

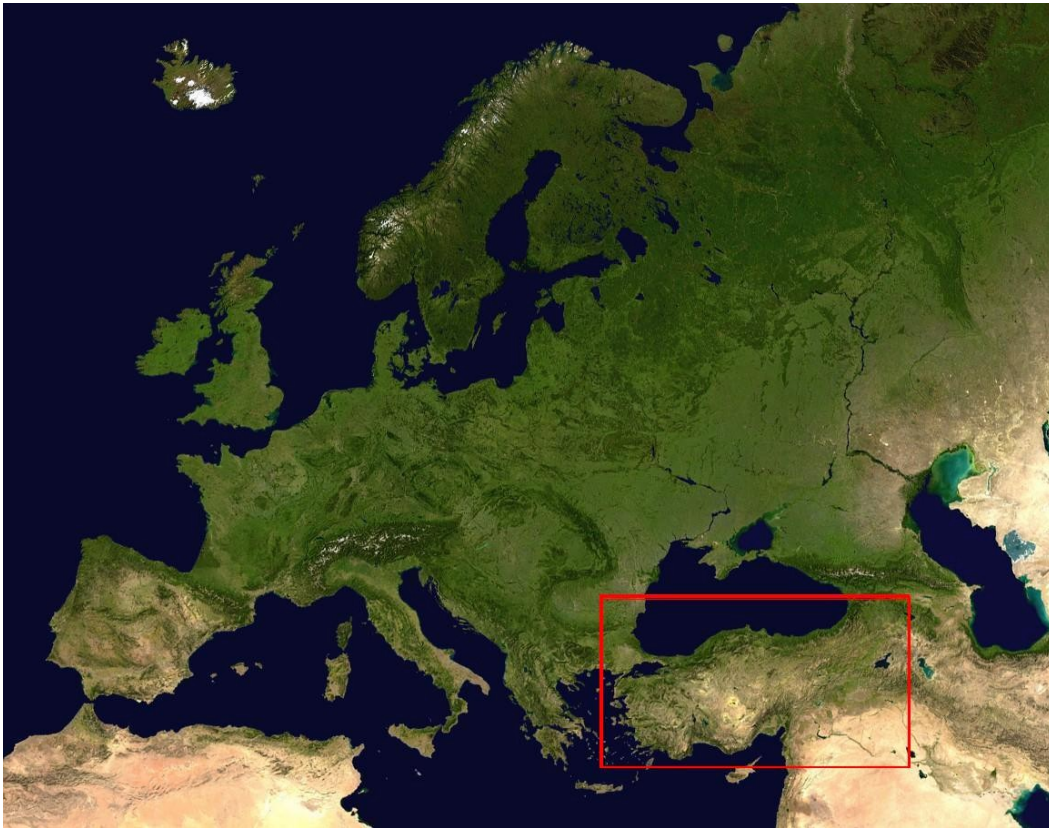
HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

(Young's Bible Dictionary for Scholarship and clarity by Biblical Archaeological Review)

The Book of Revelation is the last book of the Bible. Indications in the book itself and in early Christian tradition show that it was written by the Apostle John on the island of Patmos on the coast of Asia Minor after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The book records a series of visions which Jesus Christ gave to John through an angel. The book is both a revelation from Jesus Christ and a revelation of Jesus Christ.

The seven churches of Asia Minor were established during Paul's ministry about the years 50-56 when all Asia heard the Gospel. Acts 19:10 (KJV): And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. Paul's work followed by John's ministry after the fall of Jerusalem, established these strong churches and helps us to understand the church history of the following centuries. The early church councils took place in Asia Minor, and some of the best recorded events of early church history are linked to people and places of Asia Minor. Papias of Hierapolis and Polcarp of Smyrna appear in the first age following the Apostles.

ASIA MINOR



What do the seven churches in Revelation stand for?

Recommended Resource: The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting by Colin Hemer

The seven churches described in Revelation 2-3 are seven literal churches at the time that John the apostle was writing Revelation. Though they were literal churches in that time, there is also spiritual significance for churches and believers today. The first purpose of the letters was to communicate with the literal churches and meet their needs at that time. The second purpose is to reveal seven different types of individuals/churches throughout history and instruct them in God's truth.

A possible third purpose is to use the seven churches to foreshadow seven different periods in the history of the Church. The problem with this view is that each of the seven churches describes issues that could fit the Church in any time in its history. So, although there may be some truth to the seven churches representing seven eras, there is far too much speculation in this regard. Our focus should be on what message God is giving us through the seven churches. The seven churches are

- (1) Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7) - the church that had forsaken its first love (2:4).
- (2) Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11) - the church that would suffer persecution (2:10).
- (3) Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17) - the church that needed to repent (2:16).
- (4) Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29) - the church that had a false prophetess (2:20).
- (5) Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6) - the church that had fallen asleep (3:2).
- (6) Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13) - the church that had endured patiently (3:10).
- (7) Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22) - the church with the lukewarm faith (3:16).

Question: "What was Jesus' message to the church in Revelation?"

Answer: Revelation 2 begins a series of brief letters to seven churches that existed during the apostle John's time in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Each of these messages includes information apropos to each church, and from these messages we can draw lessons applicable to our own lives today. The first letter is to the church in Ephesus. Ephesus was a city on the western coast of Asia Minor, near the mouth of the Cayster River. The city was famous for its temple of Diana (or Artemis, Acts 19:27), and pilgrims came to Ephesus from all over the Mediterranean world to worship the goddess.

The first thing to note in this letter to the Ephesian church is that the message is from the Lord Jesus Christ: "To the angel [or messenger] of the church in Ephesus . . ." (Revelation 2:1). This is not John's message to the Ephesian believers; it is a message from the Lord, the One "who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands." The lampstands are the churches themselves, set as lights in a dark world; the stars are the pastors of the churches, held in God's hand.

Jesus affirms the Ephesians' positive actions: "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary" (Revelation 2:2-3). The Ephesian church was a hard-working group of believers full of fortitude. Also to their credit, they were gate-keepers of the truth and did not compromise with evildoers, and they showed patient endurance in bearing up under hardship.

However, Jesus also notes their shortcoming: "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love" (Revelation 2:4). They were hard working, but they no longer had the same passion for Christ as when they first believed. Their work was no longer motivated by love.

Jesus called the Ephesians to repent: "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first" (Revelation 2:5). In this case, the corrective was to remember the heights of their former love, repent (change their mind about their current status), and return to their previous way of doing things. It was time for revival in the church.

Jesus warns His church of impending judgment if they did not repent: "I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" (Revelation 2:5b). In other words, their punishment would be the disbanding or destruction of the Ephesian church. The light in Ephesus would go out.

Jesus adds another commendation concerning doctrinal purity: "But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate" (Revelation 2:6). We don't know much about the Nicolaitans and their doctrine, except that it was heretical. Irenaeus, an early church father in Lyons (modern-day France), wrote that the Nicolaitans promoted fornication and a compromising position on eating food sacrificed to idols, leading many into an unrestrained, carnal lifestyle.

Jesus then promises a blessing to those who heed the word: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7). The "tree of life" and the "paradise of God" refer to the new heavens and new earth, discussed in Revelation 21–22. Those who conquer, or the "overcomers," are simply believers (1 John 5:4-5). The Ephesian believers could look forward to the future glory of eternity with the Lord.

Like the Ephesian church, we can easily fall prey to a cold, mechanical observance of religion. Like the Ephesians, many tend to focus solely on doctrinal purity and hard work, to the exclusion of true love for Christ. As this letter shows, no amount of zeal for the truth or moral rectitude can replace a heart full of love for Jesus (see John 14:21, 23; 1 Corinthians 16:22).

Question: "What was Jesus' message to the church in Smyrna in Revelation?"

Answer: Smyrna was a large, important city on the western coast of Asia Minor, famed for its schools of medicine and science. The words of Jesus to the church in Smyrna in Revelation 2:8-11 offer insight into the life of a first-century congregation, and there are many applications for today's believers.

The message was from the Lord Jesus Christ: "These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again" (Revelation 2:8). The identity of the first and the last and the resurrected one could only be Jesus Christ (see Revelation 22:13).

Jesus starts by acknowledging their trials: "I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9). In their physical poverty, however, the church of Smyrna was "rich"; that is, they had spiritual wealth that no one could take away (Matthew 6:20).

As for the identity of the "synagogue of Satan," there are a couple of views. One is that this was a group of Gentiles who called themselves "Jews" (i.e., the chosen people of God). Instead of following Judaism, however, these self-proclaimed "people of God" worshiped the Roman emperor and spoke out against the Christians in Smyrna.

Another view is that the "synagogue of Satan" was a group of physical Jews who followed tradition and the Mosaic Law yet in reality did not know God. They were "not" Jews in the sense that they did not have the faith of their father Abraham (Luke 3:8; John 8:40), and they were "of Satan" in that they had rejected Jesus Christ (John 8:44). Jesus dealt with many such religious leaders, as did the apostle Paul (Matthew 23; Acts 18:6). In fact, Paul differentiates "true" (spiritual) Jews from those who can only claim a physical connection to Abraham: "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" (Romans 2:28-29).

Adding weight to the latter view is the fact that Polycarp was martyred in Smyrna around A.D. 155. At Polycarp's trial, the unbelieving Jews of Smyrna joined with the pagans in condemning him to death. Eusebius writes that "the Jews, being especially zealous . . . ran to procure fuel" for the burning (The Ecclesiastical History 4:15).

