

## **ἘΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, PART ONE: THE CLASSIFICATION OF EACH USE OF ἘΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ IN THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT**

Ἐκκλησία is the Greek word which is commonly translated “church” in English Bibles, but ἐκκλησία is more properly translated *gathering, meeting, congregation, or assembly*.

This study covers 118 uses of the word ἐκκλησία in the Greek text of the New Testament (including three uses in the unattributed postscripts of Paul’s epistles). A separate study [*The Concept of Ἐκκλησία in the Greek New Testament*] will examine many other instances in the New Testament which allude to the general idea of the ἐκκλησία without actually using the word.

The basic meaning and usage of ἐκκλησία in first century Greek speaking culture falls within the following range:

- (1.) The word ἐκκλησία was used to refer to a gathering, a meeting, a congregation, an assembly of persons.
- (2.) Though the word ἐκκλησία had several specialized uses for specific gatherings (such as certain informal spontaneous impromptu gatherings, certain formal planned regular gatherings, or certain official required institutional gatherings), nevertheless these specialized uses never strayed from the sense of
  - (a.) an actual gathering, a meeting, a congregation, an assembly of persons together at one location, or
  - (b.) that group of persons who at some time made up such an actual gathering at some location, or who commonly made up an actual gathering at various times and (possibly) various places.
- (3.) Hence
  - (a.) ἐκκλησία was never used to refer to a categorization or classification of persons into an imaginary group based on certain things which they all had in common, but who never actually all gathered together at one time and place (i.e. ἐκκλησία was not a synonym for an abstract category or class of persons such as all persons who have ever been president of the USA, but who have never all gathered together at one place at one time as former presidents.)
  - (b.) ἐκκλησία was never used to refer to an abstract categorization or classification of separate groups of persons into a larger group which never actually gathers together as one combined group at one time and place (i.e. an ἐκκλησία of ἐκκλησῆαι (gathering of gatherings, or assembly of assemblies) can only be several separate groups which not only gather as individual groups at separate times and places, but which also gather together as one combined group of groups at one time and place),
  - (c.) ἐκκλησία was never used to refer to a community which loosely mingles, but which never actually gathers as one group.
  - (d.) ἐκκλησία was never used to refer to a specific place at which persons gather, such as a physical building (i.e. ἐκκλησία is never a synonym for a “synagogue” or “church” building, a hall, or a meeting place of any kind).

In other words, the meaning of ἐκκλησία is rather narrow: if there is no actual gathering of certain persons at a certain time and place, then there is no ἐκκλησία, and the word ἐκκλησία does not refer to any more than (1) this gathering of persons at a certain time and place, or (2) those persons who make up this gathering.

Christians commonly assign special senses to the English word *church* which cannot be reconciled to the normal usage of the Greek word ἐκκλησία. Though the Scriptures do indeed use the term ἐκκλησία in specialized senses, the Scriptures do not use the term ἐκκλησία in a sense which is contrary to the normal usage of the term ἐκκλησία in first century Greek speaking culture. The difficulty here comes from centuries of reading a special sense into a word such that an ordinary sense in certain contexts may seem odd and extraordinary to our mis-trained understanding. This can be compared to the person who has regularly heard and read the word *inflation* used as a synonym for higher prices, so that when he hears that inflation is actually an increase in the money supply (which devalues the currency, which in turn causes a rise in prices), he is incredulous and scornful, discrediting the source for its impudence in imposing this “new” meaning on the word *inflation* – though in actuality it is not the source, but he himself who is imposing a new meaning.

A word should be taken to mean what it normally means unless there is sound evidence to prove otherwise. Before we can ever prove some special sense for ἐκκλησία – a sense which is not in agreement with normal word usage – we must first find specific examples of usage which clearly demonstrate this special sense. We cannot simply adopt or invent a special sense for the word, find some plausible way to read this meaning into certain passages, and then act as if our special usage has been proved – in essence demanding special treatment for our own invention. We cannot simply assert that the word “xyz” means *a six-legged bird*, then force that meaning into usages of the word “xyz,” and finally argue that because we can find or invent some way to make this meaning somehow fit these usages, therefore this must be the meaning. In other words, we have no warrant to conveniently read our own special meaning into a word when a meaning which falls within the normal range of usage for the word fits the passage.

If we find a usage of ἐκκλησία in the New Testament which, in its context, will not fit within the normal range of usage for ἐκκλησία, (i.e. it cannot refer to an actual gathering, or to the persons who make up the actual gathering), then we may have warrant to discern from the context some special sense. Otherwise, we have no warrant, and any attempt to substitute a special sense into the passage amounts to adding to and taking away from the Word of God (Deuteronomy 4:2; 5:32; 12:32; 17:20; 28:14; Joshua 1:7; 23:6; 2 Kings 22:2; Proverbs 4:26-27; 30:6; Matthew 15:3-9; Mark 7:6-9,13; Luke 11:52; 2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:3-5; 2 Peter 1:16; 2:21; Revelation 22:18-19).

We will discuss briefly in this article some of these special senses which Christians commonly assign to the English word *church* (and indirectly impose on the Greek word ἐκκλησία), but we will discuss these special senses more extensively in a following article [*The Meaning of Ἐκκλησία in the Greek New Testament*]. Our point in this article is simply to display and demonstrate that the common usage of ἐκκλησία in the New Testament falls within the normal range of usage for the word in Greek speaking culture.

It has not been an easy task to classify each and every use of ἐκκλησία in the New Testament. Though I have carefully examined each use of ἐκκλησία in its context, and I have carefully translated into English each text from the Greek text, this does not guarantee that I have it quite right. I have developed my own system of classifications, but I have done this in light of the attempts of others to classify many or all uses of ἐκκλησία. Discerning the various classifications of meaning is difficult. Discerning which sense is meant for certain texts is even more difficult. Several notes indicate alternative classifications. Some texts belong under more than one classification, so several notes indicate dual classification. A few texts are tricky – without careful attention, a portion of the context might distract someone from discerning just how the word ἐκκλησία is actually being used. I have worked on this project over a span of twenty-five years, regularly reviewing, revising, and reclassifying. I have carefully reconsidered each text dozens of times. This is a condensation of all of my studies on the *usage* of ἐκκλησία in the New Testament. My studies on the *meaning* and on the *concept* of ἐκκλησία will be published separately.

## 1.0 — SINGULAR ἘΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ FOR A SPECIFIC LOCAL GATHERING (50 USES)

### 1.1 — Singular Ἐκκλησία for a Local Gathering in an Identified Private House (5 Uses)

Comment: Besides a general public gathering in Jerusalem with the apostles at Solomon's porch (Acts 2:46; 5:20,25,42, compare Matthew 21:23; Luke 21:37; 22:53; 24:53; John 10:23; 18:20; Acts 1:14; 2:1; 3:1,11; 5:12), the only picture we have of where the ἐκκλησία gathered is in the private homes of individuals (Acts 2:46; 5:42). How to understand the general gathering in Jerusalem will be discussed under Section 3.0.

#### • 1.1.1 — Romans 16:3,5

Greet Priscilla and Aquila ... and greet the gathering which meets at their house [τὴν κατ' οἶκον αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίαν]

Comment: Priscilla and Aquila apparently lived near Rome at this time.

#### • 1.1.2 — Romans 16:23

Gaius, my host, and host of the whole gathering [τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὅλης] [at Corinth], greets †you...

Comment: Paul had baptized Gaius (1 Corinthians 1:14). The whole gathering at Corinth was hosted by Gaius, which implies that they all gathered in one place at his house. This text appears to contradict the theory that there were several separate house-cells at Corinth which collectively were called, in the singular, "the ἐκκλησία—gathering."

(This may also belong under Section 1.3 below.)

#### • 1.1.3 — 1 Corinthians 16:19

... Aquila and Priscilla greet †you much in the Lord, along with the gathering which meets at their house [σὺν τῇ κατ' οἶκον αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίᾳ].

Comment: Aquila and Priscilla apparently lived near Ephesus at this time.

#### • 1.1.4 — Colossians 4:15

... Nymphas, and the gathering which meets at his house [τὴν κατ' οἶκον αὐτοῦ ἐκκλησίαν].

Comment: Nymphas apparently lived near Colossae.

#### • 1.1.5 — Philemon 1:1-2

... to Philemon ... and to the gathering which meets at †your [Philemon's] house [τῇ κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ]

Comment: Philemon apparently lived near Colossae.

Comment: If Nymphas (Colossians 4:15) and Philemon (Philemon 1:2) both lived near Colossae at the same time, and if Christians gathered at each person's house, and if each gathering is called an ἐκκλησία, these facts would then seem to undermine the theory that the singular ἐκκλησία is properly applied only to the collective city-wide gathering, not to the separate house-cells in or near a city.

[See also Hebrews 2:12 under 6.1.]

### 1.2 — Singular Ἐκκλησία for an Unidentified Local Gathering (3 Uses)

#### • 1.2.1 — 3 John 1:6

who have testified to †your [Gaius'] love before the gathering [ἐκκλησίας] ...

(This may also belong under 1.4 below.)

#### • 1.2.2 — 3 John 1:9

I have written to the gathering [τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ] ...

#### • 1.2.3 — 3 John 1:10

... and he [Diotrephes] is forbidding [/*hindering*] those who are desiring to receive the brethren, and he casts them out of the gathering [ἐκ τῆς ἐκκλησίας].

### 1.3 — Singular Ἐκκλησία for a Local Gathering in an Identified City (24 Uses)

Whenever a specific city is mentioned as the location of a gathering, then ἐκκλησία is used in the singular. Scripture never speaks of the plural ἐκκλησίαι—gatherings of a city. However, when Scripture speaks of larger regions full of cities, it always speaks of the plural ἐκκλησίαι—gatherings. Some have speculated that in many cities the ἐκκλησία must have become too large to meet in one place, so the ἐκκλησία must have been divided into several separate house-cells which collectively made up the one city-wide ἐκκλησία—gathering. This has led to further speculations, such as the existence of a pooled eldership which circulated among the house-cells within a city. But there is no conclusive evidence for a city-wide ἐκκλησία—gathering made up of separate house-cells, there are several impracticalities which emerge, and there are other reasonable explanations for what we do find in Scripture. So without clear evidence or deductive inference for the singular ἐκκλησία—gathering made up of several separate cells, we must hold to the simplest explanation. (See comments on the Jerusalem gathering under Section 3.0)

● **1.3.1 — Acts 11:26**

... he [Barnabas] brought him [Saul] to [Antioch](#). And it happened that for a whole year a number of them [were assembled together with them in the gathering](#) [συναχθῆναι ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ]. And they taught a sufficient /[considerable] crowd. And the disciples were first called Christians [at Antioch](#).

● **1.3.2 — Acts 13:1**

Now there were certain prophets and teachers [at Antioch among the existing gathering](#) [κατὰ τὴν οὖσαν ἐκκλησίαν] ...

● **1.3.3 — Acts 14:23**

And when they [Paul and Barnabas and their entourage] had polled /[canvassed /evaluated] for elders [in each gathering](#) [κατ' ἐκκλησίαν] /[according to each gathering /gathering] by gathering] [\[in Lystra and Derbe \(14:6,8,20\), Iconium \(14:1,19\), and Antioch of Pisidia \(13:14; 14:19\)\]](#), and when they had prayed, coupled with fastings, then they entrusted them for safe keeping to the Lord in Whom they had believed.

Comment: This could also be listed under Section 2.3.

● **1.3.4 — Acts 14:26-27**

And from there [Attalia] they sailed to [Antioch](#), ... Now when they had arrived, and [had assembled together the gathering](#) [συναγαγόντες τὴν ἐκκλησίαν], they reported /[announced] as many things as God had caused to happen by them, and that He had opened a door of faith to the foreign-nationals.

Comment: Apparently the gathering at Antioch all gathered in one place, which appears to contradict the assertion by some that it consisted of separate house-cells which were collectively called “the gathering.”

● **1.3.5 — Acts 15:3**

those who ... had been sent forward with all necessary assistance [by the gathering](#) [ὕπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας] [\[at Antioch, 14:26\]](#) ...

● **1.3.6 — Acts 18:22**

And when he had landed at [Caesarea](#), had gone up, and had greeted [the gathering](#) [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν], he went down to Antioch.

Comment: It appears that the Caesarean gathering was all gathered in one place, not divided into separate house-cells.

Since the passage refers to going up, then coming down – a general expression for visiting Jerusalem – some believe it refers to visiting the Jerusalem gathering, not Caesarea.

● **1.3.7 — Acts 20:17**

... when he had sent a messenger to [Ephesus](#), he summoned to himself the elders [of the gathering](#) [τῆς ἐκκλησίας].

