

# Life Notes

## THE HISTORY OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

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### #2. "Summary of The Church in the First Century"

Today we begin a century by century overview of Church History. This is the time of Church History we know the most about since the story is largely contained in the Book of Acts and the Epistles.

As we review these earliest days of Christianity, the century naturally divides into three major sections.

The first section is essentially contained in the four Gospels and focuses on the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ. His ministry brings the Church into existence, even though it was ordained by God from before the foundations of the earth (Ephesians 1:4-6). Several months into His public ministry, Jesus made a bold declaration to His disciples as they visited Caesarea Philippi - "I will build my church, and the gates of Hell (the strategy, agenda, or resistance of Hell) shall not overcome the fact that I am building My Church" (Matthew 16:18ff). It is interesting to note that this promise was made in a region known for rebellion against Jehovah during the Old Testament, and was a center of Pantheism by the time of Jesus. In the face of the greatest challenge imaginable to the disciples, Jesus promised success concerning the future of The Church.

This first period reveals the essence of the Gospel: Jesus, who was, is, and always shall be God, was born of a virgin. He was not a hybrid of some sort — He was fully God and fully man. He would live a sinless life and die a substitutionary death as the complete and perfect sacrifice for all sins of all time (1 John 3:1). He was raised from the dead, and has ascended to the Right Hand of the Father where He ever lives to make intercession for us. This event was summarized in John 1:10-15.

The second period begins with Luke's account in the Book of Acts. The pattern is found in Acts 1:8, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

The mission began in Jerusalem (Acts 2), spread to Samaria (Acts 8), and eventually to the Gentile world by the preaching of Peter (Acts 10, 11) and Paul, whose three missionary journeys took the message throughout the Roman Empire. From England to India, the Apostles took the Good News to the known World.

Part Three introduces the persecution that began during the middle sixties under Nero. It wasn't empire-wide, and the church had already known persecution from Jewish opponents from the earliest days, but an era of severe crisis was beginning that would challenge the Church for centuries. Both Peter and Paul would die at Nero's hands.

Nero was possibly mentally deranged, and it appears that he blamed the Christians for the burning of Rome when, in fact, he seems to be the culprit himself.

Next week we will explore some new territory recorded about the second century. The two hallmarks of that time period are intense persecution and the rise of false teachers.