

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

“I Will Build My Church”

By Alan Hitchen

Introduction: The book of Acts was written by the Holy Spirit to give disciples of Jesus a history of the growth and development of the church. It records how Jesus fulfilled His promise to build His church on the rock of Peter’s confession: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”** (Matt.16:16-18). Peter laid that firm foundation in the sermon where he used the **“keys of the kingdom”** to open **“the gate that leads to life”** as he said: **“This Jesus, God has raised up...being exalted to the right hand of God...Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ”** (Acts 2:29-38).

Immediately after these words, 3000 were baptized into Christ and Jesus began building His church (Gal. 3:27; Acts 5:1). Acts records how the apostles were **“witnesses to Me in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), and in all Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12), and to the end of the earth (Acts 13-28), (Acts 1:8).”** When Acts ends, the church was fully revealed and the gospel **“preached to every creature under heaven”** (Col. 1:23). Acts is the blueprint to start a church in any nation at any time until the Lord’s return. It all began with the apostles.

Apostles After Jesus **“continued all night in prayer to God,” “He chose twelve whom He also named apostles”** (Lk. 6:12-13). These men had been prepared by Jesus to be His witnesses and were given the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, first to preach and later to write Scripture. Acts records how they made **“disciples of all the nations, baptizing them,”** and how they taught these disciples **“to observe all things that I have commanded you”** (Matt. 28:18-19). In the first five chapters they worked alone, but as the church grew, it soon became too large and seven men were chosen to work under and help them in their work (Acts 6).

Prophets Among those seven, one became the first prophet and the first to die for his faith. Luke introduced Stephen as the first to preach by inspiration (Acts 6:10). Although he was stoned, and died, many took his place (Acts 11:27; 13:1). Paul later revealed that the church was actually **“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone”** (Eph. 2:20), and that the gospel **“has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets”** (Eph. 3:5). **“God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...”** (1 Cor. 12:28). Every book in the NT was written either by an apostle (Matthew, John, Paul, and Peter) or prophet (Mark, Luke, James, and Jude). As the Jews had said **“we are disciples of Moses,”** hundreds of years after Moses’ death, through the writings of the Law (Jn. 9:28), we are Jesus’ disciples through the writings of His apostles and prophets (Matt. 28:18).

Evangelists After a **“great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem,”** and the disciples were **“scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles,”** they **“went everywhere preaching the word.”** Yet Luke followed the work of one man: **“Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them,”** then **“preached Jesus”** to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:1-39). Thus in **“Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven”** (Acts 21:8), we see a third office had been created by Jesus to aid in the growth of the church. Timothy was also selected for this purpose (Acts 16:1-5), and later told he must do **“the work of an evangelist”** and **“fulfill your ministry”** (1 Tim. 4:5). As Paul (an apostle), Silas (a prophet) and Timothy (an evangelist) worked among the brethren, **“the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily”** (Acts 13:1; 16:5).

Elders Although Luke doesn’t reveal when it began, elders were well established when **“the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul”** (Acts 11:29-30). They worked with the apostles in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15), and by the end of Acts were working in the Jerusalem church with no mention of apostles (Acts 21:17-18). As the gospel moved to **“the ends of the earth,”** **“they appointed elders in every church”** (Acts 14:23). When Paul called the elders at Ephesus, he told them to **“take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood”** (Acts 20:28). Thus elders were placed in the church to shepherd and oversee each flock. Unlike the other offices, elders only **“shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers.”** Their work was limited by the Holy Spirit to work as shepherds over a single flock (**“the flock among you,”** i.e. the local church that appointed them). This flock alone are **“those entrusted to you”** (1 Pet. 5:2-4). If an elder were to visit another flock, or had the opportunity to preach the gospel in another part of the world, he would not be working as an elder, but as an evangelist or teacher. While **“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,”** could work as an apostle everywhere, he was limited as **“I who am a fellow elder”** to tend only the flock of God which was among the elders he worked with (1 Pet. 1:1; 5:1).