● **1.3.8 — Acts 20:28**

Therefore, take heed to  $\ddagger$ yourself, and to all members of the little flock [among which](#) little flock [the Holy Spirit for His own use has placed  \$\ddagger\$ you as overseers](#), in order to shepherd [the gathering](#) [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν] of God [\[at Ephesus\]](#) which Ephesian gathering [singular] he has purchased /[acquired /obtained] for Himself through the blood of His own Son.

Comment: The text speaks of a single little flock at Ephesus, not of separate house-cells within the little flock.

Notice that this text speaks of Jesus dying for that local gathering. If Christ died for all of the elect of all time everywhere, then He died for every portion of those who are elect, no matter how that portion is identified, and so He died for each local gathering, including the Ephesian local gathering.

● **1.3.9 — Romans 16:1**

... a servant [belonging to the gathering](#) [τῆς ἐκκλησίας] [which is at Cenchrea](#)

**[Romans 16:23 (listed under 1.1) may also belong here.]**

● **1.3.10 — Romans 16:27\* — [\*POSTSCRIPT]**

[ ... a servant [of the gathering](#) [τῆς ... ἐκκλησίας] [at Cenchrea](#) ]

● **1.3.11 — 1 Corinthians 1:2**

[To the gathering](#) [τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ] of God which is [at Corinth](#), to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours.

Comment: The words “with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” may be taken to imply that there were many other believers who gathered in different places for fellowship, but who did not actually constitute an ἐκκλησία—gathering. Or it may

refer to ἐκκλησία—gatherings elsewhere in Achaia, or even more generally to believers everywhere who will eventually receive a copy and read this epistle. Compare 2 Corinthians 1:1.

● **1.3.12 — 2 Corinthians 1:1**

... [to the gathering](#) [τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ] of God which is [at Corinth](#), along with all those saints who are in all Achaia.

Comment: The general address to saints in Achaia may be a general reference to believers in the area who have not actually constituted ἐκκλησία—gatherings. Compare 1 Corinthians 1:2.

● **1.3.13 — Colossians 4:16**

... this epistle, cause<sup>‡</sup> that it should be read also in [the gathering](#) [ἐν τῇ ... ἐκκλησίᾳ] [of the Laodiceans](#) ...

● **1.3.14 — 1 Thessalonians 1:1**

... to [the gathering](#) [τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ] [of Thessalonians](#) in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ ...

● **1.3.15 — 2 Thessalonians 1:1**

... [to the gathering](#) [τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ] [of Thessalonians](#) in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...

● **1.3.16 — 2 Timothy 4:22\* — [\*POSTSCRIPT]**

[To Timothy ..., chosen first overseer [of the Ephesian gathering](#) [τῆς ... ἐκκλησίας] ...]

● **1.3.17 — Titus 3:15\* — [\*POSTSCRIPT]**

[To Titus, chosen first overseer [of the Cretan gathering](#) [τῆς ... ἐκκλησίας] ...]

● **1.3.18 — Revelation 2:1**

To the messenger [/angel] [of the gathering](#) [τῆς ... ἐκκλησίας] [at Ephesus](#)...

● **1.3.19 — Revelation 2:8**

... to the messenger [/angel] [of the gathering](#) [τῆς ... ἐκκλησίας] [at Smyrna](#) ...

● **1.3.20 — Revelation 2:12**

... to the messenger [/angel] [of the gathering](#) [τῆς ... ἐκκλησίας] [at Pergamus](#) ...

● **1.3.21 — Revelation 2:18**

... to the messenger [/angel] [of the gathering](#) [τῆς ... ἐκκλησίας] [at Thyatira](#) ...

● **1.3.22 — Revelation 3:1**

... to the messenger [/angel] [of the gathering](#) [τῆς ... ἐκκλησίας] [at Sardis](#) ...

● **1.3.23 — Revelation 3:7**

... to the messenger [/angel] [of the gathering](#) [τῆς ... ἐκκλησίας] [at Philadelphia](#) ...

● **1.3.24 — Revelation 3:14**

... to the messenger [/angel] [of the gathering](#) [τῆς ... ἐκκλησίας] [at Laodicea](#) ...

Comment: The idea that these “angels” were angelic heavenly creatures is not reasonable – Jesus doesn’t send handwritten letters to angels.

The angel or messenger of the ancient Jewish synagogue was the one who regularly read Scripture to the synagogue congregation (compare Acts 13:15,27; 15:21; 2 Corinthians 3:14-15). The ἐκκλησία was not modeled after the synagogue, but the functional language may be borrowed here. The messenger was represented by a star (Revelation 1:20) which might be taken as one who brings heavenly light, which the reader of Scripture certainly does. (The star might also represent the flame of each oil lampstand. The lampstand of the tabernacle and the temple burned oil which represented revelation, illumination, and divination by the Spirit of God.) These seven epistles may be understood as addressed by Jesus to the reader of each gathering (compare Revelation 1:3; Acts 15:31; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; 1 Timothy 4:13). The reader serves as – guess what – a messenger delivering the Word of God to the congregation.

Each epistle is addressed to a singular “you,” which is often taken as referring to this “angel,” but may actually mean the whole gathering considered as a unit. The refrain is “hear what the Spirit is saying to the gatherings” not “hear what the Spirit is saying to the angels of the gatherings.”

## 1.4 — Singular Ἐκκλησία in Directives for a Local Gathering When It Actually Meets (7 Uses)

These instances are most probably using ἐκκλησία to mean the actual physical gathering of persons in one place at Corinth (compare Section 6.2), not just the identifiable members of this group considered apart from the actual meeting. (Compare the directives for a generic and hypothetical local gathering under Section 1.6.)

All of the following directives to the Corinthian gathering seem to imply that there is only one gathering, not many separate house-cell gatherings. However, these directives would be understood as applicable, not only at Corinth, but generically in any gathering, wherever that gathering may be located.

● **1.4.1 — 1 Corinthians 11:18**

... I am hearing there begin to form divisions among <sup>‡</sup>you [at <sup>‡</sup>your coming together in the gathering](#) [ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ] [\[when you are assembled together in one place at Corinth\]](#) ...

[1 Corinthians 12:28 (under 1.5) may also belong here.]

• 1.4.2 — 1 Corinthians 14:4

... he who is prophesying is edifying the gathering [ἐκκλησίαν] [when you are assembled together in one place at Corinth].

• 1.4.3 — 1 Corinthians 14:5

... he should be interpreting, in order that the gathering [ἡ ἐκκλησία] may receive edifying [when you are assembled together in one place at Corinth].

• 1.4.4 — 1 Corinthians 14:12

... †you yourselves be† seeking the spirituals for the edifying of the gathering [τῆς ἐκκλησίας] [when you are assembled together in one place at Corinth] in order that †you may be abounding [excelling].

• 1.4.5 — 1 Corinthians 14:19

Nevertheless, in the gathering [ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ] [when you are assembled together in one place at Corinth] I desire to speak five words with my intellect in order that I may instruct others ...

• 1.4.6 — 1 Corinthians 14:28

... let him maintain silence in the gathering [ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ] [when you are assembled together in one place at Corinth] ...

• 1.4.7 — 1 Corinthians 14:35

... it is shameful for women to be speaking in the gathering [ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ] [when you are assembled together in one place at Corinth].

[3 John 1:6 (under 1.2) may also belong here.]

## 1.5 — Singular Ἐκκλησία for a Local Gathering Considered as a Group (5 Uses)

These instances are most probably using ἐκκλησία to mean those who come together and constitute the gathering from time to time, not the actual physical gathering itself.

All of the following directives to the Corinthian gathering seem to imply that there is only one gathering, not many separate house-cell gatherings. However, these directives would be understood as applicable, not only at Corinth, but generically in any gathering, wherever that gathering may be located.

• 1.5.1 — 1 Corinthians 6:4

... are you then appointing [seating] as judges these unbelievers who are of no merit among the gathering [ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ] [at Corinth]?

• 1.5.2 — 1 Corinthians 10:32

Become† without cause for stumbling [offence], both to the Jews [at Corinth], and to the Greeks [at Corinth], and to the gathering [τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ] of God [at Corinth].

Comment: The plural “Jews” and the plural “Greeks” is balanced with the generic “gathering”. This could also be a generic use, Section 4.

• 1.5.3 — 1 Corinthians 11:22

For it can not be that †you do not possess *houses* for eating and for drinking, can it? Or are †you intending to demean [think down upon] the gathering [τῆς ἐκκλησίας] of God [at Corinth]? And are †you intending to humiliate [put to shame] those who do not possess houses, food, or drink?

Comment: Paul is not asking if they despise the physical gathering, but if they despise the persons who constitute this gathering. Notice that though this passage clearly implies that they gathered in a private house, just as they had their own separate houses to eat and drink in, nevertheless ἐκκλησία is not used here (nor anywhere else) to mean the place of gathering, but it is used here to mean the persons who gathered.

• 1.5.4 — 1 Corinthians 12:28

And God has indeed placed for His own use these spirituals in the gathering [ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ] [at Corinth], firstly, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after these, effects of power [miracles]; next, gifts of healings; responses to need [helps/assistances]; guidances [abilities to lead/steerings]; kinds of languages.

Comment: This entire passage (Chapter 12, and particularly 12:27-30) cannot be “universal and invisible” because these are necessarily observable phenomena in specific locations. These gifts are manifested in each local gathering. The apostles, being direct representatives of Christ the Head, are members of each and every locally assembled gathering or ἐκκλησία. Hence this passage brings together both the mystical [see Section 5] and the specific local elements of ἐκκλησία.

(This text may belong under Section 1.4.)

• 1.5.5 — 1 Corinthians 14:23

Therefore, when the whole gathering [ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη] [at Corinth] should come together at the same place ...

Comment: This instance refers to the actual gathering together at one time and place of the gathering – those persons who gather or assemble. It is difficult to understand this text as referring to a physical assembling of constituent house-cells into one collective gathering.

## 1.6 — Singular Ἐκκλησία for a Generic and Hypothetical Local Gathering (6 Uses)

These six instances give hypothetical directives which are meant generically for any local gathering wherever it may be found. These directives may be applied to any specific gathering. They are like the instances above for Corinth, except that they are not directed toward one specific local gathering, but to any local gathering. (Compare Section 1.4.)

(All six passages listed below could also be listed under Section 4.)

### • • 1.6.1-2 — *Matthew 18:17 (twice)*

But if he should refuse to listen to them, then tell it to the gathering [τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ] [hypothetical, referring to any specific local assembled gathering]. But if he also should refuse to listen to the gathering [τῆς ἐκκλησίας] [hypothetical, referring to any specific local assembled gathering], then let him be to †you just as the foreign-national [=unbeliever], and the taxgatherer [=notorious sinner, ranked in Scripture with extortionists, crooks, adulterers, and harlots].

### • 1.6.3 — *1 Timothy 3:5*

But if someone has not come to know enough to guide his own house, then how shall he care for a gathering [ἐκκλησίας] [hypothetical, referring to any specific local assembled gathering] of God?

### • 1.6.4 — *1 Timothy 3:15*

... in order that †you should be informed just how it is necessary to be regularly conducting oneself in a house of God [hypothetical, referring to any specific local assembled gathering], any one of which is a gathering [ἐκκλησία] of the ever-living God ...

Comment: Though this passage refers to the ἐκκλησία as a house, it does not mean a physical building where persons gather at a specific time and place, but it is using a figure or metaphor. This passage is plainly addressing what to do in a house of God – any specific local assembled gathering.

### • 1.6.5 — *1 Timothy 5:16*

... do not let the gathering [ἡ ἐκκλησία] [hypothetical, referring to any specific local assembled gathering] be burdened ...

Comment: This instance could be referring to the specific gathering at Ephesus where Timothy was located (though it would apply to all gatherings). However, Timothy was an evangelist – an apostolic assistant – and Paul more probably meant that this directive should be applied at any gathering where Timothy happened to minister under Paul's apostolic commission. Since the text is referring to the gathering as a group, not to the meeting of the group, the article is used.

### • 1.6.6 — *James 5:14*

... let him summon to himself the elders of the gathering [τῆς ἐκκλησίας] [hypothetical, referring to any specific local assembled gathering] and let them pray over him, having anointed him with olive oil in the name of the Lord,

Comment: James was writing to the twelve tribes scattered – that is, most probably to Jews scattered from Jerusalem due to persecution. So it is unlikely that this epistle is directed to one unknown single gathering which received this letter. Hence this must be understood as a general directive to be applied wherever there is a gathering. Since the text is referring to the gathering as a group, not to the the meeting of the group, the article is used.

## 2.0 — PLURAL ἘΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΙ FOR SPECIFIC AND GENERIC LOCAL GATHERINGS (38 USES)

### 2.1 — Plural Ἐκκλησία for Identifiable Regional Groupings of Local Gatherings (28 Uses)

Comment: When referring to regions, the Scriptures always use the plural ἐκκλησία—gatherings.

