

## **Extreme Dispensationalism, the Beginning of the Church, and a Lively Debate**

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This study is a combination of several lines of thought that need to be countered with good Biblical exposition and explanation. The first part of the study exposes the errors of the extreme dispensational viewpoint, which creates two or three churches and then starts the present-day church later in the Book of Acts instead of Acts 2 (Pentecost). The second part of the study briefly deals with a summary and progression of the Church in the Book of Acts. The next section gives an answer to the offers of the Kingdom during the transitional time, between Law and Grace, God's old program with the Jews and His new program with the Church. The final section of our study argues why the Church **MUST** start in Acts chapter two and not in John 20:22 as some of my Baptist friends argue. A lively but friendly debate is given on the two positions which may prove helpful in pointing out some important matters dealing with the commencement of the Church.

### **The Errors of Extreme or Ultra-Dispensationalism**

Extreme or ultra-dispensationalists claim that there were several different Churches that began at different times throughout New Testament history. One was a kingdom or Jewish Church designed only for the Jews. It was formed in the gospels and existed in the early part of the book of Acts. They then conclude that the Great Commission, Lord's Table, and baptism are only for the Jewish Church and not for the Church that exists today.

It's asserted that there was also another Church composed of both Jews and Gentiles that was formed later in the book of Acts as a result of Paul's commissioning and witnessing to the Gentile masses (Acts 13 or 28). They view the Book of Acts as a time of "dispensational limbo" (between law and grace) before the final church is formed.

Other hyper or extreme dispensationalists go a step further and **create a third church** by distinguishing between a **bride** Church, which existed in Acts, and a **body** Church which existed in the epistles (Bullingerites – people who follow the teachings of E. W. Bullinger). This brings the total to three

Churches – **Jewish Church** (gospel period and early Acts), **Bride Church** (later Acts), and **Body Church** (epistles).

To say the least this is very confusing and results in an unwarranted division of the Scripture. We are told to “**rightly divide**” (2 Tim. 2:15) the Scriptures but not overly divide them! Where do we read any specifics in the Scripture about a Jewish Church, a Bride Church, or a Body Church? The ultradispensationalist has simply gone too far in his Bible distinctions and divisions related to the Church. Hence, he is called a hyper or extreme dispensationalist. It’s very clear that the terms bride and body are nothing more than descriptive terms relating to the same Church that Jesus spoke about and commissioned (Matt. 16:18; 28:19-20), the same Church that was formed on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:42-47), and the same Church that Paul defined and doctrinally outlined in the epistles (Eph. 2:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18).

Of course, many of the hyper or more extreme dispensationalists attempt to start the Church in Acts 13 or 28 in connection with Paul’s statements about turning to the Gentiles in order to create another separate church (Acts 13:46; Acts 28:25-26). However, there are three places where Paul states that he persecuted the Church of God (Gal. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:9; Phil. 3:8). Was this a kingdom church? Did Paul have a different church in mind? It would be erroneous to conclude that he did. **In fact, it would be meaningless for Paul to speak about some other kind of church that he was not already teaching about in his epistles.**

The obvious point is this; *the same Church that Paul was speaking about in his epistles was the same Church he persecuted before he was saved.* Consequently, this means the same Church must have been in existence prior to Acts 9 which gives the account of Paul’s conversion. This refutes the ultradispensational view which says that the Church began in Acts 13 or Acts 28. It actually began in Acts 2. Acts 13:46 and Acts 28:46 were significant *turning points* from the Jews to the Gentiles but they did NOT mark the *starting point* of the Church (Acts 1:5; 11:15).

It’s interesting that in Romans 16:7 Paul sends his greetings to the saints who were “in Christ before me” (before he was saved). Being “in Christ” is a New Testament truth that speaks about Jews and Gentiles being united together into Christ’s body - the Church (Galatians 3:28 – “for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”). This also tells us that the Church must have begun prior to

Paul's conversion (Acts 9) and even before he officially turned to the Gentiles later in the book of Acts. Let the Scriptures speak for themselves. There is only **one body** (Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 10:17; 1 Cor. 12:13) or **one Church** (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18) – not two or three. Both Biblical sense and common sense verify this to us.

Ultradispensationalism is refuted when it is shown that the same Church in Acts is the same Church mentioned in the rest of the New Testament. The real issue is whether or not the baptism of Pentecost (Acts 1:5) added members to the same body mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:13. **It should be noted first of all that the Lord's people from Acts 2, up to the conversion of Paul are never called a "Jewish church" or "kingdom church."** These designations come from the minds of ultradispensationalists, not from the Bible. The word *church* (or *churches*) is found about nineteen times in the books of Acts to describe believers of the new age and *there is not the slightest indication of a transition from one kind of church to another.*

In addition, Paul uses the same terminology, "the church of God," to describe the church which he persecuted (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal 1:13), which is the same terminology he used to describe the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:28). Also, the Lord revealed to Paul at his conversion that the church he had been persecuting was the Lord's body (Acts 9:4). Therefore, the baptism of Pentecost is the same as that of 1 Corinthians 12:13 (the body of Christ) and the mystery church did begin at Pentecost.

But the ultradispensationalists maintain that the church at Pentecost could not be the "joint-body" mystery church of Ephesians **until some Gentiles were saved**. Why not, even if the first members were all Jews? The very essence of the unity of the Spirit in the church is that national and social distinctions are no longer important (Gal 3:28). Further, **who decided that the church (which was then the local church at Jerusalem) had to have Gentiles in its membership to be the mystery church? It would be just as foolish to argue that some local church today is not part of the mystery church because it is composed entirely of Gentiles.** Finally it might be a bit difficult to prove that not a single Gentile was numbered with the thousands who believed at Pentecost and shortly after, especially in view of the fact that some Gentiles and Samaritans were converted during the ministry of Christ. The extreme or ultradispensational teaching makes a separate dispensation out of part of the book of Acts or the entire book of Acts. There are two types of ultradispensationalism: (1) The most extreme believes that the mystery

church began after Acts 28 after Paul's imprisonment. (2) The moderate believes the mystery church began sometime (they are vague about the starting point) after Paul's conversion, or between Acts 9 and 13. **The extreme group follows the teaching of Bullinger that neither water baptism nor the Lord's Supper is an ordinance for the mystery church.** The moderate group accepts the Lord's Supper as a Scriptural ordinance, but they reject water baptism. The moderate type of ultradispensationalism is the most prevalent in America. It is represented by the Milwaukee Bible College, the Grace Gospel Fellowship, and the Worldwide Grace Testimony.

Both the extreme and moderate types of ultradispensationalism agree on the following: (1) The Great Commissions in Matthew and Mark are Jewish and have no connection with the command to evangelize within the present church age. (2) The ministry of the Twelve was only a continuation of the ministry of Christ and dealt with the offer and establishment of the kingdom. (3) The church (mystery or body church) did not begin at Pentecost. (4) The sign gifts were Jewish and related to the kingdom period only when Christ was here upon earth offering the kingdom. (5) The Lord's Supper and water baptism are not for this age. (6) There is a distinction between Paul's early and later ministries. (7) That the mystery church (body church) began with Paul. (8) That Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16, Luke 7:30, etc., *teach a legalistic plan of salvation different from the grace plan for this age.* The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all teach a legalistic way of salvation (salvation by works) and should not be confused with the grace teaching of Paul the apostle in the later epistles.

All of this unwarranted division breeds confusion and is error. Salvation has always been by grace through faith throughout the changing dispensations (Rom. 4:3) and during the Book of Acts.

