

Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

History 127 Christianity in the first century I

Last time we ended with Ascension Day on Mt. Olivet near Bethany, May 14th, 33 AD. So let's press on. We only have 1983 years left to cover but over 90% of recorded history is in the last two millennia. For that matter actually the last 500 years probably account for half of all historic materials. Mankind gets better at recording history and saving that record from the ravages of time so that the more recent a historical event the better chance it has of being well documented. (P.S. the dates that follow are all AD)

So let us enter the age of the early church with that in mind. In its first few years the young church starts to structure itself and suffers a few blows from the evil one. Matthias is chosen to replace Judas shortly after Jesus death and resurrection. After Pentecost, in May of 33, they go out spreading the Gospel and even performing miracles in Jesus's name. The apostles suffer trials, beatings, the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira and the martyrdom of Stephen. In mid-36 Paul went from being one of the church's greatest persecutors to one of its greatest champions. For the next decade the apostles are busy preaching and teaching the faith; in 36 & 37 Philip preaches and plants churches in Samaria & Judea, in 37 & 38 Paul is in Arabia, Damascus, and Jerusalem. Peter sees and reports the conversion of Cornelius and other gentiles in 39 & 40. At that time Barnabas and Paul are in Antioch. In 43 Peter travels to Rome and Paul and Barnabas return to Judea with relief resources for the other churches. In late 42 early 43 Agrippa the First executes James and imprisons Peter. Later in 43, Agrippa the First dies and Paul, Barnabas and John-Mark go to Antioch.

The rest of the datable events in the first century church can be structured around Paul's missionary journeys. His first journey was with Barnabas from 45-48 when they visited Cyprus, Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Perga. During this trip Paul establishes churches and helps to organize and give guidance to new churches. In 49, between Paul's first and second journey, a church council was convened in Jerusalem. That spring Peter went to Antioch and treated gentile Christians as poorly as the Judaizers did. He later got an ear full from Paul. As they reconciled, they set into practice Christ's teaching that in His universal church, all were to be treated without favoritism or cultural separation but as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul's second journey was from 49 to 51. His companions for this journey, in whole or in part, were Barnabas, Mark, and Silas. This trip takes him to Cyprus, Cilicia, Syria, Galatia, Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Brea, and Athens. Paul spent about half of this trip in Corinth where he wrote 1 Thessalonians and went before a Gallio's tribunal. His journey ended in Caesarea in the winter of 51 and just a few months later in 52 his third missionary journey began from Syrian Antioch (where a lot of today's conflict is taking place). His companions for parts of this journey were Apollos, Timothy and Erastus. This trip went to Galatia, Phrygia, Corinth, Ephesus (while here he wrote 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians and possibly Galatians, some believe Galatians was written during the first journey), Macedonia, Greece (while here he wrote Romans), Philippi, Troas, Miletus and finally back in Jerusalem in 55.

The next 13 years are very tumultuous for Paul. He is imprisoned and spends the next two years going through legal proceedings with Governor Felix, Drusilla, Governor Festus, and the chief priest Herod Agrippa & Bernice, all playing a part in his long litigation. Finally, his appeal to Cesar is granted and is sent to Rome. He leaves Caesarea in September of 57. After a stop in Crete he survives a ship wreck in Malta and spends the winter there, cared for by the kind natives. He leaves in February of 58 and arrives in Rome in March of 58. Paul was released in 60 and that is when many believe he made a trip to Spain (a fourth missionary journey) which he mentions in his third journey. We have no record of the actual trip. James the half-brother of Jesus and Bishop of Jerusalem was martyred in 62. Then in 65, Paul leaves Titus in Crete and Timothy in Ephesus. Paul's final church visits are Macedonia in 65, Nicopolis & Ephesus in 66 and the last in Troas in 67 where he is again arrested. This time he and Peter are martyred in Rome in late 67 early 68.

All of these names, dates, and locations are important because they speak to the historicity and the truth claims of the Apostles, the early church and Scripture.
Till next month Pastor Portier