

THE BIG LIE

By Sharon Nader Sloan
 Commentary
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"The West Bank is occupied Palestinian land." This phrase is frequently repeated, as a given, by all the governments of the world and by the entire news media.

This idea that the West Bank is occupied Palestinian land has been accepted by almost everyone. Yet it is, in fact, the greatest lie ever perpetrated on the whole of humanity.

If you think this is an outlandish statement, please read on and decide for yourself.

Palestinians claim that Palestine is their land, and that Jerusalem is their capital, and that Israel is occupying their land. To resist occupation, they assert the right to send suicide bombers into crowded bus stations, pizza parlors, etc., and kill innocent men, women and children. And all Arab and Muslim countries support them in their claims and actions against Israel.

Because of this alleged occupation of Palestinian land by Israel, because of this alleged crime committed against their Palestinian brothers, all Arabs hate Israel and want to destroy it.

To anyone who is familiar with the facts, and has an objective eye, all this must be fascinating. Because never before has a complete lie, on such a large scale, been so successful.

First, if Arab animosity toward Israel is based on their love and support for their Palestinian brothers - and in wanting their Palestinian brothers to have their own state - where was that love and support before the Jewish state existed? Where were they when the kingdom of Jordan ruled Palestine? Why were they not accusing Jordan of occupying Palestinian land? Why did not the Arab world and the United Nations call on Jordan to stop occupying Palestinian land? Second, where were the Palestinians themselves, with all their grievances and claims, when Jordan occupied the whole West Bank, including Jerusalem?

Did you know that? Did you know that for 19 years, Jordan occupied and ruled the whole West Bank, including Jerusalem? Why didn't they clamor for a Palestinian state then?

All this time, did we hear a word about Palestine being occupied by the kingdom of Jordan? Did we hear anything about a Palestinian state? Or about Jerusalem being the capital of Palestine?

No, we did not.

Why not?

Because there never existed a Palestinian state.

And in the entire history of nations, Jerusalem was never the capital of any country other than that of ancient Israel and modern Israel. So how can there be a claim on Jerusalem as the capital of a state that never existed?

One of the problems here is that so few people know the history of the world. Hence, lies and more lies, repeated often enough, are assumed to be facts

I have heard many scholars, including an Arab journalist, question the very notion of a Palestinian people. What, they ask, makes a people? Well, there are four elements that define a people: language, religion, culture and cuisine. For example, the Chinese and Japanese are both Oriental. Still, they are two different peoples, because they each have a different language, a different religion, a different culture and a different cuisine.

The Palestinians speak the same language, follow the same religion, manifest the same culture and eat the same cuisine as all other Arabs. They are really Arabs who happen to live in a region called Palestine.

Palestine is not - and never was - the name of a country, or the name of a people.

It is the name of a region - just like Siberia is a region, not a country. There is no Siberian country, nor is there a Siberian people. It is a region. Just like the Sahara is a region, not a country. There is no Saharan country, nor is there a Saharan people. The Arabs living in that region are Libyans, Moroccans, etc. It is a region.

Because Palestine is a region, not a country, England was able to carve out half of it and give it to the Arabs living on the other side of the Jordan River and call it the kingdom of Jordan. Because Palestine is a region, the United Nations was able to divide the rest of it between the Jews and the Arabs living there. Had the Arabs accepted the United Nations resolution, there would have been a newly created Arab state called Palestine. Instead, they rejected the United Nations compromise and went to war to destroy Israel. They lost the war. Hence, no Palestinian state.

Here are some cold facts.

King David built the city of Jerusalem, and King Solomon, David's son, built the holy temple. This commonwealth of Israel lasted for a thousand years. There was only one break, when, 400 years after King David, the Babylonian invaders occupied the land for 70 years. Then, with the help of Cyrus the Great of Persia - yes, Persia - Israel came back to the land, rebuilt the temple and ruled for another 600 years.

CHRIST'S CHURCH

By Rosco Brong D.D., 1938

OUR LORD BUILT HIS OWN CHURCH, AND IT IS STILL DOING BUSINESS FOR HIM

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. 16:18.)

