

The History of the Faith - II

First Century Assemblies

containing:

Relationships
Membership
Government
Difficulties

by
Dean & Susan Wheelock

Now when the Gentiles heard this,
They were glad and glorified the word of the Lord.
And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.
And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.
Acts 13:48-49

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~ Introduction ~

For the LORD will not cast off His people,
Nor will He forsake His inheritance.
But judgment will return to righteousness,
And all the upright in heart will follow it.
Psalms 94:14-15



There is much disagreement among scholars as to how the early congregations of *Messianic Believers* developed and grew after the death and resurrection of *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Jesus the Messiah).

This series of booklets (consisting of previous articles published in the *Hebrew Roots*® publication) begin an attempt to trace church history in an understandable way. This is not an easy or straightforward task, as there are not always good records (other than the New Testament which ends abruptly in the latter half of the first century) showing the growth and spread of the *ekklesia* (congregation or church) of the movement that was early on known as the *Nazarenes* (those who followed the teachings of *Y'shua of Nazareth*).

Likewise, there are scanty records tracing the development of Judaism after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Complicating the problem, is the lack of detail as to why and how the *Nazarenes* and Orthodox Judaism came to part company during those turbulent years. Further complicating the matter is the move of a major segment of the Messianic movement to the West where it left the Jewish roots of the faith in favor of certain pagan doctrines and practices.

It is hoped that, over the years, all of the issues can be addressed to bring us to an understanding of where our Faith in *Y'shua* originated and where it got off track. Armed with this information it is also hoped that the 21st century *Messianic Movement* can get back on the track to observing what *Jude* called the "**faith ... once ... delivered:**"

"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

(Jude 1:3)

From this we learn, that as early as the middle to late 1st century there were already men who were bringing perversion into the pure doctrine of the *Nazarene Congregations*:

"For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*]."
(Jude 1:4)

This booklet is the second in the *History of the Faith* series. It examines how the first century *Messianic Congregations* were organized along the same principles which the Jewish synagogues had developed over many centuries. It consists of articles that were first published in Issue 07-3 under the general title *First Century Assemblies*.

Shalom!

Dean & Susan Wheelock

Beit Shalom, 2015

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~ Relationships ~

A new commandment I give to you,
That you love one another;
As I have loved you,
That you also love one another.
By this all will know that you are My disciples,
If you have love for one another.
John 13:34-35



This booklet examines how the First Century Assemblies were organized and what the characteristics were that made their organization successful. This topic is not only pertinent to the series at hand, because of its historical interest, it is also pertinent to another subject of interest to Believers -- the desire of many to develop modern Messianic Communities. Perhaps, we moderns can learn some things from the First Century Assemblies that will help those of us who wish to be involved in close knit Messianic Communities. This first chapter will deal with the relationship aspects of the early *Ekklesia* as taught by the Apostle Paul.

~ Beyond Fellowship ~

In the Messianic movement today there is much talk about going beyond Fellowship and actually building Communities where Believers in Messiah *Y'shua* can (hopefully) live together in peace, harmony, and safety, in an atmosphere of helping each other and bearing one another's burdens:

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ [*Messiah*]."
(Gal. 6:2)

On the surface it seems like such a wonderful dream -- Messianic Believers living together without many of the outside pressures of a world gone mad. How wonderful it would be to have close neighbors who believe the same, worship the same, and whose children are polite, well behaved, and home schooled. What a delight it would be to live in a close knit society that is not infected with the evils perpetrated and perpetuated by modern society and the media.

Yet, it is our opinion that most people who desire Messianic Community have not considered how difficult a task it would be to build a modern Community that is capable of enduring over time.

Sometimes we hear statements such as: "All we need to do is have the love of *Y'shua* in our hearts and whatever problems might arise in our Community will take care of themselves." This is a fine precept, but the reality is that none of us are functioning at that level on a 24/7 basis and when we slip from that ideal, the Community can end up suffering through strife and divisions:

"For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?"
(I Cor. 3:3)

Because we are all still human and have an imperfect understanding of both doctrine and relationship issues, problems will arise. One key to Community success is to find a Scripturally sound and fair way to resolve disputes. It is wonderful when the resolution to a problem can be a win/win situation, but that is not always possible. Sometimes we, as Messianic Believers, must be willing to accept the fact that a wrong has been done, that other people may have been hurt, and that we might even be the cause of that problem and hurt:

"So do this, my son, and deliver yourself;

For you have come into the hand of your friend:

Go and humble yourself;

Plead with your friend."

