



Baptism's Relationship to Local Church Membership in the New Testament

Question 1: Where in the New Testament do we see a relationship between baptism and local church membership?

Answer 1: All throughout the New Testament.

1. In the Teaching of Jesus
2. In the Acts of the Apostles
3. Observation 1: Disciples Are Always Connected to Local Churches
4. Observation 2: Brothers Are Connected to Local Churches Throughout the New Testament
5. Observation 3: Binding Brothers Is Connected with Making Disciples who are Part of Churches

1. In the Teaching of Jesus

Beginning with the relationship between Matthew 16:18-19; 18:18-20; and 28:18-20:

Matthew 16:18-19

18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. **19** I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 18:18-20

18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. **19** Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Matthew 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

These passages relate to one another in a number of ways. *First*, all of them are rooted in Jesus' authority. *Second*, in all of them Jesus brings His authority to the end of entrusting, deputizing, commissioning or commanding His people to do something with “heaven and earth” language. What he commissions His people to do has implications both on earth and heaven, and this is tied to Christ's authority. *Third*, the language of “loosing” those who were formerly considered “brothers” is the opposite of “binding”. The very work of “binding brothers” or “making disciples” necessarily requires Jesus' disciples or churches to “loose” those who claim to or be “disciple/brothers” who are not living repentantly. This decision of the church goes against that unrepentant person's desires, claim, and will. *Fourth*, the language of “binding brothers” corresponds to “making disciples”. *Fifth*, Jesus is present in a local church's agreement in “binding and loosing” and as Christ's disciples “make disciples” baptizing. The chart below shows how the language of each of these passages is connected.

Baptism exists in the context of Jesus building His church. Making disciples and gathering churches is the same work. The universal church composed of believers everywhere (Matthew 16:18-19) comes to bear in real, particular, regular, visible, local “churches” (Matthew 18:18) composed of “brothers” (Matthew 18:15) or “disciples” (Matthew 28:19) by the agreement of the church (Matthew 18:19) who are then responsible to participate in the “binding” and “loosing” of the “church” as “brother/disciples”.

The Relationship Between “Binding” “Making Disciples” and “Baptizing”

	Matthew 16:18-19	Matthew 18:18-20	Matthew 28:18-20
Jesus' Authority	Jesus uses his authority to build His church through Peter's use of the “keys”	Jesus authority is seen in the phrase “ Truly, I say to you ”. The binding and loosing is done by “agreement” of the disciples or church. In the “agreement” or “decision” of the church or “2 or 3” gathered in Christ's name, there He is among them , which underscores the fact that He has brought His authority to bear in the decision of the church.	Jesus uses his “ all authority on heaven and earth” to commission His disciples to make disciples
Heaven & Earth Language	Jesus builds His church through Peter's use of the keys of the kingdom of heaven : binding on earth with implications for what is bound in heaven and loosing on earth with implications for what is loosed in heaven .	Whatever you all (you is second person plural) bind on earth shall be bound in heaven , and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven . Jesus is among His people gathered as a church in their binding/membering and loosing/unmembering.	Jesus uses all authority on heaven and earth given to Him to tell his disciples to make disciples
Loose	The “ loosing ” key is the actions that Jesus authorizes Peter to use in Christ's building His church that lets someone go or hands someone over, again “looses”. As in loosing a cord, a yoke, a pledge, an oath.	Not just for Peter, but when the church considers someone who claims to be a “ brother ” who the church also recognized as a brother, to no longer be a brother with Jewish outsider language of “ Gentile ” and “ tax-collector ”.	Those who were “ made disciples ” who refuse to obey Jesus' commands .
Bind	The “ binding ” key is the actions that Jesus authorizes Peter to use in Christ's building His church that lets someone in or identifies them or counts them to be a part of, again “binds”. As in tying a cord, yoking, pledging, making an oath.	To consider someone no longer under the Jewish outsider language of a “ Gentile ” and “ tax-collector ” but rather a “ brother ”.	“ Make disciples ” - preach the gospel, baptize in the one name of the Trinity, and teach the disciple to obey Jesus' commands
Jesus' Presence	Jesus builds “his church”	Jesus says that as the “church” of two or three gathers in His name to “bind” and “loose” in His name He is among them .	Jesus says that as his disciples “make disciples” “baptizing” in the Trinity and teaching them to obey all of Jesus' commands that “ behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. ”

