

The House of Witness

A study of the Founding and Empowerment of New Testament Church
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Note: All Scripture references and quotations are King James Version, 1769 edition. Underlining is used for emphasis of certain points in Scripture. This is a study outline to be used for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the New Testament church. As such, it does not explain everything, but allows one the liberty to teach to a level they are comfortable with.

Introduction

When we begin to look at the church in the Scriptures, it is always the case that whoever is doing the looking brings their own bias into the evaluation of the Scriptures and what the Scriptures state about the church. It is hoped that this study will dispel many of the notions about the church that the Lord Jesus Christ founded as a result of His earthly ministry. The different ideas on when the New Testament church was founded are examined. This study also addresses the supplemental questions of the baptism administered by John, Christ's baptism and why it was necessary, and the purpose of John the Baptist's ministry.

However, before beginning to look at the church, it is essential for us to briefly look at the Lord's institutions of witness in this world. By beginning here, the purpose, or function of the church, and thus its form and operation will become more clear.

The Witness of the Lord from the Fall to the Flood

We are not told much concerning the institution of witness the Lord had on this earth from the time of the Fall until the Flood. However, some facts are evident.

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: (*Genesis 4:1-4*)

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. (*Hebrews 11:4*)

By the above passage we know that faith was just as operative then as it is now. We also know that the Lord required certain offerings as part of worship.

But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall be* his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. (*Genesis 4:5-7*)

The Witness of the Lord from the Flood to Israel

We are told more about the institution of witness the Lord had on this earth from the time of the Flood until the institution of Israel as the Lord's covenanted institution. This is commonly know as the time of the patriarchs.

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And

blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all. (*Genesis 14:18-20*)

And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She *is* my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah.

But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou *art but* a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife. But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her. Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine.

Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid. Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing? And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother.

And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and womenservants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee. And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reproved. So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife. (*Genesis 20*)

Israel as the House of Witness

Great detail is given about Israel and what the requirements were for maintaining the covenant they had with the Lord.

— It is the failure of Israel in the covenant they had with the Lord that ushers in the church as the Lord's new institution of witness.

The events in the establishment of the Old Covenant with Israel

The revealing of the mind of God in the giving of the conditions of the covenant. Exodus, Chapters 20 through 23

The primary commandment for remaining in covenant with the LORD God

In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. And Moses came and called for

the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD. (*Exodus 19:1-8*)

For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people; and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. (*Jeremiah 7:22-23*)

Israel was the house of witness

And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood. And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the tabernacle of witness. (*Numbers 18:1-2*)

And the king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection, according to the commandment of Moses the servant of the LORD, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness? For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD did they bestow upon Baalim. (*II Chronicles 24:6-7*)

The events of Exodus 24

The sprinkling of the blood. v. 3-8

And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words. (*Exodus 24:3-8*)

The ceremonial meal. v. 9-11

Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink. (*Exodus 24:9-11*)

At this point the covenant between the LORD God and the Children of Israel is sealed as a permanent covenant barring failure of one of the parties to the covenant. Since there is no question concerning the LORD God and His ability to fulfill the covenant, the burden lies upon the children of Israel. Thus, the children of Israel must serve the Lord or consequences will ensue. *Ref. Deuteronomy Chapters 5 through 30.*

It must be noted that this covenant falls within an already existing covenant between the LORD God and Abraham. This covenant is not the same as the Abrahamic covenant, but is an extension of that covenant. The fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant is not yet accomplished, even though the

old covenant with the children of Israel has been dissolved. *Ref. Genesis 17:1-21, Jeremiah 30:31-37, Hebrews 8:7-13.*

The Church as the House of Witness

The beginning of the church

Since nothing in the New Testament is without precedent, and that precedent being displayed in the Old Testament, it is reasonable to see if a pattern exists in the Old Testament for the founding of the church. After all, to some degree Israel and the church as described in the New Testament do perform the same functions. Both were given responsibility as houses of witness. Both were given responsibility for the Scriptures. Both were given certain ordinances that must be performed. Both were given offices that must be fulfilled, with strict requirements for the holders of those offices. And, most important both entered into covenant with the LORD God.

