

Study 1. "My Church"

READ: Matthew 16: 13-23



KEY VERSE:

Matthew 16: 18

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

The earthly life of the Lord Jesus was almost finished. For about three years, He had gone from place to place, preaching, teaching and healing. Now He was commencing His journey from Caesarea Philippi, in the extreme north, to Jerusalem. Note carefully, in **verse 21**, what He said would happen when He arrived there.

As this journey was about to begin, He questioned His disciples about their understanding of who He really was. He began by asking them a general question - **"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"** To this question they gave a variety of answers. (See **verse 14**) His first question was followed by a much more direct one - **"Who do YOU say that I am?"** It was Peter who replied, **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"**.

It is clear that Jesus accepted what Peter said as a true and accurate answer to His question. He did, however, remind Peter that he had not discovered this by his own unaided intelligence. (**"flesh and blood"**) It had been revealed to him by God in Heaven.

It was immediately after Peter's remarkable statement that Jesus began to speak, for the very first time, about the church. It is important to understand that the teaching about the church is closely bound up with the uniqueness of Jesus as **"the Christ, the Son of the living God"**. Only such a Person can properly speak about building **"My church"**!

There are four important points to note:

1. THE CHURCH'S FOUNDATION

"this rock"

"This rock" does not refer to Peter. The church is not built on him. The foundation of the church is

the Person of Christ, the Son of the living God, as Peter had just confessed Him to be. He is the only safe and lasting foundation. Peter himself, and all the other apostles, in their preaching consistently urged people to put their trust in the Lord Jesus - not in any mere man, however good he may be. (Read **Acts 4: 12 and 1 Corinthians 3: 11**)

2. THE CHURCH'S CONSTRUCTION

"I will build"

Jesus did not say, 'I have built My church'. At the time of His speaking, the church was still future. It would only begin to be built when three events had taken place:-

- a. The death of the Lord Jesus, as the means by which the sins of those who would make up the church would be taken away. **"Christ also loved the church, and GAVE HIMSELF FOR IT."** (**Ephesians 5: 25**)
- b. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus, by which He is empowered to give eternal life to all who believe in Him. (**Ephesians 1: 19-23**)
- c. The coming of the Holy Spirit, following the return of the Lord Jesus to Heaven. The Holy Spirit has an essential work to do in bringing people to believe the Gospel, and so become members of Christ's church. (**John 16: 7-11**)
The next Study will deal more fully with this.

3. THE CHURCH'S SEPARATION

"I will build MY church"

It is always helpful to remember that the word 'church' in the Bible means 'a called-out company of people'. It refers to PEOPLE, not to the BUILDING in which they may meet. So when the Lord Jesus speaks about **"My church"**, He is referring to all who will believe in Him after the events mentioned above. Each 'stone', so to speak, is very precious to Him, for He paid a high price to purchase it! Each one belongs to Him in a special way, having been 'called-out', or separated, from the sinful world.

4. THE CHURCH'S PROTECTION - **"the gates of Hades (hell) shall not prevail against it."**

This means that there is no force, such as Satan or death, which has the power to stop Him completing His church. Because of who He is, He has the authority and the strength to finish what He has planned! Throughout the centuries, Christians have been persecuted and even martyred, but the church of Christ, the Son of the living God, still advances!

Study 1. "My Church"

1 WRITE IN YOUR OWN WORDS WHAT JESUS SAID WOULD HAPPEN TO HIM WHEN HE ARRIVED AT JERUSALEM.

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2 A. WHAT GENERAL QUESTION DID JESUS PUT TO HIS DISCIPLES AT CAESAREA PHILIPPI?

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B. LIST FOUR ANSWERS WHICH THEY GAVE.

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C. HOW DID PETER REPLY TO HIS MASTER'S SECOND QUESTION?

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3 ANSWER TRUE OR FALSE:-

- a. Some people thought Jesus was John the Baptist come to life again.
- b. Jesus rebuked Peter for his foolish answer.
- c. Peter's statement about who Jesus is was the result of God revealing it to him.
- d. The Lord Jesus said that Peter is the foundation of the church.
- e. The first mention of the church is found in *MATTHEW 16*.