### **Summary of the Church in Acts**

1 Corinthians 12:13 says:

“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. The Church was prophesied to be born (Matt. 16:18)
2. The Church was promised to be formed (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5)

3. The Church was spiritually born (Acts 2:33)
4. The Church is being progressively formed (1 Cor. 12:13).
  - a. Pentecost (the official introduction of the Jewish people) = Acts 2
  - b. Samaritans (the official introduction of Jewish/Gentile) = Acts 8
  - c. Cornelius' house (the official introduction of the Gentiles) – Acts 10
  - d. Disciples of John the Baptist become part of the Church – Acts 19

These official introductions into the Church occurred during the infant stages of the church as it was initially being launched and when different groups of believers were being spiritually welding together by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Acts records the initial stages when the church was being pieced together. Of course, the work of building the Church goes on to this day (1 Cor. 12:13). However, the Book of Acts records the official beginning and initial expansion of the Church during its initial phase and when for the first-time people were being united together in the Body of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:27-28).

1. The Church Dispensation was officially recognized (Acts 11:15-17; 13:46-47; 15:7-14; 28:27-28; Ephesians 3).

### **Kingdom Offers in Book of Acts**

The Book of Acts is a time of transition from Kingdom to Church truth. It's a time of dispensational transitioning between the two programs (Acts 18:25-26). There is going to be some overlap of these separate programs until the program of God's Church becomes fully realized and the dominant message. The prophecies about Israel's future salvation and the offer of the kingdom to Israel during the Book of Acts does NOT indicate there was some kind of "kingdom church" that was in existence which did not coincide with the Church of the New Testament epistles (ultradispensationalism).

Peter was speaking to the Jewish nation in Acts 3:19-21:

"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 of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."

The times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord refer to the blessings of Christ's future kingdom on earth, as mentioned in the next verse. Following Israel's repentance, God will send the Messiah, Jesus. This refers to the Second Coming of Christ to set up His thousand-year reign on the earth (Rev. 20:1-6). Of course, the question inevitably arises at this point, "If Israel had repented when Peter was speaking, would the Lord Jesus have returned to earth?" Was Peter saying here that if Israel repented, God's kingdom would have come to earth?

Some insist Jesus would have returned; otherwise, they say the promise was not a bona fide one. Some suggest that Peter was not reoffering the Kingdom to the Jews at this time but only telling them what they needed to do (repent), so they can enter the Kingdom someday in the future, when it is established over the earth. They claim that Peter's statement does not constitute a genuine reoffer of the Kingdom, since the necessary prerequisites are not at hand to bring this to pass (Israel's chastening during the Tribulation Period or the signs that trigger the Second Coming). Others stress that Peter's reference to Joel's prophecy was only given to illustrate what was happening on the Day of Pentecost but was not a legitimate offer of Israel's kingdom.

How should we view the offer of the Kingdom during the Book of Acts? It's clear from Acts 3:21 that God foresaw that the nation of Israel would reject Christ by the statement "until the times of restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21) and that the present Church Age would intervene, as a gap of time (Acts 15:14-16; Dan. 9:26-27), before His Second Coming. Therefore, what Peter wanted to occur on Pentecost could not occur until a later point in time. Also, it's true that Israel would have to be chastened during the Tribulation Period (Rev. 12) and be in the position to call out to her Messiah for the Second Coming to actually occur (Acts 2:21).

The period of restoration of all things is another name for the future earthly reign of Christ, the Millennial Kingdom. It is reminiscent of our Lord's description of the kingdom as the "regeneration" (Matt. 19:28). However, Heaven must receive Christ (His ascension and exaltation) until the times of restoration of all things ("Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things" – Acts 3:21). In other words, according to God's sovereign timetable the Millennial Kingdom follows the nation's repentance. Until this time, Jesus will remain in Heaven. The times of restoration had been foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament period ("which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets" - vs. 21). The truths Peter

proclaimed were not new; God had spoken of them by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. The Old Testament prophets spoke repeatedly of Messiah's earthly kingdom. Joel 2:25 even refers to it as a time of restoration. Someday a believing remnant of Israel will repent and turn to God in preparation for the Millennium which is to follow (Deut 30:1–3; Zech 12:10–14).

The prophetic passages in Acts 2:21 and 3:19-21 confirm the progress of God's revelation concerning Israel's kingdom promises from the Old Testament. They are NOT being superseded or replaced by the establishment of the Church Dispensation. Acts 3 establishes a future time when they will be fulfilled. In the meantime, the kingdom promises are postponed for national Israel until they come to faith in Messiah following the Tribulation Period and prior to the Second Coming. After a remnant of Jews within the land repent ("Repent ye therefore and be converted" - Acts 3:19) the Bible declares that "he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you" (Acts 3:20). This aligns itself with other texts confirming the same salvation scenario in connection with the Second Coming. Israel's *repentance* (a remnant within the land) leads to Messiah's return (Hosea 5:15-6:3; Joel. 2:31-32; Matt. 23:39; Acts 2:20-21). Next, Israel's *mourning* (Zech. 12:10-11) and *confession* will take place (Isa. 53:5-7) and the official *declaration* of her sins forgiven (Zech. 13:1).

The worldwide regathering of Israel will also occur in connection with the Second Coming (Joel 3:13-16; Matt. 24:29-31) and Christ will also provide forgiveness for Israel's sins on a national basis ("And so all Israel shall be saved" – "for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" - Rom. 11:26-27). However, the unsaved Jews will be purged from Israel (Ezek. 20:37-38; Rom. 11:26; Matt. 8:11-12; 24:36-51; 25:1-30) at the commencement of the Millennial Kingdom. This is a summary of what lies ahead for national Israel. But why did Peter speak of Israel's salvation in his Pentecostal sermons?

The first chapter in Acts enables us to understand why Peter spoke of Israel and the Kingdom on the Day of Pentecost.

Luke records in Acts 1:3:

"To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

The goal of history is not merely the cross but the crown (“the kingdom of God”) or the time when King Jesus reveals Himself in all His majesty and reigns in glory (Isa. 11; Dan. 7:13, 14; 1 Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 20:4–6). Why did Christ speak to the disciples about the restoration of the Kingdom to these disciples? It’s because these men were Jewish and the great hope of the Jewish people was for the Messiah to come and reign with them in a future earthly kingdom. Christ wanted to first encourage the hearts of His disciples with this messianic hope of Israel’s blessing in the future Kingdom. These promises would never be annulled (Acts 26:6; Rom. 11:26-27).

It’s likely that Jesus’ teaching during the “forty days” dealt with such things as the validation of his messiahship (He was the King), the interpretation of the Old Testament Kingdom promises in light of His resurrection (they would yet be fulfilled). The Lord Jesus wanted the disciples to know that the crucifixion did not nullify the promised millennial kingdom (Isa. 2:2; 11:6–12; Dan. 2:44; Zech. 14:9). The apostles no doubt had difficulty believing in the future theocracy or kingdom after the death of the King. But the resurrection changed all of this and from this time forward they proclaimed Jesus Christ as the King (Acts 17:7; 2 Tim. 4:1; 2 Peter 1:11; Rev. 11:15; 12:10; 17:14; 19:16).

The disciples must have thought since the Messiah was victorious over death it would mean that the kingdom was at hand. However, after speaking of the earthly Kingdom program for the Jews Jesus then transitions into the teaching about the Church and the Great Commission connected with this program (Acts 1:8). Jesus wanted the disciples to know that Israel as a nation was not forgotten by God; however, since Israel during His earthly ministry rejected the Messiah (Matt. 23:37; John 1:11) and His offer of the Kingdom which was then “at hand” (Matt. 4:17), He would now turn to another program (the Church) and postpone His Kingdom program until another Jewish nation repents and receives Him as Messiah (Matt. 21:43).

It should be noted that when the nation of Israel officially rejected Jesus as her Messiah at His first coming in Matthew 12, Jesus follows with the mysteries concerning the kingdom program in Matthew 13 (the secret revelations concerning events that would transpire on earth before the Kingdom arrives). The essence of Christ’s teaching in Matthew 13 is that the kingdom will one day arrive, but for now it is being postponed or delayed. Christ’s answer in Acts 1:8 echoes this same teaching. He moves from



kingdom truth to Church truth and then ascends into Heaven (Acts 1:0-11) to establish the fact that the Church would come into existence in the absence of the King.