However, there are also some differences: All Israelites were automatically involved in the covenant with God by birth — they had no choice in the matter. Members of any particular church are members because they choose to be members — no one can force anyone to be a member of a church. Moreover, one does not automatically become a member of a church just because their parents are members. In Israel one did not have to be saved, or born again to be involved in all the rituals and ordinances that they had to perform. In the church, one cannot even join unless one is born again in Christ. In Israel there were a multitude of ordinances to be kept. In the church there are only two. Israel was given a particular task that the church has never been called upon to do — slay a particular group of enemies of God.

In the following two questions, only one of the views of the church is correct scripturally. The Scripture is express about the form and substance of the New Testament church.

What is a church?

- An assembly of religious persons
- A building used for religious purposes
- A covenanted assembly of baptized believers in a particular locale

What is the church?

- The Catholic Church
- All New Testament believers in every place
- All New Testament believers that are members of local churches
- All believers throughout history
- A covenanted assembly of baptized believers in a particular locale

Acts 20:28 — the church is purchased with His own blood

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (*Acts 20:28*)

Hebrews 3:1-6 We are Christ's house.

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. (*Hebrews 3:1-6*)

The Pattern of the Old Testament Repeated in the New Testament

As there were events that occurred in the establishment of the covenant with Israel, even so there are events in the establishment of the covenant the Lord has with the church. Though the sequence of events may vary somewhat, the type of events does not vary at all. Due to the fact that this new covenant takes the place of an existing covenant, there must be some variance in the sequence of events. Also, it must be remembered that the new covenant is established by the sacrificial Lamb Himself. Thus, one particular event must take place after all others.

The revealing of the mind of God

In the reading of the Gospels, one should come away with a good understanding of who the Lord God is, and what He is about. In short, we should come to know the mind of God concerning many things. This is essential if one is going to be in covenant (or have one mind with) someone else. This is particularly true when it comes to being in covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ for the spread of the gospel and maintenance of the Scriptures.

And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. 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,) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. (Acts 1:13-17)

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. (Acts 1:21-23)

What the above passage demonstrates is the fact that one was not counted worthy to be considered an apostle unless they had been with the Lord Jesus Christ from the very beginning of His ministry.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. (John 14:1-11)

The reason for the rebuke of Phillip is that he should have known by this time (3 years of daily interaction with the Lord Jesus Christ) who the LORD God is, and what He is all about. Phillip should have known that the Lord Jesus Christ would say or do nothing unless it was expressly given Him by the Father. Thus, to see the character and nature of Lord Jesus Christ was to see the character and nature of Father.

The ending of the Old Covenant (Testament)

What ultimately ended the covenant with Israel was Israel's refusal to acknowledge their King with whom they had a covenant. Instead, they made it abundantly clear that they would rather have and ungodly Roman king rule over them. One of the reasons Christ came was to first-hand ascertain the state of the leadership and people with which He had a covenant. This coming to ascertain first-hand is much like what the Lord did when He came to Abraham on the plains of Mamre, just prior to Him calling down destruction upon Sodom and Gomorrah. (Ref. Genesis, ch. 18-19)

The leadership of Israel's refusal to acknowledge and accept their King. Luke 19, Zechariah 9, John 19

And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon. And as he went, they spread their clothes in the way. And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. (Luke 19:35-40)

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. (Zechariah 9:9)

And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. (John 19:12-15)

The warning and rebuke of the leadership of Israel (the husbandmen of the vineyard) Matthew 21:33-45

This is addressed to the leadership of Israel as it was the leadership of Israel that sealed the covenant with the Lord on Mount Horeb (or Sinai) centuries before. However, this parable is not without precedent in that there is a parallel of this passage is Isaiah where Israel was warned about their apostasy and breaking of the covenant.