Christ's church was built upon Himself. **"That Rock was Christ."** (1 Cor. 10:4.) "In the Lord Jehovah is the Rock of ages." (Isa. 26:4, margin.) **"Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."** (1 Cor. 3:11.) "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." (Eph. 2:19-20.)

BUILT UPON CHRIST

The word Peter means a stone. **It means a little stone, not a big rock.** The Catholic church, which did not exist until hundreds of years after Peter's death, falsely claims to be built upon Peter, **and by that very claim denies that it is Christ's church**, because the Bible teaches that Christ's church is built upon Himself.

Peter never suggested that God's people or God's churches were built upon Peter. He preached that men should turn to Christ. He knew that Christ was not only the foundation but also the corner stone of His church:

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, **Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.** Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, **the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence**, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed." (1 Pet. 2:2-8.)

BUILT IN CHRIST

Christ's church was built upon Christ as the foundation Rock; and it is built in Christ as the chief corner stone: **"Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;** in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." (Eph. 2:20-21.)

No organization is Christ's church, no matter what it calls itself, if it depends upon or owes its existence to the life, work, and teachings of any mere human being or any number of human beings. Christ's church was built upon Christ Himself; not upon popes, or Luther, or King Henry VIII, or Calvin, or Wesley, or Campbell, or Smith, or Russell, or any other men who thought they could do a better job of teaching and organizing than the Son of God.

BUILT BY CHRIST

Christ's church was built by Himself. **"I will build my church." False churches teach that the church was not organized until Pentecost, but there is no such teaching in the Bible.** On the contrary, in Acts 1:15 we are told that before Pentecost "the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty." This plainly means that the church had 120 members. **Christ built His church during His earthly ministry in the flesh, before His crucifixion.** In Matthew 18:17 we read, "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." It is ridiculous to suppose that Christ was talking about a church that didn't exist. He was plainly teaching His disciples that if they could not settle the matter of trespasses against one another as individuals, they should take their trouble to the church. What church? The church of which they were members, of course. Christ promised to build His church, and here we find it in existence before He was crucified. Why call Him a liar by saying the church was not organized until Pentecost?

Christ's church was built by Christ Himself, before His crucifixion. **No organization is Christ's church, no matter what it calls itself, if its origin is more recent than the personal ministry of Christ on earth.** Christ's church in the world today is the same in organization, in doctrine, and in practice as it was 1900 years ago.

HIS ONE AND ONLY CHURCH

Christ built only one kind of church: "I will build

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In this situation only two things remain to do, either frankly admit their organization to be extra-scriptural and rivals of Christ's church or else devise some theory that will justify their separate denominational existence and still permit them a place in the ecclesia of Christ. The latter alternative is the one that has generally been taken, for there have been theories a-plenty. One of these is what is sometimes called "the church branch" theory. It is the theory that all of the various Protestant churches are but "branches" of the true church. It embraces the idea that all are headed for the same place—all are part and parcel of the same thing—the Church of Christ. However, this church "branch" theory immediately raises the embarrassing question as to the identity of the trunk of the church tree to which the "branch" denominations belong. I use the word "embarrassing," and it is embarrassing in the light of the historical fact that all of the great Protestant denominations (remember again that Baptists are not Protestants) have either directly or indirectly "branched off" from the Catholic Church.

Of the theory mentioned above, Dr. R. L. Baker aptly says: "The branch church theory has a great place in the popular thinking. It is untenable, unscriptural, and even unthinkable. Plant a water melon, let its branches run out in several directions, on one branch there grows a pumpkin, on another a melon, on another a citron, and so on until we have the various branches all covered in the Protestant melon patch. Who would not say this is a freak of nature, a real monstrosity? Yet this is the average reasoning of to-day amongst the branch theory people. 'Tell it to the church' would hardly work in such a wonderful monstrosity."

