

CHAPTER ONE: HOW MANY CHURCHES?

“Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18). These are the words of Jesus. Yet, thousands have ignored the fact that not more than one church can be built upon one rock! In this lesson, we will discuss the fact: THE LORD BUILT BUT ONE CHURCH. Paul commanded we “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). It is mandatory that we seek out and find the scriptures that prove beyond question there is but one church.

In an issue of Good Housekeeping Magazine (March 1980), J. Gordon Melton listed some 1200 religious organizations claiming acceptance before the eyes of God. Only those whose god is Satan (i.e. Satanic worship, cults and/or worship of demons) did not fit the criteria for what Melton calls “Christianity in America.” Obviously, those fitting his criterion suggest themselves as being in agreement with the New Testament; his listing including most Jewish religions and far-eastern religions which are practiced in the United States. While they admit the New Testament is not always used as their sole rule and authority, they nonetheless claim they are not condemned by the New Testament.

Any serious Bible student sees readily the fallacy in such reasoning. Such suggestions simply cannot be truthful! God is not he author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). It is Man and not God that has developed the idea of “one church is as good as another church.” If we can determine Jesus built but one church, then we also determine mankind is wrong when sanctioning and promoting more than one church and/or any religion disagreeing in doctrine or practice with the New Testament scriptures.

HOW MANY CHURCHES? (Outline of Lesson)

Text: Matthew 16: 13 – 20

- I. Scripture term for the church
 - A. Various name, EACH INDICATING JUST ONE
 1. Body – Ephesians 1:22 – 23; Colossians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 12:12- 13
 2. Bride – Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 21:2, 9
 3. Kingdom – Colossians 1:13; Acts 8:12; 1 Corinthians 15:24
 4. Church – Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47; 1 Timothy 3:14 – 15; Ephesians 3:10
 - B. Oneness in Christ shows oneness of church
 1. Define: THE = this certain ONE
 2. John 17:20 – 21

- 3. Matthew 17:5; 3:17
- 4. Ephesians 4: 1 – 6

- II. The kingdom in prophesy
 - A. Daniel 2:44 – 45
 - B. Isaiah 2:2 – 3 (see also Luke 24: 45 – 48)
 - C. Isaiah 35: 8 – 10 (see also John 14:6)
- III. From whence come “other churches?”
 - A. 1 John 2:18 – 19
 - B. Acts 20: 28 – 31
 - C. Galatians 1: 6 – 9
 - D. 2 Thessalonians 2: 1 – 12
 - E. 2 Timothy 4: 1- 10

Conclusion:

As there is only ONE Christ, (one Head, one King, one Husband, etc.) it is clear there is ONE church. If it takes more than one church to please God, why did He not tell us which ones?

Discussion:

Fewer subjects create more disagreement than the question, “How many churches?” But note the TERMS used to describe the church: BODY, BRIDE, KINGDOM. Each one is SINGULAR. Just as Jesus Himself is ONE (Ephesians 4:4 – 6), the church is ONE. Compare also this fact: No rightfully formed body has more than one head; no honorable marriage has more than one husband for one bride (see 2 Corinthians 11:2) and no respected kingdom of reputation and strength has more than one king. Do we dare believe God would allow anything less than the VERY BEST of unity between the Head and body, Husband and bride, King and kingdom?

