

Biblical Notes — Acts 7:38

38 – This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. (38. οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ γενόμενος ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ μετὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου τοῦ λαλοῦντος αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ ὄρει Σινᾶ καὶ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν, ὃς ἐδέξατο λόγια ζῶντα δοῦναι ὑμῖν)

"When we speak of "one people of God" we should not conclude that the Old Testament saints belonged to the "Church." The "Church" properly and technically had its birthday on Pentecost. Although Acts 7:38 refers to "the church in the wilderness" (an obvious reference that the word *ekklesia* ("church") is used some eighty-six times in the LXX of the nation Israel, let us not forget that the word had not as of then attained its technical sense of the body of Christ, a congregation of God's people called out from among all nations and united by the baptism in the Holy Spirit. It was at Pentecost, and not before, that God's people (at that time, I might add, a people comprised almost wholly of believing Israelites, the remnant) became or took on a new form as the "Church," the body of Christ."

—— Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come, The Amillennial Alternative* (Mentor Imprint of Christian Focus Publications, Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, IV20 1TW, Scotland, U.K., 2013), 343.

"The first evidence is based on the fact that Acts 7:38 refers to Israel as the church in the wilderness. It should be noted that this translation is found in the King James Version. Most other translations have more correctly translated this verse to read, the congregation in the wilderness, or the assembly in the wilderness. The Greek term *ekklesia* is not only used in the technical sense of the New Testament Church, but it is also used in the Septuagint as the translation of the Hebrew *kahal*, meaning "congregation." That was the obvious intent of Acts 7:38. Furthermore, in the Book of Acts itself, *ekklesia* is used in the non-technical sense of "assembly," for it is used to describe an assembly of townspeople who were neither Jews nor Christians but Gentile pagans: Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly (*ekklesia*) was in confusion; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. (Acts 19:32) And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly (*ekklesia*). (Acts 19:41) Certainly, Hodge would never consider this assembly of Gentile pagans who were yelling, Great is Diana of the Ephesians, (v. 28) as being the Church. The mere use of *ekklesia* in Acts 7:38 no more proves that Israel is the Church than its use in Acts 19:32 and 41 proves that the pagan Ephesians constituted the Church."

—— Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: the Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, (Ariel Ministries, 2016), 29.

"In the church - The word "church" means literally "the people called out," and is applied with great propriety to the assembly or multitude called out of Egypt, and separated from the world. It has not, however, of necessity our idea of a church, but means the "assembly," or people called out of Egypt and placed under the conduct of Moses."

—— Albert Barnes, *Albert Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible, Commentary on Acts 7:38*.

"This is he that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel that spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received living oracles to give unto us: to whom our fathers would not be obedient, but thrust him from them, and turned back in their hearts unto Egypt, saying unto Aaron, Make us gods that will go before us; for, as for this Moses, who led us forth out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him. The church in the wilderness ... This is not a reference to the church of Christ, but to the congregation of Israel in the wilderness which is typical of Christ's church."

—— James Coffman, *Coffman's Commentaries on the Bible, Commentary on Acts 7:38*.

"This is he. Moses. That was in the church in the wilderness. The congregation of Israel, the typical church. Moses was its mediator."

—— People's New Testament, *Commentary on Acts 7:38*.

"In the church in the wilderness (ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐν τῇ ἐρημῳ — *en tēi ekklesiāi en tēi erēmōi*). Better rendered "congregation" here as in Hebrews 2:12 (Psalm 22:22), the people of Israel gathered at Matthew. Sinai, the whole nation."

—— A.T. Robertson, *Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament, Commentary on Acts 7:38*.

"Israel in the land is never called a church. In the wilderness Israel was a true church (G. *ecclesia* = called-out assembly), but in striking contrast with the N.T. *ecclesia*."

—— Scofield's Reference Notes, *Commentary on Acts 7:38*.

"γίνομαι μετὰ is not a Hebraism, as Kuin.: see reff. That Moses conversed with both the Angel of the covenant and our fathers, implies that he was the mediator between them, as indeed ὃς ἐδέξατ. λόγ. ζ. more plainly declares. ἐκκλησίᾳ

probably, the assembly held (Exodus 19) for the promulgation of the law at Mt. Sinai, not 'the Church' generally: but the article does not determine this: it would be expressed, whichever meaning we take. Wordsw. observes on the meaning which the words ἡ ἐκκλησία ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ carry for the student of Christian prophecy, Revelation 12:1-6."

—— Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary, Commentary on Acts 7:38.