



His Truth Marches On

A Survey of Christian History with a View to Biblical
Principle

Prepared for Adult Sunday School Class
Berean Baptist Church
Lafayette IN

by
Shawn Haynie

**His Truth Marches On:
A Survey of Christian History with a View to Biblical Principle**

**Lesson 1
Why Study Christian History?**

First of all, I want to thank Pastor Goodwill for giving me the opportunity to teach this Sunday School class. It is something which I have anticipated with great enthusiasm ever since he first asked me to consider the possibility.

We are going to be switching gears from our past study. For well over a year...almost two years we have been studying what the Bible has to say about future events and how that applies to our life. And I hope you have been greatly blessed and impacted by that study. Today, we are going to begin a study on Christian History.

Having announced the topic...several questions may have popped into your head...Why are we studying Christian History? After all, isn't this a Sunday School Class? Aren't we supposed to be learning the Bible? These are legitimate questions and I want to answer them by discussing the following:

I. Reasons for Studying History of Christianity.

- A. *“Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.”*** (Isaiah 51:1)

Learning from our past helps us in our pursuit of righteousness and aids us in our seeking of the Lord today. In many ways the History of Christianity is the story of Christian living.

The verse we have just quoted is just one example from the Bible. Many times in Scripture God's men have challenged His people to righteousness by rehearsing history.

Exodus 15, Deuteronomy 32:7-8, Joshua 24, Psalm 136, Acts 2:14-40, Acts 7, *Et al.*

It is my prayer that this study will challenge us to the same.

- B. **History helps us recognize the sovereignty of God working in humanity.****

Someone once said History is “HIS Story.” God is the sovereign author of history and the more we study it, the more we see Him. Acts 15:18, 17:26-28

Closely related to this is our next point...

- C. **A knowledge of the history of the church is essential for understanding the present condition of Christianity.****

-**“One does not know where he is going until he knows from whence he came.”**-Edward Panosian

-**“Without knowing the history of the Church, I cannot understand myself as a Christian.”**-Justo Gonzalez¹

In other words, it answers the questions...How did we get to the point we are at today?

This is related to the concept of “**Metanarrative.**” What is metanarrative? It is “an attempt to grasp the meaning and destiny of human history as a whole by telling a single story about it; to

¹ Quotes here are taken from various classes/seminars attended by the teacher.

encompass, as it were, all the immense diversity of human stories in a single, overall story which integrates them into a single meaning.”² Today’s postmodern world, and the Emergent Church that has embraced postmodern thought, has lost (or even actively shunned) (show picture) the concept of metanarrative and has lapsed into (or even actively pursued) an existentialism that views “my perception and feelings of the present as the only reality.” Today, more than ever we need to return to our roots and recapture the metanarrative that is so very much a part of our lives as Christians.

D. It enables us to see how biblical principles work themselves out over long periods of time.

God’s time frame is not our time frame. (Psalm 90:4, 2 Peter 3:8)

We may not see obedience fully blessed, or disobedience fully punished, in one generation. But we certainly will see biblical principles worked out over long periods of time.

Having said that, I commit to you, each Sunday we will not only be looking at history. We will be in our Bibles...Bring Them.

Sometimes we will look at Scripture to expound one or two principles that we will see repeated...Sometimes we will be in Scripture for each and every point and sub point. Whatever the case, we will continue to be dedicated to the Bible in this study.

E. It serves as a warning, helping to prevent our fall into heresy.

Some groups that we will study were founded on heretical thinking. Some slipped into heresy over several generations of time. Each serves as a warning.

F. It is powerful evidence of the assurance of the final triumph of Christianity.

Romans 8:35-37, I John 5:4

Every triumph of a faithful Christian group is a foreshadowing of the eventual ultimate triumph of Christianity.

G. It is essential for an adequate understanding of Systematic Theology.

In other words, it helps us answer the question, “How did we get to our present day system of doctrinal beliefs, creeds, statements of faith, etc.?” Some may say, “We have always held to *“the faith once delivered unto the saints.”*” (Jude 3) Yes and no. Yes, in that the beliefs which make up our doctrinal heritage have existed since the day they were penned in the original inspired manuscripts. No, however, in that those original saints may not have had the clear, systematized understanding of that doctrine, because they most likely did not have the completed Scriptures in front of them. In fact, we will see how the church wrestled even with recognizing the completed canon of Scripture until the Council of Carthage which took place in A.D. 397.

² Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Academic, 2003), 4.

(example of the development of the doctrine of Christ...starting at Gen. 3:15)

“Church history is of vital importance...since it provides theology the context in which it was produced and defined.”³

“In systematic theology, one attempts to summarize biblical doctrine, addressing theological topics one by one to summarize all the biblical teaching on each particular subject... It should ultimately end up with application, which is done through the process of practical theology.”⁴

II. General Definitions.

A. History

History is commonly defined as “authenticated and interpreted facts from our human past which have social importance.” The facts upon which history is based have been collected and organized by the scientific method from many different sources such as archeology, literature, etc.

B. History of Christianity (or History of the Church)

Narrowing the preceding definition somewhat, we may then define Christian History (or the History of the Church...I shall use the terms interchangeably) as, **“authenticated and interpreted facts regarding the origin, development, and impact of Christianity on human society.”**

III. The Problem.

In our definition, you will notice the word “**interpreted**.” The plain truth is that ALL history, written and spoken, comes to us from someone’s point of view. There is NO such thing as history without interpretation...without interpretation we only have chronological flow charts. For an example from American history...we all agree on chronology of the events of 9/11, but each person will tell (or write) that history from his/her point of view. How does a militant Muslim view that day? What would a patriotic Midwesterner say about it? What about a leader of liberation theology in Latin America? How about a person who lost a loved one that day?

(give example from two different TV stations in Chile)

It is the same when we discuss the History of Christianity. We need to select a point of view. Many exist:

- A. Humanist-“Christianity is only another level in the development of the moral and superstitious thoughts of the human race.”-Aldous Huxley⁵
- B. Communist-“Christianity is the opiate of the masses.”-Karl Marx
- C. Catholic-The Holy Roman Church has been the Steward of the Truth from the day in which Jesus Christ declared Peter as the first pope (Matthew 16) until today.

³ Content comes from Theopedia.com, and is under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license. More information on this license is available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Quotes in this section, unless otherwise noted, are taken from various common knowledge sources.

D. Protestant-Christianity lost the truth through the abuses and excesses of the Roman Catholic Church in the Medieval Ages. Thank the Lord for the Reformers that helped us recuperate the Truth.

Note: There is a point of view held by many Baptists called “The English Separatist Theory” which is really a Protestant point of view.

E. Liberal-It is good to see how Christianity is changing from superstitiously held belief to scientific realism.

F. Fundamental Baptist-“**His Truth Marches On.**” We need to study history in order to see how God has preserved the Truth. We also must study history to be able to avoid the abuses, excesses, and heresies of the past.

But even among fundamental Baptists there are two major divisions:

1. “The Baptist Bride” theory. This view says that the Baptist Church was founded by Christ in Matthew 16:18 and its first symbol was the Baptism of John the Baptist. Since that time, there has always existed a line of Baptist churches (although possibly not in name). The only true Bride of Christ is the Baptist church. All other believers are simply “witnesses of the marriage.”

Two key doctrines of this group are:

a. Baptismal succession-the only authentic (“Biblical”) baptism is that which is administered by those who can prove a direct lineage back to either Jesus or John the Baptist.

b. “Apostolic” succession-the only authentic ordination is the ordination which can prove a direct lineage to Peter or one of the other apostles. Or in one variation, the only true local church is one that was founded by another true Baptist church which can prove its lineage.

2. “Traditional”-The church was founded in the Day of Pentecost. (Acts 2) From the time of the completion of the revelation of the Scriptures, God’s truth has existed in the form of the fundamentals of the faith and the Baptist distinctives, but with groups that have had other names. The name “Baptist” came into usage in the 15th Century as a derisive term for our predecessors and around the year 1640 came into common use by churches.

“We believe that the Baptists are the original Christians. We did not commence our existence at the reformation, we were reformers before Luther and Calvin were born; we never came from the Church of Rome, for we were never in it, but we have an unbroken line up to the apostles themselves. We have always existed from the days of Christ, and our principles, sometimes veiled and forgotten, like a river which may travel under ground for a little season, have always had honest and holy adherents. Persecuted alike by Romanists and Protestants of almost every sect, yet there has never existed a Government holding Baptist principles which persecuted others; nor, I believe, any body of Baptists ever

held it to be right to put the consciences of others under the control of man..."—Charles H. Spurgeon⁶

We are going to study the History of Christianity from the "Traditional" Fundamental Baptist point of view.

