

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF  
THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH



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### AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This outline was developed for a church history course in the Chichewa language while I was a missionary in Malawi, Africa, from 1961 through 1980, and has been translated into English.

A person cannot teach about the history of the church without mentioning the names of various religious bodies as well as their doctrines and happenings within them. Although I have mentioned many religious groups and beliefs, I have not done so with the intention of disrespecting the sincere belief of any person. I have simply tried to review briefly how things were in the early church and what things have developed between that time and ours. It is possible for two people to see some religious matters differently and still both reverence Christ. But the arrogant, disrespectful person, whoever he is, disobeys Christ.

The scriptures say, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" - 1 Corinthians 8:1. If a person enters this study just in order to put someone else down, or to show his superior knowledge, he or she lacks the spirit of Christ. But if this study helps believers to fear God, to gain wisdom from the past, to recognize the apostolic church and the development of various religious traditions, and to understand God's help for those who seek to follow him, I will be grateful to God. May God be glorified through this study.

### INTRODUCTION

Our mission is to understand developments in the church from the beginning, in the time of the apostles, until now. We will see the church sometimes persecuted, sometimes growing, sometimes straying, sometimes victorious. We will meet famous persons good and evil. We will study the emergence of divisions and of new doctrines and practices which were not taught by Christ and his apostles. At times the church has strayed far from Christ's ideals. We will follow the work of some who tried bravely at various times to reform the church and point it back to the will of God. And all of this will help us understand who and where we are today.

When we speak in this study of the history of the *church*, we mean the history of all people who have called themselves Christians, some of whom really walked with God and some of whom, serving themselves, separated spiritually from him like dead, fruitless

branches - John 15:1-7. We human beings look on the outward appearance of the church, but the Lord sees the heart and the things of the spirit. He has always known those who are his - 2 Timothy 2:19; Matthew 7:21-23.

When we speak of the *history* of the church, we mean history based on dependable testimony, not just unfounded traditions or myths. The history of the church is gleaned from records and writings of church leaders, governments and other witnesses.

The history of the church is the story of the obedience to Jesus' Great Commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." - Matthew 28:19,20 NIV.

A study of church history helps us in many ways:

1. We, in spite of our modern veneer, are not different from people of previous centuries. Seeing their errors will help us to avoid them, and seeing their good examples will lead us to do better.
2. By observing how religious errors and factions began, we can better help people who are in error or faction.
3. By seeing the whole course of the church, we can see the hand of God and his love in caring for the church, his people, and purifying it. Seeing this, we can thank and praise God.
4. In the history of the church we see Bible prophecies fulfilled from the time of the apostles until the present. This strengthens our faith.
5. Also we can see how the teachings of Jesus have given spiritual life and health to the people of the world.
6. Church history helps us understand our roots and where we came from historically.
7. Understanding what has happened throughout the history of the church gives us better perspective and balance and helps us avoid extremes.

We will follow the divisions of church history used by Dr. Jesse Lyman Hurlbut in his book The Story of the Christian Church. They are as follows:

1. The Apostolic Church, from the birth of the church on Pentecost, c. 29 A.D., to the death of the last apostle, John, c. 98 A.D.  
  
God's preparations for the church. The beginning of the church. Its faith, authority, worship, organization and life. The growth of the church. The struggle to accept Gentiles. The chronology of the apostolic age.
2. The Persecuted Church, from the death of the apostle John, c. 98 A.D., to the Edict of Milan, 313 A.D.

Persecutions by the Roman government. The formation of the New

Testament canon. The rise of monarchical bishops. New ideas in doctrine. Notable church leaders of the second and third centuries. Various doctrinal heresies.

3. The Imperial Church, from the Edict of Milan, 313 A.D., to the fall of the Roman Empire, 476 A.D.

Christianity emerges triumphant from persecution. Efforts of the Emperor Constantine to help Christians. The division of the Roman Empire. The decline of pagan idol-worship. Great controversies over doctrine. Ecumenical councils. The growing authority of the church at Rome and its bishops. Notable church leaders of this period.

4. The Medieval Church, from the fall of the Roman Empire, 476 A.D., to the fall of Constantinople, 1453 A.D.

The development and rise of the papacy. Further departures from the teaching and worship of the apostolic church. The rise of Mohammed and Islam. The "Holy Roman Empire." Evils in the papacy and the hierarchy. The division of the Eastern and Western Churches. The height and decline of papal power. The Crusades. The Inquisition. Early forerunners of the Reformation. Notable church leaders of the Medieval period.

5. The Reformed Church, from the fall of Constantinople, 1453 A.D., to the end of the Thirty Years' War, 1648 A.D.

Historical factors which helped the Reformation. The Reformation in Germany. The Reformation in other countries. The major beliefs of the reformers. The Catholic Counter-Reformation. Notable leaders of this period.

6. The Modern Church, from the end of the Thirty Years' War, 1648 A.D., to the present.

The beginnings of more Protestant churches. The rise of rationalism and humanistic unbelief. The period of great missionary expansion. The Restoration Movement. The rise of Marxism and the persecution of Christians. Translation of the Bible into many languages. Modernism, liberalism and unbelief within the churches. Social issues. The ecumenical movement. The charismatic movement. Other late developments in Catholicism and Protestantism. Postmodernism. Religious opposition to Christianity. The church in the world today.

May God bless our study to his glory.

