

Martyrs & Miracles

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A History of the Church of God

by Gregory Lee Dullum

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To my wonderful wife, Marie

Forward

When Jesus Christ walked on this earth early in the First Century, he began something that would not end. Notice it in the last part of Matthew 16:18: “I will build my church; and the gates of hell will not prevail against it” (*KJV*).

The New Testament is a chronicle of the beginnings of that church. During his short ministry of three and a half years, Christ groomed 12 disciples to be leaders in his church—as well as an additional 120 followers.

When the day of Pentecost came A.D. 31, these believers (with the exception of Matthias replacing Judas Iscariot—Christ’s betrayer) had gathered “with one accord in one place” to keep the holy day (Acts 2:1). At this time, God gave to his church—his very special people—a unique gift. He gave his church the power of his holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God transformed weak men into powerful preachers who proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom of God in powerful ways. So moving was Peter’s sermon on Pentecost that about 3,000 people were baptized that day (Acts 2:41)!

The remainder of the book of “The Acts of the Apostles” gives a brief history of the

beginnings of the church. The books which follow Acts are letters written by God’s apostles to his church.

The epistles do not appear in the order in which they were written. Some were written during the time period covered by Acts—A.D. 31 to about 66. The rest were written later. John wrote his as late as A.D. 97.

How did the New Testament end up in its current order?

“The order of the [Pauline] Epistles in our Bible is not the chronological order. They are arranged according to the Tridentine Council (which is almost identical with that established by the Council of Laodicea in 360). The Epistle to the Romans is given the place of honor at the head of the list; then follows Epistles addressed to communities according to the relative dignity of the church receiving the Epistle and the length of the message. After the letters to the churches are placed the Epistles addressed to individuals, and at the end is the Epistle to the Hebrews (placed between Thess. and Tim. in the Council of Laodicea), which was the last epistle placed in the Canon by the whole Church” (*A Companion to the New Testament* by John E. Steinmueller and Kathryn Sullivan, p. 161).

Goal No. 1

The first goal of this book is to return the epistles to their chronological order—the order in which they were written. This, I believe, gives new life to the words of those letters, when they are read in historical context.

Many other sources have been researched to give additional background to the people, places and customs we read about in the scriptures.

My goal is not to discuss every verse of every book in chronological order but to discuss highlights and important passages.

The importance of passages is determined by two things. First, any scripture giving specific details of what was happening in God's church at that time—a mention of names or places or events—are discussed.

Secondly, great detail is given to scriptures describing the beliefs of God's church. It is important to learn from the scriptures the name of God's church, on which day it worships—and which holy days it keeps. It is crucial to know how God's church believed when it began in order to trace its history through the labyrinth of false churches and their histories down to the present day.

Goal No. 2

The second goal of this book is to trace the history of the church Christ started from the time the Bible concludes (about A.D. 97) to the present day.

This is difficult to accomplish. Most of the history we have today about God's people through the ages was written by enemies of the church. They called God's people all kinds of names: Nazarenes, Paulicians, Waldenses, Lollards, Sabbatarians. But God's people always called themselves "the Church of God."

There are times when an entire group may not have belonged to the Church of God, but members of the true church can be found among the group.

If there was any doubt about whether groups or individuals were connected with

the Church of God, I gave the benefit of the doubt and included them in this book. I do express my reservations in these cases.

There are numerous resources which discuss true church history. But I have found none which are as complete as this book or which are in chronological order.

Goal No. 3

My third goal is to share some of the wealth of knowledge about church history I learned at Ambassador College and from sermons and Bible studies on this subject.

These were the three goals I set for this project when I began writing in the summer of 1975.

Dates

A caution about dates. Nearly every book I used in research had a date for a certain event which conflicted with the date given for that event by another source. This is especially true with dates of events recorded in the Bible. If dates conflicted, when did these things really happen? This was important to me, because I was putting events in chronological order.

The Church of God has established that Jesus Christ was born in the autumn of 4 B.C. He began preaching when he was about 30 and was crucified three and a half years later on Passover in the spring A.D. 31. The following Pentecost (June 17), the Church of God began.

Using this date as the beginning, we are able to flow some events into their proper order. The Roman Catholic Church believes erroneously that the church began A.D. 33. (Perhaps the *Catholic* church did begin then, but God's church began two years earlier!) Most scholarship is based on Catholic dates and therefore are said to have occurred as much as two years after the date they most likely occurred.

I have used the best research available to me—often comparing dates listed in various sources—and have selected dates I feel are accurate and appropriate for the events.

I could have given a two-year range of dates for events and thus help ensure my accuracy. But I think using a range of dates (such as A.D. 65-67) can confuse the reader and defeats the purpose of this book—to put the history of the church in chronological order. So I have selected one date—even to the season if possible—as the most likely date for the event. And I wish here to caution the reader that most dates in this book could be off by a year or so in either direction, though I believe them to be accurate.

Authorship

As I discuss the epistles, I have written from the physical point of view that it was the apostle (or his amanuensis) who actually penned the letter.

I seldom discuss the important point that it was God who inspired the apostle to write, though I know this to be true. I also seldom have described how these letters are a message from God to us today—which, indeed, they are!

But for the purpose of this book I have used mainly the view of physical history, that of physical men writing letters to actual churches or ministers.

Translations

And now a word about the Bible translations

used in this book. The book of Acts and many of Paul's epistles lose their vitality when read in the old English of 1611 King James. If I were to begin this book today I probably would use the *New King James Version* in most cases.

But when I began in 1975, the *New King James* was non-existent. There were several modern translations available but I chose *Today's English Version*. The translators of this version strove to put the Bible in modern vernacular. I wanted to bring the story of God's church to life, so we could picture ourselves walking the streets of Joppa with Peter or shipwrecked on Malta with Paul.

There are a few instances where other translations render a verse more correctly or in a manner that is more dramatic or sounds better because we have heard it repeated in that version more often. In those cases I have used other translations. But unless otherwise noted I have used *Today's English Version (Good News for Modern Man or Good News Bible)*.

With all this preliminary information out of the way, we are now ready to begin a study of one of the most exciting histories ever recorded—a history of martyrs and miracles, of prosperity, preachings and persecutions, of ideology and intrigue—the history of a small church, persecuted through the ages, led by Jesus Christ—the dynamic story of the Church of God.

