

# An Overview of Church History

## MOPC Adult Sunday School

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## Part 2

*From the spread of the Gospel  
to the rise of Islam.*

## The Spread of the Gospel

- 35 A.D. Palestine
- 40 A.D. Eastern Mediterranean, Northern Africa
- 60 A.D. Asia Minor, Greece, Cyprus, Crete, Italy
- <100 Spain, Persia, France, England (?)

Contributing 1st century factors:

- Christian missionaries (Apostles & Others)-
- “Thomas was chosen for Parthia, Andrew for Scythia, John for Asia” (Eusebius, Christian historian)
- “Paul after preaching in the east and west taught righteousness to the whole world, and came to the extreme limit of the west” (Clement of Rome, 1st century)
- Christian Roman soldiers-

## The Spread of the Gospel to the Barbarian Tribes

- Goths- Ulifas (340A.D.) & Boniface (720)
  - Picts- Ninian (400)
  - Irish- Patrick (435)
  - Franks- Clovis (496)
  - Scots- Columba (563)
  - Angles & Saxons- Augustine of Canterbury, Ethelbert (600)
  - Frisians- Willibrord (690)
  - By 1000, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Russia converted
- ▶ By 450, heathenism conquered by Christianity within the Roman Empire
- ▶ By 1000, all of the new nations of Europe had been similarly brought under the influence of Christianity

## 30- 450 A.D.

- Age of Universal Christianity: 30-311 A.D.
  - Relative purity through persecution; “convinced believers”
- Age of the Christian Empire: 312-450 A.D.
  - Christians favored and pampered; Christianity is the state’s official church; declining commitment
  - Christian empire building seen as way to fulfill church’s mission
  - Secularization and misuse of religion for political purposes
  - Relationship of the church with the state debated; Augustine’s *The City of God* influential- only those in “city of God” are working to advance God’s kingdom; those of the “worldly city” subject to laws of Christian church

## Roman Empire in Decline

- Constantinople: capital of Roman Empire in 330
- Visigoths (Goths), crowded by Mongolian Huns, cross lower Danube River into Roman Empire and annihilate Roman army in 378
  - Theodosius subsequently defeats Goths in east, splits empire east/west between his sons
- Alaric, Goth leader, in 410 captures and plunders Rome, but spares the Christian churches (Goths previously evangelized by Ulfilas)
- Vandals attack from Spain into north Africa in 430
- Attila the Hun advances on Rome in 452; Leo, Bishop of Rome, negotiates sparing of Rome and withdrawal from Italy; Bishop of Rome assumes prominent role thereafter in both church and secular matters
- Gaiseric, King of the Vandals, enters Rome in 455 without resistance following mutiny of Roman troops; Leo negotiates to spare Rome from burning, gets “14 days looting”, Rome’s treasures and sacred vessels from Solomon’s Temple taken to Carthage
- Leo assumes title Pontifex Maximus, the high priest of religion throughout the empire... the first Pope
- In 476, Odovacar, Germanic commander of imperial troops, proclaims himself head of government
- Ancient Roman Empire ends, but Church survives... why?
  - Many barbarian tribes had accepted Christianity through prior missionary outreach
  - Position of church improved through protecting efforts of Leo
  - Church subsequently acted to educate the barbarians
- Ancient History ends and Middle Ages begins

## The Rise of the Papacy: How Could It Happen?

- Early Church Structure: Elders lead local church; councils held to resolve disputes among “equals”
- As churches grew, multiple elders needed; head elders (bishops) elected to rule over believers in cities or regions
- After Constantine, competition between bishops emerged for prominence
- Metropolitan Bishops of Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, and Rome respected as “Patriarchs”
- Hierarchy of bishops established; Rome preeminent... why?
  - Historical capital of Roman Empire; Nero’s persecution gave Roman Christians prominence; Peter & Paul martyred there
  - As western-most bishop, Roman Patriarch ruled over more regional churches; declared they must align with Roman doctrine
  - Roman church weathered barbarian invasion better than eastern churches did against Islam
- Patriarch = “father” = “pope” (from papa, Latin for father)

## The Papacy Solidified

Pope Gregory (590-604)

- First monk to become pope; called himself “the servant of servants”; title still used today
- Assumed broad political powers
  - more power in Italy than the emperor
  - appointed secular heads of cities, raised armies, made peace treaties
  - took on governing tasks relinquished by old Empire: education, care of poor, maintaining justice system
- “Gregorian chant” style of music ascribed to him
- Taught that Lord’s Supper was a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ, that dead saints can be of help to us, that there is a purgatory

## Issues Facing the Church, 400+ A.D.

- Christianity as a passport to political, military, and social promotion attracts Christians in name only
- Influence of paganism (from “lite” converts... prayers to and for the dead, sacrifice (Lord’s Supper), division of church between clergy (priests) and laity, veneration of martyrs and saints, superstitious ascription of magical powers to relics, pictures, statues, and altars in churches, more ritual than preaching in worship)
- Relationship between church and state becomes a prominent issue...
  - political means is new tactic for evangelism (previously, church grew through peaceful means, now conquest and persecution starts against heretics and heathen)
  - separation or integration of church and state? Emperor as head of church, pope as head of state?
- Barbarians the anti-Christ?

## Rise of Monasticism (<350-750 A.D.)

- Appeal to those fleeing persecution
- Appeal to those fleeing worldliness
- Appeal to those who aspire to more than the ordinary; asceticism
- Appeal to simple life, clear purpose, discipline, study (Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine took sabbaticals in early monasteries)
- Benedict’s mandated vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience (Monte Cassino, in 529)
- Mixed assessment: un-Biblical world/life view and corruption, offset by preservation/proliferation of Scriptures and classic literature, education centers, mission efforts, care of poor throughout the Middle Ages

## Rise of Islam

- Mohammed (570-632 A.D.) born in Mecca, lineage of Ishmael
- In 40th year, spent whole month in solitude near Mecca; claimed to see visions and received messages from Gabriel
- Acknowledged Moses, Solomon, and Jesus as prophets, but that he was the greatest. To him, Jesus was a holy man, but not the Son of God. He also denied the virgin birth, resurrection and ascension.
- Islam (means “obedience” or “surrender”)
- Tenets- everything is fore-ordained by fate, and that after death, evil is punished and good rewarded
- Chief requirements include:
  - 1) confession that there is no other God but Allah and that Mohammed is his prophet,
  - 2) offering up prayer at stated intervals, 5X per day, facing Mecca,
  - 3) giving of alms,
  - 4) fasting during Ramadan (9th month of Mohammedan year) from sunrise to sunset,
  - 5) pilgrimage to Mecca at least once per lifetime