

Baptist Polity in the Book of Acts

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INTRODUCTION

The title “*The Acts of the Apostles*”¹ is that which the *King James Version (KJV)* translators gave to the fifth book of the Christian Canon of Scripture. Certainly the book deals with historical activity. The context and content of this sacred literature reveals the nature of the activity and gives the necessity that the biblically appropriate title should be “the acts of church members.”² This assertion is based the writer’s purpose “*of all that Jesus began both to do and teach...through the Holy Ghost (Acts 1:1-2)*. The Lord Jesus Christ started His assembly (Ps. 22:22; Heb. 2:12; Mt. 10:1-6; I Cor. 12:28), edified it (Mt. 16:18), and commanded the apostles to follow His example (Mt. 28:19-20). *The Book of Acts* (“*Acts*” subsequently) demonstrates that the apostles and early disciples of His first church (Acts 1:13-15; 2:1 ff., 47) did just that, and as the Spirit empowered and directed church members (Acts 2:4, 17; 8:29 *et al*) they evangelized the world and planted NT assemblies (Acts 9:31; 18:8-11). “*Acts*” reveals the activity of practicing the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16), which commission required church members to evangelize, baptize, and catechize the world. As Christians were biblical in following the Lord’s commands, they planted immersionist churches. Throughout *Acts* the Greek noun ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia* [“*church*”]) occurs eighteen times in the singular and six times in the plural ἐκκλησίαι (*ekklesiai*), always referring to a singular congregation or to several churches. The Lord’s churches were started in “*Judaea and Galilee and Samaria*” (Acts 9:31), in Antioch (Acts 13:1), in Asia Minor (Acts 14:23), in Macedonia (Acts 16:9 ff.), and in Rome (Acts 16:1 ff.). The book of *Acts* gives the history of churches as they were started by the biblical “*acts*” of church members.

Not only does *Acts* give a historical presentation of Christian activity, but it also presents it in the context of theology, especially ecclesiology. It is the effort of Luke the physician to

¹The patristic Irenaeus was the first to use the Greek title Πράξεις ἀποστόλων (*Praxeis apostolon*; Latin: *Actūs Apostolōrum*). Irenaeus of Lyons, “*Irenaeus against Heresies*” 3.14.1, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), p. 415.

²Although titles like “The Acts of the Apostles” or “the Acts of the Holy Ghost” are biblically accurate, they do not summarize the fuller picture of the nature of the activity—church planting by the apostles through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. An expression like “be witnesses” is even more vague about the true nature of the Great Commission which requires evangelism, baptism, and catechism (Mt. 28:19-20).

present the only biblical Historical Theology or the history of the ἐκκλησία. The Lukan *Book of Acts* is the inspired account of historical ecclesiology or ecclesiological history. The man Luke was a professional physician, precise historian, and practical theologian.

Acts is the second of a two-part work by one identified as “*Luke, the beloved physician*” (ὁ ἰατρὸς³ ὁ ἀγαπητὸς [Col. 4:14]). It not only connects with the Gospels but *Acts* also gives background to the NT *Epistles*. *Acts* is the linchpin between Christ’s teaching, the disciples’ obedience to His teaching, and the practical implementation of this teaching as expressed in the *Epistles*. The number of words in this companion set is more than all of the words in Paul’s fourteen *corpus* of work.⁴ In fact, “*The Gospel of Luke*” and “*The Acts of the Apostles*” constitute about thirty percent of the Greek New Testament (NT). Whereas the *Gospel of Luke* covers about thirty-three years of early Christianity, *Acts* covers about the next thirty-three years of expanding Christianity.

As the inspired *Book of Acts* revealed historical ecclesiology, or the development of Christ’s biblically active ἐκκλησία starting many more ἐκκλησίαι, it behooves the commentator to be scripturally fit to comment. As the *Select Bibliography* reflects, there have been numerous commentaries through the centuries on *Acts*. To be a precise commentator on the *Book of Acts*, one must be scripturally qualified. The scriptural qualifications for one to comment on the Bible are the following: 1) One must be a “born again,” regenerated, saved, Spirit-indwelt believer in the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:7). 2) One must believe that he has available the preserved, inspired words of the canonical Scriptures in the original languages (Mt. 24:35) 3). One must be an active member of a NT immersionist assembly under the divinely-given leader (I Tim. 3:15). In other words, the scripturally fit commentator must know the Spirit of Truth, possess the Word of Truth, and be in the Church of Truth. Most of the commentators in the *Select Bibliography*, by their own admission, do not meet the aforementioned qualifications. However, this commentator is scripturally fit, and desires that this commentary will reflect his biblical training, extensive research, and ministerial experience as an accurate and precise commentary on “*The Acts of the Apostles*.”

POLITY

The English word “polity” comes from the Latin *polita* meaning “organized government.” The noun refers the governing of an organization including the offices and policies of the organization. The ἐκκλησία of the Lord Jesus Christ is both an organization and an organism. The church has offices with officers and policies which are to be put into practice. The assembly is also likened to a body with Christ as the Head. The *Book of Acts* reveals the offices and policies of the Lord’s organization/organism. As the student of Scriptures begins to

³The noun occurs 7x in the NT, three of which occur in the *Gospel of Luke* (4:23; 5:31; and 8:43) and once a reference to him (Col. 4:14).

⁴The number of words in the Greek *Textus Receptus* text of *Luke/Acts* is 9327, in contrast to the 7441 words in Paul’s thirteen *Epistles* to the Gentiles and one *Epistle to the Hebrews*.

read through *Acts*, offices and policies permeate this second theological essay of Luke. The polity of the Lord's ἐκκλησία begins to take form as one journeys through Acts. This essay will treat the offices and policies of the church polity of the Lord's immersionist assemblies as they occur. The Baptist Polity of the *Acts* will reveal biblical truth about the following governing headings of **Offices**, the practice of **Business Meetings**, the practice of **Baptism**, the observance of the **Lord's Supper**, the application of **Church Giving**, the practice of **Church and Prayer Meetings**, the implementation of **Church Discipline**, the **Ordination of Elders**, and the sending and supporting of missionaries for the **Mission Program**. Some passages overlap with polity content and will be noted.

I. OFFICES

Other than the pastorate or office of “*pastors*,”⁵ which the Lord Jesus Christ assumed for His assembly, the first office revealed in *Acts* was that of “*apostle*” (ἀπόστολος *apostolos* [81x]).⁶ In Acts 1:2, the Lord Jesus had commanded the apostles to carry out the Great Commission of Baptist church planting “*through*” (διὰ⁷ *dia*) divine indwelling (Jn. 20:22)⁸ and empowerment of the Spirit (cf. Jn. 16:13), which apostles He had chosen, including the apostate Judas (*vide* vv. 16-20). The *Book of Acts* has demonstrated that the apostles and later disciples did exactly as the Lord ordered and established Baptist assemblies throughout the Mediterranean Basin, as they were “*led by the Spirit*” (Rom. 8:14). Later in Acts 1:13, He listed the eleven by name, starting with the first (cf. Mt. 10:2), “*Peter*”⁹ (Πέτρος¹⁰ *Petros*). Following Peter, the

⁵In the OT the plural title “*pastors*” translates the Hebrew רֹעִים *ra`ah* (7x), all in Jeremiah (2:8-23:2). The Greek noun is ποιμήν *poimen* (18x) which applies to the Christ in the majority of occasions such as in His affirmation, “*I am the good shepherd*” (Jn. 10:11, 14). He was the first Pastor or Shepherd of the first Baptist assembly (Jn. 10:16). Several biblical titles refer to the office of pastor. These titles reveal the nature of the pastorate, such as “*bishop*” or overseer (I Tim. 3:2), “*elder*” (I Tim. 5:19) or mature leader, “*star*” (Rev. 1:20) or brilliant prominence, and “*angel*” (Rev. 1:20; 2:1) or messenger.

⁶The noun ἀπόστολος *apostolos* occurs 81x, and refers to “a sent one” such as the twelve (Mt. 10:2 ff.), other disciples (Acts 14:14 *et al*), and the Lord (Heb. 3:1). The qualifications listed in Acts 1:16-23 cannot be achieved today, and therefore there are no “apostles” today. The Apostolate was the first office for the assembly and the church was so constituted when the Lord Jesus appointed the twelve and sent them out to the Jews (Mt. 10:1 ff.). Paul affirmed that they were put into the church first, revealing that the Lord Jesus Christ had an assembly long before Pentecost (cf. I Cor. 12:28; Acts 1:13-26; 2:47)

⁷The Greek preposition with the genitive case usually means “instrumentality” or “agency.”

