

Restoring The Early Church

What Once Was...

Then Was Not...

Is Now Being Restored

Volumes 1 thru 4



by Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz



Restoration Ministries International

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Preface

Our heavenly Father has permitted my wife Sue and me to observe “Christianity” in ways few people have had opportunity. From 1983 to 1993 Sue and I administered a retreat ministry that touched the lives of over five thousand people from just about every Christian denomination and sect. For eight years I counseled pastors and church leaders, primarily in Connecticut but also in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Maine and New York. Before that I was Controller at a highly regarded Christian college. I am a graduate of a respected seminary. Using the current church vernacular, Sue and I are “lay people,” and this book is written for “lay people” so they may know what our heavenly Father is restoring today. For a video understanding of how we received what our heavenly Father is restoring today, see [How We Got This Prophetic Message](#)

**“I will rouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece,
and make you like a warrior’s sword” (Zechariah 9:13).**

We first heard an explanation of this verse at a prayer conference in Jerusalem. In the months following the conference our Father took us aside, and through revelation and resources, gave us the basis for this book. Two broad facets of the message He gave us will be developed more fully throughout the book:

1. The Holy Spirit is restoring a biblically Hebraic understanding of your relationship with our heavenly Father and Lord Jesus, as well as with the significant people in your life.

A Hebraic understanding not only affects the depth of your relationship with your Lord, but is inseparably linked with how you relate to others. For instance, a descriptive essence of Hebraic understanding of marriage in the early Church would perhaps be: **“If you want to know the extent of my relationship with Jesus Christ, look for it in my love for my spouse.”** Our Father planned for husbands and wives to put their marriage above all other relationships or activities: **“A man will be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).** Their mutual love should be a visible representation of their relationship with their Lord Jesus. Those who have suffered broken marriages and relationships are able to receive the healing intimacy of restoration with God by exploring and applying the Hebraic principles of the Bible.

The Holy Spirit is turning the hearts of fathers toward their families (see Malachi 4:6). The Hebraic home was the basic building block of spiritual development in the early Church. It is the foundational starting point for the growth of healthy home fellowships and congregations. The older men, the shepherd/teachers, have traditionally been recognized as respected repositories of wisdom and insight. God is once again raising them up to guide and to counsel husbands and wives, and men and women in general. The return to Hebraic mentoring through shepherd/teachers, along with their wives teaching the younger women, is an indispensable factor that’s being restored by our heavenly Father.

2. The Holy Spirit is alerting Christians to the reconciliation now taking place with the Jewish People.

God has promised great blessing to those who bless the seed of Abraham, the Jewish people. He is regathering the Jewish people to the land of Israel in fulfillment of His promise to them: **“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.** I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you” (Ezekiel 36:24-26).



You Need To Know What Our Father Is Restoring

In a sense we are writing with concern for those to whom we ministered at the retreat center. We wish that we had known years earlier the Hebraic foundations our heavenly Father gave us to share. Many people came to mind as we absorbed these truths. We often thought, “If only they could hear this, they could more readily trust Him and be resolutely determined to do His will.”

Although the medium of the written word lacks the informal and interactive dynamics of a retreat, our goal is to furnish something insightful that will revolutionize your spiritual walk. Through this material we hope you will be able to discern the appropriate steps of action in your faith to strengthen your walk with the Lord Jesus Christ and revitalize your relationships of marriage, family, and intimate friends.

We have documented events that occurred over the centuries, developments that have removed the vitality of the Hebraic early Church of the first century. It was important to us to have confirmation that what we were writing was both biblical and needful. This was a concern of the apostle Paul as well in his own endeavors:

“Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain” (Galatians 2:1,2).

With that in mind, the first draft of this book (1995) was sent to several men and women who are recognized as theologically sound in their respective areas of Christianity. Our thinking at that time was, “If these respected individuals examined what our heavenly Father commanded us to share, would they come to the same conclusions?” The feedback was an overwhelming endorsement of our work. Two frequent comments surfaced in their feedback. The first, “I know that what you have written is true, but I’d be afraid to implement the changes that are needed to help get my congregation back to the foundations of the early Church.” The other often repeated comment was, “You don’t have to prove your case; instead, show people how to bring it about.”

In light of these responses, Restoring the Early Church is a synthesis of both historical research and practical suggestions. And, the equipping lessons in [Discussing How To Restore the Early Church](#), or the parallel video series, [Jesus In Your Home](#), are helpful in personally restoring the relational intimacy and spiritual power of our Lord’s first followers.

Think of the Hebraic Restoration which our heavenly Father is bringing about as a large oak tree, with the foundations fitting in right above the roots at the base of the trunk. The Root is of course our Lord Jesus.



Due to the comprehensive breadth of what we're sharing, we've organized the book into four distinct volumes:

Volume 1: Christianity Has Departed From Our Lord's Purposes

Christianity today, with its over 38,000 competing denominations and sects, does not represent the unity which our Lord Jesus intended. His followers were to be love-motivated and equipped for service by the combined input of apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherd/teachers. Working in synergy, these gifts would achieve unity in the faith.

"So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherd/teachers, to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Volume 2: The Mainstay Of Christianity Was Its Hebraic Roots

This volume presents the historic backdrop and influences of the God-fearing Hebraic community that accepted the Messiah during the first century. Their relational practices and teachings both preceded and were foundational for the Newer Testament writers.

Volume 3: Christianity's Loss Of Its Hebraic Roots

This brief overview highlights the events that brought about the exchange of Hebraic roots for an alien ungodly culture and an unbiblical organizational structure. Because of the extensive research and writings of others in this area, we have compressed our presentation of the incursion of Hellenist philosophy and Roman government into the church.

Volume 4: Our Father Is Restoring His Relational Priorities

The last volume focuses on the primary relational arenas for Christlike development and growth. All other dimensions of life, including a viable congregation that worships the Lord and serves the interests of His Kingdom, are spawned from these central areas.



About Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz



Mike and Sue Dowgiewicz became followers of our Lord Jesus in 1977 while Mike was a career officer in the navy, having served three deployments during the Vietnam Conflict as a helicopter pilot. After being born again he realized that following Jesus was a response of overwhelming love toward his Lord, and he wanted to learn how he could more adequately present the life-changing work of His Savior to others.

Resigning from the navy in 1978, he attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to study the roots of the many various denominations and sects throughout Christendom. There he was made painfully aware of both the division and the competition among the segmented religious establishment. Through his own ministry track, however, he learned how important interpersonal connection with one another is in discipling others to walk in Jesus' steps through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Sue attended the seminary as well, focusing on studies in New Testament Greek and on effective ways to reach others from different cultures. In a way that only our Father could work out, both of these pursuits would feature heavily in their various ministries over the course of their lives together.

After seminary Mike and Sue administrated and taught at a Christian retreat center where they interacted with over 5,000 people. They were able to come alongside those who were hurting relationally within their families and experiencing frustration in their own faith walk. While at the center, Mike was a counselor to religious leaders throughout southern New England. He was able to use the skills he'd acquired from his graduate studies in interpersonal relationships to encourage these leaders to develop a unified concern among their congregations for the lost in their communities to encounter Jesus. Sue found her heart's desire to work among people of other cultures by teaching conversational English to international students at a nearby university for six years. Through their time together these students became dear friends, and a number of them heard about Jesus for the first time.

Mike and Sue's combined ministry was recognized by the Associated Press in an article that was published nationally. Mike also was featured in an article in *New England Church Life*, "Who Pastors the Pastor? Following their retreat ministry they lived in Israel, where our Father revealed the Hebraic foundations to them. Restoration Ministries International has its basis in research and revelation they did while living in Israel, and Mike and Sue are sharing our Father's re-establishment of the Hebraic foundations that both communally strengthened the early followers of our Lord Jesus and spiritually empowered them. Their present ministry through the internet is reaching people from 105 countries with a call to a life of loving and obedient trust in Jesus as their Lord.

Mike holds a B.A. in Economics from the University of Connecticut, an MBA from California Lutheran College, and a Master of Religious Education from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Sue holds a B.S. in Education from the University of Connecticut as well as having taken several graduate courses at GCTS.

For a video introduction, see [Introducing Mike & Sue](#)

Father's Purpose For Restoration Ministries International

Restoration Ministries has its basis in revelation and research they did while living in Israel. For the past 27 years through Restoration Ministries International Mike and Sue have been sharing our Father's re-establishment of the relational priorities that strengthened the early followers of Christ to boldly reach and disciple others.

The core of the Hebraic Foundations is based upon prioritizing relationships, beginning from the center of the diagram below outward. Restoration Ministries International was given by our Heavenly Father the responsibility to focus on the center three priorities.



- [For further information on our Father and Jesus.](#)
- [For further information on Your Home.](#)
- [For further information on Fellowship In Homes.](#)

Each of the materials produced by Restoration Ministries International is interconnected with a family of information related to what our Father told us to call "The Hebraic Restoration". Each item is designed to stand alone to equip you to apply these foundational truths and principles to your life. Yet the real strength of each is found in its interrelationship to the other facets of the Hebraic Restoration.

Through these truths our Father is revealing the trust-based, obedient lifestyle of our father Abraham:

"The promise comes by trust, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of **the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. 'If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed,** and heirs according to the promise'" (Romans 4:16,17; see also Galatians 3:29).

Followers of our Lord Jesus are children of Abraham, the first Hebrew. Abraham trusted God in love-grounded obedience, willing even to sacrifice his son at God's command. Therefore, God called him into covenant union with Himself, and through him poured out precious promises for all his children to come.

THAT MEANS YOU!

Volume 1. Christianity Has Departed From Our Lord's Purposes

Chapter 1. Face It! Christian Families Today Are A Mess

Today we need “Men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do”
(1 Chronicles 12:32).

When the tribes of Israel gathered to make David king, all of them journeyed to Hebron with thousands of troops. One tribe in particular, the tribe of Issachar, came with two hundred men “who **understood the times** and knew what Israel should do.” If we are ever to see the powerful first century early Church restored, we must become a people who understands the current times. Then, if we have faith and courage, we can be part of the restoration of the Church as Jesus founded it: His Body of followers who are consumed with love for Him, for our families, for other believers, and for the lost.

Before we consider what our Father is requiring of men today as He restores the Hebraic foundations of early Christianity, let's assess the current status of the family and “The Church” in the US. Carle Zimmerman, in his book Family and Civilization, provides unique insight into the disintegration of the modern family and church. Zimmerman traces the typical development and eventual disintegration of the family in a variety of cultures.

In most great civilizations, including Greece, Rome, and now the United States, the shifts in family relationships and in societal attitudes toward the family follow a similar course. Initially there is great respect for the family, and individual desires are subordinated to family needs. Eventually this attitude gives way to its opposite: a deification of individual rights and a deprecation of family commitments. This is accompanied by a disintegration of society. This was the pattern, he believes, that took place among the Greeks and Romans, and the same pattern that is currently operating in the US.

Zimmerman identifies three types of families, each of which predominates at various times in the life cycle of a civilization: the trustee family, the domestic family, and the atomistic family.

The **trustee family** is the most stable family form. Great value is placed on the resources and truths that ancestors have passed along from generation to generation. The governing authority is normally a patriarchal structure ruled by the oldest males. The input of all the relatives, however, is sought when typical problems arise in each family unit. Because family loyalty is held in such high regard, senior members can function as the recognized disciplinary agents. They can demand obedience in a way that those who are outside the family or clan might not respond to.

Divorce is rarely practiced in this type of family structure. Individuals are expected to subordinate their own interests to the greater interest of the family as a whole. Family members accumulate wealth and provisions through a spirit of selflessness and hard work. The solidarity of this family type can be seen in the era of the Pilgrims and Puritans of early America.

The **domestic family** occupies a middle ground between individualism on the one hand and absolute authority of the family on the other. The government structure in this family type values the strength of family ties and stability but leaves room for individual expression and a certain creative autonomy to present new ideas. Clan power is subordinated to church and state agencies.

Divorce is infrequent but does occur occasionally. A husband and a wife are seen as a family unit that assumes major responsibility for raising their children according to the values that they believe are right. Parents are willing to undergo the pain of childbirth and the trials of childrearing because they view their children as an extension of themselves. At times this means that some parental desires have to be sacrificed in order to focus on the needs and training of the next generation. Generally mothers and fathers of this family type are willing to forego, if necessary, luxury cars, upscale homes, and even time-consuming hobbies in order to have energy, time, and resources for their kids.

This type of family structure epitomized Greece and Rome at their height of trade and commerce. The subsequent decline of these civilizations occurred when the state took over the responsibilities that up until then had been assumed by the families and religious institutions. Up until the 1950's, this structure characterized the majority of American households.

When the ties within the family unit disintegrate, an obsession with individualism develops. This marks the **atomistic family stage**. Each person is viewed as a distinct unit, disconnected from the rest of the family. Individual rights are emphasized rather than family responsibilities. A fixation on individualism develops. Selfishness and self-absorption abound as individuals become obsessed with their own desires and concerns, and disregard the needs or suffering of others. Commitments and responsibilities are perceived as infringements on personal freedom, so human life is devalued.

Whereas self-sacrifice was the norm under the trustee and domestic families, complete and unabashed selfishness becomes the norm under the atomistic family. Cultures of this type experiment with childless liaisons and suffer increased divorce rates. Because the majority of people are unwilling to sacrifice for the future, fewer children are born.

A civilization in the throes of the atomistic period resembles a swarm of antagonistic insects engaged in mortal combat.



Religious and moral customs have little effect on protecting the sanctity of the family. As one writer says, “The individual, having no guiding morals, changes the meaning of freedom from opportunity to license. Having no internal or external guides to discipline him, he becomes a gambler with life, always seeking greener pastures. When he comes to inevitable difficulty, he is alone in his misery.” Not content to suffer in silence, the atomistic individual seeks out others with similar difficulties to establish a political “voice.” His special-interest group can then gain power and influence in order to coerce social institutions to remedy their misery.

Note the contrast between the ethic of personal responsibility in the domestic family and the development of social victimization (“It’s not my fault”) in the atomistic structure. Individuals become obsessed with their own desires and concerns, disregarding the needs or suffering of others. Commitments and responsibilities infringe on personal freedom.



Consider the characteristics of an atomistic society.

- **Marriage loses its sanctity** as a stable, committed institution. The inviolability of marriage as a covenant is lost. The relationship is often broken by relatively easy, “no-fault” divorce.

- **Feminist movements abound** as women lose their inclination to bear children and personally raise them. The birth rate decreases. Daycare facilities replace intimate parenting as mothers are no longer motivated or encouraged to raise their own children in the security of the home.

- **Public disrespect for parents, parenthood, and authority in general rises.** Parenthood becomes more difficult for those still trying to raise children with biblical values. The media mock and malign time-honored values and traditions.

- **Young people are increasingly disrespectful** of their parents and others in authority. Juvenile delinquency escalates, as do promiscuity and rebellion. Neither the legal system nor educational institutions are able to deter unrighteous or criminal behavior.

- **Adultery is accepted** and even promoted in many circles. Alternatives to marriage, such as cohabitation, are increasingly accepted.

- **Sexual perversions of all kinds** (homosexuality, rape, incest, pedophilia) **move from toleration to proliferation.**

In 1986, when we first began to share Zimmerman’s thoughts with pastors and others on retreats, there was unanimous consensus that the United States had entered the atomistic stage, the period when social disintegration was occurring. Many of us began to seek ways that we as Christians could be “salt” and “light” no matter what happened to our country. This became our purpose in writing this book.

Authors’ Note

In 2005 Christian pollster George Barna published his insightful book, Revolution. His organization had researched the spiritual lives of 77 million adults who are churched and are self-identified as born-again Christians. The results of his research uncovered widespread failure among those who claim to belong to Jesus to effectively serve our Lord in proclaiming His work of redeeming mankind.

As Barna has reported, there is no moral difference between Christians and unbelievers in this nation. Those who call themselves Christian embrace the same worldly values as non-Christians, and their moral standards are as lax and culturally dictated as those of people who make no claim to follow Jesus.

More recent statistics from Barna reveal that there is no difference in the rate of abortion among the churched and the unchurched. Just as telling, the rate of divorce among churchgoers is perhaps 50% higher than among those who make no claims to a relationship with God.

Chapter 2. Christianity in the Atomistic Culture of the USA

“Another thing you do: You flood the LORD’S altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, ‘Why?’ It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because **you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.** Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because **He was seeking godly offspring.** So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. **‘I hate divorce,’** says the LORD God of Israel, ‘and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,’ says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith” (Malachi 2:13-16).

In this culture, the decline of strong supportive parental ties with their children has produced a detrimental side effect. During the 1960’s, the period of adolescence spanned ages thirteen to nineteen. By the late 1980’s, however, sociologists had extended adolescence from age twelve to age thirty. More recent studies have extended adolescence to age 36. This assumes that the beginning of adolescence is marked by the onset of puberty and ends when an individual takes complete responsibility for his or her actions and decisions in life.

Our culture has, in effect, produced a generation of “adult adolescents” who are ill-equipped to assume the roles of responsible adulthood and leadership.

At the retreat center we were asked in 1985 to conduct a singles ministry representing many different churches in our region. We did this for about two and a half years until individual churches began their own singles ministry. The average age of those who attended our monthly potluck and quarterly retreats was 28-29 years. The size of the group varied from thirty to sixty people. Except for one or two, the participants had never been married. Only a few resided at home with their parents; many lived alone in apartments. Over a several month period we encouraged these individuals to ask their parents, “Is it a joy for you to have me as your child?” The vast majority of the singles were held captive by their fears. They could not get up the courage to ask their folks that question. But seven of the group did inquire. Their testimonies to the others were filled with wonderful love and affirmation on the part of the parents, much to the inquirers’ surprise. Still, the majority could not overcome their fear to approach the very people who had once changed their diapers.

Many of these people were college graduates and had experienced a certain measure of personal freedom due to disposable income and an enormous amount of discretionary time. Many of their options and decisions centered around what “toys” to buy and what activities to occupy those extra hours. Their maturity level was commensurate with that of the 14-17 year-olds we had guided in youth groups during the early 1970s. No matter what counsel or suggestions we presented, little change was effected in the lives of most of them. (At that time, we were still unaware of how crippling the demise of the three-generation family had been as it impacted personal maturation.) We have followed the lives of many of these men and women, observing a disquieting pattern of migration from one singles group to another to yet another.

About a year after we were “relieved of duty” from the singles ministry as various churches developed their own singles groups, a man we’ll call Bill came to us. He had been asked to start a singles group on behalf of his church, the largest congregation in our area. Someone on the church staff had recommended that he talk with us.

After our introduction Mike asked, “Bill, do you know what hell on earth is? It is being forty, single, and wishing you had been married the whole time.” He peered at Mike sadly, replying, “I’m forty, single, and wishing I had been married all that time.” As we conversed, Mike encouraged him to pray for an older grandparent-aged couple to conduct the singles ministry. We had discovered that even in our forties, we were too young to significantly help our single friends. Bill disregarded our advice, and after one or two years of struggling with the group, suffered an emotional collapse.

How often do you labor in your own strength, even for “good” causes, only to discover that what seems good but is outside of Father’s purpose and timing will not bear the lasting fruit of changed lives?

“Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

Today, many Christians question the meaning of our forms of worship and service. They dutifully attend services and meetings, yet they are burdened by the meaninglessness of so much that is traditionally a part of our churches. They sense a need for a new perspective, a new awareness, and rightly so. Their Sunday-at-eleven culture was timed generations ago to fall between the two milking hours in the agricultural society — and most of contemporary western society doesn’t have to worry about that.

😞 **Sermons remain one of the last forms of public discourse where it is culturally forbidden to interact with the speaker or ask questions.**



Think of a typical congregation at their weekly gathering.

“[Leadership is] surrounded by a cloud of uninvolved and mildly approving witnesses... Basically, we do not want anything to happen on Sunday morning that will upset our daily routine. We want to be ‘inspired,’ to come away with a warm feeling, but we do not want to be disturbed, so subconsciously we structure the service in order to assure safe, predictable, comfortable results...”

“We say that our faith must be lived—that Christ invades us to transform every aspect of daily life. Yet we teach this faith in formalized classes or sermons far out of a life context... We say that every believer is a priest, gifted and responsible for building up others in the Body of Christ. And we bring adults to church, set them down and tell them to listen to a teacher or to the pastor. They have exercised no ministry, held no responsibility but to be quiet and orderly, and have helped no one by their presence... We say that parents are responsible for the Christian nurture of their children. Yet we develop more and more church programs to minister to them and thus promote the idea that parents can turn their children over to the church and the church will do the job of nurturing them.”

“It does not matter what we say. What we do talks most convincingly. And the fact is that our current church patterns and our educational programming intellectualize Christianity, promote parental irresponsibility, prevent believers from ministering to one another, and permit Christians to feel comfortable without any personal ministry.” (emphasis added)

Prophetically penned by Lawrence O. Richards in his book, A New Face For The Church, do these observations correctly describe the present state of the church in the United States? Or more specifically, can you see any similarity to what is happening in your congregation?

The late David Wilkerson, former pastor of the Times Square Church in New York City, wrote in his 6-13-94 Pulpit Series letter,

“The denominational church system appears to be in the throes of death. It has almost no influence in the secular world, no mighty power in Christ. Growing numbers of ministers are falling on all sides—to adultery, covetousness, pride and perversions of all kinds.

Pastors... are bringing in entertainment and showmanship... [and] many pastors today are cowards when it comes to naming sin. They merely go through the motions of the ministry, having a form of godliness but no power. It is because they have grown comfortable in their position. They have lost the touch of God and no longer hear His voice.”

In May, 1994, Wilkerson stated,

“I believe the gospel can’t be fully preached unless it is accompanied by the power and demonstration of the Holy Ghost—working mighty wonders, proving the gospel is true... The church today has become weak and ineffective. Why? Because it no longer believes in the supernatural! Theologians tell us that at some point God quit performing mighty deeds. Yet, exactly when all of this supernatural activity stopped, no one can say!” (Authors’ comment: This theological position reflects reversionism, which means altering Scripture to reconcile its meaning with current cultural beliefs and standards.)

Wilkerson continues,

“The miracles of this last-day church will be genuine, real, indisputable, undeniable—and yet they will not be well-known. Instead, they will issue forth from the hands of ordinary, holy, separated saints who know God and are intimate with Jesus... If you think you’re too ordinary for God to use, listen closely: God is not going to do His last-day work through big-name evangelists or pastors... The fact is, God is going to need every housewife, teenager, elderly person and all who love Him to carry out His mighty work!”

C. Peter Wagner, professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, offered this in Ministries Today:

“Rapid change is taking place in the landscape of worldwide Christianity... The form that churches are taking is so different from past eras... By far, the most rapidly growing segment of Christianity on all six continents is a type of church that does not fit traditional categories or classifications... Perhaps one title that would fit is the term ‘post-denominational’. These churches are characterized by indigenous leadership, contemporary worship, concert prayer, power ministries and mutual affiliation based on spiritual rather than legal and bureaucratic ties.”

A trend of thought is evident in these quotations: a movement away from an institutional and hierarchical system toward a daily reliance on the Lord that empowers individual believers to worshipful and trusting obedience.

Chapter 3. Be Careful How You Measure Spiritual Success

“As He was leaving the temple, one of His disciples said to Him,
‘Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!’
‘Do you see all these great buildings?’ replied Jesus.
‘Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down’”
(Mark 13:1,2).

Don't let the size of your congregation or the beauty of your place of worship deceive you. Massive congregations filled with apathetic spectators are not what our Lord intended. Wayne Jacobsen, in *A Passion For God's Presence*, illustrates Satan's plan to make the church big and impersonal:

“In the third century Satan must have called a BIG meeting with his demons. Hades I, he probably called it. Since persecution had failed so miserably, this diabolical council needed to develop a new strategy to undermine the life of the church... The objectives were clear: The plan would have to diffuse the self-sacrificing love that carried the church through conflict, distract it from intimacy with God, and devalue the importance of the individual believer... Someone came up with a very simple idea: ‘Trying to keep it small hasn't worked—let's make it big!’

What would happen if the church suddenly became acceptable? Many would come just for social reasons. They would quickly dilute those who are really in God's clutches. And imagine all the programs and activities they would have to plan to keep those people happy. Nothing chokes out intimacy as well as busyness. The church would eventually become a machine, chewing up individuals instead of loving them. They couldn't possibly teach all the followers to walk with God personally, so they would soon substitute rules and guidelines for His ever-present voice. The machine would have to be run by professionals. The others would become nothing more than spectators and billpayers.”

Whether or not such a demonic meeting actually occurred is debatable, but the deception of the demonic goal can readily be seen throughout the church today: “Size equals success.”

We were visiting friends in a large Florida city a few years ago. As they drove us around, our host pointed out different church buildings. Many were vacant. His tale sounded something like, “This one once had 5,000 in attendance... This one had 3,000... This one...” Each church we were shown had grown to tremendous size and then destroyed itself from within.



Soon after our visit to Florida we were visiting other friends outside Washington, DC. As we drove down one of the main streets enroute to the Sunday morning worship service, our host Karl remarked that this particular street was listed in the Guinness Book of World Records. It contained more churches than any other street in the world! As we drove along, Karl pointed out which churches had split from others along that same thoroughfare. Interestingly, during the service we attended, a letter of reconciliation from the church leadership was read to the congregation. It was addressed to the congregation from which they had split some years earlier.

Authors' Note

When we arrived back to the US from Israel in 1994 there were over 24,000 competing denominations and sects in Christianity. By 2010 there were over 38,000 competing denominations and sects, with more being added every year!

This state of affairs would not be so serious if the examples cited in Florida and DC represented just a few isolated cases in the US. However, we are now talking about the rule, not the exception. Our churches have become human institutions, not living spiritual organisms.

Corroborating this thought is the following from Ernest Wright in The Rule of God:

“God, through the work of the Spirit, has always been at war with human institutionalism, because the institution becomes idolatrous, self-perpetuating, and self-worshipping, because church membership becomes synonymous with the new birth, because man tries to make the Spirit follow law.” How complex we have made the simplicity of the gospel, with our “programs, methods, organizations and a world of nervous activities which occupy time and attention but can never satisfy the longing of the heart. The shallowness of our inner experience, the hollowness of our worship, and that servile imitation of the world which marks our promotional methods all testify that we, in this day, know God only imperfectly, and the peace of God scarcely at all.” (emphasis added)

John Stott, a well-known Christian writer, was asked to explain why Christianity has declined in the West, and how this process can be avoided as more and more of the world becomes Westernized. Stott replied:

“It began with these philosophers who mounted a frontal attack on the Christian church, seeking to replace revelation with reason...And the church was feeble to capitulate to that assault...Another reason why Christianity is declining is that what is declining is pseudo-Christianity. It is not the authentic Christianity described in the Gospels and the Newer Testament...

“Christianity has declined in the West because Christian people who claim to follow Christ don't look like it... If Christians lived like Jesus Christ, the world would be at our feet today. The greatest hindrance to the spread of the gospel is the church. The church that is intended to be a stepping stone to faith is more often a stumbling block to faith.” (emphasis added)

Probably the biggest reason for the church's difficulty in breaking its ties with people management systems and programs is that institutionalism, an established and recognized body that performs a particular function, is so prevalent in our culture. The culture, more than God's Word, now influences the church.

Both Jesus and the early Church kept organized institutionalism to a minimum, preferring the power of the Spirit and the relationships among believers to provide ministry. They could see from the Hebrew Scriptures and from the society around them that the institution of the priestly system had failed to produce an obedient people who loved and served the Lord.

Institutional efforts can look like success even where the vitality of Jesus isn't real. That's what is so deceptive about it. You think you're pleasing our Father for all your activity and its results, yet beneath the programs and entertainment lies an emptiness that few will admit. Institutionalism deceives you into feeling good about yourself even after your responsiveness to God has ceased.

Our dear friend Casey Sabella was preaching in England a few years ago when he asked the congregation this question: “If Jesus Christ were dead, how long would you keep on doing what you are doing?” The people were convicted as they realized and admitted that everything would go on just as it had. The institution provided all that they needed or wanted to meet their social and religious needs.

Chapter 4. Mutated By Vested Interests And Revisionists

 **Mutated: changed in form, nature, or substance**

“You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.’... So from that day on they plotted to take His life” (John 11:50,53).

Another hindrance to obedient trust and loving intimacy with our heavenly Father is “vested interest” in the church. Vested interests are found in those people who, because of position and power, try to keep what is to their own advantage.

For example, while Mike was in the Navy he read a dramatic account of vested interest that had required an Act of Congress to overcome. During the early decades of the 20th century, airplanes were introduced aboard ships. The pilots of these aircraft were in control of the missions of the planes, free from the direct decision making of the ship’s captain. Throughout the Navy’s history, a ship’s captain had always exercised total dominion over everything that was aboard his vessel. The captains perceived the pilots’ autonomy as a threat to their own vested interest of absolute authority.

A number of ship captains tried to jeopardize the success of aircraft missions aboard ships. Some actually endangered pilots’ lives by putting their ship into a turning maneuver just as a plane was attempting to land onboard. Therefore Congress stepped in and enacted a law that any ship with aircraft stationed onboard was required to have a captain who was also a qualified aviator. Today over half the people in the Navy are connected to aviation in some way. Once vested interests are exposed and challenged, changes can occur.

In A Passion For God’s Presence, Wayne Jacobsen wonderfully exposes the power of vested interests in churches today. Jacobsen illustrates his point with the story of The Emperor’s New Clothes in which a group of royal advisors seeks to keep their jobs by lying about the emperor’s nudity. As the king parades through the town in his “new clothes,” a little boy with no vested interest at stake shouts the obvious: “He’s naked!”

Jacobsen correlates the fable with the history of the church:

“It’s easy for us now to look back at those generations, not sharing their vested interests, and see how believers sold out to political and personal corruption during the Middle Ages; to high finance prior to the Reformation; to terror and murder during the Inquisition; to natural reason during the Enlightenment; and to liberalism early in this century... We stay captive to deception by the same appeal of personal interest... So it is with the church today: many people are making Christianity just what they want it to be, whatever fits their interest... It doesn’t take great wisdom to unmask deceit—only a desire to look at things the way they really are, not the way we want to see them.”

A growing number of observers are now pointing to the church in the United States and crying, “We are spiritually naked!”

A tale from The New England Church Resource Handbook further illustrates the concept of vested interests.

“Henry Cabot Lodge, a [former] senator from Massachusetts, was convinced that many bureaucrats have little else on their minds than maintaining their power and position (a problem sometimes encountered in churches as well as government). ‘They are a lot like old Si Haskins,’ he said. One day we came upon Si sitting on the dam up above the town. ‘What are you doing, Si?’ we asked. ‘I’m paid to shoot the muskrats,’ he replied. ‘They’re diggin’ under the dam.’ ‘Well, there’s one over there right now.’ We pointed to a big one with his eyes just above water. ‘Why don’t you shoot him?’ ‘You don’t think I want to lose my job, do you?’ he replied.”

The Pharisees of Israel had their own vested interests. Many people had put their faith in Jesus following the raising of Lazarus from the dead:

“The chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. ‘What are we accomplishing?’ they asked. ‘Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him’... Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, ‘You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.’... So from that day on they plotted to take His life” (John 11:47-50,53).

Think about how far the vested interest people would go to protect their positions: “So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in Him” (John 12:10,11). Do you wonder if Lazarus, having been brought back to life, ever found out that the priests were planning to kill him?

At what point does a vested interest so thoroughly blind a person (who thinks he or she is doing God's will!) from discerning the truth?

Chapter 5. Did You Know That God’s Word Was Lost?

**“Be eager to present yourself approved to God as a workman, unashamed, cutting straight the word of truth”
(2Timothy 2:15).**

Very few non-Jewish Christians recognize that they are “Gentiles.” Before our trip to Israel, if someone had called us Gentiles, we would have responded, “So what!” According to Romans 3:9, “Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin”, and, speaking of salvation, Paul writes that “there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles—the same Lord is Lord is all and richly blesses all who call on Him” (Romans 10:12).

At the same time, however, Romans 11 delineates a difference between Jews and Gentiles: “Because of [Israel’s] transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious” (11:11), and, “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:25,26).

We didn’t recognize that our reading and understanding of the Bible had been derived from the patterns and methods of the Hellenist philosophers who had come into the church in the centuries after Christ. We had not considered noteworthy the Hebraic thought patterns and relational practices of the God-fearing Jewish authors of the Newer Testament.

Our understanding of the early Church had been based on a theological exposition of the Greek words in the Newer Testament manuscripts. It had never occurred to us until our study and research in Israel that many of the early Church practices and understanding of their faith had been adapted from practices already taking place among the God-fearing Jews. We had always connoted all of Judaism at the time of Christ to be as rigid and unyielding as the Gospel representation of the priests, the Pharisees, and the Sanhedrin.

Volume 1 introduces you to the foundations and practices of the Hebraic early Church. It is our belief that to a large extent these Hebraic foundations and practices formed the basis for the Newer Testament writers’ understanding of the foundations and practices of the collective Church as a whole.

For example:

- Did you know that many rabbis at the time of Jesus were already teaching that “you must be born from above”, that is, experience spiritual birth?
- Are you aware that men in the synagogues already served as apostles, evangelists, elders, and deacons?
- Do you understand the purification that baptism represented to Jewish believers?

If you can remove the anti-Semitic veil that has covered the eyes of much of the church for so many centuries, you will relish a study of what the Jewish writers of the Newer Testament understood these practices to signify. We are espousing a return to the Hebraic thought and relational practices of the Jewish people who feared God and trusted Jesus for their salvation. Men and women such as these were present to hear and respond to Peter’s message on Pentecost: “Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5).

Much philosophical conjecture and oral division has led believers to argue over the meaning of Greek words. “Correctly [handling] the word of truth” as an approved workman (see 2 Timothy 2:15) should include the study and application of the Hebraic teachings and practices at the time of Christ. Think of the vitality that could flow in and through the church if believers expended as much effort in living what they have already learned as seeking after more knowledge. Applying our full biblical heritage could unify the church today to live in the power that was so evident in the Hebraic early Church.

“What is this Restoration all about?” has been one of the most common questions we have been asked. “We have the Bible, God’s Word—what is it that we need to have restored?” These questions must be partly answered with two more questions:

- “Has God’s Word ever been lost to His people?”
- “What has occurred to restore His Word and His understanding of it?”

“God’s Word couldn’t ever be lost!”



The Bible lists at least three occasions in which God's Word was lost. In some cases the Law had been misplaced or hidden. In other instances the interpretation of the Word had been marred by men who had tried to put their own laws and writings on par with God's. Let's examine some of these situations and note how the past restorations took place.

Loss #1

After the death of King David, a series of kings ruled. Some followed the way of the Lord while others worshiped Baal and Ashtoreth. At one point following a spiritually low era for Judah, King Josiah, whose heart was for the Lord, came to power: "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left" (2 Kings 22:2). Josiah ordered the priests to set about rebuilding and purifying the temple, which had become a mess of decay from lack of use.

"Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, 'Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.' And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king. When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes... He gave these orders: "Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the Lord's anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us."

Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: "**Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard** what I have spoken against this place and its people..., **I have heard you,** declares the Lord"... Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem... "He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep His commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant" (2 Kings 22:10-23:3, emphasis added).

When the righteous king recognized the disobedience of his people and repented, he called the elders, who represented the family leaders of the people, to hear the Word and renew the covenant. Restoration led to repentance and rededication, a profound lesson for us today.

Loss #2

Some of the Israelites with Nehemiah and Ezra returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity of Israel. After rebuilding the temple and walls of the city, the people wanted to renew their covenant with God:

"All the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel... They read from the Book of the Law of God, **making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read**" (Nehemiah 8:1,8, emphasis added).

Loss #3

Prior to the time of Jesus, the Pharisees and scribes attempted to keep the Jewish people from violating God's law by establishing other laws and traditions as "fences". Their original intent was noble. Yet over time, tradition, which has a hal-
lowedness all its own, enabled these manmade laws and practices to be treated as if God had given them.

Their own laws and traditions actually blinded the Pharisees from seeing the Messiah as the fulfillment of the very Scriptures that they thought they were upholding. Confronting this third “loss of God’s Word”, Jesus chastised the Pharisees:

“And He said to them: ‘You have a fine way of **setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!** For Moses said, “Honor your father and your mother,” and, “Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.” But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: “Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban” (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus **you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.** And you do many things like that’ (vv. 9-13, emphasis added).

The Pharisees indeed upheld their laws and traditions but missed the most basic and vital of God’s commands: to love the Lord wholeheartedly and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Loss #4

Roman Catholicism was able to control most people’s perspective of God because so few during those centuries could read or write. The religious and political power of Roman Catholicism went relatively unchallenged for over a millennium. Corporate worship services were conducted only in Latin, a language understood by just an educated few and the clergy. The Bible remained hidden in Hebrew, Greek and Latin for over 1,100 years. Church authorities forbade it to be translated into any other language on penalty of death.

Not until Martin Luther’s influence during the Reformation was there any concern for educating the lower classes so they could read the Bible for themselves. And, not until 1963 were priests permitted by the Vatican to conduct the Catholic Sacrifice of the Mass in the language of the people.

Chapter 6. It's Time to Apply God's Word As He Intended!

“Do not go beyond what is written.’ Then you will not take pride in one man over against another”
(1 Corinthians 4:6).

Revisionism. Does that word mean anything to you? Most of us are so subtly influenced by its effects that we don't even notice. The Random House Dictionary defines revisionism as “attempting to reevaluate and restate the past based on newly acquired standards.”(emphasis added)

Many school textbooks are now being written with gross distortions of history or with omission of formerly significant facts and data with the express purpose of appeasing particular political or social agendas. For example, most references to the spiritual heritage of our founding fathers have been revised to reflect instead a desire for greater economic prosperity in the New World. In order to appease the Arab countries that provide them oil, several European universities are teaching from revised history books which claim that the Jewish Holocaust never took place. (An ancient proverb says, “Lies written in ink can never replace facts written in blood.”)

Not even the Bible is safe from revisionism. One version contains a genderless God to accommodate the feminist movement. Another has had all verses pertaining to the miraculous and supernatural events removed to accommodate the rationalistic and scientific community. We are reminded of Frank Peretti's novel, Piercing the Darkness. Although fiction, the book deals with the conscious demonic effort to undermine people's confidence in the reality that absolute truth exists. The Bible tells us,

“The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent, called **the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was **hurled to the earth, and his angels with him**” (Revelation 12:9).**

Jesus tells us that lies are Satan's native tongue: “You belong to **your father, the devil,** and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks his native language, for **he is a liar and the father of lies**” (John 8:44).

Lies and distortions have been with the church since its earliest years. Paul dealt with a serious deception regarding the return of the Lord. The deceiver has been at work since the Garden of Eden and it is no surprise that his work continues unabated.

“Concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter **supposed to have come from us,** saying that the day of the Lord has already come” (2 Thessalonians 2:1,2).

Revisionism within the church has had a profound effect throughout the centuries. Many today think that the customs, practices, even the organization of the church date from the time of Jesus and the apostles. But history proves that prejudice and vested interests over the centuries “revised” the operation and function of the early Church, handing down to believers something far different than what was intended by the Lord. In fact, much of what you consider to be key elements of church practice may even violate 1 Corinthians 4:6, quoted earlier. We will explore these factors in subsequent chapters.

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).

The opposite of revisionism is apperception, interpreting new information according to an older truth or by what you already know beyond doubt to be true. In other words, a newer teaching or practice is evaluated in light of older, proven truths.



Jesus relied on apperception in His teachings by often quoting the Older Testament and then applying that truth to a situation He was addressing. For instance, while speaking in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read aloud from the scrolls the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 61:

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and recovery of sight for the blind, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (vv. 1,2).

His listeners already believed this prophecy to be true, so He used these verses as the basis for understanding Himself, telling them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:16-21).

To justify His disciples plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath (see Matthew 12:1-8), Jesus reminded His critics of the commonly known fact of “sanctified Sabbath breaking”. David and his hungry troops had entered the tabernacle and eaten the consecrated bread that by law was relegated solely to the priests (see 1 Samuel 21:3-6). On the Sabbath, the priests regularly broke the commandment that demanded no work on that day in order to offer sacrifices and circumcise babies (see Matthew 12:6, from Hosea 6:6). So important were the Hebrew Scriptures as a basis for the Gospel message that they were quoted, or apperceived, throughout the gospels, epistles, and the Revelation.

The Bereans were commended for studying the Scriptures, **apperceiving** Paul’s new teachings in light of Hebraic scriptural truths (see Acts 17:11). Due to the extraordinary amount of revisionism which has entered the church over the centuries and the consequent loss of the early Church vitality, the authors are writing with apperception in mind. We are trying to clearly discern our Father’s intent at the time the Scriptures were written.

In order to be true to God’s Word, you must be willing to depart from today’s church structure and traditions that may seem “sacred” yet have no biblical foundation. Take on the nobleness of the Bereans and investigate the Bible to apply what God has said. Like the Bereans, you also may have a burning desire to reach the point in your faith experience in which the practices of that faith “do not go beyond what is written” (see 1 Corinthians 4:6). If we are honest with ourselves, the Christianity that revisionism and institutionalism have produced bears little of Christ’s image. Our Father is seeking a people who long to be touched by Him personally with the intensity of David: “O my Strength, I watch for You; You, O God, are my fortress, my loving God” (Psalm 59:9,10).

Our Lord penetrates hearts, not programs. That’s what intimacy is all about, and that is what you are called to pass on to others. You cannot expect to impact prisoners of the spiritual forces of darkness throughout the world—or even your family, neighbors, and coworkers—if you hold out a formula of steps to them but withhold your heart. Many of the past

church reforms stemmed from arguments over revisionist writings. You are experiencing the results even today: tens of thousands of denominations and sects have been established because of doctrinal divisions.

Today's doctrinal differences have distracted God's people from personal intimacy both with Jesus and with each other. Individual congregations keep people occupied with programs and meetings but generally fail to lead them to the fullness of loving obedience in Christ. In fact, church busyness often lures people away from intimacy. Instead of a source of edification and mutual support, "church life" is all too often a wellspring of pettiness, gossip, and manipulation.

It appears that there are two possible options open to the church. If you use the same processes of reforming the church that your forefathers used, you will find yourself still clinging to non-biblical or extra-biblical forms and patterns that have, over time, become hallowed because of tradition. Just possibly, this generation can be honest with itself and recognize that the whole edifice is crumbling. A whole generation may reject empty form that lacks living substance.

Your second option is to accept the challenge of restoring the true biblical foundations of the early Church. If you understand that Jesus is the only Head and Builder of His Church, you must search the Bible for what He and the apostles presented in terms of the Hebraic framework in which it was initially addressed. Those who are willing to do this can work together in agreement with the Holy Spirit, and in our time see a true expression of the collective Church of Jesus Christ.

**Will it be popular? Probably not.
Will it be powerful? Yes, exceedingly so!**

Glossary For Volume 1

Apperception

Interpreting new information based on previous facts you already know to be true. In other words, a newer teaching or practice is evaluated in light of older, proven truths. If the newer teaching or practice doesn't match up to the older true teaching, then it's skewed and unreliable. Jesus often apperceived the Hebrew Scriptures by basing His teachings on passages His hearers were familiar with and knew were true.

Covenant

From a biblical point of view, a relationship of permanent commitment, whether between God and His people (Israel in the Older Testament and followers of Jesus in the Newer Testament), or between a man and a woman in marriage. Each covenant of God carries with it His promises and man's responsibilities if he accepts God's terms.

Elders

Older men of wisdom, compassion and experience who guide, safeguard, shepherd, counsel and disciple others in an extended spiritual family. The term literally means "gray-bearded" and is a role worthy of respect because they fulfill God's plans for leadership within a faith family. These are the shepherd/teacher spoken of in Ephesians 4:11 to equip the followers of Jesus for service and unity.

Hebraic

The foundational motivation of love-grounded obedient trust in the God of the Bible as He has made Himself known through the inerrant written text and through the Living Word, the Lord Jesus. In the pattern of the first Hebrew, Abraham, Hebraic understanding of an ongoing walk of obedient trust expects a follower of Jesus to adopt and put into practice in their everyday lives the truths that are pleasing to God and are empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This calls for relational priorities which are marked by personal holiness and a moment-by-moment awareness of His presence which filters through all other relationships.

Hellenist

A philosophical worldview fostered by ancient Greek culture in which the material body is evil and only the spiritual is good. Through this influence, spiritual expression became institutionalized. Thus a holy clergy class were intermediaries between God and man, and the "laity" of commoners were confined to silence in the pews. Worship could take place only in "God's house."

Institutionalism

Adherence to or strong belief in established forms, rituals, and traditions, especially belief in organized religion. The unquestioning belief or policies that a congregation maintains for standardization on behalf of its members.

Revisionism

A widely used practice of rewording historical truth and facts by manipulating them to fit current social agendas or cultural standards. For example, revisionist writings and councils convinced the Church to adopt the autocratic system of the Roman government with which it became enmeshed. Hellenist-influenced revisionists severed the continuity of the Hebrew Scriptures with the Newer Testament so that God's Laws were discarded and His grace was perverted into lawlessness.

Vested interests

A strong personal attraction to something because you could gain an advantage from it. A person or group having a personal stake or involvement. A personal stake or involvement in an undertaking or state of affairs, especially one with an expectation of financial gain.

Volume 2. The Mainstay Of Christianity Was Its Hebraic Roots

Chapter 7. Hebraic Understanding Is The Keystone

Many of today's practices and church traditions emanate from a Greek, or Hellenistic, understanding of the early New-er Testament manuscripts. It is generally thought that the original texts were written in Greek, although some scholars conjecture that the Gospels were originally penned in Hebrew. The authors, however, were definitely Jewish, either by birth or by conversion, as may have been the case with Luke.

During the second century, growing anti-Semitism among Gentile believers caused the original Hebraic understanding of the text as it had been apperceived from the Older Testament to be discarded in favor of a Greek cognitive mindset. This tragic loss has robbed the church of the full richness of the faith as a unified whole from Creation to the last days.

Nearly all of the earliest followers of Jesus were Jewish. Jesus emphasized that He had come first for the Jew: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Even the early Church was viewed not as a new religion but as a sect within Judaism: "We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots **among the Jews** all over the world. He is a ringleader of the **Nazarene sect**" (Acts 24:5, emphasis added). In his first sermon, delivered on the day of Pentecost, Peter addressed his audience as "Fellow Jews" (see Acts 2:14).

The question that the early Church faced was not whether Jews could belong, but whether Gentiles could be included in a faith community consisting wholly of Jews. Must they first convert to Judaism? (See Acts 15:1-29).

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Romans 1:16).

At the time of Christ, the Jews of Palestine were clinging resolutely to their Hebraic heritage and ideals despite the infiltration of the Hellenist lifestyle and philosophical ideas into the society around them. The Jews feared that if they became acculturated to this Greek influence, they would dilute the faith of their fathers. The Greek (Hellenistic) world-view was universalist in its concept of religion; no one belief system was absolute. This outlook, of course, was antithetical to the Jewish people who felt that they were the chosen people of the one true God.

To the Jews of the Diaspora (Jews living outside Palestine), though, the pursuit of Hellenistic science, literature, and philosophy was enticing, particularly to those living in the great study centers of Alexandria, Asia Minor, and Syria. These Jews were assimilating Hellenistic teachings into the non-religious aspects of their lives, fitting in culturally and socially with the ethnic groups around them. However, their spiritual ties to the temple in Jerusalem and their distinctiveness as the chosen sons of Abraham kept their identity in unity with Jews the world over.

Even the Hebrew Bible had been translated into a Greek version, the Septuagint, for a broader appeal to the diverse population. Following the conquests by Alexander the Great during the fourth century BC, almost everyone spoke Greek, the language of culture and trade. Hebrew was understood by relatively few outside Palestine. By making the Hebrew Scriptures available in the language most widely recognized, Judaism experienced an influx of Gentile converts. Despite these influences, though, the very Jewishness of their religious convictions kept most Jews separate from "heathen intrusion" into their faith.

So integral to their very being was their spiritual heritage that the central focus of the Jews was preservation of the faith handed down from their forefathers. No matter where they lived or what foreign customs surrounded them, the Jewish people worldwide struggled to maintain the uniqueness of the Hebraic relationship with God, a relationship that was totally different from that of any other religion.

Paul recognized the unprecedented position of his Jewish people:

“Those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is over all, God be forever praised! Amen” (Romans 9:35).

The interweaving of Jews who held firmly to Hebraic tradition and those Jews who had been influenced by Hellenism forced the fledgling Jerusalem Church into an early confrontation. A not-so-subtle form of racism was threatening division in the body:

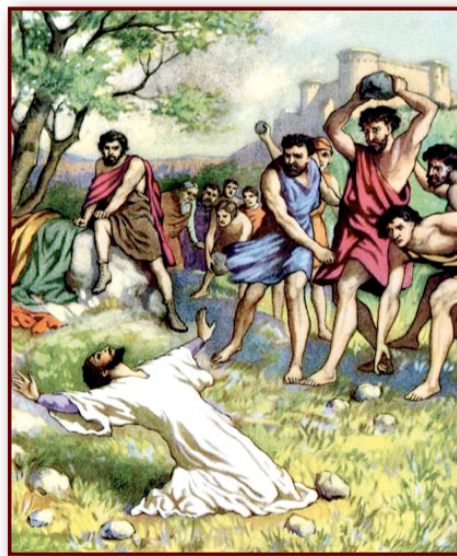
“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the **Grecian Jews** among them complained against those of the **Aramaic-speaking community** [Hebraic Jews] because their **widows were being overlooked** in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are **known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom**. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose **Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism” (Acts 6:1-5, emphasis added).

The willingness of the Hebraic followers of Jesus to cooperate with the Hellenists regarding food distribution affirmed their desire to maintain unity despite differences in their cultural fabrics. It was more important that they all be reconciled as brothers in the Messiah than to let ethnic dissimilarity divide them (see Colossians 3:11).

Please Notice

The criterion for qualification of the seven selected men was that they be “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.” In the eyes of the early Church, evidence of the overflowing presence of the Holy Spirit was a priority. As these men had lived out their faith through righteous obedience empowered by God, each had earned a spiritual reputation that was irrefutable.

The stoning of Stephen (see Acts 7) and subsequent persecution of followers of Jesus compelled the early Church to carry the Gospel beyond Jerusalem, fulfilling Jesus’s words that they would be witnesses to “all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (see Acts 1:8).



God wanted the good news of the Kingdom to penetrate every nation. However, most of the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem were Jewish and were uncomfortable with the idea of interacting with Gentiles. Notice in the book of Acts how God enabled the Church to meet this command:

“And Saul was there, giving approval to [Stephen’s] death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and **all except the apostles were scattered** throughout Judea and Samaria...Those who had been scattered **preached the word wherever they went**. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there” (Acts 8:1,4,5, emphasis added).

Philip, one of those who had been selected to oversee food distribution in the Church, was among the Hellenist believers. As such, he had probably interacted on a wider basis with non-Jews and was less likely to have innate prejudices against them.

The Samaritan communities were especially despised by the Jews because they were a mixed race of heathen and Israelite blood. As an intermediary in the faith, however, Philip could minister among them and prepare the way for the devoutly Hebraic apostles Peter and John to come: “When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them” (Acts 8:14).