After commending the church in Smyrna for their spiritual victories, Jesus warned of coming persecution: "You are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days" (Revelation 2:10). Some of the church members would be imprisoned, and this wave of persecution would last for ten days. However, Jesus gives hope to His church: "Do not be afraid," He says. The Smyrnan believers would have the courage to face the trial (Matthew 5:11-12).

Jesus calls them to remain faithful in their suffering: "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). Here, a specific crown is mentioned for those who die as a result of suffering for Christ. This same "martyr's crown" is also mentioned in James 1:12: "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."

Jesus makes a final promise to the believers in Smyrna: "He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death" (Revelation 2:11). The overcomers, or "conquerors," refer to all believers (1 John 5:4-5). The second death is a reference to the final judgment of the wicked (Revelation 20:6, 14; 21:8). Believers will not be hurt "at all" by that judgment; their sin was judged at the cross, and, in Christ, there is no more condemnation (Romans 8:1).

Question: "What was Jesus' message to the church in Pergamum in Revelation?"

Answer: Revelation 2:12-17 continues with the third of seven messages to the churches of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) during the apostle John's time. Each of these messages includes a specific word to a specific church, but there are also lessons applicable to the lives of believers today. This third letter is to the believers in Pergamum (or Pergamos), which was a beautiful and art-filled city in the province of Asia built along two tributaries of the Caicus River. Pergamum was a center for the worship of Dionysus, Zeus, and other pagan gods.

The message to the Pergamene church was from the Lord Jesus Christ, specifically addressed to the "angel" (or "messenger") of the church: "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword'" (Revelation 2:12). This was not John's message to the believers at Pergamum; it was a message from Jesus Christ. The depiction of Jesus holding a sharp, two-edged sword refers to the Lord's readiness to bring judgment (cf. Revelation 1:16).

First, Jesus affirms the church's positive actions: "I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives" (Revelation 2:13). The Pergamene believers lived in a difficult place, surrounded by pagan influences, yet they held fast to Christ's name and did not deny Him during difficult times.

One Christian in Pergamum named Antipas is mentioned as a "faithful witness." Church tradition says that Antipas was a physician suspected of secretly propagating Christianity. The Aesculapians (members of the medical guild) accused Antipas of disloyalty to Caesar. Upon being condemned to death, Antipas was placed inside a copper bull, which was then heated over a fire until it was red-hot.

The church was not perfect, however, and Jesus took note of their sin: "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (Revelation 2:14-15). The "teaching of Balaam" is explained in the context, as Christians were eating food that had been sacrificed to idols (religious compromise) and committing sexual immorality (moral compromise). The original Balaam's deceitful work is described in Numbers 25:1-3 and Numbers 31:15-16. The Nicolaitans are mentioned only in this letter and in the letter to the Ephesian church (Revelation 2:6). They were likely a group similar to those who held the teachings of Balaam, though the exact nature of their doctrine and practice is unknown.

Jesus then issues a clarion call to repent of their sin: "Repent therefore!" (Revelation 2:16). Our Lord hates religious and moral compromise. He calls His people to live differently.

Jesus notes the judgment that would take place if the church of Pergamum did not repent: "I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (Revelation 2:16b). The Nicolaitans and those who were teaching Balaam's error would be destroyed, along with their followers, from the congregation at Pergamum. Jesus desires purity among His people, and we have a responsibility to remove false teachers from the church.

Jesus makes a final promise to the believers in Pergamum: "To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it" (Revelation 2:17). The three blessings are hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name. The precise explanation of these three items is disputed; however, all three blessings must concern the believer's victorious reign with Christ, consistent with the blessings bestowed on the other six churches of Revelation 2-3. The "hidden manna" is likely an allusion to the manna hidden in the Ark of the Covenant, representative of God's faithful presence and sustenance. The "white stone" could be a reference to the stones used for entrance into temple events in ancient times or to one of the stones on the high priest's breastplate (Exodus 28:21), although the exact meaning of the stone is uncertain.

Question: "What was Jesus' message to the church in Thyatira in Revelation?"

Answer: In Revelation 2:18-29 Jesus sends His message to the church of Thyatira. Thyatira was a wealthy town on the Lycus River in the Roman province of Asia (modern-day Turkey).

The message was from the Lord Jesus Christ through an angel (or "messenger"): "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write . . ." (Revelation 2:18). This was not John's message to the Thyatiran believers; it was a message from the Lord. The description at the end of verse 18 verifies the author of this message is Jesus Christ: "The words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze." This description removes any doubt of the identity of the One giving the message.

After identifying Himself, Jesus affirms the church's positive actions: "I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first" (Revelation 2:19). Five qualities are listed: 1) love, 2) faith, 3) service, 4) patient endurance, and 5) greater works.

Next, Jesus notes their sin: "Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols" (Revelation 2:20). Apparently, a false prophetess was leading believers into compromise. The church was engaging in sexual immorality and dabbling in idolatry. It is possible that "Jezebel" was her real name, but it is more likely the name was a metaphorical reference to the Jezebel of the Old Testament—another idolatrous woman who opposed God's ways. Rather than rebuke this false teacher and send her out of the church, the believers in Thyatira were allowing her to continue her deception.

Jesus pronounces judgment on this "Jezebel" and calls the church of Thyatira to repent of their sin: "I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead" (Revelation 2:22-23).

Then Jesus encourages those who had remained faithful: "Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come" (Revelation 2:24-25). The faithful believers did not fall into Satan's trap, and they only needed to remain faithful until Christ's return.

Jesus lists His promises to the believers in Thyatira: "To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star" (Revelation 2:26-28). These blessings would include 1) authority over the nations, 2) victory over all enemies, and 3) the morning star. This morning star is Jesus Himself, as Revelation 22:16 reveals. Jesus will give Himself to His church, and they will fellowship together forever.

Question: "What was Jesus' message to the church in Sardis in Revelation?"

Answer: Revelation 2 begins a series of brief letters to seven churches in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) that existed during the apostle John's time. Each of these messages includes specific information for each church, and there are lessons in each letter for believers today. The fifth letter is to the church in Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6). Sardis was one of the oldest and best defended cities in the region and the wealthy capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia.

The message to Sardis is from the Lord Jesus Christ through an angel or messenger (possibly a reference to the pastor): "To the angel of the church in Sardis write . . ." (Revelation 3:1). This was not John's message to the church at Sardis; it was a message from the Lord. The description at the end of verse 1 further verifies the author: "These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars." Only Jesus has the seven spirits (or "seven-fold Spirit," meaning the complete or perfect Spirit of God), and only Jesus holds the seven stars, i.e., the seven angels (or pastors) of the seven churches (Revelation 1:20).

Jesus quickly and clearly condemns the lifeless state of the Sardian church: "I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead" (Revelation 3:2). This church may have had a good reputation, but they were spiritually lifeless. In other words, the church was filled with unsaved people going through the motions of religion. There were many tares among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30).

Jesus then calls them to repent of their sin: "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you received and heard; obey it, and repent" (Revelation 3:2-3a). To "wake up" means to start paying attention to their need of salvation, to stop being careless about their heart's condition before God.

Jesus notes the judgment that would take place if they did not repent: "If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you" (Revelation 3:3b). A dead church, and one unrepentant in its deadness, will be disciplined by Jesus Himself.

After the warning, Jesus encourages those in Sardis who had remained faithful: "Yet you have still a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy" (Revelation 3:4). The faithful remnant had not soiled their garments (participated in sin). They are "worthy." The idea of walking worthily is also found in Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10; and 1 Thessalonians 2:12. To be "worthy" is to "match up" with something—the profession of faith in the mouth matches the reality of faith in the heart. The faithful ones are promised to walk with Jesus in white (see Matthew 22:11-12; Revelation 19:8).

Jesus makes a final promise to the believers in Sardis: "He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels" (Revelation 3:5). The one who "overcomes" is anyone who is born again (1 John 5:4). The overcomer will receive a white garment (a token of righteousness), he will never have his name removed from the book of life (a promise of eternal security), and he will be confessed by Jesus in heaven (cf. Luke 12:8).

Question: "What was Jesus' message to the church in Philadelphia in Revelation?"

Answer: Revelation 3:7-13 records Christ's message to the sixth of the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2-3. The Philadelphian church is the recipient of this letter. Philadelphia was a city in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) on the Imperial Post Road, an important trade route.

The message is from the Lord Jesus Christ through an angel or "messenger" (likely a reference to the pastor): "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write . . ." (Revelation 3:7). This was not John's personal message to these believers; it was a message from the Lord, who identifies Himself as "him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open." This description of Jesus emphasizes His holiness, His sovereignty, and His authority. The reference to the key of David is an allusion to the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 22:22. Jesus is the one who opens and shuts, and no one can say Him nay.

Jesus affirms the church's positive actions: "I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name" (Revelation 3:8). The church of Philadelphia was weak in some respects, yet they had remained faithful in the face of trial. Because of this, the Lord promises them an "open door" of blessing.

Jesus' letter then condemns the enemies of the Philadelphian believers: "I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you" (Revelation 3:9). Those who persecuted the believers (the persecutors were religious hypocrites in this case) would one day realize Christ loves His children. The church of Philadelphia would be victorious over its enemies.

Jesus encourages the Philadelphian believers regarding His future coming: "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (Revelation 3:10-11). The church's faithful endurance would serve as a blessing. Jesus would take them to be with Him before the coming tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). He also exhorts them to remain faithful, because this would lead to rewards in the afterlife. Based on this and other passages, many Bible interpreters conclude that the rapture is an event distinct from the second coming of Christ. The fact that the Philadelphians are promised to be preserved from the time of the tribulation corresponds with the pretribulational view of the rapture.

