

UPON THE ROCK

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PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE CHURCH

James E. Farley

Dispensational Premillennialists like Hal Lindsey, John Walvoord, Jack Van Impe, Pat Robertson, Billy Graham, etc. often refer to the age we are now living in as “The Mystery Age,” “The Mystery Gap,” or the “Mystery Parenthesis”. They will say that the prophets of the Old Testament really did not anticipate the church, but saw the great kingdom of God...the kingdom of David restored on earth. They teach that Jesus came to establish the prophesied kingdom, but the Jews rejected Him, so He had to substitute the church as a kind of parenthesis. In fact, Walvoord wrote in THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM, “...the present age is a parenthesis or a time period not predicted by the Old Testament and therefore not fulfilling or advancing the program of events revealed in the Old Testament foreview...” They sometimes illustrate this erroneous view by saying that the prophets saw the “mountain of the Lord’s house” (Isaiah 2:2-4; Daniel 2:35; etc.), but there was a smaller mountain in front of the greater mountain that blended into the greater so that the prophets did not see it. We, according to their doctrine, are in the valley between the smaller mountain and the greater mountain today. One stated, “The prophets of the Old Testament knew nothing of the church age.” This seems terribly strange when we consider the words of the inspired apostle Paul to King Agrippa. Paul told the king that he was “*witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come...*” (Acts 26:22). Did Paul preach Jesus Christ crucified, buried and risen from the dead? (Compare I Corinthians 15:1-8). Did the inspired apostle preach about the Lord’s church? (Read the Book of Ephesians). Paul’s words reveal that the prophets of the Old Testament period did

indeed foretell the church of Christ. Let's notice some of these prophecies.

Isaiah 2:2-3

Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, God inspired men like Isaiah to foretell of the coming kingdom of God; the church of Christ. *"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-3)*

Note first of all that Isaiah said that this would happen in *"the last days"*. As we read of the events that transpired on the day of Pentecost after Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and ascension, we read Peter quoted from the prophet Joel and stating clearly that what the folks on Pentecost (A.D. 33) were witnessing was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:13-24). Notice especially verses 16 and 17 of Acts 2. Here Peter said, *"...this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days..."*

The inspired Peter stated clearly that he and those to whom he was speaking were living in *"...the last days..."*. And, of course, the church of Christ was established on that day of Pentecost when about 3000 precious souls were added to the church by the Lord upon their submission to His righteousness (Acts 2:37-47).

Isaiah 2:2-3 also reveals that those from *"...all nations shall flow unto it"*. Our Lord Jesus Christ has commissioned His disciples to go and teach *"...all nations..."* (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:47; Mark 16:15-16). The gospel is truly for all! The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians about the time before they were Christians. He wanted them to remember that they were *"Gentiles in the flesh...without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in*

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provides a way for man to escape from the ruins of sin – in spite of himself!

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THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

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the world...” He went on to say that these were now “...in Christ Jesus...” He then wrote, “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in the flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And they he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God...” (Ephesians 2:11-19). In Christ Jesus, there is no more Jew and Gentile! Both are now one people in Christ (I Peter 2:9-10; Galatians 3:26-29). Salvation in Christ is for “... whosoever will...” (Revelation 22:17).

Furthermore, notice that Isaiah refers to the kingdom as “...the house of the God of Jacob...” Remember Paul told the Ephesian Christians that they were now “the household of God...” (Ephesians 2:19). Paul wrote to Timothy about how Christians are to “...behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Timothy 3:15). It is clear that Isaiah was prophesying the coming of the house of God...the church of the living God!!!

And, Isaiah said that the law ... the word of the Lord ... would go forth from Jerusalem. In Luke 24:46-49 we have the record of the risen Lord instructing His disciples about what they were to do. He told them to “tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). He said that. “...repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Luke also records, in the book of Acts of the Apostles, that the Lord “... commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me” (Acts 1:4). The Lord told them they would “...receive power, after that the Holy Ghost 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 1:8). This is precisely how the Book of Acts unfolds... They began in Jerusalem, then went into Judaea, then to Samaria, then launched

into all the world! Just as Isaiah had prophesied hundreds of years earlier!!!

