

30 EVENTS
THAT SHAPED THE
CHURCH

LEARNING *from* SCANDAL,
INTRIGUE, WAR, AND REVIVAL

ALTON GANSKY



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

© 2015 by Alton Gansky

Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gansky, Alton.

30 events that shaped the church : learning from scandal, intrigue, war, and revival /

Alton Gansky.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-8010-1608-0

1. Church history—Miscellanea. I. Title. II. Title: Thirty events that shaped the church.

BR153.G36 2014

270—dc23

2014028822

Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations labeled KJV are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Published in association with MacGregor Literary Agency.

15 16 17 18 19 20 21 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Alton Gansky, *30 Events That Shaped the Church*
Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2015. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Contents

Introduction 9

1. Pentecost (AD 30) 13

The church was born under a cloud of grief and fear. Timid disciples became fearless apostles fifty days after Passover. The birth of the church also introduced the new work of the Holy Spirit. In those moments the church was born and the world was turned upside down. It can be argued that prior to Pentecost there was no church.

2. The Conversion of Paul

(AD 35) 22

Paul's influence exceeds that of kings and popes. Few individuals changed the world as much as this conservative Jewish activist-turned-Christian. Half of the New Testament is tied to this one man, yet his first goal was to scrub the world clean of the Christian infestation. He went from persecuting the church to becoming its first theologian. No one has matched his achievements.

3. Gentiles and Judaism: Showdown in Jerusalem

(AD 50) 33

The first great internal challenge for the church was who would be allowed into the fellowship: Is Christianity a sect of Judaism? Was it just Judaism with a twist? This debate would transform the church into

an all-inclusive, global organization that welcomed all new believers into its ranks—Gentiles and Jews.

4. When Rome Burned

(AD 64) 42

One of the worst urban fires in history not only destroyed most of Rome but also almost destroyed a large portion of Christians. Under Nero, more than buildings burned, and Christians had to deal with the first major persecution in their history.

5. The Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus

(AD 70) 53

Jerusalem was the city at the heart of not only Judaism but also of Christianity. Its destruction upended the church and saw the death of 1.1 million people and the enslavement of close to 100,000. Christians had to flee and Jerusalem ceased to be the center of Christianity, allowing the church to break from Judaism and become an outreach to all people.

6. The Edict of Milan

(313) 60

Emperor Constantine reversed the persecution of Diocletian, giving the church (and all other faiths) freedom to worship without fear. It was the first act of Constantine to elevate the church he would be baptized into. This edict allowed

- the church to meet freely and expand throughout the Roman Empire.
7. **The First Council of Nicaea** (325) 66
From its inception, the church battled for doctrinal purity. Free from oppressive persecution, it could better argue matters of doctrine. Here the church began a long history of clarifying what it believes. The council showed the power of the church to police its doctrine and to fight misunderstanding and even heresy.
8. **Jerome Completes the Vulgate Translation of the Bible** (405) 73
Jerome was given the task of revising the old Latin translation. His translation was not the first, but it became the official translation of the Roman Catholic Church.
9. **The East-West Schism** (1054) 80
Church history is a saga of church splits. The largest split came between the church in Rome and the church in Constantinople. The church sought unity through power—and it didn't work. That split, and many of the harsh feelings that brought it about, still exist today.
10. **Innocent III Expands the Power of the Papacy** (1198) 85
Today the pope is one of the most powerful men in the world and oversees the care of over a billion followers, but the power of the office didn't happen overnight. Pope Innocent III and others took it to new heights.
11. ***Unam Sanctam* Proclaims Papal Supremacy** (1302) 92
An edict issued by Pope Boniface VIII made him, and subsequent popes, supreme leader of the church and made membership in the Catholic church a necessity for salvation, increasing the power of the pope and the Church.
12. **Gutenberg Produces the First Printed Bible** (1456) 101
The invention of the movable-type printing press changed the world in a way seldom matched by other inventions. For the church, this meant the Bible could be printed faster and better. The Gutenberg Bible took the Scriptures to the masses. Bible printing helped raise the biblical knowledge of believers and spread the gospel.
13. **The Protestant Reformation** (1517) 109
The Reformation came to be through the bold work of three Reformers. Through dangers and criticism, these three blazed a path for other Reformers. The Reformation changed the lives of millions and kick-started several important changes in the world.
14. **The Scientific Revolution Begins** (1543) 120
Christians are often portrayed as unscientific, but many of the leaders of what became known as the Scientific Revolution were people of deep faith and keen scientific insight. It can be argued that the Protestant Reformation led to the Scientific Revolution. The church cannot claim all the glory for the advancement of science, but neither can it be said that Christians had no involvement.
15. **The Council of Trent** (1545) 131
The meeting was sparsely attended, but the Council of Trent made decisions about doctrine that last to today. The differences between Protestantism and Catholicism were formalized in what some have called the Counter-Reformation, which also further alienated Protestants. The Council of Trent showed the power of a council to dictate what Christians should believe.
16. **Smyth Baptizes Himself and Begins the Early Baptists** (1609) 140
John Smyth started as an Anglican priest but soon broke with the group. Like the

