

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"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 18:19,20)



SECTION 1 - LESSON 5

THE OLDER TESTAMENT
Foundation For The Newer Testament
Disclosure Of God As Initiator and Revealer
Source For Understanding Covenants
The Prophetic Voice of God



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**The Older Testament:
*Foundation For The Newer Testament***

***“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 the above words to the followers of Jesus in Rome, the only written Scripture was the Hebrew Bible, the Older Testament. The earliest Church needed the encouragement of the Hebrew Bible so that they might have *hope*.

When you read the passage, ***“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”*** (2 Timothy 3:16,17), what was the only Scripture in existence when Paul wrote to his younger protege? The Older Testament.

The first followers of Jesus verified the teachings which we now see in the Newer Testament, by searching the Older. Luke commends the Bereans and directs us to a similar pattern of verification: ***“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). If our spiritual

forefathers searched the Older Testament for truth, should Christians today do any less?

Write down *your* view of the Older Testament and how it applies to your faith practices today.

When you read 2 Timothy 3:16,17, what do you believe Paul is saying about the usefulness of the Hebrew Scriptures in *your* walk of obedient trust?

For the earliest followers of Jesus, the *Older Testament* was their source text for 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 humanity.

Without referring to the Hebrew Bible, how could believers today ever

grasp such a concept as the *atonement sacrifice*? How can they ever grasp all that pertains to Jesus's death and resurrection victory over sin?

It's within the Older Testament text that we find God's just evaluation of mankind: "*The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time*" (Genesis 6:5).

You can never completely understand the depth of your own depravity and the necessity of Jesus's death on your behalf until you grasp from the Older Testament your sinful nature and the prophecies pertaining to your need for Jesus's incarnation.

[See our video and written script: [Certain of What We Do Not See, The Influence of Your Sin Nature](#)].

In the Older Testament you'll find 333 prophecies that point directly to Jesus. When you put these together, you discover the significance of the high priestly mediation of Jesus between His Father and His people. This understanding makes His sacrifice very personal for you. And, your appreciation for what Jesus accomplished for you intensifies.

Think about your own faith walk. If you don't fully understand the *priesthood of Jesus*, how can you carry out your own role in the *priesthood of believers* and the spiritual responsibilities and privileges that that entails?

So many today abdicate their priesthood role to clergy, abandoning this all-important responsibility. If you relinquish your holy priesthood purpose, you'll condemn yourself to lifelong enslavement to your sin nature.

In summary:

The *Messiahship* of the Lord Jesus is found in the Hebrew Bible.

You can't fully know Jesus and your responsibilities to Him as Lord unless you know Him as the Older Testament relates.

Peter proclaims to us, "*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). Describe how you live out your role as a priest of God.

The Older Testament:

Disclosure Of God As Initiator and Revealer

The Hebraic believers of the earliest 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 created the heavens and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1).

Our Lord not only *initiated* creation. He also *reveals Himself* to us through His creation:

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).

Have you ever stopped to consider how a *God Who is Spirit* interacts with His *creation which is physical*?

The false gods of the pagans were demonic, choking off truth. The true God of all the universe desires to be *experienced in trust* by the humans He made in His image. The account of Adam and Eve testifies that the God Who created them *interacted* with them as a father.

Experiencing God should be as much a life reality for you as experiencing the people with whom you have a relationship. This certainty was critical to the Hebraic Stream. When you read the life of Abraham, would you agree that he *experienced* God in his relationship with Him?

The one true God Who permeates the Bible yearns for His people to experience Him in spiritual union. In fact, if you're going to have a relationship with anyone, especially a loving relationship, it must be experienced.

Our loving Father indeed initiated His interaction with you. As Jesus declared, ***"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him"*** (John 6:44). You didn't first seek Him independently of His orchestrating the circumstances and encounters that drew you to Him!

God reveals His nature as a loving and caring Father to those who are humble and repentant before Him. Examine a few scriptural examples of various ways in which our Father revealed Himself.

- The Book of Exodus overflows with supernatural evidence of our Lord's revelation of His Person and His power: parting the Red Sea; showering manna from heaven; providing quail for meat; destroying powerful nations that opposed the Israelites; swallowing the rebellious Korah into the earth.
- In 1 Kings 8 we see the shekinah glory of God fill the Temple.

- God forces the sun to go backward as a sign to King Hezekiah that he would be healed (2 Kings 20).
- All throughout the Hebrew Bible God spoke to prophets that they might convict the people of their sins.

As the Initiator and Revealer of Himself, our Lord continued His pattern right into the Newer Testament. To fulfill His plan of redemption He sent an angel to address Mary about her impending conception, to warn Joseph to flee Herod's massacre, and to reassure the couple when it was time for them to leave Egypt. Most importantly, our God revealed Himself through the Incarnate Jesus.