(Prov. 6:3)

Often, the parties involved in a dispute are not able to resolve the matter because they are so emotionally attached to their respective positions that they are unable to see any value in the other person's position. In such cases it may require a third party, or even a Community Court to resolve the issue. If a Community Court is used, both parties must agree ahead of time to abide by the Court's decision.

~ Challenges ~

One of the difficulties in forming a Community is the challenge of developing healthy personal relationships. As anyone who is married, or has been married, can testify, living in a close personal relationship can be challenging, even with someone you love very much. How much more problematic would it then be to live in close association with others where the love ties are not as close? Community members must be ever ready to forgive and be forgiven:

"Then Peter came to Him and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?'

²² **"Jesus [*Y'shua*] said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'"**

(Matt. 18:21-22)

Then there is the very real matter of the adversary, *HaSatan* הַשָּׂטָן (Hah Sah-tahn' = Satan the devil #7854) who is, no doubt, adamantly opposed to Messianic Believers living together in healthy Community:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."

(I Peter 5:8-9)

"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

(James 4:7)

One of the principal ways in which the adversary seeks to destroy the faith of Messianic Believers is to pit them one against another:

"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you,

but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (I Cor. 1:10)

~ The Works of the Flesh ~

The Apostle Paul listed a number of actions, which he called the "works of the flesh." Some of these actions are clearly overt, such as adultery, etc. In addition to the overt actions, Paul listed seven others (underlined below) which, at least initially, involve the inward man and what goes on in the heart of the individual:

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal. 5:19-21)

Sooner or later, the outward "works of the flesh" become known by the Community. However, the inward "works of the flesh" are often hidden (sometimes for long periods of time) where they fester and grow before becoming evident to others. These inward "works" must be found and rooted out if at all possible, for they are like a cancer which is not visible to the naked eye and yet is growing into a life threatening condition. The "works of the flesh" are the negative inward pulls that dwell in the hearts of men and create spiritual disease. They are most difficult to detect and therefore most difficult to root out. These inward "works" are the ones which, if not conquered, will eventually destroy a Community:

- ◆ **Hatred** -- Perhaps the most insidious of sins is hatred, because the one who hates usually cannot see what that hatred is doing to himself, much less to others:

"He who hates, disguises *it* with his lips,
And lays up deceit within himself;
²⁵ When he speaks kindly, do not believe him,
For there are seven abominations in his heart;
²⁶ Though his hatred is covered by deceit,
His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly."
(Prov. 26:24-26)

- ◆ **Contentions** -- ("strife or wrangling"). Some people seem to thrive on strife and cannot be satisfied unless there is some kind of battle going on. These people are devastating to a Community because they bring hurt and discouragement to other members. They must be dealt with quickly and effectively, lest they wreck havoc in the Community:

"As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire,
So is a contentious man to kindle strife."
(Prov. 26:21)

"He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, ..."
(Prov. 28:25)

"An angry man stirs up strife,
And a furious man abounds in transgression.
²³ A man's pride will bring him low,
But the humble in spirit will retain honor."
(Prov. 29:22-23)

- ◆ **Jealousies** -- In Greek this word is *zelos* (#2205) and is also translated as both "zealous" and "envy." However, in this case, many translators understood it to mean "jealous," for further down the list a different Greek word is translated as "envy." Of course, jealousy and envy are closely related and when they become lodged in a person's heart they are difficult to uproot.

