

**TOPIC IV**  
**THE TRUE CHURCH**  
**INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

WHAT THE TRUE CHURCH ISN'T.

THE EARTHLY CHURCH

1. People coming together on a specified Day to worship God.
2. The building where these people meet.
3. A group belonging to a named organization  
Such as: The Catholic Church, The Baptist Church, The Presbyterian Church, The Community Church...etc.
4. Any organization calling itself a "church" that has human leadership and hosts meetings where doctrines, opinions, and theological presumptions are presented as truth when in fact they may not be.
5. Confirmed, baptized, and accepted members of a group, denomination or organization calling itself a church.

None of these represent what the Scripture calls the "church."

WHAT THE TRUE CHURCH IS.

A SPIRITUAL ENTITY, NOT  
A PHYSICAL ONE

1. Defined in this study.

**THE TRUE CHURCH**

What or who is the true church? Above left are some common ideas of what the definition of "church" might be. All of them are untrue from a Biblical standpoint as is the definition of a "Christian" – a person who simply belongs to a church. An old preacher once said, "Going to church no more makes you a Christian than going to a garage make you an automobile."

So here is what we are going to do. This study will be in two parts. First, What the church really is, and second what actual its purpose is. Those two parts are followed by an "appendix" where more detailed information is given as to the origins of the word "church" and its misunderstood meanings.

## PART I.

The church is a spiritual entity, not a physical one.

Though we are physical and live in a physical universe created by God for us, those of us who are in the true church are there by faith, not because of any physical attribute or activity such as being confirmed, baptized, being a member of an earthly church, attending services or giving money or any work whatsoever.

The true church is made up of people belonging to God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus calls them an assembly of those who are His, as we will see in a moment. These people of faith in Him as their own Lord and Savior are also called, “the sheep of His pasture”; “citizens of the kingdom of God”; and “the household and family of God.” This last phrase is the most important of all.

Ephesians 2:19. “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,”

What we see is that the true church is actually God's family where each child is born into it by a new spiritual birth described in the New Testament. We, for example, we see family terms in the Bible such as: “God the Father”; Jesus is called the “Son of God”; believers called “brothers and sisters”; and most poignant of all, we who are His by faith called God's children:

Galatians 3:26, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

John 1:12-13, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

We know we are not physical brother and sisters because we have different earthly parents, but we are spiritual brothers because we all have one spiritual Father who is God. And, though we inhabit this physical world at the moment, we are actually a spiritual family who already have our citizenship and place reserved for us in heaven.

Philippians 3:20, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;" [ NASB, NLT, NEB, MKJV] It is also important to know that only those who are God's children will inherit the kingdom God has prepared for them.

Galatians 3:28-29, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."

So, how did we get so confused?"

Let's start off with the word “Church.” This is an English word translated from a word the apostles used to designate a gathering or assembly of people who have come to a committed faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, the Son of God, the Messiah and the risen Lord. That word is “Ekklesia.”

The word simply means “assembly” or “gathering” called together for some purpose. The word itself does not include the nature of the gathering and, in ancient times it could apply to a political or social gathering. Again, it does not define who these people are who are gathered together.<sup>1</sup>

But in time, the assembly of believers commonly used this word for their gathering together (or "assembling") as Christians for their time of sharing together as believers. Soon, over the centuries, it came to be used for the building where they gathered. As the New Testament was translated into English, this word was translated “church.”

Soon, in more recent centuries, the word “church” became used as a denomination such as the “Catholic Church” (assembly); “The Episcopal Church”; “the Baptist Church”; “The Community Church” and so on. The building and the denomination within it came to be called a “church.” When we drive down the street we might say, “Oh, look at that lovely church.” But that is not what Jesus came to build, at all. More appropriate would be me looking at you, my fellow believers, and saying, "What a lovely church."

Also, if you list the great religions of the world, you will see in that list; Islam; Buddhism; Hinduism; and Christianity among others. Though “Christianity” is listed as a religion, Jesus did not come to start a new religion. Nor did He come to begin what is defined as a “church” in the list above. Why?

Included in the developing “earthly” church is an authority structure that enforces doctrine and power over those who belong to it. Of course, it wasn’t long before men began to take the role of the head of the church and put Christ’s actual headship on a shelf somewhere while they sit in His place...like the Pope or some priest or pastor. Then, of course, as this progressed and these authorities began to exert power and influence, all sorts of different ideas and doctrines emerged and so we have the conflicting mess, distortion and corruption we have today in what is called “Christianity.”

