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Passing the Torch



Church History - Steve Gregg

In "Passing the Torch," Steve Gregg discusses the apostolic period of the church, emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit and the formation of the body of Christ. Gregg notes the importance of avoiding confusion between the work of the Spirit and the organization of the church, and warns against the tendency towards legalism and mystical practices. He also touches on early church heresies and the influence of James, who played a significant role in establishing the authority of the Jerusalem church. Overall, Gregg emphasizes the important role of the apostles in establishing the norms and authority of the church.

Transcript

Tonight we're going to continue talking about the apostolic period of the church. The first century, right up until about the year 100 A.D., is generally referred to as the apostolic age for the simple reason that it was the time in the church's infancy during which the apostles were still alive, at least some of them. It is suggested that the apostle John outlived all the other apostles, and he died somewhere around the turn of the first century.

So when we say the year 100, we're estimating the approximate time of John's death and the end of the age of the apostles, the death of the last apostle. Certainly when the apostles were alive, the church had certain advantages that it has not really had since. Because, as I pointed out last time, the apostles had a unique authority in the church.

Now, some believe that that apostolic authority has been passed down from generation to generation, from century to century. In particular, the Roman Catholic Church believes this, and we'll talk about that later tonight. If that is true, of course, then the early church didn't have any unique advantages, and it would be very nice to believe that.

It would be very nice to think that we had all the same advantages they had, but I just don't believe biblically that is the case. We do have, however, the most important advantages. We do have the same Holy Spirit, we have the same God, we have the same Lord, and we have the writings of the apostles, and therefore we are not very much

disadvantaged.

One of the great advantages, I think, of living in the apostolic age is that when there was a dispute over theology, it was possible to actually consult the apostles and ask what the answer was. Whereas today, and ever since the time of the apostles, there have been disputes among those who think, in every case, that they are faithfully representing the apostolic teaching. And without the apostles here to actually side with one camp or another and settle the dispute, we are left to simply look to the Holy Spirit to guide us, which is certainly not a bad deal.

But when the apostles were here, they were able to settle these questions quite simply and audibly for the church. And so we mentioned last time that there was this phenomenon in the early church of the apostolic authority. They had special authority to teach, to testify of the resurrection of Christ, and to set the norms for doctrine and practice in the church.

And we also emphasized that the church was a supernatural institution. Under the Holy Spirit's guidance, Jesus, of course, is the head of the church, as the Bible makes very clear. The church is His body.

It is His flesh and of His bones. It says in 1 Corinthians 12 that we have been baptized by one spirit into the body of Christ. So the coming of the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost brought a new phenomenon to the followers of God and of Christ.

I have mentioned that the church that we belong to is simply a continuation of what God started way back even before the time of Christ, in that remnant of Israel, those people who trusted in God, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These are the roots of the olive tree that we have been grafted onto, according to Paul in Romans chapter 11. And yet, while there was always a remnant of saved, faithful people from the time of Abel on, there were some who had faith in God, and God never was without a remnant.

Yet at Pentecost, a new thing happened to that remnant, and that was that the Holy Spirit came to dwell in that body of believers in a way that was new, in a way that was not available to them in the Old Testament time. And the coming of the Holy Spirit into the believing community transformed it into the body of Christ. You see, the Holy Spirit inhabited the body of Jesus when He walked on earth.

He said, if I don't go away, the Holy Spirit won't come to you. So, He went away, and He sent that same Spirit that occupied His body when He was on earth to occupy the church, to occupy us. And that's what makes us now the body of Christ, just as Jesus of Nazareth was Christ when He was on earth, the embodiment of the Holy Spirit.

So the church has become because of the Holy Spirit. Now, if someone thinks that elevates the church too much, or maybe in some way denigrates the position of Christ,

and I could see how some people might feel that way, let me just point out to you that the Apostle Paul used terms no less exalted in speaking of the church than those that I'm using. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul is giving the illustration of the church being the body of Christ, but he's using the illustration of a human body when he says, for as the body is one, and by this he means any human body, generically, as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

Now, we would expect him to say, so also is the body of Christ. He's comparing with the human body. Look at any body.

It's made up of many members, and yet all these members taken collectively are yet one body. So also is the church, or the body of Christ, we would expect him to say, but he says, no, so also is Christ. What is Christ? He is a body made up of many members, and Paul makes it very clear that on his understanding, we are the members.

We are members of Christ. In fact, Paul said this is so real, so true to him, that in 1 Corinthians 6, he said that if a Christian were to go out and become guilty of sexual immorality, that person would be joining Christ to a prostitute, because we are his body. That's how united, that's how identified with Christ the church is.

It is his body, or as Paul put it in Ephesians chapter 1, in Ephesians chapter 1 and the closing verses of that chapter, I suppose the book of Ephesians has the most to say of all the books of the Bible about the church in its role as the body of Christ, and Paul said in Ephesians 1, 22 and 23, that God has put all things under Christ's feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. The church is the fullness of him. No person is complete if they have only a head.

The rest of the body is the fullness of that person. The church is the fullness of Christ. This is not blasphemy, this is what Paul teaches.

And therefore, when the Holy Spirit that had inhabited the body of Jesus came and inhabited the bodies of the believers, the believing community, that community, which had always throughout history been in existence, there had been a remnant, and had always been saved by faith like Abraham, believed in the Lord, and it was accounted to him for righteousness, yet that community at that point in time took on a new identity, as the habitation of God through the Spirit, as the body of Jesus, the body of Christ. And so, from its very inception, the Christian church has been supernatural, and throughout the book of Acts we read again and again the emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, doing almost everything that got done. Almost everything that was accomplished of any value is attributed in the book of Acts to the Holy Spirit's activity.

We see that the church grew also as God sovereignly added to the church daily, such as we're being saved. The church did not grow the way organizations grow. As a matter of

fact, I've tried to make clear from the beginning of this series that I make a personal, very clear distinction in my own thinking between the church as the true spiritual body of Christ, the original spiritual movement that Jesus started on the one hand, and the organization or the institution that is called the church today.

And I'm not thinking of any particular institution, just any institution called the church. There is an overlap, of course, between the true spiritual church and the institutional church. There are some in every institutional church, probably, who are part of the true church, and there are some who are in the institutional church who are not part of the true church.

Likewise, in those who belong to the true spiritual church, some are in the institutional church and some are not. There's a realm of overlap between those two groups, but they are not to be confused one with another. And as our age has really, for centuries, confused the institutional church for what the Bible calls the church, we have today what they call church growth seminars and so forth, where pastors who want to have big institutions, big buildings, the measures of success.

One pastor friend of mine said in his denomination the measure of a pastor's success was the three B's, bricks, bodies, and bucks. The more bricks it takes to make your building, the bigger your building is. The more people inhabit it, the better, and the more money you bring in.

Those are the measure of the success of a church in his denomination. By the way, he's not part of a liberal denomination. He's part of a conservative evangelical denomination.

And so we have all these sociological gimmicks being recommended in the name of church growth, and churches running after these like crazy. I mean, there are some churches, some institutional churches in the world that are huge, with thousands and thousands of members. And there's a lot of little churches that don't bring in many people, don't bring in many bucks, and where those pastors in some cases look wistfully at those big churches and say, I wish I had a big church like that.

So they run off to the seminars where these pastors of these huge churches go to teach you how to become the pastor of a big church, in other words, how to transform your little church into a big church. But everything they say there is carnal. Well, I shouldn't say everything.

I won't say that they eliminate things like prayer and preaching the word. I don't know. I've studiously avoided these seminars, but I've read the articles about them, talked to people who've been to them.

I know they say things like if your parking lot is full, you know, if your meeting starts at 11 o'clock and your parking lot is full by 10 to 11, you're going to have to get a bigger

parking lot or you're going to not grow. Or they'll say if your church is two-thirds full, you need a bigger church because people will start to feel crowded and stifled and you're not going to grow anymore after that. So the pastor looks at his parking lot, looks at his church building, looks how full it is and decides whether he needs a bigger building because he's told that these sociological studies of church growth have shown that the church will stop growing at a certain point.