It is my prayer that you, too, see the biblical reasons that it is important for us to study our Christian heritage and that you will not only plan on attending, but invite others who may have questions about this important topic.

Personal Notes

⁶ Content comes from www.reformedreader.com.

**His Truth Marches On:
A Survey of Christian History with a View to Biblical Principle**

**Lesson 2
Background Studies, part 1**

Last week we started our series on the history of Christianity by looking at some Biblical and practical reasons for studying it. As a matter of review, they are:

- A. *“Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.”* (Isaiah 51:1)
Learning from our past helps us in our pursuit of righteousness and aids us in our seeking of the Lord today.
- B. **History helps us recognize the sovereignty of God working in humanity.**
- C. **A knowledge of the history of the church is essential for understanding the present condition of Christianity.**
- D. **It enables us to see how biblical principles work themselves out over long periods of time.**
- E. **It serves as a warning, helping to prevent our fall into heresy.**
- F. **It is powerful evidence of the assurance of the final triumph of Christianity.**
- G. **It is essential for an adequate understanding of Systematic Theology.**

We also defined Christian History as **“authenticated and interpreted facts regarding the origin, development, and impact of Christianity on human society.”** However, in that very definition we discovered the word “interpreted” and saw that there are many different points of view regarding the History of Christianity. Among them are:

- A. Humanist
- B. Communist
- C. Catholic
- D. Protestant including the viewpoint of many Baptists called “The English Separatist Theory”.
- E. Liberal
- F. “The Baptist Bride” theory.

We then declared that we are going to study Christian History from the **“Traditional” Fundamental Baptist point of view**, which can be summarized like this, “The church was founded in the Day of Pentecost. (Acts 2) From the time of the completion of the revelation of the Scriptures, God’s truth has existed in the form of the fundamentals of the faith and the Baptist distinctives, but with groups that have had other names. The name “Baptist” came into usage in the 15th Century as a derisive term for our predecessors and around the year 1640 came into common use by churches.”

Today, we need to further define some terms. I want to make sure that we are all on the same page before we launch into the actual study itself. If our point of view is called the “Traditional Fundamental Baptist,” I think it is wise to define what the terms Fundamental and Baptist traditionally mean. They are terms which are misunderstood today. I have taught in a Baptist Bible College in Chile and in a Baptist Bible Institute here in the US and have found that men preparing to go into the ministry, many of whom grew up in Fundamental Baptist churches are hard pressed to define these terms. So let’s take some time to define them and look at their Biblical background.

I. The Fundamentals of the Faith.

The history of fundamentalism is a long and interesting study in itself. We will briefly study it later on. However, we must at this point give a brief synopsis of fundamentalism in order to give a proper foundation to our studies.

From 1909-1915, a group of well recognized preachers and professors, among whom were A.C. Dixon, R.A. Torrey, James Gray, J. Gresham Machen, A.T. Pierson, Benjamin Warfield; C. I. Scofield, G. Campbell Morgan, and, C.T. Studd, Henry Ironsides, W. B. Riley, and Lewis Chafer, wrote a collection of articles defending the historically accepted doctrinal position of the church against the recently born theological liberalism. The result was a series of 12 booklets (originally) which were named **The Fundamentals** and it was from this title that the term “fundamentalist” was born.

From these booklets sprang many different, but nearly parallel statements regarding the fundamentals of the faith. Some list as few as 5 major doctrines. Some list as many as 16 major doctrines. For the sake of this class I have chosen what I believe to be a good synopsis of historic Fundamental doctrine is found in what some of you may recognize as the **The Bob Jones University Creed** which is recited daily in chapel at BJU. However, several other fundamentalist institutions, and even some churches use the same (or very similar) creed. It says,

**“I believe in the inspiration of the Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments,
The creation of man by the direct act of God,
The incarnation and virgin birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,
His identification as the Son of God,
His vicarious atonement for the sins of mankind by the shedding of His blood on the Cross,
The resurrection of His body from the tomb,
His power to save men from sin,
The rebirth through the regeneration by the Holy Spirit
And the gift of Eternal Life by the Grace of God.”**

Now while each of these doctrines takes up multiplied pages in the books **The Fundamentals** or in any text of Systematic Theology, let’s take a few moments today to look at the Biblical support for each of these doctrines: (with each one, also ask why it is an essential “fundamental” doctrine...that is to say, a hill to die on.)

