

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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MORE ABOUT EKKLESIA

The word *ekklesia* was certainly quite prominent and in common use in the Greek-speaking world long before the Lord Jesus spoke of building His *ekklesia*. *The Septuagint Version* of the Hebrew Old Testament was translated in the third century before the birth of Christ. The noun *ekklesia* is found at least 80 times in this version, and the verb *ekklesiazō* occurs seven times. This Greek version of the Old Testament was made for the Greek-speaking Jews at Alexandria, so that they could read their Bible in the language that was spoken among the diaspora, the exiles who had lost an accurate knowledge of the Hebrew language.

The word *ekklesia* was common among them, and its elements were easily understood; therefore, it was used by the Septuagint translators to express the Hebrew word *qahal*. This was good translating as demonstrated by the fact that the Holy Spirit did the same when He inspired the writer of Hebrews to use *ekklesia* as a rendering for *qahal* in Hebrews 2: 12. In ancient Israel the word *qahal* was always used of companies, large or small, that had a position out of God. The "**great qahal**" which Christ promised to build "out of himself" will be composed of every public servant in Israel. This waits for the coming of the kingdom of God.

In Athens the famous *ekklesia* which was instituted by Solon, often spoken of as "the assembly of all the citizens," was composed of "assemblymen" who were called *ekklesiastes*. The hall in which they met was called and *ekklesiasterion*, and the payment received by the Athenian citizens who sat in the *ekklesia* was called *ekklesiastikos*. (See *Liddell-Scott Greek-English Lexicon* for confirmation of the facts set forth above.)

In a period of acute economic distress, Solon had been elected archon and given absolute powers to initiate economic and constitutional reforms. He reorganized the popular assembly, giving to these men powers and positions that belonged to him, and thus laid the foundations of Athenian democracy. These men had their positions out of

Solon, were nicknamed "Solons," a term still applied to members of a legislative body. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says: "As a governing body the Ecclesia died when Athens became a *civitas libera* under Roman protection."

These facts show the multiple and prevalent use of the word *ekklesia* in the six centuries before the birth of Christ. It was a common word; therefore, the twelve disciples knew quite well what He meant when He spoke of building His *ekklesia*. We today will never understand it until we break with the tradition that the *ekklesia* of which He spoke is the institutional church in its various historical manifestations.

Holding fast and making viable our belief in the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures we can declare that a prophet of God, David by name, spoke as he was moved by the Spirit of God (2 Pet. 1:21) and wrote concerning the Messiah: "**I will declare Thy name unto My brethren: in the midst of the *qahal* will I praise Thee**" (Psalm 22:22).

More than a thousand years later another holy man of God (Paul) desiring to establish a truth that he was unfolding was led by the Spirit to call forth David's words, using the word "saying" as a preface: "Saying **I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the *ekklesia* will I sing praise unto Thee**" (Heb. 2:12).

From this it can be seen that if the word *ekklesia* does not mean the same as the word *qahal*, then Paul misrepresented David by declaring that he said something which He did not say at all.

The word *qahal* is found 123 times in the Old Testament. It is translated "assembly" 17 times; "company" 17; "congregation" 86; and "multitude" 3. (See Eng. Heb. Con., page 1094. Strong's word number 6951). This indicates that we have 123 opportunities to discover what *qahal* means based upon its usage in the Old Testament. And if its meaning cannot be found from these occurrences, then there is simply no way it can be found.

If each one of these 123 occurrences of the noun *qahal*, also the 39 occurrences of the verb, are carefully examined in their contexts, it will be seen that everyone of them is related to representative, governmental bodies. The *qahal* had to do with the administrative processes of the people of Israel. It was always composed of out-positioned men. This can be demonstrated by a look at certain passages.

In Gen. 28:3 it was Isaac's expressed desire that God Almighty would multiply Jacob so that his descendants would become a *qahal* of peoples. (The plural "peoples" should be noted here.) This desire of Isaac was in harmony with the divine promise

made to Abraham, that one nation should have a position out of God and be a channel of blessing to all nations (Gen. 12:2,3). This truth is reiterated in Gen. 35:11 where God declares that "a nation, even a *qahal* of nations "would come from Jacob; a promise which Jacob repeats in Gen. 48:4: "I will multiply thee, and I will make of thee a *qahal* of peoples." Thus we see that a nation is to be given a special mediatorial position out of God, and so becomes an "out-positioned" nation to be used of God. A nation in this position could well be described by the word *ekklesia* which, from its very elements, means "outpositioned" (See Issue No. **SB097**).