# CHAPTER 1:

## THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

*From the beginning of the church of Jesus Christ on Pentecost, c. 29 A.D., to the death of the last apostle, John, c. 98 A.D.*

A. "When the time had fully come..." (Galatians 4:4), the church was established.

- 1) Notes on chronology: the time of the church as related to world-time. From Adam to Christ there were over 4,000 years. From Abraham to Christ there were about 2,000 years. From Christ to the present there have been about 2,000 years. (See the time charts at the end of the outline). World-time is usually counted in relation to the birth of Christ. Christ's birth is the central dividing line. The years before Christ's birth are counted backward and are designated "B.C." ("Before Christ"). For example, King David reigned about 1,000 B.C. or 1,000 years before Christ was born. But the years since the birth of Christ are designated "A.D." (Latin "Anno Domini," "the year of our Lord"). For example, the United States became independent in 1776 A.D., or 1,776 years after Jesus was born. Because of the dechristianization of our culture, it is becoming more common to use BCE (Before Common Era) for before Christ and CE (Common Era) for years since Christ's birth.

At the time that Jesus was born and lived, people had not yet begun to count time in terms of A.D. and B.C. The A.D. - B.C. world calendar began with a scholar named Dionysius in the 6th century. But due to insufficient data, Dionysius calculated the time of Jesus' birth at least four years too late, as subsequent investigation has shown. Therefore Jesus was actually born in about 5 or 4 B.C., not at the beginning of 1 A.D. This also puts the beginning of the church at about 29 A.D., not 33 A.D. as popularly conceived.

To help us understand better the time involved, if we count one generation as 20 years, there have been about 100 generations from Christ to our own time. The church has been in the world almost 2,000 years. See the time charts.

- 2) God's preparations for the church through various world empires. In the prophecy of the great image (Daniel 2), Daniel mentioned four successive world empires.

- The head of gold represented the Babylonian Empire.
- The breast and arms of silver represented the Medo-Persian Empire.
- The belly and thighs of bronze represented the Grecian Empire.
- The legs and feet of iron represented the Roman Empire.
- The stone cut out without hands symbolized the Kingdom of God, the church, which began in the days of the Roman Empire (the fourth kingdom, Daniel 2:44).

The stone struck and pulverized the image representing the four empires, and became a great mountain, filling the earth and existing forever. The stone (the church-kingdom) did not destroy the empires by war or sword, but by the word of God. Christianity did not remove a king from his throne, but conquered the hearts of the people of the land, destroying pagan worship and evil customs through the liberating truth of the gospel of Christ.

God was able to use even nations and pagan empires to prepare the way for the coming church:

Through God's chosen people, Israel, God prepared a people scattered throughout the known world who knew God, the Old Testament scriptures, and morality, and who awaited the Messiah, the Savior, the promised Seed of Abraham.

Through the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires who conquered Israel and Judah, God disciplined his people and eliminated the worship of idols, and also accomplished their scattering so that there would be a Jewish community in every city of the Roman Empire, a ready receptacle to receive the gospel.

Through the Medes and Persians, God restored the remnant of his people the Jews to their homeland, where the temple would be rebuilt and the Messiah would later be born.

Through the Grecian Empire, God caused a common language, *Koine* Greek, to be spoken throughout the lands where the gospel would later be preached in that language.

Through the Romans peace and easy travel and communications were established so that the gospel could move freely. Also through the Romans God destroyed the Jewish temple and its sacrificial system in 70 A.D., so that Judaism could no longer effectively undermine Christianity.

- 3) Preparation through the teachings of John the Baptist and Jesus: John the Baptist was sent to go as a herald before Christ and prepare the way for him - Mark 1:1-8; Luke 1:5-25,57-80; 3:1-18. People who obeyed the preaching of John turned from their sins and prepared to receive the Kingdom of Christ. Jesus and his disciples also taught and warned people and prepared for the establishment of the church. Jesus chose twelve apostles and taught them about the Kingdom, preparing them to be his future witnesses throughout the world. He promised that they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit for their work after his ascension to heaven - Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4,5. After receiving this power, they were to be his witnesses in preaching the gospel to

the whole world - Luke 24:47,48; Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16.

- 4) The church was established on the day of Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection - Acts 2. Before that day, the church or kingdom is always spoken of as future, as in Matthew 3:2, 10:7, 16:18,19; Mark 9:1; Luke 19:11, 22:18. But after that day, the church or kingdom is spoken of as something that is present and something which people enter - Acts 5:11, 8:3; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28; Revelation 1:6,9. The kingdom is sometimes spoken of as still future during this period, but only in reference to the glorious phase of the kingdom to be unveiled at Christ's coming. But the kingdom, in its present earthly expression as the church, was opened to the Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10). Peter preached the opening to both groups, using the keys that Jesus had given him (Matthew 16:18,19).

B. The faith and authority of the church in the beginning:

- 1) The real center and foundation of their faith was that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, or in other words, that Jesus is Lord - Matthew 16:15-18; Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9; Acts 2:36; 1 Timothy 6:12,13; Mark 15:2. The apostolic preachers centered their preaching on the resurrection of Jesus, because in the resurrection Jesus was demonstrated to be the Son God as he had claimed - Romans 1:4; Acts 2:22-36, 3:14,15, 5:30, 7:56, 8:35, 10:39,40, 13:29-39, 17:30,31, 26:22,23, 28:30,31. Another central point of their faith was that Jesus died for the sins of all people so that people could be saved - John 3:16; Matthew 26:28; Romans 3:23-25, 5:6-10; 1 Peter 1:18,19. Paul summarized the three main points of the faith of the early church:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures - 1 Corinthians 15:3,4 NIV.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul listed seven great basic unifying doctrinal tenets of the early church:

There is one body and one Spirit,...one hope,...one Lord,...one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all... - Ephesians 4:1-6 NIV.

