

The Start of the Church

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing by the author. All materials printed by the Bluestone Baptist Printing Ministry are free of charge. Absolutely, no materials are to be sold!

BLUESTONE INDEPENDENT BAPTIST CHURCH
BLUESTONE BAPTIST PRINTING MINISTRY

PASTOR – DR. RYAN MCGUIRE
PO Box 987 CLARKSVILLE, VA 23927
CHURCH PHONE: 434 374 8232

The Start of the Church

If we are to understand the church and its function, we must go back to the start of the church. The first mention of the church came from our Saviour's lips in Matthew 16:18. "*And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" From this point, the word "church" is used 78 more times and the word "churches" 36 times. Apparently the church, or as Jesus titled it "my church", is a distinct class of people, as three were mentioned in I Corinthians 10:32. "*Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:*" Although the church was not seen nor mentioned in the Old Testament, it is prominent in the New Testament and is even considered a separate dispensation. Therefore, the Old Testament emphasized the Jews while the New Testament accentuates the church (where Jew and Gentile come together as one in Christ). Accordingly, we should note a few basic elements about the church.

What exactly is a church? Many people have misunderstood precisely what the church is. Some feel that it is nothing more than a building while others view it as a social club. James Strong defined church as, "an assembly of Christians gathered for worship in a religious meeting". (1) Noah Webster defined church as, "The collective body of Christians, or of those who profess to believe in Christ, and acknowledge him to be the Savior of mankind." (2) From these views, we see that a church is a body of called out believers that assemble themselves together to worship the Lord.

We can even see the meaning and intention of the church in its Greek form, *ekklesia*. (3) If we were to break down this word into its parts, we would observe that "*ek*" means "called out" while "*klesia*" signifies "an assembly". Again, we note that the church is a body of born again believers that assemble themselves in order to worship the Lord and carry forth His ordinances, commandments, and evangelism. Therefore, the church is not a building, but it is a body. Buildings may burn down but the church will still exist.

A second area that should be noticed about the church is its distinction. Jesus declared, in Matthew 16:18, that the church is something new and different. It is not the tabernacle or the temple of the Old Testament (nor a continuation of them), but it is a body. *“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”* This is something that has not existed up to this point.

The church is so distinct, that the Lord gave it a separate dispensation. Some feel that we are in the “Grace Dispensation”, but that is not so. J. Edwin Hartill defined “dispensation” as, “a period of time during which God deals in a particular way with man in respect to sin and man’s responsibility. The word ‘dispensation’ means ‘administration’ and is first found in I Corinthians 9:17.” (4) He further states, “time is an island in the sea of eternity, which is divided into different dispensations or periods of time.” (5) Therefore, we must conclude that we are not in a “Grace Dispensation” because there has always existed grace. Even Noah found grace long before the church was birthed. We must arrive to the conclusion that this is the “Church Dispensation”.

Another question that one may ask is, “Who owns the church?” Some feel that the church is a family owned and operated organization. Others feel that it belongs to the deacons, chairmen, and preachers. However, to answer the question, Christ owns His church. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, *“I will build **my church**”*. Therefore, the church belongs to our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He holds the deed to it.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.”

Jesus is the Shepherd that owns the flock. The flock does not belong to a hierarchy, denomination, government, or board. Churches are to be autonomous and indigenous since they belong to the Lord. They should receive their orders from heaven and not earthly headquarters.

God expects churches to be independent from one another (Revelation 2-3). They should not be subject to the control of others. Churches should be independent in their government and should possess the right to self-government. These rights have been stripped away from the local church by associations and conventions. We need to keep in mind that Jesus said that the church was “*my church*”. Failure to heed this fundamental fact has caused many local churches their pastor, buildings, and assets.

