Upon this rock i will build my church

Jesus Himself only once mentions the “building” of the Church, this being found in Matthew 16:13-20 where He asks the disciples “whom do people say I am?” He then asks them whom do they say He is and Simon son of Jonah answers, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” To this Jesus replies,

18 “. . . That thou art Peter [petroV, *petros* (masc.), a moveable “stone” or pebble], and upon this rock [petra, *petra* (fem.) the immoveable “rock face or quarry”] I will build my church; . . .”

There is much conjecture amongst biblical commentators of what Jesus meant when saying “upon this **rock**.” It was certainly not Peter the “stone” as the Roman Catholic Church teaches. Some say it was his confession as the Greek word *apologia* is in the feminine gender agreeing with the feminine word *petra*, while others say it was on Christ Himself, the “foundation stone” of Isaiah 28:16.

. . . “Behold , I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone [a stone of testing], a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste [not be disturbed or dismayed].”

However, I would suggest that Jesus is referring to Isaiah 51:1-2,

1 Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit [hollow of the quarry—Sarah’s womb] whence ye are digged. 2 Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.

We are reminded again in Isaiah 44:1-2, 7-8, 21-22, 24 that it was God Himself who formed or fashioned Isaac in the womb of Sarah, whereby Israel became God’s special creation of a “chosen” people,

1 Yet hear, O Jacob My servant; and Israel whom I have chosen 2 Thus saith the Lord that made the, and formed thee from the womb, Which will help thee; “Fear not, O Jacob, My servant; and thou Jeshrun [God’s ideal Israel], whom I have chosen. . . . 7 And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient People [= the everlasting Nation]? . . . 8 Fear ye not, neither be afraid; have I not told thee from that time, and have declared it? Ye are even My witnesses. . . . 21 Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art My servant: I have formed thee; thou art My servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of Me. 22 I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee. . . . 24 Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, and He that formed thee from the womb, . . .

Most teach today that in this dispensation Jesus is “building” His New Testament ‘church’ which has replaced the nation of Israel—usually referred to as Jews. I’ve purposely spelt ‘church’ with a small ‘c’ because the Greek word ekklhsia, *ekklēsia* is neutral or non-specific, meaning a gathering or assembly of people called together for any purpose. The King James Version has translated *ekklēsia* every time as church except in Acts 19:32, 39, and 41 where ‘assembly’ is used. This is because it was the episode in Ephesus where Paul had persuaded the people of this city to give up worshipping their silver idols of Diana and the silversmiths, seeing they would be out of business, called an “assembly” (v. 32, *ekklēsia*) of their guild to protest the matter. The town clerk, fearing a riot would break out, directed that the people should form a lawful “assembly” (v.39 & 41, *ekklēsia*).

Likewise Jesus only used the word *ekklēsia* 3 times, and they are found in Matthew 16:18—the above verses under discussion—and twice in Matthew 18:17. These latter two is Jesus’ advice to an Israelite who has been wronged by one of his own, that he not settle it in a Roman law court but take two or three witnesses and go to the “church” (*ekklēsia*)which would be a gathering of the elders of the Sanhedrin who would then hear the case and make a ruling.

Now we must be aware that ‘building’ and ‘planting’ go hand in hand where the ‘planting’ or establishing occurs first followed by the ‘building’ or nurturing of what has been ‘planted.’ We may consider the ‘planting’ in this wise:

God brought a vine, His people, out of Egypt (Ex. 15:17) and **planted** it (Ps. 80:8) with His own hand Ps. 80:15) among His choice vines (Isa. 5:2). Yet with all His care, God’s vine became a wild vine (Jer. 2:21). He longed once again to call them “the shoot of My planting” (Isa.60:21) for they were meant to be the “**planting** of the Lord” (Isa. 61:3). Before this could be, however, God told Israel that they first must be uprooted and exiled from the land; “Thus says the Lord; What I have **planted** I am plucking up, that is, the whole land” (Jer. 45:4). But this would not be a permanent transplant (to the land of Assyria), for God specified in His covenant with David, “I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will **plant** them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more (2 Sam. 7:10; 1 Chron. 17:19). This promise also came with the fact that God would **build** an everlasting dynasty from David’s seed to rule over the kingdom of Israel, an everlasting kingdom.

And thine house (dynasty) and thy kingdom (Israel) shall be established for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established for ever. (2 Sam. 7:16).

In Jeremiah 18, God sends Jeremiah to the "potter's house" to witness a clay vessel that was marred in the making on the wheel and that the potter squashed the soft clay down and remoulded it as another vessel. Then God says to Jeremiah:

6 0 house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in Mine hand, 0 house of Israel. 9 And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it.

Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, 0 virgin (il'" 11:1 *betula,* a marriageable maiden) of Israel: . . . (Jer 31 :4).

