

# What is the Church?

(Mat 16: 15-19)

by Abri Brancken – 28 Aug 2016

## Important Questions:

What is the church?

Where does the term church come from?

How should we do church?

What does the Bible have to say about Church?

## What is the church

Many people see the church as:

- a. A building used for public worship.
- b. A particular Christian organization.
- c. The Christian religion
- d. Club or social institution

To understand the idea of Church, we need to look at what the Bible says about it.

Here are some verses where “church” is mentioned in the English Bible:

### Matthew 16:18,

"...And I say also unto you, that you art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.

### Acts 2:46-47

And continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they shared food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

### Ephesians 1:22

And He has put all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church,

### James 5:14

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Let's take a closer look at the word Church to understand what God is saying to us. It is essential that we understand its original meaning as it was used in New Testament times. In order to establish a New Testament church, we must first know what the word "church" means in Scripture.

## Meaning of Ecclesia:

In the Greek the word used to refer to God's people is "Ecclesia". (ἐκκλησία (ekklēsia) ek-klay-see'-ah) It means : "A calling out", "a congregation or assembly" and it implies "A point from where motion or action proceeds."

The Greek word "ecclesia," is used about 115 times in the New Testament, and in most bibles, it is always translated as "church" (except in Acts 19:32,39,41, where it is properly translated as "assembly"). Most English Bibles translate the word "Ecclesia" as church, which is actually incorrect, but we will not deal with grammatical translation errors it in this session.

## **Origin of the term Ecclesia**

Many of the Greek philosophers played around with the term Ecclesia. These include:  
Plato (was born around 428 B.C., during the final years of the Golden Age of Pericles' Athens)  
Socrates (was born circa 470 BC, in Athens, Greece)  
Aristotle (was born circa 384 B.C. in Stagira)

The term Ecclesia was not a religious term. It was more a political, legal, legislative and governmental term.

## **What was the Ecclesia?**

Ecclesia is "a called out assembly of citizens summoned by the Master or Emperor, the legislative assembly." The word as used in the New Testament is taken from the root of this word, which simply means to "call out." In New Testament times the word was exclusively used to represent a group of people assembled for a particular cause or purpose. It was never used exclusively to refer to a religious meeting or group.

An examination of the Greek word "ecclesia" reveals that the word is properly translated into English as the "assembly" or "congregation." It is used to refer to a group of persons that are organized together for a common purpose and who meet together around the purposes of their Lord.

Thus, ecclesia, centuries before the writing of the New Testament, was clearly characterized as a political phenomenon, repeated according to certain rules and within a certain framework.

The English dictionary reveals that the English word "church" which is used in our English Bible is taken from the late Greek word kyriakon not ecclesia.", but like I have said, we are not going to deal with grammatical issues here.

So, the Ecclesia (those being called out by their master) would sit with their master, lord or emperor, they would hear his heart and go out to make it law. The ecclesia had governmental and judicial power. They served as representatives of their master.

## **We are Jesus' Ecclesia**

We have been chosen by Jesus to live with Him, hear His heart and take it to those who do not know Him yet. Christians are God's ambassadors in that they have been "approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel" (1 Thessalonians 2:4). As we go through this world, we represent another Kingdom (John 18:36), and it is our responsibility to reflect the "official position" of heaven. We are in this world, but not of it (John 17:16).

## **What the Ecclesia is not:**

Social club or a humanitarian organisation  
Non-profit organization  
A building or a structure  
Religious system

## **Where does God dwell?**

God "dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 17:24,48, 2 Corinthians 5:1, Hebrews 9:24).

**1 Cor 6:19**

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;

**John 4:23**

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

You will worship neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, but...

**Ephesus council was called ecclesia:**

In Acts 19, "ecclesia" is a town council: a civil body in Ephesus. Ecclesia is a civil body of select (called, elected) people.

**According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica:**

In the New Testament, "ecclesia" (signifying convocation) is the only single word used for church. It (ecclesia) was the name given to the governmental assembly of the city of Athens, duly convoked (called out) by proper officers and possessing all political power including even juridical functions.

An "ecclesia" was a civil assembly in Athens even before the writing of the New Testament.

**Ecclesia's meaning in the New Testament**

What, then, did the writers of the New Testament mean when they used the word "ecclesia" to describe a Christian body of people? We can assume that they intended to convey the original Greek meaning of the word: "a body of Christians called out of the system of this world to come together under a new ruler ship, no king but Jesus; under no other jurisdiction but that of Jesus. No man ruled them, but Jesus did. And that was the reason these same Christians ran into trouble with kings and rulers; were arrested, crucified and martyred. They dropped Caesar as their King and the one they worshipped and took up Christ. The early Christians were announcing ANOTHER KING! Not Caesar! This was a king who was bigger than Caesar.