The Book of Acts then describes what would occur on earth while the King is absent. Christ would establish His Church while the King is absent (“Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things” – Rev. 3:21). The Church Age would fit into the time period when the King has gone into the far country (Luke 19:12) and the Kingdom program is delayed or postponed (“The kingdom of God shall be taken from you” - Matt. 21:43), but later on the King would return when another group of Jews within the nation repent and call on Him for salvation (Acts 3:19, Matt. 23:38-39).

Acts 1:6-7 is a key passage that helps us to understand Peter’s Pentecostal sermon and why he inserted truth about Israel in the Millennium. The texts reads: “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.”

This passage helps us to understand Peter’s offer of repentance to the Jewish nation in Acts 3:19-21. In the disciples’ minds the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the coming of the promised kingdom were closely associated since the Old Testament frequently joined the two events together (Isa. 32:15–20; 44:3–5; Ezek. 39:28–29; Joel 2:28–3:1; Zech. 12:8–10). When Christ told the disciples of the soon-coming Spirit baptism, they immediately concluded that the restoration of Israel’s kingdom was near. However, the disciples with their limited knowledge were not expected to understand “the times or the seasons” related to Israel’s Kingdom blessing.

In other words, the timing and specific events taking place in the world, prior to this prophetic fulfillment, could not be fully grasped by the disciples. They could not know the fixed or predetermined time that these events would occur until later revelation would be given which would result in greater understanding of end-time events (1 Thess. 5:1). Initially, Peter and the disciples could not fully grasp the timetable related to God’s Kingdom program for Israel and how the Church program would *replace* the kingdom program and cause Israel’s kingdom/earthly program to be *postponed* for a later time. In fact, in Peter’s first Pentecostal sermon, he may have been thinking in terms of Israel’s salvation and blessing in the Millennial Kingdom

at the Second Coming of Christ (“this is that which was spoken by the prophet of Joel” - Acts 2:16). Peter’s quote of Joel’s prophecy, which deals with Israel’s salvation after the Tribulation Period has expired and the signs associated with Christ’s Second Coming (Joel 2:30-31; Matthew 24:29-30), would indicate that Peter believed the restoration of the Kingdom was going to literally occur (“this is that which was spoken by the prophet of Joel”) if Israel as a nation would repent on the Day of Pentecost (Matt. 11:14).

Peter’s timing was off regarding the inauguration of the Millennial Kingdom and a greater understanding of God’s new work (Church Dispensation) would come later to both Peter and the apostles (Acts 10; 15:14; 18:6). At Pentecost, the Kingdom Dispensation was not coming; instead, the Church Dispensation was about to begin. Nevertheless, without realizing it, Peter’s quotation of Joel’s passage was designed by God to be applied to the Church Dispensation, which began on Pentecost. Peter’s perspective was Israel’s blessing in the Kingdom but looking back upon these events from our perspective today, we view them as the Church’s blessing. Peter would later come to this realization as well when his understanding of the Church Dispensation increased (Acts 11:15-17; 15:14).

Looking back, Peter’s description of Joel’s prophecy about Israel’s salvation, the Second Coming and entrance into the Millennial Kingdom is somehow related or similar to what happened on the Day of Pentecost when the Church was born. In each instance, God’s people would speak in tongues (different languages) confirming the new work of God and their entrance into the new Dispensation. In Acts 2 the tongues were spoken by Jewish people and became a confirming sign that the Church Dispensation began whereas in Joel 2 they are spoken by Jewish people and will become an indication that the Kingdom Dispensation is about to commence with the Second Coming of Christ to planet earth.

Although Peter may have had Israel’s restoration in mind during his Acts 2 sermon, unbeknown to him, he was directed by the Spirit to quote Joel’s prophecy in Acts and today we can compare Joel’s prophecy of Israel’s salvation and blessing in the Millennial Kingdom to what initially happened on the Day of Pentecost. The expression “this is that which was spoken by the prophet of Joel” (Acts 2:16) can be viewed from our perspective as only a *comparison* or *likeness* to the events that would transpire at Israel’s salvation, the Second Coming, and entrance into the Millennial Kingdom.

Pentecost was NOT the *fulfillment* of the end-time prophetic events described as “blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke” and the time when “The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood” (Acts 2:19-20). Of course, these astronomical and terrestrial prophetic/apocalyptic events that transpire in connection with the Second Coming did NOT occur on the Day of Pentecost, but Joel’s prophecy was similar in relationship to the Spirit’s working and role in the lives of God’s people, which occurred on Pentecost. The relationship between Joel’s prophecy and Pentecost was the Spirit’s arrival and ministry upon God’s people. This is what we need to grasp from Peter’s Pentecostal sermon.

Peter’s understanding of Israel’s repentance, salvation, and blessing in the Millennium (Acts 2-3) puts kingdom truth in the Church Age. However, this should not alarm us since Church truth was found even before the Church began at Pentecost (Matt. 16:18; 18:17; John 10:16; 14:20). Therefore, the mention of God’s two programs for Israel and the Church should not cause us to become confused between these distinct programs (Covenant Theology) or in relationship to when the Church began (ultradispensationalism).

The Kingdom offers are seen because of *a time of transition that was occurring between God’s programs related to Israel and the Church*. A time of transitioning between God’s program for Israel and the Church would occur during the Church Age. Of course, in God’s mind Pentecost marked the commencement of the Church because God had already officially postponed His program with Israel (Matt. 21:43; 23:38-39). However, it took some time for the disciples to fully understand this and therefore both programs were sometimes mentioned even while the Church Dispensation was underway. The book of Acts must be seen as a hinge book, a transition time bridging God’s covenant promises for Israel and His new work with the Church.

This time of transition explains the other Jewish and Kingdom contexts throughout the Book of Acts (Acts 4:5-12; 5:30-31; 7; 8:12; 13). Paul also spoke about the future concept of the Jewish Kingdom and the need for the Jews to receive Christ as their Savior as the only way of entering the kingdom (Acts 19:8; 28:23, 31). Paul did not forget about his beloved people even though God was changing His program to the Church. The Jewish people needed to repent and believe in the Messiah in order to enter the Millennial Kingdom in the future. Although this truth was presented to the Jews through

the period of transition from God's Jewish and Church programs, the disciples would eventually understand in a clearer fashion about God's program for the Church and direct their energies and teaching in relationship to the new program (Acts 10:28-48; 13:44-48; 15:14-16; 18:6; 28:25-31).

All the disciples were given revelation about the mystery period of the Church which would interrupt God's Kingdom program for Israel (Eph. 3:5). However, it took time to understand the exact timing of the Church program and grasp the total meaning and significance of the new program as it began to be initiated. The understanding and timing of the new Church program became clearer to the disciples as time progressed, as the Jews constantly rejected the testimony of the apostles, and as Gentiles were being saved (Acts 15:14). James tells us that the purpose for the current Church Age is to major on Gentile salvation and take out from among the Gentiles a people for his name, which become part of the Church, the Bride of Christ. However, "After this" (after the Church Age – Acts 2:16) God would once again return to "build the tabernacle of David which is fallen down" (a description of Israel's salvation and covenant blessings - Acts 2:16). This return to Israel's kingdom program will only occur when the full number of the Gentiles comes in (Rom. 11:25). After the Church Age has expired, God will return and deal with the nation of Israel once again. This will occur during the Tribulation Period (Jer. 30:7) and result in her conversion and the arrival of the Millennial Kingdom.

The New Testament does not teach that the Church has replaced Israel (Covenant Theology), instead it reconfirms the teachings of the Old Testament that Israel will enter into her kingdom once she believes Jesus to be her Messiah (Luke 1:31-33). In addition, the Book of Acts does not teach a separate "kingdom church" composed only of Jewish people (ultradispensationalism) but the birth, growth, expansion, and progressive understanding of the New Testament Church, the Bride of Christ (Rev. 22:17), as later defined and taught in the epistles (Eph. 1:22, 3:10; 5:25; Col. 1:18; Heb. 12:23).

