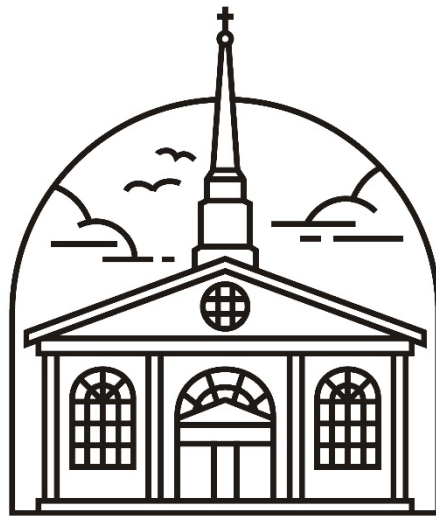


# Origin of



# the Church

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## Lesson Two

The Church of the Apostles

## Overview

The work of the Church inaugurated by the Son of God (God actively present on Earth) was placed in the hands of the student disciples who graduated to become the Apostles and Church Fathers of the early New Testament Church.

Prior to the glorious ascension of Christ into the heavens, they are instructed to begin the work in Judea among their Jewish brethren, continue the outreach initiated by the Messiah to the Samaritans, and ultimately launch a campaign to preach and teach the gospel to the ends earth. (Acts 1:8)

The first impact of the new Apostles was captured on the day of Pentecost when devout Jewish men from many nations heard the twelve collectively speaking the words of the Torah in languages native to the audience. (Acts 2:5-8) Peter addresses the large audience of men with the first declaration that their Rabbi teacher is the anointed messiah. (Acts 2:36)

The Apostles continued to practice and observe all Jewish ceremonies and traditions, including daily prayers, but they also introduced a new, less formal encounter to their Jewish brethren. They met in Jewish homes to study the Torah and teachings of the Messiah and to break bread and fellowship together.

## Origin of Synagogue:

Babylonian period – The Hebrews disrespected the Holy Temple assigned to represent the presence of God among them. Their violation of the Holy Place initiated the physical destruction that also led to their captivity as a consequence of their idolatry. (IIKings 23:26/ IIChronicles 36:14-17)

Nebuchadnezzar required all of the elite members of Jewish households, including religious leaders and educated families, to be taken into permanent custody. (IIKings 24:12-14) The Holy Temple was burned, and the sacred artifacts were confiscated. (IIKings 25:9-10 / IIChronicles 36:7-19) (\*the loss of the Holy Ark of the Covenant is unknown)

The destruction of the temple and removal of the priests and Levites responsible for its oversight made it impossible for the Jews not taken into Babylonian captivity to continue the practice of religious rituals, including daily temple prayers.

Many Rabbinic and Jewish leaders believe this paved the path for alternate gathering places, which led to the creation of the synagogues (Beit Knesset) and House of Gathering.

In its inception, the synagogue was not intended to replace the temple. The concept of the synagogue was an informal facilitation in the absence of the formal Holy Temple. Indeed, the first generation exposed to the synagogue accepted it as a utility, with hopes and expectations that the function of the Holy Temple would be restored.

In 550 BC, forty-seven years later, Cyrus, the Persian King gave a direct mandate to send Jewish families home to return and restore their homeland. (IIChronicles 36:22) Zerubbabel organized the restoration and initiated the work by constructing a new altar. The altar and temple foundation were celebrated by restoring the practice of burnt offerings and honoring the annual feasts. (Ezra 3:1-4,10-13)

Observing that the temple walls remained burned and broken, Nehemiah would lead to the work to restore the temple walls. (Nehemiah 1:3, 2:5) The completed temple was formally dedicated under the watch and leadership of Ezra as the prepared and ready scribe. (Nehemiah 8:1-6) This would become known as the Second Temple Period (516 BC - 70 AD). The restored Zerubbabel-Nehemiah temple existed until the time of the Messiah. In Matthew 24:1-2, the Messiah predicts that the temple will be reduced to rubble, a prophecy fulfilled in 70 AD.