Jesus provides a final promise to the believers in Philadelphia and to all believers: "Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down from out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name" (Revelation 3:12). Professor Thomas Constable notes, "God promised that He will not just honor overcomers by erecting a pillar in their name in heaven, as was the custom in Philadelphia. He will make them pillars in the spiritual temple of God, the New Jerusalem (21:22; cf. Gal. 2:9; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-10)." (Source: Thomas Constable, Notes on Revelation at <http://soniclight.org/constable/notes/pdf/revelation.pdf>.)

So, those who struggled with weakness Jesus makes everlasting pillars in the house of God. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). Jesus' words of comfort certainly would have been a blessing to the Philadelphians who had faithfully stood for Christ in their pagan culture. His words continue to serve as an encouragement to faithful believers today.

Question: "What was Jesus' message to the church in Laodicea in Revelation?"

Answer: The seventh and final letter to the churches of ancient Asia Minor is to the church in the city of Laodicea. This last message is found in Revelation 3:14-22. Laodicea was a wealthy, industrious city in the province of Phrygia in the Lycos Valley.

The message is from the Lord Jesus Christ via an angel or messenger (likely a reference to the church's pastor): "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write . . ." (Revelation 3:14). This was not simply John's message to those in Laodicea; it was a message from the Lord. Jesus identifies Himself thus: "The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation." These titles emphasize the Lord's faithfulness, sovereignty, and power to bring all things to their proper completion (the "Amen").

In contrast to the other six churches, the Laodicean church has nothing to commend it. Jesus begins the message with condemnation: "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Revelation 3:15-17). Jesus emphasizes their "lukewarm," apathetic nature three times. As a result of their ambivalence to spiritual things, Jesus would have nothing to do with them. He would "spit them out," as the people of Laodicea would spit out the tepid water that flowed from the underground aqueducts to their city. With their apathy came a spiritual blindness; they claimed to be rich, blessed and self-sufficient. Perhaps they were rich in material things. But, spiritually, the Laodiceans were in a wretched, pitiful condition, made all the worse in that they could not see their need. This was a church filled with self-deceived hypocrites.

Jesus calls the Laodicean church to repent of its sin: "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see" (Revelation 3:18). Their material wealth had no eternal benefit, so Jesus commands them to come to Him for true, spiritual riches (see Isaiah 55:1-2). Only Christ can supply an everlasting inheritance, clothe us in righteousness, and heal our spiritual blindness.

Jesus then notes His concern for His church in Laodicea: "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:19-20). His rebuke is not born of animosity but of love. "The Lord disciplines those he loves" (Hebrews 12:6). The desired response to God's reproof was zealous change and true repentance.

Verse 20 is often used as an evangelistic appeal, yet its original context communicates Christ's desire for fellowship with His lukewarm church in Laodicea. The church is nominally Christian, but Christ Himself has been locked out. Rather than turn His back on them, He knocks, seeking someone to acknowledge the church's need and open the door. If they would repent, Jesus would come in and take His rightful place in the church. He would share a meal with them, a Middle Eastern word picture speaking of closeness of relationship.

Jesus then makes a promise to the believers in Laodicea: "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Revelation 3:21). The "overcomer" refers to any believer, and the promise is that he will share Christ's future kingdom.

In summary, the church at Laodicea had become apathetic in their love for Christ. They were allowing "the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things [to] come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful" (Mark 4:19). Christ called them to repent and live zealously for Him, to "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). The Lord Jesus issues the same call to those who say they follow Him today.

Question: "Who were the early church fathers?"

Answer: The early church fathers fall into three basic categories: apostolic fathers, ante-Nicene church fathers, and post-Nicene church fathers. The apostolic church fathers were the ones like Clement of Rome who were contemporaries of the apostles and were probably taught by them, carrying on the tradition and teaching of the apostles themselves. Linus, mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:21, became the bishop of Rome, and Clement took over from Linus. Both Linus and Clement of Rome, therefore, are considered apostolic fathers. However, there appear to be no writings of Linus that have survived, while many of the writings of Clement of Rome survived. The apostolic fathers would have largely passed from the scene by the beginning of the second century, except for those few who might have been disciples of John, such as Polycarp. The tradition is that the apostle John died in Ephesus around A.D. 98.

The ante-Nicene fathers were those who came after the apostolic fathers and before the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. Such individuals as Irenaeus, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr are ante-Nicene fathers.

The post-Nicene church fathers are those who came after the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. These are such noted men as Augustine, bishop of Hippo, who is often called the father of the [Roman Catholic] Church because of his great work in Church doctrine; Chrysostom, called the "golden-mouthed" for his excellent oratorical skills; and Eusebius, who wrote a history of the church from the birth of Jesus to A.D. 324, one year before the Council of Nicea. He is included in the post-Nicene era since he did not write his history until after the Council of Nicea was held. Other post-Nicene fathers were Jerome, who translated the Greek New Testament into the Latin Vulgate, and Ambrose, who was largely responsible for Augustine's conversion to Christianity.

So, what did the early church fathers believe? The apostolic fathers were very concerned about the proclamation of the gospel being just as the apostles themselves proclaimed it. They were not interested in formulating theological doctrine, for the gospel they had learned from the apostles was quite sufficient for them. The apostolic fathers were as zealous as the apostles themselves in rooting out and exposing any false doctrine that cropped up in the early church. The orthodoxy of the message was preserved by the apostolic fathers' desire to stay true to the gospel taught to them by the apostles.

The ante-Nicene fathers also tried to stay true to the gospel, but they had an additional worry. Now there were several spurious writings claiming to have the same weight as the established writings of Paul, Peter, and Luke. The reason for these spurious documents was evident. If the body of Christ could be persuaded to receive a false document, then error would creep into the church. So the ante-Nicene fathers spent a lot of their time defending the Christian faith from false doctrine, and this led to the beginnings of the formation of accepted church doctrine.

The post-Nicene fathers carried out the mission of defending the gospel against all kinds of heresies, so more and more the post-Nicene fathers grew interested in methods of defending the gospel and less interested in transmitting the gospel in a true and pure form. Thus, they began to fall away from the orthodoxy which was the hallmark of the apostolic fathers. This was the age of the theologian and endless discussion on arcane topics such as "how many angels can dance on the head of a pin."

The early church fathers are an example to us of what it means to follow Christ and defend the truth. None of the early church fathers were perfect, just as none of us are perfect. Some of the early church fathers held beliefs that most Christians today consider to be incorrect. What eventually developed into Roman Catholic theology had its roots in the writings of the post-Nicene fathers. While we can gain knowledge and insight by studying the early church fathers, ultimately our faith must be in the Word of God, not in the writings of early Christian leaders. Only God's Word is the infallible guide for faith and practice.

Recommended Resource: Christianity Through the Centuries by Earle Cair

Question: "What is the origin of Christianity?"

Answer: "And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead . . . the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints . . . Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:18, 26-28).

Discussing the origin of Christianity requires the review of an intricate story spanning time and eternity. Instead of a simple beginning, we consider Christianity's origin from several points of view. Acts 2 records the birth of the church at Pentecost. This was indeed a Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16), because a harvest of about 3,000 souls took place on that day when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and disciples (Acts 2:1-41). Biblically, Christianity is not a building or religion but the church, or household of God. It is embodied in Christ and His people, individually and collectively. Before time began, the church was conceived in the mind of God. Then, "when the time had fully come" (Galatians 4:4), God sent His only son, "born of a woman, born under law" to be the church's true founder, foundation, and head (1 Corinthians 3:11). As the first of the chosen ones (1 Peter 2:6), Jesus, the anointed one (that is, the Christ) died as the perfect Passover lamb fifty days before the events of Acts 2. Before that, He prepared the apostles for three years, giving them the Father's Word and keeping them in His name (John 17:12, 14). After His resurrection He breathed into the apostles the breath of eternal life in the form of the Holy Spirit, who was to indwell them (John 20:22; cf. John 14:25-26). They became the seeds of the new church, which sprouted into thousands when the Holy Spirit came upon them, empowering them to witness, preach, and carry out the mission Jesus gave them. Rising from the dead, Jesus was the first fruits of God's Kingdom; "then, when he comes, those who belong to him will also rise, never to die again (John 11:25-26). Thus, Jesus is the one foundation and source of the church.

The Old Testament had prophesied that a "shoot" would come from the "stump" of Jesse (King David's father) and that this "branch" would bear fruit (Isaiah 11:1, 10). Jesus is that Messiah or Christ. He is the hope of Jews and Gentiles. "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him" (Romans 15:12; cf. Revelation 5:5; 22: 16). Peter learned that Jesus is not merely a human being, the Son of David, when God showed him that Jesus is "the Son of the living God." To this, Jesus added that He Himself is the Rock or foundation upon which He would build His church (Matthew 16:16-18; see also Isaiah 26:4). The building of the church upon Jesus, the Rock of Israel (Isaiah 30:29), is taught in 2 Corinthians 6:16 (see also Ephesians 2:21-22).

Some writers mention that the word for "church" in the original Greek is *ecclesia*, meaning "a called-out assembly" (ἐκκλησίαν – Matthew 16:18) and that the church is formed by the "elect" or chosen (Mark 13:20; Luke 18:7; Romans 8:33). Yes, the elect have been called out from the kingdom of darkness, but we have also been called into God's family as adopted children. "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Romans 8:16; cf. Ephesians 5:1, 8). We are chosen, but Jesus is the first of the chosen (1 Peter 2:6), and He lives in us as we live or abide in Him (John 8:31; 15:4-9).

