

Highlights in Church History

S. C. McClain

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by S. C. McClain

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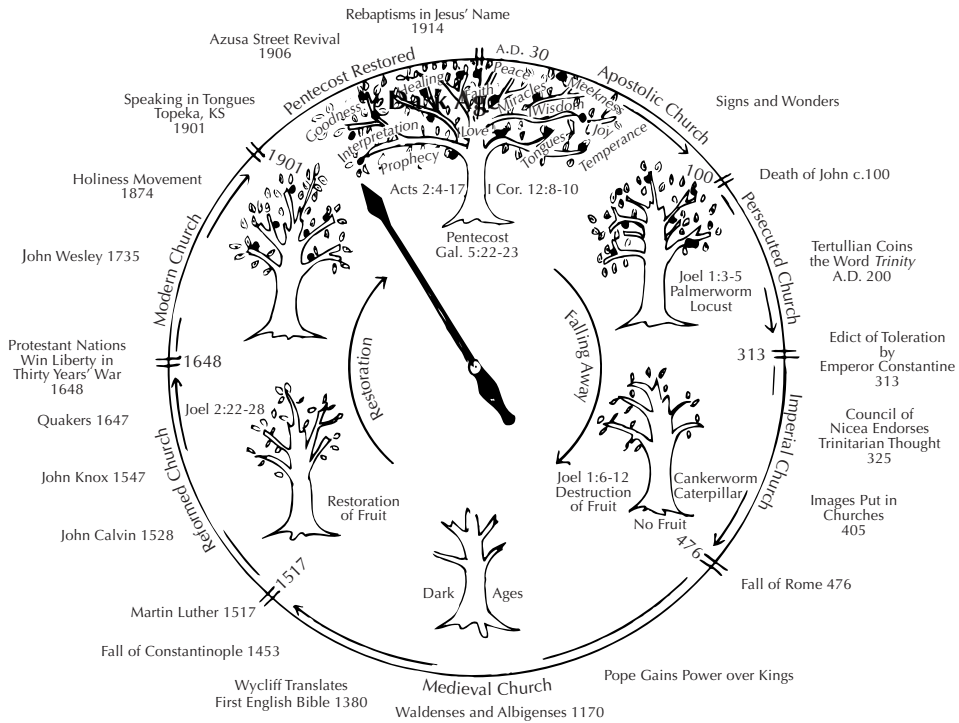
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CHAPTER ONE

A GENERAL VIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY

In this brief study of church history, let us begin with the Day of Pentecost, when 120 of the most faithful followers of our Lord had assembled and tarried ten days, waiting for the promised baptism of the Holy Ghost. (See Acts 1:5. See Leviticus 23 to determine the number of days these disciples waited for this Spirit baptism.) Then let us note what mighty power was manifested from the first outpouring of the Holy Ghost, throughout the time of the apostles, until signs of a falling away were seen and the professing church as a whole drifted away from God into one of the darkest periods ever known.

But thanks be to our Christ, who promised to be with His people even to the end, this darkness could not continue when the light of a new day broke in and reformers began to preach Bible truths that had almost been lost in the age of darkness. The apostolic message began its return little by little as people began to enter the light of

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truth. Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, and many others boldly preached a reformation, starting a process that brought the professing church on its way back to Pentecost, the goal it has now begun to reach in these last days.

Let us observe that all the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit were in the church at first. With the three and one-half years of His ministry, the Lord had prepared disciples who could and would yield to the leadership of the Spirit, and He began His church in the fullness and strength of the Holy Spirit. All manner of signs, wonders, and miracles were done by the apostles and others in the church; and as long as they loved one another and kept in fellowship by the Spirit, these mighty works followed them.

With the beginning of a falling away in the church, however, great discussions and arguments arose and false doctrines were introduced. It is commendable that the original church had few doctrines other than definite proofs that Jesus is the Lord and Messiah; that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day for our salvation; that He ascended to heaven and poured out the Holy Ghost; that Jesus is to return for His people; that they must repent and be baptized in Jesus' name; and that the promise of the Holy Spirit baptism is for every believer (Acts 2:22-39).

The greater part of their ministry was like that of the Lord Jesus, filled with power to heal and to do signs and wonders, which made their ministry more convincing than hairsplitting preaching. The first council of the church settled the question of whether the Gentile believ-

ers were to keep the law and be circumcised (Acts 15). Although there were discussions, the Holy Ghost kept all in one accord and guided the decision. How much difference there was as the professing church fell farther from God and lost the power of the Holy Ghost! The path of history is red with the blood of those condemned by leaders of the apostate church.

Persecution by the unbelieving heathen made the early church grow all the more, but a compromise was effected by Constantine, and he, by what seems to have been a false profession of Christ, became effectively the leader and head of the church. With the emperor ruling over the church, persecution ceased and the doors of the fast-backsliding church were thrown open to the world. Constantine had made it unlawful for anyone to hold a political office unless he was a church member; therefore, everybody wanted to enter the church. With the world and its politics in the professing church, it sank into the darkest depths of the Dark Ages.

About A.D. 150, some teachers introduced the concept of plural persons in the Godhead, and around A.D. 200 Tertullian coined the word *trinity*. From that time forward, there was much disputing over this new doctrine. Thus Constantine called the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 to decide what doctrinal formula his new state church would use. Being ignorant of spiritual leadings, knowing but little of Bible truth, and having been brought up under heathen worship, Constantine decided to support the teaching of a trinity. Many gospel truths were thus all but lost in the Dark Ages. Those who dared to