Anabaptists, he believed in believer's baptism. In Holland he baptized himself, then he baptized a small band of his followers. Today there are scores of Baptist groups, and together they make one of the largest Protestant denominations.

17. The King James Version Is Published (1611) 147

The most beloved of all English translations, the KJV remains the translation of choice for some Christians—even four hundred years after it first appeared. The KJV Bible became the Bible of the people. The beauty of its language and the depth of scholarship made it beloved by English-speaking churches across many denominations.

18. Bishop Ussher's Chronology (1650) 152

Ussher is one of the most misunderstood and falsely ridiculed men in history. His attempt to date the creation has become a joke to many, but there is much more to the man and to his dating method. Ussher's date of creation has overshadowed all of his other work, but he was not alone in his methods.

19. The Great Awakening in the United States (1740) 157

Led by the likes of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, the Protestant revival did more than stir people's souls; it also changed preaching, church life, and even had an influence on freedom of speech. Not only did the Great Awakening have a spiritual impact, but many believe it helped bring about freedom of religion.

20. The Bill of Rights Is Written (1789) 166

Few documents are as well-known as the American Bill of Rights, and although it is a political document, it had great influence on the future work of the church in the United States and served as an example to other countries. The Bill of Rights secured for churches freedom of speech and freedom from government influence or involvement.

21. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* Is Published (1859) 177

Former ministry student Charles Darwin releases his work *On the Origin of Species* and forever changes the relationship between the church and science. For the first time in the modern era the church is forced to defend some of its beliefs against an accepted scientific principle.

22. *The Scofield Reference Bible* Is Published (1909) 187

The first modern reference Bible changed the way Christians studied. Over one hundred years later, it is still loved by some and reviled by others.

23. *The Fundamentals* (1910) 193

A series of books set the stage for an enduring battle between modernism and liberalism. It also created a subset of Protestantism.

24. The Scopes "Monkey Trial" (1925) 201

A media sensation, the case of *The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes* pitted two legal heavyweights—William Jennings Bryan (three-time presidential candidate) and brilliant defense attorney Clarence Darrow. The entire country followed what became known as the "Monkey Trial," which brought the battle between evolutionist and conservative Christians to the forefront. Tennessee won, but the image of the church lost.

25. The Rise of the Neo-Evangelicals (1943) 219

Many believed the fundamentalists went too far, and were too conservative and too exclusive. The neo-evangelicals included many people kept at arm's distance by fundamentalists. The two groups had much in common, but their differences kept them apart—and still do.

Contents

26. **The Dead Sea Scrolls Discovered** (1947) 227

The discovery of an Essene collection of Old Testament documents revitalized biblical study and, when the documents demonstrated the accuracy of the Old Testament books currently in use, ramped up respect for the accuracy of the Bible.

