

Lesson One

THE NATURE AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

- 1) In historical and theological order, God gave a *person*, a *proclamation*, and a *people*.
 - a) The Person was Jesus Christ, whom God gave as the object of faith and the basis of salvation.
 - b) The Proclamation centers in the Person who is the content of the message preached.
 - c) The Proclamation that centers in the Person calls and gathers a People who respond to the proclamation of the Person.
 - i) Our study will stress the people or the church, but the church is not part of the proclamation; rather, it is the result of the proclamation.
 - ii) In other words, the message about Jesus gathered a people and so created the church.
- 2) This study is concerned with the New Testament doctrine of the church.
 - a) This first lesson (and the second lesson dealing with the kingdom) will discuss some Old Testament topics and Jewish background that are important for understanding the church.
 - b) The concepts of 1) covenant, 2) kingdom, and 3) messiah provide a framework to understand the place of the community (people, church) of Christ in God's purpose and plan.
 - c) God initiates the covenant relationship in calling a people; God rules in the affairs of human beings for the redemptive purpose of saving a people; God anoints (selects and empowers) his chosen representatives to lead his people; and God's goal is to build a community of people who acknowledge him as their God.
 - d) In the New Testament these items are related to Jesus Christ.
 - i) The New Covenant is in Christ.
 - ii) The authority of the kingship is now given to Christ; he is the anointed king.
 - iii) The church is the community of Christ.

BODY:

- 1) Covenant. JER. 31:31; Heb. 8:8.
 - a) A covenant is a relationship based on promises or sworn oaths.
 - b) Different kinds of covenants existed in ancient Israel.
 - i) Parity covenant
 - (1) A covenant between individuals who were in certain respects equals, such as the covenant between Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31:43-54) and the covenant between David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:3; 23:18).
 - (2) No covenant in which God is a partner is conceived in this way; human beings never initiate the covenant with God or draw up the conditions of the relationship.

- (3) Most often covenant language in the ancient Near East referred to actions by sovereigns and relations between nations.
 - (a) The different types of covenants may be classified as charters, treaties, and loyalty oaths.
 - (b) The first two offer significant parallels to God's covenants in the Old Testament.
- c) God's Covenants.
 - i) God's covenants with Noah, Abraham, and David are examples of charters, in which God bound himself by oath to grant certain favors to a chosen person and the people descended from or joined to that person.
 - (1) The first reference to a covenant in scripture occurs in the account of the flood (Gen. 6:18; 9:8-17).
 - (a) Here God gave his unconditional promise not to destroy again the world by water and placed the rainbow in the sky as a reminder of his covenant with the earth and all flesh.
 - (b) Even this unilateral covenant was accompanied by laws of conduct for Noah and his descendants (Gen. 9:1-7).
 - (2) God bound himself to Abraham by an unconditional promise that God would bless Abraham and through him all of the families of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3), that God would grant Abraham numerous descendants to whom he would give a grant of land (Gen. 15:18; 17:1-21).
 - (a) The sign of the covenant was circumcision, which became so important that the covenant was called "the covenant of circumcision" (Acts 7:8).
 - (b) The covenant promise was continued through Isaac and Jacob (Israel). 1 Chron. 16:14-17.
 - (i) The parallelism of Hebrew poetry in this passage (see also Ps. 105:7-11) concerning God's covenant with Abraham gives an indication of the meaning of the word "covenant" by the terms used in parallel with it: "judgments," "word commanded," "sworn promise" (oath), and "statute."
 - (ii) The emphasis is clearly on God's initiative – his promises, decrees, and ordinances.
 - ii) God's initiative also lies behind the Sinai, or Mosaic, covenant.
 - (1) It differs from God's covenants with individuals and their descendants by being entered into with a nation, or a people, and by being expressly accompanied by stipulations.
 - (a) On the basis of God's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage at the Red Sea (the Exodus), God offered a covenant relationship to the people and added the requirement that they obey his voice (Exod. 19:1-6).
 - (b) God had done for them what they could not do for themselves: he saved them from slavery and oppression.
 - (c) God's action in Egypt was followed by the giving of the Torah, setting forth that action and God's required response.