While the early Christians were united by these central beliefs, they were taught to grant freedom and tolerance to each other on lesser, "disputable" matters – Romans 14:1-15:7. For godly unity to be possible, it was as important to be graciously tolerant over disputable differences as it was to be uniform in the basic beliefs.

- 2) The religious authority of the early church was the word of Christ and that of his inspired apostles and prophets.
- a. The church obeyed Christ, not Moses and the Old Testament - Matthew 17:1-6; Hebrews 1:1,2; John 1:17; Jeremiah 31:31-34;

Hebrews 8:7-13; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:23-25; Acts 15:1-29. But the church loved and respected the Old Testament scriptures and used them, for those scriptures bore witness to the Christ and taught about God and his righteousness and his promises - Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; John 5:39.

- b. The word of the apostles and prophets of Christ carried the same authority as the word of Christ himself - John 13:20; Matthew 10:40; John 14:26; 15:26,27, 16:13,14; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 14:37. Through his apostles and prophets, Jesus laid the foundations of faith in the church once and for all - Ephesians 2:19,20; Galatians 1:8,9; Jude 3. And since oral tradition changes as it is passed from generation to generation, some of the apostles and prophets wrote down the same essential teachings which they taught orally, teachings which were common to all the apostles and prophets. These Spirit-inspired writings were regarded as authoritative "scripture" just as the writings of the Old Testament were - 2 Peter 1:12-15, 3:15,16; Ephesians 3:3-5; Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30,31.
- c. The worship of the early church: The early Christian worship was very simple and inward, in contrast to the complicated, ornate, and sense-oriented forms of the Old Testament. Christian worship required no great outward preparations or equipment. There was no rigid structure or liturgy. There were no beautiful buildings, special holy places or special garb for leaders. There was little to appeal to the senses. A person could worship anywhere if he worshiped "in spirit and truth." Whatever brother had a song, a scripture, or a teaching to share was allowed to do so if he did so in an orderly way and so as to edify the church. See John 4:24; Acts 2:42, 4:23,24, 20:7,8; 1 Corinthians 14; Ephesians 5:18,19; Colossians 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:1-15.

There was no special order of priests through whom the worshipers had to approach God, only Jesus the High Priest - 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:15, 4:14-16. The apostles taught that every Christian is a priest able to approach God with offerings of praise and service - 1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:6; Hebrews 13:15,16; Romans 12:1. Sometimes Christians met for worship and fellowship daily - Acts 2:42,46,47; 19:9,10; but the principal day was "the first day of the week" (Sunday, the day Jesus rose) - Acts 20:7, also called "the Lord's Day" - Revelation 1:10. There were several expressions of worship that were regularly engaged in:

- 1) They sang "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (there is no reference to the early church using instruments) - 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.
- 2) Prayer was prominent - 1 Corinthians 14:15,16; 1 Timothy 2:1,2,8; Acts 2:42.
- 3) They heard the word of God - Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Acts 20:7.
- 4) They remembered the death of the Lord by "breaking bread" in

the Lord's Supper. In the first century this was done each week - Acts 20:7, 2:42; 1 Corinthians 11:23-30 (compare also Justin Martyr, *Apology*, I, 67). Apparently this memorial was often observed in connection with or as part of a "love feast," a fellowship meal - Jude 12.

- 5) Offerings were made toward the needs of the poor and the work of the church - Acts 4:34,35; 1 Corinthians 16:1,2; 2 Corinthians 9:6,7.

Various gifts of the Holy Spirit were exercised in the meetings and in ministry to needs within the church body - 1 Corinthians 12,13,14.

Baptism in the early church was an immersion of the whole body in water - Mark 1:9,10; John 3:23; Acts 8:38,39; Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12. There is no record in the New Testament church of baptizing infants or small children; people were required to believe, to repent of sins, and to confess faith in Christ before being baptized - Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9; Acts 8:37 (margin); 8:12; 18:8. Baptism was understood in the first century as "for the forgiveness of sins" - Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; compare Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3. After a person was baptized, hands were laid on him or her with prayer that he or she might receive the Holy Spirit - Acts 8:14-17; 19:5,6; Hebrews 6:1,2; compare Acts 9:10-18. (For a definitive study of first century baptism, see *Baptism in the New Testament* by George R. Beasley-Murray, an eminent Baptist scholar.)

The "laying on of hands" was also used to ordain those chosen to be preachers, elders and deacons of local churches, or missionaries - 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; Acts 6:6; 13:2,3. This was accompanied by fasting and prayer - Acts 14:23. If a Christian was seriously sick, he could call for the elders of the church who would pray for him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord - James 5:14-16.

#### D. The organization of the apostolic church:

- 1) Church membership: A person entered the church in the first century through hearing the gospel and believing in Christ - Acts 18:8; 16:31,32; Mark 16:15,16; Romans 10:9,10,17; repenting of sins - Acts 2:38; 3:19; confessing Jesus as Christ, the Son of God (as Lord) - Romans 10:9; Acts 8:37 (margin), and being baptized in the name of Jesus (in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit) - Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27.

If a Christian committed serious sin and did not repent, he was judged and put out of the church fellowship so that he might become ashamed and repent - Matthew 18:15-18; 1 Corinthians 5; Romans 16:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15; 1 Timothy 1:20; Titus 3:10. The sinner could be received back into fellowship if he repented and prayed for forgiveness - Acts 8:18-24; 2 Corinthians 2:6-8; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:16,19,20; 1 John 5:16.