#### • 2.1.1 — Acts 9:31

Then, indeed, the gatherings [plural: αἱ ... ἐκκλησίαι] throughout the whole area of Judaea and Galilee and Samaria were experiencing [having] [plural: εἶχον] peace, while they were being built up [plural: οἰκοδομοῦμεναι] and were continuing [plural: πορευόμεναι] in the fear of the Lord. And they were increased [plural: ἐπληθύνοντο] in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Comment: Acts 8:1 describes the persecution against the singular ἐκκλησία—gathering at Jerusalem, which dispersed all except the apostles throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria. Here in 9:31, Galilee is added to Judaea and Samaria. Later, in Acts 11:19, the scattering is extended to Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch.

Comment: Some ancient Greek manuscripts have singulars instead of plurals:

Then, indeed, the gathering [singular: ἡ ... ἐκκλησία] throughout the whole {area} of Judaea and Galilee and Samaria was experiencing [having] [singular: εἶχεν] peace, while it was being built up [singular: οἰκοδομοῦμενη] and was continuing [singular: πορευόμενη] in the fear of the Lord. And it was increased [singular: ἐπληθύνετο] in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Plurals – “gatherings ... were experiencing ... were being built up ... were continuing ... they were increased” – are found in the vast majority of all manuscripts, including: uncials E08 (with slight variation), H014, L020, P025, 049, 056, 0142, selected minuscules 104, 326, 330, 436, 451, 614, 629, 630, 1241, 1505, 2127, 2412, 2492, 2495, Old Latin, Harkel Syriac, some Bohairic Coptic, Georgian, Byzantine Lectionaries, Chrysostom, Augustine.

Singulars – “gathering ... was experiencing ... was being built up ... was continuing ... it was increased” are found in a few manuscripts: papyri 74, uncials Aleph01, A02, B03, C04, Ψ044 (with slight variation), minuscules 5, 33 (apparently), 35 (with slight variation), 36, 81, 88, 94, 181, 242, 307, 322, 323, 453, 945, 1175, 1739, 1877, a few Byzantine manuscripts, Latin Vulgate, Peshitta Syriac (with slight variation), Sahidic Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Dionysius, Theophylact.

The use of plurals here would be thoroughly consistent with the usage of ἐκκλησία everywhere else in Scripture.

Some assert the use of singulars here could mean that the term ἐκκλησία is used to refer to a “region-wide (singular) church” made up of many (plural) “churches.” But the concept of “region-wide” cannot be fitted into the meaning of ἐκκλησία, which always referred to an actual gathering, or to those persons who made up an actual gathering. However, even if the singulars are correct, there are other possible interpretations. For example, the singulars could refer to the Jerusalem gathering. Acts 8:1 describes the persecution against the singular ἐκκλησία—gathering at Jerusalem, which dispersed all except the apostles throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria. Acts 9:31 adds Galilee to Judaea and Samaria. This passage would then belong under Section 3 below.

Since

- (1) the whole idea of the “region-wide” interpretation goes contrary to the meaning and usage of ἐκκλησία everywhere else;
- (2) there are other possible interpretations of the singular which do not disagree with the meaning and usage of ἐκκλησία everywhere else;
- (3) the manuscript evidence is by no means certain,

there is therefore no cause for creating here a special sense for ἐκκλησία, namely, a larger Platonic or idealistic and spiritualized “gathering” of smaller actual gatherings – a “gathering” which is in no sense a gathering because it never in any sense – not even mentally or imaginatively – gathers.

If singular, this passage may belong under 4.1, and if plural, this passage may belong under 4.2.

#### • 2.1.2 — Acts 15:41

And he [Paul (with Silas)] was going through [the regions of] Syria and Cilicia, strengthening [confirming] the gatherings [τὰς ἐκκλησίας].

#### • 2.1.3 — Acts 16:1,3-5

Then he arrived at Derbe and Lystra... in those regions [of Lycaonia 14:6]... they were traveling through the cities ... Therefore, indeed, the gatherings [αἱ ... ἐκκλησίαι] were being strengthened in the faith, and were greatly increasing in number day by day.

#### • 2.1.4 — Romans 16:4

... to whom not only I myself give thanks, but also all those gatherings [πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι] from among the foreign-nationals.

#### • 2.1.5 — Romans 16:16

... The gatherings [αἱ ἐκκλησίαι] of Christ [in the region of Achaia] greet †you.

#### • 2.1.6 — 1 Corinthians 16:1



... just as I have ordered the gatherings [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] of the [region of] Galatia, in this same way †you yourselves also perform the collection for the saints.

● **2.1.7 — 1 Corinthians 16:19**

The gatherings [αἱ ἐκκλησίαι] of [the region of] Asia greet †you...

● **2.1.8 — 2 Corinthians 8:1**

... the grace of God which has been bestowed upon the gatherings [ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] of [the region of] Macedonia;

● **2.1.9 — 2 Corinthians 8:18**

... the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the gatherings [διὰ πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν] [of the region of Macedonia, compare 8.1]

Comment: If this text is not limited to the region of Macedonia, then it may belong in the next Section, 2.2.

● **2.1.10 — 2 Corinthians 8:19**

... who also had been chosen by the gatherings [ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν] [of the region of Macedonia, compare 8.1] to be our traveling companion ...

Comment: If this text is not limited to the region of Macedonia, then it may belong in the next Section, 2.2.

Comment: More than one gathering chose in concert together.

● **2.1.11 — 2 Corinthians 8:23**

... our brethren: they are those sent on a mission from the gatherings [ἐκκλησιῶν] [of the region of Macedonia, compare 8.1] ...

Comment: If this text is not limited to the region of Macedonia, then it may belong in the next Section, 2.2.

● **2.1.12 — 2 Corinthians 8:24**

... show † to them the demonstration of †your love and of our boastings concerning †you in the presence of the gatherings [εἰς πρόσωπον τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν] [of the region of Macedonia, compare 8.1].

Comment: If this text is not limited to the region of Macedonia, then it may belong in the next Section, 2.2.

● **2.1.13 — Galatians 1:2**

... to the gatherings [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] of [the region of] Galatia:

● **2.1.14 — Galatians 1:22**

but I was unknown by face to the gatherings [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] of [the region of] Judaea which are in Christ.

● **2.1.15 — 1 Thessalonians 2:14**

... †you yourselves, brethren, became imitators of the gatherings [τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν] of God in [the region of] Judaea which are in Christ Jesus ...

Comment: The singular is used to refer to the city of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1; 11:22; 15:4), but the plural is used to refer to the region of Judaea (Acts 9:31; Galatians 1:22; First Thessalonians 2:14). Compare Acts 8:1; 9:31.

● **2.1.16 — Revelation 1:4**

... to the seven gatherings [ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις] which are in the [region of] Asia ...

● **2.1.17 — Revelation 1:11**

... write † what †you see onto a scroll, and send † the scroll to the seven gatherings [ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις] [which are in the region of Asia]; to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamus, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.

● ● **2.1.18-19 — Revelation 1:20 (twice)**

Here is the mystery of the seven stars which †you saw upon My right palm, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are angels //messengers of the seven gatherings [τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν] [in the region of Asia]; and the seven lampstands which †you saw are the seven gatherings [(αἱ\*) ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι] [in the region of Asia].

*\*Some manuscripts place the article αἱ before the last use of ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαι.*

● **2.1.20 — Revelation 2:7**

He who has an open ear for listening, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the gatherings [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] [in the region of Asia]

● **2.1.21 — Revelation 2:11**

He who has an open ear for listening, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to [the gatherings](#) [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] [\[in the region of Asia\]](#)

● **2.1.22 — Revelation 2:17**

He who has an open ear for listening, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to [the gatherings](#) [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] [\[in the region of Asia\]](#)

● **2.1.23 — Revelation 2:23**

... [all the gatherings](#) [πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι] [\[in the region of Asia\]](#) shall come to know that I Myself am He Who is continually examining the minds and hearts ...

● **2.1.24 — Revelation 2:29**

He who has an open ear for listening, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to [the gatherings](#) [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] [\[in the region of Asia\]](#)

● **2.1.25 — Revelation 3:6**

He who has an open ear for listening, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to [the gatherings](#) [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] [\[in the region of Asia\]](#)

● **2.1.26 — Revelation 3:13**

He who has an open ear for listening, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to [the gatherings](#) [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] [\[in the region of Asia\]](#)

● **2.1.27 — Revelation 3:22**

He who has an open ear for listening, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to [the gatherings](#) [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] [\[in the region of Asia\]](#)

● **2.1.28 — Revelation 22:16**

I Myself, Jesus, have sent My Angel to testify these things to †you [about the gatherings](#) [ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] [\[in the region of Asia\]](#).

## 2.2 — Plural Ἐκκλησίαι for Many or All Local Gatherings Generally (7 Uses)

● **2.2.1 — 1 Corinthians 7:17**

... And I ordain that matters be arranged in this same way [among all the gatherings](#) [ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις πάσαις].

● **2.2.2 — 1 Corinthians 11:16**

... we ourselves are not holding to any such custom, and neither are [the gatherings](#) [αἱ ἐκκλησίαι] of God.

● **2.2.3 — 1 Corinthians 14:33**

... As it is [in all the gatherings](#) [ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] [of the saints](#)

Comment: This is followed in 1 Corinthians 14:34 by a reference to all actual regularly repeated meetings of the local gathering.

**[2 Corinthians 8:18,19,23,24 may belong here if they are not limited to the region of Macedonia.]**

● **2.2.4 — 2 Corinthians 11:8**

I plundered [other gatherings](#) [ἄλλας ἐκκλησίας], having received wages for serving †you.

● **2.2.5 — 2 Corinthians 11:28**

... the care of [all the gatherings](#) [πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν].

● **2.2.6 — 2 Corinthians 12:13**

For in what is it which †you were made inferior [to the rest of the gatherings](#) [ὑπὲρ τὰς λοιπὰς ἐκκλησίας] ...

● **2.2.7 — 2 Thessalonians 1:4**

so that we our very own selves are boasting for ourselves on account of †you [among the gatherings](#) [ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] of God ...

## 2.3 — Singular Ἐκκλησία Generically Implying Plural Local Gatherings (2 Uses)

Expressions such as “every gathering” and “not one gathering” are generic uses [see Section 4] which imply that more than one gathering exists. Paul is not here referring to a specific gathering, but to anything and everything which qualifies as a gathering.

**[Acts 14:23 (under Section 1.2) could also be listed here.]**

● **2.3.1 — 1 Corinthians 4:17**

... just as I always teach everywhere <sup>(\locations in all directions)</sup> in each and every gathering [ἐν πάσῃ ἐκκλησίᾳ].

● **2.3.2 — *Philippians 4:15***

... when I departed from Macedonia, not even one gathering [οὐδεμία ... ἐκκλησία] partnered with me in the matter of giving and of receiving, except †you yourselves alone.

**2.4 — Plural Ἐκκλησίαι for Regularly Repeated Meetings of the Local Gathering (1 Use)**

● **2.4.1 — *1 Corinthians 14:34***

let †your women maintain silence in the gatherings [ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] ...

Comment: In context, this instance probably refers to the many regular repeated times one ἐκκλησία—gathering assembled together in one place, not to the many distinct ἐκκλησίαι—gatherings which assemble together in different places separately.

### 3.0 — SINGULAR ἘΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ FOR THE JERUSALEM GATHERING (9 USES)

Comment: The following are the only unquestioned uses of the singular “gathering” with reference to a situation where we are relatively certain that there were many smaller individual meetings in private houses. This particular usage of the singular Ἐκκλησία with reference to Jerusalem occurs only between Acts 2, and Acts 12, only with reference to Jerusalem, almost always with some relation to the apostles, and sometimes with relation to persecution. These may all be a generic use of the term Ἐκκλησία (see Section 4), or they may reflect the fact that the Jerusalem gathering was a unique situation among the early Jewish converts which required some exceptional structure where they would all be considered, in some sense, one Ἐκκλησία—gathering under the college of apostles. They all met daily at one place – the portico of the temple – to hear the preaching and teaching of the apostles. This fits the definition of an Ἐκκλησία in the broader sense of a gathering of persons, though it does not match the functional qualities of an Ἐκκλησία in the narrower sense of the special Christian gathering. [See *The Size of a Biblical Gathering*.]

