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An Inquiry Into the Biblical Perspective of the Purpose of the Local Church

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AN INQUIRY INTO THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE
PURPOSE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

A Research Paper
Presented to
the Graduate Research Committee of
Western Evangelical Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Divinity

by
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CHAPTER I

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

The importance of the church is clearly stated in Scripture and is clearly evident in the life of Christians. It is important and essential because of what it is and what it does.¹

I. AREA OF INQUIRY

The Biblical perspective of the purpose of the local church. That is, this study involves a search to find out from the Scriptures what the church is and what its purpose is.

II. JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

In many local churches today there seems to be a lack of clear understanding as to what the Bible says about the purpose of the local church. Therefore, my aim in this study will be to discover what the Biblical perspective of the purpose of the local church is so that I will be able to relate it to others.

¹Dr. Wesley Duewel, Ecclesiology (Allahabad, U.P. India: The Allahabad Bible Seminary, n.d.), p. 1.

III. PREVIEW OF ORGANIZATION

A Scriptural Study. This is the basis of the entire paper. It forms three chapters, which are as follows:

CHAPTER II: THE ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH
CHAPTER III: THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH
CHAPTER IV: THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

IV. RESOURCES

The Scriptures are the primary resource for this study. Other sources will be scholars and books in the area of the ministry of the church such as those listed in the Bibliography of this paper.

CHAPTER II

O R I G I N O F T H E C H U R C H

The purpose of the Church begins with God's purpose in history. And as Howard Snyder says, "The Bible, a historical book, shows how God has worked in history."² Therefore the only logical way to discover the origin of the church is to look at God's purpose in history as shown in the Bible. Thus this chapter is divided into three sections plus a summary. The three main sections are as follows:

- I. The Beginning of the Church
- II. The Old Testament Church
- III. The Birth of the New Testament Church

The study of this chapter is based primarily on God's purpose in history.

I. The Beginning of the Church

Contrary to what many Biblical scholars think (e.g. Henry Thiessen and H. Orton Wiley), the Church had its beginning in the Old Testament. In order to understand this it is necessary to begin from the perspective of God Himself - i.e. His identity and His work as seen in the Old Testament.

²Howard A. Snyder, The Radical Wesley (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1980), p. 79.

God's Identity

The subject of this paper cannot be approached apart from the identity of God. To help understand this a look at several portions of Scripture is needed ("...no part of the Bible is without authority" ³).

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God...". The word for God here is Elohim which means, "God, the true God" ⁴ as taken from the root word Alah. From this verse we can see a starting point which indicates that Elohim existed before all things. Psalm 90:2 tells that God existed before the mountains were brought forth and before the earth and the world were formed, that He is eternal from the past as well as in the future. Job 36:26 says that "God is great, and we know Him not; the number of His years is unsearchable." Isaiah 57:15 tells that God is the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity and His name is holy. These are but a few passages that are witnesses of God's existence in eternity past, before anything was created. So, we see from the very beginning of the Bible that the Supreme Being, who is before all things and who has made all things does indeed exist. The existence of God is the foundation of all the theology of the Bible (which is the basis for the life of the local church). The Bible is the Word of God, not only because God is its author,

³John Bright, The Authority of the Old Testament (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), p. 151.

⁴Benjamin Davidson, The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 26.

but because God and His doings are its pervasive theme. The word Elohim is a plural form; "but throughout the Old Testament it is regularly construed as singular when used of the true God which indicates that it is a plural of majesty, and has no connection with polytheistic notions." ⁵ Dr. John R. Sampey says:

This first verse (of Gen. 1) denies atheism; for it assumes the being of God. It denies polytheism, and among its various forms, the doctrine of two eternal principles, the one good and the other evil; for it confesses the one Eternal Creator. It denies materialism; for it asserts the creation of matter. It denies pantheism; for it assumes the existence of God before all things, and apart from them. ⁶

Here too we see God as The Living God. He is alive. He walked and talked with Adam and Eve. Many Scriptures testify to this (e.g. Josh. 3:10; 1 Sam. 17:26; Ps. 84:2; Jer. 10:10; Matt. 16:16; 1 Thess. 1:9). Life implies feeling, power and activity. God has all of these. He is alive, whereas the idols of the heathen are dead (Ps. 115:3-9).

Not only is God alive, but He is a Person too. Henry C. Thiessen says that "Hegel and the idealistic philosophers are wrong in representing God as an impersonal spirit, for the very idea of spirit implies personality." ⁷ He also says the

⁵Oswald T. Allis, God Spake by Moses (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1951), p. 9.

⁶John R. Sampey, The Heart of the Old Testament (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1922), p. 22.

⁷Henry C. Thiessen, Lectures in Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), p. 121.

only way of determining what spirit is like, apart from the Scriptures, is by analogy with our own spirit; and since the human spirit is personal, the Divine Spirit must be personal too (Thiessen, Lectures in Systematic Theology, p. 121). The essence of personality is self-consciousness and self-determination, and the Scriptures ascribe both self-consciousness (Ex. 3:14; Isa. 45:5; 1 Cor. 2:10) and self-determination (Job 23:13; Rom. 9:11; Heb. 6:17) to God. The Scriptures also represent God as possessing the psychological characteristics of personality: Intellect (Gen. 18:19; Ex. 3:7; Acts 15:18), sensibility (Gen. 6:6; Ps. 103:8-13; John 3:16), and volition (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 115:3; John 6:38). And finally the Scriptures ascribe qualities and relations of personality to God. He is represented as speaking (Gen. 1:3), seeing (Gen. 11:5), hearing (Ps. 94:9), repenting (Gen. 6:6), and being angry (Deut. 1:37), jealous (Ex. 20:5), and compassionate (Ps. 111:4).

As stated earlier God is majestic in holiness also. Isa. 6:3 says, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory," (RSV). Samuel declares in 1 Sam. 6:20 that the Lord is a holy God and none other can stand before Him. In the Bible holiness is not one of several attributes of God. "It is rather God's essential being or nature, as seen in Amos, 'God hath sworn by his holiness' (4:2)." ⁸

⁸George Allen Turner, The Vision Which Transforms (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1964), p. 19.

In order to understand the "holiness" of God we need to look at the meaning of the word "holy" as used in the Old Testament. As George Allen Turner says the most important word for "holy" in the Old Testament is Qadosh.

...Its importance is reflected in its frequency - over 830 occurrences in the canonical Old Testament. The verb "to sanctify," the noun "holiness," and the adjective "holy" are from the same root (QDSH...). The etymology of the word is uncertain. Attempts to find its origins in Babylonian, Assyrian, and Arabic languages remain in the realm of the conjectural.⁹

After noting what Turner says and seeing what Benjamin Davidson says in his Analytical Hebrew Lexicon three meanings are discernible: "radiance," "separation," and "purity."

a. Radiance. The meaning of "radiance" is apparent, both explicitly and implicitly. It is here that the affinity with the concept of "glory" is seen. Many passages speak of holiness which is linked with God's presence and radiance, such as the burning bush, described as "holy ground" (Ex. 3:5). Mount Sinai, topped by God's presence in burning holiness, was described as holy and unaccessible (Ex. 19:16-23; 24:27). God's presence in the Tabernacle or the Temple was manifested by a fiery radiance filling the place (Ex. 40:34-38; 2 Chron. 7:1ff.). The pillar of fire by day was an indication of God's presence (Ex. 14:24). So it seems clear that one meaning of "holiness" is radiance, "a synonym of glory."¹⁰

⁹Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁰Ibid., p.17.

b. Separation. Turner says that an examination of the more than 830 occurrences of the word qadosh in the Old Testament indicates that the idea of separation is common to all. He says, "Contrary to Snaith and Eichrodt, the meaning of radiance and separation are not mutually exclusive but are complementary." ¹¹ This meaning is apparent in Isaiah's vision when he saw the Lord radiant in holiness, "high and lighted up," separate from sinners. This separation is both positive and negative. Considered positively it means separation or dedication unto deity; negatively it means separation from all that is common and unclean.

c. Purity. Donald Metz says that the conception of holiness as purity appears in Scripture. He says that the central text of the covenant is Lev. 19:2 which says, "You shall be holy:for I the Lord your God am holy." In referring to this covenant text Metz says:

Eichrodt declares: "The injunctions that follow make it clear that this holiness which is required of the people because of the holy nature of Yahweh implies moral purity and blamelessness." ¹²

The conception of holiness as purity appears to some extent in Ezekiel (43:7-9) and is especially prominent in the Levitical legislation. "Cleanness, outwardly and inwardly, was a condition of holiness." ¹³ Metz quotes Albert C. Knudson as

¹¹Ibid., p. 18.

¹²Donald S. Metz, Studies in Biblical Holiness (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1971), p. 43.

¹³Ibid.

saying:

Only clean objects could become holy. Hence cleanness and holiness came to be used almost synonymously. Both formed an anti-thesis to uncleanness. Holiness in this sense as applied to God expressed a sensitiveness on His part to everything impure. ¹⁴

Summarizing the Old Testament idea of holiness as an attribute of God's identity, it may be said that the word holiness is nearest to an adequate description of God found in its pages. And as Henry Thiessen says, "Holiness occupies the foremost rank among the attributes of God. It is the attribute by which God wanted to be especially known in Old Testament times." ¹⁵

Also included in God's identity are the attributes of justice and righteousness. While closely related, these two, justice and righteousness, may be distinguished from each other, and both from holiness. As H. Orton Wiley says:

The term holiness applies to the nature or essence of God as such, while righteousness is His standard of activity in conformity to that nature. This refers both to Himself and to His creatures. Justice may be said to be the counterpart of God's righteousness but is sometimes identified with it. Righteousness is the foundation of the divine law, justice the administration of that law. ¹⁶

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Thiessen, Op. cit., p. 129.

¹⁶H. Orton Wiley, Christian Theology, Vol. I (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1940), p. 387.

The Bible clearly presents the teaching that God reveals himself and acts in harmony with His holy nature. The Psalmist frequently sang of the righteousness of God. "The judgments of God are true and righteous altogether" (Ps. 19:9); "The heavens declare his righteousness" (Ps. 50:6). Isaiah looked to a time when God's rule would be supreme, for "righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins" (Isa. 11:5). Paul thrilled to the glory of the gospel, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed" (Rom. 1:17). According to the Book of Revelation, even the angels testify to God's righteousness: "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be" (Rev. 16:5). Other places in the Bible where these qualities are ascribed to God are "2 Chron. 12:6; Ezra 9:15; Neh. 9:33; Ps. 89:14; Isa. 45:21; Dan. 9:14; John 17:25; 2 Tim. 4:8." ¹⁷

Among all the attributes of God, "Love" is the greatest of these. Why? Because it includes all the other qualities that answer to the conception of God; that is, it includes His holiness, righteousness, grace and truth. The holiness of God emphasizes His moral excellence, His transcendence, His "otherness." But "God is love" - Holy Love. "It is God's love that makes the transcendent God also the immanent God. 'God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him' (1 John 4:16)." ¹⁸ Metz quotes Wiley as

¹⁷Thiessen, Op. cit., p. 130.

¹⁸Metz, Op. cit., p. 49.

saying, "the love of God is in fact the desire to impart holiness and this desire is satisfied only when the beings whom it seeks are rendered holy." ¹⁹ The Scriptures frequently testify to the love of God. It is in His nature to love. His holiness demands that He always acts out of pure love. He is in contrast with the gods of the heathen who hate and are angry; and of the god of the philosopher who is cold and indifferent. God is said to love the world (John 3:16), His ancient people Israel (Deut. 7:6-8), and His true children (John 14:23). This love of God is what is known as Agape which is "spontaneous and unactuated, uncalculating, unlimited and unconditional." ²⁰

And it is with these attributes that God begins His work toward building a Church.

God's Work

Just as Gen. 1:1 revealed God's identity, it also reveals what God did "in the beginning". "In the beginning created God the heavens and the earth." ²¹ "In the beginning" (Bereshit) means the first of its kind, in respect to time, rank and worth, and here it has reference to the commencement of God's creative work. So we see that the universe (heavens and earth) came into existence through the creative action of God as being unique (i.e. the first of

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Jay P. Green, Sr., The Interlinear Bible-Hebrew/English Vol. I (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 1.

its kind and evidently for a special purpose). The universe was not complete and perfect in all its parts when God first created it. Gen. 1:2 says the earth was without form and empty (void) and but for the brooding of the Spirit of God over the waters, the earth might have remained waste and void. The creative activity continued. He spoke and light came into existence. He made the heavens and the dry lands and the sea; he made the plants, the stars, the fish, the birds, the animals of the earth. After doing this we see God putting an emphasis upon goodness, joy and delight. No sooner does the creation story get under way than it says, "And God saw that the light was good" (Gen. 1:4). It is as if God were an artist who, having splashed color boldly and joyfully on His canvas, steps back to rejoice in the contemplation of His work. As the story comes to a close, the emphasis grows stronger, until it concludes with ecstasy: "And God saw everything that He made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). The word which the Hebrew uses for good (tob) is all-inclusive and is best described in such synonyms as "beautiful glorious, joyful, right, pleasing." ²² And as Dr. Donald Miller says:

The witness of the Bible is clear at this point - God wanted to make available to others His experience of joy. He found His own aliveness so delightful that He wanted others to taste it too. He desired to create persons like Himself who would be capable of experiencing and doing things as He did them. ²³

²²Davidson, Op. cit., p. 283.

²³Donald N. Miller, Developing Local Church Effectiveness Through the Systems Approach to Planning (A major Thesis Project submitted to Bethel Theological Seminary, 1980), p. 10.

As discovered earlier the Bible says that God is love. And love is not content to be confined to itself. It must go forth to others. So, God the true Source, Author and Example of pure, holy love, expressed His heart of love; He created beings to enjoy His love and His kindness. He made them capable of understanding, knowing Himself. And He created a universe of material objects, to show forth His infinite wisdom and perfections, so that His creatures could see His glory in His works. And God took pleasure in what He had made and told man to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (the reason for this was that when God created man He did not make them independent of Himself, but made them receptacles for His holiness, wisdom and love; that they might enjoy Him, and "show forth" gladly and freely, the glorious excellencies of their blessed God - 1 Peter 2:9).

God's purpose in history is further substantiated by Gen. 1:26, 27 when God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness...". "In our image, according to our likeness" are two nearly equivalent words in the Hebrew and are used to emphasize the immensely important fact that man is made in the image and likeness of God. In this way God was preparing man for His divine purpose. Man's nature was good (i.e. one of holiness, righteousness, truth, love, kindness, wisdom, knowledge). With this nature man would show forth God's love to others as he multiplied and filled the

earth. However, this nature was not programmed into man like a robot, it was given to him in a way that he could be free to choose to do God's will. And as Fulton Oursler says:

Man was no mere puppet whose strings were to be pulled this way and that by his Master. Instead he had been given something as precious as life itself, which was free will. God wanted him to be happy here, but through that extraordinary franchise of free will he could obey the rules or refuse to obey them; not animated automaton but a potential companion, having free will to love or hate - and if he loved God and obeyed Him as a free agent, and not under compulsion, his potential companionship with his Maker would become a reality and he could be close to his Father. ²⁴

To further prepare man for carrying out His divine purpose, the Lord God (Jehovah Elohim - i.e. "the most sacred name and proper name for the Supreme God" ²⁵) made a delightful home for him. Genesis 2:4-25 tells that God planted a beautiful garden rich in earth's choicest fruits in Eden to the east and He placed him in the midst of it. (In the Hebrew the word Eden means "luxury, delight, pleasure" ²⁶.) In this garden were planted two trees that were of utmost importance for man's carrying out God's purpose. The tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil were planted in the middle of the garden. By the use of these two trees the proper relationship in which man stands to God is made clear.

