

Session 1 and 2: The Biblical **Nature** of the Church

-Ecclesiology: A fancy word for the *theology of the church*.

- *Logy* comes from the word *Logos* and it means “Word.” *Ecclesi* is *assembly* **or as we call it, Church**. Therefore, Ecclesiology is the word of the Church. Or, we might say, ecclesiology = a study of the church.

The goal of this class: To understand what the ecclesia is, AND what it is NOT.

What is the Church? What is it supposed to be? What about the Kingdom? The nation of Israel? The Jewish people? The Christian People?

As a general rule, many people mix all of these together — There is great confusion of *what church is* because of it!

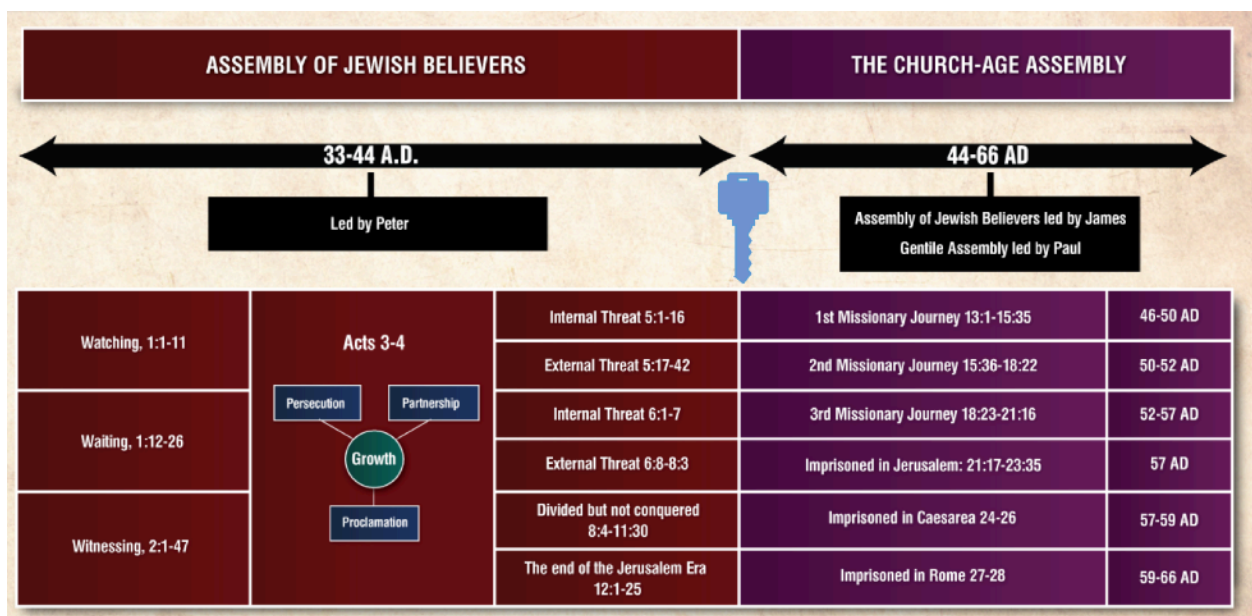
What happened to the Church? There was a time when the church came together and studied the Bible and the members of the church were equipped to go and live their lives in the world. But things have changed. At one point the church focused on the Word, but it became a *doing organization* that had to go out and fix the world. Is that what the church is about?

Is the world more broken today than it was ten or twenty years ago? One reason, people are not coming to the Word of God and aligning themselves with the Word of God.

- Developing a good solid Biblical worldview.

Key to understanding the Church: We need to know the about the *fall of Israel* and *the rise of the church*. When we understand those two key points, they become the building blocks for understanding.

Both Israel and the church has a role and a place. There is a transition from one to another which we need to understand from the Scriptures. Once that is figured out, then it is much



easier to look at Scripture and say “This is Israel category, and this is the church category.” Unless we understand this key we are really going to get confused.

The preceding chart is a flow of the book of Acts. Prior to the book of Acts we only have an assembly of Jews (we will discuss *assembly* in more detail in a future session). The Old Testament Scriptures, Genesis through Malachi are about the Jews. The gospels which are really Old Testament books are a discussion about Jesus among the Jews; Jesus among people who are under the Mosaic Law (Matthew 10:6; Matthew 15:24).

After Jesus died, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven we see this “assembly” of New Testament Jewish believers who are led by Peter (Matthew 16:19; John 21:15-17). Peter is doing the leading in the early parts of the book of Acts (Acts 2-12:25).

As Peter is leading this new group of believing Jews, there is a Gentile who receives Peter’s gospel, his name is Cornelius (Acts 10). When Cornelius believed he did not become the pastor of the local Bible Church. Rather he was brought into the assembly of Jewish believers. In essence he became a Jew. Before a Gentile was brought into the Jewish assembly, he was without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:11-12).

Later in Acts 15 there is a controversy about these non-Jews brought into the commonwealth (community) of Israel—did they need to be circumcised like the Jews.

Is This New Assembly a Church?

Can we at this time in the book of Acts, up to chapter 13 call this a “Church” like we know it? There are many today who say the Church, as we know it, began in Acts 2. But maybe we should be careful how we view this early assembly of believers?