Another aspect about the church that should be recognized is its development. The Lord said that He would “*build*” His church. According to Strong’s Concordance, “*build*” means to, “found, establish, to promote growth in Christian wisdom, affection, grace, virtue, holiness, blessedness”. (6) Jesus made a promise that He would cultivate this church, and we see that He fulfilled this promise in the Gospels, Acts, and the epistles. With Jesus making a promise like this one, we can see that He has devoted Himself to the church.

There is only one church that Jesus promised to build. He did not say, “I will build my churches”, but it is “church” singular. You cannot be built in a denomination, organization, convention, or association. It is only in God’s church that saints can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. There must be an unbroken line of God’s church of which we can be a part! Spiritual strength is only found at God’s church, and nowhere else.

Now that the church has been defined, and we realize that it is distinct, and Jesus holds the deed to it, and the Lord promised to develop it, when did the church begin? This question is a much-debated one. However, a simple chronology of idea and forethought will shed some light on the issue.

It is the view of the author that the church was empowered and in existence before Pentecost. One of the key verses to support this idea is I Corinthians 12:28. “*And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.*” From this inspired passage, we notice that the apostles were the first members of the local church. Jesus placed them in the church “*first*”, which was before Pentecost. The apostles were called out of the world and placed in a local congregation

according to Matthew 4:18-22. Is not the definition of the church a body of called out people?

*“And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and **he called them**. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.”*

Also, notice Matthew 10:1-4:

*“And when he had **called unto him** his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.”*

From these two portions of Scripture, we see that the first people that were called out of the world were the apostles. They were placed “*first*” in the church, which was before Pentecost.

Paul also expressed, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, that the second class of people that were placed in the church were the prophets. “*And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.*”

Carefully think about what Matthew said in Matthew 11:13. *“For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.”* Luke also commented on this in Luke 16:16. *“The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.”* The prophets were until John. Since all the prophets ceased to exist after the death of John, then how could Jesus add them to the church if it (the church) did not exist until Pentecost?

The principal behind this thought is, “How can you add something (apostles and prophets) to another thing (the local church) that does not exist (Idea: The church did not exist until Pentecost)?”

This thought is also supported by the addition of converts to the church at Jerusalem. After the powerful message by Peter at Pentecost, people were saved. Luke, in Acts 2:41, records this fact. *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were **added unto them** about three thousand souls.”* Once again, how can you add unto them (the local church at Jerusalem) if they did not exist until Pentecost? How can you add to something that does not exist?

We see the importance of the statement found in I Corinthians 12:28 when dealing with the birth of the church. The following is a suggested outline of the birth of the church:

“The Birth and Membership of the Local Church”

1. Apostles- Occurred in the Gospels
2. Prophets- Occurred in the Gospels
3. Teachers- Occurred in the Gospels
4. Miracles, Gifts of Healings, Helps, Governments- Occurred in the Gospels
5. Diversities of Tongues- Occurred on the Day of Pentecost

In the Gospels, 18 times Jesus made the statement, *“Follow me”*. Why did Jesus tell His disciples to follow Him in the Gospels? The answer is that He gave them a ministry to fulfill. Notice their ministry found in Matthew 10:5-15.

“These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city.”

One of the obligations of the local church is ministering. Therefore, we see that a ministry existed in the local church before Pentecost.

A debatable factor for the church not being in existence until Pentecost is that the gospel was not fulfilled until after the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some feel that you must have the gospel and the preaching of the gospel in the church. However, Jesus preached the gospel before His death, which is the same gospel after His death. This is supported in Mark 1:1. *“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.”* Therefore, you have the preaching of the gospel in the Gospels.

Jesus gave two ordinances to the local church to fulfill, which are baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Most agree that through the

authority of the local church can we carry out these ordinances. Since this is true, who gave John the Baptist the authority to baptize converts as seen in Luke 3:16? *“John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:”* Even Jesus’ disciples had the authority to baptize in John 4:1-3.

“When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.”

If the church did not exist until Pentecost, then Jesus instructed His disciples to baptize without the authority of the local church. Is not this a contrary teaching of the Baptists today? Did Jesus tell His disciples to contradict the Scriptural teaching of local church authority? We must conclude that they baptized in the power of the local church, which was in existence before Pentecost.