²⁴Fulton Oursler, The Greatest Book Ever Written (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1951), p. 2.

²⁵Davidson, Op. cit., p. 300.

²⁶Ibid., p. 588.

Genesis 2:16-17 says, "And Jehovah God commanded the man saying, You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you may not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, dying you shall die." ²⁷ The Hebrew word that is used for the word commanded is yetsv which comes from the root word tsavah which means to "set over, appoint, to charge, to command, to determine, to decree, to commission." ²⁸ This word is used here as a command but it implies something more - it implies a covenant being made. When He commanded man not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil He also said if you do you will surely die; thus implying that if man obeyed His orders he would surely live (because man was free to eat of the tree of life). So in this covenantal relationship that is established between God and man, God has commissioned man to do His will (i.e. to carry out His purpose). And as has already been shown God's purpose for man is to multiply and "show forth" gladly and freely the glorious excellencies of their blessed God.

From the work of God in creation it becomes clear that God has chosen man (i.e. people) as the receptacles of His own holiness, wisdom and love; that they might enjoy Him and show forth gladly and freely the glorious excellencies of their blessed God. And even though the word "chosen" is not

²⁷ Jay P. Green, Sr., Op. cit., p. 5.

²⁸ Davidson, Op. cit., p. 641.

used in the creation story, it is implied in the very act of the creation of man. God could have used animal or beast as the receptacles of His holiness, wisdom and love, but He chose to use man. Therefore man becomes God's "chosen people" or "Bachirayv - His chosen ones" ²⁹ (this word is used to describe the people of God in the same way that qahal Jehovah is used and translated in the Greek as ekklesia or church; this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter III). Thus, we see God establishing His Church with a specific task at the very beginning of creation.

II. The Old Testament Church

There can be no doubt that the Church (i.e. the people whom God had chosen) was perfect at the beginning. For God had said of it, as of everything He had made, "It was very good." That is, it was just right for its purpose. Now the man (Adam - Genesis 4:25) and the woman (Eve - Genesis 4:1) were happy as they lived in the beautiful garden. They had more to enjoy than their countless descendants, for they had been born in a perfection of mortal powers, and every sight and sound, feeling and smell and taste was more intense to them, supremely satisfying. In God's full pleasure and approval their felicity bloomed. Naked and unashamed, they were never satiated with each other. They lived in Paradise.

²⁹ Jay P. Green, Sr., Vol. II, Op. cit., p. 1100 (i.e. 1 Chron. 16:13).

Now the Church was completely prepared to carry out the purpose which God had divinely planned for it. However as we look at the development of the Old Testament Church it becomes clear that it failed to fulfill God's eternal plan and purpose. To understand this more clearly the development of the Old Testament Church will be divided into two major sections: The Patriarchial Period of the Church and The Mosaic Form of the Church.

The Patriarchial Period

Ordinarily most people think of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as being the patriarchs. But as the definition of the word "patriarch" points out, Adam, Noah and Joseph should be included in this group of "fathers". The first definition of patriarch given in Webster's dictionary is, "The father and ruler of a family or tribe, especially in Biblical history before Moses." The first two definitions given in the American Heritage Dictionary are, "1. The paternal leader of a family or tribe. 2. In the Old Testament: a. Any of the antediluvian progenitors of the human race, from Adam to Noah. b. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or any of Jacob's twelve sons, the eponymous progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel: 'And Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs' (Acts 7:8)."

When we read the stories of the patriarchs as a whole in the Bible, it becomes obvious that one theme runs throughout it like a single thread: the covenantal relationship between

God and His Church (i.e. the people He chose to show forth His glory). This relationship was very significant in the development of the Church and will be seen as we look at the patriarchs one at a time.

Adam. As stated previously the covenantal relationship was established with Adam from the very beginning. That relationship was that God would give man eternal life if he would obey His commands and show forth His glory to others. However, something happened in man that caused him to break that covenant that God had established with him. G. Campbell Morgan along with most biblical scholars call this the "fall of man". He says that in Genesis 3 we find:

...the beginning of the account of the fall. Yes, I resolutely adhere to the old theological word - there is no other. You can say failure if you like, breakdown, missing the mark. There is no better word than the fall of man. What was it? Rebellion against the rule of God. Man is seen listening to a voice which slanders God. Man is then seen yielding to certain desires, and here we have an act of disobedience.³⁰

Whatever we may call it we see the entrance of sin into the heart and life of man; and we see man being separated from the communion and fellowship of God. Why did this happen and how did it effect God's divine purpose for the Church? The Scriptures shall be the guide to the answers to these questions.

³⁰G. Campbell Morgan, The Unfolding Message of the Bible, (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1961), pp. 33-34.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden is a witness to the fact that two forces already existed - good (Godliness) and evil (later known as Satan). Genesis 3 gives a clear explanation as to why this separation happened. At first there is the temptation by the serpent. The serpent as the agent in the temptation is simply described as "cunning" (arum - "crafty, cunning, subtle; prudent, and cautious" ³¹) above every beast of the field. Oswald T. Allis says that it wasn't until much later that it was made clear that the real agent was Satan, the deceiver of mankind. Dr. John Sampey said that the tempter appeared as a serpent, insidious and artful. As he appeared he raised the question whether God is not unkind and arbitrary in withholding from His creatures the right to use the good things by which they are surrounded. When he succeeds in winning a hearing, he boldly accuses God of being a liar, and intimates that God is jealous of His creatures, lest they rise to His own plane of knowledge. Thus the tempter injects a terrible doubt into the mind of Eve. (As 1 John teaches the real liar here is the serpent because "he who says 'I know Him' but disobeys His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" - 1 John 2:4.)

"And she took...and ate." The sin was an act of disobedience. Adam's sin was different from Eve's. He was not

³¹Davidson, Op. cit., p. 615.

deceived (1 Timothy 2:14). But he followed Eve into an act of disobedience. This act of disobedience was in opposition to God's plan for man's relationship with Him. The very first Church (i.e. the people God had chosen to show forth His glory to others) had failed by breaking the covenant God had made with them.

God's plan was that man might have continuous and unbroken fellowship with Himself by free choice. Man disobeyed God and the penalty of disobedience is death (Genesis 2:17; 3:19). That it meant physical death is obvious as shown by the phrase "and he died" (the Hebrew vayyamot comes from mut which means "to die, both naturally and by violence" ³²) as found in Genesis 5. But in its fullest sense death is separation and alienation from the living God. This took place at once. Expulsion from the garden, the place of communion with God, is the beginning of the carrying out of the sentence of death, by debarring man from the tree of life. This separation or "fall" is rarely mentioned in the Bible. Its effects are more frequently referred to sin, suffering, death. This separation is fundamental to all that follows for the Church. It alone accounts for the subsequent course of the history of mankind upon the earth, for the contrast between the good of man (Genesis 1:27, 31) and the wickedness of man (Genesis 6:5), and for the catastrophic course of human

³²Davidson, Op. cit., p. 476.

history which the Bible records. It represents sin as alien to man's nature as originally created; as the result of seduction from without; as something that ought not to be; as a bondage from which God purposes to redeem man. The effects of this sin is that man is a fallen being and cannot have a physical eternal life as he once was able. Now he must have a way of salvation from this sin. Even though it is not mentioned directly in the Scriptures, Jehovah God must have given Adam and Eve (or the Church) some instructions concerning "life after death", i.e. to obtain it they must live in obedience to His will. And because of His great love He must have instructed them to "show forth" the way of salvation as they continued to live on the earth and live in obedience to Him; that is living in holiness, wisdom and love.

In Genesis 1:28 God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. God's plan was changed somewhat because of disobedience (i.e. now man must die physically before he could inherit everlasting fellowship with God) but His desire to have more beings for fellowship was still there. And so was His command of Genesis 1:28. The birth of Cain and Able was in accordance with the command in Genesis 1:28. In Cain and Abel can be seen the immediate consequences of the disobedience of the people God had chosen to show forth His glory. Cain and Abel both brought of their possessions to give to God. (God's wanting man to worship Him can be seen in the sacrifices

being given to Him by Cain and Abel even though it is not directly stated in the Bible.) But God only accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's because of his nature within (Genesis 4:7). Dr. John Sampey says that Cain's offering was not accepted because of unbelief; Oswald T. Allis says that it was rejected both because of the nature of the offering and because of the spirit in which it was offered; Adam Clarke says that it was not accepted because of his not being humble and not having faith. Whatever the reason for God not accepting Cain's offering it originated because of disobedience which comes from man's inner nature. Cain became angry and God told him to rule over (conquer) it. But Cain nursed his hatred until the opportunity came to kill his brother. Now because of the failure of the Church (i.e. God's chosen people...) through disobedience and the breaking of the covenantal relationship we see the formation of two distinct classes of people on the earth, represented by the first two children born of our race. The "evil" man comes first. He is also religious (Genesis 4:3), but he was not God's child - he was of the evil one (1 John 3:12); he was not righteous, but unrighteous. Abel on the other hand, is accepted as of God; declared righteous or "dikaia" as 1 John 3:12 says; which means "righteous, just, upright, innocent, pious." ³³ Abel is saved eternally; whereas Cain, utterly refusing to repent of

³³Harold K. Moulton, The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 102.

or confess his sin, goes out from the presence of the Lord, and is left in the eternal darkness he had chosen - of which he was. Now the general truth discovered in all this is that there are two great classes of beings on earth, the enemies of God (those who choose to stay in their sin) and the Church (those who love God and choose to obey Him - i.e. the people of God). In other words there are the unrighteous and the righteous.

Cain and his line go on to increase on the earth. Note:

...He and his line begin the "world" as we now have it. See 1 John 2:16, which describes what the Bible means by "the world". ³⁴

Now Seth is born to replace Abel and it is through his line which comes the "righteous" (which is the Church). Genesis 4:26 says that it was after this that "it was begun to call on the name of Jehovah." Adam Clarke says:

The marginal reading is, "Then began men to call themselves by the name of the Lord,"; which words are supposed to signify that in the line of Enos the true followers of God began to distinguish themselves, and to be distinguished by others, by the appellation of "sons of God"; those on the other branch of Adam's family, among who the divine worship was not observed, being distinguished by the name "children of men." ³⁵

These people were the ones who were to reflect God's own glory and show forth God's great love and way of salvation.

³⁴William R. Newell, Old Testament Studies (Toronto, Canada: Evangelical Publishers, 1923), p. 19.

³⁵Adam Clarke, Adam Clarke's Commentary - One Vol. Ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1972), p. 26.

These people were the Church (i.e. they were true followers of God and were carrying out His purpose as He originally planned).

However, a terrible thing happened in the Church. When "men" (i.e. Cain's line) began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, the "sons of God" took to wife such of them as they chose. Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man for ever" (the Hebrew word for man here is adam and means "human being, irrespective of sex, more frequently collect" ³⁶). The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth because of the intermarriage of the righteous with the unrighteous ("which probably means the corrupting of the line of Seth by the line of Cain" ³⁷). Instead of the Church ("sons of God") showing forth God's love and way of salvation, it again disobeyed God and became corrupt and lived in unrighteousness. Because of this God's purpose could not be carried out and He repented (yinnachem which means "to feel regret, to repent so as to produce either a change of conduct or purpose" ³⁸). Genesis 6:7 witnesses to this fact, it says that Jehovah said, "I will wipe man whom I have created from the face of the earth..." ³⁹

³⁶Davidson, Op. cit. p. 7.

³⁷Allis, Op. cit., p. 23

³⁸Davidson, Op. cit., p. 544.

³⁹Green, Op. cit., p. 14.

Noah. Destruction is God's judgment over the disobedient people. But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord because he was a "righteous" (tsadhiq means "just, righteous in character and general conduct" ⁴⁰) man. He and only he was blameless and innocent in his generation and he walked (halak means "to walk, to go after, to follow, to live" ⁴¹) with God. So not only did Noah talk with God, but he also lived according to God's purpose and obeyed Him; thus he found favor in God's eyes. Now God could continue with His original plan by showing His great love and saving Noah from the destruction. In turn Noah would continue living in righteousness and show forth God's love and way of salvation. Noah and his descendants were the people God chose to fulfill His purpose, therefore, they were the Church.

As before God establishes His covenant with the people He has chosen to show forth His glory. Noah kept his part of the covenant by doing all that the Lord had commanded (Genesis 7:5). Because Noah kept the covenant that God had made in Genesis 6:18 God saved Noah and his family from the destruction of the flood.

Because Noah was ~~was~~ a righteous man he recognized that it was because of God's mercy and love that he was spared. So as soon as they were on dry land again he set up an altar of thanksgiving (by this action of Noah as well as that of

⁴⁰Davidson, Op. cit., p. 640.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 189.

Cain and Abel it appears that God had already given instructions to the Church concerning the "showing forth" His worth to others - i.e. worship).

God was so pleased with Noah that He said, "Behold, I am establishing My covenant (Hebrew berith means "agreement, league, covenant - from the idea of cutting" ⁴²) with you, and your descendents..." (Genesis 9:9). By the use of the word "My" God is implying that this is the same agreement that He had made with Noah before he went into the ark. God had already blessed Noah and his three sons and told them to multiply and fill the earth - with an implication that God wants more people to share His love with as was His purpose from the beginning. But now there are new dimensions in this agreement, e.g. this is made to Noah and his descendants for everlasting generations (Genesis 9:12); and God made a new promise in His covenant and that promise was to never again destroy flesh by water. To show man that He would keep His promise of never destroying flesh by water again He set His bow in the clouds as a sign of a covenant between Him and the earth (Genesis 9:13). By using the article "a" instead of the word "My" God is showing that this promise is only a part of His great covenant that He has established between Himself and man. And God said that when He sees the bow in the clouds He would remember the everlasting covenant He has made. As God said that

⁴¹Ibid., p. 189.

⁴²Ibid., p. 114.

the bow in the clouds is a sign that He will keep His promise, it is also a sign of the everlasting covenant of which man is a part, i.e. man must remember his responsibility to obey God and show forth His love so that God's purpose can be fulfilled.

Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood. Noah and His sons had multiplied as God had commanded (see footnote 43 in reference to this). During this time the earth became filled with people who began to scatter. And these became wicked just as the people before the flood. The Church (i.e. those people God had chosen) failed to keep God's covenant through holiness, wisdom and love. In fact they became so interested in self that they decided to build a tower in Babel that would reach the heavens. Because they wanted to make a name for themselves rather than show forth the love of God, the Lord confused their language and scattered them abroad over the earth. This was not what God had originally intended because He had wanted all men to reflect His glory to each other so that man would walk with God and keep his part of the covenant as Noah had done. Now this seemed impossible because man could not communicate with one another, i.e. outside their own group. Each group must begin again to

⁴³Fulton Oursler states that Shem was blessed by Noah and became the forefather of the Hebrews, the Shemites; Japheth, was to be the progenitor of the goyim or Gentiles; Ham was to be the seed of the peoples of Canaan, except for the Israelites, who were destined to conquer all others; and Ham was also the father of the dark peoples of Africa and Egypt was known as the "land of Ham".

find its destiny. Would there appear righteous people among them seeking to find God, talk to Him, learn His will and obey? Would the Church be gone forever?

