

THE CHURCH — WHAT IS IT? ¹

— R. K. Campbell

We might say at the very beginning that the word translated "church" in our Bible is "ecclesia" in the original Greek Scriptures and means "an assembly of called out ones." It is more properly translated "Assembly" as more correct versions render it. Neither this word nor its Hebrew equivalent are found in the Old Testament, which shows us at once that the Church or Assembly did not exist then.

No Church Before Pentecost

In the Old Testament God had a nation of people, Israel, in covenant relationship with Himself, but this is not the Church which has a far more intimate and blessed relationship to Christ than Israel had. The nation of Israel is only once spoken of as "the assembly in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38, New Trans.). There they were, in a sense, a called out assembly from Egypt, but in great contrast with the New Testament Assembly and true Church.

In the Old Testament there are types and shadows of the Church, such as the brides of Joseph and Moses and the tabernacle in which God dwelt, but the Assembly of God itself did not exist at that time.

However, in the counsels of God the Church was ever in God's mind and purposes from before the creation of the world. It was "the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God" (Eph. 3:9). It was "kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest" (Rom. 16:25, 26).

The word "Church" or "ecclesia" is first found in Matthew 16:18 and was spoken of by the Lord when He said to Peter, "thou art Peter (Petros-Greek, "a little rock"), and upon this rock (petra-Greek, meaning Himself) I will build My Church." Here the Church is still future and not yet built, for the Lord said, "I will build," not "have built," or "am building." The Greek text indicates future action as all scholars and translations agree, in spite of some who would teach otherwise.

The next reference to the Church is in Matthew 18:17 where instruction is given regarding personal trespasses and discipline. This also is evidently future; otherwise, surely whilst the Lord was with His disciples, the case of an offending brother would have been laid before Himself.

There are no other Scriptures whatever which speak of the Church until we come to the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, which is the Church's birthday. While the Lord was on earth He was not forming a Church, but presented Himself to Israel as their true King and Messiah and gathered a remnant of true believers and disciples around Himself, while the leaders of Israel rejected Him more and more.

These faithful believers of the Lord's time existed as individual followers of Christ and became the nucleus of the Church at its formation on the day of Pentecost. On that day they were baptized by the descended Spirit into the body of Christ and were thereby joined to their glorified Saviour on high (1 Cor. 12:13). Then they no longer existed as individual believers, but as a corporate body, the Body of Christ, and members one of another, linked together by the Spirit of God which now indwelt them. This was the beginning of the Church of the living God.

This is what the Church is — a body of true believers in Christ, baptized by the Spirit of God into the body of Christ and joined to the Lord and to one another by that same Spirit.

¹ These few pages on the Church are taken from the *Church Of The Living God* authored by R. K. Campbell, Bible quotations in this article are taken from the Authorized Version unless marked otherwise.

From what has been before us, it should be clear that the teaching of some that the Church began with John the Baptist is quite erroneous and unscriptural.

It should likewise be apparent that the common practice of calling buildings used for religious services "churches" or "the church" is also unscriptural and misleading. The Church is not a material building, but a body of living believers, living stones forming a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5). This truth we will consider more fully later. The believers meeting together in any certain place constitute a true Church, the building where they meet being but the meeting place, whether a home, hall, chapel, or formally designated church building.

We have so far been largely considering what the true Church is not. We may now proceed to look more directly at the positive side, at what Scripture presents the Church to be.

Called Out Ones

Returning to the meaning of the word "ecclesia," we may observe that the Church of the living God is, therefore, a company of called out ones — called out of the world — those whom God has called unto Himself by the Gospel of His grace and who have accepted that Gospel and the Saviour it presents. They are thus separated from the world and are spoken of as "them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus" (I Cor. 1:2), which means "set apart" in Christ.

In harmony with this we have the words of James in Acts 15:14: "Simon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." This is what the Church is — a people taken out of the nations for His name by the sovereign operations of the Holy Spirit. Had the Church only remembered this it would not have settled down in the world and become worldly minded, but would have remained separated from the world and would have been heavenly in character, as those truly called out to the rejected Christ in glory.