A permanent physical temple has existed for less than 1000 years. The first temple was built by Solomon, who began his reign in approximately 960 BC. The First Temple Period lasted 363 years, from 949 BC to 586 BC, and lasted 10-11 years under Nebuchadnezzar's siege. The restored temple existed from 516 BC to 70 AD, adding another 586 years for 949 years.

Over two thousand years elapsed from Noah to Abraham and from Moses to David with people calling upon the name of God before Solomon built the first Jewish Temple. The timeline from the early New Testament Church to the present does not yet exceed the thousands of years when no physical structures were necessary for worshipping God. The extensive period where temples and cathedrals were absent as places of worship suggests that the emphasis on physical structures is driven more by human desire than by divine requirements.

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## Synagogue Facts:

- The synagogue is autonomous and not subject to any direct authority or hierarchy. Each synagogue is governed by a board of directors composed of laypeople. They manage and maintain the synagogue and its activities, including hiring a Rabbi for the community. A synagogue can and does often exist without a Rabbi.  
There are exceptions to this characteristic, specifically outside of the U.S., where synagogues may be controlled by a variety of Jewish factions, as in the homeland of Israel.
- The synagogue is sometimes referred to as the “little temple.”
- The Yiddish term for synagogue is “Shul,” a German word for school, a place for learning and instruction.
- The synagogue is also formally known as the **beit midrash**, a house of study. For the observant Jew, studying sacred texts is a life-long task, and a synagogue generally has a well-stocked library of sacred Jewish texts for community members to study.
- A facility: used as a social hall for religious and non-religious activities. The synagogue often functions as a town hall where matters of importance to the community can be discussed.
- The synagogue is a facility that offers social welfare and tangible support for its community members—collecting and dispensing money and other items to aid the poor and needy.

**\*In the centuries between the Old and New Testaments**, the concept and use of synagogues developed within Judaism. It is apparent in the Gospels that the nuanced institution continued during the time of the Messiah, who is often referenced as being present in the synagogue. The book of Acts captures most of the Apostle’s encounters in synagogues outside of Jerusalem.

Literary and archaeological sources associate the Jewish Diaspora in the New Testament with synagogues well outside of Israel. They became necessary gathering and meeting places and replaced lost access to the temple after their dispersion before it was physically destroyed. The “little temples” became prayer houses and Sabbath places, functioning differently based on their location-infused culture. Generally, common features relative to practice or physical design were found in each synagogue.

Theodotus was a synagogue ruler in the first century, and archaeological remains of a dedication inscription attributed to him place this ceremonial dedication in the first century AD. This inscription identifies it as one of the earliest known in the Holy City, where the Holy Temple once formally existed. The inscription also offers a sample of synagogue practices within the land of Israel in the first century: 1) the reading of the Torah, 2) the teaching of the commandments, and 3) as a guest house for travelers.

***\*\*Synagogue highlights during the Messiah's ministry include:***

Teaching in the synagogue:

**Matthew 4:23, 9:35, 13:54,**

**Mark 1:21, 6:2**

**Luke 4:15-20**

**John 18:20**

Praying in the synagogue:

**Matthew 6:5**

Miracles in the synagogue:

**Mark 1:21-23, Mark 1:39, Mark 3:1**

**Luke 4:33, 6:6**

Seating in the synagogue:

**Matthew 23:6**

***\*\*Synagogue Characteristics identified during the Messiah's ministry include:***

Rulers of the synagogue:

**Mark 5:22/**

Roman built synagogue **Luke 8:41**

**Luke 13:14 vs. spoke against Jesus**

Place of judgment/discipline

**Luke 21:12, John 9:22, 12:42**

***\*\*Early Church Synagogue Highlights***

Encounters/Conflict

**Acts 6:7-13, 9:2, 13:5-42, 14:1**

Synagogues of Asia

**Iconium, Antioch , Lystra**

**Acts 14**

### Church Terms:

House of Prayer: is from the reference in Judaism – “**beit tefillah**” (**house of prayer**), a term that highlights the general purpose of a synagogue, especially in the absence of a formal temple.

Pulpit: is from the reference in Judaism – “**bimah**” (**altar/podium**) the podium table designated for the Torah Scroll when read aloud.

Sanctuary: is from the reference in Judaism signifying the area of the synagogue designated for prayer.