

## Chapter Three

### *“He Created The Church When?”*

#### **“THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST: ITS ORIGIN”**

In chapter one, I pointed out that the Church of Jesus Christ is a mystery revealed in the New Testament portion of God’s Word, but not revealed in the Old Testament. Therefore, Scriptural truth related to the Church is to be found only in the New Testament.

In chapter two, titled “The Church of Jesus Christ: Its Identity,” I noted that each Church of Jesus Christ is de jure Christ’s and ought to be de facto Christ’s. That is, the Lord Jesus Christ actually owns each Church; therefore, He ought to actually exercise ownership rights and prerogatives over that which He owns.

The goal of this chapter is to evaluate precisely the creation, the bringing into existence, of the Church of Jesus Christ. To do that we need to settle several historical facts:

#### **First, WHO CREATED THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST?**

It might initially seem useless to spend any time at all ascertaining who brought the Church of Jesus Christ into existence, but there is a reason for seeking clarity: In Matthew 16.18, of course, we read the Lord Jesus Christ claiming that the Church either is or will be His, when He said,

“That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

However, in Acts 20.28, the Apostle Paul states to the Ephesian elders,

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

As well, First Corinthians 1.2 reads,

“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”

The pattern we find is not isolated, since First Corinthians 10.32, 11.22, 15.9; Second Corinthians 1.1, Galatians 1.13, and Titus 3.5 use the phrase “the church of God,” with First Timothy 3.15 using the phrase “the church of the living God.”

Thus, we have but a single instance of the Lord Jesus Christ describing the Church as “my church,” while we find nine instances in which Churches of Jesus Christ are identified by the Apostle Paul as “the church of God” and “the church of the living God.” Is this significant? Or is this a distinction without a difference? I am persuaded that Paul’s is a distinction without a difference because of the revelation that was given to him concerning Christ’s relationship to His Church as that of a groom to his bride. We observe this in Ephesians 5.23-33:

- 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.
- 24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing.
- 25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
- 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,
- 27 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.
- 28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.
- 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

- 30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.
- 31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.
- 32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.
- 33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife *see* that she reverence *her* husband.

The Apostle Paul referred to the Church as the Church of God. He also declared that Christ is the head of the Church. He additionally showed the Lord Jesus occupying a role with the Church as that of a husband with his wife. Do these three relationships introduced by Paul detract from the Church of Jesus Christ being Christ's by right of creation and by right of His position? No.

The question before us is still who created the Church of Jesus Christ? Though Paul exclusively refers to Churches as the Church of God, does he in any way detract from the claim that the Lord Jesus Christ created the Church? No such evidence exists in the New Testament. However, I do find three places in the Gospels which provide satisfactory evidence that not only did the Lord Jesus Christ bring the Church of Jesus Christ into existence, but any reference to His Church as "the church of God" would not in any way detract from His role as Creator of the Church.

*First*, I remind you once again of Matthew 16.18. It is interesting that our Lord would take His apostles to Caesarea Philippi of all places as the setting for this episode since it was the most thoroughly Gentile and pagan of all the places He had taken them. And for what reason did He take them there? Because it would be in such settings as pagan Caesarea Philippi that the Churches of Jesus Christ would have their greatest impact. Notice His words again, asserting not only ownership but also origin:

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The phrase “I will build” translates a future tense Greek verb, οἰκοδομήσω.<sup>1</sup> Davies and Allison maintain that this verse places the Church’s birth *before* the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

*Next*, I remind you of Matthew 18.15-20, where the Savior provided instructions for the Church to properly deal with matters of sin and reconciliation, suggesting that the instructions provided *for* the Church of Jesus Christ were also instructions provided *to* the Church of Jesus Christ, which at that time already existed.

*Third*, there was the selection of twelve who were designated apostles of Jesus Christ, Luke 6.12-16:

- 12 And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.
- 13 And when it was day, he called *unto him* his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;
- 14 Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew,
- 15 Matthew and Thomas, James the *son* of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes,
- 16 And Judas *the brother* of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor.

The reason our Lord’s appointment of apostles at this time in His earthly ministry was significant is that the Apostle Paul wrote in First Corinthians 12.28,

“And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”

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<sup>1</sup> Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1980), page 49.

<sup>2</sup> Davies and Allison, Vol II, page 628.

Ephesians 2.20 reveals the significance of the verse just cited, where the Apostle Paul informed the Ephesian Church they

“are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*.”

Taking Luke 6.12-16, First Corinthians 12.28, and Ephesians 3.20 together, we see the strongest evidence the Church of Jesus Christ was brought into existence by the Lord Jesus Christ *before* His crucifixion, in that it was established on the foundation of the apostles, who were themselves set in the Church by God when the Lord Jesus Christ called them.