⁸The Lord had promised the permanent indwelling of the Spirit in fulfillment of the New Covenant *provisos* to His disciples (Jn. 14:17; *vide* also Ezk. 36:27), obviously after He ratified the New Covenant with his blood (Mt. 26:26-28). After His death and before Pentecost the Lord Jesus “*breathed*” on the ten (Thomas and Judas were missing) and they received the indwelling of the Spirit of God (Jn. 20:21-22).

⁹Peter’s name occurs 56x in Acts 1-12 and 1x in 15:7.

Baptist Polity in the Book of Acts

author named the additional ten, namely, “James” (Ἰάκωβος¹¹ *Iakobos*), “John” (Ἰωάννης¹² *Ioannes*), “Andrew” (Ἀνδρέας¹³ *Andreas*), “Philip” (Φίλιππος¹⁴ *Philippos*), “Thomas” (Θωμᾶς¹⁵ *Tomas*), “Bartholomew” (Βαρθολομαῖος¹⁶ *Bartholomaios*), “Matthew” (Ματθαῖ¹⁷ *Matthai*), “James” (Ἰάκωβος¹⁸ *Iakobos*) the son of “Alphaeus” (Ἀλφαίου¹⁹ *Alphaiou*), “Simon Zelotes” (Σίμων²⁰ ὁ ζηλωτής²¹ *Simon ho Zelotes*), and “Judas” (Ἰούδας²² *Ioudas*) the brother of James. Several apostles are not mentioned again in *Acts*, including Andrew, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James, the son of Alphaeus, Simon Zelotes, and Judas, the Lord’s brother. Of course,

¹⁰The name Πέτρος occurs 162x and means “rock,” the Greek equivalent to the Aramaic קֶפְתָּס *Kephas* (6x) for “stone.” He was Σίμων *Simon* (75x) Βὰρ Ἰωνᾶ *Bar Iona*, the son of Jonas (13x). He was a Galilean fisherman by trade before becoming the first apostle.

¹¹Ἰάκωβος is the Greek form for Jacob (42x), which Hebrew means “one who supplants.” It is the equivalent to יַעֲקֹב *ya`aqov* (Gen. 25:26; 27:36).

¹²Ἰωάννης means “Jehovah’s grace” and occurs 133x referring to four different individuals. Its Hebrew counterpart is יְהוָנָן *Johanan* (27x).

¹³The brother of Peter, Ἀνδρέας has his name recorded 13x in the NT and it means “manly.”

¹⁴Φίλιππος “the lover of horses” occurs 38x by name in the NT. Four individuals in the NT have this name.

¹⁵The name Θωμᾶς means “twin” in Aramaic and occurs 12x in the NT. He is also identified as Δίδυμος *Didumos* (Jn. 11:6).

¹⁶Βαρθολομαῖος was the son of *Tolmai* and identified with Nathaniel (Jn. 1:45-49). His name occurs 4x.

¹⁷The tax-collector Ματθαῖος *Matthaios* received the Lord’s call as a “publican” sitting in “receipt of custom.” His name means “gift of God” and it occurs 5x. He is identified as Levi (cf. Mk. 2:14; Lk. 5:27 with Mt. 9:9).

¹⁸Another Ἰάκωβος, he is distinguished from the first as the son of Ἀλφαῖος *Alphaios*, who was not only the father of James but also of Levi (Mk. 2:14). Perhaps James and Matthew were brothers.

¹⁹The name Ἀλφαῖος means “changing.” Some have tried to identify him with *Cleophas* (Jn. 19:25).

²⁰A different Σίμων *Simon* (“hearing”), he was also identified as Σίμων ὁ Κανανίτης *Simon ho Kananites* (Mt. 10:4; Mk. 3:18). He apparently was a Jewish zealot for the Land of Canaan.

²¹The noun Ζηλωτής *Zelotes* (2x), from which comes “zeal” (cf. Jn. 2:17), is not a family name but a description of Simon’s former enthusiasm for Jewish nationalism and defense of the Land of Canaan.

²²The name Ἰούδας *Ioudas* (45x) applies to at least eight different individuals in the NT, and it is transliterated from יְהוּדָה *Jehuda* meaning “praise” (Gen. 29:35). He is identified as the brother of James and the writer of the canonical book *Jude* (Jude 1:1). Furthermore, he is distinguished from “Judas Iscariot.” Other names for Jude were “Lebbaeus” (Λεββαῖος [“a man of heart”]) and “Thaddaeus” (Θαδδαῖος [“large heart”]) in Mt. 10:3 Both James and Jude were step-brothers of the Lord Jesus (Mt. 13:55), and after the resurrection (I Cor. 15:7) they were converted and wrote their respective canonical books, *James* and *Jude*.

“*Judas Iscariot*” (Ἰούδαν Ἰσκαριώτην²³ *Ioudan Iskarioten*) had already betrayed the precious Lord and removed himself from the list (*vide vv. 16-20*). Judas occupies the last place in lists of the apostles before his fall (cf. Mk. 3:16-19).

Peter expounded the *Tanak* concerning the great apostate Judas, using two passages (Acts 1:16-20). The second passage (see also Ps. 69:25) comes from Ps. 109:8, which states, “*Let his days be few; and let another take his office.*” The Hebrew word for “*office*” is פֶּקֻדָּה *pequddah* (32x)²⁴ which means “*oversight.*” Simon Peter targumed the Hebrew verse saying, “*his bishoprick let another take*” (Τὴν ἐπισκοπὴν²⁵ αὐτοῦ λάβοι²⁶ ἕτερος *ten episkopen autou laboi heteros*). The apostolate received the inspired description as a “*bishoprick*” or as the office of bishop. Paul employed the same noun, saying about the office of bishop or overseer (see Acts 20:28), “*This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work*” (I Tim. 3:1). Certainly the first office of the assembly was the apostleship (I Cor. 12:28), of course after the Lord Jesus Christ was both the first Shepherd/Pastor²⁷ (Jn. 10:11; Eph. 4:9) and the first Apostle (Heb. 3:1) of the church that He built up (Mt. 16:18). Therefore the apostolate had the same requirements as the episcopate, including the necessity for the family life of wife and children (I Tim. 3:1-6; Tit. 1:5-9).²⁸ In fact the Apostle Paul affirmed this truth, saying, “*Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?*” (I Cor. 9:5). Paul the apostle had been a married man, presumably widowed, and had children who were old enough to leave home. Paul was a widower and not a bachelor or a divorcee!

The first office of the early church then was that of apostleship, in which Matthias was numbered. Using the *aorist* passive verb “*was numbered*” (συγκατεψηφίσθη²⁹ *sugkatapsephisthe*), the reader must determine the subject of the verb—who numbered? Obviously the apostles recognized and received Matthias as the divine choice, but it was the

²³The Greek Ἰσκαριώτης means “*man of Kerioth*” and occurs 11x (cf. Lk. 6:16). The location of “*Kerioth*” (קֶרִיּוֹת *Qeriyoth*) was in southern Judah (cf. Josh. 15:25; Jer. 48:24, 41; and Amos 2:2).

²⁴The *KJV* gave several glosses for the Hebrew, including “*visitation*” (13x), “*office*” (5x), “*charge*” (2x), “*oversight*” (2x), and “*officers*” (2x). The *Vulgate* rendered the Hebrew as *episcopatum*.

²⁵The articular noun from ἐπισκοπή *episkope* occurs 4x and means literally “*oversee.*” Obviously the noun “*episcopate*” comes from this word. There is no reason to postulate, speculate, or assume that Peter quoted the *LXX*.

²⁶This optative *aorist* comes from λαμβάνω and expresses a wish for the future.

²⁷Using the ecclesiological term “*shepherd,*” the Lord expected all Christians to be baptized and become church members (Mk. 16:16). He was not the pastor of the universal invisible church!

²⁸The two remaining offices of the Lord’s assemblies are that of the pastorate and that of the deaconate. Qualified men for both offices must be married, have only one living wife, and have children. In other words, the Lord wants these officers of His churches to be family men who have experienced family life first hand, and then to be able to help other families.

²⁹The *aorist* verb comes from the *hapax* compound verb συγκαταψηφίζομαι *sugkatapsephizomai* which means “*to be chosen together.*”

Lord Who numbered him “with the eleven apostles” (μετὰ τῶν ἑνδεκά³⁰ ἀποστόλων *meta ton hendeka apostolon*). Although some interpreters have suggested that the early church made a mistake³¹ and that the apostle Paul was the twelfth apostle,³² the Scripture confirmed that Matthias completed the number, saying, “Then **the twelve** called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, *It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables*” (Acts 6:2; also see 2:14).³³

Apostles were the early leaders in the assembly and Peter was the head pastor and the preacher of the apostolate. In the first twelve chapters of *Acts* the leadership of Peter permeates the text (55x) as the spokesman for the Jerusalem assembly (Acts 2:14, 37, 38; 3:1 ff.; 4:8 ff.; 5:3 ff.; 8:20 ff.; 9:34ff.; 10:21 ff.; 11:4 ff.; 12:3 ff.). That the apostles headed up the Jerusalem assembly is evident in their recommending the office deacon to deal with the widow problem. Luke recorded, saying, “Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, *It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word*” (Acts 6:2-4). After Saul of Tarsus persecuted and scattered the Jerusalem assembly, only the apostles remained, as Scripture recorded, saying, “And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1).

