

The Distinctiveness of this Age of Grace

Did the Body of Christ begin at Pentecost?

What arguments are proposed that it did? -- " # " (And replies to those indications -- " ** ")

Christ said "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18).

** But, according to Psalm 22:22, Christ was ministering to the church (εκλησια in the Septuagint and in Heb. 2:12) during His post resurrection ministry -- and this was before Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost.

** On Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon them and they were filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4, 17, 18). This filling was to prepare the believers to witness effectively to the nation at this critical time -- a time when the kingdom was promised to them if, as a nation, they would repent and receive Christ as their Messiah and King (Acts 3:19 - 21). They had already received the Holy Spirit at John 20:22 -- after His resurrection, but before Pentecost. The reception of the Spirit awaited His glorification, "(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)" -- John 7:39. Christ's glorification, spoken of here, refers to His resurrection in a body of glory (Phil. 3:21) three days after His death, not to His public, visible, ascension in Acts one.

Acts 2:47 (KJV) relates that "the Lord added to the church daily," so there must have been a church to which they were added.

** Other translations put it, "the Lord was adding to their number daily." But, even accepting the KJV translation, the use of the word "church" here (and in Acts 5:11; 7:38; 8:1, 3; 9:31; 11:22, 26 and 12:1, 5) does not prove that the church which is His Body is in view. See the use of the word εκλησια in Acts 7:38; 19:29, 32, 41.

The baptism of the Spirit prophesied by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jno. 1:33) places believers into the Body (1 Cor. 12:13) and that baptism took place at Pentecost.

** The pentecostal baptism was accomplished by Christ as the baptizer while that of 1 Cor. 12:13 was accomplished by the Holy Spirit. The former resulted in the Spirit coming upon the believers, the latter in believers being placed into the Body of Christ. They are not the same.

The church must have been in existence before Paul was saved in Acts nine for, as an unbeliever, he persecuted the church of God (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13; Phil. 3:6).

** The title "church of God" may be applied to any congregation gathered to worship God in any dispensation. See Acts 7:38 where God's "church" was a congregation of Jews back in the days of Moses. Nowhere does it say that Paul persecuted those in the Body of Christ. Since the dispensation whose assembly (εκλησια) is called the Body of Christ began with Paul, and was intrusted to him for us, he was saved, and discontinued his persecution of believers, before the church of this age began.

Gal. 1:2 (NASB) tells us that after his conversion he preached the faith which once he

tried to destroy. Therefore his message was the same the twelve had received and preached from Pentecost on. Thus he had no new message or program.

** "The faith" in this verse does not refer to Paul's entire message or program but to the fact that Christ is the Messiah and has been raised from the dead -- truths common to both the kingdom church and the Body church. See Acts 23:6; 24:1, 15, 21; 26:6 - 8, 20 - 23.

Paul speaks of those who were "in Christ" before him (Rom. 16:7). Therefore the Body of Christ must have been in existence before Acts nine.

** **IF "in Christ"** is the equivalent of "in the **BODY of Christ**" -- the Body must have begun before Paul's salvation. However these terms do not refer to the same thing.

As to salvation there are only two places to be: in Christ or in Adam (Rom. 5:12 - 21; 1 Cor. 15:22). The term "in Christ" sets the saved of all ages and dispensations apart from the lost. It is brought about by a **spiritual birth**, as being "in Adam" is by a physical birth (1 Cor. 15:22). It relates men to the federal headship of Christ (Rom. 5:19 and context).

As to position a division is made between believers who are members of Christ's mystical Body and believers who are related to God's prophetic program. Being in the Body of Christ is accomplished by the **Spirit's baptism** (1 Cor. 12:13). It relates to the spiritual headship of Christ (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18).

No one can be in the Body unless they are in Christ, but not all who are in Christ are members of His Body. In this Age of Grace only, everyone who is in Christ by the new birth is also in the Body by the baptism of the Spirit. Paul may, therefore (and does at times), use the two terms interchangeably when he has only Body members in view.

Paul was God's choice to take the place of Judas. The decision to put Matthias in his place was made before they received the Holy Spirit and thus is an instance where the flesh was going ahead of God. Peter was acting in the flesh in Acts 1:15 - 23.

** As shown before, the apostles already had received the Spirit before they made this choice. See the section on the apostleship of Paul.

Several of the twelve apostles (Matthew, James, Peter and John) mentioned the church in Scriptures they wrote (Matt. 16:18; 18:17; James 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:13; 3 John 6, 9, 10; Rev. 1:4, 11, 20; 2:1, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17, 18, 23, 29; 3:1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 22; 22:16) -- so the church didn't have to do with Paul alone.

** It can be shown that most, and probably all, of these references refer to the prophetic Jewish church, not to the Body of Christ.

Indications that the Body of Christ did NOT begin at Pentecost!

-- Pentecost was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Acts 2:16). Those truths specifically associated with the church of this age were not made known until they were revealed to Paul (Eph. 3:2, 3).

