

# **The Birth of the Assembly**

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**Matthew 16:18**

When was the assembly of Jesus Christ born as an assembly? When did it really begin? There are several views regarding the birth of the assembly.

There are those who believe it began at Pentecost. (A great number of denominational churches and others believe it began at Pentecost.)

There are two aspects of the foundation of the assembly:

1. The Primary- Christ Himself being the Foundation (I Cor. 3:11)
2. The Secondary- The Apostles (Ephesians 2)

**Since the Apostles constitute the secondary foundation of the assembly, their calling before Pentecost cannot be its beginning at Pentecost.**

Furthermore, baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost cannot be synonymous with regeneration.

## **The Birth of the Assembly**

God did not leave Himself without a witness in the world after setting Israel aside. According to Acts 14:17; God has never been without a witness. Therefore, during Christ's personal ministry, the Lord Jesus established His assembly and committed to her the responsibility of making

Himself known through the ministry of the word. Since God must be made known in the world for the purpose of calling out the elect to Himself, He has chosen to be made known by the *ekklesia*, the assembly, which Christ is continuing to build.

**Matthew 16:18** KJV "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church;"

The progressive future tense of the verb *oikodomeo*, "I will build," is used in Matthew 16:18 in the Lord's statement to Peter concerning Christ's building His assembly. This is what is known in the Greek as a progressive future active indicative verb, signifying that the Lord Jesus Christ has not completed His assembly. Paul, an apostle to the Gentiles, succeeded the twelve apostles; and he and all who have been saved since that time are part of the assembly Jesus Christ is continuing to build. The Lord Jesus will continue building His assembly until the last one that will constitute the assembly is brought into the ark of safety.

In order to accomplish the purpose for which she was established, the assembly must use only the means set forth in the word of God. Suggesting that the assembly of Christ has been sent into the world without a divine compass--the word of God--and chart to direct her course is unthinkable. God's compass and chart are not to be replaced by man-made programs and gimmicks.

There is little agreement among Christians as to when the assembly was founded and how she was established. Some say the birth of the assembly took place at Pentecost. Others contend that she was established during Christ's personal ministry.

Those who believe the assembly began at Pentecost say her birth must be preceded by the following events:

1. They say the death of Christ must be history; thus, the cornerstone was already laid.
2. They say Christ's resurrection provided the assembly with resurrection life; therefore, the gates of Hades have been opened.
3. They say Christ had ascended to the Father's right hand; therefore, the assembly's Head had assumed His proper place.
4. They say there could be no assembly on earth until the Holy Spirit came to baptize repentant persons into Christ's body and indwell the assembly.
5. They say according to Christ's prediction, the formation of the assembly was future.
6. They say that if the assembly existed before the death of Christ, it would have died.
7. They say the true assembly must have the finished work of Christ on which to stand, the resurrection position, and a new humanity with its resurrected Head.

Although a large percentage of believers embrace the view that the assembly was born at Pentecost, Biblical evidence will not support that view. When Christ's suffering at Calvary was accomplished, He had already called His disciples during His public ministry (Matt. 16:13-18). Furthermore, Jesus Christ commissioned these disciples--the assembly (Matt. 28:18-20)--who constituted the secondary foundation of the assembly. He gave to this infant assembly a foretaste of the power she would experience at Pentecost (John 20:19-23).

1. He had called His disciples (Matthew 10)
2. He commissioned the disciples (The church- Matt. 28:18-20)
3. He gave them a foretaste of the coming power which they would experience at Pentecost (John 20:19-23)

The opinion of some is that the assembly was formed at Pentecost, and they emphasize the word "formed." But that view will not hold up in the light of the calling of the disciples, their being commissioned, and their receiving power prior to Pentecost. The mistake is made not primarily in their use of the word "formed," but in what the word includes. The Holy Spirit came in power only on the Jews in Acts 2, on the Samaritans in Acts 8, and on the Gentiles in Acts 10. The gospel is to be preached first to the Jews, then to the Samaritans who were mixed--part Jews and part Gentiles--then to the Gentiles. Hence, Pentecost did not stop with the Jews, but it also included the Samaritans and Gentiles, thus harmonizing with Leviticus 23.

Some compare the "formation and birth" of the assembly to the formation of Adam's body before God breathed life into him. They emphasize the difference between the formation and life of Adam. No Christian denies that man's body was first formed, and then the breath of life was breathed into it (Gen. 2:7). However, using this exact analogy to speak of Christ's assembly as being formed by Christ and later receiving life at Pentecost is missing the Biblical significance of Pentecost. If that analogy were correct, the disciples would have gone out preaching without life. How could they receive the power of life if they did not have life?

The assembly was formed during Christ's earthly ministry, but the suggestion that the infusion of the principle of life must wait until Pentecost is unscriptural. The assembly which Christ formed was composed of regenerated persons who had been effectually called by Christ Himself. The

command to wait for the promise of the Father had nothing to do with the principle of life which they already possessed (Acts 1:1, 5).