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on

whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. (*Matthew 21:33-45*)

Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry. (*Isaiah 5:1-7*)

The condemnation of the leadership of Israel and prelude to the formal breaking of the covenant. Matthew Chapter 23:1-33

In this condemnation the Lord Jesus points out how that the leadership had totally perverted the teaching and ordinances given them to hold. They had twisted what they were given into something totally perverse. He condemns them for their total blindness to the truth of the word of God and for being utter hypocrites unable to even begin to come to the truth. In short, they have no love of the truth, and they were only using the word of God and the authority they had in the covenant for their own ends. In all this, it is very apparent that they were totally unusable to the Lord and were, in fact opposing all that He desired to do.

The curse for breaking the covenant. v. 34-36

Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. (*Matthew 23:34-36*)

The dissolving of the covenant to be the house of witness. v. 37-39

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. (*Matthew 23:37-39*)

The invitation to the New Covenant (Testament) Matthew, Chapter 26

The ceremonial meal. v. 26-29

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. (*Matthew 26:26-29*)

The sealing of the covenant Matthew, Chapter 27

The sprinkling of the blood. v. 26-50

Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be

crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched him there; And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. (*Matthew 27:26-50*)

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. (*John 19:28-30*)

Now, it is verified by the book of Hebrews that the New Testament was not in effect until the death of Christ on the cross. This being the case, since the church is purchased by the blood of Christ, the church also did not exist as a covenanted institution until the death of Christ as well.

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. (*Hebrews 9:15-21*)

The Commissioning of the Church and call to witness. Matthew, Chapter 28 & Luke, Chapter 24 **The apostles given the commission to witness**

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (*Matthew 28:18-20*)

The apostles called to be witnesses

And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. (Luke 24:46-48)

The empowerment of the House of Witness — the local, autonomous, visible, New Testament church

Just as it is not sufficient for someone to have a contract with a builder to build a building, without providing them the legal and financial means to carry out such a work; it was not sufficient for the apostles to be commissioned as witnesses and in covenant with the Lord. Before they could carry out such work, particularly since they were called to go into all the world, they had to have the means to do so. They had to be empowered. This was the function of the day of Pentecost.

The command to wait for empowerment

Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. (Luke 24:45-49)

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. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:6-8)

The day of empowerment

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? (Acts 2:1-12)

The day of Pentecost was a visible and audible sign that the Lord intended his gospel to go throughout the entire world. The day of Pentecost is very much the reverse of the day of the confusion of the languages at Babel. This event of Pentecost also is a fulfilling of the promise of God to preserve His word and have it reproduced in every language. Moreover, since the apostles were the ones manifesting the signs and gifts, this also plainly demonstrates that the carrying out of the commission is to be through the Lord's ordained and empowered institution — the church.

1. When did the church officially begin?

- When all things required for covenant were complete.
 - The agreement of the parties to the covenant.
 - Agreement to the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - The pattern of Baptism as practice for the New Testament church established
 - The dissolving of the Old Covenant.
 - The sequence of events leading to the dissolving of the covenant.
 - The entrance into Jerusalem of their King and their refusal to accept Him.
 - The cleansing of the temple.
 - The parable of the vineyard.
 - The rebuke of the elders of Israel.
 - The dissolution of the old covenant.
- The ceremonial meal.
 - The ordinance of the Lord's Supper established.
- The sprinkling of blood.
- The church is established.
 - The commissioning of the church
 - The ordinance of Baptism established.
 - The New Testament church empowered.

Problems with the different views

A. The church began on the day of Pentecost.

- equates empowerment with founding. This makes the Holy Ghost the founder of the church.

B. The church began with John the Baptist.

- conflict of houses of witness

"I will build . . ." is future tense, not present tense thus creates a conflict of grammatical usage. The Lord cannot, and would not say "I will build . . ." if His church is already in existence. This also means that Israel and the New Testament church are entirely different entities in different dispensations of witness.

