

Ekklesia Renewed

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What a heaven will it be to see the many myriads of poor heathens, of Britons amongst the rest, who by their labours have been brought to the knowledge of God. Surely a *crown of rejoicing* like this is worth aspiring to. Surely it is worthwhile to lay ourselves out with all our might, in promoting the cause, and kingdom of Christ.

- William Carey, An Enquiry, 1792 -

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Introduction

It is God's heart that every person on earth be part of one global family that intimately knows the Creator God, Messiah Jesus, and Holy Spirit. If this were ever to happen, it would mean that we have achieved the highest expression of our ultimate privilege and purpose as human beings.

[Fromke, DeVern. *Life's Ultimate Privilege*. Sure Foundation Publishers, 1986-1998, p.17]

In pursuit of this goal, Jesus left each of his followers with a mission to evangelize and disciple every ethnic group (Greek '*ethnos*') in the world. Within a few decades this mission will likely complete. [Matthew 24:14] Soon every *ethnos* will have a way to hear the good news, and have at least a partial translation of the Bible available in its own language. Congregations of believers will have been established everywhere and they will be actively discipling their members to spiritual maturity. Jesus' indigenous followers within each *ethnos* will then continue to evangelize and disciple each new generation, pressing ever closer to our ultimate purpose.

The discipleship mandate goes beyond personal learning and sanctification to include maintaining fellowship with other like-minded persons while on the path of maturity. God has ordained both personal and group covenants among himself and his people, and Jesus made clear how important is brotherly love in attracting the world to his evangelistic message.

Jesus' collective family is a sovereign community that both follows and manifests his kingship in the earth. This community offers an alternative to fallen human culture and governance. It does not take physical dominion; rather it serves as a loving example of society's ultimate expression.

It is therefore important that after 2,000 years there remains a lack of trust and faith among God's people that hinders ideal relationship. We see this in guarded giving to ministries in developing nations, in the reticence of many pastors to gather regularly for prayer, and in the continued choice by many disciples to remain passive observers. Most Christian congregations continue to operate as autonomous parts of the body, failing to engage and commune with other congregations. A divided kingdom has little ability to carry out a shared mission.

As the evangelistic push nears its global goal, Jesus is therefore encouraging his followers to revisit the first century community of faith that formed after his resurrection. This community was united by a common purpose and vision we need to rediscover in discipleship if we are to be his partners in transforming the world.

This manuscript seeks to define and describe a latter day '*ekklesia*', the Greek word attributed to Jesus when he first appointed his followers to become a community. It explores the attributes of the first century community that went about fulfilling his Great Commission with great spiritual power. It suggests practical ways that a local group of disciples might organize its affairs so as to maximize the remit of Holy Spirit while being Jesus' hands and feet in the earth.

Purpose and Organization

Our overall objective will be to answer one key question having several practical implications:

How do we know if a latter day community of Jesus' followers is functioning in a mature form, being both effective locally and integrated globally?

Answering this question allows us to:

- Trust a given community as a model that can and should be replicated in regional church planting and discipling.
- Have confidence that investments made into that community of time, talent, and finances will result in abundant missional fruit.
- Embrace authentic revelation from Holy Spirit released through that community while guarding against false teaching that divides and disempowers it.

Answering this question in turn requires exploring several others:

- How does Jesus express himself in communities of his followers?
- What are the attributes of a mature latter day community?
- How does the benchmark differ from place to place?
- How do local, regional, and global communities function?
- How should the community relate to God-fearers who do not follow Jesus?
- Are there pathways to maturity that can be reliably followed by newer communities?
- How is maturity maintained over time?

The document addresses these topics in two parts as follows.

Part I elaborates on the characteristics of communities of faith as codified in *Torah*, adapted by the Jewish nation during its diaspora, and practiced by Jesus' earliest followers. It considers various aspects of community structure and operation, seeking always to understand Jesus' original intent. Major themes that emerge include sovereignty, spiritual authority, proper order in self-governance, and the central on-going kingship of Jesus himself.

Part II addresses practical issues in the formation and maturation of covenanted communities. We look at the need to contextualize principles within the unique expressions of various cultures, the dangers of institutionalizing the faith, best practices in community maturation, and interaction with national governments. The goal is to develop a Biblical template for achieving and sustaining community in the latter days that can be adapted and extended by practitioners.

Limits

This is not intended to be a manuscript about Christian doctrine or belief. Apologetics is its own discipline, and it anyway serves no purpose to try and impose a global standard on something God designed to be organic and local in expression. Two millennia of missionary work in the diversity of world culture has demonstrated the futility of that objective.

We will not use this as an occasion to restate the history of the ‘church’, although aspects of that history will be helpful in illustrating key principles as we look forward to the future. For our purposes we will focus on the structure and experiences of the first century community of believers, including how they resolved problems that arose within their ranks. We supplement the New Testament in this regard with reliable extra-Biblical sources, including documents written by early church historians who themselves were interpreting the same events.

This is also not a speculation on eschatology. Biblical and extra-Biblical prophetic and apocalyptic literature liberally mixed future-telling, history as prophecy, and exaggerated imagery in a way that makes it an uncertain foundation on which to build. So when exploring the latter days we will stick to a pragmatic adaptation of eternal attributes of God’s community on earth, extrapolated using recent revelation that believers are experiencing around the world.

Of necessity some of what is written here is unknowable and reserved to God’s knowledge. [Isaiah 55:8-9] We have not yet experienced the fullness of what it means to be a community of Jesus’ followers in the latter days. This manuscript is but an initial attempt to probe God’s plan that will inevitably require much revision. And therein lays the adventure of discovery that is such a part of our Messiah!

Sources

Words that an author chooses to convey a certain meaning can be interpreted quite differently depending on the listener’s worldview, cultural context, and personal life experience. The Bible’s authors spoke in ancient languages unfamiliar to most of us today, and everything they wrote was subject to multiple later translations. We need to put the words back in their original context to be sure we are hearing what the authors intended.

The Old Testament documents were written primarily in Hebrew with some portions in Aramaic. They date roughly from the time of King David in 1,000 B.C.E. to Greek rule in 300 BCE. Thus Hebrew writing began a full 500 years after Moses and 1,000 years after Abraham such that much of *Torah* was based on tribal oral tradition.

The New Testament documents were written primarily in *Koine* Greek, which was the prevailing language used by the literate during the first century CE when Greek culture dominated the region. They date from 20 to 70 years after Jesus was crucified. The gospel history was therefore also written from oral memory decades after the events they describe, and Jesus’ words were paraphrased as best his intent could be recalled.

To make matters a bit more complicated, the vast majority of people was not literate until well after Jesus’ time and depended on a trained rabbi or scribe to read, translate, and interpret the scriptures. Most spoke the commoner’s language Aramaic, which Jesus would also have used when teaching them. So, not only are Jesus’ words paraphrased, it is paraphrase that has further been translated into Greek.

Many of the Old and New Testament documents were written and regularly redacted by schools of scribes over a long period of time during which the understanding of God and Jesus evolved.

This is reflected in the rich corpus of Jewish and early Christian literature, within which one finds much on-going disagreement and debate. There is an old joke that four rabbis analyzing a passage generally had five opinions about its meaning. This certainly extended into the ferocious debates over which documents should be included in the New Testament canon.

Most of our Old Testament English translations are based on the ‘Masoretic Text’ formalized by Jewish rabbis in 700 to 1,000 CE. This source is often supplemented by the translators with others including the Greek Septuagint, Aramaic Syriac Peshitta, Latin Vulgate, Targums, and Dead Sea Scrolls. As you might expect, the various sources frequently yield very different translations of the same scripture passage, so we often cannot be sure which is ‘correct’.

The same challenge exists when making modern translations from the many versions of the Greek New Testament gospels and epistles that were in circulation during the first 300 years after Jesus. Entire passages exist in some translations that are omitted from others, suggesting that the documents were edited over time amidst on-going discussion and were packaged differently for various audiences.

Perhaps most importantly, we need to acknowledge that Jesus chose not to explain many things to his disciples. He left them pondering mysteries as to his nature, the future plan for the church, predestination, and a host of other issues. The Hebraic mind has no problem with mysteries. The Greek mind was most uncomfortable leaving them undecided. God apparently isn’t overly concerned that we fully understand. He has allowed varying opinions to continue for millennia, and Jesus still does miracles regularly through people of very diverse understanding and belief.

For all these reasons we need to be conservative and consider the cultural context and agendas of the writers when developing principles applicable to our topic. People of faith have built elaborate doctrines and theologies around the specific wording that appears in their favored version of the scriptures. Key conclusions cannot depend on passages that are unique among the sources.

Most importantly, we must depend on Holy Spirit to inspire proper understanding of all things written long ago, and not get overly invested in things that are not ours to know.

Application

This is a practitioner’s manual. It is hoped that Jesus’ followers will actively apply the principles herein to the establishment, building up, sustenance, and replication of fellowships throughout the world that will manifest Messiah’s presence.

The author acknowledges up front that there will likely be something here to offend nearly everyone given the great diversity of doctrinal and theological belief in the Christian world. Some of the conclusions may seem to take away from the simple beauty of the Bible as the inerrant, inspired word of God, meant to be understood literally. The author can only admit humbly that this is an inadequate work in progress which is pushing the limits of what God has revealed to the world.

For those prepared to discern on some new wine it will be helpful to remember several things:

1. God has revealed himself as Creator in some way to every *ethnos* on the planet, and Jesus appears to people in culturally-appropriate ways. We have to divorce ourselves from thinking of God's manifestations in the earth as always being near-eastern, or his commandments for living as always being Siniatic. This is not helpful for Asian and other people groups that do not find themselves mentioned in the Bible.
2. Practitioners are concerned with real-world methods, and need to guard against super-spiritualizing history or treating ancient teaching parables as fact. The reality is that God's miraculous interventions in the world today are no more or less intense and obvious than they always have been. We should therefore go about the business of stewarding earth with commitment, prudence, and obedience to Holy Spirit; expecting miracles surely, but not anticipating God will part oceans or kill thousands of Philistines with a single jawbone.
3. Finally, God's Kingdom on earth has always been a messy affair full of human frailty and syncretism. The patriarchs and apostles were the same 'earthen vessels' as any of us, and no more holy, wise, or powerful. This should give us confidence that God can and will work equally great transformative works through us in this generation.

Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God. [William Carey]

There are Christians today who are ready to post an updated set of 'ninety-five theses' on the doors of the institutional western church, and the discussion herein will likely inspire them. But this is written with the knowledge that change is difficult for people, and faith by its very nature is a fragile thing. So it is the author's prayer that wherever these principles are adopted as tools for change it is done with grace, humility, and love. Where change is resisted, we are admonished to heed Jesus' advice to resist bitterness and move on to greener pastures. God is amply able to prune his own garden in the appointed season. [Matthew 10:13-14]

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Part I - Attributes

Transformation

Community Transformation

Much has been written about spiritually impacting society, defined as Jesus becoming broadly acknowledged as king in a region.

[See for example:]

[Dennison, Jack. *City Reaching: On The Road To Community Transformation*. Wcl 3rd Party, 1999]

[Haggard, Ted and Hayford, Jack. *Loving Your City into the Kingdom: City-Reaching Strategies for a 21-Century Revival*. Regal Books, 1997]

[Silvoso, Ed and Wagner, Peter. *That None Should Perish: How to Reach Entire Cities for Christ Through Prayer Evangelism*. Chosen Books, 1995]

[Swanson, Eric and Williams, Sam. *To Transform a City: Whole Church, Whole Gospel, Whole City*. Zondervan, 2010]

Some strategies involve positioning followers of Jesus at points of influence in primary spheres of culture such as business, government, media, arts and entertainment, education, family, and religion. They can then serve as an example of the Godly lifestyle, witness to others through their personal testimony, and use the power of their position to further God's agenda.

[See for example: <http://www.7culturalmountains.org/>]

Other strategies include annulling ancient covenants with territorial spirits; establishing houses of 24-hour prayer; evangelizing through service; and facilitating forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation related to past offenses.

Most of the strategies for large-scale societal transformation require that the community of believers in the social context cooperate with each other in the effort. The theory is twofold; that a unified community can do things at the scale needed for noticeable impact, and that the sight of a significant population of people loving and preferring one other will be attractive to a secular world driven by competition and individualistic narcissism.

Unfortunately, despite nearly 40 years of city-reaching strategy, it remains a rare thing to see the followers of Jesus in a region united together as one family with one focused purpose. It requires laying down individual church programs, doctrines, liturgies, pulpits, and offerings. It requires that the group collectively seek God's will and then help each member to be obedient to that will. It requires taking no offense in the midst of human frailty. And it requires covenanting together to keep pulling as one until there are results.

This is exactly what the first century believers did. They made sure that everyone attending the religious festivals in Jerusalem heard the gospel, and then proceeded to carry it to the furthest points of the Roman Empire - and beyond. They began a movement that has lasted over 2,000 years; a movement propelled by the shared vision of Jesus' Great Commission. They excelled in discipling members of the believing community to the point where they too could become the manifest presence of Jesus in the world.

Individual Transformation

It remains today the privilege of every believer to participate in the Great Commission to evangelize and disciple the world. We must all be dedicated to nothing less than ensuring that every soul on the planet is visited by the manifest presence of God in the earth.

Individually, we are each a unique representation of God in his creation. We were made in his spiritual image with many of the same attributes. We were given intellect and revelatory insight to be creators. We have emotions like God so we can love him, hate evil, and hurt when he hurts. We were delegated his authority to care for and enjoy our earthly home - unique and special as it is in the immensity of the universe. [Genesis 1:27-28]

Holy Spirit unites Jesus and his followers as part of our choosing to be spiritually 'reborn'. We find our individual fullness in union with him, and he is made complete through us collectively. Jesus expresses his presence through his submitted people, who are designed to have a constant and visceral experience of him. Whenever we enter a room, Holy Spirit (and therefore Jesus' presence) enters the room with us. Whether translated as 'abide', 'remain', 'united', or something similar, the scriptural message is that he is continually and congenitally with us. [John 15:4-8]

Jesus delights in expressing himself through each of us in a miracle of connectedness we can never fully understand this side of eternity. We are at once both a bride for Messiah and the entity that makes his body complete. [Ephesians 1:22-23] [Ephesians 5:25-27]

We know whether a person's heart and spirit are transformed by looking at the degree to which manifestations of God's character can be found in his or her life. The apostle Paul clearly contrasts the 'deeds of the flesh' and the 'fruit of the Spirit' for us. [Galatians 5:19-23]

For those followers of Jesus who commit their lives to the work of the Great Commission, there is a so-called Holy Spirit baptism of "fire" that goes beyond the "water" baptism of faith confession and initial indwelling of Holy Spirit. [Matthew 3:11] [Luke 3:21-22] [Acts 2:3-4] [Mark 16:17-18]

This second baptism is an enlarged expression of God's presence in us, allowing him to perform through us supra-natural signs like healing, interpretation of tongues, demon deliverance, weather miracles, and raising the dead. These unusual manifestations of God's presence in us are known in the New Testament by the Greek word '*dunamis*'. They are used by Holy Spirit to authenticate the gospel message preached by believers in the context of evangelism and discipleship. Followers of Jesus who do not share the gospel do not require such signs, and do not experience God's kingdom presence quite as profoundly.

We are trusted by Jesus to carry out assignments in partnership with Holy Spirit based on how much of our being Jesus occupies. The highly yielded follower is a clean portal through which Jesus can speak and do. Transformation is a life-long process, and spiritual leadership is therefore generally reserved for those that have already walked some way down the road to

maturity. It is why discipling is so crucial; every believer should have the benefit of learning from others more mature.

Jesus' Affinity Group

Jesus did not want his followers to take the journey of spiritual rebirth alone, and the apostolic letters frequently remind us of the importance of fellowship and mutual support. God designed us to be relational; to love him and prefer one another while embracing those that have not yet accepted Jesus as Messiah. When we are sharing the wide variety of gifts placed among us, we become more than the sum of the parts. We experience the greatest joy when we are with others of our tribe walking together through the experience of life. We find much of our identity and purpose among others.

Followers of Jesus share common beliefs and values, and are known in marketing parlance as an 'affinity group'. They have a common purpose to tell the world about the good news of eternal reconciliation with God. They mentor new believers who are discovering their own gifts and purpose, and then encourage them to go and reach yet another generation.

One of the important characteristics of every affinity group is its need to self-manage its affairs. Each is, after all, a sovereign society that exists within larger secular society. Its members obey the laws of the nations where they live, but the group also tends to develop its own protocols and standards by which it organizes its affairs. In healthy groups, membership is voluntary and members are always free to leave.

Over time Jesus' followers likewise developed a common set of basic rules, albeit implemented in many different ways. Generally speaking, membership is a function of professing submission to Jesus and mutual support for one another. Members are expected to live lives consistent with the Ten Commandments and can be removed from the group for chronic, un-repentant sin. Typically, appointed leaders are expected to hear from Holy Spirit and give guidance to the larger body. Spiritual and natural gifts distributed throughout the membership play their part in helping the group to accomplish its collective mission.

Affinity groups that grow successfully, particularly over long periods of time, must guard against becoming institutionalized. It is human nature to give things structure and replicability in hopes of reproducing successes in a mechanistic way. The danger is that the focus shifts from carrying out the shared mission for which the group was formed to perpetuating the institution itself. Jesus strongly criticized the temple establishment of his day which had fallen into this trap and was neglecting its primary purpose. God does not want to be institutionalized or reduced to theological constructs. The history of the denominational church since Constantine has frequently been one of institutionalized control of the faith.

We have just touched on some of the milestones that communities of Jesus' followers need to attain on the pathway to community maturity. It is only when they can self-manage in peace, remain in close relationship with Jesus and one another, and remain dynamic and organic in operation that they can effectively carry out their great commission as a transforming force for good in the world.

Spirit-Led Transformation

We are all in a lifelong process of becoming more like Jesus and are all therefore an imperfect tabernacle for his Spirit. So by definition there is also no perfect community of believers, containing as each does a mix of more and less mature members. Heaven knows, the disciples picked by Jesus to be mentored by him for three years were a messy lot, and the community of faith that emerged after his death struggled with any number of issues. Yet despite this it became, and continues to be, the single most compelling movement in human history. This is because to every generation is given Holy Spirit to sanctify and lead us into present truth.

Holy Spirit gave fresh revelation to the first community of believers as they ordered their affairs, preached the gospel, and cared for one another. They became a community unlike other Jewish sects of the time, and great fruit emerged from their kingdom work.

If followers of Jesus today are to carry out their latter day Great Commission, then they need to rediscover what the first century followers of Jesus knew and adapt it to present circumstances. The central principles will always hold true; to take up the challenge as one family, listen to God daily as a group, and do what he says. For a large portion of the family this will require changing how community operates. It will require a transformation in our collective thinking and actions that can only be effected by Holy Spirit.

The remainder of this manuscript addresses the question of what a transformed community looks like, building on the standard set by the first century fellowships. We will attempt to define the attributes of such groups and explore ways in which they can be implemented.

Kingdom Salvation

As a starting point, it will be helpful to level-set what the community of Jesus' followers believes about its king so it can offer a clear, consistent, and transforming message to the world. We then need to contrast such belief with that of other 'God-fearers'.

God of all

The Bible tells us that there is one Creator God ('YHWH' / 'Yahweh') who brought all things into being, including the angelic host in the heavens and everything that we know of as the physical universe. He put in motion life on the little planet we call Earth, and in a great mystery wants to have a relationship with each of the billions of persons that has ever lived and will ever live on Earth. He wants each person to achieve his or her ultimate purpose of freely choosing to acknowledge, honor, and walk with him throughout their lives in this world and the one to come.

Creator is the God of all people, expressing his personality simultaneously through Native American Sioux, Asian Uyghurs, West African Ligbi, and Latin American Quechua. He does not have a religion; being as he is above everything we humans think of as Jewish, Animist, or Buddhist. He does not prefer those born into royalty over those who choose a life of austerity. All are equal before his eyes, and he wants to be the personal God of each.

We will put our civilization and our ecclesiastical system at the disposal of India to take as much as may suit their purposes. But we do not insist upon these. We will give them Christ, and urge them to interpret him through their own genius and life. Then the interpretation will be first-hand and vital.

[E. Stanley Jones. The Christ of the Indian Road. First Edition. 1925. p.34]

One must be very humble when conceiving of this Creator. Westerners in particular have a need to describe everything in very definitive terms, including the dynamics of a spirit world that God by choice has kept mostly hidden. We codify the doctrine for gaining entrance to the next world, and having done so declare victory over every other understanding.

Salvation

Every religious system developed by the world's people groups throughout time ultimately addresses several central issues including what type of relationship to have with God, how to best achieve our purpose in this world, and how best to prepare for the next.

The great salvation distinction among religions is found in their conception of 'sin', and whether breaking a social norm impacts life beyond physical death. If there is no god or afterlife, there is no need for repentance or forgiveness apart from maintaining earthly relationships. If one believes that there is an ultimate God who has established universal laws for living, then breaking those laws ('sinning') requires seeking forgiveness from that God. If one also believes in an afterlife which outcome is based on God's favor, then a person is incited to obedience.

The following chart summarizes what each of the major faiths believes about God and salvation.

<i>Major Faiths</i>		
<i>Perspectives on God</i>	No spirit realm →	Humanism ← None needed
	Universal energy (gods optional) →	(Neo)Paganism ← None needed New Age Taoism
	Ambivalent gods →	Norse ← Good deeds Shinto
	Everything is god in many forms →	Hinduism ← Karma Buddhism
	Individual concepts of god →	Baha'I ← Good deeds Higher Powers
	Single Creator →	First Nations ← Grace, good deeds Sikhism
	Single Creator →	Judaism ← Law, Prophets, good deeds Islam
	Single Creator →	Christianity ← Messiah
<i>Requirements for Salvation</i>		

The apostle Paul wrote that the Creator God placed a simple understanding of correct behavior on each person's heart apart from any organized religious doctrine, and that we are ultimately judged based on "our conscience bearing witness to what is right". [Romans 2] God is fair and does not reject those who have never heard about him unless they irremediably violate that conscience. Children who die before the age of accountability are understood to be automatically saved under this standard.

The challenge to simple faith in God is the uncertainty of knowing which god is the true Creator. There appear to be innumerable spirits that are happy to play the role vis-à-vis unseeing man, a problem acknowledged by the apostle Paul when he witnessed to the Athenians. [Acts 17:23] Simple faith can only be attested by the peace a person feels when contemplating God, and in the absence of that peace he often fears death and is preyed on by terrestrial spirits over which he has no control.

Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and other people of 'monotheistic' faith believe in one God who has also established specific rules for living that we are expected to follow for our own benefit, both

individually and collectively. They believe that God judges each person's heart and actions during their lifetime on earth, and then decides what they will experience in the next world.

The Jewish *Torah* contains a simple, eternal, and universal standard for our individual reconciliation with God: each person must make a best effort to love and honor both God and neighbor, and then believe in faith that God is willing and able to forgive any violation subject to repentance. [Genesis 15:6] Most people of other spiritual traditions who believe in a Creator also find this an intuitive and reasonable standard once they learn of it.

But it remains a necessity for each people group to determine how such a universal standard should be contextualized for practical living in its specific culture. God made humans to be creative and delights in expressing himself through them in wildly different ways – so long as he remains their one God. The *Torah* is unique in this regard because it lays out a complete legal system for running a theocratic government, albeit borrowing from other legal systems that predated it. No other faith has been so prescriptive.

The Christian view of salvation is more nuanced than the Jewish. Jesus is understood to be the Jewish Messiah anticipated by the prophets. During his first extended visit to earth he fulfilled the role of the suffering servant '*machiah ben Josef*'. [See for example Isaiah 53] During a future visit he is expected to fulfill the role of the conquering Davidic king '*machiah ben David*'. [See for example Isaiah 11] In a spiritual mystery, Jesus' willingness to exchange his innocent blood for the sinful blood of man activated God's salvation promise. The doors were opened to salvation for all who would seek reconciliation with their Creator. [See the *Hallel* Psalm 118. Jesus' Aramaic name '*Yeshua*' translates 'salvation'] [Acts 4:12]

But this doctrine leaves open the question of how much a person needs to know about Jesus to take advantage of this offer.

