

First or Twenty-first?

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Jesus promised to build His church, which He identified as his spiritual kingdom (Mat. 16:18–19; John 18:36). Gabriel told Mary that Jesus, the Son the Holy Spirit would implant in her womb, would fulfill the kingdom prophecies God made to David (and to Israel) a millennium earlier (Luke 1:26–35; 2 Sam. 7:12–13).

The church began in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the risen Christ ascended to sit upon the throne of His kingdom (Acts 2:34–47). The book of Acts records the history of the spread of the Gospel, beginning “in Jerusalem,” then to “all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8b). When the Gospel was/is preached, the church was/is established (Luke 8:11). Luke provides some information regarding such things as the organization and worship of the church (e.g., Acts 2:42; 14:23; 20:7; 17, 28), but the epistles flesh out the picture of the Lord’s church as established and nurtured by His apostles. These men were inspired by and had been baptized in the Holy Spirit (Mat. 18:18; John 16:13; Acts 1:4–5; 2:1–4), so the church as they established it was just as Jesus designed it.

A pressing question for all who are serious about Christianity is, “Did the Son of God intend for His church to remain in its inspired, apostolic form only for their time or for all time?” Does the assertion, “We don’t need a first-century church, but a twenty-first century church,” represent Biblical teaching or human opinion? Shall we let the Bible answer?

- Jesus’ “Great Commission” charged the apostles to take the Gospel to all the world, promising that those who believed it and were baptized would be saved (Mark 16:15–16). They began to execute this order on Pentecost, telling believers in the Christ to repent and be baptized for/unto remission of their sins (Acts 2:37–38). The Lord added those who were baptized – thus saved – to His church (vv. 41, 47).
- The execution of the “Great Commission” was not confined to the apostolic age. Jesus said that preaching the Gospel and baptizing men and women to make them disciples was to continue “even unto the end of the world” (Mat. 28:19–20).
- The church in the first century was what it was because of the Gospel/doctrine it received. Jesus, Peter, John, and Paul all warned of false teachers (Mat. 7:15–16; 2 Pet. 2:1–3; 1 John 4:1; Acts 20:29–30). If the apostles were on earth now, would they be warning men of “a different gospel” or “a different doctrine” (Gal. 1:6–9; 1 Tim. 1:3)?

The Bible teaches that Jesus’ first-century church is His **every**-century church, including the twenty-first century. This goal is accomplished only when men follow the New Testament alone regarding the worship, work, organization, and every other aspect of the church.

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