2. In the Acts of the Apostles

Let's take a guided tour of Acts. Note that “context is king”, so when you follow up by reading these verses yourself you won't see “church” “disciple” and “brother” all in the same verse. You'll need to do the work of understanding the context, something that is always important for good study and understanding of the Scriptures.¹

The first we read of baptism after Jesus' commission takes place in the context of the beginning of the first local church in the New Testament - the local church in Jerusalem. Everything that Jesus teaches about “building” His church comes to pass as His disciples “bind brothers” or “make disciples” by “baptizing”. **Acts 2:41-42**, “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Jesus' teaching in **Matthew 16, 18** and **28** fit perfectly with **Acts 2:41-42**, as a key engages a lock. This binds or locks the pattern in place.

A few observations on this text given what Jesus has already taught about His church and baptism. *First*, Jesus is building His church. *Second*, this happens as His people preach the gospel. *Third*, those “men of Israel” (Acts 2:22) who received the word preached by Peter were baptized. *Fourth*, 3,000 of the “men of Israel” were added.

How were they added? The only action described here that could be connected to “adding” was the act of “baptizing”. It is Jesus who builds His church or adds to the number of His church, and this happens on earth as his disciples make disciples preaching the gospel and baptizing. The “adding” via “baptism” is harmonious with what Jesus taught in **Matthew 18:19**,

¹ A commentary that would help you in seeking to do this well would be *Acts* by Eckhard Schnabel, Volume 6 of the *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*.

“if two of you agree on earth...it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.” The church is in agreement on whom to bind and the Lord is doing the adding. This is also harmonious with **Matthew 28:20**, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Jesus builds his church and it becomes visible as He is with His disciples as they agree who to “bind” via baptizing. Jesus is there among them as they are united together in the work of “binding brothers” or “making disciples” “baptizing”. Jesus uses the local church to exercise the key of binding, men did not baptize and add themselves.

What were they added to? They were added not only to the invisible/universal church (i.e. Matthew 16:18-19), but in a existential local real life context to the visible/local church in Jerusalem (i.e. Matthew 18:18), which was already composed of approximately 120 of Jesus’ disciples (Acts 1:15). Later, we see what they were added to, namely, “their number” in **Acts 2:47**: “praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” A few observations on this text in the context already laid out. *First*, it says “the Lord added to their number”. *Second*, **verse 47** doesn’t mention baptism and baptism isn’t mentioned again until **Acts 8:12-17**, but the way the Lord previously added to the number was done as the apostles “made disciples” and “baptized” them. The pattern is set and “adding” or “being numbered” from here forward plainly implies that more people are joining the visible church via baptism. *Third*, being “added” cannot be divorced from “binding brothers” or “making disciples” and “baptizing” in the context of a local church. To “baptize” those who would then not either be or even able to be “added to the number” would be to inappropriately “baptize”. In **Acts 4:4** the number of the disciples in the church increased to 5,000. **Acts 4:32**, “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.” This is talking about the local church in Jerusalem. This wasn’t just a loose band of Christians that met in house groups without any commitment and accountability to each other within the larger body of the whole “number” of the church. It was a local church that gathered together in **Acts 5:12** as a local church, all 5,000-plus, in Solomon’s Portico.

Then the next mention of “adding” can be seen in **Acts 5:14**, “And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.” A few observations on this text. *First*, it says “believers were added to the Lord”. This passage doesn’t mention baptism, but this is plainly what happened as they were added. Notice it doesn’t say “added to the church”, but in Acts (and the rest of the New Testament) the Lord so closely identifies with His people that to be added to the Lord is to be added to the church. Do a word study of “in Christ” and see also **John 17:22-23**. This is clearly seen in the conversion of Saul. In **Acts 9:1-2** Saul was seeking to murder “the disciples of the Lord” who “belonged to the Way” (see also Acts 9:19). **Acts 9:4-5**, “And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’” Who was Saul persecuting? The disciples and in this context the specific disciples or church at Damascus. Who did Jesus say Saul was persecuting? Jesus. To be “added to the Lord” is connected to being added to the body of Christ invisible/universal that finds expression in Christ’s visible/local body in a local church. Being “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16; 19:5), and having been, “baptized into Christ,” having, “put on Christ,” (Galatians 3:27) is inseparable from “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one

body” (1 Corinthians 12:13).² Water baptism is a visible picture of an invisible reality of being united to Christ by faith and so making visible the union to His body, the church. **Ephesians 1:22-23**, “...the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” *Second*, they were believers. *Third*, those who were added were men and women. And as their number was increasing (Acts 6:1) they even had a member meeting to solve problems and decide who would serve as deacons (Acts 6:1-7). And as they gathered as a local church we read in **Acts 6:7**, “and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.” This is synonymous with the church in Jerusalem growing in number as people are baptized and added to the church.

