

Essentials of Church History

(abridged)

Dr. Gordon Isaac



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Because Spiritual Growth Matters

Essentials of Church History (abridged)
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Overview

Title: Essentials of Church History

Speaker: Dr. Gordon Isaac, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

This is an abridgment of the full class, which looks at the people, events, and movements that shaped church history from the life of Jesus to the twentieth century. The class looks at the early church, Constantine, the church in the Middle Ages, the Reformation in Europe and Great Britain, and Protestantism in France. It then moves into more recent centuries and deals with the issues of doubt and dogma, and finally the Great Awakening with Edwards, Whitefield, and eventually Wesley.

GOALS

1. Ability to articulate the importance of the environment and events surrounded the birth of the early church.
2. Know the key individuals and issues that sparked the Reformation and its lasting implication for today.
3. Understanding and ability to explain the major developments and movements of the modern era.

REQUIREMENTS

1. 4 sessions
2. 2 hours per week (lesson and discussion)

PREREQUISITES

None

FORMAT

Audio

BiblicalTraining.org

BiblicalTraining.org is not-for-profit ministry that gives all people access to a world-class Christian education at no cost. Our classes range from new believers to biblical literacy (“Foundations”), deeper Bible study (“Academy”), and seminary-level training (“Institute”).

We are a 501(c)3 not-for-profit and rely solely on the donations of our users. All donations are tax deductible according to the current US tax codes.

DISTINCTIVES

World class. All Bible classes are taught by world-class professors from major seminaries.

Holistic. We want to see students move through content to deep reflection and application.

Configurable. Ministries can use BT lectures as well as their own to design their educational program.

Accessible. BiblicalTraining is a web-based ministry whose content is provided at no cost.

Community-based. We encourage people to learn together, in mentor/apprentice relationships.

Broadly evangelical. Our materials are broadly evangelical, governed by our Statement of Faith, and are not tied to any one church, denomination or tradition.

Partners. We provide the content and delivery mechanisms, and our partner organizations provide the community and mentoring.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Overview | iii |
| BiblicalTraining.org | iv |
| Table of Contents. | v |
| Your Speaker | vi |
| Student's Guide | vii |
| Mentor's Guide | ix |
| The Early Church | 1 |
| Reformation | 10 |
| 19th Century | 19 |
| 20th Century | 36 |

Your Speaker

Dr. Gordon Isaac is the Berkshire Associate Professor of Advent Christian Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Dr. Isaac studied at a holiness seminary, a Lutheran seminary and a Jesuit university, and has expertise in the Reformation, including extensive study of Martin Luther.

He studied under an internationally known Luther scholar at Marquette and wrote his dissertation on Luther's expositions of Psalm 90. Until 2002, he was the Associate Editor of Luther Digest. He teaches in the area of Christian thought as expressed through courses on Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Great Confessions of the Faith, Popular Religion in Nineteenth-Century America, the Anabaptists.

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Marquette University

M.Th., Luther Theological Seminary

M.Div., Western Evangelical Theological Seminary

B.A., Seattle Pacific University

Student's Guide

We are pleased that you have chosen to use materials from BiblicalTraining.org. We trust that you will find them to be of the highest quality and truly helpful in your own spiritual growth and that of your church. Please read through the following guidelines; they will help you make the best use of this guide.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Listen or watch the lesson. The lesson for each chapter is designed to be listened to outside of your meeting. Each lesson lasts for an hour. This is a crucial step. If the meeting time with your fellow students is going to be productive and encouraging, everyone in the group needs to have listened to and wrestled with the lesson.

Take notes. This guide has the outline for each lesson with a summary of the teaching for each major point. If you are unable to take notes while listening to the lesson, please work through the guide at some point before your meeting.

Questions. Each chapter closes with a series of questions. Some of the questions are data based, confirming that you understand the information. Other questions are more reflective, helping you move beyond the important accumulation of knowledge to challenging you to think through what you are learning about God, yourself and others, and finally to application. Our encouragement is to think through your answers before your meeting and then use the meeting to share your thoughts and interact with others.

Meeting. Meet together with your group.

MEETING TOGETHER

While some people may have to study on their own, we strongly recommend finding a group with which you can study.

A group provides encouragement to finish the class.

Interacting with others, their understanding and insight, is the most effective way to sharpen your own thoughts and beliefs.

Just as you will need the help of others from time to time, so also they will need your help.

Mentor's Guide

If you are leading the group or mentoring an individual, here are some suggestions that should help you.

Your role is to facilitate. This is not an opportunity for you to teach. In fact, the less visible role you take, the better. Your role is to listen and bring out the best in the other people.

