

6. THE ECCLESIA—“OUT-CALLED”

Just as the Greek word *aiōn* is lost in a sea of confusion in most English translations of Scripture, so is another Greek word, that is, the word *ekklesia*, which is often translated as *church* or *assembly*. To understand the purpose of the eons, it is important that we understand the meaning of the word *ekklesia* and how it is used in Scripture.

We are immediately faced with a challenge, for when one mentions the word *church* many people think of a building where believers gather or an organization to join. In Scripture, the *church*, as many call it, is simply *the body of believers in Christ* and not some great, powerful institution as viewed by the world and even many believers. The emphasis as given by the spirit of God is on Christ’s body, which is unique in God’s purpose and plan, for the body of Christ is seated together among the celestials in Christ and through this vessel God is making known His multifarious wisdom among the celestials (see Ephesians 2.6; 3.8-12).

The word *church* is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means “out-called” or “a called-out company.” In English Bibles, this word is translated in different ways, depending on the context. If it refers to believers, it is most often translated *church*. When *ekklesia* refers to other groups or people who are “out-called,” translators use other words such as *assembly* or *congregation*. And yet, some of the translations that seek a more literal rendering use the word *assembly* in all places of the word *ekklesia*. The Concordant Version uses the equivalent word *ecclesia* in all cases. Henceforth, the word *ecclesia* will be used for the Greek word *ekklesia*.¹

Before looking at some *ecclesia* references, a word is needed about the equivalent Hebrew word, which is *kahal*. It is usually translated *congregation* or *assembly* in the Old Testament. By comparing a verse in the New Testament quoted from the Old Testament, we discover that *kahal* and *ecclesia* are equivalent words.

I will declare Your name to My brothers; I will praise You in the midst of the **assembly [kahal]**. (Psalm 22.22 LITV)

“I will announce Your name to My brothers; I will hymn to You in the midst of the **assembly [ekklesia]**.” Psa. 22:22 (Hebrews 2.12 LITV)

Thus, *ecclesia* is not a building, an institution or an organization. It is people! A people called out to assemble together.

¹ Notice that in the English equivalent form of the Greek transliteration, the only difference is the use of the letter *c* instead of the letter *k*.

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Now, the word *ecclesia* is not exclusively used in reference to believers. In fact, it is a common noun (generic term) that refers to any company or gathering of people that fits the description of “out-called.” There are two examples.

First, in Ephesus, there was a riot that rose up against Paul and his companions.

Others, indeed, then, cried some other thing, for **the ecclesia** was in confusion, and the majority were not aware on what account they had come together. Now they unite on Alexander, one of the throng, the Jews pushing him forward. Now Alexander, gesturing with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the populace. ... For we are also in danger of being indicted concerning today’s commotion, there inhering not one cause concerning which we shall be able to render any account concerning this riot. And, saying these things, he dismisses **the ecclesia**. (Acts 19.32-33, 40-41 cv)

This mob of silversmiths was a distinct “called-out” group based on their profession and their riot against Paul. Who would ever think of an *ecclesia* as a mob? What if we replaced the word *ecclesia* with the translated word *church*? The church of the riotous silversmiths!

Second, within this same story about the mob and Paul, there is another *ecclesia* mentioned that refers to a legal or governing council that put down the mob of silversmiths. This was a legal council or *ecclesia* that settled disputes in Ephesus.

Now if you are seeking for anything concerning other things, in the **legal ecclesia** will it be explained. (Acts 19.39 cv)

So, we have an *ecclesia* of riotous silversmiths and an *ecclesia* of legal authorities in Ephesus. Why not call this group the legal church?

It is unfortunate how this common noun has been changed to the word *church* and made into a proper noun and capitalized as the *Church*. The emphasis has shifted from simply a “called-out” people to a great institution called the “Church.” Consequently, the word *church* has taken on a meaning far greater than Scripture presents. Throughout Christendom, it has become many things that Scripture never assigns to it. Say the word *church* and to many it means a great institution, an organization or enterprise with much machinery (activities, programs) that has to be maintained and supported with a big bank account, a building, a membership roll in a denomination, a bunch of people sitting in pews every Sunday doing something they call “worship” and then listening to the pastor, much of which looks more like a rendition of Judaism.

Groups of people who are the *ecclesia* or “out-called” are to stand out from others around them. They are called out from others, and thus they are to stand apart from them. However, there is nothing unique about the word *ecclesia*, for many gatherings could be considered “out-called.” The uniqueness is found in the “out-called” themselves, in the people.

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It could be argued that the uniqueness of the “church” has been lost. In fact, the “church” has failed in this regard. What is called the “church” does not stand out as a spiritual *body*, which is its uniqueness from every other type of ecclesia. It is safe to say that the so-called “church” of our day hardly looks like a *unique* called-out body, for it looks, acts and functions with little difference from organizations of the world. Most of what is called the “church” has lost its distinctiveness from the world around. Thus, when people of the world hear the word “church,” they associate it with a building on a street corner and people who meet there to do “church” things. Contrast this concept with 1 Corinthians 16.19.

Consequently, the word translated *church* is just like the words translated *hell* and *eternal*, for it has taken on a meaning foreign to the original language.

Let us not grow discouraged over the failure we see in what is called the “church.” It is all in accord with the purpose and plan of God. Failure is necessary to prove the futility of the flesh. Failures among denominations, non-denominations, house churches and church houses will occur, for the flesh profits nothing; that which is of the carnal man must fail and will fail. After all, *God locks up all together in stubbornness, that He should be merciful to all* (Romans 11.32 cv). Only Christ can build His ecclesia.