However, let’s remember that Christ is the head of the true church, also called His body of whom we are all members if we have submitted to Him as Lord.

Eph 1:22-23; “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Eph 4:14-16; “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

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<sup>1</sup> In the appendix is a more complete document regarding the evolving of both this term and the consequences occurring in the human church.

Col 1:17-18; “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”

So, we can see what a mess we have made of things, including our translations, and understanding of what it all means. So, we have all sorts of people, who, by being a member of a church believe themselves to be saved. A physical involvement has been substituted for a spiritual reality.

The apostle Paul is pretty clear who is “in” and who is “out.” That’s the real issue. I simply deny that just because a person is a member of a so-called church that he or she is saved. Years ago, in California, a preacher in a local church proclaimed that if you were not a member of his particular “church congregation” you could not be saved.

In a Baptist church I once pastored, half the congregation, the “old guard,” were determined to make people into Baptists while the other half prayed for people to come to Jesus in faith so they could be saved and have eternal life in His name. Which do you think is the more Biblical truth?

Jesus came preaching the “kingdom of God” not the “kingdom of the church.” In Mark 1:14-15 we read, ‘Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."'

And in John 3:3-5, “Jesus answered (Nicodemus) and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

So, entrance into God’s kingdom is a spiritual matter based in faith, not a physical matter of joining a group. The assembly Jesus spoke of is clearly stated in the New Testament:

Matthew 16:18; "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build **My church**; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

Setting aside the Catholic interpretation of this verse, we focus on: “My church”; “My assembly”; “My gathering”; not man’s and certainly not the Catholic Church though they claim this verse for their authority.

I Timothy 3:15; “...but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the **household of God**, which is **the church** (or assembly) of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

Well, that ought to seal it, I would think. The entrance into the household of God is by being born into it through faith in Jesus. No physical involvement or works involved. This is a spiritual event. The apostle Paul wrote,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9.

I always define my stand in Christ this way, “My feet are firmly planted in the kingdom of God by faith.” I never use the term "church" though there are those in organized churches who are his sheep, no doubt. But that is neither what makes them God’s children, a Christian, or among the saved.

In his novel, "The Cottage" one of author Michael Phillips characters says, "...for many years I refused to have anything to do with organized Christianity. But over the years, God softened my heart and turned me toward Him rather than any teaching *about* Him. Thus, as I grew into manhood my spiritual quest has not involved the doctrine of any man or church, or any system of dogma, though I hope I have been receptive along the way to the quiet influences of honorable men who have pointed to truth. And with that has come a love for the church-the *true* church, God's people. Mine has been a quest to discover who God is and how He works in human hearts, free from the corruptions which man seems often to bring into it."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Phillips, "The Cottage" (Book 2 of "Secrets of the Shetlands", Bethany House, 2016, pg. 170.

## Part II.

The purpose of the early and true church.

A. To encourage one another. In researching what the "church" did when they got together, a main purpose was simply to "encourage" one another in the faith. Persecution and false teachings were occurring.<sup>3</sup> One might think that their purpose was to worship God and His Son as a congregation. But worship wasn't an hour spent each week together. In actuality, worship was the essence of one's daily life and the director of how they lived their lives. Paul wrote in Romans 12:1-2 for example,

"Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

But their main purpose was to encourage and build each other up in the faith.

Acts 11:23, "Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and *began* to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord;"

I Thessalonians 3:2, "..and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,"

I Thessalonians 5:11, "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing."

I Thessalonians 5:14, "We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone."

Hebrews 3:13, "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

The reason for this mutual "encouragement" was due to the severe persecution of believers in the early church, especially from Orthodox Jewish sources.

Acts 8:1, "Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

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<sup>3</sup> Note: Revelation 2:1-3, 9-10, 13-15, 19-25; 3:9-10, will underscore the matter of persecution and false teachings. See also, Galatians 1:7; Ephesians 4:14; II Peter 2:1-3; I John 4:1; Matthew 24:24; Acts 20:29; I Timothy 4:1; II Timothy 3:13; II John 1:7; etc.

Acts 11:19, "So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone."

Acts 13:50, "But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district."

I Peter 4:12-16,

12: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13: but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14: If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15: Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16: but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name."

