

The Birthday of the Church

A Study in Acts Chapter 2



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Acts Chapter 2

The day of Pentecost arrived exactly fifty days after the resurrection of Christ. The events of this day would be some of the most significant events in human history. God would form the Church, the precious body and bride of Christ, which would have a presence on earth for the next two thousand years. This day marked the beginning of Church history.¹ What took place in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost must not be understated. It was a planet-altering event.

Acts 2:1

“Pentecost” is a transliteration of the Greek word “pentēkostós” denoting fiftieth. Bruce Scott comments on this significant Jewish holy day:

Shavuot (lit. *weeks*) is another of the holy convocations ordained by God and given to the nation of Israel. Shavuot was the second of the three pilgrim festivals that all adult Jewish males were required to attend at Jerusalem. The Feast of Weeks (Ex. 34:22) is also known in Scripture by other names. It is referred to as the “feast of harvest” (Ex. 23:16) because it inaugurated the beginning of the wheat harvest. It is called the “day of the first fruits” (Num. 28:26) because its primary purpose was to bring a designated portion of the harvest, the “first fruits,” into the Temple as an act of dedication to God in recognition of His provision. The festival is also termed in the New Testament as “Pentecost” (lit. *fiftieth*) [Acts 2:1], signifying the *fiftieth* day from the waving of the *omer* (*sheaf*) of first fruits (Lev. 23:15-16).²

When He arose, the Lord Jesus became the “firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20), and fifty days from His resurrection the day of Pentecost arrived. Because of this special pilgrimage feast, there were hundreds of thousands, perhaps over a million Jews gathered in Jerusalem, having traveled from all over the Roman empire. The Pentecost feast was a harvest celebration, a very joyful time for the Jewish people. There were great multitudes of people to witness the miracles that God would accomplish on this notable day.

Acts 2:2

The 120 disciples were of one mind and heart and were all gathered together “in one place” (v. 1) and in one house (v.2). Suddenly something supernatural happened: “There came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind” (v. 2), and that sound filled the whole house where they were staying. Luke uses a simile. It was not a violent, rushing wind, but the sound which they heard was

¹Bible-believing men have differed over the question of when the Church began. Reformed scholars often teach that the Church is comprised of all the elect of all ages, and thus they believe the Church existed in Old Testament times. Many Baptist groups see the Church as beginning before the cross, perhaps with the ministry of John the Baptist. Ultradispensationalists begin the Church either in Acts 13 or Acts 28. The Bible pinpoints this event very clearly. For a study on “When Did the Church Begin?” see Special Topic #2 at the end of this chapter.

²Bruce Scott, *The Feasts of Israel*, p. 58.

like the sound that such a wind would produce. The sound was *like* the “blowing of a violent wind” (NIV). It was a sound similar perhaps to the noise of a hurricane rushing by. The word “wind” means “a blowing, a blast.” The noise was spectacular and supernatural. The message was clear: God was doing something very special on this day. In fulfillment of His promise, God was sending His Spirit in an unmistakable way. The Greek word for Spirit [*pneuma*] also means “wind” (as in John 3:8).

Acts 2:3

The Pentecostal miracles involved both sights and sounds, a display that was both visual and audible. The sound was like a mighty wind (v. 2); the sight involved tongues of fire (v. 3). As in verse 2, a simile is used. It was not actual fire, but it was *like* fire. No one was burned and no heat was given off. The term “cloven” (KJV) means “to part asunder,” suggesting that what appeared to be like fire divided and separated and was distributed to each believer. The flame was resting on each and every believer; not one was excluded. Today the Spirit of God indwells every person the moment he believes on the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19), and also baptizes each believer into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). But God does not mark this in a visual way. We know it to be true because the Word of God tells us so. However, on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit first came, God gave visual evidence that something very special was taking place in the hearts of each and every one who belonged to Him.

Some have wrongly equated the “tongues of fire” with what John the Baptist predicted in Matthew 3:11, “He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” However, the context of Matthew 3:12 makes it clear that the “fire” John the Baptist predicted involved eternal judgment and pertained to unbelievers, not believers. That judgment has nothing to do with the day of Pentecost. People are faced with a choice leading to eternal consequences. They can either be immersed in the Spirit and identified with Jesus Christ, or they can be immersed in the eternal lake of fire to suffer everlasting punishment (John 3:36; Matt. 25:41,46). May our choice be to trust Christ and thereby flee from the wrath to come.

Acts 2:4

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Many things happened to the disciples on this day and the filling of the Spirit was one of them. They also experienced Spirit baptism and were placed into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). We learn this, not directly from Acts 2, but from Acts 1:5 and Acts 11:15-17. For believers, there is one baptism but many fillings. For example, in Acts 4:31 the disciples on another occasion were all filled with the Spirit, and we find examples of this throughout the book of Acts. Believers are not re-baptized throughout their Christian lives, but they do need to be re-filled. That is, they frequently need God’s fresh filling and enabling power. In the epistles we have the command to “Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18), but we never find a command to be baptized by the Spirit, because Spirit baptism is something that has already happened at the moment of saving faith (1 Cor. 12:13). See *The Baptism and Filling Compared and Contrasted*, Special Topic #4 at the end of this chapter.

Spirit baptism is not accompanied today by miraculous signs. It takes place the moment a person believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. At that moment he is baptized or immersed into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13) and becomes a member of Christ’s body (1 Cor. 12:27). This happens without miracles or fanfare, as God quietly does His miraculous work in the heart of the person who responds in faith to Him. The day of Pentecost was unique and of great significance, and God used miracles

to show that something special was taking place. After Acts 2 we have no record of God ever sending a rushing wind or tongues of fire. There were, however, two very significant occasions where the gift of tongues was heard: 1) when the Gentiles first became members of the body of Christ in Acts 10 (see verse 46); 2) when a group of John the Baptist's disciples learned of the Gospel, received the Holy Spirit and became members of the body of Christ in Acts 19 (see verse 6).³

We also must recognize that a unique transition was taking place. These disciples who were present at Pentecost were already believers. Jesus made it clear, before the cross, that the eleven disciples (Judas excluded) were "clean," having had their full salvation bath (John 13:10-11). However, they were not saved in the full New Testament sense. They had not yet become members of the body of Christ, fully identified with the risen Son of God seated in glory. In Acts 2 this complete salvation transition was taking place. Our Lord alluded to this new relationship in John 10:16 when He predicted that there would be "one fold" made up of His present sheep as well as "other sheep" (presumably the Gentile believers).

Jesus also anticipated this new relationship when He said, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11). That is, everyone who is in the true Church is positionally higher than John the Baptist. This does not mean that every Church saint is morally better than John the Baptist. His godly walk puts many of us to shame. But those who are part of the body and bride of Christ have a higher position and privilege than pre-Pentecostal saints or even post-rapture saints. John the Baptist was a friend of the bridegroom, but he was not part of the bride (Rev. 15:9).

Another transition took place in Acts 18:24-28 when Apollos, a disciple of John the Baptist, was in need of the fuller revelation of Christ provided by Aquila and Priscilla. See also a similar situation in Acts 19:1-7. Many err by failing to recognize the transitional nature of the book of Acts. Even Peter had a very hard time understanding that he was in a new dispensation. He was in the Church age where certain Jewish/Gentiles distinctions no longer applied. For this reason he had to receive Paul's sharp rebuke in Galatians 2:11-16.

In Acts 2:4 we have the third sign-miracle on the day of Pentecost: "and [they] began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). Pentecost marks the beginning of the Church. On this important day Spirit baptism first took place (see Ephesians 1:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 12:13; compare with Matthew 3:11; 16:18; Acts 1:5; 11:15-17). Thus for the first time believers were immersed into a new and unique organism, the body of Christ. God's new program was inaugurated on this momentous day!

This day also marked the beginning of the gift of tongues. For the first time the Lord's promise of Mark 16:17 was fulfilled as the disciples spoke with new tongues (speaking in languages that were new to them).

³Although not specifically stated, it is probable that the Samaritan believers also spoke in tongues when they received the gift of the Spirit in Acts 8. It may have been this manifestation of tongues that so impressed Simon (Acts 8:18-19). The people of Samaria were a mixed race (half-Jew, half-Gentile) and when they received the Spirit they became full-fledged members of the body of Christ (Acts 8:14-17).

Speaking in tongues was a sign which served to signal some aspect of God's new program. It pointed to the fact that God was doing something new and different. No longer would God's witnesses **comprise a nation** (Isaiah 43:10-12), but His witnesses would be **among all nations** (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:47; cf. Col. 1:27). No longer would Jerusalem be the focal point (cf. 1 Kings 10:1-9). Rather it would be merely the starting point (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). No longer would God's message go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6), but it would go to every nation and kindred and people and tongue (Matthew 28:19-20; Revelation 5:9).

Tongues, since the ancient experience of Babel, has conveyed an ominous message of rebellion, judgment, and dispersion (Genesis 11; compare Deuteronomy 28:49; Isaiah 28:11; Jeremiah 5:15). Now, at the beginning of the Church age, God sets forth this doomful and judgmental sign to a rebellious people whose official judgment at the hands of the Romans was only forty years away (70 A.D.). This judgment would be followed by a worldwide dispersion that would last for 2000 years. The purpose of the gift of tongues will be discussed at the end of this chapter (see Special Topic #6).

On the day of Pentecost the disciples spoke with "other tongues" (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:21). The adjective "other" (*heterais*) could be translated "different." They spoke in "different tongues." The word "tongues" is plural, indicating that they spoke in a number of languages, languages which were "different" from what they had previously known or spoken. So the tongues that they spoke were both *new* to them (Mark 16:17) and *different* from what they had ever spoken (Acts 2:4).

Obviously they would need supernatural enabling to speak in new and different languages. Thus we read that "the Spirit gave them utterance." It was the Spirit of God who enabled them to "speak forth" in such a unique way. It was a supernatural, Spirit-given ability (Acts 2:15-17). They were able to speak a foreign language which they had never known and had never learned, which was totally new to them.

It should be understood that the gift of tongues involved a miracle of speaking on the part of the tongues speaker, not a miracle of hearing on the part of those who received the message. Those who heard the message could easily understand it because it was spoken in a language that they recognized (Acts 2:8). The miracle involved the tongues speaker. It would be like an American giving a talk and having it come out in fluent Russian, even though Russian was a language with which the speaker was totally unfamiliar. A similar miracle happened at the Tower of Babel, when people started speaking different languages, different from the one language which they had previously known (Genesis 11:6-9).

Acts 2:5

"And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). Pentecost was one of the pilgrimage feasts (along with Passover and the feast of Tabernacles) when every male Israelite was required to come before the LORD at His appointed place (Deut. 16:16). These were devout Jews who revered the LORD and honored His holy days. At this time Jerusalem was packed with people, just as it was seven weeks earlier at Passover time. It is highly significant that on this special day God had Jewish representatives present from "every nation under heaven." It is as if God were saying to these Jews: "I want you to understand what is involved in My new program, and I want you to appreciate the worldwide scope of My great commission (cf. Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47). Therefore I am going to give you a preview of world evangelization. I am going to give you an audio-visual aid (namely, uneducated Galileans speaking

in tongues) to show you that God's message is going to go to every nation under heaven, even to every nation that is represented here today."

As Merrill F. Unger has noted: "The supernatural display of languages at Pentecost was a harbinger of the dominant feature of worldwide evangelism to be realized in the new age, and was a sign to the Jews that the Holy Spirit had been given to work out in believers Christ's glorious salvation purchased on the cross and to equip them to proclaim the wonderful message of this salvation to every creature under heaven."⁴

With the miracle of the sign-gift of tongues, God performed somewhat of a reversal of what happened at the Tower of Babel. In Genesis 11 we learn that everyone spoke one language until God acted in judgment resulting in many languages, which produced sudden confusion and ultimate dispersion. The many nations of the world today owe their origin to this supernatural event. In Acts 2, Jews representing every nation gathered together in Jerusalem, not to be confused by God, but to hear of the wonderful works of God in their own language and dialect. Following this God blessed them with Peter's gospel message, delivered presumably in Greek, which, in the providence of God, could be understood by all because Koine [from *koinē* meaning "common"] Greek was the common language of the entire empire.

Keep in mind that Hebrew was always the language of the Jews. It was in Hebrew that most of their sacred Scriptures were written.⁵ It was Hebrew that was spoken from the mouths of their faithful prophets. The Jews normally received God's message in Hebrew. What a difference on the day of Pentecost! They were hearing the wonderful works of God in different languages, with Hebrew apparently being excluded. This was certainly not the norm. God was doing something very different.

According to the Great Commission, the gospel was to go to every nation (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). The Church has, to a large measure, failed to fulfill this commission, but during the Great Tribulation God will succeed: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations" (Matt. 24:14). This will be accomplished by 144,000 Jews (probably sent out in pairs making 72,000 gospel teams), assisted by the ministry of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:3-6) and even helped by an angelic herald (Rev. 14:6-7). God in His kindness will reach the nations of the world with His message of good news, even though most will reject it and refuse to repent. The gospel of the kingdom will also emphasize that the King is coming and His kingdom is very near. May we, as believers living in this age of grace, have a burning desire to get the gospel to all the nations, by supporting and participating in sound, Biblical mission programs, to the glory of God.

We can rejoice that when all is said and done there will be saved representatives giving glory to God out of every tongue and out of every nation, to the praise of His grace (Rev. 5:9-10). When we read

⁴ Merrill F. Unger, *New Testament Teaching on Tongues* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971) page 34.

⁵ Apart from two short passages (Genesis 31:47 and Jeremiah 10:11), Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26; and Daniel 2:4-7:28 are the portions of the Old Testament that were written in Aramaic. All the rest was written in Hebrew.

the Bible to its grand conclusion, we discover that the Lord Jesus wins! “Thine, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory **and the victory!**” (1 Chron. 29:11).

Acts 2:6

“Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded [astonished and bewildered] because every man heard them speak in his own language” (Acts 2:6).

The multitude realized that something strange and extraordinary was taking place, so they assembled together to investigate this phenomenon. We assume that the disciples had left the room where they were staying and had moved to a public location. Why was the multitude confounded and perplexed? Because every one of these Jews (who were from every nation under heaven) heard them speak in his own language or dialect (*dialektoi*, the language of a particular nation or region). It is obvious then that the different tongues which they heard were real languages.

We might think it confusing for these Jews from many nations to hear many languages being spoken at once. However, the listening ear would naturally be drawn to the spoken language which was understandable. Americans, if surrounded by people speaking in different languages, would be drawn to the one who was speaking in English.

Acts 2:7-8

“And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?” (Acts 2:7-8)

These Jews were amazed because of the miracle of uneducated Galileans speaking in foreign languages (compare Mark 14:70). “How can Galileans be speaking in our native tongue?” The word translated “tongue” is again the word “language.” The Galilean disciples were speaking in the native languages of these Jews who had come from all over the known world.⁶

Acts 2:9-10

“Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia. and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia. Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes” (Acts 2:9-10).

⁶At the time of the King James translation (1611), the word “tongues” simply meant “languages.” Many editions of the Authorized King James Version contain these words on the title page: “The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments **translated out of the original tongues.**” Today it would be more natural to say, “translated out of the original languages.” In the translation of Revelation 9:11, the text simply gives a name “in Hebrew” and “in Greek” (see NASB), but the translators of the KJV wrote, “in the Hebrew tongue” and “in the Greek tongue.” The word “tongue,” which is not in the Greek text, is obviously inserted as a synonym for “language.” We use the term this way even today. One might ask, “Is German your native tongue [language]?”

God's new program was for the gospel to go to all of these regions. God's message must be proclaimed to every nation and tongue under heaven. Even on this day when the Church was born, God's message was made known to representatives of many nations, as if God were giving the Jews a preliminary indication of His worldwide intent.

Robert G. Gromacki comments on these verses: "Not only did the disciples speak different languages, but they also spoke various dialects of the same language. The Phrygians and Pamphylians, for instance, both spoke Greek, but in different idioms; the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites all spoke Persian, but in different provincial forms."⁷

Acts 2:11

"Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11).

When this verse is compared with verse 8 it becomes evident that tongues is equated with languages:

Verse 8 – "We hear ... in our own language [dialect]"

Verse 11 – "We hear ... in our own tongues"

Verse 11 explains the content of the tongues-speaking. What did these Jews hear? Did they hear nonsense syllables? Did they hear ecstatic utterances? Did they hear unintelligible gibberish? No, they heard "the wonderful works of God," or as it could be rendered, "the great things (*megaleia*) of God." These Galileans were filled with praise for what God had done, and the Spirit gave them the ability (verse 4) to communicate this praise in languages which were foreign and unknown to them. No interpreter was needed since every man heard the message in his own native dialect (verses 8,11).

The tongues-speaking served only an indirect evangelistic purpose, in that it prepared the way for Peter's convicting message. Tongues did in Acts 2 what the healing of the lame man did in Acts 3. It served as an attention-getter for the gospel message that was to follow. Tongues in Acts 2 was a sign, indicating and pointing to the fact that the gospel would go into all the world—to every kindred and people and nation (Revelation 5:9), according to the great commission of our Lord (Matthew 28:18-20). If the gift of tongues served to signal the inauguration of God's new program, then by implication God's old program (Israel) would be set aside at least for a time. The bringing in of the new necessitates the going out of the old! More information will be given on this topic when we discuss the purpose of the gift of tongues as a sign to unbelievers (see Special Topic #6 at the end of the chapter).

Acts 2:12-13

"And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine" (Acts 2:12-13).

It is of interest to note the reaction of these foreign Jews to the miraculous tongues-speaking (verse

⁷Robert G. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1972), p. 60.

12). They were all amazed and perplexed (verses 7-8), and they wanted an explanation. They wanted to know the meaning (“What meaneth this?”) of the remarkable exhibition of different languages which they had just witnessed. They had heard the “great things of God” communicated in their own native languages by mere Galileans! How was this possible?

“Others mocking” (verse 13) offered an explanation of the tongues spectacle. Who were these mockers? The word “others” (*heteros*) refers to a group of Jews different from the foreign Jews mentioned in verses 5-12. These mockers were local Jews from Palestine and Judea who apparently did not understand the foreign tongues being spoken. The tongues-speakers seemed to be producing “uncertain sounds” (1 Corinthians 14:23)!

They thus accused the Galileans of drunkenness. These mockers provided a naturalistic explanation of a phenomenon that was obviously supernatural, thus robbing the Spirit of God of the credit and honor that was due Him (compare verse 4). Peter then seized this opportunity to address the men of Judea and Jerusalem to show the absurdity of such a naturalistic explanation.

Peter’s Pentecostal Message

Peter’s message at Pentecost was Bible-centered, Christ-centered and Spirit-filled. It was Bible-centered in that Peter quoted repeatedly from the Old Testament Scriptures (Joel 2; Psalm 16; Psalm 132; Psalm 110). It was Christ-centered, the main theme being that the One whom they crucified God raised from the dead and exalted. It was a Spirit-filled message (compare 2:4), with the Spirit of God bringing great conviction to the hearts of hundreds of individual Jews (2:37). One might wonder why Peter said nothing of Christ dying for our sins (compare 1 Cor. 15:3), but it must be remembered that what is recorded of Peter’s message in Acts 2 is accurate but very incomplete, because Peter also spoke “many other words” which, in God’s wisdom, were not recorded (2:40). Also it should be remembered that God’s chosen preacher for this day was the very one who had denied the Lord three times about 53 days earlier. How wonderfully this man was transformed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ! The one who cowardly denied Christ before a small number of people on the night of Christ’s arrest (Matt. 26:69-75), is now the preacher on the day of Pentecost, boldly and fearlessly proclaiming Christ to thousands of Jews in the power of the Spirit. It was also at this time that Peter opened the way of salvation for the Jewish people in this new dispensation, as Christ had predicted in Matthew 16:19 (Peter was given “the keys of the kingdom of heaven”). Later Peter would be God’s instrument in opening up the door of the gospel to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and the Gentiles (Acts 10).

Acts 2:14-20

Peter spoke with a tone of authority: “Hearken to my words” (v.14). Peter knew that he was the mouthpiece of the Lord, delivering God’s message for these people at this time. What an awesome responsibility to proclaim the Word of God and to deliver God’s message to needy souls! May God’s preachers never take this responsibility lightly (James 3:1).

Notice that Peter first addressed the local Jews (from Judea and Jerusalem) because they were the ones who made the false charge of drunkenness. He would address all of the Israelites starting in verse 22 (“ye men of Israel”).

The first reason for the absurdity of the charge of drunkenness was the simple fact that it was only

about 9:00 a.m. Usually that is the time when drunkards are recovering from the night before. The Bible reminds us that normally those who get drunk, get drunk in the night (1 Thess. 5:7). We also learn from this verse that the Pentecostal events took place early in the day. This morning hour was also the hour of prayer in the temple and no Jew would ever want to be found intoxicated in the temple of God. This baseless charge made no sense.

Peter's second reason is taken from Joel's prophecy concerning the supernatural outpouring of the Spirit in the last days. He used this Scripture to show that what had just taken place was obviously the miraculous working of the Spirit of God (compare verse 4). In essence, Peter was saying to these mockers, "We are not drunk with wine, as you suppose, but we are filled with the Spirit (verse 4). Just as there will be a supernatural outpouring of the Spirit in the last days producing great signs and wonders (verses 17-20), so there has been a supernatural outpouring of the Spirit today producing the sign-gift of tongues. What you have witnessed is just what Joel spoke of: the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I totally reject your absurd and naturalistic explanation of drunkenness!"

