

Jerusalem's
Western Wall



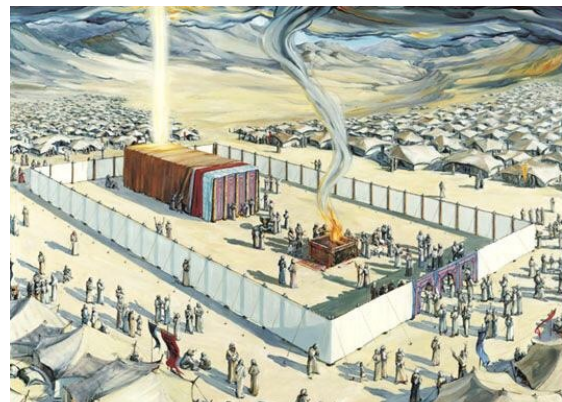
CLASS #2—THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, GOD'S ECCLESIA

THE EARLY ECCLESIA: IN THE WILDERNESS AND THE LAND OF PROMISE

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CLASS OUTLINE: THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, GOD'S ECCLESIA

- Old Testament Precedents
- The Ecclesia in the Wilderness
- The Ecclesia in the Times of the Judges
- The Ecclesia in the Time of the Kings
- Some Final Comments

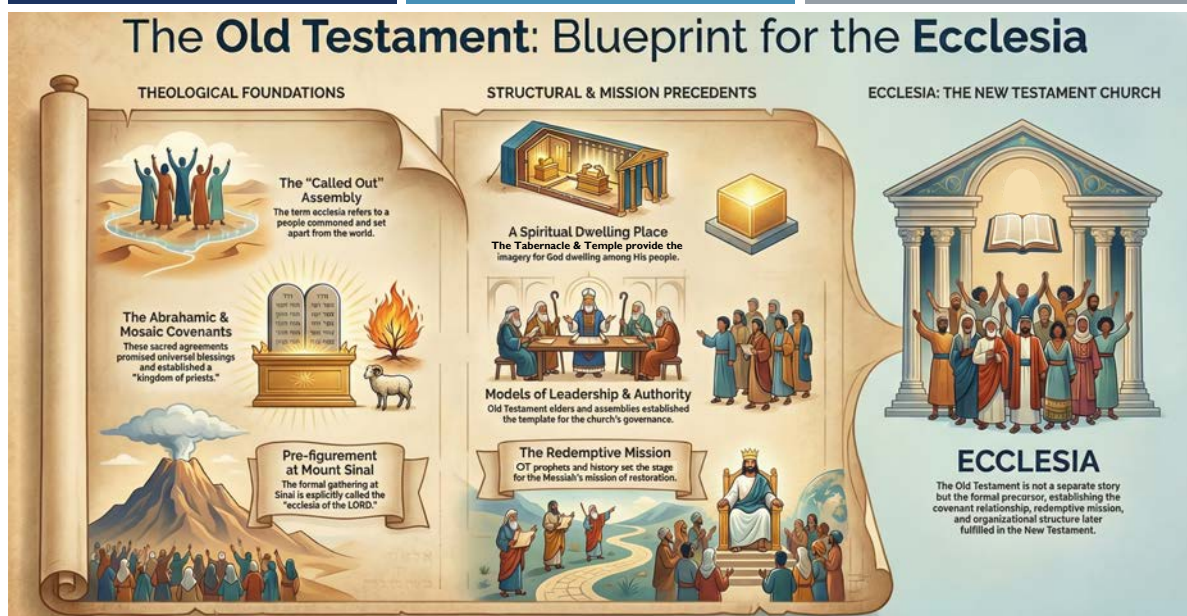


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God's Congregation

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Old Testament Precedents



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OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENTS (1/7)

- The Old Testament is a foundation for God's ecclesia
 - It contains the origins of the covenant community God called out from the world, a concept reflected in the Greek word "ecclesia"
- The assembly of Israel served as a pre-figurement
 - In the Septuagint, *ecclesia* was used to refer to the congregation of Israel, demonstrating a clear connection between the covenant people of the Old Testament and the ecclesia of the New
- The Old Testament establishes the covenant with Abraham, the laws of Moses at Mount Sinai, and the ongoing story of God's people, i.e., the children of Israel
 - All which serve as a precursor and template for the New Testament ecclesia