Acts 11:23, "Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord;"

Colossians 4:8, "For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts;"

Titus 2:4, "...so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,"

Acts 15:31, "When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement."

Romans 15:4-5, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Romans 15:5, "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus,"

Philippians 2:1, "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,"

Colossians 4:11, "and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me."

Hebrews 6:18, "...so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us."

Is this enough passages to underscore the need for encouragement? These things are happening today also as you know and where you are. So, you need to be an "encourager" and the people to each other as well.

By the way, the word "encourage" in nearly every verse is the same word used of the Holy Spirit and is used over a hundred times in the N. T. and is also translated, "comforter", to "urge," "exhort," "implore", "admonish" and almost every time it has to do with persevering in the truth, faith and care for others.

In reference to Hebrews 10:19-25 that reads,

19: "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20: by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21: and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22: let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23: Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24: and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25: not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

A comment is warranted. Often verse 25 is quoted to admonish people to be sure and attend "church" or be in disobedience to God's will. However, there is no specific formula given for this "assembling together." And the word for "assembling together" is not "ekklesia" but "epi-soon-ah-go-geh" from which we get "synagogue." "Synagogue" means to gather or assemble together. In the early days, small groups met in homes. Their identity and purpose remain as described throughout this study as we see in this passage.

B. Caring for one another and sharing their assets, labor, goods, time with each other and especially those in need.

Luke 14:13 "But whenever you give a banquet, invite people who are poor, who have disabilities, who are limping, *and* people who are blind;

Acts 2:44-45,

44: "And all the believers were together and had all things in common; 45: and they would sell their property and possessions and share them with all, to the extent that anyone had need."

Acts 4:32-35,

32: "And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one *of them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33: And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34: For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35: and lay *them* at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each to the extent that any had need."



Acts 11:29, “And to the extent that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brothers *and sisters* living in Judea.

C. Sending out prepared and gifted apostles and people to do mission work, help, encourage, teach, preach, follow-up a previous ministry and so on.

Matthew 10:16,

16: “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be as wary as serpents, and as innocent as doves.”

Matthew 28:18-20,

18: “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. 19: ‘Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20: teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Acts 13:1-3

3: “Now there were prophets and teachers at Antioch, in the church that was *there*: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2: While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set Barnabas and Saul apart for Me for the work to which I have called them.’ 3: “Then, when they had fasted, prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

D. Tend to the poor and needy, widows and orphans.

Matthew 6:1-4,

1: “Take care not to practice your righteousness in the sight of people, to be noticed by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. 2: “So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, so that they will be praised by people. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 3: “But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4: so that your charitable giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.”<sup>4</sup>

Galatians 2:9-10, 9: “...and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. 10: *They only asked* us to

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<sup>4</sup> The Old Testament is filled with verses where God tells His people to help the poor and curses them when they take advantage of them. For example see: Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Proverbs 14:21, 31; 19:17; 28:27; 31:20; Isaiah 10:1-4; Isaiah 58:6-7; Ezekiel 16:48-50; Amos 4;1; Zechariah 7:10 etc.

remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.”

James 1:27, “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

E. Mostly, the "church" (Christian assembly - if you will) was to "love" each other and those in their community. It was and is to be a place where Christians love and conduct themselves in a manner that glorifies Christ (and God) demonstrates godliness and holiness, beginning with its leadership.

Ephesians 4:1, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,"

Philippians 1:27, " Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”

Colossians 1:10, "...so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;"

I Thessalonians 2:12, "...so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."

II Peter 1:3-7, 3: "...seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4: For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 5: Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, 6: and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, 7: and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love."

A proper definition of the church might be something like;

"His assembly of people, a living organism Paul calls 'the body of Christ' comprised of those who by faith in Christ are members of God's household and His family, citizens of His kingdom.”

Numbers do not matter as Jesus said, “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” (Matthew 18:20)

The place, day or time of gathering is insignificant as to this assembly. In Christ, every day is the "Sabbath Day" we enter when we place our faith in Jesus (As Hebrews, chapter 4 teaches). A building, denominational membership, specific group identity for the world to take notice of, or any other human or worldly designation is of no importance at all except as a place we can gather together. It is simply His people, people He knows, gathered together in His name at any place and at anytime.

For over 300 years, the believers met in homes. It is simple: His people - people He knows, gathered together in His name at any place and at any time. That would consist of an earthly gathering of a spiritual body.

