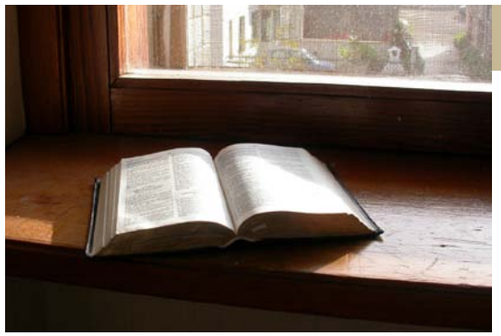


fellow-Jews in His community in a purpose-built facility dedicated to Bible study and worship.

This is not to say that churches have always made good use of their facilities. Churches should be alive with spiritual activities, and their buildings are ideally suited for such. Special classes, workshops, seminars and meetings should be commonplace in our buildings. Sometimes we spend huge amounts of money on facilities that are used only two or three times a week. Many churches could do better. Sometimes churches put too much emphasis on their facilities. I have long said that the three most important things in many a local church business meeting are paint, plumbing and parking. I once recall a vigorous business meeting discussion where the men were ready to drop several thousand dollars to upgrade their parking lot, but bridled at spending a few hundred to upgrade their song books. I've seen churches that spend thousands on the appearance of the facility, but balk at spending similar amounts on class material, teaching supplies, and classroom technology. Let's put the emphasis where it belongs—on worship, teaching, learning, and edification.

Church buildings are tools. Like the tools in a carpenter's bag, some are well designed and functional, while others are merely novel, expensive, and ineffective. Let's use this tool profitably to the Lord's glory, in the furtherance of His kingdom.

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Faithful Sayings

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Services
Sunday: 9:00 AM
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10:30 AM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:
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Brady McAlister
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Justin Smiley
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:
Kyle Pope

Synagogues and Church Buildings

By Cloyce Sutton, II

Every year, churches across the land spend a large portion of their funds on the ubiquitous "church building." Especially in view of the recent revived interest in house churches, it is useful to consider again the biblical authority for church buildings. Some among the house church movement insist that church buildings are unscriptural, that there is no authority for them whatsoever. It is a fair question that should be asked and answered biblically.

It is beyond dispute that Christians worshipped together in local assemblies in New Testament times (see Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 5:4f; 11:17-34; 14:1-40; Jas. 2:1-4). They were also rebuked when they became lax in coming together (Heb. 10:25).

If they were expected to meet together, it follows that they could secure some kind of meeting place. If they were not permitted to have a meeting place, it would be like God telling Noah to build an ark, but not to use tools. Or, imagine God telling John to write the revelation he saw, but not to use pen or ink or papyrus. The command to build includes a means of compliance. The command to write includes a means of compliance. Likewise, the command to meet allows for a means of compliance.

The actual location is of little importance. Jesus said, **"Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst"** (Matt. 18:20). He told the Samaritan woman, **"Woman, be-**

lieve me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father . . . the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:21, 23) The first Christians met in many places including the Jerusalem temple (Acts 2:46), a riverbank (Acts 16:13, 16), houses (Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15), synagogues (Acts 19:8), and schools (Acts 19:9f).

It cannot be proven or disproven that churches borrowed, rented, or owned property. They may have done any or all of these things. We simply do not have the evidence to determine which option they used. However, it is gratuitous to think that local churches would never have paid money to rent or own a building, as if people just went around loaning and borrowing buildings in ancient times.

The Scriptures are replete with references to real estate transactions. The Law of Moses regulated some aspects of real estate transactions (Lev. 25:29). Amos rebuked landlords for exorbitant rent (Amos 5:11). Jeremiah was commanded by God to buy some property being sold by his cousin (Jer. 32). Jesus's parables mention tenant farming (land rental: Matt. 21:33, 41; Mark 12:1; Luke 20:9) and land purchases (Matt. 13:44; Luke 14:18). The early Christians bought and sold land and houses (Acts 4:32-37; 5:1-11). The apostle Paul had to rent a place to live while under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30). Buying, selling, and renting real estate was commonplace in the ancient world. Why would we think that local churches were somehow exempt from what everyone else had to do?

I think a strong case for church buildings can be made by analogy with the Jewish synagogue. Synagogues were simply meeting places where Jews assembled for prayer and worship. In Acts 13:43, synagogue appears to refer to the assembly, not the building. These purpose-built facilities (Luke 7:5) were found throughout the Roman Empire in places like Damascus (Acts 9:2), Salamis (Acts 13:5), Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1), and Corinth (18:14). There were several synagogues within Jerusalem (Acts 6:9).

Synagogues were never intended as substitutes for the temple at Jerusalem. Only in the temple could be found the Ark of the Covenant and the other holy relics. Only there could the priesthood offer sacrifices. Only there could the nation gather to celebrate their three annual festivals.



Synagogues, however, served as places where Jews could assemble regularly in simple devotional services. They recited the Shema (Deut. 6:4-9), prayed, listened to the reading of the Law, and listened to preaching and teaching (Luke 4:15-22, 44; Acts 13:14ff). They apparently also collected money for the needy among them (Matt. 6:2).

The word synagogue is not found in the Old Testament. Scholars think that synagogues originated during the exile, when Jews could not worship God in the temple at Jerusalem. They could not offer sacrifices, but could they do other things? The Law of Moses did not specifically mention such meeting places. There were, however, numerous general principles that allowed for something like a synagogue.

In the Law, priests and Levites were assigned the function of teaching the Law to the people (Lev. 10:10f; Deut. 17:8-13). Even before this, Moses recognized the principle of delegating some of his teaching responsibilities to others (Exod. 18:20). When the land was settled, Levites were allotted cities throughout the land (Josh. 21:20- 42), which enabled them to carry out their functions. One such man was Samuel, who was a priest (1 Chron. 6:16-33), prophet (1 Sam. 3:19-21), and judge (1 Sam. 7:15-17). During his ministry, he rode from place to place, so it is not hard to think of him teaching in the various communities he visited, away from the tabernacle.

There are other references to teaching and assemblies in communities outside of Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat sent men throughout the land, from city to city, to teach from the Law (2 Chron. 17:7-9). During exile, teachers were scattered throughout the exilic communities (Ezra 8:16). Leaders of different communities periodically consulted the prophets (Ezek. 14:1; 20:1; Jer. 29:1ff) for instruction and guidance.

Some outlying places of prayer and worship may already have existed prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Psalm 74 is a lament regarding the destruction of the land, probably after the fall of Jerusalem. Verse 8 refers to the burned "meeting places of God in the land." The word translated as "meeting places" (*mo'ed*) in verse 8, is the same word used to refer to THE meeting place—the temple (vv. 4, 7).

The point in all of this is that the synagogue functioned in essentially the same way as modern church buildings. They were places of prayer, study, and worship. They were authorized, not by specific precept, but by generic principle. If there is any doubt about their divine approval, we need only look to Jesus, who regularly attended their services and used them as a place to teach the gospel of the kingdom (Luke 4:15-16). Jesus the Son of God assembled with