

Discipleship Training Course

This course contains 23 chapters and is released freely to the public domain for the purpose of discipling new believers and strengthening those older in the faith.

All Bible quotations are given in italics with their book, chapter and verse(s), followed by an abbreviation for their translation as follows:

AMP	The Amplified Bible © 2015 The Lockman Foundation
AMPC	The Amplified Bible (Classic Edition) © 1987 The Zondervan Corporation and the Lockman Foundation
ESVUK	English Standard Version Anglicised © 2001 Crossway Bibles
HCSB	The Holman Christian Standard Bible © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 Holman Bible Publishers
MSG	The Message © 1993, 2002, 2018 Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress.
NASB1995	The New American Standard Bible © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NHEB	New Heart English Bible, Edited by Wayne A. Mitchell 2008-2026, Public Domain
NIVUK	The New International Version® Anglicized © 1979, 1984, 2011 Biblica, Inc.®
NKJV	New King James Version® © 1982 Thomas Nelson
NLT	New Living Translation © 1996, 2004, 2015 Tyndale House Foundation
WEBPB	The World English Bible® Protestant British Edition, Public Domain

The use of Bible quotes within this course conforms to the copyright exceptions of all these publishers.

The following systematic adjustments have also been made to Bible quotes:

- The Old Testament tetragrammaton name of God (derived from the four Hebrew letters translated into English as YHWH) has been rendered LORD unless translated Jehovah or Yahweh
- Pronouns referring to the Trinity and some specific terms relating to the Trinity (such as Name and Word) have been capitalized
- Speech marks around entire quotes and at the beginning of new paragraphs have been omitted
- Anglicised spellings have been used
- All quotes begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop
- Some weights, measures and times have been replaced with easier to understand terms given in the footnotes using square brackets
- All verse numbers, footnote numbers and symbols have been removed
- Poetry has been indented and only new sentences start with a capital letter

Published in electronic format by Pastor Peter Samuels, Morecambe, UK

Version 2.5, July 2026

ISBN 978-0-9956916-1-2

Chapter 7. The Church

Contents

1. Some common misconceptions about the Church
2. What did Jesus teach about the Church?
3. Old Testament roots of the Church
 - 3.1 Original passages
 - 3.2 Old Testament words associated with the Church
 - 3.3 The temple
 - 3.4 The exile and synagogues
4. The five main churches in Acts
 - 4.1 Jerusalem
 - 4.2 Antioch
 - 4.3 Corinth
 - 4.4 Ephesus
 - 4.5 Rome
 - 4.6 Summary
5. New Testament development of the Church
6. The seven churches in Revelation
7. Origins of denominations
8. Things that can go wrong with churches

1. Some common misconceptions about the Church

- The Church is not a building
- The Church is not all the people who attend a building
- The Church is not just the services held in a building
- The Church is not divided between different denominations within the same geographical location
- The Bible does not teach that the local church should be governed by a single pastor

The true Church is made up of people who are born again. Being a local church member or attending church services does not guarantee that you are a member of the true Church. God only sees one church in each geographical location, not denominations. The Biblical model of the true Church is for it to be governed by elders as well as pastors under the oversight of senior ministers, such as apostles, prophets and overseers.

2. What did Jesus teach about the Church?

There are only two passages in the Gospels in which Jesus mentions the Church:

*Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" They said, "Some say John the Baptist, some, Elijah, and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "**You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.**"*

*Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also tell you that you are Peter, **and on this Rock I will build My Church**, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then He commanded the disciples that they should tell no one that He is the Messiah.*

Matthew 16:13-20 (NHEB)

*"If your brother sins against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained back your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two more with you, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. **If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector.** Truly I tell you, **whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.** Again, truly I tell you, **that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they will ask, it will be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.***

Matthew 18:15-19 (NHEB)

The word for church in the original Greek is **ekklesia**, meaning **an assembly of the people convened at the public place of the council for the purpose of deliberating**.

The context of Jesus' two uses of the word 'church' are:

1. Revelation of His true identity as the Christ (or Messiah)
2. The discipline of a brother or sister in Christ who sins and the ultimate sanction of excommunication (although we should also remember 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 where Paul encouraged separation from rebellious believers and not treating them as enemies but rather warning them as brothers). This is followed by a promise on binding in heaven when we bind on earth (i.e. when we exercise godly discipline on earth through the church) and a promise of God's presence when two or three gather in His Name (which can be taken as another definition of the church).

