

A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLES “What is Church?”

Questions for the congregation:

1. What is church?

Possible answers: all the saved, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the congregation we belong to, a building, etc.

2. When did it start?

Possible answers: during the ministry of Jesus, on the day of Pentecost, at 3:30 PM.

*The word translated “church” or “assembly” in the New Testament is the Greek word **ekklesia**. It simply means “called out.” The church is “called out” to gather together*

Though we certainly think of the church as a New Testament concept, we should know by now that all that is revealed in the New Testament has its roots in the Old Testament.

Acts 7:37-38

37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

38 This is he, **that was in the church in the wilderness** with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: KJV

.Before we look at New Testament concepts of church, let us look at its roots first and “the church in the wilderness.”.

Old Testament Concepts of the Assembly and their New Testament Correlations-

1. The Blessing of Abraham-

Gen 28:1-4

1 So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him: "Do not marry a Canaanite woman.

2 Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother.

3 May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers **until you become a community of peoples.**

4 May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham." NIV

*The Hebrew word translated “community” in verse three is the Old Testament comparative to the Greek **ekklesia**. It is the word **qahal**. This was after Jacob's deceit. His father blesses him now with no deception being imposed on him. Part of this blessing is that Jacob would become a congregation of peoples. Verse four ties this blessing with the blessing of Abraham.*

Gen 35:10-12

10 God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel.

- 11 And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. **A nation and a community of nations** will come from you, and kings will come from your body.
- 12 The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." NIV

During Jacob's second visit to Bethel, God confirms the covenant with him. Israel is to become a "community of nations" and receive the land promised to Abraham. Israel is to be fruitful and multiply and become an assembly of nations for the possession of the land.

Gal 3:7-9, 14

- 7 Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.
- 8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."
- 9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.
- 14 He redeemed us in order that **the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles** through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. NIV

The church of Jesus Christ in general and the churches of the Gentiles more specifically have come into this blessing of Abraham through the redemption by the blood of Jesus. We now are part of that "assembly of nations" promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

2. The Assembly and Passover-

Ex 12:5-13

- 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats:
- 6 And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: **and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.**
- 7 And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.
- 8 And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.
- 9 Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof.
- 10 And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.
- 11 And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD's passover.
- 12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.
- 13 And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. KJV

The commandment for the passover lamb was for the whole assembly. If any in the assembly didn't put the blood on their doorposts, they would die.

1 Cor 5:7

Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. NKJV

To get out of Egypt, the assembly of Israel had to sacrifice a passover lamb and apply its blood to their dwellings. In like manner, to be redeemed from the world (i.e. called out), we had to accept the blood of Jesus and apply it to our lives.

3. The Day of the Assembly-

Deut 9:10

And the LORD delivered unto me two tables of stone written with the finger of God; and on them was written according to all the words, which the LORD spake with you in the mount out of the midst of the fire **in the day of the assembly**¹. KJV

Deut 10:4

And he wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments, which the LORD spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire **in the day of the assembly**¹: and the LORD gave them unto me. KJV

Deut 18:16

According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb **in the day of the assembly**¹, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. KJV

*The children of Israel were already a congregation. But in these verses, the Lord places an emphasis on "the day of the assembly." I know He is referring to the time of their convocation, but I don't think that is all. In the day of the assembly, the Lord spoke the Law from the mountain and entered into covenant with His people. I believe that in that day, they became **the assembly**.*

In like manner, we became part of the ekklesia when the law was written in our hearts by the Spirit of the living God. Many count Pentecost (the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the commemoration of the handing down of the Law) to be the birthday of the Church.

4. The Sounding of the Horn-

Num 10:1-3

1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

2 "Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the assembly and for directing the movement of the camps.

3 When they blow both of them, all the assembly shall gather before you at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. NKJV

The priest blew the silver trumpets (silver is redemption metal, the sound is the proclamation of redemption), the assembly was called to the door of the tabernacle.

1 Thess 4:16-17

16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. NIV

At the end of this age, we will be assembled by a trumpet call to the true tabernacle of meeting in heaven!

So we see that part of the blessing of Abraham was to be part of the great congregation of nations, which we are in Christ. The passover lamb was sacrificed by and for the whole community and Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us. Israel entered into covenant with God “in the day of assembly” when He spoke the Law out of the fire. The church of the New Covenant was birthed on the day of Pentecost when the apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire and the law was written on their hearts. The nation of Israel was called to assembly by the redemption trumpets and at the end of this age, the Lord shall blow the horn and we shall assemble before Him at the door of the tabernacle in heaven! Glory to God!!

Concepts of Church-

- ❑ The Universal Church – all the saved.

1 Cor 1:2

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: NKJV

Who composes the church? Those that are 1) sanctified in Christ Jesus, 2) called to be saints, 3) call upon the name of Jesus Christ as Lord (signified by “both theirs and ours”) make up the church of God.

Heb 12:22-24

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,

23 **to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven,** to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. NKJV

The most widely used term in the New Testament for the universal church is “the church of God.”

