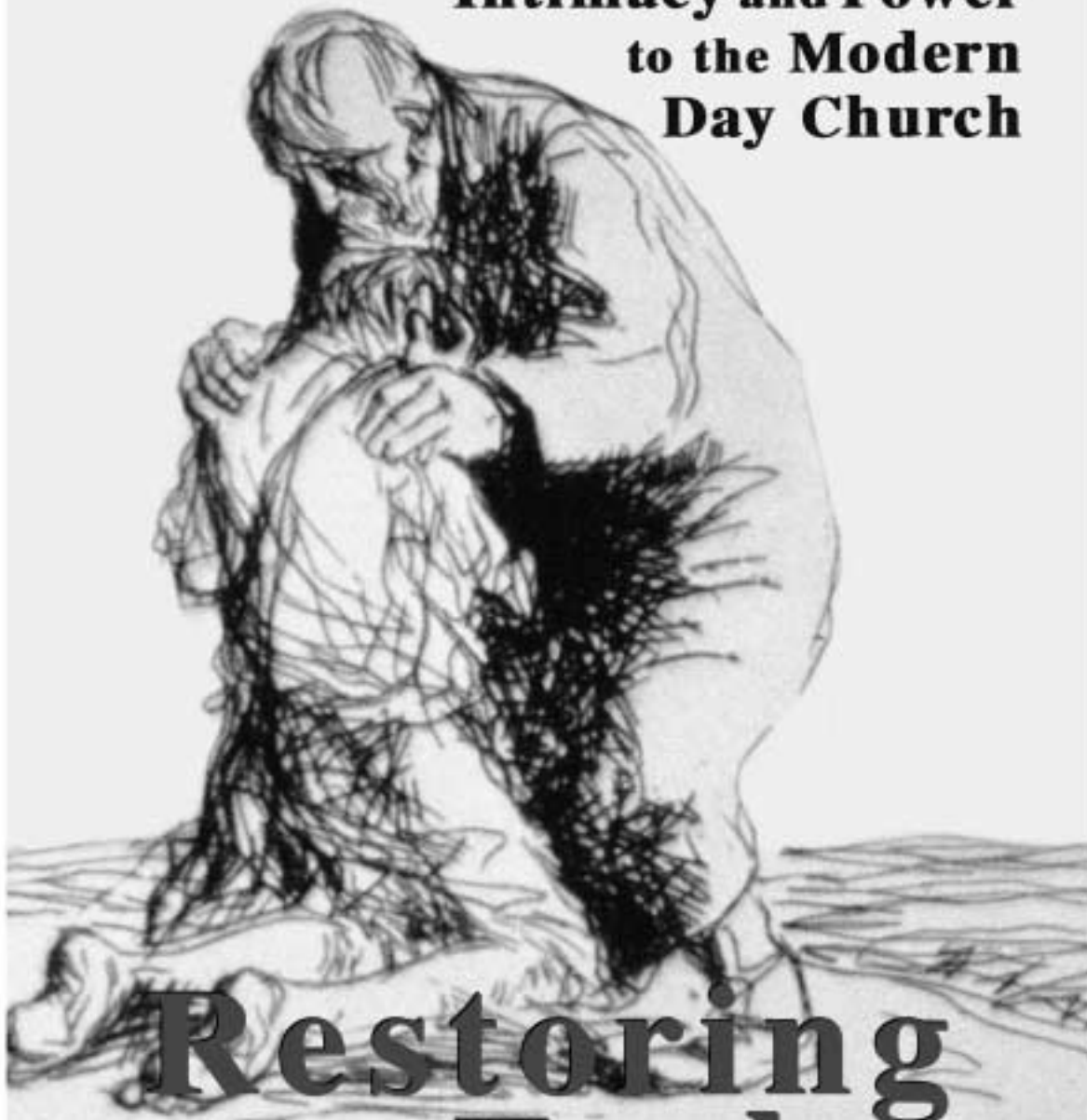


**Returning  
Intimacy and Power  
to the Modern  
Day Church**



**Restoring  
the Early  
Church**

**Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz**

# Restoring the Early Church

Mike & Sue Dowgiewicz

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# RESTORING The EARLY CHURCH

MIKE AND SUE DOWGIEWICZ

To our son Sean Michael (“Mike”)

May you live to see your children and your children’s children  
walking in trusting reliance on the Lord  
and humble obedience to Him.