No one apparently told Chuck Smith about that during the Jesus movement because we had to park sometimes three or four blocks away from the church and we'd walk in the rain to get to the church and stand outside for the whole service in the rain because there were no seats inside nor on the floor anymore nor even in the flower plots outside. There were thousands of people standing around just to worship God together and just to learn the word of God. In other words, where there is spiritual revival, you don't need church growth gimmicks.

It's interesting that Chuck Smith's church, which I'm not here to advertise because there are some differences I have with Chuck on some things, but he is something of a hero of mine. Chuck, who has the third largest church in the United States, his own congregation, not to mention the 600 daughter churches that have spawned from it, some of which have thousands of people in them, but he holds in contempt the concepts of church growth. Yet he has the third largest church in the country.

The reason he holds them in contempt is because he believes that church growth is the Holy Spirit's work. Without spending any more time talking about that particular movement, I believe he's right. In the early church, they didn't consider how large the parking lot was or how large the building was.

In fact, they didn't even have buildings for the first two or three centuries. But the Lord added to the church daily as such as were being saved. So we see God sovereignly blessing the church, building the church, and it grew quite rapidly.

And we see signs and wonders being done. The Lord was working with them, confirming the word with signs, following. So this is the supernatural, spontaneous, sovereign work that we see God doing.

Now, I think about the time we were quitting last time. I came to the point that, if you've got the notes before you, under point number F, the second part of that. The church did organize somewhat when necessary.

When problems arose and the apostles were too busy to handle them, financial distribution of assets and so forth, they would appoint men to an office. It might have been an ad hoc group that disbanded when the need was gone. We don't know.

We sometimes call them deacons, the seven that were chosen in Acts chapter 6 to

distribute the goods to the poor in the church. We sometimes call them deacons. The Bible nowhere calls them that.

There are deacons mentioned in the Bible, but those seven in the book of Acts in chapter 6 are never referred to as deacons. They might have been called that. We don't know.

All we know is that when there was a need, certain persons were set aside or there was some organization done in order to fulfill the need. That organization may have continued after the need was gone, or it may have - we don't know. They may have just disbanded that particular organized unit when the need was no longer a living need.

We know that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he definitely instituted some organization in their meeting because they were chaotic, it would appear. I mean, there were people getting drunk at communion. That's pretty chaotic.

And there were people - everyone wanted to speak in tongues, apparently, at the same time without any interpretation, so Paul had to reign them in. And where necessary, the early church did organize. Organization did happen.

And you might think that from what I've said about the institutional church versus the spiritual movement that I'm against organization. I am not. I believe that any time a group of people are going to try to work in harmony to accomplish anything in particular, there's going to have to be some measure of organization, whether it happens spontaneously and then you can look at it and say, oh, I see how God has organized this thing, or whether it's done consciously, say, okay, you do this, you do that, and we'll meet at this time and not at that time.

That's organization. But the problem is - see, I don't believe that the apostles were against organization. I'm certainly not trying to sound like I'm against organization.

What I believe is this, that once you organize it, it's possible for the life to move on somewhere else and the organization keeps running like a machine. And that is what has happened with a great number of revival movements in history. A great revival happens.

It gets organized because it must. I mean, Wesley's revival or Wesley's movement that he was sort of spearheading, it got highly organized. He had his Methodist societies and so forth and these qualifications for leaders and their meetings and how they did it and everything.

It was all organized. The problem is when the revival ended, the organization kept going. And there's nothing wrong with organizing so long as the organization doesn't have a life of its own separate from the life of the Spirit because the Spirit can move on somewhere else and do something else and the organization keeps grinding along century after century.

And in some cases, hardly a saved person is still in it, but the organization still works like a well-oiled machine, oiled by the flesh. And so my thought is that – and this is my interpretation. Everyone's going to have to have their own opinion about this, I guess.

I think organization is good, but it should be regarded from the beginning as temporary. I think that when a group organizes, they should organize only so much as is needed to carry out the work that God seems to be doing, and it should be understood that probably at some point this particular work won't be what God is doing, quite the same as He's doing now. I mean, if history is any example, God does new things and different things in different places, and this organization can dissolve and we can reorganize around whatever God's doing at a later time.

Now, I don't have time to talk about the logistics of how I picture that, but that is, of course, my little editorialization about all this. But in the early church, they did organize as necessary, but we don't know whether the apostles intended for the organization that they did to continue generation by generation by generation. If they did, they didn't have very much foresight because it was that very institutionalization of an organization that led to the Dark Ages and to the apostasy that lasted almost a thousand years and has in some sectors continued to this day.

And so let's move along here. I want to talk about the expansion of the church and the opposition it received, and these two points go together because wherever the church expanded, there was opposition, and at the same time, the opposition fed the expansion to a great extent. In fact, the very first evangelistic activity outside of Jerusalem was caused because of opposition in Jerusalem.

Now, when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, Peter preached to the gathered pilgrims from all over the world, the Jewish people who had come to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, and about 3,000 of them were converted on that day, and later several thousand more were, and there was some opposition there in the city. It was not full-blown. The apostles Peter and John were arrested a couple of times and forbidden to keep preaching, but that didn't even slow them down.

They just kept preaching and ignored the sanctions against them. Eventually, though, it got really ugly because one of their men, one of the seven, was stoned to death by the Sanhedrin, and this caused sort of like a feeding frenzy. You know, you throw a bloody thing into the ocean to a shark, and as soon as the blood spreads out in the water, all the other sharks are attracted there, and there was sort of like the scent of blood of the first martyr caused a more violent outbreak in general against the church in Jerusalem.

It was in the context of that outbreak of persecution that Saul of Tarsus emerged as a leader of sorts. He was apparently one of the most antagonistic of those attached in some way to the Sanhedrin, and he received papers from the Sanhedrin to persecute Christians wherever they could be found, and he even got papers permission to go out of

the country to the synagogues outside Israel in places like Syria, where Damascus is, to persecute the Christians there. Now, because of the persecution that broke out over the death of Stephen, we read in the Scripture that Christians were scattered throughout the Mediterranean world, and they went preaching the gospel everywhere.

Now, these people were not sanctioned by anyone to preach the gospel, unless we say they were sanctioned by Jesus. They were not sent out officially as missionaries by anyone, but they couldn't help but speak what they knew, and when they went into new areas, they preached the gospel there so that little brushfire movements began to spring up in various places. One of those places was Antioch, and Antioch became the next center of missions after Jerusalem, but it was because of the persecution that the church received in Jerusalem that the church was scattered.

I mean, they were so happy to stay there in Jerusalem until it got uncomfortable, and who can blame them? The apostles all lived there. I mean, if I were living in those days, I'd want to go to church where the apostles were teaching. I wouldn't want to go anywhere.

I mean, you're seeing miracles on a fairly regular basis. There's wonderful fellowship, an immensely growing movement that's the most happening thing in town. You're living under the spout where the glory comes out.

Why go anywhere else? And yet when persecution came, it's like God stirred up the nest and put the screws on the church there so that a great number of Christians fled from Jerusalem, and that was the first missionary activity outside of Jerusalem that we have record of, and they went everywhere, and the church in Antioch was founded as a result of that persecution. Now, once the church in Antioch was founded, or I should say once there were a variety of these little brushfire movements founded that were not authorized by the apostles, it was necessary for the apostles to find out whether these movements were something they would authorize or not. Now, let's remember that just because someone starts a little group and calls it Christian doesn't mean that their theology is truly Christian theology or that they're living a Christian life or that it's anything that the church would want to put its endorsement on.