Now, let us look at how the word *ecclesia* is used in reference to the Lord’s people. Just as the kingdom of God is progressively unfolded in Scripture, so is *the ecclesia of God*. In fact, they are intimately related, for a kingdom is comprised of people that can either be rulers (vice regents) for a king or subjects of a king; it is not just comprised of a king and his territory.

Ecclesia in the wilderness.

The first obvious indication of *the ecclesia of God* is revealed through the ancient nation of Israel, a called-out company from among all the nations of the world. For those who prefer to use the word *church*, they were the first to be called the *church of God*.

In Acts, Stephen, a man full of grace and power, was doing great miracles and signs among the people, which caused a stir among those of a synagogue termed Freedmen (Acts 6.8-9 cv). All that listened to Stephen could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke. True to form, since they could not cope with a man of such stature, they spoke falsely against him and dragged him before the Sanhedrin. However, Stephen sat before these men as if he had the face of a messenger (angel), and he began to recount the entire history of the nation of Israel, referring to the Israelites as an ecclesia as they were wandering in the wilderness under Moses. This is the beginning of the *Passover Age* (Eon).

This is the Moses who says to the sons of Israel: A Prophet will God be raising up to you from among your brethren, as me. This is he who came to be in **the**

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ecclesia [church] in the wilderness with the messenger, who speaks to him in Mount Sinai.... (Acts 7.37-38 cv [KJV])

Moses stood in the midst of the *ecclesia* in the wilderness. Using our modern-day term, we could call this *the church in the wilderness*, for they were a people called out of Egypt to serve God. The *Passover Age* (Eon) began when they applied the blood. This was the beginning of the progressive unveiling of God's *ecclesia*. The *ecclesia in the wilderness* became *the ecclesia of Pentecost* when those waiting in the upper room after Jesus' ascension received the Holy Spirit of promise as an earnest of the enjoyment of our allotment (Ephesians 1.14 cv). This commenced the *Pentecostal Age* (Eon). They received (as all who believe in this eon receive) an earnest of the spirit as a promise that one day the *ecclesia* of God will receive the full anointing of the Holy Spirit in order to possess the allotment (spiritual land). Spiritually speaking, the allotment is not a physical plot of land on earth but the spiritual land of new, glorified, spiritual bodies capable of transcending time and space, that is, celestial bodies. When this comes, we begin to enter the *Tabernacles Age* (Eon).

Whole ecclesia.

Stephen himself was part of *the ecclesia of Pentecost* that started with a handful of disciples called to follow the Lord. Peter, Andrew, James, John and the other disciples of Christ were the embryo and the nucleus of the *ecclesia* that was given an earnest of the spirit. After Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, a small gathering of Jews numbering about 120, along with the twelve apostles, waited in an upper room as commanded by the Lord.

On the day of Pentecost as they waited together in a house, tongues as if of fire came upon them; they were filled with the spirit and they began to speak in different languages (Acts 2.1-4). These were not strange tongues but the known languages of the Jews from many countries of different languages that were gathered in Jerusalem for the Jewish festival of Pentecost. They needed to hear what the spirit of God had to say to them, so God's spirit arranged for them to be told in their own languages, so that they could understand.

Peter, who was given the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, stood before the throngs of Israelites to declare the truth and call for repentance.

Men! Israelites! Hear these words: Jesus, the Nazarene, a Man demonstrated to be from God for you by powerful deeds and miracles and signs, which God does through Him in the midst of you, according as you yourselves are aware—**This One, given up in the specific counsel and foreknowledge of God, you, gibbeting by the hand of the lawless, assassinate.** ... Now Peter is averring to them, **“Repent and be baptized each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the pardon of your sins, and you shall be obtaining the gratuity of the holy spirit.** For to you is the

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promise and to your children, and to all those afar, whosoever the Lord our God should be calling to Him.” (Acts 2.22-23, 38-39 cv)

Notice the distinctiveness of Peter’s declaration. It was to a very specific audience, the Israelites. Peter was calling his blood brethren unto sonship. He reminded them of the powerful deeds done by Jesus in their midst. It rightly accused them of offering up their Messiah and held them responsible for killing Jesus. It required that they repent and be baptized, in order to receive a pardon for their sins and to receive the Holy Spirit.

It is noteworthy that this message was directed only to the Israelites and was not directed to the gentiles or the nations. This message had limited meaning to those who were outside the commonwealth of Israel *in that day* and who had not demanded the death of Israel’s Messiah.

It seems that we often think that everything fell into place all at once, including the good news of salvation. However, this is not how the Lord has worked in the history of mankind. He shines increasing levels of light on matters as He unfolds truths to mankind. Scripture is the unfolding of the truth of God. His truth goes forth in progressive stages.

We see the same progression when it comes to the spirit of God. The ecclesia in the wilderness had the spirit of God in their midst (Isaiah 63.11; Haggai 2.5). The ecclesia of Pentecost has an earnest of the spirit within each person. The coming ecclesia of the Tabernacles will have the full anointing of the spirit of God within each one of the conquerors that are glorified as Christ is glorified. Further, each conqueror is being connected together as God’s dwelling place, *in spirit* (Ephesians 2.22 cv).

The initial message to the Israelites did not contain the depth of the message that later went out, particularly through Paul, the apostle of the nations, that is, salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2.8), justification by faith (Romans 3.28; 5.1) and the conciliation of all (2 Corinthians 5.18-19; Colossians 1.20).