Everything in Joel's prophecy will be literally fulfilled in the future, and Peter was not denying this future prophetic fulfillment. Peter was simply pointing out obvious similarities between Joel's prophecy and what had just taken place at Pentecost. The similarities between the two passages are clear. First, in both passages God was doing special miracles as the result of the supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This answered the foolish charge of drunkenness. It was obviously something God was doing. Drunkenness could not explain people speaking in a language which they had never learned. Secondly, because God was working in such a remarkable way, the people needed to heed the message and repent and call upon the name of the Lord. These similarities allowed Peter to make powerful applications, but nothing else in Joel's prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost.

Joel's prophecy is divided chronologically into two parts, based on the key words found in Joel 2:28 ("afterward") and Joel 2:31 ("before"). This indicates that some of these events would take place after the day of the Lord and some events would take place before the day of the Lord. Thus the events mentioned in Acts 2:17-18 would take place after the day of the Lord (after the Messiah returns to the earth) and the events mentioned in Acts 2:19-20 would take place before the day of the Lord (before the Lord's return).⁸

For a fascinating discussion of Peter's use of the Joel 2 prophecy, see Special Topic #7 at the end of this chapter.

Acts 2:21

Here and in Romans 10:13 we find a wonderful salvation promise. Man must do the **calling**; God will do the **saving**. This verse is a quotation of Joel 2:32 which has reference to the name of JEHOVAH. The New Testament quotes this Joel passage here in Acts 2:21 and also in Romans 10:13, both having reference to the name of JESUS (thus Jesus is equated with Jehovah, a solid

⁸This chronology is explained in a paper by Dr. Roy Beacham presented at Central Baptist Seminary, May 23, 1997. See <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/20092118/the-analogical-use-of-joel-228-32-in-acts-215-21-central-baptist-> (accessed 4/20/17).

argument for the absolute deity of Christ).

“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him” (Romans 10:12). The richest people in all the world are those who are saved! The unsaved billionaires of this world are rich for a second but poor for all eternity. Notice the important invitational words in this passage: Romans 10:11--“whosoever”; Romans 10:12-- “all”; Romans 10:13--“whosoever.”

There are two clear Biblical examples of men who called upon the name of the Lord: 1) The publican or tax-collector of Luke 18:10-14--“God be merciful to me a sinner!” 2) The malefactor on the cross of Luke 23:39-43--“Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.” Knowing their desperate need they cried out in faith to the only One who could meet their need. The publican was “justified” and the malefactor was soon to be in “paradise.” The Pharisee and the other malefactor both refused to call upon the Lord and refused to cry out for salvation, and they both remained in their sins. They would face a Christless eternity in hell.

Calling upon the name of the Lord is not a condition of salvation which is separate from faith. Calling upon the name of the Lord is an outward expression of inward faith. Before a person calls on Christ, he must first believe on Christ in his heart. Before the malefactor cried out, “Lord, remember me!” he first believed in his heart. His words merely expressed the faith which he already had. When the publican cried out to the Lord for mercy, he had already believed in his heart. This is why Romans 10:17 says, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?” You cannot call upon Christ for salvation unless you have first believed on Him in your heart. Calling upon His name is a natural manifestation or expression of the faith the person already has.

People can call upon the Lord in many different ways. The thief said, “Lord remember me.” The tax collector said, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” A person may say, “Lord, save me” or “Lord, come into my heart and forgive all my sins” or “Lord, I’m a great sinner and I need Your mercy and grace” or “Lord, I don’t know what to say, but I need You to be my Savior.” It’s not the words that count; it’s the heart. A person could insincerely pray the most eloquent “sinner’s prayer,” but words do not save. God looks on the heart. God is looking for a person who is resting all his weight on the Person and work of Christ, depending on Christ and on Christ alone.

Acts 2:22

Peter here focuses upon the Man, Jesus of Nazareth. He did not address Him here as the second Person of the Triune Godhead by whom the universe was created. Peter begins with His manhood because his audience was familiar with Jesus of Nazareth and the miracles which He performed. Peter’s message begins with His manhood, but it crescendoes to His exalted deity when we reach his grand conclusion in verse 36, where he declares Him to be “Lord” (absolute deity) and “Christ” (Messiah, the promised King). Peter focused first on the human nature of the God-man who in His self-emptying and self-humiliation came all the way down to this earth. He came not to some city of great reputation, but He chose to live in a notorious place called Nazareth.⁹ Of this city Nathaniel said, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Being from Nazareth was somewhat of a derogatory insult. Thankfully God can bless what men despise, and the greatest good for

⁹His childhood home was Nazareth, but His birthplace was Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1-6).

mankind came out of Nazareth, even the Savior of the world.

Note the three terms Peter used for miracles: 1) **miracles**, derived from the word “power,” signifying mighty works and supernatural acts; 2) **wonders**, referring to things truly spectacular which really grab the attention and amazement of those who witness them; 3) **signs**, pointing to some special meaning or significance (for example proving that Jesus was the Messiah as in Matthew 11:1-6). These were tokens of divine authority and power. For men such as Peter and John, uneducated fishermen, the miracles served as their divine credentials. The message they preached was backed up by the wonders they performed.

Our Lord’s miracles may be described as follows: 1) **Instantaneous**. The Lord Jesus touched a leper and immediately his leprosy was cleansed (Matthew 8:3). Jesus touched the eyes of two blind men and immediately their eyes received sight (Matthew 20:34). There was no need for any prolonged period of recuperation or therapy. 2) **Perfect and complete**. “And when the men of that place had knowledge of Him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto Him all that were diseased; and besought Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment, and as many as touched were made **perfectly whole**” (Matthew 14:35-36). 3) **Everyone healed**. “But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed Him, and **He healed them all**” (Matthew 12:15). 4) **Undeniable**. “Then was brought unto Him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, ‘Is not this the son of David?’ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, ‘This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the demons’” (Matthew 12:22-24). The Lord’s enemies could not deny the miracle. Instead they accused Him of doing this great miracle, not by the power of God, but by the power of Satan. But the fact that a great miracle had taken place was undeniable. 5) **Spectacular**. People witnessed the lame leaping, the blind seeing, lepers cleansed, demon-possessed men delivered, thousands of people miraculously fed, a man walking on water, a cut-off ear instantly restored, and even the dead raised back to life!

God’s approval of His Son was evident from the beginning (Matt. 3:17), and also toward the end of His public ministry (Matt. 17:5): “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” And this approval was demonstrated by the miracles which God the Father did through Him. No other man in all of human history was used by God to perform the miracles that Christ did in such a diverse manner and affecting so many thousands of people. And what the Lord did was not done in a secret corner. The miracles were done publicly, right in the midst of the people, in full view of everyone, and witnessed by thousands of Jews, both unbelieving and believing. When Peter mentioned the miracles of Christ, his audience knew exactly what he was talking about. Indeed, some in Peter’s audience may have been healed by Jesus or may have been participants when Jesus fed a great multitude of people on more than one occasion.

Acts 2:23

We have in this verse the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man in perfect balance:

God’s Sovereignty

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God

Man’s Responsibility

ye have taken, and by wicked [lawless] hands have crucified and slain.

There is a problem whenever God's sovereignty is emphasized to the neglect of man's responsibility, and there is a problem whenever man's responsibility is emphasized to the neglect of God's sovereignty. Either can lead to serious error: *The pendulum swings, ridiculous extreme, bypassing the truth which lieth between.* This verse shows the correct balance. Men did what they did in their wicked depravity and God-rejecting unbelief, and yet what they did ended up being exactly what God had planned. Some have described this as an antinomy, an apparent contradiction between two equally valid principles. It seems to contradict the law of logic and brings one to a realm that the human mind cannot fathom.

A Biblical Antinomy **(anti = against + nomy = logic)**

Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility
(An Apparent Contradiction)

John 6:37

“All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me,
and the one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out.”

1. Does God determine who will be saved? YES!
2. Are we all free to make this heaven or hell choice? YES!

It is like a railroad track. As far as we can see, the two rails never merge into one. God also sees them as two, but ultimately as one!

Let us ponder these statements by our LORD to Moses, Isaiah and Paul:

1. Deuteronomy 29:29 “The secret things belong to our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”
2. Isaiah 55:8-9 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”
3. Romans 11:33 “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

Things too baffling for us are clearly seen and understood by God. Our responsibility is to believe what God says, even if we do not understand how certain statements fit together and harmonize.

Christ's death had been completely predetermined, preplanned and predicted according to numerous prophecies written hundreds of years before the event. In Psalm 22 we have the description of His crucifixion including the very words which He would speak on the cross, and the casting of lots by the Roman soldiers for His clothing. In Daniel 9 we have the timing of the crucifixion. In Isaiah 53 we have the purpose of His death, to die for our sins. Every detail was prearranged. The Lord Jesus was not taken by surprise. The wicked men involved in this deed were not mindless robots mechanically fulfilling what God had preprogrammed them to do. No, they acted freely and did just what they wanted to do; but the result was that they performed just as God knew they would in fulfillment of His predetermined plan for the redemption of men. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee" (Psalm 76:10).

Another fascinating illustration of the interplay between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility is seen in Luke 22:22—"And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed." Judas will be fully punished for his traitorous act of betrayal, but his evil act perfectly harmonized with God's predetermined plan. Judas was wrong and he was guilty, but he unknowingly fulfilled God's purpose. What an encouragement this should be to us today, that the wicked acts of unbelieving men will not thwart the plan of God and His ultimate victory. In the end, God always wins! We can count on it.

Another stunning example of God using depraved men to fulfill His overall plan is found in Acts 4:27-28. Here we see Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles and the Jews all gathered together, each one having a part in the crucifixion of Christ and each one bearing full responsibility for his evil actions. Yet when all is said and done, these Christ-hating unbelievers ended up doing whatever God's hand and God's counsel determined before to be done! They unwittingly fulfilled God's plan. May we praise our blessed God for His sovereign and providential working!

In Acts 2:23 Peter blamed his Jewish audience for the crucifixion of Christ, and they did bear responsibility for this monumental crime, even though it was the Romans who actually nailed Him to the cross. This brings up the important question of who really crucified Christ. Multiple answers can be given, all of which are true:

The chief priests and elders persuaded the Jewish multitudes and they all cried out, "Let Him be crucified!" (Matt. 27:20-23)

Judas played a key role because he betrayed Him (Matt. 26:47-50).

Pilate, the governor, played a part because "he delivered Him to be crucified" (Matt. 27:26).

The Romans were the ones who nailed Him to the cross (Matt. 27:27,31,35).

The devil played a major role (John 13:2; cf. Genesis 3:15).

God the Father was involved because in His perfect plan He determined that the cross was the only solution to remedy man's great sin problem (John 3:16-17; Acts 2:23). It pleased the Father to bruise His Son on the cross so that sinful men might be saved (Isaiah 53:10).

The Lord Jesus Christ was involved in His own death because He voluntarily "gave His life" and "laid down His life" so that men might be saved (John 10:11,15,17,18).

But most importantly, we all crucified Christ! Our sins made His death necessary. It was for our sins that He suffered and bled and died (Isaiah 53:6; Rom. 5:8; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18).

One of the tragedies of Church history is how anti-Semitic the Church has been over the centuries. Their rallying cry has been that the Jews murdered Christ. As early as 170 A.D. there was a strong anti-Semitic spirit especially in the Greek church in the East, and Gentiles who professed to be Christians would refer to Jewish people as “Christ-killers.” In the fourth century Augustine wrote his *Tract Against the Jews*. The motif of Jews being Christ-killers assumed a major role in the Church’s anti-Jewish preaching. Martin Luther, who helped uncover vital truths concerning justification and the sufficiency of the Bible, nevertheless expressed great hatred for the Jewish people. “He went so far as to advise their expulsion from Christian lands, the prohibition of their books, and the burning of their synagogues and even their houses in which they blaspheme our Savior and the Holy Virgin.”¹⁰ “Adolf Hitler read Luther’s statements to the Germans to justify the systematic elimination of millions of Jewish people in the Holocaust of World War II.”¹¹ Those who blame Israel for the death of Christ need to look in the mirror. We are all responsible because it was our sins that sent Him there, and He mercifully died for the sins of both Jews and Gentiles alike. May we emulate the Apostle Paul and have our hearts wide open in compassion for the Jewish people, doing all that we can that they might be saved (Rom. 9:1-3).

Foreknowledge, as used in the Bible, is not mere prescience. It is more than just knowing ahead of time what will take place. The omniscient Lord certainly knows in advance all that will take place (John 6:64). God’s foreknowledge does not mean that God knows ahead of time all that will take place but has no control over those events. Blessed be His name! He not only can predict the future but He also causes all circumstances and events to come together as He has planned. The grammar of Acts 2:23 suggests that God’s determinate counsel and God’s foreknowledge are grouped together. God’s foreknowledge must be understood as being vitally connected with God’s “fixed purpose and settled plan” (Acts 2:23, *Amplified Bible*). God knows what is going to happen because He is successfully working out His predetermined plan for mankind, which in this case centers around Calvary’s cross. God is not a slave to future events; He is in charge of these events. Christ is said to have been actively “delivered up” by means of the fixed counsel and foreknowledge of God. How could foreknowledge be in any sense the means or instrument by which the delivering up of Christ was accomplished, if foreknowledge were merely passive prescience? Passive prescience accomplishes nothing!

Acts 2:24

You crucified Him, but God raised Him up! Death was swallowed up in victory. Christ was the “Prince of life” or the Author of life, and it was impossible that death should hold Him in its grip. The prophet predicted this glorious resurrection in Isaiah 53:10: “He shall see His seed (cf. Heb. 2:10), He shall prolong His days (cf. Rev. 1:18).” Man’s greatest crime was shortly followed by God’s greatest miracle, even the sign of the prophet Jonah (Matt. 12:38-40). “Pains” or “pangs” refers to agonizing birth pangs. When an expectant mother suffers through birth pangs it is temporary and soon followed by the birth, something very wonderful. Christ’s struggle with death

¹⁰Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume 7 “Modern Christianity--The German Reformation,” pages 61-62.

¹¹Renald Showers, *The Coming Apocalypse*, page 17.

was short-lived, followed by His triumphant resurrection. “Death cannot keep his prey—Jesus, my Savior! He tore the bars away—Jesus, my Lord!” (Robert Lowry in the hymn “Christ Arose”). The resurrection of Christ was an absolute necessity (see Matt. 16:21, “must”).

It is important to understand Christ’s spiritual and physical death. The last three hours that the Lord Jesus was on the cross He was alive physically, and yet He was spiritually dead because, during those three hours of darkness, He was bearing our sins and was separated from fellowship with God (Matt. 27:46; 2 Cor. 5:21). At the time He died physically He was alive spiritually: “Into Thy hands I commend My spirit” (Luke 23:46). He once again enjoyed blessed fellowship with the Father, even though His body was dead. He was alive spiritually when He was dead physically. And three days later He became alive physically as well as alive spiritually, and so forevermore in glory.¹²

Acts 2:25-28

Peter quotes from Psalm 16 which predicted the resurrection of Christ. Paul said that Christ “rose again the third day **according to the Scriptures**” (1 Cor. 15:4) and Psalm 16 is one of these Scriptures which spoke of Christ’s resurrection. As Peter introduces this quotation he makes it very clear that David spoke (and wrote) concerning the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:25). David could not have been referring to his own experience in these verses.

Verse 27 speaks of Christ’s soul which went to Sheol/Hades and Christ’s body which did not see corruption or decay. For the three days that Christ was in the tomb, His body did not decay. This is in contrast to the body of Lazarus which smelled of decay after being in the tomb for four days (John 11:17,39). The reason Christ’s body did not decay is found in verse 27, namely, that God did not allow it to happen. Normally when a body dies the cell structure (and even the DNA inside the cells) immediately begins to deteriorate. In the case of Christ, God did not permit the normal post-death process to take place, due to the infinite and impeccable moral glory of the Person whose body it was.

God the Father gave His beloved Son an honorable burial, in the tomb of a rich man where no one had ever been buried previously. Those deemed as despicable criminals worthy of crucifixion were normally disposed of in the city’s “dump” which was called Gehenna. There fires burned continually, but not so in the case of Christ. What a spectacular miracle would take place in Joseph’s tomb, though initially witnessed by no human eyes!

Also of significant interest is that the descriptive term “Holy One” is used of the Person of Christ, and in particular of His soulless, non-decaying body (verse 27), referred to in verse 31 as His “flesh.” The Biblical concept of man varies significantly from the Greek or Platonic dualistic view of man which gives priority to the soul. Greek philosophy sees the physical body as a hindrance, a burden, sometimes even as the tomb of the soul, and in later Gnostic thought as something evil.¹³ The goal of Greek philosophy was to be liberated from the body. In the Biblical view, manhood is not complete apart from the body (1 Thess. 5:23). The body is a vital part of our personal identity,

¹²John C. Whitcomb, “Resurrection and Life” Series, Part 6, Isaiah 53, November 9, 2008. www.sermonaudio.com

¹³“The Greek Versus the Hebrew View of Man,” by George Eldon Ladd. See <http://www.presenttruthmag.com/archive/XXIX/29-2.htm>

though our personal identity continues to some extent even in death. Believers long for the “redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23) when our salvation will be completed. Compare also 2 Corinthians 5:4 which speaks of our corruptible bodies in which we now groan as a result of the effects of sin in us. Yet we still desire to be, not unclothed, but clothed upon with our glorified bodies. When viewing the physical remains of a believer who has died, people often say such things as, “That’s not Uncle Joe; that’s just his body. He’s not here.” We understand what is meant by this, and it is true that Uncle Joe’s soul is not there. But Uncle Joe’s body is part of his manhood, and he is not a complete man without his body. All this will be resolved in the first resurrection when believers will be reunited to their bodies. At that time our Savior, for whom we await, will transform our bodies of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory (Phil. 3:21).

Acts 2:29

Peter presented Psalm 16 as a prophecy of the resurrection of Christ. Peter carefully argued that David could not have been writing about himself because David’s soul was left in Hades (for centuries) and David’s body did see corruption in the grave where it still lay. The proof of this was a fact well known to the Jews because they were very much aware of the location of David’s tomb. Only the Lord Jesus could meet the requirements of Psalm 16. David was buried in the Jerusalem area (1 Kings 2:10). The tomb of David was somewhat of a tourist attraction, believed by F. F. Bruce to be located to the south of Jerusalem, near Siloam.¹⁴ Peter’s audience was very familiar with David’s tomb, even though Bible scholars today may have difficulty pinpointing its exact location.

Acts 2:30

David was a prophet, and in Psalm 16 he gave a prophecy of the resurrection of his most notable descendant, the Messiah Himself. In Psalm 132:11 we read, “The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; He will not turn from it; of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.” David’s own descendant would someday sit on David’s throne. The same promise was echoed just prior to Christ’s birth by the angel Gabriel: “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David” (Luke 1:35). Again, Peter’s argument was that David in Psalm 16 was not referring to himself but referring to his promised descendant, the fruit of his loins, even the Messiah.

Please notice that this verse does not tell us **when** Christ would sit on David’s throne. Progressive Dispensationalists wrongly assume that this took place in heaven, when Christ was exalted to the right hand of the Father. Thus they see Christ ruling on the Davidic throne starting immediately after the ascension, ten days before Pentecost. However, the Bible is very clear that the throne of David is located in Jerusalem, and Christ will not assume that throne until His second coming when the Messianic kingdom will be established on the earth. See Special Topic #8 at the end of this chapter, entitled *When and Where Does Christ Sit Upon the Throne of David?*

Acts 2:31

This is the conclusion of Peter’s argument. David, being a prophet, spoke a thousand years ahead of time, and predicted the resurrection of Christ, that His soul would not be left in Hades and His flesh would not see corruption, because He would be raised bodily from the grave.

¹⁴F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 72.

Acts 2:32

This Christ (Messiah) of whom David spoke is none other than Jesus Christ! Peter and the other eleven apostles were all witnesses of His bodily resurrection. They had seen the risen Lord with their own eyes. How blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed the faithful testimony of these eyewitnesses (John 20:29).

Acts 2:33

Where is Christ now? “By the right hand of God exalted.” The Head of the Church is in heaven; His beloved body is on earth representing its exalted Head. The world does not see the Head today (John 16:10; 1 Pet. 1:8), but the world sees His witnesses on the earth who are indwelt and empowered by the Spirit of God.

The Father and the Son were both involved in the sending of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26—the Father; John 15:26—the Son). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was a theme of Old Testament prophecy in connection with Israel’s new covenant. “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring” (Isa. 44:3).

Based on many Old Testament prophecies, the Jews knew that the Messianic kingdom would be inaugurated by a remarkable outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Here are some examples: “Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field” (Isaiah 32:15). “A new heart also will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you...and I will put my Spirit within you” (Ezekiel 36:26-27). “I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezekiel 39:29). “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (Joel 2:28-29). See also Isaiah 59:21; Ezekiel 11:19-20; 37:14 and Zechariah 12:10. Indeed, all of these prophecies will be literally fulfilled in the kingdom. The establishment of this kingdom is contingent upon Israel’s repentance and reception of their promised Messiah.