Preparation. Be sure to have done your homework thoroughly. Have listened to the lesson and think carefully through the questions. Have an answer for each question that will get the conversation going. A great question is, "What is the Lord teaching you this week?"

Creativity. What works to help one person understand may not help another. So listen to the conversation and pray that the Lord help you bring out the greatest interaction among all the people.

Correct error. This is difficult. If someone says something that isn't right, you don't want to come down on them, telling them they are wrong and shutting down their participation. On the other hand, if you let an obvious error pass, the rest of the group may think you agree and what was said was correct. So look for gracious ways to suggest that perhaps the person's comment was incorrect.

Focus. Stay focused on Jesus and the Bible, not on church or religious traditions.

Lead the discussion. People don't want to listen to a sharing of common ignorance. Lead by asking questions that will prompt others to think.

Silence. Don't be afraid of silence. It may mean nothing more than people are thinking. But if the conversation lags, then ask thought-provoking questions to get the discussion started, and then step out of the way.

Discipleship. Be acutely aware of how you can mentor the people in the group. Meet with them for coffee. Share some life with them. Jesus' Great Commission is to teach people to obey, and the only way this happens is in relationship.

Men and women. Different perspectives. People process information and express themselves in different ways based on their background, previous experience, culture, religion and other factors. Encourage an atmosphere that allows people to share honestly and respectfully.

Privacy. All discussions are private, not to be shared outside the group unless otherwise specified.

Goal. The goal of this study is not just increased knowledge; it is transformation. Don't be content with people getting the "right" answers. The Pharisees got the "right" answer, and many of them never made it to heaven (Matt 5:20).

Relationships. Share everyone's name, email and phone number so people can communicate during the week and follow up on prayer requests. You may want to set up a way to share throughout the week using Slack or WhatsApp.

Finish well. Encourage the people to make the necessary commitment to do the work, think reflectively over the questions, and complete the class.

Prayer. Begin and end every meeting with prayer. Please don't do the quick "one-prayer-covers-all" approach. Manage the time so all of you can pray over what you have learned and with what you have been challenged. Pray regularly for each individual in the meeting.

1

The Early Church

LESSON OVERVIEW

Specific political and cultural events combined to form a setting when Jesus lived, which can be described as the “fullness of time.” In the founding and development of the early church, Pentecost, the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the persecution of Christians were significant.

INTRODUCTION

Church history is the story of the Christian community and its relationship to the rest of the world.

OUTLINE

The movement, persecutions, development of doctrine and influence in the world of the Christian faith.

EARLY CHRISTIANITY TO CONSTANTINE

The beginning of Christianity until it was made the official religion of the Roman Empire by Constantine.

1. Fullness of time

The Old Testament prophet's looked forward to the day in which God would act in a decisive way to bring about his kingdom; Jesus is seen as the embodiment of this in the New Testament.

A. Political empires

Palestine had long been a land of strife causing Israel to be constantly in uncertainty and upheaval. Under the rule of Alexander the Great, the Jews rose up in revolt and ousted the occupiers, believing that God would rise up his true Kingdom by winning victory of the kingdoms of the world and vindicating the Jews.

B. Different parties in Judaism

Pharisees: did not receive material benefit from the Roman rule; to them it was important to be faithful to the law.

Sadducees: Conservative Jews belonging to the Jewish aristocracy; focused on the temple.

Esseenes: Ascetic group who separated themselves from others; intense expectation that the end is near.

C. Diaspora of Jews

Following the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 came the dispersing of the Jews beyond Israel, creating channels for the gospel to flow.

D. Greco-Roman world

Advances in uniformity and infrastructure allowed for widespread movement of the gospel.

2. Pentecost

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the initiation of the Christian church.

3. Question about how much the Gentiles should be bound by Jewish Law

As Christianity spread to the gentiles, there was a question about whether they should be required to obey the Jewish Law.

4. The message of the early church

The early church preached that all have sinned, Christ died for us to reconcile us to God so we can live in relationship with him.

5. The fall of Jerusalem

The fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 was significant for both Jews and Christians as it spelled the destruction of the Temple for the Jews and the propelling of the gospel beyond Jerusalem.

6. Persecutions

Early Christians placed a premium on martyrdom, largely due to the example of Ignatius. Many in the early church faced persecution in the Roman Empire.

7. Early heresies

Church councils met to develop Creeds to counteract heresies, such as Marcion's Gnosticism.

8. Lessons we learn from the early church

The early church was known for forgiveness, creating communities with people from diverse backgrounds, and demonstrating a living out of salvation worth celebrating.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe why the influences of the Greek and Roman empires created a political situation that was favorable to the spread of Christianity throughout the world such that people often describe this as the, "fullness of time."

