Ekklesia

A. Classical Usage
1. The noun *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία) is a compound word composed of the following:
   a. Preposition *ek* (ἐκ), "out from."
   b. Verb *kaleo* (καλέω), "to call."
2. Liddel and Scott list the following meanings (page 509):
   a. Assembly duly summoned
   b. In LXX, the Jewish congregation
   c. In NT, the Church as a body of Christians
3. So therefore the word has 3 distinct stages of meaning:
   a. Secular
   b. Jewish
   c. Christian
4. As a secular term, *he ekklesia* was a technical term for the lawful assembly of free Greek citizens met to transact public affairs.
5. That they were summoned is expressed in the verb *kaleo* and the preposition *ek* indicates that they were summoned out of the whole population as a select portion that included neither the populace, strangers, nor those who had forfeited their civic rights.
6. Both the calling and the calling out are the distinctives that make the word well adapted for its new Christian usage.
7. The word was used in classical literature for the summons to the army to assemble.
8. It is attested from Euripides and Herodotus onwards (5th century B.C.) and denotes in the usage of antiquity the popular assembly of the competent full citizens of the polis, “city.”
9. It reached its greatest importance in the 5th century and met at regular intervals (in Athens about 30-40 times a year, elsewhere less frequently) and also in cases of urgency as an extra-ordinary *ekklesia*.
10. Its sphere of competence included decisions on suggested changes in the law (which could only be effected by the council of the 400), on appointments to official positions and—at least in its heyday—every important question of internal and external policy (contracts, treaties, war and peace, finance).
11. To these was added in special cases (e.g. treason) the task of sitting in judgment, which as a rule fell to regular courts.
12. The *ekklesia* opened with prayers and sacrifices to the gods of the city.
13. It was bound by the existing laws.
14. Every citizen had the right to speak and to propose matters for discussion, but a proposition could only be dealt with if there was an expert opinion on the matter (Aristotle Ath. Pol. 45).
15. A decision was only valid if it won a certain number of votes.
16. Authorization to participate, and the methods of summoning the assembly and of voting—by show of hands in Athens (Aristotle Ath. Pol., 45), by acclaim (Thuc. 1.87), by ballot sheets or stones (Xenophon Hell. 1.7.9)—were strictly regulated, as was the control of the assembly, which originally lay with the president of the Prytaneis and from the 4th century B.C. with a college of nine.
17. Thus, *ekklesia*, centuries before the LXX and the NT was clearly characterized as a political phenomenon, repeated according to certain rules and within a certain framework.
18. It was the assembly of full citizens, functionally rooted in the constitution of the democracy, an assembly in which fundamental political and judicial decisions were taken.
19. The scope of its competence varied in the different states.
20. The word *ekklesia* throughout the Greek and Hellenistic areas, always retained its reference to the assembly of the polis.
21. In only 3 exceptional cases was it used for the business meeting of a cultic guild.
22. Otherwise it was never used for guilds or religious fellowships.
23. The Greeks had a well developed vocabulary to describe their religious gatherings and offerings.
24. Most of these terms are not found in the NT.
25. *Ekklesia* was used in a very restricted sense while *sunagoge* was used especially for the cultic gatherings and various offerings to the pagan deities.

B. LXX Usage
1. The noun *ekklesian* occurs about 100 times, of which 22 are in the Apocrypha and a further 3 have no Hebrew equivalent.

2. It represents exclusively the Hebrew *qahal* (including once each for 4 derivatives of the root).

3. On the other hand, it is striking that the Hebrew word is not always rendered by *ekklesia*.

4. In Genesis, Leviticus and Numbers for example *qahal* is translated 21 times by *synagoge*, and of the 15 passages in Ezekiel *ekklesia* appears only in Ezekiel 32:23 and never in the 5 passages in Jeremiah.

5. Instead, *sunagoge* along with *ochlos*, “crowd” (eg. Jer. 31:8; Ezek. 16:40; 17:17) or *plethos*, “multitude” (Ex. 12:6; 2 Ch. 31:18) are used.

6. *Ekklesia* did not pass immediately from the heathen world to the Christian church; the LXX supplied the point of transition.

7. When the Alexandrian translators undertook the rendering of the Hebrew Scriptures, they found 2 constantly recurring words:
   a. *Edah*
   b. *Qahal*

8. For these they employed their most adequate Greek equivalents:
   a. *Sunagoge*
   b. *Ekklesia*

9. This is the rule they seem to have followed: to render *edah* for the most part by *sunagoge* and never by *ekklesia*.