This action confirmed to the Jews at large that non-Jews could also be evangelized. God was sovereignly working through both the Hebraists and the Hellenists to bring to pass His plan that “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). The heavenly Father’s call to Paul (see Acts 9) was yet further confirmation that Jews were to share the Gospel message as they went, wherever they went.

As the early Church grew in number, it became increasingly pluralistic due to the large Gentile influx. Jewish believers needed to oblige the new work God was performing to reach the Gentiles. The writings referred to as the “Newer Testament” were not available to the earliest believers. Most of these documents were not even written until decades after Jesus’s ascension.

For both Jew and Gentile, the “Bible” meant the Hebrew Scriptures, now called the “Older Testament.” Every follower of Jesus recognized the Hebraic roots of the faith. Though they were diverse in membership, the early Church agreed on the Messiahship of Jesus. Prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures had prepared them to look for His coming. Early followers of Jesus, Jew and Gentile alike, shared a common experience as they yielded to the Lordship of Jesus, sought guidance by the Holy Spirit, and relied on the Hebrew Scriptures as their teaching source.

“The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:1-3).

What if the promise that God gave to Abraham is still in effect today? Could part of the church’s problems throughout the centuries been due to its failure to bless the Jewish people, thereby remaining unblessed in exchange?



An increasing number of followers of Jesus today are going back to the Bible, past centuries of the church’s anti-Semitism, to discover what the Christian’s relationship to the Jewish people should be. They are finding Paul’s words to be accurate: “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are **heirs together with Israel**, members together of one body, and **sharers together** in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 3:6, emphasis added).

To understand our Father’s perspective regarding the Christian’s relationship to the Jews, examine Romans 11:1-32. Paul wrote this section to specifically address the relationship of Jew and Gentile.

[1] I ask then, Did God reject His people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. [2] God did not reject His people, whom He foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel...[5] So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. [6] And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. [7] What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened...

[11] Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. [12] But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! [13] I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry [14] in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. [15] For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? [16] If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

[17] If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, [18] do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. [19] You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.' [20] Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. [21] For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.

[22] Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. [23] And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. [24] After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

[25] I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full numbers of the Gentiles has come in. [26] And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. [27] And this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins.'

[28] As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, [29] for God's gifts and His call are irrevocable. [30] Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, [31] so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. [32] For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all" (emphasis added).

If you put aside the revisions of replacement theology (also called supersessionist theology) that developed during the centuries after Christ, you can more clearly recognize what would have been understood from this passage at the time Paul wrote it. "Replacement" doctrines teach that God has permanently rejected the Jewish people and that the Church has replaced them; that all of the promises God made to the Jews now apply to the Church. (Many believers today hold to this concept without even knowing that it has a doctrinal title!)

But what you find from examining the above passage of scripture is that:

- God did not reject the Jews. "I ask then: Did God reject His people? By no means!" (v. 1). Salvation comes only by faith in the sacrificial work of Christ. However, God still has a plan and purpose for His Jewish people to be unveiled in His timing when the Messiah is revealed to them.
- God has maintained a remnant. "So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace" (v. 5). These too have not "bowed the knee to Baal" but are awaiting the promised Messiah. At this point they don't realize that He has already come and will return!
- It was part of God's plan for the Jew not to receive Jesus as Messiah so that salvation could come to the Gentile: "Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious" (v. 11). God had chosen the people of Israel to be His precious bearers of truth. They rejected His plan and were, for the most part, led astray.
However, when the Jews of today see followers of Jesus truly living out their relationship with Him, they will long for that intimacy with God and repent. One rabbi has said that if those who claim to follow Jesus would just live out the Sermon on the Mount, the Jewish people would see that He was truly the Messiah Who changes lives!
- The metaphor of the olive branch best captures the relationship of Christians with Jews. "If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root" (v. 17). A thorough study of the Scriptures written prior to Jesus's incarnation, the Older Testament, will enrich your understanding and appreciation of the "sap" of your Hebraic heritage.
- The natural branches will be grafted in again in accordance with God's plan: "After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!" (v. 24).

God has already shown through His prophet Zechariah how He will regraft the Jewish people into the olive tree: “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a **spirit of grace and supplication**. They will look on Me, the one they have pierced, and mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day a fountain will be opened to the **house of David** and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to **cleanse them from sin and impurity**” (Zechariah 12:10,13:1, emphasis added).

Through the work of the Holy Spirit the Jews will understand the truth of the Gospel and proclaim Jesus as Messiah and Lord.

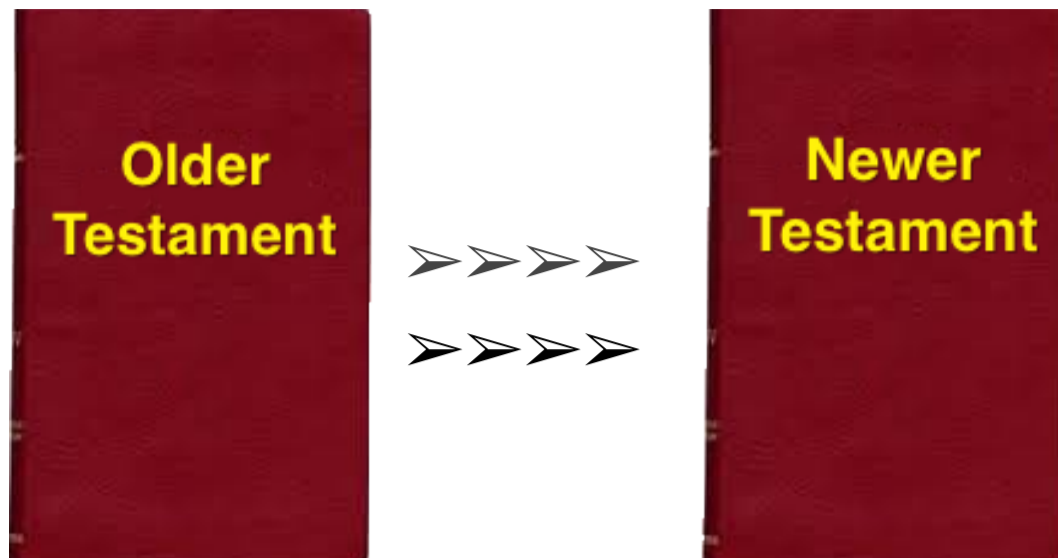
• We Christians need to put away the arrogance of past centuries that the church has demonstrated toward the Jews. “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, **so that you may not be conceited**: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in” (v. 25). **God** initiates the relationship between Himself and an individual: “No one can come to [Jesus] **unless the Father draws him**” (John 6:44).

The hardening of Israel is only in part; there are hundreds of thousands of Jewish believers worldwide. When the full number of Gentiles who will enter the Kingdom of God have done so, God will then draw in the elect among His Jewish people who have thus far been hardened.

• Our Father has purposed for both Jew and Gentile to be shown His mercy: “For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all” (v. 32). Since no one deserves the mercies of God, neither can anyone judge another person or group of people and think, “They had their chance and blew it.” Our Father will have mercy on those for whom He will have mercy.

• All of the promises presented in Romans 11 will be fulfilled because God’s Word cannot be revoked: “For God’s gifts and His call are irrevocable” (v. 29). What a comfort to know that His plans will be fulfilled in His timing, by His power, and according to His Word.

Chapter 8. The Older Testament: Basis Of The Newer Testament



**“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction,
for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete,
thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16,17).**

**“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us,
so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4).**

When Paul penned these words, the only written Scripture was the Hebrew Bible, the Older Testament. The early Church needed the encouragement of the Hebrew Bible so that they might have hope. These writings were their source text for their foundational beliefs: the truth of creation; the fall of man into sin and God’s plan for reconciliation; the covenant relationship between God and man; God’s moral law and His ethical standards—for everything man needed to know about God and His relationship with mankind.

Without referring to the Hebrew Bible, how could believers today ever grasp such concepts as the atonement sacrifice? The high priestly mediation of Jesus between His Father and His people? The priesthood of believers and the spiritual responsibilities and privileges that that entails? The Messiahship of the Lord? Because their faith was based on the God of the Hebrew Bible, the Newer Testament writers repeatedly referred to those Scriptures. (Matthew alone quotes from the Older Testament over fifty times!)

Baptisms, observance of the Lord’s Supper, thanksgiving to God before and after meals, and other early Church practices were rooted in Judaic purification rituals, the Passover celebration, and Sabbath blessings that had been instituted and practiced long before Jesus’s incarnation.

Sadly, all too many churches today emphasize the Newer Testament and neglect the Older. Many consciously or unconsciously believe that the Older Testament concerned the Jews, and the Newer Testament the Christians. The teachings of Jesus and the apostles, however, found their origins in the thirty-nine books of the Older Testament. We must diligently study the Older Testament as well as the Newer if we are to ever understand the Hebraic theology of our forebears and regain the spiritual life of the early Church.

The Gospel message has been significantly weakened by minimizing the importance of the Hebrew Bible. Without an understanding of the Older Testament truths, the claims of Jesus may seem irrelevant to people today, particularly regarding His atoning sacrifice for their sins. We live in a pluralistic, relativistic culture in which concepts of absolute truth are negated or disparaged as “intolerant.” Assuming personal liability for sinfulness and spiritual guilt contradicts the ubiquitous blame/victimization mentality of present-day American society. With these truth-denying influences, commitment to Christ as Lord of one’s life may diminish instead to mere desire for a life-improver: “If I come to Jesus, my life won’t be so lonely, so poverty-stricken, so anxious.”

Have you gone through the anguish of watching those with whom you have shared the Gospel (and who, perhaps right in front of you, “gave their hearts to Jesus”) go on in life unchanged by the Good News? How many “new believers” have

lost their early zeal for God and their gratefulness to Him, and have even returned to their old ways? Is it because Christians have spent so much time developing methods and theories for Bible teaching that we've forgotten to simply teach the Scriptures as they were written: The Bible as one complete and independent revelation of God?

Paul well understood this continuity of the Newer Covenant with the Older Testament; the Hebrew Bible is all that existed when he wrote his letters. Veteran missionary Trevor McIlwain writes that many heresies, misinterpretations, overemphasis of particular verses, and even the development of denominations and sects can be traced back to failing to teach the whole Word in its chronological, panoramic format—from Genesis to Revelation.

Consider the tremendous distinction between man approaching God from man's point of view, and God approaching man out of His great love. Ponder these points drawn by McIlwain in his thought-provoking seminar, "Building on Firm Foundations":

"The Gospel is not man accepting Jesus as his Savior, but that God accepted the Lord Jesus as the perfect and only Savior two thousand years ago. The Gospel is not man giving his heart or his life to Jesus, but that Christ gave His life, His whole being, in the place of sinners. The Gospel is not man receiving Christ into his heart, but that God received the Lord Jesus into Heaven as the mediator of sinners. The Gospel is not Christ enthroned in the human heart, but that God enthroned the Lord Jesus at His right hand in Heaven." (emphasis added)

Christ has already fulfilled the reconciliation requirements of His Father. His payment is complete. His resurrection is a sign to us on earth that the sacrifice for our sin has been accepted by God the Father. He is satisfied.

The observant Jew regarded God as the Initiator Who drew people to Himself. But the Word makes no sense to those who are without the Spirit's indwelling presence: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and **he cannot understand them**, because they are **spiritually discerned**" (1Corinthians 2:14).

Why should you even try to present Bible truth to unbelievers? Jeremiah 23:29 offers one answer: "'Is not **My word like fire**,' declares the Lord, 'and like a hammer that **breaks a rock in pieces**?' The stubbornness of your own rebellious nature becomes like burnt stubble and crushed debris as the Spirit wields the Word of God to bring conviction of heart to the unrighteous (see John 16:8-11).

Paul directs you to another reason to proclaim the Truth: "So the law was put in charge to **lead us to Christ** that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24, emphasis added). Even more clearly you see in Romans 7:7 that "I would not have **known what sin was** except through the law" (emphasis added). The Spirit of God takes the truths of the law to reveal in you your constant failure to keep it. He then turns your eyes Christ-ward to the only perfect Law-keeper Who has received your just punishment to satisfy a holy God.

The Jews of Jesus's time were well aware of their depraved, sinful state. They understood that they were totally incapable of keeping the demands of the Law by their own strength and effort. The annual Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) only magnified the abyss between man's performance and God's requirements. The fasting and prayer that characterized Yom Kippur were outward symbols of the inner transformation that was needed. As the late Rabbi Phillip Sigal emphasized, Yom Kippur was "a day of spiritual regeneration leading to the promised atonement."



“Hold a sacred assembly and fast, and present an offering made to the Lord by fire. Do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when **atonement is made for you** before the Lord your God” (Leviticus 23:27,28).

Repentance represented for the Jewish people a true cry from the heart to God and a return to His law, even if that took place just before death. Just as salvation by grace is a gift from God to followers of Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 2:8,9), so too did Judaism teach “salvation by grace, a necessary gift of God to help human beings bypass their inability to fulfill all God’s expectations that they be holy ‘as Yhwh [is] holy.’ Human salvation by merit is impossible. God’s grace is an absolute need, and Yom Kippur teaches that it is an absolute and free gift of God.” (emphasis added)

The ten days leading up to the Day of Atonement were a time of personal reckoning for repentance and throwing one’s self upon the mercies of God. During this period each individual was to examine his or her heart to discern and repair any injury done to another during the preceding year. Only then could a person seek God’s absolution. Note that this is exactly what Jesus demanded of His disciples in Matthew 5:23,24:

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

**“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God.
The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth
to be His people, His treasured possession”** (Deuteronomy 7:6).

Out of His own volition, God established a love relationship with the Israelites through His promises to Abraham. They were to be holy, set apart from all others as His treasured people. Through that unique relationship they could then be ambassadors of the one true God to all other nations. How clearly we see from the Older Testament the “husband love” of God toward His chosen, and the devastating effects of sin rupturing that relationship. How marvelous does that tenacious love of God appear as He moves His people to repent and find restoration!

The Jewish believers of the early Church were so “God-centered” that they never questioned the existence of God. Their confidence was grounded in the opening statement in their Bible: “In the beginning God” (Genesis 1:1). To the Jew then and now, God is experienced throughout life, not contemplated or analyzed. Those concepts were later introduced by Hellenist philosophers who converted to Christianity.

God is known by what He does: He initiates and He fulfills. The Hebraic people did not analyze God from an abstract, philosophical vantage point. They recognized that the God of action also demanded active obedience from them. In other words, their “chosenness” obligated them to heed and submit to God. Obedience to God’s truth brought the nation of Israel blessings; disobedience resulted in judgment.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4,5).

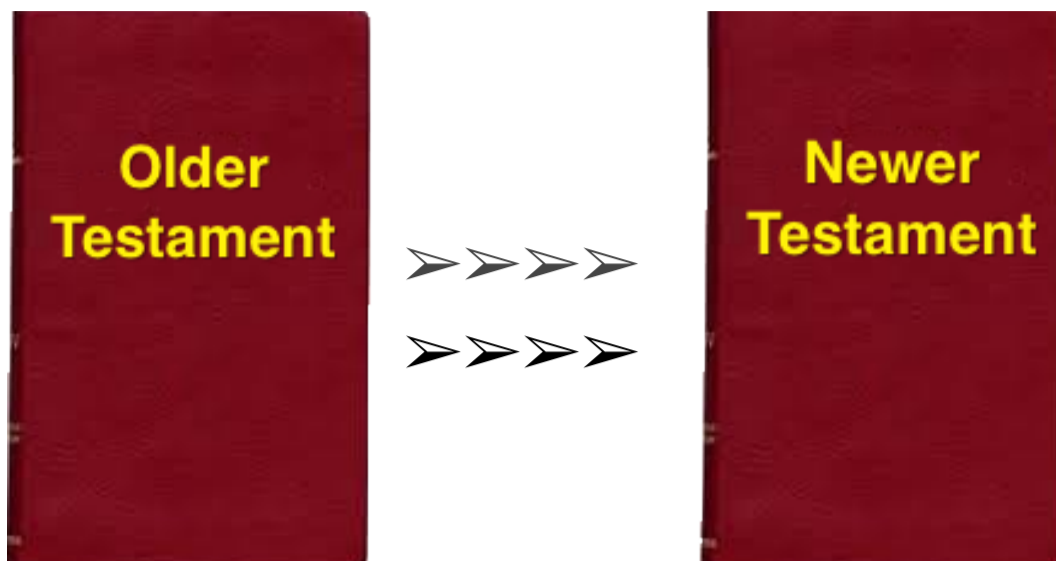
“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40).

If you were to try to summarize the Older Testament, it could be expressed in Deuteronomy 6:4,5, above. The heart-cry of God throughout the Hebrew Bible expresses a longing for a relationship with His people. The essence of the Newer Testament is the same. Quoting from Deuteronomy, Jesus reiterated the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:37-40, above.

Everything in your Christian life—everything about knowing God and experiencing Him, everything about knowing and doing His will—depends on the quality of your love relationship with God.

If your relationship with Jesus is not right, nothing in your life will be right.

Chapter 9. Born Again: Basis In The Older Testament



“Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.’
[Jesus said] You should not be surprised at My saying, ‘You must be born again’” (John 3:3,7).

Jewish doctrine at the time of Jesus taught that a person must experience a spiritual birth. In Hebraic terms, a definition of conversion involved the total human being responding to God’s call on his life. Conversion equaled rebirth, i.e., being “born from above”, and answered the appeal of God to the spirits of His people. The act of conversion was a shift in response from the head to the heart, from knowing about God to knowing Him intimately. It represented a move from the “outside” to the “inside,” from following the letter of the law to abiding in relationship with the God Who initiated it.

“I have set the Lord always before me” (Psalm 16:8) expressed a person’s inner desire to obey God out of love for Him rather than an external obedience compelled by His Law. This represented true spiritual rebirth in those claiming His Lordship. The faith which Jesus required to be “born again” is defined more in terms of trust and reliance on God rather than on specific creedal positions. Examine Romans 10:9,10 from the Jewish New Testament (JNT) translation by David Stern to see just how ongoing and personal this relationship is:

“That if you acknowledge publicly with your mouth that Yeshua [Jesus] is Lord and trust in your heart that God raised Him from dead, you will be delivered. For with the heart one **goes on trusting and thus continues toward righteousness**, while with the mouth one **keeps on making public acknowledgment and thus continues toward deliverance**.” (emphasis added)

The Hebrew word for “faith”, emunah, does not mean belief but trust in God. It’s a powerful word packed with heartfelt motivation leading to action. Trust does not merely signify or acknowledge that God exists; that is already a given! To simply believe with the mind is to give intellectual assent to a factual statement. To truly trust in our Father requires a wholehearted yielding of yourself to Him unconditionally.

For further information on biblical trust, see: Our Father's Children Must Trust Him Completely.

Salvation in the early Hebraic Church was recognized as an ongoing process. Entry into the process meant to trust that the shed blood of Jesus paid the penalty for sin. Remember that on the Day of Atonement each year the Jewish people offered an unblemished lamb as the penalty for their sins. They trusted that God, through His grace and mercy, would forgive them the guilt of all their sins:

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

It is sometimes difficult for us Gentiles to grasp the significance of the Jewish community as a people who fully understand the severity of sin and the need for forgiveness, yet trust that the shed blood of a lamb could bring forgiveness of those sins.



Think of that community of Jews, after centuries of penitent Days of Atonement, being asked to believe that through one man's death God would forgive all their sins if they would trust in Jesus the Messiah as their atoning sacrifice. Surely the only two responses could be wholehearted joyful acceptance or dumbfounded disbelief.

The process of salvation requires that you **keep on** trusting. It is in this realm that spiritual warfare is necessary. Satan may have lost your soul because you have put your trust in the shed blood of Jesus, but he will purpose to entice you to live in doubt and unbelief. As the enemy of God and also of Christ's followers, the devil's goal is to "make war... against those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (see Revelation 12:17). Satan's warfare tactics include influencing your mind, will, and emotions away from trusting in God in any area of your life.

Nearly all English translations of the Bible present the message of warfare in the spirit realm from a Greek framework of linguistics, culture, and theology. Have you generally thought that the demonic activities that are described in both testaments were merely cultural manifestations of an uneducated, unenlightened society? A Hellenist orientation would enculturate demonization as a first century phenomenon, inapplicable to a scientific, technological culture.

In contrast, the Hebraic framework recognized the reality of Satan and demons because they were described in Scripture and because they were clearly observable in the lives around them.

Consider the following verses as presented from a Hebraic viewpoint:

"For I am not ashamed of the Good News, since it is God's powerful means of bringing salvation to everyone who **keeps on trusting**... For in it is revealed how God makes people righteous in His sight; and from beginning to end it is **through trust**— as the scriptures put it, 'But the person who is righteous will **live his life by trust**'" (Romans 1:16,17, Jewish New Testament, emphasis added).

"And it is a righteousness that comes from God, through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah, to all who **continue trusting**... Therefore, we hold the view that a person comes to be considered righteous by God **on the ground of trusting**" (Romans 3:22, 28, Jewish New Testament, emphasis added).

Faith comes down to this: Man finds complete purpose and fulfillment in his relationship with God and expresses this life of trust by deeds of gratefulness which are empowered by His presence. Our Father is eager to share His boundless grace with those who are His own. His people, however, must realize their own helplessness apart from His sustaining power and love. As our heavenly Father initiates a circumstance, a follower of Jesus should respond in such a way that God is recognized as both real and trustworthy in his or her life.

James makes this distinction between "believing" (which even the demons do) and a faith that is seen in how a person lives: "But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will **show you my faith by what I do.** You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder" (James 2:18,19).

The faith that is recounted in the Hebrew Scriptures emphasized justice for the poor and compassion for the needy, both of which required that the believer respond by meeting a specific need. Jesus modeled obedience to this command by

healing the sick (see Matthew 14:14), restoring sight to the blind (see Matthew 20:34), cleansing lepers (see Mark 1:42), and feeding the hungry (see Matthew 15:29-39). He was profoundly aware of the needs of others and took concrete steps to satisfy them.

To better understand the difference between modern evangelism and true conversion at the time of Christ, we need to reflect on these important facts: From a Hebraic perspective, in order to be in relationship with God, one needed to voluntarily become one with the Jewish people. The Jews welcomed converts as true sons of Abraham, their spiritual forefather. The process of conversion involved solidarity with the Jewish community. This was not just adherence to the Hebraic laws but rather a drawing near to other believers.

In Exodus 19:6, the Israelites were told that they would be for God “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” and in 1Peter 2:9, followers of Christ are called “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” In both covenants, the communal dimension of the body of believers was emphasized.

Think of the impact of mutual responsibility as you read Philippians 2:12,13, recognizing that the pronoun your (referring to salvation) is plural:

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed... **continue to work out your salvation** with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose” (emphasis added).

It was in community with other believers that early Jewish followers of Christ enacted the support, nurture, and affirmation that they had experienced in Judaism. As one writer puts it, the person who chose to separate himself from the community “had no share in the God of Israel. The heretic in the tradition is one who does not feel solidarity and empathy with the joys and suffering of his community.”

Judaism was **convert-driven**. This means that the responsibility to “become Jewish” lay with the convert, not with the community or the rabbis. If one truly experienced a spiritual rebirth, his heart focused on learning and obeying everything that would please God. His obedience would constitute his “yokedom” in the kingdom of heaven, submitting to God’s ways as taught and modeled by those whose lives attested to His working from the inside out.

A person’s way of life prior to rebirth was “earthly, unspiritual, of the devil” (James 3:15) or, as defined in Numbers 15:39, prostitution of oneself “by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes.” Evidence of a life that is set on glorifying God fulfilled Malachi 3:18: “And you will again see the **distinction** between the **righteous** and the **wicked**, between those who **serve God** and those who **do not**” (emphasis added).

You would not have to look too far today to find examples of pastors begging new “believers” to attend Bible studies or worship services. Nor would it take much recall to think of someone you know who is actively involved in an immoral lifestyle yet blatantly claiming to be a “Christian.”

“The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’”
(Genesis 2:18).

Marriage and family were (and are) very significant to observant Hebraic men and women. The family was the most basic unit of society, and marriage was considered a gift from God: “So God created man in His own image ... male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27). The woman was given to the man, and he delighted in her from the minute he saw her; they were naked and not ashamed. Since both the man and the woman were created in God’s image and yet are so uniquely different, the marriage relationship implicitly creates a fuller picture of the image of God.

Man was created by God to be motivated by sexual pleasure. According to Psalm 139, any offspring that were produced were the result of His hand. Scripture instructed a husband to view his wife in the same manner as God does: “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and she lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm all the days of her life” (Proverbs 31:10-12).

Because marriage was considered a sacred bond and not merely a legal contract, many rabbis insisted that “a man should first take a wife for himself, and then apply himself to the study of Torah.” To marry and to have children was regarded as the primary religious duty for a Jewish man. In this way he could fulfill the first command (and blessing) in the Bible: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28).

The Jewish people recognized that marital intimacy satisfied longings that might otherwise be a source of temptation: “May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love (Proverbs 5:18,19). Human need for intimate companionship was fulfilled in the marriage relationship. Single life was considered a misfortune; a good wife was the chief delight a man could hope for. Husbands were encouraged to follow the example of the man in the Song of Songs, sharing love and tenderness with the wife of his youth.

The Hebraic early Church understood that a wife was more than a helper. A husband was to draw strength from his wife, his life partner (see Malachi 2:14). Many rabbis of Jesus’s day would have understood women to be highly sexual, based on Genesis 3:16: “Your desire [urge] will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” A husband was required to satisfy his wife’s desire for intimacy on a regular basis. This is reiterated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:3,4:

“The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.”



Since God had created the body, to denounce intercourse within marriage would be blasphemous. Using the body in situations outside His framework for intimacy would be unholy. Followers of Jesus knew God’s purpose for giving Adam a wife: Adam was incomplete. He needed a helper who was suitable for him as a unique creation, man. The Holy Spirit works through a wife to develop and help complete in her husband the elements that make up a Christlike character in a man. She enables her husband to develop the “soft side” of God’s love—mercy, compassion, patience, long-suffering—when he is tempted to respond out of anger or impulse.

The marriage relationship was regarded so highly by the Jewish people because of the emphasis that God placed on it. He established the marital bond between Adam and Eve (see Genesis 2:24). He called Himself the “husband” of His people Israel (see Jeremiah 3:14, 31:32; Isaiah 54:5) and their “bridegroom” (see Isaiah 62:5). So too the Newer Testament writers later paralleled the Church as the “wife” of Christ (see Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 19:7, 21:9), and presented Jesus as a “bridegroom” (see Luke 5:34-35; John 3:29). Marital love was regarded as a covenant of flesh and spirit (see Malachi 2:15); a **commitment** rather than a feeling.


Another way to view the goals and processes of a Hebraic/Christian marriage is this saying:

“If you want to know the extent of my relationship with Jesus, consider my love for my spouse.”





The biblically Hebraic view saw love as a development growing well into the marriage, and certainly not a prerequisite. In fact, most marriages were arranged by the parents, and at a very early age. Genesis 24:67 strongly influenced the Hebraic understanding of the marriage relationship: “Isaac brought [Rebekah] into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her.” Their love for each other deepened as their years together lengthened. A young lady who was still single by age eighteen was regarded with pity or suspicion as an old maid or a woman of ill-repute.

 **The writings of Shakespeare and subsequent authors have immortalized an unbiblical concept: Romance leads to marriage. The rise of divorce ensued.**

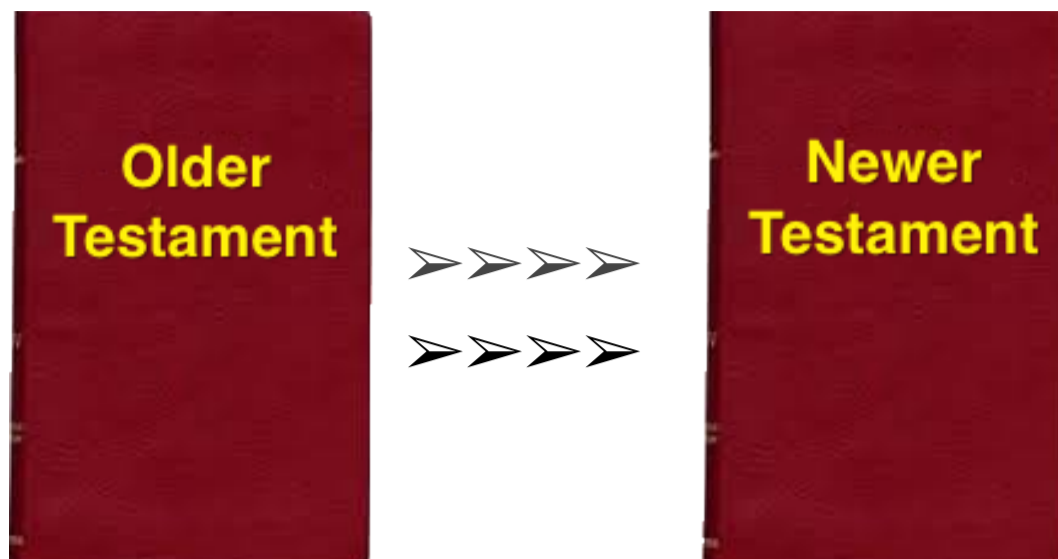
Think of marriage as a box, writes J. Allen Petersen. If you get married thinking that the box is full of all the beautiful things you have longed for, you will be disappointed. You must see that the box has started out empty—you have to put something in before you can take anything out. As you infuse your marriage with the love you have for each other, you will fill the box with giving, sharing, serving, and praising. The box will be filled with elements that will hold the relationship together during the difficult times.

We have often wondered about the many couples we saw on retreats who grew wearier of each other as years went by. Perhaps their marriages would have gotten off to a stronger start if they had paid attention to Deuteronomy 24:5: “If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. **For one year he is to be free to stay at home** and bring happiness to the wife he has married.” From a practical viewpoint, this could mean avoiding any outside responsibilities such as social or political committees, work assignments involving overtime or travel, or even time-consuming hobbies that might interfere with developing a secure bond of commitment between the spouses during that vital first year.

In a Jewish marriage ceremony, the bride and groom twice share a cup of wine. As one writer puts it, these are “reminders of the couple’s common destiny. The first cup is the ‘cup of joy’. It reminds the couple that when joys in life are shared, they are doubled. The second is the ‘cup of sacrifice’, recognizing that burdens and problems will someday enter. However, troubles shared are halved.”

A Hebraic understanding emphasizes that marriage is a covenant union in which the whole community has a stake. No married couple is expected to make it through life alone. The extended family is there for support. For Christians, the home fellowship or intimate circle of friends can fulfill this role if relatives are unavailable. Older mentors who have raised their families well, or those who have learned from their mistakes, are a resource no couple should be without.

Chapter 10. The Older Testament: The Basis For Godly Family



**“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.
These commandments which I give to you today are to be upon your hearts.
Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road,
when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).**

The above passage was the key to Hebraic success in making the home the primary site for instilling God’s truths in their children. Today’s church, however, finds Satan continuously inducing families to shy away from their responsibility to personally impress God’s truths on the next generation. Paul apperceived Deuteronomy 6, above, when he exhorted fathers,

“Do not exasperate [i.e., bring to a point of frustration] your children; instead bring them up in the **training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4, emphasis added).**

Hebrew parents were told, “Train a child in the way he should go [i.e., in the way his personality, talents, and motivations are steering him], and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6). The Jewish people did not view the Book of Proverbs as a compendium of “cause and effect” promises. The Proverbs contained the best wisdom the sages could offer but did not carry any guarantees from God about results.

Many Christians believe that God promises a particular outcome if they keep a specific rule. This premise has caused heartbreak for so many parents. They have been taught that Proverbs 22:6 guaranteed that their children would grow up walking in Jesus if they as parents had trained them up with Christian values.

But the Hebraic perspective commands fathers and mothers to spend such significant ongoing time with their children that they can appreciate their individual personalities and motivations. Then the parents can imbue in their offspring the character and behaviors that please our heavenly Father. With this awareness, the parent is then better able to discern God’s plan for each child for the vocation and way of life that is most suitable for him or her.

Spiritual life in the 21st century church of the United States is often viewed in terms of church activity. A vast majority of the action benefits the individual and requires little or no sacrifice or responsibility except to show up on time. But the focus on the congregational gathering as the center of spiritual activity has robbed followers of Jesus of something the biblical Jew understood all too clearly: **the home was the primary place for spiritual development**.

For many western Christians, the home often takes a second position to the church building or Christian school for developing spiritual training and growth in the family. Most church attendees expect that the professionals—the pastoral staff—will feed them all the spiritual nourishment they need in order to grow in Christlikeness. Along the same line, the parents hope their children will absorb what they hear in Sunday school and youth group and grow up to be “Christians”.

Many pastors with whom we have talked over the years admit that they have developed programs and activities in their congregations to **compensate for the lack of spiritual emphasis in the home**. We once surveyed a sizable group of pastors, asking if they

took time for family prayer or Bible study in their own homes. Although each of them admitted to having his own devotional/prayer time, not one of them included his family in any spiritual participation in the home other than grace before a meal.

The spiritual life of the Jewish people was and is focused on the home. “Judaism survived persecution in every generation because the real structure and function of religious life was **home-centered**. The strength of the family exists in peace-filled religious family functions.” The virtues of Christlike character are learned in the crucible of the home. How parents live is as important as what they say; they are the first picture of God that a child has. That first impression will ultimately affect their concept of God as Father, Shepherd, and Lord.

This is truly an awesome responsibility for which no amount of outside teaching can compensate. You must use your family time wisely!

“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”

(Matthew 4:4).

The early Church relied solely on the teachings of Jesus, the Hebrew Scriptures and the Holy Spirit for direction. “They had to depend on the Holy Spirit and His teaching and guidance. They had no other option but to minister, to preach, and to write under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.” As the various manmade forms of church governments developed over the centuries, an important element of guidance for the early Church, rhema, was lost.

In the Bible are two Greek words which, when translated into English, mean “word.” These terms are logos and rhema. Logos represents God’s ways and thoughts, which never change. The Bible is a part of God’s logos that has been written down for man. Rhema is that specific word spoken directly and individually from God to the follower of Jesus. Without the Holy Spirit within a person, there can be no rhema. Through rhema the Holy Spirit brings a particular portion of the total counsel of God for man, His logos, to a particular time and individual.

This specific application is vital, because man’s capacity to understand our Father is so minute and His wisdom so beyond our comprehension: “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8,9).

“Rhema,” writes Derek Prince, “is like each of the broken pieces of bread with which Jesus fed the multitudes; it is suited to each person’s need and capacity; often it comes to us through another’s hands. Thus, we can see the need for connectedness in the body of Christ, our need for one another.” (emphasis added)

In Matthew 4:4, above, the word “comes” is in the continuous present tense. It is ongoing. Another way to say this is, “We must live on every word **as it comes** out of the mouth of God.” Waiting for guidance from the Holy Spirit by the rhema of God is humbling to our sinful, self-confident nature. Seeking the rhema of God is to us what gathering manna was for the Israelites during the Exodus: “He gave you manna to eat in the desert... to **humble** and to **test you** so that in the end it might go well with you” (Deuteronomy 8:16, emphasis added).

The Hebraic early Church knew how important it was to seek God’s specific guidance. As their history demonstrated, with obedience came victory. King David sought God’s specific guidance for his battles. When the Philistines attacked Israel,

“David inquired of the Lord, ‘Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will You hand them over to me?’ The Lord answered him, ‘Go, for I will surely hand the Philistines over to you’” (2 Samuel 5:19).

On another occasion when the Philistines attacked, David again prayed. This time God gave him a different strategy:

“So David inquired of the Lord, and He answered, ‘Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, move quickly, because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army’” (2 Samuel 5:23,24).

Just because our Father has provided specific guidance for a particular circumstance in your life or in someone else’s does not mean that that direction will apply for all situations you encounter. Joshua and his people were given the rhema to march around Jericho seven times to gain the victory (see Joshua 6), yet God revealed other strategies for subsequent battles.

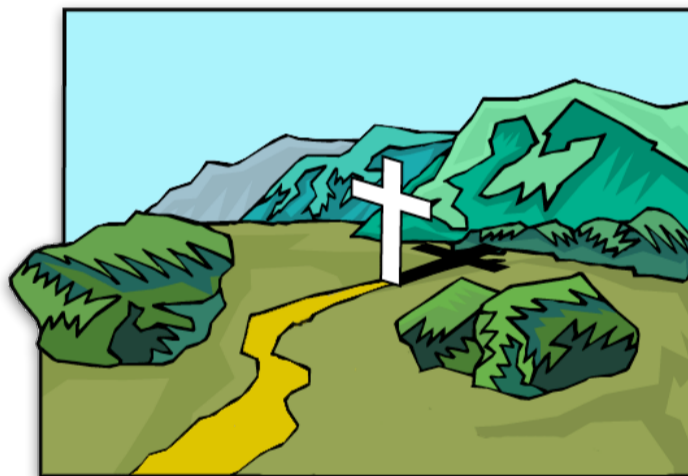
Followers of Jesus in the early Church knew that they did not want to “lean on their own understanding”; that is, they wanted revelation, not reason, to guide them. Consider Acts 13:13: “In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers... While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘**Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul** for the work which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” The rhema from the Holy Spirit, God’s specific revealed will, set apart Saul and Barnabas for their particular ministry.

When God reveals a rhema for a specific purpose, He also empowers the person involved to fulfill it. In the Newer Testament the angel Gabriel told Mary, “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:31). When Mary asked how a virgin could conceive, the angel replied, “Nothing is impossible with God” (v. 37). In other words, every word (rhema) that comes from God will bring with it the power to fulfill His purpose. Mary’s humble acceptance to willingly obey what had been told her was faith enough for God to act. “May it be to me as you have said” (v. 38).

The Bible commands a married man to apply the truths of Scripture to his family members: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water **through the word**” (Ephesians 5:25,26, emphasis added). The term used for “word”, rhema, means more than quoting Bible verses to your spouse. It implies life-giving application of the Word that will result in spiritual cleansing and a greater degree of personal holiness.

The sacrificial attitude of Christ demonstrates a depth of love and commitment that was borne out in His act of atonement. The “**sword of the Spirit, which is the rhema of God**” (see Ephesians 6:17) finds power to combat the hosts of darkness as the follower of Jesus who wields that sword of rhema applies in faithful obedience what Scripture tells him.

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’
(John 14:6).



Jesus called Himself “the way”. In the Book of Acts the early Christians were known as “the Way”: “However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of **the Way**, which they call a sect. I believe everything that **agrees with the Law** and that is **written in the Prophets** (Acts 24:14, emphasis added). This use of the term “the way” has a very distinct Hebraic importance known as halakhah.

Halakhah is the way in which Mosaic law was interpreted and applied to a particular situation. Halakhah is the determination and application of one of several true options provided in the Bible to a given actual situation. It did not specify that one decision alone was right but that this particular option seemed to apply better than other valid solutions. The emphasis was not on interpretation alone but on correct application.

As an example, in the Book of Ruth, Boaz approached the elders of the city concerning the property of Naomi and Ruth. The Mosaic law stipulated,

“If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband’s brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel” (Deuteronomy 25:5,6).

Boaz had been approached by Ruth to exercise this privilege, called the right of the kinsman-redeemer. He knew that there was a relative closer than himself to fulfill the role. Despite his desire to marry Ruth, Boaz approached that relative

and brought him to the elders. When the kinsman refused his responsibility, the elders applied the law to Boaz and he married Ruth. This decision by the elders would have been recorded as a halakhah, a precedent in applying the law that had been established in Deuteronomy.

The Older Testament prophets often spoke in broad terms. Amos intoned, “Let justice roll like a river” (5:24). Halakhah translated this general command into something do-able: mercy that met the needs of the poor, charity that expressed one’s faith in God (similar to James 2:14-17, helping a brother in need).

Most Christians today have halakhahs without being conscious of it. If you are married and have prayerfully established with your spouse a biblical understanding of your practice concerning birth control, or have made your decision before God to educate your children in a public school, Christian school, or home school, you have in fact established a halakhah for your family. You have explored the Word of God and sought the understanding of the Holy Spirit, the rhema, in order to apply God’s will for yourselves.

Halakhah requires you to apply biblical truths to all realms of your life, whether to education, finances, ethical decisions, or religious practices. The halakhic process is apperceptive. It values the decisions of earlier rabbinic (or church) authorities over their successors so as not to defile the truth. This was important for the earliest believers, as “progress and reason” were to emerge on the cultural scene.

The plain sense of scriptural meaning should be the one first considered. Metaphors or allegories should never replace what would have been clearly understood by the writer or by his audience. If the Hellenist ideals of rhetoric and a “higher plane of thought” could be considered as poetry, then halakhah could definitely be pictured as prose. Halakhah deals with the individual’s tasks and responsibilities in his concrete daily existence, not with some visionary escape to a perfect world.

Halakhah was not intended to be just a code of rules to dictate behavior in each of life’s situations. It was also an expression of a heart yearning for a dynamic love relationship with God. The Hebraic people recognized this relational aspect: “The need for order must not be at the expense of spontaneity, personal passion, novelty and surprise.”

The one true God as He is recounted in the Bible was far from being a distant, unapproachable deity. A major purpose of halakhah bound an individual to God through love that was seen in his or her obedience. The very nature of our Father’s goodness and holiness should inspire obedience, and it is His authoritative right to demand it. This balance of God’s power, justice, and righteousness with His long-suffering, kindness, and mercy was to be seen in the incarnation of Jesus the Messiah.

For further insights into the basis of the Older Testament and Fulfillment in the Newer Testament, see Jesus In Your Home Videos:

[The Fear Of God](#)

[Biblical Covenants \(Part 1\)](#)

[Biblical Covenants \(Part 2\)](#)

[Why Jesus Died](#)

[Older Testament Pattern Of Acceptable Sacrifice](#)

Chapter 11. Insights Into The Hebraic Perspective

**“Live in harmony with one another.
Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.
Do not be conceited” (Romans 12:16).**

As Jesus ministered among the poor, the sick, and the needy, He was reflecting the rabbinical teaching method of His day. As one writer said, “[It] was customary for teachers to spend a great deal of time among the poor in attempts to treat those who were ill, provide food for those who were destitute, and perform other concrete acts of mercy.”

Young men often attached themselves to a particular rabbi, literally my teacher, because of certain strengths in his character and a distinctive focus on God that especially appealed to them. The disciples of that rabbi were absolutely devoted to him, inhaling not only his every word, but the manner in which he taught. Every act of that rabbi became a role model trait that was emulated by his students. If a rabbi performed acts of mercy, his disciples then followed his example, learning by doing.

In Hebrew, the word for “work” and “worship” (avodah) has the same root meaning. Hebraic teaching was expected to point to practical truths that people could adopt and apply to their everyday lives. And because the influence of the teacher was so profound, his character was far more important than the content of his teachings. The hypocrisy that Jesus criticized in the Pharisees and scribes was an affront to both God and man. The discrepancy between their actions and their words showed that they “honor [God] with their lips but their hearts are far from [Him].” Special integrity was required of leaders: “Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7). We would say today that their walk better match their talk!

Because Hebraic thought was founded on what is lived and experienced, Jesus could teach as He did about the final judgment. How a person enacted his trust in Jesus determined if he was truly in the Lord’s sheepfold. As Jesus spoke of the separation of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46, He concluded, “Whatever you **did** for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you **did** for Me” (v. 40). To **do** the work of salvation was to bring healing, relief, and victory to those weighed down by the debilitating difficulties of the here and now.

The book of James, filled with the Hebraic understanding of “living your faith”, presents this poignant portrait: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27). This definition mirrors the character of God Himself: “Leave your orphans; I will protect their lives. Your widows too can trust in Me” (Jeremiah 49:11).

In his first epistle, John goes even further to unite your deeds and your belongings as means of living out your faith:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to **lay down our lives** for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but **with actions and in truth**” (1John 3:16-18, emphasis added).

Our Father created you as a physical being with distinct material needs. He wants you to depend on Him in faith to provide for those needs. While He may allow you to work to earn money, you need to keep in mind that He has furnished your job, your strength, and the food itself for which you labor:

“You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and **so confirms His covenant**, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today” (Deuteronomy 8:17,18).

If you open your spiritual eyes, you will also see His provision through the kindness and care of others who love Him and are obedient to His prompting to serve you. Recall some recent instances in which you were made aware of the tangible needs of someone. How did you respond? What was the most difficult sacrifice you have ever been called on to make on behalf of someone else?

Now be honest: Was the “religion” that you displayed in that instance pure and faultless as unto God, or did you enjoy the acclaim of men for responding as you did?

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3,4).

Satan has especially focused his attacks against the family, against your ability to pass along an active, viable faith to your children. That’s a faith that’s concerned with the needs of others. Your home is the first place where you learn to interact and participate with others. Your first encounter with subordinating personal desires is learned in the home. There you are frequently put in a position of having to make some sacrifice for the sake of others in your family.

Paul instructed the Philippian believers to look beyond themselves with a considerate attitude that goes beyond natural inclination. Think about the pain he must have felt as he wrote, “For **everyone** looks out for his **own interests**, not those of Jesus Christ” (v. 21, emphasis added). Paul grieved that these followers of Jesus were clinging to their fleshly desires and resisting the work of the Spirit in this area of their lives.

How do you learn to look to the interests of others? One answer is as simple as sharing a family meal. In that common framework you learn to live by the command that “sums up the Law and the Prophets,” that is, “In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12). At the retreat center we served the meals family-style to encourage interaction and helpfulness. Most retreats began with dinner on Friday evening. One men’s retreat stands out. The participants had come for the first time. When they sat down for supper, we were dumbfounded that no one even passed the food around to the others. Each man reached across the big table to take his own portion from the serving dishes as though he were alone, disregarding the other dozen empty plates and the presence of people who could have helped him reach!

On another occasion during a clergy retreat from a particular denomination, we placed the coffee pots near the table where people could get up and help themselves. While the superintendent of the denomination was at the pot getting coffee for himself, he commented to Mike that he had difficulty getting his clergy to follow through on things that he needed them to do. Mike asked him, “What are you doing right now?” He replied, “Getting coffee.” Mike directed his attention back to the table where the clergy were sitting, and from which he had just gotten up. “How many empty cups are there?” Awareness dawned, and instead of filling his own cup, he took the pot back to the table and filled the empty cups of everyone else. “Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one **who serves**... I am among you as one **who serves**” (Luke 22:26,27, emphasis added).

Care and concern for others epitomize the nature of Jesus in you. These character qualities must be practiced in the training ground of your home until they truly become facets of your ever-transforming nature.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9).

Many Americans touring Israel often find themselves frustrated by the seeming lack of logic in the Middle Eastern way of doing things. Western reasoning tends to think in steps that begin with a premise and lead up to a conclusion. Each step is linked to the next in some sort of rational order. But the Jews often use what Marvin Wilson, in Our Father Abraham, terms “block logic”. Each of their thoughts is able to stand alone; they don’t necessarily fit together sequentially.

If you view the Scripture as a form of block logic it makes incredible sense. The Bible does not require a lot of the extra-scriptural explanation we in the West are so used to. Westerners try to piece together a lot of seemingly related scriptures in order to organize the Bible into a teachable format. Perhaps we feel we need this organization in order to meet our Hellenist-oriented rational thinking processes. We even construct our doctrines so that they might be systematically understood, verse upon verse.

The Jew knows that he does not have all the answers; nor does God require him to. He is willing to live at peace with God without being able to explain everything. Life is full of irreconcilable opposites: living on the temporal plane with an eye on the eternal; having a simultaneous love and fear of God; experiencing His nearness yet His transcendence.

Westerners, however, feel a compelling need to rationalize biblical truths to make sense. But God defies rational explanation. How can you explain a God Who is transcendent above the highest heavens yet indwells the spirit of His children? How can the same God Who has allowed His people Israel to undergo exiles, Inquisitions, and the Holocaust be the God of the resurrection to them that believe? Paul emphasized the unknowable mystery of God and marveled:

“Oh, the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord?” (Romans 11:33-34).

The God of the Hebrew Bible is the Creator of all that is, and His standards are absolutes. Punishment and reward were concepts well understood by the Jews of Jesus’s time. The Almighty was fully capable of using the wicked as instruments of punishment for His disobedient people (see Habakkuk 1) and then punishing those wicked agents Himself. You don’t need to understand your heavenly Father. But neither do you need to suppress your questions either. Since He knows your innermost heart, a half-hearted “I guess it’s OK, God...” is hypocritical. He certainly doesn’t expect you to try to justify or vindicate Him for His ways.

The obedient life is one of constant choices: Do you try to determine from your own reasoning what is “good” and what is “evil”? Or do you instead seek to determine God’s will and live in accordance with that? Perhaps like Habakkuk you need to wait patiently but eagerly for Jesus’s return, when you will no longer see through the glass darkly because your questions will then be answered.

The Jesus of Hebraic society two thousand years ago would probably not be accepted by most theologians of modern America. His teachings were intended for man to **live by**, not to ponder. Your “salt” and “light” had to permeate not only your own life but all your relationships and your society at large. There would have been no doubt to others as to where you stood as you followed Jesus. Since all of the Newer Testament writers (with the possible exception of Luke) were Jews, their approach to their written accounts addressed the problems of life with solutions. They did not offer a myriad of options from among which a follower of Jesus could browse.

True holiness reflects a transparent obedience in life decisions that meets God’s purpose and design. Because your body is the Spirit’s temple, you need to commit yourself as a steward of what God owns and has been purchased by the blood of Christ. All truth emanates from God, and His standard is obedience. Obedience demands action. The biblical Jew viewed all of life as God’s dominion. The Lord was not relegated to the spiritual domain alone; He made His presence felt in all aspects of life.

In his exposition of Romans 11, The Olive Tree, Carl Kinbar elaborates on a Hebraic understanding of Exodus 19:5, the call to be a nation of priests. The Jews of Jesus’s time “sought to define the Judaism of daily life in terms of priestly ministry — that a man treat his home and life at the same level of holiness as the priest ministering in the Temple.” Therefore all of life’s pursuits were “sacred”, to be accomplished for the glory of God. A person’s job was considered just as “holy” as the time spent studying God’s Word. There was no division of sacred and secular. This culture, however, tends to compartmentalize the different aspects of life into tidy categories: work, play, religion, education. Not so in God’s Word!

Religious Jews practiced a vibrant awareness of God in their daily routine. Their guiding principle was Proverbs 3:6, **“In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight”** (emphasis added). Prayer is God-directed speech that results in God-directed actions. Even today Orthodox Jews lift up set prayers to God all day long for abilities and situations we take for granted so that praise might continually rise up before God’s throne. How often do you greet each new day with thanks to God for the ability to get out of bed, for having a job, for being able to brush your teeth?

All of the circumstances of life, the good times and the hard times, come not by chance or fate, but are allowed under the sovereignty of God. Even suffering is orchestrated by Him for your good: “So then, those who **suffer according to God’s will** should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and **continue to do good**” (1 Peter 4:19, emphasis added).

God yearns for a humble people who gratefully acknowledge His presence throughout the day and rest in their dependency on Him. The Hebraic prayer life forms a continuum that starts with a personal needs focus, then moves to the needs of others, then to praise to God for His blessings, and ultimately to adoration of God just for Who He is. The goal of a mature prayer life is the practice of God’s presence so that He alone become the “one needful thing.” Humility in prayer is key: mindfulness that He works through others on your behalf, and meekness when you realize that only by His grace and His approach to you can you even experience a love relationship with Him.