But the theory that is most commonly relied upon, by those who belong to apocryphal institutions and do not wish to admit the truth of Baptist claims, is the "Universal, Invisible Church" theory. This theory, which plays exegetical tricks, employs specious arguments and minimizes the importance of the true churches of Christ, is a theory that has been and is a curse to the cause of Christ. It is one of the most widespread and hurtful heresies of our day, and yet, strange to say, without foundation and contrary to common sense once it is subjected to close scrutiny. The theory has variations, but in the main the holders of it maintain that the church mentioned in Matthew 16:18, the one that Jesus said He would build, was not the local assembly, but consisted of all believers of every church (or no church, as the case may be) everywhere. According to this view, one becomes a member of this church automatically when he becomes a Christian. To believe this one must believe that side by side today exists two churches, one local and visible, consisting of men and women organized for the carrying out of Christ's commands, the other unseen and invisible and entrusted

with no work or mission. Moreover, this involves that these churches have a different membership, since some presumably belong to the universal, invisible Church who have never joined the local and visible body. Not only that, it further makes Christ the author of two churches, unless we utterly deny that He is the Founder and Head of the local, visible church.

It ought to be clear to everyone that much is involved in the meaning of Matthew 16:18, and in the correct answer to the question, "What kind of a church did Jesus build?" If the church which Jesus promised was "universal and invisible," then it follows that the Baptist claim to perpetuity is absurd, and the product of an unwarranted arrogance. This being true, the Baptist claim to church perpetuity stands or falls according to the meaning of *ecclesia* in Matthew 16:18, and other passages of the New Testament.

After careful study of all the passages in which the word *ecclesia* occurs in the New Testament, and the Septuagint, and after examining to ascertain the use of the word in classical Greek, I submit the proposition that the church that Jesus founded was *the local assembly*, and that to use the word *ecclesia* to designate a "universal," or "invisible" Church is to pervert its meaning, and to fall into serious error.

I realize full well that for me merely to make the bare statement recorded above is not enough. Proof is, of course, required. But I believe that ample proof can be produced to satisfy any mind that is open to the truth.

Since the validity of the Baptist belief in the perpetuity of their churches hinges upon the *kind* of church that Jesus established, it seems advisable to deal with the question somewhat at length. I trust that the reader will pardon me if I seem to spend an undue amount of time on this point. It is because the question of the *kind* of church that Jesus founded is absolutely fundamental to the discussion of church perpetuity. If the church that Jesus established was the local assembly, the Baptist claim that their churches are the true New Testament churches which have had a continuity of existence since the days of Jesus, is simply unassailable. I have a number of reasons to offer as to why I believe that the church founded by Jesus was the local, visible assembly.

My first reason is that the meaning of the word "ecclesia" used in Matthew 16:18 irresistibly leads one to believe that the local assembly was meant. Indeed, locality inheres in the very word, so that it is really improper for anyone to speak of the "local" or "visible" assembly, since the only kind of an assembly that can exist is both local and visible. In this book I only use the terms "local" and "visible" because of the failure on the part of so many to recognize the truth that there can be no ecclesia or assembly anywhere without a place to meet. By using these terms so commonly used I hope to be better understood, although I realize that to do so is to use mere tautology.

ECCLESIA—CHURCH OR ASSEMBLY?

By E. L. Bynum

The critics of the King James Version never seem to let up in their relentless attack. Many critics are simply modernistic or of the new evangelical persuasion, and these we can understand. On the other hand it is difficult to understand why professed fundamental Bible believers would join the insane attack upon the Word of God. When I continue to hear and read these attacks by men who are otherwise sound in the faith, I can only say, "Lord, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Independent Baptists generally place a strong emphasis on the local church. Many of them, and rightly so, refuse to believe that the Bible teaches the existence of a universal invisible church, or body. I happen to be of that persuasion. Some of these dear brethren have been led to believe that some words are wrongly translated in the KJV, and that they would be helped doctrinally in their stand against the universal invisible church theory, if the translation was changed. With this we do not agree.

IS ECCLESIA TRANSLATED WRONG IN THE KJV?

