

THE CHURCH

CORINTHIANS | WEEK 1: JAN 10, 2016

EKKLESIA

The most common classical usage of *ekklesia* and its cognates was as a political term, meaning an assembly of citizens. In the Greek city-state the citizens were called forth by the trumpet of the *kerux* (herald) summoning them to the *ekklesia* (assembly).

However, Paul's use of the term probably derives from the LXX's use of the term as a translation of *qahal*, "assembly." Most notable are the phrases *qahal Yahweh* or *qahal Israel*. There can be little doubt that Paul intended to depict the assemblies of Christian believers as equally manifestations of and in direct continuity with "the assembly of Yahweh," "the assembly of Israel."

PAUL'S NARRATIVE AND THE CHURCH

But a word like *ekklesia* is only part of the picture for understanding how Paul describes the church in his epistles. So, just because the word *ekklesia* does not occur cannot solely be the basis for determining whether the passage is part of Paul's theological understanding of the Church.

A better approach is to recall Paul's narrative as it relates to the Church:

1. Creation: aka The Garden of Eden as a Temple
2. Humanity: aka God's priests in the Temple/Garden
3. Israel: aka God's assembly (*qahal/ekklesia*) and a nation of priests (Ex 19:6)
4. Messiah: aka Jesus...or all of the above.

These parts of Paul's story inform how he understands "The Church." So even if "church" does not occur in a passage, Paul may still be referring to a theological implication for the Church. Often Paul uses *Ekklesia* to refer to number 3, Israel. Yet, for Paul all of the parts are necessary.

1 CORINTHIANS 3

CHURCH AS A GARDEN

Notice how Paul describes the Church as a Garden-Temple (1 Cor 3:6-9b). He uses garden language to describe himself, Apollos and God. Next he refers to the Corinthians (the Church in Corinth) as God's field and simultaneously God's "building."

Paul is describing the Church in part 1 language, Creation. He understands Genesis 1-3 as God setting up a temple for himself to present. So it is logical that he would transition to temple language for the Church.

CHURCH AS A TEMPLE

That Paul compares God's people to a temple in verses 10-15 is apparent from the specific description of the structure. The only other place in Scripture where a 'foundation' of a building is laid and 'gold', 'silver' and 'precious stones' are 'built' upon the foundation is Solomon's temple (1 Ki 5:17; 6:20-21, 28, 30, 35). Compare 1 Corinthians 3 with 1 Chronicles 29:

1 Chronicles 29:2 (esp. LXX)

I have provided for the house of my God the gold...silver...wood...precious stones...

1 Corinthians 3:12

If any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood...

Further, Paul states that Christ is the foundation of the temple/church (1 Cor 3:11).

PAUL, MALACHI, THE TEMPLE AND THE CHURCH

Malachi 3:1-4:1 appears to be behind 1 Corinthians 3:10-17. In language very close to Paul's, Malachi predicts that the Lord will 'come to his temple' in the latter days and will 'refine' the priests in the temple with 'fire...like silver and gold', 'burning' up every evildoer like 'stubble' and the wood of branches.

References:

Beale, G. K. *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Dunn, James D. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998.