Central to prayer from a Hebraic view is a heart longing to draw near to God, even when words cannot express what is in the heart. This is perhaps what Paul was referring to in Romans 8:26: “We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” Once your heart is totally focused on God, then your petitions can be presented. Or, expressed Hebraically by one writer, “The anguished soul... finds rest from its labors.

For God is wholly present here [in profound communication with God]—and what more can one ask of eternity but that it be present?”

How comfortable are you with not understanding God? On a scale of 1 to 10, do you view your life in terms of segmented compartments, or do you see it all as a whole involving God? Is the level of holiness you exhibit in corporate worship the same as the level you maintain in the privacy of your home? Are you accustomed to waiting on God before plying Him with petitions and requests?

Remember the Hebraic understanding of personal holiness and a moment-by-moment awareness of His presence. How can these attitudes impact your prayer life?

Chapter 12. The Hebraic Perspective: Divine Involvement

**“Blessed are those whose strength is in You,
who have set their hearts on pilgrimage” (Psalm 84:5).**



Pilgrimage signifies that you are traveling toward a destination or culmination. The Hebraic view of life was understood in terms of an ongoing journey, a pilgrimage of progress: “Being confident of this, that He who began a good work will **carry it on to completion** until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6, emphasis added).

The God-centered view of life demonstrates a passage with a divine plan and a Guide who will bring fulfillment according to His own will. This represents the underlying theme of the Bible and strongly supports, as mentioned earlier, that the Bible should be taught from beginning to end to fully grasp the significance of redemption. Consequently, the Hebraic view of history is sacred: “The Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone He wishes” (Daniel 5:21). He is also the God Who delivers His people when they plea for His intervention in their time of need.

The Bible also chronicles again and again the satanic deception, domination, and attempted destruction of God’s people, as well as God’s deliverance whenever they turned to Him and cried out for help. Evangelist Ed Siloso speculated that the book of Exodus might have ended with the second chapter if the people of Israel had not finally recognized that calling out to God was their only hope for deliverance! It took thirty-eight more chapters in the book to show how He delivered.

Viewed from God’s perspective, the Bible is an ongoing story of divine deliverances in response to the prayers and cries of His people. The repetition of captivities and deliverances in your life is part of your pilgrimage, which will culminate in your final deliverance when Jesus returns for you. This pattern of His faithfulness should strengthen and comfort you in any of your trials!

Ponder a few of the times when circumstances in your life seemed too desperate to be resolved. At what point did you cry out to God? How did He respond? Were you surprised by the answer He provided? How long was the interval between crises when you called out to Him again?

**“In everything set them an example by doing what is good.
In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned,
so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have
nothing bad to say about us” (Titus 2:7,8).**

Synagogues were not always part of the Hebraic scene. During the time of Elisha, it was common for a prophet to open his home as a meeting place for study and prayer. Ezekiel also mentions this: “In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day, while I was **sitting in my house** and the **elders of Judah were sitting before me**, the hand of the Sovereign Lord came upon me there” (Ezekiel 8:1). As these gatherings became more regular and more organized, they developed into the pattern of weekly Sabbath meetings after which the weekly Christian gatherings were modeled.

Understanding the application of God’s Law to their lives was primary to the Jewish people in order that they might distinguish what constituted obedience. As His chosen people they had often experienced the rod of discipline as well as His abundance of grace. Holy obedience to His ways was key to enjoying His grace, so earnestly seeking what pleased God was great motivation to gather together to learn from His Word:

“But let him who boasts boast about this: that he **understands and knows Me**, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for **in these I delight,**’ declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:24).

Each gathering of Jews was an autonomous entity. Any gathering of ten Jewish men formed a minyan, or quorum, to represent a congregation before God. Early writings indicate that some synagogue structures were portable and therefore easily replaced if they wore out. In fact, they could also be used to temporarily lodge needy strangers—the prototype of a multi-purpose sanctuary!

The Hebraic faith of Bible times did not function as a religion with paid professionals who were called by congregations to perform religious duties and services. The rabbi was what we today would call a “layperson”, having no more special duties or offices during worship than a thirteen-year-old boy. There was no hierarchical structure to which he had to report. A rabbi held no priestly office nor was he a synagogue functionary, but instead a learned consultant on religious matters. He worked to provide for the needs of his family and devoted time to scriptural study after that. In fact, he was considered a fellow learner along with his students, for an individual never “graduated” from studying God’s Word.

As a member of the local community, a rabbi was motivated by his love of God and of his fellow man to render halakhic decisions with the elders that could be readily and practically lived out in response to a love relationship with God. This approach was in direct contrast to the rigid restrictions of the Pharisees, who, Jesus noted, “tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them” (Matthew 23:4).

Men who were recognized as full of wisdom were revered as sages, models of ethical and spiritual excellence. These elders set a visible standard of the holiness called for by God in terms of just and merciful decision-making on behalf of the entire community. When the people of the community gathered at the synagogue, any member of the congregation who was able to instruct could be called up to read from God’s Word, lead congregational prayers, or preach. Jesus demonstrated this at the synagogue in Nazareth when He was invited to read from the Bible and teach (see Luke 4:16).

Translation of the Scriptures from Hebrew into the language of the people and explanation of the text into a meaningful lesson formed the basis of what would later be considered teaching in the Christian gatherings. Although so many synagogues were destroyed over the course of centuries, Judaism survived because every Jew was expected to be knowledgeable about the faith of his ancestors. Therefore Judaism could always survive in the home. The home was a little sanctuary, a miqdash meyat, to be set aside for the worship of God, the study of His Word, and a place of hospitality.

Judaism as well as early Christianity was based on the participation of laypeople. This was practiced first of all in the home. The soundness of the entire Hebraic society depended on training up the next generation, the children, in the beliefs and traditions of the Jewish people. Both the synagogue and the home provided secure boundaries of truth for children as they developed their perceptions of the uniqueness of those who were chosen to be God’s people.

Are you relying on your church staff to compensate for what you aren’t doing yourself? Or, are you looking to them to supplement the truths you are already studying and applying? Do your children sense a special wonder that they too can access the God of the universe through His Spirit?

“They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green” (Psalm 92:14).



The Hebrew Bible asserts the importance of wisdom gained through years of experience: “Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?” (Job 12:12). The Bible emphasizes the spiritual, psychological, and mental maturity of the aged. The Hebrew community of Bible times did not believe that the elderly had outlived their usefulness, as is often the case today. The “counsel of the elders” referred to in Ezekiel 7:26 was prized and eagerly sought after. Elders sat at the city gates, accessible to all who entered or left the city. There they made decisions that affected the entire community. Older women were expected to model for younger women the godly activities that would bless the needy, as did Dorcas, “who was always doing good and helping the poor” (see Acts 9:36).

In The Masculine Journey, Robert Hicks presents an insightful and practical Hebraic understanding of the stages of male development and the importance of aging. Manhood is reflected differently throughout the adult life cycle. “Adult life is not static,” writes Hicks. “It is a journey [a pilgrimage], and while on the journey the landscape is constantly changing... “We expect our jobs, our marriages, even our faith to mean the same things as we get older. When we see changes in ourselves we think something is seriously wrong, rather than recognizing this is a normal part of the journey.”

Six distinct Hebrew words denoting “man” appear in the Older Testament. God addresses the individual to whom He is speaking using a very particular Hebrew word for man. Hicks describes these terms as six stages in a man’s life journey.

The first stage, the **Creational Male** (adam), connotes mankind in general, both male and female. Having been made in the image of God, a person is fully capable of designing and creating what he puts his hand to. Due to his sin nature, however, his abilities can be used for evil as well as for noble intent.

The **Phallic Male** (zakar) stage recognizes the innate sexual drive of maleness that impels and motivates a man toward an intimate relationship. Biblical admonitions constrain him, however, to confine expression of that sexuality within marriage.

When the term gibbor is used in the Hebrew Scriptures, it refers to the **Warrior Male** who seeks to excel and conquer. He is known by what he does. In our culture this would represent a man in his twenties and thirties heading for the top in his occupation as he scurries to acquire the trappings of material success.

Eventually the man becomes a **Wounded Male** (enosh) whose wounds are received as he passes through the Warrior stage. Only through wounding can a man begin to understand the needs of those around him. Often this wounding takes place in his forties. We might refer to the resulting confusion and malaise as a mid-life crisis. The man’s marriage seems unfulfilling, his children don’t seem to need him, his job is unsatisfying, his body is starting to fall apart. He feels very much isolated and is unable or even unwilling to reach out to those who could help him see God’s purpose for this wounding.

The Hebrew term ish defines the **Mature Male** and reflects a man who has passed through his wounded period to become a person of dignity and integrity. At this stage of his life, a man is known by his character, by who he is. He senses a renewal of life purpose and is willing to confront what he perceives is wrong in relationships and society at large.

A man addressed as a zaken or **Sage** is a gray-headed wise man or mentor who was revered for his judgments and sought out for guidance and understanding. Jewish sages passed along wisdom in the practical realm, not the theoretical. They provided skillful advice for solving the current problems facing the community. In biblical times, arrival at the stage of sage represented culmination of a life worth living. Contrast this attitude of high regard for the elderly with that of modern disdain. Contemporary seniors panic that they may be thought of as “old”, and fight age with every modern weapon available: cosmetic surgery, frenetic exercise, scientific diet.

For more on the role of the zaken, the shepherds of the earliest followers of our Lord Jesus, see our book, [Pastoring By Elders](#). Or, listen to an audio version of the book, [Pastoring By Elders](#).

If today’s church is going to regain the relational warmth of its past, followers of Jesus must seek out and reactivate the elderly. A sufficient number of sociologists over the years have stated that when the US lost the three-generation family in the home, i.e., grandparents, parents, and children, the destruction of the American family began.

People in the United States are consumed by fear of growing old. Although statistically the elderly have increased in number in the decades since World War II, the church today reflects a paucity of elderly in influential positions of leadership and direction. Years ago the authors were part of a congregation of two hundred in which we, in our mid-forties, were among the oldest!

This culture has lost its reliance on the wisdom and experience of older people. Our scientific, technically advancing society does not see how emotionally naked it is, nor does it perceive the need for the character development that the counsel of older people provides. The magnitude of destroyed relationships in this society is too great to grasp. The process has happened in such an insidiously subtle way since World War II that we are like frogs immersed a pot of cold water and slowly brought to a boil. We were cooked without knowing what happened.



Compare the respected sage of biblical times with today's elderly man stretched out in his recliner mesmerized by the TV, playing cribbage with other senior citizens, or heading off to Florida, separating himself from his extended family. The older woman, on the other hand, is so consumed with appearance that she's out jogging or playing tennis in order to accommodate the most stylish fashions! Congregations have indeed suffered as they have lost the sages and their wives.

At the retreat center we would occasionally get a call from a pastor asking for guidance about a particularly tangled family problem. We would encourage the pastor to have the family meet with a grandparent-age couple from their congregation to discuss the difficulty. The positive results were overwhelming. To many older people we often chuckle, "You've made enough mistakes by now to be useful."

The church lost much by forsaking its Hebraic roots. The people who are needed the most right now are not in our congregations, nor even in our homes. They have retired and moved away, leaving believers helpless and bereft of the wisdom of experience. Followers of Jesus desperately need what their Hebraic predecessors had going for them lest we become a community prone to the foolish and wicked ways of the world.

Chapter 13. The Hebraic Perspective: Faith Is A Way Of Life

“A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom” (Proverbs 10:23).

At what point should you as a follower of Christ realize that the truths and wisdom you desire to share are being ignored, mocked, or used against you? Marvin R. Wilson has written incisively about the various meanings for the word “fool”. “In biblical wisdom literature the pupils of the sages and mentors are the unwise, often termed ‘fools’ (Proverbs 1:7) or ‘simple one’ (1:22). In wisdom literature the different kinds of fools, both young and old, are the raw material on which the sages had to work and they represent the varying degrees of rawness. Perhaps as much as anything else, the term fool is descriptive of an attitude, bent of mind, or direction in life which needs correcting.” (emphasis added)

Since there are more than one hundred references to fools in Proverbs alone, Hebraic thought revolved around discerning that which was pleasing to God (wisdom) and that which was abhorrent to Him (foolishness). Wilson has categorized the five Hebrew words for fool according to their distinct characteristics.

The **simple fool** (peti) found in Proverbs 1:4 denotes an ignorant or immature person who is vulnerable to error but still teachable. The peti who is willing to seek help should be welcomed when he sees his own need for correction and is willing to learn and apply wisdom to a certain area of his life.

A kesil, or **hardened fool**, is stubbornly set in his ways: “As a dog returns to its vomit, so a kesil repeats his folly” (Proverbs 26:11). This type of fool so enjoys his evil ways that intervention by a sage would probably prove futile. The ewil, similar to the kesil, adds insolence and anger to his unwillingness to change (see Proverbs 29:9) and will probably respond with quarreling and wrath if you try to correct him.

The **mocking fool**, or letz, is described in Proverbs 21:24: “The proud and arrogant man—“Mocker” is his name; he behaves with overweening pride.” This fool disrupts the discussions of righteous men and women and heckles people of wisdom. His arrogant pride keeps him from admitting his need for correction. A sage would be wasting his time and effort on this kind of person.

The nabal **denies God** has an influence in his life: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalms 14:1). His disdain for holiness closes off any opportunity for you to admonish or correct him, since he doesn’t even believe that the God you love and serve cares about earthly matters.

It is evident, then, that you must exercise discernment toward those whom you choose to guide toward holiness. How easy it is to be distracted and worn down by people who keep voicing their problems over and over and yet have no real desire or intent to change. It is as though they want only to “empty their garbage” another time but have no real desire to keep their “pail” from refilling. Your heart’s desire might be to impart wisdom to try to help change the hurting and/or disobedient. But if they are determined to stay in their folly, your words will fall on deaf ears: “Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him” (Proverbs 27:22).

As we in today’s faith communities minister to people, remember the practical Hebraic focus of imparting wisdom. Simple fools can be taught and are worthy of a sage’s time and wisdom. The “hardened”, “mocking”, “angry”, and “God-denying” fools must be cut off until they repent of their depraved ways of thinking and desire wisdom in order to change. The person who is being mentored, the one seeking wisdom, needs to make it pleasant for the sage to invest his time in him. The writer of the book of Hebrews emphasizes the importance of this in 13:17, “Obey the ones leading you and submit. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

“Calling the Twelve to Him, He sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits” (Mark 6:7).

Biblical ministry that is done in groups of two or more coincides with the injunction, “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses” (2 Corinthians 13:1). As Jesus taught about a basic foundational practice of His called-out ones in confronting someone who was continuing in sinful behavior, He emphasized the Hebraic principle of “two or three” working together:

“But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’... For where **two or three come together in My name, there am I with them**” (Matthew 18:16,20).

The elders and those with whom a follower of Jesus fellowshiped could discern whether a person in sin was an unteachable fool who was unwilling to repent and receive correction. If that was the case, that individual could be cut off from the faith community until such time as he did repent. An example of this can be found in 1 Corinthians 5:4,5: “When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, **hand this man over to Satan**, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord” (emphasis added).

As Jesus sent the disciples out ahead of Him, He emphasized both the importance of ministering in two’s or three’s and of not combating those who refused to listen:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them **two by two** ahead of Him to every town and place where He was about to go. He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field... When you enter a house, first say, “Peace to this house.” **If a man of peace [a man who will listen] is there, your peace will rest on him**; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house... He who listens to you listens to Me; he who rejects you rejects Me; but he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me’ (Luke 10:1-7,16).

Keep in mind the biblical ministry and relationships that were so vital to the early Church: the respected role of sages in the faith community; ministry based on the biblical principle of “two or three witnesses”; admonishment and correction directed toward the “simple fool”; avoidance of frustrating and fruitless time spent with “hardened”, “mocking”, and “God-denying” fools.

How many people are you aware of in your own circle of acquaintances who are struggling with burdens which they have inflicted on themselves through foolishness or ignored counsel? Is God bringing to your mind any who need to be cut off in order that they might see the nature of their hardness and come to repentance? Are you willing to come alongside a simple fool in your midst and redirect his or her path in a biblical, accountable relationship?

“Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children” (Titus 2:4).

The value of an older Christian woman from a Hebraic standpoint is found in Titus 2:3-5:

“Likewise, teach the **older women to be reverent in the way they live**, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. **Then they can train the younger women** to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.”

The young Hebraic wife and mother was not expected to have all the answers for raising her children; she needed the warm wisdom of an older woman. Wives and mothers today need to set aside time to spend with those who have life stories to share of their successes and failures with their families. Why burden your children and husband with mistakes you could have avoided had you heeded someone who has already “been there”?

The “woman of noble character” cited in Proverbs 31 was most likely an older woman, as we are told that her husband “takes his seat among the elders of the land at the city gate” (v. 23). She has acquired her orderly diligence from years of caring for her household, and has exercised compassion with the poor and needy. These are worthy virtues to be passed along to younger women who are willing to reprioritize their schedules and come alongside to learn: “She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue” (v. 26).

You can easily recognize that the following admonition found in 1 Timothy 5 is counter-cultural to today’s society, but it is key to rebuilding your home:

“Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by **caring for their own family** and thus **repaying their parents and grandparents**, for this is pleasing to God. The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help ... No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been **faithful to her husband**, and is well-known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and **devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds**” (vv. 3-5,9,10, emphasis added).

All of these elements may seem inconvenient and time-consuming, but they give practical momentum to your faith. These are the visual images that your children will remember as they establish their own homes. A gradually increasing number of Christian homes are re-establishing the three-generation family and being blessed mightily as they do. Some live close enough to their own parents so that they are able to interact regularly. Others who have moved away are finding surrogate parents for themselves and grandparents for their children.

Many are encountering the beauty of home fellowships built on the Hebraic idea of extended families with older people mentoring the younger ones. Most followers of Jesus, however, have yet to experience restoration of the importance of the elderly within their congregations. If anything, it appears that congregations have become even more youth-oriented. Possibly, in the future, the changes taking place in the home will ultimately affect the congregations at large.

What relationships do you have in place who are mentoring you? If you are an older person, have you made yourself accessible to a younger individual or couple to share the life lessons you have experienced? Or, are you so over-involved in activities that such a relationship seems more like a burden than a joy?

**“Then He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.
So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath’ (Mark 2:27,28).**

Reflection, worship, rest, refreshment. Do these words accurately describe your weekly Sabbath? Originally that day was established just for the Israelites, to set them apart from all other nations in their relationship as God’s chosen people (see Exodus 31:12). A great deal of trust in God was required for them to set aside one day out of each week to refrain from labor (their source of income) to focus on worship, refreshment, and prayer. And the same principle applies to Christians today: You may plant the seeds and water them, but it is God who gives the increase (see 1 Corinthians 3:6).

How essential that you appreciate God’s plan for you to gratefully appropriate His purposes for setting aside this day! He exhorts you to keep the Sabbath rest as a blessing, “for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His” (Hebrews 4:10). The blessings you receive from observing a weekly Sabbath rest may not be tangible but they are for your good, as are all of God’s commands.

One writer notes, “Among all Jewish communities, it was understood that the whole community was responsible for ensuring that all families had the food, wine, shelter, and companionship to celebrate shabbat [Sabbath] with joy rather than pain.” Keeping the Sabbath remains a priority to observant Jewish families. According to Jewish literature, “The Jews have not kept the Sabbath, but the Sabbath has kept the Jews.”

Because the home is a “little sanctuary,” it is the joyful obligation of an observant father to pray God’s blessing over his wife and children, for “as we bless our children in Yeshua’s [Jesus’s] Name, they will grow up to be a blessing.” Our atomistic culture promotes abortion, greed, and self-idolatry. How much more our children need their parents to reinforce godly values and their worth in the image of God!

If you as a mother preserve and celebrate traditions at home that focus your family on God, you can engraft in your children a special appreciation of the bond between our Lord and His people. Praying with your children as they head off for school each day; a praise song sung before or after the family meal; music that exalts our Lord in your home; a nightly chapter from a Christian biography—these are little ways that can become big traditions in your family.

Children who are accustomed to acknowledging the presence of God in their home welcome the Sabbath like a weekly holiday. The family and the faith community are drawn together to gratefully express their appreciation to God as “living sacrifices.” Parents do so much to set the tone and content of conversations and attitudes in the home. The more you exemplify the yieldedness to God that says “Thy will, not mine,” the more your family will be transformed from the inside out to impact others for the Kingdom.

In the United States, Christian families rarely seem to look forward with delight to their weekly day of rest and worship. The Sabbath, when kept as God ordained, provides the opportunity to strengthen relationships and regain peace of mind and spiritual focus following the course of weekday demands. But if you use the Sabbath as a day to catch up on all the chores you didn’t get done during the week, you will miss the blessing for which God designed the day.

In Israel, observant Jewish people often have guests in for the Sabbath dinner to celebrate this weekly day of thanks to the Lord. The father reads Proverbs 31:10-31 to his wife and family, both as a blessing to her and as a reminder of her im-

portance to them. The Sabbath lights and wine represent relaxation, peace, joy, uplifted hearts. On this evening, the best meal of the week is presented; flowers grace the table, and conversation is enjoyed long after the Sabbath candles have burned down. There is time to share and to listen, to plan and to laugh. Since the Sabbath begins at sundown, the whole next day awaits family savoring.

Israelis work and attend school six days a week, but the Sabbath is the day for focus on the family. As one writer says, it is a “sacred day, a foretaste of heaven, pure and set apart, free from worries and problems of everyday life.” You should realize, however, that if you are not grateful to God during the rest of the week, you will probably not present genuine thanks on His day of worship. Your children, especially, will be sensitive to notice if you are “expressing holy joy” in your worship when you have been expressing an entirely different attitude on the home front.

Our Father has the same disdain today for those who “honor [Him] with their lips, but their hearts are far from [Him]” (see Isaiah 29:13) as when those words were originally penned. Be quick to respond to the convicting prompting of the Holy Spirit so that you may be a fit vessel available for God’s use all week long!

Chapter 14. The Early Church – Humble, Hebraic, & Spirit-Filled

“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the called-out ones”
(1 Corinthians 14:26).

Jesus and the twelve apostles had laid for the Church the complete foundation for life in Him. Everything that believers needed to know about enacting their faith in a manner pleasing to God had been made known to the early Church. As disciples of Christ nurtured in a Hebraic cradle, His followers defined their faith in terms of trust and reliance upon the God of Creation. Specific doctrines and dogma were not as important to them as love for their heavenly Father that expressed itself in obedience.

True worship of God focused on preoccupation with Him rather than on the ways of the world. Religious perfection, i.e., “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48), was an unattainable standard, but it represented a goal for righteous living that was a lifelong process. In one sense, “walking with God” could be summed up in this: **“Fear God and keep His commandments**, for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

The practices and structure of the early Church were modeled after those of the synagogue, as evidenced by “the appointment of elders and the adoption of the service of prayer. The provision of a daily dole for widows and the needy reflect[ed] current synagogue practices.” There are so few descriptions and instructions about church gatherings in the Newer Testament because the apostles did not have to explain what was so very well known to the Jewish followers of Jesus who comprised the early Church.

Apostles and evangelists were already functioning in the synagogues prior to the time of Christ. Elders and deacons oversaw the gatherings and collected and distributed alms for the needy. Their activities were not new developments beginning with the Church age. The synagogue model for congregational gatherings provided the freedom for participation noted in 1 Corinthians 14:26, quoted above. As Paul instructs in Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you **teach and admonish one another** with all wisdom, and as you **sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs** with gratitude in your hearts to God” (emphasis added).

The Jewish people not only recognized their individual worth and standing before God; they also held fast to their sense of belonging to the Jewish people as a whole. The covenants that God had made with their ancestors Noah, Abraham, and David were unique among agreements and treaties that tied man to man and God to man. The gulf of inequality that lay between the holy God and the sinful people had been unilaterally bridged by God.

A “smoking fire pot and a blazing torch” (see Genesis 15:17), precursors of the cloud and the pillar of fire that would lead the Israelites from Egyptian captivity, had passed through the sacrificed animals and sealed the covenant between Abraham and his God. Abraham himself did not pass through; God’s endorsement was sufficient. Even while in dispersion and captivity, that profound awareness of being the people of God caused the Israelites to solidify their oral traditions of God’s relationship with Israel into the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. These Scriptures then became the framework for preserving their distinct identity.



In a similar manner, the early Jewish believers appreciated their unique relationship with God based on the righteousness of Christ. They also clung to one another as a community, a “body”, in which each belonged to the other. The Holy Spirit was their seal of acceptance or chosenness, “a deposit guaranteeing [their] inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession” (Ephesians 1:14).

Modeling the synagogue, the early Church encouraged spiritual gifts to be manifested, since each person was expected to take part in worship and to be edified. The manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the believers’ individual and communal lives demonstrated their continual awareness of God’s proximity and concern for His people. Communal participation as an essential feature of the synagogue was the basis for early Church gatherings.

What we today might refer to as “body life” was an essential element of that communal awareness of the Spirit. A Jew of Jesus’s time who was captive to his own private needs and interests would have been characterized as a unbeliever. The person who ignored the distress around him reflected little belief in the God Who is the ultimate Provider of all that is necessary for life:

“If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you. Do not take interest of any kind from him, but fear your God, so that your countryman may continue to live among you” (Leviticus 25:35,36).

Just as the prophets had spoken in broad terms of “giving” as a requirement of God, the halakhahs established by the elders translated giving into something doable to reflect the work of God in the believer: “Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath but righteousness [tzedekah, which could be translated as charity] delivers from death” (Proverbs 11:4). This theme parallels James 2:14-17, in which the brotherhood/family aspect of load-bearing is further defined:

“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well-fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, **faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.**”

Because of the deeply-seated identity of the Jews as being made in the image of God, their concept of true charity was to provide the needy with the conditions that would maintain their dignity. The ultimate goal was to establish the means for the individual to provide for himself. Consider a Hebraic example of charity. A young woman was left orphaned. The goal of those who wanted to help her was to find her a suitable husband when she reached the appropriate age. While her immediate economic needs had to be met, of greater concern was her need for the dignity and respect that marriage would bring. How different from the current welfare system that perpetuates and, in a sense, rewards dependency on public assistance from one generation to the next!

The early Christian congregations believed that the Lord was present in their gatherings through His Spirit: “For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20). Paul had admonished them to let their “gentleness be evident to all [for] **the Lord is near**” (Philippians 4:5, emphasis added). God’s proximity had earlier been noted by Isaiah: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit” (57:15). No hierarchical positions of authority had been established in their synagogues, and none were needed in the infant Church.

One writer puts it this way. “As understood by the Jewish people, the work of the Holy Spirit among God’s people would be recognized by teaching and practicing God’s Word, by performing kind deeds, and by sacrificing one’s time and resources for the sake of fellow believers—and all this with a joyful heart!” The Holy Spirit would illuminate elements of godly living to lead a follower of Jesus to seek changes toward righteousness. The individual seeking holiness would then be responsible to help others toward a more righteous walk. Again, the focus was on the communal participation and benefit: Obedience to God that resulted in being equipped to help one’s brother and sister.

**“Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,
and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matthew 20:26,27).**

In these verses Jesus presented the inviolable groundwork for leadership for the apostles and for all subsequent leaders of faith communities. They were not to rule but to serve. He warned them, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **Not so with you**” (Matthew 20:25,26, emphasis added). Even Peter demanded no preeminence among other elders: “To the elders among you, **I appeal as a fellow elder**... Shepherd God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers” (1 Peter 5:1,2, emphasis added).

Revisionist writers, however, have altered the facts and circumstances regarding church structure that would have been understood during biblical times. These alterations became particularly evident during the fourth century after the time of Constantine when the Roman Empire merged with the organized church. The ecclesiastical powers at that time tried to project back to the apostolic era a hierarchical ruling authority among the apostles. This ladder of power, however, was a phenomenon which neither the apostles exercised nor the Bible supported. Thus the ecclesiastical authorities had to invent an “altered truth” in order to maintain their vested interest in the rule and domination that they had copied from the Roman Empire.

Jews who were serious about their faith were expected to set an example for those who were looking to them for wisdom. The lifestyle expected by God was made clear in Micah 6:8: “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To **act justly** and to **love mercy** and to **walk humbly** with your God” (emphasis added). A large number of Hebrew words describe mercy, which could be defined in this context as good will, lovingkindness, loyalty. “Acting”, “loving”, and “walking” are action words of direct intervention that modeled the standard Jesus set in His command to all His followers: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

Those with the gift of leadership participated in a hands-on approach, “eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to [them], but **being examples to the flock**”(1 Peter 5:2,3). Failure to understand the true servant nature of the apostles has caused much confusion and division in the church over the centuries. The Gentile church writers of the third century had begun to interpret the Bible in light of the prevailing Roman Empire government system that they were in the process of adopting. The leadership parameters revealed in Scripture were secondary to them. The gift of pastor developed into “clergy,” vested with ecclesiastical and regulatory power that totally contradicted the servant leadership of the Newer Testament.

If today’s Christians are honest, the biblical gift of pastor is no longer viewed as a spiritual gift but as a paid professional occupation like the vocations of the world.

Chapter 15. The Early Church – Built On Relational Priorities

The diagram (below) captures the crucial relational connectedness of the Hebraic early Church. Their relationship with our Father through His Son Jesus was central, sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Next in priority was the intimate sanctity of the home, supported by close relationships that met in the home. For a while they also gathered at the synagogue or temple. However, a number of unbelieving Jews took offense at their trust in Messiah Jesus and eventually forced them out.



- For Jews the home, not the synagogue, was the primary place for spiritual development.
- The extended spiritual family of the home fellowship cultivated caring personal support among close friends and neighbors who interacted openly and freely, while the synagogue was the site for mutual participation in worship and study. [In Volume 3 we will show how our Lord is restoring these biblical priorities to the collective church today.]

In the early Church, followers of Jesus functioned according to the gifts that the Holy Spirit had manifested in each believer. Only in this participatory form of the synagogue and home fellowships could these words of the writer of the book of Hebrews make sense: “And let us consider how we may **spur one another on toward love and good deeds**. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us **encourage one another**—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24,25, emphasis added). To “spur one another on” and to “encourage one another” can only occur in a personal participative gathering of believers.

“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Galatians 5:6).

Love is the basic principle upon which all of God’s order is founded. God had singled out Abraham to direct his children to “keep the way of the Lord by doing what was right and just” as a response to His lovingkindness (see Genesis 18:19). The goal of Judaism was to teach mankind to love. The Torah of the Hebrew Scriptures cited three commandments relative to love:

- Love God (see Deuteronomy 6:5), which was expressed by serving Him through worship and obedience to His commands. This service was motivated not by fear of punishment or desire for reward but purely out of a desire to express one’s devotion to God.

• Love your neighbor (see Leviticus 19:18) required practical application of acts of loving kindness at personal cost to the believer. Whether or not your neighbor reciprocated in kind or even expressed gratitude was irrelevant.

• But it was in the realm of loving strangers (see Leviticus 19:34), those who probably couldn't repay a favor or perhaps even acknowledge the giver, that the manifestation of God's work from within was most clearly seen.

Love that is sincere and truly concerned for the well-being of others is, in a sense, independent of the specific object of that love. Righteous acts of love are done because they are right to do and in your power to choose to do, not because they might be coerced by legal requirements.

Prior to yielding his life to God, Mike did not understand the kind of love that Paul was referring to. Sacrificial love was an alien concept to him as far as his religious experience went because he was consumed by church activity. The positions he served and the programs he was involved with kept him busy representing the church leadership but added nothing to his search for intimacy with the Lord. Our Father, however, tilled the ground of his spirit to deepen his understanding.

This is Mike's account of witnessing firsthand what sincere, sacrificial love in an authentic follower of Jesus looks like:

"Dick Shand was a helicopter pilot at the same Navy base I was stationed. He was the first man I had ever met who unabashedly called himself a "Christian." He exuded an incredible peace, and his kind and gentle demeanor was noticed and appreciated by everyone. One of the assignments we performed involved retrieving drones, or unmanned missile targets, from the ocean. Dick, an experienced pilot, had flown these missions often. One afternoon he encountered difficulties when the retrieval lines from the drone tangled around the rear helicopter rotor blades. Realizing that the aircraft would soon fall thousands of feet spinning helplessly out of control, Dick ordered the crew to bail out. Everyone managed to jump clear except the co-pilot, who got snagged against an outside wheel mount. Alone in the cockpit of the rapidly descending helicopter, Dick did the only thing that could free his helpless friend. He aimed the nose of the aircraft straight at the ocean below, throwing the man free but guaranteeing his own demise. The co-pilot lived, watching in horror as the helicopter exploded on impact."

A brass placard bearing Dick's name stands in the chapel garden of Point Mugu Naval Air Station. It reads: "Greater love has no man than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." It is with this "dead to self" attitude that followers of Christ are to be available through the Holy Spirit to respond to our Father's promptings to love.

Who have you known personally that has demonstrated this kind of heroic sacrificial love? What impact, if any, do testimonies of heroism and martyrdom make on your devotion to God or to others? Would you be willing to ask God to show you ways to "lay down your life" that would bring glory to Him and provide opportunity for you to share your reason for so doing?

"Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant" (1 Corinthians 12:1).

Paul's exhortation to the Church in 1 Corinthians 13 describes various attributes of love. Love is patient, kind, humble, long-suffering, forgiving, rejoicing, protecting, trusting, hoping, persevering. This chapter is often quoted at weddings since spouses will certainly have opportunities to exercise these qualities before very long!

Of greater importance to the body of the Church, however, is the "love chapter's" location between the teachings in chapters twelve and fourteen regarding the exercise of spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost to bestow gifts from God that would strengthen His Church. Every follower of Jesus in that upper room was touched by Him. In the same way every believer today is so gifted.

We should distinguish between the "fruit" of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.) and the "gifts" of the Spirit (such as healing, administration, exhortation). The fruit are the manifestations of the Spirit in your everyday life. They reflect the character of Jesus brought about in you by the work of the Holy Spirit. You know, for example, that God has developed the fruit of patience and self-control in your life when some driver cuts you off and you are able to just smile and say, "Thank you, Lord, that we weren't in an accident!"

The gifts are the manifestations of the Spirit through you in service in order to build up and edify the church. What glory our Father receives when those who are endowed with a mercy gift are poured out among the lonely and needy in a nursing home or hospital! To understand the church as a "living spiritual organism", you need to grasp why God imparts gifts to His people. The Greek word for gift, "charisma," comes from a verb meaning "to show favor, to give freely." It is re-

lated to the word charis, which means “grace”. A spiritual gift is not the same as a natural talent. It is not something you already possessed as part of your human nature but something given by God after your conversion.

The gifts of the Spirit are also referred to as “pneumatikon”, as in “manifestation of the Spirit” (see 1 Corinthians 12:7). The indwelling Spirit manifests His presence in each follower of Jesus through the particular gift He has imparted. This He gives with the power to use it and the wisdom to know when to use it (when you quiet your spirit to ask!). You remain a free agent, however, to decide whether or not to obey His prompting. “All these [gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and **He gives them** to each one, just as **He determines**” (1 Corinthians 12:11, emphasis added).

These gifts, unmerited by the believer, emanate not from natural inclinations or hope for recognition but from God’s desire to be glorified through us. The Holy Spirit knows what gifts are necessary to accomplish the work He desires to do through each person in an intimate setting such as a home fellowship, or in a larger group of believers. The Lord spoke of the Spirit as “power [dunamis, dynamic power] from on high” (see Luke 24:49). Again Jesus said:

“**But you will receive power** when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will **be My witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, emphasis added).

Paul insisted that his preaching was “not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the **Spirit’s power** not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught **by the Holy Spirit**” (1 Corinthians 2:4,13, emphasis added). Recognizing his own limitations, Paul relied on the wisdom and power of God Himself. Since the Holy Spirit was so essential to the work of the early Church, followers of Jesus today must regain a biblical understanding of His importance. Unfortunately, as the term is currently used, “charismatic” seems to apply more to a lively form of worship than to the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in everyday living.

What then is a spiritual gift? Simply the Holy Spirit working through His people in a given manner at the time He chooses so that they can carry out the ministry appointed to them by God: “Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the called-out ones” (1 Corinthians 14:12). As one brother has commented, “Every believer has a gift or gifts apportioned to him or her. Every believer is responsible to exercise those gifts. Every believer has some gift, therefore all should be encouraged. No one has all the gifts, therefore all should be humble. All gifts are for the one Body, therefore all should be harmonious. All gifts are from the Lord, therefore all should be content” (emphasis added).

Followers of Christ are privileged to be gifted, yet are held accountable by our Father to exercise that privilege. Do you have an understanding of how God plans to use your spiritual gift or gifts to benefit the body of believers around you? On a scale of 1 to 10, would you classify yourself as a “zealous user of my spiritual gifts in the body and in the world” or as a “complacent spectator who would be apprehensive to use my gifts”? Have you been in situations in which you have called upon specific believers to exercise their gifts on your behalf, such as for service, giving, or showing mercy in a tangible way? What benefits would derive in your congregation if each believer manifested the gifts of the Spirit to one another?

“**It was He who gave some to be... evangelists**” (Ephesians 4:11).

“**To Timothy my true son in the faith**” (1 Timothy 1:2).

“**To Titus, my true son in the common faith**” (Titus 1:4).

Many Bible commentaries call the letters to Timothy and Titus the “pastoral” epistles. That is unfortunate. Both Titus and Timothy were missionary/evangelists exhorted by fellow missionary/evangelist Paul to tend to the faith communities in Ephesus and Crete, among other places. They were to train up qualified men for leadership so that these two men could then be on their way to plant the gospel in other areas such as Troas, Dalmatia, Macedonia, Corinth, and Thessalonica. Paul exhorts Timothy: “But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the **work of an evangelist**, discharge **all the duties of your ministry**” (2 Timothy 4:5, emphasis added).

The ministry of an evangelist, or “church planter,” was not something entirely new at the time of Christ. In the Jewish practice, men appointed by the Great Sanhedrin traveled to wherever there were colonies of Jews. They were to see to the appointment of elders (zakens), mature men of God) in the synagogues. Evangelists such as Paul, Timothy, Titus, Silas, and Barnabas were representatives of the Church as a whole. If Judaism was somewhat missionary in spirit, the Christianity of the Bible was intended to be primarily missionary, making the work of the evangelist that much more important.

It was Paul’s normal practice to establish a congregation of believers wherever he preached. These new followers of Jesus needed training in propagating their faith because Paul expected them to do just that, to evangelize their own village

and neighboring regions! The Hebraic understanding of faith was enactment, putting into practice what was known to be pleasing to God.

Many of today's denominational and independent congregations have been started by pastors rather than by the evangelist-church planter of the Bible. The pattern of the biblical evangelist was to start a church and disciple the believers, making himself dispensable once the flock was established with elders in place. We have no statistical information, but our experience, which covers many denominations and independent congregations in southern New England, demonstrated that a number of churches which have been started by pastors have ultimately been destroyed by them. The pastor's pre-eminent position as "clergy" and the increasing desire to control the growth and direction of the church in the end ravaged what he had started. (In other painful situations, the pastor was simply forced out by a congregation no longer willing to follow his lead.)

Regrettably, within a few centuries after the time of Christ, the influence of Roman governmental/hierarchical organization shifted the work of "church repair" from the spiritually gifted evangelist to ecclesiastical representatives: bishops or, later, superintendents. With the demise of the evangelist's ministry of church planting and church rehabilitation, the ecclesiastical office of bishop assumed greater authority. The bishop, removed from personal contact with the congregation, was in no position to fire up spiritual zeal and generate unity among the people. The missionary/evangelist who had ministered, raised up, encouraged, and exhorted in the spirit of Paul and Timothy and Titus became a biblical bygone.

An outgrowth of the ecclesiastical structure and organization adapted from the Romans was the elevation of the clergy class. This led to the pursuit of "outsiders" for local pastoral ministry. Rather than developing and exercising the spiritual gifts found within a body of believers, trained professionals were brought into a congregation to function in a wide variety of roles. This trend continues to the present and has brought about a pattern of "outsider ministry" by individuals who generally have no prior history of relationship with other members of the congregation. The pattern of spectator passivity is thus perpetuated. An article by Nicholas B. Tatro entitled "Interim Ministers Answer Calling of Churches in Need" appeared in The Hartford (Conn.) Courant. The reporter stated,

"The studies [by The Alban Institute, a church research organization] found that new pastors did not last long when they went to churches that had been in conflict or where the [previous] pastor had served a long time... The [interim] ministers are barred from being candidates for the permanent position. With nothing personal at stake, they can be expected to make the hard decisions that a new permanent pastor might shy away from." The interim pastor has few intimate relationships in the congregation to motivate him or her to exert the effort necessary to train up leaders or disciple the flock into useful ministry.

The concept of "interim pastor" is based on the revisionist policy of leaning on current experience rather than appropriating from Scripture the importance of the evangelist's ministry to bring healing to troubled churches. In other words, if society at large relies on professional outside help, then the church seems validated by doing likewise. The way in which the quoted reporter writes about the interims who have "nothing personal at stake" reminds us of the trustees assigned by the courts to take over corporations filing for bankruptcy. Normally heedless of the needs of the employees, they seek through any means to get to the "bottom line."

We truly believe that there is an urgent need for the church today to return to the evangelist/church planter model given to believers in the Bible and exemplified by Paul. If your pastor left next week, do you think that your congregation could/would function as a body if no replacement pastor were sought? Why or why not? What would need to be done in order for your congregation to function effectively as the body of Christ?

Chapter 16. The Early Church – Led By Age And Wisdom

“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might ... appoint elders” (Titus 1:5).

The term elder is used frequently in the Newer Testament to designate those appointed to leadership in a local congregation. The Hebrew word for elder, zaken, refers to a gray beard, especially in the context of growing older. In other words, to be an elder, age and the wisdom that came from experience were important criteria for appointment. Exercise of wisdom was certainly necessary for the well-being of followers of Jesus:

“Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. shepherd the church of God, which He bought with His own blood... So be on your guard!” (Acts 20:28,31, emphasis added).

The average age of elders that Mike dealt with in his years as a counselor to church leaders was mid-thirties to late forties. Where were the gray-haired sages, the zakens, the wise older men with experience and perspective?

Paul twice references Aquila and Priscilla and “the church that meets in their house” (Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19). Home gatherings were not an unusual situation. As one writer puts it, in the first century “family ties and church worship went together, ... church authority and family authority were often indistinguishable, ... ‘honor thy father and thy mother’ were not different from spiritual accountability in the church... It is likely that the synagogues of the Newer Testament period as well as the Gentile-run churches of the Newer Testament period mainly consisted of a cluster of extended families guided by the elders of those families” (emphasis added).

The Pharisees inadvertently contributed to the practice of followers of Jesus meeting in homes. Increasingly concerned about the politicization of the temple high priesthood, the Pharisees encouraged worship to be exercised in the home as well as in the temple. Even temple purification rites were adapted into personal observances for home practice.

As American families have become so fragmented and often geographically distant, it would be impossible for most to gather intergenerationally for regular worship and sharing. However, there is a pattern here that is worth considering: Establishing elders who have already exhibited through the impact they have had on others’ lives a particular leadership capacity based on relationships with the people they are leading. Strangers who have been called in from afar for leadership roles in the local body are not mentioned in the Bible. Since elders were already a part of the synagogue structure, Jewish believers quite naturally accepted the “shepherding” and “pastoring” of the zakens.

We today must seize the early Church emphasis on elders—older experienced men, not novices with seminary degrees—to function in pastoring and shepherding capacities. Job sheds light on the responsibilities of an elder in his community: “Think how you have **instructed many**, how you have **strengthened feeble hands**. Your words have **supported those who stumbled**; you have **strengthened faltering knees**... Men listened expectantly, waiting in silence for my counsel” (Job 4:4,5;29:21). Job further commented that he had rescued the poor and fatherless and had put on righteousness and justice as garments (see Job 29:11-17). These actions spoke of a life motivated by love for people.

The communal life of the church body demanded that the elder’s role was “teaching people, leading and guiding people, protecting people, admonishing people, visiting the sick, caring for the needy, and seeking those who stray. Eldership is shepherding people.” Wise leaders with a Hebraic understanding of eldership would model these qualities so that the members of a congregation could learn to minister them to one another in their smaller home settings of relationship.

First Timothy 5:17 makes it clear that not all the elders in the Newer Testament churches were actually preachers or teachers: “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, **especially** those whose work is preaching and teaching” (emphasis added). That which is today considered the most essential equipment of a pastor, dynamic preaching, is not mandated for him in the Word.

Within the synagogue, sharing wisdom was a privilege for any and all male members of the congregation, not just the elders. Nowhere in the Newer Testament is it stated that an elder must be gifted by the Spirit as a teacher, but simply that he is “**able to teach**” (see 1 Timothy 3:2). Mutual participation was fully expected by all within the gatherings of followers of Jesus:

“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, **everyone** has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. **All of these must be done** for the strengthening of the church” (1 Corinthians 14:26, emphasis added).

Nowhere in the Scriptures is “administration of sacraments” mentioned. Since 1 Peter 2:9 refers to all believers as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood,” the elder is a “priest” serving among a company of “priests,” ministering to his fellow believers in a servant-leadership capacity.

First Timothy 4:14 instructs, “Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the **body of elders** laid their hands on you” (emphasis added). The group of elders in each congregation constituted a distinct subset, a presbytery. These men are referred to in the Newer Testament in the plural form, elders, indicating that more than one were present in each congregation.

There is no evidence of a hierarchy in this group. Rather, they were equal in authority in each local faith community. It was not until the second century that a change in this equality appeared. Ignatius, an early Church Father, recorded the emergence of a hierarchy in the churches of Syria and Asia. This situation finds a biblical parallel in 1 Samuel 8: The people, tired of God’s rule, wanted a king like all the surrounding nations had. Twelve hundred years after Samuel, the church was looking to the Roman Empire as its model for government.

One other development occurred in the creation of a professional clergy class. It had been the general practice in both synagogue and early Church for the elders and rabbis to earn their living through outside employment. Work was an honorable institution in Hebraic society, as it had been given to Adam before the fall. With the rise of Hellenist influence that separated the secular from the spiritual, leadership became encouraged to insulate themselves from common concerns. The congregation was counted on to fund this pursuit of the “higher calling” of spiritual endeavor. By the end of the fourth century, the division between the congregational laity and the paid clergy had become cemented. (This will be covered more fully in a later chapter.)

Once the church had been penetrated with the Hellenistic influence of separation between “the sacred spiritual soul” and “the common physical body”, the political systems of that time could make inroads. A hand-picked individual with a personal dynamic style of leadership could be elevated and selected to make decisions that would represent the whole body. The need for individual believers to bear the responsibility of hearing from the Holy Spirit for themselves diminished to the point of being nullified by the hierarchy. The foundations laid by the apostles could then be disregarded as obsolete, or “revised” in light of the current culture.

Does your congregation take seriously the requirements for elders listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1? In the midst of your congregation, are there wise, older men who fit the biblical parameters for an elder? Do these individuals earnestly seek God for direction and ministry among the flock?

“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and He is in heaven” (Matthew 23:8,9).

When we first visited our Jerusalem kehilah (kuh-hee’-lah), or congregation, we were at a loss to figure out who the pastor was. Actually, the bulletin listed four pastors, but with so many from the body participating in sharing a testimony or concern, leading a song, or reading from the Word, no one person stood out!

Not one of over 25,000 Christian documents from the early era of the Church makes any reference to a clergyman. Even the most saintly and humble person—the revered and much loved leader of a devoted congregation—inevitably makes his followers dependent upon him, like little children. It is not his faults, but his virtues, his fame and richness of spirit, which hold them back and prevent them from growing up themselves. They do so only when he is gone.

Just as the rabbi of a synagogue functioned as a learned teacher, the elders of the congregations modeled righteous living and clarified how the Scriptures should be followed on a daily basis. Co-equal with all the other members of the congregation, neither a rabbi nor the elders were part of a special class referred to by title. Not until the second century did the title “rabbi” signify anything beyond an informal term of honor for a learned mentor.

As “servant leaders,” elders did not occupy the hierarchical positions that are seen in the church today. Their status was based upon spiritual maturity from years of obtaining and enacting wisdom, which their silver hair exemplified. Whether followers of Jesus of today call a person “Father” or “Pastor” or “Bishop”, they violate the intent of Jesus to keep

His disciples free from titles and the resultant intermediary roles that the high priests of the temple system exercised. With the sacrifice of Jesus, no other intermediary was necessary:

“Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is **also interceding for us**” (Romans 8:34).

The evolution of the church into a hierarchical structure brought with it the rise of conventions and councils. At these councils, ecclesiastical authorities developed doctrines and traditions based on their own interpretation of Scripture. Unfortunately, as centuries passed, decisions were grounded more often on previous traditional writings than on the inerrant standard of God’s Word. The authority assigned to these council-generated decisions further removed individual congregants from Spirit-led participation.

The church today has deviated greatly from the early Church that quietly waited on the Lord’s guidance. Christian gatherings have metamorphosed into assemblies run by professionals who dispense doctrines hammered out through rhetorical arguments at denominational councils and conventions, doctrines which do nothing to develop Christlikeness in individual believers.

**Is there a way to get back to what the early Church
had going for itself in
relational intimacy and spiritual power?
Yes, there is!**

Glossary For Volume 2

Apperception

Interpreting new information based on previous facts you already know to be true. In other words, a newer teaching or practice is evaluated in light of older, proven truths. If the newer teaching or practice doesn't match up to the older true teaching, then it's skewed and unreliable. Jesus often apperceived the Hebrew Scriptures by basing His teachings on passages His hearers were familiar with and knew were true.

Avodah

The Hebrew word for both work and worship. Your true worship of God begins in experiencing grateful joy in the work you do as you experience purpose and meaning in it.

Block logic

An Hebraic pattern of reasoning in which individual verses and passages don't always have to agree or fit into sequential order, especially when they are referring to God. The Hebraic understanding is that God defies rational explanation; therefore there are facets of His Person and His character that don't coincide with our own ideas of Who He should be.

Called-out ones

The collective Body of Christ as the Church universal, (literally the ekklesia) of the sons and daughters He has called out of the world system with its self-serving values, goals and ways. The phrase called-out ones distinguishes Christ's Spirit-filled followers from the institutional organizations of religious practitioners.

Communal awareness

The conscious realization of being connected with others like you worldwide, such as individual Jews knowing that they belong to all other Jews on earth. This sense of communal belonging undergirded early believers who recognized that each one belonged to Jesus individually, yet each was also part of all believers everywhere. Much of the Newer Testament has been written using plural word forms based on this interconnectedness among all followers of Jesus.

Covenant

From a biblical point of view, a relationship of permanent commitment, whether between God and His people (Israel in the Older Testament and followers of Jesus in the Newer Testament), or between a man and a woman in marriage. Each covenant of God carries with it His promises and man's responsibilities if he accepts God's terms.

Elders

Older men of wisdom, compassion and experience who guide, safeguard, shepherd, counsel and disciple others in an extended spiritual family. The term literally means "gray-bearded" and is a role worthy of respect because they fulfill God's plans for leadership within a faith family. These are the shepherd/teacher spoken of in Ephesians 4:11 to equip the followers of Jesus for service and unity.

Emunah

The Hebrew word for trust in God from an emotional response from your heart that transforms your goals and desires through the Spirit's work in you. By contrast is to simply believe with the mind by giving intellectual assent to a factual statement. To truly trust in God requires that you wholeheartedly yield yourself to Him unconditionally.