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4 EXPLAIN HOW THE BIBLE'S USE OF THE WORD 'CHURCH' OFTEN DIFFERS FROM OUR EVERYDAY USE OF THE WORD.

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5 "THE GATES OF HADES/HELL CANNOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT."

- a. To what does "it" refer?
- b. Who said these words?
- c. What is the meaning of these words?

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6 WRITE A SENTENCE TO EXPLAIN, AS CLEARLY AS YOU CAN, WHAT JESUS MEANT WHEN HE SAID, "I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH".

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7 WHY WAS IT NECESSARY FOR THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE LORD JESUS TO TAKE PLACE BEFORE THE FORMATION OF HIS CHURCH?

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Study 2. The Church's Birthday

This study sheet belongs to:

READ: Acts 1: 7-11 & 2: 1-5



KEY VERSE:

1 Corinthians 12: 13

“For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body...”

In Study 1, we stressed that when the Lord Jesus first spoke of His church, it was still in the future. He said, **“I WILL build My church”**. (Matthew 16: 18) It was not until fifty days after His death that His promise began to be fulfilled. Think back over the events of those days! You remember that after He rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples on several occasions. At first, some of them were very skeptical, but eventually all of them became totally convinced of the reality of His resurrection. He instructed them to **“go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”**. (Mark 16: 15) Before embarking on this task, however, they were to remain, at Jerusalem, until the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Forty days after His resurrection, the Lord Jesus returned to Heaven, and, true to His word, the Holy Spirit came down just ten days later. In the Jewish calendar, with its annual round of religious festivals, or feasts, it was the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came. (Each year, Pentecost, which means ‘the fiftieth day’, occurred fifty days after the Feast of Passover. In this particular year Jesus had been crucified at Passover) From the Christian point of view, the Day of Pentecost described in **Acts 2** is very special, because on that day, the church was formed.

The experience which the followers of the now-ascended Lord Jesus had, is very remarkable. The whole house was filled by a sound, like that of a great rushing wind. In addition, there were tongues, like fire, which appeared and rested on each person in the house. Equally wonderful was the fact that they found themselves able to speak in languages previously unknown to them! It was a truly miraculous thing to hear ordinary Galileans proclaiming **“the wonderful works of God”** in languages which they had never studied. (Acts 2: 11) It was all happening because the Holy Spirit had come - just as Jesus had promised before He left. For the Christian church, this was a never-to-be-

forgotten day! It was its beginning, its ‘birthday’. We believe that Paul, years later, had this event in mind when he wrote the words of the **Key Verse**. He was teaching his readers that the descent of the Holy Spirit had fused all individual Christians into one ‘body’, thus creating a spiritual unity. They all ‘belong together’, just as all the parts of your body are joined together to form one living unit!

The crowds who filled the streets of Jerusalem demanded an explanation! How could these disciples of Jesus suddenly speak unknown languages? What had happened to them? Perhaps they had been drinking too much wine! (See **verses 12 & 13**)

Peter seized the opportunity to speak to them. He immediately denied the accusation of drunkenness, and went on to explain that what had just happened was the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy of Joel. He then spoke about the Lord Jesus, whom the Jews had crucified (just seven weeks earlier!), but whom God had raised from the dead. Peter’s whole argument was that the events which had just occurred were a conclusive proof that Jesus was who He had claimed to be - the Christ, the Son of God.

On hearing this, many of Peter’s listeners were deeply troubled.

“Men and brethren,” they said, **“what shall we do?”**

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”, was Peter’s plain reply. (Acts 2: 37 & 38)

Many did just as Peter said! On that day - the church’s ‘birthday’ - about 3,000 people became believers in the risen, glorified Lord Jesus, received the Holy Spirit, and were incorporated into Christ’s church.