## A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

This work represents a spiritual pilgrimage. As with any pilgrimage, there have been years of preparatory groundwork before the first step toward the objective was ever made. We are grateful for our parents, Sam and Mary Dowgiewicz, Bill Goodrich and Rosmar Goodrich, who raised us to look to the interests of others even to our own hurt. We recognize the humble servants of God who, even before we had accepted God's grace, role-modeled lives that reflected Jesus: Bob Greco, Dick Shand, Wilma Southworth. We are grateful for the men and women who, during our seminary years, demonstrated by their own lives that mere "content conveyance" does not come close to the relational sacrifice that Christ calls for in His followers. Thank you, Christy and Betty Wilson, Bob and Wilma Fillingier, Dan and Nancy Jessen. And special thanks for our late mentor Charles Schaufele, who set the standard for us to never retire from service to God.

The many years at the retreat center prepared us for another milestone along the way: The joyous responsibility and privilege of load-bearing among spiritual brothers and sisters. How we cherish those years of intimate relationship! The incredible variety in the members of the body of Christ with whom we shared fellowship was preparation for us to more fully appreciate the height and depth and breadth of the love of God. How glorious are His ways, and how infinitely beyond our understanding!

It was our odyssey to Israel, however, that removed the scales from our eyes to expose the subtle anti-Semitism that had subconsciously influenced our pilgrimage. As our dear friend Exie Schlossberg commented, "The brilliant sunlight of Jerusalem exposes within you all manner of darkness to confess before the Lord." And as we were enlightened about God's prophetic fulfillment for the Jewish people, God began to reveal His purposes for bringing us to the land of Jesus's birth. Thank you, Bert and Exie Schlossberg, for opening your home and your lives that we might learn by example the righteous way of the Lord.

As we continue our pilgrimage, it is our prayer that those whom God touches through this work will intensify their hunger and thirst to see Him more clearly through the Hebraic roots of the Church. May their love for God and their service for His glory draw many into His Kingdom!

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## P R E F A C E

God 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. For eight years I counseled pastors and church leaders, primarily in Connecticut but also in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, 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.” We have found that the truths God revealed to us during our stay in Israel in 1993 and 1994 are also being revealed to others.

“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 the above verse at a prayer conference in Jerusalem. In the months following the conference God took us aside and led us to the resources and information that are the basis for this book. Two broad facets of the message God gave us will be developed more fully throughout the book:

### **1. The Holy Spirit is restoring to followers of Jesus a biblically Hebraic understanding of their relationship with God and with the significant people in their lives.**

The early Church related to the Lord through a biblically Hebraic framework of understanding. A Hebraic understanding affects the depth of your relationship with God and is inseparably linked with how you relate to others. For instance, a descriptive essence of a Hebraic-Christian 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 the love I have for my spouse.” God 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 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 still the foundational starting point for the growth of healthy home fellowships and congregations.

The older members of your community, the sages or mentors, 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* in the church is an indispensable factor being awakened by the Lord today.

## **2. The Holy Spirit is alerting Christians to the reconciliation now taking place with the Jews.**

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). Christians who are made aware of this move of God can share His loving kindness toward the Jews and be ever ready to *“give the reason for the hope that [they] have...with gentleness and respect”* (see 1 Peter 3:15,16).

### **Why Have We Written?**

In a sense we are writing with concern for those to whom we ministered at the retreat center. We wish that we had known earlier the Hebraic principles God opened up to us in Israel. Many people came to mind as we absorbed these truths. We often thought, “If only they could hear this, they could more readily *trust God* in their difficult circumstances.”

Although the medium of the written word lacks the informal and interactive dynamics of a retreat, our goal is to furnish something practical, something useful and pertinent to your daily life. Through this material we trust that you will be able to take 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.

Some of the truths contained in this book are based on revelation from God through the Holy Spirit as we searched the Word. We believe these truths agree with the Bible in every sense. Other information is gleaned from our own investigation, the research of others, and from our observations through years of personal involvement with many Christians from different walks of life and various denominational and doctrinal persuasions.

The first draft of this book was sent to several men and women who are recognized as theologically sound in their respective areas of Christianity. We wanted to be certain our work wasn't in vain. Our thinking at that time, almost two years ago, was: “If these respected individuals examined the research that we did, 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 would be frightened to implement the changes needed to help get my church back to the foundations of the early Church.” The other often repeated comment was, “You don't have to prove your case; 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.

A visual image of the Restoration now underway within the Christian community is a large oak tree, with the Restoration fitting in right above the roots at the base of the trunk. The Hebraic truths of the first century Church were that foundational. In another analogy, if church ministry could be compared to computer programs, the existing church practices would compare to application programs and the Restoration to a deeper system software.

Due to the comprehensive breadth of the topic covered, we have organized the book into three distinct sections:

### **Section 1: The Hebraic Facets of the Early Church**

This section 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 were foundational for the New Testament writers.

### **Section 2: The Loss of the Hebraic Roots**

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

### **Section 3: Jesus, the Home, and Home Fellowships**

The last section focuses on the primary 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.

Restoration Ministries provides specific training materials in support of this book. For further information, please call the number listed in the Resources section.