The conventional view is that Jesus' resurrection replaced all prior covenants, and salvation became exclusive to those who choose to follow him. A Jew saved before Jesus' death became unsaved after that death if he knew of Jesus but chose to remain a *Torah*-observant Jew. To be a Christian requires believing that Jesus is God, Jesus made salvation possible, and God will reject any person that does not now actively follow Jesus. Most of the 'exclusive' claims Jesus is recorded making about himself are found in the book of John. [John 14:6] There are also echoes in the apostle Paul's ministry. [Acts 13:46]

In contrast, the older synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) present another view of salvation; one shared by Jesus, his 12 apostles from the Galilee, and the community of Jewish disciples that lived in Jerusalem after his death. The disciples understood that Jesus had a central role to play in God's salvation plan (his death obviously mirrored the Passover sacrifice), but they did not understand the mechanism any better than the prophets who foresaw it. For them, the means by which Jesus enabled salvation (his exclusive atoning death) was separable from the criteria for receiving that salvation (traditional Jewish faith in God and his covenant).

This view says salvation remains dependent simply on loving God and neighbor. One need not have some special knowledge regarding Jesus or his ministry to cry out to God in repentance and

be reconciled. [Mark 9:40] [Luke 18:9-14] [Acts 10:34-35] The apostles Peter and Paul both quoted Joel 2:32 when affirming that “all who call upon the name of *Adonai* [God] will be saved”. This standard of salvation is known as the ‘eternal gospel’. [Acts 2:21] [Romans 10:12-13]

*And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an **eternal gospel** to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."*

[Revelation 14:6-7]

Clement was a disciple of the apostle Paul and one of the first bishops of the congregation of Jesus’ followers in Rome. He wrote a letter on behalf of his congregation to that in Corinth that closes with a similar statement of early doctrine. All who call upon God are saved - because of what Jesus did – not because of what the person understands or how he prays.

*May God, who seeth all things, and who is the Ruler of all spirits and the Lord of all flesh—who chose our Lord Jesus Christ and us through Him to be a peculiar people—grant to every soul **that calleth upon His [God’s] glorious and holy Name**, faith, fear, peace, patience, long-suffering, self-control, purity, and sobriety, to the well-pleasing of His [God’s] Name, **through our High Priest and Protector, Jesus Christ**, by whom be to Him [God] glory, and majesty, and power, and honour, both now and for evermore. Amen.*

[1 Clement 58 – Edinburgh Translation, 1867]

Apart from the so-called ‘high Christology’ of the Johannine documents, [John, John 1,2,3, Revelation] the scriptures contain a consistent theme from beginning to end that Abraham’s trust in God’s promises, Jewish faith in its unknown Messiah, and following Jesus as that Messiah have all been acceptable expressions of faith that are approved by God. All such believers are called ‘God Fearers’ (fear referring to reverence), and God readily embraces them for eternity.

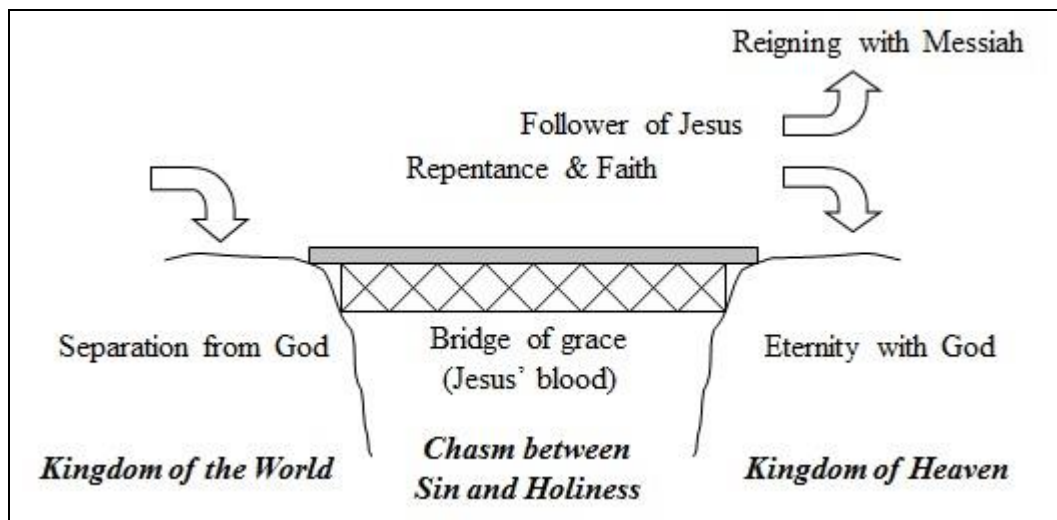
It is left to the reader to decide what to do with the two different Christian views of salvation. For many believers, any softening of the exclusivity of belief in Jesus as personal savior undermines everything. But it should be pointed out that Jesus left his disciples unclear about a lot of things even after having lived with him for three years. The book of Acts recounts very clearly how his followers were learning as they went. It is sometimes hard for westerners to accept that in some things God and Jesus are happy to remain a great mystery. They certainly are not jealous of one another. Their priority for us is relationship, not knowledge (‘*gnosis*’). Church history is replete with splits over doctrinal differences, something we can be sure Jesus would have preferred not to see among his people.

Having acknowledged the broad definition of a ‘God-Fearer’, there remains much to be gained by those persons who are specifically covenanted to Jesus and committed to obeying his Great Commission. Only they are recorded as receiving a special *dunamis* baptism of Holy Spirit

through which Jesus manifests his spiritual authority in ways other God-fearers generally do not experience. [Matthew 3:11]

This special status changes everything for a person because it gives full assurance of reconciliation with God. The person has become a tabernacle for Jesus himself as validated by the miraculous signs done through him. He is filled with an inexplicable hunger to share his experience with others, and to see them in turn filled with Jesus. Collectively, these anointed Jesus-following God-fearers were known as the 'ekklesia' (pronounced ek-klay-see'-ah).

It may be helpful to summarize God's salvation with the diagram below. We all fall short of his hope for us in this world, and there is a great chasm that separates our sinful nature from his holiness. Some are content to ignore God and remain in the world, while others seek relationship with him in eternity. God has been faithful to provide a bridge of grace constructed from Jesus' blood that carries us into his presence. One need not know what the bridge is made of to cross it, but such crossing does require acknowledging sin, turning to God for forgiveness, and believing that he is willing and able to forgive.



Those reconciled God-fearers who do choose to follow Jesus specifically are given a special but unknown role as part of Jesus' spiritual government, both in this lifetime and presumably the next. [2 Timothy 2:12] [Revelation 20:6] This is a high privilege and honor, and the ultimate expression of what it means to be a human being. Our obligation is to ensure that every person on earth is told of this choice and encouraged to take it. Jesus is passionate about his followers making this witness their life's work.

We are to continue delivering the same message that Jesus did:

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel. [Good News]"
[Mark 1:15]

But what exactly is the 'Kingdom of God', and how do we define the 'Good News' in which everyone is to believe to achieve salvation? These terms were so commonly understood in the Jewish context of Jesus' day that the New Testament writers felt no need to define them for us. Today we need to be reminded since they remain so central to our latter-day mission.

Kingdom of God

The New Testament writers used various renderings for Kingdom of ...God, ...Heaven, ...Messiah, ...the Father. God's Kingdom includes that part of creation (heaven and earth) which has chosen to honor its Creator, obey his rule, depend on him for all needs, and make a place for his presence to manifest. It is the opposite of the 'kingdom of the world', which is that part of creation that has chosen not to have relationship with him. He has allowed it to operate under its own self-interested authority. The Biblical writers used monarchical language because at the time the scriptures were written kings were the ultimate expression of authority.

In both the Jewish and Christian tradition, God has a vice-regent who figures prominently in the rule of this Kingdom. The New Testament apocalyptic literature anticipates a day when the earth and heavens are regenerated, the kingdom of the world disappears, and all of creation comes under the joint authority of God and Jesus as the King(s).

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."

[Revelation 11:15]

The Old Testament Jewish prophets had little understanding of this grand plan, and their version of God's Kingdom on Earth centered on Israel and Jerusalem becoming the leading spiritual and political center of the world. A latter day King David in the form of a human Messiah would sit on the throne backed by the manifest presence of God. This Messiah would be a warrior-king whom God would use to militarily overthrow the prevailing occupying power - be it the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, or Romans.

Jesus did not come as a warrior king, of course, and so did not fulfill this expectation. He was therefore rejected as the Messiah by many faithful Jews. His was a very different Kingdom marked by service rather than control, and one that would ultimately bless the entire world, not just Jewish Israel. This explains why he was always warning people not to declare him the Messiah. He knew the zealots would try to turn him into a regional political leader, thus defeating the sacrifice for all persons that he needed to fulfill.

Jesus is the legitimate King of the earthly Kingdom of God, and of course it was the confusion over whether this was a spiritual or political role that got him crucified for sedition by the Romans. The disciples themselves were not clear what kind of king Jesus would end up being or how the Kingdom of God would be organized once he was enthroned. After Pentecost they began to understand that the Kingdom would initially be expressed - and the King rule in the earth - directly through them via the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Manifestations of the Kingdom

People with no Biblical knowledge readily acknowledge the Kingdom of Heaven among them when they see or experience a manifestation of God's presence or a demonstration of his power. Usually this comes through an encounter with Jesus' indwelt followers, but God also reaches people with his messenger angels, dreams, and signs in the environment. The Old Testament recounts lots of examples of such encounters.

'*Memra*' means 'Word' in the Aramaic language. When it appears in the Old Testament, it often indicates God's force or presence in a situation, in the same sense that our spoken word expresses our presence to others around us. Its use is frequently accompanied by a physical appearance of God's vice-regent. Here are two examples of many found in the *Targums*:
[Heiser, Michael. *The Word of Yahweh*. White Paper. <http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/>]

And the Memra of the Lord [YHWH] said, "Let there be light," and there was light by his Memra.

[Genesis 1:3]

And Abraham trusted in the Memra of the Lord [YHWH], and He counted it to him for righteousness.

[Genesis 15:6]

This *Memra* that appears in the Old Testament is directly associated with Jesus in the New Testament book of John where Jesus appears as the creating and saving 'Word'.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

[John 1:1-3]

This suggests that Jesus has appeared among us many times and in many forms over the millennia. He continues to do so in these latter days, but since Pentecost now also expresses himself through his followers. In days to come, Jesus will increasingly manifest his Kingdom presence through his people as God pours out his Spirit.

Good News

What then is the specific 'good news' of the Kingdom that Jesus' followers are commanded to share as part of their discipling mission?

Jews have always looked forward to the 'Day of the Lord' as foreseen by the prophets. This anticipates a time when the Messiah establishes God's government and the Kingdom of Heaven rules over the whole earth. If hate and greed are not completely vanquished, then at least they are kept far away from God's covenanted Kingdom people. Israel finally becomes the delight of the world, and people everywhere honor her God and celebrate the festival of Tabernacles in

Jerusalem. The Messiah sits on the throne of David and judges fairly among the people who no longer experience suffering. [Isaiah 11:4] [Micah 4:3] [Acts 10:42]

Any proof that this day had arrived would be the best news any Jew could possibly hear.

Jesus declared publicly that this was indeed the case; the Kingdom of God was finally being established and God's Spirit was being poured out. John the Baptist was the forerunner and Jesus the King. [Luke 4:21] [Matthew 11:2-5] The miracles Jesus did proved he was the anticipated Messiah and that the Kingdom was manifesting. Many began to believe the 'Day of the Lord' had indeed come.

But the Kingdom of God and his Messiah was to fall upon the earth via Holy Spirit, not a human king, and Jesus' death took his followers by surprise. They wondered what happened to the political leader that would overthrow the Romans and their corrupt temple leadership. Didn't God intend for all nations to be circumcised into the covenant of *Torah*? How could a new covenant written on the heart alone be good news? [Jeremiah 31:33] [Acts 3:18-26] Jesus warned this would be an issue. There was new wine coming, and the lost sheep of Israel needed to be prepared. [Mark 2:22]

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."
[Luke 17:20-21]

After Jesus' death, the apostles continued preaching the 'good news' that Jesus was the expected Messiah and that he would return soon to fulfill the remaining Messianic prophecies. [Acts 3:19-21, 5:42, 13:32-39] There were those Jews who could grasp this new paradigm of government in the earth through Holy Spirit rather than human king, and those who could not make the mental and spiritual leap. Response to the 'good news' depended on whether one sought a closer relationship with God, or a new geopolitics. The Jerusalem community of Jesus' followers held to this message as they evangelized their fellow Jews.

The gentiles to whom the apostle Paul was preaching had little or no familiarity with *Torah* or the Jewish prophets, no conception of the 'Day of the Lord', and no expectation of a new governmental Kingdom of Heaven in the earth. It was therefore necessary for him to provide a contextualized explanation of the 'good news' as they would understand it. He chose to do so using the theme of salvation, readily admitting it was his version. [Romans 2:16]

He wrote that God sent a part of himself in the form of his son Jesus to be an atoning sacrifice. When we join Jesus in death by turning away from the world's idolatry, then we also become united with Jesus in his resurrection to a new life in the presence of the Father. The 'good news' was God's acceptance of the new disciple just as he ethnically was, including entry into a new covenant without becoming a Jew. All that was required was confessed belief that Jesus had successfully completed what God had asked of him in order for the person's salvation to be real.

Paul's salvation theme, picked up by the Johannine writers, shifted the focus away from *Torah* and onto Jesus, causing a rift with some of the apostles in Jerusalem who thought the Jewish perspective applied to gentiles as well. Paul felt that the good news of salvation from death was nullified if gentiles became shackled by Jewish law. Paul's new disciples were getting mixed messages and some fiery correspondence was exchanged. [See for example Galatians 1:6-9]

It is in the crucible of disagreement that communities must learn to self-govern, and the apostles did so by holding council twice to address head on both the criteria for salvation and the expectations of new disciples who were not Jews. They decided on some cultural distinctions between Jewish and Gentile believers, while simultaneously embracing what appeared to be the universal mission of Holy Spirit to verify the good news by whomever it is preached.

For our purposes, the 'good news' is that the Kingdom of Heaven has been established in the earth for the purpose of turning all people back to their Creator. Jesus provides universal access to salvation for all who acknowledge their sin before either Creator or him. Those who also accept the high calling of discipleship in Jesus become a part of the government of God's Kingdom on earth, manifesting Jesus' presence in ways that draw the world to his community.

The Great Commission

Jesus' final instruction to his disciples is documented in Matthew and Luke. [Matthew 28:18-19] [Luke 24:45-49] Here is a consolidated and amplified restatement of the mission of the *ekklesia*.

Be my witnesses, testifying as I did that the Kingdom of God is permanently manifest in earth. Immerse every person into the reality of Father God, the Son of Father God, and Holy Spirit. Make each person a disciple through whom I can express myself. The miraculous signs you do in my name will confirm the truth of your testimony and teaching. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you to do, including:

- Repent and turn back to God and the primary commandments of his Torah
- In practical ways, love both God and man as the fulfillment of Torah
- Serve everyone as the defining characteristic of my Kingdom government
- Avoid defilement and especially unforgiveness
- The relationship you establish with God in this world will determine whether eternity is spent in God's presence ('*olam haba*'), in darkness separated from God ('*sheol*'), or in a cursed place reserved for those who actively hate God ('*gei-hinnom*').

Regarding Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit is the mechanism by which Jesus' presence is manifest in his people. But it is impossible to develop a clear theology around his work in the earth.

Throughout the Old Testament he 'fills' [*plethos*] God-Fearers, with the frequent result that they prophesy. [Deut. 34:9] [Micah 3:8] [1 Samuel 10:6] John the Baptist was filled from birth [Luke 1:15] before Jesus began his ministry, while Jesus seems to have received the Spirit when he was 'baptized' [*baptizo*] by John [Matthew 3:16]. Some were baptized into Jesus' name and were not filled with the Spirit. [Acts 8:16] Others were filled with the Spirit even though they had not

been baptized into Jesus' name. [Acts 10:44] Still others became followers of Jesus through a water baptism and only received Holy Spirit when they were formally re-baptized into Jesus' name. [Acts 19:2-6] Jesus sent out seventy of his disciples in the power of his Spirit to preach and heal [Luke 10], and then told them they would later be baptized by Holy Spirit at Pentecost. [Acts 2]

Holy Spirit does appear to 'fill' many God-fearing Kingdom people who love God but do not specifically follow Jesus, just as he did during Old Testament times. The author has been among such submitted people as they manifest various of the spiritual gifts. The only thing one can say for certain is that Holy Spirit loves to empower those who bring the 'good news' to the world and affirms with signs the message of God's salvation. This appears to find its fullest manifestation in those who follow Jesus specifically and obey his Great Commission.

As regards Holy Spirit, we really have no choice but to accept Jesus' own view of this as another of God's great mysteries.

The wind [pneuma] blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit. [pneuma]
[John 3:8]

Ekklesia Community

Community begins where individual salvation leaves off. We now explore how communities of God's people are covenanted to him, and what behaviors are expected of each saved member. God intended that all his people be members of Kingdom communities, to support one another on the path to maturity and not fall prey to deceiving wolves. [Acts 20:29-30] [Hebrews 10:25]

This manuscript assumes that the apostolic leaders of the first Jewish sect of Jesus' followers based in Jerusalem learned enough from him to begin the community he would have wanted. It also posits that Jesus in these latter days wishes to restore us to a modern version of that ideal.

Hebrew Covenant

The Hebrew culture emerged from the Canaanite that preceded it, including inheriting a religious system that originated even earlier in Ugarit. Over time the *El Shaddai* of the Baal Cycle evolved to become the *YHWH* who spoke to Moses. In doing so, God changed from an ambivalent old ruler amongst a council of gods into the one all-powerful Creator. He changed from an impersonal deity to a loving father who delights in revealing himself to his people. His vice regent changed from the goddess Ashterah to his firstborn son Jesus.

[For further insight into this historical process, see:]

[Dever, William. *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?*. Eerdmans, 2003]

[Smith, Mark. *The Early History of God*. Eerdmans, 1990, 2002]

It is difficult for us today to grasp just how radical a revelation *YHWH* was in the Bronze Age when fear of death dominated people's relationship with a world full of terrestrial spirits. The Hebrew revelation of *YHWH* is unique, and the offer this God made to this particular *ethnos* equally unique.

The Siniatic law (more properly translated 'teaching') given to Moses took the form of a legal agreement. [Exodus 19-20,24] It contained a promise to favor the Hebrew people if they would agree to certain conditions, and promised to disfavor them if they broke the terms of the agreement. [Deuteronomy 11,27-28] Such legal transactions are known as covenants.

[For other examples of covenants God is recorded to have made in *Torah* see:]

[Genesis 9:9-17] [Genesis 15] [Genesis 17]

Everything about the Siniatic covenant was collective. That is to say, the promises made were to the Hebrew nation as a whole, not just to individuals, and the nation as one entity was expected to live by its terms. Because each generation needs to be reminded of its covenants, we see it being renewed by Joshua at Shechem, [Joshua 24] Solomon as he dedicated the temple, [2 Chronicles 7] and Josiah when he initiated his reforms [2 Kings 23].

The law began as the Ten Commandments, was codified into a legal system by Moses and his assistants sitting in the seat of judges, subsequently elaborated with an oral 'hedge' in first and

second temple times, and finally interpreted and expanded into the Talmud by rabbis after Jesus' resurrection. The law, along with the prophets, writings (*Tanakh* and *Talmud*), and synagogue system with its rabbinical scholarship and teaching, form the pillars of Judaism. Their revelation of *YHWH* is the foundation of their identity.

God designed his covenant to be one of mutual love, and the entire *Torah* is summarized by this essential principle. [Deuteronomy 6:5] [Leviticus 19:18] Jesus was quoting *Torah* when he said:

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.
[Matthew 22:36-40]

Torah views the Siniatic covenant as a type of marriage between the Hebrew nation and *YHWH*. *YHWH* is a jealous God who does not tolerate his people embracing any other gods. This metaphor was repeated by Jesus who also used wedding imagery when describing the Kingdom.

Importantly, the Hebrew nation had the option of not entering into this agreement at all. It was free to be as the other nations of the earth, subject to the whim of terrestrial spirits and unrestrained in social behavior. Because this was the case, Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and the writers of the New Testament letters all expressed the same heartfelt desire that people would freely agree to God's covenant as the loving gift it is intended to be. [Deuteronomy 30:19-20]

The evidence that the Hebrew nation collectively made the right choice is borne out in its status as the only ethnic people group to have remained uniquely identifiable for three *thousand* years.

Jewish communities of covenant

The ancient Jewish nation, from its origins under Moses to the fall of Masada in 73 CE, was led by an on-going partnership between a high priest who fulfilled the responsibilities of the temple rites, and a civic leader who was king/governor, judge, and military commander. Both priest and civic leader were supported by staff, and each was expected to hear from *YHWH* and conduct his responsibilities in absolute obedience. Examples of these historical pairings include Saul & Samuel, David & Zadok, Nehemiah & Ezra, and Zerubbabel & Joshua.

During the Greek and Roman occupations both leaders were generally appointed by the occupying powers and followed a political rather than covenantal agenda. By the time of Jesus, the Jerusalem temple had become more business and tax collection venue than habitation for the God of Israel. Jesus was highly critical of the compromised temple leadership.

Local Jewish communities in second temple times organized themselves in a variety of ways depending on their alignment with the political leadership. Usually, the local spiritual leader was the Pharisee (later rabbi) of the synagogue who served his town in a variety of roles. There was also civic leadership in place which had its own courts and government services apart from the local synagogue.

Some communities chose to separate themselves from the rest of society and organized their own networks for mutual support. The best known of these is the Qumran community located at the head of the Dead Sea. It was a part of a network known as the *Yahad* (Unity), possibly made up at least in part by *Essenes*, whose approach to ascetic living was called ‘The Way’. Each local community had one or more priests who tended to spiritual needs, and an administrative group of ten men who governed local affairs. Decisions were taken by majority, and local communities were advised by the leader of the *Yahad* known as the ‘Righteous Teacher’.

The *Yahad* communities saw themselves as ‘children of light’ opposing the ‘sons of Israel’ and ‘sons of darkness’ who filled the parties of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and others. They also polemicized against the ‘wicked priest’ who officiated in the Jerusalem temple. They saw their Levites as ‘sons of Zadok’ (‘righteousness’) as contrasted with the wayward Levites of Ezekiel 44. They anticipated a final showdown with the Romans in which *YHWH* would miraculously intervene in mid-battle and wipe out the foreign occupiers. [Dead Sea Scrolls; Charter of a Jewish Sectarian Association, Commentary on Habakkuk, Damascus Document, War Scroll]

The Jerusalem followers of Jesus organized themselves much like the *Yahad* and shared their dislike for the occupying leadership. We are told for example that the apostle Simon was a Zealot (*Kananaïos*). [Mark 3:18] Both the Jerusalem church and communities of the *Yahad* disappear from history during the First Jewish-Roman War in 66 to 73 CE. Whether they actively resisted or not, no one from Qumran was left after the massacre to recover their scrolls.

[Eusebius and Epiphanius hint of a ‘flight to Pella’ by the Jerusalem church, although neither the Nazarite nor Ebionite theology later observed in Pella follows that of the Jerusalem church.]

The table below summarizes several of the principal similarities and differences between the *Yahad* and Jerusalem church.

Similarities	Jerusalem Church	Yahad
Name of movement	The Way	The Way
Movement leader	Jesus the Teacher (Rabbi)	The Righteous Teacher
Movement priesthood	Jesus the High Priest	Chief priest in community
Local leadership	12 apostles	10 elected men
Source of guidance	Jesus’ Holy Spirit	<i>YHWH</i> ’s holy spirit
Expectation	Messiah returns in final battle with the Romans or successors	Messiahs come in final battle with the Romans or successors
Differences	Jerusalem Church	Yahad
Mission	Evangelize and disciple	Withdraw and purify
Style of living	Relational	Communal/monastic
Belief in Messiah	Jesus is the Messiah	Unknown ‘Messiah of Israel’ and ‘Messiah of Aaron’

Covenant for Jesus' followers

The first community of Jesus' followers was based in Jerusalem and appears to have consisted exclusively of Jews and Jewish proselytes. They continued to honor the Sinai covenant in full. They believed Jesus, by his example and instruction, to have affirmed their obligation to continue participating in the temple rituals, keeping the festivals, and practicing circumcision.