And, our Father and Jesus *continue* to reveal themselves through the Holy Spirit Who indwells those who embrace the Father's New Covenant.

The Book of Acts cascades with revelation of God about Himself. For example: **Acts 2** — the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; **Acts 3** — the healing of a crippled man; **Acts 5** — the death of Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit; the healing of many by the Apostles; **Acts 7** — Stephen's martyrdom experience, *"full of the Holy Spirit, look[ing] up to heaven and [seeing] the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God"* (Acts 7:55). Now, *that's* a revelation!

So many facets of our God's character are revealed by Him in His Word. Take the time to read the entire Bible to get a good understanding of our Lord as Initiator and Revealer. Why? Because the God Who is true to His nature is operating the same way He always has! The unchanging nature of our God is sure:

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the *Father of the heavenly lights*, who *does not change like shifting shadows*” (James 1:17).

Why would God not initiate a relationship and reveal Himself to you?

This is a crucial question. Can you readily describe how *you* experience God in an ongoing way? Don't quote Bible verses. Rather, describe real experiences through which our Lord initiates and continues to reveal Himself to you.

If you weren't able to answer above, how did the idea make you feel? Are you willing to ask Him to stir up in *you* the same intimacy of relationship that you see Him doing in the Bible?

Because the reality of God as Initiator and Revealer is so important for your faith journey, we want to review this a little more...

Our God is a very real Person Who is known by what He does: *He initiates and He reveals*. You may think that *you've* been seeking God — but the Bible makes clear that *He's* been seeking *you!*

Before you knew Him, our Father

accepted the sacrifice of Jesus on your behalf. He made sure that as part of His eternal plan, Jesus rose from the grave as a sign to you that He accepted His Son's sacrifice as the penalty for your sin.

Ever pointing to His Father, Jesus again reiterated, that **“no one can come to Me, unless it has been *granted him from the Father*”** (John 6:65). *The Father* initiated that Jesus-shaped longing in you! HE has been opening the eyes of your heart to reveal more and more how He intends to fulfill His purposes in your life! Never lose sight of the fact that it is *His grace* that makes your salvation possible.

Maybe you've been hindered from experiencing God because the religious teachings you've received have taught you to analyze Him from an abstract, philosophical vantage point. This demonic pagan approach came into the church through the Hellenist philosophers of the second and third centuries.

The Hebraic Stream recognized that the God Who is described in the Hebrew Bible *revealed Himself* in very real ways to very real people like Moses, Elijah, Daniel and Jacob. Both Testaments profess that our God, Who is spirit, *initiates and reveals Himself to His physical creation*.

The most intimate and perfect revelation of our God is revealed in the incarnation of Jesus — God-become-man. And our Father and Jesus reveal themselves through the indwelling Holy Spirit to all who embrace the true Gospel.

[For more on this, see: [Certain of What We Do Not See: Section 2. Relating To A God Who Is Spirit](#); video or Lifebyte.]

A sobering obstacle exists for those who consider themselves “Christian” but have embraced a false, man-centered gospel: They are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Most of God's revelation of Himself

at work is not perceived by people who are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Spirit needs spirit in order to be known and experienced: *“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”* (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Because of the analytical influence of Hellenism, many so-called “Christians” don’t experience the reality and presence of God. They can rely only on the input of their mind, which is limited to receive information only through the five senses of sight, taste, touch, hearing and smell. These senses allow you to perceive only the *physical* world around you.

Your mind can never *know and experience* a God Who is Spirit. Only your *spirit* in communication with the Holy Spirit can bring about spiritual communion.

Have you embraced the true Gospel, the one that enabled the earliest followers of Jesus to display such Spirit-power in union with Him? What indicators verify that the Holy Spirit is operating within you?

If you had difficulty answering the above, what do you think you need to do?

The Older Testament:

Source For Understanding Covenants

The Hebrew Bible reveals our God as both a *Covenant-giver* and *Covenant-keeper*. The word *covenant* means “*to live in union with.*” Union meant fully *experiencing* and *interacting* with the one with whom you were in covenant.

The covenants our Lord gave in the Older Testament to Abraham, Noah and Moses represented His offer to man to live in intimate relationship with Him.

Each covenant carries with it particular responsibilities on man’s part if he accepts the covenant. In return, God promises blessing for obedience and punishment for disobedience. All of God’s interactions with man since His calling out of Noah have been based on covenants.

The coming of Jesus fulfilled God’s promise of a “New Covenant” that would fulfill the righteous requirements of the Levitical priestly sacrifices. The prophet Jeremiah foretold, *“‘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’”* (Jeremiah 31:31).

At His Last Supper Jesus shared with His disciples that Jeremiah’s words were finding completion in Him: *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you”* (Luke 22:20).

God inaugurated the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman to fulfill very precise purposes according to His will. Because the Hebraic foundations have been lost in Hellenized Christendom, too many people focus on *getting* married or *being* married rather than on God’s perspective for the marriage covenant.