The Apostle Paul revealed that the Lord had given several leadership “offices”³⁴ to the assembly, all of which occur in *Acts*. Paul said, “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11).³⁵ Not only did

³⁰The number ἑνδεκά *hendeka* for “eleven” occurs 6x in the NT, always referring to the eleven apostles (cf. Mt. 28:16; Mk. 16:14; Lk. 24:9, 33; and Acts 2:14). The English “hendecagon” comes from the Greek.

³¹Cf. Rudolph Stier, *The Words of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1869), pp. 12-15.

³²Paul recognized his unique position as an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7-8), referring to his apostolic call as an “abnormal birth,” saying, “And last of all he was seen of me also, as of **one born out of due time**” (I Cor. 15:8). Although the Apostle Paul received the divine call for apostleship (cf. Gal. 1:11-16; 2:7-8; I Cor. 9:16-17), he could not meet the conditions proposed by the Apostle Peter! Others in the NT are labeled “apostle” such as Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Timothy and Silas (I Thes. 1:1; 2:6), Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16:7 [?]), and Titus (II Cor. 8:16-23 [?]), but there were only twelve who met the qualifications and ministered as Jews to Jews. Paul never identified himself with the twelve, saying, “For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles” (II Cor. 11:5).

³³The names of the 12 apostles in the foundation of the New Jerusalem will omit Judas and Paul, but include Matthias. Cf. “And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:14).

³⁴These are called offices because there were qualifications required for one to fill the office (cf. Acts 1:21-22; I Tim. 3:1-6).

³⁵Significant in Paul’s listing of leadership offices for the assembly is the omission of the office of deacon, since it is the office of service and not of leadership (*contra* “chairman of the deacon board”).

he reveal the office of apostles, but also of “*prophets*” (προφήτας³⁶ *prophetas*). Agabus was one such prophet, as Scripture declared, saying, “*And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar*” (Acts 11:28), and again, “*And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles*” (Acts 21:10-11). Apparently the famine occurred, and certainly the Apostle Paul was bound in Jerusalem (Acts 21:31-33).

Along with apostles and prophets, the office of “*evangelists*” (εὐαγγελιστάς³⁷ *euaggelistas*) was a gift to the churches. Philip the deacon received the designation of this office, as Luke declared, saying, “*And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him*” (Acts 21:8). Apparently the evangelist worked solely in evangelism for the assemblies. Later, Pastor Timothy was enjoined by Paul to “*do the work of an evangelist*” (II Tim. 4:5). One would conclude that the qualifications for the office of an evangelist are the same for the pastor (I Tim. 3:1-6). Also, apparently the office of evangelist was subsumed in the office of pastor.

The fourth office of leadership given to the assemblies was the office of “*pastor*.”³⁸ The first Pastor gave the office of pastor to the early church. Paul's Greek construction in Eph. 4:11 is theologically significant. He employed the particle “*some*” (μέν δέ *men/de*) four times to reveal four distinct offices and included the ministry of “*teachers*” (διδασκάλους *didaskalous*) to the last office of pastor. In other words, all pastors must be teachers (I Tim. 3:2) but not all teachers are pastors (Rom. 12:7).

Internal in the *Book of Acts* is the ascendancy of the office of pastor over and against the office of apostle. In the theological council held in the Jerusalem assembly (Acts 15:1-32), James became the apparent replacement of Peter. He demonstrated his pastoral leadership with two expressions: “*And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, **hearken unto me***” (v. 13) and “*Wherefore **my sentence** is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God*” (v. 19). Pastor James' pastoral behaviour corresponds with Paul's injunction, stating, “*Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow*” (Heb. 13:7), and with John's revelation, saying, “*Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent*” (Rev. 2:5). James expected compliance from the congregation as he was ultimately responsible for the counsel of the Jerusalem assembly. By the time Paul wrote

³⁶The noun (149x) comes from the verb meaning “to speak forth.”

³⁷The noun occurs thrice (Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11; II Tim. 4:5) and its cognate verb εὐαγγελίζω *euaggelizo* means “to announce good news.”

³⁸See footnote 5.

the qualifications for the pastorate (I Tim. 3:1-6), the other leadership offices (apostle, prophet, evangelist) became less prominent because of increased canonical silence concerning them.

The second permanent office of the church, the one of service rather than leadership,³⁹ was the deaconate or office of deacon. It originated out of necessity, dealing with the important but mundane task of distributing to the daily “*ministration*” (διακονία *diakonia*) of widows (Acts 6:1). The noun “*deacon*” (διάκονος⁴⁰ *diakonos*) occurs in the plural thrice (Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:8, and 12) and as the verb (διακονέω *diakoneo*) “*the office of deacon*” twice (I Tim. 3:10, 13). Although the Greek noun for “*deacon*” does not occur in this passage, the verb διακονέω (“*serve*”) does occur as Luke stated, “*Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables*” (Acts 6:2). Chronologically, the noun “*deacons*” appears as a church office in Phil. 1:1, between the origin of the deaconate in Acts 6 and the qualifications for deacon in I Tim. 3:8. Since the first reference to this office required qualified men to help church widows, and since Paul elaborated on the qualifications for the widows’ roll (I Tim. 5:9), it follows that the main duty of deacons was to serve widows.⁴¹ Who else but the deacon and his wife could minister to “*widows indeed*” (I Tim. 5:3)?

Summary

1. Besides the Lord’s office of Pastor in His first church, the office of apostleship came first and the apostles met the requirements for the bishoprick.
2. The Lord also gave the offices prophets and evangelists to the assembly.
3. The office of bishop/elder/pastor had qualifications.
4. The second abiding office and the only office of service rather than leadership was the deaconate. The office of deacon also had qualifications. The main task of the office of servants of the church was to serve widows.

II. BUSINESS MEETINGS

During the ten days between the Ascension of the Lord and Pentecost (1:3; 2:1), the Apostle Peter, the new bishop of the Baptist assembly,⁴² began to address the church with

³⁹The NT Scriptures know nothing about a “board of deacons” or “the chairman” of the deacon board.

⁴⁰The compound noun διάκονος means literally “through the dust.”

⁴¹The only biblical role for deacons is serving widows. They are not pastoral assistants or junior elders.

⁴²Of course, the Lord Jesus Christ was the first leader of His assembly, since He was the “*Shepherd*” or “*Pastor*” (ποιμήν *poimen* [Jn. 10:11 ff.; Eph. 4:11]). Peter, as all of the apostles, met the requirements for the pastorate (I Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; cf. also Acts 1:20).

biblical counsel. He “*stood up*” (ἀναστὰς⁴³ *anastas*) demonstrating his bold leadership and authority for all to see and hear.⁴⁴ “*In the midst of the disciples*” (ἐν μέσῳ⁴⁵ τῶν μαθητῶν⁴⁶ *en meso ton matheton*) Peter conducted the first post-resurrection church business meeting. He became the human head of the church as Christ is the divine head of the assembly (*vide* Col. 1:18; also Eph. 4:15-16),⁴⁷ and is in the midst of His churches, as Scripture reveals, saying, “*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*” (Mt. 18:20) and “*And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle*” (Rev. 1:13).

Before Luke could report about what Peter “*said*” (see v. 3 *et al*), he needed to add the detail that “*the number of the names*” (ὄχλος⁴⁸ ὀνομάτων *ochlos onomaton*) were about “*an hundred and twenty*” (ἑκατὸν⁴⁹ εἴκοσιν⁵⁰ *hekaton eikosin*).⁵¹ This “*list*” may have been the charter membership roll.⁵² The physician Luke may have counted the names of the attendees totaling the number at one hundred and twenty. This number of believers no doubt prompted the need for another apostle, giving the ratio of one apostle/bishop for every ten disciples.

Following the biblical pattern of addressing male leadership in the ἐκκλησία,⁵³ Peter invoked the hearers as “*Men and brethren*” (Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί⁵⁴ *Andres adelphoi*).⁵⁵ He informed of two important matters of business, namely the recognition of fulfilled Scripture and the appointment of the twelfth apostle. With great spiritual illumination, Peter asserted that “*this*

⁴³The *aorist* participle comes from ἀνίστημι *anistemi* (112x)

⁴⁴He had been sifted by Satan to deny the Lord (Lk. 22:31-32), and consequently he had been restored by the Lord (Jn. 21:15-22).

⁴⁵The prepositional phrase occurs 30x in the NT.