It has been argued by some that this community was not bound by *Torah* because there is no record of the Jerusalem assembly having explicitly renewed it. But this is to assume that the Jewish believers in some way broke from the Jewish nation. They did not; they saw themselves as simply another of the many sects of Judaism fully included in the ancient ethnic covenant. The various communities followed their various Messiahs. Jesus was not unique in this regard.

[See for example Honi ha-M'agel in Josephus' *Antiquities* 14.2.1 21 and Mishnah Taanit 3:8]

Things were different in the non-Jewish gentile world, of course, and it took a meeting of the Jerusalem apostles with Paul and his evangelism team to clarify in what ways *Torah* would apply to non-Jewish disciples. [Acts 15, 21] There was never any question about the Ten Commandments being applicable regardless of ethnic origin or geography, but should gentiles also be required to convert to Judaism and enter into the Jewish national covenant with all of its legality and rituals?

After much debate the Jerusalem Council decided to retract some 'unauthorized' teachings given by its members to new gentile believers, and highlight only four specific behavioral abstentions:

1. "Things sacrificed to idols" - honored *YHWH* as the one exclusive God.
2. "Blood" - honored blood as the symbol of life and forbade human murder.
3. "Things strangled" – ensured animals were treated humanely.
4. "Fornication" - kept sex inside the marriage covenant so as to avoid defilement of the body which is the temple of Holy Spirit.

These are four of the 'Seven Laws of Noah' that Jews had long assumed to apply to all persons, since everyone was believed to be a descendent of the one global flood survivor. From the perspective of the Pharisees and later rabbis, any gentile who followed the laws was counted righteous and had 'a share in the World to Come'. Six of the seven laws were included in the Ten Commandments. The prohibition against strangling animals followed from God's instruction to Noah that people (previously vegetarian) could now eat animal flesh, but only after the animal had been killed and bled out in a humane way.

The apostolic meeting confirmed that the primary commandments of the Sinai covenant remained in force for all gentile followers of Jesus. But they would have latitude to determine how they were applied in daily life. Jesus told his disciples that he came to fulfill (or complete) the *Torah*. [Matthew 5:17-18] Said another way, anyone who followed him and kept the primary commandments was keeping *Torah*. Thus, when a follower of Jesus participates in a communion ceremony, he not only commemorates Jesus' permanent atoning sacrifice, [1

Corinthians 11:23-26] he also re-covenants to obey the Ten Commandments with its associated blessings and curses. [**1 Corinthians 11:27-30**].

The relationship of the individual follower of Jesus to the community of like believers is similar to that of the individual Jew born into the Jewish national covenant. God blesses everyone who belongs to a community in ways that are different from his blessing on an individual. This means that lawless members can block this communal blessing and even open the door to punitive curses for everybody else. Jesus does not take chronic lawlessness lightly in a group that is bearing his name as a loving testimony for the world. He disciplines us both individually and corporately.

To 'sin' or to be 'lawless' is to miss the target of individual or collective obedience to *Torah*. Community leadership and membership become complicit in serious sin if they know it is taking place in their midst and do nothing to correct it. For this reason it is important for the community to self-manage its affairs, including dealing with lawless members.

Ekklesia

We have made the point already that Jesus saw himself manifesting the Kingdom of God in the earth. He is the anticipated Messianic King of that Kingdom, and the community of his disciples is its membership.

The Greek word *ekklesia* was used by the New Testament writers when referring to the community of Jesus' disciples. It literally means a group of persons who are 'called out' of the larger population as an 'assembly' having a specific purpose. '*Sunagogē*' (from which we get 'synagogue') is the Greek word used by those writers to describe an assembly of Jewish God-fearers who do not agree that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah. *Sunagogē* and *ekklesia* were used in the Greek Septuagint to translate the original Old Testament Hebrew words *qahal* and *edah*.

Ekklesia is the word Jesus was recorded to have used when he established the community of his followers. [**The equivalent word in Jesus' native Aramaic language is 'edutha'.**]

I also say to you that you are Peter [petros – single stone], and upon this rock [petra – large mass of rock] I will build My church [ekklesia]; and the Gates of Hades [death] will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

[**Matthew 16:18**]

In this same scripture Jesus appointed leadership for the *ekklesia*. The name 'Peter' in Greek means 'rock'. Peter was one of the individual stones that Jesus selected who, when all were properly aligned with Jesus as the cornerstone, completed a single solid foundation on which the *ekklesia* could be solidly built. [**Ephesians 2:19-22**]

The foundation stones like Peter would receive delegated judicial authority to bind (prohibit) and loose (permit) specific behaviors in the community consistent with the historical role of the

Pharisee in the synagogue and Moses in the Sinai. Jesus extended this authority to also include the ultimate act of forgiving sin and saving new disciples from death to eternal life. [John 20:22-23] Holy Spirit would authenticate that authority (as well as the truth of the ‘good news’) by working through the foundation stones to heal disease and deliver people from demons. [Mark 2:5-12] [Luke 10:17-19]

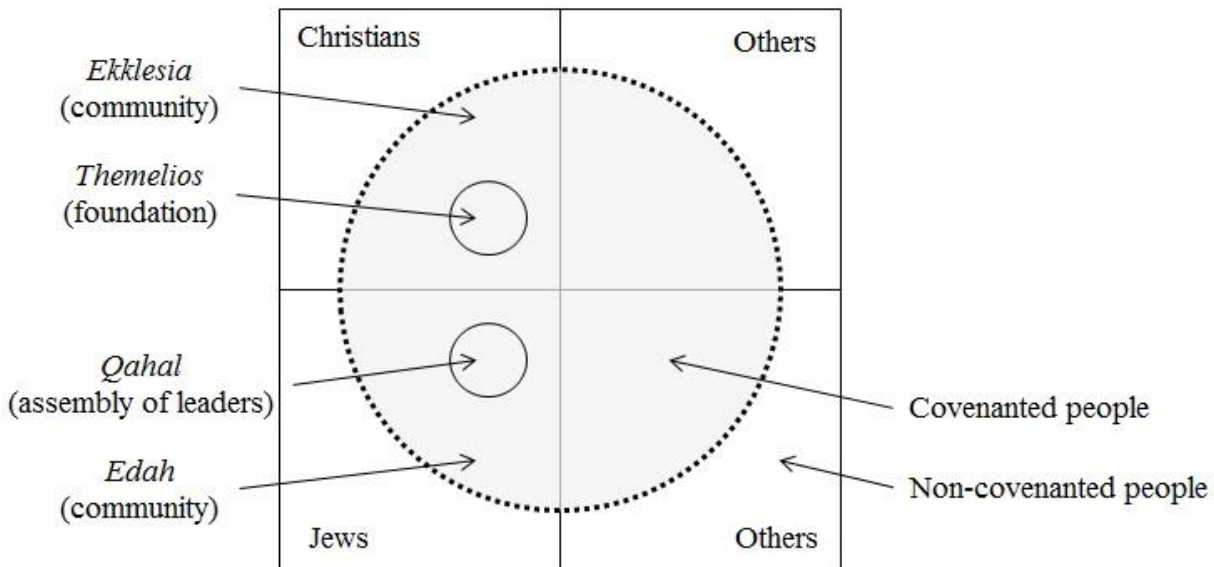
Jesus never had very many covenanted disciples during his lifetime, although thousands sometimes gathered to watch when he was teaching and healing. He sent out 70 to demonstrate the good news with power [Luke 10:1], and there were only 120 [Acts 1:15] gathered after his death. But with the strong foundation of even these few in their place, the community could grow by thousands in a day. [Acts 2:41]

The *ekklesia* is made up of people at all levels of commitment and spiritual maturity. True discipleship comes at a high personal cost. [John 6:60, 66] As we will discover later, spiritual authority has nothing to do with hierarchical, top-down control. It has everything to do with empowerment to be a sacrificial servant. It turns out that most folks are not as eager to pursue sacrificial service as a career option. As a result, there will always be a smaller dedicated core of leaders close to Jesus through whom Holy Spirit manifests the Kingdom with power and authority. There will always be a larger community of transformed people who are somewhat more ambivalent about the Great Commission mandate.

This distinction based on covenantal commitment is consistent with Jewish experience. In ancient Israel the full nation was called in Hebrew ‘*edah*’. The small judicial assembly formed around Moses and Aaron that was called out to lead the nation was the ‘*qahal*’.

Now if the whole congregation [edah] of Israel commits error and the matter escapes the notice of the assembly [qahal], and they commit any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and they become guilty; when the sin which they have committed becomes known, then the assembly [qahal] shall offer a bull of the herd for a sin offering and bring it before the tent of meeting.
[Leviticus 4:13-14]

The chart below conceptualizes this arrangement. There are many *ethnos* in the world, some defined by a religion and others not. These are shown as squares. Within each of these groups there are individuals who have made peace with God by covenanting with him for their salvation (within a box and within the large circle) and those who prefer to keep God at a distance (within a box but outside the large circle). The *ekklesia* is that part of Christianity that has made a covenant with Jesus to follow him (as distinguished from ‘cultural’ Christians who have not). Those that Jesus himself has called out to be foundation stones in the *ekklesia* are shown in the small circle. The equivalent model is shown for Judaism.



Christian

We have not used the appellation ‘Christian’ very much in this manuscript. There are two primary reasons why.

First, the English term ‘Christians’ comes from the Greek ‘Χριστιανός’ which appears only three times in the Bible. In Acts 11:26 the unbelieving people of Antioch used it as a pejorative to describe the followers of Jesus. In Acts 26:28 the unbelieving King Agrippa does so as well. In 1 Peter 4:16 the disciple of Jesus is told to take pride when being humiliated with the name.

Jesus’ followers preferred to address one another as “brethren”, “disciples”, “the elect”, “followers”, “the saints”, and “servants”. The original Jerusalem community referred to itself as ‘the Way’, a term used in the culture of the time to describe the righteous pathway of living for God. [Acts 9:2] The community was generally known among outsiders as “the Nazarenes”. [Acts 24:5] The Greek word *ekklesia* appears to have been used primarily by writers and rarely if ever in conversation.

Second, there are many parts of the world in which people honor Jesus but are troubled by the perceived baggage that comes with ‘Christian religion’. There are overtones of crusades, church sequestration of wealth, and interminable division within the ranks over obscure theological and doctrinal issues that have nothing to do with the love of Jesus. A ‘follower of Jesus’ is often received more readily than is a ‘Christian’.

To avoid unintended connotations, the manuscript will follow the New Testament standard by using *ekklesia* to describe the covenanted followers of Jesus.

The same applies to the Cross and Crucifix so closely associated with Christianity. Neither symbol was used by the first century believers who saw Jesus as risen and exalted, not continuing to hang forever in sacrifice.

Rather, their community was represented by such symbols as the ‘Messianic Seal’, which contained a Jewish Menorah superimposed over the tail of a fish, the overlapping triangles forming the Star of David in the middle. The fish contained the crossed Hebrew letter *tav* which is the ‘mark’ of righteousness referred to in Ezekiel 9:4-6. The Messianic Seal was found by archaeologists in Jerusalem drawn on stone vessels inscribed with the words “For the oil of the Spirit”.

The Greek word for fish is **ΙΧΘΥΣ**. The *ekklesia* used each letter to spell out Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ which is Anglicized as ‘Ichthys’ or ‘Jesus Christ God’s Son Savior’. The letters could be stylized and superimposed to form a circle with spokes. During times of persecution, believers identified each other by knowing these symbols and their Greek rendering.



Messianic Seal

Circular Ichthys

[Source: Google Images]

[For an elaborated discussion of ways in which the original practices of The Way were changed as the church became institutionalized, see for example: Barna, George. *Pagan Christianity*.]

Ideal Community

Thus far we have concluded the following:

1. The *ekklesia* is part of the broader ‘Kingdom of God’ - comprised of people from various spiritual traditions who honor the one Creator God as he has revealed himself to them. Like-minded groups of such people share common characteristics:
 - Love and trust both God and other members of their community globally
 - Take care of the needs of all members of their community
 - Make the world a better place for everyone
2. The *ekklesia* is unique because Jesus expects his covenanted followers to actively participate in a Great Commission led and empowered by Holy Spirit:
 - Evangelize every ethnic group with the good news that Jesus is the saving and serving King of God’s Kingdom
 - Disciple every believer to reflect the character of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
 - Globally manifest Jesus’ presence as a testimony to the world

We now proceed to address the central question of this study:

How do we know if a latter day community of Jesus’ followers is functioning in a mature form, being both effective locally and integrated globally?

We propose the following attributes, each of which is discussed further below.

1. Members are exclusively believers in Jesus as the Messiah, and the faith of each is confirmed by evidence he or she is indwelt by Holy Spirit.
2. Members have a long-term covenant both with Jesus and with each other that honors the Hebraic roots of the faith.
3. Members are all expected to hear from Holy Spirit and actively use the gifts he manifests through them for the benefit of the group.
4. The group spends significant time together in worship and prayer, including dedicating much of that time to waiting on God and listening for his wisdom.
5. The group’s focus is always on its dual mandate of caring for its own while carrying out the Great Commission to evangelize and disciple the world.
6. The group effectively manages its own affairs.
7. The group remains as sovereign as possible.
8. The community always maintains a unity of honor in the midst of diversity of opinion.

Members are exclusively believers in Jesus as the Messiah, and the faith of each is confirmed by evidence he or she is indwelt by Holy Spirit.

True freedom of worship and ministry requires a unity of belief and trust among group members. That is not to say that outsiders would never be allowed to observe and even participate, but the covenanted members themselves must be of a common spirit.

It is important that all agree to basic beliefs well established in the community of Jesus for 2,000 years (eg., Jesus is the prophesied Messiah), and are comfortable with not needing to agree on other points that have divided the community (eg., at what times Jesus functioned as God and human).

Every person reborn into the fellowship of Jesus becomes indwelt by his Holy Spirit of sanctification, wisdom, and presence. During the life-long process of learning to walk with Jesus evidence will increasingly appear in the person's life that Holy Spirit is working through him. This will be outwardly evidenced by behaviors associated with the 'fruit of the spirit', with minimal display of 'deeds of the flesh'.

Members make it a personal mission to manifest the presence of God whenever they are with other people, allowing Holy Spirit to minister through them in any way that he desires. If God clearly asks a member to undertake a certain service, the member does so without hesitation.

Members have a long-term covenant both with Jesus and with each other that honors the Hebraic roots of the faith.

All members obey the Ten Commandments literally and the *Torah* in principle as a defining part of their lifestyle. The specific limits on behavior appropriate to a person are contextualized based on culture and social norms, but the principles are inviolable. When a member misses the bull's-eye of perfection ('sin') he is quick to acknowledge the failure, earnestly seek forgiveness from God and any other person who might have been offended, and rededicate himself to not missing the mark again.

The *Torah* was given for the entire nation of Israel, and God's blessings and curses continue to apply to all his collective family. For this reason the group must actively covenant with God to appropriate his blessings, and purge the sin from its midst to ensure the group does not bring curses upon itself. These ancient covenants are still an active part of our collective relationship with Jesus. [Deuteronomy 28]

One of the things God is placing in his people in these latter days is a desire to know more about the Hebraic roots of their faith. Jesus was a 'Yehudi', a member of the Hebrew tribe of Judah, and he taught eternal principles within the context of Iron Age Roman Judaea. When we read the Old Testament from that perspective, it comes alive with meaning for us today. Not in a legalistic sense of having to slaughter animals at a temple, but in the sense of desiring to be nearer to God in ways the Father clearly enjoys. This leads many, for example, to keep certain of the Jewish festivals as part of being a covenanted group.

Some groups also choose to use the original Hebrew names for God ('Yahweh'), Jesus ('Yeshua'), and Holy Spirit ('Ruach HaKodesh') because they unlock deeper meaning lost in later translation. For example, Jesus' true name *Yeshua* means 'God Saves'.

"She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus [Yeshua], for He will save His people from their sins."

[Matthew 1:21]

Group members love, support, and fellowship with one another regularly as part of maintaining active relationships. This includes eating together and meeting each need as one extended family. [John chapters 14-17]

The group is always active in mentoring and discipleship, growing collectively in the knowledge of God. More mature members make themselves available to help along those who are less seasoned, and they in turn actively impart their testimony and learning to others in an on-going generational continuum.

Members are all expected to hear from Holy Spirit and actively use the gifts he manifests through them for the benefit of the group.

Each follower of Jesus was uniquely appointed in God's grand design to serve in a unique combination of ways. Holy Spirit decides how he wants to manifest through each person to best enable that service. This includes expressing himself both in natural and in supra-natural ways as appropriate and in proper order. [1 Corinthians 12:8-11]

Community members should be intentionally disciplined to receive the 'baptism of fire' and to learn to allow Holy Spirit to express any manifestation he desires through them. This is so that the group may have all necessary spiritual expression present when it meets. If all gifts are properly represented, Holy Spirit ensures that they are also naturally integrated. Signs and gifts are not for show; it is serious business hearing from Jesus and every gift is needed if the community is to carry out its part of the Great Commission. [1 Corinthians 12:18-21][Luke 10:19-20]

Importantly, each group member must recognize that any spiritual or natural gift he has belongs to Jesus who has the right to give and take away in every season. All spiritual assignments must likewise be loosely held since they too are owned by Jesus. His followers are granted the privilege of working alongside him when and how he decides. One of the worst things we can do is hang onto things we think are 'ours' after Holy Spirit has asked us to release them back to him. The good news is that this relieves us of any sense of 'performance'. Our job is to be a willing and qualified vessel through which Holy Spirit can do his job in the earth.

The group spends significant time together in worship and prayer, including dedicating much of that time to waiting on God and listening for his wisdom.

Every follower of Jesus has a responsibility to minister to both Jesus and other people. The first of these is the more important, however, because it is relationship with us that Jesus wants more than any work we might do on his behalf. Jesus quoted from Psalm 22 as he hung on the cross, a Psalm that emphasizes continually honoring the Father even when facing a death that resembles Jesus' own. It is a central concept in our relationship with God who fervently and jealously loves his people. It is our joy to spend time with him both individually and collectively.

The group ministers to Jesus. He loves to be in the midst of his people as they celebrate, and he loves group praise. He seems to delight in the variety of ways spiritual and natural gifts are

combined through music, dance, singing in the Spirit, prophetic painting, and so on. [Psalm 100:1-5]

We are not describing here the traditional Sunday morning church service with its structured homilies, liturgies, songs, and offering. There may be a place for that, but the group worship we are referring to here is quite different. It flows dynamically as Holy Spirit directs with no agenda and no deadline. Every person present is a vessel through whom Holy Spirit can speak, teach, exhort, and praise. The only leader is Jesus, and it is for him only that the group exists. It is a wondrous thing to watch and hear instruments, voices, dancers, painters, and prayers flowing together prophetically in a perfectly choreographed display of God's creativity. Jesus delights in having his way among us, and we are incredibly blessed to allow him to do so.

The group also intentionally spends extended time together just listening to what Holy Spirit is saying to his people; and the greater the diversity of gifts present, the more complete is the tapestry of that message that emerges. Often he will call for specific prayers, and the group transitions into targeted intercession based on that strategy. This is the key to releasing God's will in the earth that Jesus granted his followers in Matthew 16:19; to first accurately hear what has been ordained in heaven and then release it specifically into earth knowing it is already accomplished. What power is displayed in group intercession!

The group's focus is always on its dual mandate of caring for its own while carrying out the Great Commission to evangelize and disciple the world.

As *individuals* our eternal purpose is to have a close relationship with our Creator God, and to host his manifest presence in creation. It is a free choice each person must make on his or her own to live as a Kingdom person guided by the Ten Commandments.

Every group of Kingdom people is called to steward creation well and to ensure that every person has an opportunity to walk in the fullness of his or her eternal purpose. The Sinaiatic sacrificial system was given to the nation of Israel as a way to keep it focused on the price of sin. But the real underlying thing on God's heart is that his people would avoid sinning completely by simply loving him and each other as he intended them to do.

[Deuteronomy 10:12-13] [Isaiah 58:6-7] [Hosea 6:6] [Micah 6:8] [Psalm 51:16-17]

The *ekklesia* has a dual mandate that adds to its Kingdom calling. First, it is to actively evangelize and disciple the world as part of its Great Commission. Second, it is to ensure that its members' needs are met appropriately. The two mandates work together. The call to salvation is more impacting when unbelievers can see its fruit demonstrated in a transformed group of believers who love and care for one another. And it is hard for a person to fulfill his or her Great Commission when struggling to meet basic living needs.

The *ekklesia* also has an obligation to do what it reasonably can to serve unbelievers with mercy, justice, and honor in the context of sharing the love of Jesus. [Deuteronomy 15:10-11] The example of selfless service is a central part of evangelism in a selfish world.

Jews have no similar Great Commission mandate, but they likewise do good deeds for the sake of ‘healing the world’ and thus pointing people to *YHWH*.

[For example, the principle of ‘*tikkun ha-olam*’ appears multiple times in Mishna Gittin 4]

Some people are specially gifted for evangelism, and Jesus expresses himself through them with a deep heart for the ‘lost’ and miraculous signs that demonstrate the authenticity of the message. Jesus also expresses himself through the disciplers who help the new believer along the road to maturity. They are gifted to teach the principles of the faith, heal spiritual and physical hurts, help the person learn his callings and gifts, facilitate self-sufficiency, and encourage the next generation of the *ekklesia* to pursue its continuing dual mandate.

It is easy to pour labor, finances, and other resources into priorities that are not related to the dual mandate. The mature *ekklesia* is intentional about committing much of its resource base to outreach and discipling, especially in regions where there is no established body of believers.

Opinion:

There is pervasive misallocation of Jesus’ resources today at both the individual and corporate level. Aggregate church giving among American Christians averaged just 2.3% of adjusted gross income (AGI) in 2011. This is very low by historical standards. For its part, the typical church congregation distributed that money according to the following set of priorities:

- 45% Salaries
- 16% Facilities
- 25% Other operations
- 14% Benevolences

This means that total church-directed giving to mission and mercy work outside the building was 0.3% of AGI. This spending priority is not consistent with mature community.

[Open Tomb, Inc., 2013]

The group effectively manages its own affairs.

The Bible regularly uses the illustration of heterosexual marriage when describing governance of the community of believers. [Ephesians 5:23-27] There is a proper order of authority in decision-making, but that authority can only be used properly in the context of building up the other in love. Jesus’ job as chief priest, prophet, apostle, and cornerstone is to help his believers fully mature into their glory. He has performed this duty perfectly, to the point of defeating our death with his own.

All community members have equal standing under one leader – Jesus - in a flat organizational structure. That being said, there is a human dimension to Kingdom authority, and influential leaders are recognized based on their humility, maturity, and loving submitted service to Jesus and his community of followers.

There are many ways to order the affairs within a community. Neither *Torah* nor Jesus ever specified whether the nation of Hebrews or the family of Jesus' followers should make decisions and allocate resources based on consensus, majority vote, or the drawing of lots. It is left up to the community to manage its own affairs in ways that honor all members in the context of the community's shared mission.

The point is that the mature community does so without creating anger or bitterness. The Holy Spirit is never divided in his opinion about any specific issue. It is we humans that cannot seem to agree on what he is saying, or have agendas we deem more important than his. As in all things Kingdom, the more time we spend together in the presence of our God, the more easily we will individually and collectively hear consistently and make the right decisions in an environment of peace.

We will have much more to say on the subjects of community self-governance and spiritual authority in subsequent chapters.

The group remains as sovereign as possible.

The fellowship of Jesus' followers is a unique affinity group within and among the countries of the world. It is a spiritual nation whose purpose is to infuse the natural world with the light of life through the influence of its witness and testimony.

This spiritual nation is invisible to country governments so long as it has no registered organization, visible assets, or public political presence. It cannot be taxed or controlled if there is nothing for a government to see. While individuals must comply with the laws of the nation, the community itself remains sovereign and free to manage its own affairs. It gives to, rather than taking from, the world around it.

Sovereignty requires self-sufficiency. The mature community of believers should be minimally dependent on outside resources; productively generating its own financial resources, deciding judicial matters internally, and directing its spiritual gifts to the community's social health.

To be clear, sovereignty does not mean separation from secular society. The whole purpose of the community of Jesus' followers is to evangelize and disciple the world. But this mission must be accomplished without compromising the community's values through dependence on, and bondage to, the world's institutions. [1 John 2:15-17] [Luke 16:8] [2 Corinthians 6:14] [Luke 12:57-59] [Matthew 22:19-21] [Romans 13:1,7-8]

The community always maintains a unity of honor in the midst of diversity of opinion.