27. **The Jesus Movement** (1960–70s) 233

From the hippie movement came the Jesus Movement. Hippies who found their lifestyle empty and void of value turned to faith while maintaining much of the “drop out” culture. From this movement rose several important people and groups, including the Calvary Chapel churches. They changed Christian music and redefined the image of Christians as many tried to reflect a first-century lifestyle and challenged the contemporary church to return to first-century ideals.

28. **Vatican II** (1962) 241

The most significant council in the history of the Roman Catholic Church undid many views of previous councils, a change not everyone was happy with. The modern

Catholic church is rooted in what happened in 1962.

29. **The Rise of the Christian Right: Confrontational Christianity** (1979) 248

Established by megachurch pastor Jerry Falwell, the Moral Majority became the spotlight for the rising Christian Right movement. It also created division in the church and combined the power of the church and the state.

30. **The Rise of New Atheism** (Present) 256

Recent years have seen a rise in the acceptance of atheism. Atheism, which had been content to simply avoid the church, has gone on the offensive. Bestselling books have pushed atheism to the forefront and made nonbelief acceptable and even a source of pride. Recent polls show a global trend away from a belief in God, with some countries showing one out of every two citizens as atheists.

Notes 265

Introduction

Imagine standing on a barren shoreline staring across the smooth waters of a massive lake. Poking out of the depths are small islands that seem to float independently of all the others, but a closer look reveals causeways connecting one island not just to its nearest neighbor but also to scores of others. There is something important on each of those islands, something worth investigating. History is like that vast lake, and this book is about that lake.

We are all products of history. The cities or towns where we live exist because people in our past chose to settle there. The medicines we take were created on knowledge learned by scientists and doctors decades and even centuries ago. The places we work, the way we travel, and the entertainment we enjoy all have history.

Appreciating history is a nice sentiment, but the twenty-first century is a demanding place filled with distractions, challenges, and sometimes mentally and physically taxing effort just to get by. Still, we are the product of the past. Every new day, year, decade, and century is rooted in its past, and—at the risk of sounding like a history professor on the first day of class—that past is important.

The late Michael Crichton (1942–2008) is known for his works of fiction: not for his medical degree, not for being a Harvard graduate, but for his ability to spin captivating tales. He said, “If you don’t

Introduction

know history, then you don't know anything. You are a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree." This book is about that tree.

Church history is a broad topic spanning two thousand years. Unlike the timelines we all learned in junior high school, history is more of a web than a straight line, more mountains and hills than open plains. It has twists and sudden turns and unexpected happenings that resonate for centuries.

Of the seven billion people in the world, over two billion are connected to a church. Christianity is the largest religious system in existence. Christian history is *everyone's* history, not just those in the pews but those who have never crossed the threshold of a sanctuary. Even the most anti-church individual must admit that Christianity has changed and continues to change the world.

It may seem odd to quote a Hindu in a book about Christian events, but Mahatma Gandhi's (1869–1948) words could certainly apply to the events that shaped the church: "A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history." This book is about those "determined spirits."

30 Events That Shaped the Church is the companion book to *60 People Who Shaped the Church*. In the first book I focused on the people who helped or hurt the Christian cause. In this book, I focus on events that continue to shape our Christian behavior and thinking.

"Events" can be misleading. The word conjures up an occurrence that happened at some moment in time, but events can slowly rise from the depths, break the surface, and last for years. I use the term liberally here. At times I discuss events that happened over a period of hours, and at others events that are still ongoing.

"Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it," or so said Edmund Burke. This sentence is often uttered as a warning, a way of saying, "Wake up, pay attention, or you will make the same mistakes as those who came before you." True as that is, some history deserves to be repeated. The examples of the brave, the determined, and the dedicated are worth emulating.

Selecting which events to include in this book was difficult. I started with a much longer list, then began paring it down. With every event

Introduction

I removed from the list, I felt I was leaving something important on the cutting room floor. For every bit of joy I felt over what remained, I felt guilt for those left behind. Even after the list was set it began to change. During the writing of this book I dropped some events to make room for others.

