements in history that the church has impacted.

Our study will begin in the Old Testament to provide us with the necessary background to the formation of the New Testament Church around 33 A.D., and will continue on to present day.

What Will This Course Be Like?

This class has been prepared with special consideration to Christians of all denominations and without intentional bias to one Christian group over another. Students will be studying church history from the men and women who were present in the different ages of history and recorded it themselves. Students will study the development of all prominent denominations.

As such, students and parents should be aware that some of the reading material will present a worldview that is disagreeable to you. To teach church history in light of all the historical evidence and to thoroughly understand how the church got its shape, it is necessary for students to read some texts that present a different worldview. Some of the works will be agreeable to all Christians; some will be disagreeable to all Christians. Others were written unfavorably to specific denominations. All of these works will be highlighted and will have a warning beside the referral, stating which groups may be sensitive to the material.

All work may be submitted for grading, but this is not a required component of the course. For those who will be submitting work for grading, there will be two large projects in this class, in addition to regular weekly assignments and occasional short quizzes.

Concluding the study of the Reformation, students will be given the opportunity to offer their theological rebuttals to the historians who wrote the works they read through this period.

A final project at the end of the year will allow students to use their desired medium. Students may choose a visual art, performing art, writing, speech, filmmaking, or any other outlet that he or she enjoys to demonstrate a person, group, or period in history that had the most impact on them through the course.

Regular weekly assignments will involve adding dates to timelines, making maps, reading works from all periods of history, and short answer writing to provoke thought and deeper comprehension while students read.
Prepare to spend about four to six hours a week in church history lessons and assignments. Always feel free to contact me with questions.

Why Should Studying Church History Matter To Me?

There are many great personal reasons for studying church history. Romans teaches us that history is a vital study because the things that were written before our time were written for our learning (Romans 15:4). By studying the history of the church, you will learn about spiritual summits and surmises of Christians through history. Hopefully by learning these lessons through someone else’s life, you will avoid the same mistakes and experience the same victories.

Have you ever wondered why we celebrate Christian holidays on the days that we do? Or where the Bible came from? Or who decided what worship should be like? Or what the difference is between the different denominations, and why they split in the first place? Church history provides us with vital answers to why we live, worship, and believe what we do. By having these answers, we are better prepared for the skeptical world, but we are also more personally committed to the truth of the Gospel.

Further, this class will help you understand the impact each person has on the rest of the body of Christ. Hopefully, this will help you to be a more active member in your local church. It should also help to give you a little more direction as you plan and prepare for how you will serve God after graduation.

Overview of upcoming lessons:
- Key doctrines of the Christian faith
- The temple system of the Old Testament and its links to the New Testament Church

Assignment One: Prepare a folder or notebook for church history. In it you will make timelines and maps, take notes, store flashcards, and complete weekly assignments. Staying organized will be vital to your success in this class.

Day Two: The Non-Negotiable Doctrines of the Church

As we prepare to look in the Old Testament and survey the origins of Christian doctrine and the church, we need to spend a little bit of time first in theology.

First of all, what is doctrine? *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines doctrine as, “That which is being taught.”

Christian doctrines, therefore, are the clear teachings of Scripture.

Some Christian doctrines are necessary for all Christians to hold to; they are the very doctrines that classify us as Christians or unbelievers. They are non-negotiable. These doctrines are called the fundamental or essential doctrines. Other doctrines are specific only to certain denominations. These are non-fundamental doctrines.
How can you tell the difference between which doctrines are fundamental and which are non-fundamental? This is what we are going to learn today.

1. A doctrine is fundamental if salvation depends on it. Which Christian doctrines does the Bible speak of salvation depending on?
   A. The Triune Godhead and God’s character
   B. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ
   C. The sinless life of Jesus Christ
   D. The bodily death of Jesus Christ and its atoning
   E. The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ
   F. Salvation cannot be earned by good works, but only by faith through grace in Jesus Christ alone.
   G. The inspiration, infallibility, and authority of the Bible.

2. A doctrine is fundamental if the Bible gives a forbidding warning against it not being observed. As you read your Bible, you have probably noted that there are some things that God very clearly demands cannot be avoided or ignored. These are fundamental doctrines; they are necessary for the Christian faith.

Non-fundamental doctrines may discuss issues like church governance, worship music, how God’s sovereignty functions with salvation, and other denomination-subjective doctrines.

Teachings by the church that are not supported by Scripture are called extrabiblical or eisegetical. They need more than the Bible to confirm them. These teachings are not doctrinal, because they are not the teachings of the Bible, but many eisegetical teachings are considered significant to some denominations.

In this course, you will be learning about all of these forms of teachings, in addition to pagan and secular terms of thought as well. Unbiblical teachings comprise a significant part of early church history because it is through them that the church developed its doctrine and apologetic.