God also had amazing blessings for the repentant Jews who were gathered on the day of Pentecost, and God would also bless Gentile believers who would later become part of Christ’s Church. In Galatians 2 we learn that God’s grace and generosity were made available to the Church which includes believing Gentiles: “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal. 2:14; compare Gal. 2:2-3). The blessing of Abraham would certainly include the blessing of justification (Gal. 2:6,8,11). In Romans 11 we learn that the Gentiles, the unnatural branches, have been grafted into the olive tree which involves the blessings and spiritual provisions of the Abrahamic covenant. Part of God’s promise to Abraham was that in him “shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).

The Lord Jesus anticipated the gift of the Holy Spirit which would be poured out at Pentecost:

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy

Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (Acts 7:38-39, NKJV).¹⁵

Acts 2:34

Peter now continues his use of Old Testament Messianic prophecies, quoting from Psalm 110 (the most frequently quoted Psalm in the New Testament). Consider Matthew 22:41-46 where this key Psalm is discussed. The Jews knew that the Messiah must come from the line of David (Matt. 22:42). The Jews also understood Psalm 110:1 as being a reference to the Messiah: “The LORD (Jehovah, referring to God the Father) said unto my (the pronoun “my” refers to David, the writer of the Psalm) Lord (“Adonai” meaning “Lord” or “Master,” and here referring to the Messiah or the Christ). The Jews were baffled by our Lord’s question (Matthew 22:45-46) which was simply this: How can David’s son also be David’s Lord? No Jewish father would call his son “Lord,” but this is what David did!

Paul answers this question in Romans 1:3-4. In His humanity (“according to the flesh”) He is the Son of David (Romans 1:3). In His deity, He is the Son of God (Romans 1:4), and thus He is David’s Lord. His resurrection was the final proof that He was everything that He claimed to be.

In Acts 2 Peter answers the question in the same way. The Messiah will be **David’s Son** and will come from his loins according to the flesh (Acts 2:30). The Messiah will also be **David’s Lord** because He is the exalted Lord God (Acts 2:36).

When Peter says that “David is not ascended into the heavens” he was referring, of course, to David’s body, which was still resting in his tomb (v. 29). Whether his soul went from Abraham’s bosom (upper Sheol-Hades, cf. Luke 16:22-24) to heaven at the time of the ascension is another issue entirely, and was not addressed by Peter, nor would the Jews in Peter’s audience even be aware of this event.¹⁶

Acts 2:35

Peter’s message was forceful and clear, based on Psalm 110. His audience had crucified Christ (verses 23 and 36), thus making them God’s enemies and God’s foes. The Psalm declared that God’s foes would be totally crushed at the footstool of God’s wrath, unless they should repent. When it came to the judgment of God deserved by sinful men, Peter did not soft-pedal the message. His preaching cut them to the heart (v. 37).

¹⁵Christmas and Pentecost: **At Christmas time** we celebrate the incarnation, that God (the Second Person of the Godhead) inhabited a human body, God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). **At Pentecost** God (the Third Person of the Godhead) inhabited a body, a body of believers which is His Church: “in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22). “We have this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7). “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16). What a wondrous thing God has done!

¹⁶See the study, *Where Do the Dead Go?*
<http://middletownbiblechurch.org/doctrine/hades.htm>

Acts 2:36

Here is Peter's powerful conclusion, a summary of what he had already set forth in his sermon. Everything he had said was leading up to this twofold conclusion about who the Lord Jesus Christ really is. Nothing is more important than for a person to understand WHO Jesus Christ really is (Matthew 16:13-17). A person's eternal destiny depends on this. Jesus said, "**If ye believe not that I am He**, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). Peter's initial confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), anticipated what Peter proclaimed to these thousands of Jews at Pentecost. 1) He is the Christ, the Messiah, the promised "son of David"; 2) He is the Son of God, sharing the same nature as God, being equal with God (John 5:18; 10:33); thus He was David's Lord (Matt. 22:41-46). In the words of Peter He was both Lord and Christ. How sobering and convicting it must have been for these Jews to realize that the One they crucified was both Lord and Christ, *with the resurrection proving that He was everything He claimed to be*. They crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8).

Do not misunderstand the use of the word "made": "God **hath made** that same Jesus...both Lord and Christ." It does not mean that God made Him Lord and Christ on the day of Pentecost but that He was never identified as such prior to Pentecost. No, the word "made" means that God officially proclaimed that His Son was Lord and Christ.¹⁷

"Christ" refers to the Messiah, the anointed King who will sit on David's throne. "Lord" [*kúrios*] is the common term used in the Septuagint which translates the divine name Jehovah or Yahweh, the name of God most revered by the Jews. The New Testament uses this term to refer to Jesus' absolute deity, as in Phil. 2:10 and Rom. 10:9. Not only is He the Messiah, God's promised King, but He is God. The Jews understood that a descendant of David would be the Messiah. They should have also understood that this Messiah would be God, based on such passages as Isaiah 9:6 ("the mighty God") and Isaiah 7:14 ("God with us").

Peter's twofold proclamation ["Lord and Christ"] is reflected in other New Testament passages as seen in the following chart.¹⁸

¹⁷In John 5:18 Jesus "said also that God was His Father, **making Himself** equal with God." This means Jesus claimed to be equal with God, a claim that was absolutely true (see also John 10:33 and 19:7 for other examples). In 1 John 1:10 we learn that if we say that we have not sinned, **we make God a liar**. This does not mean that we somehow make the God of truth into a liar. It simply means the following: God says we have sinned, and if we deny this, then we are claiming that God is a liar (a claim that is utterly false).

¹⁸The chart is taken from Chapter 9, "Contingency of the Davidic Reign in Peter's Pentecost Sermon" by Ron J. Bigalke Jr. and George A. Gunn, *Progressive Dispensationalism—An Analysis of the Movement and Defense of Traditional Dispensationalism*, edited by Ron J. Bigalke Jr., University Press of America (2005), page 191.

<u>Reference</u>	<u>Davidic Kingship</u>	<u>Deity</u>
Matthew 16:16	Messiah	Son of the Living God
Matthew 26:63	Messiah	Son of God
Mark 1:1	Messiah	Son of God
John 1:49	King of Israel	Son of God
John 11:27	Messiah	Son of God
John 20:31	Messiah	Son of God
Acts 2:36	Messiah	Lord
Romans 1:3-4	The Seed of David	Son of God
1 John 4:15; 5:1	Messiah	Son of God

Acts 2:37

What the Spirit of God did in the hearts of these unsaved Jews on this momentous day was truly staggering. The English word “prick” as used today merely means to pierce slightly, but the Greek term used above goes much deeper. They were *cut* to the heart by the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). The truth *pierced* them very deeply. At the time of the Lord’s arrest, Peter had wielded a sword against a servant named Malchus, removing his ear but accomplishing nothing else. The Lord immediately healed Peter’s victim (Luke 23:51). On the day of Pentecost, Peter wielded a much more effective sword which did far more than surface damage. It pierced deeply into the hearts of thousands. Peter used the sword of the Spirit which is living, powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). The One who would convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8) brought great conviction to the hearts of those who had crucified their promised Savior and King (Acts 2:36). As a result they cried out, “**What shall we do?**”

We are reminded of a terrified Gentile jailer who had a similar response (Acts 16:30). Those who heard the powerful preaching of John the Baptist responded with similar questions (Luke 3:10). How wonderful it would be today if people would be so convicted of their sin that they would come to us desperately asking what they need to do in order to be saved from God’s wrath and judgment! And may we be ready, like Peter and Paul and Silas, to give them God’s required response (Acts 2:38; 16:31; 1 Pet. 3:15).

Acts 2:38

Peter commanded them to do two things: 1) Repent; 2) Be baptized. The modifying phrases are best understood as being part of a chiasmus or inverse parallelism. Chiasmus is a literary form in which ideas that have been presented in order (A, B, C, . . .) correspond to ideas that later occur in reverse order (. . .C, B, A).¹⁹ Thus, in this case we have:

¹⁹Two other example of chiasmus: 1) Matthew 7:6 where the swine do the trampling and the dogs do the rending; 2) Philemon 5 where the faith is toward the Lord Jesus and the love is toward all saints (the Bible never tells us to put our faith in fellow believers!). For a full discussion of inverse parallelism, see <http://middletownbiblechurch.org/egreek/greek09.pdf>.

- A. Repent
 - B. Be Baptized
 - B. Everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ
- A. For the remission of sins

The A's go together and the B's go together. So Peter was not saying "Be baptized for the remission of sins." Instead he was saying, "Repent...for the remission of sins." Other Scriptures confirm this. For example, in Acts 3:19 Peter gave this command: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Here we see that repentance was essential for the remission of sins and water baptism is not even mentioned. In the Great Commission according to Luke, repentance and the remission of sins are connected together: "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations" (Luke 24:47). The heart of such preaching is that a person must repent in order to have complete remission or forgiveness of sin. Water baptism is not mentioned.

Those who were familiar with John the Baptist's ministry knew that John's baptism symbolized "repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3). Here again, it is repentance that is connected to the remission of sins, not baptism, which was merely an outward symbol. Peter's preaching later in the book of Acts makes it very clear that faith is the one condition for receiving the complete forgiveness of sins: "To him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission [forgiveness] of sins" (Acts 10:43). In this passage Peter does not mention water baptism as a condition of salvation, though later these Gentile believers were commanded to be baptized (Acts 10:48), after they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:45). For a full discussion of why Acts 2:38 does not teach baptismal regeneration, see Special Topic #9 at the end of this chapter.

Repentance involved a drastic change of mind.²⁰ These Jewish believers needed a radical transformation of their thinking. They needed to think differently about the Lord Jesus Christ, the One whom they recently crucified, and they needed to think differently about their own sins. Of course, repentance is something that only the Holy Spirit can enable us to accomplish as He performs His convicting work in our hearts. As we trust the Lord, a highly complex series of events take place in the spiritual realm that is beyond our comprehension. The Spirit of God enables us to see ourselves as horrible hell-deserving sinners. A change of mind about ourselves results from a change of mind about God. God is not some remote, irrelevant deity out there somewhere. No, He is the thrice holy God (Isaiah 6:3) who demands absolute perfection, a perfection which is impossible for sinful men. However, God through Christ has made a provision for us, based on the cross, whereby the believing sinner has imputed to him (put to his account) the perfect righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:22,24; 4:5).

In the days of the early Church, beginning here at Pentecost, water baptism was a very costly act in which the believer was identifying with Jesus Christ and declaring to the world his intention to follow Him and be His disciple. In those days followers of the Lord could be disowned by their families, excommunicated from their synagogues, suffer the loss of employment, and in some cases be severely persecuted or even put to death. By an outward act of water baptism, the believer was declaring this message: "I want you all to know that I belong to Jesus Christ who loved me and gave

²⁰For a more complete discussion of the term "repentance" and its Biblical significance, see <http://middletownbiblechurch.org/salvatio/termsrep.htm>.

Himself for me. I have decided to follow Him at any cost, and there is no turning back!” As Christianity became more accepted by the world, water baptism degenerated into a meaningless ritual. For example, when Emperor Constantine declared his empire to be “Christian,” thousands of unbelievers were baptized. This outward act did nothing for their souls. Baptizing a heathen does not transform him into a believer and does not make him a saint.

So today, it is a spiritual tragedy that thousands of people have been baptized (many sprinkled as babies) in churches without really understanding salvation or the new birth. Christian ritual is no substitution for a real and right relationship with Jesus Christ. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that an unbeliever is under the condemnation and judgment of a holy God, whether he has been baptized in water or not (Mark 16:16; John 3:18,36). Faith (and true faith includes repentance—Acts 20:21) is the sole condition of salvation. Water baptism is not something that a person does in order to be saved; water baptism is something a saved person does. It is not essential for salvation, but it is essential for obedience once a person is saved. The waters of baptism do not cleanse a person from his sins; only Christ and His blood can do that (1 Pet. 1:18-19), and this cleansing takes place the moment a person believes on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31). Before the people were baptized in water on the day of Pentecost, they first exercised saving faith by gladly receiving (and believing) God’s Word spoken by Peter (Acts 2:41).

It should be also noted that the New Testament never contemplates a unbaptized believer. Such a creature was unheard of! It was assumed that true believers would obey their Lord and be baptized. This was what believers did in obedience to the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:16). It is interesting that Mark 16:16 contemplates only two groups of people: those who believed and were baptized and those who did not believe, whether they were baptized or not. The verse says nothing of those who believed but who refused to be baptized, because this group did not exist. On the other hand, the New Testament does contemplate the situation of an unbeliever being baptized in water. Such was the case of Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8). This man initially believed to some degree (Acts 8:13), but subsequent verses show that he was not truly saved (Acts 8:20-23). His faith fell short of genuine saving faith.²¹

There are two extreme teachings when it comes to water baptism. First, there are those who teach that water baptism is essential for salvation. This teaching has come to be known as baptismal regeneration, that a person is regenerated or born again, not at the point of saving faith, but at the point when he is baptized in water.²² The second extreme is the view held by certain ultradispensational groups, namely that water baptism should not be practiced at all in this present Church age. Insight into the Scriptural balance on this issue can be seen in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. First, we notice that Paul did indeed baptize: “I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius...and I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other” (1 Cor. 1:14,16).

Water baptism was not of utmost importance, which it would have been if it were necessary for salvation. If water baptism were essential for salvation, Paul never would have said this: “For Christ

²¹See *Was Simon the Sorcerer Saved?*
<http://middletownbiblechurch.org/problemv/simonsv.pdf>

²²For a full refutation of the error of baptismal regeneration, see the paper *Does Water Baptism Save?*: <http://middletownbiblechurch.org/salvatio/baptsave.htm>.

sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 1:17). Paul’s primary mission was to preach the gospel of the grace of God, the good news that salvation is not based on anything man does, but is based solely upon what Christ has done and is appropriated by faith and by faith alone. Paul exercised wisdom in not baptizing many of the Corinthians, lest in their carnal divisiveness they would boast that they had been baptized by Paul and were somehow superior to others who had not been baptized by him (1 Cor. 1:10-12). Paul also wanted to make it clear that people were to be baptized in the name of Christ, not in the name of Paul (1 Cor. 1:13). Paul was merely Christ’s servant, by whom they heard the gospel.

The day of Pentecost was the first time that Christian baptism took place. It was an outward act that was meant to attract attention and provoke questions. It was an outward *ritual* which portrayed an inner *reality*. Since Christian baptism symbolizes the believer’s identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5), it is obvious that such a baptism could not take place until those events had taken place in history. The book of Acts makes a clear distinction between the baptism of John the baptism and Christian baptism (see Acts 19:1-7; compare Acts 18:24-26). In the baptismal formula, given after the resurrection, the name of the Son is put on the same level with God the Father (Matt. 28:19), a point considered blasphemous by the Jews of that day. The Son of God, as seen in this baptismal formula, is distinct from the Father and the Spirit, but He is equal in essence and deity. It is a beautiful expression of the Trinity or the Tri-Unity of God, a doctrine which is at odds with Judaism, at odds with the cults, at odds with liberal Unitarianism and at odds with one billion Muslims in our world today who will not tolerate this fundamental teaching of the Christian faith.

Peter commanded the people to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38). They were to be baptized in the authority or on the authority of Jesus Christ (see also Acts 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 1 Cor. 1:13). This is not in contradiction to the Trinitarian formula in Matthew 28:19. Indeed, it was on the authority and by the command of Christ that the Matthew 28 formula was given! For a full discussion of the supposed difference between the Trinitarian formula and baptism in the name of Jesus, see Special Topic #10 at the end of this chapter.

Those Jews who truly repented were promised a double blessing in Acts 2:38: 1) they would receive the complete remission or forgiveness of sins; 2) they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise of the Holy Spirit was mentioned earlier in verse 33 and also in Acts 1:8 (compare also Luke 24:49). It was the fulfillment of several of our Lord’s statements in the upper room discourse regarding the coming Comforter (John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7,13). Later, the gift of the Holy Spirit would be poured out on the believing Samaritans (Acts 8:15-18) and on the believing Gentiles (Acts 10:44,47). Both of these subsequent events were remarkable turning points in the history of the early Church. To the Jewish mind, the implications of this were staggering. According to their prior experience and teaching, a person had to become a Jew in order to be acceptable before God. However, God altered this requirement as the gospel reached out to Samaritans and Gentiles. They did not need to become Jews in order to receive salvation blessings. As promised to Abraham, all the nations of the earth would be blessed in Christ who was Abraham’s promised Seed (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8-9). Faith in Christ was (and still is) the only requirement (Gal. 3:6-7, 26).

Acts 2:39

We find, in this marvelous verse, the worldwide scope of God’s promised salvation. It was not just for those Jews who were present on that day, but also for their children, that is, their descendants. What a display of God’s grace to those people who less than two months earlier had cried, “His

blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt. 27:25)! God made it possible for Christ-rejecting Jews to be partakers of the promise of His so-great salvation, if they would repent and call upon His Name.

God’s salvation was not limited to the Jerusalem area only, but the promise was also “to all that are afar off” (Acts 2:39). This was a gospel which was going to go into all the world (Mark 16:15), to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8), and to all nations (Matt. 28:19; Luke 24:47). It would include those who will be redeemed to God by Christ’s blood “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Rev. 5:9). It would include the Gentiles throughout the world. Ephesians 2:13,17 (those who “were far off”) is a clear reference to Gentiles who have now, through faith, been made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Obviously, the promise to their children did not mean that if they believed on Christ, then their children and their descendants would automatically be saved. By using the same twisted logic one might conclude that if these Jews believed then all that are afar off (the whole world) would be saved also. The salvation promise is extended to all, but each individual must trust Christ and call upon the name of the Lord for himself. No one can believe for someone else.

The verse is very specific about which children or descendants will be saved and which people “afar off” will be saved: “**even as many as the Lord our God shall call.**” It is important to make a distinction between the general call of God for salvation and the effectual call of God. In the general call, God’s invitation to salvation goes out to all men without exception, as the Savior graciously calls all sinners to repentance: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13). “He that cometh to Me I will certainly not cast out” (John 6:37). Concerning God’s general call, people can choose to remain in their unbelief and refuse to come to the Savior: “And ye are not willing to come to Me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40, translated from Greek).

The effectual call involves God’s wonderful working in the human heart: “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me” (John 6:37). Those who truly call upon the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21) eventually discover that God has called them unto Himself. Indeed, God’s purpose for this present age is to “take out of them [the nations] a people for His Name” (Acts 15:14). The term “church” [Greek-*ekklēsia*] means “a called-out assembly.” Believers have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). We have been called unto the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1:9). We are “called according to His purpose” and that purpose is that we might be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28-29). Those who are saved are those who are called (compare 1 Cor. 1:18 with 1:24), and our effectual calling is discussed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28. The fact that God has called us to Himself should stir our hearts to much thanksgiving and praise. May we give all diligence to make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10), that is, to live each day in such a way that we demonstrate, beyond any doubt, that we belong to the living God.

Acts 2:40

This verse indicates that we only have a sampling of Peter’s Pentecostal sermon. He addressed this crowd with “many other words” which God has chosen not to record for us. This is true of most of the messages that are recorded in the book of Acts. The messages are not given in their entirety, but only that portion of the message which the Holy Spirit wanted to record as part of Luke’s inspired record. As a witness, Peter gave solemn testimony to the amazing things which he had seen and

heard, especially as it concerned the death and resurrection of Christ. As a preacher, Peter earnestly urged and encouraged these Jewish people to change their minds about Christ and to save themselves from that wicked generation of Christ-rejecting Jews.

Peter described his generation as crooked or perverse (see the same word in Phil. 2:15). The Lord Jesus once gave a similar description, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you?” (Luke 9:41). Peter’s listeners were part of a generation that rejected their promised Savior and King. They were part of that crowd which had said, “We have no king but Caesar!” (John 19:5). They also shouted “Away with this Man” and “Crucify Him” (Luke 23:18, 21). Peter’s audience was a part of that unbelieving, Christ-hating generation, and they needed to separate themselves from it by true repentance.

While we today are not part of that generation of first-century Jews, yet in our unsaved days we were part of that massive crowd on the broad road headed for destruction (Matt. 7:13). We needed to flee from the wrath to God by passing through the narrow gate that leads to life (Matt. 7:14). The way of the cross was our only hope. As saints who have been delivered from so great a death, may we devote ourselves to testifying and exhorting the lost to save themselves from this present generation that is perishing.

Acts 2:41

These Jewish people responded to Peter’s message in a remarkable way. About three thousand persons welcomed God’s Word into their hearts.²³ They believed Peter’s powerful message and they repented. They totally changed their mind and attitude about Jesus Christ and who He really was. They agreed with Peter’s conclusion that the One they had crucified was Lord (God) and Messiah (Acts 2:36). They determined to **follow** Him and not **fight** Him any longer. They surrendered to the will of God and trusted the Savior. In obedience to the Great Commission they were immediately baptized.

The body of believers was growing. It began with 120 disciples who earlier in the day had received the Spirit and were placed into the body of Christ. After Peter’s convicting message, about 3,000 more were added, having likewise received the Holy Spirit as promised (Acts 2:38; compare Acts 11:15-17).

“Their numbers amounted to three thousand—a much larger company won in a single day than Jesus had secured to His allegiance in two or three years of public ministry.”²⁴ One factor which may have contributed to this large number of converts was the very effective preparatory ministry of John the Baptist.

This was an enormous baptism service. If the twelve apostles did the baptizing simultaneously, and if each individual baptism took only 15 seconds, then it would have taken over an hour to baptize

²³The opposite response to receiving God’s Word is to reject it. This is a disastrous choice for any person. The Word which they reject will someday be their Judge (John 12:48).

