

# **The Church of the New Testament (Part 1 of 8)**

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## **The Establishment of the Church**

This is the first in a series of studies concerning that institution for which Christ died and bought with his own precious blood, and which was filled with his Spirit. I refer to the institution that we designate the church. It is my firm belief that it is possible for men and women today to become members of the church that Jesus built. Perhaps it is hardly necessary to attempt to prove that there is such an institution as the church now in existence, since the great majority of people now believe that God does have an organization properly styled "the church" now upon the earth. In this study, I want to show the time of its establishment.

## **Different Terms Refer to the Church**

There are different terms used to refer to this institution in the New Testament. The expression "kingdom of heaven" sometimes refers to the ultimate state of heaven; sometimes it is used to refer to those attributes that belong to the people of God; and sometimes it is used to refer to the church.

From the standpoint of its government, it is called a "kingdom." That means that it is not like the United States government, which is a representative democracy. In the making of the laws of the United States, the people have a voice. But in the church, we have no voice, for it is a kingdom, a monarchy. That means that Jesus Christ is the ruler supreme. In him are vested all the departments - legislative, judicial, and executive. Its laws are perfect and no single man or council of men has the right to revise, amend or strike out any of its laws.

From the standpoint of its organization, it is called a "body." In this respect, it is like the human body. We are the members of the body, and Jesus Christ is the head. Every member, therefore, is subject to the directions and orders of the head.

From the standpoint of its relationship to the world, it is properly called the church, which means the, "called out," or the "separated." Those who are in the church are "called out" to be separate and distinct from the world in general. But today, we are interested in the time of the establishment of the church.

## **The Time of Its Establishment**

Various theories either true or false, are connected with the time of its establishment. Some have suggested that it does not matter when the church was established, but I believe that it does matter, because of its relationship to these various theories.

There is a theory, which says that the church existed before creation. This theory is based upon the idea that before creation, God had already determined the identity of every member of the church, to the extent that from that time until now it has neither increased nor decreased by a single soul. As you know perhaps, that led to the doctrine of election and predestination of individuals as taught by some.

There is another theory, which states that the church was established in the days of Abraham. This theory led to the doctrine of infant church membership. They assume that just as there were infants in the family of Abraham, and that they were inducted by the rite of circumcision, even so in the church there is room for babies, and they should be sprinkled and inducted into the church. On this point, however, I would like to note that circumcision in Abraham's day was not an initiation into family fellowship, but on the other hand the male children were circumcised because they were born into Abraham's house. Even then, only the male babies were circumcised so why it is that baby girls should be sprinkled on that basis, I have never been able to understand.

There is another theory that the church was established in the days of John the Baptist, and there was a time when people who believed that had the courage to announce it, affirm it, and defend it. Why they will no longer do so is no doubt because they have found that such a theory cannot be defended with the word of God.

The church of the New Testament could not have been in existence before the New Testament itself became effective. The divine writer very distinctly says in Hebrews 9:16, 17 that where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of the man who made it, for a testament is of force after men are dead. It is a contradiction of terms to talk about the church of the New Testament having been in existence prior to the effectiveness and force of the New Testament.

I would also point out that the institution of which Jesus is the head is not simply a continuation of the organization back in Abraham's day. It is something new, distinct, and separate from the congregation that existed then. The divine writer said, in Hebrews 8:6-13: "But now hath he obtained

a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." Therefore, we understand that that organization, that covenant and institution under Jesus Christ is a new affair and quite different from that institution of the old testament in the days of the fathers.

The apostle Paul taught the same thing to the Ephesians: "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off (by this he refers to the Gentiles) are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make - (What does that mean? It means that he might make, or for the purpose of making) - for to make one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Ephesians 2:13-16). Here it is affirmed that Christ broke down the law of commandments that he might make "one new man" i.e., "one new body."

The institution about which so much is said was established, inaugurated, and set up on the Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ. So far as I know, every scholar of any note who has written on the matter has come to acknowledge that Pentecost marks the birthday and the beginning of the church of Christ, the church of the New Testament. Lengthy arguments might be made, but please notice some plain and simple statements on the matter.