The apostles kept hearing of things happening over here in Samaria and over here in Cyprus and over here in Antioch and over here in Damascus and say, wow, you know, there's things going on around here, but are they genuine? Are they something we can endorse? And so the apostles would either themselves visit or send trusted men to visit these movements that they'd hear about. Apparently, Antioch, which was in Syria, was far enough away that none of the apostles had the liberty to go and visit, so they sent Barnabas, a trusted man up there. He was very impressed and pleased with the work of the Lord that he saw going on there, and he decided that they needed someone a little more mature and knowledgeable to kind of steer the movement in its early stages.

So he made himself available, and he also went and got Saul of Tarsus, who had been converted probably 14 years earlier but who had not really been doing any ministry that the apostles had any knowledge of. And Barnabas and Saul came, and they lived about a year in Antioch and headed up the church there until the leaders of that church heard from God, and the Holy Spirit said, separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the ministry that I have called them to. That's in Acts chapter 13, verse 1. And so the first, as far as we know, the first deliberate outreach to the Gentiles took place on that occasion from the church of Antioch.

Paul and Barnabas, as Saul was sometimes called Paul now, they were two of the five leaders of that church, and the church sent off their two leaders, Barnabas and Saul, out into the mission field, left three guys behind. This is an interesting thing, certainly a different concept of missions than what is very often seen today. In our time, it's very common to take the youngest, the most untested but the most zealous young people and steer them in the directions of missions and launch them as quickly as possible.

The church in Antioch, which was the leader in world missions in the early days, didn't, as far as we know, send off any young and untested men. They sent off their two leaders, the guys who had been leading their church who were tested men, who were known to be anointed and known to have their doctrines straight and known to have their lives in order. An awful lot of scandals have come from the mission field in our day because people who really don't show tested Christian character or who have some other kinds of problems theologically or something are out there in the field and they're not necessarily the best representations of the gospel to send out to pagan lands.

But Saul and Barnabas went on a first missionary journey where they evangelized the region up to the north of the Mediterranean in Pisidia and in Galatia. That was their first missionary journey. They came back to Antioch, reported back.

After the Jerusalem Council, they went out again. Actually, Barnabas and Saul almost went out again, but they didn't have an agreement as to whether they'd take Mark the second time. So Paul went one way with his friend Silas, and Barnabas went another way with Mark, his nephew.

And they had two missionary teams now going out from Antioch. The Book of Acts does not record the missionary work of Barnabas and Mark. This is not because there was no approval of God on it, simply that the man who wrote the Book of Acts traveled with Paul, not with Barnabas, and so he recorded Paul's activities.

And although Paul wasn't with Luke yet, Silas and Paul went back and visited the same churches that had been established on the first missionary journey, and they also pressed further west to Troas, where they apparently were joined by Luke. Oh, they had picked up, by the way, a young man named Timothy while they were in Lystra visiting a second time. And they had a dream that they interpreted as a call to go into Europe.

They'd been in Asia Minor all this time, and they'd never gone to Europe yet. So they passed over the Aegean Sea into Greece and evangelized in Philippi and in Thessalonica and Berea. And from there, Paul went down to Athens and Corinth.

And so a lot of these Greek cities were evangelized by Paul and his companions. Paul spent a full 18 months in Corinth and then went on to Ephesus and on back to Antioch, his home church, and to Jerusalem to keep a feast. Then there was a third missionary journey that Paul took.

He went back to Ephesus, did some more evangelism. He actually stayed about two or three years in Ephesus, and most of Asia Minor was evangelized through his efforts at that time. He went back to Jerusalem again after his third missionary journey, and he was arrested there, and that was the end of his recorded missionary efforts.

He was arrested in Jerusalem on false charges by the Jews. Actually, the Jews were not going to arrest him. They were going to kill him, and the Romans came and took him into protective custody from the Jews.

He was kept for two years in custody in Caesarea, which was in Palestine, and then he appealed his case to Caesar, and he was taken by ship to Rome, where he spent at least two years under house arrest awaiting trial before Nero. And that's how the book of Acts ends. Now, there's a lot of things that are not told to us in the book of Acts.

We don't know, for example, from the book of Acts whether Paul was condemned or acquitted at his trial. However, there is some indication in his later letters in Titus and Timothy that Paul was released on that occasion. He mentions in 2 Timothy chapter 4 that he was acquitted the first time, and there is speculation that Paul may have gone to Spain.

We know that was his desire before he was arrested. He may have fulfilled that desire after being released. There is even a tradition that he went as far as Britain, although most historians don't credit that with much validity.

There is certainly evidence that he went to Crete because Titus, in Titus, Paul mentions they left Titus there, and there's no reference in the book of Acts to Paul doing any ministry in Crete, so it must have been after he was released. So there is additional ministry apparently done by Paul later in his later years, and according to tradition, he was beheaded after a second arrest at the command of Nero, along with Peter, who also was killed, not at the same time, but both were killed by Nero. Now, that is how the church went forward.

Now, I need to say something about the persecutions from the Romans. As I mentioned, the first persecution that came to the church was from the Sanhedrin. This was the governing body in Jerusalem who also had condemned and had Jesus crucified, and then

they were the ones who, in a mob scene, had stoned Stephen.

They also had been largely responsible for the death of James, the first apostle to be martyred, because Stephen, of course, though he was the first martyr, was not an apostle, but the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred was James, the son of Zebedee, brother of John, and he was martyred in Acts chapter 12. Herod the king is said to have done this, and Herod was, strictly speaking, a Roman official, but he did it to please the Jews. It was not really a Roman government persecution of Christianity.

It was still in Palestine, it was still in Jerusalem, and it was, although a Roman official authorized it, it was done to please the Jews, and when he saw that the killing of James did please the Jews, Herod also arrested Peter, intending to kill him. The Bible says that in the middle of the night, an angel sprung Peter from jail, and he got out of there, and we don't know where he went, because it just says he went to another place. Even Luke doesn't tell us where he went.

But anyway, Peter escaped and was later killed by a Roman persecution. But all that early persecution in the book of Acts, all of it, came from the Jews. Sometimes the Romans were involved.

Even in the crucifixion of Jesus, the Romans were involved. Pilate gave his approval, and the Roman soldiers crucified Jesus, but it was all at the instigation of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish body. So the real persecutor of the Church in the early days of Christianity was the Jewish court, really, the Jewish Supreme Court, and also just individual synagogues.

Paul, when he traveled, would minister in the synagogues, and his message would be received briefly, but it wouldn't take very long for the leaders of the synagogues to see that his message was radical and revolutionary and challenged many of their prejudices, and so he would get kicked out of the synagogues. And as Paul would go to another city, many times the Jews from the city he just left would follow him and stir up trouble for him in the new city, and they'd follow him around from place to place. And so throughout the Book of Acts, almost all the persecution, you read of, of the Church was from the Jews.

Now there was a time, even in the Book of Acts, where the Jews in one city did attempt to get the Romans interested in persecuting the Church. Now we know that at a later time in history, Rome was the principal persecutor of the Church, but not during the time of Acts. But there was a time when it was kind of touch and go.

It could have turned. The Romans could have begun persecuting the Church. In Acts chapter 18, what you need to understand is that when the Romans took over a territory, and they conquered that whole region of Palestine, of course, about 63 or so, or 70 B.C., the Romans had a policy that when they would come in and they would conquer a land and make a land a vassal of Rome, they would allow any religion that was being

practiced in that land prior to its conquest by Rome to continue, just for the sake of the morale of the people.

And, you know, I guess the Romans understood how deeply ingrained religious sentiments were and figured that if they just banned the local religion, that would just cause a general uprising. So the Romans allowed any religion that was being practiced prior to the Roman occupation and conquest to continue being practiced in the local areas. Judaism, therefore, was legal because the Jews were practicing Judaism before the Romans conquered Palestine.

So Judaism was a legal religion in the Roman Empire. Christianity, however, had arisen after the Romans had come to power, and the Romans did not permit any new religions that were not older than Roman occupational times to arise that was illegal. Therefore, if the Romans had recognized Christianity as a separate religion from Judaism, they would have called it an illegal religion.