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OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENTS (2/7)

■ The Covenant People

- The concept of a covenant—a sacred, binding agreement between God and His is people—is foundational to the Old Testament and carries into the New
- The Old Testament records God calling out a people, Israel, to be His special, redeemed people
 - This “called out” assembly is the precedent for the New Testament “ecclesia”
 - A term also used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) to refer to the assembly of Israel
- **The Abrahamic covenant** promised a people and a blessing for all nations, a promise that is ultimately fulfilled through Christ and *ecclesia* (Genesis 12:2 & 3)
- **The Mosaic covenant** at Sinai established Israel as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” showing their unique position to serve God and be a witness to the world (Exodus 19:6)

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OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENTS (3/7)

■ The Sinai Covenant

- The formal gathering of the Israelites at Mount Sinai is explicitly referred to as the “assembly” or “ecclesia” of the LORD in the Greek Old Testament (Deut.4:10)
- This event established a formal covenant between God and His people, laying the groundwork for the covenant relationship with God through Christ



Moses with the Children of Israel at Sinai, Unknown

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OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENTS (4/7)

■ God's Promises

- The Abrahamic covenant in the Old Testament promises that God would bless the world through Abraham's descendants
 - This promise points toward the later blessing that would come through Jesus, the fulfillment of this promise, establishing the New Testament ecclesia

■ A Model for Learning

- The Old Testament provides a foundation for God's ecclesia by showing its own successes and failures, reminding future generations that God will act for His people as He did in the past

The Old Testament provides a foundation for God's ecclesia.

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OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENTS (5/7)

■ The "Called Out" Assembly

- As we have previously discussed, the term ecclesia itself is derived from a Greek word meaning "to call out" or "summon"
 - In both its classical Greek and Old Testament usage, it referred to an assembly of people called together for a purpose, a meaning carried forward to the New Testament, where believers are "called out" from the world to assemble before God



The Children of Israel
Crossing the Red Sea,
Frédéric Schöpin

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OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENTS (6/7)

■ The Redemptive Mission of God

- The Old Testament lays the groundwork for the mission of salvation that is extended through the ecclesia
 - The story of God's plan of salvation unfolds throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, setting the stage for the Messiah's coming
 - The promises and prophecies found in the Old Testament point toward Jesus, and the ecclesia continues his mission of redemption and restoration



Praying with Torah,
Alex Levin

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OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENTS (7/7)

■ A Spiritual Dwelling for God

- The Old Testament provides the imagery of the tabernacle & temple as places where God's presence dwelt among His people

■ Leadership & Authority

- Old Testament forms of governance, such as the elders & assemblies of Israel, provide precedents for the structure & authority of the ecclesia



King Solomon's Temple,
Unknown

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The Ecclesia in the Wilderness

From Sinai to Zion: The Evolution of the Ecclesia

The Ecclesia is a sacred society under divine government. While the church began as a physical camp in the wilderness under Moses, it finds its "more excellent" and spiritual completion through Christ and the new covenant.

Mount Sinai (Earthly)

A Fearful and Terrible State
Defined by thunder, darkness, and a presence so dread-inducing that the people entreated God to stop speaking.

Limited and Dangerous Access
Restricted only to Moses and Aaron, any person or beast touching the mountain faced immediate death.

The Earthly Shadow
An external, physical society formed on Mount Sinai characterized by "dark shadows" and strict types.

Mount Zion (Heavenly)

A Mild and Spiritual State
Suited to human weakness, this "heavenly Jerusalem" is characterized by brightness, kindness, and spiritual freedom.

Universal Access through a Mediator
All believers gain direct access to God through Christ, the mediator of the new covenant.