Halakhah

The Hebrew root word, halak, means "to walk." Thus, halakhah refers to walking out your life in a way that coincides with God's Word. Halakhah deals with the Bible-based decisions and responsibilities you encounter in your concrete daily existence for a life that pleases God.

Hebraic

The foundational motivation of love-grounded obedient trust in the God of the Bible as He has made Himself known through the inerrant written text and through the Living Word, the Lord Jesus. In the pattern of the first Hebrew, Abraham, Hebraic understanding of an ongoing walk of obedient trust expects a follower of Jesus to adopt and put into practice in their everyday lives the truths that are pleasing to God and are empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This calls for

relational priorities which are marked by personal holiness and a moment-by-moment awareness of His presence which filters through all other relationships.

Hellenistic

A philosophical worldview fostered by ancient Greek culture in which the material body is evil and only the spiritual is good. Through this influence, spiritual expression became institutionalized. Thus a holy clergy class were intermediaries between God and man, and the “laity” of commoners were confined to silence in the pews. Worship could take place only in “God’s house.”

Load-bearing

The love-motivated relational intimacy that’s empowered by the Holy Spirit and enacted among authentic family in Jesus. They practice “one-anothering” by shouldering burdens, sharing pain, rejoicing together and coming alongside each other as brothers and sisters.

Logos

The Greek term for “word” representing God’s unchangeable ways and thoughts. The Bible is a part of God’s logos that’s been written down for man, and Jesus is referred to as the Logos, the Living Word.

Minyan

Any gathering of ten Jewish men as a quorum to represent a congregation before God.

Replacement Theology

A prevailing misconception within much of Christianity that the Church has replaced Israel in all of God’s divine plans. Many scriptural passages that pertain to the Jewish people are now “spiritualized” to be blessings to the Church, while any of God’s curses pertain to the Jew.

Revisionism

A widely used practice of rewording historical truth and facts by manipulating them to fit current social agendas or cultural standards. For example, revisionist writings and councils convinced the Church to adopt the autocratic system of the Roman government with which it became enmeshed. Hellenist-influenced revisionists severed the continuity of the Hebrew Scriptures with the Newer Testament so that God’s Laws were discarded and His grace was perverted into lawlessness.

Rhema

A Greek term meaning “word”, it is that specific word spoken directly and individually from God to the believer through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings a particular portion of the total counsel of God for man, His logos, to a particular time and individual.

Zaken

Older men of wisdom, compassion and experience who guide, safeguard, shepherd, counsel and disciple others in an extended spiritual family. The term literally means “gray-bearded” and is a role worthy of respect because they fulfill God’s plans for leadership within a faith family.

Volume 3. How Christianity Lost Its Hebraic Roots

Chapter 17. The Loss Of Our Hebraic Roots

As this volume will detail, the Hebraic roots which nurtured the fledgling Church were gradually discarded in favor of the more prevalent influence, Hellenistic (or Greek) philosophical thought. The simple organization of neighborhoods of believers ministering to those around them faded as man's system of management and power overtook the various cultures into which the Gospel had spread. The most powerful system known at that time, the might of Rome, would ultimately become the standard of ecclesiastical organization for the centuries to follow.

Don't be surprised that the Church was vulnerable to an evolution process that ripped her Hebraic roots out from under her. Even the Jews at the time of Christ had been confronted with exalting their traditions to a level regarded as more sacrosanct than God's Word:

[Jesus] replied, 'Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.' And He said to them: 'You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!' (Mark 7:6-9, emphasis added).

Today Christians must ask themselves, "Did God plan for the Church to become syncretistic and adopt the pagan elements and practices that fill so many of its activities today? Was there a complete foundation for the Church laid by the Newer Testament writers who drew upon the Hebrew Bible and incorporated the teaching and practices of those who feared God?" Once you are able to detect the extent to which Hellenist thought and Roman organization have infiltrated the church to this present day, you can then prepare your heart to return to that which the first believers held so strongly:

- an intimate and obedient relational walk with their Lord;
- strong, devoted marriages with families trained in their homes to treasure their God;
- load-bearing, relational fellowships of believers walking out their faith in ministry to one another and to a needy world;
- Spirit-empowered church-planters linked devotionally to senders;
- newly established pockets of believers becoming equipped to reproduce themselves through God's power.

"If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you" (Romans 11:17,18).

At this point you may be asking yourself, "How was the Hebraic influence lost?" These three chapters review the dissolution of our Jewish roots after the time of Christ as inroads were established by **Hellenist philosophy** and **Roman organization**.

From the biblical period to the present day one would be hard-pressed to find a single century in which the Church has not in some significant way contributed to the anguish of the Jewish people. Although the term "anti-Semitism" did not come into use until 1879 (it was coined by a German political agitator), it soon became associated with hatred of all things Jewish. The Jewish community worldwide cannot forget the atrocities perpetrated against them by the Christian church in the name of Christ.

To the disgrace of humanity, expression of Jew hatred continues, from subtle degrading comments to gross violence. For instance, the prosperity that new freedom was supposed to bring to the people of the former Soviet Union has failed to materialize. Out of their poverty and misery, the people are again seeking a scapegoat. As reported in an article entitled "Jews Need Divine Help As Anti-Semitism Rises", Jews in the former USSR are suffering "harassment, physical violence, vandalism and desecration of their synagogues and cemeteries. As many as one hundred and thirty-seven publications blame Jews for all of Russia's ills."

The influence of our Jewish roots seems to have disappeared early in the history of the church. Why has no serious attempt been made to reestablish our Hebraic heritage before now? Many factors have affected this. A large and influential segment of the church has clung to an unscriptural **replacement theology** attitude: the Body of Christ has become the "new Israel," replacing the Jews as the chosen people of God.

Next, there is potential embarrassment to the church establishment if the **vitriolic anti-Semitism of some of the early Church Fathers** is revealed. These men have been held in such reverence by Christianity that disputing even one point of their teachings could brand someone a heretic. Other points of their teachings might then come into question.



Since the Newer Testament model of the Church was lost in the early centuries after Christ's ascension, many of today's church practices came about as a result of the writings of the "Church Fathers". Many of these men had been influenced by Hellenist philosophy; some of their writings were also virulently anti-Semitic.

"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city" (Luke 21:20,21).

Fear and intimidation characterized the means by which the Romans ruled their subjects. The penalty for rebellion was death, often by crucifixion. The Sanhedrin, or Jewish ruling party, feared that Jesus would "rock the boat" of their orderly little world, a fear that was indeed justified. Far better, as Caiaphas had said, that one man die for the people than the whole nation perish.

The Romans would not hesitate to wipe out the entire Jewish population of Jerusalem if they caused too much trouble. If this "Messiah" led enough followers into believing that they would be freed from Roman oppression by his kingship, then all the Jews would suffer the consequences. This was serious. Not only were there three million Jews living inside Palestine at that time, there were also four million others scattered around the Roman-dominated world. All, in a sense, were vulnerable to retribution by their military oppressors.

The non-Messianic Jews, those who did not proclaim Jesus as the Anointed One of God, were divided into two camps: the spiritual Jews, who believed that if they prayed, fasted, and performed good works, God would intervene on their behalf; and the Zealots (called Sicarii, or "daggermen"), who relied on insurrection against the Roman occupation to bring about freedom.

Within four decades after the ascension of Jesus, Rome's contempt for the Jews turned to violence when the Jews of Jerusalem displayed open hostility against their authority. Florus, the Roman procurator, had stolen large sums of silver from the Temple. The Jews responded with bold anger. Eleazar the priest put an end to the daily sacrifice for the emperor's health. The Zealots overran the Roman garrison in Jerusalem, driving out the soldiers. The First Jewish Revolt against Rome had begun. The Zealots, however, could not hold out for long against the military power of Rome. With the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, the Temple—the heart of Judaism for worship of God and atonement by animal sacrifice—was destroyed, fulfilling Jesus's words, "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). An estimated 100,000 Jews had died by sword or famine, or had been enslaved.

The brewing unrest of the Zealots did not go unnoticed by the Jewish Christian community. Perhaps remembering Jesus's words recorded for us in Matthew 24:16, "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains," followers of Jesus headed for safety in Pella in the Perea region, about 60 miles northeast of Jerusalem. The Zealots and other Jews who had opted to stay and fight the Romans in Jerusalem perceived as traitorous those who had fled, widening the division between the two groups. This flight marked a turning point in the relationship between Judaism and the Church. Up until the de-

struction of the Temple in AD 70, the Jewish Christians had been regarded as a sect within Judaism. Only after the First Jewish Revolt did the Church gradually become recognized as an entity separate from the Jewish religion.

The loss of their Temple, however, did not minimize the worship of the Hebraic Christians. Their forbears in exile had experienced the home as the small sanctuary spoken of in Ezekiel 11:16: “Therefore say, ‘Thus saith the Lord God: Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, **yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary** in the countries where they have come’” (KJV, emphasis added).

In the privacy of their homes Jewish believers could thus pray, study, and await the time when the Temple would be rebuilt and the Messiah would return to reign over His people.

“They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).

The advent of a “second messiah” in AD 132 deepened the division between the Jewish believers and the Jews. Simon “Bar Kochba”, a Jew, believed that he had been raised up to crush the Roman armies. He was backed by the formidable Rabbi Akiva, who had traveled all over Palestine reawakening a love for Judaism. Through Akiva’s renown and the “brains and sword” of Bar Kochba, thousands of Jews were caught up in the revolution that they hoped would establish God’s kingdom on earth. This Second Revolt, however, ended in disaster for the Jewish people. A half million were slaughtered by the Roman military machine; the Holy City was leveled. Jews were no longer permitted into what was left of Jerusalem. And the “second messiah”, the one in whom the Jews had put their hope, died a failure.

The Jewish believers who had returned from Pella or who had remained behind during the First Revolt again refused to fight. They had but one Messiah, Jesus. Allegiance to another so-called messiah would mean renunciation of the One they worshiped. Jesus had warned them, “At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it” (Matthew 24:23). In their choice of Bar Kochba over Jesus, the Jews had openly declared their rejection of the Messiah from Nazareth. The split was complete.

Overwhelming stress was placed upon Jews and Christians alike in the aftermath of the Bar Kochba revolt. Roman edicts were enacted forbidding observance of Jewish laws or teaching. The scattered believers had to be circumspect about their Jewish roots if they wished to survive.

Although the Roman policies relaxed during the mid-second century and Jews were allowed to open schools and make pilgrimages to the destroyed Temple site in Jerusalem, many of their holy books had been burned. The people themselves had been widely dispersed. In order to maintain continuity with their faith, they taught and worshiped in their homes, following the Jewish calendar that had been established by the rabbis. Significantly, they maintained Hebrew as their holy language to communicate with God.

“So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

The influx of Gentiles and the refusal of Christians to participate in the two Jewish Revolts played decisive roles in de-Judaizing the Church. Paul had told the Gentiles that they could not become Jews by circumcision of the flesh nor were they required to. As the early Church Fathers began to propagate doctrines against the Jews, the Hebraic connection was lost. Noted fourth century bishop John Chrysostom wrote: “The synagogue is worse than a brothel...it is the den of scoundrels and the repair of wild beasts...[It is] a place of meeting for the assassins of Christ...a den of thieves...a house of ill fame; a dwelling of iniquity, the refuge of devils, a gulf and abyss of perdition.” The violent hatred against the Jews expressed in the Crusades, the Inquisition, and even in the Nazi Holocaust did not grow out of a vacuum. The roots of anti-Judaism sprang from a deep-seated repudiation of the Hebraic origins of Christianity.

With the loss of the Temple, Judaism itself changed. Rabbinic Judaism sprang up, replacing prophetic revelation of Scriptures with interpretation based on reason. As for the Church, following the death of the apostles a mostly Gentile leadership arose, particularly in the influential cities of Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome. Since much of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) had been available since the third century BC, Greek-speaking Gentile believers abounded, far outnumbering the Hebrew-speaking Jews of the mid-second century.

For a period following the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, His disciples continued to meet daily in the Temple courts. Since they conformed to the law of Moses and continued to circumcise their sons, followers of Jesus were accepted

as another sect of Judaism. This wasn't unusual. Jesus Himself had interpreted Mosaic Law to meet the needs of man's spirit and the demands of daily life. His frame of reference for the Torah pointed to God's relationship with man. The Law, while impossible to keep by man's own strength, nevertheless was good. It delineated the way of life that was pleasing to God. Obedience to the Law brought prosperity: "So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (Romans 7:12). The Law was incapable, however, of justifying a person before God.

Jewish believers observed the Sabbath as God's gift to man for replenishment and rest. Even Easter was celebrated during the Passover. These were Jews following their Jewish Lord. After the two revolts, however, observance of the Sabbath shifted away from the centuries-old Jewish tradition of Friday sundown to Saturday sundown. Since Sunday had generally been recognized as the day of the Lord's resurrection, coming together to celebrate and worship on this day (or more likely, on this evening) was not met with resistance, especially since by mid-second century, the church was mostly non-Jewish. To the Jews, however, this change of the Sabbath day constituted a violation of the very Law of God, further widening the schism between the two faiths.

Fewer than thirty years after the second revolt, further division emerged in the form of what we today would call "replacement theology": The church took upon itself the blessings that God had given to His people Israel, and relegated to the Jewish people the curses of the Older Testament.

This development was not entirely unexpected. The Hellenist allegorizers had considered a literal interpretation of the Bible to be vulgar and earthy, too coarse for their "spiritualized" approach to religion. Therefore, the search for "hidden, deeper meanings" could harmonize Scripture with Hellenist philosophy and conveniently exclude any covenantal promises made to the Jewish people.

Further propagating Jewish exclusion was the writing of Church Father Justin Martyr, an eager student of philosophy who had pursued the teachings of Plato, Aristotle, and the Greek Stoics. Around AD 160 he produced Dialogue With Trypho, A Jew, focused on refuting Jews who objected to the Sonship of Christ. The destruction that had been heaped on the Jews, noted Justin, was deserved, for:

"Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him" (Acts 7:52).

Justin's condemning treatise confirmed in Gentile hearts that God was through with the Jew, that His promises to Israel were, in fact, to the Christians. It was then not a far step for the spiritual de-Judaizing of the church to take a more ominous turn. The Jews who had clung tenaciously to the faith of their fathers found themselves the objects of discrimination, rejection, and ultimately, violence.

In the third century, Church Father Origen wrote, "And these calamities the Jews have suffered, because they were a most wicked nation, which, although guilty of many other sins, yet has been punished so severely for none, as for those that were committed against our Jesus." The perceived collective guilt of the Jews thereby justified the vitriolics poured upon them by fourth century church leadership. Not only were the Jews of Jesus's time held responsible for His sufferings, but all subsequent generations of Jews would be considered criminal.

For Christians the edict of Roman Emperor Constantine in AD 313 proclaimed toleration, freedom of worship, and even a return of property that had been confiscated from them. This was excellent news for believers who had held to their faith during earlier times of intense persecution. Unfortunately, this edict did not benefit the Jews. They were compelled to accept baptism into Christianity or be forced out of their homes. Jerusalem, the Holy City, was once more forbidden to them. Their homeland of Palestine had become "Christian"; they had become aliens in the land promised by God to their father Abraham.

Succeeding centuries found no improvement in the lot of Jews, particularly in Europe. There the policy remained: Convert and be baptized, or be expelled or killed. Needless to say, numbers converted, although some "relapsed" when it seemed that pressure was off. However, of the three million Jews who had occupied the European theater in 70 AD, only a half million remained by the dawn of the seventh century.

By the end of the twelfth century, many heresies had entered the church. Convening the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Pope Innocent III reinstated all the dreaded anti-Semitic laws that the Christianized Roman Empire had formulated almost a millennium earlier. Jews were ordered to separate from Christians; they could no longer even live near one another.

er. Jewish holy books were torched. Rabbinical schools were closed, again reinforcing the Jewish home as the center for learning and religious instruction. All Jews were required to wear a badge of distinction, a yellow circle. (This would be the precursor of the yellow Star of David to be worn by all Jews under the Nazi tyranny.)

The Council intended that this repression of the Jews would serve as a warning to errant Christians who were straying from the Catholic fold. It would also be seen retroactively by the Jews as a foreshadow of the ghettos to come.

Chapter 18. The Treatment Of The Jewish People By “Christians”

For many years Jews had populated the worlds of finance and trade. The Western church, bowing to Hellenistic dualism, had long considered with disdain anything to do with filthy lucre. Many Jews who had been forced from agricultural enterprises due to confiscation of their lands became adept financiers. As moneylenders and trade intermediaries between Moslems and Christians, they grew exceedingly prosperous. With so much untapped treasure for their coffers, Gentile noblemen and civil authorities all over Europe came up with the same idea: Expel the Jews.

The noblemen could confiscate the Jewish land and at the same time cancel out their debts to the evicted moneylenders. These expulsions did not occur simultaneously; a sampling of dates and their locations will give an idea of how universal the situation was. To the Jew it became increasingly a matter of, “Where can I go?” Official government policy twice expelled the Jews from France, in 1306 and 1394; from Hungary between 1349 and 1360; from Austria, Lithuania, Spain, and Portugal in the fifteenth century; and from numerous localities in Germany between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Jews were also forced to leave Russia during the three hundred years between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, where could the Jew safely rest his head?

To understand why “Christian” people would not only tolerate these expulsions but even encourage them, you must understand an unfortunate aftermath of the aforementioned Fourth Lateran Council. It was at this thirteenth century gathering that the doctrine of transubstantiation became church dogma. This doctrine affirmed that the elements of communion were miraculously transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ by the priest at the Catholic Mass. To a superstitious and fearful populace already suspicious of the perceived focus of Jews on blood sacrifices, it took no stretch of imagination to accuse Jews of kidnapping and torturing sacramental wafers to blaspheme Christ.

The year 1298 found 100,000 Austrian and German Jews obliterated. The cause? A Communion wafer that had turned red was discovered. The Jews were accused of pounding the “body of Christ” until it bled. (Centuries later, it would be discovered that a certain bacterial growth caused the whitish wafers to turn red when exposed to damp cellar conditions.) Hysteria reigned.

In thirteenth century rural England, a young boy was discovered missing. Three weeks later his body was found in a cesspool into which he had apparently tripped and drowned. Local peasants, however, were convinced that the Jews had crucified him, and even had the “confession” of a tortured Jew to prove it. Nineteen Jews were hanged without a trial. Ritual murder accusations became recurrent, not only in England but throughout Europe. Ultimately, Jews would become scapegoats not only for ritual murders, but also for well poisonings and the virulent bubonic plague that would wipe out a third of Europe’s population.

By the fourteenth century, superstition mixed with fear resulted in the accusation of “blood libel” against the Jews. The Jews, a people forbidden by the Torah to consume blood of any kind (Leviticus 3:17, “This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: ‘You must not eat any fat or any blood’”), were accused of blaspheming Christ by mixing Christian blood into their Passover celebration elements. Jews were sentenced to death without any proof beyond an accusation.

Playing on this underlying fear, in the 1930’s the Nazi newspaper “Der Stuermer” vividly portrayed rabbis as villainous bloodsuckers preying on hapless German children. Even as recently as forty years ago, Saudi Arabian newspapers carried repeated charges by King Faisal that Jews celebrating Passover consume Gentile blood, words sure to inflame the volatile Arab hatred for their Jewish neighbors.

Thus, by the end of the fifteenth century, Jews had been expelled from much of western Europe, except for pockets in Italy and Germany where political disunity had prevented a unified attack against them. Despite their exile, Jews continued to be vilified in literature. Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales and Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice both portrayed Jews as blood-thirsty villains. Jewish blood, however, was about to be spilled in ways unimaginable.

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:1,2).

Spanish Inquisition (1481-1808)

Contrary to common misconception, the Inquisition was not focused solely on the Jewish people. Protestants were persecuted for refusing to adhere to Roman Catholic doctrine. Jews were apprehended for worshiping a foreign god. Even some Catholics were arrested and stripped of their land and possessions if they failed to satisfy the all-powerful Inquisitors. Anyone who failed to confess Christ as He was presented by the Roman Catholic church was branded a heretic and was scrutinized and interrogated.

How could the church fall into such evil misrepresentation of the doctrines of Christ? Only true Christian believers could be accepted into Christ's eternal presence, the priestly hierarchy reasoned. Far better that they suffer for a little while here on earth in the hope of causing their spirits to see the Truth than lose their souls for eternity. Recognizing, however, that confessions gained under duress might be suspect, the Inquisition priests developed categories of punishment for those who might not be utterly sincere.

Individuals who confessed to being "secret Jews" were allowed the privilege of strangulation prior to burning at the stake. Those who refused to accede to the accusations, or who even boldly held fast to their Jewish identity, were repeatedly tortured in order that they might be "convinced" of the truth of Christianity. If, after all that, they still refused to convert, the "heretics" were publicly burned in a ceremony well-attended by the "faithful."

Attacking dead heretics with equal zeal, the Inquisitors exhumed the bones of suspected "secret Jews" and burned them as well. It is little wonder that few Jews "went public" with their faith. In Spain, however, there were enough who practiced Judaism in secret that a term was coined for them: Marranos, meaning "swine." They kept their identities well-hidden from all but the most trusted of family and associates. Many Marranos, in fact, were able as "outward" Christians to rise to power in public office and even marry into aristocracy. They, too, finally came under the wrath of the Inquisition.

The danger and the pressure to convert became overwhelming. It is estimated that 30,000 Marranos were burned at the stake. Most finally escaped Spain for the borders of more tolerant nations such as the Netherlands, North Africa, and England. The toll on the Jewish and the Christian communities during the three and a half centuries of the Inquisition was great: 400,000 faced trial. Not until 1834 would the Inquisition finally be abolished throughout Europe.

One point pertaining to Martin Luther (1483-1546) must be mentioned. The great reformer represents an extreme example of one who, having once loved Jews, turned into a Jew-hater. During the early years following his break with the Roman papacy, Luther determined to accomplish what the Catholic church had failed to do: Draw large numbers of Jews to the faith. Relying on the impact of the printed word, in 1523 he penned a pamphlet, "That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew". Faulting the church and the shameless lives of its leadership for alienating the Jewish people, Luther argued passionately for the right of Jews to compete in the marketplace. (Up until this time, they had been relegated to the position of money-lenders.)

After years of growing frustration and anger at his failure to convert the Jews, Luther's response was not unlike the attitude of the third and fourth century Church Fathers in their Jew excoriation. Alerting Christians to be on their guard, Luther warned, "Verily a hopeless, wicked, venomous and devilish thing is the existence of these Jews, who for fourteen hundred years have been, and still are, our pest, torment, and misfortune. They are just devils, and nothing more."

Luther's fury against the recalcitrant Jewish people found expression in a tract entitled "Concerning Jews and Their Lies" (1543). Labeling the Jews as "venomous" and "disgusting vermin," he recommended that the following steps be taken against them: Their synagogues should be set on fire; their homes should be destroyed; all Jewish holy books should be confiscated; rabbis must not teach, under threat of death; passport and travel privileges should be revoked; Jews should be forbidden to charge interest on loans; young Jewish men and women should be forced into hard manual labor.

Unfortunately for the Jews, these anti-Semitic writings became well known not only throughout Germany but wherever Luther was revered. Four hundred years later, the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 9-10, 1938 that resulted in the death and destruction of hundreds of Jews and their property, was deemed a fitting birthday remembrance for Martin Luther. Is it any wonder that at the 1946 Nuremberg Trials, virulently anti-Semitic news publisher Julius Streicher used the following defense: "He had said nothing worse against the Jews than had been pronounced some four hundred years earlier by Martin Luther."

Ghettos and Pogroms

The dank, overcrowded urban spaces that we refer to as ghettos originated in sixteenth century Italy. The Reformation that had brought freedom of faith to many believers escaping the excesses of Roman Catholicism witnessed the initiation of yet another reprisal against the Jews. The Italian Counter-Reformation reinstated the oppressive, anti-Semitic medieval laws. These mandates resulted in an onslaught of persecution and death that would last until the eighteenth century. In Eastern Europe entire Jewish villages were massacred in a single day.

Vehement in his hatred against the Jews, Pope Paul IV instituted legislation that would segregate Jews into arenas under papal control, ghettos. He reasoned that since God had condemned the Jews for the sin of crucifying Christ, the church must respond in an equally unloving manner. The ghetto idea spread quickly throughout Europe, surviving until the late 1800's. In a sense, however, the ghettos worked to preserve the purity of the Jewish faith as well as to provide a modicum of self-protection. Jews had long been accustomed to separation from the Gentile world.

It was during this period of relegation to the ghetto that Hasidic, or ultra-orthodox, Judaism developed. Permeated by joyful worship and hopeful expectancy, this sect eagerly awaited the Redeemer Who would bring peace and joy to all the world. This was not to be, however, even in the centuries to come. Just as Hitler had gained credence for his anti-Semitism through Luther's writings, so would the Nazis find their basis in the ghetto for confining the Jews to concentration camps.

The ghetto idea was carried to extremes in nineteenth century Russia, where the Jewish people were confined by the "Christian" monarchy to an area of wilderness known as the Jewish Pale. This in itself did not cause the extreme anguish that another imperial edict brought about: Jewish boys between the ages of twelve and eighteen were ordered to serve in the military. This was bad enough; however, the Orthodox church saw this conscription as the means of rooting out the faith of Abraham. The captive audience of children was exposed to ruthless torture to force them into conversion to Christianity. To the families back home, there was no suffering more intense than losing their children to the faith of the enemy.

In order to understand the fear and hatred of Christians against Jews during the nineteenth century, you need to consider the astonishing impact of industrialization and international trade. Jews had been involved in merchandising for generations, and had risen rapidly in the arena of economic opportunity. The old European aristocracy represented an outmoded way of life; their influence was dying. The poor, replaced by mechanized labor, resented the prosperity of the Jews.

As European stock markets faltered, blame was heaped onto the financiers, the Jews. Anti-Semitic Protestants and Catholics alike agitated public sentiment against them. The stage was set for a new German doctrine: Aryan racial superiority. Fearing an international conspiracy, Russian forces slew Jews by the thousands. Pogroms, violent waves of attacks against the Jews, swept forward throughout Russia between 1881 and 1920.

A forged document, "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," supposedly written by a non-existent International Jewish Congress, detailed plans for the destruction of Christian organizations and a Jewish world takeover. Published worldwide, this counterfeit document inflamed suspicion and hatred toward the Jewish people.

As pogroms, persecutions, and famines increased, especially among the Jews of Eastern Europe and Russia, hope of freedom in the "New World" shone as their only chance for life. Waves of Jews poured into the Americas, particularly to the trade center of New York. Two million Russian Jews would find refuge in the United States. Not only Russian Jews were eager to escape their homelands. In 1884, a Jewish officer in the French army, Alfred Dreyfus, was falsely convicted of treason based on spurious evidence. An uprising of the French populace against the Jews ensued.

Other European nations became incited by an official Jesuit publication, "Civiltà Cattolica", which promoted anti-Semitism and encouraged exclusion of Jews from all of Europe. The Vatican concurred with this opinion. In the US and South America, Catholics condemned both this article and the false imprisonment of Dreyfus. The French president, the military, and the judicial bureaucracies, however, refused to budge. Despite massive evidence of Dreyfus's innocence, they would not reverse their decision.

French mobs ransacked Jewish shops. Algerians, allies of the French, followed suit, joined by Arabs. Finally, in 1906, with world opinion ringing against them, the French court declared Alfred Dreyfus innocent. But the damage to world Jewry had been done.

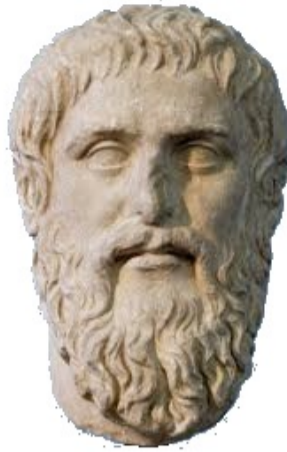
The brew of Russian pogroms, western migrations, and the international notoriety of the Dreyfus case fanned into life an idea that had been awaiting birth for two thousand years: Zionism. A homeland for the Jews. Reclamation of the Land promised by God to Abraham. Those unable to find passage to the New World could seek their dream in Palestine. This was a land of primitive farm collectives (kibbutzim) and of overpopulated city spaces. But it was the land of their fathers and in they flocked.

The 1917 British signing of the Balfour Declaration brought new life to hopes of a permanent Jewish homeland. This decree supported the establishment of a home in Palestine for the Jews. By this time, 55,000 Jews had made their way there. (By the eve of World War II, that figure would swell to 450,000.) Although penniless, lacking medicine and often food, nevertheless they were home. Their joy was squelched, however, by the issuance of the 1922 White Paper. Caving in to Arab opposition, the British severely limited Jewish immigration to their ancient land and laid plans for an independent Palestine to be ruled by an Arab majority.

Meanwhile, in Europe the rise of Nazism and the ideology of Aryan superiority were beginning to advance. These ideas did not spring suddenly upon the people, though. The populace became gradually desensitized to the plight of the Jew in a carefully planned and enacted three-stage thrust. The first stage found the Jews being mocked as they had been through history: tormented by youths, humiliated by placards, occasionally subjected to violence. Thus inured to the Jews as individuals, the Germans were ripe for the next stage: suppression of categories of non-Aryans. Since German reason accepted the “truth” of Aryan superiority, the subsequent reality of the next stage, death and incineration, became a blur of ethical indifference.

And where was the church during this demonic dynasty of destruction? Beyond some vocal protests and quiet humanitarian efforts of individuals, there was ... silence. The papacy, careful not to offend the German might, refrained from issuing moral responses. The Protestant churches, for the most part, turned their eyes the other way. Six million Jews and several million Gentiles would encounter death in gas chambers, slave labor camps, and factories.

Chapter 19. Platonism Displaced The Hebraic In Christianity



“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

We in the United States may speak English, but we think “Greek.” Competition, “personal best,” mind over matter, rationalism and reasoning rather than a trusting faith, the “higher ground” of the spiritual—these ideas came from the Greek/Hellenistic civilization. This influence has permeated western culture for so long that it is like our breath: because of our lifelong familiarity with it, we don’t smell it.

The Bible, however, was written to reflect Hebraic thought. Loss of the Hebraic understanding of the Scriptures has significantly diminished our ability to understand God and relate to Him.

The basis for humanism, which has taken over public education and is increasingly influencing the church today, is found in the Hellenist philosophical spirit. The common thread for both belief systems requires man, not God, to be the measure of all things. Hellenist philosophy and humanism place man as the ultimate evaluator of everything. The outgrowth of this view is that there are no God-given standards. Everything changes and evolves. Ethics and morality are based upon the whims of man, not on the holy will of God.

Western societies have been inundated by the philosophies and culture of the ancient Greeks, particularly by that of Plato. The Hellenist influence has severely limited the scope of believers with respect to God as revealed in His Word and has diminished our capacity to apply biblical truths to our vital relationships: God, marriage, family, friendships. As the ranks of the early Church swelled in number, the impact of its Hebraic roots shriveled. Believers became increasingly vulnerable to a wide array of destructive influences and philosophies.

Roman military might had brought with it an admirable road system and a relatively speedy communications network. The Gospel message that had permeated Jerusalem could easily and safely flow outward to the Gentile nations of the world. Unfortunately, the purity and power of that message were altered by the dominant cultural influence of the time, Hellenist philosophy. The early centuries following the two Jewish revolts of AD 70 and AD 135 saw a Hellenist, man-centered worldview begin to reshape the church.

Let’s examine how the various aspects of Hellenist religious thought came about and how they have affected the church. Many centuries before Christ’s advent, the Greeks had been known for their wide array of mythological deities who seemed beset by the same personality quirks and behavioral foibles as mankind. Followers of these gods feared their superhuman capabilities and presented offerings and worship to avoid personal calamity and retribution.

By the seventh century BC, philosopher-mathematician Thales tried to dissuade the educated populace from such fables. Guided by the natural senses and by reason, Thales argued, all of nature could be understood through scientific observation and measurement. Nature was the life source of energy that controlled all of earth’s activities. Nature alone was responsible for what could be experienced and examined. Supernatural deities had nothing to do with it. (The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century followed the same line of reasoning. Scholars at that time denied any divine intervention into life. Rather, they elevated rationalism and science as man’s guiding power. The Humanist Manifesto that so controls American education today reflects this ancient Thalian fallacy.)

The difficulty in Thales's approach was this: If reason were the determinant for truth, whose reason was to be followed? The philosophical chaos that ensued led to the Sophist rationale of the fifth century BC. Since the Greeks had no sacred texts from which to derive absolute standards, truth was therefore relative. Thus, maintained the Sophists, people should seek to be all they could be in the here and now. (Isn't this the goal of contemporary culture in the United States?) Knowledge was beneficial only insofar as it benefited the individual, i.e., "What will I get out of this?"

Needless to say, the civic authorities were not thrilled with this thinking. What would happen to the collective society if everyone did his own thing? Out of this argument emerged Socrates. There must be absolutes of good, of justice, of virtue, he insisted. Once the mind is trained to seek these standards, then man can, through rationalization, develop his own reasons and means to attain these ideals. (Keep in mind the foundation for this reasoning, that man is basically good. The Bible teaches that man, with his sin nature, is bent on evil when left to his own devices.)

Socrates's disciple Plato recognized the limitations of each man's ability to discern what goodness and justice really were. Turning instead to the concept of dualism, he postulated that life was divided into two components, the transcendent arena of eternal truths and the temporal realm of the physical. The former was an ideal, higher than could be realistically achieved, but a worthy goal to aim for. The earthly concerns of the temporal, such as food, shelter, and vocation, were vulgar and common but unfortunately necessary for existence.

This viewpoint was in juxtaposition to the Hebraic view of man created in God's image for relationship with Him both on earth and in eternity. God had called the physical body "good"; joined with the spirit, it defined "man". God placed such great value on His physical creation because it testified to His greatness:

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).

Plato's dualism entered the church through the writings of the Church Fathers, a number of whom were Hellenist philosophers who had converted to Christianity. They attempted through their writings to reconcile Platonic thought with Christianity. The dualist concept brought about the myriad of church rituals wherein one had to sanctify, or make holy by prayer, that which God had already created and declared to be good. For instance, no longer could a group of believers simply share in the breaking of bread and passing of the wine cup as the early Church had enjoyed. Dualism viewed bread and wine as too "earthly" to be the body and blood of Jesus; the physical elements had to be spiritualized.

As noted earlier, at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 bread and wine were declared to become the body and blood of Christ through transubstantiation in order to represent the "sanctity" of God. Only the priests, those who had separated themselves from the world's defilement, could carry out this consecration. Transubstantiation added to the host of sacramental controls that only the clergy could conduct on behalf of the congregants. The system of clergy control through sacraments would keep worshipers spiritually enslaved for centuries.

Hebraic people would never have considered what dualistically influenced Christians regularly do: Ask a blessing on their food, or "on the hands that made it." If God has made what is to be eaten and has provided it for our benefit, it must be good! Hebraic prayer focused only on blessing God, the Creator and Provider of all our needs: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth and fruit from the vine." He alone is worthy of thanksgiving and praise.

By relying unquestioningly on centuries of revisionist writings and by failing to apperceive the Scriptures, today's Christian colleges and seminaries have remained gripped by the Hellenist influence. The result has perpetuated a Platonic philosophical approach to the Scriptures. Plato's dualism can be seen in the seminarian pursuit of a "spiritual calling". Seminaries infer or teach that those who choose to engage in a full-time ministry as an occupation are somehow more worthy than those in secular vocations.

Because of Plato's influence, the Greek culture viewed manual labor as degrading. The Hebraic culture, conversely, recognized the worth of a manual trade, remembering that before the Fall, Adam and Eve had been given a vocation in the Garden. Even rabbis were expected to participate in a trade: Jesus was carpenter; Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla were tentmakers; noted Jewish teachers Hillel and Shammai were woodcutter and carpenter, respectively. Heed the Hebraic encouragement of A.W. Tozer in his classic, The Pursuit of God:

“The ‘layman’ need never think of his humbler task as being inferior to that of his minister. Let every man abide in the calling wherein he is called and **his work will be as sacred as the work of the ministry**. It is not what a man does that determines whether his work is sacred or secular, it is **why he does it**. **The motive is everything**. Let a man **sanctify the Lord God in his heart** and he can thereafter do no common act. All he does is good and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For such a man, **living itself will be sacramental and the whole world a sanctuary**. His entire life will be a **priestly ministration**.”

Hellenist philosophical thought has impacted those seminary teachers who depend on Hellenist reasoning skills rather than on faith and divine revelation. Ed Silvano, one of the leaders of the current revival in Argentina, states in his videotape series, “How To Reach Our Cities for Christ,” that the introduction of the G.I. Bill following World War II has significantly reduced the power of God in the church in the United States today. As seminaries scrambled for federal money, they introduced to their curricula Hellenist-inspired courses of study: psychology, sociology, and philosophy. Many seminaries have replaced God’s power with man’s wisdom, disregarding Paul’s warning to the Greek Corinthians:

“Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks that he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a ‘fool’ so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight” (1 Corinthians 3:18,19).

Silvano bemoans the problem many new believers encounter when they read about the miracles of God in the Bible and wonder why they don’t see them now. For instance, a young believer rushes into the church office: “Pastor! See what the disciples were doing in Jesus’s time? It says here that He gave us the power to do these things too!” “Just a minute,” patronizingly intones the pastor. “Let me explain a few things.” And by the time he explains the Scriptures, they don’t say anything like what they were written to say!

The Hellenist reasoning in our seminaries has produced patented answers for why God has changed and isn’t in the business of doing miracles through His people any longer. Because of this incongruity, we in the churches often find ourselves in the confusing situation of trying to comprehend a Jewish Book taught by teachers who rely on Plato and other Hellenist philosophers—ideologies that nullify faith in the miraculous. The resultant pattern of teaching deals with biblical truth as theoretical and conceptual rather than as realistic and applicable.

**“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!
You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter,
nor will you let those enter who are trying to.
‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!
You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one,
you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are’” (Matthew 23:13,14).**

Church Fathers such as Origen, Justin, and Clement had been powerfully swayed by Hellenistic thought. Converts to Christianity, their combined influence fashioned a new theology based on the philosophy of Plato. Their emphasis on pietism, withdrawing from worldly concerns in order to focus on spiritual matters, was passed along for centuries within the church. But personal withdrawal contradicted community participation that exemplified the Hebraic outworking of faith.

Justin Martyr, mentioned earlier concerning his anti-Semitic writings, reflected a dualistic worldview of the body imprisoning the soul. This approach enjoyed wide appeal among second century Greeks. The great learning center of Alexandria, Egypt drew many, including Clement, who did not hesitate to draw upon unbiblical sources to formulate his own mix of Christian and Hellenistic thought. Origen, Clement’s best-known pupil, was called “the father of Christian theology.” Origen had been enveloped by Hellenistic teaching that regarded the flesh as evil and the spirit as good.

Note a key Hellenistic tenet recorded by theologian Kenneth Scott Latourette: “The goal of every man’s striving must be salvation by the emancipation of the spirit from the contamination of the flesh.” As Origen studied the Newer Testament, he found that he could allegorize the Older Testament away from its historical, “earthy” perspective. The truths that God had revealed to His people Israel could instead become a type of the truths that would be shared in the Newer Testament with those not exposed to the Law.

The promises made by God to Israel could then be transferred to the Church as Christ was “read” into each text. The biblical curses became the due legacy of the Jews. Such interpretation nullified God’s focus on the Jewish people as His precious and chosen people. Only that which could be carried forward into the “Christian” realm of Newer Testament

thought would have validity. Eager theological students from all over flocked to Alexandria to be impregnated with these teachings, which they then propagated throughout the known world.

All of these teachings lay in stark contrast to the true Biblical perspective. Because of God's words at creation, "It is good," the Hebraic people viewed the world as a desirable entity. Even though sin had come into the world, the universe had been created by a God who had humanity's best interests at heart. The Hebraic people followed no dualistic dichotomy.

Many of the extremes of self-denial and discipline that later entered the church were based upon the Hellenist polarity of the physical and the spiritual. Ascetics hoped that by vigorously subduing the flesh, they could free themselves from the evil they perceived in the physical realm and draw closer to spiritual perfection. Paul rejected the ascetic attitude of his day:

"Do not handle, do not taste! Do not touch!" These are all destined to perish with use, because they are **based on human commands and teachings**. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, **but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence**" (Colossians 2:21-23).

Nevertheless this attitude became deeply embedded in the history of the church. The observance of Lent became a period of denying oneself earthly pleasures in order to identify with the suffering of Christ. The love that had motivated Christ to sacrifice Himself for mankind was lost, however, on those who displayed great pietistic zeal outwardly but failed to demonstrate love for their neighbor.

How could believers so willingly stray from the truth as it had been presented in the Word? Initially, the majority of Christians opposed Origen's teachings. The Alexandrian system of allegory that explained away the context and content of the Word arose out of the need to integrate Hellenist philosophy with the biblical text. These writings were venerated as highly as the Scriptures; therefore no pressure was exerted to stay true to the meaning intended by the scripture writers. As students from the Alexandria schools spread and established their own arenas of instruction, these interpretations gained ground steadily, ultimately achieving near-universal acceptance.

By the early fifth century the use of allegory had become engrained in ecclesiastical thought. This was due particularly because of the influence of Augustine. This late fourth century theologian also promoted the idea that church authority superseded that of the Scriptures. Therefore the educated clergy class were endued with even greater power over the common man. Christian doctrine was no longer spiritual wisdom imparted to each believer by the Holy Spirit through the apostolic founders of the Church. The increasing reliance on Hellenist thought removed the Holy Spirit from His true place as the Life within and the power for ministry.

Biblical Christian faith and practice were meant to reflect the work of the Spirit in the inner man, not to propagate mere dogma to which intellectual assent was given. When the philosopher-theologians sought to make spiritual life intelligible to the natural mind through reason, they removed trusting faith as a scriptural mandate for the Christian life. For the church, power from on high was replaced by doctrine, a code to adhere to, an empty shell by which one could only hope to achieve salvation. How unfortunate for us all that Paul's words have gone largely unheeded:

"For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? **Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"** (I Corinthians 1:19,20).

Chapter 20. Hellenism Invaded Christianity And Conquered It

“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.

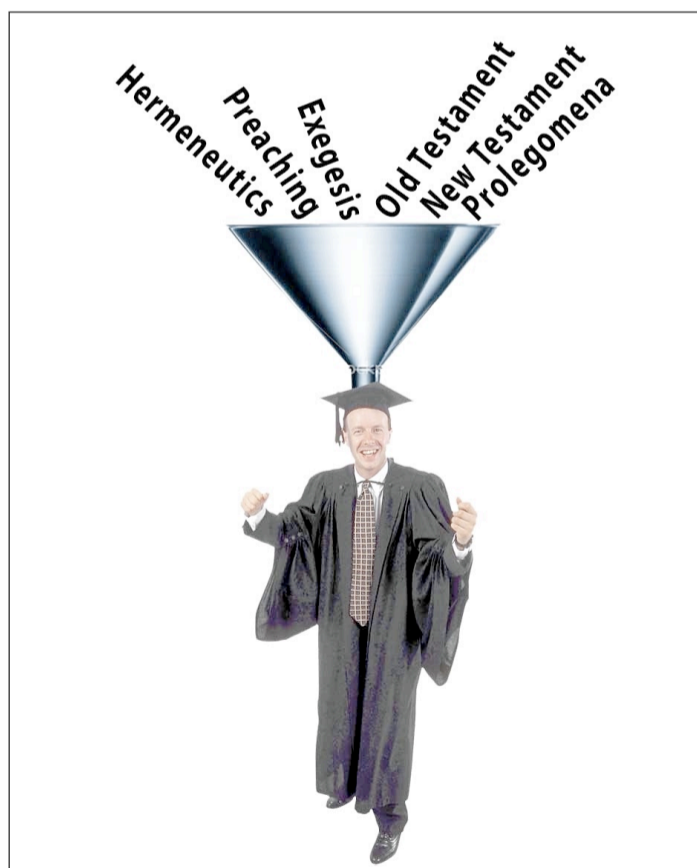
My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:2-5).

When Hellenist oratorical skills replaced Judeo-Christian role modeling, the church lost the Hebraic approach to life’s difficulties: **practical application of biblical truth**. Through the influence of John Chrysostom, a fourth century theologian from Antioch, oratory (and anti-Semitism) rose to new heights. Hellenist rhetoric, the structure and style of what is taught, became the main teaching pattern in the church.

Today, modern seminary homiletics, hermeneutics, exegesis, prolegomena, oratory—all the related fields that today’s pulpits so depend on—find their origins not in the first century Church but in the Greek teaching tradition. Most seminaries also teach future pastors that the ideal sermon contains an introduction, three memorable points, and a conclusion. Does this sound familiar? If so, ask yourself: “How much of what I hear, sermon after sermon, do I retain?” And more importantly, “How much of this type of teaching has impacted my life in such a way that I am more conformed to the character of Christ?”

At the retreat center we frequently asked people what the previous Sunday’s sermon was about. Almost no one could remember, as the message did not meet them in their needs and concerns. But our Hebraic biblical predecessors presented truths that **changed behavior and/or attitude** to conform to God’s will.

At the seminary attended by the authors, a poster in the hallway showed a man with a funnel going into his head: All those religious courses taught at the seminary were being dumped into his mind so he could later spew them out as factual information.



During his first semester at seminary in 1978 at the age of 32, Mike had a class with a godly professor who had been teaching there for decades. As the semester progressed the man took a fatherly interest in him. In their talks together he learned about Mike’s past. Two things caught his attention, prompting him to ask Mike to do a special class project for him. Mike had been a Navy helicopter instructor pilot, training others to fly operational missions. Although this required a lot of teaching and briefing before each flight, still, the essence of teaching flying is flying: using the “see and do” method. The

early rabbis used this same concept of training, relying on personal example as they taught their students practical skills. Paul, in the mold of the rabbis, could say, “I urge you to imitate me” (1 Corinthians 4:16).

In addition, following his third deployment to Vietnam, Mike had been an analysis officer at Naval Air Station Pt. Mugu, California, evaluating on an ongoing basis the air station’s operational capabilities. In his office that morning the professor asked, “Mike, would you do a project analyzing the fruit of this seminary? I have been here over thirty years, and I don’t know if I have wasted my time.”

Mike accepted his request. Through the use of surveys and interviews he studied the nearby churches to which some of the seminary’s pastoral graduates had gone to minister.

When he read the results of the research, that elderly gentleman sat in front of Mike and wept. None of the surveyed graduates had demonstrated a vision for what God desired for each congregation. They had merely maintained the status quo, concerned about the quality of their rhetorical preaching, their own security, and making sure nothing “rocked the boat.” Mike was deeply touched by the hurt and the sense of failure he saw behind those tears. The professor stared at Mike earnestly and said, “You haven’t been around this institution long enough to be tainted by the system here. Would you write a paper on what you believe a Bible-based church should be doing?”

Most of the suggestions in Mike’s paper regarding the biblical church called for more role modeling, mentoring, and facilitating in the body. He encouraged church leadership to provide time for discussion of truths taught during the service so that people might have a greater probability of applying the teachings to their lives. After the professor read the paper, he asked if he could give it to other faculty members. Unfamiliar with the sacred cows of academia, Mike assented. What he got himself into surfaced a short while later.

As he sat in the cafeteria having a cup of coffee, a professor from the pastoral degree program came up to him. He bluntly asked, “Are you Dowgiewicz?” When Mike nodded, he went on, “I read your paper and you better not show up in any of my classes.” Over the next few days this scenario was to be repeated several times. One or two professors, though, asked if Mike could meet with them to help change their style of conducting classes.

You see, for the most part, the classes had been taught in the Hellenist rhetorical style designed to convey content. Students were then tested on their ability to cognitively grasp the facts presented. No behavioral changes were ever called for to demonstrate application of the truth.

Please note: What was understood by the early rabbis and has been substantiated by educational research is that people tend to connect content with the context in which it has been learned. In other words, if you learn something in a formal structured environment such as a classroom or sanctuary, your likelihood of using that information in a different setting or context is close to zero. The content and the methodology by which it is learned are inseparably linked.

Most seminary instruction is presented in a formal classroom setting, often taught from behind a podium. This impersonal, non-participatory classroom context is the environment in which pastors have been trained to convey biblical truths. Others who have studied educational methods in depth would say that seminaries use the Hellenist academic model, i.e., content/data to be tested. What is needed today is the Hebraic synagogue/church model, lifestyle training by example.

Many seminary-trained pastors have been taught to assume that the essence of biblical teaching is **content conveyance**. Conversely, the biblically Hebraic essence of teaching is **personal training through discipleship**, appropriating both the content and the method under the caring nurture of role models and mentors.

Examine the spectrum of differences between the **biblically Hebraic approach** and the **Hellenist philosophical approach** to instruction.

HEBRAIC / HELLENIST COMPARISON	
<u>Hebraic</u> (Direct Experience from Most to Least)	<u>Hellenist</u> (Increasingly Indirect Experiences)
Direct Participation Student learns by <i>doing</i> . •Responsible for the outcome of his practice	Audio & Visual Combo Student learns through combination of <i>audio and visual</i> elements: TV, movies, explained exhibit.
Dramatized Experiences •Student directly involved through <i>participation</i> : role-play, discussion, skits, simulations.	Audio or Visual •Student learns by <i>seeing or hearing</i> : CD, radio, tape, internet; display or bulletin board.
Demonstrations •Student learns by <i>watching</i> how ‘how to do it.’ •Observation rather than participation.	Verbal Portrayal <i>Abstract</i> learning through diagrams, reading a book, hearing a lecture or sermon.

Studies indicate that a person will retain:

- 90% of what he sees, hears, and demonstrates.
- 70% of what he sees, hears, and discusses.
- 50% of what he sees and hears concurrently.
- 30% of what he sees.
- 10-20% of what he hears.

Mike’s analysis paper confirmed that the seminary was using the most abstract approach, **Verbal-Portrayal**, to teach at pastoral candidates. In reality, however, a pastoral vocation requires concrete methods in order to disciple and train others. The results of Hellenist influence can be seen in the program orientation that is so prevalent in the church today.

Compare this with the participatory and active process orientation of the Hebraic synagogue/early Church. It is evident from the Gospels that Jesus, Who was fully aware of man’s need for visual images and living example, used the Hebraic form of teaching. Look closely at His use of parables, His role modeling, His informal style, His in-depth discussions with the disciples. Jesus understood the manner by which people learn. He was the model teacher for all who would follow Him.

A Hebraic—Hellenistic Comparison

For a pdf copy of this comparison <[click here](#)>

Hebraic Active — Appeals to the heart

Motive

Love of God and others
Life viewed as a pilgrimage leading to ultimate culmination
Suffering seen as necessary for development of Christ-like character

Process Oriented

Stresses direct participation
Emphasizes age and wisdom
Role modeling, mentoring, and discipleship indispensable
Leadership by personal example
Character of leader essential
Personal relationships imperative

Biblical Application

Doers of the Word
Bible—reality that must be confronted
Goal—to develop Christlikeness
Emphasizes doctrine as demonstrated in a way of life

Ministry Activity

Small intimate groups
Leader as facilitator
Cooperative, participatory planning
Spiritual gifts shared
Frequent scheduled and unscheduled gatherings

Fruit

Love, acceptance, forgiveness
Transparency encouraged
Active participation
“How you serve” vital
Each believer trained to serve
Produces mature believers

Hellenist Cognitive — Appeals to the intellect

Motive

Pursuit of self-interest and knowledge
Life viewed in circular terms, to some day achieve a higher spiritual state
Suffering to be avoided; people and activities weighed for self-gratification: “How does this person/event benefit me?”