There would be few among the multitudes of hardened men, "but enough to save us all from annihilation." ⁴⁴

Abraham. Because God was (and is) a God of love He did not throw aside His divine plan, no, He continued it in spite of the wickedness of man. So God chooses Abraham (just as He had chosen Adam and Noah) to be the progenitor of a family which He would establish His covenant with and develop into a nation, and separate from all other nations of men, so that they should show forth the knowledge of the only true and living God.

If the book of Genesis stopped with ch. 11, a fitting title for it would be "The Plan That Failed." It would describe God's attempt to bring into being a world in which men in fellowship with him and with each other would realize a perfect order. And it would show how God was defeated by man's perversity so that nothing resulted except confusion and misery. But Genesis does not end with ch. 11. In ch. 12 we see taking shape God's plan for the redemption of a world that has rebelled against Him. God chooses a man, Abraham, to be this man; that through Abraham others may become God's men, knowing Him and serving Him. ⁴⁵

Abraham's origin came from Shem whom Noah had blessed and from Seth who replaced Abel and was righteous before God. And because of this somewhere in his life Abraham must have found

⁴⁴Oursler, Op. cit., p. 23.

⁴⁵David N. Freedman and James D. Smart, God Has Spoken (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 31.

the truth about God and began to walk with Him. When God called Abraham, he was seventy-five years old and a very wealthy man, his whole life deeply rooted in the quiet countryside of Haran - by leaving this fertile, well-watered country he had everything to lose and nothing to gain. But when God called he obeyed without hesitation. And through Abraham God is able to once again establish His Church.

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing...; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." (Genesis 12:1-3. RSV).

This passage of scripture is a covenant although the word "covenant" is not used. God is in fact establishing His covenant with Abraham just as He did with Adam and Noah. In this covenant are the same elements, i.e. promise of blessing and guidance if Abraham will obey. The promise here is that from Abraham will come a great nation and his name will be great. But with this promise comes an implied responsibility on the part of the Church (Abraham and his great nation). That responsibility is seen in the last phrase of the above passage (Genesis 12:3b): "and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves (or shall be blessed)." The Hebrew word for blessed here is neberek which comes from the word barak and means more than just to be blessed or happy. It also means to invoke God, to praise, to celebrate, to adore

and to bless God which is done with bended knees. Nebereku is here Niphal but is used the same as Hithpael in Genesis 22:18; 26:4; and 28:14; and has the same meaning as Galatians 3:8 when Paul was talking about the witness of Abraham's faith. It also seems to refer more to a relationship than a receiving of something as a gift.

Genesis 22:18 and 26:4 could read, "they shall pray that the lot of Israel may be theirs." Comp. with Gal. 3:8 which could read, "be brought by them to the true knowledge and worship of God." ⁴⁶

And because the word for blessed here in Genesis 12:3 has the same meaning as Genesis 22:18; 26:4; and Galatians 3:8 it could read "by you all the families of the earth shall be brought to the true knowledge and worship of God."

But how was this purpose of bringing all the families of the earth to the true knowledge and worship of God going to be accomplished? In the covenant God promised to make a great nation of Abraham's descendants by multiplying them and giving them the land of Canaan (see footnot 47 for more comment about this). In other words Abraham's descendants were going to be God's Church (i.e. the people God has chosen) with a specific task of showing forth God's glory to all the earth.

⁴⁶Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 143.

⁴⁷Why did God promise Abraham the land of Canaan? There must have been a special purpose for the Promised Land. James C. Muir, in his book His Truth Endureth (Philadelphia: National Publishing Co., 1937), p. 39, helps us to understand this more clearly. He says, "As it was the mission of Israel to spread a gospel that would bring about the spiritual regeneration of

Abraham kept his part of the covenant and obeyed God, and wherever he went he built an altar and called upon God's name in public worship (e.g. Genesis 12:8; 13:4). Whenever Abraham called upon the name of the Lord it did not mean that he merely asked the Lord to help him; the word for called here is yiquera' and comes from the root word qr' which means "to call upon, cry-out, shout, invoke, cry to publish, celebrate, praise, proclaim."⁴⁸ So we see Abraham fulfilling his part of the covenant by showing forth the knowledge of the true God not only by calling on the Lord but also by proclaiming and publishing who He is.

Because of Abraham's obedience God's plan began to run its course. God renewed His covenant with Abraham again and again (e.g. Genesis 15; 17:2; 22:18). Each time God promised that "...by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." So as a pledge of its fulfillment God gives Abraham a son. The boy, Isaac, was a living sign of the covenant between God and Abraham. Abraham was to be the "father of God's chosen people" (i.e. those whom God would choose to continue carrying out His purpose) and through Isaac and his descendants the promise of God would be made good. When

of mankind, this great movement must center itself somewhere on the great highways. At that early date, the highways were the great means of communication, and in Palestine the great inter-continental highways running east and west were intersected by the commercial highways running north and south...Situating like a corridor opening on three continents, Palestine was the logical place to be the Promised Land."

⁴⁸Davidson, Op. cit., p. 665.

God renewed His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 22:18, He says that the reason why He is going to keep His promise and allow his descendants to be the Church (i.e. by them all the nations of the earth shall be blessed) was because Abraham had obeyed His voice, indicating that in the fulfillment of God's divine purpose obedience by the Church is required.

Isaac. After Abraham died God blessed Isaac his son as He had promised. And Isaac chose for himself the way of God as his father Abraham had done. Isaac had married Rebekkah and the promise of an heir was fulfilled in their son Jacob. God confirmed His covenant with Isaac in Genesis 26:1-5. This was the same covenant He had made with Abraham. The Lord said to Isaac, "...and I will bless you; for to you and your descendants I will give all these lands (i.e. Canaan where He had told them to stay), and I will fulfill the oath which I swore to Abraham, your father." That oath was to multiply his descendants as the stars in the heavens, and give the land of Canaan to his descendants. Then the Lord added, "and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed", i.e. by his descendants the nations of the earth shall be brought to the knowledge and worship of the true God. The Lord said that the reason He was going to do this was because Abraham had obeyed His voice and kept His charge (the word for charge is moshemarethi and means the same as meshe-mar that is found in Proverbs 4:23 which means "watching or

guarding; to take heed;" ⁴⁹ in other words Abraham took heed to walk with God and guarded his steps), His commandments, His statutes, and His laws. By this we see that God has already established guidelines as to how the Church should live as they carry out the purpose of God. And of course if this covenant was to be fulfilled by Isaac, he would have to obey the Lord as Abraham had done.

Isaac obeyed the Lord and he called on the name of the Lord in public worship just as Abraham had done, i.e. he proclaimed and published who God was before the other nations (Genesis 26:28). Isaac did indeed fulfill God's purpose.

Jacob. In Genesis 28:3-4 we see Jacob receiving through Isaac the same covenant that God had made with Abraham. Isaac believed that God was powerful enough to carry out His promise of making a nation of peoples out of Jacob and giving them the land of Canaan. He showed this by using the name El Shaddai (i.e. The Almighty; Omnipotent). After this Isaac was sure that God's purpose would be fulfilled through his son Jacob.

God establishes His covenant with Jacob in a dream. In this dream (Genesis 28:10-22) there was a ladder that reached to heaven and at the top of it stood God, and God said to Jacob, "I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac..." After identifying Himself to Jacob God establishes His covenant with Jacob as He had done with Abraham

⁴⁹Davidson, Op. cit., pp. 727-728.

and Isaac. Again the same elements were present in this that were in the covenant with Abraham and Isaac. God promised to bless Jacob and be with him wherever he went. And the purpose of the covenant was that "by Jacob and his descendants all the families of the earth might be blessed, i.e. they shall be brought to the true knowledge and worship of the true God Jehovah" (Genesis 28:14). Jacob responds by acknowledging God as Jehovah (the true God who was God of Abraham and Isaac). By doing this he is identifying himself with the covenant that God made with both Abraham and Isaac and acknowledging that God's purpose is to make a company of peoples or nation through him in the land of Canaan to show forth God's glory to all the families of the earth.

Jacob obeyed God and his name was changed to Israel because Jacob had seen God's face and striven with Him and had survived (Genesis 32:22-30). In Genesis 35 we see God again renewing His covenant with Israel. In this covenant God says that a nation and a company of nations shall come from Israel, and He reaffirms that He (El Shaddai) will give to Israel the land which He gave to Abraham and Isaac. Israel obeyed God just as Abraham and Isaac had done and built altars and called on the Lord (Genesis 33:20; 35:8).

Now Israel was to become a father of one nation and a company of nations which were to be the Church (i.e. the people God had chosen to show forth the knowledge of Him and

His worship). How was this to be done? Israel had twelve sons that were to become the tribes of Israel, God's "chosen people", i.e. the Church.

But God had told Abraham that before this would come about his descendants would spend four hundred years in bondage (Genesis 15:13). What about the years before the bondage? What would take place in the Church during this time? These years were to be the years of preparation and multiplication for Israel. And it all began with the life of Joseph.

Joseph. Of his twelve sons Israel's favorite was named Joseph. The story of how Joseph was sold as a slave and how he became a ruler in Egypt is well known and is found in Genesis 37 - 50; therefore it will suffice to say that Joseph was used by God to bring Israel's family to Egypt to prepare the way for multiplication and bondage. Joseph walked with God just as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had done.

When Joseph was about to die he confirmed that he had known about the covenant between God and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He said to his brothers with an oath, "God will visit you and bring you out of this land to the land which He swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." So even in and through the use of Joseph God could continue His plan of establishing a Church (i.e. a nation/people who would show forth God's glory in a way that all the families of the earth could be blessed or come to the knowledge of the true God and His worship).

God's intended purpose for choosing to create man was that man would multiply and show forth God's glory. But as seen in the Patriarchial period man disobeyed God and brought about two classes of people - the "righteous" and the "unrighteous". Because of His great love, God provided a way to continue with His plan. He would call people to show forth His love and way of salvation. The descendants of Seth were the ones responding to God's call of obedience and therefore were qualified as the qahal Jehovah (i.e. the called-out ones or the Church). The worldly people (i.e. unrighteous) who refused to become a part of the true worshippers of God gradually prevailed, and at the time of the flood the Church consisted only of Noah and his family. Later when faith in the true God was on the verge of dying out, God renewed His call and covenant with Abraham, making his family the Church.

In the Patriarchial period of the Old Testament Church man kept his part of the covenant by showing forth the true God and His worship. How was this done? As stated previously God gave instructions concerning this; He gave them external forms by which to do this. Dr. Wesley Duewel says:

The aspects of formal patriarchal religion included:

- (a) A plain altar.
- (b) Burnt-sacrifices.
- (c) Sabbath observance.
- (d) Circumcision of male infants and proselytes.

- (e) Tithing.
- (f) Prophecy of coming Messiah was progressively given.
- (g) Divine revelation was given through visions, dreams, and theophanies.⁵⁰

The Mosaic Form

As stated previously Genesis 12:3 ("In you all the families of the earth will be blessed") means that through the Church all the families of the earth will come to the knowledge of the true God and His worship. This is very significant in the study of God's plan and purpose for His Church. In this verse is the understanding that all that has happened to Abraham and Israel is intended to fulfill God's purpose. In His covenant with the patriarchs God had promised them blessings so that they might show forth His blessings to all peoples of the earth. This covenant was not a one-sided one committing God unconditionally to the support of the patriarchs in all circumstances. Instead, it was a "mutual affair in which the God of Israel could not be expected to do his part unless the people did theirs."⁵¹ The patriarchs recognized this and they obeyed the Lord's commands. Because of the covenant between God and the patriarchs (i.e. the promise of God and the obedience of the patriarchs) God chose Israel out of the great multitudes of peoples to be the

⁵⁰Dr. Wesley Duewel, Ecclesiology, Op. cit., p. 41.

⁵¹Lindsay B. Longacre, The Old Testament Its Form and Purpose (N.Y. - Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1945), p. 19.

Church (i.e. the people who would show forth the knowledge of the true God and His worship). By this is meant that "the whole burden of responsibility for all mankind falls on this people." ⁵²

In order to understand this more clearly it is necessary to look at the history and development of the nation of Israel. As we look into the development of this nation, we can see that by the use of His name, God is able to set forth His purpose and establish His covenant with the nation Israel.

After Joseph died there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. This king order that all the Israelites be put into bondage as slaves. This oppression continued for over four hundred years. Finally the day came when things grew so bad for Israel that they cried out and groaned for help. We see in Exodus 2:23-25 that their cry went up to God (here the word Elohim is used with an article and means the Supreme God or Jehovah the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.) God heard their cries and remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Also God saw that the condition of Israel was such that they were ready to follow Him and His purposes. In other words God was now ready to lead them from bondage and fulfill His promise to the fathers by giving them the land of Canaan and making of them a great nation so that they can show forth His glory to all the families of the earth.

⁵² Rolf Rendtorff, God's History (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 20.

Moses is to be used by God in the deliverance of the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt. God reveals Himself to Moses at Mount Horeb as Jehovah the God of his fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. At this point Moses must have remembered the promise God had made with his fathers of old. And in Exodus 3:7-12 God tells Moses what his part in His plan is, i.e. to deliver Israel (the people God has chosen to show forth His glory to all the families of the earth) out of Egypt. And by His name God is able to set forth His purpose of fulfilling His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the covenant He made with them. The Israelites know about this covenant and God tells them that He is repeating His covenant with them, i.e. He promises to deliver them from the bondage of Egypt and give them the land of Canaan providing they serve Him (Exodus 3:12; 4:23). As has been shown a covenant is a two-way agreement and the word that God uses in these verses for "you shall serve" is tha'abedun taken from the word abad which means "...doing the will of God as a true worshipper, or executing the purpose of God." ⁵³ Here this word is used in such a way that it indicates that God is telling Moses that the condition for Him bringing them out of Egypt is that they all must do His will so as to execute His divine purpose. And that divine purpose was that they would show forth the knowledge of the true God and His worship.

⁵³ Benjamin Davidson, The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon, Op. cit., p. 583.

After being led out of Egypt the Israelites arrive at Mount Sinai. Here the Church was reorganized. Previously God had called specific families to show forth His glory; now He is making His covenant with the nation Israel. Exodus 19 through the book of Deuteronomy describes how God established His covenant with the Israelites and reorganized them into a theocracy.

In order to establish the Israelites as the Church (i.e. so they could show forth the knowledge of the true God to all the families of the earth) three things were necessary. "One was a unifying loyalty; another, a pattern for everyday living; and the third, a code for the direction of their worship." ⁵⁴

In the beginning of Exodus 19 we see how God sent Moses down from Mount Sinai to tell the people about the covenant under which they would accept Jehovah as their God and obey His voice and keep His commandments and He would guard them as His "chosen people". It was this allegiance to God under the covenant that was to be for them a unifying loyalty. By virtue of her relationship with God Israel (i.e. the Church) became "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). Here God said that Israel "shall be..." indicating that it is her duty to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. And as Lawrence E. Toombs says these terms ought to be taken in the reverse order to that in which they appear in the text.