²⁴F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, p. 79.

them all! Each apostle would need to baptize 250 people!²⁵ If each baptism took a minute, then baptizing 3000 would have taken over four hours.

Some have questioned whether there was any place in Jerusalem where so many could be immersed in water. There are several possibilities: 1) The Virgin's pool was about 132 feet square and some three feet deep. 2) The pool of Siloam occupied approximately 800 square feet and was more than three feet deep. 3) Lower Gihon covered more than three acres and could be as much as 40 feet deep. 4) Upper Gihon was about one and a half acres and could hold a depth of some 20 feet of water.²⁶

Today much is said about super-churches or mega-churches, and the Jerusalem church, at least size-wise, would have certainly qualified as such. Sadly, today many mega-church adherents are locked into the mentality that if a ministry does not have thousands of people responding and attending, then that ministry has failed the Lord. To achieve such a goal, the Biblical message is often watered down, sin is downplayed and the ministry seeks to be "user-friendly." Often attendees are asked what they would want the church to provide for them so that they can be comfortable and enjoy the worship experience. This approach is dangerous because it can result in giving people what they want instead of giving them what they truly need.

Here in Acts 2, Peter certainly did not modify his message to please the crowd. His sermon was Spirit-empowered, very convicting, and pierced many hearts. God's truth was not compromised in any way. There may be legitimate reasons why some churches remain small, but God-honoring believers should never be opposed to seeing people saved and numbers increasing, as long as the ministry is faithfully honoring the Lord and is faithful to His Word. God will give the increase in His time and in His way. God's people must not use unbiblical methods in the desire to see more people come to Christ. God's work must always be done in God's way for God's glory, leaving the results in God's good hands.²⁷

Acts 2:42

There is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7). On the first day of Church history God delivered 3,000 little bundles of joy to the apostles who were responsible for their spiritual welfare. These twelve men suddenly became the spiritual parents of 3,000 spiritual children, babes in Christ! Think of all that was involved in teaching and discipling this great multitude of converts. Here in verse 42 we have God's wonderful formula for how believers in the Church are to grow and prosper and have a powerful testimony for Christ.

They adhered to four things and persisted in them. They gave constant attention to these things and would let nothing deter them. These four things characterized the early Church.

²⁵Of course, we are not told how many people did the baptizing.

²⁶J.W. McGarvey, *Lands of the Bible*, Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1881, p. 201.

²⁷See *The Mega Church Compared and Contrasted with the Bible Believing Church* at <http://middletownbiblechurch.org/lochurch/mega.pdf>.

1) The Apostles' Doctrine.

They continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles. The apostles had immersed themselves in the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ for three and a half years. After His resurrection, Christ had instructed them to disciple others and to teach them all that He had commanded (Matt. 28:19-20). The term "indoctrination" sometimes carries a negative connotation because we might think of communist indoctrination, Muslim indoctrination, Jehovah's Witnesses indoctrination, and other kinds of evil brainwashing as people's minds are saturated with error. However, indoctrination by means of the truth of God is something very wonderful. The early Church practiced apostolic indoctrination. The apostles taught and made disciples (learners) of many. It is a sad thing that after many evangelistic campaigns today there is little indoctrination and little follow-up teaching. People are told to go to "the church of their choice" and are given no instruction as to how to recognize a good church. Many of the churches of today have been swallowed up by dead formalism, liberalism, and other forms of compromise. To send people to these churches is to take the sheep and send them to the wolves (cf. John 10:12). God forbid!

Today we do not have the apostles, such as Peter, Paul, and Matthew, to teach us. They have long since finished their race and are with the Lord. However, we still have the teaching (doctrine) of the apostles. In the first century, God made sure that the teaching of the apostles would be preserved in written form, now known as the New Testament. We have the teaching of the Apostle Paul (thirteen books), the teaching of the Apostle John (five books), the teaching of Peter (which includes Mark's gospel and Peter's epistles), the teaching of Matthew, etc. Today the Church does not lack an authoritative source of doctrine and truth, because we have the Bible. What the early Church had verbally from God's chosen Church leaders, we now have in written format in the New Testament Scriptures. These are essential for the health and growth of the Church. How handicapped the Church would be today without the New Testament! It, along with the Old Testament, is our only sure guide and rule for faith and practice.

2) Fellowship

Fellowship (*koinōnia*) comes from the Greek term "common." Fellowship involves sharing in common. Those who have been placed into the body of Christ have so much in common! Paul spoke of our oneness in Christ in Ephesians 4:3-6. We are fellow-members of the same body, under the wonderful Headship of Jesus Christ. We are all indwelt by the same Spirit. We all expectantly look for the same blessed hope, even the return of our Lord which the early Christians anticipated with the rallying cry of "Maranatha" (1 Cor. 16:22). We are all united around one faith, that is, one body of truth. We all believe the same Bible and are bound by its precepts. We all serve the same Master and Lord, the One who saved us by His blood. We all pray to the same Heavenly Father who knows our every need and who lovingly cares for His children.

There is no greater unity on earth than what believers share in common, and it is essential that we continue steadfastly in these things that unite us as brothers and sisters in Christ. The world will know that we are His disciples by our love for one another (John 13:35). The early Christians were united together in the sweet bond of true fellowship—edifying one other, encouraging one another, helping one another, supporting those who were poor, weak and needy. They did not forsake the assembling of themselves together (Heb. 10:25) because they were members of one body, a living organism, wonderfully joined to each and every believer and wonderfully joined to Christ, their living Head. Oh that people today would see the Church, not as some club or organization, but as a vital union of blood-bought believers joined with an unbreakable bond to their exalted Lord in

heaven! We need to see the Church as God sees it (Eph. 5:23-32).

3) Breaking of Bread

The breaking of bread involved remembering the Lord's death, in obedience to the Lord's command (Luke 22:19-20; later taught by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:20-34). While the breaking of bread may have been observed more often at first, it came to be observed on the first day of the week, the day Christ arose from the dead. The importance of remembering the Lord in this way can be seen from Acts 20:6-7 where Paul deliberately waited so he could be with the believers on the first day of the week to celebrate and remember the Savior's death.

To the believers of the early Church the cross of Christ was central. Paul wrote, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). And again, "God forbid that I should glory [boast] save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14). The glorious blaze from Calvary's cross illuminated everything that these believers did. How tragic today that people professing to be Christians are writing books and delivering sermons condemning what they consider to be the barbaric concept of "blood atonement." They deny the very Lord who bought them (2 Pet. 2:1) and blaspheme His saving work accomplished on Golgatha's tree. May the old rugged cross, so despised by the world, ever have a wonderful attraction for every true child of God! When the Church loses the meaning of the cross, it no longer has a message. How we need to search our hearts to make sure that our regular observance of the Lord's Table does not degenerate into a meaningless ritual. It is a holy sacrament commanded by our Lord to remember the most important event which ever happened on our planet. As such it must be observed with reverent, meaningful, and joyful contemplation. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

4) Prayers

Prayer is to the Church what breathing is to the individual. The Church cannot live without it. In a day when more and more local churches are abolishing their prayer meetings, how we need this reminder that the early Church was a praying Church. Prayer characterized all that they did. Communication with the Commander in Chief was and still is essential. The body needs to be totally dependent upon its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). Without Him all our labor is in vain.

It is very instructive to study the book of Acts and learn from every occasion when they prayed. Even before the Church began they were continuing steadfastly in prayers (Acts 1:14, 24). After the Church was formed they continued this vital practice. Study Acts 3:1; 4:24-29; 6:4, 6; 7:59-60 (Stephen died praying!); 9:6,11; 9:40; 10:9; 11:5; 12:5,12; 13:3; 14:23; 16:12-13,15-16; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 27:33-35; 28:8.

Someone once said, "I'd rather have a little child whose strength is in the Almighty than a mighty warrior who is prayerless." Those who have back trouble are sometimes given this advice: "Don't lift with your back, lift with your knees!" There is a good spiritual lesson here as well! Our Lord said, "Men ought always to pray and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). The early Church, as demonstrated again and again in the book of Acts, took our Lord's words seriously!

* * * *

In the first century God was working mightily with His people (Mark 16:20), but Satan was also at

work, corrupting and distorting the truth. How quickly the Biblical practice of baptism degenerated into baptismal regeneration, not just for adults, but even for infants. How tragically the Biblical practice of the Lord's table changed into the religious observance of the Mass. And what of the apostles' doctrine? It was not long before the common man was told that he could not understand the Scriptures by himself, but he needed elite and learned clergymen to interpret them for him. How successful the serpent has been at beguiling the minds of people and corrupting them from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor. 11:3)! May we never lose the simple devotion that was displayed by those dear Jewish members of the Jerusalem Church.

Acts 2:43

Fear came upon every soul. The entire city of Jerusalem was feeling the impact of what had happened on that day. The Pentecostal miracles were not done in a secret corner of the city. They were a public display of God's power witnessed by many. Thousands heard Peter's message as he spoke about a risen Savior, the very One they had killed less than two months earlier. And the miracles were just beginning: "many signs and wonders were done by the apostles," an example of which we find at the beginning of chapter 3. God was working. These were attention-getting miracles which could not be ignored and could not be denied. Already more than 3,000 had come to faith in Christ. Those who had hated Christ and who rejoiced when the Romans nailed Him to the cross had to deal with the unexpected and disturbing message heralded by the apostles that He had conquered death (compare Acts 4:1-2). Moreover, there were more than 500 people in Palestine who were eye-witnesses of the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:6), indicating that the preaching of the empty tomb was not fake news that could easily be quelled. News of the birth of Christ impacted the whole city of Jerusalem (Matt. 2:3) and news of His resurrection did the same (Acts 2:43).

Acts 2:44-45

The early Christians had a great care and love for each other, and they were willing to meet the needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ even at great personal cost. They did this willingly and not out of compulsion. It is quite possible that some who came to know Christ were excommunicated from their synagogues and disowned by their own family members. Others may have been unable to make a good living due to unfair treatment by unbelievers. Whatever the reasons, some of the believers were very poor and needy and they were not neglected by those believers who had means. People were willing to sell their private properties and possessions and share them with others "as every man had need."²⁸

Many have wrongly suggested that this was some kind of "Christian communism." This is a misnomer because communism is founded on atheism and thus could never be called "Christian." What took place in the early days of the Church was totally voluntary (Acts 5:4), motivated by love. It was not a government welfare program. "This was not cold charity. This was the Body at work. This was the hand caring for the foot, the eye looking out for the ear. This was love, not law; compassion, not compulsion. The communist ideal is noble enough, but it breaks down because it

²⁸Some believe these Christians sold their property and possessions because they believed the Lord was coming soon. The doctrine of imminency does not mean that the Lord will come soon but that He could come soon. He could come at any time, but there also could be a delay.

leaves out God and relies on force.”²⁹

An open-air preacher was being heckled by a communist in the crowd. About that time a drunken derelict staggered past, a pitiable object, down at heel and arrayed in rags. The communist pointed to him. “Given the opportunity,” he said, “Communism would put a new suit on that man. What does your Christianity do for him?” Said the preacher, “Given the opportunity, Christ would put a new man in that suit.”³⁰

The sharing of things in common was not a practice that continued. Later in the book of Acts we read nothing of it. The New Testament letters do not command believers to sell their goods and possessions for the common good. Paul had to warn certain Thessalonians who may have been trying to live off of the generosity of the church: “We commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat...we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread” (2 Thess. 3:10,12). Government welfare proponents should learn a lesson from Paul’s forceful teachings on these matters.

Acts 2:46

The temple courtyard became an ideal meeting place for the growing Church. It could accommodate great numbers, and every day the believers would meet for prayer, worship and fellowship. It also afforded a wonderful opportunity to share with Jews who had not yet come to faith in Christ. The believers also met in homes where they continued to remember the Lord’s death and also partook of their daily sustenance. These two meeting places, the temple and in homes, are also mentioned in Acts 5:42 where the activities of teaching and evangelism are stressed.

These early disciples ate their food with gladness. The Lord had transformed their daily routines into occasions of joy (Gal. 5:22), and even the ordinary things of life became extraordinary as God was working in their hearts: “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). Even fierce persecution could not rob them of their joy and gladness (Acts 5:41).

These believers carried out their daily duties with “singleness of heart.” Their eye was single (Matt. 6:22-23). We need to return to the simplicity that is in Christ and have the proper focus and goal. The single eye refers to single-minded devotion, single undivided loyalty. The heart’s eye is fixed on Christ alone, and thus the body is full of light. A good illustration of this is an Olympic athlete who has a single focus. His eye is on one thing and one thing only. Suppose you were to question an Olympic athlete. His answers to every question would be the same: Why do you lift weights? “GOLD!” Why are you so careful about your diet? “GOLD!” Why do you get up so early in the morning? “GOLD!” Why do you train for hours a day, year after year? “GOLD!” Why are you willing to subject your body to hardships even to the point of painful exhaustion? “GOLD!” Why do you deprive yourself of many of the niceties of life that other young people your age enjoy? “GOLD!” So also the focus of the blood-bought believer ought to be just as singular: Why do you wake up early to have prayer and devotions? “GOD!” Why do you spend quality time in God’s Word? “GOD!” Why are you temperate in all things? “GOD!” Why are you not moved by the

²⁹John Phillips, *Exploring Acts*, p. 63.

³⁰John Phillips, *Exploring Acts*, p. 63.

trials and hardships of life? “GOD!” Why are you willing to say “NO” to self and deprive yourself of many things that others enjoy? “GOD!” Why do you eat and drink and do all that you do? “ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD!” David had a single eye. He was focused on only one thing (Psalm 27:4). Likewise Paul: “This one thing I do” (Phil. 3:13-14).

Acts 2:47

The early Church was marked by a spirit of praise. The gospel of Luke ends with a triumphant burst of praise: “And [they] returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God” (Luke 24:52-53). As more believers were added to the Lord, praise to God only crescendoed, as exemplified in a wonderful way by the man who was born lame (Acts 3:8-9). What a life-changing difference the spirit of praise can make in our lives today as we focus on the great things God has done and is doing!

They found favor (grace) among the people. Although the Jewish religious leaders would soon demonstrate fierce opposition to this new movement (Acts 4:1-3), the common people were favorable and respectful towards the Christians, treated them well, and would often gather in large numbers to hear them preach. We are reminded that they had favor with God and with man (Luke 2:52). Only when we enjoy God’s grace and favor can we properly relate to our fellow men.

In this verse we find the first mention of the term “Church” in the book of Acts.³¹ It is the Greek term *ekklēsia* which is made up of two Greek words: 1) *ek* which means “out, out of” and 2) *klēsis* which means “a calling” (from the verb *kaleo* which means “to call”). If we put these two meanings together we have “a calling out.” Therefore the term “Church” means “an assembly of called-out ones, a called-out assembly.” The importance of being called by God had already been stressed in Peter’s message (Acts 2:39). The term *ekklēsia* is used later in Acts to describe Israel in the desert wilderness (Acts 7:38). God had called out Israel from the land of Egypt by His mighty hand at the Red Sea (Hosea 11:1) to be His own special people, His own possession (Deut. 7:6). In this present age, it is the New Testament Church, born on the day of Pentecost, which is God’s special possession (Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:9). The Church’s tenure on earth began at Pentecost and will continue until the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

The Church is not only a body of believers (1 Cor. 12:12-27), but it is also a building, “a holy temple in the Lord...built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:21-22). It is a spiritual house made up of living stones (1 Pet. 2:5), Christ Himself being both the chief corner stone of the building (1 Pet. 2:6) and also the foundation of the building (1 Cor. 3:11). It is the house of God, the Church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15).

We learn in Acts 2:47 that it is the Lord Jesus who adds to the Church. He is the Builder: “I will build My Church” (Matt. 16:18, spoken in the future tense since that Church had not yet begun). Christ is the One who baptizes believers into the body of Christ by the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11). This work began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 11:15-17). The one requirement

³¹Some Greek manuscripts omit the word “church” here in verse 47. The next occurrence of the term *ekklēsia* is found in Acts 5:11.

to be a part of God's building is to be saved. Those who are saved are part of the true building.³² God's saving operation takes place on a daily basis, a reminder to us that we need to be ready always to be God's instruments in pointing others to Christ (1 Pet. 3:15). Today and every day God is adding to His Church. Over three thousand were added on the day of Pentecost. In Acts 4:4 the number had grown significantly, with just the men numbering about five thousand. Later multitudes of additional believers were added to God's building (Acts 5:14). Church growth is God's business. He is the One who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:7). Numbers need not be our concern; our responsibility is to be faithful (1 Cor. 4:2).

There are accounts of faithful missionaries who labored for years without seeing many converts. Adoniram Judson, the father of American missions, arrived in Burma in 1813. He labored hard and faithfully but he did not see many results. Five long years passed before Judson was able to baptize his first convert. As he himself said, winning a convert in those regions was "like drawing the eye-tooth of a live tiger." He labored hard for ten years before he was able to gather one little flock of 18 converts into a church. But God eventually brought in an amazing harvest of souls. Before Judson died there were 7,000 Christians living in Burma with 63 churches and 163 missionaries, native pastors and helpers to watch over the churches. Robert Morrison (1782-1834) was the first missionary to China. Seven years passed before Morrison baptized his first convert and the total number of converts as a result of his work remained small. God will do His part, in His way, in His time. May we do our part, whether we see results or not. God evaluates His servants based on faithfulness, not based on the number of souls saved. Every soul, even just one, is important to God, and there is joy in heaven over just one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7,10).

³²There are some professing believers who are like scaffolding. They seem to be part of the building, but as time progresses it becomes obvious that they were only temporary attachments. See Luke 8:13; Heb. 3:6,14.

Special Topics Which Relate to Acts Chapter 2

Index of Special Topics for Acts 2

Because Acts chapter 2 is such an important chapter both doctrinally and dispensationally, and because many false notions and false doctrines have arisen from a misunderstanding of this chapter, it seemed appropriate to include ten special topics that help to clarify these vital issues.

Special Topic #1—Pentecostal Miracles

Special Topic #2—When Did the Church Begin?

Special Topic #3—Spirit Baptism

Special Topic #4—The Baptism and the Filling of the Spirit Compared and Contrasted

Special Topic #5—Twelve Reasons Why the Gift of Tongues Consisted of Real Languages

Special Topic #6—The Purpose of the Gift of Tongues

Special Topic #7—Peter's Use of Joel's Prophecy in Acts 2

Special Topic #8—When and Where Does Christ Sit Upon the Throne of David?

Special Topic #9—Does Acts 2:38 Teach That Water Baptism Saves?

Special Topic #10—Baptism in the Name of Jesus and the Trinitarian Formula

Note: There is a certain amount of duplication or repetition found when comparing Special Topic #2 (*When Did the Church Begin?*) and Special Topic #3 (*Spirit Baptism*). This is because the two topics are vitally related. One cannot answer the question as to when the Church began apart from understanding Spirit baptism and when this first took place. Likewise, any full discussion of Spirit baptism is must include the question of when the Church began. In spite of some repetition, we want to allow each document to stand by itself without abridgement.

Special Topic #1
Pentecostal Miracles

Miracles are described by three Biblical terms: miracles, signs and wonders. A miracle is a special and very rare work of God which defies explanation, often involving the suspension of the normal laws of science. Examples would be when an axe head floated in the days of Elisha, and when Christ and Peter walked on water. Such wonders are spectacular and cannot be denied even by unbelievers.

A careful distinction must be made between supernatural miracles and the providential working of God. God's providence is the normal outworking of God's plan as He works through natural processes and natural laws to accomplish His will and His purposes. God's providential working is beautifully illustrated in the life of Joseph and in the book of Esther. In the book of Esther, God's name is never mentioned but God's providential hand is everywhere seen.¹

There are also spiritual miracles which take place in the spiritual realm. One such miracle would be the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of unsaved people, bringing about conviction of sin and conversion, and the spiritual miracle of regeneration. On the day of Pentecost thousands experienced the new birth. The filling of the Holy Spirit in the daily lives and ministries of believers is another area where God works mightily in His people. God can do great and mighty works in those hearts that are fully yielded to Him.

The Pentecostal movement, the more ecumenical Charismatic movement, and the recent Signs and Wonders movement all emphasize the gifts of tongues, healing and prophecy as being given by God to believers today. Followers of these movements reason that if God gave these gifts to the early Church, then why would He not give these gifts to believers today? Such thinking reflects a basic misunderstanding of the nature, purpose and duration of these special gifts.²

In the Bible, miracles were the exception, not the general rule. Sign-miracles occurred during special periods of Biblical history, such as in the days of Moses, during the times of Elijah and Elisha, and during the first century with Christ and the apostles.³ Even John the Baptist, the greatest born among women, "did no miracle" (John 10:41). Neither did Abraham, the father of the Jews and the father of the faithful. Miracles, even in Bible times, were rare, not common.

"But isn't God able to perform miracles today?" It is not a question of God's power or ability. God can perform miracles whenever He chooses. He chose to perform miracles through Peter, but not through John the Baptist. The issue is God's plan and purpose, and this does not involve distributing gifts and sign-miracles to everyone in every period of time.

The outward spectacular sign-miracles are always given a secondary position compared to spiritual sign-miracles. The very night of His betrayal, the Lord Jesus told His disciples: "He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do because I go unto the Father" (John 14:12). What did He mean by these words? The works that Jesus performed during His public ministry were fantastically great. Diseases were banished, demons were cast out, dead men arose, wine, bread, and fish were created, and mighty

¹For further study see *Esther and the Destiny of Israel*, by John Whitcomb, Revised Edition, 2005, www.Whitcombministries.org.