The English word 'church' is derived from the old English word **kirk**, meaning a **house of prayer**. This is reflected in the way Jesus spoke about the temple:

*Jesus entered into the temple of God, and drove out all of those who sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the money changers' tables and the seats of those who sold the doves. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called **a house of prayer**,' but you have made it a den of robbers!"*

Matthew 12:12-13 (WEBPB)

3. Old Testament roots of the Church

3.1 Original passages

The roots of the Church can be traced back to Abraham being called out from idol worship and the Israelites being delivered from slavery in Egypt. They were **called out to be separate** from the Egyptians and the other nations and to **worship God**:

*Now the LORD said to Abram, "**Leave your country**, and your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation. **I will bless you** and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who treats you with contempt. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."*

Genesis 12:1-3 (WEBPB)

*Therefore, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may **lead My people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.***

But Moses asked God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

*He answered, "I will certainly be with you, and this will be the sign to you that I have sent you: when you bring the people out of Egypt, **you will all worship God at this mountain.**"*

Exodus 3:10-12 (HCSB)

3.2 Old Testament words associated with the Church

The words associated with the Church in the Old Testament are:

Edah: (E.g. Exodus 12:3) an assembly, meeting or congregation. It is believed to be associated with **ya'ad**, meaning to appoint. It refers to the assembly of all the children of Israel, usually for a specific purpose.

Qahal: (E.g. Exodus 12:6, Psalm 89:5) an assembly, a company (e.g. the band of men who were attracted to David when he was a fugitive – see 1 Samuel 22:1-2), a congregation or convocation; an assembly for religious purposes; a company of returning exiles; a congregation as an organised body. It may refer to the whole assembly of Israel or to the assembled leaders of Israel.

Moed: (E.g. 2 Chronicles 1:3) a congregation, festive gathering, appointment or signal. Often designated a determined time or place without any regard for the purpose. It became closely associated with Jewish festivals. It is also used in a broad sense for all religious assemblies and became closely associated with the tabernacle itself.

Asaph: (E.g. 2 Chronicles 30:3) to bring together or collect, to come together or assemble

Qavats: (E.g. Ezra 10:1) to grasp, collect things, to gather people. Unlike qahal, it is not a call to gather. Instead, it emphasises the central place to which people converge.

3.3 The temple

The temple symbolises the church because it is a physical manifestation of God's presence on earth:

Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell amongst them. According to all that I show you, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all of its furniture, even so you shall make it.

Exodus 25:8-9 (WEBPB)

When Moses finished the work the glory of the LORD covered the tent of meeting and filled the tabernacle:

*He raised up the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the gate of the court. **So Moses finished the work.***

***Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the LORD's glory filled the tabernacle.** Moses wasn't able to enter into the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud stayed on it, and the LORD's glory filled the tabernacle.*

Exodus 40:33-35 (WEBPB)

This indicates that when the church is built according to God's principles the glory of the LORD will come down. We need to understand God's blueprint of divine order in the way we build the church. This can be thought of in four stages:

1. **Coming to Christ, the Living Stone, and being broken by God** – see the passage from 1 Peter 2 below and:

*But He looked at them and said, "Then what is this that is written,
'The stone which the builders rejected
was made the chief cornerstone?'*

***Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces,
but it will crush whomever it falls on to dust."***

Luke 20:17-18 (WEBPB)

2. **Coming to each other in unity**, seeing each other according to the spirit and not the flesh:

*Not for these only do I pray, but for those also who will believe in Me through their word,
that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also
may be one in Us; that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

John 17:20-21 (WEBPB)

So from now on we regard no one from a human point of view [according to worldly standards and values]. Though we have known Christ from a human point of view, now we no longer know Him in this way. Therefore if anyone is in Christ [that is, grafted in, joined to Him by faith in Him as Saviour], he is a new creature [reborn and renewed by the Holy Spirit]; the old things [the previous moral and spiritual condition] have passed away. Behold, new things have come [because spiritual awakening brings a new life].