The prevailing man-centered view of marriage has led to Christians leading

this nation in divorce as they've tried to mingle a veneer of spirituality with a motive of self-gratification.

Through the prophet Malachi God made clear to the Israelites why their prayers were going unheard: they were breaking faith with the wife of their youth. Sound familiar? The marriage covenant was so vital to God because it was His means of ensuring that godly children would result from a stable family unit. The *spiritual* connection that God intended to permeate the couple would be broken if they lacked diligence in protecting its sanctity.

*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' (Malachi 2:15-16).*

Marriage and family were highly significant to observant Hebraic men and women of Jesus's time. The family was the most basic unit of society, and the marriage covenant was regarded as a gift from God: "*So God created man in his own image... **male and female** he created them. God **blessed them**" (Genesis 1:27,28).*

According to the pattern God established, the woman was given to the man to form a union. The man 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 were so uniquely different, the marriage relationship implicitly created a fuller picture of the interdependent working of the Godhead.

Mankind was created by God to be motivated by sexual pleasure — an incentive generated by the Creator to

unite a couple's hearts in a loving bond. Psalm 139 verifies that the children that may come from this union are the result of *His* hand bringing forth life to bless their covenant relationship.

Scripture calls for a husband to value his covenant partner with the same worth God places on her: "*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).

In biblical times, marriage was viewed as a *sacred bond*, not merely a legal contract. Many rabbis in the Hebraic Stream emphasized the importance of a man taking a wife for himself, and *then* applying himself to the study of God's Word. To marry and to have children was regarded as the foremost religious duty for a 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).

Our Hebraic forefathers 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 relationship that grew within the marriage covenant.

For a man to be a bachelor was thought a grave misfortune. They understood that a wife was the highest gift God gives a man. Husbands were encouraged to follow the example of the man in the Song of Songs, *eagerly* sharing love and tenderness with the wife of his youth.

The Hebraic early Church understood that a wife was more than a helper to a man. A husband was to *draw strength* from his wife as his life partner (see Malachi 2:14). He was required to satisfy his wife's desire for intimacy on a regular basis — a command 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.

Hellenistic thought denounced the physical realm of sexual desire, deeming it evil. (We'll discuss this more in a later lesson.) This unbiblical view ultimately led to celibate clergy.

From a Hebraic standpoint, however, since God created the body with a yearning for intimacy, to denounce intercourse within marriage would be blasphemous. (To misuse the body *outside* the marriage covenant would also betray God's standards for holiness.)

The Hebraic followers of Jesus understood God's purpose for giving Adam a wife: Adam was incomplete. He needed a helper suitable for *him* as a unique creation. The Holy Spirit works through the covenant of marriage by enabling a wife to develop and help complete in her husband the elements that make up Christ-like character in a man. She helps her husband develop the "softer side" of God's love — mercy, compassion, patience, long-suffering — when he's tempted to respond out of anger or impulse.

The marriage relationship was regarded so highly by the Hebraic Stream

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 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.

To paraphrase the goals and processes of a Hebraic/Christian marriage: **"If you want to know the extent of my relationship with Jesus, see it in my love for my spouse."**

The same Greek word for selfless love in the Newer Testament, *agape*, is used both toward God and toward a mate (Matthew 22:37; Ephesians 5:33).

So many marriages today fail to grasp the importance that marital love is a direct reflection of the love relationship a person claims to have with God. The writings of Shakespeare and subsequent authors have perpetuated an unbiblical concept: *Romance* leads to marriage. The romantic attraction that deceives so many today into marriages built on sand finds no biblical backing.

The biblically Hebraic view upholds love as a *development* that grows as the marriage matures. 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."*

Do you see the pattern here? He married her, they shared the intimacy of a husband/wife relationship, and from

this union love developed.

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.¹

We've 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 ministry, 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. 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.”²

A Hebraic understanding emphasizes that marriage is a commitment in which the *whole community* has a stake. *No married couple is expected to make it through life without help*. The extended family is there for support.

For Christians, the home fellowship of *extended spiritual family* 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.

In light of the Hebraic understanding of marriage you get a far clearer picture of God as husband of Israel in the Older Testament, and Jesus as bridegroom in the Newer Testament. The purpose is summed up in Malachi’s words, “*Because He was seeking godly offspring.*”

Describe how your life is lived in union with God.

If you’re single, write a 45-minute love letter to Jesus. If you’re married, write a 45-minute love letter to Jesus, and another 45-minute love letter to your spouse.

If you’re having trouble with either of the above, what does that say about your idea of love and relationship?

**The Older Testament:
The Prophetic Voice of God**

“Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7)

One of the dangers for the Israelites, and for many “Christians” today as well, is that human nature wants to define God in *our* image. If we’re able to design a god who fits our concept of what God should be, then we develop a religion in which man is in control of his life and our god is given lip service.