What would we call a situation where thousands of people are converted in a small area over a very short period of time? An emergency! Thousands of Jews, raised under the carnal, earthly, immature shadows of the Old Testament, were brought to faith in Christ in Jerusalem in a day, and thousands more were added shortly thereafter. These converts must be brought up to the spiritual, heavenly, mature ways of the New Covenant. The twelve Apostles are the ones who must bring them along on this journey – and they themselves are learning on the job. So the Apostles offered daily instruction in the porticos of the temple to those who had been converted en masse or who were added to the mass. This is “**AN**” Ἐκκλησία – that is, “**A**” gathering, but it is not “**THE**” Ἐκκλησία – that is, “**THE**” gathering. In other words, this is a *regular gathering of persons*, including believers, at one public place to hear preaching and instruction from the Apostles, but it is not *the regular gathering of believers* in private homes as an intimate fellowship and communion. These believers were certainly in an emergency situation, expecting the imminent destruction of the city sometime within their lifetime, which led them to sell their properties and to hold all things in common as they awaited the signal for them all at one time to flee together from the city to hide and survive together in the mountains, thereby sharing the same deliverance together.

Acts 15, Acts 21, the epistle to the Hebrews, and other scattered places indicate that Jewish believers in general, and Jerusalem believers in particular, had a peculiar problem with shedding the Jewish yoke of the Mosaic laws and regulations and with moving on to maturity. The Lord had forced them out of their Jerusalem incubator Ἐκκλησία—gathering and had scattered them about Judea and Samaria, creating separate gatherings (Acts 8:1; 9:31). Perhaps those who remained in the city of Jerusalem found security in continuing to hold to the Jewish yoke, and wouldn't let it go until the very end. At any rate, it would be unsafe to consider the emergency measures of a daily public meeting at the temple and the community of goods among believers as the norm or as anything more than an example which might be followed in a similar emergency situation. Such an emergency would almost certainly lead to such practical measures A general gathering under a college of teachers would be necessary to dispense the teaching. Smaller gatherings (house-cells) which partake more of the functional qualities of an Ἐκκλησία in the narrower sense of the Christian gathering would be necessary to put the teaching into practice.

The passages listed under this section could be understood either specifically or generically, depending upon whether one views Jerusalem as one large massive all-encompassing Ἐκκλησία—gathering, or as many small separate distinct Ἐκκλησία—gatherings. These passages seem to be used in a way similar to the passages which refer to Saul's persecution (see 4.2 below), and all of the passages referring to Saul's persecution can only be understood generically.

There is evidence of separate meeting places within the Jerusalem “gathering.” Besides the references to breaking bread and teaching from house to house (Acts 2:46; 5:42; compare 20:20), and Saul persecuting the gathering from house to house (Acts 8:3), Acts 4:23 indicates that Peter and John had their own place – probably a private house – where they regularly gathered with other Christians, apart from the general gathering with all of the apostles regularly at the temple.

Acts 4:23

Now [Peter and John] having been released, they came to their own [their own place where believers regularly gathered for fellowship and communion], and declared whatever the chief priests and elders said to them... 4:31 And when they had prayed the place at which they were gathered was shaken, and they all were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they were speaking the Word of God with boldness.

In Revelation, Jesus refers to the gatherings collectively by their region in the plural – “the seven gatherings which are in Asia” (Revelation 1:4; compare 1:11,20,20; 2:7,11,17,23,29; 3:6,13,22; 22:16) – and Jesus refers to the gatherings individually by their city in the singular – “the Ephesian gathering” (Revelation 2:1; compare 2:8,12,18; 3:1,7,14). This same pattern is observed everywhere else in Scripture:

many gatherings in an area are referred to or addressed in the plural (see Section 2.1);  
gatherings in general are referred to or addressed in the plural (see Sections 2.2-3);  
gatherings in individual homes are referred to or addressed in the singular (see Sections 1.1-2);  
gatherings in cities are referred to or addressed in the singular (see Section 1.3);  
each gathering is addressed as an entity which is to have one mind with no divisions among the members (Romans 12:16; 15:5-6; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 1:27; 2:2-3; 3:16; 4:2, compare Sections 1.4-5);  
directives for behavior are addressed to the gatherings in the hypothetical generic singular (see Section 1.6).

All of this consistent evidence forces one to the conclusion that the Jerusalem situation must have been either

- (1) a unique, irregular, “emergency” situation (as we suggested above) and so the usage may be irregular and therefore confusing, or
- (2) Ἐκκλησία is used in a generic sense with reference to Jerusalem (which explanation does not do violence to the passages), or else
- (3) the true understanding of the references to the Ἐκκλησία at Jerusalem involves both the uniqueness of the situation and the generic sense (which seems more probable).

Several or all of the following passages could arguably be generic rather than referring specifically to Jerusalem. Even “the gathering which is at Jerusalem” could mean generically “that which is gathering at Jerusalem,” as distinguished from that which is gathering elsewhere.

(All of these passages may also belong under Section 4.2.)

### 3.1 — Singular Ἐκκλησία for the Jerusalem Gathering (7 Uses)

#### • 3.1.1 — Acts 2:47

... So *the Lord* was adding together to the gathering [τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ] [?at the portico of the temple in Jerusalem?] those who were being saved day by day.

Comment: Some manuscripts omit τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ or replace it with ἐπι τὸ αὐτό = "in one place" or "altogether." (Compare ἐπι τὸ αὐτό in Matthew 22:34; Luke 17:35; Acts 1:15; 2:1; 2:44; 3:1; 4:26; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 11:20; 14:23.)

#### • 3.1.2 — Acts 5:11

And great fear came upon the whole gathering [ἐφ' ὅλην τὴν ἐκκλησίαν] [?at the portico of the temple in Jerusalem?], and upon all those who were hearing these things.

#### • 3.1.3 — Acts 8:1

... Now in that day a great persecution occurred against the gathering [ἐπὶ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν] which assembles together [?at the portico of the temple?] in Jerusalem; and all leaders except the apostles were dispersed [sown /scattered] throughout the regions of Judaea and of Samaria.

Comment: Compare Acts 9:31.

#### • 3.1.4 — Acts 8:3

But Saul was inflicting injury on the gathering [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν] [?at the portico of the temple in Jerusalem?], entering house by house, dragging both adult men and adult women, he was delivering them to prison.

Comment: Ἐκκλησία is easily understood in the generic sense especially in this text. The separate gatherings which meet in houses may be referred to generically as ἐκκλησία—that which is a gathering. Or Saul knew he could not succeed with arrests at the general ἐκκλησία—gathering at the temple, so he traced the attendees back to their private houses, or more probably back to their house-gatherings, where the pickings were easier.

**[Acts 9:31 (under 2.1), if singular, may belong here.]**

#### • 3.1.5 — Acts 11:22

Then the report concerning them was heard in the ears of the gathering [τῆς ἐκκλησίας] which assembles together [?at the portico of the temple?] in Jerusalem ...

#### • 3.1.6 — Acts 12:1

Now about that time, Herod the king stretched forth his hands to harm [oppress] some of those leaders from among the gathering [ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας] [?at the portico of the temple in Jerusalem?].

#### • 3.1.7 — Acts 12:5

... Peter was indeed being kept in prison: but fervent prayer to God was being made on his behalf by the gathering [ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας] [?at the portico of the temple in Jerusalem?].

### 3.2 — Singular Ἐκκλησία for an Actual Meeting in Jerusalem (2 Uses)

Comment: The following passages apparently refer to an actual meeting together of certain persons in a small gathering for the purposes of consultation. Regardless of whether the Jerusalem ἐκκλησία is considered as a generic reference, or simply en mass, these passages cannot refer to a massive meeting in one place at Jerusalem of all of the thousands of individual members of an ἐκκλησία.

#### • 3.2.1 — Acts 15:4

Now when they had arrived at Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the gathering [assemblage] [ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας], [somewhere in Jerusalem, but not the portico of the temple] and [even] by the apostles and by the elders ...

#### • 3.2.2 — Acts 15:22

Then it seemed agreeable to the apostles and to the elders, along with the whole gathering [assemblage] [σὺν ὅλη τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ] [somewhere in Jerusalem, but not the portico of the temple], when they had selected for themselves gentlemen from among themselves, to send them to Antioch along with the entourage accompanying Paul and Barnabas ...

## 4.0 —SINGULAR ἘΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ FOR THE GENERIC LOCAL GATHERING (4 USES)

The following passages (both here under Section 4.0 and also under Section 5.0) are sometimes classified under a “universal” or “catholic” sense of ἐκκλησία. However, this concept of a “universal” gathering, at least in the way which this concept is commonly taught, does not fit within the normal range of the meaning of ἐκκλησία, and this concept distorts the Biblical usage of ἐκκλησία.

The Greek word for “catholic” [καθολικός] is never used in Scripture. “Catholic” is used with reference to the ἐκκλησία—gathering in later writings of the early centuries, but it is doubtful that the expression “catholic” or “universal” ἐκκλησία—gathering was used by them in the sense which this expression has come to mean in our day.

The modern “universal” sense is based on a peculiar linguistic theory which thoroughly mixes the generic sense, the mystical sense (see Section 5), the Jerusalem gathering (see Section 3), together with the “universal” nature of the Kingdom of Heaven. This peculiar linguistic theory has turned hermeneutics on its head. A larger essay will be devoted to this one issue, but to introduce the matter, consider the following sentence:

The buffalo is a cow-like animal which roamed the western prairies before hunters shot most of the buffalo, so that eventually the buffalo became almost extinct.

Where do we find this one universal buffalo? Certainly, you aren’t going to insist that there were many buffaloes, when the text plainly speaks in the singular with the definite article – “the buffalo.”

In English, we use the generic sense often enough, though we rarely do it self-consciously. Greeks probably used the generic sense more often. Consider the following sentence:

John 18:20 Jesus answered him, “I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in the synagogue and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and I have said nothing in secret.”

Where do we find this one universal synagogue? Certainly, you aren’t going to insist that there were many synagogues, when the text plainly speaks in the singular with the definite article – “the synagogue” and “the temple” – and we know there was only one universal temple, don’t we?

Well, as a matter of fact, we don’t know anything about a *universal* synagogue or a *universal* temple. In both instances, Jesus used the *generic* sense. Jesus spoke wherever there was any member of that generic class designated by the term “synagogue” or any member of that generic class designated by the term “temple.” In that day, there happened to have been only one member of the class “temple” – at least in the sense which He meant it in this context. In that day, in Jerusalem alone, there just happened to have been at least three hundred members of the class designated by the term “synagogue.” Some translations actually translate the Greek singular expression into the English plural – “in your synagogues” – because these translators understand perfectly well that Jesus was referring to the many synagogues. Still, Jesus’ point was not that He made the rounds of the many synagogues, but that He spoke in all of the appropriate public venues – synagogue and temple – wherever these two venues may be specifically found.

Matthew 18:17 (twice), 1 Timothy 3:5,15; 5:16; and James 5:14 (listed in Section 1.6 above) are clearly generic references, giving general instructions which apply to any local gathering wherever it may be found.

The plural ἐκκλησία “gatherings” is used only once (1 Corinthians 14:34) to refer to regularly repeated gatherings of the ἐκκλησία—gathering (see Section 2.4). This fact alone suggests very strongly that it was common to refer to the ἐκκλησία—gathering in the *generic singular* rather than in the *specific plural*. (Compare the *generic singular* – synagogue – example cited above which is sometimes translated into English by the *specific plural* – synagogues!) It would be strange indeed if, out of 118 uses in the New Testament, not once was the word ἐκκλησία used in the generic sense.

Should we accept without question a supposed “universal” sense for the word ἐκκλησία? Who can name another word which is used in a universal sense in this way? Let’s give it a try:

Specific Singular – I buy gas at Joe’s gas station.

Specific Plural – Americans buy gas at gas stations.

Generic Singular – Americans buy gas at the gas station – i.e. any one of a number of places called “gas station.”

Universal Singular? – Americans buy gas from the great universal Gas Station cartel which controls all gas pumps. (Remember, we are trying to come up with possible examples of a universal.)

Specific Singular – This is a horse.

Specific Plural – Those are horses.

Generic Singular – That (pointing to a representative horse or horses) is horse – i.e. a sampling of the general category designated by the term “horse.”

Universal Singular? – That (referring to all horses together considered as one) is “the horse” (a new category of being?).

Specific Singular – This is a body.

Specific Plural – Those are bodies.

Generic Singular – That (pointing to a representative body or bodies) is body – i.e. a sampling of the general anatomical category designated by the term “body.”

Universal Singular? – That (referring to all specific bodies) is “the body” (some new universal Platonic idealistically defined entity?).

Specific Singular – This (specific building or institutional entity) is a Roman Catholic Church.

Specific Plural – Those (specific buildings or institutions) are Roman Catholic Churches.

Generic Singular – That church (pointing to a representative building or institutional entity) is Roman Catholic – i.e. a member of the category of churches which falls under the general term “Roman Catholic.”

Universal Singular? – The Roman Catholic (visible) Church has mass in church buildings throughout the world. (Well, what do you know? It seems to work here. Why?)

Specific Singular – This is a gathering.

Specific Plural – Those (specific congregations) are gatherings.

