

God's Eternal Plan

Lesson 5: The Church



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

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Study Number: DGW30

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About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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important to your eternal salvation (as I hope to demonstrate during the course of this lesson). You need to be part of Christ's kingdom/church!

This fifth (and final) lesson in this series will focus on the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingdom/church – and helping you understand the true nature and importance of the church of Christ.

The Church In Old Testament Prophecy

Prophecies concerning the church

As we considered some of the prophecies that were made concerning the Messiah, we noticed that some of those prophecies pointed to the everlasting kingdom He would reign over. At that point, we were focused specifically on the Messiah. However, we now want to think about the kingdom the Messiah would be King over (you might go back and notice some of the prophecies we considered in lesson 3 that related to the rule of the Messiah – since we will be discussing other prophecies during this lesson).

Before we consider these prophecies, though, I need to make mention of the fact that the terms “church” and “kingdom” are used interchangeably in the Scriptures. Observe this fact from Matthew 16:18-19: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” We'll talk more about this as we go through this lesson.

Isaiah 2:2-4

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house

In our last four studies we have observed the unfolding of God's eternal plan to save mankind from his sin. The plan that had once been considered a “mystery” has now been revealed (see Ephesians 3:3-5, 8-12)! We have watched as God promised to send a Savior into the world through whom all nations would be blessed. We have watched as God used His chosen people (the Israelites) to bring this Savior into the world. We watched as this Savior was born of a woman, lived a sinless life, gave His life as the sacrifice for sin, was buried, rose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven. We have watched as a New Covenant was established – and discussed some essential elements of the gospel's message.

Now, there is one final piece that we must investigate as we consider God's eternal plan. We have already considered passages that talk of an everlasting kingdom which God would establish. But, as of yet, we have not focused on that kingdom. What is this kingdom? Has it been established? Why is this kingdom important to your life on earth? I hope that this final study will help you to understand how the Bible answers each of these questions.

I hope that you are already seeing how the story of the Bible is relevant to your life. You were the one who had sinned (as all have sinned, Romans 3:23). Therefore, you were in need of the Savior God sent into this world. You have the need to hear and obey the message of the gospel (knowing that those who do not obey the gospel will be eternally punished in Hell, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). In the same way, the church (which is Christ's kingdom) is

of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore."

This is a prophecy concerning the church. Notice the specific prophecies about the church that are contained in this reading. (1) All nations would have the opportunity to be part of this kingdom (church). (2) Out of Zion (Jerusalem) the law would go forth. (3) The kingdom (church) would be peaceful. (4) This would occur in the last/latter days.

Daniel 2:31-45

"You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all — you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided;

yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold — the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure."

This also is a prophecy concerning the church. In this passage, Daniel interprets King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The dream was concerning a statue (which represented four earthly kingdoms). It had a head of gold (representing the Babylonian kingdom), a chest and arms of silver (representing the Medo-Persian kingdom), a belly and thighs of bronze (representing the Grecian kingdom), and legs of iron with feet partly of iron and partly of clay (representing the Roman kingdom). In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, there was a stone that struck this image and broke it into pieces. This stone represented the kingdom of God that would be established, which would be greater than all of the others! This kingdom would be established during the time of the kingdom that was represented by the legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of clay (the Roman kingdom). Therefore, notice the prophecies that were made concerning the church in this passage: (1) God's kingdom would be everlasting. (2) God's kingdom would be established during the reign of the Roman Empire. (3) God's kingdom would begin small and grow larger.

Joel 2:28-32

"And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions.

And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the Lord Shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, As the Lord has said, Among the remnant whom the Lord calls.”

This passage contains another prophecy concerning the church. Notice that Joel’s prophecy was actually repeated by Peter in Acts 2:17-21 (when Peter says that it was being fulfilled on the day the church was established)! Notice the prophecies that are made concerning the church in this text. (1) God’s Spirit would be poured out on all flesh. (2) The one who calls on the name of the Lord would be saved. (3) This would happen in the last days (remember, Peter says this was being fulfilled in Acts 2:17-21).

Micah 4:1-5

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, And rebuke strong nations afar off; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, And no one shall make them afraid; For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. For all people walk each in the name of his god, But we will walk in the name of the Lord our God Forever and ever.”

This, too, is a prophecy concerning the church. Notice the specific prophecies that are made concerning the church in this passage. (1) It would be established in the latter/last days. (2) It would be

superior to all other kingdoms. (3) People of all nations would be part of this kingdom. (4) It would be established in Zion (Jerusalem). (5) The law would go forth from Jerusalem. (6) The kingdom would be a peaceful kingdom.

