

Doing Church Acts 2:41-47 (February 16, 2025)



What is a local church supposed to look like?

About once a year I get a request to support a group setting up a new church that they say they is going to be authentic and based on first-century principles from Acts 2.

Basically, they are going to finally do church right.

The majority of these are small house churches with no formal leadership, often little Bible training, mainly young men and women – and a lot of commendable enthusiasm.

I have seen dozens of these.

In my experience they either die or eventually grow and develop into a more formal church – the very thing they hope they will never become.

This idea of a first century ideal sounds great – but none of the first century churches were as ideal as we might think.

I mean, which first century church would you want to be a member of?

Corinth? – Jerusalem? – The seven churches in Revelation?

All had real issues.

And what the first church did is clearly not a universal template for every church.

Many things were specific to their context.

Acts **describes** the first church – it does not **proscribe** how every church must function.

You only have to read Acts itself to find this. Many practices of the very first church seem to have disappeared by the later chapters.

What we have in our passage are principles for doing church.

These principles are then to be fleshed out in different contexts and cultures.

So, this is what we are going to see this morning.



The local church is where the people of God gather, grow and go in order to see His kingdom come.

The church is not a building, a denomination, a theology – it is a group of blood bought saints seeking to love and serve Christ together.

We are in the book of Acts and we have seen that its message for us is:



We must strive to see His kingdom come, through the empowering of His Spirit, by witnessing to the nations, until He comes again.



Today we look at:

2:41-47 Doing Church

Here is what we will see.



A local church is to:

Gather
Grow
Go

First – A local church is to:



Gather 41

You commit to a local church

Christianity is never a Lone Ranger life.

If you are a Christian, you are meant to be part of a local church.

And the sign of initiation into a local church – is baptism.

Baptism declares God's grace in you.

Baptism leads to membership.

If you are here and are not baptised or you are not a member of a local church – this is the pattern – get baptised and commit to a church.

Acts 2:41:

So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them.

Sounds straightforward but there is so much debate swirling around this verse.

It is hard to know how many would have been there on the Day of Pentecost.

It is estimated that during each of the great Feasts up to 200,000 crammed into Jerusalem.

How many would have been attracted to the miracle of tongues at 9.00 in the morning?

It is pure speculation – but maybe 10,000 would have gathered to find out what the fuss was about.

How many stayed for Peter's sermon – who knows?

What this verse seems to say is that 3,000 – an incredible number said – I accept Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Messiah and signalled they were joining the church by being publicly baptised.

This was no minor deal. They knew the leaders of the Jews had killed Jesus. They knew identifying with Him would put a target on their backs. They knew it would burn bridges with family, friends, employers.

They knew their old life was ending.

They knew most Jews would not understand and would see this new group as a cult.

The logistics of 3,000 unexpected baptisms is astonishing.

Immersion seems the mode throughout the New Testament – so we assume they used pools like Bethesda and Siloam and the *mikvah* – the pools built for proselyte baptism.

Maybe an Apostle or two in each place. A long line of converts at each place waiting.

They are immersed in the water – confessing publicly – Jesus is the Messiah – He is my Lord – I call on Him for salvation and forgiveness of sins.

If tongues made an impact – so would this.

This was going to cause a stink and everyone knew it.

The leaders had decided Jesus must be crucified – now thousands are saying – we confess this One you murdered is the Messiah.

Up to that point – Gentiles were baptised into Israel.

Now good God-fearing Jews are being baptised into the church in the name of this crucified One.

As we will see in chapter 4 – this led to the Jewish leaders seeing the church as a threat and trying to stamp this group out.

They were baptised.

What is the significance?

Three related things.

- 1. It is a public declaration of God's grace in saving us.**
- 2. It is a public declaration we have joined the people of God.**
- 3. It is a public declaration that pictures salvation.**

One other factor, throughout Acts we have mention of Spirit baptism and water baptism.

What is the relationship?

Spirit baptism is the invisible work of salvation.
Water baptism is the visible picture of salvation.

Going down into the water pictures washing away sin and dying with Christ, coming up – rising with Christ.

All by the power of the Spirit.

I think all of this is clear – but I can tell you that when people come for membership – and we ask them about their baptism – we have had just about every response imaginable.

- I was taught water baptism saves you.
- I came from a group like the Salvation Army who don't see the necessity of water baptism
- I was a hyper-dispensationalist who thinks water baptism is not for the church age.

And as far as the actual baptism goes – many are now unsure if their baptism is valid.

- What if my husband baptised me in our bathtub?
- What if my dad baptised me in our pool?
- I was baptised at ten – but I don't think I was a true believer?
- What if I was sprinkled or poured?
- I was baptised as an infant but what if I now I think believer's baptism is what the Scriptures teach?

These are important questions – and in the membership process we work through them.

But there is one significant question related to these verses I do want to pause to address.

Who were those baptised on Pentecost?

Believers or believers *and* their households?

Now, we need to be honest about this – when we read a passage we bring some preconceived ideas and assumptions to it – we all do.

Good, godly, well thought out Christians read their Bible and verses on baptism strike them in different ways.

For example – household Baptists would read verse 41 and understand that what is implied by this verse is that Rufus comes to faith at Pentecost – he repents and is baptised.

He shares the good news with his wife – if she comes to faith she is also baptised.

They have four young children who would also be baptised.

So, in this way – **all six of them were baptised and joined the church.**

You might say – but this verse says nothing about households, wives, children – but their argument is that baptism in Acts means baptism of entire households and something Peter had just said confirms that.

If they are right, then this verse likely means **either** that 3,000 believed – were baptised and then later went and had their households baptised – so maybe 8,000 joined the church.