But the Romans could not see the difference between Christianity and Judaism. As far as they could tell, Christianity was just another branch of Judaism. They knew there were different branches.

There were the Sadducees. There were the Pharisees. There were the Essenes.

There were the Zealots. And there were the Nazarenes, as they called them, which were the Christians. And, you know, put yourself in the Romans' eyes.

The Romans and the Greeks and all the pagans all worshipped pantheons of God. They all believed in multitudes of gods. The only people among them that they knew of that didn't believe in multitudes of gods were the Jews, who believed in one God.

And now they hear of this Christian movement. And those Christians also believe in one God. And they're following a guy who is a Jewish guy, Jesus.

And all the leaders of the movement are Jewish people. And as far as the Romans are concerned, this looks like another Jewish movement. And it was good for the Church in terms of immunity from Roman persecution.

It was good for the Church that the Romans didn't know Christianity was something independent and different. In fact, even when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D., Josephus tells us that Titus believed, Titus was the Roman general who destroyed Jerusalem, Titus actually hoped and believed that the destruction of Jerusalem would at once bring an end to Judaism and Christianity. Because Titus, even at that late date, didn't realize that Christianity is not dependent on the temple and on Jerusalem as a center.

It was assumed that Christianity was part of Judaism. Well, there was a time when Paul

was in Corinth that the Jews tried to convince the Romans that Christianity was an illicit religion, that it was not Jewish. But they failed, fortunately, so that the Romans did not begin persecuting Christianity this early.

But if you look at Acts 18, verses 12 through 17, this is while Paul was spending 18 months in Corinth, the Greek city. It says, when Galileo was proconsul, that's a Roman ruler like Pilate was in Palestine, Galileo was the proconsul of Achaia, which is southern Greece where Corinth was, the Jews, with one accord, rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat. Now, this is the Jewish population in Corinth bringing Paul, a local Christian preacher, before the Roman authorities, to the Roman court, trying to get him ousted, trying to get him in trouble.

And they said, this fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law. And they mean, of course, the law of Moses, because Paul was not advocating keeping kosher and circumcising and so forth. So as far as they were concerned, he was teaching the worship of Jehovah in an unlawful manner.

That is contrary to the law of Moses. And what they were trying to point out to the proconsul is, look, this guy is teaching worship of the same God, it may be, that we're talking about, but his way of worship is against our laws, the laws of our religion. Forbid what this man is saying.

And they're trying to show that there's a wedge here, there's a difference in these two religions, Christianity and Judaism. However, the proconsul was too dull to recognize it, fortunately. And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Galileo, that's the Roman official, said to the Jews, If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you.

But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves, for I do not want to be a judge of such matters. And he drove them from the judgment seat. So he couldn't see the difference.

They all worship one God, these Jews slash Christians. And the Jews were trying to point out, you know, these people are different than us. They're not the same religious beliefs we have.

They teach things contrary to our religious laws. They say, Ah, I just can't make it. Words, laws, names, I don't know.

You guys all look the same to me. Get out of here. And it's very fortunate that that happened, because had Galileo, had he at that time bought the Jews' criticism, and by the way, they were right.

They were right. Christianity is not a sect of Judaism. It's just that very few people in the Roman Empire recognized that yet.

And if the Roman official had been made to see that, then he would have been able to outlaw Christianity as an illicit religion that has arisen after the Roman occupation of those lands. It is not part of Judaism. And if he had done so, that would set a precedent throughout the Roman world.

But it didn't happen. So Christianity got to function for a considerable long time more, several decades anyway, without Roman opposition on the basis of it being an illegal religion. Now, there were Roman persecutions, one significant one, in the days of Nero.

Now, Nero began his persecution, I believe, in 64 A.D., and it was very intense for a little while. It probably continued. No one knows for sure.

It may have continued in some measure until Nero's suicide in 68 or 69 A.D. But Nero obviously was a Roman emperor, and everyone knows that Nero burned Christians and fed them to wild beasts and so forth and did all kinds of terrible things to them. So you might say, well, that's a Roman persecution of Christianity, and indeed it is. However, Nero was not outlawing the religion of Christianity.

That happened later. Again, Nero didn't know the difference between a Christian and a Jew. He didn't consider Christianity a new and illegal religion.

He just needed to find somebody to blame for the burning of Rome because rumors were going around that he had burned Rome, Nero himself. No one knows for sure whether he did, but that was the rumor that was going around Rome after a terrible, devastating fire. And so he needed some scapegoat, someone to blame, and the Christians were already fairly unpopular in Rome, so he picked on them.

It wasn't a matter of declaring Christianity illegal. There were just some people that he could pick on to blame for this fire. And so that was a momentary, brief persecution.

It did not necessarily render Christianity illegal permanently in the Roman Empire, although it did set a precedent for later Roman emperors. Since Nero had persecuted Christians, later emperors found it easier to command that Christians be persecuted as well. It was after 70 A.D., however, when the temple was destroyed and Judaism really came to an end in its historic Old Testament form that Christianity's own virulence was seen to be owed to their independence of the temple.

Christianity didn't need a temple. Christianity didn't need Jerusalem. Christianity was based on spiritual worship, not worship in this mountain or in Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth.

And it was with the destruction of the Jewish Commonwealth in 70 A.D. that it became obvious to all that Christianity had a life of its own. It was not part of Judaism. And that meant, of course, that it was just a matter of time before it would be declared to be an illicit religion, a new religion in the Roman Empire.

And it was so declared on various occasions. There were, I believe, ten emperors who persecuted the church. One of the earliest who persecuted Christians for their religion, as opposed to Nero who persecuted them just because he wanted to blame someone else for the fire in Rome, was Domitian, who was in the last decade of the first century.

In the Book of Revelation, there's very good reason to believe that that was written at a time when the church was being persecuted by a Roman power. There are hints of it throughout the Book of Revelation. There's the harlot who's drunk with the blood of the saints, and she's sitting on a beast that has seven heads, and the seven heads are said to be seven hills, which is thought by most to be a reference to Rome, the city on seven hills and so forth.

And although the Book of Revelation is very symbolic and hard to understand, there are many hints in it that the persecuting power in John's day was probably Rome. And that is certainly the case. After the fall of Jerusalem, Rome, not Jerusalem, became the main center of persecution and the main power that persecuted the church.

Now, I've mentioned Paul's travels and Paul's activities, and one reason that I can say more about those than anyone else's is because the Bible records more of them. In the Book of Acts, after Paul's conversion, we don't read very much of any other apostles. There's a little bit there about Peter in chapters 10 and 11 and 12.

Saul's conversion is in chapter 9. But once you get to chapter 11, Peter's not very much in the picture anymore. He is in chapter 12 again, but then after that, in chapter 13, it's Paul and Barnabas, then it's Paul and Silas and his team, and eventually we just run into James or Peter incidentally here and there. The Book of Acts clearly focuses, in its latter part, on Paul's activities.

Therefore, we don't have any biblical record, nor do we have any real authoritative early church records in writing as to what happened to the other apostles or what they did. However, there have been very probable traditions. They come from fairly early on, say the 2nd century or so, as to what the other apostles did, not in detail, but just in general.

There's a strong tradition that attaches Peter to ministry in Rome. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church would suggest that Peter was the first bishop of Rome. There's no biblical reason to believe that.

But he may have, probably did, spend his final years in Rome. There's a strong tradition that Peter was crucified upside down in Rome. The story of how, in Nero's persecution, Peter was among those that were fleeing to avoid being martyred in Rome because of Nero's madness and his recklessness and his hostility toward the Christians.

And that, according to the tradition, Peter was on his way out of Rome and he saw Jesus in a vision, and Jesus was going toward Rome. And Peter said, Where are you going? In

Latin, quo vadis. You may have seen the movie Quo Vadis.