In Gen. 49:6 we find that the tribal council of Simeon and Levi are spoken of as being their *qahal* ("assembly" in KJV). This was the governing body of these two tribes. This body appears to have been responsible for some very cruel acts, and Jacob asked that his honor be not linked up with the acts of this *qahal*. This is about the same as if the President should not agree with some act of the Congress and ask that he be not in any way related to it.

In Exo. 12:6 we are told that the Passover lamb was to be killed by decree of the whole assembly (*qahal*) of the congregation (*edah*) of Israel. At this time the people of Israel were well organized and disciplined as can be seen in the facts that it was their elders (representatives) that stood before Pharaoh. These elders formed the *qahal* (out-positioned ones) in Israel, and it was their duty to kill by decree the passover lamb.

In Exodus 6:14-27 the "heads" of each house are listed. A "head" had his position out of the family and he represented and stood for every member of the family. Individually they were "elders" and collectively they were a *qahal*, or, as a Greek would say it, and *ekklesia*. At this point an illustration may be helpful.

In the State of California, at certain times each year it is necessary to assemble the people of California in the state capital, Sacramento. The times for such assemblies are set by law, but the Governor has power to call for such an assembly when need may so require. Those who make up this assembly are called assemblymen. These are men who have their positions out of the people of their district. They are duly elected representatives, and when they are officially assembled in Sacramento, then all the people of this state are assembled there in the persons of their chosen representatives.

The reader will have noticed what appears to be a redundancy in the above paragraph. This is intentional for the purpose of emphasis. If the above paragraph had been written in the first century A.D. the word *ekklesia* could have been used in place of "assembly" and the verb *ekklesiazō* could have been used for every occurrence of "assemble." This would have been "good Greek," using words from everyday speech, and would have been readily understood by all who heard or read it. In view of this, we need to ask, "What did the disciples understand when the Lord spoke of building His own *ekklesia*?"

Every ancient king, monarch, or potentate had his own *ekklesia*. If he had a company of men, large or small, who had their standing and position out of him, then they were his outpositioned ones, that is, his *ekklesia*. Today, in our own country, we would speak of these as the President's Cabinet.

The common use of the word *ekklesia* and what it signified is helpfully set forth in Acts 19. The word is found in verses 32, 39, and 41, where it is translated "assembly" in each occurrence. The events described took place in the city of Ephesus.

Two important points that must not be missed in this portion is the presence of the chiefs (*Asiarchs*), some of whom were friendly to Paul (19:31), and the fact that these events took place in close proximity to "the theatre," the usual place for official meeting. These "Asiarchs" were the men from each city who elected a representative annually, an honor that was eagerly sought. These special Asiarchs who had their position out of the body of Asiarchs were meeting in Ephesus when the riot described here took place.

This riot described was started by one Demetrius, a silversmith, who fanned a spark into a great conflagration. His fellow silversmiths became filled with anger and great confusion, and not knowing what to do, they rushed into the theatre where the Asiarchs were assembled. Lacking someone to prosecute they laid hold of Gaius and Aristarchus, fellow travelers of Paul, and pushed them into the building. Once inside, some cried one thing and some another, by which the *ekklesia* was confused, not knowing what they wanted or why the mob had come to them (v. 32). Demetrius had started something that he could not control, so the mob he had led to the theatre stood and cried for two hours: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," an exhibition of typical mob psychology. It was a foolish demonstration making no sense, having no object, and without any purpose.

When their emotions were drained, the "town clerk" took charge. He was the chief official in Ephesus, and his appearance brought prompt silence. He pointed out the impropriety of the mob's actions, declared that they had brought their complaints to the wrong *ekklesia*, and placed all in legal jeopardy, by forcing the *ekklesia* to deal with matters that did not concern it. Thus a lawful *ekklesia* could become unlawful if it dealt with matters not under its jurisdiction. Having so declared the town clerk dismissed the *ekklesia*. This was not the mob, but the *ekklesia* that was in session in the theatre to whom the mob had wrongfully taken their complaint.

Worthy of note here are two remarks by Karl Ludwig Schmidt: "*Ekklesia* cannot be translated, it must be taken over." "It is desirable to establish the exact meaning of

ekklesia, because this is a point at which linguistic accuracy makes a real contribution to Biblical theology. "

End Issue No. SB141