The church fulfilled all of the prophecies

Every one of these prophecies that were made concerning the kingdom of God finds their fulfillment in the church of Christ. Unfortunately, time does not permit a detailed examination of the fulfillment of these prophecies; yet, as you make a study of these prophecies, you will discover that only the church (Christ’s kingdom) is the fulfillment of them – as it was established during the days of the Romans, in Jerusalem, at the beginning of the last days (the gospel age), inviting people of all nations to join it, etc.

Then, before we move on in our study, I want to take a moment to consider Luke 9:27. Jesus said, “But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God.” Before you draw any other conclusions about the nature of Christ’s kingdom, please understand that Christ Himself taught that His kingdom would be established within the lifetime of many who were living at the time He was on the earth! Therefore, if Christ’s kingdom has not yet been established, Christ has lied! Yet, we can know that Christ did not lie (Hebrews 4:15) – and that the church is His kingdom, which was established during the lifetime of many in Jesus’ audience in Luke 9:27!

The Establishment And Growth Of The Church

Wait in Jerusalem

Jesus did a great deal of preaching concerning the coming of His kingdom during His earthly ministry. As we have already noticed, He even gave a time reference as to when His kingdom would be established (within the lifetime of many who were living at that time, Luke 9:27).

During His lifetime, Jesus promised that He would build His church. Again, in Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus said, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” In order to build His church, He would have to die on the cross to redeem those who would become His people (Acts 20:28). Therefore, this church would not be established until *after* His death, burial, and resurrection.

Just prior to His ascension to Heaven, Jesus told His apostles to wait in the city of Jerusalem. “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Acts 1:4-8 says, “And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’ Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’”

Acts 2

It is important to read the promises that Jesus made in Acts 1 (and the parallel account in Luke 24) because Acts 2 is a continuation of the story – and the fulfillment of the promises. In Acts 2, the apostles are waiting in Jerusalem (read Acts 1:12-14). Remember, it was prophesied that Christ’s kingdom/church would be established in Jerusalem – and that the law (the word of the Lord) would go forth from Jerusalem!

In Acts 2:1-4, the text records how the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles – and they began to speak in tongues. Now, this gift was not given to all of the 120 disciples who were waiting in

Jerusalem. Instead, the promise Jesus made was only to the apostles – and only the apostles received it (consider the pronoun “they” and “them” in this passage as reference to the apostles, Acts 1:26).

As Peter and the other apostles were questioned concerning the events that were transpiring, Peter stated that what was happening was the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (Acts 2:17-21, which we noticed in Joel 2:28-32)! Therefore, this was the beginning of the last days (which is a reference to the gospel/Christian age – the last period of time before Jesus Christ will return and end this world). All of the things Joel prophesied are said to be fulfilled in the events that were transpiring!

As you continue to read the account in Acts 2, you should observe the fact that the apostles preached the message of the gospel to those Jews who were present for this occasion. As you consider this chapter, you notice that the preaching of the gospel included the message about Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection – as well as about what individuals must do in order to be saved. Remember, it was prophesied that the word of the Lord (the law) would go forth from Jerusalem!

As individuals heard the message about Jesus Christ, some wanted to know if there was anything they could do to be saved! They asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). To their question, Peter responded, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Those who believed and obeyed the gospel’s message, therefore, fulfilled Joel’s prophecy that “whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved” (Acts 2:21) – since calling on the name of the Lord involves the obedience to the gospel (according to Acts 22:16). There were about 3,000 individuals who were obedient to the gospel’s message by repenting and being baptized that day (Acts 2:41).

Acts 2:47 records the following, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” This is the first time that the church is referred to as being in existence! Prior to Acts chapter 2, the church (or, Christ’s kingdom) is always referred to in the *future* tense (i.e. “I **will build**

My church,” Matthew 16:18 – emphasis mine, EMK). After Acts chapter 2, the church (or, Christ’s kingdom) is always referred to as being in existence (i.e. when people were then “added to the church” – Acts 2:47). Notice what Paul wrote in Colossians 1:13: “He *has delivered* us from the power of darkness and *conveyed* us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (emphasis mine, EMK). Certainly, Acts 2 marks the establishment of Christ’s church/kingdom!