⁴⁶This is the first reference to μαθητή *mathete* in Acts (30x). The noun refers to a “*learner*,” “*pupil*,” or “*apprentice*” in its 269x in the NT.

⁴⁷Cf. Thomas M. Strouse, *En Epheso. An Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Newington, CT: Emmanuel Baptist Publications, 2009), pp. 84-90; 205-212.

⁴⁸The noun ὄχλος *ochlos* occurs 175x in the NT and refers to “*a crowd*” or “*a gathering*.”

⁴⁹The cardinal numeral for 100 occurs 17x in the NT. The English “*hectare*” is derived from it.

⁵⁰The Greek εἴκοσι *eikosi* for 20 occurs 11x and is the source for “*icosahedron*.”

⁵¹Apparently there was a need to have 12 apostles for the 120, giving a bishop to each unit of 10 believers! The duodecimal (12 based) system is predominant in Scripture, including 12 tribes, 12 apostles, 24 elders, 12,000 evangelists from 12 tribes totaling 120,000, 12 stars, 12 gates, 12 foundations, 12 fruits, etc.

⁵²Paul seemed to have alluded to a registration or a “*catalogue*” of the names of qualified widows for church support, saying, “*Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man*” (I Tim. 5:9). The verb “*be taken into the number*” is the *hapax* καταλέγω *katalego* which means “*to enroll*” or “*to catalogue*.”

⁵³The Bible requires men to be the leaders in the home (Eph. 5:25), in Government (Prov. 29:1; Isa. 3:12; Rom. 13:4, 6), and in Church (I Cor. 14:34-35; I Tim. 2:12-14), albeit all are equal in Christ (Gal. 3:28).

⁵⁴Both nouns are in the vocative case.

⁵⁵The Greek expression occurs 14x in the NT, exclusively in Acts.

scripture must needs have been fulfilled” (ἔδει⁵⁶ πληρωθῆναι⁵⁷ τὴν γραφήν⁵⁸ ταύτην *edei plerothenai ten graphen tauten*). Having the “*the gift of prophecy*” (cf. Rom. 12:6) the Apostle Peter no doubt looked in the *Tanak* (Lk. 24:44) for the prophecy and fulfillment of the betrayal of Judas. After all, Isaiah revealed that just as every animal needs to have a mate (Gen. 1:20-25), so must every prophecy have a mate in fulfillment, saying, “*There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate. Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them*” (Isa. 34:15-16).⁵⁹

Peter revealed his bibliology which included divine inspiration and preservation. He declared, harmonizing with other biblical writers including the Apostle Paul,⁶⁰ the divine and human roles in the scriptural doctrine of inspiration.⁶¹ The Holy Ghost (see vv. 2, 5, and 8) worked “*by the mouth of David*”⁶² (διὰ στόματος⁶³ Δαβὶδ⁶⁴ *dia stomatos Dabid*) and gave prophecy concerning “*Judas*”⁶⁵ (Ἰούδα *Iouda*), as he “*spake before*” (προεἶπε⁶⁶ *proeipe*) in old time.

⁵⁶This is the imperfect impersonal verb form from the verb δεῖ *dei* (105x) meaning “it is necessary.”

⁵⁷This *aorist* infinitive from πληρόω *pleroo* (90x) meaning “to make full” or “to complete.” Cf. Lk. 4:21.

⁵⁸The noun γραφή *graphe* occurs 51x in the NT, in all cases referring to a portion or to all of the Scripture. The writer of Acts employed γραφή 7x, always referring to the *Tanak* (cf. 1:16; 8:32, 35; 17:2, 11; 18:24, and 28).

⁵⁹God the Father speaks (Jn. 17:8) and God the Holy Ghost fulfills (II Pet. 1:21). This is the process of inspiration, including predictive prophecy.

⁶⁰The singular and significant statement on the doctrine of inspiration finds specific wording in Paul’s declaration, saying, “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*” (II Tim. 3:16). The six KJV words “*is given by inspiration of God*” translates the Greek *hapax legomena* θεόπνευστος *theopneustos* meaning “God breathed.” *Vide* Thomas M. Strouse, *The Lord GOD Hath Spoken. A Guide to Bibliology* (Cromwell, CT: Bible Baptist Theological Press, 2018), pp. 53-67, 137-146.

⁶¹“*The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd*” (Eccl. 12:10-11).

⁶²Cf. Acts 4:25 for the same Greek prepositional phrase.

⁶³The noun from στόμα *stoma* occurs 79x meaning “mouth” or “edge [of sword].”

⁶⁴Δαυίδ (59x), the Greek name for the second Jewish king and the ancestor through whom the promised Messiah came, the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 1:1-17; see also II Sam. 7:12-16). It is the transliteration of the Hebrew דָּוִד *Dawid* (1076x), meaning “beloved.” The writer of *Acts* referred to this patriarch 11x.

⁶⁵Judas Iscariot receives mention 22x in the NT.

⁶⁶This *aorist* verb comes from προλέγω *prolego* (10x) meaning “to foretell” (*vide* II Pet. 3:2).

The heavenly-illuminated Peter (Mt. 16:17) now recognized the one about whom the Lord hinted when He said, “*I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me*” (Jn. 13:18). Apparently Peter began to look carefully at passages such as those of David, who predicted, saying, “*Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me*” (Ps. 41:9).⁶⁷ “*The sweet Psalmist of Israel*” (II Sam. 23:1)⁶⁸ prophesied about the ultimate betrayer Judas, as Peter expounded about Judas “*which was guide*” (τοῦ γενομένου⁶⁹ ὁδηγοῦ⁷⁰ *tou genomenou hodegou*) “*to them that took Jesus*” (τοῖς συλλαβοῦσι⁷¹ τὸν Ἰησοῦν *tois sullabousi ton Iesoun*). Peter’s words about the sin of Judas (“*guide*” and “*took*”) were somewhat empathetic, since Peter had denied (Jn. 18:27) and the other apostles had forsaken the Lord (Mt. 26:56). Luke had recorded how Judas guided the temple personnel, saying, “*And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him*” (Lk. 22:47). He added, affirming, “*Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest’s house*” (Lk. 22:54). Certainly, Judas was a blind guide, fulfilling Christ’s prediction, saying, “*Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch*” (Mt. 15:14; Acts 1:18).

The verb of action reported by Luke was that “*they prayed*” (προσευξάμενοι⁷² *proseuxamenoι*). Not wanting to be presumptuous and sin against the Lord (I Sam. 12:23),⁷³ the assembly members sought the Lord in prayer as their manner was (Acts 6:6, 12:5). The careful physician even found and cited the phraseology of the prayer of the apostles. Since the apostolate was a spiritual position in the church, the members invoked the Lord “*which knowest the hearts of all men*” (καρδιογνώστα⁷⁴ πάντων *kardiognosta panton*) to reveal the divine will. They

⁶⁷Thomas M. Strouse, *An Exegesis of Psalms 1-41* (Newington, CT: Emmanuel Baptist Theological Press, 2006), pp. 364-367.

⁶⁸King David knew he was involved in the inspiration process (cf. II Pet. 1:21), saying, “*The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue*” (II Sam. 23:2). So did the Apostle Paul, who stated, saying, “*Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual*” (I Cor. 2:13).

⁶⁹The *aorist* participle from γίνομαι *ginomai* (676x) connotes Judas’ punctiliar action as guide.

⁷⁰The *penta legomena* noun ὁδηγός *hodegos* means “a leader” (cf. also Mt. 15:14; 23:16, 24; Rom. 2:19).

⁷¹The substantival *aorist* participle from συλλαμβάνω *sullambano* (16x) means “to seize” or “to arrest.” Cf. Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:54; and Jn. 18:12.

⁷²The *aorist* participle comes from the προσεύχομαι *proseuchomai* verb (87x) meaning “to make prayer.” See note on v. 14.

⁷³King Saul did not want to take the time to seek the Lord’s will through the priest and the Ark of God, and impatiently demanded of Ahiah “*Withdraw thine hand*” (I Sam. 14:19)!

⁷⁴This is a masculine singular vocative case noun. Moreover, this Lukan term is *dis legomena* (cf. Acts 15:8) from καρδιογνώστης *kardiognostes*, certainly a medical term for the physician, who must be “a knower of hearts.” The Lord is omniscient, as Chronieler stated, saying, “*For the eyes of the LORD run*

realized that the Lord used them as the authorized institution to accomplish the heavenly choice about the successor. After all, did not the Lord Jesus Christ reveal this truth, saying, “*Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven*” (Mt. 18:18-19).