If we look at Acts 2 we find the believers there a truly separated company. The 120 are gathered together in the upper room, away from the world that crucified their Saviour, and continuing with one accord in prayer. Then the Spirit descended from heaven and filled them all and they began to tell out in other tongues the wonderful works of God. Peter now preached Christ to the multitude urging them to repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and save themselves from this perverse generation by thus taking their stand for Christ and separating from the nation that rejected Him. They that received his word were baptized and about three thousand souls were added to this separated company. Such was the beginning of the Church of God, the called out Assembly.

Ultra-Dispensational Error

As there are those today who would tell us that the true Church did not begin at Pentecost in Acts 2, but at the end of Acts and Paul's imprisonment, we must say a few words about this teaching. The 47th verse of this second of Acts says, "the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved."² These words certainly tell us that the Church had now begun and that it was being built as the Lord added saved souls to it day by day. But, say these ultradispensationalists, this was not "the church, Which is his body," which Ephesians 1:22,23 afterward speaks of. To this we reply that the Lord has but one Church and that the Church of Acts 2 is as truly the body of Christ as that spoken of later in Ephesians. There is not a Jewish Church and then a Church of Gentiles, or of Jews and Gentiles.

The Church began at Pentecost with Jewish believers and later Gentiles were added to it (Acts 10), both being reconciled unto God in one body by the cross and the twain made one new man (Eph. 2:14-16). True, this was not all revealed at once and the distinctive truths of the Church were only brought out later by Paul, the special apostle to the Church, in his prison Epistles, but the Church of the living God began at Pentecost just the same. The book of Acts is a transition period from Judaism into the liberty and fullness of Christianity. These Jewish believers could not be taken all at once from Judaism into the full

² *The Nestle Greek Text omits the word church in Acts 2:47. This however does not affect the claim of the author. In Philippians 3:6 (i.e. in one of the prison epistles) Paul admits that he persecuted the church. This persecution is described in Acts 8:1 and doubtlessly concerned the church mentioned in Acts 5:11 and those people referred to in Acts 2:47.*

teaching of the Church, so these great and wonderful truths of the Church were gradually revealed and fully brought out at the proper time during Paul's imprisonment.

Joined by the Lord

Returning to Acts 2:47, it is well to notice that "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Men did not join themselves to it, as people join churches today; the joining was done by the Lord Himself. Those whom He saved He joined to the Church by His Spirit 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" (Acts 5:13, 14). Such was the power and holiness of the early Church that the unsaved would not dare to try to join themselves to it; they felt that they had not what these born-again believers had. But when any were saved, they were added to the Lord, not to men or organizations, and found themselves naturally one with the believers and already joined to the Church of God.

The same principles should be true today, for it is as true now as then, that the Lord adds to the Church daily such as are being saved. If one is not saved, he cannot join himself to God's true Church. He may join a church on earth, but no one belongs to the true Church unless he is born again. It ought to be as true today as then, that no one who is unsaved would dare to join himself to the local Church of believers, but alas, the Church has lost its power and it is no longer thus.

How comforting it should be to every believer in Christ in this day of confusion, disorder, and apostasy in the professing church on earth to know that he is joined by the Lord to God's true Church to which only genuine, saved believers belong! He is part of the "church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven" (Heb. 12:23), and should rejoice because his name is written in heaven in the book of life from which it will never be blotted out (Lk. 10:20; Rev. 3:5).

This is the only church that one can scripturally belong to. For we do not find believers in the Bible belonging to any church but the Church of Jesus Christ. Neither do we read of any church membership rolls, but simply of the believers being joined to the Lord and added to the Church by the Lord. The only membership known in Scripture is membership in Christ's Body.

We will make a few practical applications of these truths to our day. If one is joined by the Lord to His true Church, why should he join another church since he is already joined to the only Church which God recognizes?

