

Introduction to the Early Church

... the church in the wilderness ... (Acts 7:38)

Readings: Acts 7:30-38
Hebrews 2:12
Psalm 22:22

Believing every word of God, as God has given them to us in the holy scriptures, his one perfect interpretation in English, God's book, the KJB... let us consider what God might have hidden in his word for us to discover concerning the word "church" as it appears here in Acts 7:38.

Many believe that the church began at Pentecost in Acts 2. But as can be seen in Acts 7, God seems to be telling us otherwise: for Acts 7 is referring to the Israelites during the 40 years in the wilderness after being brought out of Egypt by God's mighty hand (Exodus 32:11), and is referring to them as "the church."

Rest assured (well, don't "rest" in this respect, but you can *be* sure) that modern versions of man will eliminate any and all references (that they can) to the church existing before Acts 2, so as to remove the spiritual connections their readers would otherwise be able to make regarding "the church in the wilderness."

Considering that the gospels and epistles often cite "earlier" scripture, let's put some passages together...

Hebrews 2:12 ... I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of **the church** will I sing praise unto thee.

Psalm 22:22 ... I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of **the congregation** will I praise thee.

It is well known that Psalm 22 is a prophecy about Jesus Christ ("they pierced my hands and my feet" – "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture") ... but though they are God's words, relate to David's personal experiences. And it was David's personal experience to sing praise unto the LORD in the midst of the congregation: in the midst of the church.

Acts 20:28... 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**.

Psalm 74:2... Remember **thy congregation**, which **thou** hast **purchased** of **old**;

of **old**;

Hebrews 4:3 ... **the works** were **finished** from **the foundation of the world**.

Revelation 13:8 ... **the Lamb** **slain** from **the foundation of the world**.

Though in eternity "time" Jesus the Lamb was slain "of old"... "from the foundation of the world," he came to us and for us "in due time" (Romans 5:6), "once in the end of the world" (Hebrews 9:26), and was "manifest in these last times" (1 Peter 1:20).

Comparing spiritual things with spiritual, God appears to be telling us in his written word that the congregation, mentioned over 350 times in the "old testament," is the church. Therefore, the church is mentioned hundreds of times in the "old testament" from Genesis thru Malachi. It is not hidden, but with God's interpretation into English in his book, the KJB, the early church stands out to us in the "old testament" as clearly as bright daylight.

Consider also Psalm 78:54... And he brought them to the border of **his sanctuary**, even to **this mountain**, which **his right hand** had **purchased**.

- This verse has the word “purchased” which can be compared with Psalm 74:2 & Acts 20:28.
- In this verse, it is “his sanctuary” which his right hand had purchased. This should bring to mind where the church/congregation of God meets.
- And “sanctuary” should also bring to mind “sanctify” – which should bring to mind how we ought to keep “the house of God, which is the church of the living God...” (1 Tim 3:15) ... how we ought to behave ourselves in his sanctuary: keep it sanctified, and sanctify ourselves before coming and entering into the sanctuary.
- Back to “purchased” – seeing the words “his right hand had purchased” should raise thoughts about what (or rather, who) is “his right hand”?
 - He that stands or sits on the right hand of somebody is often referred to as that person’s “right hand” (or “right hand man”).
 - Jesus is seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3).
 - Jesus was standing on the right hand of God when Stephen was being stoned (Acts 7:56).
 - Thus Jesus **is** (or, **Jesus** is) the right hand of God.
 - And so Psalm 78:54 is telling us that Jesus “had purchased” his sanctuary – *already* – i.e., “from the foundation of the world.”

So, adding Psalm 78:54...

Psalm 74:2... Remember **thy congregation**, which **thou hast purchased of old**; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this **mount Zion**, wherein thou hast dwelt.

Psalm 78:54... And he brought them to the border of **his sanctuary**, even to **this mountain**, which **his right hand had purchased**.

Acts 20:28... 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**.

Hebrews 2:12... I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of **the church** will I sing praise unto thee.