Now that the assembly narrowed the field of candidates down to this duo, they prayed that the Lord Jesus would “*shew whether of these two thou hast chosen*” (ἀνάδειξον⁷⁵ ἐκ τούτων τῶν δύο ὃν ἔνα, ἐξελέξω⁷⁶ *anadeixon ek touton ton duo hon hena, exelexo*). Using the same verb ἀνάδειξεν, Luke recorded that Christ showed other appointees, saying, “*After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come*” (Lk. 10:1). The Lord would use His means to point to the one He had chosen. His predetermination of man did not predestinate spiritual outcome or under-mind human responsibility, as is obvious in the case of Judas.⁷⁷

The first church business meeting presented the pattern which should be followed to honor the Lord. The leader of the church, Peter, brought forth to the assembly the members on the membership roll the situation which needed a biblical reply. Having presented the church with the problem, he used Scripture to guide his decision, prayed to the Lord, and surrendered the outcome to the Lord through the use of the casting of lots.

In a subsequent church business meeting, the church at Jerusalem received request from the church at Antioch for spiritual and theological counsel (Acts 15:1-31). The chapter divides into The Problem (vv. 1-2), The Presentation of the Problem (vv. 3-12), The Proclamation about the Problem (vv. 13-29), and The Promulgation of the Proclamation (vv. 30-31). First, the question about the salvation of Gentiles arose, whether they needed to be circumcised for salvation. The delegates Paul and Barnabas presented the problem and Peter helped give clarity about the requirements for salvation. After Paul and Barnabas concluded with testimonials about supernatural working among Gentiles, Pastor James responded, saying, “*Men and brethren, hearken unto me*” (v. 13). Although the Jerusalem church had a plurality of elders (v. 4), James was the authoritative leader of the assembly with the final word. Just as the Lord addressed the “senior” pastor or “angel” (ἄγγελος *aggelos*)⁷⁸ of each of the Asian churches and revealed their singular responsibility for authoritative counsel and leadership (Rev. 2:1 ff.), so also with the

to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars” (II Chr. 16:9; I Jn. 3:20).

⁷⁵The *aorist* imperative from compound verb ἀναδείκνυμι *anadeiknumi* is another of Luke’s *dis legomena* words meaning “to show clearly.” It is a command directed toward God, which behaviour He promotes in Scripture (e.g., Ps. 119:49).

⁷⁶See v. 2 for the verb.

⁷⁷Cf. “*Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?*” (Jn. 6:70).

⁷⁸The angel is the human messenger of the Lord who experienced poverty and was promised the crown of life for martyrdom (Rev. 2:9-10).

Jerusalem church. Scripture reveals about the stars/angels (Rev. 1:20), saying, “*And he had in his right hand seven stars...*” (Rev. 1:16). The right hand of God represents authority, power, protection, and blessing. The Lord holds every pastor responsible for the assembly, and if the candlestick fails the culpability falls upon the unrepentant pastor. Christ said, “*Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent*” (Rev. 2:5).

James gave his biblical counsel and the church members (“*apostles and elders, with the whole church*” [v. 22]) unanimously accepted⁷⁹ his wise decision to send a letter requiring only from Gentiles that upon conversion they cease and desist from idolatry, immorality, and blood consumption (vv. 20, 29). Upon dismissal of the business meeting church service, the counsel was carried out (vv. 30-31).

Summary

1. The leader of the assembly called together the assembly members and presented the subject of the meeting.
2. After Scripture and prayer, the pastor presented the church with his answer to the problem based on Scriptural truths.
3. The church members submitted to the pastoral decision.
4. The pastoral decision was carried out immediately.

III. BAPTISM

The practice of the ordinance of baptism followed the requirement of the Lord in His “Great Commission,” Who said, “*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned*” (Mk. 16:15-16; also Mt. 28:19-20).⁸⁰ The Lord’s commission perpetuated the practice of John the Baptist. The Lord Jesus realized the truth about John and expressed to the disciples that “*John*” (Ἰωάννης⁸¹ *Ioannes*) “*the Baptist*” (ὁ βαπτιστῆς⁸² *ho Baptistes*) was “the

⁷⁹Although the Jerusalem assembly members handled the business meeting “*decently and in order*” (I Cor. 14:40), they did not necessarily follow the “Robert’s Rules of Order.” Furthermore, they did not vote for or against the pastor’s counsel, but accepted it from the Lord. After all, if church members are praying for their pastor who is in the right hand of the Lord giving counsel with scriptural guidelines, how could a church member “vote” against his counsel? Church members should raise the right hand to affirm publicly the pastor’s decision, as was the case when churches “*had ordained*” elders. The *aorist* participle comes from the verb χειροτονέω *cheirotoneo* (4x) meaning literally “stretching one’s hand.”

⁸⁰The Lord expected all believers to be baptized, but not for salvation but as the fruit of salvation.

⁸¹The proper noun means “Jehovah’s grace” and occurs 133x in the NT, 92x referring to the Baptist.

practitioner” of water baptism. As the biblically established forerunner to the Messiah (Mk. 1:1-3), John authenticated the Jews’ King by immersing Jesus in the Jordan River (Mt. 3:13-17). In the waters of this Jordan he “truly” (μὲν *men*) “baptized” (ἐβάπτισεν⁸³ *ebaptisen*) multitudes (Mt. 3:5-6).⁸⁴ John’s “baptism of repentance” (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3; Acts 13:24; and 19:4)⁸⁵ “with water” (ὕδατι⁸⁶ *hudati*) was for believers subsequent to their salvation (Mt. 3:7-9), confessing their sins (Mt. 3:6). That John baptized believers by immersion “in” water receives confirmation from several Scriptures, namely, “And were baptized of him **in Jordan**, confessing their sins” (Mt. 3:6), and “And Jesus, when he was baptized, **went up straightway out of the water**: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him” (Mt. 3:16).⁸⁷

John the Baptist was the forerunner to the Messiah, as the *Tanak* predicted in two key passages, namely, “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isa. 40:3) and “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 3:1). The Baptist began the Gospel era, as Mark revealed, saying, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mk. 1:1-4). The era of Christ, or the Christian era, began with the Baptist

⁸²The noun occurs 14x and it identifies the nature of John’s ministry of immersion. Obviously, it is related to the cognate verb βαπτίζω *baptizo* meaning to immerse or to plunge. The Greek meaning and NT practice of the word asserts that the mode is dipping.

⁸³The *ao*rist verb comes from βαπτίζω *baptizo* (80x) meaning to immerse, plunge, dunk, or dip. The practice of immersing to identify with the Messiah has no OT precedent! Other verbs for applying liquids are ῥαντίζω *rantizo* (4x) meaning “to sprinkle [blood],” ἐκχέω *ekcheo* (28x) meaning “to pour, shed, spill,” and νίπτω *nip*to (17x) meaning “to wash [hands],” in Heb. 9:13, Lk. 5:37, and Mt. 6:17, respectively.

⁸⁴The Christian movement started off as a Baptist movement as thousands received John the Baptist’s immersion. There is no reason to question that John baptized all of the apostles as they followed the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:28 ff.). However, many of these Baptist disciples “went back, and walked no more with him” (Jn. 6:66). The NT knows nothing about an unbaptized disciple.

⁸⁵Every biblical baptism in the NT required repentance (Mt. 3:8, 11; Acts 2:38; 11:18; 19:4-5)!

⁸⁶The noun is in the locative case in the eight-case system of Greek nouns: nominative, genitive, ablative, dative, locative, instrumental, accusative, and vocative. The ἐν “in” preposition enhances the locative case.

⁸⁷Baptism pictures a burial, as Paul explained, saying, “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:12; *vide* also Rom. 6:4-5).

movement of John, who baptized multitudes in the Jordan,⁸⁸ including the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth (Mt. 3:1-17).⁸⁹

The Lord Jesus Christ began His public ministry with the public identification of water immersion.⁹⁰ Peter recognized this truth because he himself began his life ministry with baptism (Jn. 1:28-42). The apostle revealed the initial parameter of the Lord's public ministry saying, "beginning from the baptism of John" (ἀρξάμενος⁹¹ ἀπὸ τοῦ βαπτίσματος⁹² Ἰωάννου *arxamenos apo tou baptisματος*) and concluded with the Ascension. He added the final parameter, saying, "unto that same day that he was taken up from us" (ἕως⁹³ τῆς ἡμέρας ἧς ἀνελήφθη⁹⁴ ἀφ' ἡμῶν, *heos tes hemeras hes anelephthe aph' hemon*). The Lord's three and half year ministry was from His public Baptism to His public Ascension, forty days after His resurrection. The apostolic candidate then must have walked with the Lord before and after His resurrection and until His Ascension.

After Peter had preached a strong and convicting message on the truth that the Jews had crucified their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 2:22), then the audience queried about their responsibility. The apostle retorted, saying, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Μετανοήσατε,⁹⁵ καὶ βαπτισθήτω⁹⁶ ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς⁹⁷ ἄφεσιν⁹⁸

⁸⁸It is biblically appropriate to call immersed believers "Baptists." The Scripture does not acknowledge or countenance "un-baptized" believers! Those who refuse baptism reject the counsel of God (Lk. 7:30). Baptists trace their spiritually and theologically organized heritage back to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Baptist.