OR others argue that those who believed is a smaller number – maybe 1,000 believed – but they also had their households baptised and the total number who were then baptised – believers *and* those in their households – were 3,000.

And associated with this – if you add infants in – most want the mode to be pouring or sprinkling. They don't immerse infants and see the symbolism as a promise the Spirit will be poured out.

I think the association with proselyte baptism, John's baptism, the need for much water, the Romans 6 symbolism all point to immersion.

This is not unimportant – but it is a whole other debate.

In regard to household baptism, I freely admit a plausible case can be made for it. Very godly men and women hold this view.

But I don't believe it is the best way to understand the arguments.

Now let me be very clear:

The debate is not over the baptism of believers or households.

The debate is over whether it was only believers in a household who were baptised OR whether believers and their infant children in the household were baptised.

Both sides baptise all the believers in a household.

Neither side would baptise an unbelieving spouse or unbelieving adolescent children.

Infants is the issue.

So, is this whole debate important? – yes – but of secondary importance.

It doesn't change the gospel – or gospel fellowship.

Most Baptists struggle to understand the household baptism argument.

Where does it come from in Acts?

Two main reasons.

First, in verse 39 the promise is said to be for you and your children.

Up front, I want to say that the debate doesn't hinge here. It is why I didn't focus more on this last week.

The word here for children is **teknon**.

It can mean your immediate physical **children** – or it can mean your **descendants**.

Both uses are common in Acts and the New Testament.

I see the covenant links here as strong evidence for reading **descendants** or **future generations**.

In Genesis 9:12 we have the promise to Noah:

God said "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you ... a covenant for **all future generations**."

Here is the promise to Abraham. Genesis 17:7:

I will confirm my covenant that is between me and you and your **future offspring** throughout their **generations**.

But – either way – **children** OR **descendants** – it doesn't actually answer the question of **who** should receive the sign of baptism.

It can mean your children – but only when they come to faith.

It can mean your descendants – including while they are infants.

How you translate this adds weight – but it is **not** determinative.

For mine, it is the context that says this is adult believers only.

Those who believed, repented and were baptised – these same ones devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

What they did in verses 42 to 47 – I don't see them as acts children could do.

And even how Peter phrases this. The promise is for you (**Jews**) and your descendants **and** all who are far off (**Gentiles**).

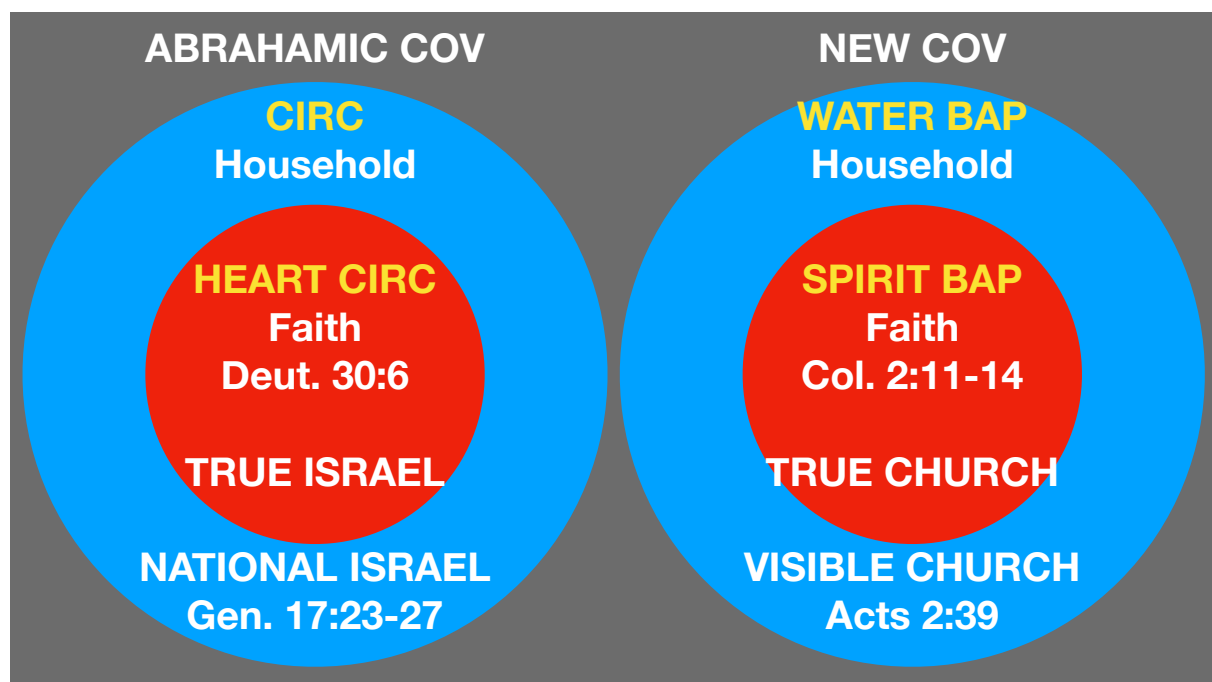
The promise will always include Jews – not just Gentiles.

If children were in view – it should be – and for all who are far off **and** their children.

Surely if this was children – then Gentile children should also be baptized?

However, the far more important argument is the **second** argument.

Household baptisms.



Paedobaptists understand the Abrahamic and New Covenants to be different administrations of the Covenant of Grace so are meant to be viewed similarly.

