

Lesson 2
The Early Church To
Early Reformation

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Class Schedule

- **The Ancient Church (100 – 313 A.D.)**
 - 1. Historical Backgrounds and the World of the Early Church
 - 2. **The Church in Jerusalem and the Mission to the Gentiles**
 - 3. 1st & 2nd Century Conflicts with the State
 - 4. Early Apologists
 - 5. Defining the Faith
 - 6. Christian Life

The Church in Jerusalem and the Mission to the Gentiles

Lesson 2

“And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all”

- Acts 4: 33

The Church in Jerusalem

The 1st Community of Faith

- In Jerusalem & exclusively Jewish
- “the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.....” Acts 6: 1
- *Hellenistic => favoring Greek language, culture, and thought – reason and logic*
- These words do not refer to a conflict between Jews & Gentiles in the church.
- It was a conflict between 2 groups of Jews; those who kept the customs & language of their ancestors, and those who were open to Hellenistic influences. Acts makes it clear that at this time there was still no Gentiles in the church.

Hebrew & Hellenistic Jews

Diversity in the Church on Day 1

- Acts 7 – the story of Steven
- The Sanhedrin was composed of mostly anti-Hellenistic Jews. They refused to listen to Steven and condemn him to death.
- Peter & John were released after being beaten. Acts 5: 40
- When persecution broke out many Christians fled Jerusalem, but the apostles remained.
- Paul leaves for Damascus, but leaves the apostles behind.
- Perhaps the earliest persecution was aimed mostly at what could be called Hellenistic Christians??
- In Acts 12 it is Herod Agrippa, & not the Council, that orders the death of James and the arrest of Peter.

Hebrew & Hellenistic Jews

Diversity in the Church on Day 1

- Immediately after the death of Stephen, Acts turns to Philip and the church in Samaria.
- Peter & John are then sent to supervise the life of that new community of believers.
- Thus, a congregation begin born outside of Judea is acknowledging their authority.
- What appears to be happening was that Hellenistic Jewish Christians were serving as a bridge to the gentile world. Gentiles would eventually join the church in such numbers that they would soon overshadow the earlier Jewish Christian community.

Religious Life of Jewish Christians

- The earliest Christians didn't consider themselves followers of a new religion. All of their lives they had been Jews and still were.
- Their faith was not a denial of Judaism, but was rather the conviction that the long awaited messianic age had finally arrived.
- Paul in Acts 28: 20 says he was being persecuted "because of the hope of Israel."

Religious Life of Jewish Christians

- Early communion services did not center on the Lord's passion, but rather on His victory through which a new age had dawned.
- It was many centuries later that Christian worship focused on the death of Jesus.
- As a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, in the earliest communities of faith the breaking of the bread took place "with glad and generous hearts" Acts 2: 46. The word generous probably referring to the sharing of food.
- There was time set aside for sorrow of one's sins. In particular during the 2 weekly days of fasting. It appears the church adopted this from Jewish practice. Though at an early time they changed the days from the Jewish Mon & Thur to Wed & Fri. This could have taken place to remember the betrayal & the crucifixion.

Religious Life of Jewish Christians

- In the early church authority was vested primarily in the twelve apostles.
- Of the apostles, Peter & John appear to be the “pillars” Paul refers to in Gal 2: 9
- The 3rd such pillar was James the brother of Jesus.

Decline of the Jewish Church

- Soon after the murder of James, the brother of Jesus, in 62 A.D. the leaders of the Christian community in Jerusalem moved to Pella, a city beyond the Jordan River. Pella's population would have been mostly Gentile.
- In the desolate regions beyond the Jordan, Jewish Christianity made contact with various groups that had also abandoned orthodox Judaism.
- Lacking contact with the rest of the churches, that Jewish Christian community followed its own course, and was often influenced by the many sects among which it lived.
- Later Gentile Christian writers spoke of that church's heretics & strange customs.



Decline of the Jewish Church

- The late 1st & early 2nd century saw an increased alienation of believers in Jesus from the synagogues.
- This move could have been caused by increased persecution at the hands of Jews, or due to increased suspicions of Romans regarding this new Jewish religious sect.
- By 135 A.D a number of the 1st Jewish church returned to Jerusalem. Their relationship with the rest of Christianity had been almost entirely severed, and leadership eventually passed to Gentile Christians.
- In 135 A.D. Rome forbid Jews to be in Jerusalem, and the Palestinian church became largely Gentile.
- The original Jewish congregation faded from history by the 5th century.

The Mission to the Gentiles

Early Gentile Conversion

- Acts 10 – Peter & Cornelius
- If the Christians who first fled from Jerusalem were Hellenistic Jews they would have been the first to be scattered through neighboring towns.
- The earliest expansion was approved by the Jerusalem leadership.
- For sometime there remained the question of whether Gentile converts had to obey the Law.

Early Gentile Conversion

- Most early Gentile converts were not completely alien to Judaism. They were what Jews referred to as “God-fearers”.
- God-fearers were people who had come to believe in the God and the ethical teachings of Israel, but for some reason had not joined the ranks of Israel by becoming “proselytes.”
- Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, Paul at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13: 14 & 50), etc.

Paul

- Antioch was where followers of Jesus were first called “Christians.” Antioch was the city from which the Gentile mission of the church spread.
- The NT records the significance of Paul’s work, but we must not forget that many others were preaching in various regions.
- Paul’s most unique contribution was his Epistles in connection with missional activity. Thus, he had a decisive & continuing impact on the early life of the church.

Paul

- His message was not that Israel had been abandoned by God, but rather that now, through the resurrection of Jesus, the age of the Messiah had dawned, and that therefore the way was open for Gentiles to join the people of God.
- The church became predominantly Gentile by the end of the 1st century.
- By the end of the 1st century the church at Ephesus was large, as well as being the center of the most influential region of Christians.

Diversity Continues

- When most converts were either Jewish or God-fearers, the church could take for granted that they already knew most of the fundamentals of Christian faith & ethics.
- As increasing numbers of Gentiles sought to join the fellowship it was found necessary to provide for them more extensive periods of teaching & training before they were admitted into the church by baptism.
- The worship service came to be divided into two main parts: the “service of the Word” & the “service of the table.”
- This process continued at least through the 1st three centuries.

I Don't Want to Miss that Train

- Late in the 2nd century, a development took place that greatly hinders the task of historians who seeks to discern the later career of the apostles. The congregations in every major city began to claim apostolic origins.
- Alexandria – Mark
- Constantinople – Philip – much later
- Spain – Paul & James the brother of John
- India - Thomas