Christians are individually in Christ even as the church as a whole is in Christ (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30). The mystery of Christ and the church is brought out in Paul's discussion of the mystery by which two become "one flesh" in marriage, in Ephesians 5. There the apostle writes that "this mystery is profound," referring to Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:32). The tense of the Greek word translated "mystery" (μυστήριον) is singular. This grammatical detail shows that in their unity Christ and the church are one mystery. They are not a mixture or compound; rather, their union is like that of a man and woman in holy matrimony who become "one flesh" or a new family unit without giving up their individuality (Genesis 2:24). In marriage a couple becomes legal "kin," even though they are not blood relatives as Adam and Eve were. Similarly, through Christ God legally adopts the chosen as children (Ephesians 1:5). Because of this, and because Christ lives in each member of the church, His spiritual body, He is our hope of glory (Colossians 1:18, 26-28). Christ's presence in Christians answers Jesus' prayer in John 17: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:20-21; see also John 17:11).

The connection between the words "church" and "Christianity" is old and complicated, but we can simply say that Christians do not go to church; rather, they are the church. Most disciples who first joined the growing church were Jews. Like Paul (Philippians 3:5; Romans 11:1), they considered themselves Israelites, descendants of Abraham, to whom belonged the covenants, the giving of the law, etc. (Romans 9:4-5). They acknowledged the Lord Jesus as Messiah and God but did not (at first) call themselves "Christians." At Antioch in the first century, outsiders first called the followers of the Christ "Christians" (Acts 11:26). They thought "Christ" was the proper name of the God whom they worshipped, not aware that "Christ" means "anointed" and that Jesus is the Christ. As for "church," some early Christian writers used this word to refer to the place where people worshipped (i.e., the church building). But in the New Testament, the word translated "church" refers to the "household of God." In Ephesians 2:19, the Greek word translated "household" is οἶκος. This plural form refers to the all those who belong to the immediate family of God, i.e., those who are spiritually family in the faith (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19). As members of this universal household, Christians have taken root and blossomed among the various peoples and in almost every language group in the world.

Now, let's look beyond history to reflect on the eternal origins of the church (i.e., "Christianity") in the mind of God. Even as God chose Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6; 26:18), He also elected the church in Christ "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). In eternity past, God willed that the elect would be saved and made part of His household by adoption. "He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will" (Ephesians 1:5). However, the church born on Pentecost has not yet realized its ultimate purpose in its development. The church is not yet the spotless bride of Christ (Revelation 19:6-8), in accord with God's purpose for it, as we read in Ephesians 1:4: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." The fulfillment of this prophetic purpose which God set forth in Christ (Romans 8:28; 9:11) "to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment" (Ephesians 1:10) does not depend on "... anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Timothy 1:9).

One reason the “visible” church is not perfect is because within its ranks there are false Christians. Jesus told the apostles that within the church there would be a mixture of “wheat and chaff,” genuine saints and secret, unrepentant, self-deceived sinners (hypocrites). Considering that Christ has not yet returned in power and glory (Matthew 26:64; Mark 13:26), and that the elect have not yet been revealed as God’s children (Romans 8:19; 1 John 3:2), the mystery of Christ and the church, kept secret for long ages (Romans 16:25), remains partially concealed. The unveiling of the church will not take place until the moment we are changed, as 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 says. The real hope for Christians is not that we will be immortal (the damned in hell will also be immortal, but they will be without Christ), but that Christ lives in us now (Colossians 1:28).

This brings us to a final thought about the church’s present hidden-ness and ultimate unveiling. We have been redeemed, we are no longer slaves to sin, and death no longer has dominion over us (Romans 6:5-9). Nevertheless, our “body of sin” or “body of death” (Romans 6:6; 7:24) has yet to be “brought to nothing.” We still await the resurrection and redemption of our sin-stained flesh. This will take place when the Lord returns for us. Then “we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is” (1 John 3:2). Then, our glorious, imperishable spiritual bodies will be revealed (Philippians 3:20-21), and we will no longer be burdened by what remains of the carnal or sinful mind. Thus, in a real sense, the church or Christianity in its perfection, as the undefiled and glorified bride of Christ, continues to wear a discrete veil, until she is called to heaven in glory at the marriage supper of the Lamb. This event is prophesied in Revelation 19:6-8, where we read, “Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: ‘Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.’ (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)”

Recommended Resource: Christianity Through the Centuries by Earle Cairns

Question: "What is the history of Christianity?"

Answer: The history of Christianity is really the history of Western civilization. Christianity has had an all-pervasive influence on society at large—art, language, politics, law, family life, calendar dates, music, and the very way we think have all been colored by Christian influence for nearly two millennia. The story of the church, therefore, is an important one to know.

History of Christianity - The Beginning of the Church

The church began 50 days after Jesus' resurrection (c. A.D. 30). Jesus had promised that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18), and with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), the church—ekklesia (the "called-out assembly")—officially began. Three thousand people responded to Peter's sermon that day and chose to follow Christ.

The initial converts to Christianity were Jews or proselytes to Judaism, and the church was centered in Jerusalem. Because of this, Christianity was seen at first as a Jewish sect, akin to the Pharisees, the Sadducees, or the Essenes. However, what the apostles preached was radically different from what other Jewish groups were teaching. Jesus was the Jewish Messiah (the anointed King) who had come to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17) and institute a new covenant based on His death (Mark 14:24). This message, with its charge that they had killed their own Messiah, infuriated many Jewish leaders, and some, like Saul of Tarsus, took action to stamp out "the Way" (Acts 9:1-2).

It is quite proper to say that Christianity has its roots in Judaism. The Old Testament laid the groundwork for the New, and it is impossible to fully understand Christianity without a working knowledge of the Old Testament (see the books of Matthew and Hebrews). The Old Testament explains the necessity of a Messiah, contains the history of the Messiah's people, and predicts the Messiah's coming. The New Testament, then, is all about the coming of Messiah and His work to save us from sin. In His life, Jesus fulfilled over 300 specific prophecies, proving that He was the One the Old Testament had anticipated.

History of Christianity - The Growth of the Early Church

Not long after Pentecost, the doors to the church were opened to non-Jews. The evangelist Philip preached to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5), and many of them believed in Christ. The apostle Peter preached to the Gentile household of Cornelius (Acts 10), and they, too, received the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul (the former persecutor of the church) spread the gospel all over the Greco-Roman world, reaching as far as Rome itself (Acts 28:16) and possibly all the way to Spain.

By A.D. 70, the year Jerusalem was destroyed, most of the books of the New Testament had been completed and were circulating among the churches. For the next 240 years, Christians were persecuted by Rome—sometimes at random, sometimes by government edict.

In the 2nd and 3rd centuries, the church leadership became more and more hierarchical as numbers increased. Several heresies were exposed and refuted during this time, and the New Testament canon was agreed upon. Persecution continued to intensify.

History of Christianity - The Rise of the Roman Church

In A.D. 312, the Roman Emperor Constantine claimed to have had a conversion experience. About 70 years later, during the reign of Theodosius, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Bishops were given places of honor in the government, and by A.D. 400, the terms "Roman" and "Christian" were virtually synonymous.

After Constantine, then, Christians were no longer persecuted. In time, it was the pagans who came under persecution unless they "converted" to Christianity. Such forced conversions led to many people entering the church without a true change of heart. The pagans brought with them their idols and the practices they were accustomed to, and the church changed; icons, elaborate architecture, pilgrimages, and the veneration of saints were added to the simplicity of early church worship. About this same time, some Christians retreated from Rome, choosing to live in isolation as monks, and infant baptism was introduced as a means of washing away original sin.

Through the next centuries, various church councils were held in an attempt to determine the church's official doctrine, to censure clerical abuses, and to make peace between warring factions. As the Roman Empire grew weaker, the church became more powerful, and many disagreements broke out between the churches in the West and those in the East. The Western (Latin) church, based in Rome, claimed apostolic authority over all other churches. The bishop of Rome had even begun calling himself the "Pope" (the Father). This did not sit well with the Eastern (Greek) church, based in Constantinople. Theological, political, procedural, and linguistic divides all contributed to the Great Schism in 1054, in which the Roman Catholic ("Universal") Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church excommunicated each other and broke all ties.

History of Christianity - The Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages in Europe, the Roman Catholic Church continued to hold power, with the popes claiming authority over all levels of life and living as kings. Corruption and greed in the church leadership was commonplace. From 1095 to 1204 the popes endorsed a series of bloody and expensive crusades in an effort to repel Muslim advances and liberate Jerusalem.

History of Christianity - The Reformation

Through the years, several individuals had tried to call attention to the theological, political, and human rights abuses of the Roman Church. All had been silenced in one way or another. But in 1517, a German monk named Martin Luther took a stand against the church, and everyone heard. With Luther came the Protestant Reformation, and the Middle Ages were brought to a close.

The Reformers, including Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, differed in many finer points of theology, but they were consistent in their emphasis on the Bible's supreme authority over church tradition and the fact that sinners are saved by grace through faith alone.

apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Although Catholicism made a comeback in Europe, and a series of wars between Protestants and Catholics ensued, the Reformation had successfully dismantled the power of the Roman Catholic Church and helped open the door to the modern age.

History of Christianity - The Age of Missions

From 1790 to 1900, the church showed an unprecedented interest in missionary work. Colonization had opened eyes to the need for missions, and industrialization had provided people with the financial ability to fund the missionaries. Missionaries went around the world preaching the gospel, and churches were established throughout the world.