Generic Singular – That (pointing to a representative gathering or gatherings) is gathering – i.e. a member of the category designated by the general term “gathering.”

Universal Singular? – That (referring to all specific gatherings, or to all believers whether members of specific gatherings or not) is “the (invisible) gathering” (a universal Platonic idealistically defined entity?).

In order to help wash this imaginary “universal” (Latin: “catholic”) sense out of our minds, and to help us to become more self-consciously aware of the generic sense, especially in the Greek Scriptures, and to open our eyes to understand some passages of Scripture in a more normal way, we here offer a few easier examples of the generic use of words, selected from a cursory reading of a few chapters in John’s Gospel.

John 1:29

On the next day John saw Jesus coming to him, and he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world.”

Jesus takes away the sins – plural – of the world, does He not? Well, no, at least not in the sense which John meant it here. *Generically speaking*, Jesus takes away all that fits into the general category called “sin,” which includes many specific sins.

John 5:16

Now because of this healing, the ruling ‘Jews’ were pursuing Jesus, and they were seeking to kill Him because He had been doing these healings on the Sabbath day.

Was there only one Sabbath day in all of history, and was Jesus doing these healings only on that one Sabbath day? No, *generically speaking*, though Jesus healed on all days of the week, the Jews were bothered because He chose to heal on certain days which fit into the general category called “Sabbath.”

John 6:23,31

... they ate bread-loaf, after the Lord had given thanks ... Our fathers ate Manna in the wilderness, just as it stands written, ‘He gave to them bread-loaf from out of heaven to eat.’”

If the Bible contradicts itself, then it is false. John 6:9 says that they began with five bread-loaves. No doubt, this number was greatly multiplied by Jesus’ miracle. Yet this text says they ate “the bread-loaf” – that is singular – only one bread-loaf. Contradiction! Well, no, *generically speaking* they ate from specific items which belonged to the general category called “bread-loaf.”

John 7:22-23

For this reason, Moses has given to you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but rather, it is from the fathers), yet on the Sabbath day you circumcise a man. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath day in order that the Law of Moses should not be broken, then why are you angry with Me because I have made a whole man well on the Sabbath day?

Imagine that, the entire nation Israel, throughout its entire history, was circumcised on one single Sabbath day. What an astounding miracle! Or could Jesus possibly be *speaking generically*, using the expressions “circumcision” and “Sabbath day” to refer to everything which falls into those general classifications or categories?

The use of ἐκκλησία in a generic sense may take two forms: (1) the focus may be more upon the individuals – that class of individuals who gather, considered as a whole, without any necessary thought for the many separate meetings in which they may gather, or (2) the focus may be more on the event – that class of events where individuals gather, considered as a whole, without any necessary thought for the many separate individuals who constitute the many gatherings. So the generic “gathering” may be either (1) the class of those who gather, or (2) the class of that which is a gathering.

In the following instances, the word ἐκκλησία is not used as a specific name for a specific thing, but ἐκκλησία is used as a general and inclusive name to identify the individual members of an entire group, class, kind, or category.

Every one of the following uses includes some reference to persecution.

**[Matthew 18:17 (twice), 1 Timothy 3:5,15; 5:16; James 5:14, listed in Section 1.6, could be listed here.]**

## 4.1 — Singular Ἐκκλησία for the (Then) Future Generic Local Gathering (1 Use)

### • 4.1.1 — Matthew 16:18

... **†you †yourself** are Peter [Πέτρος] [|\a movable stone (a fragment detached from a rock)], and upon *this* foundation rock [πέτρα] [|\immovable rock formation] I will begin to build **My gathering** [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν] [|\congregation /assembly], and the *gates of Hades* [|\councils of unseen evil powers /power of death] shall not prevail against [|\overpower \have strength against] it — the immovable rock foundation.

Larger context: Matthew 16:13-19

Now while *Jesus was coming* into the villages [|\districts \parts] of Caesarea Philippi, He began [|\was (beginning the process of)] questioning His disciples, saying, “Who are men regularly *pronouncing* Me — the Son of man — *to be*?” So *they* said, “Some indeed say John the Baptist, yet *others* of a similar sort say Elijah; still *others* of a different sort say Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “He says to them, But *who* do **†you †yourselves**— not they — pronounce *Me* to be?” Then *Simon Peter* said *in response* (speaking for the other apostles), “**†You †Yourself** are THE CHRIST [|\Messiah /Anointed-One], the Son of the Living God.” And so *Jesus* said *in response* to him, “†You are blessed [|\happy /prosperous /favored], Simon, son of Jonah, because *flesh and blood* has not revealed this to †you, but rather, My Father Who is in the heavens has revealed it to †you. Now **I Myself also** am-telling †you that **†you †yourself** are Peter [Πέτρος] [|\a movable stone (a fragment detached from a rock)], and upon *this* foundation rock [πέτρα] [|\immovable rock formation] I will begin to build **My gathering** [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν] [|\congregation /assembly], and the *gates of Hades* [|\councils of unseen evil powers /power of death] shall not prevail against [|\overpower \have strength against] it — the immovable rock foundation. And I shall give to †you the keys of the Kingdom of the heavens, and *whatever* things †you may bind upon the earth shall have already been bound in the heavens; and *whatever* things †you may loose upon the earth shall have already been loosed in the heavens.”

Comment: The Future Tense “I will begin to build My gathering” — Jesus will build it, not has built it — eliminates the concept of an “Old Testament” ἐκκλησία.

Jesus is recorded as having used the word ἐκκλησία twenty-three times. He used the word ἐκκλησία twenty times in the book of Revelation, each time only in the sense of the local gathering. He used ἐκκλησία twice in Matthew 18:17, which describes a disciplinary procedure which can only be understood in the sense of the local gathering. The only other time Jesus used ἐκκλησία in Scripture is in Matthew 16:18, where it is best understood in a generic sense. The generic sense is not a different meaning, but only a different usage of the same meaning.

Local Specific meaning: An ἐκκλησία—gathering is a specific group of persons assembled together at one specific place.

Generic meaning: The ἐκκλησία—gathering is that general category of specific groups of persons which assemble together at one specific place, each of which groups is called a “gathering.”

A Universal meaning would be an altogether different meaning.

Universal meaning: The gathering is a specific group consisting of all persons without exception within a certain class which never gathers at any place.

This, of course, is contrary to the essential meaning of ἐκκλησία. An ἐκκλησία which never gathers is a meeting which never meets, a congregation which never congregates, an assembly which never assembles. Why call it by a name which in no way characterizes it? As a matter of fact, the term for all believers is ἡ βασιλεία — the kingdom, not ἡ ἐκκλησία—the gathering.

Someone might ask, “If Jesus meant to refer to many individual gatherings, then why did He speak of the ‘ἐκκλησία’ in the singular — ‘I will build My gathering,’ and not the ἐκκλησίαι in the plural — ‘I will build my gatherings?’” There are two large presumptions in this question.

1. The first presumption is that the generic sense is not readily available to Jesus. But that assumes the thing to be proved — it assumes that ἐκκλησία would easily and quite ordinarily be understood in a universal sense. The reality is that almost any noun can be used in a generic sense, but can anyone give an example of another word being used in both a local and a universal sense? Would the following use of the word “land” be an example?

Local Specific: My land is drought stricken.

Universal: There is a drought in the land (including all individual pieces of land).

This is not an example because the second use of the word “land” is not a universal sense of the first use, but an entirely different sense than the first use. The first sense refers either to physical soil on which things can grow, or to possessed property with borders. The second sense refers either to a geographical boundary or to a political entity, not to a universal clump of soil or to a universal possession of property.

Maybe there are words which have a universal sense, but we have yet found one (except, of course, the modern use of the English word “church”). Yet even if there is such a universal sense, we submit that it is the universal sense which was not readily available to Jesus here in Matthew 16:18, or to His apostles elsewhere. No one could possibly expect Jesus to mean such a sense without considerable explanation, yet there is not so much as a hint of such an explanation in all of Scripture. We propose that the universal sense for ἐκκλησία was developed after the Apostolic era. The philosophy of the Athenian Plato (428-347 B.C.) asserts that the physical phenomena of the world are an imperfect and transitory copy of a transcendent world of ideal archetypal forms. We suspect some Christians, under the influence of this Platonic philosophy, applied it to theology as they developed what resembles in many ways an ideal archetype, the “universal church” which from one perspective is “visible,” but in other ways is “invisible.”

2. The second presumption is that a generic sense does not fit the context. But this is precisely the sense which does fit the context. Jesus refers to His ἐκκλησία—gathering being built upon a rock foundation. Now we ask, in what sense does he refer to this foundation? Is it a local and specific foundation, or is it a universal and ubiquitous foundation, or is it a generic foundation — a certain kind of foundation which includes many specific instances?

Is there is one *particular* foundation in one particular place and everyone must go there to build?

Or is there one *universal* foundation which is spread out everywhere like peanut butter covering a slice of bread?

Or is there one *generic* kind of foundation — namely, regeneration and conversion — which might appear anywhere? Wherever you find that kind of foundation, that is where Jesus will build His kind of gathering.

There is one generic kind of foundation, namely, the true confession that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” revealed to the individual — not revealed carnally — by physical generation and earthly relations of flesh and blood — but revealed spiritually, by regeneration



and heavenly relation to God the Father. Upon that kind of rock foundation – wherever God the Father may cause it to appear – there is where Jesus Christ will build His ἐκκλησία—gathering.

The Roman Catholic does not agree with this explanation. We just used “Roman Catholic” in the singular and generic sense. The Roman Catholics do not agree with this. We just used “Roman Catholics” in the plural and specific sense.

We often use a singular noun to refer generically to all items within a class identified by that singular noun. Dog is man’s best friend. How many dogs and how many men are there? In this sentence, there is only one of each. If the usage cannot refer to a particular dog and a particular man, do we then assume that there is a universal dog and a universal man, or do we assume that there is a *genera* or *class* of things called “dog” and a *genera* or *class* of things called “man?”

Furthermore, Jesus does not say, “I have been building, I am building, and I will be building My gathering,” but He only declares that He will begin to build (future tense) His gathering. If Jesus means this in a universal sense, then He has just cut off all past believers from this universal ἐκκλησία, which means it ceases to be universal any longer, which means Jesus is speaking contradictory nonsense.

A word is used in a generic sense when that word does not refer to any specific item or items within a general class, but that word refers only to the general class itself to which any specific item identified by that word may belong. For example, if we said, “We buy gas at Joe’s gas station on the corner,” we are referring to a specific, identifiable, concrete, and tangible gas station located at a specific place. And if we said, “Americans buy gas at gas stations (plural),” we would still be referring to specific, identifiable, concrete, and tangible gas stations located at specific places, though we would be referring to them in a more general way. But if we said, “Americans buy gas at the gas station (singular),” we would not be referring to one great big universal and visible gas station where Americans show up with their cars every day. We would not even be referring to one great big universal-and-invisible gas station corporation which controls thousands of local-and-visible gas station outlets. We would simply be referring to the general class or abstract idea which we identify with the label “gas station.” In other words, we would be referring to a *generic* gas station, of which there are many particular, concrete, and independently-owned examples down at street corners all over the country.

There is only one kind of immovable foundation – the Lord regenerating persons into the Kingdom of Heaven. There is only one kind of building built upon this foundation – the Lord adding regenerated persons to the ἐκκλησία—gathering. The Kingdom of Heaven is sovereignly laid by God in many places, but it is always the same *kind* of foundation. The foundation is *universal* – in the sense that it can be found in all kinds of places. The foundation is *invisible* – in the sense that it cannot be seen except by the regenerate eye of faith. Flesh and blood does not reveal it, but only the Father in Heaven. Unless someone is born again, he cannot see it. Wherever God has revealed His Son and thereby laid this *universal invisible* foundation, that is precisely the *kind* of place where Christ builds His *kind* of gathering. Multiple confessions of Christ lead inevitably to the gathering of believers into local-and-visible ἐκκλησίαί—gatherings. In many different places an ἐκκλησία—gathering is sovereignly built by Christ, but each ἐκκλησία—gathering is always the same kind of ἐκκλησία—gathering. If the ἐκκλησία—gathering is not built according to the blueprint specifications – the pattern handed down by the apostles – then the local builder will suffer loss by the fire of God’s trial, but the foundation will be saved, and the building will have to be rebuilt according to God’s specifications. (First Corinthians 3:9-16)

We can compare this to the housing developer who reproduces his *one certain kind* of house plan only upon *one certain kind* of lot. “I have this one house plan. But I won’t build according to this house plan just anywhere. I will build according to this house plan only on this one kind of lot. Upon this lot I will build my house.” He does not build a great big universal house upon a great big universal lot. Instead, he builds many houses according to the same house plan. “Upon this (certain kind of) lot – and this kind only – (wherever I find it) I will build my (certain kind of) house – and this kind only.” And so Jesus says, “Upon this rock (the rock foundation of an inwardly revealed and outwardly confessed faith in me as the Christ, the Son of the Living God – upon this rock only, wherever it may be found – that’s where ) I will build my (kind of) gathering (and no other kind).”

