

THE GLORIOUS CHURCH

2 - WHEN DID THE GLORIOUS CHURCH COME INTO EXISTENCE?

It is important to know when the church came into existence. Its beginning marks the fulfillment of the promise and prophecies of God for the new age. If one is wrong about the beginning of the church, he is apt to be wrong as to the conditions of salvation.

Old Testament prophecies foretold the establishment of the church. "And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:2,3). That which Isaiah prophesied was to take place in the "last days" or "the latter days." This is a reference to the age of the Messiah (Acts 2:16,17; Hebrews 1:1,2). The term "mountain" signified a government or seat of government (Jeremiah 51:25). The mountain of God's house is the church (I Timothy 3:5; Hebrews 12:18,22,23). This mountain shall be exalted above the mountains, that is, it shall transcend in greatness and grandeur all the kings of the world (Daniel 2:35; Mark 4:30-32). "All nations shall flow unto it." People of all nations, not just Jews, shall enter (Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 10:34,35). It was to be established in Zion, and the word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem (Luke 24:47,49; Acts 1:8; 7:1-5,47).

Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream which referred to the establishment of the kingdom of God (Daniel 2:36-45). The four universal kingdoms began with the Babylonian Empire represented by the head of gold (Dan. 2:38). The breast and arms of silver represent the Medo-Persian Empire (Dan. 5:28). The Greek Empire came next represented by the belly and thighs of brass (Dan. 8:20,21). The Roman Empire is represented by the legs of iron and feet of iron and clay. Rome ruled in the New Testament (Luke 2:1).

The New Testament opens with prophecies and promises. The earliest preaching pointed to the coming kingdom. John the Baptist preached that it was at hand (Matthew 3:1,2). The kingdom he foretold could have been no other than that of the Old Testament prophecies and Jewish expectations. When John said the kingdom was "at hand," he was saying the time for it had arrived. John means it is near in time. He called the people to prepare for the kingdom. This involved repentance.

John was, of course, followed by Jesus Who began with the same message. Jesus taught the kingdom was "at hand," thus soon to come (Mt. 4:17). In His sermon on the mount, Jesus stressed the spiritual nature of the kingdom's citizens for it is a spiritual kingdom. Jesus never ceased to preach repentance, and to enforce it by announcing the speedy coming of the kingdom. The kingdom was the theme best suited to cause people to repent. Jesus sent the apostles to preach the same message (Mt. 10:7). Later He sent the seventy with the same message (Luke 10:9).

During the lifetime of Jesus, His disciples looked forward to the coming of the kingdom. Joseph of Arimathaea is described as one "looking for the kingdom of God" (Mark 15:43). Obviously the kingdom had not come yet although Jesus and the apostles had said it was at hand. After Jesus died, there was both desire and speculation of its coming (Acts 1:6). Their use of the word "restore" suggests they still had thoughts of a material kingdom. The need of the guidance of the Holy Spirit is obvious if they are going to preach the gospel of the kingdom to all the world, and preach the truth about it.

Jesus identified the kingdom as His church. "Upon this rock I will build my church...I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven..." (Mt. 16:18,19). Some try to make a distinction between the church and the kingdom. It is evident from His words to Peter that the keys are to that which He promised to build. The idea of government does not reside in the Greek word "ekklesia" or church. It is applied to people because they are a body of people. This body of people must have a government. Being ruled by Christ, the King, they are a kingdom (Colossians 1:13).

The church began on Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus made a most significant statement in regard to the beginning of the kingdom. "Verily I say unto you, There are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1). Some things are obvious from this verse. First, the kingdom to be established is not in the far future because some of the disciples to whom Jesus was speaking would not taste of death until the kingdom came. It would come in the life time of people living and hearing Jesus speak.

Second, it would come with power. Let us look at another statement from the Lord. "And behold, I send forth the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). At that time they did not have the power, but it would come. "But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses..." (Acts 1:8).

They went into Jerusalem to wait. Note the kingdom was to come within their lifetime. It was to be characterized by the power that accompanied it. They were to receive power after the Spirit came upon them. Thus, if we can find when the Spirit came, that will settle when the kingdom came. Thus the kingdom came, the church was established, on Pentecost. "And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they (the apostles) were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4).

The kingdom was to begin when the law went forth from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2,3). Jerusalem was where the apostles were to wait, and where they were to begin their preaching (Luke 24: 47). The first preaching was on Pentecost (Acts 2:31,32,38). Pentecost was designated as "the beginning" (Acts 11:15). After Pentecost the church or kingdom was always spoken of as in existence (Acts 5:11; 8:1; Colossians 1:13).

The time for the beginning of anything is important. The particular time Christ had in mind for building His church is of earthshaking importance (Matthew 16:18). Every Bible truth is important to those who love the Bible.

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