

At the beginning of the book of Acts, a „mega-church“ appears to have arisen in Jerusalem: *Those who joyfully accepted Peter’s word were baptized, and about three thousand souls were added that day.* (Acts 2:41) Two chapters later the number is five thousand. (Acts 4:4) Among today’s Christians, I perceive an idea that the first church in the Jerusalem temple was some kind of ideal to which we should aim.

Acts 2:46 *They stayed with one accord in the temple every day, breaking bread from house to house and taking food.* I hear the interpretation here from evangelicals that when they were in the temple with one accord, that is the „congregation“. And the households were „small groups“ that they sort of had as an addition to the main thing that took place in the temple.

As soon as you take a closer look at the practical functioning of the Jerusalem temple at that time, I am quite sure that this idea will disintegrate. A piece from Matthew 21, time a few weeks before this event of the emergence of the church: *Jesus entered the temple of God and drove out all those who were selling and buying in the temple, he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves...* (Matthew 21:12) According to John 2:14 cattle were also sold in the temple!

Imagine it naturally: In addition to the fact that cattle need food – at least hay and water – think about what inevitably had to be on the floor in the place where the cattle were stabled, and what kind of aroma it probably gave off... If there were cattle, if they sold and bought everything possible there, if they exchanged money there and did who knows what else, then it was certainly not a holy and peaceful gathering of the church, as if in a quiet chapel separated from the sinful world.

Exactly the opposite! The area of the Jerusalem temple was a public place for the Jewish population! A lot of Jews who don’t recognize Jesus come here and the priests run this temple, many of whom shouted „crucify him“ a few weeks ago, and in a few days they will beat the apostles and put them in jail. The meeting of the church in the temple is essentially a meeting in the midst of a crowd of non-believers!

That inspires me! If we want to imitate the model of the first church in the temple, we should meet in a shopping park or in a city market place and share the Good News about Jesus there!

The apostle Paul somewhat imitated this model. His first steps in a new city usually led to

the synagogue or other places where people who did not know Jesus gathered. For example, some kind of prayer place by the river in the city of Philippi or a square in Athens. (Acts 16,12n; 17,16n) Please do not overlook an important principle: the Apostle Paul speaks their language, uses their images, and those people there communicate with him - they answer him or jump right into the conversation.

When in Acts 8 the disciples were scattered into the surrounding countryside, there is no further mention of the church meeting in the temple! And since AD 70, no stone has been left unturned of the temple. The church now only operates in homes or other private environments! Similarly, the sharing of the good news is mainly confined to the sphere of personal initiative of „ordinary believers“: *Those who scattered, went through the land and preached the Word!* (Acts 8,4) This was a real movement in the sense of sharing and passing on life to the next and next generations of disciples. Someone aptly called it „the liquid church“. Depending on the possibilities, inconspicuous churches were created in households, which could be easily moved and, above all, reproduced in subsequent generations.

As I indicated, in this section of Bridges to People, I am thinking about the biblical models of the church and the application of those models for our time when it comes to new believers „from the world“.

They stayed with one accord in the temple daily and broke bread from house to house...
(Acts 2:46)

As we have shown, it was far from being one mega-church in Jerusalem. But rather a mega-NETWORK of house fellowships, which - if possible - also met in the temple to share with more and more Jews about the resurrected Jesus!

I very much desire that „ordinary believers“ even here today accept this biblical calling and empowerment, that THEY too can start and lead a healthy, simple church made up of new disciples! The next lessons will show you how to do it.

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your repeated assurance that the church is an opportunity for simple disciples who listen to Your Word and submit to Your guidance.