- (d) The people, out of gratitude and out of their experience of God as gracious, bound themselves to keep the words of God before they even knew what those commands were (Exod. 19:1-8).
- (2) Obedience is connected with the covenant as the faithful response of those to whom the gracious promises were given.
 - (a) The Sinai covenant was a conditional covenant, the conditions being spelled out in the law delivered through Moses.
 - (b) The law and the covenant are not the same, but are related.
 - (c) The covenant was the basis of the relationship, and the law constituted the stipulations of the covenant.
- (3) In the Sinai covenant, it was human beings and not God who were bound by an oath (Exod. 19:24, esp. 19:5-8 and 24:7-8).
- (4) Even with the emphasis in the Sinai covenant on the stipulations of the covenant, Israel's relationship with God was dependent on God's grace (Deut. 7:7-9).
- iii) Because of the covenant with Abraham, Israel was not completely cast off when she failed to live by the covenant.
 - (1) God's grace continued to find a remnant among the people.
 - (2) Thus, even for Israel, the situation was not a matter of keeping the law in order to be justified.
 - (3) Disobedience could cause a person to be cut out of the covenant, but keeping the law was not the basis of the relationship and the covenant itself remained because of God's faithfulness even in the face of human unfaithfulness.
 - (4) The people obligated themselves because of what God had done, which they could not have done by themselves and which was unmerited by them.
- iv) The Mosaic covenant established a people as God's own special possession (Exod 19:5; Deut. 29:12-13).
- d) The Promise of a New Covenant.
 - i) The New Testament concept of covenant is particularly influenced by Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34).
 - ii) There are several items in this text that are significant for New Testament teaching.
 - (1) The new covenant will not be like the covenant made at the time of the Exodus and mediated by Moses.
 - (2) While the result of the Lord being their God and they being his people would be the same (cf. Lev. 26:12), the nature of the relationship was different in two important respects.
 - (a) The law would be written within – on the hearts of the people – instead of on tablets of stone, so that they would all know the Lord.
 - (b) The basis of this relationship would be that the Lord would pardon their iniquities and remember their sins no more.
 - (3) The differences, therefore, are not in what God requires, but in the internalizing of his law and in the means of forgiveness for violation.

- (4) The consequence of everyone knowing the Lord indicates that instead of coming into a covenant relationship by natural birth one would enter the new covenant by a conscious choice based on personal knowledge of the Lord.
 - (5) Other Old Testament passages that should be consulted on this issue: Jer. 32:37-41; Isa. 55:3; 59:21; Ezek. 37:26; cf. 34:25; 36:25-27. Ezek. 37:27 contains the same promise as Jer. 31:33.
 - (6) From these prophetic promises it may be seen that the essence of the promise of a new covenant is the forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
 - (7) The result was to be the people of God (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:10).
- e) Covenant in the New Testament.
- i) The covenants of God with Abraham and David are of particular importance for the New Testament, because both are affirmed as being fulfilled in Christ (The connection of Jesus with both Abraham and David is signalled in the first verse of the New Testament, “Jesus, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1).
 - ii) The resurrected Christ is declared to occupy the throne of David in fulfillment of God’s promises to David.
 - (1) In Acts 2:30-32 Peter, drawing on Psalm 132:11, 2 Sam. 7:12-13, and Psalm 16:10, interprets God’s oath that he would set one of David’s descendants on his throne as referring to the resurrection of Jesus.
 - (2) In Acts 13:32-35, Paul similarly understands the everlasting covenant of kingship with David as referring to the resurrection of Jesus.
 - (3) The resurrected Christ now occupies the throne of David and rules over the new people of God made up of Gentiles as well as Jews.
 - (4) The promise of the Lord to build a house (that is, a family) for David, maintaining his line and his throne forever (Ps. 89:28-29) and that his son would build a house (that is, a temple) for the Lord (2 Sam. 7:11-13) are presented in the New Testament as having their ultimate fulfillment not in Solomon but in Jesus as the “son of David” who built the new temple of the Church.
 - (5) Already in Isa. 55:3 the covenant with David was related to the whole people, so the way is prepared for the New Testament application of the Davidic covenant not only to his descendant, the Christ, but also to the people of the Christ.
 - iii) Paul connects the Christian’s relationship to God with the Abrahamic covenant, in contrast to the Mosaic covenant.
 - (1) The definition of his descendants is no longer limited to his fleshly descendants.
 - (2) The promise that Abraham would inherit the world (Rom. 4:13) and that he would be the “father of many nations” (Rom. 4:17 = Gen. 17:5) “depends on faith in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham” (Rom. 4:16).
 - (3) Abraham’s faith was reckoned for righteousness (Rom. 4:3, 22).