Some have objected that Jesus declared the gates of Hades would never prevail against the ἐκκλησία—gathering, so He couldn’t be referring to local gatherings because no matter how we may wish to interpret the expression “gates of Hades,” we cannot deny that the gates of Hades have prevailed against many individual ἐκκλησίαί—gatherings. Therefore, some argue, it seems plain Jesus could only refer to the “universal church,” not to local gatherings. Again, the “universal church” concept blinds people to obvious truths. If Jesus refers to gatherings generically, then He can also refer to their survival generically. Does the death of some dogs mean the end of the generic class we call “dog?” If not, then neither does the end of some ἐκκλησίαί—gatherings mean the end of the generic class we call “ἐκκλησίαί—gatherings.” But we believe the correct explanation of this question is that Jesus does not say that the gates of Hades will never prevail against the ἐκκλησία—gathering. He only says that the gates of Hades will never prevail against “it.” “It” [αὐτή] agrees in grammatical feminine gender with either the immovable rock foundation [πέτρα] or with the gathering [ἐκκλησία]. Since the rock foundation is immovable by definition, it only makes sense that the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. We are often driven back to this rock foundation. This rock foundation is the regenerative act of God in the heart of the believer causing him to confess Jesus as the Christ, the son of the ever living God. The gates of Hades may kill the body, but they will never kill the regenerate soul. They cannot prevail against “it” – the foundation of the new creation. First Corinthians 3:9-15 declares that the foundation cannot be moved, but what is built upon that foundation may be destroyed. Upon that foundation we may build God’s house with gold, silver, and precious stones, or we may build with wood, hay, and stubble, and the fire will reveal what kind of work we’ve done in building the house, but the foundation will always be saved. So, technically speaking, Jesus’ words would still hold true even though there could be times in history when there ceased to be any genuine ἐκκλησίαί—gatherings at all. The Lord could yet, in His own good time, raise up believers in His kingdom by sovereign regeneration, then assemble them together and form them into ἐκκλησίαί—gatherings within His kingdom. Or another possible interpretation is that the “it” which the gates of Hades will not prevail against is indeed the ἐκκλησία—gathering, but this is also understood generically. Though the gates of Hades may prevail against many actual representatives of the genus ἐκκλησία, nevertheless the gates of Hades will never totally prevail so that there is no longer any actual ἐκκλησίαί—gatherings – there will always survive an actual representative of the genus ἐκκλησία on the earth.

The call for repentance is the door to the βασιλεία – kingdom. (“Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.”). Since the time of John the Baptist, the Kingdom of Heaven is preached. Submitting to water baptism is an individual’s outward act which declares that he has spiritually entered into the Kingdom. The repentance and faith of the Kingdom serves as the foundation upon which the ἐκκλησία—gathering is then built. John prepared the way for Jesus by instituting the baptism of the βασιλεία – kingdom, then Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper of the ἐκκλησία—gathering upon the foundation of the baptism of repentance and faith. Because both the kingdom-foundation and the gathering-building are so closely connected in Matthew 16:18, the two have been mistakenly merged into one, and the qualities of the βασιλεία – kingdom (“universal” – out from among all nations, and “invisible” – unless someone is born again he cannot see or enter) are interchanged

with the qualities of the ἐκκλησία—gathering (“local” and “visible” – “the whole gathering come together at one place” First Corinthians 14:23). So the Roman Catholics regard their “church” as the universal and visible “kingdom,” and the Protestant Catholics regard their “kingdom” as the universal and invisible “church.”

In the final analysis, the concept of a “universal church” is about like the Arminian doctrine of “general redemption” – it may look good on the surface, but under closer examination it completely disintegrates.

**[Acts 2:47; 5:11 (under 3.1) may belong here.]**

**[Acts 9:31 (under 2.1), if singular, may belong here.]**

## **4.2 — Singular Ἐκκλησία for Saul’s Persecution of the Generic Local Gathering (3 Uses)**

**[Acts 8:1,3; 11:22; 12:1,5 (under 3.1) may belong here.]**

**[Acts 9:31 (under 2.1) if plural, may belong here.]**

### **● 4.2.1 — 1 Corinthians 15:9**

... I persecuted the gathering [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν] of God.

### **● 4.2.2 — Galatians 1:13**

... I was persecuting the gathering [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν] of God, and I was destroying it:

### **● 4.2.3 — Philippians 3:6**

with respect to zeal, relentlessly persecuting the gathering [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν] ...

Comment: How does someone ravage and persecute a “universal and invisible” gathering? Saul is acting as the “gates of Hades” destroying anything and everything which qualifies under the genera of “ἐκκλησία—gathering.” By way of parallel, a district attorney might say he prosecutes the criminal of society – not that there is one universal criminal, but that he prosecutes whatever qualifies under the category of “criminal” – which means he prosecutes all individual criminals which he encounters. See Comment under 3.1.4 for another possible explanation of these passages.

## 5.0 — SINGULAR ἘΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ FOR THE MYSTICAL-BODY GATHERING (12 USES)

There is something resembling the generic sense in the passages listed below, but that does not quite satisfy all of their meaning. Ephesians 5:32 is the key which opens the door to understanding this particular use of the word ἐκκλησία. The ἐκκλησία—gathering is spoken of in a *mystery* or *mystical* sense. “This mystery is great: but I myself am talking with regard to Christ and with regard to the gathering.” A *mystery* is something hidden from our normal experience, an obscure riddle, puzzle, or enigma which can be solved only by those who have been given the hidden clue which guides one through the labyrinth, or the secret key which unlocks the closed door, or the missing piece which completes the puzzle.

**What is the mystery of God?** [Colossians 2:2] God is one essence and three persons. Though this may appear to be a logical *contradiction*, it is not a contradiction at all, but rather it is a *mystery* outside of our normal experience and therefore beyond our range of understanding if we did not have the key supplied by divine revelation. If God were one person and three persons, or one god and three gods, that would be a contradiction.

**What is the mystery of Christ?** [Colossians 2:2; 4:3; 1 Timothy 3:9] Christ is one person, God the Son, with two natures, both divine and human. This also is not a *contradiction*, but rather it is a *mystery* outside our experience and beyond our understanding. If Christ were two persons, one divine and one human, that would be a contradiction.

**What is the mystery of the kingdom?** [Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10] The kingdom is in this world, and yet invisible and not of this world. This again is no *contradiction*, but a *mystery* solved only by divine revelation. If the kingdom were both of this world and not of this world, that would be a contradiction.

**What is the mystery of the ἐκκλησία—gathering?** [Ephesians 5:32; Revelation 1:20] Each individual local gathering is not one among many bodies, nor a part of one larger body, but Scripture describes the local gathering as **THE** body of Christ (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17,21,24,31-32; 11:26-32; 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:4-16; Colossians 1:24; 3:15). This is no *contradiction*, but a *mystery* revealed only by God. If each ἐκκλησία—gathering were one among many bodies of Christ, and each ἐκκλησία—gathering were also only a part or a portion of one all-encompassing body of Christ, that would be a contradiction.

Mystically speaking, the risen Christ is omnipresent, and He manifests Himself in more than one place at any one time. (We use the term *mystical* here in the sense of whatever pertains to a mystery; revealed realities which are beyond our normal perception or intellectual apprehension.) Robed as the High Priest, Christ walks among the seven separate golden lampstands (Revelation 1:12-13; 2:1) which represent the seven separate ἐκκλησία—gatherings (Revelation 1:20), and each ἐκκλησία—gathering is the *νάος* – innermost dwelling place of the temple of God:

“you [plural] are the *νάος* – innermost dwelling place [singular]” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16)

“your [plural] body [singular] is the *νάος* – innermost dwelling place [singular]” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

‡You have been built up upon the foundation consisting of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in Whom **each and every** [each several] **building**, while being closely joined together into one entity, is growing **into an innermost dwelling place** [inner temple – *νάος*] in the Lord, by Whom **‡you ‡yourselves are also being consolidated** [gathered and pieced together and built up] **into a dwelling place** [permanent abode – κατοικητήριον] **of God** in [by] the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:20-22)

The words “πάσα οικοδομή” are literally translated “each several building.”

“Each several building. ... Ordinary Greek idiom here calls for ‘every building,’ not for ‘all the building’ (Robertson, Grammar, p. 772), though it is not perfectly clear what that means.” (A. T. Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*.)

“In the singular *πᾶς* may be used without the article in the sense of ‘every.’ ... Blass distinguishes between *ἕκαστος* = ‘each individual’ and *πᾶς* = ‘any one you please.’ ... Other examples somewhat open to doubt are *πάσα οικοδομή* (Eph. 2:21) which is most probably ‘every building’ because of *εἰς ναόν*.” (A.T. Robertson. *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1934, pages 771-773.)

“*πᾶσα οικοδομή* – not: *the whole building*, which would be at variance with linguistic usage, and would absolutely require the reading ... *πᾶσα ἡ οικοδομή* ..., but: *every building*. ... The objection that there is only *one οικοδομή* is baseless, since ... *every congregation* for itself, [may be] conceived as a temple-building. The latter conception is found, as in 1 Cor. iii. 16, so also here, where the former [a collective body of Christians] is linguistically *impossible*. Chrysostom ... is wrong in holding that by *πάσα οικοδ.* is signified every part of the building (wall, roof, etc.), since *οικοδομή* rather denotes the *aggregate* of the single parts of the building, the *edifice*, and since not a wall, a roof, etc., but only the building as a whole which is thought of, can grow unto a temple.” (H.A.W. Meyer. *Critical and Exegetical Hand-book of the Epistle to the Ephesians*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1884 [reprint, Winona Lake, IN: Alpha publications, 1979], page 396.)

“The admissibility of the anarthrous form *πάσα οικοδομή*, in the sense of ‘the *whole* byilding,’ cannot be at all conceded, since *οικοδομή* is neither a proper name, nor to be regarded as equivalent to such. See Winer, p. 101; Buttmann, neut. Gram. P. 78 [E.T. 86]. In general *πᾶς* in the sense of *whole* can only be without an article, when the substantive to which it belongs would not need the article even without *πᾶς* (Kruger. 50,11.9). Hence *πάσα οικοδ.* can only signify either *every building*, or else a building *utterly*. In the latter sense Chrysostom appears, very unsuitably, no doubt (see above), to have taken it. According to Hofmann, II. 2, p. 123, *πάσα οικοδ.* is meant to signify ‘*whatever becomes a constituent part of a building*’ ... As if *οικοδομή* could mean *constituent part of a building*! It signifies ... *edifice*. And as if *πᾶσα*, [could mean] *every part of the building*... The rendering is *linguistically* and *logically* incorrect.” (H.A.W. Meyer. *Critical and Exegetical Hand-book of the Epistle to the Ephesians*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1884 [reprint, Winona Lake, IN: Alpha publications, 1979], page 396, footnote.)

“[T]he distinction between *πᾶς* with the article and *πᾶς* without it is so well maintained in the NT that only an absolutely intolerable sense can justify us in departing from it. The only exceptions to the general rule appear to be those that hold good also for ordinary Greek – in general and unqualified statements, with proper names, and with nouns which have acquired so stated a meaning that they can drop the article, etc. (cf. Win.-Moult., p. 138, and especially Buttm., *Gram. Of N.T. Greek*, pp. 119, 120; Blass, *Gram. Of N.T. Greek*, pp. 161, 162). The present instance does not come within the scope of these exceptions. ... Hence the rendering here must be “every building”

or “every several building”. (W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*. Volume III. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., reprinted 1976, pages 300-301.)

There are a few ancient manuscripts which actually read “πᾶσα ἡ οἰκοδομὴ” = “all the building,” but critical scholars of all persuasions (from Selective Majority Text to Eclectic Minority Text) do not support that reading, and no translation is based on that reading except possibly the Geneva and the King James. (Note, not even Tyndale agrees with KJV here).

Here is how a wide assortment of translations renders the expression:

TYNDALE: “every building”

ASV, RV: “each several building” [Footnote] “Gr. every building.”

JB, NJB: “every structure” [Footnote] var[iant reading] ‘the entire’

NEWBERRY (KJV): “all the building” [Margin] “or, every b[uilding]”

RECOVERY VERSION: “all the building” [Footnote] “Or, every building.”

WEYMOUTH: “the whole fabric” [Footnote] “The literal translation, if this were Classical Greek, would be ‘every building,’ a meaning irreconcilable with the context here.”