In the end, I believe this is a good sample of key events in church history, drawn from both the distant past and modern times. It is my hope that this book will help the reader get a sense of the people, times, and events that make the church what it is today.

Alton Gansky

Pentecost

(AD 30)

Fifty days after the crucifixion, the inner circle of disciples watched the resurrected Jesus ascend to heaven. Before leaving, the Messiah told them they would be witnesses to the world. Since that moment they had waited, as they had been told to do, in Jerusalem, uncertain what would happen next.

Outside their doors the people who had chanted for Christ's crucifixion carried on their daily lives as if nothing had happened two months before. The Jewish leaders who orchestrated his arrest and the Roman leader who allowed it all to happen—all were still in place. The danger remained.

The leaders of the fledgling church, people we think of today as brave, bold, unrelenting in their duties, and ready to die for the cause of Christ, started off as timid, uncertain, confused, and frightened.

But what happened at Pentecost would change them—and the world—forever. The church did not come on the scene quietly. Its birth was loud. Chaotic.

Jesus practiced an itinerant ministry, walking from town to town preaching and performing miracles. This created a variety of interested parties. Some came out to hear and behold the spectacle that often followed Christ. Others believed his message but continued their daily lives as before. There is no evidence that they gathered for fellowship or worship.

Then there was the larger group of disciples, those who were closer to Jesus, who supported and aided him in his work. When we hear the word *disciple* we often think of the twelve men who were part of Jesus' ministry. The Bible sometimes refers to them as "the Twelve." (Mark 4:10 mentions the Twelve and "His followers.") The New Testament reveals Jesus' followers numbered 120 people, which included the Twelve and a group of women. Still, there is no indication that, other than the Twelve, they considered themselves as part of an organization or community. The idea of a "church" was foreign to them. Jesus said the word *church* only twice in the Gospels (Matt. 16:18; 18:17). He visited synagogues and, when in Jerusalem, the temple. This was no oversight; it was part of the plan. Jesus came to teach, to die, to be raised from the dead, and then to ascend to heaven to take his seat at the right hand of God. The establishment of the church wouldn't come until after those accomplishments. The rest was in the hands of his followers.

At Pentecost the church and its leaders received a spiritual power that allowed them to do what they never could have done before. Prior to that, Jesus' followers had been a *congregation* but not a *church*.

Timeline

A timeline helps us link separate occurrences into a unified series of events. Jesus begins a public ministry that lasts three years. During Passover, he is arrested in Jerusalem, endures three trials, and is crucified and buried in a borrowed tomb. His followers are scattered and directionless. Three days later, Jesus rises from the dead, and over the next forty days he appears to his followers—and only his followers—as many as five hundred at one time (1 Cor. 15:6).

At the end of the forty-day period following the resurrection, he calls the Twelve (technically the Eleven after Judas' suicide) and gives them their final marching orders. Then Jesus, in full view of his disciples, ascends into heaven. It is interesting that their first question reveals their lack of understanding of Jesus' overall goal. They ask about an earthly kingdom, with Jesus on the throne. This misunderstanding would continue until Pentecost.

It is in Jesus' last words that we get a hint at what was changing. There are two accounts of this event recorded in the Bible:

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God. (Luke 24:44–53)

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:1–11)

Waiting

The disciples were to stay in place for ten days. It is doubtful they fully understood what would happen, but they were obedient nonetheless. Waiting can be hard work, but it often has a reason. Why wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit? Why would Jesus order his disciples to bide their time in a hostile city—the same city where he was tortured and crucified? The answer is timing.

They were to wait for the arrival of the Holy Spirit, who would grant them supernatural power. This part was not new to them. Most scholars link the start of Jesus’ public ministry with his baptism at the hands of John the Baptist. John fit the mold of the Old Testament prophet. He lived an ascetic life, like a desert monk, but preached to the masses the need for repentance and baptism. He said, “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt. 3:11). There it is, the mention of fire and the Holy Spirit. John was speaking of an event that wouldn’t happen for three years. But the disciples would recognize it when it came.