- 2) The offices/ministries of leadership in the first century church were these (Ephesians 4:11; Acts 6:1-6):
- a. An "apostle" is a messenger sent with authority. Twelve apostles were appointed by Christ, and Paul was also appointed by him later as an apostle to the Gentiles - Matthew 10:1-4; Acts 9:15; 1 Corinthians 15:7-9; Galatians 2:7; Romans 11:13; Galatians 1:1. These apostles were appointed only by Christ himself. They were with Christ in the foundational work of the church - Ephesians 2:19,20.
 

A few other persons are called apostles in the New Testament, either out of honor for their leading work or because of being sent as messengers by the church. But only the Twelve and Paul were apostles in the universal sense, with special authority given by Christ through the Holy Spirit. When the apostles gave commands in the church, they spoke with the authority of Christ himself, as we have seen - 1 Corinthians 14:37. To be an apostle, one had to have seen the risen Christ - Acts 1:21,22; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:1-9. Apostles were given special power to do signs and wonders confirming that they were sent by the Lord - 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3,4; Mark 16:20.

(There are no apostles in this sense on earth today, because the work of Christ's apostles was foundational in originally revealing the saving faith or gospel of the Lord Jesus once for all - Jude 3; Galatians 1:8,9; Ephesians 3:3-5; 2:19,20. The foundation once laid is still with us, and we today build upon it - 1 Corinthians 3:10,11. The scriptures say nothing of successors to the apostles. The faith which the apostles revealed is still with us in the scriptures - 2 Peter 1:12-15.)
  - b. Prophets were people who received revelations directly from God himself through the Holy Spirit. They worked together with the apostles in revealing foundational truths to the church - Ephesians 2:19,20; 3:3-5. The gift of the prophetic office was distributed by the Holy Spirit as he willed - 1 Corinthians 12:4-11,27-31. The prophets helped Christians to know the will of God in the very early days before the New Testament scriptures were completed and assembled in one book. Agabus was a noted prophet - Acts 11,21.
  - c. Evangelists (preachers of the gospel) were ordained by elders of a local church - 1 Timothy 4:14. Their work included preaching the gospel to the lost, baptizing those who believed, and teaching the converts to obey Christ's commands - Matthew 28:19,20. They were to counteract false teaching - 1 Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:10,11. They ordained worthy elders (also called overseers, pastors) and deacons in each local church when the new Christians had matured enough to exercise these functions - 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9. The preacher/evangelist handled the cases of elders who sinned - 1 Timothy 5:19-22. A preacher could work in more than one area or local church at the same time - Titus 1:5. Preachers were usually supported financially by the church so they could give their time to spiritual work - 1 Corinthians 9:1-14; 2 Timothy 2:3-7. Timothy, Titus and Philip were evangelists (preachers).

- d. Pastors (shepherds) were also called elders (presbyters) or bishops (overseers) - Acts 20:17,28,29; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Philippians 1:1. In other words, pastors, elders or bishops were the same men. A pastor in those days was not what we think of when we use the word today; he was one of several men who together led the local church. Every local church had its own pastors/elders/overseers (plural) - Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:17; 15:2,4. Therefore the elders of a local church had no authority in any other local church. All the elders of a local church were equal in authority during the apostolic period. We need to understand these things in order to see the changes that came later. Elders were ordained by an evangelist - Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-22. They could not be ordained unless they had certain moral and spiritual qualifications.
  - e. Teachers were men who, though they may not have had the stature of an elder or evangelist, did know God's word and were qualified to help them teach those who needed teaching. Teachers are mentioned in Acts 13:1 and Ephesians 4:11.
  - f. Deacons (from the Greek word meaning "servants") took care of the more secular tasks in the church so those in the teaching offices could give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word - Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:8-13; Philippians 1:1. Since Timothy was given a list of the qualifications of deacons, it appears that deacons too were ordained by the evangelist. Though not all interpreters agree, many believe that there were also official deaconesses.
- 3) In the time of the apostles there was no person on earth who was considered head of the universal church. Christ was the head - Ephesians 1:22,23; 4:15.
- 4) In the apostolic period there was no place on earth that was considered the earthly headquarters of the church worldwide - compare John 4:19-24. Some have supposed that the meeting at Jerusalem to discuss the matter of circumcision for the Gentiles, Acts 15, is an example of rules being handed down from Jerusalem, as world headquarters, for the whole church. But a closer examination shows that this matter was discussed at Jerusalem, not because it was headquarters, but for two reasons: 1. The apostles were still at Jerusalem at this time, and the authority was in them, not in the place; and 2. the teachers who had disturbed the church on the question of circumcision had come from Jerusalem, which made it proper to discuss the matter back at Jerusalem. Had the apostles been elsewhere, or had the teachers originated elsewhere, the matter might have been discussed elsewhere. (This meeting in Jerusalem is not an authoritative precedent for the later ecumenical councils which met to make rules for the church, because the bishops at the later councils were not inspired apostles of Christ who had such authority. No person or council on earth today has authority to legislate for the church worldwide. Christ has already defined his will for the church through the apostles, and it is ours to obey them, not to meet and make new rules and doctrines. The scriptures are sufficient for the guidance of the church - 2 Timothy 3:16,17.)

Others have supposed that Jerusalem was headquarters because the Gentile churches sent contributions to Jerusalem to help the poor. But the contributions were sent there not because Jerusalem was headquarters, but because the poverty was there. Had it been somewhere else, the funds would have been sent elsewhere.