It is safe to state that the emphasis and expectation of the ecclesia that came forth at Pentecost was not quite the same as that which evolved, because they were still looking through the lens of ancient Israel, which was promised the land of Canaan. As the evangel began to evolve and Jerusalem was destroyed, this tie was broken. Undoubtedly, like the brethren from among the nations, their expectation grew under the leading of the Holy Spirit that they had received (Acts 2.33).

Building My ecclesia.

Like Stephen, let us recount a little of the history of the ecclesia.

Based on the prophets, the Jews were looking for the King of Israel to come and set up His earthly kingdom. John the baptist appeared on the scene declaring the

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kingdom was near and the need for repentance. He pointed to the Messiah who walked among the people. Jesus took up John's message and then passed it on to His disciples, who were commanded to take the message to the lost sheep of the house of Israel as He had done.

As He approached the cross, Jesus began to tell His disciples that He must be killed but that He would rise on the third day. Before He began to expose them to the horror that He faced, He asked them who they thought He was. Peter made that famous declaration: "***Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God***" (Matthew 16.16). To this, Jesus responded: "*Now I, also, am saying to you that you are Peter, and **on this rock will I be building My ecclesia**, and the gates of the unseen shall not be prevailing against it*" (Matthew 16.18 cv).

This is the first reference in the New Testament of an *ecclesia*, and Christ takes ownership of this ecclesia. He will build it. Truly, Jesus spoke of this building project as something going forth from that time, but does this mean that no building took place before this time? In studying Scripture, it should become apparent that the first obvious indication of the building of His ecclesia began when the sons of Israel came out of Egypt. We could even argue that, in type, it can be traced back to the fashioning of Eve from the body of Adam. Paul tells us the ecclesia is the body of Christ, and we know that Eve is a type of Christ's body.

The key to seeing that the ecclesia in the wilderness is the first obvious indication of the building of the ecclesia of Christ is discovered in the use of the word *rock* in the above verse. *On **this rock** I will be building My ecclesia!*

When He spoke these words, Jesus was declaring what would happen on the day of Pentecost as Peter stood before the Jews. Peter was a little rock standing on the testimony that the one true Rock is the Christ, the Anointed Son of the living God. Peter was not the first pope as the Roman Catholics believe. Simply, Peter was the one who led the other disciples in the call for repentance to his fellow brethren. He held the keys to the kingdom of the heavens.

The Greek word for *Peter* is *petros*, which means a "piece of rock," and the word for *rock* is *petra*, which means a "mass of rock." We could say that Peter was a little rock hewn out of the mass of rock, which is the testimony that Jesus is **the Christ, the Son of the living God**. He is the Rock.

We need to see that Christ the Rock was not a new concept. The sons of Israel knew God as their rock.

And they remembered that **God was their rock**, and the Most High God their Redeemer. (Psalm 78.35 NASB; also Psalm 18.2, 31, 46; 19.14; 28.1; 31.3; 62.2, 6, 7)

However, Paul gives us the clearest connection to Christ as the Rock in relation to the ecclesia in the wilderness.

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For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and **all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea**; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for **they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them**; and **the rock was Christ**. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. (1 Corinthians 10.1-5 NASB; see Exodus 17.6; 33.21, 22; Numbers 20.8, 10, 11; Deuteronomy 8.15; 32.15).

Christ, the Son of the living God, was the One who led the sons of Israel through the wilderness. Given this fact, Christ began the building work with the ecclesia in the wilderness. Christ is the builder; however, He entrusted this building work to be done through those He called out of Egypt, and this work was the building of the theocratic kingdom on earth. Their charge was the prayer that Jesus told His disciples to pray: **Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven** (Matthew 6.10 KJV). As a people, they were to bring the kingdom of the heavens to earth by being obedient to the will (law) of God in all things.

We could say that this building of the ecclesia was the building under Passover, for they had applied the blood, but had not been given an earnest of the spirit.

Now, fast forwarding to the day of Pentecost, Peter stood before the men of Israel and declared that they needed to be pardoned for their sins in order to enter the coming kingdom of Christ. Those who repented became part of *My ecclesia* that Christ was going to continue building through Peter and the other eleven apostles of the circumcision. National Israel was called to be part of building the theocratic kingdom nation under God, but they rejected the very Stone that was to be the structural support of this building, the cornerstone to hold it together and give it its strength. They were called to be builders, but they failed in their calling by not trusting the Rock that led and sustained them.

After Pentecost, Peter was confronted by the rulers and elders of Israel that wanted to know by what power or name they could heal a sick man. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and answered them with authority (Acts 4.5-10).

Let it be known to you all and **to the entire people of Israel**, that in the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, **Whom you crucify**, Whom God rouses from among the dead, in this name, this man stands by before you sound. **This is the Stone** that is being scorned by you builders, which is becoming the head of the corner. (Acts 4.10-11 CV; also see Mark 12.10-12)

Peter quoted Psalm 118.22, which Jesus also quoted as recorded in Mark 12.10-12. We must not overlook the fact that the Israelites were originally called to build on the Rock. They scorned the Stone that is to be head of the corner, which means that Christ is the very foundation of this building. The vast majority of Israelites rejected this foundation, and because of this, Jesus declared that He would build His ecclesia; He was no longer entrusting it to the rulers and elders of the Israel-

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ites. Instead, He chose a diverse group of men, including some lowly fisherman, through whom He would continue to build.