Ecclesia in the Wilderness	Gospel Ecclesia
Location: Mount Sinai (Earthly)	Mount Zion (Heavenly)
Atmosphere: Darkness, Storm, and Dread	Light, Peace, and Mercy
Mediation: Moses (Intercessor)	Christ (Life and Soul)

A Message of Mercy
Unlike the blood of Abel which cried for vengeance, this dispensation speaks of pardon and peace.

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE WILDERNESS (1/10)

- This connection between the "church (ecclesia) in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38) and the "church of the firstborn" is critical
 - Christ's ecclesia is a continuation of the one in the wilderness, it isn't a new one



Tabernacle in the
Wilderness, Jeremy Sams

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE WILDERNESS (2/10)

- As stated in Matthew Henry's Bible commentary,
 - The camp of Israel is here called **the ecclesia in the wilderness**; for it was a sacred society, incorporated by a divine charter under a divine government, and blessed with divine revelation
 - The ecclesia in the wilderness was an ecclesia, though it was not yet perfectly formed, as it was to be when they came to Canaan, *but every man did that which was right in his own eyes*
 - It was the honor of Moses that he was in that ecclesia, and many a time it would have been destroyed if Moses had not been in it to intercede for it
 - But Christ is the president & guide of a more excellent and glorious ecclesia than that in the wilderness was, and is more in it, as the life and soul of it, than Moses could be

Reading from Hebrews 12:18-24...

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE WILDERNESS (3/10)

Heb 12:18 For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

Heb 12:19 And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:

Heb 12:20 (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:

Heb 12:21 And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and **church of the firstborn**, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE WILDERNESS (4/10)

- In Acts, Paul describes how the “gospel” ecclesia differs from the “Jewish” ecclesia, and how it surpasses it
- Here we have a particular description of the state of the ecclesia under the Mosaic dispensation
 - As described by Paul, it was external and earthly, formed on Mount Sinai
- Whereas the state of the gospel ecclesia, formed on mount Zion, is more spiritual



The Apostle Paul,
Pompeo Giralamo Batoni

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE WILDERNESS (5/10)

- As stated in Matthew Henry’s Bible commentary,
 - [The ecclesia formed in the wilderness] ...was a dark dispensation
 - Upon that mount there were blackness and darkness, and the congregation of Israel was covered with dark shadows and types
 - The gospel state is much more clear & bright
 - The ecclesia in the wilderness was a dreadful & terrible dispensation; the Jews could not bear its terror
 - The thunder and the lightning, the trumpet sounding, the voice of God himself speaking to them, struck them with such dread that they *entreated that the word might not be so spoken to them any more*
 - Moses himself said, *I exceedingly fear and quake*
 - **The gospel ecclesia is mild, kind, and more approachable** for our weak frame

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE WILDERNESS (6/10)

- Matthew Henry's Bible commentary continues,
 - [The ecclesia in the wilderness] ...was a limited dispensation; all might not approach to that mount, but only Moses and Aaron
 - But under the gospel we have all access to God through His son
 - The ecclesia in the wilderness was a very dangerous dispensation
 - The mount burned with fire, and whatever man or beast touched the mount must *be stoned, or thrust through with a dart*
 - It is true, it will be always dangerous for [us] sinners to draw nigh to God; but it is not an immediate & certain death
- This was the state of the Jewish ecclesia
 - A chosen family, but **a stubborn & hard-hearted people**

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE WILDERNESS (7/10)

- In this passage in Hebrews, Paul describes the gospel ecclesia, by calling *mount Zion* (v22), *the heavenly Jerusalem, which is free*, in opposition to mount Sinai
 - This was the hill on which God set his king, the Messiah, His only begotten son
- *To an innumerable company of angels* (v22), who are of the same family with the saints, under the same head, and in a great measure employed in the same work
 - Ministering to believers, keeping them in all their ways, and being with them
 - **Those who by faith are joined to the gospel ecclesia are joined to the angels**, and shall, one day, be like them



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Sermon on the Mount, Jorge Cocco

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE WILDERNESS (8/10)

- The Apostle Paul describes the general assembly of the first-born (i.e., of Christ)
 - All saints of all times, who saw the promises of the gospel, but received them not
 - All the children of God are heirs, and everyone has the privileges of the first-born, if we so choose
 - The names of these are written in heaven, in the records of the ecclesia (i.e., in the book of life)
 - Are written among the living in Jerusalem; they have a good standing for their faith and faithfulness, and are enrolled in the book of life
- *To God the Judge of all (v23), that great God who will judge both Jew & Gentile*

As believers we all come to him by faith.

