

Sunday, May 5, 2024 am

WHEN DID THE CHURCH BEGIN?

In our recent meeting with Micky Galloway, he presented some fundamental lessons. 3 of those lessons dealt with the church. We addressed how the church is precious and what the church needs now. There was also a lesson entitled, "What the Angels Saw in the Church." This was a lesson based upon God's eternal plans concerning the church. Ephesians 3:10-11 is a verse that establishes this plan. In that lesson one of the points mentioned was that they saw the beginning of the church.

While that is a fundamental principle, today I would like to present a lesson developing the beginning of the church in greater detail.

I. The church in prophecy

- a. Establishing the eternal plans of God for the church is seen in various prophecies related to its establishment. True prophecy is only attributable to one who can foresee and control what will happen in the future. That is an attribute of deity. True prophecy is not vague. It includes specific details that move it beyond a mere guess. Isaiah 41:21-23 illustrates this as the LORD, speaking through Isaiah condemns the foolishness of idolatry that Israel was practicing.
- b. **Isaiah 2:1-2**, written around 725 BC and challenging the idolatrous corruption of Israel and Judah. After an initial plea for repentance, Isaiah speaks of a future time when God would establish his kingdom. In this text we note:
 - i. WHEN this would happen - "in the latter days" ("last days" – NASB).
 - ii. WHAT was going to happen – "the mountain of the LORD's house" would be established and be exalted
 - iii. WHO would it apply to – "all nations" and "many people" (not exclusive to Israel).
 - iv. WHERE would this happen – "Out of Zion." He also identifies it as Jerusalem. **Zion** was a name associated with Jerusalem and specifically, the temple mount (cf. Psalm 78:68-69, *But chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved. And He built His sanctuary like the heights, Like the earth which He has established forever.*) A term used 152 times in the OT, about 2/3 are found in prophetic literature and most of the other in the poetic books. It was mostly associated with Jerusalem AS THE PLACE where God met with His people.
 - v. WHAT would happen out of Zion – "the law" and "the word of the LORD" would go forth.
 - vi. NOTE: **Micah 4:1-2** also foretells this same prophecy.
 - vii. We will see the unfolding of these details in a few moments.
- c. **Daniel 2:44**, written around 600 BC by Daniel, a Hebrew servant taken captive from Jerusalem to Babylon where he would serve and influence kings. After being prepared for service, we read of a dream that Nebuchadnezzar had that bothered him. He called for his magicians and wise men and ask for their interpretation. BUT he did not tell them the dream to test if they really were able to do their professed abilities. They failed and the king began ordering the execution of all these frauds. When they come to Daniel, he stops the killing and is able to both tell the king what his dream was and its interpretation.
 - i. Daniel 2:19-23 records that the vision and interpretation were revealed to him in a vision. He praises the God of heaven. Note vs. 20-22 – God is in control!

- ii. As Daniel appears before the king he gives credit to God in heaven in vs. 28 and then proceeds to tell what he had seen.
- iii. The dream (2:31-35) was about a statue with a head of gold, chest & arms of silver, a belly and thighs of bronze, and legs of iron, with its feet a mixture of iron and clay. Watching the image, he sees a stone “cut without hands” strike the image at its feet and shatters it into pieces and blows away like chaff on the threshing floor. The stone becomes a GREAT MOUNTAIN and fills the whole earth.
- iv. NOTE vs. 28 that these things would materialize “in the latter days”.
- v. The interpretation is found in vs. 36-44. The different elements represented 4 different kingdoms. Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold and would be followed by 3 other kingdoms inferior to his. The 4th kingdom (iron) would be strong and crush others. BUT it would be divided (the feet a mixture of clay and iron).
- vi. A study of ancient history reveals that there were 4 kingdoms beginning with Babylon.
 - 1. The head – Babylon – lasted from 626 to 539 BC
 - 2. The chest – Medo-Persian – lasted from 539 to 331 BC
 - 3. The belly and thighs – Macedonian - ~331 BC – assimilated into the Roman empire
 - 4. The legs & feet – Roman empire – 63 BC – into the 1st century AD & beyond.
- vii. Vs. 44, Daniel declares CLEARLY that “in the days of these kings” (that 4th kingdom), *“the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and that kingdom will not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and shall stand forever.”*
- viii. NOTE: Only Daniel establishes this time frame. As you study further into Daniel you find some of the details of these various kingdoms further developed and prophesied about.
- d. **Joel 2:28-32.** Joel is one of the prophets that we do not have a specific date, but he is believed by most to be one of the earliest written prophets (of the books of the prophets). Like other prophets he addresses “the day of the Lord” (reference to a day of judgment of which there were several in scripture). And thus he calls for Israel to repent and they would be restored. In our text, Joel gives specific details about a coming time of deliverance that would be different.
 - i. WHEN - It would happen “afterward”
 - ii. WHAT – The Spirit of the Lord would be poured out
 - iii. WHO – on all flesh. It would be a time of prophecy and miracles and judgment.
 - iv. WHAT – the ultimate result would be salvation available to all flesh, “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”
 - v. WHERE – in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem “there shall be deliverance.”
- e. We have seen here 4 prophecies that are related to establishment of the church/kingdom and how it would be different.

II. The church in the plans of Jesus

- a. Based on the teachings of Jesus, the church was NOT yet established while He was on earth.
- b. Matthew 3:1-2, John the Baptist as he begins preaching declares, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
 - i. John the Baptist was a forerunner to Jesus to prepare the way for Him. His birth and coming work are addressed in Luke 1. AND he was prophesied – Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1, 4:5-6.
 - ii. NOTE that he is declaring the kingdom is “at hand”. It is near but not yet established.