Mike Dowgiewicz  
July 1996

# I N T R O D U C T I O N

## The Current Plight of the Church in the US

***“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 *consumed with love* for Him, for our families, for other believers, and for the lost. Before we consider what God is requiring of His people as He restores these biblical facets to the church today, 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 currently operates 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 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 trials of childrearing because they view their children as an extension of themselves.

At times that 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 family. Individual rights are emphasized rather than family responsibilities. Whereas self-sacrifice was the norm under the trustee and domestic families, complete and unabashed selfishness becomes normative under the atomistic family. Cultures of this type experiment with childless liaisons and suffer increased divorce rates. Because the majority are unwilling to sacrifice for the future, fewer children are born.

Religious and moral mores have little effect on protecting the sanctity of the family. "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."<sup>1</sup> 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. A civilization in the throes of the atomistic period resembles a swarm of antagonistic insects engaged in mortal combat. Individuals become obsessed with their own desires and concerns, disregarding the needs or suffering of others. Commitments and responsibilities are looked on as infringements 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 for childbearing and child nurturing. 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 rear children with biblical values. The media denigrate 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 such unrighteousness.
- 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.<sup>2</sup>

In 1986, when we first began to share Zimmerman's thoughts with pastors and other people 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; thus the purpose in writing this book.

### **How Has the Church Fared in the Atomistic Culture of the US?**

***"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 his thought-provoking book *Marriage Savers*, author Michael McManus provides some startling facts concerning the church and single parenthood. He writes,

According to George Gallup, Jr., two-thirds of Americans are members of churches, and 42% attended church in any given week in 1991. Seventy-three percent of first marriages are blessed by the church, according to the Census, and we are troubled by the more than 50% divorce rate. Clearly, the American church—300,000 local congregations—has access, a latent power, to influence most people. This is in sharp contrast with the church's access in Europe, where church attendance is 4% in Finland, 12% in France, and 14% in Great Britain according to a 1986 Gallup Poll.

Yet....Japan, with almost no Christians, has one quarter as many single parents as America, and every European country and Canada do twice as well as the United States in holding two-parent families together. Clearly, the nation with the *deepest church penetration* has the *least impact* on central issues involving rearing of children.

<b>US:</b>	<b>22.9%</b> of homes headed by a single parent
Japan:	5.9% of homes headed by a single parent
United Kingdom:	12.7% of homes headed by a single parent
France:	10.9% of homes headed by a single parent
	West Germany:
	17.5% of homes headed by a single parent
Canada:	14.8% of homes headed by a single parent

(Source: Bureau of the Census report, "*Children's Well-Being: An International Comparison*," Bureau of the Census, 1992.)<sup>3</sup>

In this culture, the decline of strong supportive parental ties with their children has produced another 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*. (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" 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. Perhaps 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 1970's. 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 God’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 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...Their Sunday-at-eleven culture is timed to fall between the two milking hours in the agricultural society. Sermons remain one of the last forms of public discourse where it is *culturally forbidden to talk back...*

Made up, usually, of a small inner core of believers who assume the necessary posts of leadership with gratitude and devotion,...[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 pro-

mote 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)<sup>4</sup>

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?

David Wilkerson, 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.<sup>5</sup>

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 *revisionism*, 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!"<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup>

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 obedience.

***“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).

You must not 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 the 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 1, 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.<sup>8</sup>

Whether or not such a demonic meeting actually occurred is debatable, but the decep-

tion 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 the city, 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 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. This state of affairs would not be so serious if the two examples cited 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.<sup>9</sup>

John Stott, a well-known Christian author, 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 New 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)<sup>10</sup>

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 provide a guise of success even where the vitality of Jesus isn't real. That's what is so deceptive about it. You think you're pleasing God 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.

***"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 intimacy with God is "vested interest" in the church. Vested interests are found in those people who, because of position and power, attempt to keep the status quo. 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 this 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.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup>

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.

*“But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. 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 11:46-50,53).*

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?

***“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)<sup>13</sup> 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: “*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). The deceiver has been at work since the Garden of Eden and it is no surprise that his work continues unabated.

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. History shows 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 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 in terms of the old or 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 Old 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 concomitant loss of the early Church vitality, the authors are writing with apperception in mind, trying to clearly discern God’s intent at the time the Scriptures were written.

In order to be true to the Word of God you must be willing to depart from today’s church structure and traditions that may seem “sacred” yet have no biblical foundation. Appreciate the nobleness of the Bereans, investigating 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. God 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). The 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 to them but withhold your heart.