E. The life of the early Christians:

- 1) It was a transformed life - 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Righteousness, honesty and peace characterized their families, their work, their business, their citizenship, and their social relationships. Outsiders marveled at the good character of the Christians which contrasted so plainly with that of the world - Acts 2:47; 1 Peter 4:3,4; compare Matthew 5:13-16.
- 2) They turned away from the fear and service of occult spirits, from magic and sorcery, because they believed that Jesus had conquered all spiritual powers and authorities and was able to protect Christians as well as help them in every needed way - Acts 19:18-20; 13:6-12; 8:9-13,18-23; Ephesians 4:8-10; Colossians 2:14,15; Romans 8:31-39.
- 3) They were joyful people, although they were often needy or in trouble. Jesus was their joy - Acts 2:47; 5:41; 9:31; 16:23-25; Philippians 4:11-13; Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:22,23.
- 4) They were merciful, doing good to others as they had opportunity - Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-37; 11:27-30; Romans 15:26,27; Galatians 6:10.
- 5) They were obedient to the governing authorities in everything that did not conflict with the word of God - Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Titus 3:1,2; Matthew 22:16-21; Acts 4:19; 5:29.
- 6) They told others constantly about Christ and spread the gospel wherever they had opportunity - Acts 8:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15.
- 7) Although there were appointed leaders and servants, there was no clergy-laity distinction as was made later. All the Christians were to serve (minister) according to their gifts and opportunities. All Christians were priests - Ephesians 4:11,12; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6.

- F. The growth of the church in the time of the apostles: On the day of Pentecost, 3,000 people entered the church at Jerusalem - Acts 2:41-47. Soon the men alone in the church numbered 5,000 - Acts 4:4. Other scriptures describing further growth of the church in the book of Acts include 5:14; 6:7 8:1-4; 9:31; 11:19,20,24; 12:24; 13:48,49; 14:1; 16:5; 17:4,11,12; 18:8; 19:10,18-20; 21:20. First the church existed only at Jerusalem, but persecutions scattered the Jerusalem Christians and they planted local churches throughout Judea and Samaria - Acts 8. Then the seed of the gospel was cast into Africa through the conversion of the Ethiopian treasurer - Acts 8. Soon Christians were found in Damascus in Syria - Acts 9. The gospel began to be preached to Gentiles (non-Jews), and soon a local church was founded in Antioch of Syria - Acts 10,11. The acceptance of Gentiles into the church was one of the most momentous developments in the first century. It was accomplished

with great struggle, because Judaizing influences in the church wanted to require Gentiles to become Jews religiously (receive circumcision and keep the law of Moses) before they could be accepted as followers of God. But Paul and others persevered in teaching that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, not through the law. Only the love of Christ could have bridged the gulf of prejudice and hatred that separated Jews and Gentiles.

The church at Antioch sent Paul and his fellow workers on three great missionary tours. On Paul's first journey churches were founded in the province of Galatia, part of what is now Turkey - Acts 13,14. On the second journey, Paul revisited these churches, and then the gospel reached Europe for the first time as Paul crossed over from Asia to Greece and established churches in Macedonia and Achaia - Acts 16-18. On his third journey, Paul visited these churches again and also evangelized the province of Asia in what is now Western Turkey - Acts 18-21. Paul had a desire to preach in Spain after visiting Rome - Romans 15:28. He was imprisoned in Caesarea and then Rome because of false charges by the unbelieving Jews - Acts 21-28, but there is good reason to believe that he was released after two years in Rome and did preach in Spain and elsewhere, after which he was again imprisoned and was executed in Rome about 67 A. D. during the Neronian persecution.

There are traditions (how reliable we do not know) which say that all the apostles except John were martyred because of the gospel. According to tradition, Peter was crucified head downward in Rome about 67 A. D. Tradition says Bartholomew preached in Armenia, Thomas in India and Persia, James the Less in Egypt, Jude in Assyria, Matthew in Ethiopia, and John in Asia. The traditions say also that Andrew preached in Asia, to the Scythians (now Russia), and to the Greeks; Philip preached in Phrygia and Hierapolis; Thaddeus in Syria, Arabia and Mesopotamia. We know that John was imprisoned on the Island of Patmos in his old age around 96 A. D., probably after all the other apostles had died.

G. A chronology of the time of Jesus and the apostles:

Many of these dates are not exact, and some differences may be found with other chronologies. The symbol "/" is used for "between." The abbreviation "c." is for the Latin *circa*, meaning "near" or "about."

5/4 B.C.	Birth of Jesus
8 A.D.	Jesus visits Jerusalem with his parents.
25/26	John the Baptist begins to preach.
26	Jesus is baptized by John and begins his ministry.
29	Death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The beginning of the church on Pentecost in Jerusalem, Acts 2.
c. 31	Death of Stephen, and beginning of a great persecution of the church by the unbelieving Jews, Acts 7,8. The Christians are scattered. The gospel reaches all Judea and Samaria, and also reaches Africa (Ethiopia).
31/32	Saul is converted, Acts 9.
34/35	Saul (Paul) visits Jerusalem for the first time since his conversion, Acts 9; Galatians 1:15-21.
35/40	Cornelius, the first Gentile, is converted at Caesarea, Acts 10,11.
c. 42	Gentiles are received into the church at Antioch, Acts 11. Saul (Paul) leaves Tarsus and comes to Antioch to work with Barnabas.

