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## The Mustard Seed Story

A BC to AD Course  
By Timothy Ministries

# Why Study History?

A Survey Of The *Ekklesia's* Progress Since The First Coming of Christ

## Course Introduction

When the subject of history arises, people have asked, “Why learn about a bunch of dead people?” To this I offer the answer of Jesus: “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him” (Luke 20.38). Not only do the heroes and villains of the past still actually live, whether in Paradise or Hades, but they still haunt us who yet live on earth: they haunt us through their words and past actions. Whether consciously or not, we are influenced by the Christians, pagans and infidels of the past who have shaped western civilization by their triumphs, blunders and atrocities. Once we recognize and understand their influence upon us, we must embrace it or resist it as may be required.

Even more important than the study of people, however, is the study of God. The God of ages past is everlasting, and He continues to write *The Book of Human Events*. Proverbs 16 says:

“The Lord works out everything for his own ends—  
even the wicked for a day of disaster.

“In his heart a man plans his course,  
but the Lord determines his steps.

“The lot is cast into the lap,  
but its every decision is from the Lord.”

God is the author of history, and therefore, to study history is to study the character and works of God. History is an ambiguous teacher, of course, if one does not have an authoritative interpreter. That is why followers of Jesus are at such an advantage when it comes to understanding history: we have the Bible, which is the key to understanding God and His hand in human events. With the Bible as our authoritative interpreter, history becomes a treasury of illustrations that illuminate the divine nature and agenda.

The Bible clearly defines God’s agenda as His own self-disclosure in the advancement of His kingdom on Earth. Jesus referred to this in many of His parables. Jesus knew that His own life and work would give a new impetus to God’s kingdom on earth, and He foresaw what the subsequent growth of the kingdom would be like. Among other things, Jesus compared the imminent growth of the kingdom to that of a mustard seed:

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He presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all other seeds; but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.” (Matthew 13.31,32)<sup>1</sup>

The history of the *Ekklesia* is the story of that mustard seed sprouting and growing over the course of the last 2,000 years. As we study its branching growth, its times of fruitfulness and times of infestation by “the birds,” we will not only learn about God and His agenda for this age, but also about how we can effectively join Him in His kingdom work and kingdom battles.

We’ll see that to work and fight effectively for God’s kingdom, we’re going to have to set aside our spiritual provincialism. We have to resist the idea that we, and those in our particular religious neighborhood, are the ones who best know what following Jesus should look like. I’ve been down that foolish path. When Christ saved me, I was a high-schooler in a dead, liberal church. What Christ did in my life was so different from anything I saw happening in the church people around me, it made me think I was the only real believer in Tacoma, and that I had re-discovered the gospel for mankind. I soon found out that there were plenty of believers around, and most of them much wiser and humbler than myself. You see, it’s easy to believe that we are the most spiritual, the most zealous, the most theologically correct until we expand our horizons and get to know Jesus followers from other parts of town, and other parts of history. *The Mustard Seed Story* will provide a fresh set of criteria by which to examine ourselves and the vitality and integrity of our own spiritual lives.

If we are willing to examine ourselves humbly, we will find history to be a kind teacher. It is much less painful to learn crucial lessons through the experiences of our predecessors, than to pay the price of learning the same lessons firsthand. Unfortunately, arrogance often keeps us from investigating the lessons of the past. Hegel said, “The one thing man learns from history, is that man learns nothing from history.” If we will swim against that current of human pride and study the history of the *Ekklesia* with a willingness to learn from the saints of an earlier day, we will find our investigation well rewarded, and wonder why we’ve waited until now to hear more of *The Mustard Seed Story*.

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<sup>1</sup> The mustard of the Bible, Mat. 13.31,32 and parallel passages, was probably black mustard, which grows to heights of 3.7m/12 ft in Israel.



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# Syllabus Orientation

A Survey Of The *Ekklesia's* Progress Since The First Coming of Christ

## WorkSheets -----Section B

Be sure to download Section B which consists of the work sheets we will use for taking notes during each week's presentation.

## Christian Centuries Chronology-----Section C

During our study of the Mustard Seed Story, we will make regular reference to these time lines in order to associate the events we discuss with their contemporaneous events in "secular" history.

## Ancient Documents-----Section D

The best way to study church history—for the person who can make the time—is to read the original accounts and treatises of the people who lived it. We've provided a few samples of ancient documents in this syllabus, both in order to refer to them in the course of our study, and to whet your appetite for more from the treasury of past Christian writings.

## Charts and Articles-----Section E

We will make reference to these pages as we refer to different sects that have arisen since the apostolic period, and to historic church councils that have influenced the course of Christianity.

## List of Books and Other Resources-----Section F

This list refers to books and periodicals used in the preparation of this course, and to other recommended resources.

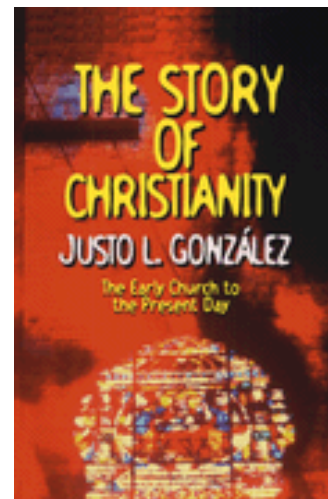
## Glossary-----Section G

Please refer to the Glossary for unfamiliar terms that you may hear in the course of our class discussions.

## Reading Assignments-----

### Section H

Our background textbook for this study is Justo González's *The Story of Christianity*, available online, in one volume from ChristianBook.com. Look in this section of the syllabus for your weekly reading assignments in González's book and the study questions to answer as you read.



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“Tell me more about this Christianity of yours. I’m terribly interested.”