Believers are to have fellowship one with another and to worship and serve the Lord together. They are to edify one another and to pray with each other as those already joined together in the Lord, as "members one of another" (Rom. 12:5), but Scripture never tells us to form a church organization or to join one of man's devising. We are exhorted in Ephesians 4:3 to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," — a unity of believers already made by the Spirit, not a unity of views or doctrines which we are to make. This God-made unity of true believers we are to recognize and act upon and to recognize and act upon no other. These are a few of the practical principles which flow from being joined by the Lord to the Church of the living God.

PRAYER AND DESIRES — 1 John 5:15.

Shall I ask God to do what I desire?

No, let me ask Him that I may do His desire!

THE FUTURE (7)

—H. L. Heijkoop

The Future of Israel

In the previous issue we saw that time and time again God has confirmed in His Word that He would fulfil His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This means that He will bring Israel back to Palestine to live there forever enjoying the blessings of Jehovah. We could ask:

How and when will Israel return to Palestine according to Prophecy?

God has a clear and simple answer to this question. When the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, were taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah prophesied that after 70 years God would judge Babylon and bring the people back (Jer. 25:12; 29:10). Daniel knew this prophecy for he searched the prophetic Scriptures (Dan. 9:2). And after the destruction of the Babylonian power by Darius (Dan. 5:25-31), he bowed himself before God, to implore God's grace in connection with these predictions (Dan. 9). However, he fails to plead the promises given to Abraham and does not go further back than Moses and the law. In accordance with his plea, the divine answer, although touching on the ultimate blessings, dwells extensively on the judgments that will come over the two tribes as the result of their unfaithfulness. Verse 24 speaks of the holy city and the people of Daniel. After reading verses 2, 7, 16, 18 and 19 no doubt can be left that this must refer to Jerusalem and Judah. In seventy weeks the transgression will be closed (or completed), an end will be made of sins, and expiation (atonement) will be made for iniquity. The righteousness of the ages (i.e. eternal righteousness) will be brought in. The vision and the prophet will be sealed and the holy of holies will be anointed.

It is clear that this is not yet fulfilled. Jerusalem and Judah have not as yet stopped sinning and their iniquities are not yet expiated. As yet there is not eternal righteousness brought in. The predictions are not yet sealed (fulfilled) and the holy of holies is not yet anointed. It is, however, just as clear that the fulfillment of this verse will mean full blessing for Jerusalem and Daniel's people.

The first point to be looked into then is when the 70 weeks began, afterwards we should see how long they will last and finally when they will end.

When did the 70 weeks begin?

The answer to this question is in verse 25. "*From the going forth of the word to restore and to build Jerusalem.*"

If we take just the first part of this sentence, there might be a difference of opinion, if restore (Hebr. *shub*, to cause to turn back) is thought to refer to the return of the nation as it does in certain translations in other languages. In that event the return under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2), or under Ezra (Ezra 7), or the one under Nehemiah could be referred to (Neh. 2).

But once we include the second part of the sentence there cannot be any doubt left. For in the first two cases there is no mention of building the city, but only of building the temple (Ezra 1 and 7). To the contrary, when the enemies falsely report to the king that the city is being built, the king immediately gives charge to prevent this (Ezra 4:17-24).

In Nehemiah 2 explicit instructions to rebuild the city are given to Nehemiah in answer to his request. The 70 weeks begin therefore at this time, which is quite generally agreed to have been about 445 B.C.

How long is one week?

That Daniel 9 doesn't refer to weeks of 7 days is of course rather clear. So we will have to establish what time span is meant by it.