What about the Lord’s Supper found in Matthew 26:26-30, Mark 14:22-25, and Luke 22:7-20? Is not the Lord’s Supper an ordinance given to the local church? Why were Jesus and His disciples partaking of it without the authority of the church? Certainly, from the three views of the administration of the Lord’s Supper (open communion, close communion, and closed communion) closed communion is the proper way. This is the idea that only saved; baptized members of that local church can partake. Evidently, Jesus and His followers were in the local church (before Pentecost) fulfilling this ordinance. Jesus delivered to the local church these ordinances as found in I Corinthians 11:2. *“Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.”*

Singing is a part of the church services. After the Lord’s Supper, the disciples commenced singing as seen in Matthew 26:30. *“And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.”* The prophecy in Hebrews 2:11-12 reveals Jesus singing in the midst of the church with His brethren.

“For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.”

In this Scripture, we see the unity of the body. Jesus is the head and the brethren are the body. With this unity, “...are all of one”. As one, they are singing in the church, which was before Pentecost. Someone made the statement, in defense of the church starting at Pentecost, “How can the body live three days without the Head (referring to Christ as the Head of the church)?” The answer to this is that Jesus never ceased to be the Head of the church, even during His three days of being in the tomb. He was alive in Spirit. How can you kill the resurrection and the life? The Head was never severed from the body. He was alive in the heart of the earth as well as in the third heaven. Only the body was dead (Revelation 1:18). Jesus never ceased to be God!

Another supporting factor for the existence of the church before Pentecost is the institution of church discipline. In the context of Matthew 18:15-20, New Testament (local church) church discipline is explained. Jesus (before Pentecost) was instructing His disciples how to handle unruly members within a local assembly. When they will not listen to reason, Jesus informed them in verse 17, “*tell it unto the church*”. How could they tell the church anything if the church did not exist until Pentecost? Were they supposed to wait until Pentecost before they could handle problems? How was something that did not exist (the local church) supposed to speak (“*if he neglect to hear the church*”)?

Most churches today have treasurers. Whether it is a general fund treasurer, missions fund treasurer, or any fund treasurer churches possess treasurers. This is also the case in the church before Pentecost. Their treasurer’s name was Judas, as seen in John 13:29. “*For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor.*”

One final thought on the existence of the church before Pentecost is found in Acts 1:15. *“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)”* Evidently, someone kept a list of names of those believers that were present at Jerusalem. Their names amounted to 120. This is the practice of churches today, and it was a procedure for the church that was in existence before Pentecost.

Despite the difference of opinions that may arise after these statements, we can settle on one issue and that is that the church is in existence today. Before we close, many observations about the start of the church needs recognition. The way Jesus began His church (whether it be in the Gospels or Acts), He intends for His church to remain.

Once the Lord established the church, what were their practices? In the book of Acts, we see the church at Jerusalem and their performances, which all churches should follow. The location is Jerusalem and the time is after the Pentecost. Our Lord has empowered the church and given them a great command in Acts 1:8. Now, with their resources available, it is their responsibility to carry forth the admonition of the Lord. Several fundamental facts can be taken from Acts 2 that reveal how the church should continue. Notice their salvation, submersion, submission, steadfastness, social life, supper, supplication, similarity, support, services, shouting, and status.

In Matthew 16:19, Jesus told Peter that he would receive *“the keys of the kingdom of heaven”*. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter used the keys to open up that door to the kingdom of heaven. Amazingly, there was a tremendous offer of salvation made to possibly more than 3,000 people. In this great move of God toward sinners, we see the steps to salvation. These steps are preaching, pricking, penance, and a promise.