The Gospel Paul Preaches Changes Things

It is not until the apostle Paul comes on the scene that he begins to preach something different beginning in Acts 13, around the year 44 A.D. about 11 years after the accession of Jesus Christ. With Paul, we begin to see more of what we think of today as “Church.”

Are these Jews in the first half of the book of Acts truly believers? Yes! They have trusted in Jesus as Messiah, the One who is going to establish the Kingdom.

When we get to the dividing line in the book of Acts (see chart) we need to recognize that something is changing.

Recognize the difference in the end of Acts from the beginning, then it will begin to make sense. Where do I belong, where is the church today, where do I find the principles of the Christian life? You won’t get it from the beginning of the book of Acts, but at the end.

- Jewish people think Paul is preaching heresy.
- A meeting is needed to find out what is going on.
- Jerusalem council (Acts 15).

A New Dispensation

God speaks in different ways (Hebrews 1:1,2). God begins to speak through Paul at the mid point in Acts. God gave new revelation to the apostle Paul. No longer is the Gospel “Repent and be baptized” but, “By grace are you saved, through faith!

Does the group led by Peter have the same theology as the group led by Paul?

-Early Acts we see only Apostolic leadership. No personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is all about national salvation. A prosperity gospel is preached which looks for the Kingdom and the restoration of all things.

-Later in Acts we see elders, bishops, pastors, etc. Different structures and different promises.

Our hope is not the Kingdom, but it is that we are going to see Jesus one day, i.e., Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). We become new creatures, absent from the body present with the Lord, etc.

Are both Peter and Paul teaching salvation? Yes. But we want to recognize that Paul received some new information that fits in perfectly with the old, but does not mix with the old because it is new.

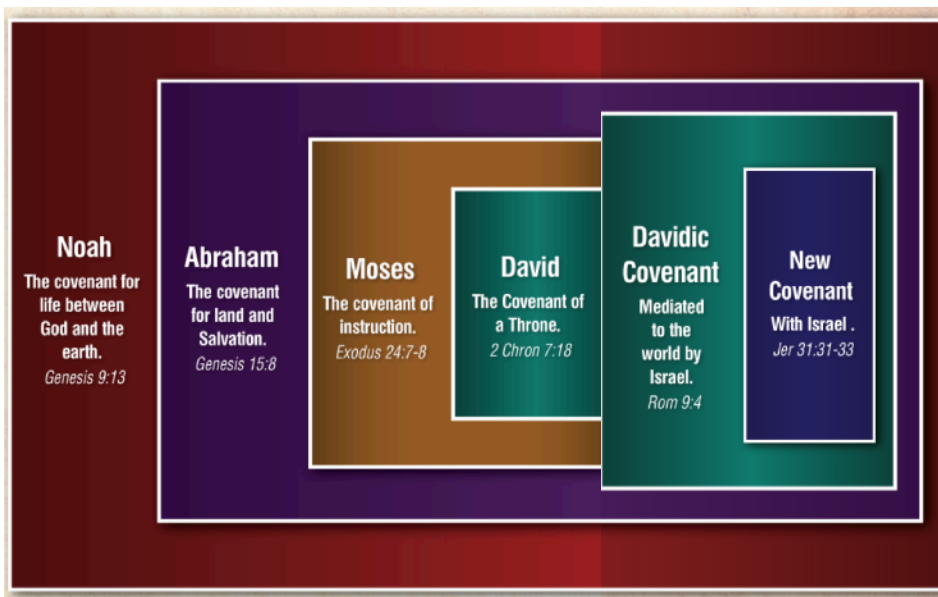
Rightly Dividing What Paul and Apostles Teach

So now we must begin to “divide” that which is taught by Paul with that of the rest of the apostles. Then we will know which teaching is *my* teaching, which requirements are *my* requirements. That is how we build a healthy ecclesiology.

When we do that, the Bible begins to make sense. All the contradictions in the Bible are cleared up.

Here is the KEY: Peter’s message was to a nation, Paul’s message was to individuals. And so we see, even in some of Paul’s writings that there is a transition taking place. But we don’t want to make the error of mixing Peter’s gospel with Paul’s.

Biblical Covenants



Another error we can make is taking the covenants (or promises) and mixing them in with the Church today. The reason this is a problem is because the covenants belong to the nation of Israel.

Along the way, God did something that was unseen by the Prophets or the Old Testament, and that is, He started what we call the **Dispensation of Grace**.

The Davidic Covenant is still underlying this dispensation, but we are not ultimately looking for the Kingdom to come, we are looking for the Rapture. We know the Kingdom will ultimately come, but we are not Kingdom era people, nor are we expecting the Kingdom. In fact, we are not completely focused on any of the covenants, rather we are rejoicing that outside of these covenants we are saved. We have an individual salvation, not a national salvation. When we mix our dispensation of grace into the Biblical covenants we end up with a life of shame, guilt, and self-doubt.



What about the New Covenant?

Hebrews 8:6; 9:15

We have a mediator between the Old Covenant and the New. If you have a mediator, you have not signed the deal yet, or made the agreement.