The mention of “adding” can be seen again in **Acts 11:24**, “And a great many people were added to the Lord.” The clear and plain context of everything that has come before between the authority of Christ, the keys of binding brothers, making disciples, baptizing in the name of the Trinity, being added to the number, baptized into the body, baptized into the the name of the Lord, being added to the Lord, being added by the Lord, and being added to the number of the church would have us understand that these people were added to the Lord and His body, the church, via the the set pattern of receiving the gospel that was preached and getting baptized. The Bible plainly puts all these things together.

3. Observation 1: Disciples Are Always Connected to Local Churches

Jesus commissions to “make disciples”. In Acts disciples are always connected to local churches. To argue that we baptize “disciples” who are not members or even able to be members of local churches in a biblical sense would mean that we aren’t “making disciples” and “baptizing” in a biblical way. *First*, disciples are part of the local church in Jerusalem in **Acts 6:1, 2, 7; 9:1**. The disciple Ananias is an individual disciple who is part of the disciples or local church in Damascus in **Acts 9:10, 19, 25, 26**. The disciple Tabitha was part of the local church in Joppa in **Acts 9:36, 38. Acts 11:26** and **29** use “disciples” interchangeably with “church” “Christians” and “brothers” in reference to the local church in Antioch. Disciples is used to refer to the churches of Antioch and Pisidia in **Acts 13:52**. Disciples is used to refer to the local church in Lystra in **Acts 14:20, 21**. Disciples refers to the local churches in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch who Paul and Barnabas strengthened the souls of, saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God in **Acts 14:22**. In **Acts 14:27-28** “disciples” is used interchangeably with the “gathered church together”. In **Acts 15:10** Peter asks why the church in Jerusalem is placing a yoke on the neck of the “disciples” referring particularly to the church in Antioch where they had come from in **Acts 14:26; 15:4. Acts 16:1** describes Timothy as a disciple who was from the church in Lystra. **Acts 18:23** describes how Paul left and went from one place to the next through the

² Tom Schreiner writes the following on 1 Corinthians 12:13-14: “we should not separate Spirit baptism from water baptism as if Paul were attempting to segregate the one from the other. Conceptually they may be distinguished, but Paul himself was not interested in distinguishing them from one another in this verse since both are associated with the transition from the old life to the new... Baptism in water and the Spirit is the signature event for Christians, making them out as members of the people of God.” Schreiner, Thomas R. *Believer’s Baptism, Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006), 72. This is harmonious with this helpful observation from D. A. Carson about the way that Paul writes on the nature of the church in 1 Corinthians: “each local church is not seen primarily as one member parallel to a lot of other member churches, together constituting one body, one church; nor is each local church seen as the body of Christ parallel to other earthly churches that are also the body of Christ - as if Christ had many bodies. Rather, each church is the full manifestation in space and time of the one, true, heavenly, eschatological, new covenant church. Local churches should see themselves as outcroppings of heaven, analogies of ‘the Jerusalem that is above,’ indeed colonies of the new Jerusalem, providing on earth a corporate and visible expression of ‘the glorious freedom of the children of God.’” Carson, “Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church,” in DPL, 366. See also Carson’s discussion in the following: Carson, D. A. *Showing the Spirit, A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 42-49.