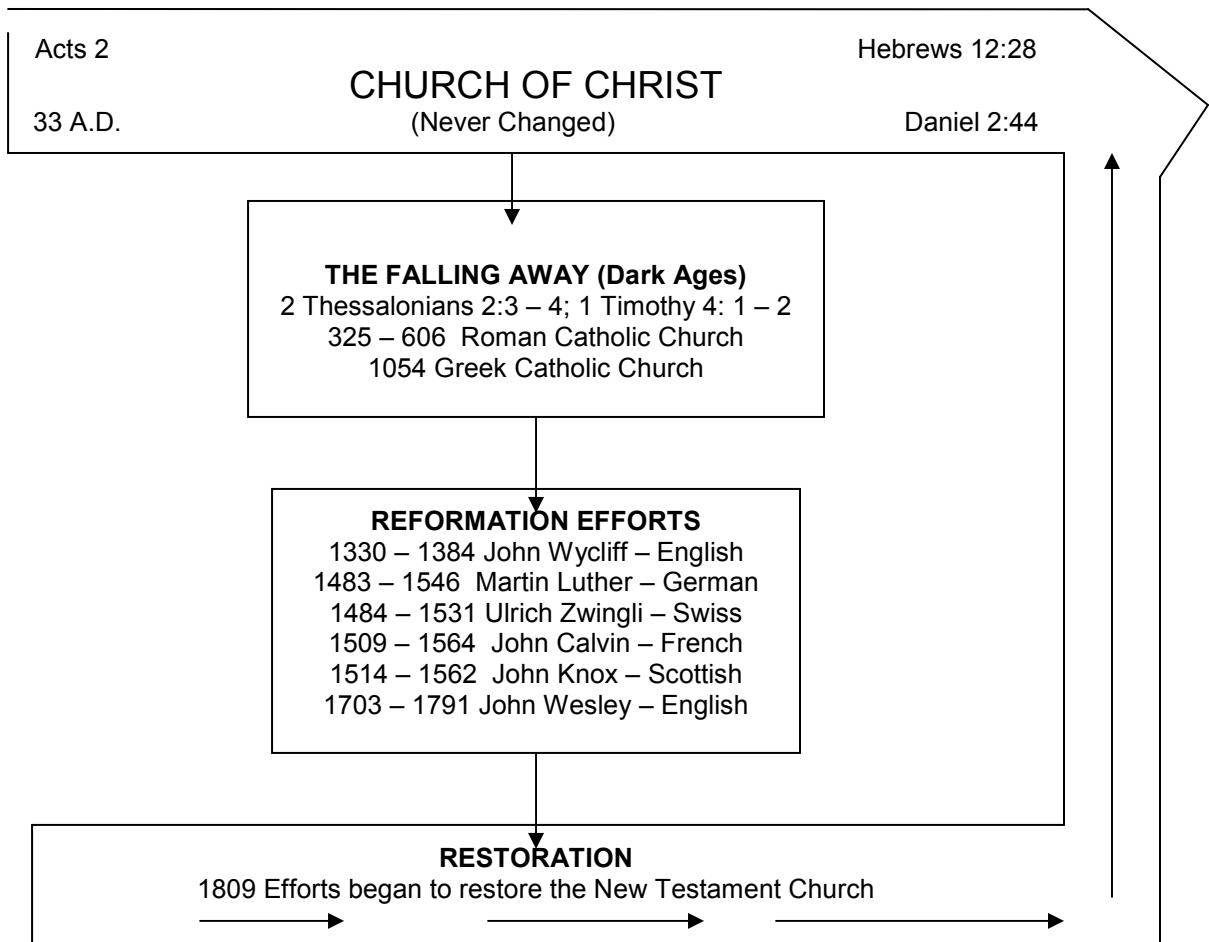
Second, we must note the church in prophesy, Daniel was not the first to prophesy concerning the church; however, he is one of the best remembered prophets. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar contained the following:

- A. A great image, showing the kingdoms of earth from the greatest to the least.
- B. Head was fine gold. (Nebuchadnezzar – Babylon Empire)
- C. Breast and arms of silver (Medo – Persian Empire)
- D. Belly and thighs of brass (Macedonian Empire)
- E. Feet and toes of iron and clay mixed (division of Roman Empire and government)
- F. Stone cut out without hands (church)

As you read the passage (Daniel 2:31 – 45), you must remember the church (just one) was in the mind of God from the beginning (Ephesians 3: 1-11), and therefore the dream and the interpretation thereof would come true. The stone “which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner: (Acts 4:10 – 11) is Christ who established His kingdom in the days of the Roman kings. The point is, neither the dream nor the interpretation of the dream described more than one stone! Verse 44 of Daniel 2 is very specific when Daniel says, “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”

Look also at the Isaiah 2:2 – 3. “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the tops of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” Now examine Luke 24:45 – 48 noting Jesus demanded the exact same thing of the apostles! How many houses did the Lord establish in Jerusalem? According to the prophecy and the same statement of Jesus, THERE WAS ONLY ONE HOUSE ESTABLISHED IN JERUSALEM. Note also 1Timothy 3:14 – 15 states the house of God is the church!

Many ask the question in all sincerity, “Since God only established ONE church, from where did all these others come?” The answer demands a sad but true commentary of mankind. The Biblical answer is found in 1 John 2:18 – 19; Acts 20:28 – 31; 2 Thessalonians 2: 1 – 12; 1 Timothy 4: 1 – 10. The chart on the following page illustrates these verses quite well. Study it and see the Lord’s kingdom shall never be destroyed!



As we conclude this part of our study, the evidence is clear; there is but one church established by Jesus Christ. We must realize it cost an enormous price (Acts 20:28); the same price that redeemed us (1 Peter 1:18 – 25). Once these facts are known, how can anyone with an ounce of compassion mock Jesus Christ by creating man-made religious organizations claiming to be “a church” or even an organization daring to boast acceptance with the Almighty?

1. Upon how many rocks did Jesus promise to build how many churches?

2. Name at least three other terms for the church and indicate if they are ever found in the plural form when pertaining to the church.

3. Paul states at Romans 16:16, "The churches of Christ salute you." Does this mean there is more than one CHURCH, or more than one CONGREGATION of the one church of Christ? Explain your answer.

4. The Jews had a custom that the number seven was a complete number (Matthew 18:21 – 23). If this is correct, does Ephesians 4:4 – 6 indicate a completion in God's plan?

5. Who was the prophet that foretold the coming of the church its power over all people of all nations? In your answer, state the dream and its interpretation.

6. How do Isaiah's prophesy and Luke's recorded words of Jesus concerning the coming of the church correspond?

7. How did "other churches" get started? How many of them find favor with God and authorization within the New Testament?