The Greek word "ecclesia" is translated "church" in the KJV, where the Scripture is referring to the Lord's church or churches. When the Bible is referring to a lawful or unlawful assembly of citizens, such as in Acts 19:32,39,41, it is translated assembly. In fact, these are the only three verses in the KJV where it is so translated.

To find out the meaning of a word in English, we consult a good dictionary, such as Webster's Unabridged Dictionary. To find out the meaning of a Greek word, we consult a concordance, lexicon, or Bible dictionary. You cannot always depend upon those authorities, as to the true meaning of a word used in the Bible. It is generally needful to find every time that particular word is used in the New Testament. From the clear context of how it is used in many different instances, we can discover its true meaning in the Scriptures.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF CHURCH?

Webster's Unabridged Dictionary has this to say of the origin of our English word church. "**church, N.** [ME. **chirche, cherche**; AS. **circe, cyrce**; Late Gr. **kyriakon**, a church, from Gr. **kyriake** (supply **doma**, house), the Lord's house, from **kyriakos**, belonging to the Lord or Master; **kyrios**, lord, master; **kyros**, supreme power, authority.]"

This simply means that the word is traced back through Middle English, Anglo Saxon, to the Greek.

That the local church is the Lord's house, is certainly not something that is contrary to the Scriptures. "*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*" (I Tim. 3:15). The church certainly is the Lord's house, and it does belong to our Lord and Master.

Webster gives many different examples of the meaning of church. One of them is, "any organized body of Christians occupying the same edifice for religious worship; a congregation; as, a pastor and his church." Does this not sound very much like the true meaning of church or ecclesia, as found in the New Testament? Yes, it does, for the church is a called-out assembly.

Of course Webster also gives examples of other definitions of church, such as the building, or a universal body, etc. I can almost hear someone say, that is the reason why ecclesia should not be translated church in the first place. Let us go on to further study before jumping to such a conclusion.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF ECCLESIA?

When we consult the authorities on Greek words, we come up with confusing answers to that question. W. E. Vine in his word studies, tells us that Ecclesia means a called-out assembly. But he says, "It has two applications to companies of Christians, (a) to the whole company of the redeemed throughout the present era... (b) in the singular number...to a company consisting of professed believers..." So Vine leaves you with some unscriptural definitions, just as surely as Mr. Webster does.

When we consult Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon, we come away realizing that his definitions are also confusing and contradictory. He also indicates that ecclesia is a called-out assembly, which is good as far as it goes. Yet, he turns right around and gives many other definitions that are most certainly contrary to New Testament usage. He says that ecclesia also means, "the whole body of Christians scattered throughout the earth; collectively, all who worship and honor God and Christ in whatever place they may be." That is the false universal church theory, and you cannot make anything else out of it.

You will run into the same thing if you consult Strong, Berry, or Vincent. Some have called attention to the fact that Berry in his Interlinear New Testament renders ecclesia as assembly in every place where it is found. These same people fail to tell you how Berry defines ecclesia in the back part of the same book. He gives more than one meaning. He says ecclesia means, "an assembly of Christian believers, a church in one place...the whole body of believers on earth...or in heaven." This brings us right back to the universal

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MY church." It is His church because He created the members. (Col. 1:16.) It is His church because He purchased it with His own blood. (Acts 20:28.) It is His church because He is its Head and it is His body. (Eph. 1:22-23.) It is His church because He is its Bridegroom and it is His bride. (Eph. 5:22-32.)

"There is one body." (Eph. 4:4.) "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." (1 Cor. 14:33.) Christ built only one kind of church; **He has only one body, and that is the "local" church**, the church that has a definite membership, a definite time and place of meeting, a definite organization with elected officers (bishops, elders, or pastors, and sometimes deacons), and a definite program of **carrying on the Lord's work**—"the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Tim. 3:15.)