It's about this legend. Quo vadis means, Where are you going? And Jesus said, I'm going back to Rome to be crucified again. And Peter, according to this legend, went back to Rome too and was arrested, was condemned to be crucified, and requested that he be crucified upside down instead of right side up because he felt he was not worthy to die in the same manner as his lord had died.

So that is the legend concerning Peter. It may be true. We don't have biblical reference to it necessarily.

John, it is fairly well known, spent his final years in Ephesus, the city where Paul had established a church, and Timothy had overseen it at an earlier time. But John spent his final years there, apparently, after being exiled to Patmos where he wrote the book of Revelation. According to tradition, he returned to Ephesus, spent his final years there, and was the only one of the twelve apostles who died a natural death at old age.

Bartholomew, one of the twelve, is thought to have ministered in Armenia. Andrew, Peter's brother, is strongly associated by tradition with the southern steppes of Russia and the Ukraine. Andrew is venerated in Russia, in the Russian church, as the apostle who brought the gospel to that region.

Thomas, very strongly associated by tradition with Parthia and, more importantly, India. A lot of reason to believe that Thomas went to India. In fact, I believe there is even a tomb of Thomas there.

Whether Thomas is really in it or not, no one could prove. But it is believed that Thomas brought the gospel to India before his death and died there as a martyr. Matthew, according to similar traditions, went to Ethiopia.

James the Less, as he is called, or James the son of Alphaeus, this is to be held in distinct from James the son of Zebedee, the brother of the twelve. James the Less went to Egypt. Jude, his brother, who is also in the gospels known as Thaddeus, and Lebbeus, he is sometimes called the three-named disciple because he is called Jude.

He is also called Lebbeus, he is also called Thaddeus. He went to Assyria and Persia. Simon the Zalote, or Simon the Zealot, is associated by tradition with ministry in Egypt and Britain.

And John Mark, though not an apostle, a very important guy in the book of Acts and in the epistles, a companion of Peter's, is credited with having founded the church in Alexandria, which is, of course, in Egypt. And so it is believed that Mark went down there. So we get some idea of where the apostles went and what they did.

Of course, the gospel went to many other places carried by others that were not

apostles. But that tells us something about the expansion of the early church in the apostolic era. Now, in addition to persecution, the other great struggle and front that the church had to fight was against heresy.

The devil has two means of seeking to destroy the Christian movement. One is by force from the outside, that is, persecution. And the other is by corruption from the inside.

In fact, the devil, I think, probably will have found by now, after 2,000 years, that force from the outside really doesn't get the job done. If he's trying to stamp out the church, as Tertullian observed early on, the blood of martyrs is seed. The church only expands and grows and spreads and increases in persecution.

It's astonishing that the devil hasn't learned that lesson sufficiently to have brought an end to persecution before this. There's still persecution, of course, in many parts of the world. But it never really gets rid of the church.

I won't say it doesn't hurt the church. Some people would point out that, you know, the church becomes more pure. The false converts kind of drop away and only the real converts remain in persecution.

These things are probably true. But that doesn't mean that the church is not, in some ways, hurt by persecution. Certainly when the elders and the pastors and so forth are hunted down and executed and the church is left without leadership or the Bibles are all burned and the church is left without Bibles, no one can say that's real beneficial to the church.

So persecution is still something the devil uses, although it seems to really not work for him quite as effectively as I'm sure he once hoped it would. But his other ploy is to corrupt the church from within. The church holds up well and spreads in times of persecution from without, but corruption from within is a real constant danger.

That doctrine would be twisted and would spread like leaven in the lump of dough so that the church, although it is never destroyed, is simply rendered fruitless and maybe even heretical and apostate. And there have always been, since early days of the church, heresies that the true church had to struggle against. In the apostolic time, there were three heresies that we learn of, or at least tendencies toward heresy.

The first that we read of was that of the Judaizers. Now, the Judaizers were Jewish men in the church who were believers in Christ. At least they professed to believe in Christ for salvation.

But they also believed that the Jewish believers should keep the whole law of Moses, as they had before they received Christ, and even that the Gentile converts should become Jewish proselytes. That is, before Christ came, a Gentile could join the Jewish religion by being circumcised and joining the Jewish religion and keeping the Jewish law. The

Judaizers believed that this still should be followed.

Now, there's a sense in which you can't blame them for thinking this way. For centuries, God had always required this of his people, to be circumcised and keep the law. And now that the Messiah had come, the Judaizers just wanted to add Jesus to what they already had in Judaism.

They didn't see Jesus as starting an entirely new thing that's independent of Judaism. Paul did, however. Paul and Barnabas and his companions saw it much more clearly.

They were the ones out doing the ministry among the Gentiles and seeing how God was doing a new thing among a new people who were not circumcised. And Paul was very strong against these Judaizers who were attempting to enforce the law of Moses, especially when they were doing it on the Gentile converts. Paul seemed to allow these guys to run their errors unchallenged by him among the Jews.

In fact, when Paul came to Jerusalem on his final visit, James, the leader of the church, was strongly under the influence of Judaizers in Jerusalem. And he told Paul, look how many brethren we have here who are zealous for the law. So let's not bother them.

Let's not stir them up. How about if you just keep the law and show yourself to be a good law-abiding Jew while you're here? Because they've heard that you're not a good law-abiding Jew. And so Paul said, OK.

And he went along with it. I don't think that was a good idea for Paul. Actually, I don't think he should have been in Jerusalem on that occasion at all.

There's another issue there. But the point is Judaizing went on among the Jewish church pretty much without any opposition from Paul and apparently without any opposition from the apostles who viewed their ministry as to the circumcision, which were Peter and his companions. But Paul among the Gentiles was adamant.

No Jew was going to get their hands on his converts and circumcise them and make Jews out of them. And this was a big dispute in Acts chapter 15. We read in the first verse, Acts 15, 1. It says certain men came down from Judea.

That is, they came to Antioch where Paul and Barnabas were after they'd returned from their first missionary journey and taught the brethren, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about the question. And then we have what this chapter later describes and what we call as the Jerusalem Council, where the apostles met together, heard testimony from both sides and finally made a decision.

That decision was that the Gentiles would not be required in any way, shape, or form to become proselytes or Jews or be put under the law of Moses, although they were requested not to do the most outlandish kinds of things that Gentiles often did that would offend the Jews in their region, like eating blood and eating things strangled and meat sacrificed to idols and so forth. And of course, to avoid fornication, which was a common Gentile vice. But the Jerusalem Council dealt a death blow and pulled the rug out from under the Judaizing movement.

Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians in order to refute the Judaizers. And there is evidence even in some of his later epistles that there was movement in some of the local churches to bring Judaistic practices into the church, even in the Church of Rome. We read in Romans 14 that there were some in the church who wanted to keep kosher and there were some who wanted to keep a Sabbath day.

There were others in the church who didn't keep one day special and didn't keep kosher. And Paul just said, well, let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind. Paul had never been to Rome when he wrote that epistle and didn't have quite the same clout there that he had in his own churches.

So he just didn't try to settle that question, just gave everyone liberty to do what they wanted to do. In Colossians, Paul indicates that there were some in the church that were trying to impose Jewish practices on the believers there. In Colossians 2.16, Paul said, so let no one judge you in food or in drink or in regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths.

These are Jewish things from the Jewish law. And apparently there were some in the church trying to impose these practices on the Christians who happened to be Gentile Christians in Colossians. Now in addition to the Judaizing errors, there were errors creeping in the church from the opposite direction, from the Gentile side, from especially Greek philosophy.

Greek philosophy dominated the Gentile world, whether it was down in Egypt and Alexandria or in Greece itself or Rome. There was a lot of Greek philosophy because the Romans had conquered what had been previously the Grecian Empire. And in the days of the Grecian Empire, there had been men like Plato and Socrates and Aristotle who strongly influenced the thinking of the whole Gentile world in the Mediterranean.

And Greek philosophy tended to join itself like a parasite to other religious systems like Judaism and Christianity. One of the results, the principal result of this kind of syncretism was what later in the second century came to be known as Gnosticism. Gnosticism was recognized in the second century and the third century as a dangerous heresy in the church.