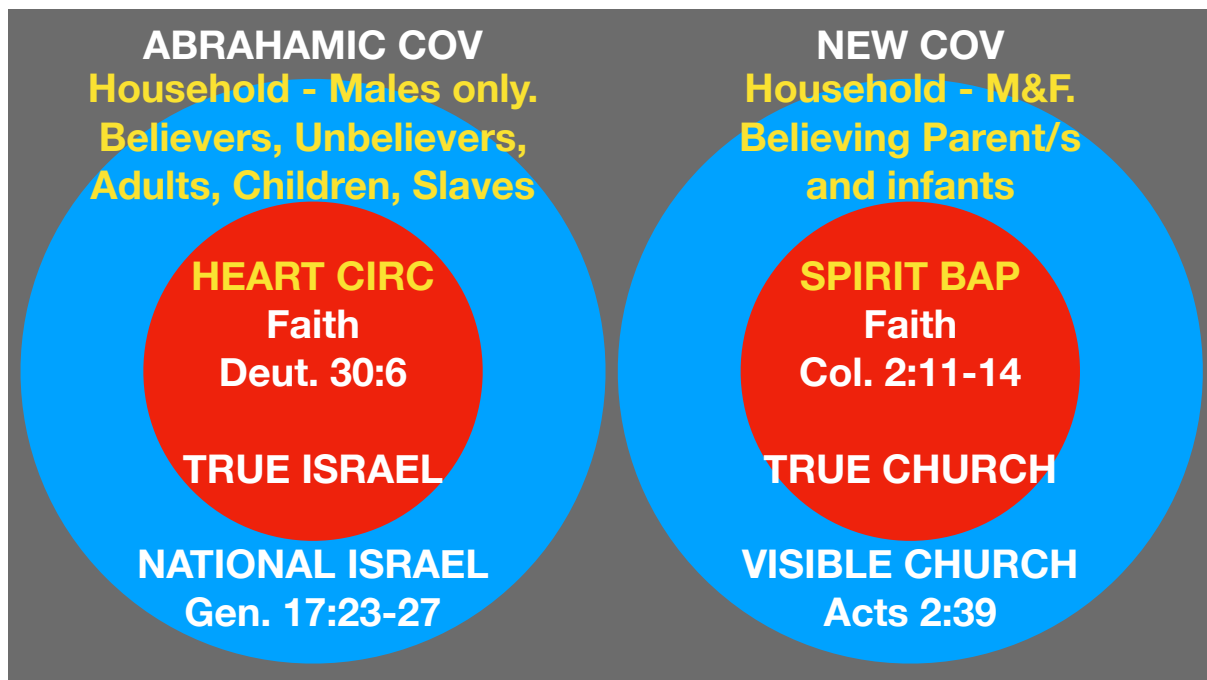
All I want you to see from this is that in their understanding there are great similarities.

God commands Abraham to circumcise his whole household including eight-day old infants – so when we read of household baptisms in the New Testament it must include infants.

Household circumcision so household baptism.

On the surface – the argument seems reasonable.

Except I want to say the argument is **not** apples with apples – it **is** very much **apples with oranges**.



It is not same kind of household with same kind of household.

The households are completely different.

- **Abraham's household was broad.**

Genesis 14 – says just those males born in his household alone were 318 men – then you add in children and slaves.

Who was circumcised? – **all** in the household. Family, slaves, adults, adolescents, infants.

And – crucially the adults and adolescents are circumcised **regardless of faith**.

Read Genesis 17 – no faith requirement for the adults or the children.

If there is a husband – he is head of the household – regardless of faith – and all males in the household are circumcised.

And – also crucial – **only** males. The national identity is through the male line. And it is the male line that leads to Christ.

- **Infant Baptist households are narrow.**

They define the household as at least one believing parent and their young children.

And while they hold that dads are the head of the household – they will baptise infants even if just mum believes.

And some will even baptise a child if there is a baptised parent even if *neither* parent has faith.

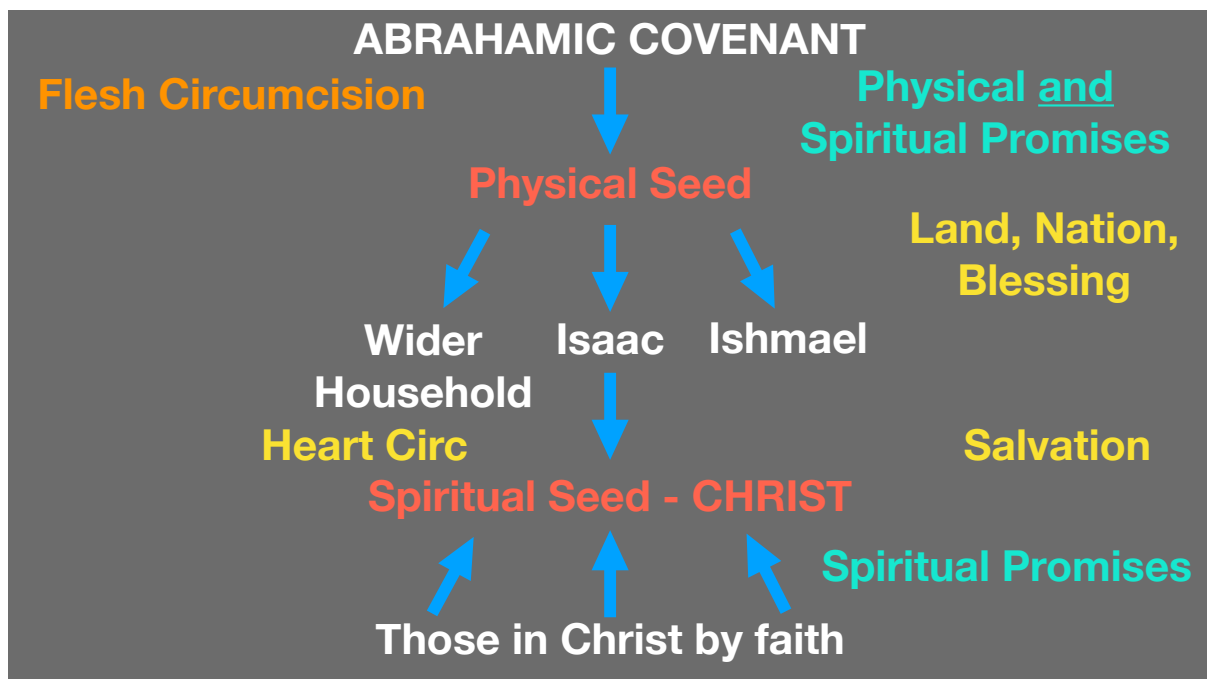
They will **not** baptise adults or adolescents who have no profession of faith but they **do** baptise both males and females.