All of the spiritual gifts in the world are of little value if the group stewarding them has no unity within itself. This issue was of crucial importance to the first century community as recorded in the Book of Acts. We will discuss this issue in more detail later, but for now note the *action* and (*consequence*) marked into the following scriptures. Unity is a covenantal issue with God in which the collective behavior of the *ekklesia* releases his blessing upon it.

*Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and (**having favor**) with all the people. And the Lord was (adding to their number) day by day those who were being saved.*

[Acts 2:46-47]

And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.

*And with (**great power**) the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and (**abundant grace**) was upon them all.*

*For there was (**not a needy person**) among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.*

[Acts 4:32-35]

There are times in which every group struggles to find sameness of mind on an issue. But issues are not the same as relationships, and there is no decision as important to God as the decision to continually love and honor one another. Conversely, if the group finds significant, unrepented sin in its midst, this can block the group's blessing and must be addressed.

The natural world has a very difficult time with any sort of unity because it requires preferring others to oneself. Doing so requires a spiritual grace that only Holy Spirit can supply. Those that have such grace do indeed stand out in the world. [Malachi 3:18]

[For further insight into mature fellowship, see for example: Viola, Frank. *Reimagining Church*.]

Organization

The *ekklesia* governs its affairs as any society does, but in ways very different from man's institutional governments. It relies on influence rather than compulsion to draw the world to Jesus. This chapter explores the organizational principles that Jesus put in place.

Spiritual and human government

Prior to Jesus coming, *YHWH* established an idealized theocratic government for the Hebrew nation. He appointed Moses as leader, and authenticated his delegated authority with supra-natural signs. Moses understood that people would not be impressed by his words or actions if they did not see evidence of God working with or through him. [Exodus 33:14-16] Moses served both as judge over social questions and as a prophet when *YHWH* shared his will for the nation.

YHWH partnered Moses' civic leadership with the priesthood of Aaron, which was responsible for performing the atonement and other rituals specified in *Torah*. Some priests ministered primarily to *YHWH* and others to the needs of the people.

This partnership of civic leader and priest was typical in cultures of the time, including those of the Babylonians, Egyptians, and Canaanites. In those cultures, ultimate authority rested with the civic leader, but the priest weighed in on important decisions to ensure the gods would not be upset and cause difficulties. The role of the priest was frequently to find a way to bend the gods' will to that of the national leader.

This is the fundamental difference between the government of *YHWH* and that of other gods. Leaders in the former are expected to follow *YHWH*'s will. Leaders in the latter seek to pursue their own human agenda while appeasing the relevant spirits. The story of Israel shows the ongoing contention between these two wills.

The crucifixion of Jesus and subsequent destruction of Israel in the first century spawned both rabbinic Judaism and the Christian church we know today. The followers of Jesus were given a Great Commission empowered by Holy Spirit to evangelize and disciple the world in ways that Judaism had never done. Judaism largely lost its expectation of a Davidic Messiah and refocused on serving *YHWH* by doing good works in the present world. The nation of Israel of today has adopted a secular rather than theocratic government.

Jesus remains the head of the *ekklesia*, just as he has been for the past 2,000 years. He remains Israel's Davidic Messiah along with being the king, high priest, chief justice, and lead prophet of his community of followers. He remains the head of spiritual government as the vice-regent of *YHWH*. [Isaiah 9:6-7]

The *ekklesia* exists globally alongside the various territorially-bounded human governments of the world, few of which like to share power with other entities. They exist in large part to perpetuate themselves, and both fear and greed can drive them to despotic extremes. Jesus does not inhabit such institutional structures and it is not the mission of the *ekklesia* to overthrow or

even replace them. Its purpose is to fill the earth with God's presence and to draw all people into its membership regardless of their other affiliations.

Spiritual and institutional authority

A government based on spiritual authority does not function like human government based on institutional authority. The Hebrew people got to experience both as a result of their choice to appoint a human king. *YHWH* warned them of the consequences of rejecting himself as king along with his appointed judges, prophets, and priests. [1 Samuel 8:10-18] The people did not listen and God's warnings came to pass in subsequent generations. Even the iconic kings David and Solomon strayed from righteous governance with terrible consequences for the people. [2 Samuel 24, 1 Kings 11:1-13]

Spiritual and institutional governments both impose their policies on members, but depend on very different methods for doing so. This is summarized in the chart below.

	Govt. Inst. Authority	Ekklesia Spiritual Authority	
Applies to:	All citizens	Unbelievers	Ekklesia
Tools used:	Force (judicial/military)	Demonstration (testimony/power/service)	Discipling (teaching/power/service)
Result:	Compel behavior	Influence behavior	Build relationship
Examples:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate resources • Protect property • Perpetuate values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive salvation • Govern responsibly • Practice social health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain covenant • Mature spiritually • Serve Jesus & people

Institutional authority is always backed by the actual or perceived use of physical force to compel desired behavior. It is a system based on fear, and thus a preferred method also of demonic government in the earth. The *ekklesia* in contrast uses a combination of selfless service, personal witness, and confirming miraculous signs to convince the unbelieving world of its need for God's salvation through Jesus. It also seeks to encourage good governance in human institutions and overall social health. Within the community of believers the *ekklesia* depends on holistic discipling to mature each member, with a focus on building up meaningful relationships with Jesus and other disciples.

Jesus' strategy for evangelizing the world is to express so much selfless love through his *ekklesia* that anyone can clearly contrast it with the world's narcissism and autocratic government. [Malachi 3:17-18] [John 13:34-35] He desires that all people choose him willingly based on the brightness of his community, rather than being forced to acknowledge him based on his power.

Jesus never sought a position of natural authority for himself. He repeatedly warned those he served not to tell anyone he was the Messiah. They would have tried to crown him a king in the natural, and defeated what God was accomplishing in the spirit realm. [John 6:15]

The *ekklesia* was faithful to this example after Jesus was resurrected. The apostles never challenged the civic or temple authorities, and never established a parallel government or place of worship. Rather, they preached and healed during the day, and broke bread together as family

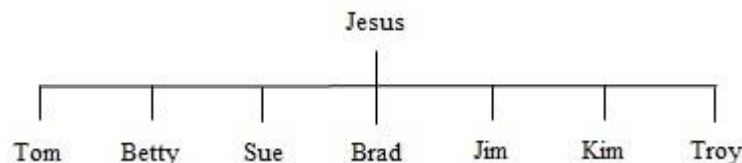
at night. They drew thousands to their fellowship through a combination of testimony and demonstrations of healing power. [1 Corinthians 2:3-5] [1 Thessalonians. 1:5] They enjoyed a new spiritual government on earth that carried spiritual authority utterly different than any human institution.

As we will discover later, the *ekklesia* lost its way after the apostles died who had personally walked with Jesus. Leadership passed to new generations that began to formalize church structure and operation. The organic and dynamic essence of the *ekklesia* was soon forgotten. The church began to operate from a place of hierarchical control rather than spiritual authority, and eventually came to resemble every other politicized human institution.

Two thousand years later, things are changing again as Holy Spirit is being poured out in this new season. There is a fresh wind of grace blowing over Jesus' followers to come out of institutional religion and return to the essence of being the *ekklesia*. We are rediscovering the brightness of spiritual power and unity of heart that will increasingly contrast with the world's headlong plunge into spiritual darkness. This contrast of light and dark will compel many to seek the fellowship of Jesus' people. The *ekklesia* is being renewed.

Organization of the ekklesia

Jesus has a style of governing that is usually gentle and patient, and he is uniquely able to dedicate however much time is needed to each person who calls on him. For this reason, his kingdom has a completely flat structure; Jesus and everyone else. His love for us is not affected by anything we do or do not, and no person is the gateway to God for anyone else.



"Teacher, we know that You...defer to no one; for You are not partial to any."
[Matthew 22:16]

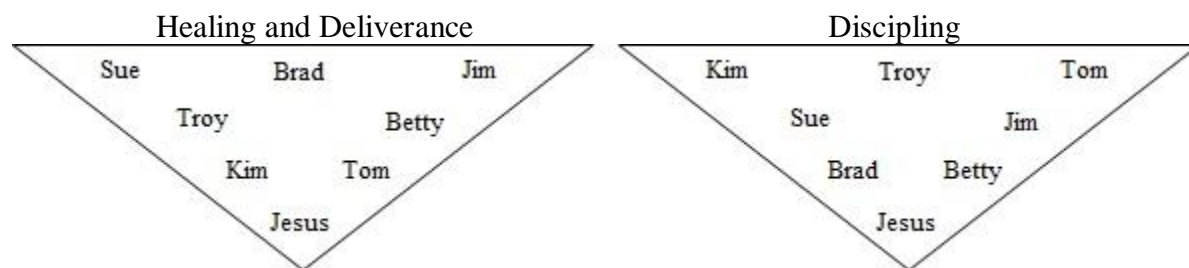
There is, however, a difference in how much of his presence we are trusted to carry as we perform our Great Commission. Spiritual maturity leads to a greater measure of delegated authority to serve in ways that have lasting and widespread impact. Functional roles within the *ekklesia* flow from such maturity, and they often change with assignment and season.

Greater spiritual authority is associated with more sacrificial service, not command and control. Jesus earned the right to rule over creation precisely because he made the ultimate sacrifice on its behalf. [Matthew 18:4] [John 13:12-14]

Never did Jesus march into the Temple or Herod's chamber and place himself in authority. In his role as prophet he did bring correction and prophesied against lawless behavior, but never did he seize power for himself. This is precisely why the Jews rejected him as Messiah; he did not seize the throne from the Romans as they expected their Messiah to do.

In fact, Jesus never taught his followers to take control of any aspect of their prevailing culture. Rather, he taught them to influence that culture through the example of selfless loving service. This inspires those in authority to do what is right. If his followers were appointed to positions of institutional leadership, they were to carry out their duties as if working for Jesus directly.

From this perspective, the *ekklesia* functions more like an inverted pyramid. The greatest servant carrying the most anointing is at the bottom. His role is to mentor and support all those above. The more spiritually mature a person is in Jesus, the closer to his position of authority they may be positioned. But remember, these relationships may change when viewed by type of ministry or over time. And they have nothing to do with Jesus' love for each person.



Perhaps it is helpful to use the metaphor of a symphony. There is one conductor who alone dictates the pace and presentation of the music. He marks the downbeat for each musician in the same way, and each plays in his turn as the score requires. For each musician there are times for rest, times to carry the melody, and times to play harmony. Roles switch around throughout the music. The same musician may even play different instruments during the performance. But each is guided directly by the one conductor. There is a flat relational structure.

Yet there is indeed a hierarchy of service within the orchestra expressed as multiple parts for each instrument. The first violin plays the primary theme and often the most difficult parts as befits an artist gifted for the role and diligently trained. Those with less experience play the part of the second or third violin. So it is in the kingdom. Jesus gifts and anoints some persons in the *ekklesia* with the most sensitive, public, or difficult roles. To others he gives tasks from which they can learn and mature, awaiting the day they may be called upon to take the lead.

The result of everyone playing his part in proper order is a beautiful choreography of sound. Notably, the music would sound hollow if only the leading musicians played. Every instrument and every counter-harmony is essential if the *ekklesia* is to carry out the fullness of its mission.

Roles/Ministries

There are a wide variety of roles (or ministries) within the *ekklesia* having both natural and spiritual responsibilities. Some are for the benefit of the community and others are for outreach beyond the community. We define a few ministries here in no particular order:

- Builder – establishes and organizes new things
- Judge – decides on issues among the members of the community
- Revelator – brings the word of knowledge, prophecy, or interpretation.
- Intercessor – advocates for issues before the seats of mercy and justice.
- Evangelist – shares the gospel with persons who have not heard.
- Miracle worker – authenticates the evangelistic message.
- Discippler – mentors and teaches members of the community.
- Mercy worker – helps those who cannot care for themselves.
- Healer – does miracles of physical, spiritual, and mental healing.
- Supplier – provides resources needed for community operation.

The various ministries are in turn empowered with both natural and supra-natural manifestations commonly known as ‘gifts’ that Jesus expresses through his people according to his sovereign will and timing. Among these are prophecy, service, teaching, leadership, giving, healing, wisdom, miracles, discernment, and so on. [Romans 12:6-8] [1 Corinthians 12:4-11,28]

Stewarding roles

It is important to remember that Jesus’ covenanted people were redeemed from spiritual death by his blood. We are all therefore bondservants – bought and paid for - and very fortunate to serve a master who loves us enough to undertake such a difficult redemption. Our lives are his and he must be allowed to express himself through us via any ministry and at any time he wishes. We may find that he does so in certain ways more often than others and that we even move consistently in certain gifts - but these are never ours to claim. Doing so causes us to fall into the traps of ministering in our own power when the Lord is not in it (witchcraft), and failing to obey when he wants us to do something unexpected. We are best advised to hold our roles and gifts lightly and simply be ready at all times to do “every good work”. [2 Timothy 3:16-17]

[For additional guidance on spiritual stewardship see:]

[Mark 10:40] [Matthew 23:8-12] [Acts 14:11,14-15] [Acts 12:21-23] [Revelation 2:2]

Commissioning roles

There is discussion in Christendom as to whether a person can be ‘commissioned’ into a specific ministry (usually through the laying on of hands accompanied by prophetic declaration) and thus attain a permanent status in that ministry. We see it most commonly today in the naming of apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists; which are specific foundational roles called out by Paul in his letter to the Ephesian church. [Ephesians 4:11-13]

Commissioning gets to the heart of how the latter day *ekklesia* will operate because permanent status in a leadership role invalidates the thesis that Jesus dynamically assigns and reassigns ministries among his followers. Roles can then be possessed by an individual, rather than being lightly stewarded for a season. Commissioning raises difficult issues of accountability when, as so often happens, human pride begins to intrude and the servant becomes the served. [Mark 10:42-44]

Jesus did appoint 12 men as ‘apostles’ from among the larger group of his disciples, and their role and title are considered to be permanent throughout the New Testament - apart from the loss of Judas. [Luke 6:13] After Jesus was resurrected, the eleven remaining apostles selected Matthias by lot to round out their number. They believed at the time that Jesus intended that there be twelve commissioned individuals involved in the establishment of the *ekklesia*. There is no record that any additional apostles were added in the Jerusalem community, which was primarily focused on evangelizing the Jews and other God-fearers.

The twelve did later acknowledge Paul as an apostle to the gentiles based on the way Jesus appeared to and manifested through him – the method that should be used to acknowledge any gift or role. Paul in turn identified several others as apostles sent to the gentiles including Barnabas, Andronicus, and Junias. It is not clear whether James, Peter, and the others who had been appointed by Jesus directly were in agreement with Paul’s practice.

We therefore find three contexts in which the title ‘apostle’ is used, and this highlights by extension how any person might be associated with a role or ministry.

- It can mean the 12 or 14 men Jesus appointed to lay the foundation of his *ekklesia* around himself as chief cornerstone. There were never any others, and this is the definition adopted by most historians and commentators of the first three centuries.
- It can refer to a permanent role that Jesus appoints to certain of his followers in every generation to help lead his *ekklesia*. An apostle once appointed is always an apostle no matter what other ministry he or she is performing at a given time.
- A person may be referred to as an apostle while performing activities or manifesting spiritual gifts that resemble those of the original 12 or 14. But it is a role like any other ministry that Jesus expresses through a person on occasion and not a permanent office.

This author chooses to follow convention and use the term ‘apostle’ solely to refer to Jesus’ original inner circle. But he also agrees that Jesus today still empowers his followers to perform the same (and more) foundational roles building up the *ekklesia* that the original apostles and prophets did. It is left to the reader to decide what names he wishes to give these ministries today. We have suggested a few earlier in this chapter.

But we are wise to err on the side of caution and treat leadership roles no differently than we do other ministries. If there is any commissioning in the latter day *ekklesia* of ‘offices’, ‘mantles’, or ‘anointings’, et al; then it is properly an acknowledgement that Jesus is manifesting through a person in a certain way for a season, with the admonition that the person always steward it humbly.

Governance

The next chapter will explore issues of governance more fully. For now, we need to recognize that Jesus has placed within each community a unique combination of gifts and roles essential for the proper functioning of that community. Each community will approach governance differently based on its unique characteristics, personalities, and revelation.

Governance

The *ekklesia* has a dual mandate. First, it is to be a community united in love and purpose. Second, it is to fulfill the Great Commission to tell the world the good news, and then to disciple to spiritual maturity those who have chosen to enter the fellowship of believers.

We said earlier that a mature community is both sovereign and self-sufficient as it carries out this dual mandate. Indicators of this maturity include:

- Provide its own financial resources sufficient to meet its members' needs and support Great Commission work without depending on outside help.
- Maintain social health by caring for those who cannot care for themselves, and teaching the values of the group including key spiritual disciplines.
- Govern its affairs equitably, including resolving disputes without a secular legal system that may not share the community's values.

This chapter explores self-governance as one of the indicators of maturity. Self-governance includes being able both to make decisions, and to hold members accountable to those decisions - while continually remaining united in mission and heart. Learning to do so is a key milestone on the pathway to maturity for every group.

Governance

Governance requires that a community answer a variety of important questions about itself:

- What standards must be met to join
- Which behaviors are and are not tolerated
- The group purpose and how that purpose should be carried out
- How decisions are made
- How to be economically self-sufficient and allocate available resources
- Any limits on member activity when not with the community

The answers will vary since every group has a unique God-given calling and cultural context. Nevertheless, all norms must be tested against the Biblical standard. In modern parlance these may be called the 'bylaws' of the group.

[For two examples of ancient community order in the Jewish and Christian contexts see:]
[*Charter of a Jewish Sectarian Association*; Dead Sea Scrolls; 1QS, 4Q255-264a, 5Q11]
[*The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, Saint Benedict of Nursia]

Leadership

In the prior chapter we saw that leadership in the *ekklesia* is based on spiritual authority which is a bottom-up rather than top-down calling. Ideal governance is a function of mutual accountability rather than command and control. Leaders generally serve as mentors and

facilitators, only occasionally resorting to exercise of political power to decide intractable issues. Every member has a role in maintaining proper community order, and true leadership understands this and calls it out.

Mutual accountability among members of a community must be based on a shared set of values - codified if necessary into a protocol for running the community. This sets clear expectations which both facilitates decision-making and clarifies appropriate behavior. The clearer the values and expectations, the less political power need be exerted by leaders.

God's ideal model of governance is displayed in the story of Moses, whose primary roles were Prophet and Judge. He used the Ten Commandments as the foundation for making judicial decisions when issues came up among the people. His various decisions, inspired by God, were codified into the legal system contained in *Torah*. The laws of *Torah* probably also benefited from prior legal systems such as the Code of Hammurabi.

Torah defined the social order among the Hebrews in the Sinai. It remained the organizing manifesto for the nation that judges and rabbis would continue to use even as it was enhanced and clarified during the Babylonian dispersion. It remains relevant in the latter days. [Jeremiah 33:17-18]

In the Jerusalem community of Jesus' followers leadership is evidenced in two contexts. First, the apostles decided that their highest value was in seeking the Lord's will for the people through prayer and teaching. [Acts 6:2-4] Second, the apostles served in the role of a council of judges as exemplified when addressing the question of ministry to the Gentiles. Note that consensus was the basis for this decision.

The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter...Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas...
[Acts 15:6,22]

The size of a community dictates the structure of leadership in practical ways. The larger the membership, the more roles need to be divided. The Hebrew nation was far larger than Moses was able to serve as judge on his own, so on the advice of his father-in-law he set up a judicial organization. Moses delegated simple issues to his appointees, and used his time to seek God's decision on the more complex issues that did not have a clear precedent. [Exodus 18:25-26]

There are lots of models for governance ranging from fully democratic to monarchical. Several are described below.

1. Community members collectively make all decisions directly.
2. Community appoints counselors to make advisory decisions that all members ratify.
3. Community appoints trusted elders to make decisions on behalf of the community.
4. Community appoints a single leader who makes unilateral decisions (hopefully after obtaining appropriate counsel).

As a community moves from shared to delegated governance, it is less and less necessary for each member to seek Jesus directly in all things. Members tend to become dependent on a professional cadre of ‘anointed’ leaders.

The alternative to this institutional progression is for a growing community to subdivide when and where it makes sense into multiple smaller groups that can preserve their democratic essence. The separated groups remain in fellowship with each other and cooperate where it makes sense. But self-governance then remains a local affair that keeps Jesus firmly at everybody’s head.

Decisions

The decision-making process itself can take any of several forms including majority vote, debate until consensus, drawing of lots, placing a fleece, physical contest between champions, and so on. It is an important matter of governance to decide what method(s) best fit community culture and decision context so that all members remain honored in the process.

Of overriding importance is the intentional submission to Jesus’ will as expressed by Holy Spirit through his people. Whatever method is used, the community should ask Jesus to express his opinion on the issue so the group takes action with wisdom and God’s favor. This requires collective time together, quiet listening to the voice of Holy Spirit, and discussion of what is heard. Themes emerge that guide decision-making.

As a caution, there is a fine line between seeking prophetic insight and divination. The former specifically asks Jesus to speak to his people. The latter uses known techniques of witchcraft that are empowered by terrestrial spirits. Guarding against false voices is one of the important applications of the spiritual gift of discerning spirits. [1 Corinthians 12:10] [John 10:27]

Unity

Self-governance requires that a community remain united regardless of specific decisions that it makes. But what does this mean for a group composed of persons whom God intentionally made to be unique? It is natural that different worldviews, life experiences, and spiritual gifts can lead to different opinions about the group’s mission. The larger the group the more pronounced the differences are likely to be.

The answer is that the Lord is seeking a oneness of heart for him and for one another; not necessarily a unity of mind or even revelation around specific issues. This might make consensus decisions about taking action more difficult, but the process of collectively seeking the Lord’s will ensures that the full counsel of God is heard. If we are listening to Holy Spirit while loving and preferring one another, then a common heart will be maintained throughout the discernment and decision process. This is a fundamental skill that God expects all his kingdom people to master. [2 Chronicles 30:12]

The blessings proclaimed from Mount Gerizim over the Hebrews entering the covenantal land of Canaan were collective. [Deut.28] They applied to the nation if it remained faithful as one to the

commandments given them. They were to be holy ('set apart') in comparison with the nations around them. If the nation broke covenant with its God, He was forced by his own legal agreement to invoke the curses of Mount Ebal. [Deut. 27] When the people are in unity, God commands that his blessing be released on them. [Psalm 133]

Oneness of heart in the *ekklesia* was a major theme for the writers of the New Testament as well. [John 17:20] [Acts 2:1] [Romans 15:5] [Ephesians 4:1-6] [Colossians 3:12] [1 Peter 3:8] [John 13:34-35] First, it is the natural outworking of a shared love that flows from the Father through Yeshua to His body. Second, Holy Spirit manifests different aspects of the Godhead in each person, and we cannot receive all of Him without honoring His collective expression. There are no super-apostles who have it all. Third, unity conveys both power in advance and protection when attacked. The lone ranger is an easy target. Fourth, Yeshua's followers each have different gifts that are needed collectively. One brings healing, another provision, a third revelation.

The first century *ekklesia* had only one admission criteria. That was faith in Jesus as God's saving Messiah, worked out in a lifestyle that showed the fruit of that faith. It was fine to have differing views on theology and ministry because it was universally accepted that nobody understood the fullness of the triune Godhead mystery. Ethnicity and prior spiritual heritage were unimportant. It did not matter if the believer lived in Rome or Jerusalem. There was one faith, one Messiah, and one family. [Mark 9:38-40]

Too often Jesus' family divides itself over minor theological and doctrinal issues. It is important to keep these in perspective. Confession for the remission of sins is sacred. Whether water baptism is done by dunking, sprinkling, or anointing with oil is not. Believing that Jesus is God's Messiah and vice-regent is sacred. A perfected theological understanding of the Triune mystery is not. Loving a sinner unconditionally as God does is sacred. Owning religious icons is not. Obeying Holy Spirit is sacred. Priestly celibacy is not.

We therefore need to err on the side of inclusion and leave most differences for Father to settle. If Holy Spirit is affirming a person through demonstrably holy character and signs following, then we accept our brethren. It is important to remember that each follower of Yeshua is:

- uniquely designed and gifted to carry a portion of His presence
- uniquely taught and disciplined
- uniquely granted revelation
- uniquely journeyed through formative experiences

Of course, embracing unity does not mean embracing demonstrably unholy character. If Holy Spirit is revealing chronic sin that blocks the group covenantal blessing, then it needs to be addressed by those with the individual maturity to discern and judge.