- (4) That righteousness is reckoned now on the same basis, faith, and that faith is in the same God, the God who raised Jesus from the dead (Rom.4:23-25).
- (5) Paul explains how this works in Gal. 3.
 - (a) The promise to Abraham is not abrogated by the law given to Moses (Gal. 3:17).
 - (b) The promises made to Abraham and his descendants apply to Christ, who is the true offspring (seed) of Abraham (Gal. 3:16).
 - (c) Everyone who is in Christ and who belongs to Christ share Christ's status, so what is said of Christ in Galatians 3:16 is said of the church in 3:29.
 - (d) Those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27) and become one people in him (Gal. 3:28), the spiritual children of Abraham (Gal. 3:29).
- iv) A central use of the language of covenant in the New Testament occurs in reference to the death of Christ and what was effected by it.
 - (1) At the last supper Jesus identified the cup with the "blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25).
 - (2) The reference in Matthew to the "forgiveness of sins" alludes to Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant with its new basis for forgiveness.
- v) Hebrews quotes Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant (Heb. 8:8-12), and connects this covenant to Christ and his sacrificial death.
 - (1) He is the mediator (Heb. 9:15; 12:24) and guarantor (Heb. 7:22) of a new and better covenant (Heb. 8:6-10; cf. 2 Cor. 3:6) by his blood (Heb. 9:15-23).
 - (2) The defect of the old law was that it had no adequate basis for once-for all forgiveness (Heb. 9:12-15; 10:4), but God has remedied that, and he reestablished and sustains the covenant relationship (Heb. 8:8-13).
 - (3) The sacrifices of the Mosaic law brought forgiveness up to the time of the sacrifice, but Christ's death covers all future sins so no new sacrifice is required.
 - (4) The new covenant is sealed with the blood of Christ that makes an eternal atonement (Heb. 9:12), so it is an "eternal covenant" (Heb. 13:20).
- vi) This new covenant brings the Holy Spirit, who writes the law of God on the heart (2 Cor. 3:2, 6, 8; Gal. 3:14).
- f) The Old Covenant is Obsolete.
 - i) Rom. 7:1-7 contrasts the old written code of the Mosaic law with the new life of the Spirit (v. 6); only one who has died to the law can be married to Christ.
 - ii) The contrast between the Mosaic law and the new dispensation is discussed at length in 2 Cor. 3 where Paul contrasts between:
 - (1) Tablets of stone and tablets of the human heart (v. 3);
 - (2) The letter and the Spirit (v. 6);
 - (3) The ministry of death (condemnation) and the ministry of the spirit (justification) (vv. 7-9);
 - (4) What was set aside and what is permanent (vv. 10-11); and