Jesus Gave Gifts Paul summed up all we have learned in Acts when he revealed that Jesus gave **“gifts to men.”** **“He**

Himself gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12). As Jesus built His church, He gave these positions to His godly servants so they would aspire to attain and work under Him through them. The living apostles and prophets passed from the earth in the first century, but their lasting legacy was *“all things that pertain to life and godliness which were “once for all delivered to the saints.”* What the Holy Spirit gave to them, they have left for us. *“When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.” “He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”* (2 Pet. 1:4; Jude 3; Jn. 16:13; 14:26).

Conclusion: Each generation can restore the church anywhere in the world when disciples take what Jesus revealed through His apostles and prophets and again lay the same foundation. Over time, men can again prepare themselves to be the evangelists, shepherds and teachers who work to strengthen and build up the church. This process can be repeated again and again, in different parts of the world and in different times in history as the seed is sown in good and honest hearts. ■

When Should We Celebrate Easter?

By Heath Rogers

I recently read an article written by a denominational preacher with the above title. In it, he indicated that his church is facing a challenge about what to do with the large crowds that attend their Easter service. One suggestion was to offer a Saturday evening Easter service the night before. However, this would have the church celebrating Easter before Easter. This dilemma led to his question, “When should we celebrate Easter?”

The article briefly touched on the history and controversy of choosing which Sunday to observe as Easter. Most churches have settled on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox (This explains why Easter is sometimes in March). Then, surprisingly, the rest of the article discussed why Christians everywhere should celebrate the resurrection of Jesus every day.

Indeed, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the lynchpin of Christianity. Everything we believe and hope either stands or falls with this one event. The resurrection proves that Jesus was the Son of God (Rom. 1:3-4) and that our sins can be forgiven (Rom. 4:25). It also validates our faith (1 Cor. 15:12-19) and assures us that there will be future judgment (Acts 17:30-31).

The point of this article was that the significance of the Lord’s resurrection cannot be confined to one day a year. I agree with his conclusion. However, this article failed to settle the question of when we should celebrate Easter. When we turn to the Bible to address this subject, we soon find that the question itself changes from “When should we celebrate Easter?” to, “Should we celebrate Easter?” Not only is the Bible silent concerning when to celebrate Easter, there is no trace recorded in the Bible of an Easter celebration ever taking place. Jesus never told His apostles to remember the anniversary of His resurrection. The apostles, in turn, never gave instruction to the church to celebrate Easter. No church, or individual Christian, is ever found celebrating Easter in the Bible.

In fact, the word *“Easter”* is found in only one verse in one translation. The King James Version renders Acts 12:4 as: *“And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people”* (Acts 12:4). The Greek word in this verse that the KJV translators rendered *“Easter”* is found many other times in the New Testament, and every other time it is translated *“Passover.”* This is the proper meaning of the word, which indicates that our modern concept of Easter was never in the original text.

In addition, this verse offers good proof that the early church did not celebrate Easter. Herod was killing Peter because it pleased the Jews (v. 3). Why would Herod concern himself with a *“Christian”* holiday by waiting to kill Peter if his goal was to please the Jews? Certainly, the Jews would have been even more pleased if Herod had killed Peter on one of the church’s special days. He waited until after the Passover to kill Peter because he was regarding the Jewish Passover.

Easter, as we know it today, does not exist in the Bible. Since this is the case, why would one celebrate Easter in honor of the Lord’s resurrection today? We will not be having an Easter Service this Sunday. As we have shown, such is without God’s authority. We will assemble and worship like we do every Sunday. We do not need a special day or a special service to give due regard to the resurrection of Jesus. We accomplish this every Sunday as the Scriptures authorize when we partake of the Lord’s Supper. Every Sunday is a special day and a special service. It is the Lord’s Day. — *Knollwood Church of Christ*, May 2012. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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