There is a paradox in being set apart in holiness while simultaneously being inclusive in unity. Jesus broke multiple religious taboos demonstrating this to his disciples. He accepted anyone who came to him with an earnest heart regardless of background. He saw people as God saw them, no matter how unlikely they might appear in the natural. He could see their latent gifts and callings and bring them forth. Peter was a rough fisherman who became a breakthrough evangelist. Zacchaeus had stolen from people to build wealth, which he later used to support the

growing fellowship. The Samaritan woman whom Jesus met at the well was living a sinful life yet catalyzed a messianic revival in her town. The established religious order could not reconcile the paradox, and Jesus criticized them harshly for it.

There are some Christians and their fellowships that choose to define themselves by what they are against, rather than what they are for, thus intentionally separating themselves from the rest. They risk missing out on that part of God's blessing that is collective. There are also some who seek unity but are so steeped in on-going sin that even the Apostle Paul would cast them out of the fellowship until they are convicted to change. [1 Cor. 5:4-5] Yet even in discipline, a big part of unity is forgiving offense as many times as the sinner honestly seeks forgiveness and submits to correction. [Matthew 18:21-22] Bitterness, jealousy, legalism, and unforgiveness have no place in any family. [Ephesians 4:30-32] These things lift God's blessing off his people and block the free flow of Holy Spirit until we collectively submit to his correction.

Specific Issues in Governance

There are innumerable specific issues that may come up that may require an intervention of community governance. Several are highlighted by the apostles in their letters to the various assemblies of believers.

- Listening to and obeying 'false' teaching
- Covenant-breaking sin within the community
- Tolerating sin in the community
- Continuing idolatry
- Corrupt leadership and 'false' apostles
- Lack of repentance when taking communion
- Discrimination between Jewish and Hellenistic believers
- Misuse of spiritual gifts
- Shirking from spiritual opposition
- Laziness resulting from comfort

One also encounters ethical questions. For example, what laws of *Torah* apply to believers in a foreign setting (eg., circumcision of Gentiles)? Should the *ekklesia* serve in the armed forces to protect the country of which the community is a part (eg., wars against the Amalekites), or participate in a revolutionary struggle against a government that is clearly corrupt or mandates ungodly obedience (eg., Maccabean revolt). If the community is unable to provide for the needs of its members, then Jesus must approve crimes of theft (an accepted doctrine the author has heard in some African churches).

The community must address such issues as a group, with a mix of wise leadership and prophetic insight that is grounded in Biblical principle. Self-governance does not practice avoidance.

Managing Disputes

The original leaders of God's Hebrew people were known as 'Judges'. Moses was the prototypical leader of this type who decided issues among the people and who sought the Lord's

direct counsel when additional wisdom was needed. We are told that Moses wore himself out addressing a continuous stream of disagreements among the people, something amazing to contemplate as the nation was living in the shadow of God's very manifest presence. [Exodus 18:13-18]

Human nature never changes, and we are also told that after Messiah returns to rule as King over the earth, one of his tasks will be to continue deciding disputes on behalf of the people. [Isaiah 2:3-4]

The apostle Paul was highly critical of his Corinthian disciples taking their disagreements to the civil courts, and thus entrusting decisions impacting Christians to secular authorities interpreting secular law and precedent. He could not understand how God's people having spiritual authority to judge the world would put themselves willingly at the world's mercy. [1 Corinthians 6:1-6]

This criticism is laid at our feet even today, as Christians continue to litigate against one another in civil courts. We are a people whose eternal destiny [Rev 20:11-15] and works as believers [2 Cor. 5:10] will be decided by a heavenly judge in accordance with the eternal values in *Torah*. How then can we hold our brethren in the *ekklesia* to a different standard?

The *Torah's* many teachings reflect underlying principles that emerged from decisions made by the Hebrew Judges under God's delegated authority. Their wisdom provides us today with sufficient examples to decide issues among ourselves when we use a values-based approach - rather than a strict legal code. Our failure today is having lost the art of interpreting *Torah* and applying it to the modern social context. It is the result of having become so assimilated into world culture.

Dispute resolution should always begin with direct communication between the aggrieved parties, and only escalate to a third party if no possibility of reconciliation exists. It is a real failure of relationship if it ever gets to that point. Nevertheless, parties should then proceed to mediation with a competent intermediary. If this fails as well, then the parties proceed to binding arbitration. This is proper protocol.

There are individuals in the *ekklesia* who have been granted the role of spiritual rabbi and judge. These persons conduct mediation and binding arbitration in the same way that Moses did for the Hebrews. He or she must be a follower of Jesus well versed in the values of *Torah*. He should be someone that hears from Holy Spirit and walks in His wisdom. He should be trusted widely in the assembly and never exceed his authority. There are not many that can fill these shoes, and the spiritual accountability is high for those that do.

Decisions should reflect God's absolute justice, tempered by His grace and forgiveness. Holy Spirit must be given His role for revelation, and the decision should acknowledge that Jesus is both the true advocate and judge in the matter. Any restitution should be proportionate to the wrong. The objective is to settle the issue without creating bitterness, unforgiveness, or continuing strife. When God judges among the people his decisions are never punitive. They are always designed to redeem and reconcile.

The secular courts are the only venue for Christians to take disputes they cannot resolve with their secular neighbors. One must be aware, however, that justice is conducted very differently there, is frequently corrupted, very expensive, and often unpredictable. Human courts are also one of those institutions in which Jesus' spiritual adversary has free reign, and it is his purpose to chain God's people whenever possible. One must use real wisdom before playing in that sandbox.

Anecdotally, one out of three people in the world will take advantage of you if they can, sometimes causing great hurt in the process. Some have so little empathy they are literally oblivious to the damage they leave in their wake. Believers in the *ekklesia* must be prudent in all their affairs, but there is a lifestyle choice to be made. Do you live life defending against the one that will offend you, or do you live with vigor for the other two whom you can bless?

Addressing Sin

There is a Biblical method for addressing sin in the community that remains applicable to the latter day *ekklesia*. It is not well understood in the present church dispensation and so bears some explanation.

If your brother sins go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.

[Matthew 18:15-20]

The basic principle is clear; address the situation privately so as not to bring unnecessary embarrassment to the offender. If that is not successful, address him again along with two or three witnesses. If that fails, then bring the offender before the full community. If the offender still refuses to live by the Biblical values of the community, he is removed.

Jesus is pointing out that chronic, unrepented violation of the Ten Commandments and related laws in the midst of the community is a big deal. It causes the assembly to violate its covenant of righteousness with God, and unless it is addressed, the community becomes complicit in the offense. This in turn blocks God's blessing and brings instead his communal judgment. The community for its own benefit has an obligation to keep itself clean.

Matthew has Jesus quoting Deuteronomy 19:15 in the passage above to emphasize the point that this is a judicial proceeding requiring that facts be confirmed by more than one witness. A community member with the role of Judge hears the charge and thoroughly considers the

testimony of the witnesses. At first it is an advisory opinion that hopefully inspires a change in behavior. If it does not, a formal decision is rendered in the presence of the full community.

But why does Jesus mention binding and loosing, and promise his presence in the gathering? Recall him saying that the *ekklesia* has the power to forgive sin or not. [John 20:23] He is reminding us that the community has been delegated governmental authority to self-manage its affairs. But he is also pointing out that God is a party to any proceeding that judges sin that might violate his covenants with his people. Jesus is present in our midst as God's vice-regent giving wisdom to the judge who is deciding the case in his name.

In addition to removal from the community, there is another potential consequence for the offender. Consider the following from Paul's instructions to the Corinthian assembly.

In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

[1 Corinthians 5:4-5]

What is the manifestation of this judgment? We get a hint from the story Jesus told of a slave who would not do right by his peer. The master puts him in debtors prison where he is tortured. [Matthew 18:23-35] Jesus is warning us that unforgiveness and injustice are met by the Lord himself sending an angel or demon of torture to the offender. Needless to say, no deliverance ministry removes this spirit without formal repentance.

On the other hand, if the person is willing to repent, despite chronic backsliding into sin, God is faithful to forgive and honor every honest turning back to righteousness. It then becomes the duty of the community to bear up its weaker brother until he attains his place as an overcomer.

Praise and Prayer

Fellowship with Jesus

Nothing marks the *ekklesia* more than its relationship with Jesus. It is vibrant and ever-changing as Jesus manifests his presence among and through his people. This experience happens at both the individual and collective levels, so praise and prayer are also both individual and collective.

Much has been written about our personal faith walk and the discipline of prayer. The reader is referred to other sources on this topic. This chapter explores how the first century *ekklesia* understood praise and prayer in a community context, and how it is being renewed and expanded for us in these latter days.

Tabernacle worship

Worship has many purposes before God, among which are to celebrate his presence among his people, honor him for who he is, give him thanks for his covenantal faithfulness, and help us to personally draw closer to him in submission and reverence.

Worship is distinctly different than repentance or intercession. King David appointed the tabernacle on Mount Zion for celebration and the altar in Gibeon for sacrifice. This is significant because the Ark of the Covenant representing God's presence was in the tabernacle. [1 Chronicles 16] The celebration of God's presence was truly festive, and came to be known as 'Davidic Worship'. It included music, dance, singing, percussion, and various expressions of the arts. [Psalm 150]

God's presence in David's tabernacle foreshadowed Holy Spirit in the tabernacle of Jesus' followers. Jesus rejoices when he is invited to arise and dance with us through the day. He is a Messiah who loves us and wants us to love him as well. He does not want his beloved groveling before him; he wants them to enjoy time with him amidst thanksgiving and praise.

Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name.

[Psalm 100:4]

The *ekklesia* of the first century rejoiced to celebrate Jesus, and Holy Spirit was given free rein to express that joy throughout the assembly. [Ephesians 5:18-19] There was lots of singing in both natural and spiritual tongues, and Jewish followers of Jesus continued to celebrate the Biblical festivals and meet in the temple. [Acts 2:46,3:1,5:42]

This is the heritage of the latter day *ekklesia* as well. Jesus still loves to be in the midst of community celebration, expressing his love for us as much as we do for him. He has placed his creative essence in us and enjoys using the gifts he has given us to dance, paint, sing, and chant.

According to the prophet Zechariah, the artisans who proclaim God's glory with their creative expression are a triumphant reserve that will be released with governmental impact in the latter days. [Zechariah 1:21]

Likewise the psalmist proclaims the power of high praise to release God's justice in the earth. [Psalm 149:6-9]

Revelation and application

God through Holy Spirit has always spoken to his people, and praying as a group yields revelation that individual contemplation does not. Different prophetic pieces of the same message come forth, and the full set of gifts in the group can sift and discern on them. The sifted pieces end up getting woven into a revelatory quilt that gives everything perspective and context. It is another example of Jesus orchestrating things in perfect order, and demonstrating that his presence in every person is needed for the fullness of the music to be heard.

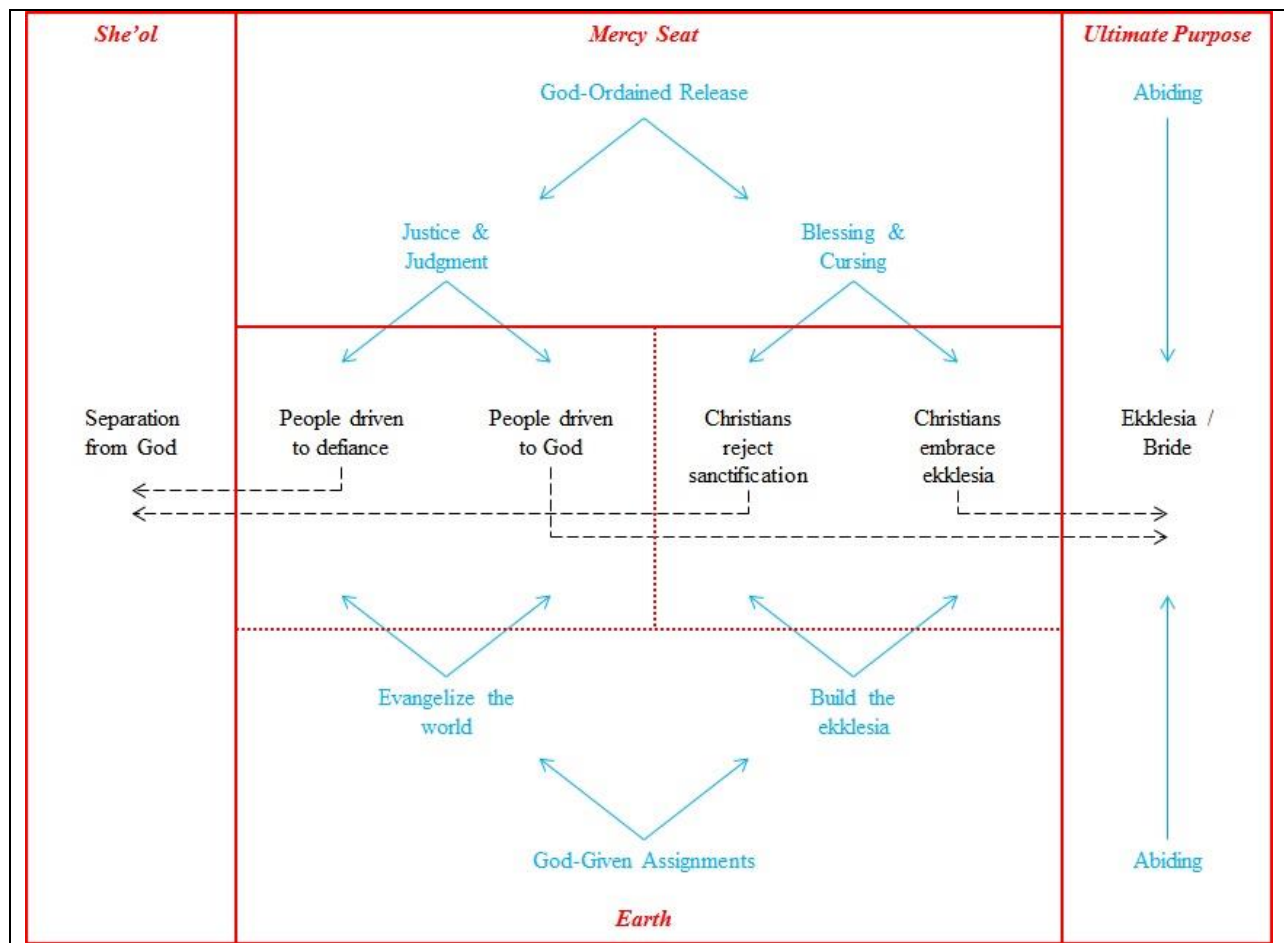
Mature prayer groups spend significant intentional time, hours if need be, listening quietly and giving place to Holy Spirit. Sometimes the group comes with an agenda seeking wisdom. Sometimes it gathers just to hear what is on God's heart. Whichever, Jesus loves dancing with his people in a two-way conversation.

Sometimes God calls people into heaven or otherwise gives visions of heavenly things. Ezekiel and John had such experiences, seeing symbolic pictures and receiving veiled explanations. God also gives very practical instruction to those he appoints to order things in the earthly realm, including documenting, teaching, and serving his people. Scribal preparation of the *Tanakh* and rabbinic preparation of the *Talmud* are two such examples.

The chart below illustrates revelation given from the Mercy Seat being released through prophetic intercession into the earth. It manifests for Kingdom people as blessings and curses. The rest of the world sees it as justice and judgment. It also shows God giving practical guidance in the earthly realm for the fulfillment of the *ekklesia*'s dual mandate to evangelize and disciple the world, and care for the community of believers.

The two meet in the middle where people are given a choice to know God and be obedient to his word, or to reject him and go their own way. This leads to two very different outcomes; the place of *ekklesia* which is the eternal expression of fellowship with God, and the place of *she'ol* where Jesus said there would be utter darkness and separation from God. [Matthew 8:11-12]
[Luke 13:28]

A crucial skill for the latter days will be hearing directly from Jesus and being absolutely obedient when he gives instruction. The renewal of the *ekklesia* will be matched by the enlargement of a competing spiritual government that will bring great deception and counterfeit. One manifestation of this today can be seen in parts of Islam which demand adherence to formal sharia law, rejects and even persecutes those who do not share its beliefs, and speaks in the name of God through the imams. Those who do not know the sound of Jesus' voice will find the call of the *adhan*, the language of tantric love, or the power of witchcraft to be appealing alternatives.



In the latter days, deception will be so intense that we will no longer be able to trust what we have understood in the past to be our delegated authority. The price of acting in presumption will be high. We may not even be able to trust another believer just because Holy Spirit is in him. The story of the two prophets should be a caution to us in this regard. [1 Kings 13] Every ministry activity will require first asking Jesus his will and then carrying it out in obedience no matter what other indicators there are in our natural world. It will require the fellowship and broad gifting of the *ekklesia* operating in proper order for us to meet this standard.

Intercession

The *ekklesia* is a praying machine, both individually and collectively. There are several types of prayer that can be used depending on the wisdom a person has about the prayer target.

- Supplication – Simple request that God address an issue
- Command – Bind or loose that which has been revealed as already completed
- Judicial petition – Legislate an issue before the throne of justice using *Torah*
- Tongues – Holy Spirit prays perfectly in ways unknown to the believer
- Praise and worship – Invites God into a situation

Any of these may be accompanied by a ‘heaviness’ that the believer can feel pressing on his or her spirit. That burden remains until the prayer assignment ends; sometimes minutes and sometimes weeks. This is intercession, and an intercessor is one who accepts the assignment and carries it through until the victory is won. This requires a sacrificial willingness to ‘stand in the gap’ no matter the personal cost. [Ezekiel 22:30] It is a sacrifice that moves God’s hand to action in situations when he wants to partner with his people to bring his kingdom to earth.

- It is when active faith dares to believe God to the point of action that something has to happen. [Kathryn Kuhlman]
- Prayer is not preparation for the greater work. Prayer IS the greater work. [Oswald Chambers]
- History belongs to the intercessors. [Walter Wink]

Spiritual warfare

No discussion of prayer would be complete without addressing demonic powers and terrestrial spirits. Like angels, these are vastly more powerful than humans and many could kill us in an instant – but for limits that God himself has ordained. [Job 1:9-12] Despite their power, angels (and demons) were designed at least in part to serve man. And in one of God’s twists of design will one day be judged by the served for their service. [1 Corinthians 6:3]

Demons are understood to be angels who, having been in God’s presence, still freely chose to exalt themselves and rebel against his will. For them there is no recourse to repentance. They are unclean and utterly evil, despite their ability to take earthly and spiritually beautiful forms.

Some people invite them to not only take up residence, but also possess them from time to time in ecstatic manifestations. They do coexist with Holy Spirit inside some followers of Jesus, but this is not a comfortable place for them. More often they seem to attach to a person without gaining entry. They both hear and speak to our thoughts, and their primary influence over most of us is to suggest behaviors that cause us to break covenant with God and incur his judgment. They seem especially skilled at inciting interpersonal offenses and discouraging forgiveness. [2 Corinthians 2:10-11] There is some truth to the old adage that ‘the devil made me do it’, but that is not an excuse worthy of a follower of Jesus.

Jesus’ response to demons is instructive. He did not look for them. He did not dethrone territorial principalities. He frequently said nothing to them during a manifestation. Rather, he just tossed them out when they popped up in the context of his doing some other ministry. Holy Spirit has absolute authority to remove evil spirits in the earthly realm. Jesus was so full of the Spirit that his mere presence in a place would cause demons to manifest, and with a word they were forced to obey.

Our techniques of deliverance and exorcism have departed from the ideal. Some practitioners beat on spirits by the hour until one party or the other gives up. Jesus had no problem with demons because he carried the manifest presence of God and they literally ran from him. This is the power that Jesus’ disciples carried in the first century *ekklesia*. They were not in the least

intimidated because Holy Spirit in them was completely free to clean house through them. The latter day *ekklesia* carry the same presence of God wherever they go, and in ever increasing measure as the days get spiritually darker.

Just because Jesus was not recorded as doing something does not mean we are prohibited from doing it today if Holy Spirit so instructs. If Jesus wants to remove a hindering spirit of any rank, then we should use our judicial authority to bind or loose whatever he has approved. But such spiritual warfare takes wisdom, discernment, and maturity. A prayer warrior who is presumptive in taking on a powerful spirit without Jesus' leading will face severe consequences in these latter days of absolute obedience.

Tongues

A word on tongues is appropriate here. Some teach that there is a distinction between a person's personal 'prayer language', and the 'gift of tongues' that is intended for public interpretation. The manifestation of both is similar. This author agrees that every believer appears to have a spiritual 'prayer language', and that those who do not readily receive it were in some way taught that they should not or could not. Addressing this issue often reveals areas in which spiritual healing is required to set the person free from bondages.

Holy Spirit works most effectively when we learn to get our minds out of the way and let him do his job. Healing, prophecy, and other manifestations feel to the one ministering much as does speaking in one's prayer language. It is an important discipline to learn to yield our bodies and minds effortlessly to his use. The free flow of a person's prayer language seems to unlock the free flow of other supra-natural gifts.

A person's prayer language has specific functional uses. When we pray this way we allow Holy Spirit in us to speak directly to Jesus and the Father. It is always a perfect prayer because it is God speaking to himself. If for no other reason, we should spend extended time praying in the Spirit because it is a wonderful way to have fellowship with Jesus. When we don't know how to pray about an issue, we let Holy Spirit do it sovereignly. The apostle Paul wrote about fixing his mind on something and then letting Holy Spirit pray about it through him. [1 Corinthians 14:14-15]

Prayer language seems to facilitate hearing from God. We more accurately hear what he has stored up in the spirit realm for release into the earthly. It is the key to binding and loosing; intercessors hear what is authorized, appropriate it, and release its manifestation. This is done both individually and corporately. Group intercession is remarkably powerful.

Finally, many fix their minds on Jesus and sing to him in their prayer language as a form of praise and worship. The same Spirit that animates the speaking also gives the music. This is extraordinarily beautiful to hear when Holy Spirit weaves the voices together into an ensemble, whether accompanied by musical instruments or sung a cappella (as was early Jewish and Christian music).

The gift of tongues should only be used for public declaration when another person is operating in the gift of interpretation. Of course, Holy Spirit may also choose to speak directly in common language via the gift of knowledge or prophecy. These are all for group edification, should be tested with discernment, and are central parts of community life.

Connections

Our study thus far has concerned itself with the proper operation of a single, local fellowship of believers in Jesus as Messiah. We now look at two further questions central to the definition of *ekklesia* as the global representation of Jesus in the earth.

1. How are local communities integrated into regional fellowships and a single global body?
2. How should the *ekklesia* relate to similar Kingdom communities that do not follow Jesus?

Ekklesia Integration

Covenanted fellowship is designed to be close-knit and local. It exists in geographic proximity because travel imposes a practical limit on regular meeting. Holy Spirit can guide smaller fellowships prophetically, and relationship makes possible effective self-governance. It is at this level that most discipleship is done, members in need are cared for, and we walk out our individual calling to make the world a better place.

But evangelizing a city or large rural area requires collaboration among local groups that can leverage collective resources, skills, spiritual gifts, cultural relationships, and location access. *Ekklesia* at the regional level is the strategic vehicle for carrying out the Great Commission and transforming the culture in an area.

The *ekklesia* also attains financial independence at the regional level. Only with a significant number of members in a variety of industries can it establish an economy of sufficient scale to control diversified supply chains, integrate value-added processing within the community, and produce in sufficient quantity to pursue mercantilist capital accumulation. Political access follows from significant economic presence, and both are foundational to impacting the rest of a region's culture and achieving some measure of community sovereignty.

[For insight into operation of the *ekklesia* economy see:]

[Coke, James. *Ekklesia Economy*. 2015. www.ekklesia-economy.com]

Regional networks of believers also have direct, if somewhat less covenanted, relationships with other regional networks at the national and global level. The *ekklesia* is not bounded by arbitrary political borders, although they impose very real limitations on travel, capital movement, and trade. Networks of networks can take literally any form, sometimes temporary and sometimes very long-term as opportunities dictate.