NO "INVISIBLE" CHURCH

The devil has persuaded many people that the church is some kind of an "invisible" thing that all Christians belong to, and if he could make enough people believe this he would soon destroy Christ's church. But Christians who get their doctrines from the Bible instead of from the devil will not be misled. **The Bible does not say one word about an "invisible" or "universal" church. There isn't any such thing.**

In Matt. 16:18, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, in Col. 1:18,24, 1 Tim. 3:5, 15; 5:16, Heb. 12:23, Jas. 5:14, and possibly a few other passages, the word "church" is used **abstractly**, as I have frequently used it above, not referring to any particular organization at any definite place, but to **the church as an institution**. When we make a concrete application of the word we must have in mind a **particular organization of baptized disciples** that meets somewhere and is engaged in the Lord's work, because **this is the only kind of church that the Bible tells us anything about.**

ABSTRACT AND CONCRETE

To illustrate what is meant by the **abstract** and **concrete** uses of words, I might say, "The horse is a useful animal." I have here used the word "horse" abstractly. I have no particular horse in mind. Now, if I were to use the word concretely, I might say, "Farmer Brown's horse is a good puller," or "The horse on this side seems balky." I am talking about particular horses. But **if I knew as little about horses as some religious teachers seem to know about churches, I might try to make**

you believe that there is only one horse in the world, a big invisible horse—and a lot of work you would get out of it!

Again, I might say, abstractly, "The public school is a great democratic institution." No **sane** person would suppose that there is only one public school in the world, [Editor: *No sane person would suppose that it is great either.*] a kind of invisible something without any form of organization, without any responsibility or authority, a school to which all students the world over belong, but without any official teachers or classrooms, a school that nobody needs to attend—boy, what a school!

People generally are not quite foolish enough to entertain such ideas about horses or schools, but when we come to religion many persons seem to forsake all reason and are **ready to believe the silliest nonsense if it will give them an excuse for laziness or sin.**

HIS CHURCH STILL HERE

Finally, Christ's church is still in the world. **It is not here again, it is here yet**—and will be here until Christ comes for His bride. **His promise is "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." All Protestant churches are built upon the assumption that Christ lied**, that His promise failed, that His church perished, and that it was necessary for man to bring success out of God's failure. Only Baptists and Catholics claim to trace their history to the time of Christ. But the Catholics, **by their own testimony**, are built not upon Christ but upon their popes, and they are further from the truth than any other so-called Christian church. Moreover, **many so-called Baptist churches are not Christ's**; more and more of them, in these latter days, are forsaking unpopular truths. **We need to know more than the name of a church to know whether it is Christ's; only those churches are His which believe and teach His word.**

Christ gave to His church "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19), with the promise that "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt. 18:18.) **Christ's church is "the pillar and ground of the truth."** (1 Tim. 3:15.) Others have selected portions of truth to mix with their errors, but the faithful ministers of Christ's true churches "have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." (Acts 20:27.)

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Unsaved sinners ought not to belong to any church. If

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The very strongest argument against the "universal, invisible theory" is a correct understanding of the meaning of the word *ecclesia* or church. Indeed, to make a study of the word in the light of its usage in the time of Christ and preceding, is to see how impossible and absurd is the belief in a "universal, invisible Church." To make the word as used by Jesus in Matthew 16:18, refer to other than the local assembly is to attach a meaning to the word utterly foreign to its nature, and completely out of harmony with its ordinary use.

Let us briefly consider the word as regards its meaning in classical and New Testament usage;

The word *ecclesia*, rendered "church" in English versions, was not a new word coined by Jesus, but a word already in current use at that time and moreover a word the meaning of which had become definitely fixed and established. This being the case, it would seem highly improbable that Jesus, speaking to the disciples, would use the word in some sense altogether foreign to its current use, and that without a single word of explanation. As one writer puts it: "It is not ingenious for a teacher without a word of explanation to use words to his pupils with a meaning entirely different from what they understand the words to have." Dr. Jesse B. Thomas says in his book, "The Church and the Kingdom": "No such difficulties attend the construction of the language—it simply supposes our Lord consistent with Himself, and with the ordinary usages of speech, assuming that He whom 'the common people heard gladly' would not wantonly use words in a strange sense that would inevitably perplex and mislead the common man."

