

This church later divided into the Roman and Greek Orthodox Catholic churches. Groups split from the Roman Catholic Church to form Lutheran and Anglican (Episcopal) churches. Through the years additional denominations formed, including: Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist churches. These churches continued to divide and other new churches also developed. Today there are thousands of man-made churches — in addition to the Lord's church.

New Testament writers warned that the Lord's church would experience this corruption (2 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 2:1-3).

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth” (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

The apostle Paul cautioned that some elders would bring error into the Lord's church (Acts 20:28-30).

The first church — the one that Jesus built — still exists today. It is to this church — his church — that our Lord adds the saved. The church of Christ can be found anywhere religious people abandon the creeds and denominations of men and practice the New Testament alone. Dear Friend, are you a member of the first church — the one that Jesus built?

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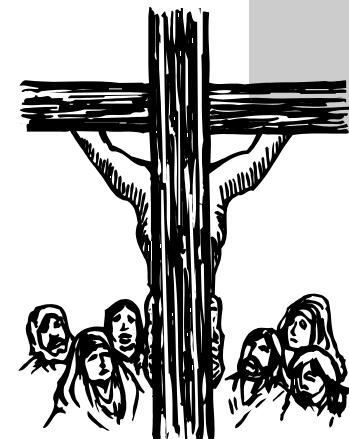
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THE FIRST CHURCH

**The only one purchased by the
blood of Christ!**



By Louis Rushmore

The first church was built by Jesus Christ in Jerusalem about 2,000 years ago. It was during his ministry that our Lord said: "...I will build my church..." (Matt. 16:18). **He only promised to build ONE CHURCH — HIS CHURCH.**

That church was not made of ordinary building material. It was not built from wood, stone or metal. Our Lord's church was made with SPIRITUAL STONES. Jesus himself is the foundation (1 Cor. 3:11) and chief cornerstone (1 Pet. 2:6; Acts 4:11). Christians are the other stones with which the Lord's church is constructed (1 Pet. 2:5). Therefore, the saved (Christians) are added to the church by our Lord (Acts 2:47).

Acts Two records the birthday of the church. The remaining chapters of the Book of Acts show how additional congregations of Jesus' church began. Where the Gospel of Christ was preached, congregations of the church started. The New Testament epistles were written to instruct the Lord's church.

For hundreds of years there was only one church on earth. Our Lord's church was described in Scripture as "the church of God" (1 Cor. 1:2), "house of God" (1 Cor. 2:15) and the "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16). Catholic (A.D. 606), Lutheran (A.D. 1530), Episcopal (A.D. 1534), Presbyterian (A.D. 1536), Baptist (A.D. 1611), Methodist (A.D. 1739) and all other man-made churches did not yet exist.

Each congregation of the Lord's church was independent from every other congregation. However, congregations enjoyed a religious fellowship through their common practice of New Testament Scripture. Also, each congregation was guided by its own elders (Titus 1:5-9; also called bishops, 1 Tim. 3:1-7; pastors, Eph. 4:11; shepherds, 1 Pet. 5:1-4). These men were selected according to scriptural qualifications to serve in the congregation where they worshipped; two or more elders served a congregation.

Deacons were also appointed in each congregation according to scriptural qualifications (1 Tim. 3:8-13). These men served the needs of the church (Acts 6:1-6). Preachers (1 Tim. 4:2; Rom. 10:13-15) and teach-

ers (Eph. 4:11; Heb. 5:12) taught each congregation.

For many years there continued to be **ONLY ONE CHURCH!** Each congregation was independent, self-ruling with the New Testament as its sole creed, overseen by elders, served by deacons and taught by preachers and teachers. Each congregation worshipped in the same way, too (1 Cor. 16:1-2; Acts 20:7; Col. 3:16).

However, eventually some congregations started to ignore the New Testament and substitute man-made ideas. The first area of change affected the elders. A single elder was elevated above other elders in some congregations. The term "bishop" was then reserved for these men. They began to meet with other bishops of sister congregations. Hundreds of years later these bishops selected one of their number to be chief bishop or pope.

Gradually through departure from the New Testament the Lord's church was generally corrupted. From this slow change developed the Catholic Church.