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE WILDERNESS (9/10)

- *To the spirits of just men made perfect (v23); to the best of men, the righteous, who are found to have the right character; to be made perfect through trials of faith*
- And finally, *To Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel (v24)*
 - There is no better encouragements then this, to devote ourselves to the gospel,
 - It is through the gospel that our relationship with Christ, our Mediator, is made
 - Is there anything better?
 - The gospel is the new covenant, distinct from the covenant of works; and it is now under a new dispensation, distinct from that of the Old Testament
 - **Christ is the Mediator of this new covenant**; he is the middle person that goes between both parties, God and man, to bring them together

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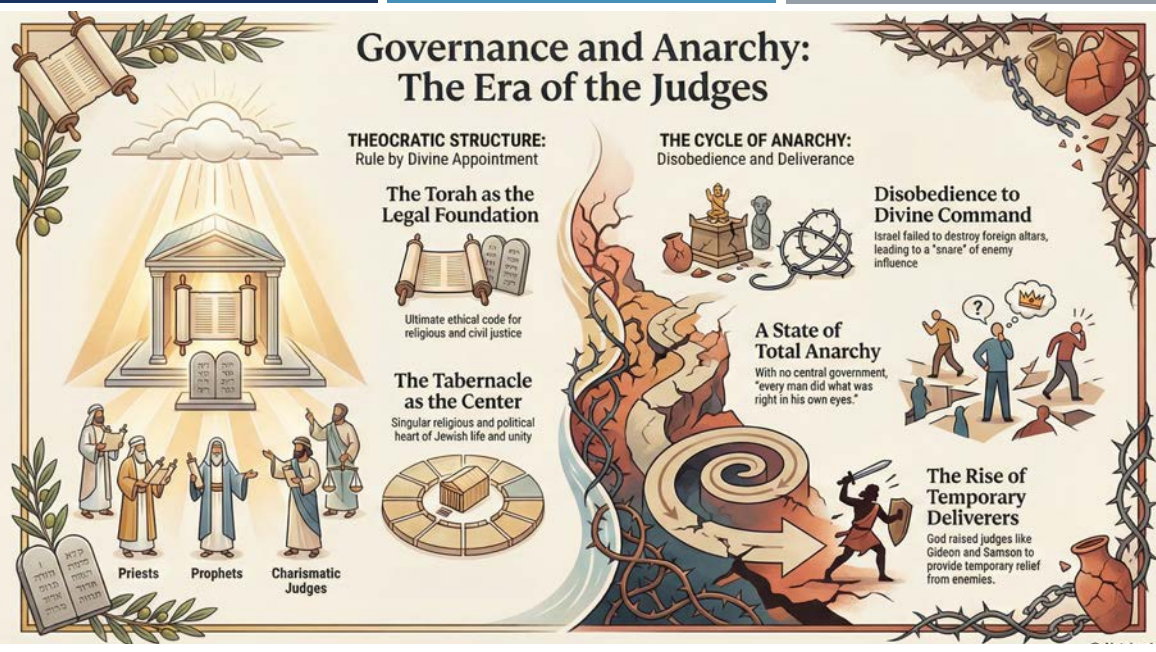
THE ECCLESIA IN THE WILDERNESS (10/10)

- *The new covenant...*
 - This covenant was ratified by the blood of Christ sprinkled upon our conscience
 - As the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled upon the altar and the sacrifice
 - The blood of Christ, his life freely given, opened the veil to the Most Holy
- This is “speaking blood,” and speaks better things than that of Abel, how?
 - It speaks to God on behalf of sinners; it pleads not for vengeance, as the blood of Abel did on him who shed it, but for mercy
 - To sinners, in the name of God, it speaks pardon to their sins, peace to their beings; and speaks their obedience and highest love & thankfulness

