

Church through the ages

Staying True to God's Way

REGULAR BAPTIST PRESS
3715 N. Ventura Drive
Arlington Heights, IL 60004-7678

Editor: Alex Bauman

Church through the Ages: Staying True to God's Way
Adult Bible Study Leader's Guide

Vol. 66 • No. 5

© 2018 • Regular Baptist Press

www.regularbaptistpress.org • 1-800-727-4440

Printed in U.S.A.

All rights reserved

RBP0198 • ISBN: 978-1-62940-870-5

Contents



Lesson 1	Thriving Despite Tensions and Threats	9
Lesson 2	The Church under Trial	17
Lesson 3	The Church in Triumph	25
Lesson 4	Doctrine of the Trinity and Christology	33
Lesson 5	Doctrinal Drift on Ordinances and Leadership	41
Lesson 6	Church Unchecked	49
Lesson 7	Medieval Confused Church	57
Lesson 8	Church Awakening	66
Lesson 9	Reformation Catches Fire	75
Lesson 10	Church Stagnation and Renewal	83
Lesson 11	Church Challenges and Opportunities	91
Lesson 12	To the Ends of the Earth	99
Lesson 13	Faithfully Proclaiming the Gospel	106

How to Use *Truth for Living*

Truth for Living:

A comprehensive, trustworthy curriculum that presents the truth of God's Word without compromise. The curriculum plan includes through-the-Bible courses as well as topical courses. Perfect for adults who want a guide in using all of God's Word as God intended.

As you prepare to teach these lessons, keep these two factors in mind:

- The FOCUS of productive adult Bible learning is the learner. The intent of teaching is not teaching, but learning—the learner's learning.
- The GOAL of productive adult Bible learning is an appropriate life-response to Biblical truth. You do not teach simply to impart information; you teach so that the Holy Spirit of God can use the truths of the Word of God to change the child of God into the image of the Son of God.

The Lesson Plan

Each *Truth for Living* lesson has three distinct parts. GETTING STARTED is the attention-getter. The questions and activities “set the table,” as it were, for the study. HISTORY LESSON is the heart of the lesson for this course. A series of study questions leads the teacher and learners through the Biblical text and historical information. LEARNING FROM HISTORY challenges learners to consider how history lessons should affect their lives today.

As is true of any teaching experience, you can adapt the parts of the lesson to fit your particular class. You may choose to alter the beginning activities or change the focus of the application. You will find more material in the study than you can probably cover in one class session.

The Study Book

This leader's guide is designed to accompany the Bible study book. We encourage you to distribute Bible study books to your learners. Urge them to complete the study before class. The more your learners have studied on their own, the better the class discussions will be. Nearly all of the questions in the leader's guide are picked up from the Bible study book. You will notice the question numbers in parentheses after the questions. The answers to the questions are in italics following the questions.

Other Resources

The resource CD has PowerPoint presentations for every lesson. They incorporate the resource visuals and provide a good way for teachers and learners to track the lesson. The resource CD also has Prezi presentations for some of the lessons. Instructions for using the Prezi presentations are on the CD. Other resources include lesson outlines and promotional materials.

Preface

Church through the Ages presents the church from both a historical and a doctrinal perspective. The emphasis is on the importance of following God's instructions and truth for the church. The learner is encouraged to be faithful to God's doctrine and practice for the church and to learn from both good and bad examples from church history. And most importantly, the church as a whole is encouraged to take steps now to protect the Biblical understanding of the gospel.

History never stops moving forward. As will be abundantly apparent in this course, it only takes one generation for a church to leave its Biblical moorings. The horizontal lines on the cover are meant to indicate departure from God's way. Some of those lines actually reverse course, but all of them end at a point. Christ is still building His church as indicated by the line down the middle capped with an arrow. It is of utmost importance to make sure we are part of His building endeavor by staying true to God's way.



Thriving Despite Tensions and Threats



Topic

The church as God's work

Theme

God instituted the church at Pentecost with the mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ is Lord to all people.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will know that the church began as God's program to unite people who are committed to Jesus Christ and faithful in proclaiming His gospel.