Household and household?

No!

Apples and oranges.

Why the difference between who receives the sign in these households?



The concept of a Covenant of Grace with two administrations doesn't fit the reality. These covenants are quite different.

When you read Genesis 17 the Abrahamic Covenant clearly includes **both** *physical* and *spiritual* seed and promises.

Circumcision pointed to **both** types of seed and promise.

Physical promises – nations and kings will come from you. I will give you the land. Cut you off from the people.

Spiritual promises – through the Seed to come.

Genesis 17:10:

This is my covenant between me and you and your **offspring** after you.

Offspring is the word seed – **zera**.

Who is the seed of Abraham?

There are **two clear** meanings in this passage:

Physical Seed – both natural sons – Ishmael and Isaac – and household males born or purchased.

They all receive circumcision – regardless of faith – which links them to the national promises like land, nation, blessings.

But there is also:

Spiritual Seed – Christ.

This promise leads to **the** Seed – **Christ** – **and** applies to those linked to Christ by faith.

God says this Seed *only* comes through Isaac. And the spiritual blessings He will bring are not for all who receive flesh circumcision – this requires heart circumcision.

Romans 4 says that is how Gentiles who never receive physical circumcision can be saved.

Here is what is significant.

All the *physical* seed of Abraham received circumcision. Genesis 17:23-27 – Abraham, all the men in the household – born or purchased, Ishmael – and Isaac when he is born.

But in Genesis 17:19-22 – God had said there is a covenant promise that does **not** come to all the seed.

It is a spiritual promise that flows through the line of promise not the line of flesh.

Notably – it doesn't come through Ishmael.

Ishmael is a real issue for paedobaptists.

If you baptise children because they are part of the covenant people – then why was Ishmael circumcised when God specifically said he is **not** part of the covenant people?

Genesis 17, Romans 9 and Galatians 3 and 4 – all deal with Ishmael and it is telling.

In Genesis 17 – God says the spiritual promise does not come to Ishmael.

Paul picks up on this. Romans 9:7–8:

Neither is it the case that all of Abraham's children are his descendants – or seed. On the contrary, **your offspring will be traced through Isaac**. That is, it is **not** the children by physical descent who are God's children, but the children of the promise are considered to be the offspring.

Galatians 3:16:

Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say "and to seeds," as though referring to many, but referring to one, **and to your seed**, who is Christ.

Paul says – in fact when God said the promise – the covenant – is between me and your Seed – He means Christ. But then He goes on to say – **and** to those linked to Christ by faith.

In Galatians 4 he specifically contrasts the lines of Isaac and Ishmael to make his point.

What is the significance?

On the Day of Pentecost – the Jews realise they killed their Messiah. They cry – brothers what must we do?

Why doesn't Peter say:

Repent and honour the promise of your circumcision – the promise made to you and your children?

Because under the New Covenant – there are now **only** spiritual promises.

Jeremiah 31:31–34:

"Look, the days are coming ... when I will make a new covenant. ... "I will put my teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ... they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them."

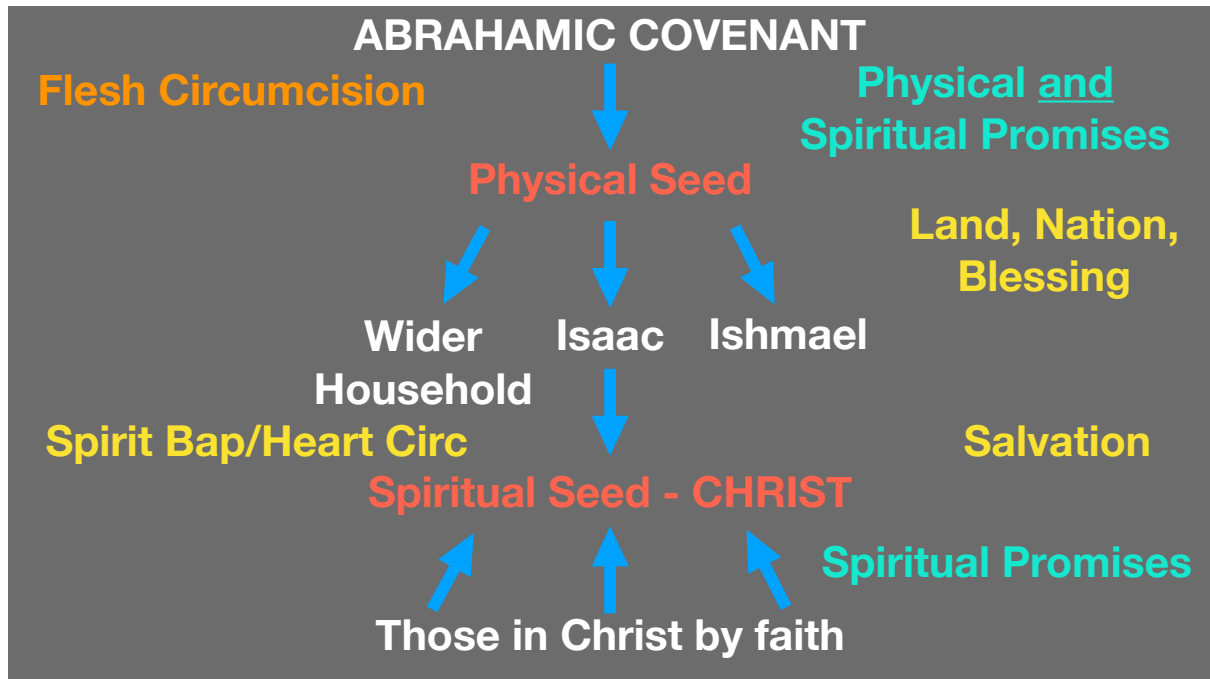
The covenant with Abraham was designed to include unbelievers in the national promises – so Ishmael, slaves, infants, the whole household receives circumcision.