History of Christianity - The Modern Church

Today, the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church have taken steps to mend their broken relationship, as have Catholics and Lutherans. The evangelical church is strongly independent and rooted firmly in Reformed theology. The church has also seen the rise of Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement, ecumenicalism, and various cults.

History of Christianity - What We Learn from Our History

If we learn nothing else from church history, we should at least recognize the importance of letting “the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly” (Colossians 3:16). Each of us is responsible to know what the Scripture says and to live by it. When the church forgets what the Bible teaches and ignores what Jesus taught, chaos reigns.

There are many churches today, but only one gospel. It is “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). May we be careful to preserve that faith and pass it on without alteration, and the Lord will continue to fulfill His promise to build His church.

Recommended Resource: Christianity Through the Centuries by Earle Cairns

Question: "What was early Christianity like?"

Answer: Christianity began roughly 2,000 years ago, shortly after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Acts 11:26b says, "It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians." "Christians" means "Christ's people." Early Christianity consisted of a group of loosely connected local bodies of believers who gathered together on a regular basis, usually in each other's homes to fellowship and worship together (Acts 16:15; 18:7; 21:8; Romans 16:5; Colossians 4:15). These churches generally had the organization of pastors, elders, and deacons within each individual congregation.

This early New Testament church lived communally and often shared resources such as food and money (Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:32-36). Their services consisted mainly of preaching (during which time they might also read letters from missionaries such as Paul) and the singing of songs. They took offerings to support the journeys of their missionaries, and they performed baptisms. Also, the early Christians celebrated the Lord's Supper each time they gathered together.

But, soon, early Christianity was challenged by Roman persecution. The majority of the persecution began with the great fire in Rome that destroyed much of the city and devastated the economy. In an attempt to absolve himself, the Roman Emperor Nero claimed it was the Christians who tried to destroy Rome and its pagan gods. From that point on, the Christians were blamed for many of the misfortunes befalling the Empire. Persecution and martyrdom was quick to follow. Because of this persecution, the early Christians were forced to meet in the catacombs, which were long, dark galleries under the city of Rome. There they continued their meetings, baptisms, and even burials for their dead. As a result of the persecution, many of the early Christians were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, expediting the cause of evangelism and fulfilling the Lord's commands to make disciples of all nations (Acts 8:1, 4-40; 11:19-26; Matthew 28:18-20).

Because early Christianity was not focused on the maintenance of a church building, endless programs, and technology, the people were able to concentrate on the study of God's Word, service and dedication to one another, hospitality, benevolence, and missions (Romans 1:8; 15:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8; Acts 13:1-26:32). While programs and technology can make some of these things easier, the early Christians had a pure, simplistic approach. Compared to the structured organization of the church today, the early church looked more like the informal settings of one of our Bible studies or small groups.

Both early Christianity and modern Christianity have good and bad characteristics, and neither can be idealized. The positives which characterized the early church—a passion for Christ and His Word and a strong love for one another—are what we should strive to emulate in the modern church.

Recommended Resource: Jesus Among Other gods by Ravi Zacharias

Question: "Which church is the true church?"

Answer: Which church—that is, which denomination of Christianity—is the “true church”? Which church is the one that God loves and cherishes and died for? Which church is His bride? The answer is that no visible church or denomination is the true church, because the bride of Christ is not an institution, but is instead a spiritual entity made up of those who have by grace through faith been brought into a close, intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8–9). Those people, no matter which building, denomination, or country they happen to be in, constitute the true church.

In the Bible, we see that the local (or visible) church is nothing more than a gathering of professing believers. In Paul’s letters, the word church is used in two different ways. There are many examples of the word church being used to simply refer to a group of professing believers who meet together on a regular basis (1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 8:1; 11:28). We see Paul’s concern, in his letters, for the individual churches in various cities along his missionary journey. But he also refers to a church that is invisible—a spiritual entity that has close fellowship with Christ, as close as a bride to her husband (Ephesians 5:25, 32), and of which He is the spiritual head (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 3:21). This church is made up of an unnamed, unspecified group of individuals (Philippians 3:6; 1 Timothy 3:5) that have Christ in common.

The word church is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning “a called-out assembly.” The word describes a group of people who have been called out of the world and set apart for the Lord, and it is always used, in its singular form, to describe a universal group of people who know Christ. The word *ekklesia*, when pluralized, is used to describe groups of believers who meet together. Interestingly enough, the word church is never used in the Bible to describe a building or organization.

It is easy to get ensnared by the idea that a particular denomination within Christianity is “the true church,” but this view is a misunderstanding of Scripture. When choosing a church to attend, it is important to remember that a gathering of believers should be a place where those who belong to the true church (the spiritual entity) feel at home. That is to say, a good local church will uphold the Word of God, honoring it and preaching faithfully, proclaim the gospel steadfastly, and feed and tend the sheep. A church that teaches heresy or engages in sin will eventually be very low on (or entirely bereft of) those people that belong to the true church—the sheep who hear the voice of the Shepherd and follow Him (John 10:27).

Members of the true church always enjoy agreement in and fellowship around Jesus Christ, as He is plainly revealed in His Word. This is what is referred to as Christian unity. Another common mistake is to believe that Christian unity is just a matter of agreeing with one another. Simple agreement for the sake of agreement does not speak the truth in love or spur one another on to unity in Christ; rather, it encourages believers to refrain from speaking difficult truths. It sacrifices true understanding of God in favor of a false unity based on disingenuous love that is nothing more than selfish tolerance of sin in oneself and others.

The true church is the bride of Christ (Revelation 21:2, 9; 22:17) and the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12; 1 Corinthians 12:27). It cannot be contained, walled in, or defined by anything other than its love for Christ and its dedication to Him. The true church is, as C. S. Lewis put it, “spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners.”

Recommended Resource: *Why Church Matters: Discovering Your Place in the Family of God* by Joshua Harris

Question: "What is true religion?"

Answer: Religion can be defined as "belief in God or gods to be worshipped, usually expressed in conduct and ritual" or "any specific system of belief, worship, etc., often involving a code of ethics." Well over 90% of the world's population adheres to some form of religion. The problem is that there are so many different religions. What is the right religion? What is true religion?

The two most common ingredients in religions are rules and rituals. Some religions are essentially nothing more than a list of rules, do's and don't's, that a person must observe in order to be considered a faithful adherent of that religion, and thereby, right with the God of that religion. Two examples of rules-based religions are Islam and Judaism. Islam has its five pillars that must be observed. Judaism has hundreds of commands and traditions that are to be observed. Both religions, to a certain degree, claim that by obeying the rules of the religion, a person will be considered right with God.

Other religions focus more on observing rituals instead of obeying a list of rules. By offering this sacrifice, performing this task, participating in this service, consuming this meal, etc., a person is made right with God. The most prominent example of a ritual-based religion is Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholicism holds that by being water baptized as an infant, by partaking in the Mass, by confessing sin to a priest, by offering prayers to saints in Heaven, by being anointed by a priest before death, etc., etc., God will accept such a person into Heaven after death. Buddhism and Hinduism are also primarily ritual-based religions, but can also to a lesser degree be considered rules-based.

True religion is neither rules-based nor ritual-based. True religion is a relationship with God. Two things that all religions hold are that humanity is somehow separated from God and needs to be reconciled to Him. False religion seeks to solve this problem by observing rules and rituals. True religion solves the problem by recognizing that only God could rectify the separation, and that He has done so. True religion recognizes the following:

1. We have all sinned and are therefore separated from God (Romans 3:23).
2. If not rectified, the just penalty for sin is death and eternal separation from God after death (Romans 6:23).
3. God came to us in the Person of Jesus Christ and died in our place, taking the punishment that we deserve, and rose from the dead to demonstrate that His death was a sufficient sacrifice (Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
4. If we receive Jesus as the Savior, trusting His death as the full payment for our sins, we are forgiven, saved, redeemed, reconciled, and justified with God (John 3:16; Romans 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9).

True religion does have rules and rituals, but there is a crucial difference. In true religion, the rules and rituals are observed out of gratitude for the salvation God has provided – NOT in an effort to obtain that salvation. True religion, which is Biblical Christianity, has rules to obey (do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not lie, etc.) and rituals to observe (water baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper / Communion). Observance of these rules and rituals is not what makes a person right with God. Rather, these rules and rituals are the RESULT of the relationship with God, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone as the Savior. False religion is doing things (rules and rituals) in order to try to earn God's favor. True religion is receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and thereby having a right relationship with God – and then doing things (rules and rituals) out of love for God and desire to grow closer to Him.

Question: "Is apostolic succession biblical?"

Answer: The doctrine of apostolic succession is the belief that the 12 apostles passed on their authority to successors, who then passed the apostolic authority on to their successors, continuing throughout the centuries, even unto today. The Roman Catholic Church sees Peter as the leader of the apostles, with the greatest authority, and therefore his successors carry on the greatest authority. The Roman Catholic Church combines this belief with the concept that Peter later became the first bishop of Rome, and that the Roman bishops that followed Peter were accepted by the early church as the central authority among all of the churches. Apostolic succession, combined with Peter's supremacy among the apostles, results in the Roman bishop being the supreme authority of the Catholic Church – the Pope.

However, nowhere in Scripture did Jesus, the apostles, or any other New Testament writer set forth the idea of "apostolic succession." Further, neither is Peter presented as "supreme" over the other apostles. The apostle Paul, in fact, rebukes Peter when Peter was leading others astray (Galatians 2:11-14). Yes, the apostle Peter had a prominent role. Yes, perhaps the apostle Peter was the leader of the apostles (although the book of Acts records the apostle Paul and Jesus' brother James as also having prominent leadership roles). Whatever the case, Peter was not the "commander" or supreme authority over the other apostles. Even if apostolic succession could be demonstrated from Scripture, which it cannot, apostolic succession would not result in Peter's successors being absolutely supreme over the other apostles' successors.

