



WHEN DID THE CHURCH BEGIN?

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WHEN DID THE CHURCH BEGIN? There is much confusion over this in Baptist circles. The vast majority of “Christian” denominations do not see any distinction between Israel and the Church. They believe that all the saved from Adam and Eve down to the end are all just one body of “Christians.” I believe the basic problem is that many are not dispensationalists; they do not see that God has dealt with man in different ways at different times. Furthermore, a proper understanding of Scripture clearly reveals that God has two separate bodies of believers; The Jew and the Church of God. See I Corinthians 10: 32: There is the Jew, and the Church of God; the Gentiles speak of the unsaved.

DID THE CHURCH BEGIN WITH JOHN THE BAPTIST? I think not! Note the nature of John’s baptism in Matthew 3:2. It was **“Repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** It was an Old Testament message for Israel. There was nothing in it (nor in Jesus’ preaching) about going into all the world with a message of death and resurrection. Christian baptism is unto death and resurrection. I Corinthians 15:3,4 and Romans 6:3,4. John’s baptism was not equated with Christian baptism. If it was, why did Paul rebaptize those 12 men at Ephesus who had already been baptized **“unto John’s baptism.”** ~Acts 19:3. Note v.4 - John baptized saying **“that they should believe on the one that should come.”** Furthermore, we are told that the Church is a whole new body, not of Israel, but of Jew and Gentile in one body - the Church; Ephesians 2:14,15. Jesus had said, **“I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”** Now, it is go into all the world and **“preach the Gospel to every creature.”** A new body was begun after the resurrection of Christ; a body made up of Jew and Gentile, the Church.

THE CHURCH DID NOT START WHILE CHRIST WAS ON EARTH. In His ministry before Calvary, Jesus never indicated that He had started the Church. Nor did the disciples, and in fact, they still went to the Temple to worship after His death. In Matthew 16 Jesus said, **“I will build my Church,”** not I am building my Church. It was still future. In Luke 24:46,47, after His resurrection he said to two disciples, **“...it behoved Christ to suffer, and rise from the dead the third day. And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations...”** Among all nations! The new dispensation did not start until after the resurrection. Another proof of that is in John 7:38,39: **“He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.”** It is clear that the Church, in which all now receive the Holy Spirit, did not begin till after the resurrection, Jesus’ glorification. Scripture could not be more clear! Read Ephesians 1:20-23, and you will see that Christ did not become head of the Church until after the resurrection and the ascension. Was the Church without a head for that time?

ONLY ONE POSSIBILITY -THE CHURCH BEGAN AT PENTECOST! Just about everyone who understands anything about the New Testament teaching on the Church, agrees that all who believe on Christ for salvation receive the Holy Spirit upon believing. That did not happen until the Day of Pentecost. Few believers in the Old Testament received the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:5 says that the believers will be baptized in the future - **“Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”** *“Not many days hence,”* must have been Pentecost. When else did it happen? In Acts 11, Peter is recounting his visit with Cornelius. In verses 15,16, he says: **“As I began to speak the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized you with water but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.”** What could he possibly be speaking of but the Day of Pentecost? Notice further, when the Holy Ghost fell, it was the beginning! The beginning of what? It was the beginning of the Church.

Just about everything in the New Testament is typified in the Old Testament. In Leviticus 23:15,16, it speaks of the Day of Pentecost. Pentecost means the fiftieth day. They were to count seven Sabbaths (that is seven sevens) or forty-nine days. The fiftieth day was Pentecost, a new beginning. On that day they were to offer a new meat (meal) offering. Interestingly, it was to be offered with leaven, v.17. This could not typify Christ (the sinless Son of God) as did the other offerings for they were all to be offered without leaven - a symbol of evil throughout the Word of God. What could this mean? It is nothing but a picture of the Church - Christ's body, the Church. This offering typifies saved sinners (members of His Church). We indeed do have sin but thanks be unto God it has been covered by the blood of Christ the Sinless One!

WHEN DOES ENROLLMENT IN THE CHURCH END? Clearly, the Church is completed at the Rapture of the Church - I Thessalonians 4:13-18, etc. It is also obvious to the one who **“rightly divides the word”** that Israel is not completed at the Rapture of the Church, for the Great Tribulation (Daniel's 70th week) is plainly Jewish with a nation of Jews being brought to a saving faith in Christ. The seven-year Tribulation that follows (Daniel's 70th week) is obviously under the old dispensation of Law, when God will save Israel as He often promised. Then follows the Kingdom Age which is the Kingdom long promised to Israel. While the Church will be present in the Millennium, the promise of a glorious kingdom on earth was made to Abraham and his descendants - the Jews. Neither the Old Testament saints nor the ones after the Rapture are a part of the Church. Dispensational truth is extremely important if we are going to fully understand the Word of God and His purposes. Though it is often ridiculed and largely fallen into disuse in recent years, Dispensational Truth is one of the basic laws required for proper interpretation of Scripture. Of course, there are all kinds of dispensationalists - we need to make sure that we are **“rightly dividing the word of truth”** and not following someone who has twisted the Scriptures to suit his own beliefs.

IMPORTANCE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH. God did not establish a worldwide, universal church. A serious study of the New Testament epistles will reveal that God established independent, Fundamental, local Churches. Yes, we would say Baptist Churches - most others do not even baptize according to the Word of God - that is, they sprinkle, pour, etc. but they do not immerse (this alone is baptism in the New Testament). Today, many who call themselves Bible believers are playing down the local church and like to talk about para-church entities and cell groups. Many say the churches are all going apostate (that's not true - some aren't) so we'll just stay home and have our own church. This is so convenient; but also so wrong. While it is true that for a few there is no Fundamental Baptist Church which they could possibly attend, that is not true for the majority of believers in the U.S. You may have to drive 50 or 60 miles. The problem is they don't want to put themselves out. Sure, it is inconvenient and expensive. But many do it for work everyday. Besides, what does God think about your lack of interest in His Church?

The Bible teaches that God works through the local Church. That is His plan! He never said it would be easy. He is not interested in your excuses. Sad to say many Christians are wasting their lives doing what they want to do rather than what God has commanded them to do. **“Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it.”** Eph. 5:25. We should do the same!

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