Segregate from among all groups in Christendom those who preach a clear Gospel message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. Of those Gospel preaching Christian groups, only Baptists (and certainly not all Baptists) correctly identify by whom the Church of Jesus Christ was directly and personally instituted and when Jesus Christ brought the Church of Jesus Christ into existence.

### **Next, WHEN WAS THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST CREATED?**

It might seem to you that this is a matter we have just settled, and so it is. However, the importance of this matter necessitates that we rehearse it from a different perspective.

It is the almost universally held belief among evangelical Christians that Jesus Christ brought the Church into existence on the Day of Pentecost. Leading conservative Bible scholar the late F. F. Bruce wrote numerous commentaries, one of which lists in the table of contents the following line to which no evangelical would object: I. THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH (1:1-5:42).<sup>3</sup> Exceptions to this general rule would be some who think that the Church is comprised of saved individuals since the time of Adam, but there is no support to be found in Scripture for that position, which is derived from the reasonings of covenant theologians. How do evangelicals justify their conclusion that the Church was founded on the Day of Pentecost without

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<sup>3</sup> See table of contents in F. F. Bruce, *The Book Of The Acts - NICNT* (Revised), (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), page vii.

violating Christ's declaration that He would build, and (by intimation) therefore of necessity, found His Church? They think He founded the Church by fulfilling His promise to send the Holy Spirit, stated in John 16.17, where He said,

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”

Do you subscribe to the notion that the Lord Jesus Christ's claim that He would build His Church was fulfilled by His dispatch of the Holy Spirit following His ascension, and that the Holy Spirit was the immediate Creator of the Church of Jesus Christ? I would embrace that assertion if only Scriptural evidence could support it. However, the evidence I discovered in my search of the Scriptures leads me to conclude that the Savior instituted His Church.

I am hardly alone in my conclusion. Paul S. Minear, in his 1960 book *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, wrote,

“One popular way of expressing this is to speak of Pentecost (Acts, ch. 2) as the birthday of the church. This location of the birthday is to some degree erroneous. The book of Acts does not use this term. Unless many of the images thus far surveyed are totally false, we should not think of the church as coming into existence for the first time on the one Day of Pentecost.”<sup>4</sup>

My response, therefore, is that the Day of Pentecost was *not* the occasion of the Church's founding, but the occasion of the Church's empowering, since the Church the Lord Jesus Christ founded had already exhibited the Church characteristics that are recorded in Acts chapter one:

- According to Acts 1.4, they assembled.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), page 133.

- According to Acts 1.14, they assembled again for prayer and supplication.
- According to Acts 1.15-26, they attended to the Church matter of selecting Judas Iscariot's replacement according to a prophecy found in the Psalms.<sup>5</sup>

That said, let me review what I previously stated about Christ instituting His Church in a more direct and personal manner than is granted by evangelical Christians. Three places in the Gospels provide satisfactory evidence to the open-minded student of God's Word that the Lord Jesus Christ personally and in hands-on fashion brought the Church of Jesus Christ into existence during His earthly ministry and before His crucifixion. *First*, there is Matthew 16.18, where the Lord Jesus Christ asserted not only His ownership but His establishing of the Church of Jesus Christ:

“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

As stated earlier, although the phrase “I will build” translates a future tense Greek verb,<sup>6</sup> such notable commentators as Davies and Allison indicate this verse places the Church's *birth* before the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> *Next*, consider again Matthew 18.15-20, where the Savior provided instructions for the Church to address matters of sin and reconciliation within its membership. This passage suggests that the instructions were provided to the Church of Jesus Christ at a time when it already existed. *Third*, there was the selection of the twelve disciples who were designated apostles of Jesus Christ, Luke 6.12-16. Our Lord's appointment of apostles at this time in His earthly ministry is shown in First Corinthians 12.28 to be profoundly significant:

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<sup>5</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts - ECNT*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), page 82.

<sup>6</sup> Rienecker, page 49.

<sup>7</sup> Davies and Allison, Volume II, page 628.

“And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”

Consider the implication of this verse with consideration of Ephesians 2.20, where the Apostle Paul informs the Church at Ephesus that they

“are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*.”

Therefore, taken together, Luke 6.12-16, First Corinthians 12.28, and Ephesians 2.20 form strong evidence that the Church of Jesus Christ was brought into existence *before* Christ’s crucifixion, in that Christ’s Church was established on the foundation of the apostles, who were themselves set in the Church by God when the Lord Jesus Christ called them.