Let's turn to the book of **Acts**; Acts is a continuation of Luke.

**Acts 1:1** "The first narrative or account indeed I produced, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to be doing and to be teaching,"

**Acts 1:4** "And, being assembled together with them, He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to be waiting for the promise of the Father, which you heard of me."

**Acts 1:5** "For John indeed baptized in water; but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days after these."

They were not formed and waiting for life; they had life. They were to wait until they were "endued [aorist middle subjunctive of *enduo*, clothed or invested] with power [*dunamis*, power or supernatural power]..." (Luke 24:49), not until they had life.

**Grace and power are distinct; they're not the same.**

**Acts 1:6** "So then the ones having come together, were questioning him, saying, Lord, are you at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

**Acts 1:7** "He said to them, It is not yours to know times or seasons, which the Father placed in his own authority."

**Acts 1:8** "But you shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

**Acts 2:1** "And in the day Pentecost was being completed, they were all together in the same place."

**Acts 2:2** "And suddenly a noise came from heaven like being carried by a violent wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting."

**Acts 2:3** "And there appeared to them tongues being distributed like fire, and it sat on each one of them."

**Acts 2:4** "And they were all being filled of the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them to speak."

The idea that Christ's death must be history before the formation of the assembly misses an important point concerning the death of Christ. If that concept were true, Christ's high priestly prayer of John 17 would have been invalid; however, it was not invalid because He said, "...having completed [aorist active participle of *teleioo*] the work which you have given [perfect active indicative of *didomi*] me to do" (John 17:4--translation). From man's perspective, Christ had not finished His work because He had not actually died. But from God's perspective, it was completed. He calls those things not existing as existing. (See Rom. 4:17.) Jesus Christ is the Lamb having been slain [perfect passive participle of *sphadzo*] from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). Since the atonement cannot be dated from God's viewpoint, Jesus Christ could call out His own, establish His assembly, and commission her on the basis of His timeless death.

**Resurrection life was the blessing of God's elect before the actual death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.** The three Jesus Christ

raised from the dead had a foretaste of resurrection life. Christ said to His disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep [perfect passive indicative of *koimao*, to fall asleep or die]; but I go, that I may awaken [aorist active subjunctive of *exupnidzo*, to waken from sleep] him out of sleep" (John 11:11). Subsequent to Lazarus' experience of spiritual resurrection, he experienced physical death; and he was about to experience a physical resurrection. All of this was before the death of Christ. The word "friend" in John 11:11 comes from the Greek word *philos*, which means loved or friend. He was loved by Mary and Martha; but most of all, he was loved by Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ did not have to die, be resurrected, and ascend to the Father's right hand in order for the elect to be quickened by the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Himself quickened some (John 5:21). The opinion that the assembly could not exist until the Holy Spirit came to baptize repentant believers into the body of Christ is unscriptural. One cannot Scripturally equate baptism in the Holy Spirit with regeneration. Baptizing in the Holy Spirit took place at Pentecost on those who were disciples: they had been quickened; they had been called; and they had received a foretaste of Pentecost.

**1 Corinthians 12:13** "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

There are only seven references in the New Testament to baptism in the Holy Spirit: Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16; I Corinthians 12:13. This baptism is always collective, never individual. Matthew 3:11 through Acts 1:5 are all prophetic of Pentecost. Acts 11:16 and I Corinthians 12:13 record the event of history. The Holy Spirit is the One in whom Christ baptized. Jesus Christ, not the Holy Spirit, is the baptizer in all the references. One may argue that this cannot be proved,

since Christ's name is not mentioned in I Corinthians 12:13. However, His name is used in the other six; furthermore, He is the One who baptized His assembly into the sphere of the Spirit even in I Corinthians 12:13.

One must not make the mistake of thinking that Peter and the other apostles were void of the Holy Spirit before Pentecost. "Being then evening, on that day, the first of the week, and the doors having been shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and says to them, Peace to you. And having said this, He showed them both His hands and side. Then the disciples rejoiced, having seen the Lord. Then Jesus said to them again, Peace to you; as my Father has sent me, I also am sending you. And saying this, He breathed on them, and says to them, Receive [aorist active imperative of *lambano*, you receive at once] the Holy Spirit" (John 20:19-22--translation). The disciples, who were passive in their regeneration (John 3:3, 5, 7; I John 3:9; 5:1, 4), were commanded to receive an added degree of the power of the Spirit to enable them to exercise their office by declaratively revealing whether their sins were or were not forgiven. They were passive in regeneration, but they were active in receiving the Spirit. The aorist active of *lambano* means they participated in the receiving. God never gives anything that is not received. In other words, they were commanded to receive a foretaste of Pentecost by receiving at once the Holy Spirit who had already been breathed on them. They were Christians because they were active in receiving. To apply the aorist active imperative of receive to the disciples receiving life 50 days later is inconsistent with the principle of life that is given to the passive sinner.