Acts – Revelation

The remainder of the New Testament (from Acts 2 through Revelation) is devoted to describing how the church grew throughout the first century (A.D.), even though it faced numerous obstacles and persecution. Much of the New Testament contains letters that were written to local churches and individual Christians to teach, rebuke, and encourage them to live in the way that is pleasing to God! Not only do we profit from learning about the history involved in these Bible books, but, they contain the doctrine of Christ (the pattern) to which we must hold fast (2 Timothy 1:13).

The Church: The People Of God

What was established in Acts 2?

We have spent some time to demonstrate that the church was established in Acts chapter 2, fulfilling the prophecies made in the Old Testament. However, we have not yet discussed the *nature* of the church that was established in Acts 2.

Let’s begin by dispelling some false ideas about what was established in Acts chapter 2. (1) A group of denominations was *not* established. Though many folks view the “church of Christ” as being a collection of “Christians” from the many denominational groups (i.e. from the Baptist church, Methodist church, Lutheran church, Catholic church, etc.), this simply does not fit with the Scripture’s description of the church – and these man-made

denominations did not come into existence until much later than the first century A.D. (when the church of Christ was established). (2) An earthly organization was *not* established. Though many folks view the church as being an earthly organization that is governed by an earthly body/leader, this does not fit with the description of the church in the Bible! Furthermore, the first century church was not a business that was focused on making money and filling buildings! (3) A social club was *not* established. Now, this is not to say that the Christians were not social people or did not spend time socializing with one another. Yet, the church in the Bible was *not* responsible for providing social and recreational activities for its members (like many churches are guilty of doing today). (4) A political machine was *not* established. While the first century church had a great impact on society through the preaching of the gospel, the mission of the church was *not* to bring about social reforms or political changes! The mission of the Lord’s church was a spiritual mission that was focused on the salvation of souls through obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Instead, as we will continue to see, what was established on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 was the collection of God’s people who would give their lives to Him and live according to the New Covenant (the gospel), resulting in the salvation of their souls! You see, the Scriptures continually make reference to the church as the collection of God’s own special people!

God’s own special people

Under the Old Covenant, God chose the nation of Israel to be His own special people. They were responsible for keeping the Law of Moses (the Old Covenant) and God would use them to accomplish His purpose. God wanted the Israelites to be a people who would dedicate themselves to Him (see Deuteronomy 10:12-13). However, the Israelites consistently rejected Him and turned to other gods (idols). Furthermore, when God sent His Son into the world, it was the Israelites who rejected Jesus as the Messiah!

However, when the nation of Israel consistently rejected God, God continued to desire a

people who would chose to dedicate their lives to His service. Therefore, Jeremiah prophesied concerning the New Covenant that would be established in which God's people would willfully serve Him and know Him – and God would forgive their sins (Jeremiah 31:31-34; compare with Hebrews 8:8-12).

Those who obey this New Covenant (the gospel) are now God's people! Peter wrote to those who were Christians concerning how Christ had been rejected and those who come to Christ (through obedience to the gospel) are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10). But, had God failed to fulfill His promises regarding the nation of Israel?

Not at all! Read Romans 9-11 for a detailed discussion of this point. In this passage, Paul summarizes how all those who are obedient to the will of God are part of spiritual Israel – and those Israelites (according to the flesh) who are disobedient are cut off! So, all Israel will be saved (spiritual, not physical Israel). This is the church of Christ: God's special people who belong to Him! The day of Pentecost (Acts 2) marks the first time that individuals heard and obeyed the New Covenant (the gospel), thereby becoming part of God's church!

The church of Christ

It is only fitting that those who would be purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ and would follow Christ would be called by His name (and not the names of men)! Therefore, Jesus referred to the church as “My church” (Matthew 16:18). It is called the church of God in Acts 20:28 (remember, Jesus is God – John 1:1). Local churches (which we'll talk about momentarily) were called churches of Christ (Romans 16:16). Individual members of the church of Christ were identified as being disciples of Christ and Christians (Acts 11:26)!

Descriptions of the church

Not only are the people of God referred to as the church of Christ, but, the Bible also uses some other terms to describe them and their relationship with God and Christ. As we study these descriptions of Christ's church, let's keep in mind that those who compose Christ's church have been called out of darkness and into God's marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9-10). Therefore, these people are separate from the world – and its sinful ways (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)!

(1) The kingdom of God/Christ. The church of Christ is described as the kingdom of God/Christ. We have already seen how the church is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingdom – as well as Jesus' own statement concerning the kingdom in Luke 9:27. You should once again notice that the two terms (church and kingdom) are used interchangeably in Matthew 16:18-19 by Jesus Christ. It is important to recognize that Christ is the King over His kingdom – and Christians are kingdom citizens who submit to the rule of Jesus Christ and enjoy the blessings that kingdom citizenship brings!