There is another passage in Scripture where a "week" consisting of more than 7 days is mentioned. That is in Leviticus 25:8. There it actually speaks of a week (sabbath) of 7 years, the period from one sabbath year to the next. This passage is closely related to Daniel 9. Leviticus 26:34 & 35 states that if the Israelites would not keep these sabbath years, they would be expelled from the country. And 2 Chronicles 36:21 brings this warning in direct connection with the Babylonian exile and with the prophecies of Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11; 29:10) that the exile would last 70 years. When the 70 years of exile, which the Israelites had to endure because they had not kept the sabbaths of the year-weeks mentioned in Leviticus 25, were completed and when Daniel turns to God for this reason about the future of his people and the city, God answers that not then, after

these 70 years, but only after 70 weeks would the complete blessing come. From this it is perfectly clear, at least to me, that 70 year-weeks are meant.

There is, however, further proof. In Daniel 9:27 the last week is divided into two halves. The last half of this week is mentioned in other places in Scripture. In Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 11:1-3; 12:6, 14 and 13:5 where a designation of time is added to it, there it is referred to as $3\frac{1}{2}$ times, or 1260 days, or 42 months. A week would therefore consist of 7 years of 360 days each.

This conclusion is confirmed by Daniel 9:25 & 26, where it says that 69 weeks will pass by until Messiah the Prince (i.e. 483 years). As mentioned the beginning of this period is quite generally accepted in secular history as 445 B.C. If we add the age of the Lord to this we come to 478 years, which is close to the 483 years. Of course we cannot calculate this very accurately, because we would have to know the day and month of the beginning and the end.

Is the 70th week past or future?

We have seen already that "until Messiah, the Prince" were 69 weeks. Consequently one week remained. If this one week had followed the others without interruption it would have run out long ago. However it cannot have passed yet, because Judah and Jerusalem have not as yet received the blessings of verse 24.

Besides verse 27 says that "he" shall confirm a covenant with the "many" for [the last] week. Who is this "he"? Is it, as some say, the Lord Jesus Who confirms the New Testament with the people? But would this eternal covenant be confirmed for seven years and that *before* the time of blessing? Of course that cannot be so!

So it is not the Lord Jesus! The context shows us who it is. Verse 26 first states that the Messiah will be cut off, and then it mentions that the city and the sanctuary will be destroyed by the people of the prince that shall come. We know which people that is. The Lord Jesus foretold us and history records that it was the Romans. Therefore a Roman prince, who during the destruction of Jerusalem was not yet come, will confirm a covenant with the Jews for the last week. From the remainder of the verse it is apparent that this will be in the last days when the Jews again dwell in Jerusalem and when they have restored the service in the temple. Isaiah 28 speaks of this covenant as well. There it is called a covenant with death. The sense of this expression will become clear to the readers when, in one of the future issues, we will see how a godless prince will become the head of the restored Roman Empire.

The 70 weeks therefore, although forming one whole are not one uninterrupted period. Scripture itself gives a subdivision into 7, 62 and 1 week, of which the first 69 weeks have already passed. The Lord Jesus came to fulfil the 70th week and to bring the blessing. But the people rejected Him in the middle of the week. After $3\frac{1}{2}$ years He was crucified. And in agreement with the prayer of Daniel, who placed himself on the basis of the promise given to Moses (that is under responsibility) the people did not receive the blessing but the judgment.

To faith the first half of the 70th week has been fulfilled. In agreement with this, in the Gospels and in the Revelation, we find only time indications in connection with the second half of the year-week. But for Israel, which in unbelief does not take into account the years of service of the Lord, the full 70th week is still to come. In the last days the many, that is the mass of the people, will confirm a covenant of seven years with the godless Roman Emperor. From this it follows that the people will dwell at that time in Palestine, the Jewish worship will be restored, but for the greater part the people will not have faith.

How will Israel's national restoration take place?

Ezekiel 37 gives a simple picture of this. The prophet sees a large number of dry bones. The Lord Himself explains in verse 11 what they represent, "These bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off!" It is obvious that this concerns the people and not dead persons. Dead persons do not speak.

The Lord says clearly in verse 12 and 13, "I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O my people, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am Jehovah, when I have opened your graves, O my people. And I will put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I will place you in your own land: and ye shall know that I Jehovah have spoken, and have done it, saith Jehovah."

