

# THE CHURCH

COLOSSIANS | WEEK 2: JAN 17, 2016

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## 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 (Genesis 1-2)
2. Humanity (Adam): aka God's priests in the Temple/Garden (Genesis 1:26-28)
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. (2 Samuel 7:12-16)

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.

## COLOSSIANS

Colossians is somewhat unique among Paul's letters in that it is a letter to a church that he did not found. Yet Paul's concern for the church (and The Church) shines through the entire letter.

## COLOSSIANS 1:1-14: THE PROBLEM

Why is Paul praying for the Colossians? Paul doesn't state the problem explicitly, but verse 9 gives a clue to the issue that Paul will spend the rest of the letter addressing (Compare Ex 31:3). Notice how the gospel in verse 6 "is bearing fruit and growing (multiplying)" and Paul's prayer in verse 10 is that the Colossians will "bear fruit in every good work, growing (multiplying) in the knowledge of God". What Bible passage does "Be fruitful and multiply" remind you of?

## **COLOSSIANS 1:15-20: THE SOLUTION**

Jesus, of course, is the solution. But notice *how* Jesus is the solution:

1. He is the “firstborn over all creation” and “firstborn from among the dead”: Christ is the means of both creation and new creation, bringing the narrative of creation to its fulfillment.
2. He is the “image of the invisible God”: Christ fulfills Adam’s calling to be the image-bearer of God, and brings the narrative of humanity to its fulfillment.
3. He is the “head of the body, the *ekklesia*”: He is the one who reconciles God’s people to Himself, and enables them to gather, holy and chosen, in his kingdom, thus bringing the narrative of Israel to its fulfillment.
4. “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him”: Jesus as the faithful Messiah, establishes the eschatological temple, the “dwelling place of God” in his body.

## **COLOSSIANS 1:21-2:23: THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST VS. EMPTY PHILOSOPHY**

The church gains her identity, understanding, knowledge, and wisdom in and through Christ by the Spirit, not by any other means. The empty “philosophies” of the world have nothing to add or contribute.

## **COLOSSIANS 3-4: BEING THE BODY, UNITED IN LOVE**

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 4:16-17).

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