What, then, let us ask, did the word mean as understood by the people of that day? Says Dr. Geo. W. McDaniel (The Churches of the New Testament), "Both with the Greeks and the Jews, the word denoted an assembly of the people . . . Among the Greeks *ecclesia* was the assembly of the citizens of a free city-state gathered by a herald blowing a horn through the streets of a town." Dr. Thomas says in another place, "It was the organized assembly of the authorized voters of the local community met to transact business of common concern. It corresponded to the town meeting of New England of later days." Liddell and Scott (Greek Lexicon) define the word *ecclesia* as follows: "An assembly of citizens summoned by the crier, the legislative assembly." Again, Dr. B. H. Carroll says: "Its primary meaning is: An organized assembly, whose members have been properly called out from private homes for business to attend to public affairs. This definition necessarily implies *prescribed conditions of membership*. This meaning applies substantially alike to the *ecclesia* of a self-governing Greek state (Acts 19:39), the Old Testament *ecclesia* or convocation of National Israel (Acts 7:38) and to the New Testament *ecclesia*. When our Lord says: 'On this rock I will build my *ecclesia*,' while the 'My' distin-

guished His *ecclesia* from the Creek state *ecclesia*, and the Old Testament *ecclesia*, the word itself naturally retains its ordinary meaning." (Ecclesia the Church).

Therefore, since *ecclesia* in its accepted meaning carried with it the idea of locality and organization, to make it refer to a so-called "universal, invisible" Church, possessing neither locality nor organization, is to do violence to the word and to use it in a purely arbitrary sense.

"But," someone objects, "does not the actual use of *ecclesia* in certain New Testament passages indicate a broader usage than to designate a local organized assembly?" In reply to this it may be said that in the Christian usage of the word there were three ideas, viz., *an institution, a particular congregation, and the redeemed of all time* considered in the light of a church in *prospect*. In each case where the word is used there is nothing that argues against the general usage. To particularize: The word is used fourteen times to denote *an institution*. When it is used in this way it is, according to Dr. Carroll, used in either an *abstract* or *generic* sense. "This follows," he says, "from the laws of language governing the use of words. For example, if an English statesman, referring to the right of each individual citizen to be tried by his peers, should say: 'On this rock England will build her jury, and all the power of tyranny shall not prevail against her,' he uses the term jury in an *abstract* sense, i.e., in the sense of an institution. But when this institution finds concrete expression or becomes operative, it is always a particular jury of twelve men and never an aggregation of all juries into one big jury."

Then he cites Matthew 16:18 as an example of the *abstract* use of *ecclesia*. Matthew 18:17 he cites as an example of the *generic* use of the word. Then he adds these words: "*Whenever the abstract or generic finds concrete expression or take's operative shape it is always a particular assembly.*"

It is permissible for us to use the word "church" abstractly as did Jesus in denoting the institution He founded. But, as Dr. Carroll points out, when we begin to particularize we must, according to the very laws of language, settle upon a particular assembly of baptized believers in Christ. So we can see that the abstract or generic use of the word is, after all, at bottom, no different in meaning from the use of it to denote a particular assembly. And it is to denote a particular local body of believers that the word is mostly used—indeed by actual count, ninety-three times out of a little over a hundred times that the word occurs in Christian usage.

And now for the third idea contained in the Christian usage of *ecclesia*, viz., the use of it to denote the *redeemed of all time, considered in the light of a church in prospect*. At least two passages seem to use *ecclesia* in this sense, and these two in no wise militate against the

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general use, since this is an assembly *that exists only in prospect*. Dr. Carroll states the whole case very clearly in his booklet, as follows: "This *ecclesia* is prospective, not actual. That is to say, there is not now but will be a general assembly of Christ's people. That general assembly will be composed of all the redeemed of all time. Here are three indisputable and very significant facts concerning Christ's general assembly: First, many of its members properly called out, and now in Heaven. Second, many others of them, also called out, are here on earth. Third, indefinite millions of them, probably the great majority, yet to be called, are neither on earth nor in heaven, because they are yet unborn, and therefore non-existent. It follows that if one part of the membership is now in Heaven, another part yet unborn, there is as yet no assembly, except *in prospect*. We may, however, properly speak of the general assembly now, because, though part of it is yet non-existent, and though there has not yet been a gathering together of the other two parts, yet the mind may conceive of that gathering as an accomplished fact. In God's purposes and plans, the general assembly exists now and also in our *conceptions* or anticipations, but *certainly not as a fact*."

