



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Church History – Part One (100-1500 AD)

Lesson 1 – Introduction

The Old Testament and the New Testament are books that contain much history – from the account of creation in Genesis 1 to the visions of John on the island of Patmos in the book of Revelation. Whatever the Holy Spirit says about the facts of history is certainly true, for the Holy Spirit is God and does not lie (Numbers 23:19). Moreover, the Old Testament and the New Testament give us the proper interpretation of history, that is, they show us the way God Himself wants us to interpret history. In the Bible we see history from God’s perspective rather than from the perspective of any human observer. It is true that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each tell us about Jesus from their own perspectives, but these four men were chosen by God to give us these perspectives, and we know that all of them spoke the truth. We know that all the details they recorded are the truth, even when they are presented from their own point of observation.

But when we now move past the age of the apostles, we have no such authentic book of history. We cannot know with certainty what actually happened in all the centuries since the days of the apostles. We have many records. We have the writings of many historians, some of them eye and ear witnesses, and some of them simply repeating what they have heard from others. And we have interpretations of historical events given by many different persons with different perspectives. But we do not have God’s own record of these events, and therefore we cannot be absolutely sure of what happened and why it happened from God’s perspective.

But we do have God’s Word in the Scriptures, and we can judge the historical records of what happened after the events recorded in the New Testament based on what God has revealed to us in the Scriptures. We can expect that those writers and historians who were themselves believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and who accepted the Bible as the Word of God will have a better grasp of what is true and important. They will have a better understanding of how all of these historical events fit into God’s plan in which He works all things together for the good of those He has chosen to be His own people in time and in eternity.

It is by God’s design that all of history is divided into two parts and the dividing point is Jesus Himself. The center of all history is Jesus Christ, and all human history is either BC (before Christ) or AD (*anno domini*, which is Latin meaning “in the year of the Lord”). Unbelievers do not like this division and they have introduced other terms: B.C.E. and C.E. (“before the common era” and “the common era”), but Jesus Christ is the dividing point when one uses these terms, because they refer to the same era as do BC and AD. God has designed it this

way, for the coming of His Son into the world to accomplish the work of saving the human race is the greatest event in world history. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians: **“In Him (Jesus the Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one ALL THINGS IN CHRIST, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – IN HIM”** (Ephesians 1:7-10).

One of our teachers has expressed it like this:

The basic work of God under which all others serve is His magnificent plan of the salvation of man which He carries out without let or hindrance throughout the ages. The basic will of God is that He wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of His salvation. Everything in history is made by Him to serve this great purpose. Every event in history is there to show forth the praises of our God in His mercy in Jesus Christ, His beloved Son...

So while we study the acts and deeds of man, we shall first of all remember that man is entirely under the mighty control of God. It is in God alone that man lives and moves and has his being. Without the supporting hand of God, he dies. Without the controlling hand of God, he destroys himself. Without the directing hand of God, he knows nothing nor can know nothing.

We will also remember that in His infinite wisdom God permits man to do many vile and destructive things. For in His wisdom He has left to man his free will so that he might be a creature above the animals. In carrying out the desires of his will it is that man does his vile and wicked deeds. But it is still God who makes it all serve His purpose...

For we will above all remember that God is building His Church. He does this also through men. But that work is carried out by regenerated men who have been set free of the curse of sin to serve God in righteousness and holiness. No, we shall not be able to select those men and women from the pages of history; they are known only to God. But as we study events we shall see the result of their work. The elect are gathered, the Church of Christ invisible is built and His gracious good will is carried out...

Finally we shall see the manifestations of the judgments of God over sections of a sinful world. These are fearful to behold. From the Bible alone we know that they do take place as judgments. The story of the Flood, of Sodom and Gomorrah, of the destruction of Jerusalem, and many others are given us as examples of such judgments of God. No doubt such judgments take place in history many times. So when we see terrifying calamities on the pages of history, we shall not think that

things have gotten out of hand for God, but shall know that His fearful judgments are still falling upon a wretched world. Far from being out of control, we shall know that throughout such calamities all things work together for good to them that love God. In the center of the storms His Church continues, for **“He is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved, He helps her and that right early”** (Winfred Schaller, Sr.: *Schaller’s Ancient History*, Volume 1, pp. 1-2).

This course will try to tell the story of what happened from the days of the apostle John to the present time; however, it can cover only the most important events. There is a huge amount of material available that talks about the past two thousand years, and no one can read all of it or give a complete account. For the most part, this course will follow the pattern and the chapter sequence of a historical account by Justo Gonzalez titled *The Story of Christianity – Complete in One Volume – The Early Church to the Present Day*, Part 1 and Part 2, published in 1999.

Questions:

1. Why can we call the Old Testament and the New Testament books of history?
2. What makes the history of the two Testaments different from other history?
3. How has God arranged all history to be divided into two sections?
4. What is the central event in all history?
5. Find a Bible passage that teaches that all things are under God’s control.
6. What does God accomplish even through evil men and horrible events?
7. Find the place in the Bible where it says that God works all things together for good to those that love God.