With Peter in the lead, Christ began to build under the Pentecostal anointing, for *His ecclesia* was given an earnest of the spirit. This initial group of apostles was commanded to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and apparently they made every attempt to do just that (e.g., Matthew 9.38-10.23; James 1.1; 1 Peter 1.1).

Starting with Pentecost, the “out-called” from Israel quickly grew from about a handful to over 5,000 believers who repented, were baptized, and who believed that Jesus is Messiah (see 1 Corinthians 15.6; Acts 1.15; 2.42; 4.4).

Proceeding to Acts 5, we discover the story of Ananias and Sapphira who were stricken dead for lying to the Holy Spirit. They received a *gehenna*-type judgment. Peter was exercising one of the keys of the kingdom when he challenged this couple.

We find a type of this *gehenna*-type judgment in Joshua 7 when Achan took and hid some of the booty of war banned by the Lord. As a result of one act of disobedience, Joshua and his army could not prevail against the men of Ai. To remedy the situation, Achan was sentenced to death.

They took them from inside the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the sons of Israel, and they poured them out before the LORD. Then Joshua and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the mantle, the bar of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent and all that belonged to him; and they brought them up to the valley of Achor. Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.” **And all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones.** (Joshua 7.23-25 NASB)

This is one of the clearest pictures of judgment by *gehenna fire* in Scripture. But take note that they were not cast into some eternal oven to be tormented forever and ever. No; **they DIED and their DEAD bodies were burned.**

Entering the kingdom was, and still is, very serious business, and Peter was given the authority to keep out any who did not live up to the righteous standard as given by Jesus in Matthew 5-7. It is recorded that great fear came on *the whole ecclesia* and on all those who hear these things (Acts 5.11 *cv*).

At this point in its history, the *whole ecclesia* was made up of Jewish believers and some proselytes. However, this was about to dramatically change as the evangel revealed to Paul began to go forth to the nations.

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Ecclesia of the firstborn.

Now, the epistle to the Hebrews refers to *the ecclesia of the firstborn*. Before looking at this reference, it is helpful to review some of the history of the word *Hebrew*, for the title in itself reveals the heart of the epistle.

The word *Hebrew* (Genesis 14.13; 40.15) comes from the root word *abar*, which means “to cross over,” or refers to a person from the “further bank,” “the opposite side of the river, or “passing beyond, a region across.” Thus, a true Hebrew is one who is a passer from beyond or one who immigrates.

The origin of this word is traced to Eber, a descendant of Shem. Following the flood, Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth repopulated the whole earth. However, Noah said of his first-born son Shem: “*Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem*” (Genesis 9.26). The Lord was the God of Shem in a very special way that was not so stated regarding Shem’s brothers. It was through the line of Shem that the Hebrews came forth and the promises of God were fulfilled. God was beginning a new work which would bring forth a new creation: “*Israel is My son, My firstborn*” (Exodus 4.22).

Shem lived 600 years and was called the father of the children of Eber, for he lived long enough to see the entire ten generations that followed him, plus the generation of Isaac. His great grandson Eber lived 464 years, and he not only saw the same generations as Shem did but also the generation of Jacob. Eber died after Shem and Abraham did. It was after Eber’s passing that the twelve tribes of Israel came forth through Jacob, who became Israel (Genesis 32.28).

Eber was significant in the history of mankind, for it was during his time that God began to bring about changes in the material creation. He was born in the fourth generation of Shem. His order in the line of Shem’s descendants is significant because the number *four* relates to the material creation. It is the number of the earth and the number of man in relation to the earth. What is significant is that during Eber’s life, the Lord began to divide the earth.

First, in Eber’s day, the whole earth used the same language and the same words. The descendants of Noah journeyed east to a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. The LORD had commanded them to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth,” but instead they chose to settle in one region of the earth. According to the record, they determined to build a tower of brick and said: “Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top {will reach} into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name; lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” The LORD came down to see it and said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city. Therefore **its name was called Babel, because**

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there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth (Genesis 11.1-9).

So, most likely, in Eber's early years, the tower of Babel fell and Noah's sons and their descendants began to spread across the earth.

Second, Eber begot a son named Peleg, which means "division," for in his days the earth was divided (Genesis 10.25). The Hebrew word for *division* means "split," which may indicate that it was during Peleg's life the land masses (continents) as we now know them were divided. With man beginning to scatter across the earth, God divided the land upon which they traveled. [It is possible that the division occurred as a further receding of the waters from the flood.] However, other historical sources indicate that Peleg divided the land by lot among his brethren.

It is also noteworthy that starting with Peleg's generation, the life span of man was reduced to almost half of what it was after the flood. Prior to the flood, the average life span of man was over 800 years. After the flood, man's life span was nearly halved (average life span over 400 years); and after man was scattered from the land of Shinar, it was halved once again (average life span under 200 years). God had declared that man's days shall be 120 years (Genesis 6.3); therefore, man's days were rapidly moving toward this end. This is further proof that during Eber's day, change in the material creation was brought about.

However, the significance of Eber lies in the thought that the origin of the word *Hebrew* seems to be traced to him. As a Hebrew, he was a passer from beyond or one who migrated. It is possible that Eber was singled out as a Hebrew, or one who passed beyond the region, or one who went to the opposite side of the river, because he was the first to move out as God had commanded. It is also possible that he passed beyond the river, which most likely was the River Euphrates, even before the tower of Babel fell. He was a Hebrew because he had the heart of a pilgrim and a sojourner.