DANIEL CHAPTER TWO

Here we have record of a dream that the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, had. He could not remember the dream so he commanded his magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers to tell him the dream and the interpretation of it. They all said, *“...tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the Interpretation.”* The king was not pleased with this, and told them that unless they would tell him the dream and the interpretation, *“...ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill.”* None of them could tell the king what he wanted to know so the king *“... commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.”*

Daniel was a young man who had been brought to Babylon from Palestine along with his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The Babylonians had given them the names of Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel sent word to the king that if he would give him time he would do as the king required. He then went to his three friends, and made this known to them so that *“...they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of wise men of Babylon...”*

The Lord God of heaven revealed the dream to Daniel and the interpretation of it. Amazingly, Jehovah used a wicked, Gentile king to tell about the coming kingdom, the church of Christ! The king asked Daniel, *“Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof?”* Daniel’s answer is significant. He simply told Nebuchadnezzar, *“...there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days...”*.

Notice that these things were going to happen *“...in the latter days...”* We remember Isaiah’s prophecy about the church coming in the *“...last days...”* and how this was indeed fulfilled (Acts 2:16- 17).

many, many writings in the days of the Roman Empire and in the Grecian culture. However, there was a class of writings that excelled in character all humanly authored works. The “prophetic scriptures” of Romans 16:26 are the “holy scriptures” of Romans 1:2 and 2 Timothy 3:15. They are the highest court of appeal in the view of biblical writers. They reveal the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:13-16). They provide the basis from which all other supposed spiritual truths are to be considered (Acts 17:11). The purpose of the prophetic scriptures is to do just what Paul states, i.e., to make the mind of God known to the nations. God could have chosen a million ways to declare His mind to the nations, but He chose one, namely the Holy Scriptures.

Further notice why the mind and will of God was revealed. The apostle declares, that it was revealed “for obedience to the faith.” The able God declared His will by means of the scriptures for the express purpose of effecting obedience in the heart and lives of His children. The specific tenets that are to be obeyed are contained in the phrase “the faith.” Paul does not address nor did God reveal a faith; He revealed THE faith! The faith that Paul preached was “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Obviously, Paul’s’ allegiance was to “the faith” that he kept to the very brink of the grave (2 Timothy 4:7). Because of his allegiance, he knew that a crown of righteousness awaited him, as is the case with all who follow in his faithful footsteps (2 Timothy 4:8).

“...To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen” (Romans 16:27). The powerful and able God who planned and executed the means by which He would draw all men unto Himself is called “alone wise.” There may be bits of brilliance in all of us and occasionally we might even describe one as being wise. However, in the absolute sense, there is but one who is wise. Paul affirmed the same truth again at 1 Timothy 1:17 when he wrote, “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

The theme that runs through Romans reveals this wise and powerful God. He is undaunted by the rebellion of sinful men and nations. God

being established in God. These are one and the same but are distinguished only from a historical perspective. First, there was the concept (the hidden mystery), then there was the execution of the plan (the ministry, death burial and resurrection of Jesus) and, finally the application (the preaching of the gospel to the nations). God's ability to establish His children was and is through these means.

The God who is able works with the will of man. God has never circumvented that will; to do so would violate His creation. When He made man He made Him distinct from all other creatures. He created us with moral faculties and the ability to know right from wrong. However, God did not stop there. He created man with the right to choose. . Not only was he given the ability to know, God vested in humanity the attribute of free moral will or agency. He placed him in an environment that would allow him to choose. There are three separate but related parts of man's free moral agency. We can know, we can choose, and we can act on our choices. God cannot violate that sacred area of His creation. There is not a case in human history that God has not respected and preserved this part of His creation. The gospel about which Paul wrote mirrors God's respect for the free will of man. He can know, he can choose and he can act.

That's what Paul says in the closing clauses of the text introduced earlier. First, notice that he states that the hidden mystery "...now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations..." To make manifest is to make known without any ambiguity. It was the mystery that was no longer a mystery. It was now open for thorough and complete examination. Like a manifest declaring the contents of a shipment of freight, the gospel that Paul preached declared the mind and intent of God. Secondly, notice that it was made known to "all nations." The Good News is good for several reasons, not the least of which is the fact that none are excluded from its provisions. Thieves, drunkards, homosexuals, extortioners and such like (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) can be washed and sanctified through the authority of Jesus Christ. The Good News is very good news because I am included in its scope!

Paul introduces a phrase here that is nowhere else used in the New Testament. He speaks of the "prophetic scriptures." There were

God, through Daniel, revealed that king Nebuchadnezzar had seen a "...terrible image..." This image's head was "of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, and his belly and his thighs of brass, His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay." The king saw a stone cut without hands, and it smote the image upon his feet and broke them into pieces. This stone then grew into a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Daniel then gave the interpretation of the dream. The image represented four kingdoms, of which Babylon was the first; the head of gold. After Babylon there would rise up another kingdom; the silver. This, historically speaking, was the joint kingdom of the Medes and the Persians which came immediately after Babylon. Then there would be a third kingdom; the kingdom of brass. If we continue chronologically this is the kingdom of Alexander the Great; the Greek Empire. In fact, in another vision that Daniel had (recorded in Daniel chapters seven and eight) there is no doubt that this third world empire is Greece for Daniel names it, and perfectly describes Alexander, his death, and the division of the Greek Empire after Alexander's death! This section of Bible prophecy is absolutely amazing!