⁸⁹The "Dispensation of Grace" began with John the Baptist and **not** with Pentecost. The Apostle John asserted this truth, saying, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:17). Also, "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John" (Mt. 11:13; cf. Lk. 16:16).

⁹⁰The first step in sanctification for the justified saint is believer's immersion in the Lord's assembly (Mt. 28:19-20; Rom. 6:1-4; Acts 2:41-47; 18:8). The behaviour of the upright is righteousness, which brings the divine approval of Jehovah. David said, "For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright" (Ps. 11:7). Therefore, the Lord Jesus wanted to fulfill all righteousness and have divine approval; He submitted to the biblical forerunner's baptism and received the Father's commendation (Mt. 3:15-17). Righteous behaviour leads to divine favor!

⁹¹See v. 1 for the root of the *aorist* participle.

⁹²The noun βάπτισμα *baptisma* occurs 6x in *Acts* out of 22x in the NT. It is cognate to the verb βαπτίζω *baptizo* (80x) which is derived from the root verb βάπτω *bapto* (cf. Lk. 16:24; Jn. 13:26; and Rev. 19:13) meaning "to dip" or "to dye." The verb means "to plunge" or "to dip" and the noun means "immersion."

⁹³The temporal conjunction occurs 148x and means "til" or "until".

⁹⁴*Vide* vv. 1:2, 11.

⁹⁵This *aorist* imperative form from the verb μετανοέω *metanoeo* (34x) means "to change the mind." The imperative denotes the need for urgency.

⁹⁶Another *aorist* imperative form, this time from βαπτίζω *baptizo* (cf. Acts 1:5).

ἁμαρτιῶν, καὶ λήψετε τὴν δωρεάν⁹⁹ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος *metanoesate, kai baptistheto hekastos humon epi to onomati Iesou Christou esi aphasis hamartion, kai leptesthe ten dorean tou Hagiou Pneumatos* [Acts 2:38]). Peter demanded repentance as the requirement for baptism as did John the Baptist (Mt. 3:6-8). This baptism then, based on the conditions of repentance and faith (Mk. 1:15), which conditions produce regeneration (Jn. 3:3; I Jn. 5:1), was the authorized and official entrance into the membership of the assembly.

The Jerusalem church then received the regenerated sinners and baptized saints into membership *via* water immersion. Luke recorded this momentous occasion, saying, “*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*” (Acts 2:41-42). The three thousand baptized believers were “*added unto*” (προσέτεθησαν¹⁰⁰ *prosetethesan*) the one hundred and twenty baptized believers, increasing the Baptist church membership many fold. As the apostles immersed the multitudes of believers in Jerusalem,¹⁰¹ they were fulfilling Christ’s promise which stated, “*Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*” (Mt. 18:18). As the apostles added immersed believers to the church, Luke revealed that heaven simultaneously added as well, saying, “*And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*” (Acts 2:47). He employed the same verb προστίθημι (“*added to*”) for the Lord’s action, and revealed that the three thousand were added to “*the church*” (τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ¹⁰² *te ekklesia*). Baptism adds repentant sinners to the membership of the church.

The apostles and disciples faithfully practiced believers’ immersion as they started churches in Judaea, Samaria, and throughout the Roman Empire. When Deacon Philip was forced to flee and went to Samaria (Acts 8:5 ff.), he apparently started a church in his home and began to pastor his house-assembly.¹⁰³ Scripture states, “*But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized,*

⁹⁷The preposition εἰς *eis* (1773x) can mean “in response to” as used elsewhere; “*The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here* (Mt. 12:41).

⁹⁸The noun ἄφεσις *aphesis* (17x) means “pardon” or “release.”

⁹⁹The noun δωρεά *dorea* (11x) means “gift” or “bounty.” The gift of the Holy Ghost is regeneration.

¹⁰⁰The *aorist* passive form of the verb προστίθημι *prostithemi* (18x) means “to put” or “to add” and is the source for the English “prosthesis.”

¹⁰¹Many “baths” (*mikveh*) for ritual cleansing of the total body have been excavated around the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, facilitating the hundreds of immersions in a single day.

¹⁰²The articular noun ἐκκλησία *ekklesia* (115x) in the dative or indirect object case is omitted in the Critical Text. The ASV reads “*And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved.*”

¹⁰³Presumably Philip was married and had children to meet the requirement to be a deacon (I Tim. 3:11-12).

he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done” (Acts 8:12-13). Since believers’ baptism is a church ordinance, it follows that where there was baptism there was a church.

Luke wrote about the expansion of local churches throughout the Promised Land, stating, “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied” (Acts 9:31).¹⁰⁴ No doubt these churches were established by the scattered disciples. Since Gaza was in the southwest region of Judaea, it is certainly possible that a Baptist assembly was established in this coastal city. With regard to the Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8:26-40), the Baptist pastor and preacher Philip used the messianic Scripture of Isa. 53:7-8 and won him to the Lord, then subsequently baptized him in water upon the profession of his faith testifying, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37).¹⁰⁵ Interpreting the passage from known to unknown, the reader knows that the Spirit of the Lord led Philip the Baptist deacon and pastor, “full of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 6:3) and faithful to the commission of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the eunuch. Since baptism is a church ordinance, it follows that the eunuch was received into some church membership (presumably either in the Samaritan assembly or Gaza assembly [?]) through believer’s immersion. What is not known is how many were in the treasurer’s entourage, how long did Philip disciple the man, what was the exact spot of the water, what was the church connection. That the Angel of the Lord prompted Philip (v. 26), that Philip had a biblically consistent ministry before (vv. 12 ff.) and after (v. 40), that Scripture was accurately and consistently practiced in exalting Christ (vv. 32-36), and that this new convert departed with joy in his heart (v 39), all bespeaks to the truth that this baptism fit harmonistically within the bounds of ecclesiology.

As one advances through the *Book of Acts*, several examples of believers’ immersion emerge, demonstrating the faithfulness of the early disciples. The query of the newly-converted Saul of Tarsus, saying “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6), received the answer through church member Ananias at Damascus. The Lord honored His assembly at Damascus and gave His message to Saul to be baptized, and he “was baptized” (Acts 9:18). Peter went to Caesarea and evangelized Cornelius and his family, and then “he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48). The expression “in the name of the Lord” (ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ Κυρίου *en to onomati tou Kuriou*) occurs also in Acts 8:16 and 19:5. Since the Lord Jesus Christ commissioned the apostles to practice church planting including evangelizing, baptizing, and catechizing in the name of the Triune God members, reference to “the name of the Lord” must be a literary example of the *synecdoche* or part for whole.

Paul, the baptized church member (Acts 9:18) and church planter (Acts 14:23), had Lydia baptized (Acts 16:15) as well as the jailor and his household in Philippi (Acts 16:33). The apostle

¹⁰⁴The Greek Critical Text changes the plural “the churches” (αἱ ἐκκλησίαι *hai ekklesiai*) to the singular “the church” (ἡ ἐκκλησία *he ekklesia*), promoting the “universal” or “territorial” church concept. The *NIV* reads, “...the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria...”

¹⁰⁵Again, the Greek Critical Text omits the entirety of verse 37.

went to Corinth and won Crispus, his house, and many Corinthians to the Lord who in turn received believers' baptism (Act 18:8). Finally, the twelve disciples of John the Baptist understood John's message as explained by Paul, received salvation, and accepted water immersion into the Ephesian church (Acts 19:5-9).

Summary

1. The Lord was the example for all Christians concerning believers' immersion since He was baptized by His forerunner.
1. The Lord Jesus Christ demanded believer's immersion for all saints.
2. Baptism is the entrance into church membership.
3. Where baptism occurs there is church existence and authority.

IV. LORD'S SUPPER

In the synoptic Gospels the writers reported the ordinance of the breaking¹⁰⁶ of bread. For instance, Luke said, "*And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me*" (Lk. 22:19; cf. also Mt. 26:26-28; Mk. 14:22-24). The practice of breaking bread refers to the ecclesiological Lord's Supper several times in *Acts*. On Pentecost Sunday the Jerusalem church broke bread following the baptismal church service, as Luke revealed, saying, "*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*" (Acts 2:42).¹⁰⁷ The Jerusalem assembly continued this ecclesiological practice regularly, as the Lukan account reported, saying, "*And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart*" (Acts 2:46).¹⁰⁸ Later, on Sunday Paul met with disciples at the church in Troas, and participated in the Lord's Supper, as Luke stated, "*And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight*" (Acts 20:7; also cf. v. 11).¹⁰⁹ The Apostle Paul, no doubt with apostolic privilege, participated in this local church ordinance. Paul had taught the Corinthians that the "*Lord's Supper*" (I Cor. 11:20) was a memorial to be practiced often (v. 25),

¹⁰⁶The verb κλάω *klao* (15x) and the cognate noun κλάσις *klasis* (2x) was employed by Luke for the action toward the bread of the Supper.

