

# CHURCH HISTORY

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## Lesson 2

100 A.D. to 200 A.D.

In our first week of looking at the birth of the Church and the early genesis of the Christian movement we saw that it's built on the Rock. In fact it's built on Peter's statement speaking about Christ that "thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God" in Matthew 16:16. We also saw from these verses through Matthew 16:19 that Christ would be the builder of the church - not man, and that in verse 19 he gave the Apostles the authority to help Him in that task "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."



Empowered by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit the Apostles set out to proclaim the Good News of Christ – that salvation had come, that Christ had paid the price needed to redeem the lost that He was the Messiah and that through Him mankind could be reconciled to God.

During the first century they established themselves as the central authority in the church, worked within the existing Jewish synagogue and Temple structure and took the message first to the Jews. Through the efforts of the Apostles and Deacons such as Philip and Stephen the church grew and would eventually be expanded to include both Jew and Gentile.

Along the way, between the birth of the Church and 100 A.D., expansion occurred; and the gospels and epistles we know today as the New Testament would all be written. By the end of the first century the church was clearly established based on Jesus as the Christ, it had adopted the two ordinances of Baptism by emersion and celebration of the Lord's Supper, had declared that circumcision or being Jewish were not required for salvation, and had established a program of community service, outreach and support for missionary activity as regular functions of the local church.

Operating within the Greco-Roman civilization of the day under the law of the Roman Empire, the first century church focused initially on reaching the Mediterranean basin. From here it would be prepared for the struggles that lie ahead to survive the rule of the Roman Empire. No longer able to rely on the leadership of the Apostles the Church leadership took on the role of martyrdom and apologists as it fought Roman persecution from outside and heresy from within.

This week we'll begin to look closer at this period in Church history, spanning 100 A.D. to 200 A.D.

For the lesson this week, and in the coming weeks, you will need to consult extra-biblical (outside the Bible) reference material. There are many good books on Church History, and many good websites. If you have trouble discovering any of these please let me know and I'll forward some good references. Basic Bible references, such as a good Bible Dictionary or Bible Atlas will add a great deal to your research as well. The Crosswalk.com web site contains links to [several online Bible dictionaries](#). I also discovered the Godweb.org site, which I am not endorsing, but I am referencing it here because its [Online Bible Atlas](#) contains links to many maps and atlases from various sources. Furthermore, with today's Internet search engines, a quick search on [Google](#), or [Yahoo!](#) should also prove very useful.

My prayer is that as we move ahead with this study it will help you to be better grounded in your faith and in your understanding of Christ's Church as it has come into being over the past two thousand years.

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*For this week we will look at several of the “Church Fathers” as they are referred and the basic organization of Church leadership as it moved into the second century. They are men of God whose writings and teachings shaped the doctrines of the church in the days following the Apostles.*

1. See what you can find about the following and jot down what key thing or things we should know, e.g., Why are these men and the writings cited important in the early days of the Church? What did each contribute?
  - a. Clement of Rome
  - b. Ignatius
  - c. Polycarp
  - d. The Epistle of Barnabus
  - e. The Epistle of Diognetus
  - f. The Second Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians
  - g. Papias
2. Church governance - how was the early church governed? Who decided which person would be placed in a leadership position and how were these positions defined? To really answer this question we need to consider what the scriptures had to say and then see how this was applied to the church in its early stages. Look at Ephesians 2:14-18, Ephesians 4:11-12, and 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14.
  - a. What does Ephesians 2:14-18 tell us about access to God? Is it just for a few high and holy appointed leaders?
  - b. Did God give everyone the same gifts? What does Paul tell us in Ephesians 4:11-12?
  - c. Finally, how could we summarize 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14 as it relates to gifts? Could we say that not all gifts are the same, but all gifts have a specific purpose within the church?

Your answers and understanding here are critical to a fundamental truth about how the early church organized and a fundamental principle we still see applied today. That is that there are first two basic types of gifts – spiritual gifts and administrative gifts. The early church saw that Christ endowed certain people with spiritual gifts. Led by the Holy Spirit these people were led by an inward call of the Holy Spirit in their lives and were externally recognized by the church through vote and ordination by the Apostles.

However, it’s important to note that those ordained did not constitute a special class of priests or leaders who led a closed system which led to salvation only through those priests – these were unlike the High Priest of the Jews who entered God’s presence on behalf of the whole nation, because as we’ve seen in Ephesians 2:18 “all have access” to God

The second group of gifted people, those with administrative gifts were chosen by the congregation after prayer for guidance by the Holy Spirit and appointed by the Apostles. Again the role of the local church and the role of the Holy Spirit were clearly seen in each of these.

From these two groups the church got its defenders of truth and evangelists and its governmental leadership and administration. And so we see the beginning of the early church organization with Bishops/Elders (Presbyter) and Deacons chosen from within the congregation and appointed by the Apostles. These groups all worked within the local church, rather than the worldwide church. While the Pastors/Teachers, Evangelists, and so on dealt more directly with the “church” as a whole. And, as we can see in Acts 6:3-5 the election of the local leaders involved the entire congregation.

In the next lesson, we'll take a close look at the early development of sound doctrine versus fables and heresy as the church begins to grow beyond the days of the Apostles.

My prayer is that this study is helping you in your Christian growth. I welcome any suggestions for how we can make it better, or help you in any way grow closer to Christ our Savior and Lord.

May He richly bless you this week as you study with us.

In Christ,

**Wes**