Process Oriented

Heavy program prominence
Emphasizes education and knowledge
Relies on speaking skills, oratory, programmed materials, information conveyance
Leader’s personal life immaterial
Leader’s true character often unknown
Personal relationships optional

Biblical Application

Belief without personal cost
Bible—data that must be taught
Focus on rules—do’s and don’ts
Emphasizes knowledge-based creeds

Ministry Activity

Large impersonal groups
Leader-directed and controlled
Organizational roles important
Acquisition of knowledge
Reliance on scheduled gatherings

Fruit

Mutual toleration
Transparency discouraged
Passivity and lethargy
“What you know” vital
Trained professionals utilized
Produces spectators

Fruit was developed in His disciples as they continued what He began. Jesus confronted His disciples with thoughts such as:

- “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15, emphasis added).
- “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40, emphasis added).
- Paul could likewise say, “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you” (Philippians 3:17; emphasis added).

The impersonal rhetoric-lecture style so common in congregations today compels you to be instructed by trained professionals who are removed from you interrelationally. You are not in a position to imitate your leaders’ Christian walk because you probably don’t spend much personal time with any of them. How then can you obey the biblical command to weigh the fruit of a man’s life before you listen to his teaching?

“Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the **outcome of their life** and imitate their faith.” (Hebrews 13:7, emphasis added)

Jesus and the apostles were as much role models as they were teachers. God wants believers to evaluate people, especially their teachers, by their actions, not just by their talk. In other words, if you cannot imitate their faith, don't listen to their teachings. Paul warns Timothy that in later times there will be teachers who are "hypocritical liars" (see 1 Timothy 4:2). Today's news certainly carries enough about the outcome of the lives of such hypocrites:

"And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve" (2 Corinthians 11:14,15).

Great responsibility comes with the role of teaching. More demands are placed on time and availability. The priority of maintaining an intimate dependency on God is tested to ensure that the counsel shared emanates from God's throne and not from man's potentially deceitful heart.

The Hellenist influence brought a heavy reliance on reasoning: "All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas" (Acts 17:21). Through Hellenist thought was developed the pattern of opinions and theories about profound ethical questions. As noted earlier, in their endeavor to defend the Christian faith against attacks by heathen philosophers, Hellenist-educated Christian converts dealt with their opponents on a philosophical basis. The result was centuries of rationalistic and syncretistic practices in the church.

Biblical Christian practices began to be considered on a theoretical basis, and theories can be changed. Christianity embarked on becoming a religion, adopting the practices of other religions with their tangible worship symbols and rational explanations. By the third century the church, once founded on revealed truth, fitted neatly into the mold of human thought. Christian practice was no longer dependent upon a theocracy, a people led by divine revelation. It had devolved into a pattern of human interpretation and evaluation.

Gone was the power on which the early Christians had once drawn to conquer an empire. Lost was a dependency on the active presence of the Spirit of the living God. Man's "ability" to do God's work for Him took precedence. Conditions were ripe for the "visual replacements" that would come with Constantine in the fourth century. (This will be discussed more fully in the next chapter).

Note: A twentieth century example of the philosophical-rhetorical defense of the faith was the Scopes Monkey Trial (1925), in which the biblical truth of Creation was argued against the theory of evolution in a court of law. Hellenist rhetoric and human oration, not the Holy Spirit, were the means of determining "truth". The reality of Creation was bypassed.

"Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4,5).

Even as the church moved away from its Hebraic roots, the basic doctrines remained the same: God was the Creator of the universe, omnipotent and all-wise. Christ indwelt His body. But all of this was only in a theoretical sense. As a result of the dualistic influence of Plato (spirit is good, matter is evil), the divinity of Christ became overemphasized and His humanity understated. The stress on His divinity led to the church developing a view of the incarnate Jesus as distant and impersonal.

The Hellenist influence also exposed the church to a pantheon of gods depicted with personal human qualities. Thus church leadership developed an array of deceased "saints" who were "deified" and prayed to. These saints replaced Jesus as intermediary between God and man. The truth voiced by Jesus was spurned: "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

No longer were believers encouraged to trust in the Holy Spirit to intercede for them (see Romans 8:27). The manifestation of His gifts steadily diminished as emphasis on body life and mutual ministry disappeared. The church no longer experienced the limitless resources of Christ in their midst but restricted itself through human reasoning to the confines of man's mind.

Since Hellenist thought portrayed the physical realm as evil, the human body represented a constant source of temptation and sin. Marriage, far from being the holy and honorable sacred bond of the Hebrew Bible—"He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord" (Proverbs 18:22)—took on a negative essence. Church history demon-

strates how Hellenist dualism contorted the biblical Jewish concept of marriage, God's provision for intimate companionship.

The ideal became the ascetic monk, whose vow of chastity illustrated the supreme denial of worldly desire. By focusing wholly on the spiritual realm, one could "draw near to God." It became only logical that priests, who were the example of holiness to their flocks, should also imitate the celibate Christ. Thus they vowed to deny themselves the pleasures and responsibilities of family life.

The Hebraic people loved to experience life, and spirituality meant passionate involvement in service to God and humanity. All that God had created was designed to be enjoyed without shame or guilt within His boundaries.

Hellenist thought, on the other hand, focused on a metaphysical misunderstanding of spiritual devotion and piety. Believers today often think of "being spiritual" as denying themselves some pleasure in life. Those who "contemplate" the awesomeness of God's holiness are somehow regarded as more pious. Activities, occupations, and pleasures involved in the physical world are considered suspect, "blue collar," less important. This is why clergy are often exalted over workers in other occupations.

In later centuries another area of dualist influence arose within the church: the development of doctrines regarding Jesus's mother, Mary. Revisionists taught that Mary, in order to bear the sinless child Jesus, must have been immaculately conceived (i.e., not by human means) by her mother. They further alleged that she lived in perpetual virginity, neither having sexual relations with her husband Joseph nor bearing other children.

In contradiction to this later fabrication, the Bible tells us that Joseph "had no union with her **until** she gave birth to a son" (Matthew 1:25, emphasis added). Revisionists explained her offspring as cousins of Jesus, or children of Joseph by a previous marriage.

The Scriptures themselves surely do not stretch for an explanation apart from what would have been clearly understood then: "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't His mother's name Mary, and **aren't His brothers** James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't **all His sisters** with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" (Matthew 13:55-56, emphasis added).

"He desecrated Topheth... so no one could use it to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire to Molech"
(2 Kings 23:10).

Hebraic society regarded children as "a heritage from the Lord" (see Psalm 127:3, KJV). This position contrasted with that of the heathen tribes all around Israel who sacrificed their children to their gods. Hellenist Athenians also had a low view of children, judging them an intrusion into their pursuit of happiness. Most limited their families to two, one, or even no children in order to avoid overpopulation and impoverishment of the natural resources. Modern American society, as did the Athenians, seeks to preserve the earth from its inhabitants rather than tending it on behalf of God to bless its dwellers.

Yet another manifestation of Hellenist thought is found in the "quality of life" argument pushed today for everything from abortion to euthanasia to infanticide. If an individual, whether infant or elderly, was considered incapable of achieving a certain standard of success, it was the duty of the Athenian or Spartan parents or family to eliminate him or her. That individual should not be allowed to become a burden on society. Therefore, abortion and infanticide were rampant. There was no intrinsic worth in the individual to guarantee his right to existence. Unproductive or inconvenient lives were expendable.

If man is just a collection of evolved tissue, then his worth to society can be assessed by objective measurements and observations. The Nazis, influenced by the Hellenist denigration of human life, gassed people at mental institutions and homes for the aged before they began widespread extermination in concentration camps.

Is the attitude of American society succumbing to this totally unbiblical approach to the value of life as well?

**“Yet a time is coming and has now come
when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth,
for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit,
and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23,24).**

At present a subtle element of Hellenist influence seeks to elevate mankind above their “earthly prison” through various forms of praise and worship. The authors are not taking issue with the lively and expressive praise and worship that have become so popular in recent decades. We want to address two tendencies observed in worship that are biblically unacceptable to the heavenly Father.

The first is a Hellenist syncretistic influence that persuades worshipers to adopt secular music patterns designed to induce a soulish high, the use of music to conjure a particular mood for worship. Closely connected to this is a disregard for the importance of personal holiness in approaching God, the folly of “worshipping” with unconfessed sin and iniquity.

It is delusion for believers to trust that the “holiness” of their priest or pastor will usher them into God’s presence. Each person must examine his or her own heart. The Lord chastised the people of His day, “These people honor Me with their lips, but **their hearts are far from Me**. They worship Me in vain” (Matthew 15:8,9). Should He do any less with His people today?

“Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? He who has **clean hands and a pure heart**” (Psalm 24:3,4). Apperceiving what the Scriptures require in your approach to God necessitates that you put aside manmade conjuring and confess your sins in order to once again see the power of God in your congregation. Just because some form of “spiritual” expression makes you feel good doesn’t necessarily make it pleasing to the Father. Remember that Eve yielded to what looked and seemed good but defied the command of God: “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it” (Genesis 3:6).

Peter’s words are true, and believers must keep them in focus as we approach God: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people **belonging to God**, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Let us agree with Ephesians 4:24 to “put on the new self, created to be **like God in true righteousness and holiness.**”

Chapter 21. Roman Authoritarianism Now Rules Christianity

“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also reject you as My priests; because you have ignored the law of your God,
I also will ignore your children.
The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against Me;
they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful” (Hosea 4:6,7).

Ever since the stoning of Stephen, Christians had been counting the high cost of following Christ. Living for God as disciples of Christ brought ever-increasing persecution from both the Jews and the Romans. From his throne in Rome, Nero had sought scapegoats for the military and economic distresses of his empire. Christians became easy targets for the burnings and crucifixions which followed.

Under the Roman Emperor Trajan (AD 98-117), those accused of the crime of being Christian faced interrogation. Ones admitting “guilt” were executed. Those denying the charge were freed only after reciting a prayer to the Roman gods, worshipping the emperor’s statue, and cursing Christ. The faithful of the early Church understood what it meant to sacrifice self, dying daily to all that was of the flesh and willing even to offer up life itself for the sake of the Gospel.



By the fourth century few were willing to pay the price that authentic faith had demanded of their spiritual ancestors. A pivotal moment for the church occurred when it entered into alliance with the Roman Empire. In AD 312 the Roman Emperor Constantine called on the Christian God for victory during a crucial battle with his opponent Maxentius for control of the Empire. Triumphant, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan the following year, ending the persecution of the church by the Empire.

Endorsed from the throne, Christianity became the favored religion. In time it became so identified with the Roman Empire that everyone born in the Empire was automatically considered “Christian.” With the dangers of persecution removed, membership in the church became attractive to growing numbers who entered for worldly reasons. These new churchgoers were readily accepted by their society, a far cry from the attitude toward the peculiar believers of the Hebraic first-century Church. The children of the Empire were counted as children of the church. Infant baptism became universal.

The hierarchical structure of the church, which through syncretism was already a clone of the Empire, merged effortlessly with the political government. This consolidation was to culminate in the establishment of the papacy; the Roman Pontiff would replace Pontifex Maximus (Caesar) as supreme authority.

The merger of church and state represented the second major turning point for the church. The first turning point, the widespread influx of Gentiles and Hellenistic thought into the body, had resulted in the loss of the church’s Hebraic roots and the rise of anti-Semitism. The period after the AD 313 Edict of Milan brought massive destruction to the faith as it had been practiced in the first century. With imperial approval the church embarked on achieving unity through stronger organization.

Ecclesiastical hierarchy and authority formed the basis for religious cohesion rather than dependence on the Holy Spirit to unite and equip the body of believers.

In one form or another, the Roman model continues to represent the organizational structure of most denominations today. In any church affiliation where the will of God and spiritual guidance are removed from individual responsibility and are determined by and/or enforced by some form of intermediary, the Roman Empire still exists.

The history of the “organized” church during the centuries following Constantine is well-documented. Whether the church or the Roman Empire triumphed is perhaps debatable. The state-supported church consolidated its position until its dominion was practically absolute. Many revisionist writings appeared at this point, attempting to validate the hierarchical structure acquired from the Romans. For instance, ecclesiastical leadership crowned Peter and the other apostles with a hierarchical authority that neither the Bible nor the early Church writings substantiated.

This state-church became so far removed from the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, and so politically dominant, that it led into the corruption and ignorance of the Dark Ages. The Roman church powers recognized that people’s minds could be controlled if their education were controlled. Since all education was conducted in Latin, a language of which the masses were ignorant, then only the select few had access to reading materials.

Since the printing press had not yet been invented, access to the Bible was exceedingly limited. The Roman church further forbade the printing of any Scriptural material in a language other than Latin. Therefore the populace at large was totally dependent upon the educated clergy for any religious instruction. Sacerdotalism, the system of ordained priests who mediate between God and mankind, became firmly established. This practice emulated the pagan pattern of an elevated hierarchy of priests. Creating titles for and conferring authority to those who were hand-picked by the leadership, the religious establishment added ceremonies that outdid one another in solemn pomposity.

The ecclesiastical authorities constructed massive cathedrals, filling them with statuary and art. Having lost sight of the kingdom of God, the established church schemed and persecuted but missed its prime directive: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Many of the “visual images” seen in the church today—statuary, candles, feast days, sacraments, ceremonies, processions—were copied from the heathen and adapted for church use.

One example is the celebration of Christmas on December 25th. That day was also the culmination of the Roman celebration for the god of agriculture. The pagan holiday was marked by partying, feasting, and gift-exchanging. Early believers, finding no basis for this in the Word, refused to participate. Rebuffed and affronted, their Roman neighbors publicly maligned the Christians contemptuously, calling them “cannibals”. These accusations resulted in grave persecution of the believers. In time, however, that which had once seemed repulsive to Christians was adopted. Thus we have the widespread celebration of Christmas. (The irony is that today, in most cases, if you don’t celebrate Christmas with parties and gifts, you appear un-Christian.)

**“Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth
in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!” (Acts 20:30).**

From Constantine onward, the glory of the church was found not in intimate relationship with God but in its riches and forms. Church leaders were held in awe as great men on the earth; over the centuries even heads of nations bowed to them. Their power represented the authority of men, enforced, if need be, by the sword.

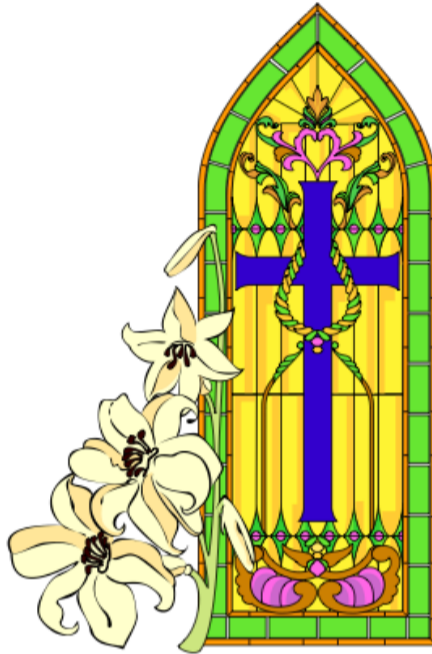
But the imposing church organization, with all the might of its authority, still found itself powerless to exercise spiritual control over the hearts of sinful men. Rome could neither unite people in true worship nor guard the soundness of the faith that had been passed on to them. Testifies Alexander Hay, “What the Newer Testament evangelists had accomplished in their material poverty and defenselessness through the weapons of faith, prayer and the Word of God, the humanly organized Church with its wealth and power was impotent to do.” (emphasis added)

Grasping the sword of human power made it increasingly necessary to use that weapon even to the extremes of Inquisitional ruthlessness and cruelty in complete contradiction to the Spirit of Christ. Dependence on human wisdom excluded more and more the Spirit-revealed wisdom of God, resulting in ever-increasing darkness.

Following the traditions of contemporaneous pagan religions, Constantine built temples in which Christians could gather. Since public buildings were provided for worship by the emperor, believers moved from meeting in homes to congregating in structures designed to imitate the temples inspired by the writings of Plato. Stained glass windows, lofty steeples, and high vaulted church ceilings: Plato’s writings spoke of light and space that would point man upward as he

strived to reach the presence of the “unknowable” God. The very edifice of worship was designed to draw the focus “up” toward some elusive spiritual truth just out of grasp.

Prior to Constantine, there had been no such thing as church buildings or “Christian” architecture. “The Christian faith was a living room movement, and was the first and only religion ever to exist that did not use special temples of worship; it is the only living room religion in human history.” The early Hebraic Christians understood that God could be known; they had a relationship with Him directly. They saw no need for stained glass windows and steeples to point upward to a God beyond their reach.



The high ceilings and vaulted windows conspired to induce an awe founded on tangible apparatus. (Is this why people so often whisper when they enter a church building?)



So it was, that in AD 323, almost three hundred years after the birth of the Church, Christians began to meet in a building we now errantly call a “church.” These structures, named after Newer Testament believers (“saints” — a term which biblically refers to everyone who loves and trusts Jesus!), paralleled the pagan temples named after their gods. In the sixth century Pope Gregory the Great invented an order of worship, designating it the only one for all the churches in Christendom. For Roman Catholics, that “order of worship” has remained basically unchanged.

During the Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin developed a pattern of worship that has remained the standard for most Protestant churches to this day: welcoming prayer, hymns, announcements, prayer, offertory, sermon, hymn, benediction. In the manner of pagan priests, a paid, professional clergy class evolved in Christianity, in time setting themselves apart from the daily lives of the people. The priesthood of all believers was forsaken.

The church lost the intimacy its gatherings had exemplified in the synagogue model: openly worshiping God, candidly sharing with and edifying each other, and freely ministering service to others in the church and in the world. With the merging of Roman hierarchy and Hellenist thought, congregational gatherings voided themselves of expressive thanksgiving and worship of a relationally loving God Who interacted with His people. The needs of personal lives and daily concerns were replaced by ethereal messages about a remote and uninvolved deity.

Christians fell into “spectator Christianity,” lulled into allowing the professional clergy, the sacerdotals, to approach the Almighty on their behalf. With the development of sacraments, the clergy found the key to absolute control over the people, since clergy alone were “ordained” to perform the rites.

The structured organization of ritualism and sacerdotalism necessarily meant the demise of the free exercise of spiritual gifts. Today many believers regard the general manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit as something peculiar to the early Church. Several denominations even have doctrinal statements to that effect. How far the church has strayed from the priesthood of believers equipped by the Holy Spirit to minister to one another.

During this period, as in the centuries to follow, the Lord was never without faithful witnesses. There has always been a remnant of believers striving to remain faithful to the teaching and practices of the early Church. As best as they could, they kept themselves from all compromise with the world, walking and serving in the wisdom and power of the Spirit. Many faced persecution and martyrdom, but as the centuries passed, the door to free expression of Truth began to crack open.

The Reformation IS Unfinished

**“I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race
and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—
the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24).**

One of the persevering firebrands for the faith who refused to be silenced was John Wycliffe, a fourteenth century preacher and theologian: “His intolerance of Church abuses, begging friars, unlearned clergy, politically motivated bishops and inaccessibility of the Scriptures in the language of the common people, as well as the Church’s demands on the monarch and its involvement in civil law and order, resulted in his championing the separation of church and state.”

One hundred and fifty years later William Tyndale would be so consumed with zeal to put the Word of God into the hands of his English countrymen that he would pay the ultimate price with his life. Once the Bible had been translated into the vernacular of the people, the Holy Spirit Himself could then breathe life into the sacred text for those earnestly seeking the truth.

At great risk to many lives was birthed the great spiritual awakening, the “Reformation”. Yet, as history has proved, the sacrifices of men and women obedient to their God were used by Him to rekindle faith in Christ’s ultimate sacrifice. As T.S. Eliot expressed in *Murder in the Cathedral*, “Martyrdom is no accident. A martyr is always made by the design of God for his love of men, to warn them, and to lead them back to his ways.”

The Reformation period saw the restoration of much that had been lost for centuries, especially a focus on the relationship between God and man. Because of the continuing powerful influence of the writings of Origen and Clement, however, the simplicity of the early Church order and practice failed to materialize. The right of all believers to take part in ministry through the gifts of the Spirit was minimally regained at best since there was still an ongoing distinction between clergy and laity.

Laity were permitted to hold certain positions of authority, i.e., “elder”, in some denominations, but even the great reformer, Martin Luther, felt that the illiterate laymen of his time were ill-prepared to minister. This became his impetus to translate the Newer Testament into the German vernacular of his people in order that they could be trained up to study the Word of God for themselves.

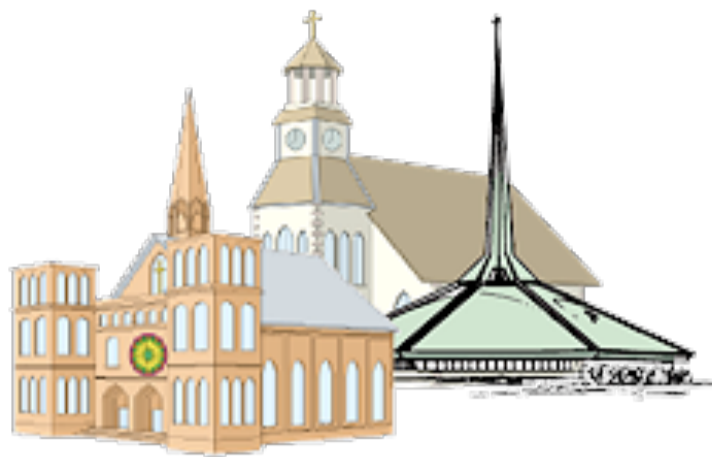
The Reformation awakened a zeal for learning and for exploration but failed to restore spiritual unity in the church. The various faith communities that were organized continued to depend primarily on human forms of government. Protestant clergy were simply replacements for the Roman Catholic priesthood. The churches that emerged, so far as their clergy structure was concerned, were reformed Roman Catholic churches rather than fully participative, Spirit-led churches.

Some of the reformers understood the early Church pattern but deemed it impossible to return to. Vested interest once more kept this from happening. Once again the “ambulance was placed at the bottom of the cliff.” The reformed Church had not only lost the (enforced) union which the Church of Rome’s human organization had provided; it had also failed to regain the true spiritual unity of the Hebraic early Church. The unity of the Church of Rome had been derived from its centralized, autocratic, totalitarian organization with the Pope at its head. The Protestant Church, lacking such authoritarian structure, paved the way for the factions and denominational splits that plague it to this day.

During the period of the Protestant Reformation, some signs of the re-Hebraization of the Christian faith began to surface as certain Hebraic biblical principles were rediscovered. The Reformers, for example, put great stress on the precept of sola scriptura, Scripture as the sole and final authority for the Christian—a view firmly rooted in Hebraic soil. An important point to consider: Armed with the well-documented history of the Reformation, whose participants attempted in great earnest to change the church, we in the twentieth (and now 21st) century can now see that any attempt at reform without a full return to the Hebraic foundations of the early Church will miss the mark.

The early Church determined to equip new followers of our Lord in relationship with one another to serve and disciple and evangelize. In contrast, the Denominations which the Reformation produced feared to depend entirely upon God, upon the leadership of the Lord, and on the power of the Spirit to change individuals, families, and societies as did the early Church. Everyone who attempts to regain the interrelational dependency on God and others who follow the Lordship of Jesus that characterized the early Church will encounter the same opposing forces.

Chapter 22. Obsession With Programs And Institutionalism



Most American churches today minister to crowds, whether small or large. Almost every facet of church life, including the seating and aisle arrangement, is designed for crowd control. Even the concept of “church” is often a place of formal gathering or a service. Man has erected large edifices to control blocks of people.

When you come to Jesus through this system, you are deposited into a big, impersonal organization called the “congregation”. Within the vastness of the congregation you then try to find some people who will care for you individually as a person. The congregational leadership may develop contrived groups in order for you to be involved in “church activities. For too long, churches have attempted to fabricate programs in the hope of generating loving relationships.

Congregations are partitioned into homogeneous groupings such as couples’ clubs, youth groups, college and career fellowships, erroneously believing that common circumstances will encourage interpersonal caring. This programmatic pattern of ministry is based on the Hellenist model rather than the Hebraic. The Hebraic paradigm would provide relational opportunities for mentoring by the older and wiser. Intergenerational contacts would be modeled and encouraged. With the home as the main meeting point for fellowship, most programmatic groups would be unnecessary.

In much of man’s design for the church, even their identity as “worshippers” appears to have been lost.

“In [worship’s] place,” notes A.W. Tozer, “has come that strange and foreign thing called the ‘program.’ This word has been borrowed from the stage and applied with sad wisdom to the type of public service which now passes for worship among us....

[Even] sound Bible exposition may be carried on in such a way as to leave the hearers devoid of any true spiritual nourishment whatever. For it is not mere words that nourish the soul, but God Himself, and unless and until the hearers find God in personal experience they are not the better for having heard the truth”(emphasis added).

Think about that.

Stop to consider when you think about the different churches in your community:

- Does God really desire that Christians cling to secondary doctrinal issues that now divide the church into thousands of denominations?
- Does the current prejudicial division come from God?
- Is this division counterproductive to the advance of the Gospel?
- How do these separations subvert the biblical emphasis on unity?

Ponder the admonition of Philippians 3:15,16: “All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.”

If such divisions in His Church counter God’s plan, can it be that the restoration underway around the world is His way to remove the barriers that now separate believers?

Many creeds and traditions incapacitate the church by focusing on what is divisive rather than on what unifies. Rather than apperceiving the Word of God and fostering agreement as did the early Church councils that followed the biblically Hebraic approach, subsequent councils even to the present day use the win-lose argument of the Hellenist philosophers: “If we think differently, then I must be right and you are wrong.”

Estrangement and separation have been the fruit of this thinking for centuries. Often the central theme of church history has been division, hatred, and murder of Christians by Christians, each believing they are serving God. Revisit the doctrines of the early Church, those matters derived from God’s Word, for which believers were willing to die.

Conversely, the church from the time of the Hellenist philosophers has been filled with “doctrinal traditions” for which believers were willing to kill or despise others. The Hellenist spirit in the church today has produced intolerance, a weapon wielded by Satan to keep Christians ineffective in reaching cities for Christ. From God’s vantage point He sees a church divided, revisionists against revisionists. As the restoration continues and apperception once again gains ground among God’s people, they will increasingly pray to understand and follow the original intent of the biblical writers and the Hebraic roots that so influenced them. The result will be an ever-increasing unity and harmony by God-lovers who are willing to let God make it clear.

While at the retreat center we witnessed the fruit of revisionism in the inability of local churches to unite in face of a spiritual threat. In the late 1980’s television news reported that two thousand satanists were moving into Connecticut to “take the state for Satan.” As small as it is, Connecticut for years was #1 in per capita income in the nation. Initially, satanism entered companies and businesses through the guise of personal growth seminars that incorporated eastern mysticism and meditation. For those who recognized and understood spiritual warfare, the satanic underpinning was readily apparent.

But the efforts of a few believers to voice their concerns and to mount an effectual offensive proved fruitless. We were reminded of the Jewish people in “labor camps” during World War II who struggled futilely to awaken others inside and outside the camp to its real function as a prison of death. As the satanic controls over these companies grew, formerly pleasant work places became oppressive. Several financially sound companies ultimately filed for bankruptcy. Media coverage questioned the bankruptcy of one particular Connecticut company, especially the disappearance of \$11 million of company assets at the hands of two “mysterious strangers”.

Since we had relationships with many Christians from different churches, we encouraged them to join with other believers in the affected companies to intercede against the demonic takeover. “Doctrinal” differences, however, separated these individuals and rendered any efforts ineffectual. It is our hope that God’s restoration will expose the source of the philosophical doctrines that now divide believers. Pray for ever-increasing cooperation among Christians in neighborhoods, workplaces, and cities in concert together for the cause of Jesus Christ.

“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age’” (Matthew 28:18-20).

“Making disciples” is the responsibility of every follower of Jesus. The early Church illustrates that no one should be on the sidelines. Even Philip the deacon (see Acts 5) became Philip the evangelist (see Acts 8) who led a revival in Samaria. Each and every individual, family, and home fellowship are God’s best means of permeating a godless society. These represent the relational troops that can be mustered and coordinated at the congregational level for a more encompassing outreach.

Of greater impact, however, is the relational mobilization of God’s people through personal contacts and relationships in their neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities. Focused, caring contacts with unbelievers require followers of Christ to personally convert their own faith into action. You can individually and collectively intercede for neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities. Crime and evil have proliferated in part because Christians have failed to exercise their authority in Jesus through trusting prayer.

A painful reality exists if you truly believe God’s Word: No matter how close you yourself draw to Jesus and to others in the faith, there will still be those you know and love (and countless others you’ve never met) who will enter a Christless eternity in hell because they have not understood and accepted the Gospel. Let us all be obedient to carry out the Lord’s command to share the Good News.

Think about the following truth as the Hebraic early Church understood it. The Book of Genesis makes clear that every human being is created in the image of God. Although sin ruptured our relationship with a loving Father, He graciously provided the means of reconciliation. Through the willingness of His own Son to lead a sinless life and to shed His blood, we can have fellowship with the Father once again. Our loving response to His love is to be burdened for humanity in the same way that He is. A popular saying in the 1970’s is appropriate as we consider the restoration of the church now underway: “With one hand reach out to Jesus, with the other bring a friend.”

What Has Happened To Our Roots?

The church that has emerged structurally and spiritually over the centuries has few points of similarity to the Church founded by the apostles. In seminaries today, revisionist writings strive to prove that the church as it stands is the form given by the Lord and the apostles. It is interesting to note what happened to the five basic ministries given by the Lord to the Church for its function and witness: apostle, prophet, evangelist, teacher, pastor (see Ephesians 4:12,13).

- The apostolic foundation became buried under a human structure that ruled by ecclesiastical force and decree, lording it over the people.
- The servant leadership of the apostles was forfeited for power and prestige.

Although several denominations today claim “apostolic lineage,” their method of leadership defies the admonition of Jesus to the Twelve:

“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves” (Luke 22:25,26).

The ministry of the evangelist or church planter, in its full sense, was lost as the pastoral function absorbed the ministries of preacher and teacher.

- The elders became “clergy,” and the other members of the church, “laymen.”
- As a result, the gifts of preaching and teaching to be distributed by the Holy Spirit as He determined (see I Corinthians 12:11) became prerogatives of the clergy. The rest of the church, deprived of its priestly privilege, has been (and continues to be) largely silenced.

It is a sad history. Instead of returning to the place of surrender and faith and free access to the Spirit’s power, the church sought strength and protection by solidifying human organization as it conferred power on human leaders. Paul and the other Newer Testament evangelists had used spiritual weapons of prayer, faith, and holiness to overthrow the strongholds of human reasoning. Tragically these spiritual weapons have been laid aside.

“They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers” (Nehemiah 9:2).

Whatever the denomination represented by the reader, we need to honestly examine the history of the church and consider if this is truly what God wanted: churches paralleling the institutions of the world (some with pastors functioning as CEO’s), compromising in order to avoid persecution and martyrdom, blending in with the culture to make worship palatable and entertaining.

This needs to be the generation that repents for both ourselves and our forefathers for having embraced the Hellenist and Roman influences. We have failed to exercise the courage to return to the Church established by Jesus and the apostles. Daniel confessed the ancestral sins that had brought defeat and captivity to the Jews. Turning to God in earnest prayer, as followers of Christ need to do today, he confessed the sins of the whole nation for generations as if they were his own iniquities. Daniel recognized that the “good hand of the Lord” would not be with his people until those sins were confessed and their effect was repudiated.

In the same way today, believers must repent for the centuries-long sins of the church for turning away from the theocracy of Jesus. With His forgiveness and grace, we may then fully cooperate with Him in fulfilling His words:

“I WILL BUILD MY COLLECTIVE CALLED-OUT ONES” (see Matthew 16:18).

Chapter 23. The Hebraic Restoration And The Jewish People

The Hebraic Restoration is a prophetic move of our Father to restore followers of His Son Jesus to the obedient trust-based lifestyle of Abraham. Followers of Jesus from whom we've heard who have diligently tested whether what we share is from Him (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21) are bearing fruit to His glory today. They're rejoicing as they realize that our Father has been doing a "new thing" all over the world since He gave Jerusalem back to the Jewish people in 1967 in fulfillment of Jesus' words, "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24).

Paul prophesied the times we today live in:

"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:25).

As our Father is completing His promise in the Hebrew Scriptures to restore the Jewish people back to Israel, He is also displaying His mercy to us Gentiles: to reveal to His children the true nature of the "Church" Jesus is building for Himself. The "collective called-out ones" are being restored to the trust-based lifestyle of Abraham, the patriarch chosen by God because he would "direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just" (Genesis 18:19).

"This is what the Lord says... 'Only if these decrees vanish from My sight,' declares the Lord, 'will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before Me.' This is what the Lord says: 'Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,' declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 31:35-37).

Obedient trust in God and in the truth of His Word hinges on His utter reliability to keep the promises He has made. The glorious riches of the Newer Testament are fulfillment of the prophetic promises voiced in the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, followers of Christ have security in the reality that the vows of God which are yet to be fulfilled will surely come to pass in His timing.

Over a three-day period in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit quickened in us the verses cited in this chapter that pertain to Israel and the Jewish people. We also sensed specific categories for each verse to emphasize key promises to the Jewish people. Many of these promises are being fulfilled before the world's eyes.

Does What God Is Bringing About In Israel Mean Something?

"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3).

The roots of Judaism and Christianity go back to our common father, Abraham. Nineteen hundred years of ecclesiastical prejudice and ignorance concerning the Hebraic roots of Christian faith have resulted in persecution of the Jews. For centuries the church has lacked the power and vitality of the first century Church as documented so clearly in the Book of Acts.

As a Hebraic understanding of God's Word is being restored, does our Father desire for the church today to bless the Jewish people? Will He not fulfill His promise to bless those who bless the Jews? Will part of the blessing the church receives entail a restoration of the early vitality and power that once characterized it? In response to a heightened interest in fully appreciating God's faithfulness to His Word, many followers of Christ have become more aware of an ever-increasing amount of "divine activity" occurring among the Jewish people and the land of Israel.

Consider the following news items which highlight repentance among Christian churches, a repentance that acknowledges with shame the historic persecution of the Jews.

• In 1962 Pope John XXIII convened Vatican Council II. At that gathering, the Jews were decreed innocent of the charge of "Christ-killer." (During World War II, Monsignor Angelo Roncalli, who would later become Pope John XXIII, had developed an extraordinary reputation for saving thousands of Jews from Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria by providing Jews with fake Catholic baptismal certificates.)

•The following prayer, composed shortly before the Pontiff's death, admitted the church's sins against the Jewish people and sought forgiveness from God for injustices committed:

"We realize now that many, many centuries of blindness have dimmed our eyes, so that we no longer see the beauty of Thy Chosen People and no longer recognize in their faces the features of our first-born brother. We realize that our brows are branded with the mark of Cain. Centuries long has Abel lain in blood and tears, because we had forgotten Thy love.

Forgive us the curse which we unjustly laid on the name of the Jews. Forgive us that, with our curse, we crucified Thee a second time."

•Lutherans have recanted of Martin Luther's writings against the Jews. In 1984, celebrating the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth, the World Lutheran Federation issued this statement:

"We cannot accept or condone the violent verbal attacks that the Reformer made against the Jews. The sins of Luther's anti-Jewish remarks and the violence of his attacks on the Jews must be acknowledged with deep distress, and all occasion for similar sin in the present or the future must be removed from our churches... Lutherans of today refuse to be bound by all of Luther's utterances against the Jews."

•Added to these acknowledgments of sinful atrocity is a document from the United Methodists:

"Jews have been victims of systematic oppression and injustice... Christians must also become aware of that history in which they have deeply alienated the Jews... The persecution by Christians of Jews throughout the centuries calls for clear repentance and resolve to repudiate past injustice and to seek its elimination in the present."

"I the Lord do not change" (Malachi 3:6).

Below are representative verses which are predicated on certain biblical truths:

- *the eternal nature of the Abrahamic covenant.
- *God's promises to, and relationship with, the Jewish people.
- *the biblical basis of the hatred of the Arabs against the Jews.
- *God's unconditional relationship to the land of Israel.
- *the regathering of the Jewish people back to Israel.
- *God's purposes in this regathering as they pertain to Gentiles the world over.

Please review the following verses thoughtfully and prayerfully.

The Abrahamic Covenant

The covenant with Abraham was instituted and initiated by the sovereign God Who gave His oath to uphold it. Only God has the right to say "I will" and it will be.

[God speaking to Abraham] "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:2-3).

The duration of the covenant that God established with the people of Israel was forever:

"All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever" (Genesis 13:15).

The boundaries of the land given to Abraham were established by God.

"To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18).

This covenant was promised to pass through Abraham's son Isaac and to his descendants forever. It did not pass through Ishmael, as claimed by the Muslims.

"Then God said, 'Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him'" (Genesis 17:19).

God then confirmed to Isaac's son Jacob and to his descendants the covenant of the promised land and the blessings to be poured upon them.

"I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying... All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.

I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Genesis 28:13-15).

God confirmed the patriarchal covenant with Moses, who then reminded the Israelites of God’s covenant promise to them of the land they were about to enter.

“And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord” (Exodus 6:8);

“When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites—the land He swore to your forefathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey—you are to observe this ceremony in this month...

After the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as He promised on oath to you and your forefathers” (Exodus 13:5,11).

Even when the Israelites had been removed from the land during their exiles and dispersion, God did not forget His covenant.

“Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking My covenant with them. I am the Lord their God.

But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 26:44-45).

God’s Sovereign Election of the Jew Is His Encouragement to the Called-out Ones

God’s actions on behalf of Israel emanated out of His love for them and out of His oath to the patriarchs.

“The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

Similarly, Peter reminded believers that they too were chosen by God in His foreknowledge and through the work of the Holy Spirit. The election of followers of Christ as well as the chosenness of the Jewish people were initiated by God for His pleasure, purposes, and glory.

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by His blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance” (1 Peter 1:1-2).

The land of Israel belongs to God. The Jews are tenants of His property. It was not designed to be broken up or traded away.

[God speaking]: “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is Mine and you are but aliens and My tenants” (Leviticus 25:23).

God’s Relationship with the Jewish People Is Everlasting

The Jews are God’s “treasured possession.” As such, He set them aside for His specific purposes.

“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession” (Deuteronomy 7:6).

God chose the Jews to make a name for Himself, a relationship designated to be “forever.”

“And who is like Your people Israel—the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for Himself, and to make a name for Himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before Your people, whom You redeemed from Egypt?

You have established Your people Israel as Your very own forever, and You, O Lord, have become their God” (2 Samuel 7:23-24).

God is prepared to destroy every other nation except the Jews. He has disciplined the Jewish people but has promised that He will not utterly destroy them.

“Do not fear, O Jacob My servant, for I am with you,” declares the Lord. “Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished” (Jeremiah 46:28).

As a servant to the Jews, Jesus Christ validated the promises that God had given to the patriarchs and fulfilled His promise that many nations would be blessed through the seed of Abraham.

“For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy” (Romans 15:8,9).

Today God is reassuring the Jewish people by regathering them to the land of Israel. God assured His people that there would be a second regathering of the Jews to the land of Israel from the four corners of the earth. It is HE Who will accomplish this.

“In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to Him, and His place of rest will be glorious.

In that day the Lord will reach out His hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of His people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea.

He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; He will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth” (Isaiah 11:10-12).

God promised that HE would use the Gentiles to help gather the Jews back to Israel.

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up My banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders’” (Isaiah 49:22).

God again affirmed through Ezekiel that HE was the One Who would scatter and gather the Jews. After HE has brought them back to Israel HE will give them a new spirit and a new heart.

“Therefore say: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: “I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again. They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols.

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. They will be My people, and I will be their God” (Ezekiel 11:17-20).

Israel Born in a Day: Seeing Is Believing

“Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children.

Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?’ says the Lord. ‘Do I close up the womb when I bring to delivery?’ says your God. ‘Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her.

For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance’” (Isaiah 66:8-11).

For many Gentiles, the verses from Isaiah 66:8-11 would have gone unnoticed and without meaning if, on November 29, 1947, God had not caused the United Nations to vote to partition British-held Palestine. This ballot established an official homeland for the Jews. In the face of great Arab adversity, on May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was declared—in a day!

For further discussion of the Hebraic foundations, see: [“A Comparison of the Hebraic Restoration and the Jewish Roots Movement.”](#)

Glossary For Volume 3

Allegory

A tool of Greek philosophical thought to explain away the original Hebraic context and content of God's Word. Instead of Scripture as practical application of truth, allegory discounted the literal meaning of scripture and inserted a "higher plane" of spirituality and hidden meaning.

Blood libel

A superstitious accusation initiated in the 14th century against the Jews charging them with mixing Christian blood into their Passover celebration elements. A blatant lie, since the Jewish people were forbidden by the Torah (Leviticus 3:17) to consume blood of any kind.

Church Fathers

Influential Greek philosophers converted in the second and third centuries who heavily infused Christianity with Hellenistic thought, such as dualism which taught that only the spiritual realm was good, while the physical life was evil. They were also responsible for the division of followers of Jesus into the clergy class and the laity, and establishing the apostle Peter as the first pope.

Dualism

The Hellenist philosophical teaching that life is divided into two components, the spiritual as good, and the physical as evil. This viewpoint was in stark contrast to the Hebraic view of man being created in God's image for relationship with Him both on earth and in eternity, and therefore his body and spirit are "good" from God's perspective.

Hellenistic

A philosophical worldview fostered by ancient Greek culture in which the material body is evil and only the spiritual is good. Through this influence, spiritual expression became institutionalized. Thus a holy clergy class were intermediaries between God and man, and the "laity" of commoners were confined to silence in the pews. Worship could take place only in "God's house."

Humanism

Philosophical worldview which places man, not God, at the center of everything. God remains "out-there" rather than indwelling His own through His Spirit; religious practice is designed to try to "reach Him" because He is inaccessible.

Pietism

The Hellenistic practice pushed forward by the Church Fathers of withdrawing from worldly concerns in order to focus on spiritual matters. This contradicts the Hebraic understanding of God's people being closely interconnected with one another as community and extended spiritual family.

Rabbinic Judaism

With the destruction of the Temple in AD70, sacrifices could no longer be offered by the Jewish people to atone for sin. Judaism was therefore restructured so that prophetic revelation of Scriptures was replaced with interpretation based on reason. Rabbis and sages were formally ordained to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures to cover every possible facet of Jewish life.

Replacement theology

A prevailing misconception within much of Christianity that the Church has replaced Israel in all of God's divine plans. Many scriptural passages that pertain to the Jewish people are now "spiritualized" to be blessings to the Church, while any of God's curses pertain solely to the Jew.

Revisionists

A widely used practice of rewording historical truth and facts by manipulating them to fit current social agendas or cultural standards. For example, revisionist writings and councils convinced the Church authorities to adopt the autocratic system of the Roman government with which it became enmeshed. Hellenist-influenced revisionists severed the continuity of the Hebrew Scriptures with the Newer Testament so that God's Laws were discarded and His grace was perverted into lawlessness.

Sacerdotalism

Religious intermediaries who stand between an individual and God to approach the Almighty on their behalf. This contradicts the priesthood of all believers in Jesus as Lord and the collective family of brothers and sisters of whom He is the High Priest.

Syncretism

Ecclesiastical leaders adapted pagan rituals and traditions into Christianity in order to make the religion more acceptable to conquered heathens and ensure their compliance. This policy subtracts from the purity of God's Word and adds other religious beliefs, rituals and practices which compromise and even contradict the Bible.

Transubstantiation

This doctrine affirmed that the elements of communion were miraculously transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ by the priest at the Catholic Sacrifice of the Mass—it's the Levitical sacrificial system all over again with intermediaries positioned between worshippers and clergy.

Zionism

A movement for the re-establishment, development and protection of a nation for the Jewish people worldwide as their Biblical homeland in what is now Israel.

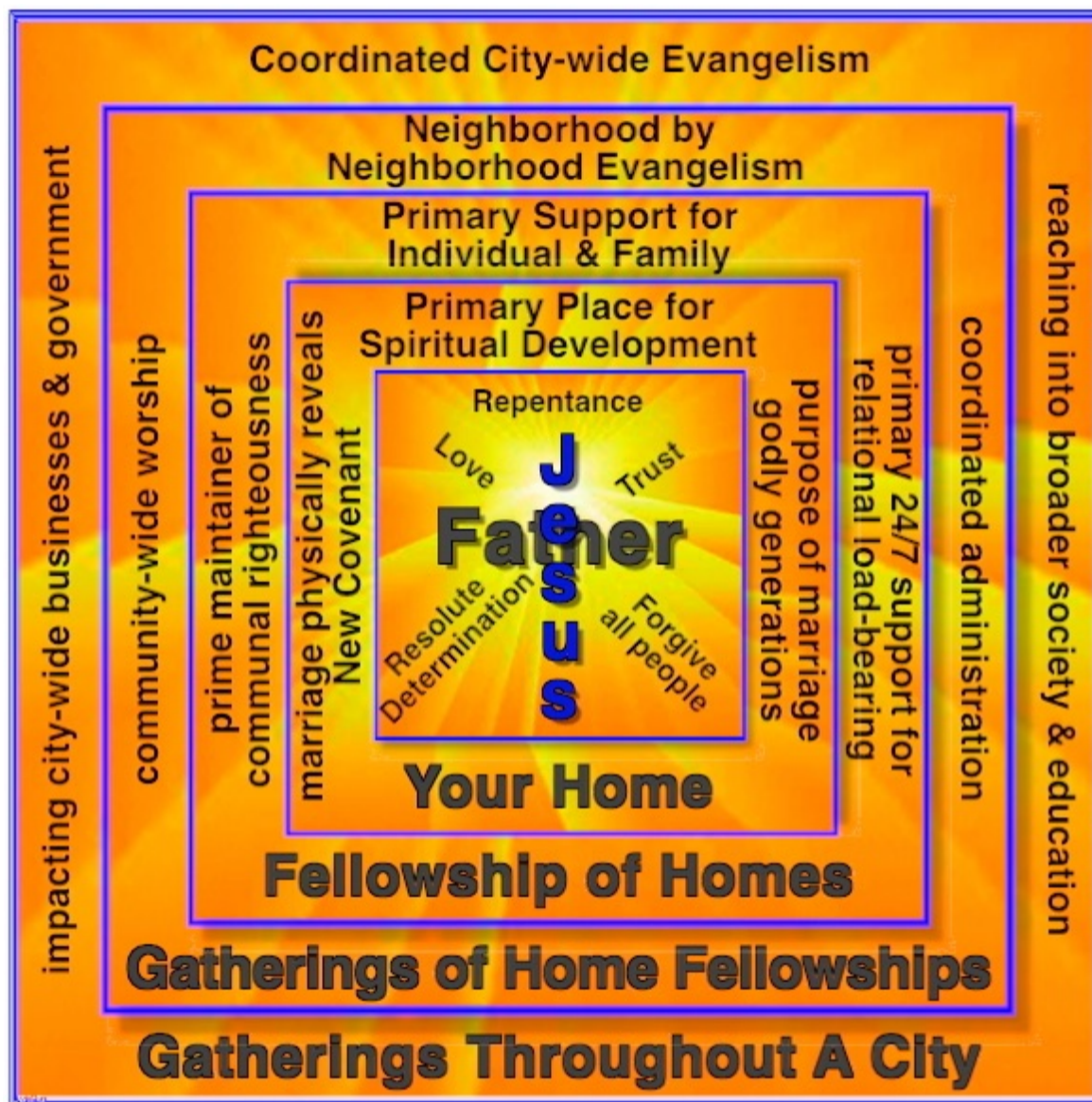
Volume 4. Our Father Is Restoring Hebraic Relational Priorities

Chapter 24. Our Father Is Restoring The Hebraic Roots

- The Cornerstone Is Our Lord Jesus And Our Covenant With Our Father
- The Building Block Is The Home — First The Marriage, Then The Family
- The Primary Support System Is Fellowship in Homes

Father’s relational design for His children

The diagram that follows represents an updated model of the **early Church priorities** based on a Hebraic-influenced spiritual focus. Take a moment to examine the diagram and the priorities it implies. Note that the focus emanates from the center outward. The inner three sections will be developed more fully in the chapters to follow and are the primary focus of Restoration Ministries International.



We developed this diagram during the course of our research and the revelations we received concerning the early Church while we were in Israel. The process embodied in the diagram begins with the intimate relationships connoted in the center three boxes. As relationships expand outward to the congregational level, a greater degree of administrative and organizational structure may be needed to coordinate the penetration and impact that believers in the restoration will have in their communities. At the same time, such organizational structure should enhance and encourage intimacy at the home fellowship level rather than promote activity that would in any way detract from those relationships.

Parallel the relational process referred to in the diagram in light of your own growth and development as a human being. Following your birth you began the process of becoming increasingly more aware of your connection to ever larger groups of people. Initially you were conscious of your mother, then your family, your extended family, your neighborhood, town, and world.

When you are born again in your spirit, this same process reflects God’s biblical design. He intends that you grow in intimacy with His Son Jesus. At the same time, through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, you begin to learn to ex-

press love and receive love in a unique and special way within your home. Supportive relationships that include a few other believers to whom you can commit yourself for nurture and strengthening in a home fellowship are an outgrowth through which you are disciplined to bear fruit for the Kingdom. As pockets of developing fellowships congregate, their opportunities expand to minister among broader venues and to financially support those who are called forth.

The nation of Israel embodied a relationship-based organization that parallels the progression illustrated in our diagram. The family relationships and authority systems provided the model for organizing the entire nation.

For Israel this organization pattern was vital, particularly when it came time to fight their enemies. To be victorious they needed to respond “as one man” when the war trumpet sounded.

The nation of Israel as described in the Bible was the summation of progression: an individual belonged to a family that was part of a clan that identified with a tribe. Finally, twelve tribes who were ruled by their elders (and later, a king) made up the nation.

The relational responsibility that bound Israel together kept them organized as individuals, families, clans, and tribes. When David became established as king over Israel, he designated fortified cities to be built all over Israel. Each city was led by zakens, or respected elders. Each city possessed an individual identity and experienced a certain measure of autonomy. Each was expected, however, to respond for the good of the whole nation when the battle trumpet was blown.

The restoration occurring in the church today parallels this pattern. An individual puts wholehearted trust in Jesus. Perhaps those in his or her home observe this changed life and also choose to trust Jesus. (Maybe they have long been praying for that family member to join them in trusting Jesus!) Believers on pilgrimage need spiritual intimacy with others who come alongside them in a home fellowship so that they may support each other’s trust in Jesus. Pockets of fellowships can then gather to form a congregation, which then joins other congregations throughout the city to cooperate in larger endeavors to impact unbelievers at large.

The supportive relationships in the home and home fellowships provide the effective mechanism to permeate neighborhoods, businesses, and the cultural and social sectors of the city. The primary weapons of God’s Kingdom, as always, are intercession, prayer to tear down the enemy’s influence, obedience to the Word, and the personal testimony of believers as they reflect increasing Christlikeness in speech and action. The administrative coordination at the congregation level helps to maintain focus and purpose.