### **When Did the Church Begin?**

It is clear that the Church could only begin on the Day of Pentecost when the promised Spirit came do His baptizing work. The church could not exist until after Christ's resurrection and ascension for this is when He became head

of the Church. Let's answer this question in a systematic way. When did the Church begin?

## 1. When Christ became Head of the Church

Ephesians 1:19-23

“And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, **when he raised him from the dead**, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: 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.”

How could there be a Church until Christ ascended and became its head? A body cannot live without a head! The Scriptures in Ephesians suggest that the church is built upon the foundation of Christ's resurrection and ascension, meaning that the Church could not exist in the Old Testament or the gospels, since Christ had not yet risen from the dead. *In other words, these two events (resurrection and ascension of Christ) needed to occur before the church could be formed.* Since these events did not occur in the Old Testament or during Christ's earthly ministry with the apostles, the Church could not yet have existed. It is silly to argue for the existence of the Church prior to these two events. The Church simply 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 the ascension.

## 2. When Pentecost was fulfilled

The teaching of the two loaves on Pentecost (Leviticus 23:16), which followed Passover (the death of Christ), taught the typical truth of how the Jews and Gentiles would be brought together into one loaf (1 Cor. 10:17), or one Church body on the Day of Pentecost (Eph. 2:16; 3:6). This would result in the formation of the New Testament Church. Thus, Pentecost became the type of the formation of the future Church and the Day of Pentecost was the exact day when the Church came into existence. The Bible says, “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come” (Acts 2:1). This means that the particular day of Pentecost had never been typically fulfilled. However, in answer to typology the Church was now fulfilling the message or picture

portrayed by Pentecost. The true Pentecost and its fulfillment had finally arrived. The birth of the Church was the fulfillment of God's prophetic calendar as God gave it in Leviticus 23. The Church would be born on the Day of Pentecost bringing both Jews and Gentiles together into one body.

When following through with Scriptural typology one can conclude the Church began on Pentecost. Pentecost (the formation of the Church) followed the death of Christ - our Passover (Lev. 23: 4-5; 1 Cor. 5:7). This means the Church could not be formed and exist on earth prior to Christ's death. The birth of the Church actually follows on the heels of Christ's death and resurrection. Pentecost actually occurred fifty days after Christ's resurrection in fulfillment of the typology of Israel's feast days. Pentecost means "fifty" because it came fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits (Lev. 23:15-22) which typically corresponds to fifty days after the resurrection of Christ. Christ is the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:23). This marks the timing of the Church's beginning. It began fifty days after Christ's resurrection. This period of fifty days would include His forty day post-resurrection ministry (Acts 1:3). After the forty days the disciples were awaiting the promise of the Holy Spirit's arrival to begin the Church which focused on the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). Following Christ's ascension (Acts 1:8) this promise became true (Acts 2:1).

The Church was born on the Day of Pentecost as the Spirit's promised arrival came. What a day it was! The timing was accurate and in line with Old Testament typology. *The Church was born exactly fifty days after the resurrection of Christ.* This is when the Holy Spirit came. The student of Scripture can see God's prophetic calendar of Leviticus 23 being fulfilled in the birthday of the Church. The time period for the Church's beginning was set by God and fixed permanently on His prophetic calendar. Of course, this poses a problem for those who think the Church started later in the book of Acts following Paul's salvation (Acts 9) or when he began his ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46; 28:28). It also poses a problem for those who believe the Church began in the Old Testament under the disguise of Israel. The truth speaks for itself and cannot be overlooked without missing God's plain meaning and intent. Fifty days after Christ's resurrection the Church would be born and come into existence. It had NEVER been born before. It would NOT be born later in the book of Acts. It would start according to God's prophetic calendar and God's exact timetable on the Day of Pentecost. Let's read and believe our Bibles!

### 3. When the Holy Spirit came

Since the Church is actually Christ's body, welded together by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), the Church's birthday could only occur on Pentecost, when this Spirit baptism initially took place. George Zeller correctly observes: "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."

Acts 1:5

"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."

Jesus predicted when the Spirit baptism would occur. He was looking ahead to the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit which would occur for the first time on the Day of Pentecost and create the Church (Gal. 3:27-28). Jesus said that Spirit baptism would take place "not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). This means that it would happen soon, in a matter of days. In actuality it happened just 10 days later on the day of Pentecost.

Since the Spirit was promised to come in the future, this baptism was NOT something that had occurred previously. Therefore, the Church and the subsequent baptism of the Holy Spirit could only occur on the Day of Pentecost when the promise of the Holy Spirit was actually given (Acts 2:33 - "having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost"). The promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14; Eph. 1:13) was connected with the Day of Pentecost and this is when the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit occurred to initially form the Church. People were initially "added" to the newly formed body of Christ. Ever since this time people are continually being added to the organism of the Church as they come to faith in Christ.

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 Church was initially formed and continues to grow by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This baptism immerses us in Christ and gives us a perfect standing in Christ before the Father (2 Cor. 5:21).

Acts 2:41

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were **added** unto them about three thousand souls.”

Acts 2:47

“Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord **added** to the church daily such as should be saved.”

The expression “added” speaks of the Holy Spirit adding these people to the New Testament Church and becomes a key indicator of when the baptizing work of the Spirit initially began. It began on the Day of Pentecost. This is when the Church was formed. Although some like to apply these verses to Church membership in the local assemblies they are actually teaching the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit that adds us to the true Church - the “church of the firstborn” (Heb. 12:23). We need membership in the true Church by the baptism of the Holy Spirit before we become a member of any local church.

In summary of this point, there can be no Church without the coming of the Holy Spirit and His baptizing ministry. This means there could be no Church in the Old Testament, or during the days of Jesus on earth, since Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would come only *after* He left planet earth and ascended to Heaven. This is when the Spirit would perform His baptizing work and form the Church.

John 16:7

“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.”

John 14:16

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.”

Without the Spirit’s arrival there could be no baptizing work and no Church. The Holy Spirit would be sent only *after* Christ’s departure. The promise of



the Spirit's arrival and His baptizing ministry into Christ would bring a new awareness of Christ's life to every believer.

John 14:20

“At that day (Pentecost) ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.”

#### **4. When Peter said it began**

Peter later talks about Pentecost as “the beginning” of the Church.

Acts 11:15-17

“And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them (The Gentiles), as on us **at the beginning** (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 Ghost (on the Day of Pentecost). Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift (the Holy Spirit – Acts 10:45) as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

Peter confirms in unmistakable terms that the Holy Spirit was given on the Day of Pentecost as a gift and this is when His baptizing ministry began, where He would save and create the Church. There should be no question regarding when the Church began. The Bible tells us when it began in plain language.

The Church began in Acts chapter 2. As time progressed, the true nature of the church came to be understood more and more, especially with the help of truths revealed by Paul. The body of Christ existed from the time of Pentecost even though it was little understood. It took *progressive revelation* to bring believers more light and more understanding. Here are some of our comments from Acts chapter 3:

Dr. John Whitcomb and George Zeller co-authored a study of the Book of Acts. Their comments are worthy to note. “It is important to understand the complexities of the book of Acts in relation to God's two programs, one with respect to the nation Israel which in this chapter involved the reoffer of the Kingdom, and the other with respect to the Church, a called-out body of believers eventually made up of saints from all nations. One program would be genuinely offered but then postponed in light of Israel's rejection

(climaxing with Stephen's murder in Acts 7). The other program, the Church, started obscurely, but became more and more understood as time went on. The Lord knew what He was doing from the beginning, but His people had to gradually learn these things. The Lord predicted the future building of the Church in Matthew 16:18, and at that time Peter and the other disciples had little idea what the Lord meant. The same was true of what the Lord said about the Church in Matthew 18:17. The Lord had much that He wanted to teach the disciples about the Church but they were not able to bear these truths prior to the cross, and even for some time after the resurrection (John 16:12). Church truths, in germ form, were presented by the Saviour in the Upper Room Discourse (John chapters 13-17), but even these teachings were not fully understood by the disciples at the time.