"Wrath is cruel and anger a torrent,
But who is able to stand before jealousy?"
(Prov. 27:4)

On the other hand, jealousy can also be used in a positive way to spur people on to righteousness. It depends on the focus of the jealousy:

"For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are my flesh* and save some of them."
(Rom. 11:13-14)

- ◆ **Selfish Ambitions** -- Another definition of the Greek word *eritheia* (#2052) is "electioneering or intriguing for office." Also: "a party or fractious spirit." This is a common problem in Communities where people desire to hold an office or perform a certain function for which they are not qualified. They will often do or say most anything to achieve their goal. This is the same problem which Democracies have, where those who yearn for public office, and the power that goes with it, are often the least qualified:

"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."
(Phil. 2:3)

- ◆ **Dissensions** -- This word (*dichostasia* #1370) is also defined as "division," those who try to divide the brethren by sowing discontent. Such people are a great danger to the Community and must be dealt with accordingly:

"But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, ²⁵ that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ [*Messiah*], and members individually."
(I Cor. 12:24-27)

Paul told the Romans such people were to be avoided:

"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them." (Rom. 16:17)

- ◆ **Heresies** -- The root meaning of the word heresy is "a difference of opinion." It is perfectly fine for members of a Community to have a difference of opinion on certain topics as long as all members recognize the authority of the leadership to set the standard for the Community. Differences of opinion, if properly handled, can often lead to a deeper understanding:

"For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." (I Cor. 11:19 KJV)

However, there are also "damnable heresies:"

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." (II Peter 2:1 KJV)

Those who traffic in "damnable heresies" must be dealt with swiftly so they do not infect other members of the Community with their false teachings.

- ◆ **Envy** -- Envy leads to strife, for the person who envies has an inordinate desire for something that is not his and which he cannot have. (This heart problem was partially covered under the heading of jealousy):

**"A sound heart is life to the body,
But envy is rottenness to the bones."** (Prov. 14:30)

Envy is the spirit of covetousness:

"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." (Col. 3:5)

"For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there." (James 3:16)

~ Relationship Responsibility ~

Before a Community can be organized effectively, there must exist, within each prospective member, a deep sense of *Relationship Responsibility* toward other individuals as well as a willingness to submit to the leadership of the community.

Some may come with the attitude that they know more and are better equipped spiritually than the existing leadership. Often, it is this underlying attitude of superiority which manifests itself as discord. Such discord can swiftly spread to others, in much the same way as the rebellion of Korah spread among the children of Israel:

"Now Korah ... took *men*; ² and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. ³ They gathered together

against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, 'You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD [YHVH] is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD [YHVH]?'" (Num. 16:1-3)

There may be disagreement on how a community should be administered. However, sowing discord in an effort to make changes is an abomination to God:

**"These six things the LORD [YHVH] hates,
Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:**

¹⁷ **A proud look,**

A lying tongue,

Hands that shed innocent blood,

¹⁸ **A heart that devises wicked plans,**

Feet that are swift in running to evil,

¹⁹ **A false witness *who* speaks lies,**

And one who sows discord among brethren."

(Prov. 6:16-19)

To have a healthy Community, we must all constantly strive to heal the Body of Messiah whenever a relationship disease erupts:

"Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ [*Messiah*] forgave you, so you also *must do*. ¹⁴But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. ¹⁵ And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ [*Messiah*] dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. ¹⁷ And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus [*Y'shua*], giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

(Col. 3:12-17)

~ Torah Foundation ~

Before attempting to establish a Community, it is important that prospective members be willing to become well grounded in a common behavioral standard. For Messianic Communities the standard must be the Holy Scriptures, with the *Written Torah* as the bedrock upon which all of the standards found elsewhere in Scripture are built. Only then will it be possible for proper relationships to be established.

The most basic of the *Written Torah* relationship principles are to be found in the Ten Commandments. However, there are many other commandments (*mitzvot*) given throughout the *Torah* which amplify the Big Ten principles. One good place to start is in *Leviticus* chapter 19, where the *Laws of Social Order* are given. For example the principle of providing for the poor is found in the laws concerning gleanings:

"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather *every* grape of

your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD [YHVH] your God."

(Lev. 19:9-10)

If a Community member finds themselves needing to help settle a dispute, either as a friend or as part of a Court, this guideline is given:

"You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor."

(Lev. 19:15)

The list goes on and on. (For a more comprehensive look at this subject see the article *Torah Law* in the booklet *Torah Concepts I*. (SPTC1)) The laws of the *Written Torah* were given to the children of Israel for the purpose of establishing them as a holy and set-apart people, and that is exactly what a Messianic Community should strive to become. A Messianic Community should be following the instruction of God within the laws established to govern today's society:

"Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD [YHVH] my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. ⁶ Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'"

(Deut. 4:5-6)

There are also many behavioral teachings to be found in the *Prophets* and the *Writings* of the Old Testament as well as the teachings of *Y'shua* and the Apostles in the New Testament. Taken as a whole, the Holy Scriptures must be the basis for the development of *Righteous Relationships* within a Messianic Community.

