



[Matthew 16:18](#)

(18) And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

New King James Version

In [Matthew 16:18](#), the word [Jesus](#) used for "church" is *ekklesia* (*Strong's* #1577), and it is so translated in the King James Version 115 times. This Greek word means "an assembly" or "a group of people called together for a purpose." It contains no implication at all of sacredness or holiness.

In practical usage, it commonly identified people called by a magistrate for a public service of some sort. This is how it is used in [Acts 19:32](#), 39, and 41:

Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the *assembly* was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. . . . But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful *assembly*. . . . And when he had said these things, he dismissed the *assembly*. (Emphasis ours.)

Each time, *ekklesia* is translated as "assembly" and names what could easily be described as a mob of excited and confused people. However, the writers of the New Testament clearly agreed this was the word that best fit the groups of Christians called of [God](#) for service to Him. How did it come to be translated as "church" when the word "assembly" fits more accurately?

This change apparently has its beginning in another, far different Greek word, *kuriakos* (*Strong's* #2960). *Kurios*, the Greek word for "Lord," is easily recognizable as the root of *kuriakos*, which means "belonging to the Lord." Curiously, according to Joseph T. Shipley, author of *The Origins of English Words*, pp. 183-184, the root of *kurios* and *kuriakos* literally means "to bend or curve."

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In the course of time, *kuriakos* was picked up by the Scots as *kirk*. Shipley shows that *kirk* and *kuriakos* share the same root. In the Scottish language, *kirk* indicates a place or a location, as in a building belonging to the Lord. The *kirk* became the place where the assembly bent before God in reverence, as in [prayer](#), appealing to Him; or bent looking upward in praise of God; or where God bent in extending mercy.

As more time passed, the English pronunciation of *kirk* changed to "church." Thus "church," which indicates a building, a place where God is worshipped, gradually evolved to include, not just the place, but also the people who worshipped there and the worship services too. The modern English *Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary* reflects this in its definitions for *church*: "1. A building for Christian worship. 2. Regular religious services. 3. A local congregation of Christians." We regularly use all three in our everyday speech and writing, allowing the context to indicate which is intended.

However, *in the Bible* the word "church" *never* refers to a building or to worship services held within the building. It *always* refers to the assembly, group, or congregation of called-out ones who belong to the Lord, worship Him, and [fellowship](#) with others of the same mind.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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[Is There a True Church?](#)

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