### **Sacred Prophecy and History Show the Time**

About 600 years before Christ, in the days of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had a dream. He wanted to know the meaning of that dream, but there was a problem - he had forgotten the dream. His magicians and wise men were called in but they were unable to help. After a time, a Hebrew prophet by the name of Daniel was brought in. With God's help, Daniel was not only able to tell him the dream but also to reveal the interpretation thereof. He said, in Daniel 2:31-35: "Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image." Daniel related that the "head of this terrible image was of gold, the breast and arms were of silver, the belly and thighs were of brass, the legs were of iron, and its feet part of iron and part of clay."

In Daniel 2:36-45, Daniel gave the interpretation. He told Nebuchadnezzar: "Thou art this head of gold." I.e., that head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire. Another empire would rise after him, represented by the silver chest and arms. That was the Medo-Persian Empire, dating from 536 B.C. After that came Alexander the Great, represented by the belly of brass. This was divided under four generals and later merged into the Egyptian and Syrian, represented by the thighs of the great image.

The fourth inferior kingdom that was to arise was the Roman Empire, whose army swept over all the earth and ruled the world from the seven-hilled city of Rome. Look at it now! The Caesars are on the throne, and the Herods are in the land of Palestine. Daniel says, in Daniel 2:44, "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed." Therefore, according to sacred prophecy and history, God's government was established upon the earth while the Romans held sway over the civilized affairs of mankind. Sacred testimony also bears out the fact that during the days of the Herods, and in the days of the Caesars, the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist, came to announce that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

### **Not Established During John's or Jesus' Ministries**

After John was cast into prison and his labors were ended, Jesus taught his disciples to pray as follows: "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, etc." It is certain that Jesus would not have taught them to pray for that which had already come. Many people thoughtlessly repeat that same prayer today, even since the kingdom has come. We should pray, "Thy kingdom continue." Also, in Matthew 18:3, Jesus rebuked the disciples, saying, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." They were not in it at that time, for the kingdom had not yet been

established.

When Jesus gathered the disciples away from the multitudes, he took them to the city of Caesarea Philippi and asked them what the people thought about his identity. They said: "Some say John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremias or one of the prophets." Jesus said, "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." Jesus said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 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." Upon what rock? Not upon Peter--he was the gatekeeper, not the foundation. Upon the great truth confessed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." We understand therefore that it is the church of Christ, by virtue of the fact that he built it and he bought it, and became head over it in all things.

Jesus said, "I will build my church." Now, if at that time he meant for us to understand that it was already in existence, Jesus certainly misled the human family by using the verb "will build." Every school teacher, and probably every school child knows, that "will build" could not refer to enlargement or embellishment or edification, because Christ calls attention to the fact that he "will build" it right from the foundation.

But again in Mark 9:1, the Saviour, in talking to the disciples said, "There be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." Thus he implies: (1) That the kingdom is going to be established in the not-far-distant future. I.e., some of you will not have tasted death until the kingdom of God comes - in their lifetimes. (2) When it does come, here is one of the ways it will be known--it will come with "power." It will come with "power from on high."

Do you remember that Jesus said in his great commission to the disciples, "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high?" At that time, they did not have the power, but they were to wait in the city of Jerusalem until power from on high came upon them. Also, do you remember that just before Jesus' ascension into heaven, the disciples asked Jesus: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" He answered: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8).

Thus, it is clear that the "kingdom of God" was to come within their

lifetimes. It was to be characterized by the power that accompanied it. They were to receive that power after that the Holy Spirit came upon them. Therefore, if I find when the spirit came, I will determine when the power came, and will also settle when the kingdom came, for these three things kingdom, power, and spirit, were to be simultaneous in their coming. What happened? The Spirit came on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

Therefore, when the Spirit came, the power came, and with the power, the kingdom of Christ, according to Christ's promise in Mark 9:1. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached the gospel to a great concourse of people. After explaining the outpouring of the Spirit, Peter described the crucifixion of Christ as a fulfillment of prophecy (Acts 2:22-24). He next argued that Jesus was exalted to sit on David's throne and "hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:25-33). He climaxed his sermon in verse 36 with these words: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

The time has now come; the knock has been sounded; it is time for Peter to insert the key, and unlock the door and swing it wide open. He did that by commanding repentance and baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). From that time, the day of Pentecost, A. D. 33, the church is spoken of in the Bible as history. Do you not wish to be added to the church of Christ?

**By Johnny Elmore, Used by Permission**