-- At Pentecost the only Gentiles involved were proselytes to Judaism (Acts 2:10). The Body of Christ sets aside the distinction between Jew and Gentile and deals with **sinners** (Rom. 11:32).

-- The message from Pentecost to Acts ten was addressed to Jews only. While Peter went to one Gentile family -- to open the door, in the eyes of the Jewish believers, to Paul's Gentile ministry (Acts 15:7 - 12) -- the first one sent openly and specifically to Gentiles was Paul.

-- The message until Acts seven was not only an offer to Jews individually of salvation but also, very strongly, even primarily, an offer to Israel **as a nation** that if they would repent and turn to Christ He would return to them and they would have their promised kingdom (Acts 3:19 - 21). The message of this age of grace is that as individual sinners believe they will be seated in the heavenlies now and caught up to meet Christ in the air at the unspecified future time chosen by God. God could not be offering the kingdom to Israel if He had already instituted a program based on the setting aside of Israel (Rom. 11:11, 12, 15).

-- The age of grace was introduced as a result of the transgression (Rom. 11:11) and rejection (Rom. 11:15) of Christ by Israel. They had not committed the ultimate transgression until they had formally, officially, and emphatically rejected the offer of Acts 3:19 - 21 by stoning Stephen in Acts seven. Only then did wrath come upon them to the uttermost (1 Thess. 2:16).¹ It is at Acts 7:58 that Saul is introduced, and by Acts nine (only a comparatively short time later) he is converted and given his commission (Acts 9:15; 26:16, 17).

-- The prophecy from Joel quoted by Peter was partially fulfilled on Pentecost but continues on into the events of the Tribulation.. This program was broken into, interrupted -- for the Pentecostal manifestations did not continue and the future manifestations have not yet begun. The same logic which leaves the Body of Christ out of Pentecost also leaves it out of the Tribulation. They stand or fall together. **If** Pentecost is the beginning of this age (which it is not) then the Tribulation is its logical destination and conclusion.

The apostleship of Paul

The decision to number Matthias with the twelve was God's will.

-- The decision was made by men who had already received the Holy Spirit (John 20:22).
 -- It was preceded by prayer on the part of the believers (Acts 1:14).
 -- It was based upon Scripture (Acts 1:16, 20 - 26; Psa. 69:25; 109:8).
 -- At least two, and probably only two, fulfilled the requirements to be numbered with the twelve (Acts 1:21, 22).

-- It was necessary that all twelve tribes be represented on this important occasion -- the fulfillment of the feast of Pentecost. See how God emphasizes the full number of tribes in other significant passages of Scripture.

* The tribes are listed in various ways, according to the situation in view, but always there are twelve of them -- except for the short time between the death of Judas and the choice of Matthias.

¹1 Thess. 2:15, 16-a is a blanket description of the hostility of Israel from Old Testament days through the Cross and up to the present. But 1 Thess. 2:16-b, "but wrath **has come** [NASB] on them to the uttermost" refers to the time when God said, in effect, "This does it!" (at Acts seven). Acts seven was a spiritual Kadesh Barnea for Israel.

* In 1 Kings eighteen Elijah is ministering to only ten of the tribes, yet he uses twelve stones, and pours twelve pitchers of water over the sacrifice, to represent the twelve tribes (1 Kings 18:31, 33, 34 -- specially verse 31).

* Notice, in Judges 21:2, 3, the importance of all twelve tribes being represented.

* In the book of Revelation the number twelve is emphasized by the 12 x 12,000 witnesses in Rev. 7:4 - 8; 14:1 and by the twelve stars in the woman's crown in Rev. 12:1. It is notable that the number twelve, and multiples of twelve, is stamped all over the description of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21:12 - 21. There are also twelve manners of fruit mentioned in Rev. 22:2.

-- There was never a rebuke or even a correction of the apostles' "mistake" -- if Matthias was the wrong man. The feast was fulfilled with majestic miracles accompanying it, surely signifying that the Lord was satisfied and pleased with it.

-- The fact that they drew lots is not a valid objection. See where the drawing of lots was used previously in Scripture (Lev. 16:8; Josh. 14:2; 1 Sam. 14:41, 42; Neh. 10:34; 11:1; Prov. 16:33). Even the fact that they chose the two men as candidates is not a valid objection, for it is very likely there were only two men who, without being at the time apostles, had accompanied Christ during His total ministry. Acts 1:21, 22 seems to indicate this.

-- The fact that Matthias is never mentioned again is not a valid objection either, for several of the twelve are not mentioned again after Acts one. This does not invalidate their apostleship.

Was Paul God's choice to take the place of Judas?

No, for Scripture indicates strongly that Paul's apostleship was neither a replacement for Judas nor an additional apostle in the same program. He was an apostle with equal **authority**, but in a different **program**.