Materials

- Resource 1

Historical Focus

First century

Summary

The resurrection of the crucified Jewish Messiah and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost ushered in a new age of God dwelling in and among His people. God's people are not identified by language, family, ethnic background, or social status, but by the bold announcement that the crucified Jesus is risen as Messiah and Lord (Acts 2:36). This lesson will cover the first 70 years of the early church from its beginning at Pentecost to end of the first century.

Outline

I. The Church's Birth

- Christ gave instructions (Acts 1:1–12)
- The Holy Spirit came (Acts 2:1–12)
- The gospel was proclaimed (Acts 2:14–36)
- A new community was born (Acts 2:42–47)

II. The Church's Expansion Despite Tensions

- Tensions among Jews (Acts 6:1–7)
- Tensions between Jews and Samaritans (Acts 8:4–8)
- Tensions between Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10)

III. The Church's Growth Despite Threats

- Threat 1: Gospel distortion
- Threat 2: Imperial persecution
- Threat 3: Jewish revolution
- Threat 4: Leadership cessation

Memory Verse

*"Upon this rock I will build my church;
and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"*
(Matthew 16:18).

GETTING STARTED

Church Misconceptions

Have you ever heard a person state something to the effect, *I believe in Jesus but not in the church*, or *I believe in Jesus, but I don't care for all the trappings of organized Christianity*? Perhaps you have heard others make the statement, *I don't need to go to church to worship God; I can worship Him alone in the woods or on a lake*.

ASK: What do all these statements have in common? *They tend to disassociate the Christian church from God or Jesus Christ. The low view of the church reveals a low view of the work of God in bringing the church into existence.*

ASK: What are some deficient ways in which the church is defined or understood in our day? *The church is the building in which people worship. The church is a denomination, such as the Lutheran Church. The church is only a specific congregation. The church is an ancient tradition like the Orthodox Church or the Coptic Church.*

This lesson launches our look at the church through history. It is important that we begin that journey with a clear, Biblical understanding of the church. So what constitutes the Biblical teaching of the church? The Bible teaches that the church is both local and universal, consisting of the elect people of God—those whose faith is grounded in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Church Frame of Reference

A person's experience with church as a child often influences his understanding and view of church as an adult. Unfortunately for some, their church experiences kept them from truly understanding God's primary program for this age.

ASK: What attitudes did you form about church as a child? (Q1)

ASK: How have those attitudes continued to influence you today? (Q2)

This lesson will help us see church from a Biblical perspective so our study on the history of the church will help us grow in our appreciation of and participation in Christ's church.

HISTORY LESSON

Before His death, Jesus told His disciples that it would be necessary for Him to leave before the Father would send the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; Acts 1:4). The coming of the Spirit during the Feast of Pentecost fulfilled His promise.

I. The Church's Birth

A. Christ gave instructions (Acts 1:1–12)

Christ's last instructions (Acts 1:1–12) were for the disciples to remain in Jerusalem

to wait for the Father to send the promised Holy Spirit. He reminded them that the Father would not yet reveal to them end-time details. Their focus was to be on something else—namely, they were to be witnesses of the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Their eyewitness accounts of Jesus were to proceed to the ends of the earth.

READ: Acts 2:8. **ASK:** When Jesus promised the Spirit would come, what questions do you think the disciples must have had? (Q3) *When would the Spirit come? What would His coming look like? Would Christ then return to establish His Kingdom?*

Jesus' promise of the Spirit is proof that God sovereignly ruled to bring about His purpose for this present age. The events that began in Acts 2 were not a result of the apostles' initiative or effort but rather were from the hand of God. The apostles watched God inaugurate a new program that they were still beginning to understand.