The Lord Jesus had begun to build, just as He had said. Each new believer in Him was like another ‘stone’ in the great spiritual structure which He called **“My church”**. The work of construction is on-going, right down to the present time!

Study 2. The Church's Birthday

1 ARRANGE THESE EVENTS IN THE ORDER IN WHICH THEY HAPPENED, BY PUTTING 1 - 7 IN THE BOXES:-

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|---|--------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| The crucifixion of Jesus happened at Jerusalem. | <input type="checkbox"/> | The Lord Jesus was buried. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The apostles waited in Jerusalem. | <input type="checkbox"/> | The church was formed. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| After 40 days, the Ascension took place. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Jesus rose again on the third day. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

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2 'WIND' AND 'FIRE' ARE BOTH USED OFTEN IN THE BIBLE TO STAND FOR, OR REPRESENT, GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT. SUGGEST SOME WAYS IN WHICH WIND IS A VERY SUITABLE SYMBOL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

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3 PETER'S EXPLANATION OF WHAT HAPPENED ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST REACHED ITS CLIMAX IN *Acts 2: 36*. READ THIS VERSE CAREFULLY, THEN WRITE TWO SENTENCES IN YOUR OWN WORDS TO SAY:-

a. What the Jews had done to Jesus.

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b. What God had done to Him.

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4 VERSE 37 STATES THAT PETER'S HEARERS "WERE CUT TO THE HEART". (OR WERE PRICKED IN THEIR HEART)

a. What do you think this means?

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b. In response to their question, what did Peter tell them to do in *VERSE 38*?

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5 WHY IS THE DAY OF PENTECOST, DESCRIBED IN *Acts 2*, AN UNFORGETTABLE DAY IN THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY?

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6 WRITE IN YOUR OWN WORDS WHAT HAPPENED, WHEN THE FIRST CHRISTIANS WERE IN THE HOUSE AT JERUSALEM, ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST.

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Study 3.

The character and the completion of the Church

READ: Ephesians 5: 22-33 and
1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18



KEY VERSE:

Colossians 1: 18

“He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.”

The church, which came into being on the Day of Pentecost as described in **Acts 2**, continues to exist right down to the present time. Of course, all the first members have long since died, but God has continued to add new members, taken from all parts of the world. Every time a person repents of sin and puts his or her faith in the Lord Jesus, that person becomes **“a living stone”** in Christ’s church.

(See 1 Peter 2: 5)

A moment’s thought will convince you that the entire church has never been, in total, upon earth at any one time. It is still ‘under construction’, so to speak. We believe, however, that it is nearing completion! It spans all the centuries, from **Acts 2** onwards, and is world-wide in its extent, for it is NOT an architectural structure, but a vast, immeasurable number of people who belong to the Lord Jesus!

We must try to understand that this church belongs to God! He planned it, owns it, has great purposes for it, and will most certainly bring it to completion. Note how the Bible often stresses this point, in a variety of ways:-

1. The Lord Jesus said, **“I will build My church, AND THE GATES OF HADES (HELL) SHALL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT”**. (**Matthew 16: 18**) This means that the power of death cannot overcome Christ’s church. Individual Christians die, but Christ’s victory over death, in His resurrection, assures them of life eternal, because of their union with Him.
(2 Timothy 2: 11)
2. The Lord Jesus has an intense love for His church, and paid a great price to secure it for Himself. **Ephesians 5: 25** tells us that **“Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself**

for it”. Because it cost Him so much, we can be sure that He will never abandon it! Rather, He will **“present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing”**. (**Ephesians 5: 27**)

3. The close links between Christ and His church are also taught in the New Testament when it speaks of Christ as **“The Head”** and the church as **“His Body”**. **Ephesians 1: 22 & 23**, for example, tell us that God gave Christ the position of being **“head over all things to the church, which is His body”**. We all know that, physically, our head (where our brain is located!) controls the movements of our body. By using this ‘picture language’, the Bible is teaching us about the authority and the control which the Lord Jesus has over His church. See also **Colossians 1: 18**, where Paul uses very similar words about the Lord Jesus and the church - **“He is the head of the body, the church”**.