Then, in Daniel chapter two, Daniel says that there would come a fourth empire upon the earth; the kingdom of iron and clay. Partly strong and partly weak. This is a perfect description of the Roman Empire. It was during the reign of these kings...those of the fourth empire... "*...shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever*" (Daniel 2:44).

When was the church of Christ established? During which world empire? Of course, it was during the reign of the Roman kings. The Word of God says, "*And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed*" (Luke 2:1-5). This was when Joseph took Mary, pregnant with her first child, and went to Bethlehem. Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem just as the prophets of old had said (Micah 5:2). They went to Bethlehem because Augustus, a Roman Emperor, had

decreed that all should be taxed. Is it not amazing how God uses even wicked men to fulfill His purposes?

Yes, Jesus was born during the reign of the Roman kings, and when He came to age He prophesied Himself of His coming church, the kingdom of God's dear Son (Matthew 16:15-19; Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9).

The kingdom is the church of Christ! It is now in existence and men and women from all nations can and do flow unto it on a daily basis. All who will meekly and humbly submit to the Lord's Will, obeying Him, are added to the church and are members of the people of God, the house of God, the kingdom of Christ, the church of Christ! (Hebrews 5:8-9; Acts 2:47; Romans 10:1-3; James 1:21-25).

This obedience involves hearing the Word of God that produces faith in your heart (Romans 10:17; Acts 4:4; Acts 18:8). We must believe that He is who He says He is! (John 8:24). We must repent of sins (Luke 13:3, 5) The choice is clear; repent or perish. However, the fact is God is not willing that any perish, but that all come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). This is precisely why He commands all men, everywhere (in every nation) to repent (Acts 17:30-31). We must confess the sweet name of Jesus before men. We must SAY, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Compare Acts 8:37; Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10). And, we must be baptized into Christ...into the one body of Christ...for the remission of sins (Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:26-27; I Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:37-38; Mark 16:15-16). The Lord adds you to His church (Acts 2:47). We rise out of the watery grave of baptism to "...walk in newness of life..." and we must walk this new life everyday of our lives. It is a walk "...in the light, as he is in the light (I John 1:7). It is "... walking in truth..." (2 John 4). It is walking after his commandments (2 John 6). It is abiding in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9). It is continuing in His Word in order to be disciples indeed (John 8:31-32). It is being faithful unto death in order to gain the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Friend, will you not submit to the Lord's way as right? Great and wonderful blessings await you now and eternally if you will but give your life over to Him (James 1:21-25). Become a member of the

REVELATIONS FROM ROMANS

Jim Bullington

This article is the first of a 12 part series that treats Romans, chapters 1 - 11. Although the book of Romans has its share of challenging and deep theological passages, it is also rich with first principle truths that await discovery and application. That is the design of this series — to dust off the revealed truths of the book and to show that they have very practical and timely application today. As a means of introducing this series, the closing verses of the book are cited for consideration. "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith — to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen" (Romans 16:25-27). This passage contains the text from which the title of this series, Revelations from Romans, is taken.

"Now to Him who is able..."

Romans begins with the God of power (Romans 1:4 & 16) and ends with the same powerful Deity. Between the opening and closing chapters of the book are many, many examples of human frailty and failure. The purpose of God was and is the salvation of mankind. God is able in that mankind, in spite of his failings, did not and cannot thwart the purpose and power of God. Paul exults in this fact as he closes the letter to the brethren in Rome — "to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever." Paul personally experienced the saving power of the gospel and he preached this saving message to thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of Jews and Gentiles. He knew that God is, in fact, able!

Note the clarifying statements made about the God who is able. He is able to establish you (Christians — JEB) according to: 1) my gospel, 2) the preaching of Jesus Christ, and 3) the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began. Although there are three distinct elements to this statement, these are not three separate methods to

wonderful day that will be! We long for the day when Jesus takes us home to rest.

OUR DESTINATION IS A PLACE OF "GLORY"

We are not just going to a home where we can rest, but to a *glorious* home where we can rest. God "hath called us unto his eternal glory" (1 Peter 5:10). Our small human minds cannot begin to conceive of the glories of heaven. Imagine all the world's mighty kingdoms and empires in one splendid realm. That does not begin to compare with the glories of heaven. "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it" (Revelation 21:24-26).