[For further information and discussion about this topic, see my website: [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org) under "Studies" "Controversial Topics, Topics V. and VI.: "The Old and New Covenants" and , "The Finished Work of Christ" And, "The Trinity or is it The Family?"]

## **APPENDIX**

### **The origin of the word "church" and its misunderstood meaning.**

A. The word "church" is Old English and describes a "building that is used for Christian religious services," or, "religious services held in a church," or, "a particular Christian group."<sup>5</sup>

However, none of these is a Biblical term at all - in terms of the Biblical definition. In the New Testament the term "church" or churches" appears 112 times in the New Testament. It is consistently the translation of the Greek - "ekklesia."

"Ekklesia" is also translated "congregation" once in Acts 7:38, and "assembly" three times in Acts, none of which refer to a "Christian" congregation.<sup>6</sup>

The translators of the New Testament take the Biblical Word "ekklesia" and translate it "church." But the word "church" in our time and language does not mean what the New Testament means by this word - at all.

In checking the origin of the word "church" beginning at the most current use of the English word and going back in time, the Old English (from which we now have the word "church") stems from the 16th century Old English, and that word was "cirice" or "circe" pronounced "Kerke." In Scotland, the Scottish word is "Kirk", even today. Going back a little more, this word actually came from the old Germanic and Saxon "kirkja." Again, now going back further to the 12th century Greek, the word "kyriake" or kyriakon" meaning "Lord's house" was used, from which we now go forward to today.

Let's look at that Greek word. "The Greek kyriakon (an adjective) meaning "of the Lord" has been used of houses of Christian worship since about 300 A.D., especially in the near East, though it was less common in this sense than "ekklesia" or "basilica."<sup>7</sup> An example of the direct Greek-to-Germanic progress of many Christian words, via the Goths; it probably was used by West Germanic people in their pre-Christian period."<sup>8</sup> The word above "kuriakon" is a New Testament word. It means "belonging to the Lord." It is used only twice in the N.T. and here are the references:

1. I Cor. 11:20, "Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper..."

And,

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/church>

<sup>6</sup> Acts 19:32, 39, 41

<sup>7</sup> (Basilica in the N.T. means "belonging to the king or to royalty. We will ignore this.)

<sup>8</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary

## 2. Rev 1:10, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day..."

As you can see, neither reference has anything to do with what we would call a term for the "church" or for a "gathering." But, two hundred years later it became used for that ("The Lord's House") and the word was carried down through to our age as "kirk" or "church" and the meaning became totally changed.

How? Well, it came to describe a building in which worshippers met. "Belonging to the Lord" became "The Lord's House" or "The House of the Lord." Specific denominations adopted the term, and we have the "Catholic Church" or the "Lutheran Church" or Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist "church" and all the rest.

As such, it also described the governing and procedural nature of each denomination. For example, the "Presbyterian" church is an organization led by "elders" from the N.T. Greek word, "presbuteros" meaning "elder." Now we have an "authority structure" in some "church" or other, that enforces power over and the conduct of its constituents. Of course, men take the role of "head of some such church" and put Christ's actual headship on a shelf somewhere while they "sit" in His place. And then corruption and all the rest set in.

The head of the "church" is Christ Himself as told in part I above.

B. What is the Biblical word for "church" and what does it actually mean? The word translated "church" is actually "ekklesia." This word is used 77 times in the N.T. when translated "church." And an additional 35 times as the plural "churches." However, it is also used in the book of Acts and translated "assembly" three times. In these three times, not once was the assembly the "church" or translated as such.<sup>9</sup>

In the case of ekklesia being used for an assembly that is not a Christian one, we have in Acts 19:32 the "assembly" being held at the great theatre at Ephesus where the "whole city" turned out to witness the clash of the silversmiths with the effects of Paul's preaching. In this "assembly" (not church) the citizens were yelling, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." This assembly is not a "church" at all. You can see the word "assembly" in Acts 19:30 through 19:41. So even the Word "ekklesia" is inadequate to describe the "church" as it ought to be.

In fact, the Old Testament, in I Kings 8:14 for example, a secular assembly is called an "ekklesia" in the LXX, the same word translated "church" many times in the N.T., while a religious assembly of the Jews is called a "synagogue." "Ekklesia" does appear in the LXX a total of 77 times as well, and it refers most often to; 1. The gathering of God's people, 2. The gathering of the nation of Israel or it's representatives, 3. A gathering of prophets, priests, the leaders of Israel, or of the people of Israel, 4. All of Israel called "the assembly of the Lord."