(2) The body of Christ. The church of Christ is described as the body of Christ. Colossians 1:18 says, “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” You should also consider how this figure is used in Ephesians 1:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. As these passages help us to understand, Christ is the Head. That is, He possesses all authority over the body (church). Therefore, those who are in Christ are individually members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27) who submit to the rule of Christ and find their life in Him, while each performing various important functions!

(3) The temple of God. The church of Christ is described as being the temple of God. Of course, you should consider the place that the temple (and the tabernacle previous to it) had in Old Testament worship. It was, indeed, a holy place in which God would be worshiped and sacrifices would be brought to God. Today, the church is said to be the temple of God. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 says, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of

God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.” You should also notice that the same is said concerning each individual Christian in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. This figure simply should help us to appreciate that God’s Spirit dwells in His people through His word (see Ephesians 2:19-22) and that His people are expected to live holy lives that are conformed to His standards (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 1 Peter 1:15-16), offer themselves as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1-2), and worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

(4) The household of God. The church of Christ is described as being the household of God. In Ephesians 2:19, Paul wrote that Christians were “no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” 1 Timothy 3:15 also says that the church of the living God is “the pillar and ground of the truth.” The church is God’s family. Every Christian is an adopted son/daughter of God, the Father (Romans 8:16-17). Therefore, Christians are frequently referred to as being brothers/sisters with one another. Consequently, Christians are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus – looking for the inheritance that God will give to those who are His children (Romans 8:17; Ephesians 1:11).

There Is Only One True Church

How many churches are there?

Today, there are thousands of different (so-called) “Christian churches” that all claim to be – or to be part of – the one true church. Yet, each of these different churches believe, teach, and practice a different gospel from one another.

But, where did all of these different churches come from? The Bible actually gives us an answer to this question! While we cannot investigate this answer in great detail at this point, read 1 Timothy 4:1-5. This passage clearly teaches that a falling away (apostasy) from the faith of the gospel would take place. Though many factors contributed to this,

one of the contributing factors was false teaching (see 2 Peter 2:1-3). Thus, the gospel was perverted and different churches were formed. This has continued for almost 2,000 years – and we see its ongoing results today!

The next logical question is: Can everyone be right? That is, are all of these different (so-called) “Christian” churches that believe, teach, and practice their “Christianity” differently right in the sight of God? Read Matthew 7:21-23 and Galatians 1:6-9 to find the simple answer to this question. These passages teach two main points that we should consider. (1) Even those who profess to believe in Jesus Christ and call Him “Lord” will be lost if they do not obey God’s commandments. (2) We must not accept any other gospel than the one true gospel. Clearly, these passages help us to see that God is *not* pleased with all of these churches (or even with most of them)!

One body

In Ephesians 4:4, Paul said that there is “one body.” Now, I ask you, “What is the body?” Remember that Colossians 1:18 (and other passages) says that it is the church. So, how many churches are there? The answer is: ONE! That is what the Bible says.

However, Ephesians 4:4 is not the only passage that demonstrates the fact that there is only one church. There was only one church that was promised to be built. Jesus said, “I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). Notice that the word “church” is singular – not plural. Jesus only promised to build one church!

Then, as you study the establishment of the church in Acts 2 and study throughout the remainder of the New Testament, you observe the fact that there was only one church that was established. Again, Acts 2:47 tells us that “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” This is the reason Paul said there is “one body” in Ephesians 4:4 – since only one church had been established!

Who composes this one true church?

So, how do you know who composes the one true church – and who are members of “counterfeit

churches”? The answer is simple. If you recall, we established (in lesson 4) that there is only one system of acceptable religious belief, teaching, and practice (as seen in the phrase “the faith of the gospel”). Therefore, those who live according to “the faith of the gospel” are part of the “one body.” Those who fail to live according to “the faith of the gospel” are not part of the “one body.”

Therefore, those who are part of the “one body” (one church) include: Those who have not sinned (i.e. babies, young children, others who do not possess the mental ability to commit sin), those who have become Christians (by obeying the plan of salvation we established in lesson 4 – hear God’s word, believe, repent, confess, be baptized), those who are living faithfully (as is the responsibility of all who become Christians, as discussed in lesson 4), and those who have died in the Lord (those who were faithful unto death).