It is true to say that God’s thoughts and plans have always been of a COMPLETE church which lacks nothing. It is when the Lord Jesus comes again that this goal will be reached. When that happens, the last ‘stone’ will have been added to the great spiritual structure, and the church will be complete, as it never was before. The dead Christians will be raised, the living ones will be changed, and, together, the whole ‘body’ will be united for ever with the Lord. Read **1 Thessalonians 4: 13 - 18** thoughtfully. What **“a glorious church . . . holy and without blemish”** that will be! (**Ephesians 5: 27**)

Let us search our hearts! Do we belong to this wonderful church which Christ is building, and for which He gave His life? It is only by repenting of our sins and receiving Jesus as our personal Saviour and Lord that we can ‘join’. There is NO OTHER WAY!

Study 3. The character and the completion of the Church

1 THE CHURCH WHICH THE LORD JESUS IS BUILDING IS NOT A STRUCTURE OF STONE, WOOD AND OTHER SIMILAR MATERIALS. WRITE A CLEAR EXPLANATION OF WHAT HIS CHURCH IS.

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2 READ CAREFULLY *EPHESIANS 5:22-33*, THEN ANSWER THESE POINTS :-

- a. Of what is Christ the head?
- b. How did Christ prove His love for His church?
- c. According to *VERSE 27*, what will He finally do?
- d. For whom, in the Christian church, is the relationship of Christ to His church, a special pattern?
- e. What does this teaching mean for today?

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3 SUPPLY THE MISSING WORDS IN THIS SENTENCE, WHICH IS BASED UPON *EPHESIANS 1:22 & 23*.

“These verses teach us that the exalted, glorified Christ is the
 and the church is His ”

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4 USE *1 THESSALONIANS 4* TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:-

- a. When the Lord comes again, what will happen to believers who have died in Him?

- b. What will happen to Christians who are alive at that moment?

- c. Where will the meeting with the Lord take place?

- d. Why is this event often referred to as ‘The Rapture’? (Clue! - use your dictionary!!)

- e. What word, in *VERSE 17*, shows that the ‘head’ and the ‘body’ will never be apart again?

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5 WHAT IDEAS DO THE USE OF THE TERMS ‘HEAD’ AND ‘BODY’ CONVEY, WITH REGARD TO CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH?

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6 EXPLAIN, AS CLEARLY AS YOU CAN, HOW A PERSON BECOMES A MEMBER OF CHRIST’S CHURCH.

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This study sheet belongs to:

Study 4. The practices of the Church and the personal qualities of its members



KEY VERSE:

Acts 2: 42

“They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

In this Study, we go back to the earliest days of the Christian church. Our task is to find the answers to such questions as these: What did the ‘foundation members’ believe? What kind of people were they? Does God intend that the practices of the first Christians should continue until the church is complete?

The Reading from **Acts 2** helps us to understand what beliefs and practices were important to the Christians who lived at the time when the church began:-

1. Upon believing in the Lord Jesus, they **“were baptized”**. This means they were momentarily immersed in water. It symbolised the end of their former life: they were now taking their stand with the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. They **“continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine”**. (**Acts 2: 42**) The apostles were formerly the disciples of Jesus. During His life-time they had learned from Him and now they became the teachers of the new Christians. What the apostles taught carried weight with the believers and was accepted as authoritative. This is what ‘continuing steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine’ means. The apostles’ doctrine was later complemented by the epistles which form a large part of the New Testament, and the basis of teaching for the church.
3. They met together regularly, finding much happiness and encouragement in their fellowship with each other. It is still God’s plan that members of Christ’s church should meet together on a regular basis, wherever this is possible. (**Read Hebrews 10: 25**)
4. Of utmost importance to them was **“the breaking of bread”**. (**Acts 2: 42**) This refers to the Lord’s Supper, at which bread and wine are used as symbols of the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus. They did this because He had requested it. (**See 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26**)

