



## ASIA PACIFIC MESSIANIC FELLOWSHIP

with **The OLIVE TREE MESSAGE!** Romans 11  
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*We Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem! Psalm 122:6*

### When Did the “Church” Begin?

By Roger Walkwitz

What do you mean? Please explain. What? The church did not begin in Acts 2?!

This is a fact of history that sorely needs explanation, since Tradition has promoted a distortion of history for its own ends. This is not something new, like the history revisionists of today. This goes back to the first three centuries after Yeshua.

As a teenage new Believer in Jesus, I was taught that Acts 2 was the beginning of the church, and that Jesus predicted that He would build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. Was the church another name for Israel? This puzzled me since I had read a lot of the OT and knew that God had made a lot of Promises to Israel of a grand future for them, even though they sinned so terribly against Him. Surely God would not go back on His solemn Promises! If so, what happens to John 3:16 and others?

A partial answer came when I read Acts 7:38, Stephen referring to “the church in the wilderness” with Moses. If the “church” existed in Moses’ day, then how can teachers today say the church began in Acts 2?

Later I came across Hebrews 2:12, quoting David in Psalm 22 where he says “in the midst of the church I will sing praise to you.” So that settled it! If both Moses and David were in the church, then nothing changed, nothing new started in Acts 2, the Day of Pentecost, and Jesus would not be predicting anything new and different in Matt 16.

However, church teachers insist that something new did start in Acts 2, the beginning of their “church,” and later I learned that “their church” had replaced Israel. Wow! Where in the Bible is that? I had read the Bible many times and never found that idea.

So, some more research was in order. All English translations have “missed the boat.” As usual, when there is a seeming problem in our Bibles, it is necessary to go back to the Hebrew and Greek words, and “**to think Jewish, to think like they thought when the texts were written,**” knowing the history and culture of those times. A 21<sup>st</sup> century Greek mindset will not solve any problems. God wrote the entire Bible through Jewish writers thinking in Hebrew, even if some wrote in Greek (NT).

Checking the Hebrew of Psalm 22:22, the word is *Kahal(Qahal)*, translated there as “congregation.” *Kahal* is translated “congregation” 86 times, never as “church”! The Septuagint (LXX), Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), translated *Kahal* in Psalm 22:22 as *Ekklesia*. In the NT, the Greek *Ekklesia* is translated as “church” in nearly every place it occurs, in every Bible. But does “church” come from *Ekklesia*, like all theological books claim? **No, it does not!**

Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, or any good dictionary, says church comes from “LGk *kyriakon*, fr. Gk, neut of *kyriakos* of the lord, fr. *Kyrios* lord, master.” There is no *Ekklesia* anywhere! So who is being fooled? Actually, a *kyriakon*, a house of a lord, was a pagan temple in NT times, as all pagan gods were called lord so-and-so.

To continue my research, I went to the library of ancient books at the University of Florida, and asked for the oldest translation of the New Testament into English. I was brought a large book, about 18” by 26” in a climate-controlled room, no copying allowed. In every place where I knew *Ekklesia* occurred, the translation was “congregation.” No word “church” anywhere! So when

did “church” become the “translation” for *Ekklesia*? My suspicion is the King James Version, but I have not verified it yet.

Why would such a change be made? Probably to let people think that there really was something new started in Acts 2. By using a new word, the normal assumption would be that it stood for something new and different. To me, this is being very deceptive. Today it has become accepted “truth” that church comes from *Ekklesia*, but it is not Truth!

The Truth is that the Congregation (*Kahal* and some other Hebrew words) of the LORD in the Tanakh (OT) is the same as the Congregation (*Ekklesia*) of the LORD in the LXX and the Apostolic Scriptures (NT). There is continuity all through Scripture, OT and NT, of the Congregation of the LORD! The word “church” should not be in any of our Bibles! **And Israel has not been replaced!**

A more correct translation of Matt 16:18 would be Yeshua saying, “I will (continue) to build up My Congregation,” as the word there in Greek is definitely *Ekklesia*.

An “evidence” that some church teachers give for their claim that “the church began in Acts 2” is that synagogue is used for Jewish meetings and *Ekklesia* (church) is used for meetings of Believers. See if your Bible faithfully translates James 2:2 as, “if anyone comes into your synagogue,” as that is what the Greek says?! James is talking about a meeting of Believers, which indicates that both *Synagogue* and *Ekklesia* can refer to meetings of Believers in Yeshua. Today, some Messianic communities call themselves synagogues, some use Kahilah (a form of *Kahal*), but none use the word “church.”

So what happened in Acts 2, the Day of Pentecost? This was **the launching of the Great Commission!** The Apostles were told in Matt 28:18-20 to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them everything that He had taught them, when they were filled with the Spirit to enable them to do such a thing, boldly. Acts 2 tells us that disciples were made, they were baptized, and they were taught daily for many weeks. They were enjoying this Bible Conference so much and not going home to implement Acts 1:8 (go to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth) that God sent persecution to scatter them! To their credit, as they went back home they did teach the Truth to all they met.