Catholics point to Matthias being chosen to replace Judas as the twelfth apostle in Acts chapter 1 as an example of apostolic succession. While Matthias did indeed "succeed" Judas as an apostle, this is in no sense an argument for continuing apostolic succession. Matthias being chosen to replace Judas is only an argument for the church replacing ungodly and unfaithful leaders (such as Judas) with godly and faithful leaders (such as Matthias). Nowhere in the New Testament are any of the twelve apostles recorded as passing on their apostolic authority to successors. Nowhere do any of the apostles predict that they will pass on their apostolic authority. No, Jesus ordained the apostles to build the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20). What is the foundation of the church that the apostles built? The New Testament – the record of the deeds and teachings of the apostles. The church does not need apostolic successors. The church needs the teachings of the apostles accurately recorded and preserved. And that is exactly what God has provided in His Word (Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:15; 4:2).

In short, apostolic succession is not biblical. The concept of apostolic succession is never found in Scripture. What is found in Scripture is that the true church will teach what the Scriptures teach and will compare all doctrines and practices to Scripture in order to determine what is true and right. The Roman Catholic Church claims that a lack of ongoing apostolic authority results in doctrinal confusion and chaos. It is an unfortunate truth (that the apostles acknowledged) that false teachers would arise (2 Peter 2:1). Admittedly, the lack of "supreme authority" among non-Catholic churches results in many different interpretations of the Bible. However, these differences in interpretation are not the result of Scripture being unclear. Rather, they are the result of even non-Catholic Christians carrying on the Catholic tradition of interpreting Scripture in accordance with their own traditions. If Scripture is studied in its entirety and in its proper context, the truth can be easily determined. Doctrinal differences and denominational conflicts are a result of some Christians refusing to agree with what Scripture says – not a result of there being no "supreme authority" to interpret Scripture.

Alignment with scriptural teaching, not apostolic succession, is the determining factor of the trueness of a church. What is mentioned in Scripture is the idea that the Word of God was to be the guide that the church was to follow (Acts 20:32). It is Scripture that was to be the infallible measuring stick for teaching and practice (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It is the Scriptures that teachings are to be compared with (Acts 17:10-12). Apostolic authority was passed on through the writings of the apostles, not through apostolic succession.

Recommended Resource: The Gospel According to Rome: Comparing Catholic Tradition and The Word of God by James McCarthy

Is Peter the rock on which the Church is built?

by Matt Slick, Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it," (Matt. 16:18).

The Roman Catholic Church puts a great deal of emphasis on Peter and claims that Jesus said he would build his church on him.

1. Simon Peter holds the first place in the college of the Twelve; Jesus entrusted a unique mission to him. Through a revelation from the Father, Peter had confessed: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Our Lord then declared to him: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." Christ, the "living Stone," thus assures his Church, built on Peter, of victory over the powers of death. Because of the faith he confessed Peter will remain the unshakable rock of the Church. His mission will be to keep this faith from every lapse and to strengthen his brothers in it." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 552).

2. "By the word "rock" the Saviour cannot have meant Himself, but only Peter, as is so much more apparent in Aramaic in which the same word (Kipha) is used for "Peter" and "rock." His statement then admits of but one explanation, namely, that He wishes to make Peter the head of the whole community of those who believed in Him as the true Messias; that through this foundation (Peter) the Kingdom of Christ would be unconquerable; that the spiritual guidance of the faithful was placed in the hands of Peter, as the special representative of Christ." (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11744a.htm>).

The scripture reference to which the Roman Catholic Church attempts to substantiate its position is found in Matt. 16:18. Here it is in context.

"Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 And Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. 19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." 20 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ," (Matt. 16:13-20).

There are problems with the Roman Catholic position. First of all, when we look at the Greek of Matthew 16:18, we see something that is not obvious in the English. "...you are Peter (p?τ???, petros) and upon this rock (p?τ?a, petra) I will build My church..." In Greek nouns have gender. It is similar to the English words actor and actress. The first is masculine, and the second is feminine. Likewise, the Greek word "petros" is masculine; "petra" is feminine. Peter, the man, is appropriately referred to as Petros. But Jesus said that the rock he would build his church on was not the masculine "petros" but the feminine "petra." Let me illustrate by using the words "actor" and "actress:" "You are the actor; and with this actress, I will make my movie." Do see that the gender influences how a sentence is understood? Jesus was not saying that the church will be built upon Peter but upon something else. What, then, does petra, the feminine noun, refer to?

The feminine "petra" occurs four times in the Greek New Testament:

- Matt. 16:18, "And I also say to you that you are Peter (petros), and upon this rock (petra) I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."
- Matt. 27:60, "and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock (petra); and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away."
- 1 Cor. 10:4, "and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock (petras) which followed them; and the rock (petra) was Christ."
- 1 Pet. 2:8, speaking of Jesus says that he is "A stone of stumbling and a rock (petra) of offense"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed."

We can clearly see that in the three other uses of the Greek word petra (nominative singular; "petras" in 1 Cor. 10:4 is genitive singular) we find it referred to as a large immovable mass of rock in which a tomb is carved out (Matt. 27:60) and in reference to Christ (1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:8). Note that Peter himself in the last verse referred to petra as being Jesus! If Peter uses the word as a reference to Jesus, then shouldn't we?

Jesus, who knew the heart of Peter, was not saying that Peter, the movable and unstable stone, would be the immovable rock upon which the Church would be built. Rather, it would be built upon Jesus; and it was this truth that Peter had affirmed what he said to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," (Matt. 16:16). This is consistent with scripture elsewhere where the term rock is sometimes used in reference to God but never of a man.

- Deut. 32:4, "The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice."
- 2 Sam. 22:2-3, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; 3 My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge."
- Psalm 18:31, "And who is a rock, except our God."
- Isaiah 44:8, "Is there any God besides Me, or is there any other Rock? I know of none."
- Rom. 9:33, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."

It should be obvious from the Word of God that the rock Jesus was referring to was not Peter--but himself.

The Aramaic Kepha

In contrast to this, in paragraph #2 at the beginning of this article, the Roman Catholic Church says that the rock cannot refer to Jesus "but only Peter--as is so much more apparent in Aramaic in which the same word (Kipha) is used for 'Peter' and 'rock.'" The problem is that the text is not in Aramaic--but Greek. Since we do not have the Aramaic text, it is not proper to refer to it as proof of the Roman Catholic position. We have to ask ourselves why the Roman Catholic Church would resort to using something that we don't have: the Aramaic text. Is it because their argument is not supported by the Greek, and so they must infer something from a text we don't possess?

Furthermore, in John 1:42 it says, "He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas," (which is translated Peter)." The word "Peter" here is petros--not petra. It is used to elucidate the Aramaic kephas which is not a name in Aramaic.

"Except in Jn. 1:42, where it is used to elucidate Aramaic kephás, Pétros is used in the NT only as a name for Simon Peter . . . The translation supports the view that Kephás is not a proper name, since one does not usually translate proper names"¹

Jesus is the rock on which the church is built

The truth is that the only foundation is Jesus. The only rock of truth is Jesus Christ; and that we, as his redeemed, need to keep our eyes on him. We are to look to no one else as the foundation, the source, or the hope on which the church is built. The Church is built upon Jesus--not Peter.

"For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ," (1 Cor. 3:11).

Is Peter supreme among the Apostles?

by Matt Slick, Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry

The Roman Catholic Church considers Peter to be supreme among Christ's apostles. This position is known as the Primacy of Simon Peter. It says that Peter is the Vicar of Christ upon whom the Church is built (Matt. 16:18).

1. In the Papal bull, *Unam Sanctam*, November 18 1302, it says "Consequently, we declare state, define, and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff."¹

2. The first Vatican Council, chapter 1, "We teach and declare that, according to the gospel evidence, a primacy of jurisdiction over the whole church of God was immediately and directly promised to the blessed apostle Peter and conferred on him by Christ the lord."

3. The first Vatican Council, chapter 3 states that, "and so, supported by the clear witness of holy Scripture, and adhering to the manifest and explicit decree both of our predecessors the Roman Pontiffs and of general councils, we promulgate anew the definition of the ecumenical Council of Florence, which must be believed by all faithful Christians, namely that the apostolic see and the Roman Pontiff hold a worldwide primacy, and that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter, the Prince of the apostles, true Vicar of Christ, head of the whole church and father and teacher of all Christian people. To him, in blessed Peter, full power has been given by our Lord Jesus Christ to tend, rule and govern the universal Church. All this is to be found in the acts of the ecumenical councils and the sacred canons.

Is the Catholic Church's assertion about Peter true? If it is, then we should see such a supremacy in the person of Peter as revealed in the New Testament--the place where spiritual truth must be verified. Unfortunately, we find no such supremacy of Peter in the Scriptures. Let's examine what the New Testament says in reference to Peter.

Matt. 16:18-19, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. 19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The Roman Catholic Church claims that this is where Peter is conferred with authority by Jesus since Peter is the rock upon which the church is built. But, this is not the case. CARM has dealt with this issue in the article *Is Peter the rock on which the Church is built?* where we see that Peter is not that rock. Rather, Christ is the rock on which the church is built. Furthermore, if Matt. 16:18 means that the keys of authority were given to Peter and his successors, why is it that Jesus gives the same authority to all the disciples in Matthew 18:18? Jesus says, "Truly I say to you (the disciples), whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." What apparently had been granted to Peter only is now extended to all the apostles. Therefore, if Peter is to be the supreme successor of Christ who has the keys to the kingdom to be able to bind and loose, then why is this same right also granted to the other disciples? If Peter is supreme among the apostles, we can't infer it from these verses.