Think about it. Your relationship with Jesus, represented in the center of the diagram, does not require organizational structure. It is out of the Father’s love that Jesus is revealed: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44). This relationship is personal and spiritual. No human organization is needed at this level, only the regenerative work of God through the Holy Spirit.

Neither structure nor organization are necessary in one-on-one relationships or in intimate relationships with a few. Even home fellowships are affiliated through relationships with others in the faith community and/or through the evangelist or church planter who cultivated the groups. When organization is kept to a minimum, the Holy Spirit’s guidance of those involved is hungrily sought and depended on. Fewer distractions of activity and programs arise to cause believers to take their focus off seeking God.

The institutionalism that has crept into the church today in the US has relationally crippled followers of Christ. They no longer know how to commit themselves deeply to other people, nor do they see the need to take the time to do so. Too often American Christians are like eggs in a carton. Their shells rub up against each other at services and meetings, but their lives never become “scrambled” in intimate relationship. Even the “cartons”, the separate congregations, seldom mix.

Personal load-bearing interaction with others may seem foreign to you. You may have committed yourself to a marriage but find it difficult to intimately care for the individual you married. You may be committed to a specific congregation and even attend Sunday school or be part of a home group but find it almost impossible to commit yourself to individuals in deeper, caring relationships. Many Christians find themselves committed to the effects of believing in Jesus: being saved, having their sins forgiven, or having their prayers answered. Few find it easy to have an ongoing daily relationship with the person of Jesus.

While in Israel our believing Jewish friends asked, “Why do you Christians in the United States always need an activity like a Bible study in order to get together? Can’t you get together just because you love and care for each other?” We were deeply convicted by their observation.

Think of the actions and the results which describe the early Church:

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and **ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God** and enjoying the favor of all the people. **And the Lord added to their number daily** those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46,47).

Remember this: Jesus loves each person individually and personally. He died for each one so that each could enjoy a relationship with Him. You may have been drawn to Him for personal reasons: for forgiveness to escape the wrath to come and for the cleansing that enables you to have fellowship with God. But as a follower of Christ you also enter into a process. You become a disciple, a lifelong practice of being transformed into His image.

Jesus designed discipleship not as a program conducted by leaders of a congregation but as an extension of your growing relationship with Him. He desires every believer to be in a relationship with other believers to enjoy true fellowship as they are discipled and as they themselves disciple others. You may be brand new to the Kingdom, but as long as you have one hand in the hand of the Master, you can reach back with the other to guide someone even newer along the path you have walked!

Remember that God still sees His Church as the ekklesia, “the called-out ones.” His people are the Church, even the gathering of two or three in His Name. Wherever God’s people are throughout the week, there is His Church, permeating society and connecting with the very people He wants His children to lead into His Kingdom. The ekklesia who already have an ongoing relationship with each other are eager to gather for fellowship, communion, and building up of one another. This level of relationship, referred to in the diagram as the “intimate few” or “home fellowship”, represents a seven-day-a-week commitment to each other.

This depth of care and concern signifies far more than just scheduled meetings together. It is a mutual commitment to uphold righteousness and to bear one another’s burdens. The early churches met in homes as well as gathered in the temple courts for worship and instruction. The temple courts represented the congregational assembly of the home fellowships. These people were relational, unified by their love for God and their commitment to each other as His people. People today generally identify one congregation with one church building. As many believers have found whose congregations are built upon home fellowships, though, several congregations can share the same facility.

At the time of the apostles all the congregations that met throughout a city would have collectively been considered “the church”:

“To the church of God in Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2).

“To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia” (2 Corinthians 1:1).

“Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea” (Romans 16:1).

As followers of Jesus who were empowered by the Holy Spirit went about the daily business of life, they could carry the message of Christ to all they encountered. As one writer puts it, “In the first century all church members were scattered abroad and the Church was the mission; today, the Church stays home and the apostles are scattered abroad to be missionaries... It was the method of ‘every-member evangelism’ that did the miracle in apostolic days.”

Are you in the habit of bearing witness to what you have seen and heard as you go about your daily business?

Recapping Our Heavenly Father's Relational Priorities



The process of expansion from one to one-on-one to a few is always personal. This always begins from the center of the diagram, with Jesus. Your fellowship must first of all be with the Lord and then with others whom God provides for mutual strengthening and encouragement. Every step and extension of commitment to other people as you move toward the outer rings is based on a network of personal relationships, someone caring for you and you expressing care for them.

Your trust in Jesus will be strengthened only as you abide in caring relationships, experiencing His love (which you already know by faith) through the love and admonition of others. As the fullness of God's love grows in you, you can then share the vitality of your faith with those who have yet to encounter Jesus. Through the intimacy of relationships in your family and in your circle of load-bearers in the home fellowship, your awareness of the Holy Spirit's work in you grows.

The Spirit continues to fill you to be God's vessel of blessing to others as you manifest His gifts. Thus you are able to truly appreciate the power of belonging to a body in which everyone does his part. Equipped and empowered, you can then fulfill His commission to you and to all believers: to make disciples of all nations.

“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile’” (Jeremiah 29:11-14).

Jeremiah's words remind us of the command the Lord gave us in Miami after our return from Israel in March of 1994: **“Free the captives.”** God desires to prosper His people in their pilgrimage of Christlikeness and to display His glory among them. This will happen when followers of Christ have the courage to forsake whatever hinders them and to wholeheartedly seek Him with a faith empowered by His Spirit and nourished by His Word.

Through apperception of the Scriptures (going back to the original intent of the biblical writers), the following chapters contain some practical suggestions to acquire the powerful, cooperative faith of the early Church, a Church built upon a Hebraic understanding of the Bible. The priorities of Jesus, marriage, family, and home fellowship are essential to His restoration. His people must seek the rhema of the Holy Spirit as did the early Church for specific guidance and direction.

Chapter 25. Father & Lord Jesus: Your Primary Relationship

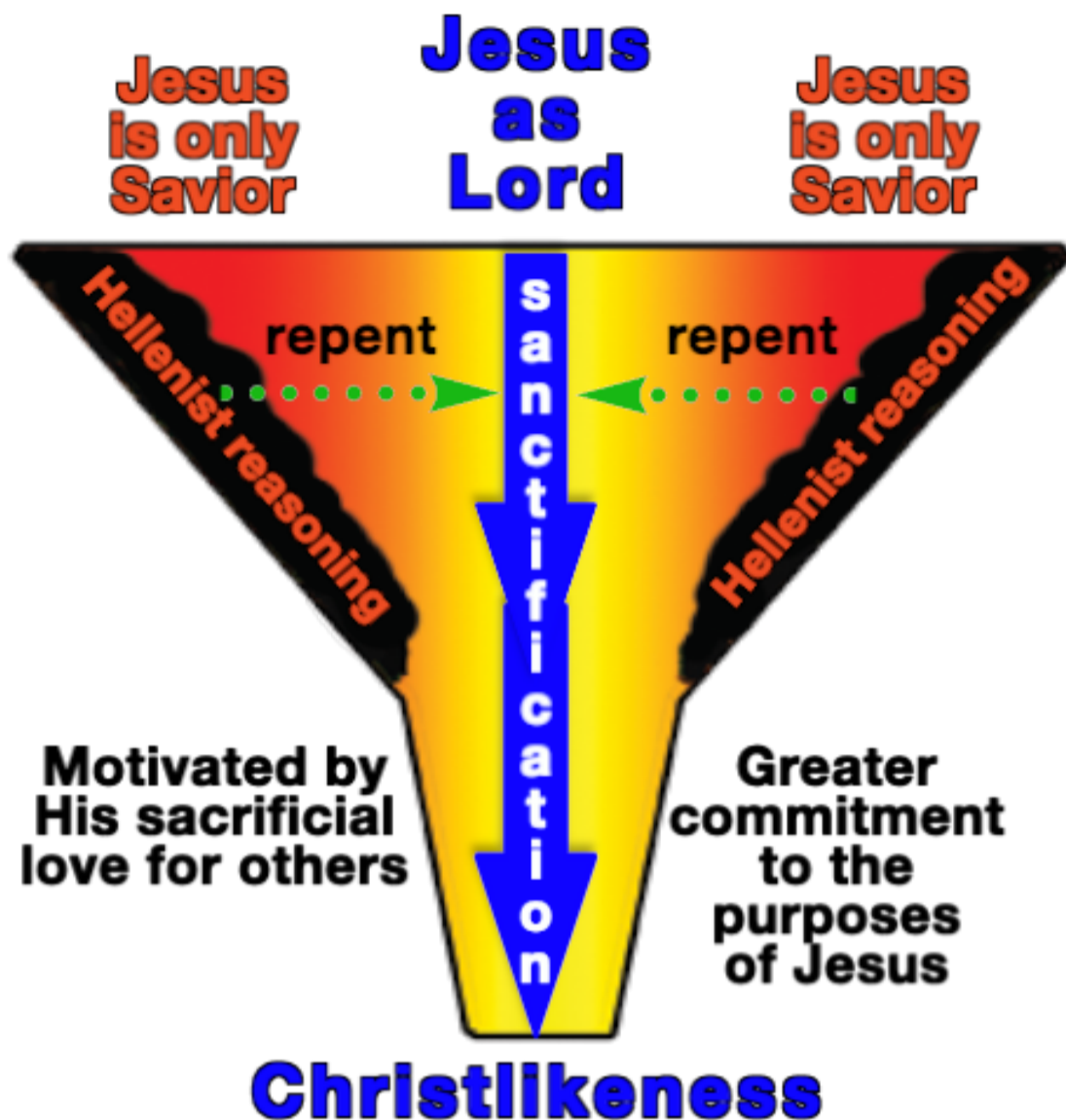


Early one Sunday morning, hours before Mike was to speak at a morning worship service, the Lord woke him up. There in his mind's eye was a vision of a **funnel**. As Mike stared at the funnel he could hear in his spirit an explanation of its meaning. Sketching the funnel on his computer, he then made an overhead transparency of it.

When he finished his message that morning at the service, he put the funnel transparency on the overhead projector and explained it to the congregation. To his surprise, people left their seats and came forward to repent of their sins, convicted of having believed a gospel that did not include the **Lordship of Christ** in their lives.

The following week Mike was asked to address a different congregation. The Holy Spirit prompted him, "Just tell them about the funnel." He again put the funnel transparency on the overhead projector. After he had finished explaining its meaning, people again left their seats and came forward to repent.

When the funnel image was presented on retreats, the explanation elicited the same response: **conviction and repentance**. This illustration represents an updated version of that funnel:



Like the pull of gravity, your humility to submit to the Lordship of Jesus draws you downward into the funnel as an invisible but constant force. The tug of His faithfulness does not let go of you. When you sin, His Spirit seeks you out and brings you to repentance through His kindness (see Romans 2:4). God pursues you to the point of your yielding so that your broken heart and spirit can once again enjoy the fullness of His presence as Lord.

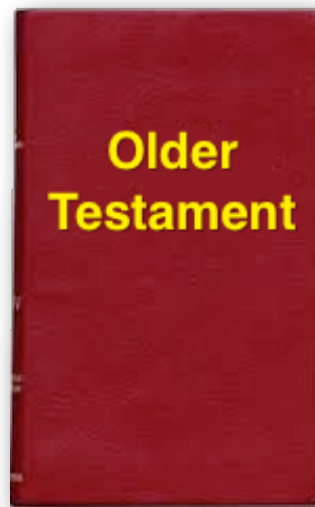
As you pass into the stem of the funnel, the love of Jesus is so compelling that you do not desire to think about yourself but only to do His will. Your personal discretion to choose what you want to do withers as you continue to yield yourself as a bondservant to His will. God's goal for you as His child is to be changed by His Spirit into Christlikeness in such a way that there truly is evidence of a "new creation."

Those who understood the funnel explanation recognized that the "being saved" gospel they had received had consigned them to the sides of the funnel to deal with all their imperfections. Through the influx of reasoning and psychology into the church during the past few decades, sins that require repentance are now considered "problems." No longer are believers held accountable to take personal responsibility for their own sins, which would bring them through repentance into the center of the funnel.

Much of pastoral counseling now convinces people that they must understand their problems and find out who is at fault for their current condition. Through the process of problem exploration, individuals may expand their awareness about their difficulties. At the same time, however, they develop an increasing unhappiness with God. Though they might not put it into words, in their hearts they neither trust Him to do what He promises in the Bible nor do they entrust themselves to Him as Lord of their lives.

Thus many Christians live as if they have been "victimized" by both God and by others. They have not grasped a loving trust in a sovereign Lord.

The Hebrew Bible Is The Basis for the Gospel of Jesus



The early Gospel was more comprehensive than we in the church have understood. Many today have been told an incomplete or even counterfeit gospel. The Bible stipulates one true Gospel as the way to eternal life. Jesus told his Jewish listeners:

“Whoever trusts in Me as the Scripture [Hebrew Bible] has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (John 7:38,39).

The “streams of living water” refer to the evidential operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of one who puts his trust in Jesus.

The only Scripture in existence when Jesus spoke these words was the Hebrew Bible. If you want to trust Jesus “as the Scripture has said,” you must study the Hebrew Bible to discern the complete Gospel. Our acceptance by God the Father through the sacrifice of Jesus was the central issue in the early Church. The Gospel that is based on the Hebrew Bible and understood by the early Jewish church was not man accepting Jesus as his Savior, but God accepting the Lord Jesus as the only Savior. Christ fulfilled the reconciliation requirements of God. Jesus’ payment was complete, and a new covenant was established through His blood. The resurrection of Jesus was the Father’s sign that the sacrifice for our sins had been accepted by Him. God was, and forever will be, satisfied.

As noted earlier, before the coming of Jesus a number of rabbis taught that a person must experience a spiritual birth, a response to God’s call on his life. Conversion equaled rebirth. Being “born from above” was a shift from following the letter of the law to abiding in loving obedience with God. Being born again was the point at which you put your full trust and reliance in the Lord. That’s why Jesus was so surprised when Nicodemus professed ignorance of this new birth: “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this?” (John 3:10).

The Hebrew word for “faith” means more than just belief; it is a profound trust in God. Trust is an emotional response from the heart, far more than mere mental assent that God is real. Reliance on the Lord penetrates the very core of your being. We must always be on guard against a counterfeit gospel. Even the first century Galatians were warned to beware of a perverted gospel:

“Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (Galatians 1:8.)

Any so-called ‘gospel’ of today that differs materially from the Gospel understood by the earliest followers of Jesus is a path to hell. Satan is shrewd. He doesn’t care how you don’t get to heaven, as long as you don’t get there! Some people wrongfully assume that God will excuse them at the judgment throne for not knowing the true Gospel. The Bible states otherwise.

The early Church understood salvation as a process that was based on repentance and loving trust in Jesus. And in the Hebrew Scriptures, God expressed His heart’s desire for a love relationship with His chosen people. The two agree. But many of the Israelite leaders perverted this love into a series of rules and obligations designed to earn salvation only if precisely followed.

Accepting The Gospel Is To Embrace The Father's New Covenant

The early Jewish followers of Jesus clearly understood the significance of **covenants**. Today we understand dimly at best. God had established covenants with His people through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. Jeremiah had prophesied that the Jews could expect yet another covenant. God is the initiator of the covenants between Himself and His people. Each covenant carries with it God's promises and man's responsibilities if he accepts God's terms.

Paul reminded the Gentiles about covenants as part of the heritage received from the Jewish people: "Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, **the covenants**, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises" (Romans 9:4).

The writer to the Hebrews builds the foundation of the Messiahship of Jesus on the institution of a new covenant: "To Jesus the mediator of a **new covenant**, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24, emphasis added).

These words sound quaint and almost antique to us in the postmodern West. But what a thundering impact Jesus' words must have had on the Jewish ears who first heard them: "This is **My blood of the covenant**, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28, emphasis added). Suddenly in that upper room that evening, it was a new ball game on earth. The rules were changing, and a new covenant was transcending the old.

But the new covenant did not eradicate the old. The old became the enduring foundation for the new. The old is still there as the historical basis. And today, we cannot adequately appreciate the new unless we have a heart-knowledge of the old, as the early Jewish followers did. For it is from the heart that we put our loving trust in Jesus to enter a covenant relationship with our heavenly Father through His Son's shed blood.

Let's review several key elements of authentic conversion:

1. Salvation requires your Repentance

John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter at Pentecost all affirmed repentance as the first step of salvation. Biblical repentance always demands a turning away from sin and a turning to God. Do you see these two distinctives? Turning **from** sin and turning **to** God. That's the vital message in this verse: "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must **turn to God in repentance** and **have faith** in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21).

Repentance grieves you that you have grieved God; you hunger for the forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration that only He can give. That grief is the "godly sorrow [that] **brings repentance** that leads to salvation and leaves no regret" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

For years, Sue had prided herself on her moral lifestyle and sound reputation, but inside she felt more like a "whited sepulcher." Hidden from view were the pride, independence, and selfishness that influenced so many of her decisions. When God made these known to her as the detestable sins that they were, she anguished before him. Desire for independence from Him vanished as she yielded to His Lordship. Her change of heart was relational. It went a thousand miles beyond agreement with a set of teachings and rules.

2. Salvation requires your agape (ahav) Love

God lays the same relational requirement in both the Older and Newer Testaments; that is, to love Him. If we try to keep God's commands without loving Him, we'll become proud and get caught up in what we do for Him. Paul tells us in I Corinthians 13 that "without love, we are nothing." Living out God's commands because of our love for Him keeps us humbly dependent on Him, and contrite when we fail.

The foundation of love is found in Deuteronomy 6:4,5: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. **Love** the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." The Hebrew word for love, **ahav** (ah-hahv'), means to be filled with desire and delight and passion for the one you love. You long to be in your loved one's presence.

The heart-cry of God throughout the Tanakh is a longing for a love relationship with His people. The ten commandments tell us that God promises to show His love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Quoting from that same Deuteronomy passage, Jesus delivered the greatest commandment:

“**Love the LORD your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second [which is from Leviticus] is like it, ‘**Love your neighbor** as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40).

The Greek word agape (ah-gah’-pay) is used for love here and its meaning is similar to the Hebrew ahav.

To summarize the priority of love:

Everything in your Christian life—everything about knowing God and experiencing Him, everything about knowing and doing His will—depends on the quality of your love relationship with Jesus as your LORD. If your love relationship with Jesus is not right, nothing in your life will be right.

In the early church, there was an intensity of love for God in accepting the Gospel message that is often lacking today. God desires a love relationship with His people. This love is wonderfully manifested by those who know the Gospel of the Hebrew Scriptures and understand the depth of their own depravity. For them it is easy to see God’s grace in the atonement and to appreciate the sacrifice of Jesus on their behalf.

Trevor McIlwain of New Tribes Missions has gotten a phenomenal response by teaching natives the Bible in chronological order, from Genesis to Revelation. When they complete the Older Testament, they see the depth of their own sin. Then when they hear about Jesus, they are delighted to respond in love to His sacrifice on the cross.

3. Salvation is incomplete without your Trust

The unwavering trust that God requires of His children is the fabric woven throughout the Hebrew Bible and the Newer Testament. Look at some of God’s promises to those who trust Him to take care of things:

- “Many are the woes of the wicked, but the **LORD’s unfailing love** surrounds the man who trusts in Him” (Psalm 32:10, emphasis added).
- “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and **He will make your paths straight**” (Proverbs 3:5,6, emphasis added).
- “So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘The one who trusts **will never be dismayed**’” (Isaiah 28:16, emphasis added).
- Salvation for the Jews was based on a loving trust in God: “**Abraham trusted God**, and it was credited to Him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6, emphasis added).

4. Accepting the Gospel Requires Your Resolute Determination And Forceful Conviction

One of the more perplexing verses for some is Matthew 11:12: “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been **forcefully advancing**, and **forceful men** lay hold of it.” In light of the military examples in the Hebrew Bible, picture this illustration of that verse. Around a military fortification such as the walls of Jerusalem, “killing zones” are established to concentrate weapon fire for maximum killing effectiveness. Those who attack the fort must first courageously battle their way through the killing zone. Because of the strong likelihood that they might be killed in the attack, these individuals have to “be dead” to everything beforehand in order to fully focus on their objective.

Such forceful determination was the standard for those who gave their lives to follow Jesus. This essence is captured in Matthew 13:44-46:

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and **sold everything he had and bought it.**”

It takes tremendous certainty to give up everything you’ve got in order to lay hold on what God is offering you.

5. You Must Forgive All Others

One truth in particular startles many believers. Jesus declared, “If you **do not forgive** men their sins, your Father **will not forgive** your sins” (Matthew 6:15). The question for us is, Can we be forgiven of anything by our heavenly Father if we do not forgive others who have violated us?

John warns about unforgiveness: “We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, **cannot love God**, whom he has not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:19-21, emphasis added).

The early Church understood that our Father will not consummate a relationship with an unforgiving person. Why? Because his Father refuses to forgive him. There will be no evidence of the Holy Spirit operating as a stream of living water in a bitter, unforgiving person. That person has failed to appreciate how much he or she needed to be forgiven by the shed blood of Jesus. That’s a relational fact, something fairly obvious to early believers—but not so obvious to those who have given themselves to the false, man-centered gospels of today.

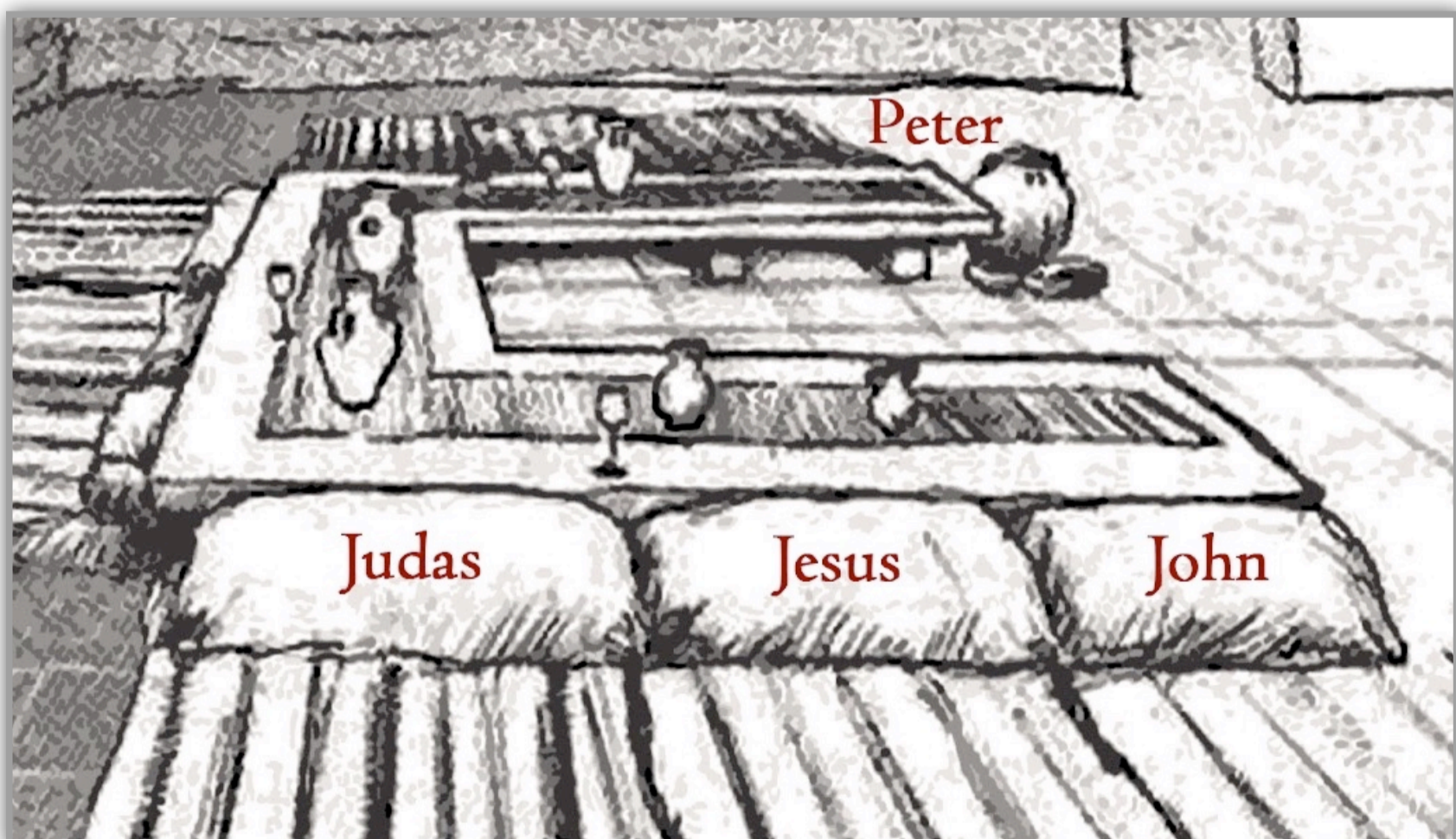
Our decision to forgive opens the way for the Holy Spirit to take up His residence in us. Richard Wurmbrand, a Jewish believer who suffered for his faith for fourteen years in a Romanian prison, teaches a profound and correct interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer. He states that “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” should be translated “forgive us our debts as we **have already forgiven** others their debts.” Only through a correct understanding of forgiveness could the martyrs throughout history have responded with grace to their persecutors. Those suffering for their faith had already forgiven their tormentors.

“Forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (Luke 11:4).

God knows that we will be hurt and betrayed by people. A wise friend, Bert Schlossberg, told us years ago, “You can never walk in the fullness of Jesus until you can wash the feet of Judas.” Rarely can human effort or strength ever wipe away the hurt you feel from what others have done to you in the past. Only through loving trust in Jesus and the power of His grace can you forgive the ‘Judases’ in your life. To the ancient Hebrews God was Yahweh-Rapha, the Lord our healer. Our trust and reliance in God releases His power to remove the sting of those painful memories.

Bert’s words impacted our hearts. On February 21, 1994, we celebrated our twenty-fourth wedding anniversary with him and his wife Exie during our stay with them in Israel. We gathered for dinner at the Biblical Resources Center south of Jerusalem to participate in a reenactment of the Last Supper. We were seated around a triclinium (three-sided) table eating what would have been a traditional Passover meal at the time of Christ. Jesus and His disciples would have reclined on their left side around the three outside edges of the foot-high table with their heads facing the table.

This diagram depicts the likeliest seating arrangement of Jesus and His disciples at the Last Supper:



The second position on the left was traditionally the host of the meal. That would have been Jesus.

The first position next to the host was the “go for” person who assisted the host. John 13:23,25 (“One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to Him... Leaning back against Jesus, he asked Him, ‘Lord, who is it?’”) indicates this to be John.

The last position on the right of the table represented the lowest place at the table. In John 13:24, Peter motions to John. Speculating that he was embarrassed as a result of the argument over “which of them was to be considered greatest” (see Luke 22:24-32), Peter possibly took this position across from John and Jesus.

Remember that Jesus had responded to His betrayer, Judas, by washing his feet. The third position on the left, next to the host, was reserved for the person whom the host wanted to honor or for special guests outside the family. When Jesus was asked who would betray Him, He said, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.’ Then, dipping the piece of bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon” (John 13:26).

We were deeply affected by the possibility that Jesus would have honored His betrayer. In our hearts we knew that it was within the character of Jesus to do such a thing. Certainly all of us at that meal left with a deeper conviction of how far we who follow in the steps of Jesus must go to forgive those who hurt us.

Chapter 26. Father Offers A New Covenant For A New Way Of Life



The Indwelling Holy Spirit: Caring For the Needs of Others

The Jewish people at the time of Jesus' birth had been anticipating the Messiah for centuries. In Matthew 11 John the Baptist, who was then in prison, sent his disciples to Jesus to ask, "Are You the one who was to come?" Jesus sent them back to John, responding with six things that the Jews knew from the prophet Isaiah would identify the Messiah when He came: The blind receive sight; the lame walk; those who have leprosy are cured; the deaf hear; the dead are raised; and the good news is preached to the poor.

The Messiah was to be recognized by His care for others, a theme repeatedly emphasized for all God's people throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the Newer Testament. Hebraic faith required action on the part of the individual. In this light, Jesus Himself reveals what He will demand as a sign of our faith at the final judgment: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me" (Matthew 25:40).

Each of us needs to consider seriously our covenant responsibilities. If your faith has not caused you to care for others, then you have no faith. James reaffirms this critical Hebraic truth: "Faith without deeds is dead" (James 2:26). This is a far cry from the contemporary faith that goes forward at a meeting, then settles back into a comfortable lifestyle and stays at the "Baby Christian" level forever after.

The consummation of the covenant between Jesus and His follower evidences noticeable change in the follower's life. When he is sealed with the Holy Spirit, those changes begin to pour out like "living water."

"I, John, your companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus" (Revelation 1:9).

What picture do you get of the early Church in the book of Acts? Wayne Jacobsen, author of A Passion For God's Presence, writes: "They were preoccupied with Jesus. Their ministry had power. Their community had reality. They were willing to sacrifice. Believers in the early Church weren't living up to a slate of expectations. They were simply doing what came naturally to people who loved God with all their hearts."

Weigh these verses as you consider your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ:

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. **And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ...** But if we **walk in the light**, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:3,7, emphasis added). In what ways are you on a daily basis "walking in the light" as Jesus did? Light cannot be hidden, and your "spiritual brightness" should be readily apparent as you walk!

"But if anyone **obeys His word**, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in Him: **Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did**" (1 John 2:5,6, emphasis added).

"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, **leaving you an example**, that you should **follow in His steps**" (1 Peter 2:21, emphasis added).

Jesus demonstrated a denial-of-self lifestyle. Your fellowship must first be with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. If you claim to be in Him, you must walk as Jesus did, a path of suffering. Suffering is not a popular concept in this culture. Yet the early Jewish believers recognized that the world in which we live is an arena of suffering.

Rabbi Philip Sigal emphasizes the ancient Hebraic doctrine of suffering as a precedent for salvation. The mystery of God's covenant relationship with Israel can be seen in the balance of the miraculous interventions of God when He delivered His people and the concealment of His presence during other times of persecution and duress. God's silence did not mean that His covenant had been canceled. He had reasons beyond their, and our, scope of understanding for why He chose not to rescue.

So, too, present believers cry out to God in their painful struggles. Are there times when you have persevered in prayer with faith and trust, only to feel as though the heavens are brass? This is part of the mystery of God for you: Can you by faith cling to His promises of never forsaking you even when it seems He is not responding? The power of your testimony intensifies its impact on others when they see that God has not only sustained you in the midst of the fire but has actually brought you to the point of thanksgiving for the suffering because of the glory God receives through you.

For example, for years a friend had struggled with a debilitating illness. Then her husband became seriously ill and was unable to work. Hospital bills accumulated. She had been asked to speak to a large group of women about her testimony of God's sustaining power. She found, though, that she couldn't quite bridge the gap between seeing herself as a victim of adverse circumstances and envisioning herself as a participant in a process of refinement that could strengthen and encourage others who might face similar trials. Depending on how her pilgrimage was presented, hearers would perhaps empathize with the pain and thank God that they hadn't faced such trials. Or they would give glory to God if thankful joy characterized her presentation. He had indeed healed the sting of the events and had granted her the privilege of joining Him in the cup of suffering. Her subsequent testimony brought glory to God and comforting hope to fellow sufferers.

This latter concept is illustrated in 2 Corinthians 1:3-6:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who **comforts us** in all our troubles, so that **we can comfort those in any trouble** with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also **through Christ our comfort overflows**. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for **your comfort**, which produces in you **patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer**."

The Lord empowers His people to endure the night of affliction through His grace. As we walk in the light, His blood cleanses us, enabling us to follow "in His steps." The Bible tells us that Jesus "**learned obedience** from what He suffered" (see Hebrews 5:8).

Paul notes in Romans, "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that **suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope**. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us" (5:3-5, emphasis added).

Suffering is not only an indispensable part of our relationship and walk with the Lord Jesus. It also represents a vital facet of intimacy with the heavenly Father:

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the **Spirit of sonship**. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—**heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ**, IF indeed we **share in His sufferings** in order that we may also **share in His glory**. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:15-18, emphasis added).

Our Father works in us a glory that can be displayed only through our identification as sons and daughters of suffering. God doesn't intend for you to go through these struggles all alone, however. When you stand before Him and He announces your name before the host of heaven, He will show you what He accomplished in you. It will not be your merit or religious activity that will count on the judgment day, but Jesus showing His work in removing your sinful nature and imparting His own pure character in you.

"Therefore, since Christ suffered in His body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin" (1 Peter 4:1).

Sometimes we Christians are so caught up in our suffering and trials that we are forced to ask ourselves, "Am I suffering because of some special attack by the devil (see 1 Peter 5:8), because of a sin on my part (see James 5:15,16), or because of my participation in the sufferings of Christ (see 1 Peter 4:13)?"

We might find that we are able to accept an occasional affliction as just a part of the human condition. But there certainly are times when we are confronted with trials from all sides and sources and find that we can no longer "gut it out." In those situations we would do well to examine our lives and hearts before God to determine if there is indeed a chastisement occurring to return us to God through repentance. (Committed prayer and counsel from a spouse or fellowship of intimate friends can be helpful!)

This is a thoroughly biblical approach and even referred to by the writer of Hebrews as an encouragement (see Hebrews 12:5). God's intervention in our lives reveals the love He has for us as His children: "My son, do not despise **the Lord's discipline** and do not resent **His rebuke**, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in" (Proverbs 3:11,12). Granted, this view may be unpopular in today's culture of disrespect, delicate psyches, and "I-am-a-victim" mentality. God's Word, however, does **not** conform itself to popular opinion.

"Glory in His holy name, let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always" (1 Chronicles 16:10,11).

Lest you become overwhelmed by sorrow and suffering and throw your hands up in despair, remember a key Hebraic principle: joy in the midst of affliction. The Colossian saints were admonished to have great patience and endurance, which are developed only through trial and testing. Yet they are instructed in the same breath to joyfully give thanks to the Father. (See Colossians 1:11,12.)

There are over a dozen Hebrew words for joy in the Older Testament. As theologian Carl Henry stated, "Joy is not merely a sporadic experience but an enduring disposition and characteristic of the devout believer. What distinctively marks the believer is joy even in affliction." No stranger to suffering, Paul from his prison cell could urge the Philippian believers to "rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4).

If we truly trust in God's sovereignty—that nothing can happen to us outside of His will and plan for our lives—then what have we to fear?

"Whom have I in heaven but You? And being with You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Those who are far from You will perish; You destroy all who are unfaithful to You. But as for me, it is good to be near God" (Psalm 73:25-28).

Even as we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ from one glory to the next, we have also that blessed assurance of our home in heaven. God had promised the people of Israel that the obedient would indeed rise to have body and soul reunited for eternity: "But **your dead will live; their bodies will rise**. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; **the earth will give birth to her dead**" (Isaiah 26:19).

These words of encouragement, “We will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:17), should never be far from our hearts or from our lips. When was the last time you joyfully pointed a troubled saint back to that reality? Your ongoing relationship with Him is critical if this is to be accomplished. And as we shall see, this intimacy is all the more crucial if your marriage and family are to bear fruit in a covenant relationship with the Father.

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for **the joy set before Him** endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2, emphasis added).

For further insight into the true Gospel, see: [The Gospel Of The Covenant Is The Pilgrimage To Salvation](#)

For factors in Christianity that have created false gospels, see: [De-Hellenizing Mental Muck](#)

As you read the following poem, ponder your level of trust in the nearness of the Lord Jesus in your own life. Is one step enough for your faith to see, or do you need to analyze the destination, implications, and consequences before moving an inch? Can you put a finger on the greatest fear that may be keeping you from trusting wholeheartedly that “in all thy journeying He goes before?”

STEP BY STEP

“As thou goest, step by step I will open the way before thee”

(Proverbs 4:12, New Translation)

Child of My love, fear not the unknown morrow,
Dread not the new demand life makes of thee;
Thy ignorance doth hold no cause for sorrow,
Since what thou knowest not is known to Me.

Thou canst not see today the hidden meaning
Of My Command, but thou the light shalt gain;
Walk on in faith, upon My promise leaning,
And as thou goest, all shall be made plain.

One step thou seest—then go forward boldly,
One step is far enough for faith to see;
Take that, and thy next duty shall be told thee,
For step by step thy Lord is leading thee.

Stand not in fear, thine adversaries counting,
Dare every peril, save to disobey;
Thou shalt march on, all obstacles surmounting,
For I, the Strong, will open up the way.

Wherefore go gladly to the task assigned thee,
Having My promise, needing nothing more
Than just to know, where'er the future find thee,
In all thy journeying I go before.

Frank J. Exley

Chapter 27. Your Primary Building Block Is Your Home: Marriage



“He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord” (Proverbs 18:22).

When God created Adam, He placed him in the Garden of Eden to enjoy fellowship with Him and to work. Adam was assigned to take care of the garden and to name the animals and birds. His life had purpose and meaning, but Adam alone of all creation had no partner “according to [his] own kind” (see Genesis 1). The man needed a **“helper suitable for him”** (see Genesis 2:18, emphasis added).

The Hebrew word for helper, *ezer*, designates one who assists, especially in time of need. It is used most often in reference to God as the One Who meets the needs of Israel. Therefore from this reference point, a woman’s role as a “suitable helper” does not imply subordination. As one writer puts it, “She is the needed helper whom God supplies to end man’s loneliness and to work alongside him, not the junior assistant.”

Adam’s authority in the union was denoted by his naming his wife “woman,” even as God had signified His authority over the heavens and earth by naming them “day,” “night,” “sky,” “land,” and “seas” (see Genesis 1:5-10). The woman that God created was suitable for Adam; she complemented those areas of his nature that were incomplete or lacking.

Government and sociological studies reveal the vast differences between the genders in terms of thought processes, perspectives, and emotional influences, as well as an array of physiological variants. According to Dr. Donald Joy, professor of human development and family studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, the manner in which males and females process information in their brains is strikingly different.

Women are able to immediately access past experiences from both hemispheres of the brain and come to speedy conclusions. Men, who differentiate strongly in either their analytical left hemisphere or affective, emotional right hemisphere, require more time to sort, analyze, and conclude. Couples who are unaware of these differences in approach to situations may experience frustration or irritation. “Why can’t my spouse see things my way?”, when God has actually “wired” them differently to make them mutually interdependent!

This need for one another illustrates the dependence that members in the body of Christ have for one another in order to achieve wholeness. Too often individuals criticize one another for their unique methodology and approach, failing to appreciate the contrast that was designed by God. When unity is achieved in the body, God is certainly the Source!

Viewed in a Hebraic framework, marriage is a pilgrimage together, an individual and collective growth in the character of Jesus. Let the quality of your marriage be a physical representation of your relationship with Jesus. Make John's words the hallmark of your marriage: "No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God lives in us and His love is **made complete in us**" (1 John 4:12, emphasis added).

Check Ephesians 5:33 for facets of a marriage which others can see has been impacted by the Lord: "However, each one of you [husbands] **must love his wife** as he loves himself, and the wife **must respect her husband**" (emphasis added). Respect and love in a marriage that displays Jesus can only be accomplished by permitting Him into your midst. Note also that God speaks directly to the husband regarding his love, and to the wife regarding her respect. He does not ask the spouses to remind one another of their particular responsibility!

As a husband, you are coordinating your purposes with God's when you consider in what ways you can become easier to respect. As the "head" in this couple, you're responsible to protect, provide for, and spiritually lead your family with the sacrificial love with which Christ loves His collective called-out ones. Similarly, as a wife, examine yourself through the eyes of the Spirit to determine how by His grace you can become easier to love. This is not an attempt to earn love and respect but an ongoing opportunity to be a willing and malleable vessel that testifies to the Potter's touch as He changes you through His Spirit.

If you are presently married, how did you determine that your intended was God's will for life partnership with you? Have you ever had doubts since then that you misread His will? Do you still have hope that God can revive and restore your relationship to the place He wants it to be?

The book of Hosea presents some marvelous insights into the character of God as the husband of His wife Israel. Israel had repeatedly committed spiritual adultery, a violation of the marriage covenant, with other gods as she departed from the Lord (see Hosea 1:2). Out of His love and desire to bring her to repentance, God brought upon Israel famine and ruin (see 2:9-13). When she repented out of desperation, Israel declared:

"I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now" (Hosea 2:7).

Note that God did not respond as an arrogant wronged party; He did not demand a "pound of flesh" for Israel's transgressions. Instead He determined, "I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert," away from distractions and responsibilities so that she could focus intently on their relationship, "and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards"— in the desert, where grapes normally do not grow and would thus be totally unanticipated!—"and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope" (2:14,15).

In this situation of infidelity and repentance, God becomes the model of mercy and forgiveness in the context of a marital covenant between Himself and His people. He gives hope to His beloved when she knows she deserves nothing but wrath. What a picture of intimacy and true love! What an eye-opener for you to contemplate your relationship to God as the Bride of Christ in such personal terms!

God continues the marriage theme in Hosea:

"In that day, declares the Lord, you will call Me '**my Husband**'; you will no longer call Me '**my Master**'. I will **betroth you to Me forever**; I will **betroth you in righteousness and justice**, in love and compassion. I will **betroth you in faithfulness**, and you will acknowledge the Lord. I will plant her for Myself in the land; I will **show My love** to the one I called '**Not My loved one**.' I will say to those called '**Not My people**,' '**You are My people**'; and they will say, '**You are My God**'" (2:16,19,20,23, emphasis added).

Why would God go to such great lengths in His Word to open His heart to His people as a Husband bereaved by the most devastating of sins, adultery? Is He not indicating that marriage is more than a coming together of a man and woman in relationship but also a covenant illustration of the sanctity of that union in His sight?

The words that Hosea chooses, prostitution, adultery, unfaithfulness, take on even greater significance if we allow our first love for God to deteriorate due to any type of distraction. That's the makings of spiritual adultery! How incumbent it is on us to reflect in the physical, earthly realm of marriage the reality of our devotion to our heavenly Bridegroom, Christ.

The devotion of the heart that God seeks from His people is poignantly described by Rabbi Menachem Mendel:

"A bridegroom might under the bridal canopy repeat to the bride 'You are betrothed' a hundred times. If however he does not add the [Hebrew word] **li**, '[You are betrothed] **to me**,' then it is as if he had said nothing. The entire wedding with all its preparations are worthless. The crucial point is **li**—to me. All of scholarship [is] worthless and all of worship is futile if they do not penetrate my bones. Essential is **li**."

How long-suffering, forgiving, and merciful God expects us to be in relation to the spouse to whom we are joined in covenant union. How needy we are of His grace to be able to do so! Although our current culture portrays marriage as a disposable option to other lifestyles, God presents an image of permanency and sanctity as the model for married followers of Christ. Does this require circumcision of the heart and total yieldedness to God's sovereignty through the Holy Spirit? Absolutely!

Does the reality of struggling with our sin nature also demonstrate the necessity of our relationship to others in the body of Christ for strengthening, admonishment, and encouragement (not to mention prayer and fasting!)? Most assuredly!! Because marriage is analogous to Christ's relationship with the Church (see Ephesians 5:22-33), Satan has focused special attention on keeping Christian marriages from exemplifying the loving radiance of Jesus.

In this "atomistic" culture where people are so disconnected from the context of their relationships, even marriage can resemble two parallel existences similar to railroad tracks. A few common concerns, such as the children, pets, or maintenance chores, may act as rail ties that connect a couple's lives periodically. They do not, however, see themselves as one in the sight of God. In the current Western culture the enemy has kept wives and husbands at bay from the support of the mentoring relationships the Bible calls for, relationships that are nearly non-existent in our churches today.

Satan has won this battle. His tactic? Pressure on couples to make it on their own.

The Husband

**"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives,
and treat them with respect as the weaker partner
and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life,
so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Peter 3:7)**

Husbands who are inconsiderate of their wives not only hurt their spouse but hinder their own ability to communicate with God. How men need to be sensitive to any loss of vitality in their relationship with the Lord! Ephesians 5:25-27 reveals an important duty of the husband in his home: "Husbands, love your wives, **just as Christ loved the church** and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, **cleansing her** by the washing with water **through the word**, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (emphasis added).

The statement "cleansing her by the washing with water through the word" indicates a vital role for a husband in his wife's spiritual development. "Word" in this passage is rhema, not logos. The husband is not being enjoined to teach his wife the logos, that is, the Bible. His responsibility is far more than that. He is to bring to light the application of the truths of God, the rhema, to her life. As the priest in his home, he is commanded to uphold God's will and to teach his wife and family.

Jesus taught with parables and stories because men in particular are more responsive to a pictorial, affective approach. This is why men so often "swap stories" when they get together. They can visualize the situation and relive it with the person sharing it. Men who have no outlet to express their feelings and burdens often lack inner tranquillity and self-control. Could this be contributing to our nation's rampant domestic violence?

Examine the relationships you currently have with other men in your extended family, your worship community, your social activities, your workplace. Who among these have you called on for encouragement or counsel? Are there any older sages among these men? If not, stop and pray that God would reveal to you those men with whom you can load-bear on a deeper level. Then approach them with the prospect. Be prepared to offer creative alternatives for meeting times, such as

early morning before work or opportunities when the two families can meet and you two men can take a walk for awhile. Any perceived inconvenience will quickly be dispelled as you form a bond of trust and accountability.

The Wife

“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husband so that, if any of them do not believe in the word, they may be won over without talk by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives” (1 Peter 3:1,2).

In her submission a wife is really yielding to the Lordship of Jesus, Who has set her husband in authority over her. Women need to seek out older women for counsel and wisdom. Nobody expects a young wife to know everything. “[Older women] can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God” (Titus 2:4,5).

The relationship between older and younger women is crucial. Satan knows that the wisdom passed along in this relationship will keep the Word of God from being maligned. He will do everything to prevent these relationships from forming within the church. There are a million excuses for how you can't possibly fit another thing into your life. However, reprioritizing for the sake of harmony in your home is worth any inconvenience when God reveals to you the woman or women who desire to be in a mentoring relationship with you!

Do you have some cherished woman friends whom you recognize in your spirit to be mature women of God? Ask them to share with you their life lessons that touch your present needs, both their successes and failures, and to identify which biblical principles were applied or missed. Then pray about a woman God may reveal to you who is either newer in the faith or earlier in her life pilgrimage who would be blessed to have you as her mentor and friend!

We have a friend in her twenties who was pleasantly surprised when a younger woman in her congregation shyly approached her to ask if she would disciple her. Our friend had never considered herself to be an “older woman,” but since she herself was being mentored by some older women in her congregation's care group, she felt pleased to be able to pass along the lessons she was learning and to nurture a new friend as well!

“The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down” (Proverbs 14:1).

Despite the current prevalence of wives and mothers in the workplace, the home still represents the heart of a woman's influence. Hebraic believers recognized the woman's great worth as she raised godly children and maintained *shalom bayit*, the peace of the home. In biblical times the family rather than the individual was the basic unit of society. Women as well as men were always seen in conjunction with others.

For a woman specifically, connectedness came through her husband or her father, the ones God had raised up to provide for and protect her. If her husband died while she was still young, a woman was counseled to remarry so that she not eat of the bread of idleness and gossip: “Therefore, I would rather the young widows get married, have children and take charge of their homes, so as to give the opposition no occasion for slandering us” (1 Timothy 5:14, Jewish New Testament).

So treasured was the home that on each weekly Sabbath celebration the wife was extolled by her husband through his reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 (actually, in Jesus's time, the husband sang it to her!). The truths from those verses were a reminder of the parameters of womanly godliness in the home and the dependent relationship of the spouses with each other. And if there was disharmony between the spouses, the situation needed to be amended before the Proverbs selection was read so that hypocrisy would not discolor the Sabbath.

Because marriage was considered a sacred trust rather than a legal obligation, the husband recognized that his wife was consecrated to him, set apart for a special relationship. How different the contemporary view of the marriage covenant would be if Christians grasped the significance of both the covenant and the consecration involved! As the Holy Spirit guides your husband, he may want to read Proverbs 31:10-31 to you while your children are present. Such expressive appreciation not only affirms your worth to your family but sets before you aspirations of godliness that the Spirit can accomplish in you by grace!

Our Father's Government of the Home

“The women added, ‘When we burned incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did not our husbands know that we were making cakes like her image and pouring out drink offerings to her?’”
(Jeremiah 44:19).

The wives referred to in Jeremiah's quote, above, were Israelites. But they excused their sin with the defense that their husbands were well aware of their idol worship yet said nothing about it. Over our years at the retreat center, one of the most common difficulties that married men confessed was an inability to differ with or correct their wives.

One method of non-confrontation found the husband playing ignorant. Even the most loving of them admitted that it took great courage to confront his wife or to voice a different view than hers. Yet the Lord's warning applies to those who feel ignorance is excusable:

“If you say, ‘But we knew nothing about this,’ does not He who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not He who guards your life know it? Will He not repay each person according to what he has done?” (Proverbs 24:12).

On women's retreats the vast majority of married women would confess control mechanisms that they used on their husbands and families. Sadly, one of the side effects of control is that the children are raised in an atmosphere of duplicity. As they grow, the children observe the unchecked wrongful attitudes and behavior of their mother as she secretly does things “behind the back” of their father. (Obviously, control can also characterize the father and produce the same results.) This too agitates the children. They respond with fear, alienation, rebellion, or withdrawal, carrying within them a distorted view of parental authority and of the authority position in general.

Perhaps you are in a marriage that's marred by dominant control or subtle manipulation. You may even be at the point of hopelessness that your relationship could ever become more Christlike. Take heart from these encouraging words from author and counselor Lois Mowday:

“We need to accept the enormity of our problem. And, with aggressive determination, we need to accept the enormity of our God... He takes broken hearts and hard hearts and restores them. He takes broken lives and makes them whole in fantastic, unforeseeable ways. He takes our shattered dreams and replaces them with new contentment. The ingredients He needs to accomplish these miracles in our lives are **repentance, forgiveness, commitment, a decision to put Him first, lives yielded to Him in the middle of excruciating pain, and time.”**

We cannot say enough concerning the many Christian families that are suffering severe consequences due to the paucity of older women offering themselves as friends and mentors to younger wives and mothers. Are you willing to choose to trust God to work in your spouse's life as well as in your own as you earnestly seek Him in prayer? And for your own well-being as well as that of your family, are you willing to prayerfully seek out an older woman as a spiritual mentor? If you are an older woman, are you willing to make yourself available to guide and encourage a needy younger woman?

For help in resolving relational tensions in marriage, see: [Growing Relationships Through Confrontation](#)

Chapter 28. Older Mentors Are Sorely Needed And In Short Supply



“He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?)”
(1 Timothy 3:4,5).

Leadership traits of an elder [Hebrew zaken], the gray-haired man of both the synagogue and early Church, were learned over time. The primary “school” for development of character was a man’s home: “Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3). His home leadership was developed in cooperative relationship with his wife and was recognized by how he raised his children. Because of the noble character of his wife, this man could join with other elders: “Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land” (Proverbs 31:23).

The Hebraic elder was a leader of influence in his community, a shaper of public opinion and a civic leader who was not afraid to dissent. The elders at the city gate made decisions for the entire community. The resolutions they handed down revealed the halakhah, the way in which the principles laid down in the Scriptures were to be enacted. Today there is such a great need for mature men of God to be role models of integrity for other men who desire to grow as Christ-like leaders: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

The writer of Hebrews stipulates that the aftermath of a person’s life is an essential prerequisite for heeding his teachings: “Remember the ones leading you, who spoke the word of God to you. Looking at **the result of their way of life, imitate their faith**. Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:7,8, emphasis added).