**Assignment Two:** Using Scripture to support your reasons, describe why each doctrine discussed under the heading, “A doctrine is fundamental if salvation depends on it,” is fundamental to the faith. Make flashcards of the definitions that were presented in this lesson.

**Day Three: Old Testament, Part One**

Though the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith are not seen expressly in the Old Testament, their foundation is present from the first chapter of Genesis. This lesson will explore the fundamental questions of church history and will provide us with the proper background with which to study the Christian church.
We will start by asking, what is the purpose of the church? What does the church do for the rest of the world?

First, the church preserves a witness of God to the world. In the New Testament book of Romans, Paul tells readers that the Jewish people have served a great purpose to the Christian church by meticulously preserving God’s Word. We also provide the lost world with a personal account of our own salvation, a testimony of God.

Second, the church evangelizes to the rest of the world. It does not merely preserve a witness; it shares it! This duty of the church is summed up in the Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:19-20. Many Old Testament passages also communicated God’s desire for all nations to know Him as their God.

Third, the church is to make disciples by educating, equipping, counselling, and providing fellowship for believers. These personal functions of the church are scattered through the New Testament.

Fourth, the church serves the world. Many examples of Christian charity and outreach are present in the New Testament. Likewise, the Old Testament preserved stories of the blessings that God gave to those who sacrificed for the sake of helping others, such as Moses, Boaz, Elijah, and many others.

So now that we understand the purpose of the church, we have to ask ourselves, why was the world in need of these services? What happened in history to make the church a necessary institution?

Read Genesis 1-3.

These chapters give us the answer: we needed the church because man was separated from God by His sin. While fellowship, leadership, and instruction were once freely given to all men through a personal relationship with God, such as what Adam and Eve enjoyed, these gifts were forfeited by our sin. Some institution was needed that would help to bridge that gap between the total absence and presence of God.

Israel was God’s first means of trying to bridge that gap, but it was later replaced by the institution of the church. Students of a Reformed background would note that Israel was not replaced, but remains present in the Christian church; the two, according to Reformed/Covenant theology, are inseparable.

Separation from God, caused by sin, changed the universe, and thereby impacted church history significantly.

Read Genesis 5-11.

The Flood and the Tower of Babel in particular have played an important role in shaping the church. Consider for a moment how the world changed by the separation of the continents, the variations in climates, and the emergence and dispersion of different languages! How might
functions of the church, like evangelism and world missions, have changed if man’s wickedness had not caused these judgments?

How was God’s plan effective in meeting spiritual needs before the temple system?

Functions of the temple, such as teaching, communication, and sacrifice, were carried out by the heads of household. We see this in men like Job and Abraham. God met with these men directly, and through them, led their families. So as you can see, the family was an institution of God that had significant spiritual importance.

Evangelism was a conversational, personal endeavor, not a corporate demand. Men like Joseph and women like Ruth shared their faith where they could.

Communion and counsel with other believers in the Biblical world was enjoyed through a close network of likeminded friends, for example, Job’s friends.

Service for those outside of the temple covenant was seldom seen.

All of these functions depended entirely on families. It is no wonder then that God’s first promises of a future covenant with Israel should originate with the family, through Abraham.

Next, we will discuss the origin and necessary components of the temple, and their relation to Christian worship and doctrine.

**Assignment Three:** Begin your timeline with the dates of Creation and the Flood. Answer the question posed in the paragraph following the instructions to read Genesis 5-11, about how significant geological and sociological events influenced church history.

**Day Four: Old Testament, Part Two**

**The Old Testament and the Church**

The Old Testament is the foundation of the church. As such, our worship, doctrine, and standard of authority are rooted in the Old Testament. To understand church history properly, we must begin by surveying these critical doctrines.

In this lesson, we are going to survey the history of the Jewish temple system and understand how and why it was done away with.

**When Did the Jewish Temple System Start?**

The temple system and Aaronic priesthood began with the Patriarch, Moses. Moses was born in 1393 BC. He was called by God to lead the Jewish people from Egypt in 1313 BC, and he oversaw the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness around 1285 BC.
This was the first centralized religious place to meet with the one, true God. With this tabernacle, the formal sacrifice system, priesthood, and ordained place for the preservation of God’s Word was established. The tabernacle was always meant to be temporary, but due to Israel’s disobedience, remained longer than originally intended.

The first temple was finished under the instruction of King Solomon in 957 BC. This marked the beginning of the Jewish temple system.