Gal. 2:7, "But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised."

We can see that Peter is the apostle to the Jews, and Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles. If Peter is the pope to the entire Church, why is it that God appointed him an apostle to the Jews and not the Gentiles to which the entire Christian church includes? Remember, Jews are not Gentiles, and Gentiles are not Jews. The Christian church is composed of Gentiles. Of course, there are many Jews who become Christians, but in so doing they are no longer non-Gentiles. So, if Peter was supposed to have had supremacy among the disciples and be the head of the Christian church (which is composed of Gentiles), why did God appoint him to reach out to the Jews? It would make no sense if Peter were the supreme Pontiff and the primary apostle.

Gal. 2:11-12, "But when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision."

If Peter is the first pope who had already been given the authority of Christ in Matthew 16:18, then why did Paul the apostle have to rebuke him? The common response here by Roman Catholics is that the papacy speaks with authority and without error, but the men who hold the office can make many mistakes. But the problem here is that there is no way to distinguish the truth of the Roman Catholic Church's claim that the papacy is descended from an office granted to Peter alone. You see, whenever a pope makes a mistake or speaks something that isn't true, the man is blamed and is said to not have spoken with authority. But whenever something is "true," then it is by virtue of his office. So essentially there is no way possible to challenge the claim that the Roman Catholic Church has regarding the office of the papacy. It is, essentially, non-falsifiable. Non-falsifiability means that something cannot be proven to be false. The Roman Catholic Church assumes, without warrant, that Peter is the first pope and then distances itself from heresies and mistakes of those who held the papal office that supposedly descended from him. In this way, it attempts to remain untouchable to cross examination.

1 Pet. 5:1-2, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;"

If Peter was supreme among the apostles, why does he state he is a fellow elder instead of asserting his supremacy? Did Peter not recognize his position given to him by Christ? The Roman Catholic Church certainly affirms the primacy of the papal office as a cited above. Apparently, the Roman Catholic pope has no problem proclaiming such self-affirmations. Yet, this is not what Peter

does in scripture. One has to wonder why the pope in the present Roman Catholic Church does not follow the lead of Peter who they claim to follow. Nevertheless, Peter does not affirm his own supremacy. In fact, he does the contrary by saying he is a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ.

Questions

1. Where is the evidence that Peter ruled the other apostles?
2. If Peter is supreme among the apostles, why does he never refer to himself as such?
3. If Peter is supreme among the apostles, why do none of the other apostles refer to him in such a way?
4. If Peter is supreme among the apostles, why is he listed second in the list of the pillars of the church in Gal. 2:9?
5. If Peter is supreme among the apostles, why is he rebuked by Paul in Gal. 2:11 for Peter's error in doctrine?
6. If Peter is supreme among the apostles, why did Jesus not appear to him first after the resurrection? That privilege went to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9-11).
7. If Peter is supreme among the apostles, why did he write only two N.T. books while Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7), wrote 13?

Did the Roman Catholic church give us our Bible?

by Matt Slick, Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry

Roman Catholics often say that it was their church that gave us the Bible. They sometimes claim this when defending their "Sacred Tradition," so that they might support extra-biblical teachings such as purgatory, penance, indulgences, and Mary worship. They often say the only way the Christian church knew what books are to be included in the Canon of Scripture was because it was revealed by word-of-mouth in the early church, that is, by the tradition of the Catholic Church.

Unfortunately, this argument implies that tradition is superior to Scripture. Of course, we are not saying that the Roman Catholic church teaches that tradition is above Scripture. But when Sacred Tradition is claimed to be the thing by which Scripture is given, then tradition is inadvertently the thing that gives blessing and approval to the Bible. Heb. 7:7 says, "But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater." The unfortunate psychological effect of saying that Roman Catholic tradition is what gave us the Bible is that it elevates their tradition to a level far greater than what is permitted in Scripture. In fact, it is contradicted by scripture:

1 Cor. 4:6, "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other."

The Bible tells us to obey the Word of God--to not go beyond the written Word (1 Cor. 4:6). Unfortunately, the problem with an elevated status of Roman Catholic church tradition is that it results in various justifications of its non-biblical teachings such as prayer to Mary, purgatory, indulgences, penance, works of righteousness, etc. Because it has deviated from trusting God's Word alone, it has ventured into unscriptural areas. Nevertheless, did the Roman Catholic Church give us the Bible? No, it did not.

First of all, the Roman Catholic Church was not really around as an organization in the first couple hundred years of the Christian Church. The Christian church was under persecution, and official church gatherings were very risky in the Roman Empire due to the persecution. Catholicism, as an organization with a central figure located in Rome, did not occur for quite some time in spite of its claim they can trace the papacy back to Peter.

Second, the Christian Church recognized what was Scripture. It did not establish it. This is a very important point. The Christian Church recognizes what God has inspired and pronounces that recognition. In other words, it discovers what is already authentic. Jesus said "my sheep hear my voice and they follow me . . ." (John 10:27). The church hears the voice of Christ; that is, it recognizes what is inspired, and it follows the word. It does not add to it as the Roman Catholic Church has done. Therefore, it is not following the voice of Christ.

Third, the Roman Catholic Church did not give us the Old Testament which is the Scripture to which Christ and the apostles appealed. If the Roman Catholic Church wants to state that it gave us the Bible, then how can they rightfully claim to have given us the Old Testament which is part of the Bible? It didn't, so it cannot make that claim. The fact is that the followers of God, the true followers of God, recognize what is and is not inspired.

Fourth, when the apostles wrote the New Testament documents, they were inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit. There wasn't any real issue of whether or not they were authentic. Their writings did not need to be deemed worthy of inclusion in the Canon of Scripture by a later group of men in the so-called Roman Catholic Church. To make such a claim is, in effect, to usurp the natural power and authority of God himself that worked through the Apostles.

Fifth, the Scripture says, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The Bible tells us that the Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the very nature of the inspired documents is that they carry power and authenticity in themselves. They are not given the power or the authenticity of ecclesiastical declaration.

Conclusion

The Christian church, as an earthly organization, recognized the Word of God (John 10:27). It didn't give us the Word of God. Also, it was the Jews who gave us the Old Testament. The authenticity of the New Testament documents rests in the inspiration of God through the apostles--not the Catholic Church. Furthermore, the Roman Catholic Church did not give us the Old Testament. The Jews did. How can the RCC claim it gave us the Bible when it did not give us the Old Testament? Finally, when the Catholic Church claims that it is the source of the sacred Scriptures, it is, in effect, placing itself above the word of God by claiming that through its authority we received the word of God.

Question: "Is the Catholic Church the mother church?"

Answer: The Roman Catholic Church claims to have originated with Christ and the apostles and is therefore the oldest church and "mother" or head of all other churches, especially those in the Protestant tradition. Sometimes Roman Catholics refer to their church as the "Holy Mother Church" or, in Latin, "Sancta Mater Ecclesia." In fact, Catholics pinpoint the Diocese of Rome, specifically the Basilica of the Savior or St. John Lateran, as the official "mother church." Protestants and others are seen as children who have "strayed" from their mother and are admonished to return "home" to Catholicism.

The term Holy Mother Church refers to the Roman Catholic Church in many places in literature. Cervantes' Don Quixote (Chapter XXVII), Scott's Ivanhoe (Chapter II), Twain's A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (Chapter XXV), and Shakespeare's King John (Act III, Scene 1) all contain instances of the Catholic Church being called the "mother church."

In order to be the “mother church,” Roman Catholicism must be the original form of Christianity. And that’s exactly what Catholics teach concerning their history. One of the dogmas of the Roman Church is that Jesus appointed Peter as His vicar (representative) over the church (Matthew 16:17–19). This teaching presumes that the “rock” Jesus said He would build His church on was Peter and that Peter was the first pope.

There is another, slightly different sense in which Catholics use the term mother church. It is a term of endearment, as faithful Catholics view their church as an entity that nurtures, cares for, and guides the family of God in all things. They give honor to their ecclesiastical “mother” as children give honor to their real mothers (Ephesians 6:2). Just as Catholics see Mary as the Theotókos or “God-bearer,” so they see their “mother church” as today’s “God-bearer”—the means by which God is brought into the world.

There are historical and theological problems with calling the Roman Catholic Church the “mother church.” Historically, Catholicism has its origins in the time of Emperor Constantine in the fourth century. The bishop of Rome did not begin calling himself the “pope” until Siricius did it late in the fourth century. Theologically, there is no biblical evidence for apostolic succession or that Peter was the “prince of apostles”; in fact, there is no clear biblical case to be made that Peter even visited Rome, and he certainly never claimed authority over the other apostles.

Biblically speaking, the true “mother church” is the church that is described in the book of Acts and the New Testament epistles. In the biblical mother church, you will find no mention of priests, cardinals, or popes. Nowhere will you find Mary being adored or saints being venerated. In the biblical descriptions of the true mother church, there are no infants being baptized or elements of the Lord’s Supper being transformed into the body and blood of Jesus. So, very clearly no, the Catholic Church is not the mother church.

Recommended Resource: Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics by Ron Rhodes

Question: "What is the origin of the Roman Catholic Church?"