- A. The inspiration of the Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments**
2 Samuel 23:2, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:19-21
- B. The creation of man by the direct act of God**
Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7 and 18-25; 5:1-2; 9:6, Psalm 100:3, Malachi 2:10, Matthew 19:4, Acts 17:26
- C. The incarnation and virgin birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**
Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-37
- D. His identification as the Son of God**
Matthew 8:29; 14:33; 26:63; 27:54, Mark 1:1; 3:11; 15:39, Luke 1:35; 4:41; 8:28; 22:70, John 1:34, 49; 3:18; 11:4, 27; 20:31, Acts 8:37; 9:20; Romans 1:4, 2 Corinthians 1:19, Galatians 2:20, Heb 4:14; 6:6; 7:3; 10:29, 1 John 3:8; 4:15; 5:5-20
- E. His vicarious atonement for the sins of mankind by the shedding of His blood on the Cross**
Leviticus 17:11, Isaiah 53:5, Romans 3:25; 5:9-11, Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:14 and 20, Hebrews 9:12-22
- F. The resurrection of His body from the tomb**
Matthew 20:19; 28:2-15, Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18
1 Corinthians 15:12-22, 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16, 2 Timothy 1:10
- G. His power to save men from sin**
Isaiah 63:1, Matthew 9:6, John 17:2, Romans 1:16, Hebrews 1:3, 7:25
- H. The rebirth through the regeneration by the Holy Spirit**
John 1: 13, 3:5-7, Titus 3:5,
- I. The gift of Eternal Life by the Grace of God.**
Romans 5: 15-18; 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9

Brethren, these are “Hills worth dying on!” It behooves each of us to study these doctrines in depth and be convinced of their absolute foundational necessity to Christianity.

Personal Notes

**His Truth Marches On:
A Survey of Christian History with a View to Biblical Principle**

**Lesson 3
Background Studies, part 2**

Can anyone give a Biblical reason that we should study Church History and the Biblical Principles behind it?

Several weeks ago we defined Christian History as **“authenticated and interpreted facts regarding the origin, development, and impact of Christianity on human society.”** However, in that very definition we recognized the existence of the word “interpreted” and saw that there are many different points of view regarding the History of Christianity.

We then declared that we are going to study Christian History from the **“Traditional” Fundamental Baptist point of view**, which can be summarized like this, “The church was founded in the Day of Pentecost. (Acts 2) From the time of the completion of the revelation of the Scriptures, God’s truth has existed in the form of the fundamentals of the faith and the Baptist distinctives, but with groups that have had other names. The name “Baptist” came into usage in the 15th Century as a derisive term for our predecessors and around the year 1640 came into common use by churches.”

We then began to define our terms because I believe it is very important, first of all, that we know what the fundamentals of the faith and Baptist distinctives are. Secondly, it is important that we study this with a clear understanding of the doctrinal background of our point of view.

Last week we studied the fundamentals of the faith, based on a well-known creed and we established our position as:

- A. The inspiration of the Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments**
- B. The creation of man by the direct act of God**
- C. The incarnation and virgin birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**
- D. His identification as the Son of God**
- E. His vicarious atonement for the sins of mankind by the shedding of His blood on the Cross**
- F. The resurrection of His body from the tomb**
- G. His power to save men from sin**
- H. The rebirth through the regeneration by the Holy Spirit**
- I. The gift of Eternal Life by the Grace of God.**

Today, we are going to study the second of those critical terms, which is:

The Baptist Distinctives.

We will learn the “Baptist Distinctives” according to a common acrostic. Please keep in mind it is not the acrostic which makes us Baptists, but rather some clever person in our past invented this acrostic as a mnemonic device. We must also bear in mind that other churches may have some of these doctrines, just as it is true that a few churches which say they are “Baptist” do not practice all of these distinctives. However, only a true Baptist church will have all of these distinctives in practice all the time.

