

THE CHURCH: GOD'S CALLED OUT PEOPLE

We noticed previously that the Greek term *ekklesia* was commonly used in reference to people, or the assembly of those people, who were called out for any special purpose. Obviously, this was a word readily at hand for God to use to describe his own people, those called out of sin by the gospel of Christ and into a covenant relationship of salvation with himself (II Thessalonians 2:13-14). Though Peter did not use the term *ekklesia* in his remarks recorded at I Peter 2:4-10, please notice that he nonetheless clearly described the concept: a spiritual house called out of the darkness of the world and into God's marvelous light.

Jesus did use this word in his familiar promise recorded at Matthew 16:18: "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." Just for the record, Peter pointed out that he was not the one on whom the church was to be built, but rather that Jesus himself was the sure foundation of God's house (I Peter 2:4-8). But our primary interest is to determine just what it was Jesus promised to build.

The description given us at Hebrews 12:22-24 supplies a clear and detailed answer. It reads, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel."

This passage clearly details the fundamentals of what the church of Christ actually is—and what it is not. It is not an earthly city, nor earthly organization of any kind, but rather a spiritual city whose population includes even the angelic host. While its citizenry includes living people, physical death does not exclude one from it since it consists of the spirits, not the flesh, of those perfected (made complete) in Christ. It is not a federation of local congregations functioning individually nor collectively under a denominational umbrella. Rather, it is a covenant relationship, a commitment, between God (the forgiver) and one who is forgiven by acceptance of the terms of this covenant (Mark 16:15-16; Romans 6:3-4). With all the clutter that men have tried to add to it swept aside, and simply stated, this is what the church of Christ's promise was to be and still is, yet today.

—Jerry F. Bassett