I have quoted Dr. Carroll somewhat at length because his booklet is one of the sanest, most careful and scholarly examinations of the New Testament church that has ever been written. Many scholarly men fully accord with his position as here outlined. For instance, Dr. J. G. Bow, in his "What Baptists Believe," writes as follows: "The general assembly and church of the first-born—this last will evidently be *local* when they shall have assembled."

A *second* reason as to why Matthew 16:18 refers to the local assembly and not to the Church universal, is that Christ's own use of the word prohibits us from believing that He meant anything else. Suppose that one should hear a speaker use a certain term, the meaning of which seems doubtful. Later on in his address the speaker uses the same word at least a score of times, and in such a way as to be perfectly clear as to his meaning. Would it be wise for one to judge that he meant something totally different in his first use of the word than in the twenty times in which he subsequently used it? Or would it be the part of common sense to interpret the meaning connected with the first use of the term, in the light of his subsequent use? This illustration sets forth the exact situation as regards the interpretation of Matthew 16:18.

Let us, for the sake of argument, say that we are in doubt as to what Christ meant by "church" in this passage just mentioned, which is the first in which the term occurs. Let us look at the other places in which He uses the word, and see what He meant there. We find, upon making a careful search that He subsequently used the

word *ecclesia* or church twenty-one times. Following the first place in which church is mentioned, we find that the next, and the last place in which church is mentioned in the Gospels, is Matthew 18:17, where Jesus says:

"Tell it to the church, but if he neglect to hear the church ..." To affirm that Jesus was here speaking of a universal, invisible Church would be to descend to absurdity, since it would be impossible for a church member to bring a matter before a universal, invisible, unorganized "Church" not possessing locality. Jesus plainly meant local assembly; nothing else would fit the case at all.

The other instances in which Christ used the word *ecclesia* are found in the Revelation. Examples are as follows: "To the angel of the church at Ephesus;" "Hear what the Spirit, sayeth to the churches;" "The seven churches," etc. With reference to the last example, Sir William Ramsey, world-renowned scholar, affirms that the seven churches mentioned were actual, local churches that existed at that time. In each of the twenty-one times that Jesus used *ecclesia*, subsequent to his utterance recorded in Matthew 16:18, He plainly and unmistakably referred to the local assembly. As Dr. T. T. Eaton remarks, in commenting on this question: "The probability therefore is twenty-one to nothing that He meant local assembly in Matthew 16:18. A probability of twenty-one to nothing is a certainty. Hence it is certain that Christ meant the local assembly when He said: 'On this rock I will build my church.'"

Again, a *third* reason for believing that Matthew 16:18 refers to the local assembly is that Christ only promised to build *one kind of church*. He never intimated in any way that He would found the local assembly and also a universal, invisible Church, composed of the redeemed of all the so-called churches. Consequently when we turn to the book of Acts and the Epistles, and find local assemblies of believers springing up here and there, we immediately identify these with the church that Jesus spoke of. To do otherwise would be to assume that something else came into existence other than the institution which Jesus promised.

Therefore, since Jesus only spoke of one kind of church, and since the kind of church which we find in apostolic times is the local assembly, for one to seek to introduce a universal or invisible Church is to seek to create a second *ecclesia*—another than Christ began. This is to breed confusion.

