

A Concise History of the Early Church from a Biblical Perspective

1. The universal church consists of all true believers in God through Jesus Christ, regardless of local church affiliation (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:22, 3:6, 4:4-6; Colossians 1:24).
2. In the New Testament days, there were many churches, which were self-governed by elders (aka bishops) and deacons but not by priests, (theoretically) operating according to the guidance of the apostles and prophets (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; Revelation 2:1,8,12).
3. Roman Catholic claims to primacy
 - a. The word “catholic” simply means “universal.”
 - b. A church cannot be both localized in Rome and also universal at the same time. The name itself is a linguistic oxymoron.
 - c. The term as understood by RC adherents asserts the primacy of the Roman church over all of the universal church, a point that I dispute.
 - d. The stated Bible basis is Matthew 16:15-19, as establishing “apostolic succession” through Peter. The “rock” is not Peter himself, although Jesus uses this as a play on words. Rather, the “rock” is the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This interpretation is not only grammatically correct, but it is further clarified by verses such as 1 Corinthians 3:11.
 - e. Additional Bible verses cited by the RC church are John 21:15-17. These record Jesus’ command for Peter to fulfill a pastoral role in the church, which Peter did (1 Peter 5:1).
4. Peter’s Ministry
 - a. According to Acts 15:6-7, Peter presided over the Jerusalem church, not the Roman church. The year was on or about 50 A.D., twenty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - b. Peter was active on the mission field, and brought his wife along with him at times also (Mark 1:30; 1 Corinthians 9:5).
 - c. Peter was writing from Babylon on or about 62 A.D. (1 Peter 5:13). There is no good reason to make Babylon mean Rome. If Scripture makes plain sense, seek no other sense. Babylon in this day did have a mixed population of Jews and Gentiles. It was known as a center of Jewish scholarship (hence, the Babylonian Talmud).
 - d. Tradition is unanimous that Peter was crucified in Rome upside down in the latter years of the reign of Nero (A.D. 68, the latest). So Peter made his way there for sure, probably multiple times, but the evidence mitigates against him being the Bishop of Rome for more than a brief period. Furthermore, the Apostle

Paul in his letters never mentions Peter as being in Rome in such a capacity, and his prison letters were many, and were written between 61 and 64.

- e. Peter himself does not assert primacy over all other elders (aka bishops). In fact, he places himself on equal footing in that capacity as a “fellow elder” (1 Peter 5:1-4).
 - f. Peter did not believe in ordaining New Testament priests. Instead, he affirmed the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:4-7). Jesus is our High Priest, according to Hebrews 3:1, 4:14, and 5:5. He is also our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).
5. So, How did we get to the Pope/Pontifex Maximus/Succession of Roman Church Headship
- a. “Pope” is simply a word which means “Father”. There is no evidence that Peter took this title unto himself.
 - b. “Pontifex Maximus” is a term which comes from the pagan Roman leader of the College of Priests. Over time, Emperors of Rome took this title unto themselves, because they wanted to proclaim their own deity, and absolute authority.
 - i. The first Christian “Pontifex Maximus” was Constantine, the Emperor, in the early fourth century.
 - ii. At Vatican 1, in 1869, the RC church declared the dogma of the infallibility of the pope, which teaches that the pope is perfect regarding spiritual matters when he makes a decree.
 - c. Succession of Roman Church headship
 - i. The fact that other men held the position of Bishop of Rome does not arise from any apostolic succession. Such was never prescribed by the Lord, as we have shown. It is simply a matter of history. Of course there would be a need for church leadership in Rome, and any other city. The fact that the professing church in Rome has had leaders through the centuries does not differentiate it from any other city of which we may say the same thing (Alexandria, for instance).