

Church Planting in Acts & Church History

I. Definitions

- A. Acts 2 records how the Church began on the day of Pentecost, fulfilling Acts 1:8, where Christ promised that witnesses would begin in Jerusalem and expand from there.
- B. However, is it true that, following this first church plant, “churches should always be planted by other churches”? Was this true even in the Book of Acts?

II. How Churches Began in Acts

- A. **Ethiopia** saw its first church planted not by another church but by Philip, whom God used to share the gospel with one of Ethiopia’s highest officials (Acts 8:26-40). The church tradition in Ethiopia is that this official brought Christianity back to his nation.
- B. **Damascus** had one of the first churches outside Jerusalem (9:19b). Did the Jerusalem church plant the Damascus church? Paul reached both Jews and Gentiles there (Gal. 2:11-16), but he had to defend himself before the Jerusalem church (9:26). The best we can tell is that it was the persecution in Jerusalem—not a church plant—that thrust out the disciples into places such as Damascus (Acts 8:1).
- C. **Antioch** remains a superb example of a local church sending missionaries like Paul and Barnabas into the harvest to plant churches (13:1-3). However, This support was inconsistent, which resulted in Paul needing to support himself as a tentmaker in Corinth (Acts 18:3). One wonders whether it can accurately be said that the Antioch church planted the church at Corinth.
- D. **Colossae** and the other Asia Minor churches began in an unknown way to scholars. The best guess as to their origin is from Paul’s daily teaching at the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus. “This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (19:10). While we may wish that the church of Ephesus planted these churches, such was not the case.
- E. **Rome** also baffles experts of early church history. Paul wrote the Romans in AD 56 to an established church, yet no one knows how it started. Catholics claim Peter started it, but we have no evidence of Peter arriving in Rome until the AD 60s. Our best guess is that Jews who trusted Christ on Pentecost brought the gospel back to Rome, as some from Rome attended this vital gathering (2:10b).

III. How Churches Began in Church History

- A. European Christians who migrated to America in the 1600s were not sent by their churches home in England and other European nations. Nevertheless, they still came, thrust out in considerable measure by Anglicans and other state churches that persecuted rather than supported them!
- B. The modern missionary movement from Europe began in 1792 when William Carey left England for India. His church refused to send him, so he established the first missionary society.
- C. J. Hudson Taylor initially entered China, backed by British churches. However, God called him otherwise when his senders insisted he stay in the coastal areas in missionary compounds and wear Western dress. He moved inland and established the China Inland Mission. CIM missionaries were viewed as “renegade” since they adopted Chinese dress

and integrated into society. However, this began a movement that lasts to this day in millions of Chinese believers, though it was not initiated by the local churches of Hudson Taylor's day.

- D. History records that Jesus Christ Himself built His church throughout the centuries, according to His promise (Matt. 16:18). Often, He did this through the faithfulness of local churches that saw their responsibility to establish new congregations. However, as in the book of Acts, he continued to call individuals to faithfulness in establishing churches when their institutions failed to catch this vision.

IV. Do You Agree or Disagree?

To explore your ideas on this vital subject, please mark each statement below as A, U, or D to show whether you Agree, are Unsure, or Disagree with the teaching.

- A. Other churches always planted churches in the Book of Acts.
- B. Other churches have always planted churches in church history.
- C. The only way to plant churches today is for churches to plant other churches.

V. Conclusion

God desires that churches plant other churches. But is this the only way that he works? In the book of Acts and throughout church history, churches often failed in this role. At these times, God raised up individuals who shared His heart with the lost, resulting in the establishment of new congregations.

This subject causes one to reconsider the identity of the bride of Christ. Is His "bride" the local church? If so, Jesus has many brides. The bride of Christ is His universal church that he washed, sanctified, and will present to Himself at his return (Eph. 5). Christ is adorning and expanding this bride through numerous church planting strategies.

Contrary to popular belief, Scripture does not command church planting. The Great Commission is to make disciples—not to plant churches (Matt. 28:18-20). I believe in church planting and am involved in this endeavor with a church planting mission board and in helping establish Crossroads International Church in Singapore. Disciple-making best occurs in the context of the local church. Still, God brings these local assemblies into being in various ways—sometimes through faithful churches, but other times through His faithful individuals who obey God's voice even when their institutions neglect to respond to the Spirit's promptings.