2

Reformation

LESSON OVERVIEW

The influence of Catholicism expanded in the 15th and 16th centuries because of the exploration sponsored by Spain and Portugal. A central figure in the Reformation was Martin Luther. His ideas theological ideas initiated and shaped the Reformation movement and are still influential today.

EXPANSION OF CATHOLICISM IN 15TH AND 16TH CENTURIES

Spain and Portugal explored and controlled most of Latin America and Portugal explored and colonized Africa, leading to a rapid expansion of Catholicism.

1. Columbus discovered the New World

Upon discovery of the New World, the Indians were exploited and decimated and the Kings of Spain were given the “right of royal patronage” over the church in the new lands.

2. Tension in Latin America between Spaniards and Indians

The system of encomienda trusts, destruction of Indian idols, and the withholding of education from the Indians caused great tension.

3. Portugal and the colonization of Africa

In an effort to find trade routs that circumvented the Muslims, Portugal began to sail around Africa, thus advancing Christian influence throughout.

CALL IN EUROPE FOR REFORMATION

By the 1400's, many of the Catholic bishops were tainted by corruption, using their positions to get money dishonestly and propagating absenteeism, pluralism and simony.

1. Martin Luther

A singular character, erudite, studious and had a particular ability to convey the Gospel in direct language.

A. Indulgences

Papers that were purchased indicating the papal rite to offer plenary remission of sin; Indulgences enraged Luther.

B. 95 Theses

Luther's 95 theses explained why he thought indulgences were not biblical or ethical

C. Luther's theology

By 1521 when he appeared before the Diet of Worms Luther had come to the main theological conclusions that would characterize the whole of his thought.

1) The word of God

The Bible is first and foremost a spoken word and it is God; the Bible has authority over church, Pope, and tradition.

2) The knowledge of God

God of revelation vs God of glory

3) Law and gospel

The contrast between law and the Gospel shows that Gods revelation is both the word of judgment and a word of grace.

4) Church and sacrament

The Church: for Luther the Church was the creature of the gospel, created by the Gospel and it is the place of the public proclamation of the saving message of Jesus Christ.

Sacraments: Luther had three critiques of the Roman Catholic understanding of the Eucharist.

QUESTIONS

1. In the parts of the New World controlled by Spain, how did the process of the choice of Bishops and the administering of tithes and offerings affect the indigenous populations?

3

19th Century

LESSON OVERVIEW

Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield were well-known preachers in the Great Awakening in the American colonies in the early 18th century. Camp meetings were common in meetings during the 2nd Great Awakening. Preachers like Dwight Moody began a movement which resulted in urban revival. Mormonism and Jehovah witnesses were two religions that were founded. The fundamentalist vs. modernist controversy, as well as the geographic expansion of missions, still affect the world today.

SOLUTIONS TO THE RISING RESISTANCE TO THE RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE

Orthodoxy, rationalism, and pietism.

TWO GREAT EVANGELISTS

1. Jonathan Edwards

Calvinist pastor; convinced of the need for personal experience in conversion; Edward's preaching resulted in great response and a movement through New England.

2. George Whitfield

Preached up and down the Atlantic coast spurring on the Great Awakening with his powerful oratory skills and focused on the grace of Jesus Christ and the necessity of new birth

AMERICAN COLONIES AND THE GREAT AWAKENING

The Great Awakening and the Revolutionary War were significant events.

1. The 1730s

Calvinist preaching led to the first Great Awakening, highlighting the importance of conversion, thereby spurring a movement in the Baptists and the Methodists.

2. The 1770s

A sense of commonality among the colonies as a result of the Great Awakening, along with new ideas regarding human rights and the nature of government, led to the environment conducive for the Revolutionary War.

THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

Revival meetings and impassioned preaching in the frontier areas were characteristic of this movement.

1. 1805 Awakening

Appearing in many localities at the same time, many revivals began to occur with an emphasis with the Presbyterians and Baptists.

2. A spiritual awakening

Camp meetings where people gathered together for extended periods of time became a common occurrence and became the conduit for much revival.

3. Charles G. Finney

Finney was a trained attorney who would use his training in his ministry, singling out individuals and asking them direct questions.

MANIFEST DESTINY

Propagated by President James Monroe, the idea of manifest destiny captures the idea that the United States was destined to control the land between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

SLAVERY AND THE CHURCHES

There was controversy in various denominations about whether or not it was biblical to own slaves.

1. Josiah Strong

General secretary of the evangelical alliance; Declared the Anglo-Saxon race as superior and promoted a charge to Anglo-Saxonize humankind

2. Dwight L. Moody

Convinced that the conversion of the masses meant better living in the cities and in the countryside, Moody was instrumental in urban revivals as an increasing number of people were living in cities.

NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses and the Christian Science movements were founded.