⁵⁴James H. Gilruth, The Eternal Purpose (Cincinnati: George P. Houston, Printer and Publisher, 1904), p. 71.

The holy nation is the nation set apart from all others because of its relationship to God and for a special kind of service to God. The words "kingdom of priests" define what this service is. In the ancient Israelite cult the priest was the mediator between God and man. When he came to the altar he brought with him the prayers and confessions of his people. When he turned toward the people it was with the assurance of the blessing and forgiveness of God. It was therefore the duty of the whole nation to stand between other peoples and God, bringing them to God and God to them. ⁵⁵

When the people of Israel heard the terms of the covenant they promised to do God's will (Exodus 19:8). In other words they accepted God's theocratic rule over them. By doing this the Church (Israel) became a "theocracy." ⁵⁶ In order to be this theocracy, two other things were necessary: a pattern for everyday living and a code for the direction of their worship. Through the giving of "The Law" (the Ten Commandments and Codes as seen in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) God was able to complete the reorganization of the Church (i.e. Israel is now a nation among nations).

The duty of this nation (the Church) is to be a "holy nation and a kingdom of priests" and stand between other peoples and God, bringing them to God and God to them. But how were they to do this? Through their everyday living and worship. In "The Law" are the instructions for this. Two characteristics of the law stand out above all the others. First, Israel

⁵⁵Lawrence E. Toombs, The Old Testament in Christian Preaching (Phil.: The Westminster Press, 1961), pp.67-68.

⁵⁶Suzanne de Dietrich, God's Unfolding Purpose (Phil.: The Westminster Press, 1960), p. 72.

(the Church) must worship God alone and keep free from all worship of idols. In a world that was full of gods and idols, this alone would be enough to mark Israel out as a nation different from all others. The second characteristic was the insistence that obedience to God demanded a life of honesty, justice, purity, and mercy.

The gods of the ancient world, the gods of the Israelites' neighbors, made few such demands upon their worshipers. Israel's God refused anything less than a thoroughgoing, daily obedience.⁵⁷

Moses received the words of the "law of the covenant" from God and told them to the people of Israel and again they promised to be obedient to all that God says for them to do (Exodus 24:3). Then God ratifies a solemn covenant with the people (i.e. the Church). God has now given them instructions as to how they are to keep their part of the covenant. These instructions are called the "Book of the Covenant" and are read to the whole assembly and then Moses sprinkles them with "the blood of the covenant" to seal the covenant between God and His Church (i.e. His chosen people). In this covenant Israel has promised to do the will of God and that meant they were promising to be a "holy nation and a kingdom of priests" (i.e. through their everyday living and worship they were to bring other peoples to God and God to them). God promised to bless Israel as a nation if she obeyed Him.

⁵⁷Freedman and Smart, Op. cit., pp. 50-51.

In the making of this covenant God was calling the Church (i.e. the Mosaic form of the Church) to be "a holy nation and a kingdom of priests." As can be seen in the Old Testament history over and again God called for Israel to be holy for He was holy, (e.g. Lev. 19:1). God had chosen Israel to be His Church so that all the families of the earth might come to the true knowledge and worship of Himself (Gen. 12:1-3). The only way this could be done is if a group of people (who answered God's call - "called out ones") would obey God and become holy. This holiness would consist of being "in the likeness" of God by: Separating themselves from all evil and dedicating and consecrating themselves to God; purifying themselves and being blameless before God; and being radiant and shining forth the glory of God to all others. By obeying "The Law" as set forth by Moses the Church could do this and be a "kingdom of priests" for all the families of the earth.

From the beginning of this reorganized Church it was difficult for Israel to remain "holy" continually. To remind them of their promises and of God's presence among them, "The tabernacle had been constructed for their worship."⁵⁸ God had promised to give them the land of Canaan but because of their rebellion practically all who came out of Egypt lived and died in the desert wanderings. The nation (Church) that finally was allowed to enter into the promised land was a

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 56.

people that had grown up in the desert under Moses' leadership and had been trained by him. In the book of Deuteronomy the covenant is restated so that this new generation will show all the families of the earth the glory of God in their holiness. The purpose of Israel as God's chosen people (the Church) can be summed up in Deuteronomy chapters 6 through 11. In these chapters Moses states the law which God commanded him to teach them. He says that the purpose of the law was so that they would do them in the land to which they were going over to possess (Deut. 6:1); implying that the land is being given for the specific purpose of showing forth the true God and His worship to the other nations. In Deuteronomy 7:6ff Moses tells Israel that they are a holy people to God and are a "chosen people" (a Church) for God's own possession. This is a restatement of what God said in Exodus and Leviticus meaning that Israel was set apart for a sacred use and purpose in the plan of God; they are to be His representatives and shall be holy as He is holy and shall be a "kingdom of priests" so that all the nations can come to Him. Moses tells them in Deuteronomy 8:6 that they must keep the commandments of God in this land by walking in His ways and by fearing Him. The word that Moses uses here for walking is the Hebrew word laleket which has the same meaning as the word for walking in Deuteronomy 19:9 and that is, "to follow the precepts of God." ⁵⁹ This

⁵⁹Tregelles, Op. cit., p. 224.

is the way to be blameless before God and so Moses is calling for this. The strongest command by Moses to the Mosaic form of the Church was to circumcise the foreskin of their hearts and lay up God's laws in their hearts, teaching them to others so that they might come to know God and be able to worship Him as He had planned from the beginning, (Deut. 10:12 - 11:21). However, as stated previously, Israel was not able to do the will of God and remain holy constantly. Even with the instructions from Moses the Church eventually (as seen in the Judges, Kings and prophets) played the harlot after other gods and instead of being holy, bowed down to the idols and turned aside from walking in God's ways (e.g. Judges 2:16-17). They became like the other nations instead of bringing them to God. Because of this they were carried off into captivity to Babylon.

God's divine purpose was that all the families of the earth might come to know Him and be reconciled to Himself through Israel (the Church) whom He had chosen to be a "kingdom of priests". But the Mosaic form of the Church had failed to fulfill God's eternal plan and purpose.

III. The Birth of the New Testament Church

As Dr. Wesley Duewel says, there is disagreement among theologians as to when the New Testament Church was born. He lists the following viewpoints as being a good sample of those that are held:

(1) Some contend that the Church began in a real sense when John and Andrew left John the Baptist to follow Christ (John 1:37).

(2) Some feel that the Church was founded when Peter, on behalf of the Twelve, confessed Jesus to be the Son of God (Matt. 16:13-20), for Christ speaks of His Church as already in existence in the eighteenth chapter (Matt. 18:17-20), and the same is implied partially in John 20:19-23.

(3) Some feel that the Church was founded at the Resurrection, when Christ regathered His disciples with a new faith and power.

(4) Most agree that the Church was really (some say for "practical purposes") founded on the day of Pentecost...The believers were baptized into one body by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

(5) Some feel that the Church was not fully begun until the work of the Holy Spirit at Caesarea, since the Church included Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6; Rom. 15:9-12).

(6) Some theologians doubt that there is a continuity between the Church of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament. They feel Pentecost was an entirely new beginning. ⁶⁰

Whatever theologians may say the Scriptures themselves seem to indicate that God's purpose for the New Testament church (the ekklesia) was (and is) a continuation of His purpose for the Old Testament Church (qahal Jehovah - Israel, God's chosen or called-out ones). This can be seen as we look at the continuity, unity and characteristics of the Old and New Testament Church.

Continuity

Israel may have failed to fulfill God's eternal plan and purpose, but its failure was not complete. God has always had

⁶⁰Dr. Wesley Duewel, Ecclesiology (Allahabad, U.P. India: The Allahabad Bible Seminary, n.d.), p. 42.

a remnant, from Adam to the present. His remnant has been faithful to Him and has been covered by His covenant. Israel was in captivity but God was going to save a remnant that He could use to fulfill His purpose of establishing His name among the nations (Ezekiel 36:22ff). Ezekiel had a vision of the life-giving Spirit of God moving upon His exiled people. In chapter 36 of Ezekiel we see that he became convinced that God was going to act in a new way in Israel's behalf, just as He had done when He brought them from the bondage of Egypt. And just as Jeremiah had believed in Jeremiah 31:31-34 Ezekiel was convinced that a new covenant was about to take place as shown in Ezekiel 37:24-28. The old covenant was giving way for a new covenant - a new deliverance was being planned by the mind of God. This deliverance was to be one in which the remnant of Israel would be allowed to return to Jerusalem and they would be God's people (i.e. the Church) and they would follow His ordinances and observe His statutes.

In this new covenant were the same principles that had been in God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (i.e. that God would bless them and multiply them and give them a place to live, and they would serve Him and be holy so that the nations would come to a knowledge of the true God and His worship). What was new in the covenant was that God was going to write His law upon their individual hearts and put His Spirit within them and it would be Him who would forgive their sins.

This law was the same law that God had given to Israel through Moses (i.e. it was the law of holiness). They were now as individuals required to: Separate themselves from evil and dedicate themselves to God; purify themselves and become blameless by observing God's ordinances and statutes; and be radiant for God (i.e. show forth the glory of God in their lives). Also it must be noted that in Isaiah 43:18-19 there is evidence of something else new in the covenant; they are to forget the former things and not consider the things of old as they show forth His glory. All through Isaiah 40 - 55 the writer tells of God speaking to Israel and saying that He has chosen them to be His servant as a covenant to the people. And in Isaiah 49:6 God states His purpose for saving a remnant from Israel very clearly. He says, "It is too trifling a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." The word for "light" here is 'or and the way it is used here it means to enlighten "for doctrine...as a teacher of the Gentiles." ⁶¹

The reason that God is doing a new thing is so that the people of Israel will see that what He is doing is for all peoples and not just for the house of Israel (Isaiah 56:6-8). The new thing is that He is including the Gentiles (all peoples) in His covenant (i.e. those who become His servants and obey Him).

⁶¹Tregelles, Op. cit., p. 23.

God keeps His promise and a remnant is saved. This was a new "Exodus" with a new covenant for all people. The new covenant very definitely is related to Israel's opportunity to help all mankind to come into a vital, living relationship with God. In Isaiah 42 God has said that He called Israel (the Church) in righteousness and has given them as a covenant to the people. And in order to win others to the love of God Israel must now become a suffering servant, not a warrior people but one of justice, humility, and deep sensitivity (Isaiah 42:1-8; 53:1-12). Here is a new Israel (Church).

One of the Great tragedies in history occurred when Israel refused to seize her opportunity as enunciated by Second Isaiah. True, a small number of Israelites returned to Jerusalem and Judah shortly after the days of Cyrus' decree..., but those who returned were not dedicated to the great vision of Second Isaiah. They did not perceive themselves as a "light to the nations," as having a priestly function to all mankind. They were concerned with re-establishing the cult at the Temple in Jerusalem, with its rituals, festivals, and sacrifices. They kept the shell but lost the kernal of their faith. They even looked for an "annointed one" (or messiah) in Zerubbabel the governor of Judah in the days of Haggai and Zechariah... In the decades following the great insights of Second Isaiah and the return to Jerusalem... the faith of the Jews in their homeland, Judah, languished. ⁶²

According to Horace Weaver in the decades that follow the Israelites were all too concerned with what God had done in the past and not concerned enough with what God was doing or

⁶²Horace R. Weaver, The Everlasting Covenant (Nashville: Graded Press, 1965), p. 205.

was going to do in their day. In Isaiah 43 God had told them to forget the things of old, implying that this was a new covenant and a new day for all people to come to know Him and His worship. But now what did they do except disobey God again and refuse to be the light to the nations by concerning themselves with the things of old. Through this "new Israel" God had tried to make a new Church that would bring all the families of the earth to Him, but once again they in turn rejected Him and His word. God had wanted the Israelites to be His suffering servant so that all the nations could come to know Him, but Israel rejected her opportunity.

But this time because God had made a "new covenant" that was not based on the sonship of Abraham He did not have to use Israel as a nation to be a witness for His name. But how was God going to implement that "new covenant" without using Israel (the Church)? In Jesus Christ (God's own Son) God was able to fulfill His plan of old. Jesus was to become the "suffering servant" of God. God's plan and purpose from the beginning was a reconciliation with all mankind and through the person of Jesus Christ He was able to fulfill that plan. As can be seen in the New Testament Jesus is that "new covenant" implemented. As can be seen in the book of Hebrews Jesus is a much better covenant than the old. In the old covenant only those who were a member of the Israelites' faith by circumcision could obtain forgiveness from God through sacrifices,

rituals, etc., but according to Hebrews 9 Jesus Christ fulfilled the new covenant and those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. And as stated previously in the new covenant God has called all to the inheritance if they will serve Him. Through Jesus' death and resurrection God was able to accomplish what He had planned to do from the very beginning, i.e. provide a way for all the families of the earth to see His glory and come to know Him and His worship.

Jesus' earthly parents were descendants from the true remnant of Israel (i.e. those who served God faithfully) and thus serves as a continuity of the Old Testament Church in the New Testament Church. As J. Robert Nelson says,

The testimony of the Bible thus presupposes both an historical break between the Jewish people of the Old Covenant and the non-national people of the New, as well as an unbroken continuity between these peoples insofar as God's saving work is concerned.⁶³

Recognition of this continuity rests upon faith in the revelation of God as the New Testament presents it. But as Nelson says there is also an internal verbal evidence which reveals at least what the Christians of New Testament times believed about their relation to the Old Israel. This is found in the relation of the Greek ekklesia, which refers to "Church" in the New Testament, to the Hebrew qahal, which means the "called

⁶³J. Robert Nelson, A Handbook of Christian Theology ed. by Marvin Halverson and Arthur A. Cohen, (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1966), p.54.

out Ones or the assembly of the congregation of Israel" in the Old Testament.

The Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, translated qahal by ekklesia. The writers of the New Testament in Greek readily chose ekklesia as the word to designate the new community of those who believed in Jesus Christ. This choice certainly implied a continuity between the Christian Church and Israel. And the importance of that implication for Christians lies in the knowledge that God's revealing and saving action in Israel has been decisively sealed and extended universally through the work of Jesus Christ and the reconstituting of the Church by Him. ⁶⁴

Unity

The Old Testament Church (i.e. Israel) served as a foundation of the New. The Old Testament Church was made up of the people of God and so is the New. God's purpose for the Church in His plan of salvation was one in both forms. The Old Testament Church (Israel) failed to fulfill God's eternal plan and purpose, but God's original plan suffered no final defeat. He started a "new" Church, i.e. people of God.

Now the Church is called by the **same** terms and names that were given to Israel in the Old Testament. Dr. Wesley Duewel lists them as follows: (These are taken from his book titled Ecclesiology that was published by The Allahabad Bible Seminary, Allahabad, U.P., India, n.d., p. 42.)

⁶⁴Ibid.

