

STUDIES IN THE BIBLE



The Establishment Of The Church

Lesson 18

Ten days after His ascension into heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ brought His church into existence in Jerusalem. How it was established is told in the Acts of the Apostles, the only strictly historical book in the New Testament. Acts, written by the physician Luke, is a chronicle of some of the activities of some of the apostles as they spread the gospel and planted the church. It gives special emphasis to the work of Peter and Paul. In this lesson we will study the establishment of the church and related events as recorded in the first seven chapters of the book.

The body of Christ is described by a variety of terms in the Scriptures. Among these are the expressions "church" and "kingdom of God" or "kingdom of heaven". That the church and kingdom are different names applying to the same body is shown by Jesus when He says to Peter, "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church . . . And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 16:18, 19.) Since Jesus uses the two expressions interchangeably, we shall do so in this investigation of the planting of His church.

The Church In Purpose

Before the church became a reality it existed in the mind or purpose of God. Paul declares, "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Eph. 3:10, 11.)

The Church In Prophecy

The Almighty by prophecy first revealed to man His purpose with the church. Daniel, interpreting King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, foretold, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." (Dan. 2:44.) As yet, though, the spiritual nature of the kingdom had not been made known.



The Church In Preparation

The preparation period of the church was first declared by John the Baptist, a few months before Christ began His personal ministry. John proclaimed the imminence of the kingdom saying, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 3:2.) Soon Jesus Himself said, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 4:17.) He sent His disciples forth with the admonition,

"And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 10:7.) Still later He promised, "And upon this rock I will build my church." (Matt. 16:18.)

Jesus told His disciples how, when, and where He would establish His church. "Verily I say unto you, that 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." (Mark 9:1.) "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." (Acts 1:8.) "But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:49.) Combining these passages we learn that (1) the church would be established during the apostles' lifetime, (2) it would come with power, (3) it would be set up in Jerusalem.

The Church In Perfection

The first chapter of Acts finds the apostles waiting in Jerusalem in compliance with the Lord's instructions. While so doing they chose Matthias as apostle to replace Judas Iscariot who had hanged himself. Just ten days after Jesus ascended and fifty days after the Passover at which He was crucified the day of Pentecost arrived. Thousands of Jews from every nation gathered for the feast. At about 9:00 a. m. the apostles were assembled when "suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:2-4.)

Here was the power which Jesus had promised would accompany the establishment of His kingdom. The church had existed in purpose, prophecy and preparation and now was to be established in perfection. The apostles seized the opportunity to preach Christ to the assembled multitude. Then a most unusual thing happened. Every man heard the preaching in his own language. The people were amazed. Some suggested that the apostles were drunk. Finally, Peter stood before them and began to speak. He explained that they were not drunk, but that this miraculous display of power was from God and had been predicted by the prophet Joel. He told them that the One they had crucified was actually the Son of God, and that God had raised Him from the dead.

So powerful was this sermon that it cut to the heart of the people. They said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37.) They realized that they had slain the Son of God and in some way must secure forgiveness. Peter replied, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 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." (Acts 2:38, 39.) Thus he declared that their forgiveness (and ours as well) could not be secured until they had repented and been baptized. That day about 3000 people were baptized for the forgiveness of sins. The church was established. Thereafter it is spoken of as being an existing institution.

At the same time that the first converts were saved the Lord added them to His church. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47.) They were saved from their sins and became a part of the church in the same action. Thus the church in the undenominational sense was and is composed of the saved; one cannot be saved from his past sins without being in the church; one cannot be in the church without being saved. Furthermore, we learn from this scripture that the early Christians were added to the church by the Lord rather than "joining" it of their own volition as we so often hear the expression today.

The first Christians worshipped in a simple manner. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." (Acts 2:42.) The breaking of bread was the Lord's supper. The church grew rapidly. Peter and John healed a lame man and this excited the op-

position of the Jewish leaders. They arrested Peter and John, threatened them, and let them go. When they resumed their preaching, they and the other apostles were again arrested. Cast into prison, they escaped by a miracle to return to preaching Christ. Once more they were arrested, threatened, beaten, and finally released.

The church had other problems. There was much poverty and to cope with it many Christians sold their possessions and brought the money for distribution to the needy. A man named Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, sold a piece of land, but tried to deceive the apostles by pretending they were giving it all when they were not. For their lie, God struck them dead and fear came on all the church. When some complained that the widows of the Grecian Jews were being neglected, the apostles appointed seven men to supervise the daily ministrations. One of these men, Stephen, soon was involved in a dispute with some Jews. When he was arrested he preached a sermon before the Jewish council. So angered were those who heard him that they stoned Stephen, the first Christian to die as a martyr. As they took his life they laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul who later became a Christian and whom we know as the great Apostle Paul.

“Seek and Ye Shall Find”

Fill in the blanks:

1. The book of Acts was written by
2. Before the church existed in PERFECTION, it also existed in P....., P....., and P.....
3. John the Baptist preached, “Repent ye: for the of heaven is at hand.” (Matt. 3:2.)
4. Jesus told the disciples to tarry in the city of
5. He also said that some would not of death until they saw the kingdom of God come with (Mark 9:1.)
6. Pentecost came days after the Passover.
7. was selected to replace Judas Iscariot as apostle.

Read Acts 2. Write true or false before each statement:

- 1. When the apostles assembled, suddenly a sound as of a rushing mighty wind came from heaven.
- 2. There were devout Jews from every nation under heaven in Jerusalem at that time.
- 3. Every man heard the apostles speak in someone else’s language.
- 4. They were amazed and said, “Behold, are not all these which speak Samaritans?”
- 5. Some mocked and said, “These men are full of hard cider.”
- 6. Peter said that what was occurring was the fulfillment of the prophecy spoken by the prophet Elijah.
- 7. In verse 25 he quotes a statement made by David.

- 8. Peter climaxed his sermon by saying that Jesus whom they had crucified was both Lord and Christ.
- 9. The people then said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"
- 10. Peter answered by telling them to repent and pray.
- 11. That day 200 were baptized.
- 12. Men joined the church instead of being added to it by the Lord.

Circle the letter representing the correct answer:

- a b c 1. The lame man healed by Peter and John sought alms at the temple gate called: (a) Beautiful; (b) Golden; (c) Liberty. (Acts 3:2.)
- a b c 2. Peter told him to arise and walk in the name of: (a) Moses; (b) Peter; (c) Jesus Christ of Nazareth. (Acts 3:6.)
- a b c 3. The husband and wife who lied to the Holy Ghost and apostles were: (a) Tyre and Sidon; (b) Ananias and Sapphira; (c) Joseph and Mary. (Acts 5:1-4.)
- a b c 4. The high priest and those who arrested the apostles were of the sect of the: (a) Pharisees; (b) Herodians; (c) Sadducees. (Acts 5:17-18.)
- a b c 5. The doctor of the law who cautioned the Jewish council about what they did to the Apostles was: (a) Ananias; (b) Gamaliel; (c) Saul. (Acts 5:34.)
- a b c 6. The number of men appointed to supervise the daily ministration was: (a) seven; (b) twelve; (c) three. (Acts 6:1-5.)
- a b c 7. The one of these who was arrested and brought before the council was: (a) Peter; (b) Stephen; (c) John. (Acts 6:5-12.)
- a b c 8. Those who stoned Stephen laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named: (a) Saul; (b) Philip; (c) Nicanor. (Acts 7:58.)

Name..... Grade.....

Address..... Date.....

City..... By.....