²For a full discussion of the issue of the temporary nature of certain spiritual gifts, see <http://middletownbiblechurch.org/doctrine/charis35.htm>.

³For further study, see *Does God Want Christians To Perform Miracles Today?* by John Whitcomb, www.Whitcombministries.org.

storms were instantly calmed. However, it must be recognized that each of these miracles was *intentionally superficial and temporary in quality!* In other words, no one was permanently helped by any of them, nor were men's deepest needs met by such works of power! Creating food for one occasion did not automatically supply the need for later occasions. And with regard to bodily ailments, every diseased, crippled, leprous person Jesus ever healed finally died anyway—every one of them! And poor Lazarus! It is true that Jesus raised him from the dead, instantly and completely, with no convalescence needed. But later on he died again! Would you like to die twice? When Christ raises your dead body some day, would you want it to be raised to mortal life again? This was certainly no favor to Lazarus, nor was it intended to be! It was rather a mere temporary and limited sign of Christ's power to do the greater work of resurrection to glory at that future day (John 5:28-29).

In this light, our Lord's words take on new meaning: "greater works than these shall ye do because I go unto the Father." Can there be any greater works than the miracles of Jesus? Yes, there can be and there are. When our Lord returned to heaven, the Spirit of God came ten days later and baptized the disciples into the body of Christ. Peter then arose, preached a sermon to a vast multitude of Jews, and three thousand men experienced the *spiritual miracle* of regeneration in one day! This was the "greater work" because it met *man's basic need*, and met it *permanently*. Let it be remembered that our Lord's purpose in coming to earth was not to preach the Christian Gospel, but to make such preaching possible (1 Cor. 15:1-4). If He had not died as our Substitute for sin, there could be no Gospel (John 12:20-24). But since His death, resurrection, and ascension, many pastors, evangelists, and missionaries *have won more men to saving faith than the Son of God did*, and physical miracles have not been the cause of their success.

If faith healers are a vital part of God's program for the Church today, why did the Apostle Paul experience the end of such powers during his own lifetime? While at Ephesus, he healed many people by miraculous means (Acts 19:11-12); but God chose not to answer his prayers for his own bodily healing (2 Cor. 12:7-10). The reason for this is exceedingly important: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my power is made perfect in weakness." What, then, should we think of a modern faith healer who states or implies that certain saints of God must continue to be cripples because they have *insufficient faith* or because they have not come to *the right man*? Is this the reason why great Christians such as John Calvin, David Brainerd, Frances Havergal, Robert Murray McCheyne, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and Fanny Crosby, among others, suffered many years of ill health or died young? If God's power is made perfect in weakness, is robust physical health necessarily a measure of one's spiritual well-being?

Paul's last recorded miracles were performed on the island of Malta. One of the miracles was a remarkable fulfillment of our Lord's promise to the apostles that they would not be hurt by deadly serpents (Acts 28:1-10; Mark 16:18). But after Paul arrived in Rome, his miracle-working powers were evidently withdrawn by the Lord. In a letter to the Philippian church, he explained how Epaphroditus, their messenger to him, had almost died from a sickness, and the clear implication is that Paul was unable to help him (Phil. 2:25-20). After a time, Paul was released from prison, visited the Aegean area again, and was brought back to Rome for execution. In his final letter to Timothy he explained that he had left Trophimus at Miletus *sick* (2 Tim. 4:20). In fact, he knew of no faith healer who could help Timothy either, so he recommended to him that he no longer drink water [which was often dangerously polluted], "but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (1 Tim. 5:23).

Thus, step by step, God was removing the scaffolding of miracles from the early Church *as the New Testament Scriptures were being completed and the apostles and prophets were dying off*. The Holy Spirit was now focusing the eyes of Christians exclusively upon the written Word, apart from which there is no salvation or spiritual maturity (2 Tim. 3:15-17). God's plan for this age, said Paul, is for men to walk by faith rather than by sight (2 Cor. 5:7), just as our Lord reminded Thomas, the sign seeker, "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

What the Church needs today is a new confrontation with the whole counsel of God, proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit with authority and love, by men who know their God and who honor His only written revelation, the Bible. Then, and then only, may we expect our deepest needs to be supplied, and God's purpose for His Church to be accomplished in our day.

Special Topic #2
When Did the Church Begin?

Introduction

Reformed/Covenant Theology teaches (with some variation in details) that the Church is made up of the elect of all ages, and therefore the Church must have begun with the first person who was saved. This is their common view, although some begin the Church with the nation Israel. In either case, Reformed men are unanimous in teaching that the Church was present in the Old Testament period.¹ Reformed/Covenant men stress that throughout all history there is but one people of God, and that these saved people comprise the Church.

Dispensationalists understand that the Church is a unique body of believers that began on the day of Pentecost and will be removed from earth on the day that Christ comes for His own (the rapture). It is made up of both Jews and Gentiles united together into one body and enjoying equal status in the body of Christ (Eph. 3:5-6). This is the “one new man” of Ephesians 2:15 and the “one fold” of John 10:16.

Others hold to differing positions as to when the Church began. Some Baptist groups believe that the Church began with John the Baptist or at some time during the Lord’s earthly ministry. Others whom we consider ultradispensational, begin the Church several years after Pentecost (some in Acts 13 and others in Acts 28).

The answer to the question of when the Church began is important and has many theological ramifications. It is not a difficult question to answer. The Scriptures pinpoint the beginning of the Church in a very simple and clear way, as we shall now seek to demonstrate.

The Key Argument from Scripture

Spirit Baptism

The key passage on Spirit baptism is found in 1 Corinthians 12:13—“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” The “one body” spoken of in this verse refers to the Church (see 1 Cor. 12:27-28; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:30-32; Col. 1:18), and Christ is the Head of this body. Spirit baptism is defined in 1 Corinthians 12:13 as that work of God whereby believers are baptized (immersed, placed) into Christ’s body, the Church. How then does a believer become a member of the body of Christ? It is by Spirit baptism.

The key to when the Church began is this: If we can determine when Spirit baptism first began, then we will know when the Church began. When did God first baptize believers into His body? When were believers first placed into the body of Christ? To answer this is to determine the day on which the Church began.

¹Thus we have the following headings at the top of *The Thompson Chain Reference Bible* in the book of Isaiah: “God’s mercy to the Church” “God avengeth His Church” “His great mercies to the Church” “The Church comforted” “The restoration of the Church” “The Church exhorted” “God will comfort His Church” “The prophet’s zeal for the Church” “Confession and complaint of the Church” etc.

Spirit baptism was first predicted by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11 (and in the parallel passages: Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33):

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire” (Matt. 3:11).

John’s baptism was a water baptism (“I baptize you with water”); Christ’s baptism would be a spiritual baptism (“He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit”). The “fire baptism” is for the unsaved and this is yet future (see Matthew 3:12). Notice the phrase, “He shall baptize you **with** (Greek-**en**) the Holy Spirit.” The verb “shall baptize” is in the future tense, indicating that Spirit baptism had not yet taken place when John the Baptist spoke these words. John was predicting that it would happen in the future, but he did not predict exactly when it would happen. Notice also that Christ is the Baptizer. He is the One who would place believers into the body of Christ. He is the One who would build His Church. Christ is also the Baptizer in 1 Corinthians 12:13, as will be shown later.

In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus said, “**I will** build My Church.” The future tense of the verb indicates that the building of the Church had not yet begun when Jesus said these words. He did not say, “I have built My Church.” He did not say, “I am building My Church.” No, the building project had not yet begun and thus the Church was yet future. At the time Jesus spoke the words of Matthew 16:18 the Church had not yet begun.

Today Christ is building His Church. He is adding to the Church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). But the question is, when did this building program first begin?

In Acts 1:5 the Lord Jesus predicted that Spirit baptism was still future:

“For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence” (Acts 1:5).

According to our Lord’s prediction, Spirit baptism had not yet taken place, though it would soon take place. No one had yet been immersed into the body of Christ. Thus, the Church could not have begun prior to Acts 1:5. When Jesus spoke the words of Acts 1:5, His death and His resurrection had already taken place, and yet Spirit baptism had not yet taken place and the Church had not yet been formed. But the announcement of Acts 1:5 was very significant because Jesus said that Spirit baptism would take place “not many days hence” (not many days from now). This means that it would happen soon, in a matter of days. Indeed, as we shall learn, it happened just ten days later on the day of Pentecost.

The day of Pentecost and the unique events that took place on that day are described in Acts chapter 2. In this chapter Spirit baptism is not specifically mentioned. It is not until Acts chapter 11 that we are told that Spirit baptism took place on the day of Pentecost: “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, **as on us at the beginning** [on the day of Pentecost]. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 11:15-16). Based on the clear statement of this passage we know that Spirit baptism first took place on the day of Pentecost. It was then that believers were first placed into the body of Christ. It was then that the Church began.

Someone might raise an objection and say, “The Spirit baptism mentioned in Matthew 3:11 and Acts 1:5 is different from the Spirit baptism mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:13. In Matthew 3:11 and Acts 1:5 Christ is the Baptizer, but in 1 Corinthians 12:13 the Holy Spirit is the Baptizer. As we read the English Bible this seems to be the case, but the Greek construction of Matthew 3:11 and Acts 1:5 is practically identical to that of 1 Corinthians 12:13, as the following chart illustrates.

All four of these passages are talking about the same baptism, and the Greek construction in all four passages is closely equivalent, as the following literal rendering reveals:

Passage	Greek Construction
Matt. 3:11	He (Christ) shall baptize you with (in) Holy Spirit
Acts 1:5	You shall be baptized (by Christ-Matt. 3:11) with (in) Holy Spirit
Acts 11:16	You shall be baptized (by Christ-Matt. 3:11) with (in) Holy Spirit
1 Cor. 12:13	We all were baptized (by Christ-Matt. 3:11) with (in) one Spirit into one body

The order of the words in 1 Corinthians 12:13 has been altered in order to show that the same Greek construction is used. In the King James Version the Greek preposition **en** is translated “**By** one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13) which has led some to wrongly conclude that the Spirit is the Baptizer. But the passage should be understood in this way: “With (**en**) one Spirit were we all baptized [by Christ] into one body [the body of Christ, His Church].”

Not only did Christ place us into His body, but He also immersed us in the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist made this prediction: “I indeed baptize you with water . . . He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 3:11). What does it mean to be baptized or immersed with (in) the Holy Spirit? The following Scriptures help to shed light:

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; **and have been all made to drink into one Spirit**” (1 Cor. 12:13).

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, **and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which** [the word ‘which’ refers to the Holy Spirit] **He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior**” (Titus 3:5-6).

“. . . **having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit**” (Acts 2:33).

“He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, **out of his belly [innermost being] shall flow rivers of living water.** (**But this spake he of the Spirit,** which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)” (John 7:38-39)

Praise God, the Comforter has come! The promise of the Father has been given! Spirit baptism began at Pentecost and continues throughout this present age whenever a person believes on Christ.

Other Arguments from Scripture

1. Pentecost, a Day Specially Marked

If Pentecost marked the beginning of the Church, then this was indeed a significant day and we should expect that day to be specially marked. This is exactly what we find.

Pentecost was wonderfully marked by the Comforter's coming as predicted by the Lord Jesus in the Upper Room Discourse (John 14:16-17,20,26; 15:26; 16:7-8,13). After the resurrection, the disciples were told to sit still and wait (tarry) for the promise of the Father (Luke 24:49 and Acts 2:4). This promise of the Father was nothing less than the coming of the Spirit and it was clearly associated with Spirit baptism (see Acts 2:4-5). So the day of Pentecost was specially marked by the coming of the Comforter.

Pentecost was also a day that was uniquely marked by amazing supernatural signs. There was **a sound like a mighty rushing wind** (Acts 2:2), and "wind" in Scripture can be symbolic of the Holy Spirit (see John 3:8). The Comforter had come! There were **tongues as of fire** (Acts 2:3) sitting upon each of the believers, indicating that God was doing a special work which involved each and every believer. There was also **"speaking in tongues"** (see our book, *God's Gift of Tongues* for the significance of tongues-speaking on the day of Pentecost). These supernatural signs indicated that God was doing something very special on this most unique day!

Pentecost was a day marked by Spirit baptism as we have already studied. It was also marked by two great distinctives which were predicted by Christ in John 14:20.

"You in Me" BAPTISM (see Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3)

"I in You" INDWELLING (see Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 6:19-20)

This twofold relationship was distinctively different from what the Jews had known in the previous dispensation. God was in the tabernacle and in the temple in a wonderful way, and in the future God will manifest His glory in the millennial temple. But today God is dwelling in a body of believers (1 Cor. 3:16; Col. 1:26-27). The Church is "the house of God" (1 Tim. 3:15), His unique temple (Eph. 2:19-22). The Lord Jesus indicated that these realities would begin to take place "at that day" (John 14:20), at Pentecost!

Pentecost was a day that was especially marked out because Peter refers to it as "the beginning" (Acts 11:15). This is highly significant. Pentecost, according to Peter, was the beginning of something. No other day in the book of Acts is referred to as "the beginning" except Pentecost. What began on this day? What first happened on this day? According to Acts 11:15, Pentecost was the day when the Holy Spirit first came ("the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us **at the beginning**"). According to Acts 11:16, Pentecost was the day when Spirit baptism first took place. Spirit baptism is that unique work of God whereby believers are baptized or placed into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). Since Spirit baptism first began on the day of Pentecost, then this must be the day when the body of Christ, the Church, was formed.

2. Foundational Men (Eph. 2:20)

“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20).

The “apostles and prophets” mentioned in this verse are the New Testament apostles and prophets (see Eph. 3:5 and 4:11). These verses are not referring to the Old Testament prophets, and obviously there were no apostles in the Old Testament. The New Testament prophets and apostles were foundational men. When a building is constructed the foundation is laid first. If the Church had its beginnings in the Old Testament period then we might expect the verse to say something like this: “And are built upon the foundation of Abraham and Moses and David and the Old Testament prophets, etc.” However, the verse does not say this. If the Church began at Pentecost then we would expect the apostles and New Testament prophets to be foundational because God’s new revelation came through these men (Eph. 3:4-5).

3. The Church Must be Post-Resurrection and Post-Ascension.

According to Ephesians 1:19-23 the Father gave Christ to be the Head of the Church, but He did this only after the resurrection and ascension. The Church cannot exist apart from its Head. The Head of the Church is the glorified, exalted, risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the Church could not begin until after His ascension. Compare also John 7:39.

4. Jew and Gentile United Together in One Body

The Church is a unique organism. In the Church, the body of Christ, Jews and Gentiles are united together in one body, and they are on an equal basis (Eph. 3:6). The saved Jew is not superior to the Gentile and the saved Gentile is not superior to the Jew. Out of the two God has made “one new man” (Eph. 2:15). In fact, in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile (Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28). Such a situation never existed in the Old Testament period and such a situation will not even exist in the millennial period (see Zechariah 8:23). Thus the Church could not have existed in the Old Testament period and the Church age must conclude prior to the millennium.

5. The Temple of God

In Ephesians 2:21-22 the Church is said to be God’s temple, the “habitation of God through the Spirit.” See also 1 Corinthians 3:16. In the Old Testament period, God had a tabernacle and God had a temple, but neither of these were a body of believers indwelt by the living God. This indwelling of a group of believers is true only during this present age, from Pentecost on.

6. One Body . . . One Baptism

In Ephesians 4:4-6 we learn that the Church is “one body” and in connection with this “one body” there is “one baptism.” This one baptism is Spirit baptism, that special work of God whereby the believer is baptized into Jesus Christ and into His body. Christian baptism (water baptism) is symbolic of this “one baptism.” Since Spirit baptism did not begin until Pentecost, the Church did not begin until Pentecost, even as we have already studied. It is significant, therefore, that Christian baptism, the symbol of Spirit baptism, was first practiced on the day of Pentecost. It is indeed a “Church ordinance.” Since there was no Spirit baptism or Christian baptism in the Old Testament period or in the days of Christ’s public ministry, it is obvious that the Church was not in

existence in those days. That John's baptism was different from Christian baptism is evident from Acts 19:1-5; compare Acts 18:24-26.

7. The Gifts that Pertain to the Church

In Ephesians 4:7-12 we learn that Christ has given certain gifts to His Church. These gifts are actually gifted men (verse 11). It is significant that these gifts were not given prior to the ascension of Christ. Therefore the Church could not have been in existence prior to His ascension because His Church could not function apart from these necessary and needed gifts.

8. Paul Persecuted the Church.

In three places we learn that prior to his conversion Paul persecuted the Church of God (Gal. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:9; Phil. 3:6). Therefore the Church must have been in existence prior to Acts 9, which gives the account of Paul's conversion.² This refutes the ultradispensational view which says that the Church began in Acts 13 (or some would say in Acts 28). Also Acts 13 and Acts 28 were not specially marked as was Acts 2 (Pentecost). Both Acts 13 and Acts 28 were significant **turning points** (from the Jews to the Gentiles—Acts 13:46 and Acts 28:25-28), but neither of these chapters marked the **starting point**.

For other helpful discussions about when the Church began, see Renald E. Showers' book, *There Really Is a Difference--A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology*, Chapter 15 (published by the Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry), Charles Ryrie's book, *Dispensationalism*, Chapter 7 (published by Moody Press) and *The Glory of the Ages* by David Dunlap.

²Romans 16:7 may be significant in light of ultradispensational teaching. Paul sends his greetings to saints whom he declares were "in Christ before me." If being "in Christ" means the same here as in Galatians 3:28 ("neither Jew nor Greek, etc."), then the Church must have begun prior to Paul's conversion.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated from the Scriptures that the Church of Jesus Christ is a unique body of believers which was first formed on the day of Pentecost, not long after Christ died and rose again and ascended to heaven. This fact strikes a fatal blow to one of the pillars of Reformed/Covenant Theology, namely the doctrine that the Church is made up of the elect of all ages and that the Church was existent during the Old Testament period. Noah, Abraham, Joseph, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, John the Baptist—these were all godly saints, but they were not members of the Church which is His body.

The fact that the Church began at Pentecost also protects us against extreme dispensational teaching which has the Church beginning in Acts 13 or Acts 28. Because ultradispensationalists misunderstand the significance of Pentecost, other doctrines are adversely affected. Some teach that the Lord's Table is not for today, while others teach that water baptism is not for today, and still others teach that the Great Commission is not for today (or different combinations of these views).

May the “God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory . . . give unto [us] the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of [our] understanding being enlightened; that [we] may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power” (Eph. 1:17-19)!

George Zeller (March 2000; revised February 2009 and July 2017)

Special Topic #3

Spirit Baptism

The key passage on Spirit baptism is found in 1 Corinthians 12:13-"For by one Spirit are [were] we all baptized [immersed, placed] into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." The "one body" spoken of in this verse refers to the Church. "And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). "And He is the Head of the body, the Church" (Col. 1:18). The Church is defined as the body of Christ, and Christ is the Head of that body.

Spirit baptism is defined in 1 Corinthians 12:13 as that work of God whereby believers are baptized (immersed, placed) into Christ's Body, the Church. How then does a believer become a member of the body of Christ? It is by Spirit baptism.

Note: Some Baptist groups wrongly teach that 1 Corinthians 12:13 is referring to water baptism. They say that when a person is baptized in water he is then placed into the local church. They interpret "one body" as "the local church" (they deny the existence of a universal Church). Thus they are saying that water baptism is the means by which a person is placed into the local church (the local church being made up of water-immersed believers). However, the verse says nothing about water. It simply says that the believer is baptized or placed into the one body. It does not say he is baptized into water. This Spirit baptism is something that takes place at the time of salvation, not at the time of water baptism. The Lord adds to the Church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). It doesn't say that the Lord adds to the Church daily such as should be baptized. As soon as a person is saved he is added to the Church, the body of Christ. In Acts 5:14 we learn that "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." This again implies that the moment a person believes (not the moment he is baptized in water) he is added to the Lord, and to the Lord's body, the Church.

This passage thus gives us the key to unlock the answer to the important question: "When did the Church begin?" If we can determine when Spirit baptism first began, then we will know when the Church began. When did God first baptize believers into His body? When were believers first placed into the body of Christ? To answer this is to determine the day on which the Church began.

Spirit baptism was first predicted by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11 (and in the parallel passages: Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33):

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire" (Matthew 3:11; compare Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33).

John's baptism was a water baptism ("I baptize you with water"); Christ's baptism would be a spiritual baptism ("He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit"). The "fire baptism" is for the unsaved and involves judgment. This "fire baptism" is yet future (see Matthew 3:12).

Notice the phrase, "He shall baptize you **with** (Greek-*en*) the Holy Spirit." The verb "shall baptize" is in the future tense, indicating that Spirit baptism had not yet taken place when John the Baptist spoke these words. John was predicting that it would happen in the future, but he did not predict exactly when it would happen. Notice also that Christ is the Baptizer. He is the One who will place believers into the body of Christ. He is the One who will build His Church (Matt. 16:18). Christ is also the Baptizer in 1 Corinthians 12:13, as will be demonstrated later.

In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus said, "I **will** build My Church." The future tense of the verb indicates that the building of the Church had not yet begun when Jesus said these words. He did not say, "I have built My Church." He did not say, "I am building My Church." No, the building project had not yet begun and thus the Church was yet future. At the time Jesus spoke the words of Matthew 16:18 the Church had not yet begun.