God has chosen preaching to reach the world with the gospel as seen in I Corinthians 1:21. *“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”* This is also discussed in Titus 1:3. *“But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the*

commandment of God our Saviour;” Sinners gathered on the Day of Pentecost and heard the preaching of Peter (“*when they heard this*”). Because of the mixture of the Scripture (I Peter 1:23) with the Spirit (I Corinthians 2:4), the pricking of the Holy Ghost moved in.

The Bible declares in Acts 2:37 that they were “*pricked in their heart*”. According to Strong’s Concordance, “*pricked*” means “to pierce, to pain the mind sharply, agitate it vehemently”. (7) This is the idea of conviction as found in John 16:8. “*And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:*” Without the pricking and drawing of the Spirit of God, no sinner will be saved as seen in John 6:44. “*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.*”

Preaching and pricking produced penance in the lives of those that were saved on the Day of Pentecost. Luke records, in Acts 2:38, the instruction to those who heard the Word, which was “*Repent*”. Repentance is a change of mind, which produces a change of one’s heart and life. In the Scriptures, there are two types of repentance. First, there is the sorrow of the world. A study of Judas will illustrate this type. Secondly, there is godly sorrow, which works repentance to salvation.

Is repentance a type of works? According to the Scriptures, repentance is not works but a working of faith. In order to be saved a sinner must repent and then believe (Mark 1:15). Some feel that repentance is not a Biblical doctrine. However, Jesus, Peter, John, and Paul preached repentance. All of these men were Spirit filled and rightly divided the Word of God.

Once these sinners reached this point, God fulfilled the promise to them as seen in Acts 2:39. “*For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*” If an unbeliever will only respond to the call of salvation, God will give him the promise. What a promise!

Another area of interest about the church at Jerusalem is their submersion. After these people were saved, Peter instructed them to be baptized (Acts 2:38). Before they were added to the church, they were baptized. This is an ordinance that God expects every

church to practice and keep. God did not suggest for us to be baptized, but He commanded us to.

It is important to note some characteristics of their baptism. First, it was a personal act (Acts 2:38- "*every one of you*"). This phrase deals with the individuality in baptism. There is not one passage that teaches substitution baptism. When an individual is born again, then that individual must be baptized.

Secondly, their baptism was a complete immersion under water. The word "baptize" means to immerse or submerge. Any form of sprinkling is not a Scriptural method of baptism. Since baptism is a type of burial, then the new convert must be completely placed under the water.

Thirdly, baptism was a proclaiming act. It should be done "*in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*". Baptism is an outward profession of an inward possession. The local church should administer the baptism by the means of their pastor. When people are baptized, they identify themselves with Christ, and then with the church.

Another area in which the church at Jerusalem should be noted is their submission. Luke described them as gladly receiving the Word of God (Acts 2:40-41). Sometimes people madly or sadly receive the Word, but these saints welcomed it happily. Many people try to treat the Bible as if it is a salad bar, where they select what they want. However, the church at Jerusalem, when the Scriptures were declared, listened and obeyed what God had to say. They treated messages as if God were speaking to them, instead of the preacher telling them what to do.

Steadfastness was another trait at Jerusalem (Acts 2:42- "*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine...*"). According to Noah Webster, "steadfast" means, "Fast fixed; firm; firmly fixed or established; constant; firm; resolute; not fickle or wavering." They continued in the doctrine that the apostles taught. It was an unwavering adherence to what they said. Where did the apostles get their teachings? Their beliefs were passed down to them from Jesus, and He got His doctrine from God the Father (John 7:16- "*Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.*"). With this in mind, we need to pass this doctrine on to others as we go into the world teaching them about Jesus. Paul

gave this instruction to Timothy in II Timothy 2:2. *“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”*

A liberal made the statement one time that doctrines divide, but love unifies. His goal was to get everyone under the umbrella of love and throw out doctrine. However, doctrines should divide. There is a desperate need, especially in the last days, to uphold sound doctrine. We are living in a time when doctrines of devils are being promoted. It is important for the saint to be steadfast in doctrine.