TERM USED	O.T. CHURCH	N.T. CHURCH
A chosen people	Deut. 10:15	1 Pet. 2:9
A holy nation	Ex. 19:6	1 Pet. 2:9
The people of God	Ps. 100:3	2 Cor. 6:16
A priesthood	Ex. 19:6	1 Pet. 2:9
God's treasure	Ex. 19:5	Mat. 13:44
The bride or wife of God	Isa. 54:6; 62:5	2 Cor. 11:2
God's vineyard	Isa. 5:7	John 15:5
God's inheritance	Isa. 19:25	1 Pet. 5:3
Israel	Isa. 44:6	Gal. 6:16
God's flock	Jer. 23:3	1 Pet. 5:2
A house	Ezek. 18:31	1 Tim. 3:15
A light	Isa. 60:1	Mat. 5:14
God's witness	Isa. 43:10	Acts 1:8
A church	Acts 7:38	Gal. 1:13

And as Dr. Duewel says there was a nominal Israel and a true or spiritual Israel (Rom. 9:6), corresponding with the visible church and the true Church of those spiritually born of God, the invisible Church. Galatians shows that the New Testament Church consists of true children of Abraham and inherit the Abrahamic blessing (Gal. 3:7,9,29). The great mystery hidden for ages but preached by the apostles was that the Jew and Gentile were now made one (Eph. 2:14; 3:5-6), in one body, one building, built upon the foundation laid by the Old Testament Church, Christ being the chief Corner Stone (Eph. 2:20-22); and that the Old and New were built into one habitation of God through the Spirit. There is one foundation, with the law and the prophets of the Old Testament Church and the apostles of the New together forming the basis for the new spiritual and true Israel, the Church of God. From this it is clear that there is a unity between the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church.

Characteristics

As we take a look of the characteristics of this newly born Church (i.e. the New Testament Church) we can see from them that God's original plan and purpose was continuing. Again we look to Dr. Duewel for help in identifying these characteristics:

The Church was Bible-centered. The Church immediately took the Old Testament (the Law and the prophets) as its authorized Scripture. The preaching of the Church was filled with references to this.

The Church was indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Time and again we read that the entire Church or its leaders were filled with the Holy Spirit. If they were conscious of anything, it was that they were cleansed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. When Peter justified his actions at Caesarea, this was the point he emphasized, that God had cleansed the hearts of the Gentiles by the Holy Spirit just as he had cleansed their hearts on the day of Pentecost. The Church was so conscious of the Spirit's indwelling, filling, empowering, and guiding, that they continually identified the work of the Holy Spirit with theirs. When Annanias and Sapphira lied to the Church, Peter said they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). When called before Jewish authorities Peter said, We are His witnesses...and so is the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32). Stephen told those angry with him they were resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51).

The Church was more conscious of the Holy Spirit than all else. It was the presence of the Holy Spirit which gave them courage in persecution and opposition, which guided them in their decisions. The first concern of Peter and John (Acts 8:15) and Paul (Acts 19:2) was that new groups of believers be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit made the Church known for its grace, faith, and power. The Holy Spirit was not given for the spectacular, but for the normal everyday life of the Church. In the Old Testament Church (i.e. Israel) the ark of the covenant represented God's presence and power (Numbers 10:33; Judges 20:27); in the New Testament Church the Holy Spirit represents God's presence and power.

The Church was full of joy and zeal. Being cleansed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Church was naturally full of joy and zeal, indeed, of all the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). The day of Pentecost was the harvest festival of the Old Testament Church, and on that day the new Church was given the abundance of the fruits of the Spirit. Joy, zeal, and miracles were constantly present in the Church. When revival came to a place, there resulted great joy in that city (Acts 8:8); when the disciples were persecuted they were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52). As news of increasing converts spread it was a cause of "great joy unto all the brethren" (Acts 15:3). Though humble, ordinary people, the Church was filled with such zeal that the world took special

note of them (Acts 4:13). When they were persecuted, they went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts 8:4). The more they were threatened, the more they kept witnessing (Acts 5:42). This is what God had called Israel (the Old Testament Church) to be like to fulfill His divine plan of bringing all the families of the earth to Him and His worship.

The Church was marked by a world-wide vision. The Church from its inception was a missionary Church. God's original purpose was one of a "world-wide vision". Through the new covenant of Jesus Christ national and racial boundaries were swept away. The new Church was given a divine order by Jesus Christ, "...in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This is what God had called Israel (the Old Testament Church) to do and now He is calling the New Testament Church to fulfill His "world-wide vision".

IV. Chapter Summary

In this chapter it was shown that the Church had its beginning in the Old Testament. From God's identity and His work at the very beginning of time was seen His divine plan and purpose for the Church. God created man in His own image (which was holy) so that man could show forth to others God's love. From the work of God in creation it was clear that God had chosen man (i.e. people) as the receptacles of His own holiness, wisdom and love; that they might enjoy Him and show

forth gladly and freely the glorious excellencies of their blessed God. Thus man became God's "chosen people" or His "Church" with a specific task.

From the very beginning God had established a covenant (i.e. a two-way agreement) with His people. In the covenant man was to be obedient to God's will and He would bless them and give them eternal life. However because of man's freedom of choice he chose to sin (i.e. rebel against God's known will) which brought with it physical death. But because of His love and mercy God still wanted His Church to multiply and continue carrying out His original purpose. So through the patriarchs God established His covenant with Israel (His chosen people) so that through them all the families of the earth would be blessed (i.e. they would come to know the true God and His worship).

But as was seen in this chapter over and over again the people God had chosen to be the receptacles of His own holiness failed to keep their part of the covenant. God had given them (i.e. the Mosaic form of the Church) instructions for their every-day living and for their worship to help them in the keeping their part of the covenant. Their duty was to be a "holy nation and a kingdom of priests" and stand between other peoples and God, bringing them to God and God to them. These instructions they received were called "The Law". By keeping this "law of the covenant" they would be a "holy

nation and a kingdom of priests" and fulfill God's divine purpose of bringing all the families of the earth back to Him. But Israel (God's chosen people - Church) failed to fulfill His plan because of their disobedience to keep their part of the covenant. As was seen in this chapter because of this they were sent into exile and Israel was no longer to be the Church through which God would show forth His love to all the families of the earth.

This chapter also made clear that even though Israel failed God's plan was not thwarted. He established a new covenant with the same principles of the old but with a new dimension (i.e. He was going to write His law upon their individual hearts and that He is including the Gentiles in His covenant). But how was He going to do this without Israel (His Church)? In this chapter it was shown that God was able to implement this new covenant through His Son, Jesus Christ. With Jesus Christ came the birth of the New Testament Church. And as was shown in the continuity, unity and characteristics the purpose of the New Testament Church is the same as God had called for in the Old Testament Church and that was, "all the families of the earth would be blessed." God had called for the Old Testament Church to be a "holy nation and a kingdom of priests" and bring all the families of the earth to Him; this is the same call that God made for the New Testament Church.

CHAPTER III

T H E N A T U R E O F T H E C H U R C H

"Christ came to establish a new society on earth." ⁶⁵

This society is that new community of the "people of God" that was chosen to show forth the glory of God to all the families of the earth. It is a new Israel embodied in Christ (the new and better covenant - Hebrews 8 - 9). As Old Testament Israel was "chosen" by God for spiritual service (Gen. 12:3; 15:6; Deut. 7:6), so the New Testament Israel is chosen (Rom. 9 - 11; Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:4-10) to live a holy life (1 Pet. 1:13-16) and to "bless the nations" (Luke 24:46-48; Acts. 1:8; cf. Isa. 43:10; 44:8). The new Israel (Church) as God's chosen shares Christ's redemption-through-suffering role of bearing the reconciling Word of God to the nations. Another New Testament characterization of this saving role embraces the concept of priesthood. Peter calls the Christians "a royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9), and John declares that the churches of Asia were made by Christ "a kingdom of priests" (Rev. 1:6). Christ's Church has been appointed to function as a priest for a sinful world, to intercede in its behalf to the end that it might be forgiven and transformed. The Church has a proclamatory responsibility, "to declare the wonderful deeds of him who called

⁶⁵David Watson, I Believe In The Church (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), p. 39.

her out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). The Church is thus a saved and a saving community. "She is a new order in society, not living aloof from the world, but living with a consciousness of her redemption and with a passion to share that redemption with those outside (Jn.17:14-16, 21)." ⁶⁶

To help make this clear a study of the nature of this new community (Church) is necessary. Therefore this chapter will be divided into four major sections plus a summary. The four major sections are:

- I. The Church is an Ekklesia
- II. The Church is a Covenant People
- III. The Church is a Royal Priesthood
- IV. The Church is a Holy People

The study in this chapter will be seen within the context of God's divine purpose as seen in Scripture.

I. The Church is an Ekklesia

Ekklesia is an expression in the New Testament signifying the new community of people of God called into existence by Jesus Christ.

Literally, the ecclesia means "the called out" or "the assembled." It derives from a Greek compound ek, meaning "out of" or "from," and kalein, meaning "to call." The word was employed in secular Greek to express this literal meaning of assemblage, especially to denote a gathering of people for political purposes. ⁶⁷

⁶⁶W.T. Purkiser, Richard S. Taylor, Willard H. Taylor, God, Man, and Salvation (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1977), p. 562.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 567.

This particular usage of the word is found in Acts 19:32, 39-40, referring to a secular assembly which was thrown into confusion over Paul's ministry at Ephesus. "For the Greeks the meaning was clear: the citizens were the ek-kletoi, those who have been called out and summoned together by a herald." ⁶⁸

Ekklesia also has a Hebrew background. "In the Greek Septuagint it translates the Old Testament Hebrew word qahal, which again comes from the root meaning 'to summon'." ⁶⁹ It is frequently used for the "assembly" or "congregation" of the people of Israel. When it is used with the addition of Jehovah, Israel becomes the "called out people of God" or Church.

With this background it is clear that the Church as an ekklesia is the summoned community responding in obedience to the call of God's Herald, Jesus Christ, yielding herself to His will, and living out His life in the world. The Church exists where people obediently respond to the summons of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

"The term ecclesia is also used in the New Testament to express the unique oneness of the Church." ⁷⁰ In Acts 8:1 there appears an explicit reference to the ekklesia in Jerusalem, but in 9:31 the word in the singular is used not merely for the Jerusalem community but for all the Christian communities in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Although the plural

⁶⁸Watson, Op. cit., p. 66.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 67.

⁷⁰Purkiser, Taylor and Taylor, Op. cit., p. 568.

ekklesiai is also used to designate all the churches (Acts 15:41; 16:5), there is fairly consistent use of the singular to express the Church at large. A congregation in any given place is called ekklesia with the understanding that it represents the Church of God. Paul exhorts the elders of Ephesus: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord" (Acts 20:28).

The Church is not the sum of all the congregations. Each community, even a house church, represents the total community, the ekklesia. Paul is explicit on this point. For example 1 Cor. 1:2 and 2 Cor. 1:1 read: "to the Church of God which is at Corinth" (te ekklesia...te ouse en Korintho). "The proper translation of the Greek is not 'the Corinthian congregation' but 'the Church as it is in Corinth'. (The Church in Corinth is not part of the Church of God; rather it is the Church of God.)" ⁷¹

This strong sense of oneness was not accidental. It arose out of the early Christians' common experience in Christ. In Christ there could be only one people of God, one ekklesia. Though expressed in local fellowships of believers, the Church remained always and singly "the Church of God." For examples of the local fellowships see Acts 5:11; 11:26; 1 Cor. 11:18; 14:19, 28. For examples of the oneness see Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:12,13; Eph. 2:16.

⁷¹Ibid.

Thus, the Church as an ekklesia is a new community of the people of God "called out" or summoned to call people in- to reconciling fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.

II. The Church is a Covenant People

"The heart and core of God's message to man through the Scriptures is that he desires a people - a community - to share in his life." ⁷² As seen in chapter two God made man to share in His joy. From the beginning to end, the Bible reveals that one of God's greatest desires is that human beings might enter into such a relationship with Him that He might call us "His people", (e.g. Ex. 6:6ff and Rev. 21:3). When God created man He gave man a free will and with this He made an agreement (covenant) with man. As seen in chapter two the elements of that covenant were: man would be obedient to God's will and walk in His statutes so that all the families of the earth would be brought to the true knowledge and worship of God; and God would bless man, multiply him, guide him, and give him eternal life. Because man kept rejecting God and breaking the covenant God called or summoned Israel to be "His people" and established His covenant with them. As the qahal Jehovah or ekklesia they were a "covenant people". In other words they were to be obedient to God's will and His statutes so that all the families of the earth would become

⁷²Watson, Op. cit., p. 75.

"His people". Through God's covenant with Israel He was going to fulfill His original plan. However Israel rejected God and broke His covenant just like all the others before. Therefore God established a "new covenant" that was better than the "old covenant".

God still wanted all the families of the earth to become "His people" so He sent His Son Jesus Christ to establish the new ekklesia (people of God). Through Jesus God was able to implement the "new covenant". As seen previously this new covenant had all the elements of the old covenant but with a new dimension (i.e. He was going to write His law upon their individual hearts and He was going to include the Gentiles in it).

As Jesus began to establish the new Church, by faith in Jesus they became the true people of God. Through Christ's death the "new covenant" was completely fulfilled (Heb. 9:15-28). Now through Christ's ekklesia (the true Israel) all the world could find the way of reconciliation with God (i.e. there is no other way than through Jesus Christ Himself). Under the old covenant there could only be reconciliation through the sacrifices by the Israelites, but now it comes through the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:19-25). And as John 3:16 says, "...whosoever believes in Him" becomes a member of that new community, and this includes the Gentiles as well as the Jewish people.

At first the new ekklesia did not understand this completely because as David Watson says,

Immediately after Pentecost there was probably little to distinguish the church from the rest of the Jewish people, apart from the new joy and love that the disciples had experienced so abundantly with the coming of the Holy Spirit. They still met in the temple, and submitted to many of the Jewish customs and regulations. Jesus had declared that he had not come to abolish the law and the prophets, and the first Christian community continued to observe the Jewish practices.⁷³

However, after Peter's vision in Acts 10 and after the Council of Jerusalem they saw themselves as the new and true Israel under a "new covenant" fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul points out that as a "covenant people" they are the ekklesia with the same purpose that the qahal Jehovah had under the "old covenant". In Rom. 9:6-8 he says, "It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel...This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise..." And writing to the Galatians he says, "Thus Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. So you see that it is men of faith who are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the

⁷³Ibid., p. 78.

gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'," (Gal. 3:6-8). Paul went on to end his letter by referring to the Church at Galatia as the "Israel of God," (Gal. 6:16). Through both the Romans passage and his letter to the Galatians Paul implies that the ekklesia under the "new covenant" has the same responsibility as Israel had under the "old covenant" (i.e. that through them all the families of the earth would come to the true knowledge of God and His worship).

The writer to the Hebrews tells the Church that they must keep their part of the covenant (as stated previously a covenant is a two-way agreement). In Hebrews 10:19-39 he gives an exhortation to hold firm without wavering. In verse 19 he addresses the Church as brethren. The Greek word used here is adelphoi (nom. plural) taken from the word adelphos which means, "an associate, a member of the Christian community" ⁷⁴ and shows that the writer definitely means the Church. The writer goes on in this passage to say that the judgment for failure to keep the covenant will be worse than it was for those who did not keep the law of Moses. He also says that for those who endure and keep the covenant there shall be a future reward "for He who promised is faithful." Thus the ekklesia (people of God) has been called to be a "covenant people" and fulfill God's original plan.

⁷⁴Harold K. Moulton, The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 6.