There were also Gnosticism attached itself to Judaism, but it attached itself to

Christianity. And basically, the things that made, well, there's a lot of things that were wrong with Gnosticism. The things that we find bothering the Christian teachers the most about it was that they believed that, as the Greek philosophers did, that matter is evil and that the spirit is good.

All spirit is good, even demons. Anything with spirit is good and anything with matter is evil. And the upshot of that was that Jesus, who was in their view an emanation from God, could not really have had a physical body because physical things are evil.

And therefore, some of the Gnostics at least thought that Jesus, the Diocese, taught that Jesus didn't even have a physical body, that he was there was not a true incarnation. And others, I think it was Sorrentis, if I'm not mistaken, taught that Jesus did have a physical body, but the Christ essence came upon him at his baptism and left him shortly before his crucifixion, and that Jesus was not innately the Christ. But these are some of the areas that Gnosticism came to bring into the church, just kind of mixing Greek ideas with Christianity.

There were two errors, opposite errors, within Gnosticism. Because the body was considered to be hopelessly wicked, there were some who taught Epicureanism, or they taught that you can just do whatever you want, just indulge the body, it's not reformable anyway. The body is inconsequential, your spirit's going to be free from it someday anyway, so just do what you want, and they went into total hedonism.

There were Gnostics who taught that. It's also called antinomianism, no law. And in the church, there was a tendency among some to buy into this and to practice this antinomianism, practicing sin.

We read of this, for example, in the Seven Letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation, in the Church of Thyatira and the Church of Pergamos. They both had teachers in the church. In one case, it was a female teacher, codenamed Jezebel.

Both churches had people teaching that it was okay to commit fornication and to participate in idolatrous feasts. Now, these things obviously are not conducive to holiness, not consistent with holiness, and yet that evidences that some of the churches in the Book of Revelation had antinomian Gnosticism being taught within them. The other extreme and the opposite from that in Gnosticism was to say, since the body is evil, we should do nothing to gratify it, do nothing to please it.

And so you have Stoicism, which was a total asceticism, denying the body pleasures, not eating food that's pleasurable to eat, sleeping uncomfortably, living uncomfortably, wearing uncomfortable clothing, hurting the body, punishing the body because it's evil. Both of these, Epicureanism and antinomianism on the one hand, Stoicism and asceticism on the other hand, they were both different ways that people reacted to the Greek philosophy about the nature of matter. Both of these things are a problem in the

early church.

Apparently, in the first century, the biggest problem was with antinomian Epicurean type ideas of indulgence in sin. Later on, in the second and third centuries, when monasticism began to arise, you find more of the asceticism being merged with Christianity. But these are still problems with Gnosticism as error in the church.

We find John wrote the book, First John, against Gnosticism. You can tell that the false teachers he refers to there were teaching Gnostic heresies. John says there, any spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.

Any spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. He's referring, of course, to the doctrine that Jesus was not really incarnate because matter is evil and he couldn't possibly have been in a physical body. That is Gnosticism.

Although it was really just emerging in the first century in the Apostolic Age, it became a full-blown terror in the early church. I mean, a terror to those who are concerned about doctrinal purity in the second and third centuries. But it was obviously incipient in the church, even in the apostolic times, if John had to write against it.

Even Paul found the influence of some of this Greek philosophy in Corinth, a Greek city. Corinth had plenty of problems, moral and theological. Among other things, there were people in the church who denied the resurrection of the dead.

This, too, was part of Greek philosophy. The Greek philosophers didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. Why? Because that's saying that your body is going to rise from the dead and be around forever.

Well, the Greeks looked forward to getting out of their body because the body was evil and being a free spirit floating around the universe, the idea that the body would be raised and you'd be trapped in that forever was unsavory to Greek philosophers. And therefore, we find that when Paul spoke in Athens on Mars Hill in Acts chapter 17, they listened to him, the Greeks listened to him, until he mentioned the resurrection of Jesus. And then they started laughing at him and they just turned on him and wouldn't listen to him anymore.

They listened to him talk about one God and a lot of other things that are Christian ideas, but as soon as he mentioned the resurrection, they were simply not willing to listen anymore. In Corinth, which was a Greek city, there were even people in the church who were denying the whole doctrine of the resurrection. According to 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 12, Paul said, Now if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? How do some among them say there's no resurrection? Well, apparently because the Greeks, which they were, tended to have an abhorrence for the doctrine of the resurrection.

And so that was even a problem in the church. So we have Judaizers, on the one hand, trying to bring the church under Judaism. You have Greek philosophers and Gnostics trying to bring the church into a merger with Greek ideas.

And then there were throughout the Roman world, and especially in Rome, a plethora of what scholars call mystery religions. Now what did these mystery religions teach? You don't know, it's a mystery. Actually, some of their beliefs are known.

Mithraism was a common one, the worship of Mithra. And a lot of the practices of Mithraism have been shown to resemble the beliefs of Christianity. In fact, so much so that critics of Christianity have sometimes said, Well, Christianity just bought all its ideas from Mithraism.

They talk about a resurrecting God and the practice of baptism and a bunch of other things. But really, when you study it out, it's more likely that Mithraism picked up their ideas from Christianity. That is to say, we don't know what Mithraism originally taught.

The only records we have of Mithraic practices come from like the 3rd century AD or something like that, long after Christianity had established itself. And probably what happened is Mithraism, in order to survive in a world that was rapidly being convinced of Christianity, had to adopt its own views to make them sound more attractive and more Christian-like. Because we don't have any records of Mithraism teaching any Christian-like doctrines before the church was well established in the Roman area.

And we don't know what all of the teachings of the early mystery religions in Rome were, but the people were very much committed to them to a large extent in Rome. And there is reference in Colossians to a heresy in Colossae that may have, probably was, associated with some of the mystery religions of the area or of the time. Paul refers to this in Colossians 2.18, for example, where he says, Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up in his fleshly mind, not holding fast to the head from whom the whole body nursed and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

Now, he talks about people who delight in worshipping angels. And this is known to be something that was part of some of the mystery religions. So it may be that some of the mystery religions that are kind of elusive to us, to know exactly what they taught, were also infiltrating the church and creating doctrinal impurity.

So we have these various kinds of problems. Mithraism and the mystery religions would probably be more or less like, I mean, occultism and New Age kind of stuff, as we would see it today. So the church had its legalists, the Judaizers.

It had its antinomian, greasy-gracers, the Gnostics. Then it had its mystical New Age

types that were coming into church. And we can see that all those tendencies still exist, even today.

There are Judaizers in the church. There are still people who believe we should keep the Jewish Sabbath, who we should keep the Jewish dietary laws. There are even dispensationalists who believe that someday we're going to even be keeping the Jewish feast and going back to Jerusalem every year.

These Judaizers are still with us. And there are other forms of legalism besides Judaizing type of legalism. There's other kinds of rules and legalistic kind of spirit that has arisen in many churches that aren't related to the Jewish law.

You also have your antinomian, greasy-grace people who say it doesn't matter how you live, you're saved by grace. It doesn't matter. That's much more like the Gnostic views that they were fighting about in those days.

And, of course, you've got your mystical types. Hey, worship of angels. Does that sound familiar to you? Does it sound like anything is happening today? It's interesting.

I mean, the New Age movement has been with us a long time, but only in the past, what, decade has it really taken on the form of worshipping angels? All this craze about angels and, you know, meet your angel and contact your angel and you've got angel stores in every major city. It's an incredible thing. There's no new thing under the sun.

The devil doesn't have any new tricks. He just recycles the old ones on a new generation. And it's interesting.

It's to our advantage, perhaps, that these problems arose in the church while the apostles were still alive so that they could write against them. And they did. They wrote things against them in the Bible so that when we encounter the same problems, we can say, hey, look, this is not a new thing.

