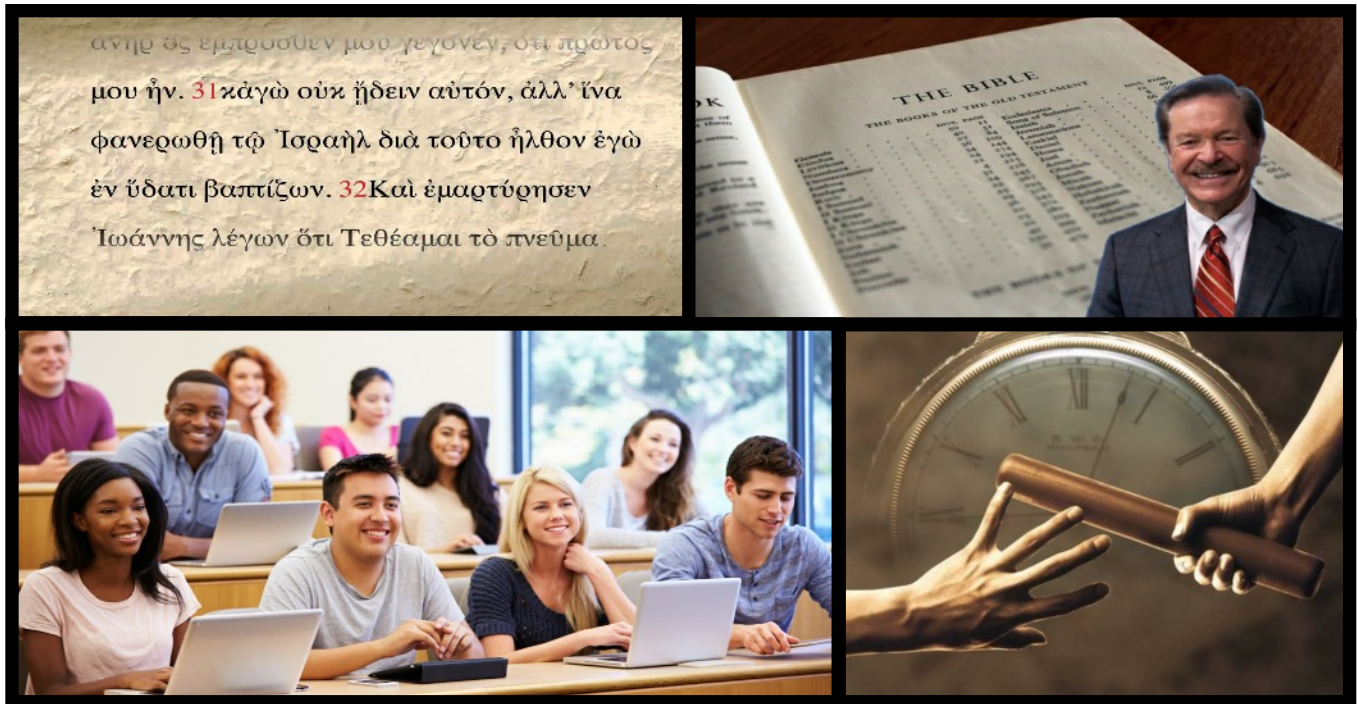


EMBASSY COLLEGE



SYLLABUS AND STUDY GUIDE History of the Early Church HT104

Dr. Stanley Fleming

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The Instructor

Stanley F. Fleming, D. Min.

Born in Portland, Oregon, Stan Fleming moved around with his family to Denver and Phoenix before settling in Reno, Nevada, for his high school and undergraduate years of education. He earned a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from the University of Nevada (Reno), a Master of Arts in Teaching from Whitworth College, Spokane, Washington, and a Doctorate of Practical Ministry from Northwest Graduate School of the Ministry in Kirkland, Washington.

Dr. Fleming has experience in pastoring, teaching, and equipping the body of Christ. Besides teaching on the history of the early Church, he has taught in numerous countries on cults and world religions.

Stan, his wife Kathleen, and their youngest children live in Priest River, Idaho. He pastors at the House of the Lord, a non-denominational church that has regional influence and is well respected in the community for its teaching, mission emphasis, Christian day school, youth activities, and mercy ministries.

Course Syllabus

I. Course Description

This is a history of the early Church spanning from its origins to the Council of Chalcedon [kâl'-sĩ-dən] in A.D. 451. Along with general overview, special attention will be paid to the notable people, movements, and traditions that have created a rich heritage for the modern day Church. There will also be discussion of some notable fables that have emerged, such as *The DaVinci Code*.