Consider the merits of the following poem. As you appraise the loss of the Hebraic influence of the early Church, you may see in today's church the dominance of Greek philosophy (which concludes that the spiritual realm is far holier than the physical) and Roman organization (which insists that a hierarchy of church leadership is necessary in order to perpetuate the church system). Ask yourself, "*Is this what God wants?*" Have the reforms of the past centuries gone far enough to reestablish the biblical Church?

## THE CLIFF

'Twas a dangerous cliff, as they freely confessed,  
Though to walk near its crest was so pleasant;  
But over its terrible edge there had slipped  
A duke and full many a peasant.  
The people said something would have to be done,  
But their projects did not at all tally.  
Some said, "Put a fence 'round the edge of the cliff,"  
Some, "An ambulance down in the valley."

The lament of the crowd was profound and was loud,  
As their hearts overflowed with their pity;  
But the cry for the ambulance carried the day  
As it spread through the neighboring city.  
A collection was made to accumulate aid,  
And the dwellers in highway and alley  
Gave dollars or cents—not to furnish a fence—

"For the cliff is all right if you're careful," they said;  
"And if folks ever slip and are dropping,  
It isn't the slipping that hurts them so much  
As the shock down below—when they're stopping."  
So for years (we have heard), as these mishaps occurred  
Quick forth would the rescuers sally,  
To pick up the victims who fell from the cliff  
With the ambulance down in the valley.

Said one, to his plea, "It's a marvel to me  
That you'd give so much greater attention  
To repairing results than to curing the cause;  
You had much better aim at prevention.  
For the mischief, of course, should be stopped at its source,  
Come, neighbors and friends, let us rally.  
It is far better sense to rely on a fence  
Than an ambulance down in the valley."

“He is wrong in his head,” the majority said;  
“He would end all our earnest endeavor,  
He’s a man who would shirk this responsible work,  
But we will support it forever.  
Aren’t we picking up all just as fast as they fall  
And giving them care liberally?  
A superfluous fence is of no consequence,  
If the ambulance works in the valley.”

The story looks queer as we’ve written it here,  
But things oft occur that are stranger.  
More humane, we assert, than to succor the hurt,  
Is the plan of removing the danger.  
The best possible course is to safeguard the source,  
Attend to things rationally.  
Yes, build up the fence, and let us dispense  
With the ambulance down in the valley.

Author Unknown

Many of the past church reforms stemmed from arguments over revisionist writings. You are experiencing the results even today: thousands of denominations established because of doctrinal divisions. Each disagreement operates like the ambulance down in the valley. 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 well-spring of pettiness, gossip, and manipulation.

It appears that there are two possible options open to the church: One, to continue to ‘effect repairs’, *i.e.*, to put the ambulance down in the valley pursuing the mistakes of the past, struggling to patch up the church as it has been revised over the centuries. 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 willing to do this can work together in agreement with the Holy Spirit, and in our time see a true expression of the Church of Jesus Christ. Will it be popular? Probably not. Will it be powerful? Yes, exceedingly so!

## SECTION ONE

# THE HEBRAIC FACETS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

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 Greek 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 New Testament.

Our understanding of the early Church had been based on a theological exegesis of the Greek words in the New 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.

This section of the book introduces you to the foundations and practices of the Hebraic early Church. It is our belief that to a large extent these formed the basis for the New Testament writers’ understanding of the foundations and practices of the Church. 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 New 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 verbal 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?" and, "What has occurred to restore His Word and His understanding of it?"

### **How Was the Word 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, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, 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 as “fences”. Their original intent was noble. Yet over time, tradition, which has a hallowedness 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 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.

## Chapter One

# THE JEWISHNESS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

## An Indispensable Ingredient of the New Testament

Many of today's practices and church traditions emanate from a Greek, or *Hellenistic*, understanding of the early New 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 Old Testament to be discarded in favor of a Greek cognitive mindset. This 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 Greek 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) worldview 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. Their spiritual ties to the temple in Jerusalem and their distinctiveness as the chosen sons of Abraham, however, 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 9:3-5).

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 Hebraic believers’ willingness 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). (Note: 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 believers com-

pelled 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, but most of the believers in Jerusalem were Jewish and 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). God'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 "New 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 "Old Testament." Every believer recognized the Jewish roots of the faith:

For Jesus was born a Jew; he lived on the ancestral soil of Palestine, never once setting his foot on alien territory; he taught a small group of disciples, all of whom were as Jewish as he; the language he spoke dripped with Jewish tradition and lore; the little children he loved were Jewish children; the sinners he associated with were Jewish sinners; he healed Jewish bodies, fed Jewish hunger, poured out wine at a Jewish wedding, and when he died he quoted a passage from the Hebrew book of Psalms. Such a Jew!<sup>1</sup>

Though 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 believers, 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 believers 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 true: *“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 God’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* (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 Old 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.