Today Christ is building His Church. He is adding to the Church daily such as should be saved (see Acts 2:47). But the question is, when did this building program first begin?

In Acts 1:5 the Lord Jesus predicted that Spirit baptism was still future:

"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (Acts 1:5).

According to our Lord's prediction, Spirit baptism had not taken place yet, though it would soon take place. No one had yet been immersed into the body of Christ. Thus, the Church could not have begun prior to Acts 1:5. When Jesus spoke the words of Acts 1:5, His death and His resurrection had already taken place, and yet Spirit baptism had not yet taken place, the Holy Spirit had not yet come, and the Church had not yet been formed. But the announcement of Acts 1:5 was very significant because Jesus said that Spirit baptism would take place "not many days hence" (not many days from that time). This means that it would happen soon, in a matter of days. Indeed, as we shall learn, it happened just 10 days later on the day of Pentecost.

The day of Pentecost and the unique events that took place on that day are described in Acts chapter 2. In this chapter Spirit baptism is not specifically mentioned. It is not until Acts chapter 11 that we are specifically told that Spirit baptism took place on the day of Pentecost: "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning [on the day of Pentecost]. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 11:15-16). Based on the clear statement of this passage we know that Spirit baptism first took place on the day of Pentecost. It was then that believers were first placed into the body of Christ. It was then that the Church began.

<p style="text-align:center"><u>Acts 2</u> Jews were placed into the body of Christ.</p> <p style="text-align:center"><u>Acts 8</u> Samaritans (half-Jews, half-Gentiles) were placed into the body of Christ.</p> <p style="text-align:center"><u>Acts 10</u> Gentiles were placed into the body of Christ.</p>

Someone might raise an objection and say, "The Spirit baptism mentioned in Matthew 3:11 and Acts 1:5 is different from the Spirit baptism mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:13. In Matthew 3:11 and Acts 1:5 Christ is the Baptizer, but in 1 Corinthians 12:13 the Holy Spirit is the Baptizer. As we read the English Bible this seems to be the case, but the Greek construction of Matthew 3:11 and Acts 1:5 is practically identical to 1 Corinthians 12:13, as the following chart illustrates.

All four of these passages are talking about the same baptism, and the Greek construction in all four passages is closely equivalent, as the following literal rendering reveals:

Passage	Greek Construction
Matthew 3:11	He (Christ) shall baptize you with (in) Holy Spirit
Acts 1:5	You shall be baptized (by Christ-Matt. 3:11) with (in) Holy Spirit
Acts 11:16	You shall be baptized (by Christ-Matt. 3:11) with (in) Holy Spirit
1 Cor. 12:13	We all were baptized (by Christ-Matt. 3:11) with (in) one Spirit into one body.

The order of the words in 1 Corinthians 12:13 has been altered in order to show that the same Greek construction is used. In the King James Version the Greek preposition *en* is translated "By one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13) which has led some to wrongly conclude that the Spirit is the Baptizer. But the passage should be understood in this way: "With (en) one Spirit were we all baptized (by Christ) into one body (the body of Christ, His Church)."

Not only did Christ place us into His body, but He also immersed us in the Holy Spirit. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and **have been all made to drink into one Spirit**" (1 Cor. 12:13). We have participated fully in the reception of the Holy Spirit with all the abundant blessings which accompany this reception:

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the **Holy Spirit which** (the word "which" refers to the Holy Spirit) **He shed on us abundantly** through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5-6).

". . . **having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit**" (Acts 2:33).

"He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, **out of his belly (innermost being) shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake He of the Spirit,** which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)"

(John 7:38-39).

Praise God, the Comforter has come! The promise of the Father has been given! Spirit baptism began at Pentecost and continues throughout this present age whenever a person believes in Christ.

For other solid Biblical reasons as to why the Church began at Pentecost, see our study, *When Did The Church Begin?*¹

If you have received the Lord Jesus as your Savior (John 1:12), are you thankful to be a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27)? People speak of "going to Church" but have you realized that you are the Church? Seeing yourself as part of the body of Christ will make a huge difference in your Christian life. God has joined you in a vital way with your Head, the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:30-32), and God has joined you in a vital way with every other believer in the Body. The Church is not an organization; it's a living organism, pulsating with the very life of God (Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20).

¹<http://middletownbibleChurch.org/dispen/begin.pdf>

Important Grammatical Considerations

We have already demonstrated that the grammatical construction of 1 Corinthians 12:13 is identical to the Spirit baptism passages found in the Gospels and in Acts. In each of these passages we learned that Christ is the Baptizer and He baptized in [Greek: en] the Holy Spirit (with or by means of the Holy Spirit).

It is possible that both Christ and the Spirit had a part in doing the baptizing. Christ could have baptized believers into the body by allowing the Spirit to actually do this work. This is illustrated in John 4:1-2. In John 4:1 we are told that Jesus baptized disciples, even more than John the Baptist baptized. In John 4:2 we discover that Jesus Himself did not baptize anyone! How could He baptize many but not baptize anyone? The answer is that Jesus baptized many disciples, but He did this by allowing His disciples to be the ones who actually did the work of baptism. It's possible that this is the case in 1 Corinthians 12:13. Jesus Christ is the Baptizer (in light of Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5, etc.) but the actual work of baptizing was carried out by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was the instrument that Christ used to carry out His baptizing work. This concept is not foreign to the New Testament epistles. We would all agree that Jesus saves and yet the actual work of salvation is carried out by the Spirit of God (see 1 Corinthians 6:11). [Another example would be a comparison between Acts 10:38 and Luke 4:18. In Acts 10:38 we are told that God (the Father) anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit. In Luke 4:18 we are told that the Spirit anointed Jesus. So God the Father anointed Jesus and He used the Spirit as His instrument in performing this anointing.]

It is certainly appropriate to say that Christ immerses His believers into the body of Christ, and thus has rightful claim to the title of the Baptizer. In Matthew 16:18 we learn that it is Christ Himself who will build His Church. In Acts 2:47 we learn that it is the Lord (Jesus Christ) who adds to the Church daily such as should be saved. Consider also Acts 2:33 where the Lord Jesus is the One who sheds forth the Spirit. The Lord Jesus, in perfect cooperation with the blessed Person of the Holy Spirit, accomplished this great work, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Further Grammatical Considerations

This section is somewhat technical, but the grammatical facts of the case argue strongly against the view that there are two Spirit baptisms in the New Testament (a view held by ultradispensationalists and others). According to this view, Christ is the Baptizer in Matthew 3:11 (and parallel passages); Acts 1:5; and Acts 11:15, but the Holy Spirit is the Baptizer in 1 Corinthians 12:13. Ultradispensationalist Charles Baker, for example, argues for two baptisms and that the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:13 is the personal agent (He is the Baptizer).

The construction is the preposition *en* used with the dative case: "in one Spirit" or "with (by means of) one Spirit." The translation "by" (KJV) could be problematic unless it is understood as "by means of" or "by the instrumentality of." **But it does not mean personal agency.** If this is what Paul meant he would most probably have used the preposition *hupo*. Dana and Mantey say the following: "*Hupo* is most frequently used for expressing agency. In fact, agency is expressed with the aid of *hupo* more frequently than it is by all the other methods combined" (*A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, by H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, p. 112).

Example: Matthew 3:11 says, "He (Christ) shall baptize you." Suppose we were to take this sentence and make it passive. It would then read as follows: "You shall be baptized **by Him (by Christ).**" If we were to write this phrase in Greek, the Greek preposition that would be used for "by" would be "*hupo*" and it indicates that Christ is the personal Agent. In other words, He (Christ) is the Baptizer, the One who does the baptizing.

Another example is in Matthew 1:22, "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken **by (hupo)** the Lord **through (dia)** the prophet, saying...(Isaiah 7:14 is then quoted). Who was the One who spoke? It was the Lord! The Lord was the personal Agent. He was the Speaker. The prophet was the

intermediate agent. The prophet was the instrument that God used. God was the One who spoke, but He used His prophet to do it.

In Matthew 3:11 and its parallel passages the same grammatical construction is used (*en* with the dative) with the same meaning. John said, “I baptize you with (*en*) water. . . He will baptize you with (*en*) the Holy Spirit.”

John was saying: “I am using water to baptize you but He will use the Holy Spirit to baptize you.” Christ will use the Holy Spirit to baptize believers and He will use fire to baptize unbelievers, but whether it is believers or unbelievers, Christ is the Baptizer. [John MacArthur has an excellent discussion of this in his commentary on 1 Corinthians. See under 1 Corinthians 12:13.]

A. T. Robertson, in his monumental *Grammar of the Greek N.T.*, cites many examples of “*en*” with the dative being used in an instrumental sense but gives no examples of it being used for personal agency. This would mean that the Spirit was the instrument that Christ used to baptize believers into the body, but the Spirit was not the personal Agent (that is, He was not the Baptizer except in the sense that He was the Agent or Instrument that Christ used to do this work).

In *A New Short Grammar of the Greek Testament* (10th edition) by A. T. Robertson and W. Hersey Davis, the authors point out that *hupo* is used for the direct agent (personal agency). They then list four other prepositions which are sometimes used to express agency (*apo, ek, para, pros*), but *en* is not one of them.

The following discussion is by Daniel B. Wallace in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (pages 373-374):

1. En + Dative for Personal Agency?

Some have suggested that either the naked dative or *en* + the dative can express personal agency in the N. T. However, once a clear definition is given for personal agency, this will be seen to be a rare or nonexistent category. Williams defines the dative of agency as denoting “the agent (personal) by whom something is done. The only difference between means and agency is that *means* is impersonal, agency is personal.”

This definition is a little too general. It would be better to say that when *en* + the dative expresses the idea of means (a *different* category), the instrument is used *by an agent*. When agency is indicated, the agent so named is not used by another, but is the one who uses an instrument. It may be noted here that an intermediate agent, usually expressed by *dia* + the genitive, is an agent who acts *on behalf of* another or in the place of another. This agent is not, strictly speaking, *used* by another as an instrument would be. Thus, *en* + dative to express *means* can be (and often is) used of persons, though they are conceived of as impersonal (i.e., used as an instrument by someone else). For example, in the sentence “God disciplined me by means of my parents,” “God” is the agent who used the “parents” as the *means* by which He accomplished something. The parents are, of course, persons. But they are conceived of as impersonal in that they are the instruments used by another.

According to our definition, if *en* + dative is used to express agency, the noun in the dative must not only be personal, but must also be the agent who performs the action. BDF accurately assess the N. T. situation of the naked dative used for personal agency: “Dative of agency is *perhaps* represented by only *one genuine example* in the NT and this with the perfect: Luke 23:15 [italics added].” **In summary, we can say that there are no clear examples of the dative of agency in the N. T., and even if the category does exist, it is, by all counts, exceedingly rare.**

Wallace then gives two examples to illustrate his point and both of these examples relate to Spirit baptism:

1) Mark 1:8 “but He (Christ) shall baptize you **with** the Holy Spirit”

Here it is obvious that Christ is the agent (since “He [Christ]” is the subject) and the Holy Spirit is the means (and perhaps sphere) that the Lord uses to baptize.

2) 1 Cor. 12:13 “for **by** one Spirit we all were baptized into one body”

Our contention is that this is an illustration of **en** used for *means*. By calling “Spirit” means here does *not* deny the personality of the Holy Spirit. Rather, the Holy Spirit is the instrument that Christ uses to baptize, even though He is a Person. Since *pneumatic hagio* [Holy Spirit] clearly indicated means in Mark 1:8 (as in several other passages dealing with Spirit-baptism), it is surely not unreasonable to see “Spirit” as the means here. Furthermore, if the Holy Spirit is the agent in this text, there is a theological problem: When is the prophecy of Mark 1:8 fulfilled? When would *Christ* baptize with the Holy Spirit? Because of the grammatical improbability of *pneumati* [Spirit] expressing agent in 1 Cor. 12:13, it is better to see it as means *and* as the fulfillment of Mark 1:8. Thus, Christ is the unnamed agent. This also renders highly improbable one popular interpretation, viz, that there are *two* Spirit baptisms in the N. T.

[End of quotation from Wallace]

Dr. James L. Boyer taught Greek for many years at Grace Theological Seminary. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians [*For a World Like Ours—Studies in 1 Corinthians*, BMH Books, 1971], he says the following regarding the grammar of 1 Corinthians 12:13 (see his footnote):

The KJV rendering, "by one Spirit," is misleading. This construction (Greek, *en*) is never used for the personal agent with a passive voice. The consistent representation of this doctrine of Spirit baptism in the New Testament is that Christ is the One who does the baptizing (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5), that He does this *in, or with the instrumentality of, or by means of, the Holy Spirit*. The historic occasion of that baptism on Pentecost was the receiving of that Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Thus, the theory that the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:13 is the Baptizer, and that there are two Spirit baptisms in the New Testament, is extremely unconvincing grammatically and highly improbable. Indeed, Ephesians 4:5 says that there is "**one baptism**" (water baptism, of course, being a wonderful picture and symbol of that one baptism).

In summary, in dealing with the grammar of 1 Corinthians 12:13 we have concluded that Christ is the Baptizer and the Holy Spirit is the Instrument Whom Christ used to do this baptizing work. We have understood the pronoun "en" with the dative in its instrumental sense and have translated it "with" or "by means of" or "by the instrumentality of." Thus Matthew 3:11 could be paraphrased in this way: “I [John] baptize you with water, but He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

There is another possibility allowed by the grammar, and this would be to understand the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:13 as the element (or sphere) into which the believer has been placed. We would thus translate the pronoun "*en*" by the English pronoun "in." Christ has baptized believers in the Holy Spirit (and "in" in this sense would almost carry the meaning of "into"). If we interpret Matthew 3:11 in this way we could paraphrase as follows: “John immersed in water but Jesus will immerse in the Holy Spirit. That is, water was the element into which those baptized by John were placed and the Holy Spirit would be the element into which Jesus would place believers.

Although this view is grammatically possible, it does not seem to be the best view theologically in the light of New Testament teaching. First Corinthians 12:13 does not say that believers are placed into the Holy Spirit, but it says that they are placed into the body of Christ. In Galatians 3:27-28 believers have been placed or baptized into Christ (with the result that they are **in Christ**). This is also the case in Romans 6:3.

In light of these considerations, it seems best to regard the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:13 as the One that Christ the Baptizer uses as His Instrument to place believers into the body of Christ. This great work first took place on the Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the Church.

Baptized Into Jesus Christ

Believers have a glorious position. They are in Christ. They are in God's beloved Son: "Therefore if any man be **in Christ**, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

"There is therefore now no condemnation (judgment) for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

How do believers enter into this position? How does a saved person get to be positioned in God's Son? It happens by way of a spiritual baptism (not a water baptism). It happens the moment a person is saved. This is the point of time when God places the believer in His Son:

Galatians chapter 3:26-28:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

For as many of you as have been baptized (immersed, placed) into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26-28).

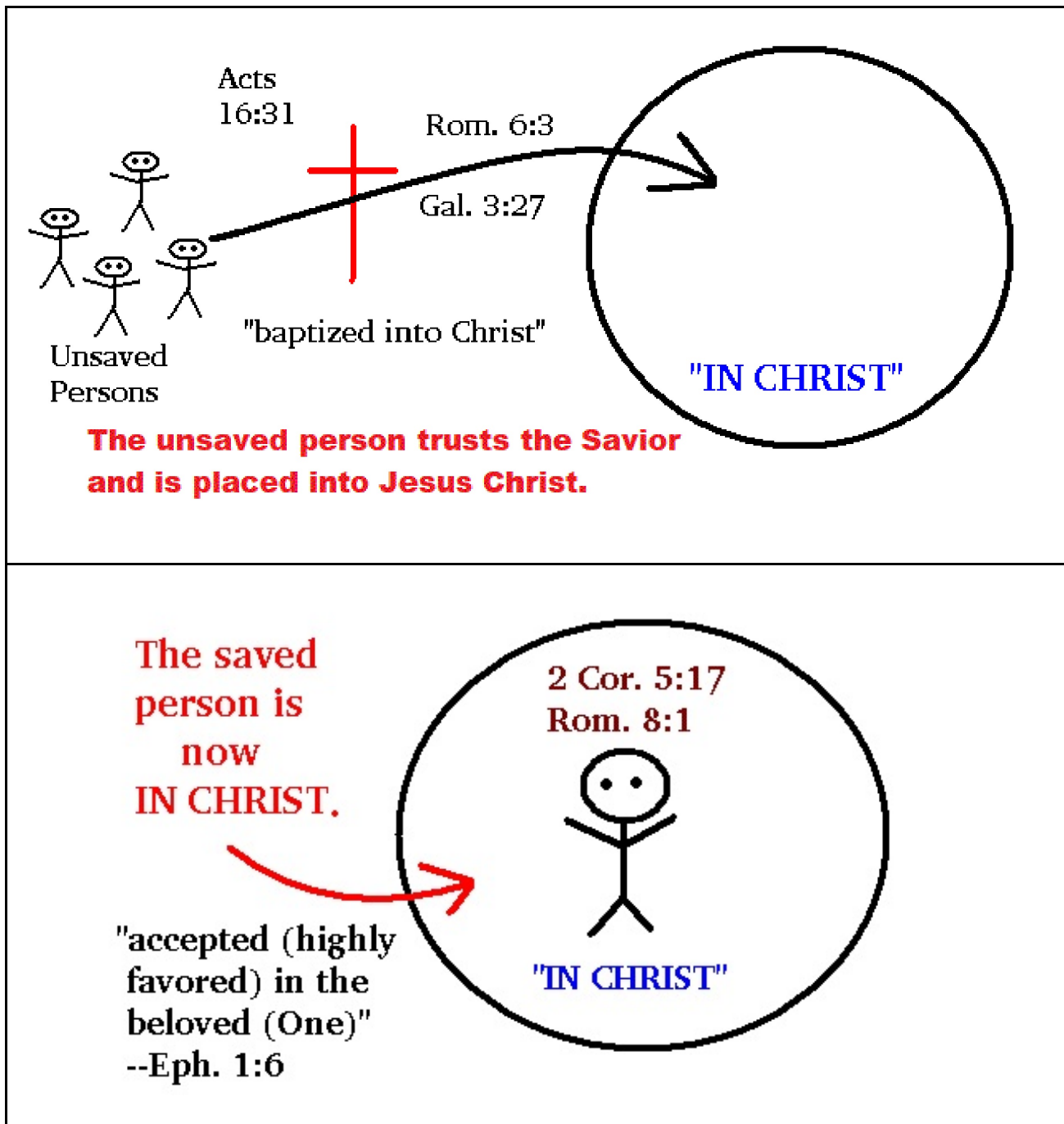
Romans chapter 6:3-5:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized (immersed, placed) into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection (Romans 6:3-5).

Water baptism is a **symbolic baptism** that pictures a **real baptism** which takes place the moment a person is saved. At the moment of saving faith, a person is baptized or placed into Jesus Christ, with the result that the person is now "in Christ." This real baptism is illustrated as follows:



Since the believer has been baptized into Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3), then this means that he has also been

- 1) baptized into His death (Rom. 6:3)
- 2) baptized into His burial (Rom. 6:4)
- 3) baptized into His resurrection (Rom. 6:4-5)
- 4) baptized into His body, the Church (1 Cor. 12:13).

In other words, the believer has been totally identified with Jesus Christ, so much so that the Lord Jesus could say to Saul of Tarsus, "Why persecutest thou **Me**?" (Acts 9:4). We know that Paul persecuted believers (1 Cor.

15:9). Why then did Jesus say, "Why are you persecuting Me?" Because if the body suffers, then the Head feels it!

Water baptism then is to be a picture of this glorious relationship and position that the believer has IN CHRIST. Thus I (as a believer) may say the following:

- 1) Because I am IN CHRIST, I have been identified with Him in His death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4), and thus water baptism is to picture the fact that I died with Him (as far as my old life is concerned) and that I now share His resurrected life (Gal. 2:20).
- 2) Because I am IN CHRIST, I am a new creature in Him (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus water baptism is to picture the fact that I no longer want to be living unto myself but unto the One who died and rose again for me (2 Cor. 5:15).
- 3) Because I am IN CHRIST, I am a member of His body, the Church (1 Cor. 12:13). Thus water baptism is to bear testimony to the fact that I am now a member of the body of Christ and am identified with a local assembly of believers (compare Acts 2:41-42).
- 4) Because I am IN CHRIST, I have complete forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7). Thus water baptism is a symbolic picture of the washing away of my sins (compare Acts 2:38; 22:16).
- 5) Because I am IN CHRIST, I am not under condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Thus water baptism bears testimony to the fact that I am free from guilt and I have a good conscience towards God (1 Pet. 3:21).

Practical Significance of Spirit Baptism

1. I have been placed into His body. I am vitally joined to my Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is my Life (Col. 3:3-4). I am vitally joined to my brothers and sisters in Christ. I am part of a living organism, pulsating with the life of God.
2. I am safe and secure in Christ forever. In order for me to lose my salvation, someone would have to dislocate me from the body of Christ (remove me from the body!). This will never happen.
3. The fact that I am Spirit-baptized should foster Christian unity. There is "one body" and "one Spirit" and "one baptism" (Eph. 4:4-6). Every blood-bought believer has been placed into the body of Christ, and we are fellow members of the same Church. We are joined to the same Head. We have been saved by the same blood. We are indwelt by the same Spirit. We are children of the same Heavenly Father. We are students of the same Book ("one faith"). We are partakers of the same life. We are all looking for the same blessed hope. Blessed unity and precious oneness!
4. Spirit baptism brings me into a new and glorious position. See our study on *What It Means to be IN CHRIST*.²
5. Spirit baptism identifies me with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. The work of Christ accomplished for me becomes very personal. His death becomes mine. His life becomes mine. I died with Him and I live with Him, and He lives in me (Gal. 2:20).