1. Mormons

Founded by Joseph Smith who claimed an angel named Moroni gave him golden tablets later resulting in the Book of Mormon

2. Jehovah Witnesses

Charles T. Russell founded the new faith rejecting the government, business, the church, the doctrine of the trinity, and the divinity of Jesus.

3. Christian Science

Similar to Gnosticism, Christian Science taught that what we see is not really real; all things can be healed through truth and spiritual science.

CATHOLICISM IN EUROPE AND LATIN AMERICA

1. The French Revolution and the Catholic Church

The French revolution and defeat of Napoleon led to nationalistic movements in Europe and the elevation of human reason.

2. Latin America and Catholicism

Independence movements in Latin American countries changed the political relationships with Spain and Portugal and the relationship of the Catholic church to Rome.

THE 19TH CENTURY AND SOCIAL CHANGES

1. Individualism

The industrial revolution and urbanization caused an emphasis on the nuclear family and individualism.

2. Scientific progress

In the wake of the industrial revolution people were no longer looking to the past but to the future.

3. Charles Darwin

Darwin's book, "Origin of the Species", was published in 1859 setting forth the notion of evolution thus provoking controversy concerning the issue of biblical authority.

4. Evolutionary liberalism and the social gospel

Belief in the progress of all things, therefore there is a need for a new moral standard

5. The fundamentalists

Desire to retain conservative ideals of dress, avoidance of the appearance of evil, modesty, personal piety, and personal conversion.

COLONIALISM, ECONOMIC IMPERIALISM AND WORLDWIDE EVANGELISM

Colonialism and the founding of mission organizations in Western countries combined to spread the gospel to Africa, Asia and South America.

CONCLUSION

The nineteenth century was a period of incredible change in regards to political horizons with the growth of the United States.

QUESTIONS

1. What role did Jonathan Edwards have in the First Great Awakening? What were two core ideas that he underscored in his sermons? How did people respond to his sermons?

23. What are some specific ways in which you live your life in a way that is consistent with biblical truth?
24. How did the combination European colonialism and the founding of mission societies, influence the spread of the Gospel to continents outside Europe in the 19th century?

4

20th Century

LESSON OVERVIEW

Wesley's preaching and the holiness movement were major influences in beginning the modern Pentecostal movement. Charles Fox Parham was instrumental in the formation of the Pentecostal movement, sometimes referred to as the "first wave." The second and third waves of the Pentecostal movement, as well as the ecumenical movement, have had a significant impact on individuals and churches across the world during the twentieth century.

MODERN PENTECOSTALISM

Emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit.

1. Wesley's preaching and the holiness movement

Wesley was concerned about righteousness, godliness and holy living which lead to the holiness movement and birthed the expectation of a second work of grace.

2. First wave—Charles Fox Parham

Parham emphasized the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a third work of salvation, along with justification and sanctification, opening the doors for the Pentecostal movement.

A. William J Seymour

Seymour lead the Azusa Street Revival that served as the beginning of the Pentecostal movement, thereafter spreading the movement around the world.

B. John G. Lake

After joining the ranks of the Pentecostal movement, Lake traveled to Johannesburg, South Africa and through his work there African Pentecostalism found its origin.

C. Ivan Voronaev (Odessa, Russia)

Voronaey pioneered the Pentecostal movement in the Soviet Union, with his church becoming a major religious force by 1993.

3. Second wave–New Pentecostalism or the Charismatic Renewal

Charismatic Renewal describes the penetration of Pentecostalism into mainline denominations with the aim of renewing and reviving historic churches.

4. Third wave—signs and wonders

The opening of the straight-line evangelicals to the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, often referred to as the “signs and wonders” and “Vineyard” movement.

TWENTIETH CENTURY

A century of vast change in civilization, culture, and technology.

1. World War 1

European political conflicts and advances in technology result in a four year war involving thirty nations.

2. Russian Church

In 1918 the Russian Orthodox church is officially separated from the state and survived 70 years of Communist rule.

3. Roman Catholic Christianity

The second Vatican Council brought significant reforms to the Catholic church and a new willingness to relate to the modern world.

4. Protestantism in Europe

World Wars 1 and 2 challenged the Protestant church in Europe to engage questions dealing with church and state and of how to draw back to a robust engagement with the modern world.

5. Protestantism in the United States

The Protestant church saw the emergence of the New Evangelical movement, many social movements, and the re-engagement of culture in the 20th century.

6. Ecumenical movement

The World Council of Churches and National Council of Churches were influential in their attempts to give a voice for world Christianity and striving for unity in the church.

QUESTIONS

1. What was John Wesley's view of justification and sanctification? How did he describe, "Christian Perfection?" What do you believe the Bible teaches about justification and sanctification?