God warned the Israelites many times not to create anything to which they would bow down and worship. He was well-acquainted with the rebellious propensity of man. Eve’s decision to sin was cemented when Satan deceived her that, “...you will be **like God**” (Genesis 3:5).

During the time of King David, God spoke through the prophet Asaph to warn the rebellious Israelites about their sins and their impudence.

These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face (Psalm 50:21).

This same arrogance goes on today as many excuse themselves from keeping God’s commands. They presume that the “New Testament” God overlooks their sins because they are “under grace”. The Bible tells us otherwise. Willful sin finds no automatic forgiveness in either Testament.

We noted in a previous lesson the seductive power of *vested interest* to maintain position, prestige or influence. God repeatedly sent the prophets who were true in heart to Him to deliver His messages. He grieved that His people

were so hard-hearted and bent on self-gratification that they needed such dire warnings.

Yet, true to His redemptive character, our Lord intended that His prophetic words might result in repentance. When people turn from sin, God relents. The lamenting prophet Jeremiah anguished because the people chose instead to heed the lying words of false prophets.

Situations that could just as easily have occurred under today’s steeples are lamented by Jeremiah from the grieved heart of God. Within the midst of the seat of their religion — the Temple — false prophets and priests alike were shamelessly leading the people astray (Jeremiah 23:11). The blatant sinful lifestyle of the prophets encouraged the populace to rationalize their own wickedness.

Ask yourself if this passage foreshadows the sin that’s overtaken much of organized Christianity by means of “prophetic words” that fail to bring repentance:

*Also among the **prophets** of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; And they **strengthen the hands of evildoers**, So that **no one has turned back from his wickedness**. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah (Jeremiah 23:14).*

What is the source of false prophecies that comfort people in their sin and fail to convict them? According to God’s word through Jeremiah, demonic entities are one root (see Jeremiah 23:13). Misleading dreams and the deceitful chaff of the prophets’ own heart are another (Jeremiah 23:25,26).

How can you discern if a prophetic word is truly from God? You test the prophecies to ensure that they aren't emanating from a false spirit (1 John 4:1). "*Do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good*" (1 Thessalonians 5:20,21). You weigh the words carefully against Scripture for corroboration (1 Corinthians 14:29).

God's holy righteousness doesn't allow Him to be in the presence of willful sin. But He loved Israel so much that He ordained the office of prophet to warn people when they were breaking His commands or maligning His character by imputing sinful human attributes onto Him.

The true prophet of God "*stood in His counsel*" by praying with clean hands and a pure heart, available for whatever God might speak through him (Jeremiah 23:18). Not every person who announced a prophetic word was reporting a message from God. Those whose self-interest required people-pleasing brought forth only what the people wanted to hear.

[The prophets] keep reassuring those who despise Me, 'The LORD says you will be safe and secure,' and saying to all living by their own stubborn hearts, 'Nothing bad will happen to you' (Jeremiah 23:17, CJB).

Isn't this the pattern so prevalent today among congregations and ministries that promote prophetic words? The hearers who are living according to the world's standards are lulled into believing that God is pleased with them despite their willful sin.

Ponder now *God's* purpose for revealing prophecy through His servants:

But if they had stood in My council, Then they would have announced My words to My people, And would have turned them back from their evil way And from the evil of their deeds (Jeremiah 23:22,NAS).

In a way, the prophet was an instrument of our loving God's mercy. The prophet's words acted much like a parent's warnings to a child who was doing wrong: *continued disobedience brings consequences.*

The voice of God through His prophets also incorporated warnings of impending disaster. With foreknowledge of what was to take place, His people could prepare in the manner of Joseph in Egypt. In the Newer Testament, similar warning was given to Agabus about the famine to hit the Roman Empire (see Acts 11:28).

Prophecy in the fledgling Church took on deeper meaning beyond warning, though. Paul impressed upon the followers of Jesus in Corinth how important the spiritual gift of prophecy was in their midst because the person "*who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation*" (1 Corinthians 14:3). The indwelling Spirit would bring conviction of sin, while the prophetic messages from God would strengthen them to walk in obedient trust.

God's Word proclaimed in prophecy *brings about change* in the lives of those who have ears to hear. They turn from any evil they've tolerated in their lives, and turn to our Lord to once more walk in His ways and His fellowship!

As our Lord reported through Jeremiah, false prophecies will always exist alongside the truth. Yet God's words are like a fire that consumes the chaff of deceit, and like a hammer that breaks into pieces the lies that stir His people to recklessness (see Jeremiah 23:28-32).

Do you believe God is still using true prophets today? (Yes) or (No). Cite the biblical basis for your position.

Has a prophetic word that stirred you to repent ever been shared with you? How did you confirm that the message was from God?

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