- B Bible is sole authority for faith and practice.**
We believe that the Bible is the only authority. No man, tradition, nor council of churches, can ever take precedence over the Bible. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)
- A Autonomy of the Local Church**
We believe that the local church is an independent body responsible only to the Lord. There is no person or organization on the earth that can dictate what a local church can or should believe or do. (Matthew 18:15-17, Acts 15, etc.)
- P Priesthood of the Believer**
Every believer in this Church Age is a priest and, as such, can enter directly into the presence of God through the Great High Priest and Mediator, Jesus Christ. There is no need for a human mediator. (1 Peter 2:5-9) This also includes the right and responsibility of every believer to study and interpret Scriptures by and for himself.
- T Two Ordinances**
The Bible teaches that there are only two ordinances given to the local church. They are Baptism by Immersion and the Lord’s Supper. (Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32) Furthermore, these are ordinances (acts of obedience and commemoration) not sacraments (methods of receiving grace).
- I Individual Soul Liberty**
Baptists believe that each individual has the liberty to believe as his conscience dictates. Nobody can be forced to believe something against his own will. (Romans 14:5-12)
- S Separation of Church and State**
The Church and the State are two distinct divine institutions with separate spheres of responsibility and influence. One should never control the other. (Matthew 22:15-22)
- T Two Officers**
The Bible teaches that there are only two offices for the local church—the pastor (bishop, elder) and the deacon. There is no biblical base for a hierarchy of offices. (1 Timothy 3:1-13)
- S Saved, Baptized Church Membership**
Every saved person should be baptized and united with a local church as their first steps of obedience and Christian growth. (Matthew

28:19-20; Acts 2:41-47) Furthermore, only saved and scripturally baptized people should be allowed to join with a local church.

Now that we have a better idea of what the terms Fundamental and Baptist mean, we can launch into our study of Church history with the understanding that we are approaching it from a traditional Fundamental Baptist perspective.

Personal Notes

Individual Soul Liberty (Romans 14:5-12)

This is especially important to understand given the current postmodern philosophy which basically says that every person in their current experience is a truth unto themselves. Although the definition of Individual Soul Liberty may sound like that at first blush...it is not anything like that.

It is a doctrine uniquely tied to Priesthood of the Believer.

Recall Spurgeon's quote from the first study...especially, "*Persecuted alike by Romanists and Protestants of almost every sect, yet there has never existed a Government holding Baptist principles which persecuted others; nor, I believe, any body of Baptists ever held it to be right to put the consciences of others under the control of man..*".

Extra Verses for Study:

2 Corinthians 4:2—The verse indicates Paul's conscious choice to not use tricky or manipulative methods of preaching, but rather he "commends himself to their consciences."

2 Corinthians 5:10—Everyone appears individually before the throne to give account. So every person is his/her own moral agent...responsible personally before God.

Titus 1:9—Note the word "convince," not coerce or manipulate.

What it is:

- We do not force or coerce anyone to assent to or deny any doctrine or practice.
- Each person will give a personal account to God for their lives. (2 Cor. 5:10)
- We trust in the Holy Spirit's work of convincing and do our best to "persuade men." (2 Cor. 5:11)

What it is NOT:

- It is not a justification for disobedience.
- It does not mean a believer can do what he/she wants without regard for others.
- It does not make each Christian a "law unto themselves."
- It does not mean a church, or other Christian organization, cannot have a doctrinal statement or covenant of membership.
- It does not mean there are many "truths."

This doctrine has been tried and developed throughout the course of history; first by our forebears in face of persecution by the Roman Empire, second in face of persecution by the Roman Catholic church, and even persecution at the hand of Protestants. Individual soul liberty was a key doctrine held by Baptists in the US colonies which led the freedom of religion clause in our Bill of Rights.