B. The Holy Spirit came (Acts 2:1–12)

The coming of the Holy Spirit was on the Day of Pentecost, which is always fifty days before the Passover Sabbath (Lev. 23:15–16). Pentecost was one of the three main Jewish feasts in Jerusalem. Jews came from around the world to bring the firstfruits of their wheat harvest as a gift to God. The Spirit's coming happened in a house that was likely near the temple area where many thousands of people were congregated to worship God as part of the Feast of Pentecost. The large crowd witnessed the believers' Spirit-empowered ability to speak in languages they had never learned. The crowd acknowledged the events as part of a divine sign. But they did not know their exact meaning until Peter revealed it under the Holy Spirit's direction.

C. The gospel was proclaimed (Acts 2:14–36)

In his sermon (Acts 2:14–36), Peter pointed to the Holy Spirit's coming as the reason why some believers could suddenly speak in languages they had never learned. He went on to preach that the Jewish people, led by their leaders, had rejected and crucified the Man, Jesus of Nazareth, whom God had approved with signs and wonders and had raised from the dead and honored as Lord and Messiah (2:36). Fear seized the people when they realized they were responsible for rejecting God's anointed one, the Messiah, for Whom they had waited so long. In desperation, they asked Peter what they should do. Peter answered them by sharing the gospel and inviting them to repent and be baptized, adding that the crowd would inherit the long-awaited promises of God through faith in Christ. Three thousand people responded in faith and became part of Christ's brand-new church.

D. A new community was born (Acts 2:42–47)

Luke gives us a glimpse into the activities that occupied the new community of believers (2:42–47). Their activities seem normal, but remember that the early church did not have a church manual to follow. Instead, the Holy Spirit was directing them to participate in church-building activities.

READ: Acts 2:42–47. **ASK:** What words show the believers acted as a *community*? (Q4) *Together, all things in common, one accord, house to house, singleness of heart.*

ASK: Do those words describe our church? Could they? (Q5) *Those words could describe any church because the Holy Spirit Who indwelt the infant church is the same Spirit Who indwells believers today. The Spirit still empowers and guides Christ's church.*

II. The Church's Expansion Despite Tensions

While the early church began as a close community, it was not long before it faced conflict. But the gospel proved powerful enough to overcome even deep, long-standing tensions in first-century Israel. The gospel's success in the midst of such tensions demonstrates that redemption in Christ was not for one ethnic group or a people from a particular background but for all nations and ethnicities. The early church showed that the gospel is the answer to a world separated by pride, prejudice, and other sinful attitudes and customs.

A. Tensions among Jews (Acts 6:1–7)

There were two Jewish groups in Israel that did not intermingle before becoming believers. The first group was called the Hellenists, or *Grecians*. Hellenistic Jews more openly embraced Greek culture and spoke the Greek language. The second group, the *Hebrews*, worshiped God in Hebrew and were more resistant to Greek culture. After Jews from both groups had come to faith in Jesus as their Savior, a dispute arose between them concerning the distribution of alms. Those distributing the aid seemed to show favoritism to the Hebraic widows in neglect of the Grecian widows (6:1).

READ: Acts 6:3. **ASK:** Who would be the ultimate answer for solving the conflict between the Jews? (Q6) *The Holy Spirit would guide men to solve the problem as they submitted to His leading in their lives.*

The problem with the distribution of alms was resolved under the direction of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the church continued to grow (6:5–7).

ASK: What problems in a community could surface in a church today? (Q7) *Racial tensions, class envy, clashing political beliefs.*

ASK: What role does the Holy Spirit play in solving those conflicts? (Q8) *The Holy Spirit fills the church members with wisdom and gives them direction to resolve the conflict in a godly manner.*

B. Tensions between Jews and Samaritans (Acts 8:4–8)

After the stoning of Stephen, many Jewish Christians left Jerusalem to escape the persecution that followed. Philip also left and preached the gospel in Samaria, the land between Judah and Galilee (Acts 8:4, 5). Philip's actions were countercultural, for Jews did not normally interact with Samaritans.