But, the New Covenant is *only* designed for those who profess faith.

There is no land or national kingdom blessings.

We are a spiritual people a nation of priests.

And crucially you don't have to be a circumcised Jew to receive it.



If I lost you – here is what this means.

The New Covenant is the fulfilment of the **spiritual** promises to Abraham.

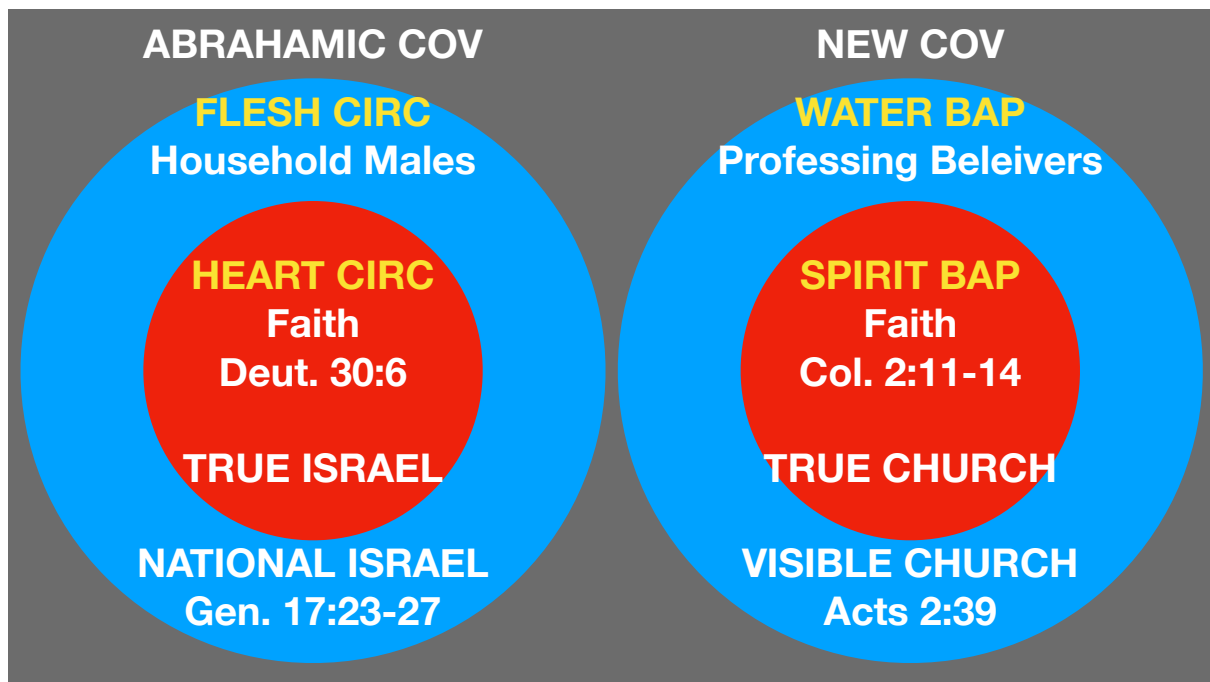
So, a new sign of initiation was given – that is **only** for the true seed of Abraham – those who profess faith.

Gentiles can receive this sign because faith is the link *not* the national line.

Women can receive this new sign because faith is the link *not* the male line.

Infants and unbelievers do **not** receive this sign because there are no physical, national promises that come irrespective of faith.

That new sign is **water baptism**.



How do these covenants line up?

Water baptism identifies those who link themselves to **the Seed** – Christ – by faith.

Importantly, in Colossians 2 Paul is emphatic that baptism is **not** linked with physical circumcision – but with a circumcision done **without hands** – heart circumcision.

Colossians 2 does **not** link fleshly circumcision with baptism.

Notice that this does **not** mean that everyone who professes faith and is baptised is truly saved. That requires true faith – heart circumcision – spiritual baptism.

Today, there is a visible church and a true church – but the sign that links you to the visible church is water baptism and the requirement for baptism is a profession of faith.

I also want to argue that when we come to household baptisms in Acts – **The accounts in Acts taken at face value seem to say that only those who believed in the household were baptised.**

You can read ahead and we will look at each one when we come to them but I believe the evidence is strong that only those who believed in the households were baptised.

OK – why is this significant? Why does it even matter?