28 And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to brea.l,<. down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch I watch over them, to build and to plant, saith the Lord. 35 Thus saith the Lord, Which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, Which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of Hosts is His name: 36 If those ordinances depart from before Me. saith the Lord. then the seed of Israel also shall cease from beine: a nation before Me for ever. (Jer. 31).

Have these things described ever ceased to be? No!

6 Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal My people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. 7 I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as before. 8 I will cleanse them from all sin they have committed against Me and I will forgive all their sins of rebellion against Me. 9 Then this city will bring Me renown, joy, praise and honour before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it. 11 There will be heard once more the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridee:room, . . . .(Jer. 33, NIV).

And finally in the New Testament we read in the Book especially addressed to the Hebrews or Israel these words about the 'builder' of the house of Israel.

1

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly

calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. 2 He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all his house. 3 For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honour than the house. 4 For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. 5 Now Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; 6 but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are (the House ofIsrael), . . . . (Heb. 3).

So in the light of the above Scriptures we have seen that Jesus as Jehovah has been the 'planter' and **builder** of Israel after the captivities. As the **builder,** He is also the future Bridegroom of Israel who He has cleansed by His own precious blood.

In Matthew 16, when Jesus asked the disciples who He was, Peter replied that He was the Christ *(christos* in the Greek and *messiah* in the Hebrew = anointed) and Jesus replied that on this confession He would **"build** His church." In the Old Testament there is a connection between one of God's *anointed* and **rebuildin!!.** This is Isaiah's prophecy about Cyrus the king of Persia who was to be God's 'Messiah-deliverer' and 'shepherd', an instrument of His Divine Plan. These are the same titles used of the Lord Himself.

26 . . . That saith to Jerusalem, "Thou shalt be inhabited"; and to the cities of Judah, "Ye shall be built," and I will raise up the decayed places thereof. 28 That saith of Cyrus, "He is Mv sheoherd, and shall perform all My pleasure": even saying to Jerusalem, "Thou shalt be !mill"; and to the temple, "Thy foundation shall be laid." 1 Thus saith the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, . . . ." (Isa. 44 and 45).

Thus we see that through Cyrus' conquest of Babylon and at his express will, a remnant was able to return to Palestine and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah. Later, under Ezra, the Temple was also rebuilt. Just as in the 'wilderness', Israel and the Tabernacle went hand in hand, so Jerusalem and the Temple go hand in hand., even in the rebuildin!! as Isaiah prophesied.

The same applied to Israel when they left their captivity and slowly migrated to the "appointed place" in the "isles of

the west" (Britain, *berith* = covenant and *ain* = land) where

they were **built** into a nation ready to receive the "Gospel of the New Covenant." Through the efforts of Joseph of Arimathea and other disciples, Britain accepted Christianity in the reign of King Lucius around 150AD. Thus was **laid** the foundation of the Temple which will not be completed until the Lord's return when His' overcomers' will take part in the first resurrection and then His body (the Temple) will be complete.

The Greek word *ekklesia* does not necessarily have religious connotations for it was the common term for a meeting of those summoned to discuss the affairs of State, such as discussions on changes to a law. The word is used in the LXX (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) for those men summoned to war who are capable of bearing arms. It is also used of the whole congregation of Israel who were gathered at Mt Sinai to conclude the Law Covenant in Deut. 9:10 and 10:14 where it is called "the day of assembly."

A good example of its non-Christian use is found in Acts 19:21-41 where the Apostle Paul and some of his followers passed through Ephesus, a city devoted to the

worship of the Greek goddess Artemis being the Roman Diana.

In the KJV of this passage of Scripture, the English word "church" is used once but it is the Greek word *hierosulos* meaning "temple plunderers." The word *ekklesia* is used three times and each time in the KJV it is translated as "assembly."

The gist of this passage is that the silversmiths were making a great profit from manufacturing and selling statues of Diana. With Paul coming to town and preaching against idolatry and the worship of the one true God, they were extremely worried that he will cause the people to stop buying their idols and thereby they would lose their lucrative living.

A silversmith by the name of Demetrius called an 'assembly' *(ekklesia)* of his fellow silversmiths to put up a

great protest that turned into a near riot. The proconsul of

Ephesus, worried about what Rome would do, told the silversmiths that if they had a case against anyone they will have to do it in a properly constituted or lawful 'assembly' *(ekklesia).* Then he dismissed the 'assembly' *(ekklesia).*

As you can see, the word *ekklesia* has no religious connotations on it at all in this anecdote. The word simply means 'to be called out' or assembled for a specific purpose. Hence Israel was called out from the other nations to be a nation of 'priests', a 'peculiar' people to God alone of all the other nations. We read of this in Exodus 19:5-8, the background of this is that the people have heard and accepted the Law of God, this being the Mosaic covenant of marriage to Jehovah.