GENEVA, KJV, WEBSTER: “all the building” [probably based on the variant reading]

BBE, DOUAY-RHEIMS, YOUNG: “all the building”

DARBY: “all (the) building”

MURDOCK: “all the edifice”

BECK, BERKELEY, HCSB, ISV, JEWISH, NASB, NEB, NET, NIV, NKJV, WILLIAMS, WUEST: “the whole building”

TRANSLINE: “(the) whole building”

NCV: “that whole building”

AMPLIFIED, ESV, NAB, NRSV, RSV: “the whole structure”

ROTHERHAM: “an entire building”

TCNT, GOODSPEED: “every part of the building”

PHILLIPS: “each separate piece of building”

GOD’S WORD: “all the parts of the building”

MESSAGE: “He is using us all – irrespective of how we got here – in what he is building.”

NLT: [words omitted from the translation]

Why do most translations render “πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ” (“each several building”) as if the text read “πᾶσα ἡ οἰκοδομὴ” (“the whole building”)?

Weymouth tipped his hand when he declared that “every building” would be “a meaning irreconcilable with the context here.” What he meant was that such a meaning would be irreconcilable with his desired interpretation of the passage. Many grammarians and commentators have noted the difficulty, then ignored it in order to “reconcile” the text to their theology. But this can only be done by ignoring well established Greek grammar. The few translations (TCNT, Goodspeed, Phillips, God’s Word) which invent the thought of separate parts or pieces of one building are admitting the problem. The passage plainly teaches that each and every building – there is more than one of them – is being fitted together into a *vóos* – the innermost dwelling place of the Lord within His temple; that the Lord is consolidating individuals – plural, the members – into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:20-22 teaches unambiguously that each local gathering is itself built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ and His apostles and prophets and is a distinct and separate temple built and indwelt by God.

Wherever the Lord dwells, there is His temple. He dwells in a special sense among His people wherever He gathers them and constitutes them as His body. The local gathering is the mystical manifestation of Christ’s one body in that particular place. In the Old Testament, the high priest attended to one lampstand with seven branches standing in the tabernacle or temple outside of the innermost dwelling place. (Some believe there was more than one lampstand, but all agree each lampstand would have seven branches.) In the New Testament, Christ the high priest walks among the seven separate lampstands representing seven separate innermost dwelling places each independently accountable directly to Christ, so that each independent ἐκκλησία—gathering becomes the body of Christ mystically manifested in that one place.

What I am describing here may need some theological refinement, but it cannot fall far from the mark for the simple reason that it accounts for most if not all of the things which the “universal church” concept has always left unaccounted for.

This understanding alone has the potential to nullify all discussion of the “city-wide church” and the “region-wide church,” because the true boundary of any particular ἐκκλησία—gathering is not determined by human boundaries, but simply by how far Christ has extended His call to gather and gift members for each particular manifestation of His body. “†You [plural – the members] also were called in one body [singular – the gathering].” (Colossians 3:15) Discernment of the Lord’s body is the essential factor (1 Corinthians 11:29), not human social or political boundaries. (Are suburbs to be considered part of the “city-wide church?” Do redistricting maps affect the “region-wide church?” What about cities which grow so large that they encompass more than one region?)

Much more can be said, and will be said in a different paper [*The Meaning of Εκκλησία in the Greek New Testament*], but enough has been said here to lay a foundation for understanding the following passages. All of the following uses in some sense involve the figures of *the husband – head – builder* and *the bride/wife – body – building/inner dwelling place*, and they only occur in Ephesians, Colossians, and Hebrews. There are other passages which do not use the word ἐκκλησία, but which nevertheless refer to the bride (Gospels, Revelation), the building and the betrothed virgin (Corinthians), and the elect woman (2 John).

The *mystical* sense of ἐκκλησία differs from the *generic* sense in that it isn’t just referring to anything which fits into the general category of ἐκκλησία, but it has in view the one one body of Christ, the one temple of God, which is manifested in each particular ἐκκλησία, for wherever the ἐκκλησία gathers, Christ is there in their midst.

### ● 5.1 — Ephesians 1:22-23

... and He has given Him to be the **Head over** all things **for the gathering** [τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ], which is His body, the fullness of Him Who fills all with all.

Comment: The Head is over the body. Compare Colossians 1:18,24 below.

● **5.2 — Ephesians 3:10**

to the intent that now, by means of the gathering [διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας], the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and to the authorities in the heavenly places

Comment: The preceding context describes the revelation of the mystery (mentioned three times: 3:3,4,9) made known by means of the ἐκκλησία, and the following context parallels the dropping of the shekinah glory upon the tabernacle of Moses and upon the temple of Solomon. The revelation speaks in terms of knowing the width and length and depth – expressions paralleling the description of the holy of holies in the tabernacle and in the temple – to which Paul adds the fourth dimension of height, as if to say this holy of holies goes beyond the dimensions of any earthly holy of holies because a heavenly dimension has been added.

● **5.3 — Ephesians 3:21**

May the glory in the gathering [ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ] be to Him [God] in Christ Jesus throughout all the generations of the ages. Amen.

Comment: See comment for Ephesians 3:10 above.

● **5.4 — Ephesians 5:23**

because the husband is head of his wife, as also Christ is Head of His gathering [τῆς ἐκκλησίας], and He Himself is Savior of His body.

● **5.5 — Ephesians 5:24**

... even as the gathering [ἡ ἐκκλησία] places itself in orderly subjection under Christ, in this same way the wives are to place themselves in orderly subjection under their own husbands in everything.

● **5.6 — Ephesians 5:25**

‡You Husbands, be- continually -loving ‡your own wives, just as Christ also loved the gathering [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν], and delivered Himself over on its behalf

● **5.7 — Ephesians 5:27**

in order that He should present it to Himself as the most glorious bride, the gathering [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν], having no spot, nor wrinkle, nor any of such things, but rather, in order that it should be holy and without blemish.

● **5.8 — Ephesians 5:29-30**

For no one at any time ever hated his own flesh; but rather, he nourishes [//nurtures] and he cherishes [//comforts] it, just as the Lord also nurtures and cherishes the gathering [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν], because we are member-parts of His body: of His flesh, and of His bones.

● **5.9 — Ephesians 5:32**

This mystery is great: but I myself am talking with regard to Christ and with regard to the gathering [εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν].

Comment: The entire passage of Ephesians 5:22-33 describes Christ as the Head and Husband, and the ἐκκλησία as the body and bride.

Notice in particular verses 5:22-25:

‡You Wives, voluntarily submit‡ ‡yourselves continually to ‡your own husbands, as to the Lord, because the husband is head of his wife, as also Christ is Head of His gathering [//congregation /assembly], and He Himself is Savior of His body. Notwithstanding, even as the gathering [//congregation /assembly] continually submits itself to Christ, in this same way the wives should submit themselves to their own husbands in everything. ‡You Husbands, be continually loving‡ ‡your own wives, just as Christ also loved the gathering [//congregation /assembly], and delivered Himself over [//gave Himself up] on [//for] her behalf.

The passage begins with specifics – wives [plural] submit to husbands [plural] – then moves to the generic principle – the husband [singular] is head of the wife [singular]. Is there one universal husband and one universal wife? Of course not. But what does Paul say? The husband is head of the wife **AS CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE GATHERING**. It is common to take “Christ” here as specific, and “gathering” here as universal. It is not difficult to see the incongruity of such a descriptive analogy: generic husband is to generic wife what specific Christ is to universal gathering. Paul here is comparing principle to principle, so we would expect generic throughout the analogy: generic husband is to generic wife what generic Christ is to generic gathering.

If someone objects that there is only one Christ so this cannot be generic, we would simply refer them back to our explanation under 4.0 above, which we here condense. Jesus declared, “I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in the synagogue and in the temple, where the Jews always meet.” (John 18:20) There were many synagogues where Jesus taught. There was only one temple where Jesus taught. But Jesus’ point has nothing to do with numbers. Jesus spoke wherever there was any member of that generic class designated by the term “synagogue” or any member of that generic class designated by the term “temple.” In that day, there happened to have been only one member of the class “temple” – at least in the sense which He meant it in this context. In that day, in Jerusalem alone, there just happened to have been at least three hundred members of the class designated by the term “synagogue.” But Jesus’ point was not that He made the rounds of the many synagogues, but that He spoke in all of the appropriate public venues – synagogue and temple – wherever these two venues may be specifically found.

Likewise here, the relationship between any member of that generic class designated by the term “husband” to any member of that generic class designated by the term “wife” is as any member of that generic class designated by the term “Christ” to any member of that generic class designated by the term “gathering.”

But Christ is not a polygamist. That is where this passage takes a step beyond the generic. It isn't just referring to anything which fits into the general category of ἐκκλησία, but it has in view the one one body of Christ, the one temple of God, which is manifested in each particular ἐκκλησία, for wherever the ἐκκλησία gathers, Christ is there in their midst.

Notice that the passage then, by application, moves from the generic principle to the specific practice: as the specific ἐκκλησία—gathering submits itself to the specific Christ so specific wives submit themselves to specific husbands.

If someone objects that the passage speaks of Christ delivering Himself over for the gathering, and that can't mean just the local gathering, we have to scratch our head and ask, “Why not?” As a matter of fact, Acts 20:28 says exactly that, “Therefore, take heed to yourselves, and to all members of the little flock among which little flock the Holy Spirit for His own use has placed you as overseers, in order to shepherd the gathering [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν] of God [at Ephesus] which [singular – Ephesian gathering] He has purchased for Himself through the blood of His own Son.” If He delivered Himself for all of the elect, then He delivered Himself for some of the elect, including any specific group of the elect, did He not? And if He gathers particular persons into specific ἐκκλησία—gatherings and gifts them particularly as a body, then perhaps there is a special sense in which He delivered Himself for each particular ἐκκλησία—gathering.

#### ● 5.10 — Colossians 1:18

And He Himself is the Head of the body, the gathering [τῆς ἐκκλησίας] ...

#### ● 5.11 — Colossians 1:24

... I am taking my turn in filling up in my flesh my portion of what things are lacking from the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His body, which is the gathering [τῆ ἐκκλησία],

Comment: Colossians 1:18,24 are parallel to Ephesians 1:22 above. This passage (Colossians 1:18-29) also speaks of the indwelling of fullness (1:19), like the shekinah in the temple; presenting the members holy and blameless (1:22), as one presents a bride; making known the riches of the glory of the mystery of Christ's indwelling them (1:25-27).

#### ● 5.12 — Hebrews 12:22-24

[1] But rather, you have approached [/come near to] Zion, namely, the heavenly *Mountain* which cannot be touched,

[2] and you have approached the city of the ever living God, namely, the *heavenly Jerusalem*,

[3] and you have approached myriads of angels, namely, the *general assembly* [πανηγύρις] before the presence of God,

[4] and you have approached the gathering [ἐκκλησία] of those firstborn, namely, those who *stand enrolled* [/registered] as citizens *in the heavens*,

[5] and you have approached the Judge, namely, the *God of all judgment*,

[6] and you have approached the spirits of the righteous, namely, spirits who *have been brought to the goal* [/stand perfected],

[7] and you have approached the Mediator of a newly established covenant, namely, *Jesus*,

[8] and you have approached the blood of sprinkling, namely, blood which *is speaking better things than the blood of Abel!*

Comment: We have extended the quotation in order to display the structure of the passage and thereby make the interpretation easier. The passage consists of eight lines, each line begun with a conjunction, and each line ended with a brief explanatory remark. Because this structure has been overlooked by some translators, the expression “the general assembly” of line 3 is mistakenly combined with the expression “gathering of those firstborn” of line 4. More correctly, the myriads of angels constitute the general assembly who stand in God's presence (line 3), while the gathering of firstborn constitute those who stand enrolled in the heavens (line 4).

In Galatians 4:22-26, Paul explains how Hagar and Sarah and their respective children represented the two covenants: Hagar represented the bondage covenant of Mount Sinai, while Sarah represented the freedom covenant of Mount Zion or Jerusalem. Similarly, Hebrews 12:18 and 22 says, “For you have not approached a mountain which is physically tangible,” namely, Mount Sinai, “but rather, you have approached [Mount] Zion,” namely, the heavenly “Mountain” which cannot be touched. In other words, we have not returned to the Old Covenant which concerned itself with the world of the tangible, but we have entered into the New Covenant which concerns itself with the world of the intangible.

Since the entire following context is about approaching present realities which are not physically seen, but which are nevertheless spiritually perceived, it does not seem correct to understand ἐκκλησία as something potential, hypothetical, or future, but rather as something real, actual, and present. This might be a generic use of ἐκκλησία (see Section 4), but because of the emphasis on spiritual perception, it is more likely a mystical use. Israel was God's firstborn (Exodus 4:22), God's kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:5-6), and Levi was taken in substitution for the firstborn (Numbers 3:12). Believers are likewise a kind of firstfruits of His creatures (James 1:18) and a kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:6; 5:10), and Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29). So it is appropriate to call “firstborn” those who constitute the spiritual house of God and who constitute the priesthood of that spiritual house. Certainly, these believers are enrolled as fellow citizens with the saints in God's Kingdom as well as members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19-22; Philippians 3:20).