Answer: The Roman Catholic Church contends that its origin is the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ in approximately AD 30. The Catholic Church proclaims itself to be the church that Jesus Christ died for, the church that was established and built by the apostles. Is that the true origin of the Catholic Church? On the contrary. Even a cursory reading of the New Testament will reveal that the Catholic Church does not have its origin in the teachings of Jesus or His apostles. In the New Testament, there is no mention of the papacy, worship/adoration of Mary (or the immaculate conception of Mary, the perpetual virginity of Mary, the assumption of Mary, or Mary as co-redemptrix and mediatrix), petitioning saints in heaven for their prayers, apostolic succession, the ordinances of the church functioning as sacraments, infant baptism, confession of sin to a priest, purgatory, indulgences, or the equal authority of church tradition and Scripture. So, if the origin of the Catholic Church is not in the teachings of Jesus and His apostles, as recorded in the New Testament, what is the true origin of the Catholic Church?

For the first 280 years of Christian history, Christianity was banned by the Roman Empire, and Christians were terribly persecuted. This changed after the "conversion" of the Roman Emperor Constantine. Constantine provided religious toleration with the Edict of Milan in AD 313, effectively lifting the ban on Christianity. Later, in AD 325, Constantine called the Council of Nicea in an attempt to unify Christianity. Constantine envisioned Christianity as a religion that could unite the Roman Empire, which at that time was beginning to fragment and divide. While this may have seemed to be a positive development for the Christian church, the results were anything but positive. Just as Constantine refused to fully embrace the Christian faith, but continued many of his pagan beliefs and practices, so the Christian church that Constantine promoted was a mixture of true Christianity and Roman paganism.

Constantine found that, with the Roman Empire being so vast, expansive, and diverse, not everyone would agree to forsake his or her religious beliefs to embrace Christianity. So, Constantine allowed, and even promoted, the "Christianization" of pagan beliefs. Completely pagan and utterly unbiblical beliefs were given new "Christian" identities. Some clear examples of this are as follows:

(1) The Cult of Isis, an Egyptian mother-goddess religion, was absorbed into Christianity by replacing Isis with Mary. Many of the titles that were used for Isis, such as "Queen of Heaven," "Mother of God," and theotokos ("God-bearer") were attached to Mary. Mary was given an exalted role in the Christian faith, far beyond what the Bible ascribes to her, in order to attract Isis worshippers to a faith they would not otherwise embrace. Many temples to Isis were, in fact, converted into temples dedicated to Mary. The first clear hints of Catholic Mariology occur in the writings of Origen, who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, which happened to be the focal point of Isis worship.

(2) Mithraism was a religion in the Roman Empire in the 1st through 5th centuries AD. It was very popular among the Romans, especially among Roman soldiers, and was possibly the religion of several Roman emperors. While Mithraism was never given "official" status in the Roman Empire, it was the de facto official religion until Constantine and succeeding Roman emperors replaced Mithraism with Christianity. One of the key features of Mithraism was a sacrificial meal, which involved eating the flesh and drinking the blood of a bull. Mithras, the god of Mithraism, was "present" in the flesh and blood of the bull, and when consumed, granted salvation to those who partook of the sacrificial meal (this is known as theophagy, the eating of one's god). Mithraism also had seven "sacraments," making the similarities between Mithraism and Roman Catholicism too many to ignore. Church leaders after Constantine found an easy substitute for the sacrificial meal of Mithraism in the concept of the Lord's Supper/Christian communion. Even before Constantine, some early Christians had begun to attach mysticism to the Lord's Supper, rejecting the biblical concept of a simple and worshipful remembrance of Christ's death and shed blood. The Romanization of the Lord's Supper made the transition to a sacrificial consumption of Jesus Christ, now known as the Catholic Mass/Eucharist, complete.

(3) Most Roman emperors (and citizens) were henotheists. A henotheist is one who believes in the existence of many gods, but focuses primarily on one particular god or considers one particular god supreme over the other gods. For example, the Roman god Jupiter was supreme over the Roman pantheon of gods. Roman sailors were often worshippers of Neptune, the god of the oceans. When the Catholic Church absorbed Roman paganism, it simply replaced the pantheon of gods with the saints. Just as the Roman pantheon of gods had a god of love, a god of peace, a god of war, a god of strength, a god of wisdom, etc., so the Catholic Church has a saint who is "in charge" over each of these, and many other categories. Just as many Roman cities had a god specific to the city, so the Catholic Church provided "patron saints" for the cities.

(4) The supremacy of the Roman bishop (the papacy) was created with the support of the Roman emperors. With the city of Rome being the center of government for the Roman Empire, and with the Roman emperors living in Rome, the city of Rome rose to prominence in all facets of life. Constantine (AD 272–337) and his successors gave their support to the bishop of Rome as the supreme ruler of the church. Of course, it is best for the unity of the Roman Empire that the government and state religion be centralized. While most other bishops (and Christians) resisted the idea of the Roman bishop being supreme, the Roman bishop eventually rose to supremacy, due to the power and influence of the Roman emperors. When the Western half of the Roman Empire collapsed in 476, the popes took on the title that had previously belonged to the Roman emperors—Pontifex Maximus. Pope Gregory I, ruling from 590–604, is usually considered the first bishop to truly wield papal authority.

Many more examples could be given. These four should suffice in demonstrating the origin of the Catholic Church. Of course, the Roman Catholic Church denies the pagan origin of its beliefs and practices. The Catholic Church disguises its pagan beliefs under layers of complicated theology and "church tradition." Recognizing that many of its beliefs and practices are utterly foreign to Scripture, the Catholic Church is forced to deny the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

The origin of the Catholic Church is the tragic compromise of Christianity with the pagan religions that surrounded it. Instead of proclaiming the gospel and converting the pagans, the Catholic Church "Christianized" the pagan religions, and "paganized" Christianity. By blurring the differences and erasing the distinctions, yes, the Catholic Church made itself attractive to the people of

the Roman Empire. One result was the Catholic Church becoming the supreme religion in the Roman world for centuries. However, another result was the most dominant form of Christianity apostatizing from the true gospel of Jesus Christ and the true proclamation of God's Word.

Second Timothy 4:3-4 declares, "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."

Recommended Resource: Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics by Ron Rhodes

Question: "What was the Holy Roman Empire?"

Answer: The Holy Roman Empire was a loosely joined union of smaller kingdoms which held power in western and central Europe between A.D. 962 and 1806. It was ruled by a Holy Roman Emperor who oversaw local regions controlled by a variety of kings, dukes, and other officials. The Holy Roman Empire was an attempt to resurrect the Western empire of Rome.

Many people confuse the Holy Roman Empire with the Roman Empire that existed during the New Testament period. However, these two empires were different in both time period and location. The Roman Empire (27 B.C. - A.D. 476) was based in Rome (and, later, Constantinople) and controlled nations around the Mediterranean rim, including Israel. The Holy Roman Empire came into existence long after the Roman Empire had collapsed. It had no official capital, but the emperors—usually Germanic kings—ruled from their homelands.

In the fourth century, Christianity was embraced by the emperor and was pronounced the official religion of the Roman Empire. This blending of religion and government led to an uneasy but powerful mix of doctrine and politics. Eventually, power was consolidated in a centralized Roman Catholic Church, the major social institution throughout the Middle Ages. In A.D. 1054, the Eastern Orthodox Church separated from the Western (Roman) Church, in part due to Rome's centralized leadership under the Pope.

Pope Leo III laid the foundation for the Holy Roman Empire in A.D. 800 when he crowned Charlemagne as emperor. This act set a precedent for the next 700 years, as the Popes claimed the right to select and install the most powerful rulers on the Continent. The Holy Roman Empire officially began in 962 when Pope John XII crowned King Otto I of Germany and gave him the title of "emperor." In the Holy Roman Empire, civil authority and church authority clashed at times, but the church usually won. This was the time when the Catholic Popes wielded the most influence, and the papacy's power reached its zenith.

During the Middle Ages, a wide variety of new church traditions became official doctrine of the Roman Church. Further, the church-state engaged in many military conflicts, including the Crusades.

Late in the period of the Holy Roman Empire, a growing number of Christians grew uneasy with the dominance, teaching, and corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. In the 1500s, Martin Luther launched the Protestant Reformation. John Calvin became a Reformation leader based in Geneva, Switzerland, and others, including Ulrich Zwingli and a large Anabaptist movement, helped reform religion in the Western world.

The major theological issues in the Reformation focused on what are known as the five solas (five "only's"), which expressed the primacy of biblical teaching over the authority of the Pope and sacred tradition. *Sola gratia*, the teaching of salvation by "grace alone" through faith alone in Christ alone, empowered a new era of evangelistic outreach in Europe that extended to those who would later colonize North America. *Sola scriptura*, or "Scripture alone," taught that the Bible was the sole authority on matters of faith. This teaching led to the development of new churches outside of the Catholic system and the development of new statements of faith for the many Protestant groups founded during this time. The Holy Roman Empire continued to hold power after the Reformation, but the seeds of its demise had been sown; after the Reformation, the Church's imperial influence waned and the authority of the Pope was curtailed. Europe was emerging from the Middle Ages.

In summary, the Holy Roman Empire served as the government over much of Europe for the majority of medieval history. The Roman Catholic Church, melded in a church-state alliance with the emperor, was the major religious entity. The Church encountered numerous changes even as it amassed land and political clout. Late in this period, Martin Luther and other Reformers transformed the way religion was practiced in central Europe, and their work continues to influence many around the world today.

Recommended Resource: Christianity Through the Centuries by Earle Cairns