- ❑ The Ethnic Church – “all the churches of the Gentiles” Rom 16:4.
- ❑ The Regional Church – “the churches of Galatia” Gal 1:2.
- ❑ The City Church – “the church of Ephesus” Rev 2:1.
- ❑ The Individual Church – “the church that is in their house” 1 Cor 16:19.

Not once in the New Testament is the term "church" used of a place of worship. It is always the assembly of people. That we have buildings that we call churches is our biggest cultural and linguistic block to understand what church is and what it should do. Both Orthodox Christianity and Reformed Christianity (also called Evangelical) have used the Old Testament concept of the Tabernacle and the Temple as places of worship to justify their building programs over the past 1700 years.

Of Place and Time, Spirit and Truth-

One may recall that God had Moses build the Tabernacle as a place of worship for the congregation of Israel.

Heb 8:5

They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." NIV

What was manufactured and set up under Moses's supervision was a shadow and a copy of heaven. The first sanctified place in the history of the world was a place in time, the Sabbath. God sanctified (made a sanctuary) out of time. Time holds the same relation to space and matter that spirit holds to soul and body. As such, worshipping God in time is the closest thing to worshipping God in spirit.

The next step in formal worship was the worship of God in a place, be it an altar of stone or the Tabernacle or the Temple. The Tabernacle enclosed space and sanctified it. The Temple was stationary, it operated in sanctified time, encapsulated and sanctified a space, and was situated as a permanent place of worship.

*As rich as all this is, we miss the point if all we do is transpose the shadows and try walking in them as if they were light. A church building is **not** the house of God!*

Acts 7:47-51

47 But Solomon built Him a house.

48 However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

49'Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what is the place of My rest?

50 Has My hand not made all these things?'

51 "You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. NKJV

To be stuck in the shadow copy framework of time and place as the ultimate sanctuaries of worship is to resist the Holy Spirit! What did Jesus say about worshipping at a place?

John 4:19-24

19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet.

20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

- 21 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.
- 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.
- 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.
- 24 God is spirit, and **his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.**" NIV

Just think how revolutionary this is! Neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall people worship, but in spirit and in truth! Spirit is the venue (comparable to time), truth is the framework (comparable to space), and we are the worshipers (comparable to place).

Remember the old childhood hand trick? Here's the church, here's the steeple, open the doors and there are all the people? Once and for all we must divorce ourselves from the thought that the church is a building or a place! The church is the people!

How many people does it take to make a church?

The Assembly of the Saints-

Matt 18:15-20 KJV

- 15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.
- 16 But if he will not hear thee, **then take with thee one or two more**, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.
- 17 **And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church¹**: but if he neglect to hear the **church¹**, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.
- 18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
- 19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.
- 20 **For where two or three are gathered together in my name**, there am I in the midst of them.

Here's a thought: in verse 15 there are two people, the offender and the offended; in verse 16 there are at least three people (the offender, the offended, and the witness) and at most four (the offender, the offended, and two witnesses). The at least 3 at most 4 are called "them" in verse 17 and are contrasted and differentiated from the church. Taken in that light, so are the two who are having the problem in the first place. If that be the case, then how can verse 20 be our operational definition of a church? Surely the Lord is present, but He Himself differentiated between the 2, 3, and 4 and the church. If we went on bare numbers and simply said the church was a larger group we can move one up from 4 and call the church a group of 5. But I think the use of ekklesia indicates an even larger group of folks. What is the point? There is a difference between a meeting and the church.

It is important in our understanding to know the dynamics of numbers.

Lev 26:8

Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you. NIV

Five chasing a hundred is a 1:20 ratio. A hundred chasing ten thousand is a 1:100 ration, or a five-fold increase in chasing power if you will. If two of us agree it shall be done. This is great and necessary. But what would happen if the church comes together and agrees in prayer?

The House of God-

1 Tim 3:14-15

14 These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly;

15 but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the **house of God, which is the church of the living God**, the pillar and ground of the truth. NKJV

Though it is true that we are all the church and are part of the church at all times, we are not always congregated. We are individually temples of the Holy Spirit, and yet corporately we are the house of God. There are ways we ought to behave in God's house. And the way we conduct ourselves in the assembly of the saints, the church of God, should focus us on what God's purpose is for His house. Since the church of the living God is the house of God, if we know the purpose of His house, we shall know the purpose of the church.

What is the purpose of the church?

Mark 11:15-17

15 So they came to Jerusalem. And Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.

16 And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple.

17 Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" NKJV

The Jews of Jesus' day were not using the Temple for the purpose it was built. It was built to be a house of prayer. He came in and drove out all those who were profiteering in His house. As the church of Jesus Christ, we should be careful that we fulfill the purpose of God for His church, to be a house of prayer for all peoples. If not, we may find Him in our midst driving out our sacred cows and marketing plans and flipping over our tables so that people may come to His!

In the coming weeks we will be examining what we can do as a church to fulfill the purpose of the Lord for us, to be a house of prayer for all peoples! Amen!