- God 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." God 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

## Chapter Four

# THE EARLY CHURCH

## Humble, Hebraic, and 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 church”*** (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, believers 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 God that expressed itself in obedience. True worship of God focused on preoccupation with God 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.”<sup>1</sup>

There are so few descriptions and instructions about church gatherings in the New Testament because the apostles did not have to explain what was so very well known to the Jewish believers 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 but 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, or 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* was an essential feature of the synagogue and 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. One 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, as in Amos 5:24 (“*But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!*”), 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 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. 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!<sup>2</sup> The Holy Spirit would illuminate elements of godly living to lead a believer 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 the above verses, Jesus presented the inviolable groundwork for leadership for the apostles and for all subsequent church leaders. 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...Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers**”* (1 Peter 5:1,2, emphasis added).

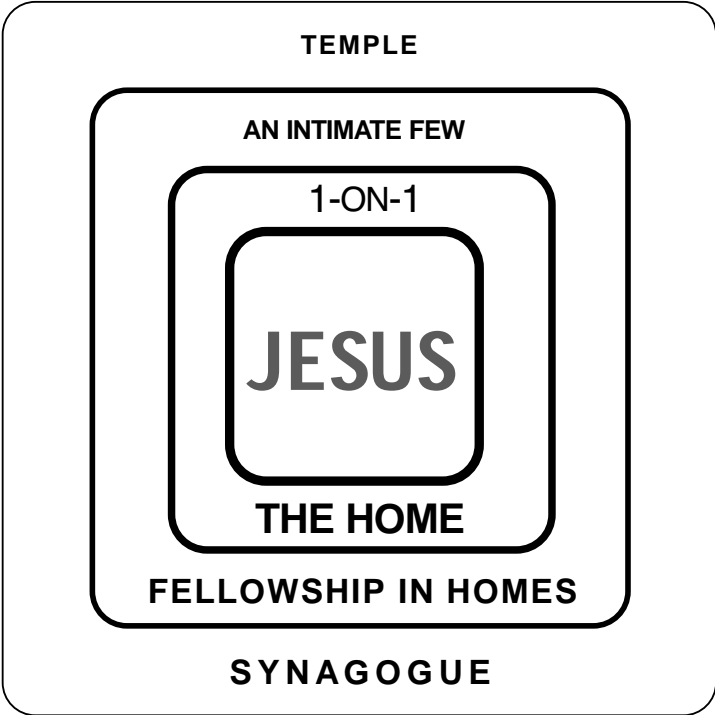
Revisionist writers, however, have altered the facts and circumstances regarding church structure that would have been understood during biblical times. These alterations became particularly evident during the fourth century after the time of Constantine when the Roman Empire merged with the church. 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 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 believers: *“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 New 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.

The following diagram captures the faith enactment of the Hebraic early Church. Their relationship with God through His Son Jesus was central. Next in priority was the intimate sanctity of the home, supported by close relationships that met in the home. Finally came the congregational gatherings at the synagogue or temple. For Jews the *home*, not the synagogue, was the primary place for spiritual development. 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 Section 3 we will show the steps the Lord is bringing about to restore these biblical priorities to the 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. God, however, tilled the ground of his spirit to deepen his understanding.

This is Mike’s account of sincere love: “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 the Base. It reads: “*Greater love has no man than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*”<sup>3</sup> It is with this “dead to self” attitude that followers of Christ are to be available through the Holy Spirit to respond to God’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 believer 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 God receives when those 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 related 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 believer 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 vitally necessary to the work of the early Church, believers 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 church” (1 Corinthians 14:12). “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).<sup>4</sup> Followers of Christ are privileged to be gifted, yet are held accountable by God 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 congregations in Ephesus and Crete, among other places. They were to train up qualified men for leadership<sup>5</sup> 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 believers needed training in propagating their faith because Paul expected them to do just that, to evangelize their own village and neighboring regions!<sup>6</sup> 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 churches 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 churches in southern New England, demonstrated that a number of churches started by pastors have ultimately been destroyed by them. The pastor’s preeminent 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.)

Today’s congregations have become lulled by their leaders into a pattern of passivity. Modern faith communities, according to James H. Rutz in *The Open Church*, often respond to such unilateral leadership with the following spiritual maladies: “Apathy, shallowness, worldliness, failure to tithe, teenage dropouts, fear of evangelism, flabby self-discipline, maxed-out schedules, and a chronic shortage of men in their midst.”<sup>7</sup> Do any of these ailments characterize *your* congregation?

Regrettably, within a few centuries after the time of Christ, the influence of Roman governmental 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 ecclesiastic 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."<sup>8</sup> 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 tremendous 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?