²<http://middletownbibleChurch.org/christia/inchrist.PDF>

**So near, so very near to God
Nearer I could not be;
For in the person of His Son,
I am as near as He.**

**So dear, so very dear to God,
I could not dearer be;
The love wherewith He loves His Son,
Such is His love to me.**

(Attributed to Horatius Bonar)

Spirit Baptism and the Filling of the Spirit Compared and Contrasted

BAPTISM	FILLING
<p><u>Definition:</u> Baptism in the Spirit is that work of God whereby the believer is immersed into Jesus Christ and into His body which is the Church (1 Corinthians 12:13 and Gal. 3:27).</p>	<p><u>Definition:</u> The Filling of the Spirit is that work of God whereby He fills and controls and enables the believer who is yielded and dependent and fit for the Master's use (Ephesians 5:18).</p>
<p>BAPTISM is presented as a fact to be believed (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27).</p>	<p>The FILLING is presented as a command to be obeyed (Eph. 5:18).</p>
<p>Every believer has had this baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13-"ALL"; and see Galatians 3:26-27).</p>	<p>Not every believer is filled with the Spirit (though he should be and this is God's will for him--see Eph. 5:17).</p>
<p>The believer is never commanded to be baptized in the Spirit nor is he commanded to seek this baptism.</p>	<p>The believer is commanded to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18; compare Galatians 5:16).</p>
<p>PAST TENSE USED: "For by (in) one Spirit <u>were</u> (aorist passive indicative) we all baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13) IT'S DONE!</p>	<p>PRESENT TENSE USED: "Keep on being filled (present, passive imperative) with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). IT NEEDS TO BE A PRESENT REALITY!</p>
<p>It is a once-for-all work of God never to be repeated.</p>	<p>It needs to be repeated. The believer who is not filled needs to be filled.</p>
<p>It relates to a believer's standing and position in Christ.</p>	<p>It relates to a believer's walk and his fellowship with the Lord.</p>
<p><u>THE RESULT:</u> The believer is placed into Jesus Christ and into His body the moment he trusts Christ as Savior (1 Cor. 12:13). As a result the believer is "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17) and in His Church (Acts 2:47).</p>	<p><u>THE RESULT:</u> The believer is controlled and empowered by God for testimony (bearing witness to Christ and manifesting His life) and service (Acts 1:8).</p>

BAPTISM	FILLING
<p><u>The Condition:</u> In order to be baptized in the Spirit the unsaved person must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31; see Galatians 3:26-27).</p>	<p><u>The Condition:</u> In order to be filled with the Spirit the believer must confess all known sin (1 John 1:9), depend fully on God and not on the flesh (Gal. 5:16), and yield fully to God's control (1 Thess. 5:19).</p>
<p>Baptism involves position. The baptized person has a brand-new position. He is "IN CHRIST" (2 Corinthians 5:17 and Romans 8:1).</p>	<p>Filling involves power: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (Acts 1:8; see Acts 4:31,33).</p>
<p>Spirit baptism is something each and every believer has.</p>	<p>Spirit-filling is something that each and every believer needs and may or may not have.</p>
<p>Spirit baptism relates to a person's salvation. It is one of the many salvation blessings that are found in Christ (Eph. 1:3; compare Eph. 4:5).</p>	<p>Spirit-filling relates to a person's walk and fellowship with the Lord in time. The "spiritual" believer is the believer who is consistently filled with the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23; 6:1).</p>
<p>A believer can never be "un-baptized." God would never take a believer out of the body of Christ (compare Ephesians 5:25-32). The believer is securely positioned "in Christ."</p>	<p>A believer can be "un-filled" due to sin in his life, refusal to yield to God's control, or by placing confidence in self rather than placing all confidence in Christ.</p>

Historically, the baptism of the Spirit took place as follows:

- Acts 2 - The Jews became members of the body of Christ.
- Acts 8 - The Samaritans became members of the body of Christ.
- Acts 10- The Gentiles became members of the body of Christ.

Today every believer becomes a member of the body of Christ at the moment of saving faith (1 Corinthians 12:13).

BAPTISM and **FILLING** may occur simultaneously. For example, in Acts chapter 2 the believers were baptized (Acts 1:5 and see Acts 11:15-17) and they were filled (Acts 2:4).

Twelve Reasons Why the Gift of Tongues Consisted of Real Languages

1. The term “tongue” is often used in the New Testament to describe real languages (Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15).
2. The adjective “new” is most appropriate for describing real languages (Mark 16:17). Tongues were the God-given ability to speak in a language that was totally new to the speaker (i.e., a foreign language). How could ecstatic utterances be thought of as being “new”?
3. Speaking in tongues was a supernatural, God-given ability (Mark 16:17-18; Acts 2:4) which is reasonable only if tongues were real languages.

As John Walvoord observes, “Any view which denies that speaking in tongues used actual languages is difficult to harmonize with the scriptural concept of a spiritual gift. By its nature, a spiritual gift had reality, and being supernatural, needs no naturalistic explanation.” [John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), p. 182.]

Bellshaw adds this comment: “If these tongues are ecstatic utterances, they could be duplicated fraudulently. Gibberish can be uttered by anyone, and a second person could feign interpretation of that unintelligible vocalization. Therefore, it is reasonable that this gift would consist of the ability to speak in a foreign language without the opportunity to learn that language by ordinary means.” [William G. Bellshaw, “The Confusion of Tongues,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 120 (April-June, 1963), pp. 147-148.]

4. The adjective “other” is most appropriate for describing real languages (Acts 2:4; 1 Corinthians 14:21; Isaiah 28:11).

These are languages other than and different from the person’s native tongue (i.e., foreign languages). In what sense could ecstatic utterances be considered “different”?

5. The tongues of Acts 2:4,11 are clearly identified in Acts 2:6,8 as real languages (dialects).
6. The tongues in the book of Acts were not meaningless utterances, but they were means of conveying a meaningful message (Acts 2:11; 10:46). Likewise the tongues in 1 Corinthians (see verses below) communicated meaningful content.

In Acts:

Acts 2:4-“the great things of God”

Acts 10:46-“magnifying God (proclaiming God’s greatness)”

Thus, tongues in Acts involved meaningful doctrinal content, not meaningless and empty gibberish.

In 1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 14:14-15 – A prayer to God

1 Corinthians 14:15 – A song of praise

1 Corinthians 14:16 – The giving of thanks

Prayer, praise and thanksgiving all involve meaningful content.

7. The expression “kinds of tongues” is understandable only if tongues were real languages (1 Corinthians 12:10,28; cf. 1 Corinthians 14:10).

Any linguist knows that the three thousand languages of the world are grouped into many classes or kinds. But could it be said that there are kinds of ecstatic utterances?

8. The fact that tongues could be interpreted demands that tongues were real languages (1 Corinthians 12:10,30; 14:5,13,27-28).

Interpretation necessitates meaning! Meaningless utterances cannot be interpreted. How can one give meaning to something that has no meaning? How can one give sense to nonsense? Two songs sung around Christmas time illustrate this: 1) “Gloria in Excelsis Deo” (this can be translated--“Glory to God in the Highest”; 2) “FA LA LA LA LA, LA LA, LA LA” (“Deck the Halls”)--this cannot be translated. These are meaningless syllables. They are merely the *emotional utterances* of those entering into the joy of the season.

9. 1 Corinthians 14:10-11 is clearly depicting real languages.
10. Tongues-speaking is said to consist of words, which would be possible only if tongues were real languages (1 Corinthians 14:9,19).
11. The tongues mentioned in Isaiah 28:11 (cited by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:21) were real languages.
12. The article of previous reference in 1 Corinthians 14:22 (“the tongues are for a sign”) proves that the Corinthian tongues (verse 22) were the very same thing as the Isaiah tongues (verse 21), namely, real languages. “The article may be used to point out an object the identity of which is defined by some previous reference made to it in the context” [Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 141].

CONCLUSION

These twelve arguments, taken together, demonstrate conclusively that all of the New Testament references to the gift of tongues concern the same phenomenon. In every case it was the miraculous ability to speak in an unlearned foreign language.

See also Robert H. Gundry, “Estatic Utterance (N.E.B.)?” *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 17, 1966, pp. 299-307. Dr. Gundry shows that the tongues-speech of both Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12-14 can refer only to known languages spoken here on earth.

Special Topic #6
The Purpose of the Gift of Tongues

What was the purpose of the gift of tongues? If the purpose for tongues is known, then it is possible to determine *when* tongues ceased. The purposive argument may be thus stated: *Tongues ceased when they no longer served the purpose for which they were given.*

There is only one place in the New Testament where Paul tells us the purpose of the gift of tongues: “Wherefore, *tongues are FOR a sign...*” (1 Corinthians 14:22). The preposition translated “for” (*eis*) denotes *purpose*. Paul’s explanation in verse 22 concerning the purpose of tongues is actually an inference based upon his words in verse 21. Verse 21 begins with these important words, “In the law it is written...”

In verse 21 Paul cited an Old Testament passage, Isaiah 28:11-12. Paul knew that the *key* to understanding the Biblical purpose of tongues is found “in the law,” that is, *in the Old Testament Scriptures*. What does the Old Testament teach concerning tongues? What was the significance and purpose of tongues in Old Testament times? When foreign tongues were spoken, what did this mean?

Isaiah 28 is not the only passage in the Old Testament which deals with the significance of foreign tongues. Several such passages together set forth a very sobering Biblical principle—a principle which has been demonstrated repeatedly in history. As we consider foreign tongues in the Old Testament, a very sad pattern becomes evident:

GENESIS 11

God had a message for the people (Genesis 9:1,7).

The people refused to listen to God (Genesis 11:4).

GOD CAUSED TONGUES TO BE HEARD AS A SIGN OF JUDGMENT (Genesis 11:7).

Dispersion followed (Genesis 11:8).

DEUTERONOMY 28

God had a message for His people (Deut. 28:1).

The people refused to listen to God (Deut. 28:15).

GOD CAUSED TONGUES TO BE HEARD AS A SIGN OF JUDGMENT (Deut. 28:49).

Dispersion followed (Deut. 28:64-65).

JEREMIAH 5

God had a message for His people (Jer. 4:1).

The people refused to listen to God (Jer. 5:3).

GOD CAUSED TONGUES TO BE HEARD AS A SIGN OF JUDGMENT (Jer. 5:15).

Dispersion followed (Jer. 5:19).

ISAIAH 28

God had a message for His people (Isaiah 28:12a).

The people refused to listen to God (Isaiah 28:12b).

GOD CAUSED TONGUES TO BE HEARD AS A SIGN OF JUDGMENT (Isaiah 28:11).

Dispersion followed (Isaiah 28:13).

COMPARE THE OPPOSITE TEACHING IN ISAIAH 33

The context is the millennium. *God will cause tongues to not be heard, indicating that Israel will enjoy the blessing of God (verse 19). There will be no more dispersion!*

THE PATTERN REPEATED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

God has a message for the people (Matt. 11:28; compare Jer. 4:1; Isa. 28:12).

The people refuse to listen to God (Matt. 23:37).

GOD CAUSES TONGUES TO BE HEARD AS A SIGN OF JUDGMENT (Acts 2,10,19, etc.).

Dispersion follows (Matt. 23:38; 24:2).

* * * * *

The gift of tongues served as a sign of judgment for unbelieving Israel. The sign of judgment is no longer needed because the judgment has already come. In 70 A.D. the Romans under General Titus brought the Christ-rejecting nation Israel to its final ruin. Ever since A.D. 70 there has been no question that Israel as a nation is under the judgment of God. Therefore it must be concluded that tongues as a *sign gift* were no longer needed after 70 A.D. The last historical mention of the gift of tongues is found in 1 Corinthians (chapters 12-14) which was written about 55 A.D. There is no evidence historically that the genuine gift of tongues ever occurred after 70 A.D. Tongues served their purpose, and *tongues ceased*, even as God predicted through the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 13:8).

Space does not allow for a more detailed development of the above points in this paper, but for a more lengthy discussion see *God's Gift of Tongues*.¹

¹ George Zeller, *God's Gift of Tongues*. Available online at <http://middletownbiblechurch.org/tongues/tongues.htm>

Peter's Use of Joel's Prophecy in Acts 2

Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, in Volume 1 of *Yeshua—The Life of the Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*, provides a lengthy and fascinating discussion of how New Testament writers quoted from the Old Testament (pages 10-44). He lists four categories of quotations: 1) Literal Prophecy Plus Literal Fulfillment; 2) Literal Plus Typical; 3) Literal Plus Application; 4) Summation. For each category he provides New Testament examples and also examples found in Rabbinic writings.

Peter's quotation of Joel's prophecy clearly fits the third category: literal plus application. Here is how Fruchtenbaum describes this category:

The third rabbinic category is represented by the letter "D," which stands for *Drash*, meaning "explanation" or "exposition." The New Testament equivalent can be called "Literal plus Application." Based upon one small point of similarity, an Old Testament verse was quoted and applied to what was a current situation for the New Testament writer. The writer was not denying the original context of the Scripture—be it historic or prophetic—but because of one point of similarity, the verse was applied to a similar, but not exact, New Testament situation. "Literal plus Application" is equivalent to the rabbinic category *Drash*, and as such it is an "explanation" or "exposition" of an Old Testament Scripture as an application to a New Testament situation.¹

The first example Fruchtenbaum gives of this third category is Matthew 2:17-18, which quotes Jeremiah 31:15.

In the original context, Jeremiah is speaking of an event that would occur at the beginning of the Babylonian Captivity....As the young Jewish men were marched toward Babylon, the Jewish mothers of Ramah came out weeping for the sons they would never see again. Jeremiah pictured this as *Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not*. Rachel weeping symbolized Jewish mothers weeping. That is the literal meaning of Jeremiah 31:15. The verse is quoted in the New Testament because of one simple point of similarity....The one point of similarity was that Jewish mothers were again weeping for sons they would never see again, because Herod had slaughtered all the males of Bethlehem from the age of two years and under. So Jewish mothers were again weeping for their sons, but everything else is different. In Jeremiah, the event takes place at Ramah, north of Jerusalem; in Matthew, it takes place in Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem. In Jeremiah, the sons are still alive but are going into captivity; in Matthew, the sons are dead. Because of one point of similarity, the New Testament quoted the Old Testament as an application.²

¹Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua—The Life of the Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective (Volume 1)*, published by Ariel Ministries, 2016, p. 24.

²Ibid., pages 24-25.

Fruchtenbaum then gives an illustration from an English idiomatic expression: “He met his Waterloo.”

The term alludes to an actual, historical event, Napoleon Bonaparte’s defeat at Waterloo, Belgium, in 1815. When we say that someone met their Waterloo, do we mean that they were defeated in battle? No. We mean that they experienced a decisive defeat of their ambitions. When Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo, he also lost his whole empire; it was there that his imperial ambitions were decisively defeated. Therefore, when we say that someone met his Waterloo, we mean that he has one thing in common with Napoleon: some climactic event in his life has caused him to suffer a decisive defeat of an ambition. In the same manner, the New Testament will often quote the Old Testament because of one point of similarity.³

Fruchtenbaum’s second Biblical example of “Literal Plus Application” is Peter’s quotation of Joel’s prophecy in Acts 2:

Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32, a prophecy which describes the supernatural manifestations that will occur when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the whole nation of Israel. This is a literal, future event. However, nothing predicted by Joel 2 happened in Acts 2. For example, Joel spoke about the pouring out of the Spirit upon *all* Jewish flesh, which did not happen in the book of Acts. In Acts 2, the Spirit was poured out upon 120 or, at the most, 120. Joel spoke about the sons and daughters of Israel prophesying, the young men seeing visions and the old men dreaming. None of that happened in Acts 2. No one did any prophesying, the young men did not see visions, and the old men did not dream dreams. None of these phenomena are mentioned in the context of Acts 2. Furthermore, the servants of the Jewish people were to experience these same things, and there were no servants involved in the context of Acts 2. Joel spoke of climactic events in the heavens and on earth: blood, fire, pillars of smoke, with the sun turning into darkness, and the moon into blood; yet, none of these things happened in Acts 2. So why does Peter apply Joel’s prophecy to what was happening around him? What we have here is the third category of quotation—*literal plus application*. The literal meaning of the prophecy in Joel is that there will be a time when the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all Israel. This will be accompanied by supernatural manifestations, and the result will be Israel’s national salvation in preparation for the messianic kingdom. This was not what was happening in the book of Acts, but what happened did have one point of similarity with the passage in Joel 2: There was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit accompanied by unique supernatural manifestations, which, in Acts 2, was speaking in tongues, an item that Joel did not even mention. Because of this one point of similarity—an outpouring of the Holy Spirit—the Old Testament was quoted by the New Testament as an application.⁴

³Ibid., p. 26.

⁴Ibid., pages 26-27.

When and Where Does Christ Sit Upon the Throne of David?

Progressive Dispensationalism

--A Compromise Position--

When Does Christ Sit Upon the Throne of David?

"THE KINGDOM IS HERE RIGHT NOW! The kingdom promises made to Israel are now being fulfilled in the Church. There will be no future, earthly, millennial kingdom. Christ is now sitting on the throne of David, reigning and ruling in the hearts of men. God will not *literally* fulfill His kingdom promises which were made to Israel. The Church is 'spiritual Israel' and the kingdom blessings promised to Israel are now being enjoyed by 'spiritual Israel,' the Church."

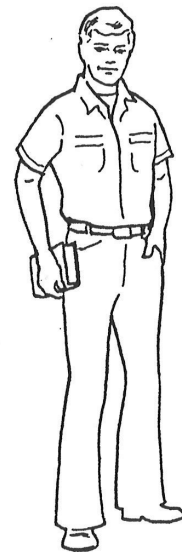


The Amillennialist
(Covenant/Reformed Theology)

"THE KINGDOM IS HERE RIGHT NOW AND THE KINGDOM IS YET FUTURE! When Christ ascended on high He sat down on the throne of David and the kingdom was inaugurated (Acts 2:29-36). In the future Christ will rule and reign for a thousand years. Thus we have an "already/not yet" tension. In a sense the kingdom is already here; in another sense the kingdom is not yet here. The covenant/amillennial people agree with us that the kingdom is here right now and the dispensationalists agree with us that the kingdom is yet future. Thus we can teach at dispensational schools while at the same time open up dialogue with our non-dispensational friends."

The Progressive Dispensationalist
(Kingdom is already/not yet)

"THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM IS YET FUTURE! It will be established by Christ at His second coming and it is only then and not before then that He will sit upon the throne of His father David. It is then that the kingdom promises made to Israel will be literally fulfilled according to the mouth of all the prophets. Today Christ is exalted as Head over all things to the Church which is His body (Eph. 1:20-23). He is today seated on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (Heb. 8:1; 12:2), but this is not the throne of David."



The Dispensationalist
(Literal Interpreter of Prophecy)

When and Where Does Christ Sit Upon the Throne of David?

"What Does the Scripture Say?" (Romans 4:3)

- 1) *The LORD hath sworn in truth unto DAVID; He will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon THY (DAVID'S) THRONE. If thy children will keep My covenant and My testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon THY THRONE for evermore (Psalm 132:11-12).*

The passage above speaks of David's throne. Where will David's throne be located?

For the LORD hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation....There will I make the HORN OF DAVID to bud: I have ordained a lamp for Mine anointed (Psalm 132:13,17).

David's throne will be located in Zion (Jerusalem), not in the third heaven. It is there in Zion that God will cause the horn of David to spring up.

- 2) *Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the THRONE OF DAVID, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:7).*

What will conditions be like when the Messiah sits on the throne of David? At that time the earth's government will be upon His shoulders (Isaiah 9:6) and the earth will enjoy peace as the Prince of Peace sits upon David's throne. Such conditions are certainly not found during this present Church age.

- 3) *Then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the THRONE OF DAVID, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of JERUSALEM: and this city shall remain for ever (Jeremiah 17:25).*

The only way to get to David's throne is by way of the gates of the city of Jerusalem (see also verses 19-24).

- 4) *And say, Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the THRONE OF DAVID, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates: For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the THRONE OF DAVID, riding in chariots and on horses, He, and his servants, and his people (Jeremiah 22:2,4).*

Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, SITTING UPON THE THRONE OF DAVID, and ruling any more in Judah (Jeremiah 22:30).

David's throne is in Jerusalem of Judah, on earth, not in heaven.

- 5) *Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto DAVID a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice IN THE EARTH. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His Name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Jeremiah 23:5-6).*

When will the Messiah be upon David's throne? This will take place when Messiah the King reigns and executes justice IN THE EARTH. At this time Israel will dwell safely. This can only mean that Christ will sit on David's throne during His millennial reign and not before.

- 6) *In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up UNTO DAVID; and He shall execute judgment and righteousness IN THE LAND (Jeremiah 33:15).*

In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness (Jeremiah 33:16).

The **time** when the Messiah will assume the throne of David is here pinpointed, as well as the **place**. The **time**: the millennial reign of Christ when righteousness will characterize the earth and when peace and safety will characterize Jerusalem. The **place**: "in the land," that is on the earth, in the city of Jerusalem.