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The Ecclesia in the Times of the Judges



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THE ECCLESIA IN THE TIMES OF THE JUDGES (1/5)

- A period of anarchy...
 - God instructed the children of Israel that when they entered the land, they were to:
 - Utterly destroy the people living there
 - Not make covenants with them
 - Break down their altars/images
 - Not marry them or allow their children to marry them
 - However, after entering the promised land, the people did not heed God's commandments
 - Because of this, their enemies were left in place to be a thorn and snare to Israel (Judges 2:1-4)
 - As such, there was a period of anarchy
 - During this time "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6) and sin and injustice was rampant throughout the land

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE TIMES OF THE JUDGES (2/5)

- A period of anarchy... (con't)
 - Occasionally, the people would cry out to God and He would raise up a judge (such as Gideon & Samson)
 - They would temporarily deliver the people from their enemies
 - But the Children of Israel would eventually return to their wicked ways



Samson in the Temple,
Luciano Borzone

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE TIMES OF THE JUDGES (3/5)

- A theocratic system is the most prominent example of the governance structure of ancient Israel
 - Particularly during the period of the biblical judges and the united monarchy under kings such as David & Solomon
 - In these times, Jewish society was deeply influenced by religious laws & the authority of its religious leaders
 - A confederation of tribes ruled by God, with judges acting as temporary, divinely appointed leaders
 - These judges led tribes or groups of tribes in times of crisis, but there was no central government
 - Often, a lack of overarching authority meant each person acted according to their own judgment, a situation the book of Judges describes as a period of chaos

Individuals were expected to follow the Law of Moses.

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE TIMES OF THE JUDGES (4/5)

- Key aspects of ancient Israel's theocratic system:
 - The priests & Levites played essential roles in religious & judicial matters
 - The High Priest, for example, held significant authority and acted as a mediator between God & the people
 - *The Torah* served as the foundational legal & ethical code
 - The laws within *The Torah* guided not only religious practices, but also civil & criminal justice
 - Prophets were central figures in this theocratic system, offering guidance, reprimands, and predictions that were divinely inspired
 - They influenced both kings & the general population by emphasizing adherence to God's commandments



Samuel, John Singleton Copley

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE TIMES OF THE JUDGES (5/5)

- Key aspects of ancient Israel's theocratic system: (con't)
 - Judges, who were often charismatic leaders, emerged in times of crisis to lead the Israelites and were seen as divinely appointed
 - They were religious & military leaders raised up by God to deliver the people and dispense justice, acting as representatives of God's law
 - The Book of Judges highlights this decentralized form of leadership before the establishment of the monarchy
 - The Tabernacle continued to be the religious & political center of Jewish life
 - It was the site of major religious rituals and a symbol of unity for the Israelite tribes
 - Religious life was centered around a few key locations & festivals

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The Ecclesia in the Times of the Kings



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THE ECCLESIA IN THE TIMES OF THE KINGS (1/6)

- With the rise of the monarchy, the kings were expected to rule in accordance with divine commandments—directed by God, Scripture & the prophets
 - The king's authority was not absolute; he was subject to divine law & prophetic guidance, maintaining the theocratic nature of governance
- During the period of the monarchy, the religious governmental structure was a complex system involving three main offices: the king, the prophets & the priests
- While the king held political power, Israel was considered a theocracy, where God was the ultimate ruler
- The system of checks & balances meant the king's power was constrained by religious authorities & divine law

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE TIMES OF THE KINGS (2/6)

■ The King

- Kings were anointed to rule on behalf of God & were responsible for upholding the covenant with Him
 - Their position was based on divine selection, not solely heredity
- The king was the head of state, leading the military, directing public works projects, and establishing a royal bureaucracy
- Unlike other Near Eastern monarchs, the Israelite king's power was not absolute
 - The king was expected to rule according to God's law, with prophets and priests serving as a check on his authority



King David, Luciano Gerrit
van Honthorst

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE TIMES OF THE KINGS (3/6)

■ The Prophets

- Prophets were individuals from any background who were called by God to deliver messages & interpret His will to the people and the king
- A prophet's primary role was to hold the king and the ruling elite accountable to God's law
 - They were responsible for exposing abuses of power, challenging the king on moral and political matters, and warning of divine judgment
- Prophets, such as Samuel, could anoint kings, indicating their role in legitimizing rule
 - They also frequently clashed with monarchs who violated religious law, as seen in the confrontation between the prophet Elijah & King Ahab

The King, the Prophets, and the the Priests all answered to the LORD God of Israel.