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

The term elder is used frequently in the New Testament to designate those appointed to leadership in the local church. The Hebrew word for elder, *zaken*, refers to a beard, especially in the context of growing old. In other words, to be an elder, age and the wisdom that came from experience were important criteria for appointment. Exercise of wis-

dom was certainly necessary for the well-being of the believers: **“Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of 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, for 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 New Testament period as well as the Gentile-run churches of the New Testament period mainly consisted of a cluster of *extended families guided by the elders of those families*”(emphasis added).<sup>9</sup>

The Pharisees inadvertently contributed to the practice of believers 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.<sup>10</sup> 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: Establishment in the churches of *elders*, those who have already exhibited through the impact they have had on others’ lives a particular leadership capacity based on *relationships* with the ones they are leading.

*Pastor.* In its noun form the term designates those who have been gifted by the Holy Spirit to nurture, or “pasture”, a group of believers. The word is found only in Ephesians 4:11. *Elders* are told in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1-4 to perform the work of “*shepherding*” or “*pastoring*” (verb form). Timothy and Titus appointed men of the *local congregations* to shepherd and pastor. These men had already been identified in their community as reliable in faith and nurturing capabilities. Their reputation among those with whom they lived and worked as well as with outsiders was well-established through daily contact. Strangers 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."<sup>11</sup> 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.

1 Timothy 5:17 makes it clear that not all the elders in the New 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, preaching was a privilege for any and all male members of the congregation, not just the elders: "*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 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).

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. 1 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 New 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 "rank" and authority in the body. 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 Greek 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 charismatic 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 could thus diminish. 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 *kehilat* (kuh-hee'-laht), 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,” declares author James H. Rutz. There is nothing addressed to any “minister” or “priest” or “pastor,” nor any term for office or any kind of leadership.<sup>12</sup> In fact, says Rutz, there is good reason for this absence: “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 back and prevent them from growing up themselves. They do so only when he is gone.”<sup>13</sup>

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 believers 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 tremendously 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? Please read on...

## Chapter Three

# A HEBRAIC PERSPECTIVE

## The Foundational Thinking of the Early Church

***“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. “[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.”<sup>1</sup> 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” has the same root meaning. Hebraic teaching was expected to point to practical truths that people could adopt and apply to their everyday lives. 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 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]*.”<sup>2</sup> 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. A person’s *enactment* of his trust in Jesus determined if he was truly in God’s sheepfold. As He spoke of the separation of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus 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 wid-*

ows too can trust in me” (Jeremiah 49:11).

In his first epistle, John goes even further to show that your deeds and your belongings are 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**”* (1 John 3:16-18, emphasis added). God created you as a physical being with distinct material needs. Your Father in heaven wants you to depend on Him in faith to provide for those needs. He may allow you to work to earn money, but you also must 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 focused his attack against the *family*, against your ability to pass along an active, viable faith to your children—a faith concerned with the needs of others. The home is the first place where you learn to interact and participate with others. Paul instructed the Philippian believers to look beyond themselves with a considerate attitude that goes beyond natural inclination. 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. Think about the pain Paul must have felt as he continued his letter to the Philippians, *“For **everyone** looks out for his **own interests**, not those of Jesus Christ”* (v. 21, emphasis added). Have these believers clung to their fleshly desires and resisted the work of the Spirit in this area of their lives, Paul grieves?

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 transforming nature.

***"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord"*** (Isaiah 55:8).

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. 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 to which we in the West are so accustomed. Westerners attempt 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 Greek-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; God does not require him to. He is willing to live at peace with God without being able to explain everything. Life is full of irreconcilable antitheses: a focus on the temporal as well as the eternal; a simultaneous love and fear of God; His nearness yet His transcendence. Westerners, however, feel a compelling need to rationalize biblical truths. *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. God 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 God. However, you don't need to suppress your questions either. Since He knows your innermost heart, a half-hearted "It's OK, God..." is hypocritical. He doesn't expect you to try to justify or vindicate Him for His ways. The obedient life is this: 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 a follower of Jesus. Since all of the New Testament writers (with the possible exception of Luke) were Jews, their approach addressed the problems of life with solutions. They did not offer a myriad of options from among which the believer 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. 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."<sup>4</sup> 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 tends to compartmentalize the different aspects of life into tidy categories: work, play, religion, education. Not so in the Word!

Religious Jews practiced a tremendous 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 upon 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, "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?"<sup>5</sup>

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?

***"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 a life journey, a pilgrimage: "*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 journey, 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 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* God 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, culminating in the 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.<sup>6</sup>

Understanding the application of God’s Law 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 the latter, 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—a prototypical multi-purpose sanctuary! The Hebraic faith of Bible times did not function as a religion with paid professionals 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.<sup>7</sup> There was no hierarchical structure to which he had to report. A rabbi held no priestly office nor was he a synagogue functionary, but 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 a person 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 preaching 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.<sup>8</sup> 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. The synagogue and the home provided secure boundaries of truth for children as they developed their perceptions of the uniqueness of those chosen to be God’s people.