The Samaritans were descendants of both Jews and the various people groups who inhabited Israel after the Assyrian destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:24). The Samaritans' Jewish ancestors had intermarried with the

imported foreign people groups and had adopted some of the foreigners' pagan religious practices (Ezra 9:1–10:44; Neh. 13:23–28). The exiles from the Southern Kingdom of Judah who returned to Jerusalem during the sixth and fifth centuries BC did not accept the ethnically and religiously mixed Samaritans.

By the time of the New Testament, the Jews and the Samaritans had developed a mutual animosity. The animosity led the Samaritans to worship God in their own temple and to recognize only the five books of Moses as Scripture.

Jesus crossed the centuries-old cultural and religious divide between Samaritans and Jews by preaching to the people of Samaria (John 4:9–42). Jesus' preaching was highly successful.

READ: John 4:39–42. **ASK:** What key phrase in verse 42 shows the gospel is for everyone? (Q9) *The Saviour of the world.*

Philip followed Jesus' pattern, being the first person on record to preach the gospel to the Samaritans in the church age. In so doing, he fulfilled Jesus' directive to be witnesses in Samaria (Acts 1:8).

An animosity of seven hundred years does not simply disappear on its own. Samaritans and Jews coming together into one body of believers showed the gospel was more powerful than deep, prejudicial lines. The Jewish evangelism of Samaria gives us confidence that the spread of the gospel is primarily a work of God.

ASK: Whom might you be tempted to label as impossible to reach with the gospel? (Q10)

C. Tensions between Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10)

The gospel also overcame tensions between Jews and Gentiles. Luke recorded the account of a Roman centurion who became a Christian and experienced the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10). He had already come to believe that the God of the Jews was the only true God. One day he received a vision to send messengers in a nearby town for a man named Simon Peter (10:3–6). Meanwhile, Simon Peter, just prior to receiving the messengers from Cornelius, had also received a vision that perplexed him (10:9–16). Peter went to Cornelius and revealed that his view of God and the gospel had changed (10:24–36).

READ: Acts 10:34. **ASK:** What did Peter perceive was true about God? (Q11) *That He shows no partiality. God's message of salvation is for all people.*

While Peter spoke, Cornelius received the gift of the Holy Spirit and spoke in foreign languages like the Jewish believers did on the Day of Pentecost (10:44, 45). The Jewish brethren needed to witness Cornelius exercise the miraculous gift of speaking in tongues. This was God's divine evidence that Gentiles were also part of God's family and that salvation had nothing to do with any religious affiliation or rites.

III. The Church's Growth Despite Threats

Four severe challenges threatened the survival of the church during its first fifty years. But none of them was strong enough to derail God's plan to spread the gospel and grow His church.

A. Threat 1: Gospel distortion

When the number of Gentile believers grew, Jews questioned the Gentile believers' obligation to practice Jewish circumcision and observe holy days and dietary restrictions. The Jews struggled with how an uncircumcised Gentile could possibly be acceptable to God without adopting Jewish practices. After all, circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. So some Jews began to teach that believing Gentiles must be circumcised to fully inherit the promises of salvation. Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians to refute this teaching, arguing that to require the Gentiles to observe Jewish elements of the law, such as circumcision, was to announce a different gospel that made justification based on works of the law (Gal. 1:6, 7; 3:2, 3). This conflict led to the Jerusalem council, a special meeting of the apostles (Acts 15). Peter definitively stated that Gentiles do not need to add Jewish rituals or rites to salvation by faith.

READ: Acts 15:6–9. **ASK:** On what basis did Peter make his definitive statement about Gentile salvation? (Q12) *He cited the coming of the Holy Spirit on Gentiles as God's approval of their salvation.*

Had these Jewish teachers succeeded, the gospel would have been changed from a message of salvation by grace alone for *all* nations (Matt. 28:19) to a works salvation that was limited to ethnic Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism.

That the gospel is still preached today in its purest form is not a matter of luck or even human effort. God has sovereignly protected the gospel down through the ages so that it is still preached effectively today.

B. Threat 2: Imperial persecution

The Roman state was initially indifferent to Christianity, assuming that it was merely another Jewish religious sect (Acts 18:12–15). However, as more and more Gentiles came to faith in Christ, this attitude changed.