Think of the glorious sights we witness in this world. Watch the majestic power and unending rhythm of the waves at the sea shore. Focus your eyes on the beautiful snow covered mountains. On a clear summer night gaze up at the millions of stars that decorate the blackness of the night sky. Stand in awe of a hillside during autumn when they seem to be ablaze with red, orange, and gold leaves. Or go into a nursery and marvel at the new born baby made in the image of God. But none of these compare to the glories of heaven. That beautiful city has "the glory of God" (Revelation 21:11) It is said to have a golden Street, pearl gates, and foundations of precious stones. It is a place uncontaminated by sin and its miseries (Revelation 21:27). God, Himself, dwells there.

If we could gaze into heaven for just a few seconds, we would be so overwhelmed nothing would deter us from going there. Let us all strive to enter into that beautiful home of the soul.

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church of Christ today. Become a fellow citizen in the kingdom of God's dear Son (Colossians 1:13; Ephesians 2:19). Let us know how we may be of service to you in these important matters.

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PREPARATION FOR THE CHURCH

Patrick Morrison

The church is the single greatest religious institution upon the face of the earth. The church established by the Son of God is the only religious body which exists with Divine approval. An institution as grand and glorious as the church of Christ required great forethought, planning, and preparation. The church has always existed, in the mind of God (Ephesians 3:10,11). Yet it would be some 4,000 years before the church would come into existence on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ (see Acts 2). This 4,000-year period spanned both the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations, and during this time there were many prophecies given concerning the church. As the time drew closer for the establishment of the church, the church in prophecy gave way to the church in preparation. With the establishment of the church looming on the horizon, the hearts of the people would need to be prepared for the coming kingdom.

In the prophecies concerning the church we also find prophecies concerning one who would prepare the way for the coming Christ and his spiritual kingdom. Isaiah records, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isaiah 40:3). In all of the gospel accounts, this passage is tied directly to John the Baptizer (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). Malachi would write, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 3:1). Again, we know this refers to John (Mark 1:2). The final words of the Old Testament are a prophecy concerning him who would prepare the people for Jesus, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the

great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (Malachi 4:5,6). Jesus proclaimed to the multitude that John is the fulfillment of this prophecy (Matthew 11:13,14).

Jesus and his disciples did much preparatory work relative to the coming church (Matthew 4:17; 10:7). However, the work they did was built largely upon the foundation laid by the great preparer, John the Baptizer. John is one of the greatest characters about whom we read in the pages of the Bible. Yet, the story of John is relatively short compared to other great Bible characters. We get but a brief glimpse of the great forerunner of the Christ His marvelous birth and his horrendous death are recorded for us, but very little is said about what happens in between these two events. Though the record of his life and his work are short, the work that John did in preparation for the coming Messiah and his great kingdom, the church, cannot and must not go unnoticed. From the time of his birth, John knew what his mission in this life would be. Luke records the words of Zacharias, John’s father, relative to John’s future work, “And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins” (Luke 1:76, 77). To this mission John would be faithful, even to the point of costing him his very life (Matthew 14:3-12). John had a task which few would envy, and even fewer would be willing to accept. His was not a glamorous work, or a work that would bring him great fame. He was not the Messiah, nor would he establish the kingdom, the church, which he so valiantly proclaimed. In the time John labored, preaching the coming kingdom, he realized that the one who was coming was much greater than he (Mark 1:7,8; Luke 3:16; John 1:26-31; 3:25-36). Because he was faithful in his work, accepting the commissioning of the Lord with humility, Jesus would proclaim that “among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11).

John came on the scene, in the wilderness of Judea, preaching a very simple, yet pointed message. He would tell all those who would listen, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). The coming kingdom would soon be a reality, and those who desired

family, security, and acceptance. Most of us fondly remember our childhood home, even returning there from time to time for a good dose of nostalgia. When the Prodigal Son found himself in life’s pignen, his thoughts turned to home (Luke 15).

“Home” is a beautiful concept designed to make us miss heaven. We long for the day of that beautiful family reunion with loved ones who have successfully made the journey before us. We yearn for the reunion from which there will be no separation (Revelation 21:4). After a lifetime of struggling through a world that is not our home, it will truly be wonderful to arrive in that city Jesus has prepared for us. We will be where we belong. No longer will we struggle in a world we don’t understand. No longer will we feel out of place. No longer will we be foreigners looking for a city (Hebrews 13:14), but will forever dwell in that beautiful city. Yes, the church’s destination is home.