- (5) Reading the old covenant with a veil and seeing the glory of the Lord face to face (vv. 12-18).
- iii) Turning to the Lord (v. 16) removes the veil, since only Christ permits one to read the old covenant correctly (v. 14).
- iv) Galatians argues at length for the freedom of Gentiles from the requirements of the works of the law, specifically circumcision (Gal. 3:23-25).
- g) The fullest use in the New Testament of the theme of the new covenant is found in Hebrews.
 - i) There must be a new law for Christ to be a priest since he did not qualify under the Mosaic law (Heb. 7:12, 14); to accept the priesthood of Christ requires one to acknowledge a change in the law.
 - ii) The earlier commandment was abrogated (Heb. 7:18) so that a better hope might be introduced (Heb. 7:19); accordingly, Jesus became the guarantee of a better covenant (Heb. 7:22).
 - iii) Under the old law, the priests kept dying (Heb. 7:23) and had to keep making atonement for their own sins while they lived (Heb. 7:27), whereas now the sacrificer (Heb. 7:15-17) and the sacrifice (Heb. 7:25; 9:25-27) are forever.
 - iv) The historical sequence of covenants is more fully expressed in Hebrews 8, which is built around Jeremiah 31:31-34 (also quoted in Heb. 10:16-17).
 - (1) Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant which has been enacted through better promises (Heb. 8:6).
 - (2) This covenant corrects the faults of the first covenant (Heb. 8:7).
 - (3) The new covenant made the first one obsolete so that it is now passing away (Heb. 8:13).
 - (4) As a result of the first covenant's becoming obsolete, all its institutions likewise became obsolete – priesthood, sacrifice, and sanctuary.
 - (5) Heb. 10:1-10 specifies that the imperfection of the old covenant had to do with its sacrificial system.
 - (6) The law was only the shadow, not the substance (Heb. 10:1).
 - (7) It was unable to make the worshippers perfect (Heb. 10:2), for its sacrifices had to be repeated (Heb. 10:2-3) and were inferior, bringing no final remission of sins (Heb. 10:4).
- h) The Covenant People.
 - i) Inherent in the idea of a covenant is a community.
 - (1) The covenants with Noah, Abraham and David involved more their descendants, not just the individual.
 - (2) To be in covenant with God means to be his people (cf. Hos 1:9 and 2:23).
 - (3) This community dimension is evident in the Mosaic covenant, for it was made with a people, Israel.
 - (4) Indeed the covenant created the people (Deut. 29:13).
 - ii) According to Jeremiah 31-34, as the Sinai covenant was made with a people, so too is the new covenant made with a people.
 - (1) The new covenant is a covenant of forgiveness; hence, the new covenant people of God is a forgiven people, on whose hearts the laws of God are written (Heb. 8:7-13).

- (2) The two covenants in Paul's allegory in Galatians 4:21-31 are represented by two women, Hagar and Sarah, who each bear children and so represent a people.
- (3) Christ makes a covenant with his disciples (Luke 22:29).
- (4) The sign of this new covenant is the gift of the Holy Spirit to dwell in the hearts of the forgiven people (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30).
- (5) The church of the Messiah is a new covenant people.
- iii) God, in bringing Israel out of Egypt did for Israel what she could not do for herself.
 - (1) On the basis of that gracious act, God entered into a covenant relationship with the nation.
 - (2) The new covenant community was formed by a new historical act of God.
 - (3) In the death and resurrection of Christ God did for humanity what it could not do for itself, in delivering us from sin and its power.
 - (4) Based on this mighty and gracious act of God, a covenant is offered and a people gathered.
 - (5) Our response is grateful obedience.
 - (6) Israel could have refused God's covenant, but it is hard to imagine her doing so.
 - (7) Human beings today can refuse the offer of salvation in Christ.
 - (8) It is hard to imagine one who really understands what is offered doing so.
- iv) A covenant, based on the promises of God and requiring the appropriate conduct by the people in response, describes the relationship of God and his people.
 - (1) A covenant requires a people with whom it is entered into, and that people may be characterized as a covenant people.
 - (2) The church is the new covenant community.
- 2) KINGDOM (This subject will be discussed fully in Lesson Two).
- 3) MESSIAH.
 - a) The kingly title of Jesus was associated with his being the Messiah, or the Christ, the Anointed of God (Mark 15:32), and his anointing was related to his role as the inaugurator of a new covenant.
 - b) The Hebrew word rendered *messiah* meant "anointed with olive oil"; it was translated into Greek as *christos*.
 - c) A turning point in the ministry of Jesus came when his disciples confessed him as Messiah (Matt. 16:13-23; Mark 8:27-33; Luke 9:18-22).
 - i) A messianic unction was to give the Holy Spirit, the power and sign of the new age.
 - ii) In Peter's Pentecost sermon, the bestowal of the Holy Spirit is added to the resurrection as evidence that Jesus was "Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:32-33, 36).
 - iii) Jesus also brought the forgiveness of sins expected in the messianic age.
 - iv) As Son of Man he claimed authority on earth to forgive sins and in demonstration of that authority performed a miracle of healing (Mark 2:1-12).
 - d) The anointing of Jesus was not with the oil that consecrated priests and kings but with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 10:38).