The church at Jerusalem had a good social life amongst them. They continued in fellowship (Acts 2:42). Fellowship is “Companionship; society; consort; mutual association of persons on equal and friendly terms; partnership; joint interest”. (9) Working together comes naturally when everyone is in fellowship with one another. Imagine what could be accomplished for the cause of Christ if churches would dwell together in unity.

We notice that the phrase “breaking of bread” refers to the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:42). A persistent observance of the Lord’s Supper will help a local congregation to examine themselves often. It also aided them to keep in mind what Jesus Christ did for them on the cross.

They also continued in prayer (Acts 2:42). The most important thing that a church can do is pray. God designed His church to be a house of prayer (Matthew 21:13). This church knew how to pray in the closet, with their families, and with one another. Prayer came as natural to them as breathing.

These vital elements assisted the church in having all things common (Acts 2:44- *“And all that believed were together, and had all things common;”*). Not only was there unity, but there was also resemblance amongst them. They probably had a common dress, desires, dedication, and duties.

The Jerusalem saints also aspired to help one another. This is found in Acts 2:45. *“And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.”* They knew how to support each other to the point that there was equality in the congregation. Rich saints were not prospering while poor believers

were suffering. Apparently, they were practicing hospitality amongst the assembly. Houses, lands, gold, vineyards, and other assets were of no interest when it came to helping others. They sold their estates and divided it among the poor. Certainly, this is a strange practice in the last days of greed.

Another unusual habit of the church at Jerusalem was that they loved to have services. Luke informs us that they were “*continuing daily with one accord in the temple*”. Every day they would enter into the temple for times of prayer (Acts 1:14- “*These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*” Acts 3:1- “*Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.*”) and preaching (Acts 5:42- “*And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*”). It seemed as a common practice amongst them.

This daily ritual of entering the temple for prayer and preaching lead to praise (Acts 2:47- “*Praising God*” Luke 24:53- “*And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.*”). It is good to come to church and praise God instead of praise the Devil. When hearts are right and attitudes are proper, one cannot help but to praise God. Evidently, shouts at the temple were an ordinary event in Jerusalem. We need the Lord’s help to get back to this way of worship!

Finally, the saints at Jerusalem had a tremendous testimony in the community. We see in Acts 2:47 that they had “*favour with all the people*”. These saints possessed a divine influence. They had a consistent Christian walk that made them have an effect on others.

With these characteristics, we see why the Lord added to the church daily (Acts 2:47). God blessed the start of the church. Through study, we can see some distinctiveness that, if we practiced them, God would bless our congregations also. What we need to do is return to these principles and practice them. If we did so, we could see revival. Robert T. Boyd describes what could happen if the church would wake up and repent.

- a. If all the sleeping folk would wake up,
- b. And all the lukewarm folk would fire up,

- c. And all the dishonest folk would confess up,
- d. And all the disgruntled folk would sweeten up,
- e. And all the discouraged folk would cheer up,
- f. And all the depressed folk would look up,
- g. And all the estranged folk would make up,
- h. And all the gossipers would shut up,
- i. And all the dry bones would shake up,
- j. And all the true soldiers would stand up,
- k. And all the tightwads would pay up,
- l. And all the church members would pray up—
- m. Then your church would have a revival! (10)

ENDNOTES

1. James Strong, The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, page unknown.
2. Noah Webster, American Dictionary of the English Language, page unknown.
3. James Strong, The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, page unknown.
4. J. Edwin Hartill, Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics, page 13.
5. *Ibid*
6. James Strong, The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, page unknown.
7. *Ibid*
8. Noah Webster, American Dictionary of the English Language, page unknown.
9. *Ibid*
10. Robert T. Boyd, World's Bible Handbook, page 191.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Boyd, Robert T., World's Bible Handbook. World Publishing, 1991.
2. Hartill, J. Edwin, Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics. Zondervan Publishing House, 1996.
3. Strong, James, The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990.
4. Webster, Noah, American Dictionary of the English Language. Foundation for American Christian Education, 1998.