OUR DESTINATION IS A PLACE OF “REST”

There is something wonderful about reaching the end of the day, putting our troubles and difficulties behind us, and resting. Even God rested (Genesis 2:2). Jesus knew the value of rest. He told his disciples, “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while” (Mark 6:31). God made us creatures who need to rest from time to time.

This life can be difficult. We struggle with pain and illness, financial and family problems, etc. We face disappointments and disillusionment. Dreams do not materialize. Hopes are not realized. Things seem to go well for awhile, but then something hits us totally unexpectedly. People ask how we are, and we politely say, “Fine”, but truthfully the list of our problems would be lengthy. Sometimes it seems life is just one long session of wearisome toil where the best we can do is put one foot in front of the other and go on to the next problem. “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). We just get so tired of it all. Thank God there will be a day when all of life’s struggles will be left behind and forgotten. Someday we will rest. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them” (Revelation 14:13). What a

those in the first century, we were added to the one church of Christ (Acts 2:41,47). The church that belongs to Christ cannot be joined. A sinner is added to it by God, not men, when he obeys the Gospel plan of salvation just mentioned (Acts 2:47). We do not then seek out a denomination that meets our needs, but serve God faithfully in the one church, which meets His approval. Christ is glorified in the church (Ephesians 3:21), but He is shamed by a denomination.

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THE DESTINATION OF THE CHURCH

Phil Grear

Those of us who make up God's church are not at home in this world, but are strangers in a foreign land (1 Peter 2:11). We are anxiously awaiting Jesus' return to take us to be with Him forever. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know" (John 14:1-4). What a great day that will be when Jesus "shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thessalonians 1:10). We must focus our attention on that wonderful place that will someday be our home. We look "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:9-10).

We, as God's church, have a destination that is beyond description. But three great words give us a small hint of what that place will be. Those words are home, rest, and glory.

OUR DESTINATION IS "HOME"

Solomon tells us that when this life is over man "goeth to his long home" (Ecclesiastes 12:5). There is no more emotional word than "home". For most people it conjures up ideas of happiness, warmth,

entrance into that kingdom had to repent. But why was repentance required of the Jews to whom John preached? They were guilty of turning away from God, and from the law He gave through Moses, if the Jews had adhered to the law as they claimed, then they would have known that the kingdom, the church, was close to fruition, and they would have been looking for it having turned away from God, the Jews were not prepared for the coming Messiah and his kingdom. For this, they had to repent and turn back to God and His law. The law prophesied this Messiah and the church which John proclaimed. John's message confronted the Jews with their sins, and it also pointed them back to God's word. Those who accepted John's message "were baptized of him in Jordan [which baptism was for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4)], confessing their sins" (Matthew 3:6). Those who obeyed the preaching of John would be ushered into the kingdom at its establishment.

The establishment of the Messianic kingdom, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, required a new covenant, a better covenant (see Hebrews 9:15ff). The Old Testament law served its purpose well. It was designed to show just how bad sin was, and also showed man that he desperately needed a Savior. The Old Law pointed to the coming Savior, who would free all who would obey him from their sins by washing in his blood, and his kingdom, the church, the body into which all the saved would be gathered. The New Testament, the new covenant which was sealed with the precious blood of Christ, is the law by which the kingdom of the Messiah operates today. Those under the Old Law during the time of John had to be prepared for this change in the law. No more would man offer animal sacrifices to atone for his sins, because the Lamb of God was soon to be slain upon the cross for the sins of the world (Hebrews 10:4). No more would man be confined to one physical location (Jerusalem) to worship, for the temple of God today (the church—1 Timothy 3:15) knows no geographical boundaries. No more would men continually be confronted with the guilt and shame of sin every time a sacrifice was made, for through the blood of Christ man could be forgiven once and for all (Hebrews 10:1-3). No more would man be required to offer his worship through an earthly high priest, for the worship under the new covenant is directed to God through the great High Priest, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:24-28). The Jews of John's day should have been ready for this new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34), but because of

their sins and stubborn refusal to adhere to the word of God, John had to prepare them for the change in law.

Thank God for the church, the Messianic kingdom into which we are brought when we obey the gospel! We are so privileged to be able to be members of the body of Christ, to work and worship with those of like precious faith, under the watchful and caring eyes of our Lord and Savior. And thank God for faithful servants like John, who prepared the way for the King and his kingdom!