region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the “disciples”. This is clearly a reference to those gathered in the local churches they planted in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch. **Acts 18:27** uses “disciples” and “brothers” to refer to “those who through grace had believed” that were part of the churches of Ephesus and Achaia. Even in **Acts 19:1** where it refers to “some disciples” who weren’t baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus yet there it is used in connection to the local church in Ephesus. It’s hard to tell if the term “disciple” here (Acts 19:1) is used because they were already considered “disciples” upon arrival or that their actions of obeying Christ in baptism into the Lord Jesus meant that they became “disciples”. In Luke’s recording of this past event he may simply be referring to them in the state that they confirmed by being baptized. In **Acts 19:9** “disciples” is used to refer to some of those that Paul took with him who were part of the church in Ephesus when he daily reasoned in the hall of Tyrannus. In **Acts 19:30** it’s likely that “disciples” is a reference also to believers who were part of the church in Ephesus. In **Acts 20:1** Paul sent for “the disciples” who were part of the local church in Ephesus where he was. In **Acts 20:30** Paul warns the elders of the church in Ephesus that men will arise speaking twisted things to draw away the “disciples”, in other words “disciples” is referring to the members of the church they are eldering in Ephesus. In **Acts 21:4** they sought out the disciples in Tyre at Syria and stayed there seven days, this is likely the local church in Tyre at Syria. And the last reference to disciples in the New Testament is in **Acts 21:16** referring to members from the local church or even churches in Caesarea. If we follow the Great Commission of **Matthew 28** rooted in the context of what Jesus taught about the local church and we observe the set pattern of how people are join churches in Acts 2, and we observe what disciples are and where they exist throughout the entire book of Acts they are always part of local churches. To baptize someone who is unwilling or unable to be a “disciple” in the biblical sense of being part of a local church described in Acts, and the rest of the New Testament, is to baptize in an unbiblical way.

4. Observation 2: Brothers Are Connected to Local Churches Throughout the New Testament

Jesus entrusts the keys of the kingdom to churches to “bind brothers” (and “loose” unbelievers). How do we see the New Testament use the idea of “brother”? *First*, again **Acts 11:26** and **29** uses the terms “church” “disciples” “Christians” and “brothers” interchangeably as references to churches: “and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the **church** and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the **disciples** were first called **Christians**. So the **disciples** determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the **brothers** living in Judea.” Similarly, **Acts 18:27** describes one church as “brothers” writing to another church referring to them as “disciples”: “And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the **brothers** encouraged him and wrote to the **disciples** to welcome him.”

“Brothers” is used in a few different ways in the New Testament,³ but the overwhelming majority is in regard to local churches. We see “brothers” used to describe:

- the local church in Jerusalem⁴
- the local church in Iconium⁵
- the local church in Antioch⁶
- the local church in Syria⁷
- the local church in Cilicia⁸
- the local church in Derbe⁹
- the local church in Lystra¹⁰
- the local church in Philippi¹¹
- the local church in Thessalonica¹²
- the local church in Corinth¹³
- the local church in Ephesus¹⁴
- the local church in Achaia¹⁵
- the local church in Ptolemais¹⁶

³ (1) Ethnic, cultural or national relationship (Acts 2:37-38; 3:17, 22; 7:2, 13, 23, 25, 26, 37; 13:15, 26, 38; 22:1, 5, 13; 23:1, 5, 6; 28:17, 21; Romans 9:3; Hebrews 7:5). (2) In reference to biological family (Acts 1:14; 12:1-2; Jude 1:1; Galatians 1:19; 1 John 3:12). (3) Regarding individual believers (Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 16:12; 2 Corinthians 1:1-2; 2:13; 8:18, 22; 12:18; Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 1:1; 4:7; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; Hebrews 13:23; 1 Peter 5:12; 2 Peter 3:15; Philemon 1:1, 7, 16, 20). (4) Unbelievers or “false” brothers (2 Corinthians 11:26). (5) General reference to all believers in the local church in Rome and possibly all believers in an invisible universal sense (Romans 8:29; Revelation 12:10; 19:10; 22:9). (6) Believers in a universal sense who are still members of local churches as they are commanded to “gather” (Hebrews 10:24-25) and who “obey their leaders” (Hebrews 13:17) in their local context (Hebrews 2:11, 12, 17; 3:1, 12; 8:11; 10:19; 13:1, 22). (7) Also “brothers” as believers who are co-workers sent with Paul by the various churches they would have been from (Romans 16:14; 2 Corinthians 8:23; 9:3, 5; Galatians 1:2; Philippians 1:14 or possibly those who were part of the local church in Rome; 2 Timothy 4:21). (8) Missionaries to be welcomed by the church in Ephesus (3 John 1:3, 5, 10). (9) Those who are connected with the martyrs (Revelation 6:11).

