

# HOW DID WE GET HERE?

## *A Short Course on Church History*

### **The Church Scattered: Beginnings to AD 313**

#### **Acts 7:51-60, 8:1-4 (ESV)**

<sup>51</sup> “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. <sup>52</sup> Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, <sup>53</sup> you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

<sup>54</sup> Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

<sup>55</sup> But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup> And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

<sup>57</sup> But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. <sup>58</sup> Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.

<sup>59</sup> And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” <sup>60</sup> And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

<sup>1</sup> And Saul approved of his execution. And **there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria**, except the apostles. <sup>2</sup> Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup> But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

<sup>4</sup> Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

*The charges against Stephen ...*

*Saul spearheads the assault on Christianity in Jerusalem ...*

*Sal – Zealot to Zealot ...*

*Philip and the Christian Diaspora ...*

**To be a Christian is to be a part of history.** And to grow as a Christian is to be a student of history. This does not mean that every Christian enjoys researching old documents in musty archives, or reading the latest historical best-seller from Oxford University Press. Rather, it Christianity isn't a religion of abstraction or of speculative philosophies, but is a religion of historical fact. It is, among other things, a message about events that took place in time and space. Christianity also teaches some eternal truths (the existence of God, his attributes, and Trinitarian nature, etc.) but is focused on the historical events of Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection. Therefore, the Christian is personally involved with history.

But often times, we tend to relegate the importance of history or we treasure history too much for its own sake.

This is how Carl Trueman describes the two tendencies:

*"An idolatry of the new and the novel, with [the concomitant] disrespect for anything traditional; or a nostalgia for the past which is little more than an idolatry of the old and the traditional. Both are disempowering: the first leaves the church as a free-floating anarchic entity which is doomed to reinvent Christianity anew every Sunday, and prone to being subverted and taken over by any charismatic (in the non-theological sense!) leader or group which cares to flex its muscle; the second leaves the church bound to the past as its leaders care to write that past and thus unable to engage critically with her own tradition."<sup>1</sup>*

## I. WHAT IS **CHURCH HISTORY** AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

A. God commands us to be students of the past ...

B. We are 'relatives' of those who came before us ...

C. "There is nothing new under the sun" ...

*Most modern heresies are not new but are recycled versions of errors long past, simply presenting themselves in updated guise. If we know our church history, we can compare present to past and arm ourselves against false teaching accordingly.*

*Church History, Christopher Catherwood (p. 17).*

D. We should be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>1</sup> Carl R. Trueman, *Minority Report: Unpopular Thoughts on Everything from Ancient Christianity to Zen-Calvinism* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2008), 116–117.

## II. THE POLITICAL, CULTURAL, AND RELIGIOUS **CONTEXT** OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

### A. Judaism

*“Ethical monotheism” ...*

### B. The Roman Empire

*“Providential” history ...*

### C. Greek philosophy and religions

## III. THE **EXPANSION** OF CHRISTIANITY

### A. Roman empire sets the stage ...

### B. Why did people become Christians?

## IV. ROMAN **PERSECUTIONS**

*“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” – Tertullian*

### A. Reasons for Persecution

## B. Apostolic Martyrdom

- **Paul:** imprisoned under Nero, then beheaded in Rome
- **James the brother of John:** was beheaded by Herod (Acts 12:2)
- **Thomas:** shot with an arrow in India
- **Peter:** imprisoned under Nero, then crucified upside down in Rome
- **Simon the Zealot:** crucified in Africa
- **Mark:** founded the church in Egypt and was burned alive in Alexandria
- **Bartholomew:** beaten, crucified, and beheaded in Armenia
- **Andrew:** crucified in Ethiopia
- **Matthew:** killed with a spear in Ethiopia
- **Philip:** crucified and stoned in Greece
- **James the brother of Jesus:** ordered stoned by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem
- **John the apostle:** exiled to Patmos, died of natural causes

## C. Major Persecutions:

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Emperor</u>	<u>Famous Martyrs, Other Comments</u>
AD 64	Nero	Paul, Peter
c.90-96	Domitian (81-96)	Clement of Rome, John (exiled to Patmos)
98-117	Trajan	Ignatius, Symeon, Zozimus, Rufus
161-180	Marcus Aurelius	Polycarp; Justin Martyr
202-211	Septimus Severus	Irenaeus
235-236	Maximus the Thracian	
249-251	Decius (249-251)	<i>libelli</i> issued to those who sacrificed to Roman gods
257-260	Valerian (253-260)	Origen, Cyprian
303-311	Diocletian (284-305)	perhaps the most vicious of the Roman persecutions

D. The Church survives \_\_\_\_\_...

Can it now survive \_\_\_\_\_?