As a covenant people the ekklesia is to be ministers of the new covenant. This is not directly stated in the New Testament, but it is implied in Paul's letters to the Church. In several of his letters Paul told the people that they should imitate him (e.g. Phil. 3:17; 1 Cor. 4:16; 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6). In 2 Cor. 3:6 Paul says that God has made him a minister of a new covenant. The word that Paul uses for minister here is diakonous and means "a commissioned minister or preacher of the Gospel."⁷⁵ It has the same meaning as the word diakonos in Col. 1:23 and Eph. 3:7 and that is to proclaim the Gospel to all men (Jew and Gentile alike). Thus if the Church is to imitate Paul it must proclaim the Gospel of the new covenant to all the families of the earth.

III. The Church is a Royal Priesthood

As Israel was "chosen" by God for spiritual service (Gen. 12:3; 15:6; Deut. 7:6; Hos. 1:1; Amos 3:2), so the New Israel is chosen (Rom. 9 - 11; Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:4-10) to "bless the nations" (Gal. 3:8; Lk. 24:46-48; Acts. 1:8).

The Church as God's elect shares Christ's redemption-through-suffering role of bearing the reconciling Word of God to the nations. Another New Testament characteristic of the saving role embraces the concept of priesthood.⁷⁶

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 92.

⁷⁶Purkiser, Taylor and Taylor, Op. cit., p. 562.

This concept is set forth in 1 Pet. 2:5-10. Peter was writing to the Christians in the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. As has been stated earlier each community represents the total community (the ekklesia), thus we can say that Peter is writing to the Church. In verse 5 he says the Church is a holy priesthood. In verse 9 Peter uses a whole series of phrases which summarizes the task of the priesthood. He calls the Church "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." Peter is saturated in the Old Testament, and these phrases are all great descriptions of the people of Israel. They come from two main sources. In Isa. 43:21 Isaiah hears God say, "This people I formed for myself." And in Exodus 19:5,6 the voice of God is heard: "Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine; and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." Peter sees that the great promises which God made to His people Israel are being fulfilled in the Church, which is the new Israel. By looking at these phrases one at a time we can see the meaning of the Church as a priesthood.

Chosen People

Here again is the covenant idea. Exodus 19:5,6 is from the passage which describes how God entered into His covenant with His people Israel. In the covenant God offered a special

relationship with Himself to the people Israel. "He approached them with the spontaneous offer that they should be specially His people, and that He would be uniquely their God." ⁷⁷ That whole relationship depended on the people of Israel accepting the conditions of the covenant and keeping the law. That relation would only hold, "if ye shall obey my voice, and keep my covenant" (Ex. 19:5). From this it is learned that the Church is chosen for three things. (1) It is chosen for privilege. In Jesus Christ there is offered to each person a new and intimate relationship of fellowship with God. (2) It is chosen for obedience. The whole relationship depends on obedience. The privilege brings with it the responsibility of doing the will of God. (3) It is chosen for service. Its honor is that it is the servant of God. "Chosen for privilege, chosen for obedience, chosen for service - the three great facts go hand in hand." ⁷⁸

Royal Priesthood

As seen earlier "the primary function of the priesthood was that of mediation." ⁷⁹ In the Old Testament Israel was a "kingdom of priests" and it was the duty of the whole nation to stand between other people and God, bringing them to God

⁷⁷William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible - The Letters of James and Peter (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), p. 235.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Dean C. Gonnerman, An Inquiry into the Religious Experience of the Godly Hebrew in the Old Testament (A Thesis presented to Western Evangelical Seminary, 1966), p. 39.

and God to them. And so the new Israel (ekklesia) has been appointed to function as a priest for a sinful world, to intercede in its behalf to the end that it might be forgiven and transformed.

This priesthood is the priesthood of all believers. It is a Christian priesthood. And as Dr. Duewel says:

The priesthood is the entire body of Christ, the Church. Every believer has direct access to God, every believer is responsible to lead others to membership in the body and thus to priesthood on their part too. Each Christian is a priest...because he is a member of the body of Christ...As a Christian he is priest unto Christ--he represents Christ in the New Testament sense of priest, i.e. a member of the body of Christ. ⁸⁰

Priesthood belongs to the Church, and therefore to every member of the Church. The Church is to be a redeeming people because it is a redeemed people. The Church proclaims the good news of salvation, of forgiveness of sins; the Church points and leads sinners to Christ and the forgiveness of sins.

The New Testament teaches that Christ is the High Priest (Heb. 4:14; 8:1), and all believers are priests unto God (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). God wanted Israel to be a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:3-7), but Israel failed God, and now the Church is the new people of God, built on the foundation of the Old Testament Church, but newly built by Christ. It is the holy nation of priests through whom God now fulfills His worldwide purpose.

⁸⁰Dr. Wesley Duewel, Ecclesiology (Allahabad, U.P. India: The Allahabad Bible Seminary, n.d.), p. 59.

Each believer, as a New Testament priest to God, has a three-fold service. This includes the following:

The Believer Offers Spiritual Sacrifices (1 Pet. 2:5).

His body (Rom. 12:1), his life and service (Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6), his praise (Heb. 13:15), his prayer (Rev. 8:3-4; Ps. 141:2), his gifts (Heb. 13:16), his good deeds (Heb. 13:16) - all are spiritual sacrifices which he offers to God, and all are well pleasing to God.

The Believer Has a Priestly Ministry of Prayer. He has a ministry for all the world, in which he gives thanks for all (1 Tim. 2:1-2), and intercedes for all (1 Tim. 2:1-2). In this he is assisted by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The Believer is a Priestly Teacher and Witness. He is to witness to Christ (Lk. 24:48; Acts 1:8) and declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called him out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9), to be a teacher for the other fellow believers (Col. 3:16), and to give answers to non-Christian inquirers (Col. 4:6; 1 Pet. 3:15).

This priesthood of believers (ekklesia) is a royal one. In 1 Pet. 2:9 Peter uses the word basileion to show that the Church is distinct from all other religions. Basileion comes from basileios and means "possessed of high prerogatives and distinction."⁸¹ Its distinction lies in the fact that God chose it to fulfill His purpose, and its prerogatives are its ability to approach God through Jesus Christ.

⁸¹Moulton, Op. cit., p. 67.

Holy Nation

The royal priesthood (ekklesia) is a holy nation. These people have been chosen that they may be different from all other people. That difference lies in the fact that they are dedicated to God's will and to God's service. Other people may follow the standards of the world, but for them the only law is the standard of God and the will of God. This "holiness" of the Church will be discussed in detail in section four of this chapter.

A People for God's Own Possession

The greatness of the Church lies in the fact that it is God's own people. God has chosen this royal priesthood as His own possession that they might proclaim or "declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

It is God's intention that as his people we should glorify Him in the world. He has commissioned us to reveal Him through our corporate life as His "own people" to a world that does not know Him. ⁸²

IV. The Church is a Holy People

The royal priesthood that God has chosen to proclaim or show forth His glory is to be a "holy" nation. This is also seen in 1 Peter. Peter says in 1 Pet. 2:9 that the Church is a "holy" nation. The word that Peter uses here is hagion and

⁸²Watson, Op. cit., pp. 80-81.

and it has the same meaning as qadosh in the Old Testament (i. e. "radiance/glory", "separation", and "purity"). In the Old Testament God had called His chosen people to a life of holiness (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2). As seen in chapter two of this paper they were to be like God and separate themselves from all evil and consecrate themselves to God; they were to purify themselves and be blameless before God through obedience of His law; and they were to be radiant and show forth His glory to all the families of the earth. Peter recognizes that this is exactly what God has called the New Testament Church to be like. So in 1 Pet. 1:13-2:3 Peter exhorts the Church to be "holy" (hagioi). Peter does not tell the Church to be holy if you want to be; instead he says "become ye" (genethete "2 per. pl. aor. 1, imper., pass." ⁸³). From this use of the Greek word genethete it can be seen that Peter is giving a command for all the Christians (entire Church) to become holy. What Peter is really saying is: "You all receive the action of becoming holy now in all your conduct." Peter supported this by quoting Scripture, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44).

Peter explains that the holy priesthood is to follow the example of Christ which was one of holiness (1 Pet. 2:21-25). Christ not only left us an example of a life of holiness, He also called the Church to "holiness". In the Old Testament

⁸³Moulton, Op. cit., p. 77.

holiness resulted from obedience to the law and the prophets. Jesus said in Matt. 5 that He did not come to destroy the law and prophets but to fulfill them. Thus He came calling for holiness just as God had called for. This is supported by the prayer He prayed in John 17. Here Jesus is praying for His disciples. He prayed in John 17:17, "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth." The word for sanctify is hagiason and comes from the root word hagios (holy) and means "to separate, consecrate; cleanse, purify, sanctify; regard or reverence as holy." ⁸⁴ In other words Jesus wants His disciples to be dedicated to showing forth God's love by being like God in obedience to God's word, staying away from evil, and being pure and blameless inward and outward. Jesus clarifies this in John 17:20-26. He says that He wants this for all who believe in Him (i.e. the entire Church) so that they may be one. Jesus says that He has given these few disciples the glory (or radiance) which God had given to Him that they may make it known (that glory is the love with which God loved Jesus).

This holiness that Peter and Jesus are asking for is "love in practical operation." This is brought out in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In chapter two of Ephesians Paul tells the Christians that they are no longer strangers and sojourners, but they are fellow citizens with the members of the Church (which is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone - Eph. 2:20).

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 3.

Paul tells that the function of the Church is fulfilling God's purpose that was realized in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:9-11). This purpose was that all men might come to know the manifold wisdom of God and be reconciled with Him. Paul also says that this purpose is fulfilled through the unity of the Church when it upbuilds itself in love. This love (agape) is the same love that Jesus called for in John 17:26. Thus Paul is saying that the Church fulfills its purpose when it is holy.

In Eph. 4:17-5:20 Paul calls for that holiness to be put into practical operation. He says in vs. 17, "you (humas - all the Christians at Ephesus or the Church) must no longer live as the Gentiles do." He says the reason for this is that they are alienated from the life of God and have given themselves over to practice every kind of uncleanness. Paul says this is not what Christ taught the Church. Paul says that the Church must do two things in order to be holy as required by God: (1) Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life; and (2) Put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. When we look at these two things in detail and compare them with what Paul says in Col. 3:1-17 we can see what the Church (people of God) is to be like as it fulfills God's purpose of being a priesthood in the world. (To help see this more clearly these two requirements will be put on the next page under separate headings with a list of things that the Church must do under each heading.)

Putting Off the Old Nature

Corruption through deceitful lusts
 Stealing
 Evil talk and lying
 Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor (loud complaining),
 slander, all malice (desire to harm others)
 Fornication, impurity, covetousness, filthiness
 Silly talk, levity (gossip)

In Col. 3:5 Paul calls things such as these sinful earthly things which is idolatry (opposite from holiness).

Putting On the New Nature

Imitating God as beloved children
 Being renewed in the spirit of your minds (created after
 the likeness of God which is holiness)
 Speaking the Truth always
 Doing honest work and give to those in need
 Speaking only good which edifies the Church
 Walk in love (compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness,
 patience and forgiveness) as God loves you
 Do everything in the name of Jesus Christ, giving thanks
 to God the Father

This is indeed the "holiness" that God calls for. It is being separated from evil and unto God, being pure and blameless before God by obeying His word, and it is being radiant (i.e. showing forth God's glory/love to all the families of the earth so that they might come to know God and His worship).

V. Chapter Summary

In this chapter it was shown that Christ came to establish a new society on earth. This society is the ekklesia (the people God called out to show forth His glory to all the earth so that they too might come to know Him and His worship). Each local church represents the total community, the ekklesia.

Also it was shown that through Christ's establishing a new covenant with the ekklesia the people of God have the same purpose that the qahal Jehovah had under the old covenant - i.e. they were to show forth God's glory to all the families of the earth. The Church must keep its part of the covenant without waivering so as to fulfill God's original plan.

This chapter revealed that the ekklesia or new Israel was chosen to be a royal priesthood - i.e. they were chosen to be priests for a sinful world to intercede in its behalf to the end that it might be forgiven and transformed. This priesthood is the priesthood of all believers (i.e. every Christian is responsible to lead others to membership in the body of Christ.)

We also learned that the royal priesthood (all believers) is to be a "holy" nation. As a holy nation every believer is: to be separated from all evil and consecrated to God; to be pure and blameless before God through obedience to His will; and to be radiant (i.e. show forth God's glory/love to all the families of the earth so as to bring them to God and His worship.)

CHAPTER IV

T H E L I F E O F T H E C H U R C H

The purpose of the Church is to be realized in the life of the "called out" community. Jesus Christ has commissioned us to reveal Him through our corporate life as His "own people" to a world that does not know Him. "As we live as His people, God will be glorified in the world, and people will want to know about the One who lives through us." ⁸⁵ God calls us not only into a personal relationship with Himself, but at the same time into a corporate relationship with the rest of the people of God. "There is no salvation outside the Church unless the body of Christ be decapitated, separated from the Head. The Church is the body of Christ; the people of God." ⁸⁶ Thus, the local Church as a gathered community is the ekklesia and must realize in its life the purpose of God (i.e. as a priesthood of believers it must show forth God's glory/love to all the families of the earth to the end that they might be forgiven and transformed to the image of Christ.)

In order to understand what the life of the local Church is to be like this chapter is divided into three sections plus a summary. The three major sections are:

⁸⁵Watson, Op. cit., p. 82.

⁸⁶Ibid.

- I. The Purpose of the Local Church
- II. The Fundamental Resources Upon Which
the Purpose Must Be Developed
- III. The Transporting Devices for **Carrying**
Out the Purpose

Each of these must be seen as an important part in the life of the Church.

I. The Purpose of the Local Church

There is perhaps no other phase of Ecclesiology that has been so misconceived as this one.

Beginning with a wrong view of the nature of the Church, educators and social workers have promoted a program of political, economic, and social reform that is without Biblical warrant and often anti-Biblical in character. ⁸⁷

Christians need to ask again the question, "What is the purpose of the Local Church?"

As stated at the beginning of this paper the purpose of the Church begins with God's purpose in history. The Apostle Paul clearly underscored this when he pointed out that believers have been called according to God's purpose, "...to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). This cosmic plan and purpose is to be carried out "through the Church" (Eph. 3:10).

Likewise, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we are reminded that we have been called to "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood

⁸⁷Henry C. Thiessen, Lectures in Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 432.

to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). In other words we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ (Eph. 4:15). This is attaining the image of Jesus Christ or Christ-likeness.

The concept of likeness to God is a common one in Scripture. Jesus, in teaching His disciples, points out that they are to be "sons of your Father in heaven." He even tells them that they must be "perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). There are indications in Scripture, however, that this transformation into Christ-likeness is a process achieved by growth (Eph. 4:15; Gal. 3:10; Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). Historically, the Church has called this process edification. It includes teaching men to "observe" all that Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:20).

But the purpose of the Church also includes evangelism. In clear and simple language Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

The Scriptures do not direct us to "convert" the world, but to "evangelize" it. By this is meant that the Church is debtor to the whole world, that is, that the Church is under obligation to give the whole world an opportunity to hear the Gospel and to accept Christ.⁸⁸

This two-fold task of the Church can be seen in the way in which both Jesus and the twelve disciples went about doing

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 434-435.

ministry. It is further evidenced in the life and ministry of the early Church. The early Christians both evangelized and edified as they went about doing their ministry.

These two purposes, evangelism and edification, in turn answer two questions, namely, why does the Church exist in the world, and why does the Church exist as a local "gathered community".