5 Now therefore, if you will obey My voice indeed, and keep My Covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure *(segullah* = a treasure acquired for a possession) unto Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests (the whole nation being a priest with respect to other nations, as the tribe of Levi was to Israel), and an holy (separate) nation. . . . 8 And all the people answered together, and said, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do."

This theme is repeated again in Deut. 7:6,

For thou art a holy People unto the Lord thy God; the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special (peculiar) People unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

Peter repeats this theme in 1 Peter 2:9,

But ye are a chosen generation *(genos* = race), a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

So Israel was 'called out' to be God's special Kingdom to demonstrate the benefits of His Law operating in their midst as he told them in Deut. 4:5-8,

5 Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither you go to possess it. 6 Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding (discernment) in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding (discerning) people." 7 For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for? 8 And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

Just as the Levites were 'called out' to sanctify the nation with animal sacrifices, so today the "Church" is made up of people 'called out' to sanctify our nation with their sacrifices of worship and prayer.

Now what we have to determine is what Jesus meant when He said "Upon this rock I will build My church

*(ekklesia)."* Is it the nation of Israel He is **building** or is it the "church" universal?

As I have shown with the story of the silversmiths, the word *ekklesia* has no religious connotations and can cover many different types of gatherings for any sort of purposes. In our nation there are three classes of people as far as Chritianity is concerned; (1) the unbelievers or disinterested, (2) Christians, so called because they go to church now and again, (3) to use an Aussie expression, the 'fair dinkum' 'ridgey didge' Christians, the true followers of God and doers, not just hearers, of the Word. This last group is termed the *overcomers* in the Book of Revelation. Jesus said twice, after telling kingdom parables, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 20:16 and 22:14). The 'chosen' *(eklektoi)* I believe are an *ekklesia* of the *overcomers* inside the *ekklesia* of Israel and I would also say out of all nations. That is, they make up the true **body of Christ,** what we would call in Paul's writings, the "Church" which I will discuss shortly.

Stephen speaks to the rulers of the Jews on the assumption that they will identifY Israel in the wilderness as the Church.

To those who approach the subject with an open mind, the testimony of these two witnesses may appear final and conclusive; while those who are determined to date the origin

of the Church from Pentecost deem it the better part of

discretion to turn the blind eye on these references to any prior existence of the Church. The word of Christ and of Stephen does not weigh in the balance for one moment with them against their own theory.

THE CHURCH IN THE OLD TEST AMENT

SO far, the investigation as to the Church seems to be entirely confined to the New Testament, and there appears to be a tacit admission that the first mention of the Church in

Scripture is in our Lord's promise to Peter: "On this rock I will build My Church."

It may startle some to be told-but a little reflection will convince any thoughtful person-that neither our Lord nor Stephen used the Greek word *'ecclesia'* at all, any more than they used the English word 'church'. Christ and Stephen both spoke in Aramaic, the dialect of Hebrew spoken by the Jews in Palestine in their time, which embodied Biblical Hebrew terms for most religious ideas and usages, and it was Matthew, the ready writer among the twelve Apostles, and Luke, Paul's companion in travel, who translated into Greek the words of our Lord and of Stephen in which the *'ecclesia'* appears.

Now if it is possible for us to tell what our Lord actually said He would build upon the Rock, what word He and Stephen used which Matthew and Luke rendered in Greek as 'ecclesia' it will bring us a long way towards discovering the identity of and nature of the Church.

When our Lord commanded the Jews: "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they

are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39), He was directing them to the Old Testament, for the New Testament was not yet written; and when these noble Bereans, "searched the Scriptures daily," it was the Old Testament that they studied.

The Apostles made continual use of the Old Testament Scriptures, and not only in the Hebrew original. They made themselves thoroughly acquainted with the Greek translation, the Septuagint, which had been made by the Jews 250 years before, and which was the only Authorised Version in their day. Both Matthew and Luke are continually quoting from the Old Testament, and, as they are writing in Greek, they quote almost invariably from the Septuagint. It should be possible, by comparing the Hebrew of the Old Testament with the Greek of the Septuagint, to determine with a considerable degree of .certainty what word our Lord used which Matthew felt justified in translating *'ecclesia'* in the promise: "On this rock I will build My *ecclesia."*

CHRIST AND THE 'QAHAL'

The evidence establishes beyond any reasonable doubt that *qahal* was the one and only Hebrew word which was to the Jewish mind the exact equivalent of *'ecclesia',* the one word which Matthew and Luke would have translated *'ecclesia'.* This makes it as near as possible a moral certainty that what our Lord said to Peter was: "On this rock will I build My *qahal.* "