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THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

Larry G. Reynolds

In Matthew 16:13-18, Jesus asked His disciples questions concerning His identity. He first asked who others thought He was. Then He asked His disciples who they thought He was. Have you thought about the reason Jesus asked these questions? Many times our Lord used questions to help individuals learn spiritual truths. It is my conviction that is what the Lord is doing with these questions. He is taking them from the physical view of Him to the spiritual. He wants them to see the spiritual kingdom the church that would soon be established. He taught that the foundation of the church was based on the fact that He was the Son of God. He also described the ultimate victory of His church (Matthew 16:18). In this article we will first look at the church Jesus built. Second, we will notice when the church was established. Third, we will notice authority in the church.

THE CHURCH JESUS BUILT

The word “church” comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning “an assembly, a congregation”. It is used in the Bible most often in two senses: the church “universal” the whole assembly of people who are saved, both the living and the dead. The church “local” a company of saved people in a geographical area who work and worship together

must be a member of the church of Christ to be saved, and this upsets many people, but why? Why would people be upset with something the Bible teaches very plainly? Christ is the Saviour of the body (Ephesians 5:23), the body is the church (Ephesians 1:22- 23), there is only one church/body (Ephesians 4:4), God adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47), it is Christ’s church (Colossians 1:18; Romans 16:16). Therefore, to be saved I must be a member of the one church that belongs to Christ, which He will save and I am added to it by God when I am saved. Is this what the Bible says or not? As with many problems, this one begins because of a misunderstanding. Those who belong to various denominations hear something different than what we say. When we say, “You must be a member of the church of Christ to be saved” (which is plainly taught in the above Scriptures), they hear “You must be a member of the Church of Christ denomination to be saved.” This is not what we believe or teach because this is not what the Bible says. If I belonged to a denomination, then we would be wrong in preaching that you had to “join our church” to be saved. But it is not just another denomination, in fact it is NOT a denomination at all. Denominations are divisions, something condemned by Paul and opposed in prayer by Jesus (John 17:20-23; I Corinthians 1:10). Denominations teach different doctrines, wear different, man-made names, have different worship practices while celebrating and applauding their diversity, all of which is expressly forbidden by an apostle of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 1:10-13). Compare the modern denominational gumbo of multiplicity and diversity with the New Testament church. They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship; all that believed were together, and had all things common; they continued daily with one accord and singleness of heart (Acts 2:42-46). Does this sound like the denominational world today? Not even close.

BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH

The church to which those on Pentecost were added was not a denomination and they did not join one after that day. The church of Christ today is not a denomination, nor does it seek to be one. Those of us who are members of the body of Christ obeyed the same teaching as those in the New Testament. We confessed our faith in Christ (Acts 8:37), we repented of our sins (Acts 17:30) and we were baptized into Christ for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38). Just like

that time there were no churches from which to choose. There was only one, just the way God intended it. It was man who would later deviate from God's pattern and begin organizing false religions that were loosely based on Jesus and His teachings. The 21st century American has the freedom to choose from a large variety of restaurants, vehicles, homes, schools, vacation destinations and much more. Because of this, many have come to the conclusion that they should also be able to choose from a variety of denominations, each one competing with and trying to out do one another in an attempt to get more people to join their church. Today on billboards, on bumper stickers, on tee shirts, in advertisements we are being told to "join the church of your choice." In an attempt to get people to join their particular church, many have turned to elaborate marketing schemes to draw in the masses. Churches are building basketball gyms, bowling alleys, swimming pools, fitness centers, play houses, concert halls, baseball/soccer fields and anything else they can think of to attract people and entice them to join their church. Of course these things are given names like "Family Life Centers" to soothe guilt ridden consciences or pacify those who might be upset by this focus on entertainment rather than service. Worship assemblies have been modified to focus on and emphasize the desires and "needs" of those in the pew, instead of submitting to the commands of the One in Heaven. The fire is only fueled by the false teaching that all denominations that believe Jesus is the Son of God are pleasing and acceptable to God. To them salvation has nothing to do with keeping commands, obedient submission, following the New Testament pattern or the church, therefore one church is as good as another in God's eyes. This teaching may sound good and be politically correct, but it is biblically wrong. One church is not as good as another, Jesus only died for, purchased and promised to save ONE (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:23). To these people salvation has nothing to do with the church, therefore a person can be saved without being a member of the church. Their belief is that a person should join a church because it would help him grow, but joining a denomination is not necessary.

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The differences between the members of the church of Christ and those who belong to various denominations can sometimes give rise to some very powerful emotions. We believe and teach that a person

as a local congregation. In Matthew, Jesus is using the word "church" in its universal sense.