The purpose of the Church, then, can be defined as God's vehicle for developing spiritual maturity in the lives of believers and relating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. This gives both a quantitative and qualitative thrust to the Church, which must be kept in balance. ⁸⁹

II. The Fundamental Resources Upon Which the Purpose Must Be Developed

According to Donald J. MacNair there are four fundamental resources upon which the purpose of the local Church must be developed. They are:

- the headship of Christ
- the final authority of the Bible for all of our faith and our practice
- the work of the Holy Spirit
- the eldership providing spiritual oversight. ⁹⁰

Each of these will be discussed one at a time in order to help clarify their necessity. These discussions will begin on the following page.

⁸⁹Donald N. Miller, Developing Local Church Effectiveness Through the Systems Approach to Planning, Op. cit., p. 15.

⁹⁰Donald J. MacNair, The Growing Local Church (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1975), pp. 21-22.

The Headship of Christ

"And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way" (Eph. 1:22-23).

Much to the amazement of many contemporary evangelical church members, no church in reality is a democracy. True, churches often determine solutions to local circumstances on the premise that "the majority vote rules." Yet, if that method is used for anything of principle, the church is in violation of the Scriptures.

The church is under a King: it is a Kingdom. The King - King Jesus, as the Scottish Covenanters called him - is the absolute potentate of the church, whether today's churchmen admit it or not! ⁹¹

Jesus' commands, therefore, are not merely altruistic theorizing, nor merely sincere motivational devices; they are orders (John 13:34). The impact of this fact occurs when the Church realizes that they must some day stand before King Jesus and give an account of the way they obeyed those orders (2 Cor. 5:10).

The Final Authority of the Bible

"And how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired and is profitable for

⁹¹Ibid., p. 22.

teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

Experience demonstrates that most Christians will readily agree to this premise, yet often do not want to accept the consequences of a firm commitment to it. When they "feel good" about this or that person, doctrine, practice, or institution, they find it difficult to submit their will to a final authority - the Bible - if that means disregarding their good feelings. But once the Christian dilutes the authority of the Bible with his own "good feelings" the wedge of unbelief has been driven into that individual's heart. "That wedge has inevitably led person after person and church after church away from Jesus Christ as God incarnate." ⁹²

Thus in fulfilling God's purpose, the Church must recognize the Bible as the Final Authority in all its doings.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

"In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit" (Eph. 2:21-22).

The third resource for developing the purpose of the Church is God the Holy Spirit. It is He who indwells each believer, dwells in the midst of believers, and builds them

⁹²Ibid., p. 23.

together into the "living Church" of God. It is the Holy Spirit that provides the Church with the gifts it needs for its specific ministry.

As Paul said in 1 Cor. 12 there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And to each member of the Church is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. In other words the Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church is to help in the work of edification and evangelism.

The Spiritual Oversight of the Eldership

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Heb. 13:17).

The elders of the Church serve in a place of responsibility which is both different from the first three resources and yet, by the decree of God, also essential for the Church's existence.

Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. The Bible is the verbally inspired revelation by God of himself, showing man what he should believe about God and what he should do about that belief. The elders, on the other hand, are like all other members of the church, merely sinners saved by grace. If the standard were intrinsic merit, the elders could not even be considered resources to the church. ⁹³

However, God has decreed that there is to be a Church conducted in a decent and orderly way under the leadership and

⁹³Ibid.

governing restraint of men specially gifted and supplied by Him as his gifts to the Church, and He has charged these men to give a meaningful account to Him of each of the sheep over which they were charged with responsibility.

As we see in Acts 14, when Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, they appointed elders for them in every Church, with prayer and fasting, and committed them to the Lord in whom they believed. Here we see that the leadership of the elders is a necessary resource to the Church. As David Watson says,

We must remember that one of God's gifts to the church is the charisma of leadership. ...the New Testament terms for elder (presbuteros), bishop (episkopos) and shepherd (poimen) appear to be synonymous...The role of an elder is a demanding and challenging one: he is to lead, to teach, to work hard, to set an example, to tend the flock of God, to encourage, to pray for the sick, to have authority over others and to exercise discipline, to evangelise and to be well thought of by outsiders (Acts 20:18ff; 1 Thess. 5:12-14; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 5:17; Titus 1:9-11; Heb. 13:7; James 5:14-16; 1 Pet. 5:1-3).⁹⁴

Because David Watson's statements are Scriptural and the Bible is the final authority for the Church, the leadership of the elders must be a resource that the Church uses as it attempts to carry out its two-fold purpose.

III. The Transporting Devices for Carrying Out the Purpose

The purpose of the Church as God's vehicle for developing spiritual maturity in the lives of believers and relating the

⁹⁴David Watson, I Believe In The Church, Op. cit., pp. 269-272.

the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world needs "transporting devices" ⁹⁵ to carry out this two-fold purpose. These transporting devices of the Church can be stated variously and the Church does not need to get "locked in" to certain titles and terminology. What is more important is the principle of "functional equivalency" as advocated by Dr. Gene A. Getz.

Whatever the culture, whatever the time in history, the Christian leader who understands New Testament leadership principles will have his feet firmly planted upon the absolutes of Scripture, but at the same time he will not be locked into functional patterns and forms that are neither contemporary nor effective in doing the work of the ministry. ⁹⁶

Five specific "transporting devices" to assist the Church in carrying out its purpose have been established from the Scriptures. These are worship, fellowship, evangelism, Christian education, and social concern.

Worship

The word "worship" has a variety of meanings derived from a contraction of the Anglo-Saxon term "worth-ship". "Thus when we worship we are declaring worth." ⁹⁷ It has to do with those occasions when something of worth is recognized and an appropriate response is made.

⁹⁵This term is used by Professor Allen Odell, Prof. of C.E. at Western Evangelical Seminary in Portland, Oregon, in his study of Developing Christian Maturity in 1981.

⁹⁶Gene A. Getz, Sharpening the Focus of the Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 128.

⁹⁷George Hedley, Christian Worship (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), p. 1.

Worship is, therefore, understandably linked with service. Again and again the Old and the New Testaments speak of worship and service as if they were inextricably bound up together. For example, in the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when King Nebuchadnezzar threatened them with the ultimatum that if they did not worship him, they would be cast into a burning, fiery furnace, they courageously replied, "Be it known to you, O King, that we will not serve your gods" (Dan. 3:18). Likewise in the New Testament, we see the linkage between worship and service. The word that comes closest to worship "in the original Greek is latreia, meaning service." ⁹⁸ In Romans 12:1, Paul uses latreian, which comes from latreia and means "service, servitude; religious service, worship." ⁹⁹ This suggests that as far as the etymology of the word is concerned, worship consists of both a recognition of value and a response to it. Christian worship, then, means ascribing worth to God in such a way that our lives will take on a likeness to the person of Jesus Christ.

Worship in the early Church had its roots in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. "The starting-point of Christian tradition was what God had done in Christ." ¹⁰⁰ And by the

⁹⁸Donald Miller, Op. cit., p. 16.

⁹⁹Moulton, Op. cit., p. 248.

¹⁰⁰C.F.D. Moule, Worship in the New Testament (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964), p. 9.

time of Jesus the synagogue was a widespread and characteristic expression of Jewish community life. The synagogue service excluded sacrifice and sought to instill knowledge of the Jewish religious heritage by making use of the secondary elements accompanying the Temple sacrifices. There were three of these secondary elements. The first was praise. This was primarily in the form of a call to worship in which the congregation sang or recited "a psalm of praise" (1 Cor. 14:26) to the Lord. The second was in the form of a series of prayers by which people recalled the mighty acts of God, including their covenant relationship. The prayers covered a wide variety of subjects and made extensive use of lay participation. The third aspect of the Jewish service included an emphasis on the reading of Scripture and instruction from the Law and the Prophets. It, too, included the participation of lay persons and visiting teachers (Luke 4:21ff; Acts 13:15ff). The service concluded with a blessing and a congregational amen.

Jesus and His followers attended synagogue services in the villages and towns that they visited as they travelled. Because of this Christian worship was continuous with Jewish worship. The early Church divised their practices in imitation of the Jewish models they knew so well. "And Christian worship thus springs directly and unmistakably from Jewish origins." 101

¹⁰¹Hedley, Op. cit., p. 17.

However, the early Christians added to this Jewish service those elements which were distinctive to Christianity. It appears that their services centered in a communal meal with a heavy emphasis on prayer and praise (Acts 2:42,46; 4:23,42). Apparently there was also considerable singing as alluded to by Paul (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:9; 1 Cor. 14:1) and James (James 5:13). There is some evidence that the early services contained a confession of faith, usually short and simple, such as "Jesus as Lord," and strong evidence that preaching and teaching was an important part of their worship services (Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:9). It also appears that worship involved a collection (Acts 2:45; 1 Cor. 16:1-4). In the beginning the early Church met daily for worship (Acts 2:46). Later, when they were forbidden access to the temple and synagogues they separated themselves from the Jewish groups and held gatherings of their own (most commonly on Sunday in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ).

Whatever else may be said of worship, one thing is clear: "Worship, in all its grades and kinds, is the response of the creature to the Eternal." ¹⁰² The Eternal of course being God who created us and who redeemed us by the blood of His only Son. Worship, then, is a "transporting device" which leads us to a knowledge of God and His fellowship. Worship is that which purifies, enlightens, and transforms every life that is

¹⁰²Evelyn Underhill, Worship (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), p. 3.

submitted to its influence. Worship is man's response to a Holy God who has saved him from eternal damnation. Thus the aim of worship is to glorify God by showing that He is worthy of our thanks and praises.

This suggests that our focal point in worship is not the minister or choir on the platform, but the Almighty One in our midst.

Soren Kierkegaard in his book, Purity of Heart, suggests that in true worship, members of the congregation are the actors on the stage, the minister and choir are the prompters, and God Himself is the audience interacting with our performance. ¹⁰³

This makes worship an active process on the part of the congregation, not a spectator - observer performance.

If God is our Greatest Worth, worship not only involves awe, respect and intimacy, but it also involves celebration in our response to God. And as Donald Miller says, "the human being naturally praises what he values, and invites others to join him in the process." ¹⁰⁴

Fellowship

Fellowship is one of the important "transporting devices" used by the early Church. In the book of Acts Luke states that the early Christians "devoted themselves to the apostle's doctrine and fellowship" (Acts 2:42). The word that Luke uses

¹⁰³Donald Miller, Op. cit., p. 18.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

for devoted here is proskarterountes which means "to persist in adherence to a thing; to be intently engaged in, attend constantly to." ¹⁰⁵ This suggests that fellowship was a deliberate, intentional act which required priority and commitment.

The Greek word for fellowship is koinonia and "was commonly used to refer to a business partnership or a marriage; it meant to be bound together and moving in the same direction." ¹⁰⁶ Marvin R. Vincent says that this word comes "from koinos, common and means a relation between individuals which involves a common interest and a mutual, active participation in that interest and in each other." ¹⁰⁷ According to Harold K. Moulton, in addition to the word fellowship, the Bible uses words like "common, communion, partnership, share, communicate, and contribute," ¹⁰⁸ to translate koinonia.

A careful study of this word in the New Testament indicates that Christian koinonia takes a number of forms. First and foremost, the faithful are bound to each other through their common sharing in Christ as the **Church**, and in the Holy Spirit (1 John 3:24). Koinonia thus signifies common participation, togetherness, and community life, all created by the

¹⁰⁵Harold K. Moulton, Op. cit., p. 350.

¹⁰⁶Donald Miller, Op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁰⁷Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), Vol. I., p. 456.

¹⁰⁸Moulton, Op. cit., p. 275.

presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus and His twelve disciples had this kind of fellowship with each other. Robert Coleman says that "It was by virtue of this fellowship that the disciples were permitted to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God (Luke 8:10)." ¹⁰⁹ The point is that by sharing with Christ they learned from Him. The early Christians also devoted themselves to fellowship for this reason. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers" (Acts 2:42). This gave them an opportunity to feel their kinship with one another and to interact with each other about their faith.

Second, fellowship is a mutual care and concern for each other. Paul states, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12:26). He likewise instructs Christians to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). The law to which Paul refers is the new commandment which Jesus gave to His disciples, namely, "that you also love one another" (John 13:34).

The New Testament lays heavy emphasis upon the need for Christians to know each other, closely and intimately enough to be able to bear one another's burdens, confess faults one to another, rebuke, exhort, and admonish one another, minister to one another with the word and through song and prayer... ¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹Robert E. Coleman, The Master Plan of Evangelism (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1973), p. 39.

¹¹⁰Ray C. Stedman, Body Life (Glendale, California: Gospel Light Publications, 1976), p. 107.

Apart from the agape love of God, which He pours into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), the biblical concept of koinonia is completely unintelligible. The Church is not specifically called "the fellowship of the Spirit," but the use of the term koinonia describes "the inner life of the ec-clesia." 111

Howard Snyder feels that this "inner life" of the Church today is suffering a fellowship crisis. He says, "it is simply not experiencing nor demonstrating that 'fellowship of the Holy Spirit' (2 Cor. 13:14) that marked the New Testament Church... it is impersonal..." 112 Ray Stedman agrees with Howard Snyder and says that,

What is missing is the experience of "body life"; that warm fellowship of Christian with Christian which the New Testament calls koinonia, and which was an essential part of early Christianity. 113

If this is true, a restoration of fellowship must be emphasized among all Christians. That same koinonia which the early Christians experienced is essential in fulfilling the two-fold purpose of the Church today. In the eighteenth century when the Anglicans became liturgically rich but spiritually dead in England, John Wesley proposed a method for renewal in which eight to twelve people would gather for Bible Study, prayer, training, support, and mutual discipline. In

111Purkiser, Taylor and Taylor, Op. cit., p. 571.

112Howard A. Snyder, The Problem of Wineskins (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), p. 89.

113Ray C. Stedman, Loc. cit.

a real sense, they provided spiritual counsel and nurture to each other which can best be described as fellowship. This is essential for the Church.

Fellowship is made possible by the "gift of the Holy Spirit" (John 14:16ff; 15:26,27; 16:7-11). Thus, being filled with the Holy Spirit is necessary to maintain and nurture fellowship.

Koinonia is the Church abiding in the Vine, that it may bear much fruit. It is a "transporting device" **that helps the** Church become "joined and knit together," upbuilding itself in love, so that the individual gifts of the Spirit may be manifest in the world (to show forth God's love and bring all the families of the earth to the knowledge of the True God and His worship).

Evangelism

The purpose of the Church is certainly that of building up itself in love, but only in order that every Christian may be strong for making known to the world the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:7-11).

Strength of spiritual life always issues in the manifestation through the Church to the world of the facts of the Kingship of God in Christ, and the power of Jesus Christ to deal with all the things in human life that are contrary to the mind and will of God. The Church is to be aggressive, capturing men, fighting against wrong, urging everywhere and always the claims of Jesus Christ. 114

¹¹⁴G. Campbell Morgan, Evangelism (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1964), p. 39.

The "transporting device" that the Church is to use in helping it carry out this purpose is evangelism. The biblical mandate for evangelism is rooted in the very nature of God's purpose in the history of the Church. It is clear that God's people are not only "called out" of the world, but also "sent into" the world to make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:14-17; 2 Cor. 5:16-21).

Jesus set the example when He came to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10), and went about all Galilee "preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom" (Matt. 4:23).

