

February 15, 2026

Church, Assembly, and *ekklesia*

A study on the use of the word “Church”

- I. Before moving forward, summarize your understanding of the meaning and use of the word “church” (i.e. what is the church, define the word, etc.): _____

- II. Greek: *ekklesia*
 - A. Often defined, “called out body”, as in a group of people called out of the community for a special purpose; spiritually, God’s people called out of the world.
 - B. Outline of Biblical Usage: “a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly. an assembly of the people convened at the public place of the council for the purpose of deliberating...”
 - C. The English word most suited to translate *ekklesia* is “**assembly**” (see Acts 19:32; Hebrews 2:12).

- III. How do we get “church” from “*ekklesia*”?
 - A. We don’t.
 - B. Historically, “church” is derived from a word meaning “House of the Lord.” The Greek, latin and Germanic words from which we get the English “church” became popularized after about 313 A.D. to describe the places of worship, not the people.

1. Following the great persecution of the church, which ended around 313 A.D., Christianity became legalized and public houses of worship began to spring up all around the Roman empire, with the support of the Roman government.
2. These houses of worship began to be called *kyriakon* (Greek). This word was picked up in other languages, becoming the more popular term for Christian houses of worship. Old Slavonic, *criky*; Russian, *cerkou*, Estonian, *kirrik*; Germanic *kirika*. The Old English, *cirice*, was derived primarily from the Germanic. Middle English (1100-1500) it evolved to *chirche*. Since the 16th century, the spelling has been church. (www.etymonline.com).
3. It was not until the 13th Century that the word *chirche* began to be used for both the building and the people who met there. Prior to this, *chirche* and *ecclesia* (Latin) were understood as two different things, distinguishing between the building, and the people who met there.
4. The Geneva Bible (1560) was the first translation to conflate the two concepts, translating *ekklesia* as "church." The King James Version of 1611 formalized the use of it.
5. Interestingly, Martin Luther used the German *Gemeinde* (congregation) to translate *ekklesia*, instead of the German *Kirche* in his 1522 translation, because he "intended to emphasize the community of believers rather than the institutional, hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic Church."

(www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/william-tyndales-concept-church)

6. Both Martin Luther and Tyndale recognized the need to emphasize the “people” or “assembly” aspect of *ekklesia* rather than the hierarchical structure commonly associated with it.

IV. Significance of Read *ekklesia* as “Assembly”:

- A. Matthew 16:18: “On this rock I will build by *ekklesia*—assembly.
- B. Hebrews 12:22-23: But you have come to:
 1. The *panegyris* (literally, festival gathering), ESV: “in festal gathering.”
 2. And *ekklesia* – assembly of the First Born.
 3. Who are enrolled in heaven.
- C. Eph. 1:22: “And put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the *ekklesia* – assembly. What assembly? (see Heb. 12:23).
- D. Ephesians 1:20; 2:6: Why is this assembly enrolled in heaven?
 1. Because when Jesus was risen from the dead, He was highly exalted and seated in the heavenly places far above all principality, power, and dominion.
 2. And when we are saved by Grace, we are “*seated with Him in the heavenly places.*”

V. How does reading *ekklesia* as “assembly” help you distinguish between a congregation of souls as versus a hierarchal organization? _____