“His Truth Marches On”
A Survey of Christian History with a View to Biblical Principle

Lesson 4
“In The Fullness of Time”

(Galatians 4:4-5)

The Backdrop for the Birth of the Church

On the first week of our study we established that one of the main reasons we should study the History of the Church is so that we can “recognize the sovereignty of God working in humanity.” My prayer is that we see that principle each and every week. However, today’s study should give us an extra strong dose of that principle. Today we are going to look at the backdrop for the birth of the Church. Of course, the church is founded on Jesus Christ and so I think it fitting to begin today with a look at Galatians 4:4-5. It says, ***“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”***

The phrase “fulness of time” is the key phrase here. “Fulness” is the Greek word, πληρωμα (pleroma) which means repletion or completion, what fills (as contents, supplement, copiousness, multitude), or what is filled (as container, performance, period):--which is put in to fill up, piece that filled up, fulfilling, full, fulness. Throughout the Old Testament we can follow a track of the times which God laid out in an ever more specific manner. Beginning in Genesis 3:15, we see the seminal promise of the Messiah. Later on in Genesis 12, we see that promise narrowed a little in the Abrahamic Covenant. Later on in Genesis 49 it is narrowed even more into the tribe of Judah. Many other prophecies, notably of Isaiah and Micah help to narrow the scope even more. Then in Daniel, chapter 9, which we studied extensively in our study of the end times, defines a 70 week period. We know from that study that at the end of the 69th week Messiah would come to the Earth and then be cut off.

God had His plan for the proper timing of the arrival of Messiah and gave many prophecies to help His people recognize the time of His coming. However, God also knew that His people Israel would fail to recognize Messiah and that He would give a time to the Gentiles to receive Christ and spread His Gospel, that is to say, He planned for the Church Age. So as God was preparing the world for the arrival of Christ, He was also concurrently preparing the world for the birth of the Church.

I. The Roman Empire-The Political Backdrop

Rome was a powerful Empire which extended from present day Iran to present day England, from the far reaches of the southern Sahara to the northern shores of present day Germany. It was said that “the Mediterranean did not wash up on the shores of many nations, but was the shoreline of one great nation and that it provided her with a great means of communication.”

- A.** The Roman Empire, like no one up to her time, developed a sense of **the unity of humanity under universal law.** (Acts 22:25-29)

- B. The conquests of the Roman army produced a general lack of confidence in local gods.
- C. The Romans developed a system of highways which extended from the center of Rome to every major city of the Empire. Also, the Empire standardized, regulated, and protected all commerce on the Mediterranean Sea.
- D. The greatest contribution of the Roman Empire was the **Pax Romana** (**Peace of Rome**).
This peace established by Octavian, Augustus Caesar in 27 B.C., established a rule of peace which lasted about two centuries. This peace permitted the free and safe movement of Christians throughout all parts of the Empire.

The system of highways and waterways, along with the Pax Romana provided the necessary conditions for the rapid spread of the gospel.

II. **The Greek Empire-The Cultural Backdrop**

Even more important than the Roman contributions was the way in which the Greek Empire prepared the world for the coming of Christianity. If it can be said that the Roman contributions were external in nature, it can be said even more emphatically that the Greek contributions were internal in nature.

- A. The greatest contribution of the Greeks was a **universal language**. It is interesting that Alexander the Great, when picking the official language of his Empire, rejected the use of “Classical” Greek and chose instead the “*koine*” (or literally “fisherman’s”) Greek. In spite of the fact that it was the Greek of the common man, it is one of the most precise languages in all of history. It was also the *first* language to gain “universal” acceptance. Earle Cairns says, “**A universal gospel needed a universal language in order to have a universal impact.**”⁷
- B. **Greek Philosophy** was another great contribution. Although Rome controlled the political, military, and economic life, Greek philosophy controlled the minds of the Roman Empire. The Greek philosophers began to meditate profoundly about the nature of the world and the meaning of life. Although there were many philosophers who contributed to Greek thinking, we are only going to give a quick overview to few whose thinking prepared the world to receive the gospel.
 1. Teles of Miletus (640-546 B.C.)
He believed that all that existed came from water and that water was present in all the processes of creation and change. Before him, the entire world believed that everything came from fire. (Sound like evolution?). (Genesis 1:2 and 6; 2 Peter 3:5-7)
 2. Heraclites of Ephesus (c. 500 B.C.)

⁷ Cairns, Earl E., Christianity Through the Centuries, pg. 38.