--Paul didn't fulfill the requirements for being one of the twelve. These are listed by Christ in John 15:27 and by Peter in Acts 1:21, 22; 10:41. They were chosen specifically, as those who had known Him intimately from the beginning of His ministry, to be witnesses of His resurrection (Acts 1:22). Paul didn't qualify to be one of the twelve, but he could be an apostle in a different program, for he had **worked** the **works** of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12).

-- Paul never claimed to be one of the twelve. Even when he was defending his apostleship at length (2 Cor. chapters 10 - 12) he gave no hint that he should be the replacement for Judas or that he should be numbered with the twelve.

-- He lists himself separately from "the twelve" in First Corinthians fifteen. In 1 Cor. 15:4, 5 Paul informs us that after Christ was buried, and rose again the third day, he was seen of Cephas, **then of the twelve**. Then, he continues in verse eight, "**Last of all** he was seen of **me** also, as of one born out of due time." When he referred to "the twelve" it was not merely a "technical term" applied to a group which numbered only eleven at the time.²

²See Luke 24:33, "And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them." If Matthias was one of "them that were with them" then Paul could look back on this occasion, after Matthias had become an apostle, and say, as he did in 1 Cor. 15:5, "the twelve" were there. To illustrate this -- we can point to an old picture of a small boy and say, "That's my father" -- even though at the time the picture was taken he was much too young to have a son. The twelve, in 1 Cor. 15:5, could not have included either Judas, who was dead by this time, or Paul, who was still a staunch and

-- The twelve are to sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel -- but Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 15:16), not to one of the tribes of Israel. Under his ministry even the distinction between Jew and Gentile is set aside -- how much more the distinction between tribes!

-- Paul's message differed from that of the twelve. See the section concerning the distinctiveness of the age of grace.

-- Paul was, indeed, an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12) -- not a false apostle (2 Cor. 11:13), and not inferior to the twelve (2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11). He was made an apostle by the will of God (1 Cor. 1:1) and chosen as an apostle by the risen Christ (Gal. 1:1). But his apostleship did not raise the number of circumcision apostles to thirteen -- for there will be only twelve thrones for them. He was an apostle because there was a new program requiring not twelve Apostles (for twelve tribes), but one Apostle (for one Body)

Is the Body of Christ found in the book of Revelation?

We have seen the contrast between the kingdom program and that for the Body of Christ at the beginning of this age of grace (in Acts), but just as clearly we must see this contrast after its close (the book of Revelation). During the coming Tribulation:

-- A different program will be followed.

* There will again be a distinction between Jew and Gentile. Compare Rev. 2:9; 3:9; 7:4 - 8; and 12:13 - 17 with Rom. 3:22; 10:12; Gal. 3:28 and Eph. 2:14.

* Men will again be judged for eating unclean meats. Compare Isa. 66:17 (the context indicates this verse has the Tribulation in view) with 1 Tim. 4:3 - 5.

* Believers will be subject to the law of the Sabbath. Compare Matt. 24:20 with Gal. 4:9 - 11; and Col. 2:16, 16.

* There will again be signs, wonders and miracles as an integral part of the ministry. Compare Acts 2:18 - 20; and Rev. 11:5, 6, 11, 12 with 1 Cor. 13.

-- A different message will be proclaimed. The "gospel of the kingdom" will again be preached, not only to Israel, as took place during the gospel period and the early chapters of Acts, but to Gentiles as well (Matt. 24:14). The "gospel of the kingdom" is not "Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ" as Paul did (Acts 28:31) but the announcement that the millennial kingdom is near, and soon to be established (Matt. 4:17; 10:6, 7; Mark 1:14, 15).

-- There will be no recognition of the Body of Christ. This term is never used outside of Paul's epistles. In Revelation there is no reference back to Paul's epistles. This indicates that he will have no authority over either the message preached or the program followed during the Tribulation. Contrast the emphasis on his authority in Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:37; Eph. 3:2 - 4; Col. 1:25, 26; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:3; 3:14; etc. To see the total absence of Pauline theology or authority during the Tribulation, try reading Paul's epistles straight through, followed by a one

zealous unbeliever. It had to be Matthias who was the twelfth apostle. It was necessary that the one taking the place of Judas be present at this time (Acts 1:22; 13:31). "The twelve" is not just "a collective term" -- as is suggested in the Scofield note at Mark 16:14.

sitting reading of Revelation.

Paul emphasizes that this age of grace is not according to prophecy. In contrast the book of Revelation is almost totally a rearrangement and amplification of Old Testament prophecies, specially those in Daniel and Ezekiel.

The introduction of this age of grace by Paul raises some important questions. What will become of the Body? Its beginning, its message, its program, even its very existence were a secret revealed to and through Paul. Could its departure, then, be part of a prophesied event needing no new revelation? In the rest of Scripture eschatology is tied tightly to Israel as such, and occasionally including Gentiles as such. Could these non-Pauline passages be speaking, at the same time, of a Body where there is no difference between Jew and Gentile?

-- William P Heath

Bible Study # 72 -- < My Documents\Bible Studies\distinct > on Microsoft Word
(< bibstudy\distinct.sam > on AmiPro)