10. Where *ekklesia* is used in the LXX for *qahal*, it indicates the assembly of the people or a judicial assembly (e.g. Deut. 9:10; 23:3 ff.; Jdg. 21:5, 8; Mic. 2:5), the political body (e.g., the returned exiles Ezr. 10:8, 12; Neh. 8:2, 17).

11. It also indicates, especially in the Chronicler, the assembly of the people for worship (e.g. 2 Chr. 6:3 at the consecration of the temple; 30:2, 4, 13, 17 at Hezekiah’s Passover; cf. also Joel 2:16 and several times in the Ps. e.g. 21.

12. Nevertheless, even in these instances (even though, unlike Deut. 23:2, 3, 4, 9, Mic. 2:5, and Jdg. 20:2, the gen. *Kuriou*, of the Lord, or *tou theou*, of God, is not added) *ekklesia* is only used where it is a question of the people as God’s assembly, characterized by having answered Yahweh’s call.

13. The noun *ekklesia* was used in the LXX primarily as an equivalent to *qahal*, a term which to some degree was itself a particular group within the people of God, even when it was translated by *sunagoge*.

14. *Ekklesia* was used only infrequently for non-religious assemblies and it was never used for a pagan religious gathering.

C. NT Usage

1. The term *ekklesia* is employed 114 times in the NT.

2. It appears only 3 times in the Gospels (Mt. 16:18; 18:17 twice).

3. The word occurs most frequently in the Pauline epistles.

4. In the overwhelming majority of the NT passages, *ekklesia* is used as a fixed Christian term and is to be translated with congregation or congregational assembly or church.

5. Early Christianity did not conceive of *ekklesia* primarily as an organizational, but rather as a theological entity.

6. The *ekklesia* universalis is neither a secondary union made up of individual autonomous churches, nor is the local congregation only an organizational sub-unit of the total church.

7. Rather, both the local assembly of Christians and the trans-local community of believers are equally legitimate forms of the *ekklesia* created by God.

8. *Ekklesia*, wherever it appears by itself as an ecclesiological term, is to be understood as an abbreviation of the original term *ekklesia tou theou*, “the church of God.”

9. The New Thayers Greek Lexicon lists the following meanings for the word (pages 195-196):
   a. A gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly
   b. Among the Greeks from Thucydides down, an assembly of the people convened at the public place of council for the purpose of deliberating
   c. In the LXX often equivalent to *qahal*, the assembly of the Israelites
   d. Any gathering or throng of men assembled by chance or tumultuously

10. In the Christian sense:
   a. an assembly of Christians gathered for worship
b. a company of Christians, or of those who, hoping for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, observe their own religious rites, hold their own religious meetings, and manage their own affairs according to regulations prescribed for the body for order’s sake

c. those who anywhere, in city or village, constitute such a company and are united into one body
d. the whole body of Christians scattered throughout the earth; collectively, all who worship and honor God and Christ in whatever place they may be.

   a. Assembly, as a regularly summoned political body
   b. Assemblage, gathering, meeting
   c. The congregation of the Israelites, especially gathered for religious purposes
   d. Of the Christian church or congregation
   e. A church meeting
   f. The church or congregation as the totality of Christians living in one place
   g. Of house-churches
   h. The church universal, to which all believers belong
   i. The local church

12. Louw and Nida lists the following (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains volume 2):
   c. A group of citizens assembled for socio-political activities – ‘assembly, gathering’ (page 133).

13. The use of *ekklesia* became more widespread than *sunagoge* as the church rooted itself more predominately in the soil of the secular world, breaking away from its Jewish stock and stem.

14. The use of *sunagoge* in the early 1st century church declined because it was permanently associated with the dispensation of the client nation of Israel, while the use of *ekklesia* increased, not only because it was already familiar but also because it had an honorable meaning in Greek culture.

15. After the period of the exile it was the synagogue which dominated the religious life of the Jews.

16. It was in the Greek Diaspora that the synagogue became accepted as the new designation for the ‘edhah.

17. The name applied not only to the house of the synagogue but to the congregation of the synagogue as well.

18. Having this background in mind, it is very interesting that the Gentile Christian congregations did not use the designation of synagogue for their significations.

19. The members of these 1st Christian congregations came in a large degree from the Jewish synagogues which consisted of both Jews and proselytes.