II. Course Objectives

Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the following objectives:

- A. Provide general knowledge of the growth and changes in the early Christian Church. (Knowledge)
- B. Cite examples of early Church beliefs, practices, and controversies in comparison to various modern day issues. (Application)
- C. Explain similarities and differences of notable people and movements. (Comprehension and Evaluation)
- D. Distinguish between the doctrines of the Eastern and Western Churches. (Analysis and Synthesis)
- E. Contrast factual history with revisionist fables. (Analysis and Synthesis)
- F. Categorize and evaluate the overriding motifs of the early Church. (Synthesis and Evaluation)

III. Course Texts

- A. The Holy Bible (New King James Version is preferred).
- B. Textbook for the course: *Lasting Legacy: The History of the Early Church* by S. F. Fleming.

IV. Course Requirements

- A. Read and study the course syllabus and the textbook.
- B. Attend all the class lectures.
- C. Complete the final examination.

V. Course Evaluation

- A. Attendance at all lectures is required. If a lecture is missed for any reason, the director must be informed in advance and the student must listen to a recording of the lesson.
- B. A final examination

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Course Study Guide

Lesson One

Christ and the Apostles

“In Jesus Christ a preparatory history both divine and human comes to its close. In him culminate all the previous revelations of God to Jews and Gentiles; and in him are fulfilled the deepest desires and efforts of both Gentiles and Jews for redemption But as Jesus Christ thus closes all previous history, so, on the other hand, he begins an endless future. He is the author of a new creation, the second Adam, the father of regenerate humanity, the head of the church”¹

—Philip Schaff, 1858

I. Introduction

A. Why study early Church history?

1. To give the believer _____ and roots (Psalm 11:3).
2. To _____ us from the limited view of the present.
3. To understand the Lord Jesus Christ better.
4. To learn to defend the development of Christian doctrine.
5. To debunk myths and revisionist history (e.g., *The DaVinci Code*).

B. What is the time frame of early Church history?

1. Creating periods for the history of the Church can become problematic for the following reasons:
 - a. Periods seem forced, mechanical, and unconnected to the one before and after.
 - b. Perspective of proper time spans varies with the religious traditions of those creating the periods. For instance, Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants all have different views of the periods and what they represent.
2. The early Church possibly has more consensus than other periods since most Christian groups identify with the teachings and events of the first several hundred years.

¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), 100.

3. For this study, we will consider the early Church to be from the days of Christ to A.D. 451 at the Council of Chalcedon. Some extend the early Church period to the time of Pope Gregory the Great in A.D. 590.^{2,3}

II. The Evidence for Jesus Christ

A. Christian writers and historians: Starting with the Gospels, the history of the Book of _____, and the epistles all the way through the writings of the early Church fathers and later historians, we see much evidence.

- One example would be Paul's epistle to the Galatians (A.D. 49) and first epistle to the Thessalonians (A.D. 49–52). These substantiate things about the life of Jesus Christ, as well as doctrines firmly established within just two decades of the ascension of Christ.

B. The _____ expansion and impact of early Christianity in a world full of idols and false gods gives strong evidence verifying Christ and His teachings.

C. Early non-Christian references:

1. _____: (A.D. 37–100): A Jewish historian. He became a Pharisee at nineteen years of age. In A.D. 66 he was commander of the Jewish forces in Galilee. After capture, he was attached to the Roman headquarters.

“Now there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as had a veneration for truth. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles: he was the Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at first did not forsake him; for he appeared unto them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had spoken of these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him: whence the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”⁴

2. Cornelius Tacitus (b. A.D. 52–54): A Roman historian and governor of Asia in 112 AD, son-in-law of Julius Agricola, Governor of Britain in A.D. 80–84. In writing of Nero's reign he says:

² Schaff, vol. 1, 13.

³ Mark S. Ritchie, “The Story of the Church—Part 1, Topic 1,” *The Story of the Church* (August 13, 1999), at <http://www.ritchies.net/plwk1.htm>.

⁴ Josephus, *Josephus: Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1978), 640.

“He falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius.”⁵

3. Plinius Secundus (Pliny the Younger): Governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor in A.D. 112. He wrote to Emperor Trajan explaining that he had been killing Christians, both adult and children, and seeking advice about how many to kill.

“They affirmed, however, that the whole of their guilt, or their error, was that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verse a hymn to Christ as to a god, and bound themselves to a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, adultery, never to falsify their word, nor to deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up.”⁶

4. Other sources include rabbinic literature, first century historians commenting on the physical nature of the darkness at Christ’s death, and a letter from a Syrian father to his son comparing the murders of Socrates, Pythagoras, and Jesus.

III. The Birth of the Church

- A. The life of Christ: Immanuel; teacher, miracle worker, redeemer, and king
- B. The calling and training of the disciples (Matthew 4:19; 9:19; John 1:43)
- C. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- D. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)
- E. The promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8)
- F. The day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4; 41)
- G. The Acts of the Apostles

IV. The Apostles: Facts, Traditions, and Legends

- A. The twelve:

⁵ Josh McDowell, *The Best of Josh McDowell: A Ready Defense*, comp. Bill Wilson (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 200.

⁶ Ibid.