	Household Baptism	Believer's Baptism
Faith	(Usual view) baptized on the faith of a parent in the expectation of personal faith	Only baptized on a personal profession of faith
Salvation	(Usual view) saved until shown not to be	(Usual view) not saved until shown to be
Status	Holy (a saint) - +/- regenerate	Blessed to be part of a Christian home and community but not considered a saint
Membership	Member of the visible church (but not a formal member). Becomes a formal member after faith	Part of the visible church community. Becomes a member after faith and baptism
Communion	Some – infants should partake. Most – wait until personal faith – self-examination	After personal faith and baptism
Status if dies	Every view – but mainly saved because holy	Every view – but mainly either saved because not actively chosen to sin or allow God to judge
Symbolism	Indicates they are part of the covenant promise. Pictures pouring out of the Spirit at salvation	Indicates they have received the covenant promise. Pictures union with the death and resurrection of Jesus

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Status if dies	Various views – but mainly saved because holy	Various views – but mainly either saved because not actively chosen to sin or allow God to judge
Symbolism	Indicates they are part of the covenant promise. Pictures	Indicates they have received the covenant promise. Pictures

	pouring out of the Spirit at salvation	union with the death and resurrection of Jesus
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Not every household Baptist or believer's Baptist would agree with everything here – but I think this fairly reflects the main views.

I want to suggest the really crucial ones are these.

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1. Church membership

Household Baptists count infants as members of the church.

If they are in the covenant – they are in the church.

But what does that actually mean?

No one does church discipline on children or gives them all the responsibilities of members.

I would maintain it is better to say they are a part of the church community – but not a member.

2. Communion.

Paedobaptists are divided on this.

A minority, but a significant minority of those who hold to household baptisms give infants and children communion. I would argue that this is a more consistent view of household baptism – but it then changes the whole nature of that ordinance too – so most don't give it.

But it is a real problem either way.

3. The symbolism of baptism.

Household Baptists say – baptism declares this child is a part of the covenant. The promise of the covenant is then fulfilled by faith and at that time the Spirit will be poured out on them.

Believer's Baptists say – baptism is for those who declare they have received the promise of the covenant.

We look to Romans 6 – the washing of sin and then dying with Christ and rising with Christ.

Look, both arguments are valid. Both have significant weight.

I know I am biased – but I truly believe the weight of argument for believer's baptism is greater.

We understand these differences to be significant enough that we won't baptize the children of a couple in the church who hold to household baptism.

It confuses the status of children, communion and the associated symbolism.

If you are here and you are a couple who hold to household baptisms – we are so glad you take the responsibility of your children seriously.

We love having you as a valuable part of our church.

But, we won't baptize your child. We think it is not wise to confuse what baptism is.

We will rejoice with you if you choose to have someone with that view baptize your child – but I trust you understand our reasoning on why we won't do it.

Children – I want to say something to you.

We love you. You are an important part of our church family. It is because we love you that we want you to grow in Jesus and we pray you will come to trust Jesus as your Lord.

We hope every time you see a baptism it reminds you of the promise of the gospel for you.

Second – A local church is to:



Grow 42-46

You do life with a local church

A local church is where Christians grow and mature. Read Ephesians 4.

And look here at verse 42:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

Believe it or not – this verse is *almost* as controversial as baptism.

Is this the pattern for Lord's Day worship or life in the church in general?

What does it mean?

What is this breaking of bread?

Many denominations such as the Brethren or the Church of Christ – have very strong views about this verse.

But here is what is clear, these first Christians devoted themselves to four things:

- 1. The Teaching**
- 2. The Fellowship**
- 3. The Breaking of Bread**
- 4. The Prayers**

I believe these are regular everyday life practices that shape you and grow you in Christ.

I want to suggest that verses 43-46 seem to give a fuller explanation of how these practices were worked out in the life of the church.

The fact that some of these happened daily suggests regular body life not just Lord's Day worship.

Every single time the church gathered for Lord's Day – I doubt the Apostles were performing signs and wonders – nor were the believers selling everything each Sunday and handing out the proceeds – and this breaking of bread house to house seems more a through the week thing than a Sunday event.

It is well known that these four actions were part of the daily life of Jews in the first century.

I think this is a pattern they were already used to and just adapted it for life in the church.

This became how they lived as Christians – not specifically how they worshipped on Sunday.

I think understanding how this verse is structured can help us. It literally reads:



They devoted themselves to **the** apostles' teaching, to **the** fellowship, to **the** breaking of bread, and to **the** prayers.

Each of these has the definite article – **the** – and it is prayers – plural. More literal translations like the ESV and LSB make this clear.

It is **not** that they devoted themselves in general to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread and prayer.

These seem to be references to specific set events in the life of the church.

For example – **the** prayers. It seems the church continued to gather for the regular times of prayer at the temple according to the Jewish pattern.

Acts 3:1:

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple for the time of prayer at three in the afternoon.

So, it is likely that all of these refer to regular known set gatherings – patterned after their Jewish life – times the church had set aside to do life together.

Let's look more closely at each of these.

First – The Apostle’s Teaching.

Why isn’t the first thing they devoted themselves to love – or evangelism – or serving others?

Because without strong regular teaching – whatever you are – you are not a church.

You can have soup kitchens and hospitals and op shops – you can have great fellowship and coffee – but without teaching – you are **not** a church – without a devotion to teaching – you will **fail** to grow.

The Jews were a people of the Word. The practice at the synagogue was for the Scripture to be read and then explained.

But why not – they devoted themselves to – Jesus’ teaching?

Shouldn’t we devote ourselves to the red-letter parts of the Bible – what Jesus actually said?