In the New Testament the church is referred to by different expressions to emphasize some blessing or responsibility we have as those who have been called out of the world into this spiritual Assembly of God's people. It is called "the body of Christ" (Ephesians 1:22,23). It is called "the household of God" (I Timothy 3:15). It is called "the temple of God" (Ephesians 2:19-22; I Peter 2:5). It is called "the kingdom of His dear Son" (Colossians 1:13). It is called "the bride of Christ" (II Corinthians 11:2). From these expressions we learn the relationship that God has with His church. The New Testament also teaches that all of God's spiritual blessings are in the church that Jesus built "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). Since all spiritual blessing are in Christ's church it is important for us to be members of His body the church.

It is evident that the church was not established at the time Jesus spoke because He said "I will build my church..." (Matthew 16:18). He told His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ (a fact related to the establishment of His church!) The first mention of anyone being added to the church was after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2:47). From that time forward, the church is spoken of as being in existence. Therefore it is safe to conclude that the church began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47).

THE AUTHORITY OF HIS CHURCH

Many passages proclaim Jesus as the cornerstone as was foretold by Isaiah (Isaiah 28:16). It was later proclaimed by Peter and then taught by Paul. "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 3:11). So when Jesus made the statement "Upon this rock I will build my church" He was referring to the confession that Peter made, that He was the Son of the living God. The apostles went forth proclaiming that very fact. When people heard the teaching and obeyed from the heart they were baptized into Christ and added to His church.

Peter was promised “the keys of the kingdom” (Matthew 16:19). The figure of “keys” suggest the ability to allow entrance into the kingdom. Peter exercised this ability through preaching the gospel, as he did on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17-41). To the apostles was promised the power “to bind” and “to loose” (Matthew 18:18). The early church recognized this authority. They “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42). Christians were commended for their acceptance of the apostles’ doctrine. “Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions as I delivered them to you” (I Corinthians 11:2).

The Lord’s church today is wherever there are souls who have been saved and who continue to abide in the apostles’ doctrine. We need to remember that all spiritual blessings are in the church that Jesus built. Therefore if we expect to receive God’s blessing we must follow the teaching of Christ and His apostles.

THE VICTORY OF HIS CHURCH

Jesus said the “gates of hell” would not prevail against His church. That is, whatever the forces of hell might bring to, His church would prevail! Satan has tried to destroy the church but has failed. If the church is to continue to exist it must arm itself and fight against the powers of darkness. We must be steadfast in resisting our adversary the devil (I Peter 5:8-10). God’s people must prepare themselves for the battle by knowing the truth. “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). The church of our Lord has gone through some tough times, but it has always survived the attacks of the devil. Through God’s grace and our faithful obedience, we can be privileged to be a part of that church which Jesus built as promised.

The church was established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of our Savior. God is still adding those who obey His word to His church. I want to encourage you to submit to the will of God so that you can be in position to receive His blessings.

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my life and I will make you the King of my life.’ If you said this prayer, you are saved and need to find a church that meets your needs, where you fit in, and join the church of your choice...then they that gladly received his word, got saved and joined a church and were baptized to show they were members of that denomination...praising God, and having favor with all people. And the Lord moved them to join the church of their choice, after they were saved” (Acts 2:37-47).

Does your Bible read like this? No? Neither does mine, nor any other reliable translation of the New Testament book of Acts. If the Bible does not read this way, why do so many people read it this way? Why do so many believe, teach and practice this? The most sensible reason is this: people read into the Scriptures what they have already been taught and already believe. They know what they believe and then focus on the Scriptures that appear to “Approve” what they believe, even when it means ignoring plain Bible teaching. The overwhelming majority of the religious world believes that a person is saved when they “ask Jesus into their heart” and then they should join a church. The duration of this article will focus on the denominational church, the New Testament church and becoming a member of the church.

THE DENOMINATIONAL CHURCH

Too many people have an incorrect understanding and concept of the church. To most people the church is an invisible, universal group made up of anybody, anywhere who believes that Jesus is the Son of God, regardless of their doctrinal beliefs, practices or conditions of membership in their particular denomination. The denominational concept of the church is that a person can be saved and not be a member of a church. More accurately stated, they believe that when a person is saved, he is added by God to this universal body of believers, and then he should join a church/ denomination that best fits him and his needs. For most of the religious world the divisions and unique doctrines of the various religions is a good thing, and should be celebrated. These are the very ones who would have Peter telling the people on Pentecost what to do to be saved and then telling them to shop around and find a denomination that met their needs and join it However, Peter could not have done this because at

(Romans 10:9,10; Acts 8:37), and is baptized into Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Galatians 3:26-29; Mark 16:16) is saved. Only those who enter into Christ by baptism, preceded by faith, repentance, and the confession of faith, will obtain salvation and will be added to the Lord's church. When one becomes a member of the Lord's church he must live a faithful, and obedient life to be eternally saved in heaven (Hebrews 5:8,9; I Peter 1:3-9; Revelation 2:10; 14:13; 22:14).