The *'ecclesia'* is a people 'called out' (Greek *ek* or *ex,* out of, and *kaleo,* to call). There is a very common, but a very erroneous, impression that this calling out began on the Day of Pentecost, and Dispensationalists labour this point to prove that the idea of a people 'called out' did not exist until the word *'ecclesia'* was used in the New Testament. It is interesting to notice, therefore, how strong to the Jewish mind was this idea of 'calling out' in the *qahal.*

We now come back to the first appearance of the *qahal,* the two places where our version renders it 'multitude'. It does not occur in any of the promises given to Abraham, for his seed included Ishmaelites, Edomites, and others who were not of the race 'called out'. But in the promise given by Isaac to Jacob (Gen. 28:3), and afterwards quoted by Jacob to Joseph as given to him by God Almighty (Gen. 48:4), both of which promises referred to the seed of Israel and to none else, we find the qahal introduced for the first time. The seed of Jacob were to become, not merely a promiscuous 'multitude' (A. V.), but a *qahal,* an *'ecclesia',* a 'church' of peoples ('peoples' is in the plural, not the singular as in our A.V.).

We have here our first promise of the national church. Here, and not in our Lord's promise to Peter, we get our first vision of the Church emerging as a body 'called out' and separated from the nations of the world. Christ's promise to build His *qahal* upon the Rock had reference to a body with which Peter and all the Jews were already familiar, a body which had existed since the days of the Patriarchs.

The *qahal* or 'ecclesia' properly speaking, embraced all the twelve tribes of the children of Israel; but, after the division of the nation into two kingdoms, a new note is introduced. The northern kingdom, having lapsed into idolatry, is cut off, for the time being at least, from the *qahal.* At the coronation of the young king Joash we read (2 Chron. 23:3): "All the congregation *(qahal)* made a covenant with the king. . ." But the Septuagint renders the *qahal, 'ecclesia Iouda',* 'the church of Judah', adding this explanatory word-which is not given in our English versions-to show that the *'ecclesia'* now referred to embraced the Jews only; Jehu was at that time reigning over the tribes.

The added gloss appears to indicate that Israel of the Northern Kingdom at this time may also have claimed to be the *'ecclesia',* so that there were two claimants to the title; but, in

the view of Judah, Israel was an apostate *'ecclesia'.* That northern *'ecclesia'* was the barren woman, who did not bear, and could not possibly travail with child; whereas the Jewish *'ecclesia'* was the married wife (Isa. 54).

To the Father's command to work in the vineyard, Judah had dutifully said, "I go, Sir," whereas Israel had said, "I will not"; so the Jew appeared to be the son who had done his Father's will. All these years the Jewish nation had served the Father, neither had they consciously transgressed at any time His commandment, while Israel, the prodigal son, was in the far country. The Jew could almost already hear the Father saying, "Son, thou art ever with Me, and all that I have is thine." Sure he was that when the fatted calf would be killed, the music and dancing would be in honour of himself­

. certainly not in honour of his prodigal brother.

The *'ecclesia Iouda',* though only a remnant of the original 'ecclesia' of the twelve tribes, was for the time being a faithful remnant, and was divinely owned as the *'ecclesia'.* And so, after the return from Babylon, *qahal* (Septuagint: *'ecclesia')* is used again and again of the body of Jews who returned (Ezra 2:64; Neh. 5:13; 7:66; 8:17). These Jews were all that was left- to all human knowledge- of the original *'ecclesia'* down to our Lord's time. The gates of hell had, over a long period, prevailed against the' *ecclesia',* but our Lord's promise to Peter was that He would bring that condition to an end.

Thus Israel was not merely a type of the Church; Israel was the Church. And, in a very real sense, more real than most

of us imagine, the Church is not merely the supplanter of Israel; the Church is Israel.

The contrast so glibly drawn by Dispensationalists between Israel and the Church is largely illusory. There were no two ways of salvation, one for Israel and another for the Church. The true Israel, though under the Law, were all saved

Without knowing the simple distinction between Judah and Israel, it is not possible to rightly divide the word of truth. The prophets all knew the difference and prophesied to each nation according to its calling. Judah was called to bring forth the King who would rule both Judah and Israel--and, indeed, the entire earth. But Israel was given the Birthright of Joseph (1 Chron. 5:1, 2).

Judah fulfilled its calling when Jesus was born of that tribe. Israel will fulfil its calling when the Birthright dispute is resolved at the time of the second coming of Christ.

In the past century, certain Zionist Jews have had a vision of returning to the old land, expelling the Palestinians, and claiming the land on the basis of Biblical mandate. They called their nation "Israel," in order to trick the Christians into confusing Judah with Israel. The Christian Zionists, spawned by the Dispensationalist teachers, supported the Jewish claim on Palestine on the grounds that God had given the land to "Israel."