- 7) *Neither shall the priests the Levites want [lack] a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually....Then may also My covenant be broken with DAVID My servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon HIS THRONE; and WITH THE LEVITES the priests, My ministers (Jeremiah 33:18,21).*

The throne of David is here associated with Levitical priests. Christ cannot be upon the throne of David apart from an association with Levitical priests. During this present age there are no functioning Levitical priests. During the millennium Levitical/Zadokian priests will be associated with Christ and serving in the millennial temple (Ezekiel 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11).

- 8) *And DAVID My servant shall be KING over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in My judgments, and observe My statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell IN THE LAND that I have given unto Jacob My servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and My servant DAVID shall be their PRINCE for ever (Ezekiel 37:24-25).*

The resurrected David, who is called both KING and PRINCE, will be directly involved in the millennial government, serving under Christ: "Directly under Christ, having authority over all Israel, will be the resurrected David, who is given both titles of king and prince. He will be king because he will rule over Israel, but he will be a prince in that he will be under the authority of Christ" (Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footprints of the Messiah*, page 282). See Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23-24 and Hosea 3:5.

These passages are often explained in a nonliteral way as referring not to David himself, but to David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, though the literal interpretation is to be preferred. But regardless of this, during this present Church age we are never told that David is reigning as King or as Prince. David the future king/prince is only mentioned in a millennial, earthly, Jewish context.

- 9) *For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and DAVID their king; and shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days (Hosea 3:4-5).*

Today Israel is without a king and Christ is not ruling on the throne of David. In the future Israel will return and seek the Lord. At that time they will not be without a King. Their King will be on David's throne in Jerusalem.

- 10) *In that day will I raise up the TABERNACLE OF DAVID that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by My Name, saith the LORD that doeth this. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God (Amos 9:11-15).*

The raising up of the fallen tabernacle or booth of David is associated with the restoration of Israel (v. 14) when God will "plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land" (v. 15). This implies that prior to the millennium the tabernacle of David will be in a fallen condition. Christ, therefore, did not restore the throne and tabernacle of David when He sat down at the right hand of the Father. The tabernacle of David has not yet been restored, but it will be in the future when Christ assumes His millennial throne.

- 11) *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of his father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:32-33).*

Notice that His sitting on the throne of David is clearly linked with His reign over the house of Jacob (Israel). Today Christ is Head over the Church which is His body. It is not until the future millennium that Christ will rule over the house of Jacob. It is then that the kingdom will be restored again to Israel.

- 12) *When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time RESTORE AGAIN THE KINGDOM TO ISRAEL? And He said unto them, 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 Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:6-8).*

Please observe what the Lord did **not** say. He did not say this: "In not many days I will sit down on David's throne and the kingdom will be re-established!" The kingdom would be restored to Israel, but not yet. God's new program, the Church, was about to begin. When God restores the kingdom to Israel, Jerusalem will be the **center point**. In God's new program, the Church, Jerusalem is merely the **starting point** as Christ's witnesses go forth to the uttermost part of the earth, "beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

- 13) *Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch DAVID, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ TO SIT ON HIS THRONE; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, UNTIL I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:29-36).*

This passage is used by Progressive Dispensationalists in their attempt to prove that Christ sat down on the throne of David when He sat at the right hand of God. However, the passage does not say that Christ is now seated upon the throne of David. It does say (v.30) that God raised up Christ to sit on David's throne. It is obvious that the resurrection was a prerequisite for Christ to sit on David's throne. How could a dead Messiah sit on David's throne? Compare John 12:32-34 where the Jews were perplexed by the problem of how a dead Messiah could reign forever and ever.

The kingdom promised to David did not begin with Christ's exaltation and session in heaven. It begins with Christ's return to earth. This is made clear in Acts 2:34-35. The key word is "**until**." Christ will not return to earth and will not sit upon David's throne until His enemies are made His footstool.

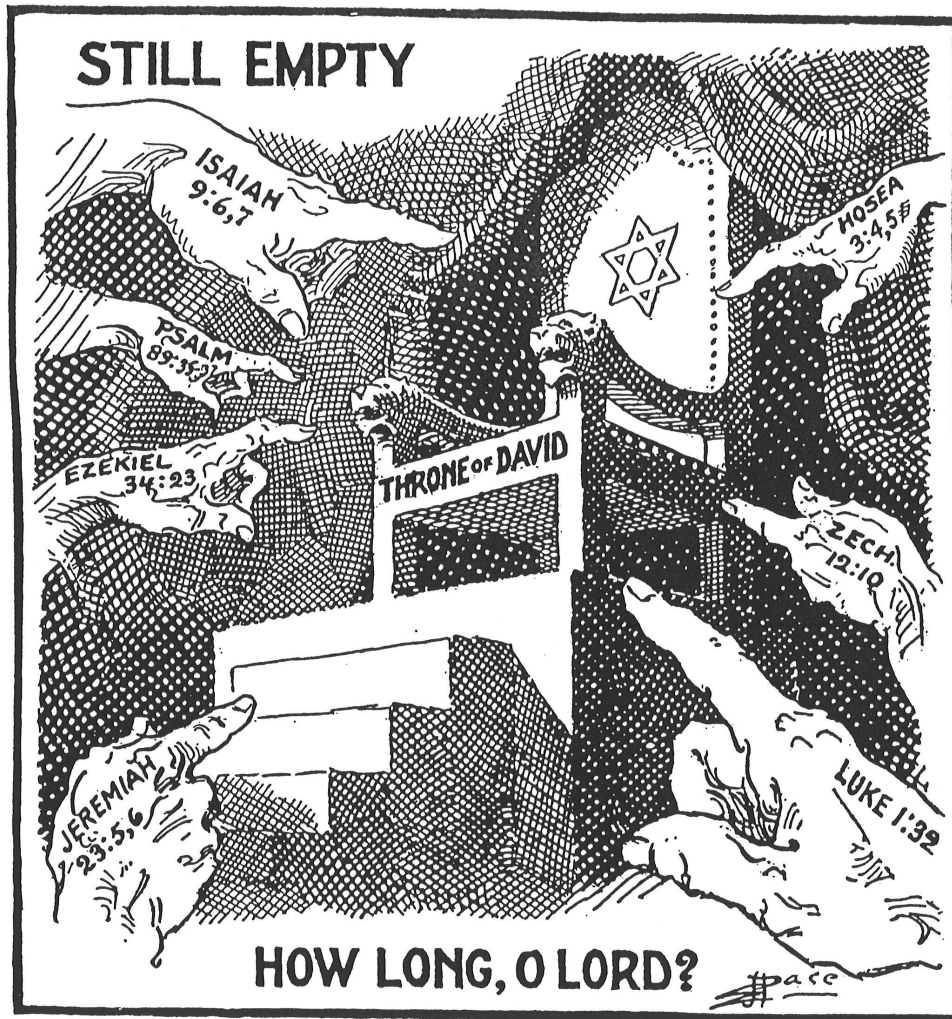
- 14) *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive UNTIL the times of restitution [restoration] of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21).*

In the early chapters of the book of Acts the nation Israel was given the opportunity to **repent**. Had they repented, the Lord Jesus would have left His heavenly throne and would have come to His earthly throne, thus restoring the kingdom to Israel. Notice again our key word, "**until**." Christ sits at the right hand of the Father and heaven receives Him **until** the right time comes to **send Jesus back to the earth**. It is only then that the restitution/restoration of all things will take place and the kingdom will be restored to Israel. It is then and only then that Christ will sit on the throne of David, on earth, in Jerusalem.

For a fascinating study of God's offer of the kingdom to the Jews in the book of Acts, see *The Strategic Grasp of the Bible* by J. Sidlow Baxter (Zondervan).

- 15) *"Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His Name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My Name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things" (Acts 15:14-17).*

This passage very clearly sets forth God's time schedule as it relates to His present program (the Church which is His body) and His future program (the kingdom as promised to Israel). First we have God's present program which involves God visiting the nations (the Gentiles), taking out of them a people for His Name. The Church is God's called-out assembly, made up of saved Jews and saved Gentiles united together in one body, sharing a common **life** and **Lord**. **"After this"** (after God's "Church" program has been completed), Christ will return and the tabernacle of David will be built again and set up. The kingdom will be restored to Israel as Christ sits upon the throne of David, all in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.



Does Acts 2:38 Teach That Water Baptism Saves?

“Then Peter said unto them, 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 Spirit ” (Acts 2:38).

This passage has become one of the favorite verses of those who teach baptismal regeneration. A Gideon Bible, in a motel room, had a section with John 3:16 written out in many different languages. In this particular Bible someone had crossed out all of the John 3:16 verses and in big letters had written **ACTS 2:38**. The person who had defaced this Bible was communicating something like this: “You are deceived if you think that John 3:16 presents the true gospel. It doesn’t present the true gospel at all. It’s not enough to believe in Christ. To be saved and to be forgiven a person also needs to be baptized in water. The true gospel is much better presented in ACTS 2:38.”

When it comes to having sins forgiven, what must a person do? The Bible teaches that it is faith and repentance that brings about forgiveness. Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. You can’t have true repentance without having true faith. You can’t have true faith without having true repentance. They go together. The Bible sometimes mentions repentance as the only condition of salvation. One example of this would be Luke 13:3, “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” See also Luke 15:7,10 and Acts 17:30. A few times both repentance and faith are mentioned in the same verse (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21). There are many, many verses which mention only faith as the condition of salvation (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:24; Acts 16:31; etc.). When only repentance is mentioned, faith is implied or assumed. When only faith is mentioned, repentance is implied or assumed. Where you have one you must have the other.

What is repentance? The word means “a change of mind.” It means to change your mind about sin, self and the Savior. It especially has to do with one’s recognition of his true condition before God. One Biblical definition of repentance is found in Job 42:4. Job said, “Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” According to this verse, to repent is to abhor ourselves, to discover how vile we are (see Job 40:4), to discover our utter wretchedness and sinfulness. No one can be saved unless he changes his mind about sin and self and recognizes how sinful he really is in God’s sight.

Harry Ironside explained repentance as follows: “Repentance is just the sick man’s acknowledgment of his illness. It is simply the sinner recognizing his guilt and confessing his need of deliverance....(repentance) is judging oneself in the presence of God; turning right about-face, turning to God with a sincere, earnest desire to be completely delivered from sin. And when a man takes that attitude toward God and puts his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he finds salvation” (H. A. Ironside, *Luke*, Kregel Publications, 2007, pages 253-254).

In another place Ironside said, “Literally [repentance] means ‘a change of mind.’ It actually implies a complete reversal of one’s inward attitude. To repent is to change one’s attitude toward self, toward sin, toward God, toward Christ....So to face these tremendous facts is to change one’s mind completely, so that the pleasure-lover sees and confesses the folly of his empty life; the self-indulgent learns to hate the passions that express the corruption of his nature; the self-righteous sees himself a condemned sinner in the eyes of a holy God; the man who has been hiding from God seeks to find a hiding place in Him; the Christ-rejector realizes and owns his need of a Redeemer, and so believes unto life and salvation” (*Except Ye Repent*, pages 15-16).

True faith requires repentance, because to be saved a person must recognize his lost estate and see himself as lost and helpless and vile and wicked and utterly sinful. True repentance requires faith, because the man who repents believes what God has said about his true condition (Romans 3:10-23) and he also believes that God has provided a perfect solution in the Person of His Son, God's only Savior.

Now let us return to our discussion of Acts 2:38. We have already noted that faith (which would include repentance), not baptism, is essential for the forgiveness of sins. This is clearly seen in Peter's very next sermon, found in Acts 3:19: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Notice that in this verse Peter says nothing about water baptism. If water baptism is essential for the forgiveness of sins, why did Peter say nothing of this in Acts 3:19? If water baptism is essential for forgiveness of sins, why did Peter say nothing of this in Acts 10:43 ("To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission [forgiveness] of sins"). If water baptism is an essential part of the preaching of salvation, then why does Luke 24:46-47 mention repentance and the remission [forgiveness] of sins but says nothing about water baptism? Even in the days of John the Baptist, it was repentance that was for the remission of sins, not water baptism (see Mark 1:4). John's baptism was an outward demonstration to show publicly that repentance had already taken place.

Forgiveness is received at the point of repentance/faith, not at the point of water baptism. Those who are not forgiven should not be baptized. They are yet in their sins. One simple parenthesis helps us to understand what Acts 2:38 is really saying, "Then Peter said unto them, 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 Spirit."

The real question centers on the meaning of the preposition *eis* (translated "for" in the KJV). It is possible to show examples where *eis* can mean "because of" (Matthew 12:41--"at") or "on the basis of" or "with reference to," and all of these are certainly grammatically possible. However, it seems more natural and more probable that in Acts 2:38 this preposition indicates purpose or result. Peter was preaching to unsaved Jews who were guilty of crucifying Christ. They desperately needed the forgiveness of sins (as we all do). Peter was telling them what they must do in order to have forgiveness (see Acts 2:37---"What shall we do?").

The translations seem to support this meaning ("for"). The KJV, NASB, Amplified, NEB, and RSV all give the rendering "for." The Revised Version has "unto." The NIV has "so that your sins will be forgiven" (although in later editions this was changed to "for the forgiveness of sins"). You can see how a person believing in baptismal regeneration could easily use all of these translations to support his view.

The lexicons seem to support this meaning. Arndt & Gingrich say that the preposition here denotes purpose ("in order to") and they render the phrase: "for forgiveness of sins, so that sins might be forgiven." Thayer has a similar rendering "to obtain the forgiveness of sins" (his discussion under *baptizō*). Thus those who believe that a man is saved by water baptism would gladly appeal to these authorities.

Acts 3:19 seems to support this meaning. This is the very next sermon that Peter gives, and again he tells the Jews what they must do to have forgiveness. We would expect that what Peter told the Jews in Acts 3 would be similar to what he told them in Acts 2. In both cases he was preaching to unsaved Jews under similar circumstances. In Acts 3:19 once again the preposition *eis* is used, and the KJV translates it "so that your sins might be blotted out." Of course, those who teach baptismal regeneration do not make much of this verse because water baptism is not even mentioned.

The grammarians also concede that the preposition may be translated "for the purpose of" or "in order that" (see Dana & Mantey, p. 104). Those such as A.T. Robinson and Julius Mantey who render it "because of" or "on the basis of" do so primarily on the basis of theology, not grammar. They suggest a rare usage for the term in order to make the verse not teach baptismal regeneration. But are we really forced to depart from what seems to be the more natural and more common rendering?

Most commentators, regardless of the view they hold, understand the prepositional phrase (“for the remission of sins”) as belonging with the verb “be baptized.” It is possible, however, that the phrase is actually part of a chiasmus (inverted parallelism) and should be connected not with the command “Be baptized” but with the command “Repent.” The verse contains two commands and two prepositional phrases which can be represented by the following chiasmus:

A Repent
B Be Baptized
B In the Name of Jesus Christ
A For the remission of sins

In English we would best represent this structure by using a parenthesis: “Repent (and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ) for the remission of sins.” This is exactly what Acts 3:19 teaches (only Peter there omits the parenthesis). In Acts 3:19 Peter could have said, “Repent (and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ) so that your sins may be blotted out!”

Indeed, the Bible consistently connects “repentance” with “the forgiveness of sins” (see Luke 24:47 where Peter received his commission; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 5:31). On the day of Pentecost the Jews would have understood this because the only baptism that they knew about was the baptism of John which was a baptism of repentance UNTO (*eis*) the remission of sins.

The strengths of this view are as follows: 1) it is theologically sound and avoids the error of making water baptism a condition for forgiveness; 2) it harmonizes with the other passages which speak about repentance and the forgiveness of sins; 3) it understands the preposition *eis* in its most natural meaning (though other meanings are possible); 4) it agrees with the parallel passage of Acts 3:19; 5) it best suits the context of Acts 2:38 where Peter is offering forgiveness to Christ-rejecting Jews. Peter was not speaking “with reference to” or “because of” or “on the basis of” a forgiveness which they did not yet have! 6) it employs a figure of speech (chiasmus) that was not uncommon or unusual to the Semitic mind, though in English it may seem somewhat awkward.¹

Stanley D. Toussaint (The Book of Acts in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 359) gives several reasons why the parenthetical view is the correct view:

Several factors support this interpretation: (a) The verb makes a distinction between singular and plural verbs and nouns. The verb “repent” is plural [“repent ye”] and so is the pronoun “your” in the clause, “so that your sins may be forgiven” (lit., “unto the remission of your sins,” (*eis aphasis ton hamartion humon*). Therefore the verb “repent” must go with the purpose of forgiveness of sins. On the other hand the imperative “be baptized” is singular, setting it off from the rest of the sentence. (b) This concept fits with Peter’s proclamation in Acts 10:43 in which the same expression “sins may be forgiven” (*aphesis harmartion*) occurs. There it is granted on the basis of faith alone. (c) In Luke 24:47 and Acts 5:31 the same writer, Luke, indicates that repentance results in remission of sins.

¹For a lengthy discussion of how Bible writers commonly used chiasmus, see <http://middletownbiblechurch.org/egreek/greek09.pdf>

Baptism in the Name of Jesus and the Trinitarian Formula

1. In the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Christian baptism is an ordinance which is done by the authority of the triune God, and the obedient believer is baptized in the name of the Father (the One who planned our salvation—Eph. 1:3-5), in the name of the Son (the One who purchased our salvation—1 Pet. 1:18-19), and in the name of the Holy Spirit (the One who personalized our salvation—1 Cor. 6:11).
2. There are no other passages in the New Testament which specifically repeat this baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19).
3. We find in the book of Acts that believers were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (in the authority or on the authority of the Lord Jesus). See Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5. This is also the implication of 1 Corinthians 1:13.
4. It should be remembered that the Son of God is ever and always in perfect harmony and perfect agreement with the Trinity of which He is a member. Hence, what is done in the name of the triune God is also done in the name of the Son. What is done in the name of the Son is also backed by the full authority of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. In either case the person is being baptized by the authority of the living God, and this living God has revealed Himself as one God in three Persons.
5. The book of Acts never quotes the actual words of the person doing the baptism. We can assume that those doing the baptism used the formula set forth by our Lord in His Great Commission.
6. That the second Person of the Trinity should receive the emphasis in the book of Acts is not surprising in view of the following:
 - a. It was the Lord Jesus who originally instituted Christian baptism and gave the command (Matt. 28:19).
 - b. Baptism pictures our identification with the Lord Jesus, the God-Man (Rom. 6:3-4). Water baptism is a picture of Spirit baptism, that work of God whereby the believer is placed in Christ the moment he is saved, and thus totally identified with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. God the Holy Spirit did not die on the cross for our sins. Even though all three Persons of the Godhead were involved in our so-great salvation, it was the Lord Jesus who actually purchased our salvation through His own blood.
 - c. When a person is baptized he is making it known publicly that he belongs to the Lord Jesus, the second Person of the Godhead. He is letting others know that he is now a Christian.
 - d. For the writer of Acts (Luke) to repeat the entire Trinitarian formula in each verse where he discusses baptism is not necessary and could be awkward. For example in Acts 2:38:

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, for the remissions of sins....”

- e. Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus is just another way of describing Christian baptism. We use the same terminology today. We speak of “Christian baptism,” but we don’t usually speak of “Trinitarian baptism” or “Baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” In Acts 19:5 the expression “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” is used to distinguish Christian baptism from the baptism of John.
7. There is no difference between the baptism of Matthew 28:19 and the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus mentioned often in Acts. When a person baptizes a new convert in the name of the Lord Jesus, in essence he is saying, “I baptize you in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who gave us the Great Commission of Matthew 28, and the One who told us to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”
8. The water baptism formula of Matthew 28 is the only authoritative baptismal formula given in Scripture. Of course, it is not merely a mechanical formula to be followed in form, but to be followed sincerely from the heart. It shows us that believers are baptized into the full revelation, the Christian revelation, of the Triune God. The passages in Acts do not repeat that authorized formula, but the very fact that we are baptized in, with a view to, or to (Gr. *en, epi, eis*) the authority and name of the risen Lord Jesus necessarily implies the doctrine of the Trinity as reflected in Matt. 28:19. The revelation of the Person of the Lord Jesus carries with it the revelation of the Triune Godhead. The revelation or truth of the Person of the eternal Son makes no sense apart from God as Triune.
9. Beware of an ultradispensational approach which says that the Great Commission of Matthew 28 does not apply to the Church today. Ultradispensationalists also teach that water baptism is not for this age.
10. One group that teaches “baptism in the name of Jesus only” is the United Pentecostal Church. This heretical group promotes the “Jesus only” heresy. They deny the doctrine of the Trinity. They teach that while God is a threefold being—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—there is only one Person, namely Jesus. In other words, their problem goes far beyond water baptism. Their real problem is a faulty and wrong concept of WHO GOD IS.
11. How can people deny that Matthew 28 is for the Church today? The Lord gave this commission to His disciples. It was first fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:42) when Christian baptism initially took place.
- If the baptism in Acts is different from the baptism in Matthew 28, then when did the Lord change it? When did the Lord give another commission and when did He negate the Matthew 28 commission? Where in the Bible do we find a commission in which God tells His believers to go into all the world and baptize people in the name of Jesus only?
12. According to Colossians 3:17, **everything** the believer does (including being baptized in water) should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus! And certainly whatever is done in His name has the full approval of the Father and the Holy Spirit as well!