¹⁰⁷As the assembly was united around doctrine, the members could enjoy unity in fellowship, the Lord's Supper and prayer.

¹⁰⁸Apparently so enthused about the recent redemptive work of the Jewish Messiah, the Jerusalem church members had church services daily along with the regular practice of the Lord's Supper.

¹⁰⁹One should notice the identifying statements that this was a church service with the Lord's Supper. Disciples assembled together on the first day of the week, they heard preaching, and they broke bread. Certainly Paul and the disciples would not be involved in any non-ecclesiological gathering on Sunday!

and was exclusive for church members who must examine their individual relationships with the Lord and with others in the assembly, saying, “*Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep*” (I Cor. 11:27-30).¹¹⁰

Summary

1. The expression “*breaking of bread*” quite often referred to the Lord’s Supper (however, see Acts 27:35).
2. The Lord’s Supper was a church ordinance for the church members to be practiced often as a memorial.
3. The purpose of the Supper was for self examination about one’s relationship to Christ and to other Body members.
4. Paul took advantage of “apostolic privilege” and practiced the ordinance at Troas.

V. CHURCH GIVING

The *Book of Acts* says little about financial giving for the financial support of the assembly presumably because the Christian Jews recognized that giving the “*tithe*”¹¹¹ was the permanent divine requirement. The *Torah* stated, saying, “*And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD*” (Lev. 27:32). This written requirement affirmed the earlier practice of Abraham and Jacob, both of whom tithed, as Scripture stated, saying, “*And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all*” (Gen. 14:20), and “*And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee*” (Gen. 28:22), respectively. The Lord Jesus Christ commended the Pharisees on their practice of tithing and required them to continue the practice, saying,

¹¹⁰The apostle also taught the Corinthian assembly that the Lord’s churches were united in the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, even though each church observed it exclusively. He stated, “*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread*” (I Cor. 10:16-17) and “*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit*” (I Cor. 12:13). The expressions “*one bread*” and “*one body*” are another way of saying “*united breads*” and “*united bodies.*” In an era when travel was much more restricted, practicing “*closed*” communion was more easily facilitated to harmonize with its biblical requirement.

¹¹¹The Hebrew word מַעֲשֵׂר *ma`aser* (32x) means one tenth or ten percent. Likewise, the Greek noun ἀποδεκατόω *apodekatoo* (4x) means one tenth as well.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Mt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42).¹¹² The practice of tithing on all income was never rescinded or abrogated! Believers in all dispensations must tithe to support the work of the ministry.

However, in *Acts* another practiced occurred but was short-lived. Members of the Jerusalem church began to practice Christian communalism or the sharing goods with the community (Baptist communism [!]). Luke recorded the beginning of this practice with the exemplary action of Barnabas the Levite who sold property (cf. Num. 18:20 and Dt. 10:9) and gave all of the proceeds to the assembly. As many Jewish believers in the early days of the Jerusalem assembly suffered persecution by relatives and employers (cf. Acts 5:16 ff.; Heb. 10:25, 32 ff.; Jam. 1:1-2; I Pet. 1:1), communal giving would have been welcomed. However, once it was abused by Ananias and Sapphira through deceit, that is, lying to the Holy Ghost, the practice ceased to exist (cf. Acts 5:11 ff.). Reference to the practice of Christian communism ceased in the *Book of Acts*.

Later, the Lord’s assemblies began to give to missionaries like Paul or to other churches such as the Jerusalem assembly. For instance, the Apostle Paul thanked the church members at Philippi for their giving, saying, “*Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity*” (Phil. 4:15-16). Also, he encouraged the Gentile churches to give willingly and joyfully a certain contribution to the poor saints at the Jerusalem church as a gift (Rom. 15:26-31; II Cor. 8-9).

Summary

1. The Jewish Christians recognized that the law of tithing to support the place of worship never was rescinded, and they therefore continued to practice it.
2. Christian communalism was attempted but stopped because of abuse. There is no biblical justification for it to continue today.
3. Christians began to help contribute to the finances of missionaries and other churches in need.

¹¹²Apparently the Jews of the first century received the final warning of the LORD through Malachi, who said, “*Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts*” (Mal. 3:8-11).

VI. CHURCH AND PRAYER SERVICES

The Jerusalem church as well as other biblical churches had regular services. The assembly at Jerusalem had a ten-day prayer service prior to Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost, after preaching and baptism, the church of Jerusalem practiced other forms of worship, as Luke expressed, saying, “*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*” (Acts 2:42).¹¹³ The “*apostles' doctrine*” (τῆ διδασκαλίᾱ¹¹⁴ τῶν ἀποστόλων *te didache ton apostolon*) was the expounding of the doctrinal teaching that the Lord Jesus Christ gave the apostles during his earthly ministry. This teaching included the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7), the Sermon in the Plain (Lk. 6:17-38), the various parables and examples (Mt. 13:1 ff.), the proverbs (Lk. 4:23), OT analogies (Lk. 4:25-27), the Olivet Discourse (Mt. 24-25), and church doctrine (Mt. 16:18; 18:15-18).

The noun “*fellowship*” (τῆ κοινωνίᾱ¹¹⁵ *te koinonia*) refers to Christian communion or association with other Body members. The Lord’s Supper and the prayer time also constituted activities in the early church. Later, Paul taught in the Corinthian church (Acts 18:11) and preached in the church at Troas (Acts 20:11). The apostle informed Timothy with these instructions, saying, “*Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine*” (I Tim. 4:13). He added these imperatives to his son in the faith, saying, “*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry*” (II Tim. 4:2-5).

Furthermore, prayer was important to Luke who wrote about prayer often in his *Gospel* and in *Acts*. He referred to the noun “*prayer*” (προσευχή *proseuche*) in *Luke* (3x) and in *Acts* (9x) and to the verb “*pray*” (προσεύχομαι¹¹⁶ *proseuchomai*) in *Luke* (19x) and in *Acts* (16x). The Jerusalem church seemed to be in a ten-day prayer service in the upper room awaiting Pentecost, as Luke revealed, saying, “*These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren*” (Acts 1:14). After Pentecost, Peter and John visited the Temple at the hour of prayer (Acts 3:1), and being threatened by the Sanhedrin, went back to their “*company*” or the assembly at Jerusalem and prayed. As a result of the church praying, the Lord manifested His presence, as Luke recorded, saying, “*And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness*” (Acts 4:31).

¹¹³Obviously the order is inspired: there can be no unity in fellowship, the Lord’s Supper, or in common prayer time without unity in biblical doctrine.

¹¹⁴The noun διδασκαλίᾱ *didache* occurs 30x and refers to “doctrinal instruction.”

¹¹⁵The noun occurs 20x and refers to relationships around common truth.

¹¹⁶The compound verb προσεύχομαι literally means “towards asking.”

The apostles, leaders of the Jerusalem assembly, were men of prayer and the word, and desired that the assembly choose deacons to deal with widows (Acts 6:1-4). The church with the apostles prayed over the men chosen as deacons and consequently anointed them for service (v. 6). Later, Peter and John visited the church at Samaria and were involved in a church prayer session with regard to the salvation of Samaritans (Acts 8:15 ff.). With the incarceration of the Apostle Peter, the Jerusalem church was in constant prayer for his release. Luke recorded the scenario, saying, *“And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place”* (Acts 12:12-17). It seems that the assembly members were surprised that the Lord answered their prayers so precisely and immediately!

The church at Antioch continued the practice of prayer in the church services, this time praying about the sending forth of the missionary church-planters Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:1-4). After establishing churches on their first missionary tour, the duo re-visited the Gentile churches and had prayer services for the choosing and anointing the elder of each of the respective churches (Acts 14:22-23). With Paul's new colleague Silas, the two visited a place where women were praying, and started a church from the baptized converts (Acts 16:13-15). Presumably Lydia's house became the meeting place for the new assembly, which now was the place of prayer to which the missionaries were advancing when met by the damsel of divination (v. 16). When thrown in jail, Paul and Silas kept the prayer service going by singing (v. 25). The Apostle Paul re-visited the elders of the Ephesian church and gave a heart-felt plea about his and their futures, culminating in a time of prayer. Luke reported, *“And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship”* (Acts 20:36-38). Again, as the apostle and his colleagues went to Tyre they found an assembly of disciples (including their wives and children), and had a time of prayer as they departed (Acts 21:1-5).

Summary

1. The church services included preaching, teaching, the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, fellowship and prayer.
2. Prayer was a vital and significant part of the church services of the Lord's assemblies.
3. The church prayed for all difficulties and obstacles facing them, many of which were life-threatening.