The first Roman official to target Christians was the emperor Nero. He used Christians as a scapegoat, blaming the terrible fire of Rome on them in AD 64. The Roman historian, Tacitus, who was no friend of Christianity, gave a brief account of how Nero unjustly and cruelly persecuted the Christians in Rome (*Annals XV*). By the end of the first century, another emperor, Domitian, also targeted Christians for persecution. This opposition increased in frequency during the second century. Yet the gospel and Christ's church continued to flourish.

C. Threat 3: Jewish revolution

The Roman persecution of Jews was the beginning of the end of a tense peace that had existed for about one hundred years between the Jews in Israel and their Roman rulers. The Jews developed deep hostilities toward both the Romans and the Jewish leaders who collaborated with them. The Jews finally revolted in AD 66, gaining several victories over Roman forces. These gains increased their confidence. Rome responded by sending legions of soldiers to Israel to capture the Jewish strongholds and reassert their control in the region. Before the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem, the Christians in the city migrated to Pella, a city on the east side of the Jordan River. The Romans eventually broke through to capture Jerusa-

lem and destroy the temple (AD 70). Three years later they captured Masada, the last Jewish fortress.

The Jewish revolt awakened the Romans and made them more aware of both Jewish and Christian threats to their sovereignty in Israel. But the awakened bear could not stop what God was doing through His new community of believers. His church moved forward under Rome's nose. The empire was no match for God.

D. Threat 4: Leadership cessation

Losing the apostles to martyrdom was the final major threat to the first century church. The end of the apostles was no doubt difficult for the young church. And the fact that the apostles were killed for their faith threatened to shake the early church to its core. They didn't expect to lose the apostles. In fact, many early Christians expected Christ to return during their lifetime. Some in the congregation in Thessalonica even believed that Christ had already returned (2 Thess. 2:1, 2). Paul wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians to correct their error (2:3, 4). The early church, then, had to learn to move beyond the age of the apostles. Under the Spirit's direction, Paul wrote to Timothy about how to do just that.

READ: 2 Timothy 2:2. **ASK:** What pattern did Paul set for replacing leadership as the apostles passed off the scene? (Q13) *Paul commanded leaders like Timothy to commit God's truth to faithful men, who would then teach others.*

Teaching the next generation the truth is as important for us as it was for the early church. This course will help us understand how and why God's truth was abandoned in the centuries since the early church. This course will also encourage us to stay faithful to God's truth and instructions for the church today.

LEARNING FROM HISTORY

The Church Is God's Work

God sovereignly worked to call into existence a new people set apart to proclaim the gospel to the lost everywhere. This new group is the fulfillment of Christ's promise to build His church (Matt. 16:18).

ASK: Do you recognize the connection between the first century church and our church? How should such a connection affect your perspective on our church? (Q14)

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. **ASK:** How might we respond to Christ's ongoing church building project? (Q15) (Reveal answers to give the learners ideas of their own to share.) *By humbly relying on Christ for wisdom and direction; by depending on the Spirit for power and boldness; by supporting rather than competing with sister churches; by being intentional in carrying out the Great Commission; by getting involved in planting churches; by determining and honing one's spiritual gifts; by participating in world missions; by giving Christ all the glory for any successes.*

Christ is still building

How might we respond to Christ's building project?

- By humbly relying on Christ for wisdom and direction.
- By depending on the Spirit for power and boldness.
- By supporting rather than competing with sister churches.
- By intentionally carrying out the Great Commission.
- By getting involved in planting churches.
- By determining and honing one's spiritual gifts.
- By participating in world missions.
- By giving Christ all the glory for any success.

Staying True to God's Way

The Church Is Believers

At its core, Christ's church is believers. We are Christ's church. That means Christ is in the business of building our lives as part of a local community of believers.

ASK: Christ wants to work in your life as part of His church building ministry. How will you respond to that truth? (Q16)

ASK: Christ also desires to work through you to build the lives of fellow believers. How will you respond to that truth? (Q17)