- c. 44 The apostle James, brother of John, is killed by Herod, Acts 12.  
45-48 First missionary tour of Paul among the Gentiles, through the regions of Galatia, Acts 13,14.
- 50 Paul and Barnabas and brothers from Antioch meet with the apostles and the brothers at Jerusalem to discuss the matter of circumcision and the law of Moses, Acts 15; Galatians 2:1-10.
- 50/60 James, brother of the Lord, writes the book of James.  
50-53 The second tour of Paul among the Gentiles, reaches Greece, the beginning of the gospel among the Europeans - Acts 15-18. Paul writes 1 and 2 Thessalonians c. 52 A. D., after leaving Macedonia and entering Achaia.
- 54-58 The third missionary tour of Paul among the Gentiles - Acts 18-20. He teaches at Ephesus 54-57 A.D. and writes 1 Corinthians c. 57 A.D. He visits Macedonia and Achaia 57,58. He writes 2 Corinthians in Macedonia 57/58. He writes Galatians and Romans in Corinth 57/58.
- 58 Paul goes to Jerusalem with benevolent gifts from the Gentile churches, and is imprisoned by the Roman government - Acts 21-23.
- 58-60 Paul in prison at Caesarea - Acts 23-26.  
60/62 The gospels of Mark, Luke and Matthew are written.  
60-61 Paul goes to Rome as a prisoner, Acts 27.  
61-63 Paul in prison at Rome - Acts 28. He writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon.
- 63 Paul is released and preaches in Spain.  
64-68 The Emperor Nero persecutes the church.  
65-66 Paul visits the churches in Greece and Asia and writes 1 Timothy and Titus.
- 66/67 Paul is again imprisoned in Rome and writes 2 Timothy. He is killed by Emperor Nero c. 67 A. D.
- c. 67 Peter writes 1 and 2 Peter and dies soon after.  
c. 67 Jude, brother of the Lord, writes the book of Jude.  
70 The city of Jerusalem is destroyed by the Roman army. The temple of the Jews is destroyed and their sacrifices permanently stopped - see prophecies of Jesus in Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21.
- 80/90 The apostle John writes the gospel of John and the books of 1, 2, and 3 John.
- 90-96 The Roman emperor Domitian persecutes Christians. John is imprisoned on the Island of Patmos and writes the book of Revelation.
- 98 The apostle John, the last surviving apostle, dies.

## SNAPSHOTS: PROMINENT PERSONS AND EVENTS

**In the first century, two leaders stand out:**

### PETER

“The Big Fisherman,” a disciple of John the Baptist, was called by Jesus while fishing on Lake Galilee. Peter was bold and impetuous. Whatever he did, he did with his whole heart, though his humanity often caught up with him. Of all the disciples, he alone stepped out of the boat on the water, yet he lost his faith and sank. He was the first disciple to confess Jesus as Messiah. He was adamant that he would die rather than deny Jesus, yet under pressure he denied him three times. In the Jerusalem conference Peter stood up against the Judaizers who would have required Gentile converts to receive circumcision and become Jews religiously. Yet at Antioch Peter caved in and withdrew from eating with uncircumcised Gentile Christians. Paul had to withstand him for the sake of gospel freedom.

Peter wrote two letters in our New Testament, 1 and 2 Peter, late in his life. He may have also influenced Mark in the writing of Mark’s gospel.

Peter’s personality made him the strongest leader among the Twelve and his name is always first in the lists. His ministry and that of the Twelve was first of all to Jews, while Paul’s was to Gentiles. It would have been natural for two strong personalities like Peter and Paul to become rivals in the church. Yet they were able to put Christ ahead of their own ambition and give each other the right hand of fellowship. In his last letter Peter calls Paul his brother and affirms Paul’s writings as inspired scripture. Before he ascended, Jesus predicted that Peter would someday die for Christ. Tradition says Peter was crucified head down in about 67 AD during the Neronian persecution.

### PAUL

Before he became a Christian Paul was known as Saul of Tarsus. He was highly trained in the Jewish religion, first in the synagogue and then under Gamaliel, one of the greatest Jewish teachers of Paul’s time. Saul was a rising young leader in Judaism. He believed Jesus was an impostor and he zealously persecuted Christians until he was converted after Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9,22).

Christ appointed Paul apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jews), and Paul probably had more impact on the world than anyone other than Jesus. Paul gave up his promising future in Judaism and suffered extreme persecution and hardship because of his total dedication to Christ. This dedication made his gospel real to people and enabled him to convert thousands and establish churches in many countries. Paul made three major missionary journeys from Antioch to the Gentile nations (Acts 13ff). Paul wrote more letters (13) in our New Testament than any other writer.