THE CHURCH IS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

Jesus is coming again to claim His bride. The Bible closes out with the Lord's church being described as a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2). Paul, in describing the relationship of Christ to His church, uses the husband and wife relationship (Ephesians 5:22-23). Paul says, that Christ "also loved the church and gave Himself for it; that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Is the bride of Christ not important and essential? "The church of Christ is essential to Salvation" has been affirmed in this article and has been proven to be true by evidence produced in the scriptures. When the Lord comes again will you be in that glorious church? To be saved one must be found in Christ, to be in Christ one must be in His church, and to be in His church one must be obedient to His word. Remember, the word of Christ will be the standard used in judgment come the final day (John 12:48).

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JOINING THE CHURCH?

Brandon Britton

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Ask the Lord Jesus into your heart by saying this prayer, 'Lord I know that I am a sinner and that you died for my sins. Please come into my heart and take control of

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION

Gerald R. Reynolds

Some say, "One does not have to be a member of the church to be saved; the church does not save you; one can be a Christian and not be a member of a church." To these statements we should ask, what does the Bible say? Let's look at what the Bible has to say about salvation and the church.

THE NEED FOR RECONCILIATION

Paul in writing to the church at Ephesus said that all spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). There are no spiritual blessings to be found outside of Christ. A few of the spiritual blessings received in Christ are redemption (Romans 3:24; Colossians 1:14; Ephesians 1:7); the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7); purification (Titus 2:14); and reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-20). One should notice that several of these spiritual blessings that were spoken about were addressed to churches or members of the church. Paul in writing to the church at Ephesus identified the church as being a part of the eternal plan of God to redeem man (Ephesians 3:9-11; 5:27). In considering spiritual blessings found only in Christ, let us notice the spiritual blessing of reconciliation. Paul in writing to the church at Ephesus stated that they were reconciled in the "one body" and that the "one body" is the church (Ephesians 2:16; 1:22,23). Reconciliation, as well as the others, is a spiritual blessing found only in Christ and we have shown that to be in the church. This would alone make the church important and essential to salvation because all need reconciliation.

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THE DEATH AND THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

Jesus Christ died and shed His blood that man might have the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:12,22-26). Jesus Christ died for His church, and purchased it with His own blood (Ephesians 5:23,25; Acts 20:28). When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi He made a promise to build His church (Matthew 16:13-18), later He gave His life to fulfill that promise. Was the death of Christ important and essential to salvation? The line from an old hymn, "What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of

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Jesus," extols the importance of the blood of Christ. Jesus purchased the church with His own blood. The blood of Christ is essential to salvation and so is the church which He purchased with His own blood. No, the church does not save you, but you cannot be saved outside of the church because Jesus' blood was shed to purchase the church and all the saved are added to it (Acts 2:38-47).

"CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY, THE CHURCH" (COL. 1:18)

Can one be saved outside of Christ? Salvation is clearly found only in Christ (2 Timothy 2:10; Acts 4:12). Christ who is the head is the savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23). One then must be a member of that which Christ is the savior of in order to be saved. Since the church is the body of Christ, and Christ is the savior of the body, then one cannot be saved unless he/she is a member of His church. Just as God made the Ark in Noah's day the place for salvation, He has established the church as the place of salvation for men today. Only those in the Ark were saved. Those outside the Ark were lost. One cannot be saved outside of the church, that makes the church essential to salvation.

ONE CANNOT BE IN CHRIST WITHOUT BEING IN HIS CHURCH, AND NO ONE CAN BE IN HIS CHURCH WITHOUT OBEDIENCE TO HIS WORD

One cannot join the church of Christ. The Lord adds those who have obeyed His word to His church (Acts 2:41,47). Denominational churches have set forth the notion that the church is not important and therefore one can be saved outside of it. They will have you to believe that you can be saved and then join the church of your choice. This is foreign to the scriptures. When the people heard Peter and the other apostles preach the gospel of Christ about three thousand souls obeyed and the Lord added them to His church. There were no denominational churches in existence then. Today when people obey that same gospel the Lord adds them to His church just as He did in the first century. One who hears (Romans 10:17); believes that Jesus is the Christ (Romans 10:10), repents of past sins (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30), confesses belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God