

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)

Ekklesia/Qahal (English word “church”)

I have heard that there really is no such thing as “the Church” in Scripture, and that the Hebrew and Greek terms used in the Bible can support this. Can you help me with this issue?

Some form of this summary appears in a wide array of articles and publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics

In the Apostolic Scriptures, no reader can deny how *ekklēsia* is used as a term to define the Body of Messiah, and so by extension it is rendered as “church” in most English translations of the New Testament. But whether this is an appropriate rendering or not is something critical to ask, because when many people encounter the word “church,” they think not of a living and breathing group of Messiah followers, but instead of a building with a steeple.¹ *TDNT* offers some rather important remarks on the term *ekklēsia*:

“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*.³ The Septuagint, or ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible dating three centuries before Yeshua, frequently translated the Hebrew word *qahal*, or assembly/congregation, as *ekklēsia*. *Qahal* is one of the main Hebrew terms for “assembly” or “congregation” used in the Tanach, which almost exclusively refers to Israel. *TWOT* indicates how “usually *qāhāl* is translated as *ekklēsia* in the LXX.”⁴ When the martyr Stephen spoke of “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38, KJV), *tē ekklēsia en tē erēmō*, “the church” here he was speaking of, was actually the assembly/congregation of Israel. The Hebrew word *qahal* is used in the Tanach to describe the people of Israel. *TWOT* indicates how

“*qāhāl* may...designate the congregation as an organized body. There is *qahal yisrā’el* (Deut 31:30), *qahal YHWH* (Num 16:3, etc.), and *qahal ʾēlōhīm* (Neh 13:1) and then at other times merely ‘the assembly’ (*haqqāhāl*). We encounter... ‘the assembly of the people of God’ (Jud 20:2). Of special interest is the phrase ‘congregation of the Lord’ (*qahal YHWH*) of which there are thirteen instances (Num 16:3; 20:4; Deut 23:2-4; Mic 2:5; 1 Chr 28:8). It is the nearest OT equivalent of ‘church of the Lord’” (*TWOT*).⁵

¹ Note how there are various people one will encounter in the Messianic community, who will not use the term “church” because they somehow think it has pagan origins. **But** we do not readily use the term “church” to describe God’s people on theological grounds, and the confusion it frequently can cause. When “the Church” is typically referred to in our ministry materials, it is primarily to refer to a religious institution.

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

³ 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.”

⁴ Jack P. Lewis, “*qāhāl*,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:790.

⁵ *Ibid*.

When the Apostolic writers used the Greek word, often rendered as “church” in our English Bibles, they did not see the *ekklēsia* as a separate assembly or group of people removed from Israel. **They considered the *ekklēsia* to be Israel**, perhaps better understood to be an *Israel maximized* by the arrival of the Messiah, the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13) or Israel of God (Galatians 6:16).

It is not surprising by any means that one of the lexical definitions given for the word *ekklēsia* does in fact include “Israel.” *Thayer* states that “in the Sept. [*ekklēsia* is] often equiv. to [*qahal*], the assembly of the Israelites.”⁶ *BDAG* further summarizes how not only does *ekklēsia* correspond to the “OT Israelites assembly, congregation,” but asserts how it was used by the early Messianic Believers “in Greek-speaking areas for chiefly two reasons: to affirm continuity with Israel through use of a term found in Gk. translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, and to allay any suspicion, esp. in political circles, that Christians were a disorderly group.”⁷ This was because in an entirely classical context *ekklēsia* could have been used to describe a civil assembly, such as that of the Athenians,⁸ or even the Roman Senate. It is unfortunate that *ekklēsia* in most Bibles has been translated as “church,” whereas it would be best rendered as either “assembly” or “congregation,” with people able to have an easier time seeing that when Yeshua said that He came to “build” His assembly (Matthew 16:18), it was undoubtedly connected with the Father’s promise to “rebuild” Israel (Jeremiah 33:7).⁹

There are many references one will find in a diverse array of technical commentaries on the New Testament, where linguistic and theological connections between *ekklēsia* and *qahal* are made.¹⁰

⁶ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 196.

⁷ Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 303.

⁸ H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 239.

⁹ Consult the author’s article “When Did ‘the Church’ Begin?” (appearing in *Introduction to Things Messianic*), which includes discussion on the linguistic connections between the verbs *banah* and *oikodomeō*, employed in Jeremiah 33:7 (LXX) and Matthew 16:18.

¹⁰ For a further, important analysis, consult the author’s resource *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*