“The unveiling of the new Church program would gradually take place as these truths would be revealed in large part by the Apostle Paul. Paul taught that both Jews and Gentiles without distinction would become full-fledged members of the body and bride of Christ (Ephesians chapter 3, etc.). Later in Acts it would be revealed by James that God's new program would involve God visiting the nations to call out a people for His Name (Acts 15:14) and that this would be followed by God's Kingdom program detailed by all the prophets (Acts 15:15-16). Early on, Peter struggled with these things, as did many of his fellow disciples. It required a drastic object lesson in Acts 10 to help Peter understand a basic fact that the gospel was to go to the Gentiles. Later in his life, Peter confessed that there were many things which Paul wrote which were "hard to be understood" (2 Pet. 3:16), undoubtedly including many things that related to Church truth.”

### **A Lively Debate**

Below is some back-and-forth email response on the issue of when the church began. Some Baptists hold the position that the Church had to begin with Christ, when He blew the Holy Spirit into the life of the apostles (John 20:22), since He is said to be the Head of the Church. However, this reasoning cannot be supported by the clear facts of Scripture. This was a good spirited debate over this matter and involved no animosity. To the contrary, we both enjoyed interacting together. The **red** is the questions and conclusions of a parishioner while my response follows in the **black**. Let's use this as a teaching tool that might help us to understand when the Church began.

Your take on Acts 2:41 as the baptism mentioned there on Sunday night as a 'dry' or 'Spirit' baptism seems to contradict what you have written in numerous other articles on baptism including the references in the Constitution and Church Membership documents. Were you referring to baptism in Acts 2:41 as having a dual meaning or have you changed your understanding to believe that the passage exclusively presents a dry baptism position? Just curious as to whether I am grasping what you are presenting correctly.

Have a great day in the Lord

The mention of "baptized" in Acts 2:41 is definitely referring to WATER baptism. What I was referring to about some of my "Baptist buddies" is that they believe the word "added" (unto them) refers to being added to the local church membership. But it most definitely refers to the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit adding the initial believers to the Body of Christ, the New Testament Church, as in Acts 5:14 – "And believers were more **added to the Lord**" (meaning they were brought into union with Christ and grafted into the New Testament Body of Christ – the Church). Sorry if I did not make it clear enough. Of course, their water baptism was descriptive of their Spirit baptism – being "added" to "the general assembly and church of the firstborn" – Heb. 12:23). I think such a verse like Acts 2:41 proves that water baptism portrays Spirit baptism – being added to the Lord. It is a very beautiful picture.

Thanks for Your Interest and Love for the Bible (and support of the Church),  
Pastor

Totally agree that water "baptism" is not necessary to be included in the organism (although as you also believe should be a natural response as which, I believe, Mark 16:16 alludes to). I also agree with you that it proves the sincerity of one who professes to know Christ as an outward proof of obedience. But, I suppose we will have to differ on Acts 2:41 as I hold that it is perfect example of the how a believer step-by-step becomes a part of the local assembly. □

Have a great day in the Lord

Round Two! (:

I do agree with what you say – "example." But as far as interpretation, the "adding" is definitely to the ORGANISM since this is what was happening on

Pentecost as clarified by other texts (Acts 5:14; 11:16 – see Peter’s description of what happened. He was NOT talking about a “church membership requirement”). Think of this also; **they would not have had time to draw up any requirements for church membership when all of this was happening.** I think many avid dispensationalists miss the great dispensational happening of Pentecost in order to try and assume something that is not taught in Acts 2:41. The emphasis is on being welded together in the Body of Christ which was prophetically spoken by Jesus (John 14:16) and then confirmed by Peter (Acts 2:33; 11:16) and taught in the epistles (1 Cor. 12:13).

By the baptism of the Holy Spirit these believers were “added” to the ORGANISM (Christ’s body) of which water baptism (“baptized”) is a beautiful picture – Acts 2:41. They were joined to the living Christ (Gal. 2:20 - which is His Church – Col. 1:18) and as an outward demonstration of this glorious spiritual transaction they were now being baptized in water to identify with Christ in the new work that was taking place (God blessing Gentiles with Jews – unheard of!!). A new people, a new work, a new body, a new relationship with Christ of which water baptism was a picture and sign. Why wouldn’t every Christian want to be baptized!

Acts 2:47, “And the Lord added to the church daily **such as should be saved**” (not as “such should become church members of the local church in Jerusalem” since not everyone was from Jerusalem!). **This is a saving statement – not a church-membership-role statement.** They were indeed “**added to the Lord**” (Acts 5:14) – the one true Church by the “**one baptism**” (Eph. 4:5) of the Holy Spirit. Again, Peter verifies that this is what took place on Pentecost – “**but ye shall be baptized by the Holy Ghost**” (Acts 11:16). He mentions nothing about a church-membership-role requirement in Acts 2:41. I have to take Peter’s word for it and not try and force some interpretation into the Acts 2:41 text. We must view this verse dispensationally and not a verse that teaches church polity. I think there is more than enough contextual evidence to verify *what* was happening and *why* the people were being baptized. They were placed into the Body of Christ (the work of Pentecost) and then baptized (the new sign of identification to Christ and the new work of God – His Church). If we miss this we are missing one of the great happenings of history. Tis a glorious Church!

Pastor

Ok, then what you are saying is that Acts 2:41 cannot be used to justify “believers baptism” as a requirement for local church membership, if I am understanding you correctly. What are your other texts to prove requirement of “Believers Baptism” for local church membership that you would use, since Acts 2:41 has been a standard reference by “Baptist and Other Independents”?

The Acts record does not talk about requirements for church membership. However, most Baptists and independents (like ourselves) do require baptism for church membership based upon the Great Commission passages and the example of believers being baptized (in the book of Acts) to prove their sincerity in wanting to follow Christ (Luke 9:23). If someone does NOT want to be obedient to Christ, by taking the first step (baptism) in order to demonstrate their discipleship and desire to obey Him, then they should not be welcomed into a church membership. Why? Because their actions are saying, “I don’t want to obey and follow Christ.”

Based upon the meaning of baptism (identification with Christ and His cause) and the example of baptism (being baptized as a follower of Christ) one should be baptized to reveal to an assembly that they are obedient Christians. Church members are not perfect but they should be willing and ready to identify with Christ and be obedient to His cause. Baptism was very important and when looking at the Scriptures there really is no example of “unbaptized Christians” since it was the sign of Christianity and all true followers of Christ. Based upon these observations it’s only natural to require baptism as necessary for local church membership (the organization) but not necessary for being added to the Body of Christ (the organism) which is what was taking place on Pentecost.

Pastor

Then **they** that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *[unto them]* about three thousand souls. And **they** continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers - Acts 2:41,42 .... And **they**, continuing daily with one accord **in the temple** (local assembly), and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart- Acts 2:46

There were of course no formal written requirements for official church membership, but obviously the known requirement (as previously demonstrated by the disciples baptizing during Jesus' ministry) to join the assembly was the proof of the conversion as evidenced by the willingness to follow public water baptism. The description and practices that the they participated in were all done in the local assembly not the universal organism, hence an evidence to v.41 as to a local assembly. What is interesting to note is that they, hold onto your seat ;), were added to an already existing local assembly "And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)" – Acts 1:15.