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (*Matthew 16:13-19*)

Moreover, the baptism of John is not the baptism of Christ. The apostle Paul demonstrates this very plainly when he came upon some disciples of John in Ephesus. John preached and baptized the baptism of repentance apart from the covenantal aspects of Christ's baptism. This was evidenced by the fact that the Holy Ghost came upon the disciples of John after they were rebaptized by the apostle Paul into Christ's baptism.

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were

ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. (Acts 19:1-6)

1. What is the function of the Baptism of John?

Just as John the Baptist was ordained to be the herald, or messenger that announced the coming of Israel, the baptism he administered was also legitimate and designed for the same purpose as his ministry — that is, to prepare a people for the institution that would replace Israel as the house of witness.

The baptism of John was necessary in that a transitional period is required for the New Testament church to be established. For all things to be done decently and in order, there had to be a people prepared to receive Him who is to come that would establish the new house of witness by His own blood.

Now, as has been shown previously, it was essential that those who would be in covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ, know and understand the mind of Christ. To begin to do that, those individuals selected by the Lord would have to have a certain identifiable prerequisite before they could be selected. In looking at the sequence of events, we find that John the Baptist is sent prior to the Lord Jesus Christ beginning His ministry, and John was sent with the specific task of preparing a people to meet the Lord. He accomplishes this task in two ways that are given him from heaven.

First, he preaches that all are to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand and they must repent or be destroyed. Now, there is no reason to assume, or conclude that the message John preaches is any different than the gospel message that has been preached throughout the ages. However, there is one thing added to the message for the people of Israel — that “there is one coming that is greater than I, the latchet of whose shoe I am unworthy to loose.” This message added to the gospel gives warning that there is going to be a change, and that the ministry of John the Baptist is part of that process of change.

Second, he baptises everyone who confesses and professes repentance for sin and desire a change in their life. In short, all those who are baptized profess salvation, and a belief in Christ to come. This is the qualification that the Lord Jesus is looking for when He selects the men that will become the first New Testament church.

Now, there is no question from the Scripture that the baptism of John for repentance is indeed valid and recognized of God. The questions that remain are centered upon the time frame of the validity of that baptism. No doubt, the baptism of John was valid when he began doing it. And there is no doubt that the baptism of John was valid when the Lord Jesus Christ was accomplishing His earthly ministry. However, without doubt, when the apostle Paul encounters 12 men at Ephesus and they profess the baptism of John, he had a problem with their baptism, and instructs them in the baptism of Christ and they are rebaptized. Now, there are those who will argue that these men were either not baptized, but knew of John's baptism, or the apostle Paul did not actually baptize them. However, neither case holds up to the plain language of the passage. The passage in question admits no other interpretation than to state plainly that these men were baptized under the authority of John's baptism, and that the apostle Paul rebaptized them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, which is the baptism of Christ.

So then, sometime between John the Baptist's imprisonment and execution, and the apostle Paul's encounter with the 12 men at Ephesus, the baptism of John became invalid as an authority under which one could be baptized. Otherwise, we could today still baptize individuals under the authority of John's baptism and the Lord would accept it as right and proper. Quite obviously fundamental, independent Baptists would howl in protest if that were done. Moreover, it is quite obvious that the baptism of John is not valid and accepted by the Lord any longer. Thus we need to determine the

point at which the baptism of John became invalid, and what was done concerning those individuals who were baptized during John's ministry.

To begin, it is easier to determine at what point the baptism of John became invalid as a practice the Lord accepted. Since the New Testament did not actually begin until the point the Lord Jesus died on the cross, it is reasonable, logical and in keeping with the administration of covenants that the baptism of John ceased to be accepted of the Lord when one of two situations occurred.