(See also Section 7.2.)

## 6.0 — ORDINARY USES OF THE SINGULAR ἘΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ (5 USES)

Comment: In the following instances, the word ἐκκλησία refers to an identifiable group of persons with an easily defined membership or makeup which specifically gathers or meets in a specific time and place. None of these instances refer to the ἐκκλησία—gathering which Christ builds.

### 6.1 — Singular Ἐκκλησία for an Old Testament Gathering (2 Uses)

#### • 6.1.1 — Acts 7:38

This man [Moses] is he who was in the gathering [ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ] in the wilderness with the Angel who was speaking to him in Mount Sinai, and with our fathers ...

Comment: The nation Israel was called out of Egypt and gathered as one man in the wilderness at Mount Sinai (Exodus 16:3; 19:1-25; Deuteronomy 10:4; 18:16). This was indeed an actual physical gathering. When the people of Israel had settled in their tribal lands, they were no longer an assembled gathering, except representatively in battle (compare Judges 20; First Samuel 11:7; Ezra 3:1; Nehemiah 8:1). Israel does typologically represent many things, including the New Covenant gathering (First Corinthians 10:1-22), but the mere use of the word ἐκκλησία in this text does not identify ancient national Israel with the New Covenant ἐκκλησία as one and the same in substance only in a different form.

#### • 6.1.2 — Hebrews 2:12

... “I will announce †Your Name to my brethren; I will sing praise to †You in the midst of the gathering [ἐν μέσῳ ἐκκλησίας].”

Comment: This is a quotation from Psalm 22:22, which follows the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, except that it replaces διηγῆσομαι with ἀπαγγέλλω. This is a very Messianic Psalm. Its original reference may have been to the solemn gatherings in homes among fraternal brethren at the Passover (Deuteronomy 6:1-8), or to other times of gathering, but its Messianic reference may be to Jesus' declaration of the Name of God to His disciples (John 17:6,26), whom He called His brethren (John 20:17; Matthew 12:48,49; 28:10), and with whom he sang praises (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26), all of which occurred when Jesus initiated the first communion, which implies that the first communion with His apostles could have constituted the first ἐκκλησία—gathering. (Judas would then have been the first person removed from the gathering by partaking of the loaf and cup unworthily, not discerning the Lord's body. By the day of Pentecost, about fifty days later, this ἐκκλησία—gathering had grown to about 120 disciples in number.)

So the original reference in Psalm 22:22 would be classified as an ordinary use, but the Messianic reference – predicting the original ἐκκλησία among the apostles, which subsequently cell-divided repeatedly into all of the other ἐκκλησίαι—gatherings – this Messianic reference could be classified under Section 1.1 as a house-gathering in an upper room set apart for the use of Jesus Himself.

### 6.2 — Singular Ἐκκλησία for a Gentile Gathering at Ephesus (3 Uses)

#### • 6.2.1 — Acts 19:32

Then indeed other men were crying out another thing: for the gathering [ἡ ἐκκλησία] had become confused; and the majority did not know for what cause they had come together.

#### • 6.2.2 — Acts 19:39

But if †you are seeking answers concerning matters of a different kind, then it will be resolved [settled] in the lawful gathering [ἐν τῇ ἐννόμῳ ἐκκλησίᾳ]...

#### • 6.2.3 — Acts 19:41

And having said these things, he dispersed the unlawful gathering [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν].

Comment: These three instances refer to the gathering of a body of citizens to do city business in Ephesus. Verse 37 provides an interesting contrast. Whereas verses 32, 39, and 41 use ἐκκλησία and refer to a gathering of persons, verse 37 does not use ἐκκλησία, though the King James Version includes the word “churches.” “For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.” The Greek word translated “robbers of churches” literally speaks of those who strip articles from a house dedicated to a pagan god. (See Section 7.1) Now the original Greek word for such a house was κυριακόν, from which we ultimately derive our English word “kyrk” or “church.” One of the major reasons for William Tyndale's martyrdom was that in his English translation of Greek Scripture, he refused to translate ἐκκλησία by the word “church.” Instead, he regularly translated ἐκκλησία “congregation.” The only place he used the word “church” in his entire translation was in verse 37, where the Greek word refers to pagan houses of worship.

## 7.0 — TEXTS WHICH CONFUSE OR DO NOT ACTUALLY USE ἘΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ (4 TEXTS)

These are passages where the translation may create some confusion.

### • 7.1 — Acts 19:37

For †you have brought here these gentlemen, who are neither temple-robbers [ἱεροσούλους] nor defamers [blasphemers] of †your god.

Comment: Tyndale's translation (followed by the King James Version) uses the word "churches."

For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet despisers [KJV: blasphemers] of your goddess.

"Robbers of churches" is ἱεροσούλους, "those who strip temples," literally "those who clear out all items from the house of a god." Contrast 2 Corinthians 11:8. See comment on Acts 19:41, Section 6.2.3.

### • 7.2 — Hebrews 12:22-23

... and †you have approached myriads of angels, namely, the *general assembly* [πανηγύρις NOT ἐκκλησία] before the presence of God, and †you have approached the gathering [ἐκκλησία] of those firstborn from among those dead, namely, those who *stand enrolled* [registered] as citizens *in the heavens* ...

Comment: The King James Version combines the expression "general assembly" with the expression "church of the firstborn."

... and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven ...

The expression "general assembly" refers back to the myriads of angels, while the expression "church of the firstborn" refers to a group distinct from the general assembly. See Section 6.3.1 for further comments.

### • 7.3 — James 2:2

... if a man with a gold ring in splendid clothing should come into †your place of meeting [τὴν συναγωγὴν], and a poor man in filthy clothing should also come in

Comment: The actual word used here is one commonly transliterated "synagogue." King James Version translates "assembly."

For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment

This is a most revealing passage with regard to the usage of ἐκκλησία. If ἐκκλησία could designate a place for gathering, then there would be nothing to prevent James from using ἐκκλησία here – indeed, he would be almost compelled to use it. Instead, he chose συναγωγή, which is the common term in Greek culture for a place of meeting – any place of meeting. True enough, among the Hebrews the word had taken on the specialized sense of their place of meeting, but the Jews certainly did not own exclusive rights to the term. Greeks still used συναγωγή as the general, common, and preferred term for a place of meeting. The Greek here is lexically emphatic: εἰσέλθη εἰς, focusing on that very point in time and space when the man is actually entering into a specified location. James is quite plainly referring to someone just as he is entering into the place where the Christians gathered. James could not possibly have used the word ἐκκλησία here for the simple reason that neither Christians nor anyone else ever used the word ἐκκλησία for a place. Of course, we could plug our modern word "church" into this translation and it would seem to work because we regularly use the word "church" for a place of gathering – a συναγωγή. If James had used such terms as θίασος, σύνοδος, or κοινόν, he would have been using strange and inapplicable vocabulary. James really had no real choice but to use συναγωγή.

Some have declared that James here essentially equates the Jewish synagogue [συναγωγή] with the Christian gathering [ἐκκλησία], as if they are essentially the same though referred to by different terminology. Such an interpretation would be a multi-level anachronism.

### • 7.4 — 1 Peter 5:13

She who is at Babylon, chosen together with †you, greets †you ...

Comment: The King James Version adds in italics the word "church" to the translation.

The *church that is* at Babylon, elected together with *you*, saluteth you ...

Comment: The words "she" and "chosen" are feminine, and the feminine in this context may be taken by interpretation as referring to the feminine ἐκκλησία—gathering." Compare 2 John 1:1,5,13.



## 8.0 — SPECIAL PHRASES USING ἘΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ (REPEATED FROM AMONG THE ABOVE, 17 USES)

The following are special phrases describing the ἐκκλησία—gathering. It appears that “the gathering of God” is the generic expression, and “the gatherings of God” is the specific expression. For example, when Paul speaks of “the gathering of God which is at Corinth” he means “that at Corinth which fits into the category of ‘gathering of God’” as distinguished from that which fits into the category of ‘gathering of God’ somewhere else. But when Paul speaks of “the gatherings of God in Judea” he means the separate groups which assemble to meet.

### 8.1 — The Ἐκκλησία [Gathering] of God (7 Uses)

#### • 8.1.1 — Acts 20:28

Therefore, take heed to ἑαυτοῦς, and to all members of the little flock among which little flock the Holy Spirit for His own use has placed ἑσὺς as overseers, in order to shepherd the gathering [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν] of God [at Ephesus] which Ephesian gathering [singular] he has purchased [acquired /obtained] for Himself through the blood of His own Son.

#### • 8.1.2 — 1 Corinthians 1:2

To the gathering [τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ] of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours.

#### • 8.1.3 — 1 Corinthians 10:32

Become ἑσὺς without cause for stumbling [offence], both to the Jews, and to the Greeks, and to the gathering [τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ] of God.

#### • 8.1.4 — 1 Corinthians 11:22

For it can not be that ἑσὺς do not possess *houses* for eating and for drinking, can it? Or are ἑσὺς intending to demean [think down upon] the gathering [τῆς ἐκκλησίας] of God? And are ἑσὺς intending to humiliate [put to shame] those who do not possess houses, food, or drink?

#### • 8.1.5 — 1 Corinthians 15:9

... I persecuted the gathering [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν] of God.

#### • 8.1.6 — 2 Corinthians 1:1

... to the gathering [τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ] of God which is at Corinth, along with all those saints who are in all Achaia.

#### • 8.1.7 — Galatians 1:13

... I was persecuting the gathering [τὴν ἐκκλησίαν] of God, and I was destroying it:

### 8.2 — An Ἐκκλησία [A Gathering] of God (2 Uses)

#### • 8.2.1 — 1 Timothy 3:5

But if someone has not come to know enough to guide his own house, then how shall he care for a gathering [ἐκκλησίας] of God?

#### • 8.2.2 — 1 Timothy 3:15

... in order that ἑσὺς should be informed just how it is necessary to be regularly conducting oneself in a house of God, any one of which is a gathering [ἐκκλησία] of the ever-living God ...

### 8.3 — The Ἐκκλησίαι [Gatherings] of God (3 Uses)

#### • 8.3.1 — 1 Corinthians 11:16

... we ourselves are not holding to any such custom, and neither are the gatherings [αἱ ἐκκλησίαι] of God.

#### • 8.3.2 — 1 Thessalonians 2:14

... ἑσὺς yourselves, brethren, became imitators of the gatherings [τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν] of God in the [region of] Judaea which are in Christ Jesus ...

#### • 8.3.3 — 2 Thessalonians 1:4

so that we our very own selves are boasting for ourselves on account of ἑσὺς among the gatherings [ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] of God ...

#### 8.4 — The Ἐκκλησία [Gathering] in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Uses)

- 8.4.1 — 1 Thessalonians 1:1

... to [the gathering](#) [τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ] [of Thessalonians](#) in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ ...

- 8.4.2 — 2 Thessalonians 1:1

... [to the gathering](#) [τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ] [of Thessalonians](#) in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...

[Compare “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” Romans 1:6; 15:6; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 8:6; 2 Corinthians 1:2,3; 11:31; Galatians 1:1,3; Ephesians 1:2,3,17; 5:20; 6:23; Philippians 1:2; 2:11; (4:20,23); Colossians 1:2,3; 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:1,3; 3:11,13; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 2:16; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3; 2 Peter 1:16-17; 2 John 1:3]

#### 8.5 — The Ἐκκλησία [Gatherings] of Christ (1 Use)

- 8.5.1 — Romans 16:16

... [The gatherings](#) [αἱ ἐκκλησίαι] of Christ [[in the region of Achaia](#)] greet †you.

#### 8.6 — The Ἐκκλησία [Gatherings] in Christ (2 Uses)

- 8.6.1 — Galatians 1:22

but I was unknown by face [to the gatherings](#) [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις] [of the \[region of\] Judaea](#) which are in Christ.

- 8.6.2 — Ephesians 3:21

May the [glory in the gathering](#) [ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ] be to Him [God] in Christ Jesus throughout all the generations of the ages. Amen.

## **Ἐκκλησία in the New Testament**

Part One: The Classification of Each Use of Ἐκκλησία in the Greek New Testament

Part Two: Cross-Index and Concordance for the Classification of Each Use of Ἐκκλησία in the Greek New Testament

Part Three: Quotations from Sources on the Meaning and Use of Ἐκκλησία in the Greek New Testament

Part Four: The Concept of Ἐκκλησία in the Greek New Testament

Part Five: The Meaning of Ἐκκλησία in the Greek New Testament