Psalm 22:22... I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of **the congregation** will I praise thee.

And next, we can see Jesus referring to the church, before pentecost – and indeed before his crucifixion (though in eternity “time” it was already finished – before he said “it is finished”) ...

Matthew 16:18 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.

Matthew 18:15-17 Moreover if thy **brother** shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy **brother**.
But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee **one or two more**, that in the mouth of **two or three witnesses** every word may be established.
And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto **the church**: but if he neglect to hear **the church**, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

We can then see, by paying careful attention to God’s wording, that the first mention of the church after pentecost refers not to the starting of the church, but to the adding to it:

Acts 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were **baptized**: and the same day there were **added unto them** about three thousand souls.

Acts 2:47 And the Lord **added to the church** daily such as should be saved.

So where, then, might we find the actual first mention of the church?... the congregation? ...

The first mention of the church ... the congregation ...

Exodus 12:1-3 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,
This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.
Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel,

This first mention of the church – the congregation – is in connection with the passover. Jesus was there. Jesus is our passover (1 Corinthians 5:7), but he was theirs (the Jews') first. Jesus, their passover and ours, visited the “congregation” at the time of its first mention, while it was still in Egypt. But he immediately led them out. And he was that spiritual Rock that followed them in the wilderness, visiting with them in “the church in the wilderness.”

To the Jew first, and also to the *Greek* ... the *Gentile*

The early church, led by Jesus out of Egypt and into the wilderness of mount Sina, was composed of Israelites, who are generally called Jews. But it included also Gentiles, who were “grafted” in (adopted in) to the family of God.
(Ruth, Naomi, Rahab, Uriah & Bathsheba, and many others.)

The church, which already existed, to which 3000 souls were added in Acts 2, was composed of Jews.

The words of scripture – God’s word: the word of the LORD – was given to the Jew first (the Hebrew scriptures) And also to the Gentile (the scriptures in tongues – including English: the KJB in these last days).

Unto the Jews were committed the oracles of God (Romans 3:2)... the lively oracles (Acts 7:38). The Jew first.

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the *Greek*.
For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Romans 2:9-11 Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the *Gentile*;
But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the *Gentile*:
For there is no respect of persons with God.

And consider this: that we which are saved are also to be... Jew first:

Romans 2:28-29 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly;
neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:
But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly;
and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

The just, that live by faith, are those that are saved. They *live* by *faith* in the finished work of Jesus Christ, not by the doing of the works of the law. Salvation is to them that are become Jews inwardly, by faith, by calling upon the name of the Lord to be saved.

With respect to salvation, God has never changed: there is no such thing as different dispensations wherein people were saved at different times in different ways. The word of the Lord makes it clear: there is one way. Period. The word of the Lord says “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). As given to the Jew first, the Lord says “whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered” (Joel 2:32). And as cited again by Peter, the Lord says “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21)... Jew first, Gentile also.

This one way of salvation did not originate with Jesus Christ's resurrection. It was always this way, even from the beginning, because Jesus the Lamb of God, though crucified on earth in due time, was already slain from the foundation of the world in God's eternal "time"...

Genesis 4:25-26 – Adam...Seth...Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.

Psalm 116: I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.

- I will take – very strongly implies a free will to choose
- cup of salvation – Jesus offers it to us freely
- will take ... Revelation 22:17 – And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

So, from "the word of truth" it would appear that men were being saved in the earliest of days, even before the flood, the same way that Abra(ha)m and Isaac were (e.g., Gen 12:8, 26:25), and Paul (Acts 22:16, if not earlier in Acts 9 on the road to Damascus). Jews and Gentiles today are saved the same way as they in olden day. There is no difference, for there is no respect of persons with God (2 Chronicles 19:7, Romans 2:11).

Zephaniah 3:9 For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.

All men are saved the same way throughout all of the dispensation of the fullness of times (Ephesians 1:10).

Jesus said, I am the way... no man cometh unto the Father, but by me... (John 14:6)

... the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (Revelation 13:8)