- i) Luke records that Jesus began his ministry with Isa. 61:1-3, which indicates that he was anointed with the Holy Spirit.
- ii) Matthew likewise applies Isaiah's prediction (Isa. 42:1) of the Spirit given to the Lord's Servant to Jesus' ministry (Matt. 12:18-21).
- e) As Messiah, Jesus was both Suffering Servant (Isa 40-55) and Son of Man (Dan. 7).
 - i) In Acts 3 Peter proclaims Jesus as Messiah (Acts 3:20).
 - ii) His declaration that God fulfilled Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would suffer (Acts 3:18) is explained by the identification made at the beginning and end of Peter's sermon of Jesus with the servant of God who was rejected and delivered over to Pilate but glorified by God (Acts 3:13) and raised up by God (Acts 3:26).
 - iii) Jesus preferred the designation "Son of Man," a designation that only appears on his lips in the Gospels (whereas the term "Messiah" always appears on the lips of others).
 - (1) The most likely origin of his usage is Daniel 7, which ties together "kingdom" and "one like unto a Son of Man."
 - (2) The Servant of Isa. 40-55 in some passages seems clearly to be the nation (Isa. 44:1), while other passages the Servant is clearly distinguished from the nation as a whole (Isa. 49:5-6; 53:4-6, 8, 11-12).
 - (3) If the community was represented by the Servant, and the Servant personified the community, there is an important basis for the relation of the Messiah and the community and thus for the understanding of the church in the New Testament.
 - (4) The community would surely have had a leader, that is, the Son of Man; and if the Son of Man is treated as truly an individual, he would surely have a community of followers.
 - (5) The New Testament affirmation is that Jesus as an individual gives concrete expression to these Old Testament representations of the people; He was the embodiment of the true Israelite, so that what was said of the nation of Israel was applied by Christians to him (cf. the use of Hos. 11:1 in Matt. 2:15).
 - iv) Jesus synthesized three figures out of the Old Testament: Messiah (Son of David), Son of Man, and Servant of the Lord.
 - (1) All three carry an association with a people.
 - (2) The Messiah rules over a people; the Son of Man embodies the saints of the Most High who are given the kingship; and the Servant of the Lord suffers for the people and embodies their role of serving the Lord.
 - v) Hence, we are prepared for the New Testament's presentation of Jesus as promising to found a new community.
- 4) Matthew 16:13-23.
 - a) Matthew connects the confession of Jesus' Messiahship with Jesus' promise to build a church.
 - b) Four pertinent questions must be answered.
 - i) What is the Rock?

- (1) A prominent understanding, especially in Roman Catholicism, is that Peter is the Rock.
 - (a) Peter was clearly the leader and often the spokesman for the twelve.
 - (b) Many Catholic scholars acknowledge that this did not make Peter the “pope,” nor do the words of Matthew 16 make any provision for successors (in fact the laying of a foundation is an unrepeatable event).
- (2) The language of the text itself argues against such an understanding.
 - (a) The wording does not naturally lend itself to this interpretation.
 - (i) There is a change from the second person of direct address (“You are Peter”) to the third person of indirect address (“on this rock”).
 - (ii) If Matthew had wanted to say that Jesus intended to build a church on Peter there were unambiguous ways to say it.
 - (b) The Greek text of Matthew makes a distinction between the words for Peter and the rock.
 - (c) If Jesus used the same word with the same sense in both cases, the wordplay is lost.
 - (i) There is no wordplay if the same word is used twice with the same meaning.
 - (ii) A play on words requires similarities of sound, different meanings of the same word, or different words with the same idea.
 - (iii) The differences in Greek and some Syriac texts indicate that a wordplay was intended here.
 - (iv) Nowhere else in the New Testament or earliest Christian writings is Peter understood as the foundation stone of the church.
 - (v) Where Matthew uses rock elsewhere in a symbolic sense, the reference is to the teachings of Jesus (Matt. 7:24).
- (3) The theme of Matt. 16:13-23 is the Messiahship of Jesus and what this entails.
 - (a) The context is concerned with the Person of Jesus, not Peter.
 - (b) To understand the rock as the fact or truth of Jesus’ Messiahship best fits the context.
 - (c) The passage as a whole is not talking primarily about Peter.
 - (d) The rock is the faith confessed by Peter, not Peter confessing the faith.
- ii) What does “the gates of Hades will not prevail” mean?
 - (1) The “gates of Hades” was a Semitic expression for the entrance to the realm of the dead, and, since the gates were the strongest part of a city’s fortifications, referred to as the “power of death” (cf. Job. 38:17; Ps. 9:13; 107:18; Isa. 38:10).
 - (2) The crucial question has to do with the word “it.”
 - (a) As a feminine pronoun, it can refer to either of the feminine nouns in the context, the church or the rock, or to some idea in the context.
 - (b) Among the proposed meanings are:
 - (i) The church will never fall into error.
 - (ii) The church will never cease to exist.
 - (iii) There will be a resurrection of the faithful.

