

Titles for God's people

Introduction

There are many titles for the people that God saves, and even more symbols and types,¹ however, the most common names that are regularly used by believers are found below. The titles are explained so that you can know what they actually mean since many are confused in this matter and use a title wrongly. Thus the name 'church' has no reference to a building and 'kingdom' has no reference to any human nation.

The kingdom (of God / Heaven)

Greek word: *basileia*.

Meaning: Those in whom God reigns; the sphere of the rule of God. The extent of God's royal power in his own people who share in that rule. This word has less to do with the people in it, as such, and more as the sphere of God's rule evidenced in people. The foundation of the kingdom is Christ (the only person who truly does God's will); believers are in the kingdom because they are in Christ.

Example: 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God,' Acts 14:22

Note:

Contrary to the claims of some, the two titles ('kingdom of heaven', 'kingdom of God') are synonymous (Matt 11:12-13 with Lk 16:16; Matt 10:7 with Lk 9:2; Matt 4:12,17 with Mk 1:14-15. Notice Matt 19:23-24 where Jesus uses both terms interchangeably.

The city of God

Greek word: *polis*; Hebrew word: *'iyer*.

Meaning: a city and its inhabitants. The emphasis is: those under God's protection, surrounded by a wall of salvation (Isa 60:18).

Examples: 'There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.' Ps 46:4-5. '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,' Heb 12:22-23. 'Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,' Rev 21:2.

The elect

Greek word: *eklektos*.

Meaning: Those whom God chose out of this world; those selected, picked out, from the rest of mankind. The chosen people; the handpicked people.

¹ For instance, God's vine or vineyard, lampstand, lily, garden, olive tree.

Example: 'Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering,' Col 3:12

The church

Greek word: *Ekklesia*.

Meaning: The people who are called out of the world by God and gathered together for his purposes.

It originally referred to the democratic Greek city-states where the *ekklesia* were the citizens called out to vote on policy matters; the legal representatives of the whole city.

Example: 'I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it,' Matt 16:18

The body of Christ

Greek words: *soma Christos*.

Meaning: The church, which is his body. Christ is the head; the church is his body on earth.

Examples: 'For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,' Eph 4:12. 'Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body,' Eph 5:23. 'He is the head of the body, the church,' Col 1:18.

The bride of Christ

Greek word: *numphe*.

Meaning: it literally means a betrothed or married woman. It speaks of the church as the wife given to Christ as his spouse; a thing of beauty presented to Christ.

Example: 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife,' Rev 21:9.

Note:

This is not a common term for the church (even though it is widely used as such today), but only directly appears in Revelation (though Paul explains the theology of it in Ephesians). It seems that this term is really only applicable to the church at the end, having been purified of every spot and blemish. It is an eschatological term only.

God's sheep

Greek word: *probaton*.

Meaning: Those whom God cares for, shepherds; God's own flock.

The word literally means small herded animals (goats and sheep) as opposed to large livestock, such as cows or oxen. [Where sheep are distinguished from goats (as in Matt 25:32-33), the same word is used for the sheep but goats are referred to as *eriphos*, or a kid.]

Example: 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me,' Jn 10:27

The household of God

Greek word: *oikeios*.

Meaning: God's own household, family, kin; those who belong to God as a blood relative.

Example: 'Therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,' Eph 2:19.

The temple of God

Greek word: *naos*.

Meaning: the place where God dwells on earth; the people in whom God dwells.

Example: 'Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?' 1 Cor 3:16

A vessel; a chosen vessel

Greek word: *skeuos*.

Meaning: originally meaning a vessel or an implement; in the plural it meant: household utensils, domestic gear or the tackle and armament of vessels (used specifically of sails and ropes). It was used metaphorically of a man of quality, a chosen instrument. Therefore, when applied to God's servants it means people of quality to be used as a chosen instrument.

Examples: 'The Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name",' Acts 9:15. 'He will be a vessel for honour, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work,' 2 Tim 2:21.

Bondservant of Christ / slave of God

Greek word: *doulos*.

Meaning: a slave or bondman; one who gives himself up to the will of another. The better translation is 'slave'. Though Jesus said that he did not consider us to be his servants, the godliness of apostles is seen in their own choice of the word 'slave' to denote their relationship to the Lord; even the Lord's own brother did this.

Examples: 'If I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ,' Gal 1:10. 'Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ,' Col 4:12. 'James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,' Jm 1:1. 'Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ,' Titus 1:1. 'Having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life,' Rm 6:22. 'Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ,' 1 Cor 4:1.

Note:

- Moses is the only one actually called a ‘servant of God’ in the NKJV (Heb: ‘*ebed* (slave); 1 Chron 6:49; 2 Chron 24:9; Neh 10:29; Dan 9:11; Rev 15:3 - *doulos*).
- Jesus specifically stated to the apostles that: ‘No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you,’ (Jn 15:15).
- The KJV has ‘servant of God’ in Titus 1:1 and Jam 1:1 (*doulos* in Greek).
- There is, perhaps, significance in that the only people designated by this term in the original languages are Moses (the chief prophet of the OT); the apostle to the Gentiles, and the elder of Jerusalem and chief church leader of the Jewish church party.
- It is not a common term for the Lord’s people, rather it is used of a very few important church leaders.

Questionable terms

It may be interesting to note terms that are not strictly Biblical. There are no literal references to:

- ‘*God’s covenant people*’. God’s people are a covenant people, that is a people under a covenant, but the actual phrase is not found in the NKJV or KJV. Neither is the shorter phrase ‘covenant people’.
- ‘*Army of God*’. 1 Chron 12:22 refers to an ‘army of God’ in some translations but the Hebrew term really means ‘camp’, ‘encampment’, ‘body of people’. It is translated as ‘host of God’ in the KJV. The term does not appear anywhere else. References to an army in connection with God usually refer to angels. God as ‘Lord of Hosts’ is an OT term that refers to God as the head of the heavenly armies. ‘There are two references to God as the ‘Lord of Sabaoth’ in the NT, which refer to God as the head of heavenly armies. The word is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word ‘hosts’.
- ‘*The planting of God*’. This is commonly accepted as a term for the church. However, there are only two OT texts that mention this. Isa 60:21 – ‘Also your people shall all be righteous; They shall inherit the land forever, The branch of My planting, The work of My hands, That I may be glorified.’ Isa 61:3 – ‘to console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.’ There is no good reason to consider that this is a formal term for God’s people, any more than ‘the work of my Hands’ or ‘trees of righteousness’. ‘The branch of my planting’ and ‘the planting of the LORD’ are merely descriptive. They are not used by other prophets, or elsewhere in the OT, and never in the NT.

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