⁴ Acts 1:15, 16; 2:1; 6:3; 9:30; 12:17; 15:7, 13, 22; 21:17, 20; 1 Corinthians 15:6; cf. when the church in Jerusalem was scattered in Acts 11:1, but then became individual tribes (James 1:1) - synagogues (James 2:2) - churches (James 5:14) in James 1:2, 9, 16, 19; 2:1, 5, 14, 15; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19; also see the reference to plural churches of Judea in 1 Thessalonians 2:14

⁵ Acts 14:1-2

⁶ Acts 15:3, 23, 32, 33, 40

⁷ Acts 15:23

⁸ Acts 15:23

⁹ Acts 16:2

¹⁰ Acts 16:2

¹¹ Acts 16:40; Philippians 1:12; 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1, 8, 21

¹² Acts 17:6, 10, 14; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 6, 9, 10, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25, 26, 27; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:1, 13, 15; 3:1, 6, 13

¹³ Acts 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:10, 11, 26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 5:11; 6:5, 6, 8; 7:12, 15, 24, 29; 8:11, 12, 13; 9:5; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6, 20, 26, 39-40; 15:1-2, 31, 50, 58; 16:15; 2 Corinthians 1:8; 8:1; 13:11

¹⁴ Acts 18:27; Ephesians 6:23-24; 1 Timothy 4:6; 5:1; 6:2; 1 John 2:9, 10, 11; 3:10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17; 4:20, 21; 5:16; cf. possibly 1 Corinthians 16:11 for another “brother” reference to the local church in Ephesus

¹⁵ Acts 18:27

¹⁶ Acts 21:7

- the local church in Puteoli¹⁷
- the local church at Rome¹⁸
- the local church and churches in Macedonia¹⁹
- the local church in Colossae²⁰
- possibly the local church in Laodicea or Hierapolis²¹
- a member in the church in Damascus²²
- members from the local church in Joppa²³
- members from the local church in Ceasarea²⁴

Brothers is also used to refer to multiple local churches:

- in regard to multiple local churches²⁵
- all those who are part of local churches of Asia Paul has contact with²⁶
- see also the seven churches of Asia that the John writes to in Revelation²⁷
- the local churches in Galatia²⁸
- the local churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia²⁹
- churches in every city³⁰

“Disciples” after the Great Commission in **Matthew 28:18-20** in the rest of the New Testament always exist in relationship to visible local churches. “Brothers” in the context of local churches after **Matthew 18:18-20** and after the Great Commission in **Matthew 28:18-20** throughout the New Testament refer to believers who belong to local churches. It would be inappropriate to “bind brothers” or “make disciples” in baptism in such a way that they would not be members of local churches.

5. Observation 3: Binding Brothers Is Connected with Making Disciples who are Part of Churches Again, Acts 11:26, 29 and Acts 18:27 use “church” “brothers” and “disciples” and “Christians”

¹⁷ Acts 28:14

¹⁸ Acts 28:15; Romans 1:13; 7:1, 4; 8:12; 10:1; 11:25; 12:1, 10; 14:10, 13, 15, 21; 15:14, 30; 16:17; cf. Philippians 1:14 with “brothers” referring to the local church in Rome

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 11:9, and plural churches in Macedonia 1 Thessalonians 4:10

²⁰ Colossians 1:2; cf. an individual member of the church in Colossae in Colossians 4:9 and Philemon 1:16

²¹ Colossians 4:15

²² Acts 9:17

²³ Acts 10:23; 11:12

²⁴ Acts 11:12

²⁵ Acts 15:36; 1 Thessalonians 4:10

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 16:20

²⁷ Revelation 1:4; **(1)** Ephesus (Revelation 2:1), **(2)** Smyrna (Revelation 2:8), **(3)** Pergamum (Revelation 2:12), **(4)** Thyatira (Revelation 2:18), **(5)** Sardis (Revelation 3:1), **(6)** Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7), **(7)** Laodicea (Revelation 3:14)

²⁸ Galatians 1:11; 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18 ; cf. false “brothers” secretly brought in Galatians 2:4

²⁹ 1 Peter 1:22; 2:17; 3:8; 5:9; cf. likely 2 Peter 1:5-7; 10

³⁰ Acts 15:40

to refer to local churches. So, “binding brothers” (Matthew 18:18-20) and “making disciples” (Matthew 28:18-20) by “baptizing” is indistinguishable from the work of planting churches. Wherever and whenever someone is baptized it’s connected with the set pattern: it’s either the beginning of a local church, or if there is already a local church on the ground their baptism symbolizes their entrance into union with Christ and also union or communion with the body of Christ, in a visible/local church. Similar to “brother”, the overwhelming majority of references to the “church” in the New Testament is speaking about a particular, regular, visible, local church.