Sounds pious but – without the Apostles – we would have no idea what Jesus taught – and He continued to teach through them.

The Gospels are decades from being written down.

There are no Epistles at this time.

But, Christ used His Apostles and Prophets to teach the truths of the gospel, life in the church, holiness, the Second Coming, heaven.

Ephesians 2:20 says that the church is:

Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

The Spirit inspired them to understand and pass on truth – initially verbally – but eventually written down for all generations.

Here is what seems to have happened.

In verse 46 – we find that every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the Temple.

In chapters 3 and 5 that place is specifically named as Solomon’s Colonnade.

When you have 3,000, 4,000, 5,000 people – where can you meet?

You are not fitting in Levi’s house or on Micah’s rooftop.

Even if there were some wealthy among the converts – the larger homes could only hold a couple of hundred spread through various rooms.

So, they came together centrally at the Temple. At the Temple there were places large enough for this number to meet.

And it was there that the Apostles taught.

Verse 43 seems related to the Apostles' teaching.

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles.

Why do I say that? Because again and again in Acts the signs and wonders are directly associated with the teaching of the Apostles. Acts 14:3:

The Lord ... **testified** to the message of his grace by enabling them to do signs and wonders.

The miracles testified to – validated – the gospel and the teaching of the Apostles.

It seems that each day the believers gathered en masse to hear the word but then went to homes to discuss it and rejoice over a meal.

How long did this pattern last?

We don't know. By Acts 5 it seems that the Sanhedrin are cracking down on them meeting at the Temple.

Maybe they were still able keep meeting there.

Maybe they moved outside the city and found a spot to gather.

Maybe they moved everything into multiple homes. The Apostles and leaders divided among homes.

We simply don't know.

Look – when I hear let's follow the Apostolic pattern – does that mean every believer in a city should meet somewhere central every day – hear preaching – and then divide into homes for fellowship and a meal?

That would be awesome – but considering the practical difficulties – is it the only way?

No – even later in Acts this doesn't seem to be the normal rhythm of life.

It would also raise other difficulties. There was just one church in Jerusalem at that time – so does that mean you can't have multiple churches in a city?

Or was each home considered a church? If so, do they all need separate leadership? Can you celebrate communion in each house?

My understanding is that we are **not** given specific details. We are given principles and then have to apply them in our context.

We don't have Apostles today – but we have their teaching in the Word.

The church is to meet regularly – Sundays **and** through the week – to hear the Word read and taught.

They devoted themselves to this. They were hungry to learn of Christ and worship Him.

In Acts 20, Paul preached so long poor Eutychus fell asleep and out the window.

A mark of a healthy church – one that stays true to Christ – is that the saints are hungry for the word.

Second – The Fellowship

The word is *koinonia*.

It seems they regularly gathered to do life together.

They wanted to associate with the other believers.

They became not just a new people – but a new family.

Acts 2:44–45:

Now all the believers were **together and held all things in common**.

These gatherings are **the** fellowship.

This fellowship seemed to primarily involve two things.

A common faith and mutual assistance.

When they gathered – they were of **one heart and mind**.

Spiritually one – which flowed into mutual help.

Hebrews 10:25 – let us gather together and encourage each other.

Out there when you say you believe there is a God who created everything – that we sinned against this God – that judgment is coming – and our only hope is faith that the Son of God came as a man and died in our place – they look with pity and sorrow.

But in here – we are of one heart and mind – brothers, sisters, family.

We worship the same risen Lord – we have the same hope.

We also assist each other. Verse 45 says:

They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need.

When I became a Christian – my mother initially wondered if I had joined a cult – my brother was sure I was throwing my life away and tainting him by association – my friends thought I was weird.

But, they got over it. I wasn't kicked out of home. I wasn't kicked out of university. I didn't lose my part-time job. I was still employed as a doctor when I graduated.

Not so these Jews.

Baptism and professing faith in Christ alienated them from everyone and everything they knew.

Family would disown them.

Friends cut them off.

Many would lose their jobs.

The authorities would persecute them.

And for the Hellenistic Jews who came to faith and stayed in Jerusalem – these fellow believers were all they had.

In chapter 6 we will find that the church organised to provide food for both Hebraic Jews and Hellenistic Jews who had need.

Those who had means – gave money, sold goods – did what was necessary to support those brothers who overnight became destitute outcasts.

Now is this the pattern for every church?

If the need arises – Yes.

At times of desperate need, persecution, exceptional circumstance – similar sacrifices need to be and have been made.

But are we always to sell everything give it to the church and have the church distribute to the saints? – No.

Making this a rule is more cult and abuse of authority.

This is something voluntary and beautiful – not coerced and dutiful.

The principle is this. Galatians 6:10:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, **especially for those who belong to the household of faith.**

Jesus said coming to faith often costs you family and wealth – but you actually get 100 times more in this life and the age to come.

In this life you get a huge, weird, loving family – us.

The church sets up charities and aid for the lost yes – but even more so does it support the saints.

In Scripture we see the church developing principles for supporting widows and orphans and others in the church who have need.

There are principles – make sure there is need.

If they can work – they should work – no work, no eat.

Another point is that we live in a society where the government provides basic needs – that was not the case in Acts.

But the principle of helping saints in the church who have genuine need – I can honestly say – I have seen that here over and over again.

One saint helping another.

Deacons organising help where needed.

But this fellowship is all of life. We do life together regularly – throughout the week.

If you want to grow – you can't just do life only on Sundays. Grace Groups, Women's Grace Groups, YAG, Youth, men's and women's ministries.

We need each other. You need Christian friends. If you are not a part – you need to join one of more of these groups.