### **Finally, WHAT WAS THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST CREATED FROM?**

Though I will delve into this much more thoroughly in succeeding chapters, it is important at this time for us to arrive at a Scriptural understanding of the components from which the Lord Jesus Christ created His Church, those constituent elements He used to fabricate the Church of Jesus Christ. Let us not deny what our Lord could have done when He chose to create the Church of Jesus Christ; He could have simply spoken it into existence from nothing the way He created the heavens and the earth.<sup>8</sup> However, we have it on good evidence that our Lord did not create His Church out of nothing but used previously existing materials, individuals actually, with which to constitute His Church.

Reminding ourselves that Luke 6.13-16 (and also Matthew 10.1-4) informs us that the first members of the Church were the twelve apostles, let us attempt to construct an understanding of the Gospel accounts of who and

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<sup>8</sup> Genesis 1.1; John 1.3; Colossians 1.16; Hebrews 1.2; 2.10

what these first Church members were, of who and what these foundations were upon which Christ laid His Church.

The first mention of any of these twelve apostles in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke finds them in Galilee, the home region of all but one of them. However, the Gospel of John refers to those who would become apostles at an earlier time and in a different location. Take note of John 1.37-49:

- 37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.
- 38 Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?
- 39 He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.
- 40 One of the two which heard John *speak*, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.
- 41 He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.
- 42 And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.
- 43 The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.
- 44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.
- 45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.
- 46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.
- 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!
- 48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

The Lord Jesus Christ's public ministry began at the southern end of the Jordan River when John the Baptist immersed Him. After that, He was tempted by the Devil in the wilderness for forty days and then twice publicly identified by John the Baptist in front of his disciples.<sup>9</sup> Those disciples included Galileans by the names of Peter and Andrew, and James and John. After our Lord and those four returned to Galilee, Philip and Nathaniel (also called Bartholomew) became His disciples.

Unlike some of the others who became apostles, Matthew was not among those who had been disciples of John the Baptist but had been a tax collector, Matthew 9.9. Unlike the other eleven, Judas Iscariot was not from Galilee but came from the southernmost part of Judea.<sup>10</sup> Humanly speaking, how did he become a disciple of Christ and then an apostle? It is likely that Judas Iscariot, like the others, except for Matthew, had first been a disciple of John the Baptist.

As near as can be determined, our Lord's first disciples who later became apostles were men who had been disciples of John the Baptist (who baptized his disciples by immersion, Matthew 3.6).<sup>11</sup> And since the disciples of the Baptist were men who had to earn a living, those disciples did not remain continually with him, but likely traveled back and forth from their places of employment from time to time. Therefore, those who later became apostles, except for Matthew (who we know to have been a tax collector and, therefore, most certainly not a disciple of the Baptist), were all likely to have been baptized disciples of John the Baptist.

One difference between John the Baptist's disciples and our Lord's disciples who became apostles was the amount of time devoted to their discipleship. The Savior very obviously wanted the twelve to follow Him on

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<sup>9</sup> John 1.29, 36

<sup>10</sup> William Steuart McBirmie, *The Search For The Twelve Apostles*, (Wheaton, IL: Living Books, 1973), page 236.

<sup>11</sup> A. B. Bruce, *The Training Of The Twelve*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, reprint edition 1971), page 5.

a full-time basis, even to the point of calling the fishermen on three separate occasions before they fully yielded to His will.<sup>12</sup> As well, it hardly seems likely that once Matthew abandoned his occupation, he would not also have repented and submitted to baptism as had the others.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, absent any evidence to the contrary, it is reasonable to conclude that the Lord Jesus Christ selected mostly Galileans from His many disciples, and mostly men who had previously been repentant and baptized disciples of John the Baptist. About some of the apostles, we know almost nothing beyond their names except that two were named James, two of them were named Judas, two of them were named Simon, and one of them (Thomas) was a twin, but we know nothing of his sibling.

The New Testament pattern is invariably repentance followed by baptism. Therefore, it would be astonishing to think the apostles were not men who had made professions of repentance followed by immersion. It is also likely that if any of them had not been baptized by John the Baptist (that one likely being Matthew), then he was baptized by one who was Christ's disciple authorized to baptize him, John 4.2.

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude from the Gospel evidence and absent anything in the New Testament that would overturn such a conclusion; the Lord Jesus Christ instituted His Church with men who professed to have repented, who were immersed, and who then followed Him. It was from among such as that that He chose His twelve apostles.

To sum up what we have discovered, the Church of Jesus Christ was brought into existence by the Savior during His earthly ministry and before His crucifixion, using His appointment of twelve men to be the apostles who were the foundation upon which Christ established His Church, Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. The Lord Jesus Christ fashioned His Church and did not delegate the formation of His Church to anyone else, not even the Holy Spirit of God on the Day of Pentecost. It is the Church of Jesus Christ that is already existing and already functioning that we see in Acts chapters one and two.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pages 11-18.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 9.9; Mark 2.14; Luke 5.27-28