The Local Church

An accommodative term

Up to this point, we have focused on the “universal church” (the collection/totality of God’s people). In this sense, there is only one church. However, the Bible *does* talk about churches (plural) in the sense of local churches (i.e. Romans 16:16 says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.”). The term “local church” is an accommodative term and does not appear in the Bible. Yet, it does properly convey the idea that is presented in the Scriptures.

A local congregation of Christians

The Bible speaks of local churches in Corinth, Galatia, Philippi, Rome, Thessalonica, Antioch, Jerusalem, and many other places. However, these were *not* different denominations! In fact, they were all expected to believe, teach, and practice the faith of the gospel. Consider the unity that God commands in 1 Corinthians 1:10: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and

that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” A local church is simply an assembly/congregation of Christians who have joined themselves together in a local geographic area.

Must follow the NT pattern

There is a pattern for a local church to follow. This pattern is revealed in the pages of the New Testament. All local churches, therefore, must strive to hold fast to this pattern (2 Timothy 1:13)! God has provided this blueprint – and man is not free to make changes to the blueprint concerning the local church (or any other aspect of the blueprint)!

There is a pattern for local churches to follow regarding their worship. This pattern for worship involves 5 elements: (1) Singing (not playing musical instruments, see Ephesians 5:19), (2) Praying (1 Corinthians 14:15), (3) Preaching the gospel (Acts 20:7), (4) Taking the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week (on the first day of every week – and not on any other day, Acts 20:7), and (5) Taking up the collection on the first day of the week (and not on any other day, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). This is the Bible’s pattern for the worship of a local church.

There is a pattern for local churches to follow regarding their work. The Bible’s pattern for the work of the local church involves 3 elements: (1) Benevolence toward needy Christians (and only toward needy Christians, Acts 4:32-37), (2) Evangelism (1 Thessalonians 1:8), and (3) Edification (Ephesians 4:11-16). This is the Bible’s pattern for the work of a local church.

There is a pattern for the organizational structure of a local church. The Bible’s pattern for the organizational structure of a local church is summarized in Philippians 1:1 as: (1) Elders/pastors/overseers (who must meet the qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9), (2) Deacons (who must meet the qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:8-13), and (3) Saints (a term that refers to everyone who is a Christian). This is the Bible’s pattern for the organizational structure of a local church.

I realize that this is only a very brief overview of the local church – and encourage you to study this subject further. However, I simply want to emphasize that there is a pattern regarding all of these things in the Bible. Therefore, if you desire to practice New Testament Christianity, you must make sure that the local church you are associated with follows the New Testament pattern in all areas! Demand Bible authority (book, chapter, and verse) for everything that is taught and practiced!

Conclusion

Those who are obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ (the faith of the gospel) are part of this one true church you can read about in the Bible. Why is this so important? It is important because God has promised to save those who are in His church (those who are His people). Only to those who were Christians (part of the church of Christ), Peter said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4)!

So, how is the Bible’s story of God’s eternal plan important to your life? This story describes your holy and eternal God who loved you so much that He had a plan to redeem you from your sin by sending His only begotten Son to die on the cross for you. However, He has given you instructions that you must obey (found in the gospel) in order for you to become part of His church and be numbered with those who will be saved for all of eternity! The question for you is: How will you respond to God’s eternal plan? Will you obey Him – or disobey Him?

Study Questions

Review what you’ve learned thus far.

1. The Church In Old Testament Prophecy

Review the following Old Testament prophecies that were made concerning the church.

*Isaiah 2:2-4 –

*Daniel 2:31-45 –

*Joel 2:28-35 –

*Micah 4:1-5 –

Did the church fulfill these prophecies?

2. The Establishment And Growth Of The Church

Why is Jesus’ instruction to His apostles to “wait in Jerusalem” significant?

Discuss the events of Acts chapter 2 – and their significance.

How many churches does the Bible say that there is?

What is the remainder of the New Testament (Acts – Revelation) about?

Who composes this church?

3. The Church: The People Of God

5. The Local Church

What was established in Acts 2? Also, what was *not* established in Acts 2?

What is a local church?

What choice did the Israelites consistently make?
How is the church God’s special people today?

Is there a pattern for local churches to follow today?
If so, briefly describe that pattern.

Why is the church called the “church of Christ”?

***How will you respond to God’s eternal plan?
Will you obey Him – or disobey Him?**

Briefly describe the following ways the Bible describes the church:

(1) The kingdom of God/Christ –

(2) The body of Christ –

(3) The temple of God –

(4) The household of God –

4. There Is Only One True Church?

How many churches are there today? Where did they all come from? Can everyone be right?