The reminder that “Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever” follows on the heels of “the result of their way of life” and “imitate their faith.” This is the Holy Spirit’s admonition for the apostles and for all subsequent church leaders: Follow Jesus’ example of servanthood. Avoid systems that are so impersonal that you cannot individually know or imitate the life of those who are leading. For his welfare and for yours, no leader should become a sacerdotal, a high priest/intermediary, between God and a congregation.

Would you want for your children a teacher who “had all the facts straight” but whose personal moral life was a shambles? We are our brother’s keeper, not to condemn but to come alongside to turn with love toward an obedient and trusting relationship with Christ. Recognize that those in spiritual leadership will come under increased spiritual attack as they impact lives for the glory of God. Have you committed to pray regularly and specifically for the particular needs and families of your spiritual leaders and mentors?

Mentors: The Wisdom of the Wise

“Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?” (Job 12:12).
“Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31).

We mentioned earlier that the Hebraic people did not expect a married couple to make it on their own. Marriages, like individuals, thirst for the mentoring of older people with wisdom and experience. Too much worldly emphasis has influenced couples to either “gut it out or get out of it.” But God is restoring the same kind of community support that so greatly strengthened the relationships in the early Church. This support includes home fellowships, which will be discussed more fully in Chapters 11 and 12, and mentoring.

In light of the biblically Hebraic importance of older people as mentors in our lives, study these statements by Robert Hicks in *The Masculine Journey*. (The statements below made about men can also pertain to the relationship between older and younger women.)

"In almost every field today the concept of mentoring is being discussed. It is as if a major corrective move is now taking place in business, industry, and educational circles... [Mentoring] holds true in any kind of relationship where an older man seeks to invest his life in younger men... [T]he mentor contributes several things: a brain to pick on, a shoulder to cry on, and an occasional kick in the pants... [T]he mentor cares for the younger man in the totality of his life and wants to see him become successful in life.

"I believe this is the greatest need in the church today. So many younger men in our churches need to hear the voices of older men in some context besides church business meetings. They need the one-on-one, the life experience, the realism of what life was like for them at the same age. Without this mentoring, men either “go it alone” or go it with others who don’t know what they are doing!”

Examine Proverbs 20:24: “A man’s steps are directed by the Lord. **How then can anyone understand his own way?**” Most older believers “have made enough mistakes to be useful” to younger men and women. The older person has probably experienced firsthand the crisis or confusion a younger person is facing and can comfort and exhort with his or her silver-refined wisdom. How sad that the ignorance, pride, or insecurity of a younger struggler could keep him or her from seeking out a mentor in time of need.

We cannot overemphasize the importance of older people “involving themselves” in the lives of their family and spiritual community. The Word tells us, “**Children’s children** are a crown to the aged” (Proverbs 17:6). How the grandchildren turn out in life is a true reflection of the grandparent’s parenting of their own children. The values and beliefs that really sank into the hearts of the children of one generation will be reflected in the manner in which they then raise their children.

Grandparents, stay personally and prayerfully involved with the guidance and training of your children and grandchildren until you die. It is never too late to help make your crown, your grandchildren, more glorious! Mentoring throughout life is biblical. The detrimental loss of the influence of older people is primarily a post-World War II phenomenon. We truly believe that God can use wholehearted believers to undo this tragedy.

In the midst of so much family disintegration, it is perhaps not so unrealistic to consider households of combined generations. Some families are being thrust into this position by job loss or marital breakdown. Others are foregoing nursing homes for their aging parents and making room in their own homes. The proposal to combine households with parents and adult children reflects the Hebraic view of *mishpachah*: family based on spiritual unity as well as on bloodlines.

As of 1995, one in three unmarried adults between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-five live with their parents, as do one in eight divorced adults. [That was nearly 30 years ago. With the Covid pandemic, that statistic has risen tremendously.] Obviously major adjustments are required on the emotional as well as the physical plane for both parties. Many live with bitterness toward their parents and/or children. Followers of Christ must confront this painful sin through the power of the Holy Spirit and seek forgiveness (see Matthew 5:23,24).

Regrettably, as the church as well as American society have experienced in the past three generations, the isolation and self-centered independence of the Hellenist influence have wreaked havoc with our children’s sense of stability and security. If you cannot possibly imagine yourself reestablishing contact with parents against whom you hold strong feelings, seek counsel from others in the body. They can join you in prayer to understand how much you have been forgiven at the Cross and how God’s grace enables His children to forgive those who have hurt them.

Pray for the healing that only Jesus can give in order that you may become an instrument of reconciliation if He so directs. Then pray for His timing and opportunity to humbly seek forgiveness for the unChristlike attitudes you have been governed by.

The authors have concluded from research in economics and business that the current concept of retirement encourages older people to abandon family responsibilities when they reach a certain age. A national plan for retirement first began in Germany following World War I. Facing hyper-inflation, the government needed a way to convince people to save their money rather than spend it. They developed the idea of “saving for retirement,” choosing the age of sixty-five for job severance. This age was chosen because actuarial tables indicated that only one per cent of the population would live beyond that age. (They neglected to tell the populace that ninety-nine per cent of them probably would not live to collect their savings.)

Over the decades, saving toward a compulsory retirement age has become standard in most industrialized nations, even as longevity has risen dramatically throughout the world. To save for the future is biblical: “Go to the ant, you slug-gard; **consider its ways and be wise**. It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest” (Proverbs 6:6,7). But this concept has become grossly distorted in the United States.

Rather than an admonition to save for old age, “retirement” has become a withdrawal from family responsibilities, a relocation to the “sun belt”, a pleasure-oriented senior citizen culture. This destructive “retirement system” has not only uprooted older women from helping the younger women (see Titus 2:4,5) but has also fostered the very life of self-indulgence the Bible warns against: “But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives” (1 Timothy 5:6). An ever-increasing number of lonely senior ladies exist without purpose in convalescent homes and cavernous old homesteads. Because some have forsaken their God-given responsibility to younger women, has God permitted them to be treated as “dead even while she lives”? It is not too late to change this situation.

Has God placed older men and women in your networks of relationship? Some may be your own relatives. Others may be acquaintances who would love to be surrogate family members. Pray for eyes to see those to whom He has given you access, then follow up on His lead with a visit or call. Not only will you be inviting them to sense a new purpose and meaning in life, but you will be reaping an extended family for yourself and for your children.

As mentioned earlier, part of the restoration of the early Church's vitality includes the return of the older mentoring sages. God has ordained that mature men of wisdom provide counsel for husbands. Our culture puts great strain on men to "know everything about everything", but the Lord doesn't expect a husband to be all-knowing. He wants a man to trust in the wise counsel and leadership of older men. "Older men [are] to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance" (Titus 2:2).

Satan knows that men are changed more through personal contact with role models than by any formal teaching. He will do everything to keep younger men away from the sages so that temperate and self-controlled behavior will not be passed along. Even congregations are often subdivided into age-related, homogeneous groupings that shield the generations from close contact with each other. Congregations should seriously examine the isolation of young men from access to older men, and encourage or even provide opportunity for them to gather informally to share their concerns and bear one another's burdens.

Men who find themselves talked at by lecturers in church settings (the abstract Hellenist approach) are really hungering for the rabbinical example of role modeling and the Hebraic experiential approach.

Chapter 29. Your Home: Raising a Godly Generation



The significance of the marriage covenant and the permanency of the relationship between a husband and wife is emphasized so strongly in the Word because God has special plans and purposes that go beyond personal fulfillment between a man and a woman. Note marriage from God's perspective:

"She is your partner, the **wife of your marriage covenant**. Has not the Lord made them one? And why one? Because **He was seeking godly offspring**. So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith with the wife of your youth" (Malachi 2:14,15, emphasis added).

The Lord Who opens the womb (see Genesis 29:31) has left instructions with the parents on how to produce "godly" offspring! His Word is full of practical application. His family of believers, *mishpachah*, has been designed as a body to minister counsel and wisdom to parents. Whatever has not been implanted in the hearts of the parents, however, is not likely to be produced in their children (outside of direct revelation and intervention by God).

Godliness encompasses a trusting faith and obedience to the Lordship of Christ, His privilege and position in our lives to expect obedience from us. Godliness also manifests a righteousness that is empowered by the Holy Spirit to reflect Christ's work by grace in us.

God is not directing us to command our children to follow orders in the Bible and toe the line in respect to outward actions. He longs for our children's hearts to press in to their loving and holy Father. To help them recognize what pleases God, apply through His Spirit the wisdom of the Word. Allow the impassioned cry of God to sear your spirit as you dwell on this verse:

"Oh, that **their hearts** would be inclined to fear Me and keep all My commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!" (Deuteronomy 5:29, emphasis added).

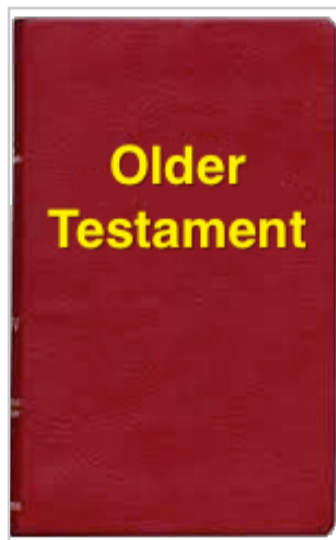
How are we to teach our children the difference between acknowledgment that God is and wholehearted service from the heart? From a Hebraic sense, the heart represents the whole of one's inner being that distinguishes him from the animal realm. With his heart man can choose to express love, to sacrifice his own well-being for that of his beloved, and to

subdue his own personal inclinations. It is the part that God searches to know and to test (see Psalm 139:23) so that we might not try to fool ourselves or others by outward behavior that appears holy but masks sinful motivation.

It is the heart that responds when we are tried by fire. Are we willing to undergo our desert experiences as did the Israelites for forty years in order that He might humble us and test our obedience (see Deuteronomy 8:2)? For the children of Israel God brought about intense hunger that could only be filled by His mighty power as He provided them manna.

We today so desperately need spiritual manna: “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3). A heart that is truly seeking God and awaiting His purposes is the clay vessel, young or old, that God is looking to shape.

Intergenerational Responsibility of Fathers To Teach The Way of Our Lord



An examination of the first several verses of Deuteronomy 6 reveals the essence of childrearing ordinances that guided the Hebraic people before and after the incarnation of Christ. In Deuteronomy 5 God had delineated the Ten Commandments, initiating their deliverance with the words “Hear, O Israel” (v. 1), the same words that Moses repeated twice more in chapter 6 (vv. 3,4). This demand for attentiveness was worded in such a way as to command obedience; these were non-optional decrees.

God’s commandments and statutes were designed to teach His people, not for mere knowledge sake but that they might obey them. In so doing, they would prolong their days. God intended that His people fear Him—have an overarching reverence and awe that recognized He was well able to reward or punish—yet at the same time wholeheartedly love Him.

The power of generational influence is seen as God directs His commands to “you, your children and their children after them” (v. 2) in order that the blessing would be upon them all. Sobering, isn’t it? How you train up your children will impact how they train up your grandchildren! No wonder God is so explicit in His directions for bringing up offspring!

The “careful obedience” (v. 3) to which parents are exhorted has in the Hebrew a sense of guarding as a watchman; preserving; building a hedge around as with thorns. What a beautiful illustration of God’s commands from His point of view: Such a wondrous treasure for our well-being demands that we carefully preserve that which pleases Him as a precious gem.

We must post a watch around our lives that parallels a hedge of thorns against enemy incursion! Is this the panorama of loving obedience that you are sharing with your children? A devoted recognition that our heavenly Father knows what is best for us and desires intimate trust in His way for our lives? In this decade of moral decadence, relativism, and economic anxiety, how good it is to cling to God’s promise “that it may go well with you” (v. 3). Our wellness may take various forms, be they emotional, spiritual, or physical (God knows what forms each of us needs the most!).

Trust-filled obedience that recognizes our need for His grace reinforces our relationship with the One in authority Who loves us. Our response to God’s will mirrors to our children the reality of Him Who is not seen but Who is so very real. What is the preeminent truth that God emphasizes in this chapter of Scripture? That He alone is God (see v. 4). That He alone is worthy of all the worship, praise, and dependence that is due one’s Lord.

And how are we to respond to this Only God, and to train up our children in their relationship with Him? To “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (v. 5). The love that is referred to here (Hebrew *ahav*) connotes a delight and desire in the one who is loved; a powerful emotional attachment that hungers to possess Him and to be in His presence.

Does that describe your “walk with God”, the relationship that your children know you have with Him so that they can emulate that? Interestingly, this is the kind of love that God expresses toward His people in Deuteronomy 4:37 (“Because He loved your forefathers”); in Isaiah 43:4 (“Since you are precious and honored in My sight, and because I love you”); and in Malachi 1:2 (“‘I have loved you,’ says the Lord”).

Such love finds its counterpart in the Newer Testament in the Greek word *agape*. This word encompasses the essential nature of God, His heart’s concern for mankind, and the relationship that through His Holy Spirit characterizes the unity of believers. This same love reflects the sacrificial devotion expected of parents: “‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love’” (Genesis 22:2); “Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons” (Genesis 37:3); “I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free” (Exodus 21:5).

Curiously, the Bible directs no such love from children toward their parents. Children are instructed to honor their mothers and fathers, to revere and respect them, and to obey them. These are words that expect action as well as the emotion inherent in the relationship.

God commands our love not only from the heart but also from the soul. The Hebrew people considered the soul to be that vital part of the being that draws breath. From that perspective, even animals have a soul, in the sense that they breathe to live. The word for soul contains no metaphysical essence of “spirit” as our culture might interpret it. Rather, it evinces a passionate zeal for life, a precious reflection of the inner person as he knows himself to be.

To love God with all your soul and to pass that fervor on to your children requires great searching and appreciation for all that God has done to enhance your well-being: He has drawn you to Himself (see John 6:44) and given you new life, supplied you with His riches from glory according to your need (see Philippians 4:19), and created you in His image to enjoy true worship and fellowship with Him (see Genesis 1:26).

What a privilege to search the Scriptures with your children to personally thank God for Who He is and for His manifestations of such great love! You are also enjoined to love God with all your strength, with all the energy and boundless intensity that you can possibly establish!

Do you get the sense that we are not talking here about an intellectual acknowledgment that God exists or a dry doctrinal stance of obedience that responds to the written word of the Bible? This is your God Who is so filled with consuming zeal for His people that He has called the Church His Bride! He has eagerly sought a love relationship that should constrain Christians to put aside all earthly pride and self-focus in order to cherish and adore Him.

This is the purpose of your creation by Him, and His goal as you train up your children to do likewise. You can no more tell them to love God if you don’t treasure Him than could a rabbi tell his students to live with integrity if he himself was a cheat. These are no casual instructions to be voiced in passing. On the contrary, they are to be taught diligently, inculcated and exhorted, from the earliest part of the day before duties and responsibilities distract you until the last moments of waking so that you might dream of His goodness.

Note the locations of this interaction with your children: “At home and when you walk along the road” (v. 7). Consider carefully the hours, many or few, that you and your children are in proximity. How do you spend most of them? In front of the TV? Putting out sibling brush fires? Frustratedly responding to a jangling phone? How about when you are literally “along the road”? Do you take the time to stroll along the paths and sidewalks to capture their hearts with Him? Do you incorporate God’s principles into your car trips together? Or are you so intent on meeting yet another obligation or activity to “benefit” your child or yourself that praising God doesn’t even occur to you?

Sports, piano lessons, and ballet may be good, but not if you are robbed of the parental interaction that God knows you and your child need.

**“Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.
Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:8,9).**

Have you ever wondered why Orthodox Jewish men wear little boxes on their arms and foreheads? The answer is found in the above verses. The boxes testify to a wholehearted desire to obey God even while recognizing that we are frail human beings prone to distraction and sin. People are visual; that which we see with our own eyes makes a deep impression.

Think of the awesome experience of the Israelites as they trembled at the foot of Mount Horeb in front of the fire that blazed out of the deep darkness: “Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice” (Deuteronomy 4:12). The voice of the Lord and the blaze of the fire totally absorbed their interest. This was God!

As the generation that observed this encounter passed away, the awe of God and His power diminished, as God had warned the Israelites through Moses that it would. They failed to trust the Lord Who manifested Himself daily in His loving provision and turned instead to idols of wood and stone. The Israelites neglected the injunction to impress the commands of God onto their children.

Today’s Orthodox men box God’s commands on their forehead as a reminder that all that is seen with the eyes and thought in the mind should be filtered through a relationship with God. The commands are bound on the left arm near the heart to convey loving determination to follow God. These are visual reminders that the Lord is indeed very near, as Paul reiterates in Philippians 4:5. They are a sign, a symbol of God’s covenant relationship with His beloved.

A sign is used to convey an idea, a desire, or a command. It points the way to a goal or destination. While Christians do not bind God’s commands physically to their bodies, we do use visual cues to remind us of His proximity. Do you usually keep your favorite Bible in the same place for devotions and reference? Do you thank the Lord whether alone or with others whenever a meal is put in front of you? Do you take note of spiritual bumper stickers, coffee mug verses, breathtaking sunsets—and immediately think of Jesus?

There are countless reminders of ways that God touches our hearts during the day to prompt us to communicate with Him. Sharing with our children these reminders of God’s presence as they happen or around the dinner table reinforces a continual awareness of our Father. This helps to make His lovingkindness more understandable to their hearts. Such reinforcement ties in with Paul’s admonition in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray continually.” A constant attitudinal awareness of God in our spirit enables us to turn to Him regularly and naturally.

This is the lesson we need to pass on to our young and to new believers. Our relationship with God is not bound to a place (a church building), a ritual (prayer meeting or Bible Study), or even to other believers. The more we can saturate our hearts with a God-awareness moment-by-moment, the more that our children and others with whom we interact closely will see Him manifested as the Living God Who changes us from within!

While we were in Israel we frequently saw the special little boxes, *mezuzot*, nailed to the entry way of each Jewish home. Inside those little boxes are the commands of Deuteronomy 6 that we have been discussing. These focus on obedience to God’s commands and our relationship with Him. Every time a family member enters the home and sees the mezuzah, he or she is reminded that behavior is to be holy within that house. Likewise when they leave, they are reminded that their behavior is to reflect God wherever they go.

To a follower of Christ, this symbolic gesture should have rich meaning. Anyone who passes through your doorway should recognize that this is a home where its occupants love God. Your walk with God as a believer should reflect a loving obedience to His Word as He motivates you from within by His Spirit. Therefore, your home should reflect holiness, a set apartness available for His purposes and glory.

When you pass through your “gate” to the outside world, are you diligent “as aliens and strangers in the world” (see 1 Peter 2:11) to bypass evil and to choose righteousness? Would your children or friends refer to you as a person of integrity and conviction on the job? Are you willing to make the hard choices that might cost you in prestige or finances in order to uphold God’s Word in and through you? Your answers to these questions can make the difference in your child’s mind between religion as a ritual and faith as a lifestyle.

Have you fallen into the trap of letting the “professionals” (the pastoral staff, youth workers, Christian School teachers) replace you as the primary source of spiritual truth for your children? How tragic to see this disregard for God’s admonition in Deuteronomy for parents to impress these things on their own children. The Israelites had witnessed the awesome display of God’s might “so that [they] might know that the Lord is God” (4:35). Surely such work of God in your own life and in those you love is worthy of retelling and praise!

It has often been said that the Older Testament presents physical truths that are to be enacted spiritually by Newer Testament believers. With this in mind, consider the force behind this verse: “Only be careful, and **watch yourselves closely** so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. **Teach them to your children and to their children** after them” (Deuteronomy 4:9).

How necessary it is for followers of Jesus, whether parents or not, to “watch ourselves closely.” The enemy of our souls came to “steal and kill and destroy” (see John 10:10). His targets encompass those who seek wholehearted devotion to God, and the children who could be powerful arrows in a righteous quiver.

Chapter 30. Your Home: A Sanctuary Of Peace



**“And when you go into a household, greet it.
 If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it.
 But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you” (Matthew 10:12,13).**

What is “peace”? The biblical concept of *shalom*, peace, encompasses completeness, wholeness, soundness. This is more than the absence of war or conflict. It is a positive term that speaks of contentment, health, calmness of heart, unity, restoration. What richness of blessing you are offered by God when you pray for the peace that comes as you trust in Him.

When you view your life as a pilgrimage, a process, a path along which you are journeying, you can more clearly see the ongoing nature of this relationship with God. Daily testimonies of God’s interventions in your life enable your children to be on the alert for His hand working around them too. As you become an available vessel prepared for His use, God can then fill you with all joy and peace, so that your hope can overflow onto those you encounter. Is your family being showered with this hope? Is your home a refuge where this can occur? Does your heart trust in full reliance on God?

At least twice Jesus connects faith and peace: **“Your faith has saved you; go in peace”** (Luke 7:50), and, **“Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering”** (Mark 5:34). Your relationship with God will determine the measure of peace that you can offer to your home. Harmony in your home, *shalom bayit*, is a critical goal toward which to work. The home is the crucible in which your sin nature is confronted and the fruit of the Spirit has opportunity to come forth.

Harmony does not come naturally. It must be nurtured, modeled, and reinforced daily: **“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification”** (Romans 14:19). You cannot pass on to your children what you don’t practice first in your own life. How important is personal peace to you? Are you willing to sacrifice activities and even certain relationships in order to be a vessel of peace? Weigh this verse carefully: **“For whoever would love life and see good days ... must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it”** (1 Peter 3:10,11).

Now obviously peace is not an entity at which you can grasp. Rather, your peace comes from a wholehearted search for intimacy with God, to seek His face: “**Make every effort** to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him” (2 Peter 3:14). Your heart will find rest in your faith only as you earnestly hunger for His presence with a sincere, pure heart (see Psalm 24:3 and a host of other psalms). This dichotomy, that you make every effort to find peace, reflects Hebraic block logic, the reality that God’s perspective isn’t always the same as man’s perspective. How can you find peace if you have to work so hard at it?

It is also a lifelong process to identify what is hindering the sense of His peace and to return to the trusting relationship of loving obedience. Constant awareness of His glorious grace will restore your peace. So important is the concept of peace that it is used as a name of God: Yahweh Shalom (see Judges 6:24) and the Prince of Peace (see Isaiah 9:6). Since the names of God reflect some part of His character, your peace will be developed by God as you choose to trust Him.

He is the God of peace, even in trial and conflict: “The **God of peace** will soon crush Satan **under your feet**” (Romans 16:20). This is a wonderful visual image for children: the God of peace crushes Satan under our feet, the very body parts that are fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace (see Ephesians 6:15)!

When Jesus sent the seventy-two ahead of Him to every town that He was about to visit, He instructed them, “When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you” (Luke 10:5,6). In order for visitors to enter your home and take note that this is a place of peace, you must first check your own heart. Are you walking in righteousness even when you are alone, away from curious eyes?

True integrity embraces reverence and awe toward God, permeation of truth that makes no room for “little white lies”. Uprightness is empowered by grace and a humble willingness to serve. Are you plagued by anxiety and fears when you are surrounded by the four walls of your home? Young eyes observe and absorb the actions and attitudes of those who are most important to them, their parents. Any discrepancy between your words and your behavior will only cause doubts in your children about the credibility of God to keep you in perfect peace.

Be open to confess your sins and shortcomings in front of your children so that they can also see the forgiveness and cleansing of God at work (see 1 John 1:9). Ask for their forgiveness when you have sinned against them, and make restitution when the situation calls for it. The Holy Spirit lives within the “four walls” of your heart to remind you of the precious promises of God: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, **will teach you all things and will remind you of everything** I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:26,27).

Make sure that you sacrifice some other activity, even sleep, so that you can pray and feed on His Word to be reminded of the things the Spirit wants you to know. Differentiate between the peace that the world gives (fickle, fleeting, dependent on circumstances and people) and the peace offered by Jesus (holy, without ulterior motive, independent of circumstances, relational to Him). Ask your children to come up with examples that show that they know the difference. The peace of Christ is designed to be fruit bearing and self-sacrificial so that others might be blessed and give praise to God!

Believers are admonished to not let their hearts be troubled. Think of how “catchy” worry, insecurity, and hopelessness are to others who love you. Most will want to quickly solve your problem for you; a few may even suffer with you. Ask God to reveal if some sin may be separating you from intimacy with Him or if some spiritual stronghold may be blinding you to His sovereignty and love. Approach your situation first from a spiritual level and then consider other factors afterward.

Jesus also admonishes, “And do not be afraid.” This parallels Peter’s words, “You are [Sarah’s] daughters if you do what is right and **do not give way to fear**” (1 Peter 3:6, emphasis added). Do you have any reason to fear? Jesus said, “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword” (Luke 10:34).

Satan has declared war on believers: “Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 12:17). Those in the world system who hate your Master will certainly respond to you with persecution: “Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, **because of the Son of Man**” (Luke 6:22). Are you able to accept such insult and exclusion as a blessing? Will you teach your children to have the kind of relationship with Jesus that will result in the same “blessing”?

It is in the presence of such “fearsome” attacks that followers of Christ are admonished, as were the disciples, to fear God alone: “But I will show you **whom you should fear: Fear Him** who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, **fear Him**” (Luke 12:5).

In the midst of the fearful crises you may face, you must immediately turn your complete focus, your thoughts, your decisions of will, your emotions, onto God, the only Source of peace. Having told His disciples to fear God, Jesus then tells them, “Don’t be afraid” (Luke 12:7). This is not double-speak. They, and you, are commanded to have awesome regard for the power and might of God. But as His precious child, you are of great value to Him. Loving submission to this awesome Lord is meant to draw you closer to Him, not to drive you away cringing.

It is through your own attitudes and actions toward God that your children, or anyone whom you are discipling, will see the balance between fearing God and loving Him as Abba, Papa Father. Think of the comfort God intends for you as you read Philippians 4:5-7:

“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **Do not be anxious about anything**, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the **peace of God**, which transcends all understanding, will **guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**”

“The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever”
(Isaiah 32:17).

Twentieth century rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, “God is of no importance unless He is of supreme importance.” The priorities with which you live determine how you spend your daily twenty-four hours and with whom. It doesn’t take long for children to recognize when your words don’t match your actions. We once challenged a friend who was a believer experiencing marital difficulties to ask his twelve-year-old daughter what she thought were the three things that were most important to him. She came up with four: “Golf, God, Mommy, and me.”

Try this with your own spouse and children; if you are single, ask your closest friends for an evaluation. This is a serious assignment, for God has purposes for each of His children. If you are not making yourself available to Him to become prepared and strengthened through personal prayer, worship, and Bible meditation, then you are hindering His development of your righteousness.

That extra hour before the day begins or after quiet has settled at night may be the opportunity for God to fill your “clay vessel” with what is needed for the coming hours. Is the benediction from the writer of Hebrews an incentive to closet with God?

“May the God of peace... equip you with everything good for **doing His will**, and may He work in us what is **pleasing to Him**, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever” (Hebrews 13:20,21).

There are many wonderful books available on activities that can draw families closer to each other and help you to train your children in godly living. We are including some “helpful hints” that might whet your appetite or at least give you some ideas to build upon if you recognize the need for your home to be a sanctuary. Note that actions alone will not build character in either yourself or your children. True reformation begins with your heart, where your character is formed.

Determine with your spouse (or with an accountability partner if you are single or a single parent) how you might specifically carry out the following commands of God. They may appear idealistic, if not impossible, but God has empowered His children through His Spirit to follow His orders!

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy [**set apart for His purpose but not yet perfect**] and dearly loved, **clothe yourselves** with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive [**Paul repeats this—it must be important!**] as the Lord forgave you [**whether the one being forgiven deserves it or not; not holding a record of it for later recall**].

And over all these virtues **put on love** [**obedience to an action as well as expression of emotion**], which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the **peace of Christ** rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. **And be thankful**” (Colossians 3:12-15, emphasis added).

Have each family member write or draw a picture of examples of each virtue, i.e., humility, forgiveness, thankfulness, presented in these verses. Pray about specific opportunities to exercise virtues during the day's activities. Encourage each family member who has chosen to appropriate one of these qualities of righteousness rather than a fleshly response during a stressful circumstance.

Exhort those who have violated one of these commands and allow opportunity for confession before God and a chance for restitution. So often people tend to excuse sinful choices ("Oh, she's too little to understand", or, "He deserved it!") rather than to recognize that the One Who was truly violated was God.

Learn to thank God for the grace He shows you as you repent, confess, and receive forgiveness and cleansing (see Hebrews 10:22). Maintain a prayer journal for the whole family, complete with dates and who was prompted to bring up that prayer topic, and update it regularly. Set aside time to orally review the journal as a family and to express gratitude to God for His faithfulness. Remember, Daniel had to wait twenty-one days before his prayer was answered, yet God heard his prayer on the first day.

Persevering in prayer is an important lesson, as God's timing is always perfect, and there are spiritual forces in the heavenlies who oppose the saints as they pray. To share "the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power, and the wonders He has done" (see Psalm 78:4) is scriptural. The people of Israel were encouraged to teach such things to their children "so that **the next generation would know them**, even the children yet to be born, and **they in turn would tell their children.**"

"Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget His deeds but would keep His commands"
(Psalm 78:6,7).

The level of respect, or lack of, that children have for their parents reflects the degree of authority that they recognize in God. If your children do not respond to the authority of those who rightfully exercise it, such as parents, teachers, police, and other civic representatives, then they will certainly not defer to God, Whom they cannot see. The writer of Proverbs 6:20 repeats a theme found throughout all of Proverbs: "My son, **keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching.**" Such injunctions are countercultural to the contemporary "rights" atmosphere. The Word, however, is timeless and unbounded by cultural constraint.

The heart attitude for parental guidance commanded in Ephesians 4:2 forbids harshness or domination: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." "Every effort" indicates a lot of work, consistency, and energy motivated by love of God and for one another.

What is the atmosphere of your home? You can influence the environment toward harmony by the choice of music there. Words that honor God, melody that sings in your heart, and rhythm that soothes rather than agitates can be a vehicle of joy for the whole family.

Take seriously the psalmist's decision before God: "I will walk in my house with blameless heart. I will set before my eyes no vile thing" (Psalm 102:2,3). Consider if any "vile thing" is being set before the eyes of anyone in your home. How carefully do you weigh what you watch on television (or the Internet) as well as what your children are allowed to view? How comfortable would you feel if Jesus were sitting there with you (as He really is, through His Spirit in you!)?

Besides desensitizing your children to evil and increasing their exposure to the world value system perpetuated through commercials, television viewing devours time, stifles creativity, and lowers attention levels toward anything that isn't constantly changing images. Set up an experiment in your own home of alternative family activities: visiting the library and sharing worthwhile reading material aloud, making your own board games (such as a "concentration" type game, picture dominoes for little ones, bingo), or gardening as a means of stewardship (sewing seeds, nurturing and cultivating the seedlings, reaping the fruit and sharing it with the needy).

Some family hobbies could even be preparation for future home business endeavors. What crafts are you often receiving compliments for? Teach them to your children. How about carpentry or car repair, during which you talk with your children even as they assist or do the repairs with you? Sewing? Baking? Accounting? The things that you may prefer to do alone because it's quicker are actually opportunities in the training-up process to produce responsibility, perseverance, and diligence in parents as well as in their children!

A number of creative families have established a bartering network to earn points for necessities. They are able to offer services to one another ranging from technical to unskilled. For instance, one father operates a carpet cleaning business. He is able to clean the carpets at another member's restaurant and accumulate points for the job done. He can choose to "spend" them there or "buy" the services of another member. You and your children have a goldmine of skills and talents to offer to other individuals in which services rather than money can be exchanged!

Older children can also use the time not spent in front of the TV (or iPhones) to gain practical skills in budgeting money earned from part-time jobs. One young friend had often come home from school listless and bored, complaining of nothing to do. A neighbor expressed a need for an after-school baby-sitter several days a week and the young lady somewhat reluctantly agreed. Within two weeks her mother remarked excitedly how responsible her daughter was becoming as she allotted time for homework, entertained the children, and made decisions regarding her earnings! Her grades soared, as did her savings. She had purpose to her afternoons and goals to achieve.

As the center for spiritual training for your family, your home is the obvious arena for living out biblical truths and developing Godly character. Rather than criticizing certain family members for their messiness, sit down as a family and establish a goal (organization, neatness, orderliness) and discuss how each person can contribute to that goal. As a parent, examine yourself first. Do you rise early enough in the morning so that rush and hustle can be avoided in your own life? Are there things that can be prepared the night before (clothes set out, books organized, keys and purse always in the same place)?

Is your home filled with time-consuming items that require extra maintenance: silver, brass, cluttery knickknacks, fussy yards? These rob time from your family, so weigh the personal importance of these time-eaters against their upkeep effort. Simple surroundings really do add to harmony and peace, especially when everybody knows where everything is!

Very few Christians have work schedules that cannot accommodate family devotional time. One family rises at 5:30 each morning to spend time sharing God's Word and praying. The very youngest in the family can draw pictures to illustrate what is read aloud as older ones take turns reading and sharing insights. We found that handwork, be it embroidery or interlocking blocks, keeps hands out of mischief even while ears are intent. This will take effort and consistency until it becomes a pattern of your lives, so don't be discouraged if your children are fidgety at first.

Especially pay attention to the needs of each family member and the application of God's Word, the *rhema*, to those concerns. Children so need to understand the vitality of God and His active presence in their lives. How wonderful that God created people to require food! The opportunities involved in food preparation, thanksgiving, sharing, and clean-up are daily occasions to evaluate the level of cooperation and consideration being developed. When these are lacking, they should be immediately addressed out of concern for what is going on inside the individuals who are troubled.

Are there situations they are experiencing that need counsel or wisdom or intervention? So vital are mealtimes together that any activity that interferes should be seriously reconsidered, be it athletic practice, music lessons, or telephone calls. So often the Bible records Jesus imparting important lessons as people were sharing meals and relaxing. Should we ignore so significant an example? Mealtimes are an opportunity for intimate communication and emotional expression. A Readers Digest poll revealed that strong supportive families were also a critical factor in giving children an edge in school.

"The family is society's main way of transmitting to the next generation the values and behavior that lead to success in school and in the world. Much of what kids know, they don't learn in school, they learn from their moms and dads... Eating together seemed to make a bigger difference in our poll than living with two [parents] together. This means that the family is not just there, but is doing its job" (emphasis added).



Can you recall the last time you had guests into your home to share hospitality? Paul exhorts believers to “practice hospitality” (see Romans 12:13). In other words, your heart should be ready without notice to receive with sincere love any in the household of faith who have need. They, too, are part of your *mishpachah*, your family.

What is the general atmosphere before guests arrive and while they are in your home? Do they sense the peace of God in your welcome, that their presence is truly a pleasure rather than an obligation? Make it a point to involve your children in the preparations, serving, and sharing of meals with guests. You are training them to interact on a personal level with those outside the family confines.

Part of Peter’s admonition to “love each other deeply” (see 1 Peter 4:8) involves offering hospitality without grumbling. The choicest food and most lavish settings cannot compensate for a hassled, frazzled host who is more concerned about the dinner than about the guests! Let your children see that entertainment and considerate conversation with others is an opportunity to show appreciation for those who care enough about you to share your hearth.

**“You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field will clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12).**

When you have the peace of God in your heart to nourish those in your home, you are then equipped to “go out in joy.” The calmness of spirit that the Holy Spirit bears as fruit in you gives you the freedom to wonder as a child, to appreciate the infinite creativity of God in the work of His hands and to thank Him for it. The vitality of Jesus that energizes believers is often portrayed as “living water” (see John 4:10, 7:38, Revelation 7:17). Life-sustaining water flows from its entry point to its outlet, ever-changing with refreshment and cleansing for you as your life circumstances change.

Think of the impact your life and the lives of your children can have on the ones outside your gates as you see your own self as Jerusalem, the City of Peace:

“I will extend peace to her [Jerusalem] like a river [the extent of God’s peace toward us is limitless], and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream [our wealth is a godly heritage, a Spirit-filled life overflowing like a flood to bless others]; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees [in our peaceful homes we are fed, our relationships prosper, and we find joy and relaxation]. As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem” (Isaiah 66:12,13).

Shalom bayit enables lovers of God to reach out beyond their family to comfort others and exercise compassion and empathy. The peace that the Holy Spirit works through you in your home acts like wholesome leaven to extend its influence into the wider arena of your neighborhood, workplace, and society. Be alert for opportunities to model and frame for your children what obedience to Zechariah 7:9,10 means on a daily basis:

“Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless [today’s single mom, and kids with absentee dads], the alien or the poor [perhaps international students or refugees]. In your hearts do not think evil of each other [make sure your outside actions match your inside thoughts!].”

And be faithful to pray earnestly “for kings and all those in authority that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and **pleases God our Savior**” (1 Timothy 2:2,3).

A practical means of outreach is through correspondence, not only to teach your children to express gratefulness for blessings shared but also to train them by example to be vessels of life and encouragement to those they don't see regularly. The letters of Paul and Peter begin with variations of “Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father.” The epistles are filled with examples of how God has demonstrated these virtues in their own lives and in the lives of others. Your correspondence, even email, should contain aspects of these elements too.

“To show mercy” can be manifested in very practical ways. One mother wanted to train her children to help those who couldn't repay. Through a local congregation she located a contact person who was helping to resettle Bosnian refugee families in their area. This family scoured friends, neighbors, and fellow worshipers for blankets, coats, and household goods to bring to a few needy families. Through an interpreter they were able to share compassionately from the heart, as years earlier, they too, had been “aliens in a strange land” as missionaries overseas. A bond of friendship was woven that has continued to this day.

They were not just doing a good deed of meeting material needs. This family was being the hands and feet of Jesus carrying His love to those who had suffered much. Opportunities such as this one abound. You have only to pray and be alert to the answers God supplies as you live out your trust in a way that your children can see is “for real”.

Parenting involves so much more than following guidelines of behavior and hoping that the professionals in your child's life will compensate for your shortcomings. Your children are on loan to you from God so that you might rely on His grace, power, and love to train them to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him. Such a responsibility could seem overwhelming, but as you will see in the next two chapters, God has redeemed you into a body of load-bearers so that together you might trust Him.

Chapter 31. Fellowship Of Homes – Support For Your Home



Supports Communal Righteousness

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46,47).

“Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia” (Romans 16:5).

“The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house”
(1 Corinthians 16:19).

“To Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home” (Philemon 2).

“Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house” (Colossians 4:15).

The above verses make clear that Paul was writing these particular letters to the ekklesia, the “called-out ones” who met in homes. As noted earlier, many of the early Church practices duplicated those of the God-fearing synagogues at the time of Christ. Like their synagogue birthplace the early Hebraic home churches (or neighborhood home fellowships, as we are calling them) retained the characteristic of personal participation. The earliest believers experienced the neighborhood home fellowship as an extension of the home for spiritual growth.

The preceding verses also reflect early Church *koinonia*, the fellowship and caring interaction that developed among those in the churches that met in homes. At the time of Christ the home signified the spiritual training base for the Jewish family, the place where parents shouldered the responsibility for training up their children in the wisdom and will of the Lord.

The home fellowship represented an extension of the home, not a programmed activity of a larger congregation that met at the temple. This is an important distinction, one that is vital if you are to understand the significance of the progression outward from relationship with Jesus to spiritual growth in the home to intimacy with fellow load-bearers to gatherings of worshipers in congregations at large.

Authors' Note:

We were once interviewed to head up a new home fellowship ministry for a large congregation. During the interview we found that we could not communicate clearly with the interviewer. He was looking for programs and activities to occupy and coordinate the congregation as they met in contrived “care groups.” In effect, he wanted a “Christian program” that would guide and instruct group attendees so that there would be standardized, predictable outcomes. Our emphasis on personal righteousness and load-bearing relationships built on an individual’s trust in Jesus actually seemed intimidating to him.

A church leader from another denomination once told us, “We can’t have our people trusting Jesus. That would cause mayhem! We need to control and direct the spiritual activities of the people in our congregation.” Do trust in God and obedience to Him really produce mayhem? “For God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Home Fellowships are also called care groups, cell groups, or home churches. Regardless of the terminology, in the early Church they represented a seven-day-a-week commitment of the followers of Jesus to one another. As an extension of the home, the neighborhood home fellowship was the relational network that upheld personal righteousness.

Keep in mind this distinction as you read this chapter. In many churches today “care groups” are viewed as scheduled meetings of small groups of believers whose interest is primarily on “self.” By contrast, the focus of the early Church was twofold: righteous, load-bearing fellowship that equipped followers of Jesus for godly living and Gospel sharing.

Remember, the goal of your pilgrimage with Jesus is a personal relationship that draws you to increasingly trust the Lord and to bear fruit for Him. True ministry within a home fellowship equips followers of Christ to share their trust in the only true Source of life and provision. Authentic fellowship finds load-bearing believers encouraging each other as they wholeheartedly trust God. Authentic ministry comes as one Christ-follower helps another to lovingly trust the Lord in all circumstances.

Paul understood that as believers followed Jesus, the Lord would allow them to encounter difficult situations “so that we might not rely on ourselves but on God” (2 Corinthians 1:9). It is God Who prompts His people to reach out beyond themselves to come alongside the needy and minister His mercy to them. Such availability and vulnerability requires de-programming from the institutional approach that is so embedded in a broad area of church culture today.

If you are ever to experience the love, understanding, and acceptance that God is restoring to His people, you must, by His grace, get past the depersonalized forms of associations to which you may have grown accustomed. For those who have been part of congregations that rely heavily on programmed activities designed only to benefit the participant, it often takes several months to adapt to the increased personal responsibilities of a home fellowship built upon the early Church model.

**“Since we have these promises, dear friends,
let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit,
perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).**

Early Church believers approached God to worship Him and to have their prayers answered. This may sound like a small point, but think about it. It wasn’t just the act of praying, but answered prayer, that got the early Church noticed. The book of Acts begins with a small band of disciples: “They all joined together **constantly in prayer**, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers” (Acts 1:14).

When Peter and John were released from the Sanhedrin’s capture (see Acts 4), they went directly to their fellow believers: “**After they prayed**, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31). When these people prayed, something happened. Miraculous answers to

prayer abounded as they trusted wholeheartedly in the One to Whom they prayed. Peter's miraculous release from prison (see Acts 12) further confirmed to them that prayer moved God to respond.

Think about Paul and his numerous requests for prayer:

• **“Pray continually”** (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

• **“And pray in the Spirit** on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and **always keep on praying** for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

• **“With this in mind, we constantly pray** for you, that our God may count you worthy of His calling, and that by His power He may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith” (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

Paul wasn't asking that mere words be lifted to God. He was earnestly seeking the response that God would give in answer to those prayers.

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”

(Matthew 6:33).

Because of their knowledge of God from the Hebrew Bible, the early Church understood God's conditions for answering the prayers of His people. The book of James contains many Hebraic themes identified with the early Church: a trusting faith that results in action; concern for the poor and underprivileged; humility versus haughtiness. Apperceiving Proverbs 15:29, “The Lord is far from the wicked but He hears the prayer of the righteous,” James reemphasizes God's prerequisite for answered prayer. That prerequisite is righteousness.

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops” (James 5:16-18, emphasis added).

Addressing the prayers of Jesus, Hebrews 5:8 states: “He was heard because of **His godliness [righteousness]**” (emphasis added). Again the writer of Hebrews emphasizes the importance of righteousness: “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the **teaching about righteousness**. But solid food is for the mature, who by **constant use have trained themselves** to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:13,14, emphasis added).

Because of the communal awareness as well as personal awareness of the Hebraic early Church, the followers of Jesus were deeply concerned with individual and communal righteousness. The Hebrew Scriptures had demonstrated that God had prevented the entire nation of Israel from conquering the city of Ai because of the hidden sin of one man, Achan (see Joshua 7). God had upheld this same standard of righteousness for the fledgling Church by taking the lives of Ananias and Sapphira (see Acts 5:1-11).

The Lord's Supper, based on the Jewish Passover observance, required all leaven to be removed from the land. The removal of the leaven signified a state of holiness (righteousness). Jesus and His disciples could not keep the Passover unless all leaven, or spiritual impurity, had first been swept away.

Paul elaborates on the state of righteousness required of those partaking of communion:

“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. Anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment” (1 Corinthians 11:23-31, emphasis added).

Partaking of communion in the early Church was a serious communal activity. The early Jewish believers understood the holiness of the Passover and believed Jesus's words, “This is My body”; “This is My blood” in their spiritual holiness and fullness. Plato's dualism that separated the sanctity of spirit and matter had not yet influenced the Church. Therefore,

the philosophical argument over the communion elements (transubstantiation, consubstantiation, or spiritual remembrance) which so divides denominations today did not divide the true believers.

Hebraic block logic, bolstered by trust, accepted the words of Jesus without further explanation. Jesus was the sinless Son of God. His fulfillment of prophetic Scripture as the sacrificial Lamb could in no way violate God's command to abstain from consuming blood. Thus, Jesus could assure His disciples, "The Spirit gives life; **the flesh counts for nothing**. The words I have spoken to you **are spirit and they are life**" (John 6:63). The faith of the Twelve could accept His words even while the mental struggle of other disciples caused them to turn back and desert Him (see John 6:60-68).

Some research of the early Church supports that the followers of Jesus got together in homes for the specific purpose of sharing communion. This encompassed a time of participation and an opportunity for repentance. Later, when communion took on a sacramental nature, participation was incorporated into the congregational gathering on the Sabbath. A very important personal and communal scrutiny element of the early Church was thus lost.

Where sins were confessed and righteousness prevailed, prayers were answered in a powerful way. These were "God-size" answers. When sins remain unconfessed, prayer becomes form without power. Paramount in any of the early Church practices was fellowship with God. Without a right relationship with Him there is no other fellowship: "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And **our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ**" (1 John 1:3).

A merciful and gracious God provided the means to restore fellowship and righteousness that had been broken by sin: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Unconfessed Sin Removes Communal Righteousness

The breaking of bread in the home was critical not only to maintain strong relationships but to preserve righteousness. Home gatherings provided a medium for accountability so that the Lord's instruction for dealing with a person who sins could be followed:

"If your brother sins against you,

- go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.
- But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'
- If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the [called-out ones]; and
- if he refuses to listen even to the [called-out ones], treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that **if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them**" (Matthew 18:15-20).

The primary goal of the above passage is to maintain individual and communal righteousness, and restore the repentant. God knows man's frail inability to always maintain His standard of righteousness. Even King David, a man after God's own heart, was an adulterer and murderer. In order to restore fellowship the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to rebuke him. David, his heart broken and contrite before his God, repented and confessed his sin. His intimacy with God was restored. For the home fellowship of today, confession and repentance are key to maintaining ongoing prayer that results in divine answers.

Recall that to be "born again" in the early Church meant that you put full trust and reliance in Jesus Christ. Followers of Christ covenanted to enter into a Lord/slave-servant relationship. The foundation of this relationship was mutual love that carried with it a certain responsibility. The Lordship of Jesus necessitated obedience from His servant. Lack of trust, unlovingness, or disobedience by the servant was sin, a breaking of fellowship with God. Confession recognized that sin had indeed occurred.

God was seeking a repentance that sorrowed over the separation of intimacy with Him. This sorrow produced repentance that turned away from evil and toward God:

"Yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because **your sorrow led you to repentance**. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings **repentance that leads to salvation** and leaves no regret, but **worldly sorrow brings death**" (2 Corinthians 7:9-10, emphasis added).

Over the centuries the church has gone along with a sinner's confession that an offensive act has been committed. But such admittance is cognitive, not necessarily from the heart, and deals just with the unlawful act. In effect, the perpetrator is focused only on the wrong action, not on the person who was hurt or the relationship that was violated. This reasoning is incomplete.

The Hebraic early Church was relational, not cognitive. Repentance required taking responsibility for damage done to the relationship as well as restitution for the offense. Note the difference of emphasis from focus on "the hurtful action" to concern with "who was hurt by the action." Since the reality of being born again was a loving trust in God, the severity of personal sin was all the more poignant—the sin violated Someone with whom the offender had enjoyed a loving and trusting relationship.

Atonement for sin could be made only through the shedding of blood (see Hebrews 9:22). Because of their knowledge of the Hebrew Bible, the Jewish people recognized the futility of atonement by human effort. Forgiveness required the grace of God, that He would accept the substitutionary atonement of the annual sacrifice of an unblemished lamb. How well Jewish believers understood the importance of the shed blood of Jesus to fulfill the just requirement of their holy God!

The Hebrew Scriptures clearly established that God could not be approached in just any manner without severe consequences. Even the high priest who represented the entire Jewish nation could enter the holy of holies only once a year after the sprinkling of blood. Jesus shared the parable of the wedding banquet to describe the kingdom of God (see Matthew 22:1-14). He told His listeners that some people outrightly resist the King's offer; others even kill His messengers. Some accept His invitation but fail to prepare themselves to enter His presence:

"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was **not wearing wedding clothes**. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and **throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**'" (Matthew 22:11-13).

Early believers recognized that even earthly kings had standards for entry into their presence. Esther understood this when Mordecai implored her to approach her husband, King Xerxes, on behalf of the Jews about to be annihilated:

"All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he **be put to death**. The only exception to this is for the king to **extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life**. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king" (Esther 4:11).

Consider the above condition of approach to the king as you read Hebrews 4:16: "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Standing alone, this verse could seem to indicate that believers may approach the throne even if filled with unrepentant sin. The early Church clearly understood such presumption to be false. The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes the necessary prerequisite of the shed blood of Jesus:

"He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption... How much more, then, will the **blood of Christ**, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, **cleanse our consciences** from acts that lead to death, so that we may **serve the living God**!" (Hebrews 9:12,14, emphasis added).

It is not through our righteousness that our prayers are heard by God. It is because of our humble reliance on the shed blood of Jesus to cover our sins that we receive forgiveness from Him as we confess and repent. The humble and contrite person who trembles at God's word and trusts Him with heart, soul, mind, and strength is the one esteemed by God (see Isaiah 66:3).

Prayer in the early Church included spiritual warfare. The example of Daniel from the Hebrew Bible demonstrated that persevering prayer and trust in a loving Father were key to God's response. Demonic forces opposed the ministering angels who brought God's answer (see Daniel 10; Hebrews 1:14). Righteous Daniel prayed for twenty-one days before the heavenly messenger, with the help of the archangel Michael, broke through with God's response.

Jesus voiced the parable of the persistent widow (see Luke 18:1-8) to encourage His followers to pray without ceasing: "And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who **cry out to Him day and night**?" (Luke 18:7).

Satan is aware of the importance of righteousness combined with prayer that perseveres until the answer is received. If he cannot hinder through unconfessed sin, he will discourage God's people from praying by instilling doubt and unbelief that the Lord will ever answer. This is why the intimate righteousness of the home fellowship is essential to encourage each other to persist in prayer. A home fellowship of today that does not experience God-sized answers to their prayers may have already given way to Satan's scheme.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24,25).

The home fellowships of the early Church encouraged participation in communion through the mutual upholding of biblical standards. The home gatherings represented the location in which individuals were included or excluded from fellowship. It would have been unthinkable for a person to join a home fellowship for purely social reasons as do many believers today. The Bible has established criteria for God's people to have fellowship with each other. The Word also establishes a precedent that men and women are influenced for good or for evil by the close relationships they keep. Study the following verses:

- “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm” (Proverbs 13:20).
- “A violent man entices his neighbor and leads him down a path that is not good” (Proverbs 16:29).
- “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared” (Proverbs 22:24).
- “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).
- “Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him” (Titus 3:10).