20. These believers claim to represent the true Jewish religion (Rm. 2:28-29) and the true Israel of God (Rm. 9:6) since they were regenerate.

21. Although these ancient Christian congregations were patterned primarily after the Jewish synagogues, they avoided using the term synagogue.

22. In fact, the term synagogue is used only one time in the NT as a designation for a Christian congregation (Jms. 2:2) since James was speaking exclusively to regenerate Jews.

23. The 1st and 2nd century Christians did not employ synagogue as a term to describe themselves in order to avoid being identified with the client nation of Israel since the latter belong to an entirely different dispensation.

24. In the Roman Empire the synagogues stood as symbols of Jewish law and religion, and the new Christian religion.

25. However, Christian congregations avoided association with this term.

26. Instead, they adopted the term *ekklesia* which had fallen out of usage in Jewish circles.

27. As well as avoiding associations with the Jewish religion, the Christians also chose *ekklesia* as a way of distancing themselves from the terms utilized by the pagan Greek cults.

28. Here a multitude of terms would have been at the disposal of the ancient Christians.

29. Secular Gentile authors such as Lucian and Celsus did, however, identify the Christians congregations by the pagan term *thiasos*.

30. More amazing than this though, the early Church historian Eusebius also used the term for the Church.

31. Therefore, the term *ekklesia* was employed by the NT writers as a technical term to designate a totally unique group of believers who at the moment of salvation were called out of the cosmic system of Satan
and were placed into union with the Lord Jesus Christ through the Baptism of the Spirit and as a result have been provided with totally unique privileges and opportunities to glorify God.

32. The *ekklesia* began with the Baptism of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost in June of 30 A.D. (Acts 2), and will leave this earth at the Rapture (1 Th. 4:13-17).

33. This group of believers is distinct from OT saints who belong to the theocentric dispensations.

34. Distinctions between the Dispensations of the Church and Israel:
   a. Israel had a "shadow" Christology and Church has a "historical" Christology.
   b. Israel had only covenants and the Church has Baptism of the Holy Spirit.
   c. Israel is a Jewish client nation and USA is a Gentile client nation.
   d. Israel is related to the OT canon and Church is related to the NT canon.
   e. Christ as the Shekinah Glory indwelt the Holy of Holies in Israel and Christ indwells the body of every believer in this Dispensation.
   f. There was limited power in Israel, less than 1%-Enduement, whereas, all Church Age believers have the indwelling & the filling of the Spirit.
   g. Spirituality in Israel was the function of the Faith Rest Drill, whereas, spirituality in Church Age is the Filling of the Spirit.
   h. Limited spiritual gifts in Israel, but every Church Age believer has a spiritual gift.

35. This term is synonymous with other terms in the NT which also designate this same group of believers, e.g., citizens of heaven, body of Christ, bride of Christ, branches, kingdom of priests, stones of the building, etc.

36. These group of believers were first prophesied by our Lord in Matthew 16:18.

37. They are totally unique by virtue of what God has provided them under His policy of grace.

38. This group of believers are the beneficiaries of 40 things at the moment of salvation, therefore, the Church Age is called the "dispensation of grace" (Eph. 3:2).

39. It began 10 days after The Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection.

40. The Church Age is divided into 2 categories:
   a. Pre-Canon: Before the NT was completed (Book Acts 30-96 A.D.)
   b. Post-Canon: After the NT was completed (Epistles of NT 96 A.D.-Rapture)

41. The Church has been elected by God in eternity past: New "spiritual" species-Great Power Experiment of Church Age (Eph. 1:4; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:3).

42. The Church Age ends with a resurrection just as the dispensation of the hypstatic union.

43. It is a unique dispensation because it is between the 1st 2 resurrections in history.

44. The term ekklesia designates a totally unique dispensation in human history, which is an extension of the hypostatic union.

45. Unique Factors of the Church Age:
   a. Baptism of the Spirit
   b. Protocol Plan of God
   c. Equal Privilege and Equal Opportunity
   d. Portfolio of Invisible Assets
   e. Royal Commisions
   f. Mystery Doctrine
   g. Indwelling of the Trinity
   h. 100% Availability of Divine Power
   i. No Prophecy
   j. Invisible Heroship

46. The term *ekklesia* was employed to designate the following regarding this group of believers who are in union with Christ by virtue of the Baptism of the Spirit:

47. Local assembly of believers in a city or town.

48. Universal assembly of believers living throughout the world.