

Ekklesia

The Cambridge Companion to the Bible [p. 474, Cambridge University Press] explains how the Greek word "ekklesia" is used in the Bible:

In Greek culture, the term *ekklesia* means an assembly of persons convened for political or entertainment purposes. Among Greek speaking Jews, it came to mean the gathering of the covenant community in any place for purposes of information, instruction, or worship, as in Deut. 31:30, I Sam. 17:47, and I Kings 8:14. The early Christian community took over this term as a group designation, as is apparent in I Cor. 11:18; 14:4, 19, 28, 35. It is usually translated "church." There is direct evidence that originally the "assembly" took place in private homes (Rom. 16:5, I Cor. 16:19, Phil. 2, Col. 4:15). In Acts (14:23) and in the letters of Paul (I Cor. 16:1) rules are laid down to be observed in each of the individual "assemblies."

The assemblies of Christians throughout certain metropolitan areas or districts are referred to collectively as "the churches of ..." (Gal. 1:2, 22; 2 Cor. 8:1). Occasionally, Paul uses the term in a comprehensive way to refer to the whole body of God's new people (as in I Cor. 10:32, 12:28; Phil.

3:6; and probably Gal. 1:13). Even when he addresses the "church of God," he sometimes adds "which is at," followed by the name of the city or province (2 Cor. 1:1, I Thess. 2:14). The blend of local assemblies with comprehensive membership of God's people is explicit in I Cor. 1:2, where the letter is addressed to "the church of God which is at Corinth" but also to "all those who in every place call on the name of the Lord."

In the later writings attributed to Paul, *ekklesia* has come to mean the whole body of Christians, as in Eph. 1:22. Accordingly, the church is described in structural, organizational terms in Eph. 2:19-22, where the metaphors used are those of hierarchy, foundation, and temple. Similarly universal in implication is the most familiar reference to *ekklesia* in the gospel tradition, Matt. 16:16: "On this rock I will build my church." The generalized force of the term "church" is highlighted by the description of the totality of Palestinian Christians in the period of Pentecost as "the church throughout Judea and Galilee and Samaria (Acts 8:31). What began as a designation for a local fellowship of Christians had become by the end of the first century a title for the body of believers across the Roman empire.

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