- (iv) Death will not prevail against Jesus' Messiahship; hence, he will rise from the dead.
- (v) Death will not prevail against the founding of the church.
- (c) The first three refer the "it" to the church, but all three of these seem to be intrusions into context, especially the first, and to direct attention more to the church than to the Messiah and what he does.
- (d) The fourth refers the "it" back to the rock, understood as the truth confessed by Peter.
 - (i) It is consistent with the theme of the passage.
 - (ii) However, it seems to go against the fact that submitting to death was included in the work of the Messiah.
- (e) The fifth seems to fit the context best.
 - (i) The idea expressed in the phrase "I will build my church," that is, what the Messiah will do, is what the powers of death will not prevent.
 - (ii) Not even the gates of Hades are stronger than Jesus the Messiah.
- iii) What are the "keys of the kingdom of Heaven"?
 - (1) A popular image has Peter as the doorkeeper to Heaven.
 - (2) A more serious proposal is that Peter was given authority over the kingdom of heaven.
 - (3) It is often observed that the background of the New Testament usage is provided by Isaiah 22:22.
 - (a) Eilakim was certainly given an important position.
 - (b) The text itself, however, spells out what his function was: to open and shut.
 - (c) That is what one does with keys; they unlock and lock.
 - (d) Any authority conferred was secondary to the function that was involved in the use of keys.
 - (4) Other "key" passages: Luke 11:52; Matt. 23:13; Rev. 1:18.
 - (a) The one with the keys opens and shuts doors; he permits or prohibits one from entering.
 - (b) In other words, keys have to do with access, entering or not entering into some thing or some place.
 - (5) Peter was to declare the terms of admission to the kingdom of heaven, that is, give access to the rule of God over people's lives, which meant the forgiveness of sins.
 - (a) Such an understanding corresponds to the function Peter performed in the beginning of the church.
 - (b) He preached what people must do to obtain forgiveness of sin or to be save, both Jews (Acts 2:37-40) and Gentiles (Acts 10:43; 11:18).
- iv) What does it mean to be the Messiah?
 - (1) To say that Jesus was the Messiah was one thing; to understand it was something else.
 - (2) It seems that most people had different understandings from Jesus about what it meant to be the Messiah and different expectations of him (cf. John 6:15).

- (3) Jesus had to redefine the term for his disciples before they could proclaim their newly acquired faith.
 - (a) So from that time forward Jesus explained to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer, and be killed (Matt 16:21).
 - (b) Peter's strong negative reaction (16:22-23) shows how valid Jesus' concern was to put the right definition on Messiahship and how difficult it was to accomplish this with even his closest followers.
 - (c) For Jesus to be the Messiah meant that he must suffer, die, and be raised from the dead.
 - (d) Only after the fact did the disciples realize what all of this meant (Luke 24:44-46).
- c) The central points of Matthew 16:13-23 are clear:
 - i) Jesus is the Messiah, that is, the Anointed One, with a royal position over a covenant community.
 - ii) Immediately on the confession of his Messiahship is the promise of the church; the existence of the church is implied in the confession that he was the Messiah.
 - iii) The church was the Messiah's.
 - iv) The authority of the apostles (in this case Peter) is delegated.
 - v) Messiahship means suffering.