2 Corinthians 5:16-17 (AMP)

3. **Being built together by God** (see Matthew 16 above and 1 Peter 2 below)

4. **Offering sacrifices acceptable to God:**

***Coming to Him*, a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God, precious. You also, as living stones, **are built up as a spiritual house**, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

1 Peter 2:4-5 (WEBPB)

However, there was nothing magical about the tabernacle, the temple or the ark in itself. Sometimes the Israelites needed to be corrected because of their misplaced trust. This was exemplified by Eli's wicked sons Hophni and Phineas whose utter contempt for the LORD and His offerings was judged through this misunderstanding:

Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle. And when the troops came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies." So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

As soon as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And when they learned that the ark of the LORD had come to the camp, the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "A god has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness.

Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight.”

So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

1 Samuel 4:1b-11 (ESVUK)

Haggai prophesied that the glory of the latter temple being greater than the glory of the former one:

“The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,” says the LORD of hosts.

“And in this place I will give peace,” says the LORD of hosts.

Haggai 2:9 (NKJV)

This can be taken as a prophecy about the End Times church having greater glory than the New Testament Church.

3.4 The exile and synagogues

During the Israelites' exile in Babylon they were unable to go to the temple to worship. This led them to invent the synagogue. This was a place of worship and the reading of the Old Testament law (the Torah). It could be established anywhere that there were ten married Jewish men. The emphasis of Judaism shifted from nationhood and the temple to personal piety and the reading of Old Testament Scriptures.

Jesus, the first apostles and Paul all took advantage of this religious infrastructure to teach the Gospel to the Jews. It was the practice of the local synagogue leaders to allow visiting teachers to participate in the worship services:

*Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding area. **He taught in their synagogues**, being glorified by all.*

*He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. **He entered, as was His custom, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.** The book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him.*

Luke 4:14-17a (WEBPB)

*Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, **teaching in their synagogues**, and preaching the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness amongst the people.*

Matthew 9:35 (WEBPB)

*Saul was with the disciples in Damascus for some days. **Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues:** “He is the Son of God.”*

Acts 9:19b-20 (HCSB)

*But they, passing on from Perga, came to Antioch of Pisidia. **They went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down.** After the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, speak.”*

Acts 13:14-15 (WEBPB)

The Church is once referred to as **episunagoge**, meaning to **assemble together** at one place, especially of Christians for corporate worship. “Epi” means “to” and refers to Christ as the One to whom the assembly was directed. The Hebrew believers' reluctance to meet together was due to fear of persecution rather than apathy, thus emphasising the importance of corporate expressions of faith in Christianity:

*Not forsaking our own **assembling together** [episunagoge], as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Hebrews 10:25 (WEBPB)

This Scripture therefore refers to some believers betraying their attachment to Christ by neglecting to attend services of corporate worship.

4. The five main churches in Acts

4.1 Jerusalem

Jerusalem was the place where the Holy Spirit fell on the Day of Pentecost. It was also the place of initial evangelism and church growth until the persecution and scattering of the church after the martyrdom of Stephen. The apostles remained in Jerusalem whilst the rest of the church was scattered and formed a council. They also sent representatives to other places when needed. The office of the deacon was also established in response to a need in Jerusalem.

4.2 Antioch

The church in Antioch was established by some Jewish believers who were scattered from Jerusalem through the persecution following Stephen's death and included Gentiles. On hearing this, the Council in Jerusalem sent Barnabas there who saw evidence of the grace of God and encouraged them to remain true to the Lord. He then searched for and found Paul, brought him to Antioch, and together they preached there for a year. Later, the church sent Barnabas and Paul out on a mission after a period of worship, fasting and prophecy. They later returned, reported all that had happened and stayed a long time with the disciples.

4.3 Corinth

The church in Corinth was established through the ministry of Paul then later through Apollos. Paul initially preached to the Jews but when some of them became abusive he also preached to the Gentiles, staying for eighteen months. It was known for its use of spiritual gifts but with a lot of disorder.

4.4 Ephesus

The church in Ephesus had initially only received the baptism of John but when Paul arrived they received baptism into the name of Jesus and baptism in the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. Paul remained here for two and a half years and the Lord performed extraordinary miracles through him. Several people who had practiced sorcery openly repented and burnt their scrolls.

4.5 Rome

Paul taught and preached in Rome for two years whilst he was under house arrest and facing his trial after appealing to Caesar. He also wrote his letter to the Romans before arriving in Rome.

4.6 Summary

These churches are highlighted in Acts because they each received systematic teaching by an apostle for at least one year.