Paul said this and Peter said that and John said this. And so heresy within the church was a problem in the days of the apostles. You wouldn't think it would ever get a hold while the apostles were still alive.

But, see, they couldn't be everywhere at once. They didn't have TBN. They didn't have satellites and so forth to beam their presence to every church simultaneously in the world.

So they'd leave town and the false teachers would come in right behind them and corrupt the church. So even with the apostles trying to put out fires all over the place of heresy, there was still plenty of it beginning to take hold. Now there's a couple other things I need to say that will wind this up.

I want to talk to you about the early tendency towards centralization. Now, it did not really work and it did not really take hold in the first century, but there were people who wanted to centralize the church authority. This did, of course, take hold in later centuries.

Eventually, Rome became the center of the church. And by the end of the second or third centuries, most of the churches were looking to Rome as sort of a mother church. And the bishop of Rome had sort of an authority that was above all the other bishops.

Eventually, this evolved into what was called the papacy, which is still the central authority of the Roman Catholic Church and would be of the whole church if there hadn't been a reformation about 500 years ago. But centralizing the church's authority into a particular institution in a location almost happened in the first century, but didn't happen. You can see evidence of a trend that way in the role that was played by James in the church in Jerusalem.

Now, this James we're talking about was not one of the twelve apostles. He was the Lord's brother. Jesus is known to have had at least four brothers.

We'd have to call them half brothers because they were sons of Mary and of Joseph, but Jesus was not the son of Joseph, only of Mary. But the oldest of these four brothers was named James. And he had three others and some sisters.

We don't know how many sisters. They are mentioned. The sisters are not named for us in the scripture, but the brothers are.

James was an unbeliever throughout probably the whole lifetime of Jesus. But we read in 1 Corinthians 15 that after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his brother James. And that, no doubt, is what brought about the conversion of the man.

And he was significant in the early church. And as time went on, especially as Peter kind of left Jerusalem because of persecution against him, directed against him, James, the brother Lord, rose, we don't know by what means, to a prominent place in the church of Jerusalem. And right up until almost the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., James was the guy that the church in Jerusalem looked to as sort of the main guy in the church.

I guess the other apostles probably got scattered out in their evangelistic work. And James was there. James, by the way, became significant enough that even Josephus mentions him.

Now, Josephus only mentions Jesus twice. There's one paragraph about Jesus. There's one paragraph about John the Baptist and Josephus.

And there's a paragraph about James, the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ, as Josephus puts it. Josephus actually records the death of James. He was stoned by the

Sanhedrin.

But he was very prominent, so much so that a non-Christian Jewish historian remembers him as the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ. James is also called by the church fathers in retrospect, as they speak of him, James the Just. Apparently, James himself was very zealous for the law of Moses.

He wrote the book of James. And you can see quite a few references to the law in that book. Not necessarily anything heretical or legalistic, but you can see an interest in the law there.

James oversaw the church in Jerusalem, where there were many, many brethren zealous for the law. And apparently, James didn't feel like rocking the boat with the Sanhedrin. And, by the way, James was respected, not only in the church in Jerusalem, but among the Jews in Jerusalem.

A very well-respected man, because he kept the Jewish law. It is said by some of the church fathers that he was a Nazirite. Not all Jews were.

A Nazirite swore off all products of the grapevine. And most Jews weren't willing to swear off wine. But the ones who did and grew their hair out long and wouldn't go near dead bodies were respected.

They were the ones who took the Nazirite vow. James, it is believed, was a Nazirite. He was also called Camel Knees by his contemporaries, because it is said he spent so much time in prayer that his kneecaps were calloused and rough and looked like the knees of a camel.

This is James the Just, James the brother of the Lord. He is the James that you read of after chapter 12, actually in chapter 12 of Acts. Interestingly, Peter, when he was released from prison by an angel, he went to a prayer meeting in the house of John Mark's mother, told them what happened, and then he got out of town.

But before he did, he says, Go and tell the brethren and James that I've been released and I'm safe. Now, he singles out James for special mention. He tells the people at this prayer meeting, Go tell the brethren and make sure James knows.

Obviously, at that point, although Peter was still in Jerusalem, James was already significant. In fact, it might have been at that very moment that Peter was essentially appointing James. Since Peter was leaving town, appointing James to kind of oversee things in his absence.

I don't want to read too much into it, but that's a possibility. We do find, though, three chapters later, when the Jerusalem council is held in Acts 15, that Peter gives testimony, Paul and Barnabas give testimony, and James gives the verdict. Very interesting,

because we would think that Peter and Paul both would outrank James.

Since James wasn't even one of the twelve and didn't have a special... Well, he may have been equal to Paul in terms of how he was called. I mean, Jesus did appear to James after the resurrection, just like he appeared to Paul. I mean, not just like, but probably with equal authority.

But we read in the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 that Peter gave testimony, Paul gave testimony, Barnabas gave testimony, and then James gave the answer. James gave the decree and wrote the letter and said, this is what the decision is. Everyone agreed to it.

So we can see that James had acquired tremendous influence in the church of Jerusalem. Now, that doesn't prove there was a trend towards centralization. But we do find, Paul says in Galatians chapter 2 and verse 12, that when Peter visited Paul and the church in Antioch... Now, this is up in another country, in Syria, away from Jerusalem and out of Israel.

Peter visited the church in Antioch, apparently for a protracted period, and while there, he had no problem eating with the Gentiles who were converted, even though they were uncircumcised. Peter knew that was okay. But it says, when certain men from James came... Now, these men were from the church in Jerusalem.

Interesting that Paul would say, from James. Not just from Jerusalem, but from James. James was the leader there, the undisputed leader there.

And it says, when certain men from James came... This is Galatians 2.12. Peter was intimidated by these emissaries from James, and he withdrew from table fellowship with the Gentiles, and Paul had to rebuke him in front of them all. Now, I mean, think about that. How powerful James had become.

I'm not saying that he illicitly wielded authority. I'm not saying he was on a power trip. It's just that his influence in the church in Jerusalem had become so significant that even Peter was intimidated and withdrew.

And Barnabas too, but not Paul. And Paul stood up and rebuked them all. We read, however, that Paul himself kowtowed to James in his last visit to Jerusalem in Acts chapter 21.

Paul comes there bringing a gift from the Gentile churches to the Jerusalem church, which had some financial needs. And when he comes there, he has to meet with James and the brethren. They're the boss of the church, as it were.

I shouldn't use the word boss, because I don't think that's necessarily what James would call himself. I think he was a spiritual, godly, probably a very humble man. But nonetheless, a man who was highly respected, and everyone did pretty much what he

thought they should do.

He was the brother of the Lord. And he might have been the only resident apostle in Jerusalem at that time, though not one of the twelve. He is called an apostle by no less than Paul in Galatians chapter 2 and Galatians 1. But James actually gives instructions to Paul.

While you're here, we want you to behave this way. It'll help clear your reputation among these Jewish brethren. So Paul says, yes, sir, and does exactly what James says.

Gets himself arrested, too, and in big trouble. That's a shame. But the point here is that there was a tendency for James not only to be significant in Jerusalem, but outside Jerusalem.

Even Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, is, as it appears, compromising his own testimony in order to please James. And even as far away from Jerusalem as Antioch, another missionary center, the main one, someone like Peter is intimidated by the authority of James by people visiting from Jerusalem. This suggests that there were some, at least, who, whether it was defined or undefined, were beginning to think of Jerusalem and of James there, kind of a pope there, as it were, you know, as sort of exercising some kind of spiritual authority over these other churches.

Now, Paul didn't buy it. Paul said, James can think whatever he wants to. This church in Antioch is not going to disfellowship the Gentiles.

We're going to eat with them, and that's so that. You know, I mean, Paul did not believe that James had any authority or James' opinions carried any weight at all in Antioch. But Peter wasn't so sure.