CONCLUSION: COMMUNITY.

- 1) It is significant for the understanding of the church that God's purpose was to call a people and that he dealt with individuals in relation to a people and individuals came to him as members of the chosen people.
- 2) His concern was with individuals, but they were treated as part of a group and their development as individuals was related to their being part of a community.
- 3) God's plan was for the community of the age to come to be composed of Jews and Gentiles (cf. Eph. 2:11-17).
 - a) The Jews as the people of God since the time of Moses formed the root and trunk of God's spiritual tree.
 - b) According to Paul's analogy of the olive tree in Romans 11:17-24, the Gentiles are branches from a wild olive tree grafted contrary to normal practice into the cultivated olive tree (Israel).
- 4) Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3 are important in understanding the nature of the church.
 - a) Although not directly quoted in the New Testament, they influence the quotation from Joel in Acts 2:17 and may be alluded to in Rev. 15:4.
 - b) The early church understood these passages as a reference to the new covenant brought by Jesus Christ and the going forth of the apostles from Jerusalem to proclaim the word of God that brought peace to all peoples who accepted it.
- 5) Prerequisites for the church (community).
 - a) The crucifixion was necessary for Jesus to be the foundation of the church.
 - b) The resurrection was necessary for Jesus to be head over the church.
 - i) The resurrection made him both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36).

- ii) At the resurrection and ascension, Jesus was exalted above all other authority and dominion and made head over all things for the church (Eph. 1:20-22).
- iii) The church will be those resurrected to eternal life because of union with Christ who is the firstfruits of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23), the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18).
- iv) Hence, his people are the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven (Heb. 12:23).
- c) The Holy Spirit had to be given as the life of the new community.
 - i) The giving of God's Spirit was part of the Old Testament hope (Ezek. 36:27).
 - ii) While the Spirit was active in the Old Testament and in the ministry of Jesus, there is a special sense in which the Spirit as a distinctive gift living with God's people did not come until after the resurrection of Jesus (John 7:38-39).
 - iii) The Messianic gift (the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) could be given only after the completion of the Messianic work.
- d) There had to be a commission to give the church a mission.
 - i) There had to be a message for the church to proclaim.
 - ii) This gave the church a purpose.
 - iii) The resurrected Jesus gave the great commission to his disciples to preach the gospel of forgiveness of sins and make disciples of all nations.
 - iv) The power of the Holy Spirit was necessary to equip the disciples for this task (Luke 24:47-49).
- 6) Pentecost as the Beginning (Acts 11:15).
 - a) The beginning of the age of the Holy Spirit.
 - i) The coming of the Holy Spirit is what Peter particularly had in mind in describing Acts 11:15 as the beginning.
 - ii) Acts 1:5 and 11:16 identify the particular event of Acts 2 as a baptism in the Holy Spirit.
 - iii) Peter's message refers to the Holy Spirit at the beginning, middle and end.
 - iv) The promise had been fulfilled; the age of the Spirit had begun.
 - b) The beginning of the public proclamation of Jesus as Christ.
 - c) The beginning of the preaching of the gospel.
 - d) The beginning of the offer of forgiveness in Jesus' name.
 - e) The beginning of the new covenant.
 - f) The beginning of the gathering of a church.
 - g) The beginning of corporate worship and life.
- 7) People of the End Time. The church is the eschatological community, the remnant gathered by God to be saved in the overthrow of the world, the People of the End Time. They are enjoying the eschatological blessings of the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit in the present, but they await the coming again of the Son of God and entrance into the future completion of God's purposes. This dual dimension of present and future, already and not yet, influences others aspects of the church that we will study. That perspective influences even those descriptions of the nature of the church other than those related to history and eschatology. Throughout

biblical history, God was gathering a people for his own possession. The church is now the eschatological people of God.