However, it is also used of an assembly of political representatives in II Chronicles 28:14; a general assembly of the people in II Chronicles 30:2, 13-17; The number of returned exiles in Ezra 2:64; used of the unfaithful Israelites in Ezra 10; used of an "assembly" of people angry with

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<sup>9</sup> See: Acts 7:38; 19:32; 19:39; and Hebrews 2:12 where "ekklesia" is translated "assembly" but describes the "church."

their oppressors in Nehemiah 5; of a general gathering of people in Nehemiah 7; of evildoers in Psalm 26:5; etc. Therefore, the word itself is not indicative of the nature of the assembly.

In fact, the type and nature of the assembly is often defined with other words or by the context such as in Psalm 89:5, "The heavens will praise Your wonders, O LORD; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the holy ones." So, the word "ekklesia", though often defined as those "called out" does not in itself define what we understand to be the assembly of God's own possession in Christ. It really means a "called meeting" without describing who is involved. So, though "ekklesia" does mean "a called-out meeting" or an assembly, it doesn't define "who" these "called out ones" specifically are within the word itself.

People have come to define it the way they want to. It should have been properly translated as "assembly", but "alas" it wasn't. So, it became a generic. It is important to note in teaching what this word meant and how it was to be defined by the "church" from the outset. The root word is also the basis for the term "elect" used by Jesus and others. It means "selected" or "called" and is used by the Calvinists and reformed churches to mean "predestined to salvation." Another topic for another time. But Jesus meant it as applying to those of true faith when He used it as those who are His by faith.

So, this term is also misused by theologians but bottom line, there are those who are born into the family of God and become heirs and citizens of the kingdom of God and there are those who are not... though many think they are because they are part of a "church."

C. So, if the term "church", or the original Greek (ekklesia) in the N.T. doesn't describe what is actually what we are after, then what does? Aha! See what a mess we have made of things, including our translations and understanding of this? Unfortunately, we have all sorts of people who, by being a member of a church" believed themselves to be saved.

The "church" is defined the way He describes it, and not just an assembly as the word "ekklesia" normally is defined. It is actually "His Assembly", "His Called Meeting."

There is a denomination called "Assembly of God." That actually is a correct definition of the concept of "church" as we wish to understand it. But anyone can name anything as they wish.

Now, the phrase "the kingdom of God" does not appear in the Old Testament in that form. But it is spoken of in,

a. Obadiah 1:20-21, 20: "And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel, Who are among the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, And the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad Will possess the cities of the Negev. 21: The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion To judge the mountain of Esau, And the kingdom will be the LORD'S." "LORD" is "Yahweh." The main place where we find this is in Daniel, which Jesus was familiar with as He quotes Daniel here and there.

b. Daniel 2:44, "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever."

c. Daniel 4:2-3, 2: "It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. 3: "How great are His signs And how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom And His dominion is from generation to generation."

d. Daniel 6:25-26, 25: "Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language who were living in all the land: "May your peace abound! 26: "I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; For He is the living God and enduring forever, And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, And His dominion will be forever."

e. Daniel 7:13-14, 13: "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14: "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."

And there are others; Psalm 145:13; Zechariah 14:9; Isaiah 9:6-7; Micah 4:7; etc.

So, Jesus' announcement of the "Kingdom of God" was not unknown to the Jews and they did not object to the use of this term as they were indeed anticipating the coming of God's Messiah and God's rule through Him. The issue is then, how does one get "in" to the kingdom of God? This is a much better way of using terms than using the word "church" which can be entered by going through a wooden door, signing up, agreeing with some statement of faith or doctrine, being "confirmed" or "baptized" and whatever. Works. For way too many, this becomes the reason they think they are saved. Of course, the entrance is not works at all, as Paul so eloquently writes in Ephesians 2:1-10, (one of, if not the most favorite passages for this old man.)

That is why Abraham and all the O.T. saints are "in" the kingdom of God despite the rantings of the dispensationalists. I always define my stand in Christ this way, "My feet are firmly planted in the kingdom of God by faith." I never use the term "church." This is a good time to differentiate the two terms. Nothing wrong with the term "church" as long as people know what we are talking about... the building, members, those who attend, a denomination, - or those in the kingdom of God through faith.