He believed that life is like a great river, in which nobody can “bathe themselves twice in the same water.” This river flows constantly and is controlled by one great mind called *logos*. (John 1:1)

3. Socrates (470-400 B.C.)
His philosophy was more interested in the quality of a man’s character than in his nature. He emphasized the ethics of “knowing yourself” which believes that with proper knowledge of self one can improve himself morally. Now, while an emphasis on moral character prepared the world for Christianity’s message, it is also true that Socrates’ overemphasis on human reason was to have severely negative effects on Christian theology at the beginning of the Middle Ages.
4. Plato (425-345 B.C.)
He developed the idea that the most important realities of life are those which exist in the invisible (or spiritual) realm. (Ephesians 6:12)
5. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)
He reintroduced the idea of *logos*. However, he defined *logos* as the divine spark in every human being, which he described in the following manner: As members of the human race, we receive our life directly from a god and the universal goal of mankind is happiness. (Genesis 1:26; Matthew 7:8; Luke 1:10)

C. **Individualism**, which started with the philosophy of Socrates and developed into both the self-denial of Stoicism and the unbridled lust the Epicureans, produced a lack of confidence in a polytheistic system of religion. Although mankind continued in polytheism, individualism left it with a great emptiness.

III. **Judaism-The Religious Backdrop**

The roots of the Christian church are in the religion of Israel. Our own Lord Jesus Christ declared, “*salvation is from the Jews*.” (John 4:22) He also said, “*Do not think that I am come to abolish the Law...but to fulfill*.” (Matthew 5:17)

Jesus, the apostles, and Paul were all Jews. The majority of the New Testament was written by Jews and had Jews as their original audiences. The most important contributions of the Jews were:

- A. **Monotheism**.
Judaism was in stark contrast to all other religions of the Middle East and Europe precisely because it was a monotheistic religion. (Deuteronomy 6:4) Although Greek philosophy had destroyed mankind’s confidence in polytheism, the world continued to follow it. After the Babylonian Captivity, the Jews never again fell into idolatry and its monotheistic doctrine spread rapidly to all parts of the world through its system of synagogues.

B. The Synagogue.

Synagogues were established during the Exile for the purpose of perpetuating worship, prayer, and study of the Scriptures. Near the end of the Exile, Ezra systematized the liturgy of the synagogue. His system is not that different than the service of most liturgical churches today. When we come to the New Testament we find that these Jewish assemblies were present in every city in which at least 10 adult Jewish males lived.

In the synagogue, Jews and proselytes (Gentiles that had converted into Jews) were constantly confronted with the message of the Bible and the ethics of Jewish culture. It was the practice of Paul to go first to the synagogue when he entered into a new city and it was through this practice that many synagogues became the first Christian meeting places. The teachings and practices of the synagogue became the *tutor* leading men to Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:23-25)

C. The Old Testament

Even the briefest of studies of the New Testament reveals the significance that the Old Testament held for Jesus Christ, the apostles and all the other authors of the New Testament and leaders of the Early Church.

It is interesting that during the Inter-testamental Period, the Old Testament had been translated into Greek (the LXX, or Septuagint) and for that reason, all the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament are actually quotations from the LXX.

The LXX made it possible for the Law of Moses to be revealed to the world. The Law of Moses was the purest ethical system the world knew up to that point. For the first time in history, sin was more than just a mere “failure to fulfill contractual obligations”. It was now the violation of the very will and nature of a sovereign and holy God. Instead of just an act, sin also was defined as a heart attitude which results in bad action.

D. A Philosophy of History.

With the exception of the followers of Heraclites of Ephesus, almost the entire world believed that history was just a series of cycles that made no sense. Jews believed that history is a linear series of cataclysms in which a sovereign and holy God wins men to Himself and establishes His kingdom.

E. The Hope of a Messiah.

All other religions offered nothing more than the fear-driven worship of egocentric and evil gods or in the learning of a philosophy which offered no hope beyond the grave. The Jewish religion offered the hope of a coming Messiah who would establish His kingdom of righteousness and offer eternal life in the bosom of Abraham.

Wow! Can you see the hand of God working behind the world scene, shaping and molding everything so that at the perfect time, the full time, the ripe time, His Son is incarnated and a few years later, His Church is born?

That very same sovereign God who worked even through the thoughts of pagan philosophers and heathen kings to prepare the world then, is still at work today! Nothing happens by chance, or without reason. God is still at work shaping, molding, and making everything to fulfill His plan! Amen!

Personal Notes