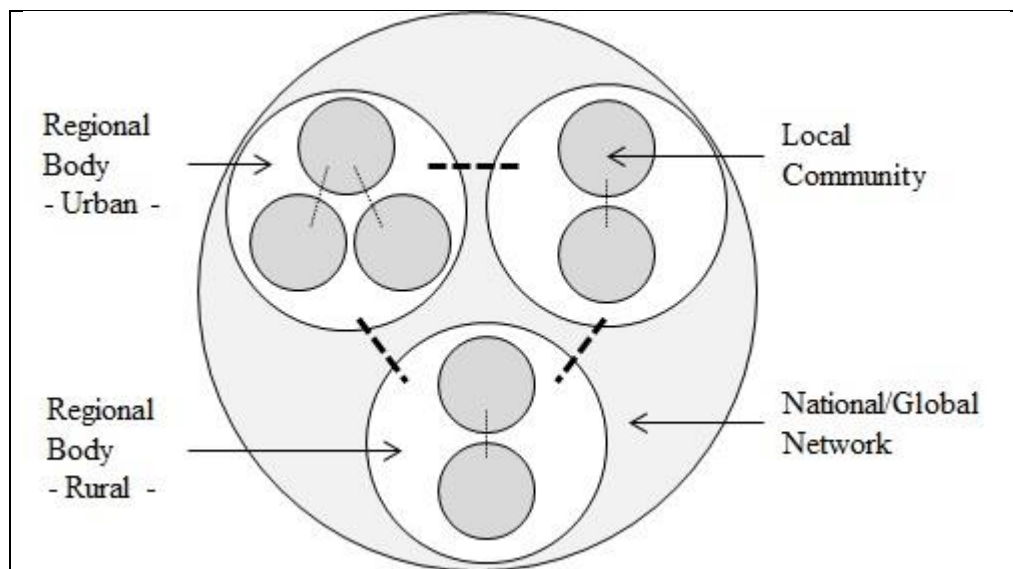
These global relationships become important for conducting business, sourcing key evangelistic and discipleship gifts, and providing mutual support in large-scale crisis. In this post-modern age, the needs of any local community should be able to readily draw upon the resources of the entire global fellowship in Jesus.

The Jewish culture provides a real-world model. During the Babylonian exile, Jews learned to be a distinctive people while living outside their homeland. They established local communities along all the major trading routes that were centered on the local synagogue. Updated *Torah*

teachings were distributed to all these communities, ensuring everyone everywhere remained connected with the national covenant. So important was trust as a value in this culture that Hebrew merchants operating along the Silk Road could have a letter of credit honored in France that was written a year prior in China. Virtually anywhere a Jew traveled he found a local community of his people that would accept him as family. The Jews established the first truly global society based on shared cultural connections among local communities. And they figured it out two thousand, five hundred years before modern travel and communications. The people had no choice but to build on their national covenant or risk disappearing as an *ethnos*.

The present day *ekklesia* does not face the same sort of crisis of survival, but it is failing to properly share and allocate resources internally. A Colombian Pentecostal might be distinctly uncomfortable showing up in a Scandinavian Lutheran church, and it is almost certain that collateral would be required by believers in Dubai before extending a loan to a merchant in Nigeria. Perhaps worse, there is no centralized infrastructure that inventories spiritual and natural gifts and resources in Jesus' Kingdom. Clearly we have a lot of work to do.

The following diagram summarizes this discussion of relationships.



Local communities maintain relationship with each other so they can combine efforts as needed to impact their region, whether urban or rural. These regional relationships in turn have implicit connection with all other regions that become explicit when needed. Jesus is all about relational love. This is his model for the *ekklesia*.

Kingdom Integration

What of relationship with other God-fearing communities? For example, how should the *ekklesia* relate to a local synagogue of Jews or a band of covenanted First Nations people?

The answer is highly differential, although dependent on one overriding determinant. The *ekklesia* love God and obey the leading of Holy Spirit. Anyone Holy Spirit wants to engage becomes a priority for Jesus' followers.

It need hardly be said that practicing Jews are the closest brethren the *ekklesia* have. They have similar covenants, honor the same *Tanakh* scriptures, share the same mission to make the world a better place, and model true family. Jesus was a Jewish man who pointed everyone within shouting distance back to YHWH. The first century Jerusalem congregation of his followers all continued to live within the Jewish covenant. Messianic followers of Jesus today still keep the festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Tabernacles. There is absolutely no reason that God-fearers in a region should not be able to fellowship freely in trusted relationship, even if they do not all share the same Great Commission calling.

Similarly, if a local community of First Nations people is honoring Creator and he is moving among them with healings and transformed hearts, then they are a wonderful partner for the local *ekklesia* to engage. By definition they will always have spiritual authority in the land, something most of the rest of us have failed to understand. The groups can learn much from one another, and their shared love of God also provides the foundation for a strong trusted relationship.

Once trust and love are in place, the relationship can extend to any form of commercial arrangement, joint social care, or a host of other types of community sharing. The broader the sharing, the more impact God-fearers with similar values can have on the transformation of regional culture.

Part II – Application

Community Models

In the first part we explored the attributes of a mature community of believers in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. We discovered that the *ekklesia* is founded on the Hebraic covenant, that an important indicator of maturity is its ability to self-govern its affairs in love, and that it has a dual mandate to care for Jesus' family while discipling the world. We also note that the *ekklesia* takes a variety of forms in different geographies and among different people groups.

In Part II of the manuscript we will look at the implications of a network of mature, localized communities being the global expression of Jesus' Kingdom in the earth. Topics include:

- Are there models for *ekklesia* community arrangements?
- Is there a reliable approach to maturing new church plants into a self-sufficient community that can then replicate itself in unbelieving regions around itself?
- Are there best practices for carrying out the changes required by the maturity process?
- What lessons can we draw from the history of the church age that might help us avoid mistakes?
- How would a natural government apply the principles of Kingdom government to its legislative, judicial, and other affairs?

We begin with the first of these questions, which is foundational to the community's ability to address its twin mandates of caring for its own and fulfilling its Great Commission.

Characterizing Communities

As discussed earlier in this manuscript, all intentional communities have certain characteristics in common that impact how they organize their affairs and pursue their mission. In the case of sharing Christian communities, there are others that speak more to their tight relational structure. A more comprehensive list of characteristics might include the following:

- Membership – demographics
- Governance – decision-making and enforcement
- Shared activities - work, outreach, meals
- Shared diet – alcohol & tobacco use, meat/vegetarian/kosher cooking
- Social practices - education, healthcare, marriage
- Spiritual practices - worship style, role of Holy Spirit, scripture centered
- Land & housing – ownership/allocation, use
- Labor & finances - debt, shared work & reward & expenses
- Evangelism & discipleship – commitment to outreach

Implicit in this list are two ways of categorizing communities that appear to have the greatest structural impact. The first is the commitment of the group to evangelism and discipleship beyond the community in satisfaction of the Great Commission. The second is the group's preference to be either an association of independent and private families, or something more mutualist in the tradition of the great monasteries. We can visualize these two domains in the

following chart, the intersections of which contain several of the better known historical communities.

	Associative	Mutualist
Missional	Anabaptists/Mennonites Quakers	Moravians
Internal	Contemporary Western church	Hutterian Brethren Israeli Kibbutzniks (Jewish)

This categorization is of necessity generalized, and it hides the fact that there are many flavors of each community. Nevertheless, there is a pattern in which associations of independent families scattered among secular society tend to be more focused on evangelism, while communities with highly integrated shared living arrangements tend to be more focused on internal discipleship. There are also a wide variety of hybrid community models. We will briefly describe each of these as templates for organizing the latter day *ekklesia*.

Model 1 – Mutualist

Mutualist families or individuals are those who have covenanted with one another to share most aspects of practical living. They occupy common housing, eat most meals together, work common farms and businesses, and share both income and expenses. These communities typically provide most if not all of their own education, healthcare, and food. This is exemplified by the broadly emulated Israeli *kibbutzim*.

The group shares a common set of cultural norms and values that are based on adaptations of Biblical covenants. As such, they insulate themselves to the extent possible from general secular society so as not to compromise the purity of those values. The extreme example of such a community is the celibate monastic order that allows individuals to spend their lives in uninterrupted fellowship with Jesus.

Living together in close quarters over long periods of time is difficult, regardless of whether the community is Christian, Buddhist, or anything else. There are often hidden social issues, and the use of one's talents and interests is likely to be limited by the closed cultural context. Nevertheless, the whole point of such mutuality is to be a part of a spiritual discipline, and something does seem to be moved in the heavenlies by such prevailing fellowship.

Model 2 – Independent Association

The other extreme is typical of western Christendom. Believing families congregate for an hour or two each week to hear a common message, and spend the rest of their time pursuing independent ministry and family life. Most spiritual growth occurs outside the congregational setting, often in small group fellowship settings. Very little is shared beyond the customary financial tithe.

This model does not emphasize interpersonal covenant, although one can certainly have a very meaningful personal relationship with Jesus. There is little coordinated evangelistic outreach

since each person is expected to be an individual lighthouse of testimony and witness in his or her respective social circles.

Such independent association does lead to very healthy para-church ministry among those that feel a call to some aspect of evangelism or discipleship beyond the local congregation. The greatest missionary organizations have formed among people from many communities associating together regionally and globally to serve a targeted part of the world.

Model 3 – Hybrid

There are two types of hybrid community model. The first is a combination of the mutualist and associative. For example, members share common activities without sharing common living arrangements. They remain in close covenantal relationship while maintaining independent space. They may share some aspects of childhood education while maintaining differing theological approaches to obtaining professional healthcare.

In the second, members spend a season as part of a mutualist group that lives and works together. This affords them an intensive experience of living as did the first century Jerusalem fellowship of Jesus' disciples. After such a learning experience they go on to live independent lives in continuing association with the broader fellowship. They then apply what they learned as disciples to the evangelism of the world and replication of the fellowship in other places. It is common for young adults to live and learn communally, and then seek independence as part of marrying and having a family.

Choosing a Model

There are a variety of factors to consider when designing a new community and selecting among the various models and model hybrids that are possible. These include in no particular order:

- Number of individuals and families involved, and associated demographics
- Level of community maturity, type of mentoring needed, and independent versus group learning style
- Economic status of the community and ability of smallholders to be self-sufficient
- Cultural comfort with communal living arrangements and shared activity
- Availability and quality of education, healthcare, sanitation, and other govt services
- Need to remain anonymous in an environment of persecution
- Role of community living and activities in preparation for Great Commission work

Maturity Pathway

Is there a reliable approach to maturing new church plants into a self-sufficient community that can then replicate itself in unbelieving regions around itself?

Dividing truth and error

We made the point at the beginning that YHWH is the Creator God of all people everywhere. The unique cultural heritage of each people group requires that we see his character and personality through their eyes in a many-faceted quilt of revelation that defies standardized packaging. There is one God who is infinitely expressive.

The biggest mistake made during the church age by the well-meaning army of Christian evangelists was to impose the Roman church model on all indigenous peoples. It is hard enough to institutionalize Greek thinking among relational people without also trying to change their culture in the process. Just try to work the Christian ethic into a shame-based society. Yet this is exactly what the missionary movement has too often attempted. In the name of Jesus, children were forcibly taken from their families for reacculturation, colonial wars were fought against the ‘heathen’, and all other spiritual expression swept away by the one Pauline ‘truth’. The gospel indeed has gone to the far corners of the earth, but at the price of bulldozing many of the unique ways Jesus wants to manifest himself throughout creation.

The classic church argument in favor of imposing Pauline doctrine on the world is that it is attested in the Bible. We trust the Bible as an authentic expression of God, and our spiritual discernment is often too weak to have confidence in finding authenticity beyond its boundary. So to err on the side of safety, Jesus must remain *sola scriptura*. If a manifestation of God did not appear a certain way in the Levant, or the writers of the New Testament elected not to detail it, then we cannot rely upon it. Every spiritual manifestation beyond the Bible is potentially a demonic deception.

To a point, such spiritual caution is warranted and there is syncretism in every culture. The western charismatic church has seen some very unholy manifestations of the supernatural in recent ‘outpourings’ like those in Toronto and Pensacola. Believers jerk, howl, and roll around in physical ways that closely resemble Hindu, animist, and Voodoo spiritism. Such signs are common in places like West Africa and India.

[See for example:]

[Strom, Andrew. *Kundalini Warning - Are False Spirits Invading the Church?* Revival School, 2010]

That being said, Jesus is no more Roman than Kazakh. He is *YHWH*’s vice-regent for all people and is pleased to meet with them whenever and however they gather to seek him. He shows his love for his people by meeting needs they cannot in their own strength, including healing sick animals, growing gigantic vegetables, and filling empty gasoline tanks. He dispatches angels to help us, sometimes in visible form, who are not above drinking fermented mare’s milk. He loves it when his people do traditional dances to the drum, call the assembly with a conch shell, and

sing in the Spirit with non-chromatic progressions. The point is that we must give Jesus permission to express himself in ways that are not found explicitly in the Bible.

This requires that the *ekklesia* mature in using the gift of spiritual discernment. Holy Spirit does overwhelm people in physical ways - for the purpose of sanctification and healing. He also performs signs to confirm the preached word – when it is consistent with Jesus’ message of repentance. The Kingdom of God is to be enjoyed - but it is a holy Kingdom, not a circus. It is Jesus himself that is manifesting in the *ekklesia* for the express purpose of turning the world’s gaze back to *YHWH*. Whenever we observe spiritual activity that distracts us from God, we should suspect that we are dealing with lying and deceiving spirits. It is doubtful Jesus would be showing himself through his people by making them act like animals.

We have to remember that the apostles did not have a New Testament. They had to rely on their spiritual gifts to discern *YHWH*’s hand and to impart truth in foreign cultures. We must do the same when discipling new believers in regions dominated by other gods. Fortunately, recent missionary outreach has become more sensitive in this regard by training and supporting local evangelists who are native to the target society. They are far more adept at contextualizing the good news for their own people than are western missionaries imported from overseas at great cost and frequent frustration. They are also much more sensitive to allowing Jesus to manifest in culturally relevant ways while guarding against syncretistic error. This is a skilled art.

[See for example:]

[Finley, Bob. *Reformation in Foreign Missions*. Christian Aid Mission , 2005-2010]

[Yohannan, K.P. *Revolution in World Missions*. GFA Books. 1986-2004]

Maturity Pathway

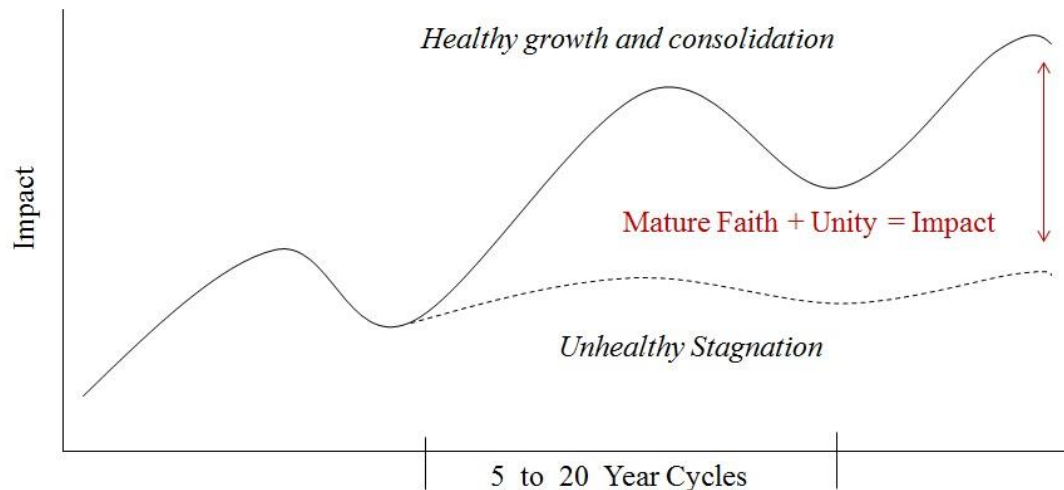
Localized evangelism and discipling begins wherever the people are spiritually, building on what is good and letting God himself prune that which will ultimately prove to be unfruitful. It is far more effective to preach the simple good news of the Kingdom manifest, than to attack what is perceived to be false local theology and doctrine. God is faithful to demonstrate to the people where the fruit is to be found. [1 Corinthians 2, 9:19-23]

Evangelists know that conversions to the faith follow an adoption curve similar to that experienced by new technologies. There are early adopters who are quick to receive the message, but mainstream adoption takes time to reach a tipping point. A certain threshold of believers in an area is needed to begin forming a strong community of Jesus followers.

The normal progression of community growth follows a pattern of increase and consolidation as Holy Spirit in turn evangelizes and disciples in waves. The community needs to build a new base commensurate with each greater level of cultural impact. Leadership must mature and pause for new vision if Holy Spirit is to truly lead. It takes consolidation to internalize the new wine needed for each new wave of growth and this should never be mistaken for Jesus changing his Great Commission priorities. This is a generational pattern.

The danger is slipping into stagnation. This can happen for two reasons. First, community growth is like a marathon in which there is great excitement and energy at the start and end, but only an enhanced awareness of being tired in the middle when those two landmarks are not visible. The community needs to learn collective faith during this time.

Second, the community itself has to change to carry the new wine. This requires ever greater commitment to covenant, love, and unity among the *ekklesia* in a city or a region. If the community in a region is unwilling to make such a regional commitment, Holy Spirit is seemingly held back from bringing a corresponding regional outpouring. It really is up to us.



All *ekklesia* communities progress on a path that begins with a few church plants and proceeds toward self-sufficiency in carrying out the great commission. The pathway differs somewhat depending on the starting point, but several common milestones must be passed to achieve maturity as we have defined it earlier in this manuscript.

Milestone 1: Individual fellowships in a region join together to become a community of faith.

Communities tend to form organically, although sometimes with outside facilitation. The community may be a few co-located households, a group of churches that agree to come together as one *ekklesia*, or believers in the marketplace who decide to come together for mutual support or economic cooperation. Members are progressing in their individual discipleship and finding common ground with others in the journey.

Milestone 2: The community enters into a group covenant with Jesus and with each other.

The Sinaitic covenant is a template for all people groups, containing as it does promises of God's collective blessings and curses centered on the Ten Commandments. The community must invite Jesus to be its leader, and agree to establish norms based on this covenant. Each member must learn to care for the others in mutual submission. It is at this point that most communities fail, and subsequent milestones are impossible to attain without this base of unity.

Milestone 3: The community effectively shares and self-manages.

The community intentionally seeks and receives from Holy Spirit a shared vision of its mission and calling. It learns through time and experience how to self-govern its affairs including maintaining both love and accountability. The community becomes an expression of Jesus in the earth, and makes decisions in obedience to his direction.

Milestone 4: The community is sovereign and missional.

The final indicator of maturity is self-sufficiency in discipling new members, economic independence from outside donors, and effective management of the *ekklesia*'s dual mandate. The community is in position to conduct outreach to new areas with a model for replicating itself in a culturally relevant way. The community begins to see itself a part of God's global Kingdom on earth, networking and covenanting with other such communities to share resources.

By choice or necessity, many communities travel the path to maturity on their own, but it is much easier if there is culturally sensitive mentoring to help them along. This mentoring assistance is in three parallel tracks addressing physical, spiritual, and economic needs. Attainment of a milestone indicates the community is ready for the associated assistance.

Track 1: Technical assistance

It is difficult to evangelize people who are starving, dying of disease from lack of sanitation or fresh water, or prohibiting women to appear in public. Community development addresses basic physical needs through basic education, introduction of agricultural and other best practices, and provision of relevant technologies. Self-governance and sustainability skills are an important part of the teaching curriculum.

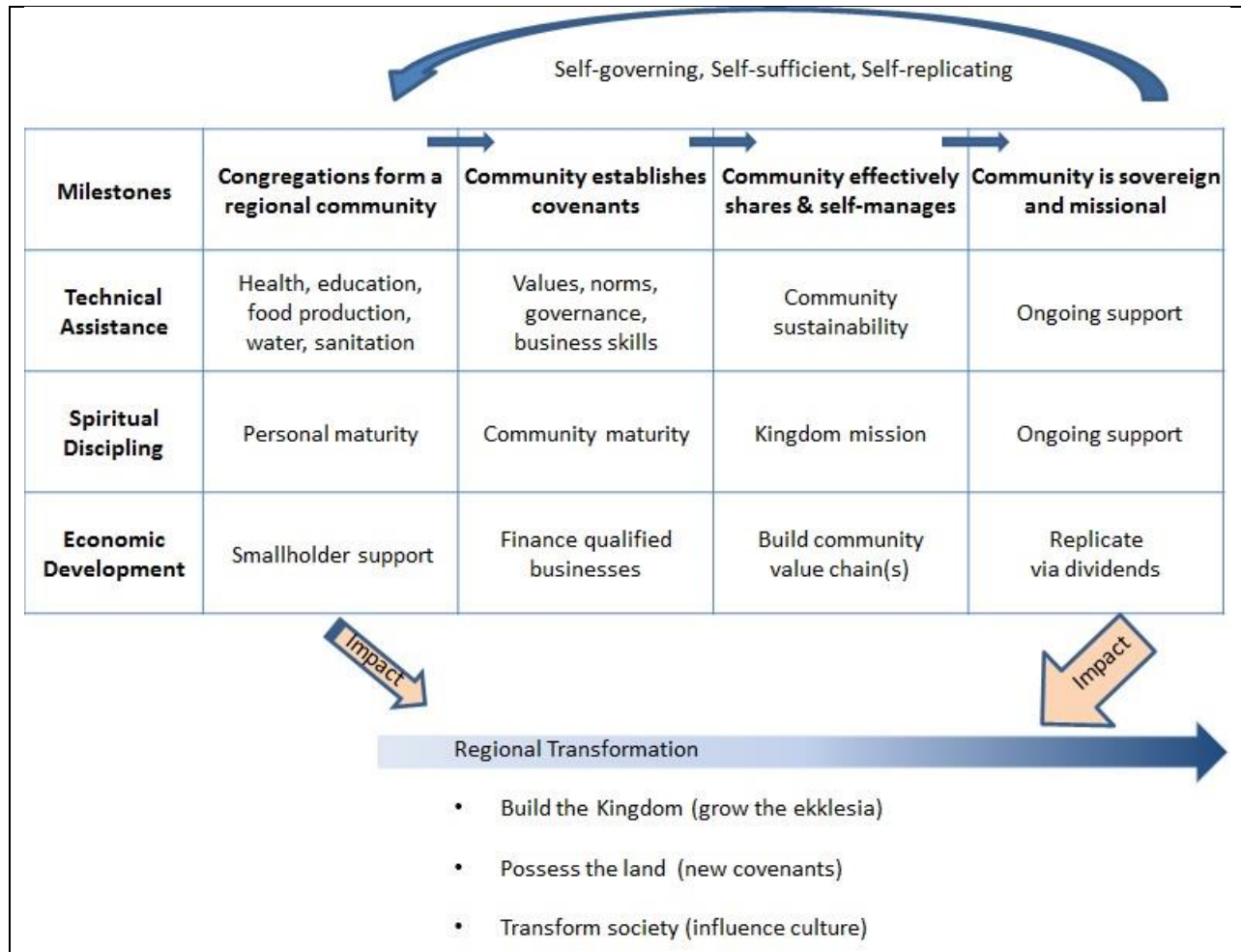
Track 2: Spiritual discipling

Individuals and their communities both need spiritual instruction and impartation. They should understand the fundamentals of covenant, and the various ministries of Holy Spirit. They must learn to hear from Jesus directly, and to discover how he wants to uniquely manifest his Kingdom presence in their culture and community. Mentors use wisdom and discernment when helping members learn the sound of the shepherd's voice.

Track 3: Economic development

Community sovereignty requires being economically self-sufficient. In the beginning this requires outside capital to support smallholders as they develop productive skills. Later one or more larger businesses are created to create significant jobs and profits. Finally, the community grows integrated value chains that create a full export-based micro-economy. Outside investment must be structured so return of and return on capital do not force the liquidation of the assets created for the community's benefit.

The relationship between the pathway milestones and types of assistance are summarized below:



At first glance this approach may seem designed for the rural parts of a third-world country. It is, however, equally applicable to the slums of Mumbai and the suburbs of middle-class America. In some ways, communities of believers in western countries with advanced infrastructure have a greater need for spiritual mentoring than do tribal clans in the developing world. The milestones remain the same, and are based on Jesus' fundamental emphasis on relationship. All else can be addressed if a community is self-governing, self-sufficient, and self-replicating.

We address the impact of *ekklesia* maturity on regional transformation in the next chapter.