These two principles – good teaching and good fellowship – get that right and your church will be healthy and growing.

Third – The Breaking of Bread

Table fellowship.

In Scripture this seems to be a generic term for a meal.

This term – **the** breaking of bread – was used for communal meals where the head of the table begins the meal by breaking bread and giving a blessing.

For example – Luke 24:30–35:

It was as Jesus reclined at the table with them that he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ... this is the breaking of the bread.

Similar statements are made in the feeding of the 5000 or the meal after Paul was shipwrecked.

And here it seems to be a common meal. Verse 46:

They broke bread from house to house. **They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts.**

The issue is that somewhere in the second century this breaking of bread was linked with communion – the Lord's Table.

Even today some churches call communion – **the breaking of bread.**

How did this happen? Probably because in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul describes the Lord's Table as occurring during a meal in the local church and breaking of bread was a part of communion.

So, some have argued that the early church had communion every single day.

Often those same groups argue that by Acts 20 – it was reduced to weekly. Acts 20:7:

On the first day of the week, we assembled to break bread.

But again, I want to point out that to break bread seems to just be a term for a common meal – not communion. A couple of verses later – Acts 20:11:

After going upstairs, **breaking the bread, and eating**, Paul talked a long time.

It is not a major issue – but I think the weight of evidence is strong that this is normal fellowship around a meal.

As well, if this was a term for communion – you would expect – **the breaking of bread and the drinking of the cup.**

And the fact that the breaking of bread is from house to house – makes it far less likely to be communion.

I think if it was communion – they would have had it gathered as one – not as separate groups.

My personal view is that when the early church did have communion it was associated with a meal – but I get that from 1 Corinthians not Acts.

I think they likely used one loaf and one cup.

These things help but are not essential to the ordinance.

You make your own mind up on this.

But, if you take this term here as a reference to communion – you are more likely to think we should have communion weekly or even more often – and more likely to allow it in homegroups and smaller gatherings.

If you don't see this as communion – you likely practice it less frequently and just when the church gathers.

The churches in our Network are free to choose how often they celebrate the Lord's Table.

Personally, I see this as a reference table hospitality not communion.

Read the Bible – meals were vital to fellowship. It is where so much life is done.

As the church was founded – they had no church buildings – opening your homes to Christians for fellowship, meals, teaching was crucial. Read 3 John.

One of the qualifications of an Elder is this kind of hospitality.

The Jews from outside Jerusalem had no homes. And those there wanted to meet – to discuss Christ – to enjoy each other's company.

The meal table is vital to fellowship – then and now.

Meals are great times of talking, doing life, sharing Christ. Don't neglect them.

I know you are busy and family time is squeezed – but this is important.

I know many have dietary needs so you don't want to be a bother.

Fine – invite someone over or take a meal you can eat.

Don't neglect how crucial life over the meal table is.

Invite your neighbours over – we had a great meal this week with our neighbours – and wonderful meals with brothers and sisters another couple of evenings.

They knit hearts together.

Fellowship – meals – loving one another.

No one does this like Christianity.

Fourth – The Prayers

This is the regular corporate prayers – but also in verse 47 – it seems that over table fellowship they praised God.

When you read through Acts one thing that stands out – the church gathered regularly to pray – for boldness, for salvations, for guidance, for missionaries.

Prayer empowers our mission.

Pray – at Grace Groups, at our times of prayer, on Sundays.

We believe we can do nothing apart from the empowering God sends through prayer.

All of these are elements of a good church culture.

- **Teaching** – makes a church strong.
- **Fellowship** – makes a church healthy.
- **Breaking of Bread** – makes a church a family.
- **Prayers** – makes a church powerful.

Third – A local church is to:



Go 47

You reach out through a local church.

Acts 2:47:

Enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

The goal of the church is to reach the nations – by how we live and what we say.

The way they lived their lives earned them the favour of all the people.

And many of those then heard their gospel – were saved – and were added to the church.

The goal of church is not to do life with pleasant people and hang in there until Jesus comes.

The goal is to reach the nations with the gospel and then Jesus will come.

The local church is the only game in town brothers and sisters.

There is no other group to join, to do life with and fulfil the Great Commission.

May God enable us to gather as His people, grow in our faith and go to the world with the gospel of Christ.

Doing Church

Acts 2:41-47 (February 16, 2025)

Main Point: The local church is where the people of God gather, grow and go in order to see His kingdom come.

General Questions:

1. Do you understand Acts 2:41-47 as more descriptive or proscriptive? Why?
2. What is the relationship between baptism and joining a church in verse 41?
3. In relation to household baptism vs believer's baptism.

How would a household Baptist make their case?

How would a believer's Baptist make their case?

What are the significant issues in how it might affect how we are to do church?

4. Do you agree that a church should only practice one form of baptism – but not make this an issue of fellowship or exclusion? Why or why not?
5. Are the 4 things listed in v. 42 necessary for gathered worship or descriptive of life in the church community? Why?
6. Why is regular teaching such an important part of church life?
7. Why is regular fellowship such an important part of church life?
8. Why is regular table meals such an important part of church life?
9. Why is regular prayer such an important part of church life?
10. In regard to – the breaking of bread:

What are the arguments for seeing this as communion?

What are the arguments for seeing this as household meals?

What are the implications either way?

11. Why is keeping an evangelistic focus so important?

Application Questions:

1. Have you decided on your view of baptism and how you will apply it?
2. If you are not a member does v. 41 encourage you to consider it?

3. How are you involved in the regular life of the church?
4. How are you keeping evangelism to the forefront of your life?

What convicted me in the message?

What moved me in the message?

What will I do in light of the message?