At least if Peter was sure, he didn't act like he was very sure. And if that trend had continued, you probably would have found Jerusalem become what Rome later became. And whoever was the bishop or leader in Jerusalem would have probably become, as history progressed, what the pope became.

There was a tendency that way, it would appear. But, of course, this was cut short by nothing less than God's judgment on Jerusalem and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. By the way, James was stoned by the Sanhedrin just shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem fled to Pella, a place across the Jordan River from Jerusalem, and the city was destroyed and leveled so that whatever trend toward centralizing the church with its center, its headquarters in Jerusalem, that was nipped in the bud by the destruction of Jerusalem itself.

And it took another century or so before a new centralized government, exercising authority over the churches, arose in Rome. But anyway, there is a tendency for human beings to get their hands on a move of God and try to organize it, try to appoint leaders

over it, and try to politicize it, really. I mean, just try to make a political institution out of it.

And yet it was a spiritual thing that God was doing. The churches didn't have to answer to anyone in any other church in the early days. But that was not so clear sometimes when James' guys were around.

Now, in closing, I want to talk to you briefly about how the torch of the testimony was passed from the apostles to the next generation. I mentioned that the apostles' authority in the church was second to none. They set norms.

And as far as I'm concerned, anything the apostles taught, I don't have any disputes with it. They're the apostles. They're the ones sent by Jesus to represent him, and I'll accept his choice and their authority.

But what about when they're gone? Who's in charge now? What provision was made that the church might continue to benefit from apostolic authority? There are two opinions about this. There might be more, but there are two principal ones to consider. One is that of the Roman Catholics.

According to the Roman Catholic Church, before Peter died, he lived in Rome. And prior to his death, he was the bishop in Rome. Now, by the way, there's no early church records to support the notion that Peter was ever the bishop of Rome.

That's just a Catholic tradition. But according to Catholic tradition, he was the bishop of Rome. And Jesus had said to Peter back in Matthew chapter 16, Peter, you are the rock.

You are Peter, which means the rock. And upon this rock, I will build my church. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

And what have you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven. What have you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. In other words, the Catholic Church says that Peter had unique authority in the early church.

And the church was to be built upon him, and he had the keys, and he could forgive, and he could withhold forgiveness. He could do all that stuff. By the way, Jesus gave sort of the same authority to the other apostles later on in Matthew chapter 18.

He told them that they, too, could bind on earth what was bound in heaven and loose on earth what was loosed in heaven. But the point is, on the view of the Roman Catholic institution, the bishopric in Rome was first occupied by Peter. And he had unique authority in the church.

He was like the head of the bishops. He was the head of the apostles. None of that is established from Scripture, nor is it even, in my opinion, agreeable with what the

Scripture does say.

But on this view, before Peter died, he appointed a successor to himself. And when that man died, before he died, he appointed a successor to himself. And that for all the generations since Peter's time, there has been a successor to Peter as bishop in the church in Rome.

Eventually, the church of Rome came to exercise a central authority over all the churches in Europe and in other places, too. And so it is believed by the Roman Catholic church that apostolic authority was passed down from Peter to his successor and from his successor to the next man and so forth all the way down to the present. And that there is the same apostolic authority that resided in Peter and the apostles can be found today in the current bishop of Rome, who is the pope.

And in the bishops that he has ordained or approved, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, the pope today sits in Peter's seat. He has the authority of Peter because he is Peter's successor in the church in Rome. And all the bishops of the Roman Catholic church have the college of bishops, as they're called, are like the other like the other apostles.

So that the combined decisions of the bishops. And the pope are as authoritative as if the apostles themselves made them, which is why the Catholic church believes that the traditions of the church, that the various councils throughout history of the church have decided, have the same authority as scripture does, because they believe that the pope and the bishops have apostolic authority. This is called the doctrine of apostolic succession.

One of the ways they try to prove this doctrine to be true is by appealing to Acts chapter one. When Judas hanged himself and died, Peter was at pains to replace him, to appoint a successor to Judas. And so they selected Matthias to be the successor to Judas.

And they say, you see, an apostle dies, a successor takes his place. We have, therefore, the doctrine of apostolic succession. But what they don't point out is that when the next apostle died, which was James, who was killed by Herod, they did not point a successor to him.

There was no effort made to appoint a successor to James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee, when he died. Why? Well, Protestants believe that the evidence of scripture is that Judas defected and therefore left a vacancy in the twelve. But when James and other apostles died faithful, they retained their apostolic office.

They don't leave a vacancy. Jesus said, you twelve will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. There are twelve positions Jesus mentioned for the twelve.

Peter thought it was not good that one was left empty when Judas had defected. And so

there would only be eleven faithful apostles to occupy those eleven thrones, those twelve thrones. So they had to get a twelfth guy.

But when James died, he didn't lose his position. And you never read anywhere that the church kept replacing apostles as they died off. You know, oops, there went Peter.

Let's replace him. There goes Matthew. Let's replace him.

There goes Bartholomew. Let's replace him. Never happened as far as we know.

And therefore, the church, I should say, the scripture does not teach anywhere the doctrine of apostolic succession. If an apostle died faithful, he retains his office into eternity. Now, what should we say then? Is there no way of apostolic authority being conveyed down to us in our modern times? There is.

There is. The apostles wrote down their decrees and their doctrines and their teachings. And they have been preserved for us in what we call the New Testament.

And these are the conveyance of apostolic authority to the church in all generations since their time. Let me show you what Paul said to Timothy. Paul, at that time, an old man in prison, facing death and expecting to die, but writing to a man who, if anyone could be called Paul's successor, apparently he viewed Timothy in a role like that, although it wasn't in the sense of apostolic succession that I think that the Roman church talks about.

But look what Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2 and verse 2. 2 Timothy 2.2. Paul said, What is Paul saying? Timothy, you've heard me teach. You've heard what I say. You've heard what I believe.

You've heard my doctrine. You know my ethics. You know everything about my ministry.

You now pass that on to other people. How? By teaching them. Not by appointing successors, but by teaching faithful men.

And they, in turn, will teach others. In other words, the authority of Paul would be passed down through his teaching, being passed along generation by generation to faithful men who would preserve it and pass it along to another generation. Fortunately, Paul's teachings, much of them are in writing.

And so, even though it's been thousands of years now, we have the teachings of Peter and of Paul and of John. We don't have the teachings of all the apostles, but we have reasonably that we have the teachings of the apostles on every significant subject of Christian doctrine of practice. So that in the Bible, we have the continuing authority of the apostles still governing the church through their words, through their teachings.

After all, they were not here to be dictators in person. They were here to be witnesses of

Christ. And they bore their witness.

Their witness has been passed down to us in the form of the New Testament. And I don't see any reason why we need new apostles to come along. And we don't need more than what the Scripture has.

All things necessary for life and godliness are there. And the Protestant church has always believed that there is no such thing as apostolic succession. The apostles died, they left their writings, and the church has had the authority of the apostles preserved in those writings.

And insofar as the church faithfully teaches and follows the apostolic teachings, the church is under the authority of the apostolic appointment that Jesus gave them and follows that authority faithfully and is the apostolic church. There will probably forever be disagreement on that point between Protestants and Catholics. That's what makes one group Protestant and another group Catholic.

They don't agree on that one point. But I personally believe that that is exhibited in Paul's instructions to Timothy. He didn't say, appoint people to replace me and to replace you and they can appoint others.

He said, teach them. And they can pass along those teachings to others. And they can pass along the teachings to others.

Paul intended for his influence and his authority to be recognized in the church in generations to come through the transmission of his teachings, not through appointing people to sit in his chair, in his office. That kind of political authority was not coveted by the apostles or by the leaders in the early church. We will, however, next time see how political authority in the church did arise and how the bishops did come to have an authority in the church in the second century, even near the end of the first.

That was almost political in nature and things began to deteriorate in many ways after the apostles left. It didn't all happen at once and the church remained more or less pure for some time. But you can begin to see some of the corrupting trends early on after the death of the last apostles.

We'll have to take that next time.