In reality the Church comprising of the Jewish disciples already was in place without the Gentiles. During the transitional period, technically the church was in place yet was not inaugurated until the day of Pentecost when the sign gift was given by the Lord as a witness to the Jews that this was indeed the new work and covenant that they were to obey. The Holy Spirit's ministry of comforter, convictor and sealer (his presence) was given in John 20:22 yet the power by visible witness (Acts 2:16-18) was to come at the day of Pentecost (the candles were lit and the birth of the Church celebrated)." Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (or *were being saved*)." - Acts 2:47 I will have to lean in the direction that this is still speaking of the events taking place at the Jerusalem Church as the whole narrative by Luke discusses Pentecost and the following events at Jerusalem, although the new believers, of course, were added to the organism as well.

I will now duck and take cover!!!

Nice try! The assembly that you say the disciples were added to (Acts 1:15) was not the Church since it had not yet been formed. They were still waiting for the arrival of the Spirit and His baptizing work (Acts 1:4-5) which is what forms the Church. Therefore, they could NOT be a local church assembly in any sense prior to the formation of the Church. **The ORGANISM must first be formed before the ORGANIZATION is formed.**

You must *assume* that the Church was already formed and in existence (John 20:22) to make a better argument for your organizational and "adding to the local church" position of Acts 2:41. What happened in John 20:22 was at best a *prelude* to the Pentecostal blessing or anticipation of the coming

event. However, it was not the *formation* of the Church. How do I know? **It's because the Holy Spirit came again to indwell the disciples at Pentecost. Jesus taught that when the Church was formed His disciples would receive the Holy Spirit "forever" (John 14:16) in the new dawning age.** Therefore, what happened to the disciples in John 20:22 was a pre-Pentecostal blessing of empowerment, a temporary infusion of the Spirit's ministry, since He would come again (Acts 1:8).

This "breathing" event (John 20:22) could NOT be the formation of the Church. There would NOT be two comings of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 2:4, 11:15). Yes, the "candle was lit" (I like your expression) but the birth of the Church could only occur when the Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost (50 days later) to permanently indwell His disciples (Luke 24:49). Since the disciples did not actually receive the Holy Spirit until the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:8; 2:1–3), this statement in John 20:22 must be understood as a pledge on Christ's part that the Holy Spirit would be coming. In other words, Christ through a puff of breath declared in a visible figure (picture) of what would happen to them at Pentecost. Jesus' actions indicated the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was about to occur, which would complete the transition between the Old and New covenants. When Jesus breathed on them it was a powerful illustration that was rich with meaning since the Holy Spirit is pictured in Ezekiel 37:9–14 as God's breath. This gesture by Christ was an emphatic affirmation of His deity.

It may be that this act of breathing on the disciples was merely some kind of prophecy or a symbolic act (picture or reenactment of the Spirit's coming) in anticipation of the Spirit's ultimate arrival on Pentecost. In other words, Jesus was performing some kind of acted-out parable – "he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Those who hold this view will mention that He did not say, *Receive him at this very moment*. He said in effect: *realize that my breath, my life, my word will be in the Holy Spirit*. We've seen this before in John 14. Jesus said in John 14:18, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." In other words, the risen and living Jesus would one day come to His disciples in the person of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus has breathed on the disciples He may have only been giving the disciples some type of symbolic demonstration of what it would be like when the Spirit came. This blowing on the disciples was only a demonstration of what was about to occur on the Day of Pentecost, with the arrival of the Spirit, when He came as "a rushing mighty wind" (Acts 2:2).

We might conclude that this breathing of the Holy Spirit, a symbolic demonstration, was only a *pledge* or a *promise* that wasn't fulfilled until the day of Pentecost. In fact, all you have to do is look at the disciples to know that they hadn't received the Holy Spirit until Pentecost. In John 20, we discover that eight days later they were found hiding. They were full of fear and they were in a locked room. This is more than a week after He breathed on them, and more than a week after He promised them, and they hadn't gone anywhere or done anything that would manifest the Spirit's presence. If this blowing on the disciples was only a demonstration of what was about to occur, then the whole idea that the Church began in John 20:22 would have to be dismissed and have no Biblical basis.

One thing is certain; if the disciples did receive the Spirit, it could only be similar to the way Old Testament saints received the Spirit prior to Pentecost. In other words, it would be a temporary indwelling until Pentecost similar to the indwelling of the Spirit in Old Testament times as with Saul and David, an indwelling that could be removed (Ps. 51:10-11, Luke 11:13). At Pentecost, when the church began, the Spirit's indwelling became permanent as Jesus promised (John 14:16).

You say, "technically" the Church was already formed and then "celebrated" on Pentecost. This simply cannot be based upon the simple facts. The Church could not in any way be formed in a technical sense since the Spirit had not yet officially arrived (Acts 1:4), since Pentecost typically fulfills its beginning according to the Jewish feast days (Acts 2:1), since the wind, tongues of fire, and speaking in tongues, along with Peter's own words (Acts 11:16), verify when it began (Acts 2:33). What does "added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14) mean? It can only mean one thing, the formation of the Body of Christ (people united to Christ in the organism). The "addition" taking place as explained in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14) is a dispensational work of the Holy Spirit. When the "Lord" **adds saved people to the Church** (Acts 2:47) it is not to a membership roll but to an ORGANISM. When "people" add others to the church membership or roll it is ORGANIZATIONAL and is part of church polity.

The dispensational (not organizational) progression of "adding" to the ORGANISM is easy to see. It began at Pentecost (Acts 2) then spread to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and finally to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10). Jesus predicted the Spirit's arrival on Pentecost (John 14:16-20), the disciples and the 120 were waiting for this arrival and baptizing work ("wait



for the promise” - Acts 1:4), it took place on Pentecost as Peter mentions in his sermon (Acts 2:33), and reconfirms later (Acts 11:15-16). Peter talks about this day as **“the beginning”** of the Church. “And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them (The Gentiles), as on us **at the beginning** (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 Ghost (on the Day of Pentecost)**. Case closed! This is when the Church began. Peter says Pentecost was its beginning. I’ve got to stick with Peter on this one and not Baptist Theology.

You also mention how the **“Spirit’s ministry of comforter, convictor and sealer (his presence) was given in John 20:22 yet the power by visible witness (Acts 2:16-18) was to come at the day of Pentecost.”** This is an unwarranted dichotomy or division of the Spirit’s work and ministry. Why would our Lord only give part of the Spirit’s blessing? If the Spirit indwells them then certainly they would also possess His promised power of the Spirit!

George Zeller correctly observes: “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.”

Acts 1:5

“For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”

Jesus predicted when the Spirit baptism would occur. He was looking ahead to the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit which would occur for the first time on the Day of Pentecost and create the Church (Gal. 3:27-28). Jesus said that Spirit baptism would take place “not many days hence.” This means that it would happen soon, in a matter of days. In actuality it happened just 10 days later on the day of Pentecost. This baptism was not something that had occurred previously. Therefore, the baptism of the Holy Spirit could only occur on the Day of Pentecost when the promise of the Holy Spirit was actually given (Acts 2:33 - “having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost”). The promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14; Eph. 1:13) was connected with the Day of Pentecost and this is when the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit occurred to initially form the Church. People were saved and “added” to the newly formed body of Christ (Acts 2:41, 47). Ever since this time

people are continually being added to the organism of the Church as they come to faith in Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

Of course, there is important truth to gather organizationally concerning the church family and services (Acts 2:42). However, let us not miss the momentous occasion and what was occurring on Pentecost.

Pastor

Did not see this till this morning since it is my work email (It has been a good conversation) ... Here is another shot.....But, this presentation is my own view, as I have not (to this date) read nor heard of any discussion dealing with Pentecost and John 20:22. The typical "Baptist" (albeit not all Baptists) Theology attempts to trace the beginning of the Church to Matthew 16:18,19 to which I do not espouse since Christ was still present bodily. Although, I am without apology a Biblicist Baptist, I believe in the Baptist (and Biblical) Distinctive of the "I" in the acronym for "BAPTIST" of "Individual Soul Liberty" (every believer has the freedom to interpret and apply the scripture as they believe the Lord leads yet is responsible and accountable to the Lord for those practices they affirm).