Pentecost (AD 30)

This commission must have sounded overwhelming to them. They were, Jesus said, to become witnesses in four geographical arenas: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the world. The last one must have made them pause. It was one thing to follow Jesus around the Holy Land for three years, but the “ends of the world” would have been too much to imagine. After all, Jesus never left his home country.

Of course, there was a reason for this. His mission centered on presenting God’s plan to the Jews first (Matt. 15:24). The global mission would spread out from there. At the right time, they were to evangelize in Jerusalem, the city they were in, then move to regional but still local areas, then to the outliers in Samaria—a place religious Jews of the day avoided—then out to the world. The New Testament book of Acts is outlined on this structure.

While Jesus had many friends, the real core of his followers numbered 120, the size of a small church, and the real outreach would be done by the remaining members of the Twelve, with the later addition of the apostle Paul.

This mission would be done with first-century technology: walking, riding, traveling by ship, and small-group communicating. No armies would march ahead of them to subdue the people in advance. That was Rome’s way. Jesus’ way was much simpler but had a much longer life, and it continues today.

The 120 waited in the upper room, probably the same upper room where Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper. They stayed busy with prayer and filled Judas’ spot with Matthias (Acts 1:23–26). In some ways they were acting like a small church and, against the custom of the day, included the female followers of Jesus. In that number were his mother Mary and most likely Mary Magdalene. Jesus’ ministry crossed gender lines. The first people to see the resurrected Jesus were women (Luke 24:1–12).

Pentecost

Pentecost is a Greek term for one of the Jewish feast periods. The ancient Jews referred to it as the Feast of Weeks and later as Shavuot.

The first name refers to a “week of weeks,” that is, forty-nine days. Adding Passover to that raises the number to fifty, hence, “Pentecost.” The word *pentecost* comes from the ancient Greek meaning “fiftieth” day.

For the Jews it was a time to celebrate the first harvest and offer the “firstfruits” to God as a sacrifice. Later the feast became associated with the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai.

The church was born on this particular Pentecost, and it came about in a remarkable way. The disciples were all in one place. There is some debate as to where that place was. It is generally assumed they were in the upper room because the phrase “whole house” is used. Some scholars think the phrase refers to the temple as the house of God, but there is no mention in the text of the disciples leaving the upper room to go to the temple after supernatural events began. Acts 2 relates the whole story.

Whether in the upper room or somewhere on the temple grounds, the disciples were together, probably a huddle of 120 or more people. There came an audible event: the sound of rushing wind filled the whole house. Then a visual event followed: tongues of fire appeared and rested on them. Both fire and wind are emblems of the Holy Spirit, that is, symbols of the third person of the Trinity. As promised by Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended upon them, at a time and in a place where thousands of people would see.

There were more attention-getting happenings. The disciples began to speak in other languages. And not just speaking, but preaching as the Spirit gave them utterance. The hook here is that the disciples, all from Galilee, were speaking the home languages of all the pilgrims at the temple. Centuries of invasions had scattered Jews around the known world, many of whom would return to Jerusalem during the holy feast days, especially Passover and Pentecost. The population of Jerusalem would swell by tens of thousands. Many pilgrims camped outside the city walls. Jerusalem and its environs were packed with travelers who lived most of the year in distant lands. As observant Jews they would have learned Hebrew, but their daily language would be that of the land they lived in.

It was not uncommon for people in the first century to speak multiple languages. In the case of the disciples, they would have been familiar with Hebrew, the language of religious worship and rites; Latin, the language of the Roman oppressors; and Aramaic, the common language for Jews of the day. Some were also familiar with Greek, which would become the language of the New Testament. There were a great many other languages in the world that were beyond their experience.