4. The seasons of corporate prayer were sometimes lengthy and always fervent.

VII. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

The Lord Jesus Christ gave the three-fold approach for dealing with offenses within the Baptist assembly, which approach for offenses is known as church discipline (Mt. 18:15-17). This teaching was foundational to the apostles as they, representing the leadership of the assembly, had authority “to bind” (in church membership) or “to loose” (in church discipline). Several occasions arise in *Acts* that relate to church discipline. Certainly Ananias and Sapphira sinned against the assembly in their real estate deception and the Lord allowed Peter to “un-loose” them from membership with sudden death (Acts 5:1-11). Obviously, this was a public lesson for the assembly, as it seems that the three-fold approach was extremely compressed (confrontation, rejection, dismissal, death), since both husband and wife were hardened in their sin. Believers who receive ex-communication from the church through church discipline will fall under the authority of Satan who may destroy the Christian physically. Paul gave instruction to the Corinthian church about the fornicating church member (I Cor. 5:1), saying, “*To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*” (I Cor. 5:5).¹¹⁷

Later, Peter confronted Simon Magus, a baptized “believer” (Acts 8:13), and reproved him for his soteriological heresy, saying, “*But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me*” (Acts 8:20-24). The text does not reveal any repentance from Simon, so presumably he was ex-communicated from the membership of the Samaritan church.¹¹⁸

Summary

1. The apostles knew of church discipline and its importance and severity.
2. Death quite possibly is the final outcome for Christians disciplined out of the NT assembly.

¹¹⁷Christians who do not judge themselves concerning their relationships with the Lord and with other Body members face weakness, sickness, and death as a form of divine chastening (I Cor. 11:30). The Bible seems to infer that individuals are either under the Head-ship of Christ (in churches) or are under the head-ship of Satan (outside of churches).

¹¹⁸Some of the patristic writers such as Irenaeus recorded that Simon continued in his magic and promoted Gnosticism.

VIII. ORDINATION OF ELDERS

Just as the choosing of an apostolic replacement for Judas was a serious church decision (Acts 1:22-26), so was the ordination of elders. After having started numerous churches on their first missionary tour, Paul and Barnabas revisited them, working with the assemblies and their efforts to install their respective pastor. Luke revealed, saying, “*And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they **had ordained** them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed*” (Acts 14:21-23). Luke employed the aorist participle “*had ordained*” (χειροτονήσαντες *cheirotoneantes*) to indicate the process of recognizing the Lord’s pastor for every church plant. The root verb χειροτονέω¹¹⁹ *cheirotoneo* means “to raise or extend the hand” as in voting on or affirming a decision. The plural subject of the participle is the two apostles, but no doubt the ordaining included the church members, since congregational government was the biblical norm. For instance, the same verb occurred when the assembly chose Titus, as Paul recorded, saying, “*And not that only, but who **was also chosen** of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind*” (II Cor. 8:19). Furthermore, the classic triad of passages for congregational rule in *Acts* include the selection of Matthias (1:23-26), the selection of the seven deacons (6:1-6), and the selection of the first missionaries Barnabas and Paul (13:1-3).¹²⁰

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul made a passing theological reference to the divine selection of elders in addressing the Ephesian elders. He averred, saying, “*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*” (Acts 20:28). Ultimately, the Holy Ghost makes or sets (τίθημι *tithemi*) men in the office of overseer (ἐπίσκοπος¹²¹ *episkopos*) or the episcopate. The Spirit of God works through the People of God in the Church of God in compliance to the Word of God to select the Man of God.

¹¹⁹The compound verb is *dis legomena* occurring also in II Cor. 8:19.

¹²⁰Paul was consistent in his doctrine and practice, since he ordained men within the authority of each assembly. For instance, he referred to Timothy’s ordination service at the Ephesian church, saying, “*Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery*” (I Tim. 4:14), and “*Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands*” (II Tim. 1:6).

¹²¹The noun ἐπίσκοπος literally means “over-seer” and occurs 7x. The overseer or “bishop” must take the oversight of the assembly to ensure conformity to the word of God. The main responsibility of the bishop is to feed the divinely-redeemed assembly.

Summary

1. Although outside elders may examine and recommend men for the pastorate of any church, the assembly must retain her autonomy even in the selecting of men for the pastorate.
2. The Lord is the One Who ultimately sets in place the qualified man for the pastorate.

IX. MISSION PROGRAM

The Mission Program of the NT assembly is the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20), or the commission to plant NT assemblies. The resurrected Lord instructed the Jerusalem assembly with these words, saying, *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). The church members were to witness about the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, winning sinners to Christ and then baptizing and training them as church members in newly formed assemblies.¹²² The *Book of Acts* gives examples of a Forced Mission Program and a Voluntary Mission Program. When Saul of Tarsus brought persecution to the somewhat complacent Jerusalem assembly, the scattered church members with their families were forced to evangelize new areas such as Judaea and Samaria, planting Baptist churches in various areas (Acts 9:31). Although effective, the Lord seemed to desire a better approach.

For example, the church in Antioch, decided to take a more normative Voluntary Mission Program. Luke gave the account, saying, *“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus”* (Acts 13:1-4). Paul and Barnabas had been members of the Antioch church for at least one year (Acts 11:26),¹²³ and were actively involved in church work. Apparently the Lord spoke through a prophet and called Barnabas and Saul. The church fasted, prayed, and then sent the duo to Gentile lands. However, the Holy Ghost worked through the Lord’s assembly members and chose and sent the missionaries away (cf. Mt. 16:17; 18:18).¹²⁴ The assembly at Antioch was the sending church and the “mission board” out

¹²²The NT entity for evangelizing, baptizing, and catechizing is indeed the exclusive baptizing agency or Baptist Church! Protestant mission boards and parachurch mission agencies have no divine approval to be involved in Kingdom work (Lk. 12:32).

¹²³Luke recorded that Barnabas and Saul *“assembled themselves with the church”* (Acts 11:26), or literally “in the church,” joining in the membership!

¹²⁴Obviously the men spoke Hebrew and the *lingua franca* Greek and had no need of Language School.

of which the men came. The missionaries had no guaranteed financial support, so they apparently lived off of the income Paul generated as a tent maker (Acts 18:1; 20:34) and perhaps off of real estate income that Barnabas may have had (cf. Acts 4:36-37). Paul declared to the Philippians that they were first church to give to him financial help, and they did it several times (Phil. 4:15-16). The missionaries travelled throughout Asia Minor, starting various autonomous churches such as Iconium, Derbe, Lystra, Lycaonia, Antioch, Pisidia, Pamphilia, and Perga, After the missionaries finished their work (cf. Acts 13:2 with 14:26) they returned to report on the Lord's blessing, as Luke reported, saying, "*And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles*" (Acts 14:26-27).

Summary

1. The Lord orchestrated the Great Commission through His assemblies.
2. He has designed and designated that His Baptist churches plant Baptist churches, which is the Lord's Mission Program.
3. The sending church supported the missionaries in prayer but made no guarantee for financial support.
4. The missionaries started autonomous Baptist churches.
5. The missionaries reported back to the sending church.

CONCLUSION

The apostles built off of the teaching of the dear Lord Jesus Christ concerning the planting, organizing, and administrating of Baptist assemblies. The policies of governing the Lord's churches, or Baptist Polity, became evident in the *Book of Acts* as the apostles and early disciples practiced ecclesiological truth. Several significant truths concerning polity emerged as Luke chronicled the history of the Lord's churches. Included in Baptist Polity was the foundational truth about Offices, Business Meetings, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Church Giving, Church and Prayer Meetings, Church Discipline, the Ordination of Elders, and the Mission Program.

The offices of leadership included the pastor, apostle, prophet, and evangelist, and the office of service included the deacon. Biblical qualifications were required for all offices, some of which offices ceased because qualifications could not be maintained. The permanent offices for the assembly today are those of pastor and deacon. Business meetings were conducted under the leadership of the designated church leader as the biblical solution to problem at hand was unanimously accepted and implemented. Baptism by immersion of professed believer led to church membership. The Lord's Supper was conducted as a memorial for church members to reflect upon their relationship with Christ and Body members. Church giving assumed the practice of tithing and then extra giving contributed to other churches and missionaries. Church

Baptist Polity in the Book of Acts

and prayer meetings included preaching, teaching, practicing the ordinances, fellowshiping, and praying. Church discipline occurred either in death or in excommunicating an unsaved church member. The ordination of elders involved the examination and committal of qualified candidate by the recommendation of experienced elders and acceptance of recommendation by the assembly. The church was the mission agency for sending out missionaries in the assembly's mission program.

Prayerfully, the Lord's current assemblies will recognize the biblical pattern for Baptist Polity set forth by the Lord's churches in the NT and implement biblical governance appropriately.

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