Eighty-five out of the one-hundred and eleven uses of the Greek word for “church” in the New Testament are references to the visible, regular, particular, local church. Out of the eighty-five references, thirty-seven are in the plural “churches” referring to *multiple* particular local churches, and forty-eight are in the singular “church” referring to *a* particular local church.³¹

Twenty-one uses of the word “church” are a type of dual reference with implications for both the local and universal church.³²

Four passages use the word “church” as a reference to congregations other than the church of Jesus Christ. *First*, Israel as the “church” who wandered in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). *Second*, “church” is used three times to describe an assembly of the crowd in Ephesus acting as a Greek *polis* where a gathered congregation would vote. Any interested citizen could attend, debate, and vote on officers and various proposals.³³

Out of the one-hundred eleven uses of “church” in the New Testament only one reference appears to be only referring to the invisible universal church (Hebrews 12:23).

Notice one observation from all of this. The Great Commission work of “binding brothers” to churches or “making disciples” by “baptizing” in the Trinity and “teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded” in the New Testament is something that happens through local churches and adds more to the number or membership of visible local churches where disciples are under the authority of Christ in that particular congregation. We do not see baptism merely leading to individual discipleship outside of the local church. Even in the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-39) there isn’t enough information in the text to contradict this observation. This is the eco-system and context of baptism both in Acts but all through the New Testament. This is also confirmed in answering: *Question* - How do we know how Christians ought to live? *Answer* - It’s in the Bible. And after the Gospels and Acts we have a collection of letters to local churches (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians), letters to a local church pastor (1 & 2 Timothy), a letter to a brother to help local churches appoint elders and become orderly (Titus), a letter to a pastor of a local church in his house (Philemon), a sermon to a local church (Hebrews, see 10:24-25 and 13:17), then more letters to local churches (1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John), and then a final

³¹ See Matthew 18:17; Acts 5:11; 8:1; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3, 4, 22, 41; 16:5; 18:22; 20:17, 28; Romans 16:1, 4, 5, 16, 23; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 4:17; 6:4; 7:17; 10:32; 11:16, 18, 22; 14:4, 5, 12, 23, 28, 33, 34, 35; 16:1, 19; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 8:1, 18, 19, 23, 24; 11:8, 28; 12:13; Galatians 1:2, 22; Philippians 4:15; Colossians 4:15, 16; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 4; 1 Timothy 3:5; 5:16; Philemon 1:2; James 5:14; 3 John 1:6, 9, 10; Revelation 1:4, 11, 20; 2:1, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17, 18, 23, 29; 3:1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 2; 22:16

³² Matthew 16:18; Acts 8:3; 9:31; 1 Corinthians 12:28; 14:19; 15:9; Galatians 1:13; Ephesians 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32; Philippians 3:6; Colossians 1:18, 24; 1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 2:12

³³ Acts 19:32, 39, 41. Finely, M. I. *Politics in the Ancient World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 71. As quoted by Leeman, Jonathan *Don't Fire Your Church Members* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016), 92.

apocalyptic book to the seven churches in Asia (Revelation).

Conclusion

Baptism exists in this biblical context of being bound to Christ and His people, and not only in an invisible spiritual sense but in a visible local sense. Many churches in the last 100 years have wrongly divorced being a disciple, a brother and baptism from local church membership. As we move forward we must be constrained by the Bible, not what other churches are doing alone, or even by our own past experiences alone. Our aim is to be “the church reformed, always reforming according to the Word of God”.³⁴ To close, consider the original question and answer again:

Question 1: Where in the New Testament do we see a relationship between baptism and local church membership?

Answer 1: All throughout the New Testament.

³⁴ The Latin phrase of the Reformation: “Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei.”