In addition, other similar features are:

- Evangelism – proclaiming and arguing the truth of the message of the gospel

Chapter 7. The Church

- Opposition – either from Jews or from local business people whose livelihoods were threatened
- Spiritual gifts, miracles and the laying on of hands
- No mention of any buildings – these churches were all established relationally through fellowship
- Tensions between Jews and Gentiles
- Recognition and appointment of other ministries

5. New Testament development of the Church

The early Church did not have any buildings. They initially met at the temple in Jerusalem:

Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, praising God and having favour with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.

*Now Peter and John were **going up together to the temple complex at the hour of prayer at three in the afternoon.***

Acts 2:46 - 3:1 (HCSB)

After the persecution following the martyrdom of Stephen they used to meet in houses:

*Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but **all the churches of the Gentiles** give thanks as well. Greet also **the church in their house.***

Romans 16:3-5a (ESVUK)

*Greet the brothers who are in Laodicea, and to Nympha and **the church that is in her house.***

Colossians 4:15 (NHEB)

Meeting together was encouraged (see reference to Hebrews 10:25 above and explanation).

Apart from the Greek words ekklesia and episunagoge, a third word **paneguris** is once used in relation to the church, meaning **a solemn assembly for the purposes of festal rejoicing:**

*To the **general assembly [paneguris]** and **Church [ekklesia]** of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.*

Hebrews 12:23 (NASB1995)

6. The seven churches in Revelation

See Revelation 2 and 3.

Ephesus: praised for their discernment of false apostles and their perseverance; rebuked for forsaking their first love; and promised the right to eat from the tree of life

Smyrna: encouraged in their afflictions and poverty; exhorted to be faithful; and promised not to be hurt by the second death

Pergamum: praised for remaining true to Christ's name; rebuked for tolerating false teachers; promised hidden manna and a white stone with a new name

Thyatira; praised for their love, faith and perseverance; rebuked for tolerating a false prophetess; promised authority to rule over the nations and the morning star

Sardis: praised for having a few members who are pure; rebuked for being dead; promised white clothes and never having their names removed from the book of life

Philadelphia: praised for keeping God's word and not denying His Name; encouraged that Christ has placed before them an open door that no one can shut; encouraged to endure; promised to be made a pillar in God's temple, and to have God's Name, the name of God's city and Christ's Name written on them

Laodicea: rebuked for being lukewarm and thinking that they are rich when they are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked; encouraged to open the door and eat a fellowship meal with Christ; promised to be allowed sit with Christ on His throne

In summary, the seven churches faced an inner enemies of pride, over tolerance and laziness, and outer enemies of persecution and false doctrines.

7. Origins of denominations

The Orthodox Church (Greek, Cypriot, Russian, etc.) formed in the first few centuries A.D. with separate traditions and accountability structure to the Catholic Church based in Rome and has largely remained unchanged up to the present day. The Catholic Church became corrupted by about the 12th Century AD. This led to the Reformation in Europe in the 16th Century and the establishment of denominations such as the Lutherans, Baptists and Methodists.

More recent denominational divisions have arisen due to different doctrines about gifts of the Holy Spirit operating in the church today. For example the original Pentecostal denominations of Elim and Assemblies of God were established following the 1904-1908 revival. These denominations then spread worldwide through other revivals. Since the 1980s the emphasis on denominational differences has shifted to differences in personality, especially in Pentecostal churches.

The Church of England was established by Henry VIII to enable him to divorce his first wife (as this was forbidden by the Catholic Church). It has a wide spectrum of local congregations ranging in style from low (charismatic) to high (Anglo-Catholic). Other post reformation UK denominations, such as Baptists, also have a broader spectrum of local congregations than in other countries, such as in Africa, where these denominations were established through missions in the 19th Century.

8. Some things that can go wrong in the Church

- Wrong doctrines, e.g. in the New Testament times one such false doctrine was held by the Nicolaitans (see Revelation 2:6 and 15)
- Sinful leadership
- Sinful church workers, especially in praise and worship
- Inappropriate leadership structures, such as division between laity and the priesthood or lack of accountable leadership
- Denominational pride
- Lack of accountability outside the local congregation
- Immature oversight (e.g. weak or overshadowing)

Chapter 7. The Church

In the modern context of denominations we should pray that the ministers (or elders) within a city or local area recognise one another (according to their new creation state in Christ – see 2 Corinthians 5:16-17), meet together and recognise their responsibility to be united under the headship of Christ in order to encourage revival rather than acting as a hindrance to it.