A look at the evangelistic activity of the early Church leads one to believe that many different words were used to describe evangelism. One of the most common words is laleo, which simply means "to speak; in N.T. to exercise the faculty of speech" ¹¹⁵ (Acts 4:1,31). The context indicates that they were speaking in such a way as to bring about belief in Jesus Christ. Another word that is frequently used is euaggelizo (Acts 5:42) which means "to address with Gospel teaching, or evangelize." ¹¹⁶ Dr. Gene A. Getz has pointed out that this "was a process carried out by all believers...They went everywhere to everyone telling the good news." ¹¹⁷ The word didasko (Acts 4:2; 5:21,25,28), which means "to teach or speak in a

¹¹⁵Moulton, Op. cit., p. 245.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 172

¹¹⁷Getz, Op. cit., p. 32.

public assembly," ¹¹⁸ is also used to describe the witness of the early Christians with non-believers. Other words used were kerusso (Acts 8:5,6) meaning "to publish, to proclaim as a herald," ¹¹⁹ martureo (Acts 1:8; 2:40; 28:23) a common word for "testify," ¹²⁰ and dialegomai (Acts 17:2,17; 24:12) meaning "to discourse, argue, reason." ¹²¹

But, however evangelism is described, the great concern of the early Church was to communicate the good news about Jesus Christ in such a way that all the families of the earth would place their trust and faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. This, of necessity, involved more than verbalization. It also included a demonstration of the Christian lifestyle in the context of daily living. Paul admonished Christians to "give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks" in their social life. He told them to do all to the glory of God "that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:31-33). Peter, likewise, counseled Christian wives of unsaved husbands to set a good example "so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives" (1 Pet. 3:1).

It becomes clear from Scripture that the task of evangelism is the responsibility of all believers. Jesus said, "But you shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit has come upon

¹¹⁸Moulton, Op. cit., p. 98

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 258.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 230.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 93.

you, and you shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). The word "witnesses" (martures) is used here to refer to the Church (i.e. all believers in general), and not just the twelve apostles or those who were given the gift of evangelism. The word esesthe (you shall be) is "2 pers. pl. fut. ind." ¹²² and can read "you all shall participate in the action of being witnesses of Jesus Christ," thus implying that the Church is to be a witness for Jesus Christ. This was exemplified in the fact that following the persecution in the early Church "those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

The methods of evangelism varied in the New Testament.

Dr. Donald Miller says,

Dr. Wayne Dehoney has ably pointed out that these included "mass evangelism" (John the Baptist, Peter, Stephen, Jesus); "personal evangelism" (thirty-five personal interviews recorded in the gospels); "impromptu evangelism" (Jesus at the well, Peter and John at the Gate Beautiful); "dialogue evangelism" (Paul at Mars Hill, Apollos at Ephesus); "systematic evangelism" (the seventy sent out by Jesus, two by two, the house-to-house visitation of Acts 5:42); "literary evangelism" (John 20:31, Luke 1:1-4 stating the apologetic and evangelistic intent of the writers). ¹²³

While these are all valid forms of evangelism (i.e. as a transporting device bringing people to the knowledge of God and His worship through Jesus Christ), the twentieth century Church must develop its own contemporary approaches utilizing biblical principles and guidelines.

¹²²Ibid., p. 168.

¹²³Donald Miller, Op. cit., p. 23.

Christian Education

Christian education as a "transporting device" is concerned with the growth of believers into a likeness of Jesus Christ. It is firmly based on the Great Commission of our Lord in which He told the disciples that their mission did not end with bringing men to an initial commitment, but included "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20).

Teaching was very much a part of the history of Israel. It appears that in the beginning, the teaching function of the people of God was discharged largely by the father of the home. The most explicit reference to this is found in Deuteronomy 6:1-8. In Proverbs 1:8, both the father and mother are singled out as having responsibility for teaching the privileges and responsibilities of the covenant relationship.

The prophets of Israel apparently also had teaching responsibilities. There are evidences that groups of disciples gathered about the prophets (Isa. 8:16) who instructed them. Later, in the post-exilic period when the prophet fell into the shadows, the scribe came forward to assume a teaching responsibility. An excellent example is Ezra, a scribe, who moved among the congregation primarily as a teacher (Neh. 8:1-8). These teachers also had the responsibility of teaching the privileges and responsibilities of the covenant relationship to the people.

In the early Church, teaching took on a prominent role among the believers. The book of Acts reports that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine..." (Acts 2:42). The apostles themselves "ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42). Likewise, the apostle Paul in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9), and throughout his letters stressed the importance of teaching in the early Church (e.g. Col. 3:16).

It is clear that Jesus was a master Teacher. He was most frequently called "Rabbi," which means Teacher (John 1:38). His goal was character transformation. He told the disciples to be perfect (Matt. 5:45-48), and said that "when a disciple is fully taught, he will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

This suggests that while the Scriptures are central in Christian education, this "transporting device" in the New Testament Church involved more than "data input" or the mere development of a "belief system". Its primary focus was the development of spiritual maturity. The apostle Paul underscores this in his letter to Timothy (2 Tim. 3:16).

Jesus' teaching ministry also involved close interpersonal relationships and interaction on a wide range of real life experiences. In addition, Jesus recognized the importance of setting an example, which is underscored by the apostle Paul (1 Thess. 1:6,7; 2:14; 2 Thess. 3:7-9). The example that must be set by the Church in Christian education is "Christlikeness" in every thing it does.

It is important to note that the methods and approaches of teaching in the early Church varied greatly.

There are no absolute guidelines or stereotype patterns. The methods and approaches - whether used by Jesus, the apostles, or other members of the body of Christ - varied according to the situation...But all with one objective in view (when it took place among Christians), their edification. ¹²⁴

Social Concern

We were not born to be alone. God created us for relationship. So we have been born first into the human family and then as Christians born again into the family of God. All of us, therefore, are members of some kind of community apart from the family of God. Within this community we are to be the "salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13) and the "light of the world" (Matt. 5:14-16). In order for salt to be useful it must be taken out of the shaker and put into the world; in order for a light to be useful it must be used in darkness. In other words Jesus tells the Church that it must go into the community (world of darkness) as a "light" and add flavour by becoming involved with social concerns.

This Christian social responsibility is expressed in numerous Scripture passages. It is sharply brought into focus by James, "If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'God in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the

¹²⁴Gene A. Getz, Op. cit., p. 63.

body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works is dead" (James 2:15-17). When James made that forthright statement he was standing in a long and honorable tradition reaching back to the Old Testament law and prophets. Repeatedly, God's people were commanded to remember their responsibility to the poor, to be just in their business and social dealings, and to forsake oppression. They were specifically told to loan freely to the poor, without charging interest (Deut. 15:7-11; Ex. 22:25), to leave part of their wheat and grape harvest for the poor (Lev. 19:9,10; 23:22), to show kindness to the widows, the fatherless, the sojourner and the poor (Zech. 7:9,10; Lev. 19:15; Deut. 16:18-20; 24:14-22; Prov. 31:9; Amos 2:6,7), and to treat the oppressed with mercy (Deut. 24:17-22).

The social emphasis of the Old Testament has been summarized in Psalm 146:5-9, "Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners, he upholds the widow and the fatherless; but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin." In other words the righteous (the Church) of the Old Testament had a social responsibility to help those in need.

The New Testament places a similar emphasis on social concern. Jesus underlined its importance in His inaugural address (Luke 4:18-21); condemned oppression of the widows (Mark 12:39) and parents (Mark 7:9-13); included social concern in His definition of what constitutes a good neighbor (Luke 10:29-36); engaged in numerous acts of love and mercy relating to the physical, emotional and social needs of people (Mark 1:29-34; 3:1-5; 6:37-41; Luke 4:33-36; 7:11-18); and contended that such practical social acts as feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, caring for the stranger, clothing the needy, visiting the sick and imprisoned would be used as evidence in the final judgment as to whether our faith was genuine (Matt. 25: 31-45).

The early Church (i.e. the New Testament Church) similarly concerned itself with the social needs of people (Acts 2: 43-45; 6:1-6; 11:27-30). The letters of the apostle Paul also concern themselves with a variety of community and social issues: political exploitation, military service, racial intolerance, the position of women, propriety of dress, taxation, prostitution, control of disease, relief of poverty, and the handling of civil matters.

While the motive for using social concern as a "transporting device" is love and compassion, it must be rooted in the Gospel. Without the latter, social concern is nothing more than humanitarianism. Furthermore, the primary concern of the Church must also be for the spiritual needs of people.

Jesus established this priority when He said, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

IV. Chapter Summary

As seen in section I of this chapter the local Church has a two-fold purpose: "edification" and "evangelism". In other words the local Church is God's vehicle for developing spiritual maturity in the lives of believers and relating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

In section II four fundamental resources upon which the purpose of the church must be developed were established. These were: "the headship of Christ"; "the final authority of the Bible for all of our faith and our practice"; "the work of the Holy Spirit"; and "the eldership providing spiritual oversight". The local Church is under a King - Jesus Christ - and it must obey His commands. These commands are "orders" found in the holy Scriptures which the Church must recognize as the Final Authority in all its doings. The work of the Holy Spirit is to help the Church carry out the "orders" of King Jesus. The leaders of the Church have been specially gifted and supplied by God to lead the local Church in carrying out its two-fold purpose; thus the leadership of the elders must be a resource that the Church (all believers) uses as it attempts to carry out its two-fold purpose.

Finally, in section III of this chapter we saw that there are five "transporting devices" to assist the local Church in carrying out its purpose. These are: "worship"; "fellowship"; "evangelism"; "Christian education"; and "social concern". Christian worship means ascribing worth to God in such a way that our lives will take on a likeness to the person of Jesus Christ, thus leading others to a knowledge of God and His worship. Fellowship is an important "transporting device" because it brings unity, common participation and creates a community life that has a mutual care and concern for one another, which is the "agape love" that Jesus commands for the inner life of the Church. Evangelism is that "transporting device" that the Church uses to communicate the good news about Jesus Christ in such a way that all the families of the earth would place their trust and faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour. An important "transporting device" for helping the local Church carry out its purpose is Christian education. Christian education is concerned with the growth of believers into a likeness of Jesus Christ. This is done by "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Social concern is a "transporting device" because Scripture calls for a social responsibility on the part of the Church. However, this social concern is to be rooted in the Gospel because the primary concern of the Church must be for the spiritual needs of people.

CHAPTER V

S U M M A R Y A N D C O N C L U S I O N S

A summary of the major findings of this study and the conclusions derived therefrom are recorded in this chapter.

I. SUMMARY

The general inquiry into the Biblical perspective of the purpose of the local church revealed some significant findings.

First it revealed that the Church had its beginning in the Old Testament. From God's identity and His work at the very beginning of time was seen His divine plan and purpose for the Church. God created man in His own image (which was holy) so that man could show forth to others His love. From the work of God in creation it was clear that God had chosen man (i.e. people) as the receptacles of His own holiness, wisdom and love; that they might enjoy Him and show forth gladly and freely the glorious excellencies of their blessed God. Thus, man became God's "chosen people" or His "Church" with a specific task.

From the beginning God had established a covenant with His people. In the covenant man was to be obedient to God's will and He would bless them and give them eternal life. However, because of man's freedom of choice he chose to sin and

separated himself from the fellowship of God. But because of His great love God still wanted His Church to multiply and continue carrying out His original purpose. So through the patriarchs God established His covenant with Israel (His chosen people) so that through them all the families of the earth would come to know the true God and His worship. Their duty was to be a "holy nation and a kingdom of priests" and stand between other peoples and God, bringing them to God and God to them.

But Israel failed to be obedient to God and did not keep their part of the covenant. Because of this Israel (God's chosen people - Church) was sent into exile and was no longer to be the Church through which God would show forth His love to all the families of the earth.

As was revealed in chapter two God's plan was not thwarted even though Israel failed. God was able to establish a new Church. This new Church was established by the implementation of a new covenant through His Son Jesus Christ. This new covenant had the same principles of the old but with a new dimension (i.e. God was going to write His law upon their individual hearts and include the Gentiles in His covenant). Also as was revealed this new Church was given the same purpose that God had called for in the Old Testament Church. God had called for the Old Testament Church to be a "holy nation and a kingdom of priests" and bring all the families of the earth to Him; this is the same call that God made for the New Testament

Church. This new Church is the ekklesia (the people God called out to show forth His glory to all the earth so that they too might come to know Him and His worship).

In chapter three it was revealed that each local church represents the ekklesia (i.e. the total body of believers) which is a royal priesthood - chosen to be priests for a sinful world to intercede in its behalf to the end that it might be forgiven and transformed. This priesthood is a "priesthood of all believers" therefore every Christian within the local Church is responsible for keeping the covenant without waivering so as to fulfill God's original plan.

As was revealed in chapter four the purpose of the Church is to be realized in the life of the ekklesia ("called out" Community). In other words, the local Church as a corporate body must show forth God's glory to all the families of the earth in such a way that they might be forgiven and transformed to the image of Christ. Thus the purpose of the local Church becomes two-fold (i.e. it becomes God's vehicle for developing spiritual maturity in the lives of believers and relating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world). As the Church carries out this two-fold purpose it must do so in obedience to Jesus Christ and His words as revealed through the Bible and the Holy Spirit to the elders of the Church. Also chapter four reveals five specific "transporting devices" to assist the Church in carrying out its purpose. These have been established from the Scriptures and they are: worship, fellowship

Christian education, evangelism, and social concern. These devices of the Church can be stated variously and the Church does not need to get locked in to certain titles and terminology.

II. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were reached as a result of this study:

1. The purpose of the Church can be seen only in relation to God's purpose in history as seen in Scripture.

2. The Church began when God "called out" Adam and Eve to multiply and show forth His glory to others. Thus Adam and Eve became the qahal Jehovah (Church) with a specific task.

3. God's original plan was that all men would worship Him, but man sinned and caused a separation from God. However, God was such a loving and merciful God that He still wanted men to come to Him so He provided a way. Through the patriarchs God established His covenant with Israel and "called" them to be His people through whom all the families of the earth could come to the knowledge of Him and His worship.

4. Israel became the qahal Jehovah (Church) and received instructions through the giving of the Law as to how they were to fulfill God's purpose. But Israel failed to fulfill God's purpose.

5. God established a new Church through His Son Jesus Christ. Christ came to establish a new society on earth.

This society is that new community of the "people of God" that was "called out" to show forth the glory of God to all the families of the earth. This society is the new qahal Jehovah which is the ekklesia.

6. The purpose of the ekklesia of the New Testament is the same purpose of the qahal Jehovah of the Old Testament. That purpose is to be a "holy nation and a kingdom of priests" so that all the families of the earth can come to know the true God and His worship through Jesus Christ.

7. The Church is a "priesthood of all believers", therefore every believer is responsible for helping fulfill God's purpose in history.

8. The local Church represents the ekklesia (i.e. the whole body) and is therefore responsible for carrying out the purpose of the ekklesia.

9. The purpose of the New Testament Church is actually two-fold in nature. The first is edification and the second is evangelism. In other words the Church (all believers) is God's vehicle for developing spiritual maturity among the believers and for relating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. Thus the local Church is responsible for carrying out this two-fold purpose.

10. The local Church must and can provide means whereby this two-fold purpose can be carried out. The means is through five "transporting devices" as revealed in Scripture. They are worship, fellowship, evangelism, Christian education and social concern.

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