In the twentieth generation from Adam, the tenth generation from Shem or the seventh from Eber, God began to unfold His purpose and plan through a Hebrew named Abram.

Ten is the number that signifies the perfection of divine order. With the completion of ten generations, God finished one work and began a new one that would lead to the birth of a nation. [Note that the 20th generation brings to completion two sets of ten. Noah was the tenth in line from Adam.] Also, *seven* is the number of completion meaning the perfection and completeness of what is in view. In other words, God had completed what He intended through the line of Eber. He brought forth the Hebrew that would be the father of nations and through whom would come the promises.

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After about two days (two 1,000-year days) from Adam, God brought forth Abraham who would become a father of a multitude of nations (Genesis 17.4-5) and the first man recorded to whom the Lord spoke a word in a vision.

Now, through Abraham’s descendants, God raised up a nation, the sons of Israel, that were called out of Egypt to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19.5-6). On the night of Passover, the firstborn of the children of Israel that were in Egypt were saved by the blood (Exodus 12.15). All the firstborn came out, and the Lord claimed them for Himself (Exodus 13.2; 34.19). They too crossed over to the other side (of the Red Sea) and headed toward the land of promise. While in the wilderness, Moses was commanded by the Lord to number every firstborn male of the sons of Israel. However, because of the sin of the people, the Lord took the Levites as His own in the place of the firstborn. These became *the ecclesia of the firstborn* in the wilderness. Through the Levites, the Lord brought near to Him the ecclesia of the firstborn that were under the shelter of the blood, ransomed by the blood (Numbers 3).

Well, what does this have to do with the Hebrews epistle and the ecclesia of the firstborn? Being the firstborn refers to receiving the inheritance, and in the case of the kingdom of God, it is about sonship, being a son in the kingdom of God and receiving an allotment in the kingdom, which refers to receiving a glorified, spiritual body. The Hebrews epistle is about sonship. Entering the kingdom of God has everything to do with sonship, and this is the very subject of the Hebrews epistle. The inheritance is sonship and all that goes with it. In fact, the whole heart of the building of the ecclesia of God is sonship; many sons conformed to the image of God’s firstborn Son (Romans 8.29).

Some of the Hebrew believers that came out of the circumcision were in danger of returning to Judaism and the old covenant. Unfortunately, many within the so-called “church” of our day are in the same danger as they relinquish their on-high calling to the apostate state of Israel (according to the flesh).

The Hebrews epistle was written to deal with this danger. The problem was that the kingdom had not come on the earth in their day, and they were in danger of falling into unbelief just as those did that came out of Egypt under Moses. The kingdom of the heavens was not going to be manifested among the nations in their day. In fact, the life of the believing Hebrews changed dramatically. Jerusalem was destroyed and all semblances of Jewish custom and order abolished, and many scattered throughout the land. With this in view, the spirit of God exhorted them not to neglect so great a salvation (Hebrews 2.3 REB) in light of the coming habitable earth (Hebrews 2.5 REB). They now had (have) a great high priest who entered heaven on their behalf and who continued (continues) to minister in the heavenly sanctuary to see them through to the end (see Hebrews 8.1-2; 9.24). Jesus is our High Priest today, and He will see us through to the end as well.

To encourage them to stay the course, the writer wanted them to see with spiritual eyes that they had *come to mount Zion and the city of the living God, celestial*

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Jerusalem, and to ten thousand messengers, to a universal convocation, and to the ecclesia of the firstborn, registered in the heavens (Hebrews 12.22-23 cv). Here we discover another progressive unfolding of the *ecclesia*, for not only had they come to the new Jerusalem which comes into view in *God's day*, but they had come to the *ecclesia of the firstborn*. This is the *ecclesia* of many sons that will be brought unto glory (Hebrews 2.10).

The old Jerusalem that was destroyed in 70 AD is no longer in the heart or economy of God. Just as the glory had departed from Shiloh, so it departed from Jerusalem (Jeremiah 7.12-15; 19.11; Ezekiel 10.18; 11.23). For this reason, Paul declared that the present Jerusalem is in bondage and needs to be cast out. The Jerusalem above is our mother, and she is free (Galatians 4.21-31).

We must understand that the true Hebrew is not one who has the sign of physical circumcision. The true Hebrew is one who has “crossed over,” who has passed to the other side, who is a sojourner and pilgrim who has migrated to the Jerusalem above, which leads us to Paul’s revelation of the *ecclesia-body*.

Ecclesia, which is the body.

The revelation of the *ecclesia* truly was unfolded by Paul, as given to him by the Lord. Paul declared that what was entrusted to him was previously a secret that was concealed from the eons but was revealed.

I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for you, and am filling up in my flesh, in His stead, the deficiencies of the afflictions of Christ, for **His body, which is the ecclesia of which I became a dispenser**, in accord with the administration of God, which is granted to me for you, to complete the word of God—**the secret which has been concealed from the eons and from the generations**, yet now was made manifest to His saints.... (Colossians 1.24-26 cv)

In these few words, we are told something quite profound that is part of the progressive unfolding of the *ecclesia* of God. Consider this one phrase: *His body, which is the ecclesia of which I became a dispenser*. Do you see the significance in what Paul wrote? Paul’s emphasis was on the body, not on the *ecclesia* per se. We could restate his words: “I was given charge to dispense the secret of the body of Christ, which is an *ecclesia*.” In other words, Paul was a dispenser of the *ecclesia* called His body or the body of Christ. He did not state that he became the dispenser of the *ecclesia* or the church. He became the dispenser of the body, and then he identified it as an *ecclesia*.

