



What does the Bible mean when it talks about the "synagogue of Satan"?

Actually, the term "synagogue of Satan" is used only twice in the Bible, namely in Revelation 2:9 and Revelation 3:9. Before analyzing these two passages in detail, let us first get some background:

The word "synagogue" is used in several places in the New Testament. The word is derived from the Greek word "sunagoge" and means, literally, a "bringing together." The Greek word "sun" means "together," and the Greek word "agoge" means "to bring." (Compare "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words," by W. E. Vine). Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible defines it as a "place where people are led together." Although originally used for religious or other gatherings of Jews, the word was later also applied to religious or other gatherings of Christians.

The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible confirms this understanding. They write, under number 4864, that the word means "an assemblage of persons; spec. a Jewish 'synagogue' (the meaning or the place); by anal. a Christian church--assembly, congregation, synagogue."

In his letter to the "twelve tribes which are scattered abroad," James addressed "brethren" from those twelve tribes (James 1:1, 2). He wrote primarily to brethren from the house of Israel--who were NOT Jews (For more information, please read our free booklet, "The Fall and Rise of Britain and America."). In James 2:2-4, he states: "For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, 'You sit here in a good place,' and say to the poor man, 'You stand there,' or, 'Sit here at my

footstool,' have you not shown partiality among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"

In the Greek, the word for "assembly" in James 2:2 is "sunagoge." The New Jerusalem Bible translates "synagogue," rather than assembly. The point is, James uses this word for a religious assembly of Christians. In addition, the Greek verb, "sunago," normally rendered as "to assemble," describes a religious meeting of Christians in Acts 4:31.

Christ also warned that His disciples--true Christians--would be "put out of the synagogue" (compare John 16:2). In the Greek, the words are "aposunagogos poieo," and they literally mean, "expelled from the congregation" or "excommunicated" (compare Vine).

With this background, let us now review the two passages where the "synagogue of Satan" is mentioned:

Revelation 2:9 addresses the Church of God in Smyrna. It says: "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."

Revelation 3:9 addresses the Church of God in Philadelphia. It says: "Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie--indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you."

As we have seen, the reference to "synagogue of Satan" does not have to describe a literal Jewish synagogue. Nor does the word "Jew" have to refer to literal Jews. Note that the Bible says that those from the synagogue of Satan claim that they are Jews, but that they are not. Romans 2:28-29 states: "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God." The Bible refers to true Christians as spiritual Jews, since salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22).

Those who claim that they are Jews, while they are not, are those who claim that they are spiritual Jews or true Christians. But Christ says that they are not true Christians, as they do not teach and do what He commands them (compare Matthew 7:21-23).

As we pointed out in previous updates, Christ addresses in chapters two and three of the book of Revelation seven literal churches at the time of John, as well as seven successive church eras of the Church of God which culminate in Christ's return. And, He is speaking to all Christians at all times. In addition, Christ is describing a false religious power, calling it the "synagogue of Satan," which is masquerading as His true Church. This false religion was already evolving at the time of the local church congregations in Smyrna and Philadelphia (This false religious system would become more and more influential and powerful throughout the successive eras of God's true Church).

The evolution of that false religious system, which was directed by none other than Satan the devil, is described in several verses in the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation:

In Revelation 2:6, the true Church of God in Ephesus is warned not to tolerate the "deeds of the Nicolaitans"--a heretical sect which might very well have given its name to "St. Nicolaus" (the German name for Santa Claus).

In Revelation 2:9, the "synagogue of Satan" is mentioned, and Christ says in verse 10 that the devil will persecute the true Church of God in Smyrna.

In Revelation 2:13, Christ tells the Church of God in Pergamos that they live where Satan has his throne. He also warns them, in verses 14 and 15, not to commit idolatry nor to accept the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. We see, then, that the deeds of the false religious system (the "Nicolaitans") had become canonized.

In Revelation 2:20, Christ warned the Church of God in Thyatira of idol worship and of a fallen woman (Jezebel) who was claiming to be a

prophetess, which would include a claim that she had the gift or "right" to speak on behalf of God. It is possible that that same fallen woman is mentioned in Revelation 17. This woman or religious system would at least exist until the time of the Great Tribulation (Revelation 2:22).

In Revelation 2:24, Christ warns the Church of God in Thyatira to be aware of the doctrine and depth of Satan; and in Revelation 3:9, Christ states that those of the synagogue of Satan will worship before the feet of true Christians of the Church of God in Philadelphia.

To quote from a letter of the Personal Correspondence Department of the Worldwide Church of God from May 1987: "Those in the 'synagogue of Satan' say they are spiritual Jews--pretend to be real Christians--but are not. This false church was already developing in the days of the apostle John. It masqueraded as God's true Church. It had congregations in the cities of Smyrna and Philadelphia in Asia Minor even at that early time. It and its daughter churches are further described in Revelation 17."

It is important to note that some in the true Church of God began to tolerate and then adopt false doctrines and practices, until they left the Church, spiritually, and became a part of that false religious system--the synagogue of Satan. These heretics might not even have departed from the assembly of true Christians, but they might have forced true Christians to leave, or they might have even excommunicated true Christians (as prophesied by Christ). Christ said that these historical events would happen again at the time just prior to His return, and recent developments within the Church of God have begun to confirm the accuracy of Christ's predictions.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown write in, "Commentary on the Whole Bible," on page 1533:

"The 'Jews' who might have been 'the church of God,' had now, by their opposition and unbelief, become the synagogue of Satan."

Turning once again to Revelation 3:9, we find that

those of the synagogue of Satan will worship before the feet of true Christians (especially those of the church in Philadelphia). This implies that true Christians will be God beings--as none other than God is worthy of worship (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9). The Bible confirms indeed that it is the potential of true Christians to become God beings (For more information, please read our free booklet, "The Gospel of the Kingdom of God."). In addition, those of the synagogue of Satan will ultimately recognize that they were deceived, and they will realize who and where the true Christians had been. What a joyful time this will be. May God speed that day.

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