During the past few decades in the United States, certain faith communities have begun to return to the home as the primary place for faith and spiritual expression. Even the “home fellowship” and “home group” movements within so many denominations are ultimately heading toward the family as the primary building block of faith development.

Have *you* established a regular meeting time with the Lord to wait lovingly before Him? 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.”<sup>9</sup>

Six distinct Hebrew words denoting “man” appear in the Old 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 revered for his judgments and sought 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.

If today’s church is going to regain the relational warmth of its past, believers 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. 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 the frog put in 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! Churches have lost the sages and their wives.

At the retreat center, we would occasionally get a call from a pastor asking for guidance concerning 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 have made enough mistakes now to be useful.”

The church lost much by forsaking its Hebraic roots. The people needed the most right now are not in our churches, nor even in our homes. They have retired and moved away, leaving believers helpless and bereft of the wisdom of experience. Christians 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.

***“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 minister 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.”<sup>11</sup> 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 (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 such a person. The *nabal* denies that 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.

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 those 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 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 church 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. It is incumbent on the person being mentored, the one seeking wisdom, 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 your leaders and submit to their authority. 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). Jesus, teaching about the basic foundational ministry of the Church, commanded, “*But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be estab-*

lished 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 he fellowshiped could discern whether a person in sin was an unteachable fool, unwilling to repent and receive correction. If that was the case, he could be cut off from the community of believers 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 the Lord 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.

Can you think of any church leaders who are overwhelmed by their workload of "counselees"? How many people are you aware of in your own circle of acquaintances who are struggling with burdens that they have inflicted on themselves through foolishness or ignored counsel? Is God bringing to your mind those 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 the 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). The orderly diligence she has acquired from years of caring for her household and the compassion with which she handles the poor and needy are worthy virtues to be passed along to those 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 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 impetus 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 in so doing. 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 Christians, 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 that are sources of mentoring for your life? 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? Are you so over-involved in activities that such a relationship appears to be more of 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 (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. 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 vital 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 the Sabbath rest may not be tangible but are for your good, as are all of God’s commands.

“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.”<sup>12</sup> 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.”<sup>13</sup> Our atomistic culture promotes abortion, greed, and idolatry of self. 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 the Lord and His people. Prayer with the children as they head off for school each day; a praise song sung before or after the family meal; music that exalts the Lord in the home; a nightly chapter from a Christian biography—these are little ways that can become big traditions in your family. Children accustomed to acknowledging the presence of God in their home welcome the Sabbath like a weekly holiday. The family and the worship 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 within to impact others for the Kingdom.

In the United States, Christian families rarely seem to look forward with delight to their 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. 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 importance 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. It is a “sacred day, a foretaste of heaven, pure and set apart, free from worries and problems of everyday life.”<sup>14</sup>

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. God 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 Two

# THE HEBREW BIBLE, THE OLD TESTAMENT

## Basis for the Teaching and Practices of the New 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, the only written Scripture was the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament. The early Church needed the encouragement of the Hebrew Bible so that they might have *hope*. These writings were 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 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 New Testament writers repeatedly referred to those Scriptures. (Matthew alone quotes from the Old Testament over fifty times!) Baptisms, observance of the Lord’s Supper, thanksgiving to God before 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. Many churches today emphasize the New Testament and neglect the Old.

Many consciously or unconsciously believe that the Old Testament concerned the Jews, and the New Testament the Christians. The teachings of Jesus and the apostles, however, found their origins in the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. We must diligently study the Old Testament as well as the New 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 Old 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 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*? Veteran missionary Trevor McIlwain writes that many heresies, misinterpretations, overemphasis of particular verses, and even the development of denominations can be traced back to failing to teach the whole Word in its *chronological, panoramic format*—from Genesis to Revelation.<sup>1</sup>

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)<sup>2</sup>

Christ has already fulfilled the reconciliation requirements of God. 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. 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*” (1 Corinthians 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 speak 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 Christward to the only Lawkeeper Who has received your just punishment to satisfy a holy God.

The Jews of Jesus’s time were well aware of their sinful state. They understood that they were totally incapable of keeping the demands of the Law by their own strength.

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."<sup>3</sup> *"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 to the hour before death.<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup>

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 one 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).

God, of His own volition, 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 Old 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 Greek 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 Old 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 New Testament is the same. Quoting from Deuteronomy, Jesus reiterated the *greatest commandment* (see 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.*

***“Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see  
the kingdom of God unless he is born again’”*** (John 3:3).