This Congregation (*Ekklesia*) of the LORD could rightly also be called the Messianic Congregation, because the focus was on the fact that The Messiah had come and gone, having accomplished everything He came to do. Salvation had always been by God’s Grace through one’s faith response, but now, faith had more evidence: THE Messiah had come! There was no longer any doubt that sins had been actually paid for. The resurrection was the proof, and so it became basic to the presentation of the Gospel.

So what about the churches all around us, many denominations, from Catholic to Pentecostal, etc, where did they come from? A careful examination of the history of the Messianic Congregations from the time of the Apostles shows that they were considered a sect of Judaism for many years. Until 70AD there were more than a dozen sects (or denominations if you prefer) of Judaism, as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Messianic, etc., but when the Temple was destroyed, only two survived: Messianic Judaism and Pharisaic Judaism. Gentiles, beginning with Cornelius, became equal partners with Jews in the Messianic Communities, without conversion, as God never had any conversion process or ceremony. Conversion was made up by Jewish rabbis for self-protection, because so many Gentiles at that time wanted to convert to Judaism.

Messianic Judaism (Jew & Gentile Believers together in the Good Olive Tree!) continued on, following Torah, celebrating the Appointed Times (Festivals of the LORD, Lev 23), for more than a hundred years after 70AD, because they were not dependent on the Temple and the priesthood. Sin and Trespass offerings were no longer required since Yeshua’s sacrifice took care of those. Until the Temple was destroyed, other offerings for vows, etc. could be made if one so desired. Even the lambs for Passover were no longer required since Yeshua was THE Lamb of God, so the lamb was symbolized with a shank bone and the matzah. Now the Messianic Believers could and did celebrate Passover anywhere in the world at the proper time each year on God’s calendar.

Pharisaic Judaism had problems after 70AD. How could they survive without the Temple and the priesthood? A group of rabbis, led by Yochanan ben Zakkai, gathered in Yavneh, a town south of Joppa, to figure out what to do. Over some time they revamped Pharisaic Judaism with substitutes for the sacrifices, such as prayer and good works. This became known as Rabbinic Judaism. Apparently they even adopted the Messianic practice for Passover, such that the Haggadah for both is the same, with some variations in emphasis within each group. Rabbinic Judaism has divided into many groups today, which is beyond our interest for this article.

As noted above, Messianic Judaism continued on the foundation of Yeshua and the Apostles for a good 150 yrs. Then persecution began to take its toll, as the vitality of life in Yeshua began to wane. For some Gentiles in Messianic Judaism, was identification with their Jewish brethren worth the persecution that they had to endure with them? NO, said some, and broke off. Over time, more left, and getting together, they decided to revamp their newly forming congregations different from their Jewish brethren. Then Rome would know they were not Jewish. Developing anti-Semitism also had a part in their separation, so they decided to change Shabbat (Saturday) to Sunday (day of the Sun god). They brought back their pagan eucharist and used it instead of Passover. They called themselves *Ekklesia*, but they were no longer the *Ekklesia* of the NT. These changes and more were ratified at the Council at Nicea in 325, when this **bogus Ekklesia** separated itself under the leadership of Emperor Constantine from anything “Jewish,” which actually meant anything from the Tanakh. The claim was made that they had “another foundation to build upon” and did not need that “most odious and despicable of mankind, the Jews,” or his Tanakh. Anti-Semitism was a main factor sealing the split from Messianic Judaism. Read Constantine’s letter for yourself! You will be shocked, as I was, when I discovered it long after seminary days!

And so began what we call “**the church, a bogus ekklesia**,” a breakaway from the Congregation of the LORD that continued from OT times, that expanded greatly from the time of Yeshua and His apostles. Church historians and theologians do not recognize this break as clearly as they should, because they want to consider Messianic Judaism as “the church.” From what we have learned from history and Scripture, we disagree.

From Constantine onward, this bogus ekklesia, departing from Scripture, with hatred toward the Jews, entered, and in our opinion caused, the Dark Ages. It became a political power, with military power, the “Church Triumphant!” The Reformation brought some turning back to Bible Truth, but failed to get back on solid ground, the Foundation of Yeshua and His Apostles, which continues today in varying degrees in all churches.

We are dealing with organizations, not spiritual salvation from sin, which is offered by God to individuals by His sovereign choice. This is another subject, not dealt with here.

Messianic Judaism is recognizable in history until the time of Mohammed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, when most Believers in Yeshua were slaughtered. Since then, it appears now and then in some old writings, but it has expanded greatly again since the 6-Day War of June 1967! Hundreds, maybe a thousand, Messianic Communities have emerged since 1967 all over the world, a new work of the Spirit of God to get His people, Jew & Gentile, back into covenant relationship with Him, on the same Foundation of Truth & Practice as He and His Apostles were, ready to welcome Him at His Return!

The Asia Pacific Messianic Fellowship is being used and blessed by Yeshua to pioneer and nurture this move of God in these exciting days before His Return! HalleluYah! Learn more at: [www.APMFInc.com](http://www.APMFInc.com).