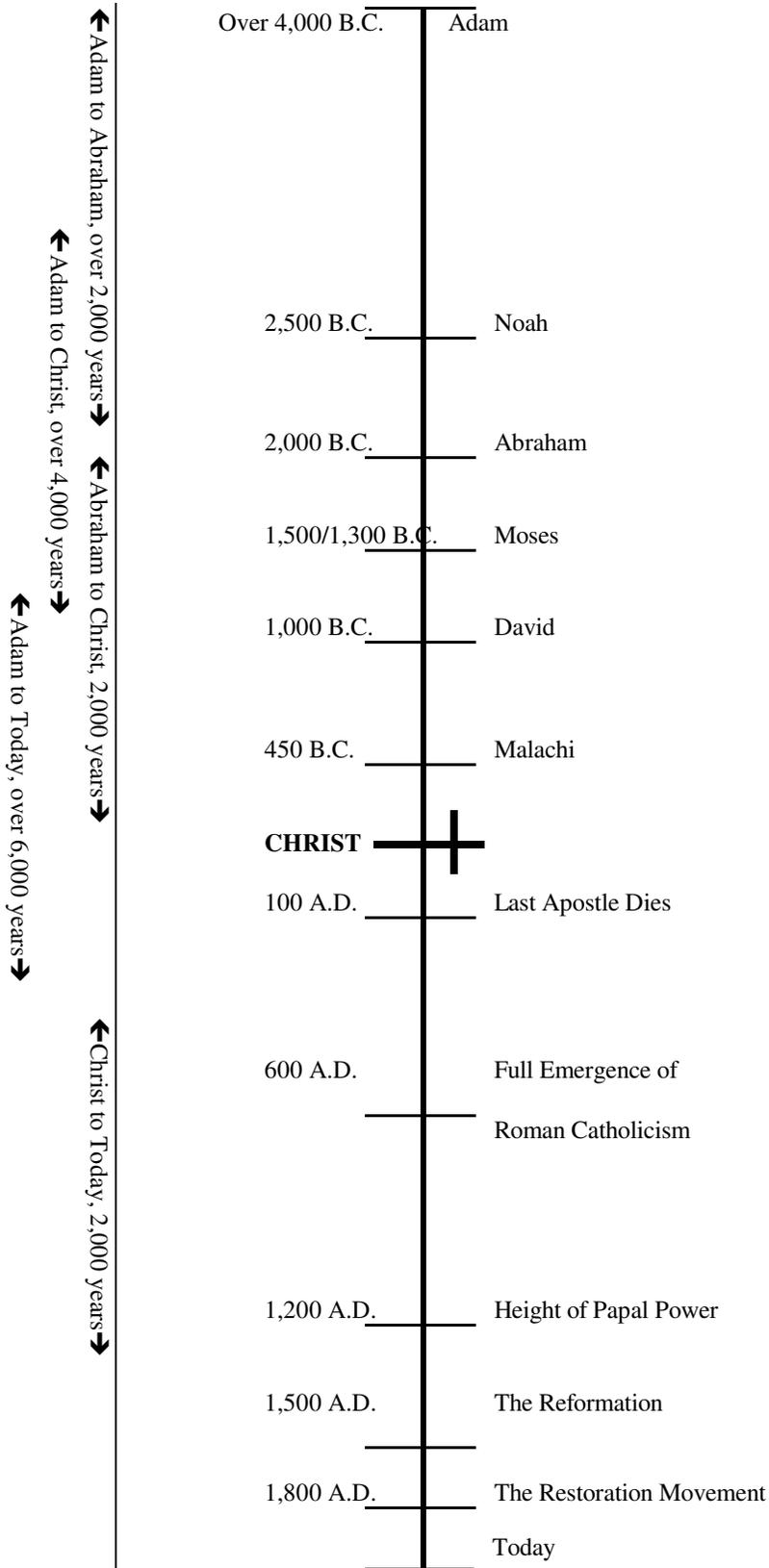
After his conversion, Paul was as passionate for Christ as he had been against him. He was also passionate for the freedom of the gospel and for the truth of salvation by grace through faith. Only someone like Paul could have withstood the pressure of the Judaizers

who wanted to pervert the gospel into another code of laws. Paul did this at great cost to himself and we owe him our faith today. Had the Judaizers prevailed, Christianity would have become just a sect of Judaism and would have soon passed away. Paul's passion for the core truths of the gospel came before friendships or human approval. He wrote the great love chapter (1 Corinthians 13) but when dealing with would-be destroyers of the gospel in the "circumcision party," he could say, "I wish they would go the whole way and mutilate themselves."

After his third missionary tour, Paul was attacked in Jerusalem by the Jews who opposed his work and was arrested by the Romans. In court Paul appealed his case to the emperor in Rome. He was imprisoned in Rome for about two years awaiting trial. We believe he was acquitted and released, preached in Spain and Asia Minor, was re-arrested and executed in the Neronian persecution in Rome about 67 A. D. Paul wrote his last letter, 2 Timothy, from prison just before his death.

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**World History Time Chart**