READ: Acts 2: 41-47; 4: 32-37; 11: 27-30

5. Times of prayer were another practice of 1st century church-life. Christians pray privately, but in the **Acts of the Apostles** the COLLECTIVE prayers of the church are emphasised. (**See Acts 12: 5 & 12**)

We believe that these practices, were not merely for the start of what we may call ‘The Church Age’. They are for each succeeding generation of Christians, and should continue until the return of the Lord Jesus. For each of us, then, the responsibility is to ensure that we try to associate with fellow-believers who value these practices. A ‘church’ which does not show these features is not really a church according to the New Testament pattern. If we desire to make progress spiritually, we must try to find such a church, and then give it our full commitment.

The **Acts of the Apostles** also shows us what kind of people the members of Christ’s church were.

Note these features:-

1. They were happy and thankful people. (**Read Acts 2: 46 & 47 again!**) Their faith was in no sense dull and boring! Rather, it was genuine and dynamic!
2. They were marked by a great spirit of oneness. Their unity was clear for all to see. Sadly, Satan has succeeded in causing many divisions, as the years have passed.
3. They really cared for each other, and were willing to share with others who were in need. (**Acts 2: 44 & 45 and 4: 32, 34 & 35**)
4. They were not afraid to talk about their Lord and Saviour to neighbours and friends. **“They spoke the word of God with boldness.”** (**Acts 4: 31**) In fact, they found it hard not to share the good news! Even when the Jewish religious leaders, who rejected Jesus’ claims to be the Christ, began to persecute them, they showed tremendous courage. (**See Acts 5: 41**)

Again we are challenged! Are the marks of true membership of Christ’s church seen in us? Do we genuinely want to obey the Lord Jesus? Are our lives showing love and concern for others? Are we trying to spread the good news of the Lord Jesus? It is important for all of us to be sure that we belong, not to some man-made organization, but to the great spiritual reality of which our Lord Jesus spoke - **“I will build My church”**.

Study 4. The practices of the Church and the personal qualities of its members

- 1** A. **ACCORDING TO Acts 2:41, WHAT WAS THE FIRST 'STEP' FOR A NEW CHRISTIAN?**

 B. **IN WHAT WAY WERE CHRISTIANS BAPTISED? (ACTS 8: 36-39, MAY HELP YOU!)**

 C. **WHAT IS THE MEANING, OR SIGNIFICANCE, OF A CHRISTIAN'S BAPTISM?**

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- 2** **THE FIRST MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH "CONTINUED STEADFASTLY IN THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE." (OR TEACHING) ACTS 2:42**
 i. Explain, IN YOUR OWN WORDS, what this means.

 ii. In what way could we, TODAY, "continue steadfastly ..."?

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- 3** **READ 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26, THEN ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:-**
 i. When did the Lord Jesus give His disciples the instructions about the Lord's Supper?

 ii. What did He say about the bread?

 iii. What did He say about the cup (of wine)?

 iv. How would you answer someone who said that the Breaking of Bread / Lord's Supper was only for the FIRST members of Christ's church?

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- 4** A. **GIVE A DEFINITE EXAMPLE OF HOW THE FIRST CHRISTIANS EXPRESSED THEIR LOVE AND CARE FOR FELLOW CHRISTIANS WHO WERE POOR AND IN NEED.**

 B. **WRITE A NOTE ABOUT A PRESENT-DAY EXAMPLE OF SUCH AN ATTITUDE.**

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- 5** **TODAY, CHRISTIANS ARE SO DIVIDED THAT IT IS NOT EASY FOR A YOUNG BELIEVER TO KNOW WHAT 'CHURCH' TO JOIN. WHAT ADVICE DO YOU THINK WOULD BE HELPFUL TO SUCH A PERSON?**

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- 6** **SUGGEST SOME BENEFITS WHICH COME TO A YOUNG CHRISTIAN FROM HAVING "FELLOWSHIP" WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS.**

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Total marks for this Unit

Return your study sheets to:

25

Total marks for this study