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE TIMES OF THE KINGS (4/6)

■ The Priests

- The priesthood was inherited by the descendants of Aaron from the tribe of Levi
- Priests were responsible for religious rituals & sacrifices performed at a designated site, first at the Tabernacle & later at Solomon's Temple
- Priests had significant influence over legal & administrative matters
 - Along with local judges, the Levitical priests decided difficult legal cases and taught God's laws to the people
- The High Priest held a unique position as the chief religious leader, mediating between the people & God
 - He alone was permitted to enter the Temple's Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement



Aaron, Pier Francesco Mola

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE TIMES OF THE KINGS (5/6)

- While the monarchy established a centralized government, a form of popular, representative influence existed through assemblies of elders & tribal leaders
 - These bodies represented the people and their concerns, though their power diminished relative to the king during the monarchy
- This religious governmental structure was fundamentally tied to the covenant God made with Israel
 - The king was expected to be the chief enforcer of this divine contract
 - However, many kings failed to uphold the covenant, frequently leading to political & religious corruption
 - This repeated failure fueled the central tension of the monarchical period and gave rise to the prophetic calls for justice & repentance

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THE ECCLESIA IN THE TIMES OF THE KINGS (6/6)

- Israel's theocratic framework evolved significantly after the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70 by the Roman Empire
 - This led to the Diaspora and the development of Rabbinic Judaism
 - In this new phase, religious authority shifted from priests and prophets to rabbis, who interpreted religious laws for communities scattered around the world



The Destruction of the
Temple of Jerusalem,
Francesco Hayez

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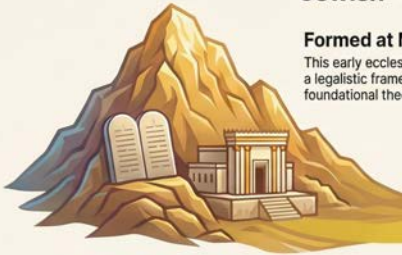
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Some Final Comments

The Evolution of the Ecclesia: From Sinai to Zion

The Foundational
"Jewish" Ecclesia

Formed at Mount Sinai
This early ecclesia was defined by a legalistic framework and a foundational theocratic system.



Checks and Balances

Ancient Israel's government balanced power between kings, prophets, and priests under God's direction.

The Spiritual
"Gospel" Ecclesia

A New Mediated Covenant
Christ serves as the mediator of a new covenant that offers eternal salvation.



From Legalism to Mercy
Unlike the Sinai ecclesia, the gospel ecclesia formed on Mount Zion is spiritual and merciful.

Shift to Rabbinic Judaism

The destruction of the Second Temple forced the evolution of the original theocratic framework.



The "Called Out" People

The concept of ecclesia signifies a community set apart for a specific divine purpose.

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Tomorrow: Learning from Christ & the First Century Ecclesias

The Ecclesia: A Journey from Foundation to Future

FOUNDATIONS AND ANCIENT ROOTS

Establishing the
Biblical Construct

Laying the groundwork for understanding the foundational nature of the Ecclesia.

The Wilderness and
Promised Land

Examining the early Ecclesia during the journey of the Children of Israel.

Christ and the
First Century

Insights gained from Christ's initiation of the original first-century Ecclesias.



CONTINUITY AND FUTURE REVIVAL

Persistence Through
the Centuries

Proof that God's word and the Ecclesia have never died out.

Addressing Modern
Spiritual Crises

An urgent call for communal action to face contemporary faith challenges.

Revival and the
Kingdom Age

Strategies for avoiding spiritual death and maintaining the Ecclesia's future.

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