As he began to take the revealed secret to the nations, Paul used the word *ecclesia* exclusively to refer to the body of Christ (or, to a local assembly). Simply, there was no other *ecclesia* in view for Paul, the apostle of the nations. Interestingly, outside of Paul’s epistles, the word *ecclesia* is used sparingly (Hebrews 2.12; 12.23; James 5.14; 1 Peter 5.13; 3 John 9, 10).

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In Acts 13, the evangel given to Paul began to go forth to the nations (Acts 13.46; 28.28). Since then, the evangel has been going forth to the nations and will continue to do so until the full number of the nations has come into the body of Christ (Romans 11.25-27), and then all the conquering saints will be snatched away to the presence of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4.13-17).

Further, Paul saw Christ as the Head of the *ecclesia*, which is His *body*. In other words, Paul was given revelation of a “called-out” people who are joined to Christ the Head as His *body*.

Now you are **the body of Christ**, and members of a part, whom also God, indeed, placed in the *ecclesia*... (1 Corinthians 12.27-28a cv)

And subjects all under His feet, and gives Him, as Head over all, to **the *ecclesia* which is His body**, the complement of the One completing the all in all. (Ephesians 1.22-23 cv)

For no one at any time hates his own flesh, but is nurturing and cherishing it, according as Christ also **the *ecclesia*, for we are members of His body**. (Ephesians 5.29-30 cv)

And He is **the Head of the body, the *ecclesia***, Who is Sovereign, Firstborn from among the dead, that in all He may be becoming first... (Colossians 1.18 cv)

I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for you, and am filling up in my flesh, in His stead, the deficiencies of the afflictions of Christ, for **His body, which is the *ecclesia***.... (Colossians 1.24 cv)

Notice that Paul states this revelation in two ways: *His body, which is the *ecclesia**, and *the *ecclesia*, which is His body*. The point of all this is that the emphasis of Paul was not just on the word *ecclesia* but on the word *body*. We could call it the *ecclesia-body*, which is the *out-called body*, something presented by Paul alone.

But the question arises as to whether the body was a unique teaching of Paul, or as to whether there was something about the body that was unique. I propose that the latter is true and that Paul knew that Israel was a body. What became revelation to him is that the body of Christ is no longer restricted to the circumcision (in the flesh) or the commonwealth of Israel (according to the flesh); but the body is now open to all that believe and are **circumcised of the heart**. Peter was also given revelation that the nations (foreigners) were not to be considered unclean, for he came to understand that God is not one to show partiality (Acts 10.9-48). As Paul wrote: ***For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God*** (Romans 2.28-29 NASB).

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Joint body, joint heirs.

In the following verses, Paul gives us the secret of the joint body.

Wherefore, remember, that **ye were once the nations in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that called Circumcision in the flesh made by hands**, that ye were at that time apart from Christ, having been **alienated from the commonwealth of Israel**, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope, and without God, in the world; and now, **in Christ Jesus, ye being once afar off became nigh in the blood of the Christ**, for he is our peace, who did make both one, and the middle wall of the enclosure did break down, the enmity in his flesh, the law of the commands in ordinances having done away, that the two **he might create in himself into one new man, making peace, and might reconcile both in one body to God through the cross**, having slain the enmity in it, and having come, he did proclaim good news—peace to you—the far-off and the nigh, because **through him we have the access—we both—in one Spirit unto the Father**. Then, therefore, **ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being chief cornerstone, in whom all the building fitly framed together doth increase to an holy sanctuary in the Lord, in whom also ye are builded together, for a habitation of God in the Spirit.** (Ephesians 2.11-22 YLT)

For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you **the nations**, if, indeed, ye did hear of **the dispensation of the grace of God** that was given to me in regard to you, that **by revelation He made known to me the secret**, according as I wrote before in few words—in regard to which ye are able, reading it, to understand my knowledge in **the secret of the Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit—that the nations be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in the Christ**, through the good news.... (Ephesians 3.1-6 YLT)

The secret that was made known *in spirit* through the apostles and prophets is that the nations have been made fellow-heirs or, in some translations joint-heirs, **of the same body**. In other words, Paul intimates that the commonwealth of Israel was considered a body and that the nations had been excluded from being part of this body, based on the flesh. They had been excluded from sharing in the household of God; but now, all distinctions of the flesh have been removed *in Christ*. All in Christ have been joined together as one body, even **a one new man, and a new creation** (Galatians 6.15). This joint body is the household of God being built together for a habitation of God *in spirit*. The wall that divided these two groups, which actually represents all mankind, was torn down, and the two have

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been reconciled. We could say that a peace treaty has been signed in the blood of Christ, and there is now only one body that, ultimately, will include all mankind.

There is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. (Colossians 3.11 NASB)

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. (1 Corinthians 12.13-14 NASB)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one **God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4.4-6 NASB)**

The more that I read Paul's epistles, the more real the *All of God* becomes. It is as if there are two truths that run through his writings. The *first* truth is that which pertains to all who believe in Jesus and the need to press on toward the goal. The *second* truth is that the very same things that pertain to us who believe in this eon also apply to **all mankind eventually**. There is no longer a distinction upon which any born of Adam's race is to be excluded. **Christ is all, and in all.** There will be only one body, for there is only one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. This is a mighty grand view of the All of God. Who will be left out of this all at the consummation of the eons? We must conclude that not a single soul will be left out of God's All. Praise God!