Regional Transformation

Possessing the Land

One of the important aspects of governing as a unified *ekklesia* is taking responsibility for the spiritual climate in a region that derives in large part from the health of the land. Jesus' followers have authority to redeem defiled land, and by their action or inaction to determine whether blessings or curses are experienced by everyone living on it. [Proverbs 11:11]

When King Solomon consecrated the first temple built in the land of Judah, both he and God explicitly linked the behavior of the people to the health of the land. [2 Chron. 6:26-27, 7:13-14] When the prophet Joel foretold the pouring out of Holy Spirit at Pentecost, he described it as a sign that God's people and their land were both being redeemed because of God's zealous love for both. [Joel 2:18]

YHWH established man as the steward of his creation [Genesis 1:28], and assigned each people group to live in specific parts of it. [Deut. 32:8] This was sufficiently important that he also said he would curse people who did not respect those divine boundaries. [Deut. 19:14, 27:17] As a result of this design, it is the indigenous people groups who established and still maintain the deepest roots of covenant in their ancestral lands.

People make explicit and implicit covenants with the Creator based on their behavior and their relationship with him. When they are obedient to his instruction and honor him as their only God, he blesses them. If they spurn him they call down his righteous curses upon themselves. These blessings and curses are clearly enumerated in *Torah*. [Deut. 28] Many of the curses result from defilement of the land itself, which is caused by major violations of the Ten Commandments. [Genesis 4:10-11, Leviticus 18:25, Numbers 35:33-34, Revelation 22:3]

The spirit world is bound by its own version of *Torah* and God judges over this realm as well. Terrestrial and regional demonic spirits gain their legal right to power and position in the earth largely based on covenants people make with them. [Exodus 20:1-5, Deut. 5:17, 6:14, Joshua 23:16] If the ancient covenants are made with the true Creator, a healthy deposit exists to benefit later generations settled in that place. If the ancient covenants were made with demons, then they are likely to remain in possession of that territory; God's people will find a resistance to the gospel and chronic spiritual uncleanness in that place.

The *ekklesia* has been empowered to possess the land for Jesus, and in doing so to usher in societal transformation. But it must be done in proper order; and this begins with a unified, missional *ekklesia*.

Transformation Strategy

The chart below suggests a strategy for transforming a geographic region. It starts when the *ekklesia* has learned to govern well its own affairs in the natural, and is now ready to govern its territory in the spirit. Phases in regional transformation are listed progressively across the top

from left to right, along with indicators typical of each phase. The three domains of activity that are appropriate for each phase are listed below, including action in both the natural and spiritual.

This strategy was derived from the study of real-world communities in which the people in a territory made the decision to honor Jesus as their local King and experienced pronounced, observable change in their society as a result. It is, however, only intended to serve as a template and must be customized as Holy Spirit directs in each regional context.

[A variety of case studies have been documented by the Sentinel Group and others.]

[See for example: <http://www.sentinelgroup.org/>]

Phases	Beachhead - Ekklesia matures	Breakout - Prophetic revelation - Spiritual backlash - Power encounters - Observable change	Transformation - Many conversions - Hunger for discipling - Political, social, & economic change	Maintenance - Kingdom established - Peace in region - Impact spreads
Build the Kingdom	- United prayer, praise, & thanks - Commitment to land & community - Repentance to God - Person Reconciliation - Embracing all gifts - Missional vision	- Persistent prayer, praise, & thanks - Rally amidst spiritual opposition	- Persistent prayer, praise, & thanks	- Continual covenant
Possess the Land		- Spiritual mapping - Identificational repentance - Judicial intercession - Prophetic acts as led - Contend for the land	- Spiritual governance	- Continual vigilance
Transform Society		- Visible service - Financially support social projects	- Evangelism - Discipleship - Policy advocacy	- Continual advance

Phase 1: Beachhead

Like an invading army, the family of Jesus' followers must first establish a spiritual and natural beachhead in the target territory. It may be a newly evangelized area or a new season in which believers have determined to become the *ekklesia*. Its very presence means that Jesus is present as well among them, and that they have a cloak of his shepherding over them. They have addressed issues of relationship with one another, repented collectively for ways they have previously failed to walk together in Jesus' footsteps, share a commitment to evangelize and disciple their territory, and are allowing all the gifts of Holy Spirit to operate in proper order so they can hear, discern, and obey whatever Jesus requires. You can't spiritually govern without him.

Phase 2: Breakout

When you ask Jesus to lead, he does, and no mission is more important to him than saving those who do not yet know him. He gives prophetic insight into the spiritual dynamics of the territory and direction in what must be done to re-establish good covenant. This brings the *ekklesia* into direct conflict with established demonic powers and can be the most difficult phase for preserving unity. There will be opposition and power encounters, but the sanctified family is positioned to overcome when in obedience. Grace is also given for supernatural favor among unbelievers. This is the phase of generous service and giving that opens the eyes of the unbelievers to the goodness of Jesus and the wonder of a people that commune in love. Prayers are answered quickly and powerfully when aligned with Jesus' strategy.

Phase 3: Transformation

This is the phase for evangelism. The body of believers grows quickly and it becomes a challenge setting up proper mentoring and discipling for them. Leaders must accommodate the people's needs in a structured way while preserving the dynamism and organic nature of the *ekklesia*. Those in positions of secular institutional authority take note of the rapid social change and begin to engage with it. Breakthroughs are achieved in legislation and political governance. Jesus increasingly becomes a part of the fabric of governance in the natural as the *ekklesia* sets in place proper order in the spiritual.

Phase 4: Maintenance

Once the ground has been taken, the troops need to dig in and intentionally defend it. Communities that go through the transformation process and churches that experience a sovereign outpouring of Holy Spirit both assume that the blessing will continue forever. But when they get complacent and lose their focus on continuing the advance, the grace for further transformation is lost. If they become too satisfied, then they also begin to violate God's covenant and lose what has been gained. It takes discipline to maintain the edge once the ground has been occupied.

It is the common fate of the indolent to see their rights become a prey to the active. The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance; which condition if he break, servitude is at once the consequence of his crime and the punishment of his guilt.

[John Philpot Curran. *Election of Lord Mayor of Dublin*. Speech before the Privy Council. July 10, 1790]

There are three interconnected domains of activity that contribute to possession of the land and all must proceed in tandem. Note that the techniques listed within each are indicative and Jesus will direct his people to the most effective tools for the job in any setting. Instruction in their use is beyond the scope of this manuscript, but most have been well documented elsewhere.

[See for example:]

[Otis, George Jr. *Informed Intercession*. Renew Books, 1999]

[Dawson, John. *Taking Our Cities for God*. Creation House, 1989]

Domain 1: Build the Kingdom

These are the activities that underpin everything else because they are the *ekklesia* managing itself through the transformation process. All of the disciplines that were mastered to achieve internal community maturity are leveraged when reaching beyond the community to society at large. Most fundamental of these is the discipline of prevailing prayer that moves God's hand to action and provides prophetic guidance for the other activities.

Jesus' followers will inevitably be tested individually and collectively in this journey; sometimes at the hand of the adversary and sometimes by God himself. God does so to ensure they are sufficiently disciplined and prepared for greater tasks ahead. Jesus does not want his people getting hurt, and any engagement with powerful territorial spirits must be done carefully. At this point some will be tempted to fall back to the defensive line while others want to press on and take the land. Division will arise in the ranks and only strong leadership with an unwavering commitment to a missional *ekklesia* will carry the team through the testing and opposition.

Domain 2: Possess the Land

You cannot transform a region without addressing the question of who has spiritual authority to rule it. The activities in this domain of activity focus on understanding the spiritual dynamics, calling forth and building on what is good, and redeeming that which is not. It involves re-opening ancient wells of covenant, cleansing defiled areas, and building altars of praise where there has been false worship.

These activities begin with a detailed understanding of the boundaries of the territory in question, who has occupied the land over time, the covenants made during their tenures, locations of defilement, and sources of legal access gained through human sin. This requires doing background research on the history of the area, interviewing people with spiritual insight, prayer walking the land to gain impressions and observe outward signs, and asking Holy Spirit to illuminate what is hidden.

Armed with this information the team then does whatever Jesus tells them to; worship at stronghold locations, repent for the sin of prior generations, conduct a ceremony of relational reconciliation, bring a judicial case against the spirits, and so on. Holy Spirit will frequently give a dream, vision, or scripture that guides the activity and confirm it in multiple ways through multiple people. The team must be careful about acting on one person's impression without such confirmation.

When the land is spiritually clean, it is much easier to evangelize unbelievers and impact institutional/public policy. Spiritual governance is the practice of stewarding the spiritual

aspects of that part of God's creation over which you have been given Jesus' delegated authority as King of the Kingdom. As we have seen, this is exercised through the body of his followers via the mix of gifts and roles with which they have been privileged to govern. It involves such matters as:

- Maintaining a watchful altar of intercession, praise, and thanks that keeps Jesus' covering over the entire territory and addresses any spiritual disruption.
- Understanding how to apply the principles of Torah to the cultural context so people know how to live in righteousness.
- Putting the evangelistic and discipleship processes in proper order so people are matured in the faith without relying on institutional structures.
- Deciding issues among the people so they need not rely on secular courts.
- Ensuring that all needs are met through sharing so the *ekklesia* remains sovereign, and to the extent possible, independent of civil institutions.

Domain 3: Transform Society

If the spiritual environment is clean, the *ekklesia* will have tremendous favor with the people. Not all will convert to serving only Jesus, but many will and over time the entire culture will become infused with his presence. The task begins with a commitment to love the people of the territory, including doing communal acts of service that unbelievers cannot miss. When all the congregations serve in unison, it has far more collective impact than the sum of the parts. This may include financing social services that the government is unable to provide, like clean water, pre-natal healthcare, or agricultural training. These services are much more credible when provided from within the community than when provided by a foreign agency.

When the *ekklesia* is ready and viewed with favor by the people generally, Jesus gives guidance on how best to evangelize unbelievers in the region. This may include showing the 'Jesus Film', hosting a public discussion/debate/teaching that fits the cultural context, doing door-to-door outreach, or simply offering publicly to serve any who need help. Whatever the combination of activities, it is not a one-off affair. For most people not in a tribal society spiritual choices are a process, not an event. It is the joy of the *ekklesia* to do what it does best as a continual testimony to the world.

Territory

The political lines on maps have little to do with spiritual borders, and transformation activities must therefore respect these unseen boundaries. It takes discernment to understand the spiritual topography of the land and over time new insights will arise. Most important to understand is what territory Jesus is asking his people to claim. It will often start small and expand over time. Spiritual boundaries are established based on what and whom people worship. Jesus knows what covenants need to be redug and which spiritual high places must be pulled down. He also knows where the wells of blessing are located and often begins building his Kingdom around those. These centers become the hospital and barracks behind the front line where the *ekklesia* prepares before venturing out to more difficult areas.

Fail Points

The transformation process can stall and fail in any phase. Here are some common causes.

- The *ekklesia* stumbles at the start if it loses focus on its mission and makes community an end in itself. Without strong leadership that keeps people focused on Jesus' Great Commission the family will not be able to sustain the long haul of commitment that transformation requires.
- Breakouts fail if leadership cannot balance spiritual and natural activity, including allowing the seven aspects of Holy Spirit to move freely. [Isaiah 11:2] Prophetic and evangelical people have different ways of expressing their gifts, and respect for each other is paramount. People need to learn how to handle and forgive offense.
- Transformation fails if the *ekklesia* begins focusing on managing growth rather than continuing to contend for complete spiritual and social change. It cannot lose its unction until the last unbeliever is following Jesus.
- God's miraculous interventions will wax and wane over time. The mission never changes, and Jesus' followers must often press on even when they are not seeing progress. It is important to keep doing the last thing Jesus commanded until he changes the strategy.

Orientation

The Christian faith has continually and persistently divided itself over the two millennia of its existence based on what it believes about doctrine, theology, and application. Perpetuating the Greek orientation toward knowledge is a strategy of the adversary. This is magnified in evangelism when we try to convert Hindus, Muslims, or animists by bulldozing their cultural heritage and spiritual traditions.

Transformation of regions demands that we embrace the eastern orientation of the original Jerusalem *ekklesia*. That was a focus on who they believed, not what they believed. We are selling Jesus, not Christianity, western culture, or even a book. Jesus wants people to follow him, just as YHWH commanded his theologically infant Hebrew people to simply love and trust him as their all-sufficient *El Shaddai*.

Managing Change

Are there best practices for carrying out what for many will be wrenching change?

Change

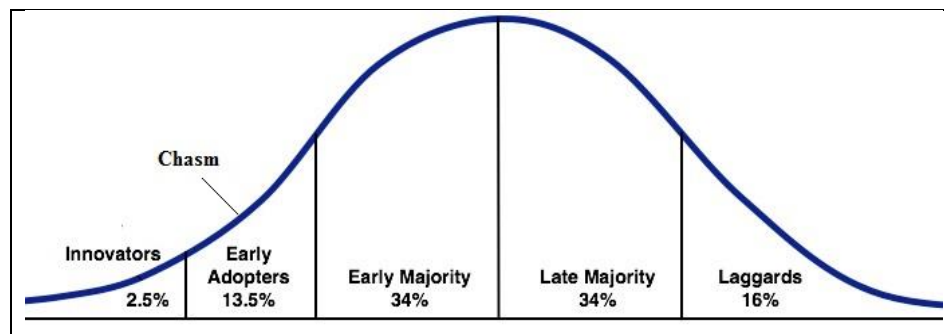
Ekklesia communities will manifest in a wide variety of ways in different places. There is therefore no one right way to conduct the change process. This chapter looks at some best practices for working with, rather than against, human behavior in the process of change.

Adoption Curve

As you have no doubt noticed, new ideas are not received the same way by everyone. Some find change easy and others quite difficult. Some love taking risks on new things and others are more conservative. This principle was popularized by Everett Rogers in his “adoption curve” derived from the field of statistics. It divides people into five groups based on their approach to change:

- Innovators actively seek out new things and change their behavior rapidly to accommodate them. They are a small “bleeding edge” group.
- Early adopters also take quickly to new ideas, but only after the biggest risks have been addressed. This is a larger group than the innovators, but still represents a small minority of the total population.
- The early majority are the bulk of us who don’t want to waste time and resources on things that might not work, but want to capture the benefits offered by things that do.
- The late majority are a large group that may begin by resisting the change, but eventually accept its value. By nature they make personal changes more slowly than their neighbors, but eventually join the rest of the majority.
- Laggards are a small group that sees little or no value in making the change everyone else already has. They will resist it to the very end and may never be happy customers.

Each of the five groups is placed side by side, with the number of their members indicated by the area under the curve that they occupy. Because most people fit the middle two groups, it occupies the highest part of the curve. Those quick and very slow to adopt change anchor the far ends of the curve.



[Rogers, Everett. *Diffusion of Innovations*. Free Press of Glencoe, 1962]

In reality we are all a mix of these different personalities depending on the issue. A person may be an early adopter of smartphone technology, for example, but in the late majority when it comes to eating genetically modified foods. Within the community there are pastors who will be quick to join with others to create an *ekklesia* company, but laggards when it comes to changing the discipleship model. The point is not to put people in boxes. It is rather to adopt a startup strategy that acknowledges and accommodates the different adoption rates to be found among community members.

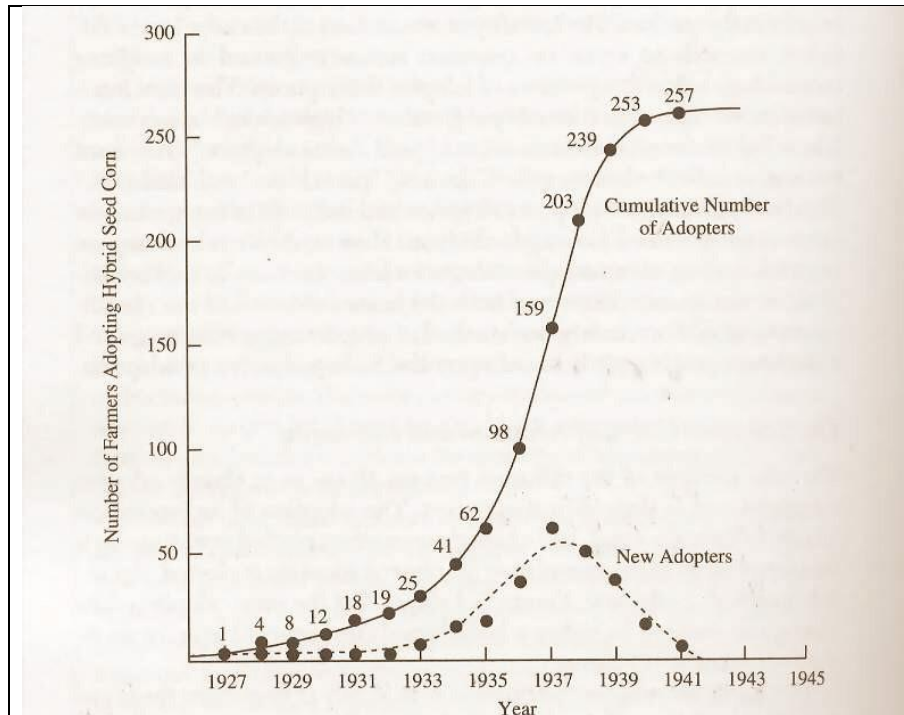
Changes like the adoption of a new economic model are substantial and must work hard to transition from innovation to mainstream acceptance. They live or die based on how the early adopters respond, and this point of decision is sometimes called the ‘chasm’. Lots of ideas die here because they cannot make the transition from prototype to mature infrastructure. This may be due to complexities in the product itself, the challenge of educating people about the necessary change, too few trustworthy examples of success, poor support of new customers, or any variety of other reasons. When introducing new concepts therefore, it is crucial to package them so as to be easy for people to accept, and targeted to those who are most likely to influence mainstream acceptance. This takes planning.

[Moore, Geoffrey. *Crossing the Chasm*. Harper Business, 1999]

Tipping Point

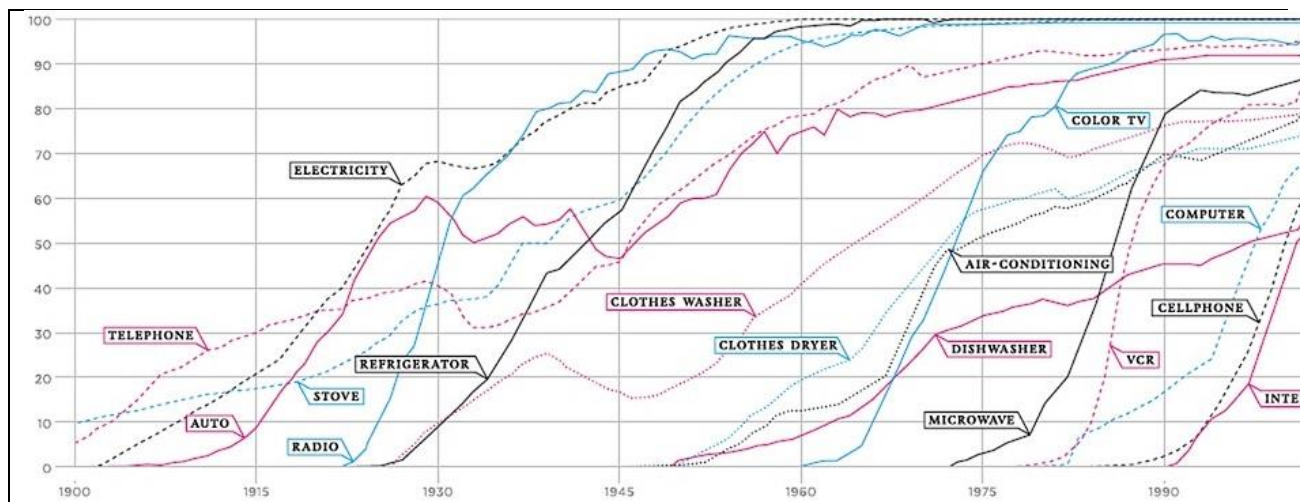
One of the useful corollaries of Everett Rogers’ work is that a ‘tipping point’ appears at the start of mainstream adoption, sometime after the chasm has been crossed. If one plots the cumulative number of persons in a population who have accepted a new idea, it rises quickly as the top of the adoption curve is reached.

The diagram below illustrates this phenomenon as published in Roger’s work. He looked at farmer acceptance of hybrid seed corn, plotting absolute and cumulative adoption by year. The tipping point becomes obvious at around 62 farmers, which was only reached after the program had been in place for seven years. Then in the next five years the population of farmers utilizing the seed multiplied 6 times. Often there is a specific event that triggers the change in public opinion, but frequently it seems to just happen spontaneously.



[Rogers, Everett. *Diffusion of Innovations*. Free Press of Glencoe, 1962]

Nearly every new technology experiences a similar pattern. The chart below runs from the year 1900 to 2005, and displays the percent of the United States population utilizing various products each year. Adoption for each product starts slow, steepens as it accelerates, and then slows again as the market becomes saturated. Note that over time the curves steepen, with the internet entering mainstream use much more quickly than did the telephone. The curves have become shockingly steep in recent years for technologies like the smartphone, with significantly enhanced models now appearing yearly. Products are increasingly designed to last for short lifetimes, with quality taking a back seat to low cost.



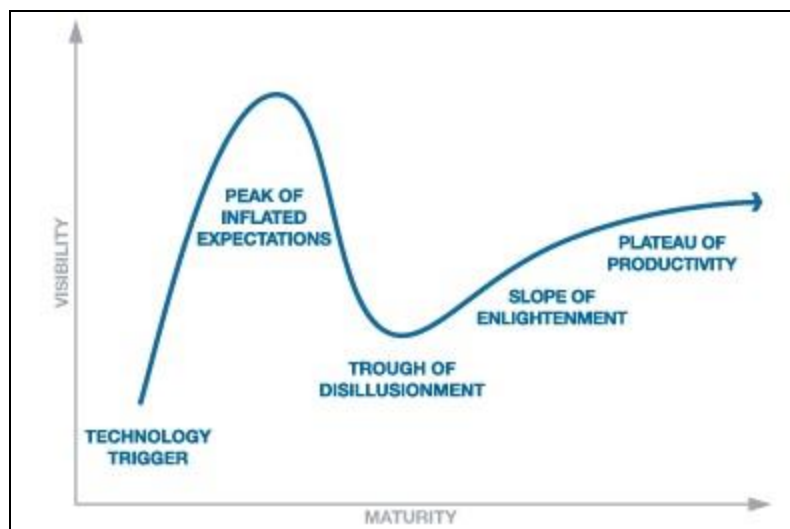
[<http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2008/02/10/opinion/10op.graphic.ready.html>]

This raises another important point relevant to our day. It takes time, money, and energy to shift behavior, and change is now happening faster than most people can integrate it into their lifestyles. It is the job of advertisers to create need that wasn't there before, and to condition our belief that new is always improved and old is socially unacceptable. This creates a challenge for evangelistic work which is based on the ancient and unchanging wisdom of God. It is hard for the evangelist to compete with the advertising cacophony, and hard for the contemporary disciple to slow down long enough to internalize God's *shalom*.

The truth is that the institutional church will likely never make progress competing with the western culture of rapid change, as evidenced by the drastic fall in church attendance we saw earlier. There is no energy left over for most people to handle one more thing, especially if that thing does not offer palpable instant-on benefits. Perhaps that is why the last great harvest is only prophesied to be gathered in the midst of crisis; only then can people's minds be focused sufficiently on things eternal.

Hype Cycle

Another dynamic of change is captured by something Gartner, Inc. called the "Hype Cycle". This acknowledges that groups of people going through significant change over time will evolve through several phases of enthusiasm. These are shown in the chart below.



<http://www.gartner.com/technology/research/methodologies/hype-cycle.jsp>

Change promoters generate a great deal of enthusiasm and often set very high expectations for success when selling their ideas. If they don't, few people will be incented to give it a try. But few implementations are a roaring success the first time and need to be adjusted over time to accommodate the realities of the customer and marketplace. This inevitably leads to a mismatch between what is expected and what is experienced, resulting in disappointment. This is the "Trough of Disillusionment" and often coincides with the "Chasm" we saw above in the adoption curve. Credibility is all-important when introducing a new product, and if a launch fails it can be a long time before the customer gives you a second chance. Eventually, if things

get sorted out and the early adopters remain with the program, it generates the necessary success stories to attract attention from the mainstream.