- c. Matthew 4:17, as Jesus began His ministry, He preached the same thing. Note Mark 1:15, Jesus was preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and saying, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”*
- d. Matthew 6:9-10, as Jesus taught HOW to pray (the “model prayer”), it was to pray, “Your kingdom come” implying it was yet future.
- e. Matthew 10:7, as He sent out the twelve, their message, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand”
- f. Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus stated that He would build His church and give His disciples, “the keys to the kingdom of heaven.” Again, the timeframe is yet future but VERY soon after He said this.
 - i. While another lesson within itself, we see in this text that the church/kingdom were actually one and the same (describing different attributes of God’s kingdom).
 - ii. Note Matthew 16:28, shortly after the above, Matthew records Jesus plainly declaring, *“Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.”* Jesus here notes that the kingdom was coming (still future). Also, this LIMITS the time of His kingdom to that generation.
NOTE: This within itself defeats various concepts associated with the premillennial belief that the kingdom is yet future.
- g. Acts 1:4-8, a final future declaration. Jesus is risen and about to ascend back to heaven. In His final earthly conversation with the apostles, he declares the timing of the kingdom is VERY near. Note that they asked Him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” They see it as FURUTRE! Jesus instructs them to go to Jerusalem and WAIT. For what? The kingdom! He also declares what will happen as the kingdom begins.

III. **The church established – Acts 2**

- a. Acts 2 records the beginning of the church/kingdom. We find:
 - i. The apostles are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to speak in tongues.
 - ii. WHAT - As Peter preaches he declares, “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel...” (Acts 2:16ff). He then quotes Joel 2:28-32 as mentioned above.
 - iii. WHEN - 2:17 - IN that quote we find, “the last days”. This ties it to Joel as well as Isaiah 2:2, Micah 4:1, Daniel 2:44 – “in the days of these kings”, and “the coming days” of Jeremiah 31.
 - iv. WHERE - Note also where we are at in Acts 2 – Jerusalem (Zion) - (1:12, 2:5). This ties it to Isaiah 2:3, Micah 4:2 & Joel 2:32
 - v. WHEN - ROME – Daniel 2:44 addressed 4 kingdoms. The events of Acts 2 occur during the Roman Empire, the 4TH Kingdom. Jerusalem IS under Roman rule as we can see in the gospels and Acts.
 - vi. WHAT HAPPENED - It was a time of great signs – Peter notes that what Joel prophesied was happening then. Documenting its fulfillment.
 - vii. Acts 2:31-36 as Peter concludes this sermon, we find Jesus exalted to the right hand of God in heaven and He has been made “both Lord and Christ”. Jesus is REIGNING!
 - viii. CONSIDERING the prophecies and the events of Acts 2, the NECESSARY CONCLUSION that we must reach is that this was the day the church/kingdom began.

IV. **The Church/Kingdom in existence**

- a. Following Acts 2, the church & kingdom when addressed are spoken of as being in existence.
- b. Act 2:47 (KJV, NKJV) notes that the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Other translations say, “adding to their number daily” (NASB). This is a clear implication that something started on that day.

- c. Acts 20:28 – the church was purchased with His own blood. Paul describes it as being in existence.
- d. The various letters written to churches with instructions make it clear the church has been established. NOTE: This is readily accepted by most who believe in Jesus.
- e. BUT the kingdom is also in existence. Colossians 1:13 speaks of us being “*conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of His love.*”
- f. Hebrews 12:28 speaks in the present tense, *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.* NOTE that this kingdom “cannot be shaken”. Recall the prophecy of Daniel 2:44 which spoke of God setting up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed and “shall stand forever.”
- g. The institution of the Lord’s Supper helps us understand some of these things.
 - i. Matthew 26:26-29, as Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He declared concerning the cup which represented His blood, *But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.*” NOTE: The kingdom is yet future. AND He declares He would drink with them (fellowship) IN His Father’s kingdom (when it was in existence).
 - ii. 1 Corinthians 10:16 – WHEN we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we are doing so IN FELLOWSHIP with Christ (His sacrifice).
 - iii. 1 Corinthians 11:17-26ff. Addresses the proper partaking of the Lord’s Supper and that what they were doing was improper. In this text we note:
 - 1. It was when they came together as the church (18, 20-22). NOTE: This point bolsters the relationship of the church/kingdom as being the same and in existence at that time. Jesus spoke of it in His kingdom, Paul ties it to the church.
 - 2. Vs. 26, notes that they WERE to be partaking of this memorial, “til He comes”. That is a reference to His return. BUT also note that we are NOW to be partaking of this memorial (each week – Acts 20:7) until that time. BUT Jesus said He would drink it with us IN His kingdom (and not until). If His kingdom is yet future, why do we partake of it right now?
 - 3. The answer is we are NOW in His kingdom!

V. Why is this lesson important.

- a. This HELPS us understand why we are not under the Old Law anymore.
- b. Many churches trace their origins to times different than this. If a church is established later than Acts 2, it CANNOT be the ONE true church (Matthew 16:18 – How many did He build?).
- c. Premillennialism advocates that the church and kingdom are distinct. Some teach the church was an afterthought.

IN SUMMARY, we have shown texts that point TOWARD the church/kingdom; how in Acts 2 we find the fulfillment of these prophecies and texts AND noted how during the time of the writing of the NT (1st century), the church/kingdom WERE in existence. It remains in existence to this day and will do so until the Lord returns and delivers the kingdom to the father (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). We NEED to be a part of that church when He returns. What about you? Are you part of His kingdom/church. Have you obeyed the gospel and been added to that number? Have you remained faithful to Him? If not, how can we help you? Think about it!