A *fourth* reason for believing that the church referred to by Jesus was the local assembly is that the universal, invisible theory is not only unscriptural but according to history is post-apostolic in its origin. Harnack, the church historian, in his "History of Dogma," makes this clear. He says: "The expression, invisible Church, is found for the first time in Hegessipus. Eusebius, Tertul-

lian, Clement of Alexandria, Hiero, Cornelius, and Cyprian, all used the term holy churches and never the Catholic or Universal Church." Again in Vol. 2, p. 83, he says: "No one thought of the desperate idea of an 'invisible Church;' this notion would probably have brought about a lapse far more rapidly than the idea of the Holy Catholic Church."

A *fifth* reason for believing that Jesus founded the local assembly is that the local assembly is not only the only kind of an assembly that can exist; it is the only kind to which Jesus could have entrusted the Commission and the ordinances. Christ's chief purpose in forming His church was in order that it might reach the lost with the gospel, and then might build up those saved by teaching and training them in all things He commanded. The functions of a church as outlined by Jesus can only be performed by a local assembly. A universal, invisible Church composed of an unorganized throng of "members of all the churches," is, from the functional point of view, simply inconceivable.

Again, when Christ promised the church. He promised that the "Gates of hades shall not prevail against it." Slight difference of opinion as to the exact meaning of the "gates of hades" does not obscure the fact that Jesus meant that His church would have foes and would encounter opposition. The history of Baptists as they were imprisoned, martyred, driven into the dens and caves of the earth, shows that His church has had to contend with the organized forces of evil. Baptist churches can be and have been persecuted, but a universal, invisible Church cannot be. Men cannot persecute an invisible something. Christ's promise is meaningless if applied to such.

A *sixth* reason that suggests itself is this: The conception of a universal, invisible Church usurps the place reserved in the New Testament for the Kingdom of God. Those who hold this theory practically identify church and kingdom. This is wholly out of accord with the Scriptures, for they make a very clear distinction between the two, as will be shown in the next chapter.

When I think along the line that I have tried to carry the thought of the reader, and am led to see the lack of any sort of foundation for the theory of an invisible, universal Church, I can heartily join with Dr. J. Lewis Smith in saying; "Here, then, is the inevitable and irreversible conclusion. This Catholic or Universal Church as well as the Invisible Church idea are things of man's devising, and when we say, I believe in the holy Catholic Church, we are placing a figment of the imagination—a chimera—a misnomer above the real local church idea which Christ Himself used, and one of which churches He built and to which He gave His great Commission and His ordinances, baptism and the Lord's

TO MY BAPTIST BRETHREN

We should remember that we have naught to gain, but everything to lose by comprising the principles which we hold. Should fidelity to God's Word lead us to separation from those we love as well as our own lives, we should still be firm; remembering that true love to Jesus, as well as to our friends, should lead us to stand firmly by the truth. Baptists have accomplished a noble work for the world. We do not believe that their mission is ended. Our fathers suffered imprisonment, stripes, banishment, death, that they might bequeath to us the rich legacy which we enjoy. Shall we barter that legacy for poplar applause? The early Christians were the "sect everywhere spoken against." Our Master bore suffering and shame for us. If our principles bring reproach upon us, let us bear that reproach. Let us be careful to avoid bitterness and unholy strife. Let our lives abound in patience, forbearance, gentleness, goodness, and truth, while we commit ourselves, not to men, but to God, who judgeth righteously.

Taken from the book entitled, "Baptist Doctrines", 1892



(Forget Not the Past continued from page 2)

Baptists were almost constantly harassed in New England and in Virginia, but in the other colonies of the South and in the Middle Colonies they had relatively little difficulty. The first association of Baptists in New England, the Warren Association, was organized in 1767 for the primary purpose of strengthening the fight for religious liberty. Over and again the Warren Association made representation to the general courts of Massachusetts and Connecticut for redress. The association also sent Isaac Backus to lay before the Continental Congress its desire for complete religious liberty.

Almost all of the Baptists supported the Revolution. One of their strongest hopes was that out of it would come religious as well as political freedom. By working with all non-Baptists who wanted religious liberty, they succeeded in disestablishing the Anglican (Episcopal) Church in Virginia and procuring the adoption of the Bill of Rights to the Federal Constitution. The last state church to go was the Congregational Church of Massachusetts in 1833. □