A. When Christ died on the cross.

B. When the Lord Jesus Christ gave the commission to the church.

In the first case, we can make arguments for this based upon the fact that we are now in the New Testament dispensation of witness. However, an argument can also be made that the church is not commissioned and therefore not fully functioning. Thus, to end the baptism of John at this point would leave a gap of an indeterminate number of days in which no baptism is accepted of the Lord. However, in no case would the number of days be less than 3, or more than 43 as the Lord Jesus Christ would not be able to commission the Church until His resurrection, and He did not commission the church after He ascended. Plainly, this cannot be as one of the ordinances of the New Testament church (and thus the New Testament period) is baptism by immersion, and no one would have authority to perform any baptism for that period of time. This leaves us with one option to look at as viable.

In understanding this conclusion that we have arrived at, we must understand that before the commission was given, though the church was in existence, it had as yet no direction. However, that all changed when the Lord Jesus Christ gave the commission to the church. Note that prior to this point there is given no commandment to the church to fulfill concerning their direction, purpose and function. The great commission fulfills all these necessary things.

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (*Matthew 28:16-20*)

If we notice, there are four elements in the above commandment that are imperative to fulfilling the commission. They are:

1. Go
2. Teach
3. Baptize
4. Teach

Prior to this, there existed no instruction as to what this new institution of witness was to do. Now, it is express. They are to do all the following:

1. Go into all the world. They are to go into every nation of the world and do the following:
 - A. Teach everyone that will hear.
 - B. Baptize everyone that responds properly in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.
 - C. Teach all those who are baptized to observe, or do all those things that the Lord Jesus Christ commanded the apostles to do.

Now, we should also note that in the midst of these commandments, there is the express ordinance to baptize. Plainly, this can only mean that all previous baptisms are swept away, or replaced with

this particular baptism. This, of necessity means that there now exists only one authority to baptize. Otherwise, there will be a confusion of whose baptism is proper and of good authority, and whose is not. Since the Scripture plainly tells us that there is only one baptism in the context of the New Testament church, it must only mean that John's baptism is no longer effectual for witness and testimony. In support of this, the apostle Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus is express:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. (*Ephesians 4:1-7*)

2. What was the function of John the Baptist?

— He was a herald, a messenger of the King to come.

The Lord established a pattern in the Old Testament which the world copied in sending forth runners, or messengers (heralds) to prepare for the coming of a king. This was done by the Lord Jesus when He set His face to go to Jerusalem.

And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. (*Luke 9:51-53*)

As the following verses show plainly, the leadership of Israel should have known that the Lord was near to come and should have perceived from the working of the Lord Jesus Christ that He was indeed the Christ and that John the Baptist testified of Him. Instead, the leadership of Israel received neither John the Baptist, nor the Lord Jesus Christ.

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. (*Isaiah 40:3-5*)

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. (*Mark 1:1-4*)

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. (*Malachi 4:5-6*)

And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist. (*Matthew 17:10-13*)

3. Why then did the Lord Jesus Christ need to be baptized?

Baptism serves several purposes, and depending upon the dispensation in which it was administered, it has different purposes. Generally, baptism demonstrates (or represents) a change

from one state of the heart to another. However, unlike us, the baptism that John administered to Christ had nothing to do with the state of Christ's heart as He had no sin, either in His flesh or soul that He needed to repent of, or had repented of. Rather, the baptism that John administered to Christ had everything to do with a demarcation (the beginning) of His ministry and with the founding of the New Testament church. It was also a picture of His own death, burial, and resurrection to come.

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (*Matthew 3:13-17*)

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. (*1 Peter 2:21-24*)

The baptism of Christ at this point fulfills all righteousness in that it is not proper for the founder, head and one party to the covenant to require those in covenant with Him to subject themselves to an ordinance that He Himself was not subject to. Since baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament church, it stands to reason that Christ Himself was baptized at the beginning of His ministry.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. (*Hebrews 2:14-17*)

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. (*Luke 4:1-14*)

In the above passage from Luke, it is easy to discern that this is the beginning of the Lord Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. Without being baptized He could not have begun His ministry and would have displeased the Father. Even so, for any child of God to have any right and proper ministry that the Lord approves of, they must be baptized by proper authority in a New Testament church.

— End —