

## THE CHURCH

The Greek word translated church throughout the New Testament is *ekklesia*. It is a compound word that was created by combining *ek* (“out of”) and *klesis* (“a calling”). It literally means “called out” and refers to those who have been called out of the world to become the people of God. It can be translated church, assembly, or congregation.

The Greeks used this word to describe a group of citizens who had been gathered together to discuss the affairs of the state. We find it used this way in Acts 19:39 where it is translated “assembly.” In verses 32 and 41 of the same chapter it is used to describe an out of control mob that was rioting.

In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament which was completed somewhere around 250-150 BC), *ekklesia* was used in passages that describe the people of Israel as having been assembled together for some special purpose. It is used this way in Acts 7:38.

*Ekklesia* always refers to a group of people. It never refers to a building. As a result, some Christians refuse to call their building a “church.” Instead, they call it the “meeting house.” They are right! The building is not the church. We are. The building is where the church meets. In fact, church buildings like we have today didn’t come into existence until the fourth century. During the first century, churches primarily met in homes (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1-2).

### Two primary ways the New Testament uses *ekklesia*

First, it is used to refer to the body of Christ which is made up of all true believers around the world and down through the ages:

**Matthew 16:18**

**Ephesians 1:22-23**

**Ephesians 3:10, 21**

**Ephesians 5:23-27, 29, 32**

**Colossians 1:18**

**Colossians 1:24**

**Hebrews 12:23**

- What does Ephesians 4:4-6 tell us about the church?

Second, the New Testament uses *ekklesia* to refer to local congregations. In this sense, a church is a group of believers in one geographical location who gather together for worship, instruction, fellowship, and evangelism. This is the most common usage of the word in the New Testament. Altogether, *ekklesia* is used 110 times to refer to the Christian Church. Out of that, ninety-two of them are references to local congregations. Notice how it does this in the following examples:

**Acts 8:1**

**1 Corinthians 1:2**

**2 Corinthians 1:1**

**1 Thessalonians 1:1**

**Revelation 2:1; 2:8; 2:12; 2:18; 3:1; 3:7; 3:14**

Sometimes it also uses *ekklesia* to refer to all of the local churches in a geographic region:

**Acts 9:31**

**Galatians 1:2**