Hearing people from Galilee speaking languages common to what is now Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, and other parts of North Africa must have been surprising. It wasn't that the languages were strange, it was who was speaking them. Add to that, they were speaking a Christian message. This was so startling that some people assumed the cacophony was fueled by early morning drinking (Acts 2:13). These were not ecstatic utterances but the voicing of known languages. Luke, the author of Acts, records the languages by listing the countries they were associated with. Most of these countries border the Mediterranean Sea.

First Sermon

The disciples were changed by the arrival of the Holy Spirit. That morning they had awakened as cautious, fearful people who harbored grave concerns about their safety and future. They knew that the religious leaders who conspired against Christ, the Romans who crucified him, and the crowd who had chanted, "Crucify Him!" were still walking the streets of Jerusalem. Even at several hundred strong, they were a tiny minority compared to those around them.

But things changed dramatically with the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Those same disciples who had abandoned Christ after his arrest became very different people: boldness replaced fear. The greatest change came in Peter, who had, a few weeks before, publicly denied knowing Jesus.

Peter had been the center of the disciples, at times showing great courage and insight and at other times making blunders. He was

always deeply committed. As if unwinding his weakest and darkest moment, publicly denying Christ, Peter steps up and delivers the first sermon of the church age. What makes it a “church age” sermon?

First, it is Bible-based. Peter quotes from the Old Testament book of Joel and several psalms (Joel 2:28–32; Ps. 16:8–11; 110:1; and others).

Second, the message is Christ-centered, not Law-centered. The Mosaic Law was the heart of Jewish life. Its codes and commandments were clearly established (although embellished through the centuries): “This is what God expects; this is what you must do.” Peter’s message focused on Jesus, hitting on all the key issues: Christ came for a purpose, worked miracles, was delivered up by the plan of God to death, was raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, and sits at the right hand of God.

He closed with, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). “Lord and Christ”; Master and Messiah.

Peter pulled no punches. He laid blame for the crucifixion on the people and called for public repentance. It is interesting that the church was planted and grew in the place most hostile to it.

The sermon was direct, harsh, accusatory, and struck at the heart of the hearer. It was longer than what is recorded in Acts (2:40), but the material we have shows a change in preaching that has lasted for two thousand years. In seminaries around the world, professors of preaching teach this account to their students.

The people responded to it—at least three thousand of them committed to repentance and baptism. The church would continue to grow daily (v. 47). We have no way of knowing how many of those same people were in the crowd shouting for Jesus’ crucifixion two months earlier.

A Church Pattern Is Established

What was it like to be a part of the first church? There were no church manuals. No seminaries to train pastors. No denominations.

Everything was new. Acts 2:46–47 lists the key habits of the first church, customs that remain to this day:

“One mind.” They cultivated and maintained unity, something that would be tested in the years ahead.

“In the temple.” In the early days of the church, believers in Jerusalem would gather at the temple. Over time, Christians would meet in homes and later in rented buildings.

“Breaking bread from house to house.” They celebrated the Lord’s Supper in private homes. Church buildings were a thing of the future. The Lord’s Supper (the Eucharist) is distinctly Christian and portrays the broken body and shed blood of Christ, not something that would fit with temple rituals.

“Taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.” Fellowship was a priority, and sharing meals was an important social ritual. It built friendship and kinship.

“Praising God.” Praise has always been a part of worship. Public singing is common today (although there were periods of history where singing was prohibited). In the first church, praise was a daily habit, not something reserved for a special day of the week.

“Having favor with all the people.” Their behavior was Christ-like, portraying Jesus in their words and in the way they treated others.

The contemporary church has changed in many ways, and some of the ways it expresses itself in worship have changed. A few things, like breaking bread from house to house, may have disappeared, but the principles behind them have remained.

The church did not slowly rise in history, it exploded on the scene, accompanied by a miracle. What had been a ragtag band of Jesus’ followers became an organized force in the world that has continued to alter human history for two millennia. The meek became the brave, the uncertain became the confident, and the world became a mission field.

That hasn’t changed.