Now, pressing on in this matter of the body, Paul reveals to us that the body of Christ goes back even further than the nation of Israel, for it started with the first Adam.

Christ loves His body, the ecclesia.

In one of his greatest epistles, Paul unveiled the whole matter of the body and related it to Adam and Eve.

Let the wives be subject to their own husbands, as to the Lord, for **the husband is head of the wife even as Christ is Head of the ecclesia, and He is the Saviour of the body.** Nevertheless, **as the ecclesia is subject to Christ**, thus are the wives also to their husbands in everything. Husbands, be loving your wives according as **Christ also loves the ecclesia**, and gives Himself up for its sake, that He should be hallowing it, cleansing it in the bath of the water (with His declaration), **that He should be presenting to Himself a glorious ecclesia, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it may be holy and flawless.** Thus, the husbands also ought to be **loving their own wives as their own bodies.** He who is loving his own wife is loving himself. For no one at any

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time hates his own flesh, but is nurturing and cherishing it, according as **Christ also the ecclesia, for we are members of His body.** For this “a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh.” This secret is great: yet I am saying this as to **Christ and as to the ecclesia.** (Ephesians 5.22-32 cv)

The entire emphasis of these verses is on a body. The husband and wife relationship represents the closest of relationships, and this relationship is of a body of two made into one. The husband is the head of the wife, which refers to Christ as the Head of the body. Christ is the Savior of the body, which means that He alone is responsible to see His body through to the end. “*I will build My ecclesia.*” Christ loves the ecclesia, which is His body. Husbands ought to love their wives as their own body just as Christ loves His own body. Christ is nurturing and cherishing His body, which is made up of many members.

Then, Paul brought the whole matter back to the very beginning when Eve was taken out of the side of Adam’s body. She was bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. Eve was literally part of Adam’s body since she came out of Adam’s body. She was part of him, and as such, Adam could not reject her when she was deceived by the serpent of old. Adam loved his body in the form of Eve and had to sin to save her. This is love! It could be called *body love*.

This is a type of what Jesus has done and will do to bring all mankind into His body, **eventually**. This is why Adam is a type of Christ (Romans 5.14).

Paul’s emphasis is on the fact that when two become one flesh, there is a certain order of the two (a head and a body), with the head loving his body. This is a picture of Christ and His body, the ecclesia. However, let us not lose sight of the fact that the body of Christ is a spiritual body and not a fleshly one. According to Paul, the body of saints will all be changed in the twinkling of an eye and each member will become a spiritual body in the image of the Celestial [heavenly], that is, Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15.42-53 cv [NASB]).

I realize that some see these verses in Ephesians as referencing the bride of the Lamb, but to me the primary emphasis is on the body that makes the bond of marriage much stronger. On the carnal level, a bride is taken from other flesh and can be rejected or divorced. But a body cannot divorce itself, for it is of the same flesh. Consequently, a body can never be rejected, for one who does so is rejecting himself. This is why Adam had to follow Eve. He could not reject his own body, Eve. If he had, then there would have been no love. This explains what Paul wrote to the Ephesians.

Now, being true, **in love we should be making all grow into Him, Who is the Head—Christ**—out of Whom the entire body, being articulated together and united through every assimilation of the supply, in accord with the operation in measure of each one’s part, is making for the growth of the body, **for the upbuilding of itself in love.** (Ephesians 4.15-16 cv)

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Truly, Christ is building this ecclesia, but notice that it is the body holding to the Head that upbuilds itself in love. The love of God that has been poured out in the hearts of its members (Romans 5.5) causes the growth or upbuilding of the body. It is God’s love flowing through the body from the Head.

This is the wonder of the body of Christ. Those who believe on Jesus have been so united with Him that in the eyes of God they are an entirely new creation of love that is bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh (see Genesis 2.23). The body is of Christ; therefore, the body must be and will be presented to Him as a glorious ecclesia. Christ cannot fail, has not failed and will not fail. He is the Savior of His body. He loves His body!

A body prepared.

In inspiring the writer of the Hebrews epistle, the spirit of God quoted Psalm 40.6-8 and added *but a body you have prepared for Me.*

Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, “SACRIFICE AND OFFERING YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A **BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME....**” (Hebrews 10.5 NASB)

In its primary application, the body prepared for the Son was the body that went to Calvary to die for the sin of the world. This is clear from what follows: *By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all* (Hebrews 10.10 NASB).

However, could this not have a secondary application? Through the offering of His body came forth the *sanctified ecclesia*, which is the body of Christ. Could we not state that the body that was prepared for Him is the corporate, spiritual body that is comprised of the sanctified believers in Christ, and ultimately all mankind? God sees things as they are meant to be. We see them unfolding, and He sees them as a finished work. Space and time are not a hindrance to God.

Through His sacrifice, His side was opened and out from His broken body came forth what was needed for the coming forth of the ecclesia, which is His body. This was represented by the blood, which provides the forgiveness of sins and by the water, which cleanses. Again, Paul brings this together in Ephesians.

Husbands, be loving your wives according as **Christ also loves the ecclesia**, and gives Himself up for its sake, that **He should be hallowing it, cleansing it in the bath of the water (with His declaration)**, that He should be presenting to Himself **a glorious ecclesia, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that it may be holy and flawless.** (Ephesians 5.25-27 cv)

Husbands, love your wives, just as **Christ also loved the church** and gave Himself up for her, so that **He might sanctify her, having cleansed her**

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by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself **the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.** (Ephesians 5.25-27 NASB)

Is it not the implanted word that cleanses us and saves our soul in this day?