“[Jesus said] *You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again’*” (John 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., “born from above”, and answered the inner appeal of God to the spirits of His people. The act of conversion was a response shift 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 with the God Who initiated it. *“I have set the Lord always before me”* (Psalm 16:8) expressed one’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: *“That if you acknowledge publicly with your mouth that Yeshua [Jesus] is Lord and trust in your heart that God raised him from the 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.”*<sup>6</sup> (emphasis added)

The Hebrew word for “faith”, *emunah*, does not mean belief but **trust in** God. This is an emotional and responsive term emanating from the heart, not a cognitive one assented to by the brain. It 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 God requires a wholehearted yielding of yourself to Him unconditionally.

Salvation in the early Hebraic Church was considered a 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 understanding the severity of sin and the need for forgiveness, yet trusting that the shed blood of a lamb could bring forgiveness of those sins. Think of that community, 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, his 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 other areas 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 activity described in both testaments were merely cultural manifestations of an uneducated, unenlightened society? A Greek orientation would enculturate such demonization as a first century or beyond phenomenon, inapplicable to a scientific, technological culture. The Hebraic framework recognized the reality of Satan and the 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 empowered by His presence. God is eager to share His unbounding grace with those who are His own. His people, however, must realize their own helplessness apart from His sustaining power and love. As God initiates a circumstance, a Christian should respond in such a way that God is recognized as both real and trustworthy. 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 described in the Hebrew Scriptures emphasized justice for the poor and compassion for the needy, both of which required that the believer be aware of the distressed individuals and respond by meeting the 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. The process of conversion involved solidarity with the Jewish community; not just adherence to the Hebraic laws but a drawing near to other believers. In both Exodus 19:6, when the Israelites were told that they would be for God *“a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,”* and in 1 Peter 2:9, in which followers of Christ are called *“a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,”* 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) was 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. 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.”<sup>7</sup>

Judaism was **convert-driven**: The responsibility to “become Jewish” lay with the convert, not with the community or 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 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 boldly 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 viewed as 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.”<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 helpmate. A husband was to *draw strength* from his wife. She was 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. The use of the body in situations outside of God’s framework for intimacy would determine the act to be unholy. Believers knew God’s purpose for giving Adam a wife: Adam was incomplete. He needed a helper 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 New 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, “*If you want to know the extent of my relationship with Jesus, consider my love for my spouse.*” The writings of Shakespeare and subsequent authors have erroneously taught an unbiblical concept: Romance leads to marriage. 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. A young lady who was still single by age eighteen was regarded with pity or suspicion as an old maid or woman of ill-repute.<sup>10</sup>

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.*” 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.<sup>11</sup>

We have often wondered about the many couples whom 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. 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.”<sup>12</sup> A Hebraic understanding emphasizes that marriage is an institution 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.

***“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 verses were the key to Hebraic success in making the home the primary site for instilling God’s truths in their children. Today’s church 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).

“*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. Many Christians hold a view 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 the above verse guaranteed that their children would grow up walking in Jesus if they as parents had trained them up with Christian values. Rather, this verse commands parents 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 God. With this awareness, the parent is then better able to discern God’s plan for each child for the vocation and way of life most suitable for him or her.

Spiritual life in the 20th 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. The focus on the congregational gathering as the locus of spiritual activity has robbed believers 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 or Christian school for the development of spiritual training and growth in the family. Most expect that the professionals, the pastoral staff, will feed them all the spiritual nourishment they need in order to grow in Christlikeness. They hope that 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.”<sup>13</sup> 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 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.”<sup>14</sup> 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 there are two Greek words which, when translated into English, mean “word.” These terms are *logos* and *rhema*. *Logos* represents God’s ways and thoughts, forever unchangeable. The Bible is a part of God’s *logos* written down for man. *Rhema* is that specific word spoken directly and individually from God to the believer. Without the Holy Spirit 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 is vital, as man’s capacity to understand God is so minute and His wisdom so beyond 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.”<sup>15</sup>

In Matthew 4:4, above, the word “comes” is in the continuous present tense, 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. 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 God 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.

Believers 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 13:1-3: *“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 individual involved to fulfill it. In the New 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 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 believer who wields it 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 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 true or valid solutions. The emphasis was not on interpretation alone but on *correct application*.

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 action on the part of the elders would have been recorded as a *halakhah*, a precedent in applying the law that had been established in Deuteronomy.

The Old Testament prophets often spoke in broad terms. Amos intoned, *“Let justice roll like a river” (5:24).* *Halakhah* translated this 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 the 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. Metaphorical interpretations or allegorizations should never replace what would have been clearly understood by the writer or by his audience. If the Greek ideals of rhetoric and a “high-

er 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 delineate behavior in each of life’s situations. It was also an expression of a 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.”<sup>16</sup> God 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 God’s goodness and holiness should inspire obedience as well as 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 His Incarnation as Jesus the Messiah.