**Why Such a Long Wait?**

*A lot of history passed before the temple was built. If the need for sacrifices and a place to reconnect with God was necessary right after Adam sinned, why wasn’t it put into place then?*

Before the fulfillment of God’s promise of a centralized Jewish religion, the responsibility to learn and communicate God’s will and to offer sacrifices was the responsibility of husbands and fathers. Before God used a centralized institution to convey His will, He used ordinary men who were moved by God to know His will and person, and who responded in obedience. We see examples of this in men like Job, Abraham, and Joseph.

**What About Now?**

*If Jews still live under the law, why has the Jewish temple system been done away with?*

Rebuilding the temple is not the same as building a new church. The Old Testament and Jewish history and tradition meant that there was an exact location, measurement, and governance that had to be honored, or the temple and its sacrifices would not be acceptable to God.

Read this article to better understand the delicate paradigm that exists with the issue of rebuilding the temple. [http://www.beingjewish.com/unchanged/rebuild.html](http://www.beingjewish.com/unchanged/rebuild.html)

As you read the article, you may have noticed that time seems one of the greatest enemies in the end of the traditional Jewish temple system. The long ages between the early New Testament period and today have caused many questions vital to the Jewish faith to remain unanswered. All the people who could answer the necessary questions are dead, and few records exist today.

So it may lead you to wonder why the Jews didn’t regain power after the temple was destroyed the last time and just build it again while they still had access to the answers they needed. Here, I will try to answer that question.

Solomon’s temple, finished in 957 BC, was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC. It was during the period of the Babylonian captivity that the Jews began to see a need for localized religious places with ordained religious heads who could teach, counsel, and offer sacrifices for Jews, regardless of where they were. Instead of the centralized temple that all Jews had to travel to before, local synagogues came to Jews around the world.
In 538 BC, Cyrus II began rebuilding the temple, a project that wasn’t completed for about twenty-three years. Probably due to the abundance of available records, eyewitnesses, and political open doors, rebuilding the temple did not come with the same challenges that Jews now experience.

In 20 BC, Herod the Great began a renovation project on this temple, to restore it to its former glory and expand its size. The renovations took twenty-four years.

Two years after the completion of the renovations, at the crucifixion of Jesus, the temple was destroyed by an earthquake that caused significant damage to the building and completely split the tapestry in the Holy of Holies right down the middle, an act that clearly expressed the end of sacrifices and separation of man from God. Interestingly, the damage caused the Sanhedrin to find the space unusable for their meetings; the last case they handled in that space was the sentencing of the Messiah to death.

It was ultimately the crucifixion, and the damage that ensued from the earthquake as its result, that led to the total collapse of Jewish strength and unity. Though the Bible says that the temple was used in some capacities after the crucifixion, it is unclear the magnitude of damage the building experienced.

Further, with the surge of Christianity among the Jews, several Jewish practices such as animal sacrifice and intercession by a high priest were deemed unnecessary, and possibly caused a cultural decline in Jewish tradition, again undermining the previous influence of the Jewish religion.

The Jews lost this last temple in AD 70, when the Roman military leader Titus took the city in response to the Jewish revolts against Roman rule and burned the temple as a sign of his victory.

The Jews continued to be politically active, but they needed the strength of Christian converts in order to gain the power they needed to reclaim Jerusalem. Because Christians were geographically isolated from the Jews by their flight out of Jerusalem after the Roman attack, Christians did not stand with the Jews, and the Jews lost their chance to regain the city and the temple. The Christians believed that the fall of Jerusalem from the Jews was part of God’s plan to judge Israel for rejecting their Messiah.

In another revolt just sixty years later, the Jews were banned from setting foot in Jerusalem and lost their say of what happened in the city.

The Christian church began to develop independently through the next few centuries, with the aid of much persecution, and thereby moved its center from the Middle East to Europe.

Meanwhile, Jews finally received the positive recognition of their leader through the Roman emperor, Julian, who sought to rebuild the temple in AD 363. However, repeated natural disasters ended the progress of the work. Meanwhile, political turmoil sent the Sanhedrin on a wild goose-chase, constantly changing the position of its headquarter and thereby causing it to lose much of its authority.
The Jews lost their legal right to the space. Through the separation of Christians and many times of persecution, Judaism also lost its strong central presence. The Sanhedrin broke up in 425 AD.

With the emergence of Islam in the 600s, Jews and Christians became the target of vicious attacks. In 637, the Roman Empire signed over the city of Jerusalem, with all its holy places including Temple Mount, to the Muslims in exchange for peaceful residence and worship in the city. The Muslims still occupy this place today.

Hopefully now you have a clearer picture of why the temple system began and ended. In our next week of lessons, we will be looking closer at the Old Testament. We will be trying to find the Triune God, the origin of Christian worship, and the origin of the books of the Old Testament over the next week.

Assignment Four: Copy the dates from this lesson onto your timeline.