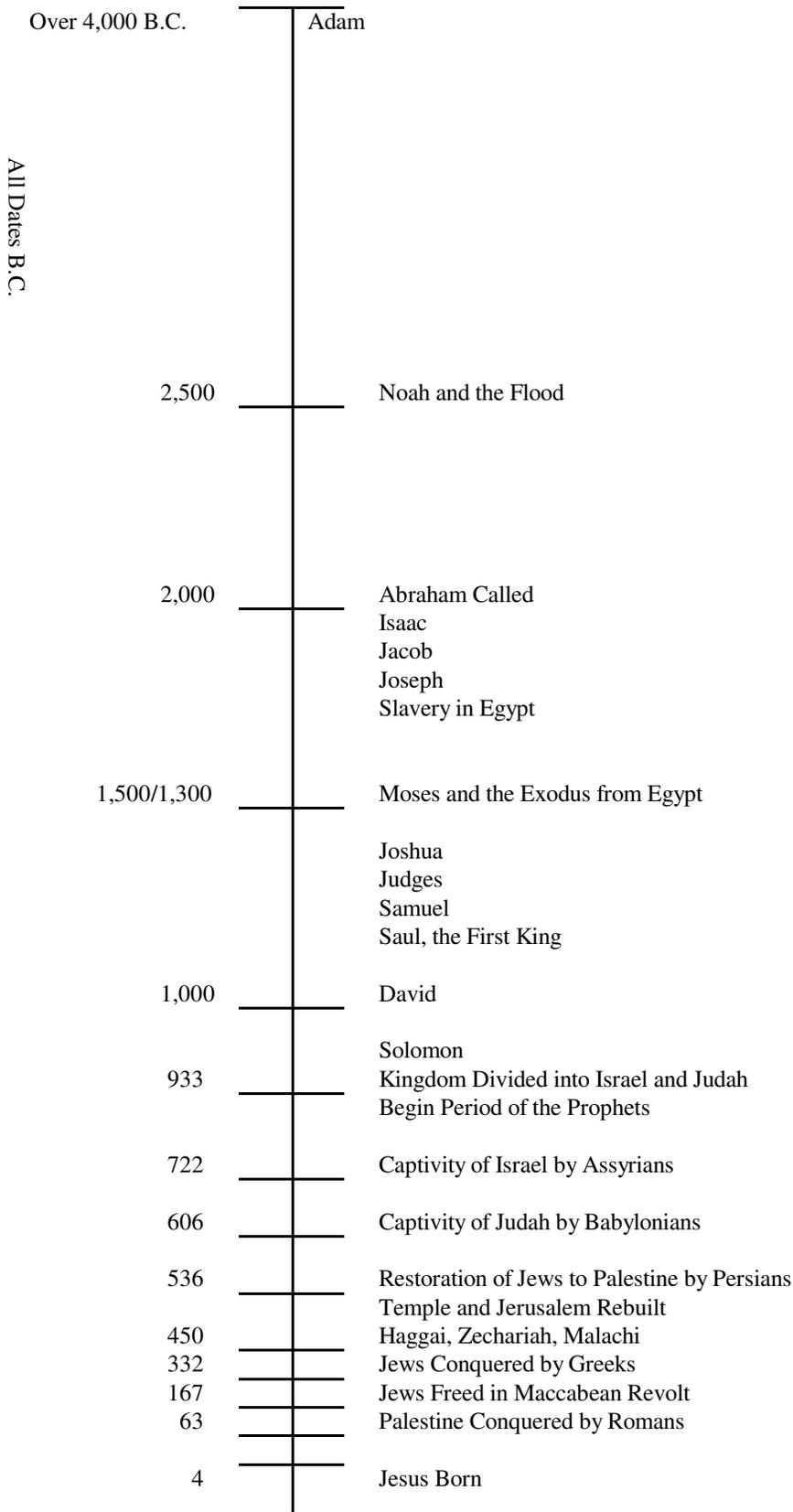


“B.C.” = “Before Christ”

“A.D.” = “Anno Domini”

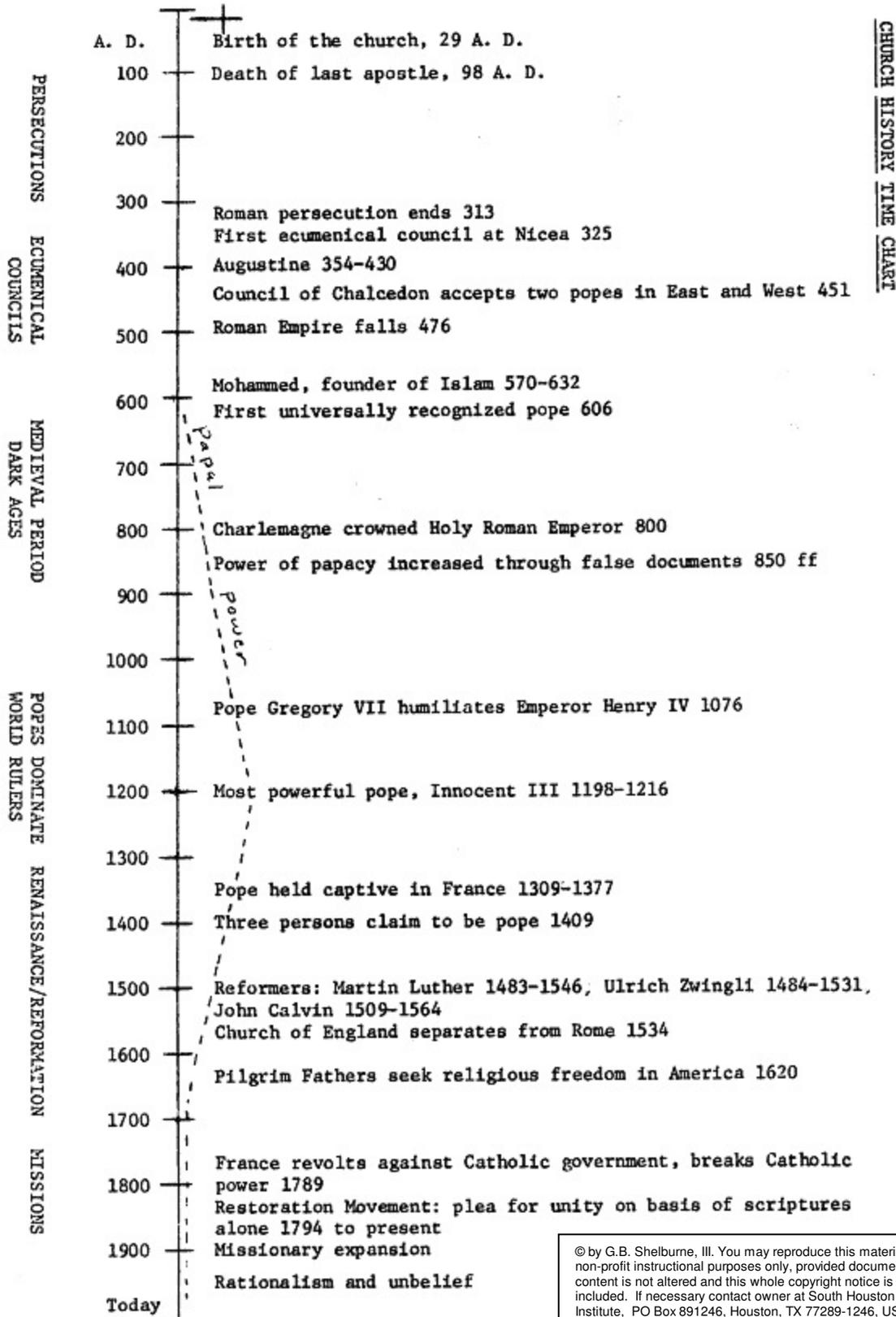
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**Old Testament and Jewish History Time Chart**



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