The right to separate from evildoers in order to uphold righteous standards is a biblical prerogative. Paul emphasized the importance of communal righteousness in the Church in his admonishment to the Corinthians:

“When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, **hand this man over to Satan**, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 5:4,5).

Author's Note:

Because of the dualism that's so prevalent in the church today, it is difficult for many to believe that God would actually use Satan to perfect His people. But the Scriptures demonstrate that God used Satan to test Job (see Job 1:6-2:10) and to sift Peter (Luke 22:31). God also uses him in the church to destroy the sin nature in His people when all other human elements fail. That is why Paul writes about believers who live close to the fringe of righteousness but still make it to heaven: “He himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames” (1 Corinthians 3:15).

“The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion” (Proverbs 28:1).

Consider the importance of interpersonal influence as it may affect believers in a home fellowship who prayerfully trust God in spiritual warfare:

“When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army... He shall say: ‘Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them.’ Then the officers shall add, ‘Is any man afraid or fainthearted? **Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too**’” (Deuteronomy 20:2,3,8).

The Bible teaches that right relationships can spur believers on to greater love, courage, and service for the Lord. Wrong relationships can deter His people from the valor and courage required to accomplish His purposes through them. **Load-bearing** in a home fellowship enables Christians to support each other in a personal way so that they can carry out God's purposes.

Courage and valor are as highly esteemed in the Bible as they are in Israel today. The Israeli military leaders of today are the ones whose wisdom and courage have won previous battles as they led, not sent, their men into the fray. Consider how biblical men of courage attracted one another. 1 Samuel 14 illustrates Jonathan's courage for the Lord at Micmash: “Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, ‘Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. **Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few**’” (1 Samuel 14:6).

The same courageous regard for God's honor is displayed by David against Goliath: "David said to the Philistine, 'You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but **I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty**, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied'" (1 Samuel 17:45).

From the time they first met, these two valiant men were drawn to each other: "And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself" (1 Samuel 20:17). Their courage produced a wonderful devotion that was eulogized by David: "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women" (1 Samuel 1:26).

People who are courageous for God attract other courageous people to themselves. The prophet Samuel describes the "men of valor" who joined David:

"These are the names of David's mighty men: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter. Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty men, **he was with David** when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. Then the men of Israel retreated, but **he stood his ground** and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The Lord brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead. Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. But Shammah **took his stand in the middle of the field**" (2 Samuel 23:8-12).

These three were joined by thirty other mighty men who also embodied courage beyond the average. Who are the ones in your life whom you can count on to come alongside you to stand firm in God's mighty power when trials and spiritual battles assail you? Consider the home fellowship of today in light of the early Church: Righteousness produces boldness. Think of the importance of courage. Valiant people attract other people of courage.

Do you believe that your close relationships in the faith reflect you? If you do, look honestly at yourself and those to whom you are close. Do they exhibit the abiding presence of Jesus? Is He producing His fruit through each of you? (Ponder the vine and branches relationship of John 15:1-17).

The writer to the Hebrews described the importance of courage and encouragement to keep Christ-followers from sin's trap:

"But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are His house, **IF we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast**. See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But **encourage one another daily**, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ **IF we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first**" (Hebrews 3:6, 12-14, emphasis added).

As you find yourself being pressured more and more by the ever-evolving standards of the world system, prayerfully immerse yourself in God's Word. Beseech Him to fill you with "all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (see Colossians 1:9). The Israelites of Jeremiah's time succumbed to the lure of deception and worldly gratification. Heed God's warning to them: "Stand at the crossroads and look; **ask for the ancient paths**, ask where the **good way is**, and **walk in it**, and you will find **rest for your souls**" (Jeremiah 6:16, emphasis added).

Does God's rest mean that your circumstances will improve, your trials subside, your temptations cease? Probably not, but your soul, your arena of emotional and decisional response, will find rest in the midst of the turmoil. God's "ancient paths" call for righteousness and trust. Let us spur each other on to walk in them.

For further insight into fellowship of homes, see our video series: [Jesus In Your Home, Fellowship In Homes \(videos 90 thru 139\)](#)

Or, use the parallel pdf lessons, [Discussing How To Restore The Early Church, Fellowship In Homes \(lessons 45 thru 50\)](#)

Chapter 32. A Fellowship Of Homes Supports Your Home



Providing Load-bearing Relationships

“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22).

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

Remember that the Hebraic early Church was both spiritual and practical. The previous chapter explored the essential “vertical element” of the home fellowship, that is, the process by which believers in a home fellowship uphold a righteousness that leads to holy boldness for the sake of the Kingdom. Such believers attract others who are courageous for the Lord.

This chapter addresses the “horizontal elements” of the early Church. These are the enactments of your faith undertaken because of your love for the Lord Jesus. As with your forefathers in the early Church, only by His grace through the power of the Holy Spirit can you live out the biblical mandates.

The keys to the horizontal element in the home fellowship are mentoring and role modeling. The seven-day-a-week commitment of those in the home fellowship is the avenue by which the wisdom of the older men and women can be incorporated into the lives of younger men and women. This is the means by which the ish, the mature man, and the zaken, the Hebraic elder, can have their most profound effect on the lives of the less mature. Because of the intimacy that is grown and nurtured in the home fellowship, loving correction can be given to those who act foolishly in their responsibility toward God and toward others.

Just how important is the restoration of the wisdom and experience of older men and women in the church today? This cannot be overemphasized. Keep in mind that this loss is a post-World War II phenomenon. If the vitality of the early Church is to be fully recaptured, the wisdom of age and experience must once again be cherished by believers.

**“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another,
God lives in us and His love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:11,12).**

In the Hebraic model of home fellowship, when your family joins together with other families and individuals for worship, sharing, and fellowship, these gatherings are special. They are time spent with friends who are spiritual relatives—family you look forward to being with, family with whom you are developing an ever-deepening, load-bearing relationship.

If you do not see these occasions as opportunities to share your life with kinfolk you care about, your gathering will become impersonal. The activity, not the people, will become your priority. Instead of strengthening the quality of your relationships as you encourage each other through prayer and testimony that enhances trust in God, each gathering will in time become a duty, an obligation for you and your family. After awhile you will regress to thinking of the coming together as “attending a service.”

Many years ago our friend Karl Duff taught us the concept of “load-bearing.” Sitting in our retreat center’s living room one afternoon, he pointed to an open beam that supported the ceiling.



“Mike,” he remarked, “that beam is continually carrying the weight of the roof; the roof depends upon it. We need that kind of load-bearing relationship among believers today.”

His words remind us of the intimacy that Paul must have had in mind:

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:10,15).

“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the **interests of others**” (Philippians 2:4).

When you get together with believers in a home fellowship, consider that gathering an extension of what you have already been doing in your home.

The home fellowship should never become a compensation for deficiency in your own home. Believers should never try to make up for what is lacking through irresponsibility in someone else’s family. It is appropriate to help others develop reliability, but never step in to take on responsibility that is rightly theirs. A number of church leaders have admitted to us that many programs in their churches were designed to compensate especially for undependable fathers. Irresponsibility becomes an increasing burden on others and perpetuates the sin that has fed it.

A home fellowship must support the home as the basic building block of spiritual development. If you are not leading the way in your own home by establishing some sort of regular spiritual focus with your family, don’t expect a home fellowship to provide a “Sunday school” program to do it for you!

The times in a home gathering when children do share and receive ministry should not be the only occasion during the week when principles of godly living are discussed with them. Most parents are glad to share ideas of activities that they are doing at home to help their children to better love, serve, and experience God. Just ask. Your children really do need to see you as their primary spiritual authority. It’s right out of Scripture!

If other families demonstrate good habits and practices that you would like to develop in your own home, ask for help until these qualities are part of your family life. For example, if you are frustrated by a strong-willed toddler’s incessant activity, ask for suggestions (and prayer!) from parents in your group who have learned from experience how to survive with victory.

If your teenager suddenly seems uncommunicative or withdrawn, seek prayer and counsel from those who have gained insight through their own experiences and investigation. God really does want you to raise godly children and has provided resources who can minister truth and wisdom to you.

One mother expressed her dismay over her thirteen-year-old daughter's occasional outbursts of tearful screaming. Another mom with a daughter the same age acknowledged that her daughter also had emotional flare-ups. This mother then shared counsel that had worked in her own situation. She said that during these tearful occasions with her daughter, she would wrap her arms around the girl to affirm that she understood the inner turmoil and pain and frustration. She would then firmly insist that screaming was an unacceptable way to vent these emotions.

This woman and her husband had already established pre-determined consequences for disobedience in this realm of behavior. When her daughter had calmed down, the mom reminded her of these, as well as the family goal of maintaining the home as a sanctuary of peace. In this way the girl was able to learn to take responsibility for her decision of whether or not to obey the family standards of behavior, for she was aware of the consequences. She was also presented opportunity to expand her awareness of the needs of others in her family for peace in the home, and to take her eyes off herself.

This type of sharing encourages others to bear one another's burdens and to give glory to God for His wisdom and compassion. The home fellowships in which the authors have participated have abided by two principles:



- **The presence of Jesus in our midst must be the foremost consideration.**
- **Children must be welcomed as integral members of the body.**

Consider this: If Jesus doesn't "show up" in your gathering, should you? In other words, true unity is really representative of your own ongoing fellowship with Jesus and your heavenly Father: "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And **our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ**" (1John 1:3). When your relationship with Jesus is intimate, your home fellowship gatherings will reflect that. The Lord Himself will guide your time together through His Spirit.

If your fellowship with God isn't personal, then something will be lacking in all of your other relationships. Without intimacy with God and others, you will in time look to some form of contrivance to impart a false sense of "fellowship" to your gatherings. An example of this would be the use of singing and music to "conjure up a mood" that makes people feel good. It provides a soulful high but does not restore lost fellowship with God. That can be done only through repentance and restoration.

Beware of another potential pitfall when small groups come together. No one individual should "sweat the outcome" of your gathering and try to control what happens. If this occurs, you have the return of the sacerdotal, someone attempting to mediate between you and Jesus. And be wary of too heavy a reliance on prepared materials as your primary reason to gather, rather than your love of Jesus and of each other.

Do your leaders show a greater interest in Jesus and you than in trying to achieve a desired goal when you meet? Over years of ministry we have observed that when the sacerdotal mediator shows up, the Holy Spirit remains silent.

"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones.

For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:10).

Home fellowships should never treat children as "second class citizens" of God's kingdom. Jesus admonished His disciples to humble themselves and change to become like little children (see Matthew 18:3,4). This perspective can revolutionize your own view of yourself as a "child of God." Are you able to humbly entrust yourself to Him the same way you desire your children to trust you?

Before you consider children a potential nuisance in your gatherings, ponder the Lord's words about them. By encouraging them to share their insights and questions, you are reflecting the value you place on them. Even the elders permitted the twelve-year-old Jesus a forum in the temple to share "His understanding and His answers" (see Luke 2:47).

One home fellowship to which we were committed consisted of six family units totaling twelve children, ages one to seventeen, and eleven adults. Generally when we assembled as a group, the adults and older children sat in a circle while the little ones played with interlocking blocks, tiny cars, coloring books, and picture books in the middle in a designated

area. (A colorful quilt could mark the boundaries of your play area.) The toys were set aside just for home fellowship times, so no one had “ownership” over them. Even the older children sometimes kept their hands busy with plastic blocks while their ears were tuned in!

Often one of the little ones would crawl into an empty lap for a quiet story or take an available hand for a drink in the kitchen while discussion was going on. The adults became aunts and uncles to these children, and the teens were regarded as big brothers and sisters. Thus, even though few in the group had extended family locally, relationships developed to a certain level of family intimacy.

On Sundays when our home fellowship gathered collectively with other home fellowships in our congregation for praise and worship, we were often there more than an hour before the worship began. The children played together while the adults supervised and drank coffee, talked, and prayed. Our fellowship family sat together with the children during the praise and worship. Because of the extended love and care, you couldn’t tell which adults the children belonged to!

We have found that children who are not accustomed to quiet play gradually learn. When outright rebellion flares, the parent can accompany the offender to a bedroom to handle the situation in the manner he or she chooses. Consistent commitment by the adults and the example set by peers and older children help more active children settle in. However, we also have no unrealistic expectations that a two-year-old will sit quietly for an hour either! Parents are encouraged to allow others to help with child care. This not only gives them a break but fosters trusting attachments between the children and adults in the fellowship. Anyone can wipe a nose or hold a little hand on a walk-break!

Spontaneous midweek gatherings strengthen these relationships. Barbecues, nature hikes, slide shows, home videos, picnics, impromptu prayer times, game nights—all are expressions that say “We care”. Not every person can make every get-together, and that’s all right. Each one knows that he or she is only a phone call away for praying, rejoicing, and load-bearing. For single and divorced members, these relationships are especially vital as the love they share in the home fellowship may represent the most comforting source of family care that they are experiencing.

We have found that it is sometimes appropriate to break by gender into different areas of a home. Older children often enjoy participating in discussions with adults if they feel that they will be heard. Either gender can supervise the activity of the little ones. If the discussion seems inappropriate for young people, the older children can head outside for a break with the younger ones or for a snack in the kitchen. The keys are flexibility and adaptability. If you meet in a home that isn’t normally “childproof”, the hosts can move the untouchables out of reach and the parents can bring toys for their own children, confining their activities to a designated spot.

Some home fellowships alternate adults (both men and women) to supervise activities with the children for part of the time. The activity depends on the particular talents of the person in charge and the age of the children. Examples are songs, crafts, storytelling, baking, games. Because relational contact is maintained during the week through personal visits or by phone, the children feel as though they are with family. New additions can be lovingly incorporated into the fellowship.

Both adults and children learn to carry on conversations with all age groups, a skill often undeveloped in a society and church culture that epitomize homogeneous groups.

If the children squabble with each other, provide an opportunity for them to resolve it (but not to the point of tantrums or belligerence!). We encourage parents not to step in too early nor to feel unduly embarrassed if their children’s behavior is not letter-perfect. Disagreements can be learning opportunities for yielding rights and helping one another. Sometimes the older children can intervene in creative ways that encourage their sense of responsibility too.

Some parents may seem oblivious to the disruptive behavior of their own children. This is a prime opportunity for the gray-haired mentors to take the parents aside to discuss appropriate “house rules” so that the apprehension levels of others can be diminished. Parents whose children have already graduated from that stage may be able to offer helpful recommendations based on their own previous experiences.

Chapter 33. Fellowship Of Homes – Supports Human Dignity



People Are Created In God’s Image — Jesus Died For Each One Of Them

“Therefore, as we have the opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10).

Seeking ways to bless those around you, particularly those in your spiritual family, demonstrates a heart that’s filled with gratefulness for all that God has done for you and in you and through you. It is in the fertile soil of loving relationships that you are able to truly discern needs that you can then fill.

A single mother in our home fellowship had undergone a painful divorce and felt emotionally and physically drained. Her nine-year-old daughter was very special to us, and each family in the fellowship spent extra time including her in family activities: sledding, walking the dog, playing at others’ homes. Both mother and child were able to regroup and continue with joy. In fact, this family has since moved out-of-state, and we still exchange calls and letters as “family.”

Remember that the early Church came together spiritually prepared to encounter Jesus. It is imperative that you prepare yourself and your family before you gather to worship: “When you come together, **everyone** has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All must be done for the strengthening of the church” (1 Corinthians 14:26, emphasis added).

Worshippers coming together should spiritually prepare themselves in advance, anticipating to participate as the Holy Spirit leads. Do not wait for the scheduled gathering to roll around in the hope that whatever is ailing you will somehow be “fixed” when you meet for worship. Each day has its own troubles. As you face these with one another’s help, you can focus on God and His moving in the body in your gatherings. Set aside the distracting worries and anxieties of what you may have to face when you get home. Concentrate instead on the majesty and sovereignty of God. He is aware of all you are going through. Worship Him!

“Do not withhold good from those who deserve it,

when it is in your power to act” (Proverbs 3:27).

There is a close connection between caring for someone and sharing with that person. Apperception of the above verse and others like it in the Hebrew Bible fill the Newer Testament. For example, Paul apperceived Proverbs 3:27, above, in this verse by looking back to the only Scriptures there were at that time — the Hebrew Bible:

“But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in the grace of giving... Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality” (1 Corinthians 8:7,13).

Jesus recognized that people have material needs for which they work. His parable in Matthew 20:14,15 addresses the landowner and the hired workers in the vineyard: “I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with My own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

If you are part of a home fellowship, ask yourself, “What benefit do others receive from me? Am I a gracious giver of myself to those whom I profess are spiritual family? Does my (sometimes sacrificial) availability reflect my appreciation for all that my Father has given to me?”

Financial responsibility to others in the faith is based on the Hebraic understanding that sees all things as God’s. The early Church clearly recognized this:

“All the believers were **one in heart and mind**. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they **shared everything they had**” (Acts 4:32, emphasis added).

James reiterated responsibility for the well-being of others:

“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but **does nothing about his physical needs**, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is **not accompanied by action**, is dead” (James 2:15-17, emphasis added).

The Holy Spirit often prompts His people to meet the specific need of another. How often the authors have been the recipients of the exact dollar amount required at a certain time! For example, we had no sooner arrived at our destination a thousand miles from home when the car radiator failed. We had no funds for this unexpected glitch, but a family friend agreed to repair it for a certain amount. The following day two checks arrived totaling the whole amount of the repair. Neither donor knew of our specific need but had responded to the urging of the Holy Spirit to send help!

Good deeds of charity were a hallmark of Hebraic daily life. The “righteousness [that] delivers from death” (see Proverbs 10:2, 11:4) was no abstract concept but a deliberate donation of material goods to meet real needs. The Hebrew word for righteousness means “acts of right or justice,” or what we would call “charity.” The attitude that God demanded toward a needy brother was this:

“**Give generously** to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to **be open-handed** toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land” (Deuteronomy 15:10,11, emphasis added).

From a Hebraic standpoint, to do that which was right constituted worship of God. To love God was to love your fellow man in a way that met his needs.

“And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother”
(1 John 4:21).

Weigh this Hebraic view of a Christian life: The essence of the love that Jesus refers to lays not in what you say but in what you do. Jesus linked the final judgment with “whatever you **did** for one of the least of these” (see Matthew 25:40, emphasis added). Sheer hypocrisy is living in a manner that refutes your moral words: “Even a child is known by **his actions**, by whether **his conduct** is pure and right” (Proverbs 20:11, emphasis added).

Paul exhorted Philemon:

“I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints” (vv. 6,7).

The living witness of your faith testifies to your ability to fully fathom your manifold treasures in Jesus as you share them with others. As those you encounter see more of Christ’s love in action through you, they will begin to attribute more to Him working in you and less to you as a “good person.” Thus they will “see your good deeds and **praise your Father in heaven**” (see Matthew 5:16).

James exhorts the faith community to “show [your] faith **by what [you] do**” (see 2:18). This outworking of a loving faith takes time, the commodity people seem to treasure most and have at their discretion the least. The choices to be made in the use of your daily twenty-four hours can seem staggering unless you ask yourself, “What would Jesus do?” (or more pointedly, “What would Jesus have ME do?”). Then abide by the answer the Holy Spirit reveals.

Aside from your responsibilities to your family, strengthen those with whom you are growing in Jesus. As “living stones” (see 1 Peter 2:5) in God’s spiritual house, you are a reflection of Christ in you and are bound by the exhortation of Peter:

“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us” (1 Peter 2:12, emphasis added).

Again, only intimate, load-bearing relationships will spur you on to actively expend your life for Jesus’s sake. Your acts of kindness in no way earn you salvation. They are the outpouring of Spirit-driven love that evidences the work of God in you.

In Israel we saw a wonderful living enactment of Paul’s word to the Galatians, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (6:2). On buses younger people gladly and automatically got up to let the older folks sit down, fulfilling (perhaps unwittingly) the injunction, “Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:32).

Passengers stepped off the bus to carry baby carriages onboard for mothers. People staggering on the rain-slippery floor immediately were met with a multitude of outstretched steadying hands. The list could go on... We were reminded of Jesus’s teaching about the Samaritan when He was asked, “Who is my neighbor?” (see Luke 10:29-37). In essence, He answered that our neighbors are all those for whom, through the love of Jesus, we reach out to bear their load.

“Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (Romans 12:13).

The Hebraic early Church excelled at hospitality, another tangible demonstration of love. Opening one’s home to others was deeply engrained in Middle Eastern culture and was expected among Gentiles as well as Jews. Biblical hospitality is an entirely different phenomenon than what we in the United States regard as “inviting people over”.

Americans may love to entertain, but our gatherings are more oriented to the activity we do (barbecuing, playing cards, discussing a study book or video) rather than to the relational development with the guests themselves. For instance, many church programs involving a home setting use a Bible study or some prescribed curriculum as the focal point for gathering. But program-based agendas often emphasize content conveyance rather than the needs and concerns of the participants. Consider the lasting impact the Word of God makes when biblical truths are addressed to current life situations—living parables, if you will.

How much likelier that God’s truths will result in changed lives, particularly if those truths are shared with people who have a genuine concern for an individual as “family”. Programmed studies may inform and interest the participants, but unless the information can be role-modeled and somehow applied, it will most likely be stored on the mind’s back burner and probably forgotten.

Since much of the western Christian community has lost awareness of the importance of the home, hospitality from the heart has become scarce. The book of Hebrews reminds believers:

“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing, some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2).

Among the pastors and church leaders we have encountered, few have practiced the criterion of hospitality required in Titus 1:8 and 1Timothy 3:2. At the retreat center, we found through survey that seldom are believers invited into the homes of others in the congregation just to deepen their relationships. Those who do share a closer-knit camaraderie often have points of contact outside the spiritual realm, such as children on the same sports team or carpool activity.

We believe that the absence of biblical hospitality in the American Christian community today contributes to the shallowness of the relationships seen in so many churches. One friend noted that the depth of relationship in her congregation appeared to be a mile wide and an inch deep!

Hebraic hospitality, on the other hand, offers spontaneity so that friends feel free to drop in without prior arrangement. This openness to unannounced intrusion also makes it easy for them to turn to one another in their time of need. In contrast, our western scheduling of every church gathering and activity makes it that much more difficult to spontaneously turn to other believers when problems befall us. It is ironic how natural it was for us as children to stop by our friends' homes. Somehow cultural entrapments take over until what once seemed so natural during youth is later perceived as intrusive when we "mature."

One chilly Jerusalem night our hosts Bert and Exie Schlossberg realized that it had been weeks since they had seen their neighbors across the street. Around 9 PM, after we had retired to our room, they headed out and knocked on the neighbors' door. Eli and Rivka answered in their bathrobes, laughing with joy to see their friends. They immediately lit up the house, set out goodies, and filled the next three hours with animated conversation.

You need the honesty in your relationships to welcome unplanned visits, or to express that the timing really is unsuitable. Just make sure that presuppositions of how others might react don't keep you from spontaneous care. (That's trying to "play their cards" for them!) Even a note on the door indicating that you stopped by when they were out demonstrates that they were on your mind.

If you examine the levels of relationship you have with the various people in your life, you might be shocked to find how shallow so many of them are. How many of your conversations ever get beyond issues: politics, the high cost of living, the decline of morals, crime, the alcohol and drug problems of young people nowadays? How many dig beneath to the things that pain you and hinder your walk with God?

True load-bearers "rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15). They pray and fast with each other to find God's answers to the painful or confusing situations afflicting them. They also have an open heart attitude that doesn't flinch at godly admonishment: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Proverbs 27:6). Such wounds require deep commitment and compassion born out of times of shared sorrow and joy.

Chapter 34. A Fellowship Of Homes Seeks The Spirit's Guidance



The Spirit's Guidance = The Father's Will

“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the LORD Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6).

One of the vertical-horizontal facets of the early Church was decision-making. (“Vertical” refers to your relationship with God; “horizontal” to those in your earthly realm.) Hebraic believers were persistent in seeking God’s *rhema*, His revealed will or decision, rather than leaning on their own reasoning and understanding. In contrast, the Hellenist philosophical influence in today’s church leans heavily on rationalization, employing a lot of “pro and con” discussion. With this type of human reasoning come elements of control and manipulation that tend to divide and estrange people.

An earnest devotion to seek God’s guidance testifies that Jesus Christ is the Head of His “called-out ones”. When God’s people long to restore intimacy with Him, a desire for His guidance is an early indicator:

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, “**Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going**”’ (Zechariah 8:20,21, emphasis added).

Pursuing the Lord’s continuous guidance must first be a matter of priority in your home. When you refuse to listen to God’s guidance, Zechariah warns: “‘When I called they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,’ says the Lord Almighty” (7:13). How detrimental to others in your home fellowship or even at the congregational level to expect God to manifest His power and presence in your midst when you neither seek Him nor uphold His holiness in your own home.

A number of times when the authors have been with a group that was seeking God, the Spirit would quicken to us or to someone else in the group, “The sin of Achan is present. God will not listen to your request.” (See Joshua 7.) Achan had tried to hide his personal sin. God had held that sin against all of Israel by letting them be defeated by the people of Ai. When the sin was revealed and dealt with, Israel was able to conquer their enemy. Be conscious of tolerating hidden sin that restrains God from guiding and acting on your behalf. Again, the pattern of spiritual guidance and decision-making experienced in the home fellowship must be an extension of what is already practiced within the family.

The Church of the Newer Testament relied solely on the Holy Spirit and His illumination of the Hebrew Scriptures to bring understanding to their walk with God. They had no access to the libraries and videos of today. As evangelist David DuPlessis wisely observed, “They had to depend on the Holy Spirit and His teaching and guidance. They had no other option but to minister, to preach and to write under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”

Seek the Holy Spirit. Do not proceed without the *rhema* of God, His guidance that brings with it the power for fulfillment: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man **remains in Me and I in him**, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me **you can do nothing**” (John 15:5, emphasis added).

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts’”
(Isaiah 55:8,9).

From the Hebrew Bible the early Church was able to apperceive God’s sovereignty in decision making:

“The Lord works out everything for **His own ends**... In his heart a man plans his course, but the **Lord determines his steps**” (Proverbs 16:4,9, emphasis added).

Decision making is a crucial facet of relationships that are committed to one another and dependent on reliant trust in God. Worldly methods or processes that are used in decision making can cause tension among friends if they feel that bad counsel was given or good counsel not acted upon. Both in the home and in the home fellowship family, be sure to select decision processes that God has ordained. Biblical examples of decision-making include, but are not limited to, the examples that follow.

When the disciples replaced Judas with another man to complete the Twelve, they followed the principle of Proverbs 16:33: “**The lot** is cast into the lap, **but its every decision is from the Lord.**” Also pertinent was this counsel: “**Casting the lot** settles disputes and keeps strong opponents apart” (Proverbs 18:18). Two disciples had been proposed to fill the void left by Judas. Instead of taking a popularity poll or vote that could have left some still wondering later if the decision had been correct, they “**drew lots**, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the apostles” (Acts 1:26). By employing this method any time a potential dispute might arise, further controversy is diffused: “Every decision is from the Lord.”

Early believers recognized that their hearts were deceptive beyond measure. “The **heart is deceitful above all things** and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Since childhood they had been nurtured on Proverbs 3:5,6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and **lean not on your own understanding**; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

The deceit of Ananias and Sapphira (see Acts 5) and its consequences certainly had warned them about lying to the Holy Spirit:

“Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that **Satan has so filled your heart** that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?’...When Ananias heard this, **he fell down and died.** And **great fear seized all** who heard what had happened” (Acts 5:3,5).

God’s protection method to keep His people from being deceived by their own personal desires included the confirmation of two or three persons. Autocratic decision-making by individuals represented a foreign concept. The early Church’s process of decision making was apperceived from the Hebrew Bible: “A matter must be established by the **testimony of two or three witnesses**” (Deuteronomy 19:5, emphasis added).

The teaching of Jesus reaffirmed this: “Again, I tell you that if **two of you agree** on earth about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:19, emphasis added). Paul reiterated the same principle: “Every matter must be established by the testimony of **two or three witnesses**” (2 Corinthians 13:1, emphasis added).

Concluding Encouragement

The faith community at Antioch used the witness of spiritual gifts, prayer, worshiping, and fasting to set aside Paul and Barnabas for ministry:

“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers...While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:1-3, emphasis added).

Our heavenly Father has not left His children to struggle alone to discern His will or how to make a way of life what He is restoring. Like Paul, earnestly ask the Holy Spirit on behalf of one another to “fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Colossians 1:9). Seek Him and diligently study His Word for *rhema*:

“The Spirit of truth will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13).

Glossary For Volume 4

Ahav

This Hebrew word for love means a devoted passion for the One you love, a yearning to be in His presence with all that is within you. This is also the word for love that's used in Exodus 20:6 as God promises to "to show love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Apperception

Interpreting new information based on previous facts you already know to be true. In other words, a newer teaching or practice is evaluated in light of older, proven truths. If the newer teaching or practice doesn't match up to the older true teaching, then it's skewed and unreliable. Jesus often apperceived the Hebrew Scriptures by basing His teachings on passages His hearers were familiar with and knew were true.

Block logic

An Hebraic pattern of reasoning in which individual verses and passages don't always have to agree or fit into sequential order, especially when they are referring to God. The Hebraic understanding is that God defies rational explanation; therefore there are facets of His Person and His character that don't coincide with our own ideas of Who He should be. God's perspective is often at variance than man's, so confusion may result until His will and way are recognized.

Dualism

The Hellenist/Greek worldview that everything in the material, physical realm is inherently evil, while everything in the spiritual realm is pure and holy — and therefore the only realm that counts. This view produced a separate category of "holy men" who functioned as priestly intermediaries between man and God. Dualism also influenced men and women to isolate themselves in monastic institutions and avoid the "physical degradation" of marriage. All of this stands in stark contrast to the Hebraic worldview which recognizes God's good hand in creation as well as the need for followers of Jesus to be interconnected with one another as extended spiritual family.

Ekklesia

The collective Body of Christ as the Church universal, (literally the ekklesia) of the sons and daughters He has called out of the world system with its self-serving values, goals and ways.

Load-bearing

Within the extended spiritual family of a home fellowship are the kind of relationships which "carry the load" of each person through putting into action the 54 "one-another" commands in the Newer Testament. Relationships which bear the load of one another are expressions of Christ's love toward each of His own through those who respond to the Holy Spirit's prompting to serve.

Lordship

The intimate relationship with Jesus in the new birth as His Spirit-empowered follower lives to please Him through motives and actions of love-grounded obedient trust. With the Lordship of Jesus we are His slave/servants to actively fulfill our Father's will.

Rhema

A Greek term meaning "word", it is that specific word spoken directly and individually from God to the believer through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings a particular portion of the total counsel of God for man, His logos, to a particular time and individual.

Tanakh

The Hebrew Scriptures which consist of three divisions--the Torah and the Prophets and the Writings.

Zaken

Spirit-empowered leadership in God's faith communities can only be fulfilled by men who have experienced years of dying to self, and have undergone the resurrections that repentance and confession bring. These men are the biblical elders (Hebrew zaken, gray-bearded) whom our Father uses to represent His heart of compassion in pastoring His flocks. (See our book *Pastoring By Elders*, a free download at our website, to explore this idea at length.)

Addendum. God Keeping His Promises To Israel Encourages Us Christians

God Is Now Fulfilling Biblical Prophecy To The Jewish People

“This is what the Lord says... ‘Only if these decrees vanish from My sight,’ declares the Lord, ‘will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before Me.’ This is what the Lord says: ‘Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done,’ declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 31:35-37).

Obedient trust in God and the truth of His Word hinges on His utter reliability to keep the promises He has made. The glorious riches of the New Testament are fulfillment of the prophetic promises voiced in the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus followers of Christ have security in the reality that the vows of God yet to be fulfilled will surely come to pass in His timing.

Over a three-day period in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit quickened in us the verses cited in this chapter that pertain to Israel and the Jewish people. We also sensed specific categories for each verse to emphasize key promises to the Jewish people. Many of these promises are being fulfilled before the world’s eyes. Now indeed is the time for a “Gentile Awakening” among believers in the US churches!

Scarcely a day passes without news of Israel appearing in the media. How remarkable from a purely secular viewpoint that such a tiny piece of real estate should consume such public attention! Yet from a biblical point of view, God is exposing and tearing down the walls that have divided Jews and Christians for centuries. In many Christian circles, however, these dramatic events go unnoticed because they appear irrelevant. The Bible indicates otherwise. This chapter emphasizes the importance of prophetic fulfillment of these promises as they apply to your personal walk with Jesus.

Israel: What Is God Doing? Should It Mean Anything to Me?

*“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3).*

The roots of Judaism and Christianity go back to our common father, Abraham. Nineteen hundred years of ecclesiastical prejudice and ignorance concerning the Hebraic roots of Christian faith have resulted in persecution of the Jews. For centuries the church has lacked the power and vitality of the first century Church as documented so clearly in the Book of Acts. As a Hebraic understanding of God’s Word is being restored, does God desire for the church today to bless the Jewish people? Will He not fulfill His promise to bless those who bless the Jews? Will part of the blessing the church receives entail a restoration of the early vitality and power that once characterized it?

God Is Changing the Hearts of the Gentiles

In response to a heightened interest in fully appreciating God’s faithfulness to His Word, many followers of Christ have become more aware of an ever-increasing amount of “divine activity” occurring among the Jewish people and the land of Israel. Consider the following news items that highlight repentance among Christian churches, a repentance that acknowledges with shame the historic persecution of the Jews.

In 1962 Pope John XXIII convened Vatican Council II. At that gathering, the Jews were decreed innocent of the charge of “Christkiller.” (During World War II, Monsignor Angelo Roncalli, who would later become Pope John XXIII, had developed an extraordinary reputation for saving thousands of Jews from Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria by providing Jews with fake Catholic baptismal certificates.)¹ The following prayer, composed shortly before the Pontiff’s death, admitted the church’s sins against the Jewish people and sought forgiveness from God for injustices committed:

We realize now that many, many centuries of blindness have dimmed our eyes, so that we no longer see the beauty of Thy Chosen People and no longer recognize in their faces the features of our first-born brother. We realize that our brows are branded with the mark of Cain. Centuries long has Abel lain in blood and tears, because we had forgotten Thy love. Forgive us the curse which we unjustly laid on the name of the Jews. Forgive us that, with our curse, we crucified Thee a second time.

The Diocese of Cincinnati concurred: “The Jewish people is not collectively guilty of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, nor of the rejection of Jesus as Messiah. The Jewish people is not damned, nor bereft of its election. Their suffering, dispersion, and persecution are not punishments for the crucifixion or the rejection of Jesus.”

A recent newspaper noted, “The Vatican is also reported to be drafting a document that would acknowledge the church fostered centuries of anti-Semitism and failed to stop the Holocaust”

Lutherans have recanted of Martin Luther’s writings against the Jews. In 1984, celebrating the 500th anniversary of Luther’s birth, the World Lutheran Federation issued this statement: “We cannot accept or condone the violent verbal attacks that the Reformer made against the Jews. The sins of Luther’s anti-Jewish remarks and the violence of his attacks on the Jews must be acknowledged with deep distress, and all occasion for similar sin in the present or the future must be removed from our churches...Lutherans of today refuse to be bound by all of Luther’s utterances against the Jews.”⁴

Added to these acknowledgments of sinful atrocity is a document from the United Methodists: “Jews have been victims of systematic oppression and injustice...Christians must also become aware of that history in which they have deeply alienated the Jews...The persecution by Christians of Jews throughout the centuries calls for clear repentance and resolve to repudiate past injustice and to seek its elimination in the present.”

“I the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6).

The representative verses included in this chapter are predicated on:

- the eternal nature of the Abrahamic covenant
- God’s promises to, and relationship with, the Jewish people
- the biblical basis of the hatred of the Arabs toward the Jews
- God’s unconditional relationship to the land of Israel
- the regathering of the Jewish people back to Israel
- God’s purposes in this regathering as they pertain to Gentiles the world over

It is our heartfelt desire that believers who ponder the promises that relate to the Jewish people will be encouraged in their faith. God does indeed keep His Word. Ignorance of God’s promises and of His faithfulness to keep those promises can often leave Christians discouraged and despairing. Wholehearted trust in God’s faithfulness fills believers with confidence, hope, and joy. Maintain intimacy with the One Who keeps His Word, the Messiah Jesus.

Please review the following verses thoughtfully and prayerfully.

The Abrahamic Covenant

The covenant with Abraham was instituted and initiated by the sovereign God Who gave His oath to uphold it. Only God has the right to say “I will” and it will be. [God speaking to Abraham] *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”* (Genesis 12:2-3).

The duration of the covenant that God established with the people of Israel was forever. *“All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever”* (Genesis 13:15).

The boundaries of the land given to Abraham were established by God. *“To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates”* (Genesis 15:18).⁶

This covenant was promised to pass through Abraham’s son Isaac and to his descendants forever. It did not pass through Ishmael, as claimed by the Muslims. *“Then God said, ‘Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him’”* (Genesis 17:19).

God then confirmed to Isaac’s son Jacob and to his descendants the covenant of the promised land and the blessings to be poured upon them. *“I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying...All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you”* (Genesis 28:13-15).

God confirmed the patriarchal covenant with Moses, who then reminded the Israelites of God's covenant promise to them of the land they were about to enter. *"And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord"* (Exodus 6:8); *"When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites—the land He swore to your forefathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey—you are to observe this ceremony in this month...After the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as He promised on oath to you and your forefathers"* (Exodus 13:5,11).

Even when the Israelites had been removed from the land during their exiles and dispersion, God did not forget His covenant. *"Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the Lord their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the Lord"* (Leviticus 26:44-45).

God's Sovereign Election of the Jew Is His Encouragement to the Elect of the Church

God's actions on behalf of Israel emanated out of His love for them and out of His oath to the patriarchs. *"The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt"* (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

Similarly, Peter reminded believers that they too were chosen by God in His foreknowledge and through the work of the Holy Spirit. The election of followers of Christ as well as the chosenness of the Jewish people were initiated by God for His pleasure, purposes, and glory. *"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by His blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance"* (1 Peter 1:1-2).

Those who are in Christ stand assured that no one can bring any charge against God's chosen ones. *"He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies"* (Romans 8:32-33).

The Land of Israel Is God's Possession

The land of Israel belongs to God. The Jews are tenants of His property. It was not designed to be broken up or traded away. [God speaking]: *"The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is Mine and you are but aliens and my tenants"* (Leviticus 25:23). God speaks possessively of both the Jewish people and the land, and of the severe consequences for violating either. [God speaking]: *"I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning My inheritance, My people Israel, for they scattered My people among the nations and divided up my land"* (Joel 3:2).

God's Relationship with the Jewish People Is Everlasting

The Jews are God's *"treasured possession."* As such, He set them aside for His specific purposes. *"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession"* (Deuteronomy 7:6).

God chose the Jews to make a name for Himself, a relationship designated to be "forever." *"And who is like your people Israel—the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for Himself, and to make a name for Himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before Your people, whom You redeemed from Egypt? You have established Your people Israel as Your very own forever, and You, O Lord, have become their God"* (2 Samuel 7:23-24).

God is prepared to destroy every other nation except the Jews. He has disciplined the Jewish people but has promised that He will not utterly destroy them. *"Do not fear, O Jacob My servant, for I am with you," declares the Lord. 'Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished'"* (Jeremiah 46:28).

God's relationship with Israel was as intimate as that of a nursing mother with her child. His people have been etched into His very hand. *"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands; your walls are ever before Me"* (Isaiah 49:15-16).

As a servant to the Jews, Jesus Christ validated the promises that God had given to the patriarchs and fulfilled His promise that many nations would be blessed through the seed of Abraham. *"For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy"* (Romans 15:8,9).

In light of God's relationship with the Jew, even Gentile believers are encouraged to share their resources with the Jewish people. *"They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings"* (Romans 15:27).

Today God Is Reassuring the Jewish People by Regathering Them to the Land of Israel

God assured His people that there would be a second regathering of the Jews to the land of Israel from the four corners of the earth. It is HE Who will accomplish this. *"In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to Him, and His place of rest will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out His hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of His people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea. He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; He will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth"* (Isaiah 11:10-12).

God promised that HE would use the Gentiles to help gather the Jews back to Israel. *"This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up My banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders'"* (Isaiah 49:22).

Jeremiah spoke of a future "exodus" to Israel beyond that made by the Jews from Egypt. This gathering of the Jews would be even more notable than their departure from Egypt. *"'However, the days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when men will no longer say, "As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt," but they will say, "As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where He had banished them." For I will restore them to the land I gave their forefathers'"* (Jeremiah 16:14-15).

God again affirmed through Ezekiel that HE was the One Who would scatter and gather the Jews. After HE has brought them back to Israel HE will give them a new spirit and a new heart. *"Therefore say: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again." They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. They will be My people, and I will be their God"* (Ezekiel 11:17-20).

God assured the Jews that their future regathering would be a sign to other nations of His holiness. Again, God repeats the phrase used fifty-nine times in Ezekiel, *"Then they will know that I am the LORD their God."* God's ultimate purpose for the Jewish people is spiritual reconciliation with Himself. Israel will acknowledge the Lord when HE brings them back from captivity. *"Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'I will now bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous for My holy name. They will forget their shame and all the unfaithfulness they showed toward Me when they lived in safety in their land with no one to make them afraid. When I have brought them back from the nations and have gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will show Myself holy through them in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. I will no longer hide My face from them, for I will pour out My Spirit on the house of Israel' declares the Sovereign LORD"* (Ezekiel 39:25-29).

After Returning the Jewish People to the Land, God Will Establish a New Covenant with Them and Cleanse Them from Their Sins

God will make a new covenant with Israel unlike the previous one made with Moses. *"'The time is coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their*

forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 31:30-32).

The new covenant to be established will be everlasting.

"In those days, at that time,' declares the Lord, 'the people of Israel and the people of Judah together will go in tears to seek the Lord their God. They will ask the way to Zion and turn their faces toward it. They will come and bind themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten'" (Jeremiah 50:4-5).

After their return God will cleanse the Jews and give them a new heart and a new Spirit. Their obedience, as it is with Christians, will be based upon the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

"For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be My people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you" (Ezekiel 36:24-29).

The time of this return and the pouring out of the Spirit appear to be after the time of Christ's first advent.

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on Me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son" (Zechariah 12:10).

From Jerusalem (Mount Zion) God will reign forever over the Jewish people. *"In that day,' declares the Lord, 'I will gather the lame; I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief. I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever. As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem"* (Micah 4:6-8).

God Acts for His Own Name's Sake

For God's own name's sake He acted on behalf of the Israelites. *"But for the sake of My name I did what would keep it from being profaned in the eyes of the nations they lived among and in whose sight I had revealed Myself to the Israelites by bringing them out of Egypt"* (Ezekiel 20:9).

For His name's sake upon which He gave His promises to Abraham, God did not deal with Israel according to what they deserved. *"You will know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for My name's sake and not according to your evil ways and your corrupt practices, O house of Israel,' declares the Sovereign LORD"* (Ezekiel 20:44).

God forgave their sins not because of the merits of the Israelites but for His name's sake. *"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for My own sake, and remembers your sins no more"* (Isaiah 43:25).

For His name's sake God promised that He would not cut off the Jews. He afflicted them in order to bring them to repentance. *"For My own name's sake I delay My wrath; for the sake of My praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off. See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake, for My own sake, I do this. How can I let Myself be defamed? I will not yield My glory to another"* (Isaiah 48:9-11).

The Arab Hatred toward the Jews Is Recorded as Animosity of the Descendants of Ishmael toward the Descendants of Isaac

God foretold to Hagar, the Egyptian slave, that the child she had conceived by Abraham (Ishmael, the father of the Arabs) would be hostile to his brothers. Isaac was Ishmael's half-brother by Abraham and Sarah. *"The angel of the Lord also said to [Hagar] 'You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers'"* (Genesis 16:11-12).

Unlike Abraham who procured a wife (Rebekah) for Isaac from God's own people, Hagar obtained a wife for Ishmael from Egypt. *"While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt"* (Genesis 21:21).

Esau, a son of Isaac and the twin brother of Jacob, married two daughters of Ishmael. Also called Edom, Esau became the father of the Edomites who did harm to the Israelites when they entered the Promised Land in their Exodus from Egypt. (Seir, in the hills east of Israel, is located in what is now called Jordan.) *“So Esau (that is, Edom) settled in the hill country of Seir”* (Genesis 36:8).

King Jehoshaphat reminded God of the injustice the Israelites had suffered at the hands of Ammon and Moab (see Genesis 19:37,38), who were descendants of the incest of Abraham’s nephew Lot with his daughters. Mount Seir was the land of Edom, Esau’s descendants.

(Jehoshaphat speaking) *“But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory You would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession You gave us as an inheritance. O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You”* (2 Chronicles 20:10-12).

The Arabs also opposed the Israelites during the time of Nehemiah when the latter returned to the land of Israel from exile in Babylon. *“But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat”* (Nehemiah 4:7-9).

In the time of the Psalmist, the Arabs used cunning against the Israelites, just as the Arab nations do against the Jews of Israel today in order to secure their land. *“O God, do not keep silent; be not quiet, O God, be not still. See how Your enemies are astir, how Your foes rear their heads. With cunning they conspire against Your people; they plot against those You cherish. ‘Come,’ they say, ‘let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more.’ With one mind they plot together; they form an alliance against You—the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, of Moab and the Hagrites”* (Psalm 83:1-6).

Ezekiel prophesied against Edom, Esau’s descendants. God’s hand was against the Edomites because: 1) They had hated Israel since ancient times. 2) They had shed the blood of Israel. 3) They wanted Israel’s land. 4) They spoke blasphemies. 5) They boasted against the Lord. These motivations still represent the attitude of the Arab nations against the Jews. These five points, in fact, were reaffirmed in the 1964 PLO Founding Charter, calling for the total destruction of Israel. Despite current peace documents and handshakes, that charter remains in effect to this day.

“Because you harbored an ancient hostility and delivered the Israelites over to the sword at the time of their calamity, the time their punishment reached its climax...Because you have said, ‘These two nations and countries will be ours and we will take possession of them,’ even though I the LORD was there, therefore as surely as I live,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘I will treat you in accordance with the anger and jealousy you showed in your hatred of them and I will make Myself known among them when I judge you. Then you will know that I the LORD have heard all the contemptible things you have said against the mountains of Israel. You said, ‘They have been laid waste and have been given over to us to devour.’ You boasted against Me and spoke against Me without restraint, and I heard it” (Ezekiel 35:5, 10-13).

God’s Command for Aliens Living in Israel Is Still in Effect Today

Non-Jewish people are permitted to live in the land of Israel. Many Arabs, currently referred to as Palestinians, own homes and property in Israel. Some are members of the Knesset, the governing body of Israel. *“You are to distribute this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. You are to allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance,’ declares the Sovereign LORD”* (Ezekiel 47:21-23).

Israel Born in a Day: Seeing Is Believing

For many Gentiles, the verses from Isaiah 66:8-11, below, would have gone unnoticed and without meaning if, on November 29, 1947, God had not caused the United Nations to vote to partition British-held Palestine. This ballot established an official homeland for the Jews. In the face of great Arab adversity, on May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was declared—in a day! *“Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children. Do I bring to the moment of birth and not give delivery?’ says the Lord. ‘Do I close up the womb when I bring to delivery?’ says your God. ‘Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her. For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance”* (Isaiah 66:8-11).

God Is Awakening the Gentiles by His Actions on Behalf of Israel

God is regathering the Jews to Israel a second time, using this action as a banner or signal to the nations. He desires for the Gentiles to help the Jews to return: *“I will bless those who bless you”* (Genesis 12:3). *“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up My banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders’”* (Isaiah 49:22).

As God shows favor and compassion to Israel, other nations of the world will learn to fear the name of the Lord. *“But You, O Lord, sit enthroned forever; Your renown endures through all generations. You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come. For her stones are dear to Your servants; her very dust moves them to pity. The nations will fear the name of the Lord, all the kings of the earth will revere Your glory. For the Lord will rebuild Zion and appear in His glory. He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; He will not despise their plea”* (Psalm 102:12-17).

In the last days, people will go up to Israel, and the law of God will flow forth from it. Peace will pervade the nations and war will be a thing of the past. *“In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore”* (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Nations will flock to Jerusalem to honor the Lord. *“At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the Lord, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts”* (Jeremiah 3:17).

As God gathers the Jews and rebuilds Israel, the nations will know that He is the Lord. His word is reliable and true. *“Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it”* (Ezekiel 36:36).

God promises the nations that if they learn what He has taught the Jews, He will establish them among His people. Severe consequences await those who fail to learn obedience to Him.

“This is what the Lord says: ‘As for all My wicked neighbors who seize the inheritance I gave my people Israel, I will uproot them from their lands and I will uproot the house of Judah from among them. But after I uproot them, I will again have compassion and will bring each of them back to his own inheritance and his own country. And if they learn well the ways of My people and swear by My name, saying, ‘As surely as the Lord lives’—even as they once taught My people to swear by Baal—then they will be established among My people. But if any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it,’ declares the Lord” (Jeremiah 12:14-17).

After God restores the Jews to Israel, He will judge the nations based upon their treatment of the Jewish people.

“In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning My inheritance, My people Israel, for they scattered My people among the nations and divided up My land” (Joel 3:1-2).

Activities for the Genuine Born Again to Consider

As the Holy Spirit continues to move Christians to look favorably on the Jews as *“the apple of [God’s] eye”* (see Zechariah 2:8), pray for increased repentance on the part of believers and growing unity between Christians and Jews.

- The arrival of 700,000 Jewish immigrants to Israel from the former USSR. The airlift of 15,000 Falasha Jews from Ethiopia to Israel. The return to Israel of Jews from China whose ancestry dates back to the exile period. God is using His activity as a “banner to the nations.” We trust that you will become sensitized to seeing these events as God’s fulfillment of His promises to the Jewish people. May the Holy Spirit encourage you in your faith and cause you to bless the Jews as He directs.

- The Bible commands a simple action—Pray! *“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.’ For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, ‘Peace be within you’”* (Psalm 122:6,8).

There are six million Jews in the United States, more than there are in the State of Israel! Of these, over 200,000 are Messianic Jews, sons of Abraham who recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah, the One Who is coming again! According to a survey taken by the Messianic Times, 71% of those Messianic believers polled indicated they “would move to Israel if Messianic Jews were allowed aliyah”, the “Law of Return” guaranteed to all Jews by the State of Israel. The current Israeli government considers Messianic Jews to be “Christians.” As such, they are not eligible for citizenship under the Law of Return. You can direct your prayers, then, that since “the authorities that exist have been established by God” (see Romans 13:1), God would change the hearts of Israeli government officials to allow the Jewish believers He is calling to the land to be able to do so.

- Ask forgiveness from the Jews. You may have friends, neighbors, and co-workers who are Jewish. Pray that “the veil” over their hearts be removed and that they would have a longing for the Messiah as He has revealed Himself, Jesus. Make a diligent effort to examine the Scriptures with new intent to understand God’s relationship with the Jews. Investigate the agencies and organizations listed in the Resources at the end of this book. These offer very tangible ways for you to become informed about, and involved in, returning the Jews to Israel and helping them get settled.