Rather than address each of your points, I will address some of the proof texts that you have utilized in your responses and give you the understanding that I take from them. Again I affirm that the church was DEFINITELY presented to the world on Pentecost but that in its infant, transitional form existed since the infusing of the Holy Spirit into the assembly of the disciples after Christ's resurrection. The commission to the disciples after Christ's resurrection is the same that is given to the Church (John 20:21-23; Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:47-49) and there was no different commission given after the day of Pentecost.

"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; [Even] the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be **in** you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; **but ye see me**: because I live, ye shall live also. At that **day** ye shall know that I [am] in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." - John 14:16-20

*The word day is used in both the narrow and broad sense (ex. The Day of the Lord) in scripture, as you know. I believe Christ is speaking of the day in a broad sense of the time following His crucifixion and resurrection when they would first see Him. John 20 and 21 fulfills this in keeping with the Gospel narrative of John.*

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace [be] unto you: as [my] Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on [them], and saith unto them, **Receive ye the Holy Ghost:** Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; [and] whose soever [sins] ye retain, they are retained - John 20:21-23.

*To say that this is a “temporary” infusion is an assumption as that is not mentioned, nor implied in the text. The promise of John 14:16 states that it would be forever. Why would Christ commission them and give them the Holy Spirit temporarily just to give the Holy Spirit again on Pentecost, just does not fit (Romans 11:29).*

And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with **one accord in Solomon's porch**. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the **more added to the Lord**, multitudes both of men and women.)- Acts 5:12-14

*A perfect example that those who were part of the assembly gathered at Solomon's Porch (the local church) were a regenerate membership since they were those which were “added to the Lord”. It is a more descriptive term employed by Luke of the assembly's regenerate state.*

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 Ghost**, he hath **shed forth this**, which ye now see and hear. - Acts 2:32, 33

*It can reference back to John 20:22 (“having received”) easily since not every believer who receives the Holy Spirit would demonstrate the temporary sign gift of tongues, especially if only the twelve were the ones that actually spoke with tongues on the actual day of Pentecost. The promise of the Holy Spirit was for all who believe.” Shed forth this” implies something added to the*

*already completed transaction or “a proof” to which the Jews always were looking (1 Cor 1:22).*

And the **apostles and brethren that were in Judaea** heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of **the circumcision** contended with him - Acts 11:1,2.

And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on **us at the beginning**. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as [he did] unto **us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ**; what was I, that I could withstand God? - Acts 11:15-17

*Whom is Peter addressing? The Apostles? The Circumcised Brethren? For if the sign gift fell on the Apostles only then he is giving a broad summary by using the term “us” when speaking to the group of brethren. “Beginning” can be defined in a broad sense, the days following the resurrection (the beginning stage if you will), or the exact day of Pentecost particular, either fits. I lean toward the broad sense.*

*I try to follow, I believe, the same rule as you do even if we seem to come to different conclusions - “WHEN THE PLAIN SENSE OF SCRIPTURE MAKES COMMON SENSE, SEEK NO OTHER SENSE; THEREFORE, TAKE EVERY WORD AT ITS PRIMARY, ORDINARY, USUAL, LITERAL MEANING UNLESS THE FACTS OF THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT, STUDIED IN THE LIGHT OF RELATED PASSAGES AND AXIOMATIC AND FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS INDICATE CLEARLY OTHERWISE.”*

I do not for one moment doubt that you are following the same hermeneutical rules of interpretation. If we would not be on the same hermeneutical page, I doubt that we would be fellowshiping together in the same church! Nor am I downgrading Baptists by any means. In fact, I know many independent Baptists who hold the same Biblical position that I do.

This is simply healthy interaction and discussion that should be able to be done in a fundamental, separatist, LOCAL church setting. We can disagree about certain things without being big-headed and I know this is not your attitude. But as you admit, there have been a Baptist interpretation that

neither one of us can fully agree with in relationship to the origin of the Church (Matt. 16:18-19) which is clearly placed in the future sense (“I will build”). Those who espouse this view can come dangerously close to “ultra” (extreme) Dispensationalism regarding two separate Churches.

I have given you what seems to be a plausible explanation of what was taking place in John 20:22 and Acts 2. I also think that my analysis of the dispensational beginning of the Church in Acts 2 cannot be satisfactorily undone in respect to the Biblical evidence that is presented. It cannot be dismissed without very clear exegetical explanations.

Here are my conclusions to your analysis.

**The church BEGAN on Pentecost according the clearly stated facts; it was not merely PRESENTED as you argue. There could be no “infant” or “transitional” form until it was born.** Only after the Church was born were there transitional occurrences taking place (receiving the Holy Spirit with laying on of hands, tongues, etc.).

I will turn the tables on you since I like your analogy. The PRESENTATION (preview) of the Church was given in John 20:22 but the BIRTHDAY took place in Acts 2. The ultrasound was given in John 20:22 but then the actual birth took place 50 days later in fulfillment of the Feast Day of Pentecost. Carl Laney says, “It would seem likely that this bestowal of the gift of the Spirit was a preliminary provision for the disciples during the fifty days until Pentecost.” The Holy Spirit was given in anticipation and as an earnest (down payment) of the great Pentecostal blessing.

I concede that a general Great Commission can be viewed in all the Gospel accounts but this should not override anything concerning the actual commencement of the Church. We certainly don’t believe we receive the Holy Spirit in any manner in which the disciples did, since Christ is no longer on earth breathing the Holy Spirit upon us. Nor do we believe that we have the sign gifts as the apostles did (Mark 16:20) during the infant days of the Church *even though these were linked with the initial Great Commission context.* The fact that the Great Commission was given to the disciples and then this unique display was given to them concerning the Holy Spirit (John 20:22) should not override the reality of when the Church began.

**They were not waiting (Acts 1:4-5) for the PRESENTATION of the Church but the permanent indwelling of the Spirit. This is the stated**

**facts.** If the permanent indwelling of the Spirit in relationship to Christ's promise (John 14:16) occurred prior to Pentecost (John 20:22) then there would be no need for the disciples to be waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit as predicted. But they were, and they received the Spirit as evidenced by the tongue speaking. They would at Pentecost receive the Spirit in the *full measure* as predicted by Jesus.

You said, **"To say that this is a temporary infusion is an assumption as that is not mentioned, nor implied in the text."** **It is not an assumption but a Biblical fact that prior to Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon people for temporary acts of service but did not permanently indwell them (Ps. 51:11 – case in point).** Therefore, this temporary infusion is not an assumption but a continued process from days of old. John 20:22 was not a permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but just a temporary filling of the Holy Spirit to supply their spiritual needs up to Pentecost, just like many Old Testament saints had for a short time such as Samson, John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), Elizabeth (Luke 1:41), Zacharias (Luke 1:61) and Simeon (Luke 2:25). Of course, these gospel passages were not intended to be the norm for today.

Elmer Towns is correct when observing: Throughout the Old Testament the coming of the Holy Spirit is portrayed through the act of God breathing upon the one receiving the Spirit (see Ezekiel 37:5). ... Here they received the Holy Spirit to the degree that men received the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, but it did not involve the baptism, fullness, or outpouring of the Holy Spirit which came at Pentecost and is classified as new Testament reality." This special bestowment of the Holy Spirit was given in view of the glorious prospect of the permanent residency of the Spirit on Pentecost. It was a prelude (not the full outpouring – Acts 2:16-21) to what the disciples could expect when the Spirit would come and take up permanent residency and empower them for witnessing (Acts 1:8). As you say, "the candle was lit."