Wherefore, putting off all filthiness and superabundance of evil, receive with meekness **the implanted word**, which is able to save your souls. (James 1.21 cv)

The spirit, the water, the blood.

John also brings these thoughts together in his first epistle.

Now who is he who is conquering the world if not he who is believing that Jesus is the Son of God? This is He Who is coming through **water and blood and spirit**—Jesus Christ—not in the water only, but in **the water and in the blood**. And the spirit it is which is testifying, for the spirit is the truth, seeing that three there are that are testifying, **the spirit, and the water, and the blood**, and the three are for the one thing. If we are obtaining the testimony of men, **the testimony of God** is greater; for this is the testimony of God, that He has testified concerning His Son. (1 John 5.5-9 cv)

The testimony of God concerning His Son is contained in the water, the blood and the spirit. The **water** speaks of **His baptism** and the Father's testimony regarding His Son. The **blood** speaks of **His crucifixion**. The **spirit** speaks of **His glorification**. This is the threefold testimony of God regarding His Son, for they prove that Jesus is the Son of God. This is what one is to believe in order to enter eonian life in the oncoming eons, and this life is in His Son.

He who is believing in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; he who is not believing God has made Him a liar, for he has not believed in the testimony which God has testified concerning His Son. And **this is the testimony, that God gives us life eonian, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life**; he who has not the Son of God has not the life. These things I write to you that you who are believing in the name of the son of God may be perceiving that you have life eonian. (1 John 5.11-13 cv)

At Jesus' baptism, the Father testified that Jesus is His beloved Son.

After being baptized, **Jesus came up immediately from the water**; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, **"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."** (Matthew 3.16-17 NASB)

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Then at Jesus’ crucifixion, John recorded that blood and water came out of His side. There is a primary and a secondary meaning to the blood and the water.

But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately **blood and water came out.** (John 19:34 NASB)

Primary meaning: During John’s day, there were Gnostics who challenged the truth that Jesus was truly a man. When John saw the water and the blood come forth from the pierced side of Jesus, it was proof to him that Jesus was flesh and blood; that is, He was truly a human and not merely some manifestation. To die for the sin of the world, the Son of God had to be human and the proof is in the water and blood that poured out of the pierced side of His broken body.

Secondary meaning: The blood speaks of the forgiveness of sins, for *without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness* (Hebrews 9:22 NASB). Paul reminds us that *He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom **we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*** (Colossians 1:13-14 NASB). As noted previously, the water could also refer to cleansing through the implanted word.

The spirit speaks of the glorification of Christ when He ascended back to His Father to sit at His right hand. As proof of His glorification, the spirit of truth was poured forth upon the 120 waiting in the upper room.

“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow **rivers of living water.**’” But this **He spoke of the Spirit**, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because **Jesus was not yet glorified.** (John 7:38-39 NASB)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. (Acts 2:1-6 NASB)

Later, as recorded in Acts, Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5 NASB), testified before the Jewish Council, which became enraged at his testimony and decided he was worthy of death for speaking the truth.

When they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. But **being full of the Holy Spirit**, he gazed intently into heaven and saw **the glory of God**, and Jesus standing at the right hand of

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God; and he said, **“Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”** (Acts 7.54-56 NASB)

As if to provide a double witness of Jesus’ glorification, heaven opened up for this dear saint to see the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He was not sitting; He was standing to see if the ecclesia would be true Hebrews and set their sights on crossing over into the promise. But the ecclesia that came out under the Passover refused to enter by looking unto the Rock and coming into the Pentecostal anointing that leads to the land of promise. As he neared his death, Stephen called on the Lord and cried out just as His Savior had done on the cross.

They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, **“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!”** Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, **“Lord, do not hold this sin against them!”** Having said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7.59-60 NASB)

And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, **“Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.”** Having said this, He breathed His last. (Luke 23.46 NASB)

But Jesus was saying, **“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”** (Luke 23.34 NASB)

This is the testimony of the conquerors filled with the spirit of God. They entrust their spirit to the God of the living who is able to raise the dead, and they are forgivers, for they heed the command to forgive others for their transgressions (Matthew 6.14-15). They even love their enemies and pray for them (Matthew 5.44). These are the ones who are more than conquering through Him who loves us (Romans 8.37). These are the ones who will reign with Christ in the oncoming eons (Revelation 22.5), all to the praise, honor and glory of God, and all in accord with the purpose of the eons.

In conclusion, the ecclesia has been on a wilderness journey waiting for the day to cross over into the land of promise. In its journey, the ecclesia has received an earnest of the Holy Spirit to continue on until the full anointing comes. The conquerors are being prepared to receive the full anointing of glorified bodies in order to cross over to be among the celestials. God’s plan in His Son is marching forward, for the dwelling of God *in* spirit is being built up until it is among the celestials reigning with Christ as He sums up all in the heavens and on the earth. The ecclesia is the *out-called* of God that is now upbuilding itself in love, the love of God poured into hearts of believers. This vessel of love is the ecclesia, which is **the body of Christ, the one new man in Christ** (Ephesians 2.15 NASB), being built together for **God’s dwelling place, *in* spirit** (Ephesians 2.22 CV). Spiritually speaking, the two have become one.

The secret is great; yet I am saying this as to Christ and as to the ecclesia!