In the first verses we see that this does not happen all at once. First we see the dry bones come together and become covered with sinew, flesh and skin. But as yet there is no breath in them. To start with there are only dry bones, without a trace of life. All who have at present life from God do not belong to Israel, but to the Assembly. Then the Lord will work in them by His Spirit and cause them to be joined together to become a nation. The beginning of the Jewish nation will therefore be in unbelief. But then the Spirit of God will work again, so that they will receive spiritual life.

It is obvious that none of this refers to the return from Babylon for the following reasons:

1. Mention is made of an exceeding great army. This could hardly refer to the 43,000 that returned at that time, considering what was called a great army in those days. In 1 Chronicles 21 it is mentioned that David could muster an army of over 1½ million men not counting Levi and Benjamin. In 2 Chronicles 21 it says that Judah and Israel had together 1.2 million troops afoot and that of Israel alone ½ million men fell. In 2 Chronicles 14 Zerah the Ethiopian attacked Judah with an army of a million men. In 2 Chronicles 17:14-19 we read that Judah alone had some 1.2 million warriors.
2. In verse 14 the entire nation is seen as alive, which cannot refer to the return from Babylon, as can be realized when reading the prophecy of Malachi.
3. It is stated that from that time on Ephraim and Judah will be one nation. That can only be in the future, for Ephraim (the ten tribes) has not returned to this day.
4. "And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant... and they shall dwell therein... for ever. And David my servant shall be their Prince for ever" (v. 25). We know however that the Romans subsequently drove them out of their land.
5. "And I will make a covenant of peace with them: it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; ...and [I] will set My sanctuary in the midst of them for ever (v. 26).

How will the Lord bring them back?

Jeremiah 16 gives us details. After God has initially driven them out because of their sins, He will bring them back. To accomplish this He will use fishers who will draw them to come to Palestine and hunters that will drive them out of the safest hiding places. But the people will still be in unbelief. Therefore they will not rely on Jehovah, but will look for help from the mighty nations. The country that will give them most help to return is described in Isaiah 18. It is a country beyond the "rivers of Ethiopia" (Heb. Cush), namely the Nile and the Euphrates. — On every map showing the distribution of the old nations based on Genesis 10:7-13 it can be seen that the sons of Cush settled near and between these rivers. The old enemies of Israel once lived along and in between these rivers. — This unnamed country, which in the olden days was unknown to Israel, will adopt a friendly attitude in the time of their return. It is a politically active nation, wielding both naval and commercial power (v. 2). Will Israel find rest and peace in Palestine?

The entire world will have their eyes fixed on Palestine and on the restored nation of Israel (v. 3). But Jehovah will remain silent (v. 4). He cannot support the efforts made in their own strength with the help of the world powers. And when their efforts have an apparent success and it seems that fruit starts to come, He will bring His judgment over it (v. 5). The people will not again be driven out of the land, but it will be delivered to their enemies, the nations (v. 6). The time of Jacob's trouble will have arrived (Jer. 30:7; Mt. 24:21, 22).

But at that time the Spirit of God will work in their hearts. When the great tribulation has begun God will work in a peculiar way (Dan. 12; Is. 26:19; Ezek. 37). The people will be restored but not all persons will receive spiritual life from God. Of them that come out of the nations to dwell in the land some will turn to God and others will be judged (see also Is. 66:24). In that day two thirds of these that are in the land will perish in the judgments (Zech. 13:8). The remainder will be refined and tried (v. 9). But, in that day, Jehovah will pour over them the Spirit of grace and supplications and all (remaining) families will look upon Him Whom they have pierced and they will wail because of Him (Zech. 12:10-14).

When will the ten tribes return to the land?

We saw that in Ezekiel 37 both Judah (the two tribes) and Israel (Ephraim, the ten tribes) will return to the land to be reunited there.