You also stated: **"Why would Christ commission them and give them the Holy Spirit temporarily just to give the Holy Spirit again on Pentecost, just does not fit (Romans 11:29)."**

This is your reasoning and your illustrative verse (Rom. 11:29) can only be applied if the Church actually did begin when you say it did (John 20:22). The temporary abode of the Holy Spirit in the lives of saints occurred for

thousands of years prior to Pentecost. What was new about the Age of the Spirit (Church Age) was the permanent indwelling (“with you” to “in you” – John 14:17 – one of the important dispensational distinctions of the Bible). It all does fit if you accept the clear explanation of when the Church actually began.

Your analysis of the broad term of “that day” (John 14:20) is lacking and misapplied in this instance regarding the simple facts being presented. Yes, in a prophetic sense the Day of the Lord can refer to the events of judgment (seven years) and Christ’s actual Second Coming. However, this “day” analogy is foreign to the context and furthermore Paul often uses “that day” in reference to one specific event (2 Tim. 1:12). Hence, Jesus was speaking about a specific event (Pentecost) – not a broad event. As stated above, this particular day could only be a reference to Pentecost. “That” is a demonstrative pronoun used to distinguish one object from another and would be referring to a specific day – not to a broad spectrum of time.

Christ’s words “**I will come to you**” in the greater context of the Spirit’s arrival refers to the time when both the Father and Son would be revealed to the disciples through the presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14:23 – “**we will come unto him, and make our abode with him**”). This is also seen in the Great Commission statement (“lo, I am with you alway” - Matt. 28:20). Although Christ would leave His disciples physically and visibly He would return to them spiritually at Pentecost (John 14:18). This could only occur after His ascension, when Christ was physically absent, and when the Spirit was promised to come (Acts 1:4-5). **According to Christ’s own words, the Spirit’s arrival would only occur after Christ ascended to the Father (John 13:33; 14:2, 25-26, 28) canceling out the possibility of any Church beginning during Christ’s post-resurrection ministry.** According to Christ’s words, the Church could only begin post-ascension and would begin at Pentecost.

The expression “**but ye see me**” may be a reference to Christ’s resurrection which gave the disciples a promise of their own resurrection (John 14:19). This wonderful promise may have been given in view of Christ’s departure to the Father (the ascension). Christ reminds them that He would first visit with them, show Himself to them (“many infallible proofs” - Acts 1:3), and give them the promise of their own resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23) before He would bodily depart and be absent from the earth. Of course, this would bring great hope to their hearts.

Others suggest that the phrase “but ye see me” has more of a spiritual reference of seeing Christ manifested to them through the eyes of faith (a continued vision) while the unsaved would not have any realization of His presence. *They would continue to see Him by means of the Spirit.* They would know Him more richly, more deeply, more truly *after the Day of Pentecost* than before. Their lives would come alive spiritually by the provision and presence of the Spirit, in the New Testament sense, as the life of Jesus Christ is released in them (Phil. 3:10).

In short, Christ would live in them (“Christ liveth in me” – Gal. 2:20) after His resurrection, when He comes to dwell in them (John 14:17) on the Day of Pentecost by means of the Spirit’s presence, revealing Christ’s life to them in a new dynamic way (John 14:20, 16:13-14). Because Christ would rise from the dead He would come back to live within them and bring to them a new way of life that was attached to Him (John 15:1-5; Phil. 1:21). All of this is wonderful to contemplate. However, if one takes this statement (“but ye see me”) as a reference to seeing Christ after His resurrection, it still does not confirm that the Church actually began after Christ’s resurrection (John 20:22) and prior to Pentecost.

We know this is true, since John 14:20 (“**At that day**”) can only be referring to Pentecost, when the Spirit would create the new relationship between Christ and His disciples (“ye in me, and I in you”). The “ye in me” and “I in you” relationship could only occur *when Christ was no longer bodily present on earth*. This was the clear teaching of John 14. **This new relationship was only promised after Christ’s departure (ascension) which indicates the timing of the Spirit’s arrival (Pentecost) and when this new relationship would occur.** Christ would NOT be in their midst when this spiritual relationship happened but with the Father as indicated (“**I go unto the Father**” – vs. 28).

The icing on the cake to when the church began is Ephesians 1:19-23 which expressly declares that Jesus would only become the Head of the Church after His ascension. Ephesians 1:19-23 declares: “And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, **when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places**, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: 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.”

**There could not be a Church until Christ ascended to the Father and became its Head. A body cannot live without its head!** Christ became Head over the Church when He was finally exalted in Heaven with the Father and this headship relationship came into existence at Pentecost. In short, the Church could not exist prior to His ascension into Glory. Therefore, it began on Pentecost – not in John 20:22.

You also state: “A perfect example that those who were part of the assembly gathered at Solomon’s Porch (the local church) were a regenerate membership since they were those which were “added to the Lord”. It is a more descriptive term employed by Luke of the assembly’s regenerate state.”

I used this reference (Acts 5:14) as an *illustration* of what happened back in Acts 2:41 and 47 but we must both remember that it is in brackets () as you indicate. However, the translators seemed to have captured the truth about what was occurring regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit adding the saints to the Church. Again, the term “adding” is best understood as believers being added to the Body of Christ instead of being a veiled reference to regeneration or regenerate local church membership. **The “adding” is something the Lord does (“The Lord added to the church” - Acts 2:47) in relationship to the promise of the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:39) – not regeneration. The Lord does not add us to local church membership (men do this) but He does add us to the Body of Christ (the organism) via the baptism of the Spirit.**

You then ask: “Whom is Peter addressing? The Apostles? The Circumcised Brethren? For if the sign gift fell on the Apostles only then he is giving a broad summary by using the term “us” when speaking to the group of brethren. “Beginning” can be defined in a broad sense, the days following the resurrection (the beginning stage if you will), or the exact day of Pentecost particular, either fits. I lean toward the broad sense.”

You seem to be looking for a needle in a haystack at this point.

Acts 11:14-16

“Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them (the Gentiles), as on us at the beginning. 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 Ghost.”

First, Peter is clearly teaching that the Holy Spirit was received by the Gentiles (Acts 11:18 – “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life”). This is a reference to a larger group of people. Second, the phrase “**as on us at the beginning**” would suggest that it too was referencing the Jewish brethren in an inclusive sense (disciples and other Jewish brethren at Pentecost – Acts 2). Even if Peter is only talking about the disciples, it is a moot point, since all Scripture elsewhere points to Pentecost as the beginning of the Spirit’s arrival as Peter clearly indicates by the statement, “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 Ghost.” **This same statement was given by Luke in Acts 1:5 as the people waited for the Spirit’s arrival on Pentecost.** This is a key indication to what Peter was referencing and the timing of the Spirit’s arrival.

Putting two and two together and without trying to *generalize* a beginning somewhere else, one would come to the right conclusion as to when the Church began – Pentecost. I have never heard of something “beginning” in a “broad sense” as you state. Peter is talking about a definite beginning marked in time (God’s time – Pentecost – when they were baptized by the Spirit as promised - Acts 1:5).

It seems that God intended to paint a clear picture concerning when the Church began with the stated facts that He has given to us in His Word. We must be careful we don’t miss the plain and main things in trying to support a proposition that does not square with the basic teachings that are being presented. Anyway, these are my thoughts on the matter. If I keep corresponding I will be repeating myself and the things that I’ve already conveyed. Any difference of opinion on this matter should not divide us nor affect our fellowship around the written Word in our independent LOCAL church ministry (Baptist/Bible). It’s good and refreshing to talk about the things of the Word.

By the way, there is also an “I” (Individual Soul Liberty) in the acronym Bible – (:

Acronyms do not make a certain name like “Baptist” magical but they are fun to play around with.

I can do the same with the Word Bible.

**B**iblical authority and separation

**I**ndependent (autonomous) and Individual soul liberty

**B**elievers are priests, baptized by immersion

**L**imit of two ordinances (baptism and Communion) and offices (Pastor and Deacon)

**E**ssential doctrine (Virgin birth, blood of Christ, Resurrection of Christ, Second Coming)

Admittedly, it sings a little better when using the word Baptist – (:

Pastor