Change Leadership

We took the time to briefly review the forgoing theory because it is 100% applicable to maturation of an *ekklesia* community. As you think through the various topics covered in the maturity pathway and consider the changes they impose on large groups of people, you get some idea of how disruptive it has the potential of being. That does not make it a bad thing, or even an overwhelming challenge. It just means that those responsible for the implementation in each region need to consider several key principles:

- Follow the leading of Holy Spirit in developing the implementation plan; He knows best how people are prepared.
- Break large change into smaller manageable parts; don't overwhelm the audience.
- Recruit your most enthusiastic innovators and early adopters; they will have the necessary staying power.
- Test and debug each new practice on a small scale, and keep repeating the process with more people over a larger area. Prototype and pilot before going public. But for heaven's sake, don't spend forever in planning. Get something going and learn.
- Establish infrastructure early for handling the behavior change that will appear at the tipping point.
- Set specific conservative expectations at each part of the adoption curve so people can determine whether they are ready.
- Over-deliver against each expectation so that each stage of rollout generates its own success. Then celebrate it!

It is paramount to remember that the *ekklesia* is people knit together in love and honor. Change is only good so long as it reinforces relationship. It cannot be divisive. Only when the community is able to make change as a community should we proceed. Leaders must be gentle with their brethren, and be given great grace by those who mentor them. It is hard to lead, and in the midst of change it is often harder to follow.

"And, my friends, in this story you have a history of this entire movement. First they ignore you. Then they ridicule you. And then they attack you and want to burn you. And then they build monuments to you."

[1918 US trade union address by Nicholas Klein]

History Lessons

The thesis herein says Jesus' followers today are being led to rededicate themselves to being a community that resembles the first century *ekklesia*. It is only in doing so that large-scale transformation of society can occur; not by dominating its institutions, but rather by the example of extreme love and demonstration of power that marked the apostolic age.

It is instructive then to glean lessons from history regarding things that the church did which led to strong cultural impact and things that compromised the power and Great Commission of its members. Several such lessons are explored briefly in this chapter.

Given the breadth of church history, the interested reader should also look to the classic works by church fathers such as Augustine, Eusebius, Origen, and Polycarp. Each in his way wrestled with historicity, doctrines of the faith, appropriate structures for preserving church integrity, and the relationship between the church and broader society. It is also helpful to review contemporary surveys that are able to view church history from a more sweeping perspective.

[See for example:]

[Latourette, Kenneth Scott. *A History of Christianity – Volumes I and II*. Harper, 1953 and 1975]

Phases of the Church Age

The chart below summarizes a few distinctive characteristics of the Christian church over time. The time buckets are somewhat arbitrary, and there are numerous other characteristics of equal interest. But we can get a sense of the various currents at work.

Period	Structure	Doctrine & Practice	Miraculous Signs	Societal Impact
30-100 Ekklesia	Apostolic leadership a function of seeing Jesus	Varied but embraced in love; tested by fruit	Prophetic and miraculous commonplace	Influence through evangelism and discipling
100-500 Early Catholic	Formal bishopric and presbyter structures. Elected and ambitious leadership	Unifying with much schism as canon formed	Weakening	Self-governing and independent of secular institutions; Hebraic mercantilism
500-1500 Roman Catholic	Formal administration with key leaders politically appointed	Unified doctrine enforced by church financed with relics etc.	Few in pockets	Fully integrated into secular political systems; economic sequestration
1500-1900 Protestant / Catholic	Formal administration among	Protestantism varied and subject to	Increasing with freer expression; teaching and	Sizable revival movements; persecution;

Reformations	fragmenting denominations	internal schism	evangelism restored	widespread influence
1900-2000 Restoration I	Transition from denominational churches to small group fellowships	Charismatic revival in both Catholicism and Protestantism	Widespread; apostolic and prophetic restored; Hebrew roots restored	Sizable revival movements; increased state suppression of church activities
2000-? Restoration II	Globalized affinity among covenanted fellowships; leaders confirmed by signs	Varied but embraced in love; tested by fruit	Prophetic and miraculous commonplace	Self-governing and independent of secular institutions; Hebraic mercantilism; brightness draws amidst darkness

The word ‘restoration’ is used intentionally to convey that certain foundational ministries like the apostolic and prophetic were lost as church structure and management was institutionalized, and now are being restored as a more organic church is re-emerging.

Doctrinal Disputes

Jesus left many things unsaid, and committed nothing of what he did say to writing. Even after three years of study under him as master rabbi, the disciples were left with a great mystery as to:

- his nature as God, Son of God, human, and indwelling Spirit
- whether he expected all disciples to enter into the Jewish covenant with God as he had
- how a community of followers was to manage its affairs
- how to contextualize the ‘good news’ for people with no experience of Judaism

The first *ekklesia* community was Jewish and based in Jerusalem under the leadership of James the Just. Its members had an on-going dispute with the Apostle Paul over both the criteria of salvation and requirements of on-going membership in the *ekklesia*. The issues were never fully resolved as evidenced by the very different approaches to life in Jesus followed simultaneously by, for example, the *Ebionite* and *Johannine* communities.

The ‘Pauline’ version of the gospel essentially won out by default following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE and later dispersion of the remaining Jews after the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 CE. The center of Christian community moved outside Judea to become a primarily Greco-Roman religion. Early Christian leaders like Marcion even held that the 12 apostles had misunderstood Jesus out of their own dullness and that only Paul had managed to grasp the correct ‘Christological’ view of Jesus.

Orthodox Jews for their part gave up on the notion of a human Messiah after the death of the zealot political leader Simon Bar Kokhba and thereafter considered Jesus to be just another in a long line of false human Messiahs. For them the Christological view was idolatry because God would never replicate himself as a man, and began de-emphasizing even the vice-regent of God

spoken of in the *Tanakh*. For this and other reasons Christianity and Judaism carved out increasingly differentiated positions, and the Messianic Jewish followers of Jesus, like those in the *Ebionite* and *Nazarene* communities, gradually disappeared under persecution from both sides.

There was no canonical New Testament until the late 300s CE and it became so only after a lengthy process of debate over what a person needed to believe in order to become and remain a 'Christian'. This naturally begs the question whether many of the things that Jesus left unsaid, especially about the nature of the triune God himself, he might have wished his followers to stop trying to figure out and just leave a mystery. [Isaiah 55:8-9] [Matthew 18:3] [Mark 9:40]

This is a foundational difference in Hebraic versus Greco-Roman thought. Hebraic thinking embraces mystery and is comfortable leaving it so. Many cultures being evangelized in these latter days are of this mind as well, and we need to be cautious about being overly prescriptive with either Nazarene or Pauline doctrine.

Institutional Church

Once the Messianic Jewish influence left the new faith, the gentile *ekklesia* rather quickly transitioned into the Catholic Church centered on Rome.

From the beginning the church was heavily influenced by the culture of the Roman Empire within which it took form. The serious debates over doctrine threatened to fragment the new religion, so the church leadership created authority structures that could standardize belief and practice similar to those used in the human political world. Thus 'bishops' were established over the various communities of believers, the most important of which was the Bishop of Rome (the Pope). Over time Cardinals and Archbishops were added to the hierarchy, all ultimately overseeing the priest assigned to each congregation. Advancement through the ranks of leadership required close adherence to the standardized doctrine and protocols of the church, and much of the organic and dynamic expression of the *ekklesia* was thereafter lost.

...the apostles declined the office of legislation, and rather chose to endure some partial scandals and divisions, than to exclude the Christians of a future age from the liberty of varying their forms of ecclesiastical government according to the changes of times and circumstances.

[Gibbon, Edward. History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Chapter XV, Part VI]

Over time the church became a political power in its own right, achieving both great wealth and influence. With the conversion of Emperor Constantine to the faith, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. The church reinforced the Roman political regime, and the State protected the church. So tight was this relationship that when the empire finally broke apart late in the first millennium the church broke into pieces with it. The Roman, Byzantine, Alexandrian, and Nestorian churches found themselves in frequent tension with each other. At times there were even multiple competing popes, the outstanding examples of which are the 'East-West Schism' beginning in 1053 and 'Papal Schism' beginning in 1378.

To be fair, the church has always used its political influence for good. In Roman times the role of women and children in society was elevated, paganism declined, dignity was returned to basic labor, and slave protections introduced. But the political nature of the church and supporting Holy Roman Empire also led it to exercise force in the world quite apart from the Kingdom of God it represents. The crusades against Islam certainly appear to have been political opportunism writ large; resulting as they did in the killing of thousands of Jews in the Rhineland, destruction of the competing Byzantine Empire, and establishment of Crusader states throughout the Holy Land.

We should not make the mistake of assuming that such repulsive behavior was limited to the Catholic Church. Among other atrocities, the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century included the dissolution and destruction of the monasteries in England by Henry VIII, and an ‘iconoclastic fury’ levied against the Catholic churches of northern Europe. As stated before, there has always been a mixture of soul and Spirit among Jesus’ people.

In truth, these two cities [heavenly church and earthly empires] are entangled together in this world, and intermixed until the last judgment effects their separation.

[Saint Augustin of Hippo. *City of God*. Book 1, Ch 35, Line 43]

Jesus did not create a new religion or religious organization. He taught fellowship, discipleship, service, and relationship with God. He was not a Messianic crusader or an administrator. He fervently denounced the corrupt political administration of the Temple even while honoring his covenantal obligation to worship there. Jesus did not concern himself with doctrine and so had no need to impose political control over his disciples – all of whom were free follow or not.

We are living today in a new age of Holy Spirit which is remaking this simple, organic *ekklesia*.

[Synan, Vinson. *The Century of the Holy Spirit*. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001]

Rather than institutionalizing a new generation of church, we need to embrace the unstructured dynamism in which Jesus is expressing himself through his community of followers.

Weakness and Separation

If the church has fallen victim to imperial overreach, it has also made the opposite mistake of retreating too far from its mission to transform the world. Christianity was a dynamic force in a stagnant but prosperous Roman Empire. It was the only real source of new ideas in a society that was producing little that was visionary. Yet the practical outworking of this revelation was largely confined to creating the church culture and little attempt was made to reshape the civilization outside the new buildings.

The reality during the waning days of the Roman Empire was of Christianity rather conformed to the surrounding culture. Christians continued to enjoy their gladiatorial contests, possess slaves, and accumulate property. There was little of the community sharing and public demonstration of spiritual power that so marked the first Jerusalem *ekklesia*. Salvation was considered a personal transformation, not a cultural or corporate one.

At the other end of the spectrum was the monastic movement, which had started in Egypt and by the end of the fifth century was well established in the Catholic Church of both Rome and Byzantium. These various communities of believers dedicated themselves to the Christian ideal and were the source of prolific Christian thought, but similarly lacked a transformative mission beyond the personal.

Both of these tendencies that emerged in the Roman Empire - to conform to culture and to withdraw from it - remained defining parts of the Christian landscape all the way through the middle ages until the Protestant and Catholic Reformations of the 16th century that laid the foundation for our modern versions of Christian religion.

The *ekklesia* is the community of believers called out of secular culture to share with one another in every way, and in this the monastic movement was faithful to its purpose. But its mission is to prepare and empower each member as a conduit for Holy Spirit to bring the good news to the world. If the community turns too far inward, then it has failed its members along with Jesus.

Cessationism

The gospel was proclaimed widely and forcefully by the first apostles because their words were validated by miraculous manifestations. Holy Spirit made himself known whenever, wherever, and however the gospel was preached in obedience to his direction. This dynamic ministry could not be structured or packaged, and it found greatest freedom in the absence of any institutional control.

As the church organized itself around standardized doctrine and protocols, Holy Spirit was less free to move. Fear of the prophetic and other gifts, particularly when expressed through the less experienced, led to abolition of their authority in the church and the public functions of religion became increasingly entrusted to the established and approved ministers. This inevitably resulted in a divide between the 'professional clergy' and the 'lay parishioners' that empowered the former and disempowered the latter. The passive laity was no longer disciplined to be a tabernacle of Holy Spirit, and in later years, even the reading and interpretation of the scriptures themselves became the exclusive right of the priest.

It should be no wonder then that miracles nearly ceased in the church and that without demonstrations of spiritual power, it lost its ability to transform society. The *ekklesia* became a government like any other human institution, resorting to control as the medium for change.

If the freedom of Holy Spirit to minister through us in power is inversely proportional to church structure, then we will see miracles increase as we learn again what it means to be a priesthood of believers. [1 Peter 2:4-5] Instead of continually seeking understanding so we can serve others in Jesus name, we need to be continually serving so that we might discover his ways. This is how cessationism itself will end and the *dunamis* power of the *ekklesia* be restored.

Government

Jesus' Kingdom on earth is a spiritual government designed to steward the world responsibly. As such, it finds itself inevitably set against other competing governmental structures, both spiritual and natural.

We have already explored how the spiritual *ekklesia* became institutionalized into the Roman Catholic Church - a human government complete with hierarchical administration, military forces, and enforced doctrine modeled on the Roman Empire.

Iron Age Israel took a different path to the same point. It was a pure theocracy in which the expression of its faith and administration of its community affairs were both led by God. This worked until the needs of administering a growing empire required the appointment of a human king and military leader, and the need to standardize behavior among a large population transformed simple spiritual laws into a complex legal code. The on-going desire by Jews to establish a human theocratic government in the midst of Roman occupation was suicidal. The Israel restored in 1948 intentionally separates civil government from the administration of the Jewish faith.

Islam has always mixed spiritual and natural government, often administering countries as theocracies until the *Mahdi* appears. Some of the Islamic Caliphates of the Middle Ages did govern well, and Islamic society in general contributed greatly to the arts and sciences of the time. But there has also been much human ambition expressed in the faith, and the personal *jihad* has often turned into communal conquest.

Whenever human history has administered civil affairs in the name of God, the power of the state has tried to apply spiritual doctrines in human ways that are disastrous. The *ekklesia* is properly a spiritual government whose authority exists in that realm. Disciples actively witness and serve in the natural, but do not engage in witchcraft by imposing their personal will on the world. There is real danger in 'dominion theology' that in taking the high points of culture for Christ we will exercise human control that was never demonstrated by our servant King. Admittedly, all that may change if and when Jesus returns as a global Davidic King, but for now it is not our job to do that job.

Advice to Governments

This chapter addresses the question of how to constitute the natural government of a geographic region that has full international sovereignty. There are, for example, island nations which have adopted ‘Christian’ principles for governance such as Bougainville and Montserrat that are small enough to leverage a relatively homogeneous set of societal values and norms. What would Jesus have to say about running such an institution, and how does it relate to the *ekklesia*?

Lawfulness and vision

It is well accepted in foreign aid circles that no amount of brilliance in community development can overcome dysfunctional government. When those with political and military power choose to use the nation as their personal plaything, every other citizen suffers. Any assets transferred into the nation become fair game for confiscation through arbitrary change to policy, corruption, and outright theft. Without protection of private property, there is no incentive for the citizenry to do anything more than subsist, with the result that the economy collapses. This is the province of dictators and strongmen.

Governments that maintain perspective of their rightful role facilitate social health. Their primary responsibility is to protect the physical safety of citizens and their property from disease, privation, and confiscation, so each person has an opportunity to achieve his human purpose. They reinforce positive social norms by legislating and modeling transparency, integrity, justice, and honor. Good governance can be found in any political model (eg., democracy, theocracy, socialist, monarchy) so long as those in power live their role as humble servants of the citizenry.

Healthy societies have a common and unifying vision of who they are collectively. Lack of such a vision leads to selfishness and social breakdown. We see this in many places today where fear, political manipulation, and greed have replaced any sense of shared purpose. There is too little willingness to sacrifice for another. The Bible speaks of this in terms of the people having no grounding in God’s covenants and thus becoming increasingly lawless (literally ‘living without *Torah*’). [Proverbs 29:18] [Matthew 24:12]

Jesus, as God’s vice-regent and *memra* in the earth, pointed us back to covenant with God. He continues today to manifest his spiritual government in the earth via Holy Spirit who tabernacles in his followers. Through the *ekklesia* he provides a vision and purpose for the world that is based on love, lawfulness, and service. The *ekklesia* is the antidote to lawless society.

Hebraic government

The Hebrew theocracy was initially organized in accordance with the *Torah*. It specified a formal priestly ritual assigned to the line of Aaron, and a legal code to be administered through Moses as prophet and judge. There was no complex organizational bureaucracy; just a tent of meeting, judge, altar, priest, and the people in their various clans and tribes. This all changed of course when the people elected to switch to a monarchy led by a king, which eliminated forever true theocratic government. Israel today is a parliamentary democracy whose organization and function resembles that of many other nations.

The *Torah* was given so that a nation in obedience would enjoy God's covenant blessing as a community. Sin that would block that blessing was punished. No modern government organizes itself around this principle any longer. Rather, the law has become an entity unto itself, and justice is now a matter of the letter, rather than of God's humanitarian intent. As Israel grew in population and complexity, it added layers of interpretation to the original commandments so specific behaviors could be more expeditiously judged. Of necessity, civic administration moved further and further away from the flat governance structure of the Biblical judges.

This same pitfall awaits the *ekklesia* if its governance is scaled up to the national level. As we have explored, there are leadership roles in the community under Jesus' Kingship and every decision is taken with the counsel of Holy Spirit. The community needs to be absolutely obedient. Administering a large territorial government involves a level of complexity that would inevitably force expeditious human decision-making that ends up ignoring Holy Spirit.

As a practical matter, the *ekklesia* should not attempt to govern beyond the scope of its ability to hear from Holy Spirit on all matters of obedience. This necessarily limits the span of control of the King's leadership team and suggests a logical point for starting a new organic community.

Jesus never gave any guidance on running a government, temple, or any other human institution. His Kingdom is spiritual; established to guide and empower his followers on earth as they carry out his great commission to evangelize and disciple the world. He chose to leave the arrangement of human affairs to humans as stewards of the world. [Genesis 1:28]

Human institutions are always subject to corruption and this should give us pause before "taking the seven cultural mountains for Christ". The church has sat astride political and economic power in the past and it did not work out very well. The job of the *ekklesia* is to influence the world, not dominate it - at least until we enter a very different dispensation in the prophesied 'Day of the Lord'.

Guidance

Intriguingly, the Greek word *ekklesia* did have another meaning during Jesus' time that speaks to this topic. It was the name of the highest governing body of the Greek democratic government (which being a democracy had no monarch or president). It is possible the gospel writer was making the point that God's Kingdom on earth, despite being a spiritual entity, nevertheless carries governmental authority to influence human institutions and their leadership.

It is therefore very appropriate for Jesus' followers to guide governors, kings, and presidents in the performance of their responsibilities. God's people carry the exhortations of the prophets regarding proper administration. [Deuteronomy 10:12-13] [Isaiah 58:6-7] [Micah 6:8]

We therefore offer two items of specific guidance. First, every government instituted among men has an obligation to conduct all its affairs with transparency, integrity, justice, and honor. This was the instruction Jesus gave to those who asked about their specific vocations.

And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" And he would answer and say to them, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." And some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And what about us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages."

[Luke 3:10-14]

Second, most governments include in their legal code those among the Ten Commandments that deal with one's human neighbor. They do not address the most important commandments – those governing the nation's relationship with its God as expressed in the Jewish *Shema*.

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

[Deuteronomy 6:4-5]

Proper governance requires first honoring the one who instituted government among men. Doing so attracts the Lord's blessing. Failing to do so ensures that the nation goes the way of human frailty, no matter how transparent or just.

Part III - Case studies

- Moravians of Saxony
- Quakers of England
- Mennonites of America
- Hutterian Brethren
- Israeli Kibbutzim

Appendix

Expressing the Presence of God

The Tabernacle – A Poem by James Coke

A cloud in the day, and a fire by night;
Tent of God's presence below.
Too holy for man, yet dwelling in sight;
Moses alone did He know.

Ruach came as the wind, blowing through as He would;
Visiting then moving on.
A Spirit of arts, of prophets and war;
Empowering, gifting - then gone.

Then Christ made the way, and Holy Spirit remains;
Baptist of fruit and of fire.
To sanctify teach, and share Father's pure heart;
Fulfilling God's Kingdom desire.

The tent is now us, and His presence within;
His holiness burns out the dross.
The cloud and the fire, a cover again;
A continuing gift of the cross.

And now in your plan, you inhabit anew;
Manifest presence in us.
Your breath speaks the words, your hands do the work;
In vessels of clay you possess.

A union with you, that makes us complete;
And brings forth a glorious bride.
Our wills bound in love, our spirits in dance;
A marriage and covenant tied.

Expressing the Vision for a Renewed Ekklesia - James Coke

I have a vision.

It is of one regional ekklesia (community of people covenanted to follow Jesus as Messiah)

- Where believers know who they are in Jesus and who he is in them
- Who intentionally humble themselves so He can express Himself through them as His Kingdom on Earth
- Who serve others in both the natural and with whatever spiritual gifts Jesus wants to give
- The highest expression being self-less love for all of God's creation and all who are in it
- Everywhere, 24x7, as a testimony and example for a dark world

It is of an ekklesia that loves its King and shows it

- Where God, His Son, and His Spirit are honored, celebrated, invited, and shared by honest hearts
- Where theology and doctrine are minor points of faith and love
- Because obedience is based on what Holy Spirit says uniquely to each person
- In which the family rallies around a moral failure to support redemption and healing
- But does not tolerate repeated, un-repentant sin in its ranks
- And thereby can appropriate all of the Father's collective blessing

It is of an ekklesia that is sovereign and self-sufficient

- In which all the natural talents, training, and spiritual gifts are recognized, called out, and catalogued
- So anyone in need knows where to turn – for the Father has placed in our midst everything necessary
- Where most assemblies are found in town, at homes, and in nature
- So churches are just buildings held in trust for the regional ekklesia to use for special gatherings
- and non-profit corporations with their secular compromises pass away
- The world cannot persecute and dilute what its institutions cannot see
- Where shepherds shepherd, healers heal, and judges judge wherever and whenever needed
- And everyone freely shares what God has freely given them
- Because everyone has a paid vocation in the family economy

It is of an ekklesia that is ever missional

- Serving the world and especially those that cannot help themselves
- Evangelizing through both word and deed
- Discipling whenever there are questions
- Because the world will be looking for light in the darkness and the Lord loves to draw to His own

And whatever is left over is sent to those in other regions that do not yet have their vision.

Understanding the Manifestation of the Glorious Ekklesia

“Dispensation”	(1) General Concepts	(2) Biblical View	(3) Metaphor of Symphony Orchestra
Old Testament	<p>People did things in their own strength as part of ‘stewarding the earth’ People ‘walked with God’ but had no revelation of an indwelling Spirit</p>	<p>General</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holy Spirit visited on specific people for specific purposes for a limited time <p>Pentecost</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Torah given to Moses on Sinai <p>Tabernacles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temple dedicated and God’s glory fills it 	<p>Yeshua conducts the orchestra. Holy Spirit enables the soloist during the time of the solo then lifts.</p>
New Testament	<p>Holy Spirit begins working through people to sanctify them, confirm the gospel message, and give gifts to others Man organizes his faith creating the ‘Holy Roman Empire’</p>	<p>Pentecost</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baptism of Holy Spirit & Fire to empower Great Commission <p>Tabernacles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yeshua comes as <i>immanu-El</i> 	<p>Holy Spirit indwells all musicians and helps them play their part as defined in the sheet music.</p>
Latter Days	<p>Yeshua expresses his presence freely through yielded vessels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our flesh must <i>decrease</i> so Yeshua can <i>increasingly</i> express his presence in us Only the presence of Yeshua can manifest the glorious church; church of man never will <p>This is the only way the ‘bride’ can be perfect and glorious despite fallen man.</p>	<p>Tabernacles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baptism of His Presence to manifest the ‘glorious ekklesia’ 	<p>Yeshua indwells all musicians and it is his breath that plays everyone’s instrument.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No sheet music since Yeshua’s conducting and playing is perfectly synchronized Parts shift around among chairs as he desires – no hierarchy or permanent assignments within an instrument type Anyone who takes back playing his own instrument sounds terribly out of place
Day of the Lord	<p>Transition to Messianic Age (7,000th year)</p>	<p>Yom Teruah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return of the King for his ‘bride’ <p>Tabernacles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yeshua lives among his people and teaches the fullness of Torah 	<p>Musicians become part of a new type of Messianic symphony orchestra</p>

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[Citations inserted in the text and marked with yellow highlight will be relocated here.]