In Daniel 9 only the two tribes which were brought to Babylon are referred to. They will be in the land in the last days and will restore the temple service. We saw in Zechariah 13 that two thirds of them will perish in the land through the judgments.

The ten tribes will not be judged in the land. Only the faithful remnant of them will return. This we learn from Ezekiel 20. Just as in the exodus from Egypt all the unbelievers perished in the wilderness, so the unbelievers of the ten tribes will fall under the judgment of God after they have left the countries in which they lived and before they enter into Palestine (vs. 34-38). It is therefore very likely that the faithful remnant will only enter the land *after* the great tribulation.

The two tribes rejected the Lord Jesus. According to the word of the Lord they will accept the antichrist (John 5:43), and for this reason the terrible judgments of God will come upon them. The ten tribes did not reject the Lord and therefore that word of the Lord is not applicable to them.

Conclusion

We have found that the two tribes will return to the land and form an independent nation there. They will receive help, which they will accept, from a large seafaring and commercial nation.

They will make a covenant of seven years (the last week of Daniel 9) with the head of the restored Roman Empire. That covenant will however be annulled and God will give the land into the hands of their enemies. Two thirds of the people will perish and the remaining third will turn to God.

Afterwards God will search out the ten tribes and bring the faithful remnant of them into the land again.

To be cont'd

— QUOTE —

He makes *all* things work together to the good of those who love Him. He weans us in every way from this world, that He may attach us to that One for which He has created us anew. This is only a place we are passing through, where Christ was cast out. We pass through it, and bereft of all here, we have only to work for Him and to glorify Him. God's hand is always better than man's; His seeming harshness even is better than the world's favour: the spring which guides it is always love, and love directed by perfect wisdom which we shall understand by-and-by. Meanwhile, He has given His Son, that we may be able to be certain that all is love. It is a world of sorrow, but where Christ has left His footsteps, indelible proofs for faith that love has entered this world of sorrow to take its part there in grace. Look then to Jesus... He bears a part in all our afflictions; and be sure that the love of God will not forsake you.

J.N.D.

ONLY TWO WORDS

—G. W. Steidl

Strange how the relationship of words to one another can make such an impact upon a person. I'm thinking of two little three-letter words which have really impressed me of late. They occasionally occur together in the Bible; and always just in the right place to bring joy out of a dismal situation. These two words are.... "BUT GOD."

Picture first the crucifixion of Christ as described by Paul in Acts 13. He details how the Lord Jesus was condemned by the outraged religious leaders; sentenced by Pilate, the Governor, in spite of His obvious innocence; and crucified by some callous soldiers. The hopes of all who trusted Him seemed to be sealed in the tomb where they placed His body. What completely reverses the tone of this sad account? "BUT GOD raised Him from among the dead." This transformed the cross from a

tragedy to a triumph. This changed Christ's disciples from fearful fugitives to bold witnesses. This makes all the difference to every believer in Jesus Christ who realizes that, "If Christ be not raised our faith is in vain; we are yet in our sins" (1 Co. 15:17).

Or think of the unhappy description of human nature in Ephesians 2. Controlled by Satan, governed by egotistical lust and subject to the wrath of God. This is how the Word of God pictures us, a picture well collaborated by history as well as personal experience. How radically this picture changes when one accepts Christ. "BUT GOD Who is rich in mercy... even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us (made us alive) together with Christ..." (Eph. 2:4-5 KJV.). We receive deliverance from Satan's bondage, from destructive selfishness and from the penalty of sin through God's love and mercy. We become children of His family.

Approaching the end of his life, the aged apostle Paul confided to his young friend Timothy about how co-workers had deserted him, enemies had persecuted him and how he stood alone before the judges when tried for his faith. What kept Paul from discouragement and bitterness? "BUT (GOD) the Lord stood with me, and gave me power!" (2 Tim. 4:17).

This is the paradox of Christianity. We walk amidst darkness and problems and frustrations, BUT GOD changes our whole view of the situation. God loves to do this.