

The Church

Study 1: Introduction

A. WHAT DOES THE WORD "CHURCH" MEAN?

1. The word for "church" is composed of two Greek words meaning "to call out - from." It came to mean a "gathering" or an "assembly."
2. As used in the New Testament it came to mean
 - a. A particular local assembly
 - 1) "the church of God at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2)
 - 2) "the church of the Thessalonians" (1 Thess. 1:1)
 - 3) "seven churches" (Rev. 1:11)
 - b. The assembly of all believers in Christ regardless of geography. (Usually called the Universal Church)
 - 1) Matthew 16:18 "I will build my church"
 - 2) Ephesians 1:22-23 Christ = "head over all things to the church, which is His body"
 - 3) Acts 20:28 "shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."
3. The following references have been properly placed in the section above with a short explanatory phrase. There are, of course scores of other references which could be added. Matthew 16:18; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Thess. 1:1; Rev. 1:11; Acts 20:28

B. WHEN DID THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL START AND WHEN WILL IT BE COMPLETED?

Years ago as a student at what was then Grace College of the Bible in Omaha, Nebraska, I taught an adult Sunday School class. I asked the class when the church began. One of the men answered, "With Abraham." Do you think he was right or wrong?

1. Looking at Scripture
 - a. Matthew 16:18 The church is still future. Jesus said, "I will build My church."
 - b. Acts 5:11 The church has already begun.
 - c. Acts 11:15 Refers to the beginning; includes speaking in tongues-- must mean the Day of Pentecost.
 - d. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 The church will be completed at the rapture.

2. An interesting question: Was Abraham in the church?
 - a. The best answer = No. Jesus began His church on the Day of Pentecost. It will be completed at the Rapture.
 - b. What if the church does begin with Abraham? (A branch of theology called "Covenant Theology" believes it did. What effect would this belief have on Israel?)
 - 1) Then the promises to Israel are fulfilled in the Church.
 - 2) The Church inherits all the promises made to the nation of Israel.
 - 3) God has no future for Israel as a nation.
 - 4) The re-emergence of Israel in the land of Palestine is an accident and has no significance in Biblical prophecy.
 - 5) There is no future literal kingdom of Christ upon the earth in which He reigns from Jerusalem.

3. How long will the Church exist?
 - a. Ephesians 5:25-27 uses the figure of marriage to picture the relationship of Jesus Christ to the Church. Christ is in the process of perfecting his church and will ultimately make her a glorious bride, perfect in holiness, one with which He can establish an eternity.
 - b. In Revelation 19:7, the invitation is given to the marriage of the Lamb and His bride, now prepared for the marriage, clothed in righteousness. The Millennial Kingdom of Christ on the earth evidently is a celebration of the marriage of Christ to His Church. (Evidently the imperfect Bride, the Church, will be perfectly prepared for the Bridegroom at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:13-15; 2 Cor. 5:10), which, presumably, follows immediately after the Rapture of the Church (John 14:1-6; 1 Cor. 15:50-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18) and before Christ's Second Advent in power to rule the earth (Rev. 19).)
 - c. Hebrews 12:22-23 speaks of the New Jerusalem, and the Church is seen as being in the New Jerusalem!
 - d. Revelation 21:14. The names of the 12 apostles are inscribed on the 12 foundation stones of the New Jerusalem.
 - e. What is your answer? The best answer is that the Church will exist throughout eternity as a recognizable entity in God's eternal program.

C. SOME THOUGHT-PROVOKING QUESTIONS

1. Are you a part of the Universal Church? Attending or being a member of a local church is not sufficient. If we trust in Jesus, we are forgiven and given eternal life (John 1:11-12; 3:16-18, 36; 5:24). The Holy Spirit places all believers into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13) which is the Church (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18).
2. What are you doing to prepare for your wedding? In other words, Jesus even now is in the process of purifying His Bride, the Church (Eph. 5:25-27). We will be totally purified at the Judgment Seat of Christ (see Scriptures above). But the more we work at purifying ourselves now (1 John 3:2-3), the less painful, it seems to me, will be the purification process at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

3. Why are there 24 elders in heaven (Rev. 4:4, 10, etc.)? We can't know for certain, but it seems to me the best answer is that twelve represent the Church and twelve represent Israel.

Introduction to the Church

This document serves as a Key to "A Study of the Church, Study 1: The Church, an Introduction." <http://www.wordexplain.com/PDFdocs/Church1bibstd.pdf>

Prepared by James T. Bartsch

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Email Contact: jbartsch@wordexplain.com