

FAQ

FROM THE MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS ARCHIVES (2000-2018)

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MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

Frequently Asked Questions

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

- ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
Ara: Aramaic
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
CJB: *Complete Jewish Bible* (1998)
CJSB: *Complete Jewish Study Bible* (2016)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
ESV: *English Standard Version* (2001)
Ger: German
GNT: *Greek New Testament*
Grk: Greek
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
HCSB: *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (2004)
Heb: Hebrew
HNV: *Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible*
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
JBK: *New Jerusalem Bible-Koren* (2000)
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
KJV: *King James Version*
Lattimore: *The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore* (1996)
LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)
LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)
LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
LXX: *Septuagint*
m. Mishnah
MT: *Masoretic Text*
NASB: *New American Standard Bible* (1977)
NASU: *New American Standard Update* (1995)
NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
NEB: *New English Bible* (1970)
Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
NETS: *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (2007)
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: *New International Version* (1984)
NJB: *New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic* (1985)
NJSB: *Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (1999)
NKJV: *New King James Version* (1982)
NRSV: *New Revised Standard Version* (1989)
NLT: *New Living Translation* (1996)
NT: *New Testament*
OT: *Old Testament*
REB: *Revised English Bible* (1989)
RSV: *Revised Standard Version* (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: *Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version* (2014)
TNIV: *Today's New International Version* (2005)
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: *United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition*
v(s). *verse(s)*
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: *Latin Vulgate*
YLT: *Young's Literal Translation* (1862/1898)
WMB: *World Messianic Bible* (2020)

Church, word of pagan origin

I have heard that the English word “church” is of pagan origins. Is there any substantiation to support this?

There is debate over the origins of the English word **church**, but before we can address this, we need to have a proper understanding of the Greek word *ekklēsia*, which in Bibles is commonly rendered as “church.” Is “church” an appropriate translation of this word?

LS defines *ekklēsia* as “an assembly of the citizens regularly summoned, the legislative assembly” and “in N.T. the Church, either the body, or the place.”¹ In the Apostolic Scriptures, *ekklēsia* is used as a term to define the Body of Messiah, and thus by extension, is rendered as “church” in most English translations of the New Testament. *TDNT* remarks that

“Since the NT uses a single term, translations should also try to do so, but this raises the question whether ‘church’ or ‘congregation’ is always suitable, especially in view of the OT use for Israel and the underlying Hebrew and Aramaic... ‘Assembly,’ then, is perhaps the best single term, particularly as it has both a congregate and an abstract sense, i.e., for the assembling as well as the assembly” (*TDNT*).²

This Christian commentary says that **assembly** would be the best, consistent translation for the word *ekklēsia*.

The ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Tanach, the Septuagint (LXX), produced approximately three centuries before Yeshua the Messiah, frequently translated the Hebrew word *qahal*, or assembly/congregation, as *ekklēsia*. *TWOT* indicates how “usually *qāhāl* is translated as *ekklēsia* in the LXX.”³ When the Apostolic writers used the Greek word *ekklēsia*, often rendered as “church” in our English Bibles, they did not see the *ekklēsia* as a separate assembly or group apart from Israel. Rather, they considered the *ekklēsia* to be Israel—albeit an enlarged Kingdom realm of Israel, with a restored Twelve Tribes at the center, and enlarged borders to welcome in the righteous from the nations (cf. Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:15-18). It is not surprising by any means that one of the definitions given for the word *ekklēsia* does in fact include “Israel.” *Thayer* states that “in the Sept. often equiv. to [*qahal*], the assembly of the Israelites.”⁴

It is unfortunate that *ekklēsia* in most Bibles has been translated as “church,” whereas it would be best rendered as either “assembly” or “congregation.” Two Christian translations which render *ekklēsia* as “assembly” include Young’s Literal Translation and the Literal Translation of the Holy Bible by Jay P. Green. The Complete Jewish Bible by David H. Stern often uses phraseology like “Messianic community.”

As it relates to whether or not the English word “church” is of pagan origins, there are a number of differing opinions. *ISBE* indicates that it comes from “Gk. *kuriakós*—‘belonging to the Lord’; NT *ekklēsia*—‘gathering’; Lat. *ecclesia*.”⁵ *NIDB* further remarks on how, “The English word derives from the Greek *kuriakos* (belonging to the

¹ H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 239.

² K.L. Schmidt, “*ekklēsia*,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 397.

³ Jack P. Lewis, “*qāhāl*,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:790.

⁴ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 196.

⁵ G.W. Bromiley, “Church,” in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1:693.

Church, word of pagan origin

Lord), but it stands for another Greek word *ekklēsia* (whence ‘ecclesiastical’), denoting an assembly.”⁶ *Smith’s Bible Dictionary* has a slightly different view of the origins of the English word “church,” remarking,

“The derivation of the word is generally said to be from the Greek *kuriakon*, ‘*belonging to the Lord*’. But the derivation has been too hastily assumed. It is probably connected with *kirk*, the Latin *circus*, *circulus*, the Greek *kuklos*, because the congregations were gathered in circles.”⁷

Regardless of if you believe that the English word “church” comes from the Greek *kuriakos*, meaning something which belongs to the Lord, or the Latin *circus* via *circulus*, because the early congregations gathered in circles—there is no substantial proof that “church” is from a word of pagan religious origins.

There are a few you may encounter, in their criticism of our Christian brothers and sisters, who say that they are part of “the kirk” or “the kirch” and that the English word “church” is of pagan origins. (*Die Kirch* is simply German word “the church.”) Their problem, aside from this being a non-substantiated belief, is that they are trying to insult others and incite them, rather than reason with them from the Word of God about who the true assembly is.

The true assembly or *qahal/ekklēsia* is the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13). While we believe that *ekklēsia* is properly rendered as either “assembly” or “congregation” in English (“assembly” is probably slightly better than “congregation”), saying that the word “church” is of pagan origins is a poor excuse in light of a bigger problem. The bigger problem is getting people to theologically see that there is no separate assembly of elect called “the Church,” and that there is only one *ekklēsia*, that of Israel. This has to be proven from more than just vocabulary, but specifically from the calling and mission the Lord has placed upon His people—a separate “Church” **or** not.⁸

⁶ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “Church,” in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 218.

⁷ [E-Sword 8.0.8: Smith’s Bible Dictionary](#). MS Windows 9x. Franklin, TN: Equipping Ministries Foundation, 2008.

⁸ For a further discussion of related topics, consult the author’s publication *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*