~ Summary ~

A healthy Messianic Community will exhibit the love of Messiah:

"Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. ² And walk in love, as Christ [Messiah] also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma."

(Eph. 5:1-2)

In addition to exhibiting the love of Messiah (which is the key to healthy relationships), a healthy Messianic Community will have a membership standard and a governmental structure that is also based upon Scripture. These topics will be covered in the following chapters.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ Membership ~

For as we have many members in one body,
But all the members do not have the same function,
So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ,
And individually members of one another.
Romans 12:4-5



There was a great deal of disputation in the early Messianic *Ekklesia* (Assembly or Community of Believers) as to who was eligible for membership and if there were supposed to be different levels or degrees of membership. These disputes no doubt emanated from the manner in which the Jewish Synagogues of the first century conducted themselves, for in the beginning (just after the death and resurrection of *Y'shua*) all of the Messianic Believers in *Y'shua* were either born Jewish or were Jewish proselytes:

"And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. ⁷ Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, 'Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs -- we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God."

(Acts 2:5-11)

However, in due time God revealed that some of the membership traditions, which had developed in the Synagogues over the years, were not necessarily what He had intended for his New Covenant *Ekklesia* (Assembly).

Of course certain criteria must be followed when admitting members into a Congregation. It is even more important when it comes to a Community where people live in close proximity. One primary way in which the adversary can cause division among the brethren is if there is no clear agreement concerning requirements for Community membership, or how the Community will be organized. It is also important to establish beforehand how the Community is expected to function on a daily basis and how disputes are going to be resolved. Only by agreeing to a sound Scripture based membership and governmental structure and mechanism, can a Community hope to resolve their differences in a righteous and Scriptural manner that builds unity.

~ A Pattern ~

We do not pretend to have all the answers to the problem of how to properly organize and staff a Messianic Community, or how to resolve disputes or heal relationships. However, there is an ancient pattern which does give important

guidelines. That pattern is the way the Synagogue was organized and run in the first century (the time of *Y'shua*). From our studies, it seems clear this is the same pattern which was used by the early *Ekklesia* (Messianic Communities) to organize and run their congregations. We believe that, with diligent study, the general outline of this pattern can be derived from Scripture and used in a practical way to aid in the establishment and maintenance of modern Messianic Communities.

Sometime after the first century, this Synagogue pattern was lost (or abandoned) by most of the *Ekklesia* (Messianic Community), along with some of the basic doctrines of the early Faith as taught by *Y'shua* and the Apostles. This occurred over a period of time and culminated when the Roman Church began to cast off doctrines which made them appear to be Jewish, and substituted a Gentile inspired hierarchical model of church government in place of the Synagogue pattern.

~ The Early *Ekklesia* ~

Historical records show that in the very early days of the *Ekklesia* (Messianic Community), those who were followers of *Y'shua HaMashiach* (known as *Nazarenes* -- followers of the man from Nazareth) often met in the same Synagogues with other Jews, including those who did not accept the Messiahship of *Y'shua* (i.e. non-*Nazarene* Jews). In all probability, these "mixed" Synagogues would have initially been run by a leadership composed of non-*Nazarene* Jews. Nevertheless, there was, at least in many Synagogues, a general willingness to allow the Sect of the *Nazarenes* to continue in fellowship -- after all, in the very early days, those who were part of the *Nazarene* movement were either fellow Jews or Jewish proselytes.

This intermixing of other Jewish sects with the *Nazarene* Jews, was injured greatly by the First Jewish Revolt of 66-70 CE (resulting in the destruction of the Second Temple), for the *Nazarenes* fled across the Jordan to the city of Pella, as they saw Jerusalem becoming surrounded by armies, instead of staying with the *Zealots* to fight the Romans:

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her." (Luke 21:20-21)

This was the first fulfillment of this prophecy. Another fulfillment is expected to come just prior to the return of Messiah *Y'shua*.

Relations between the *Nazarene* and non-*Nazarene* Jews was permanently severed by the Second Jewish Revolt of 132-135 CE (the *Bar Kochba* Revolt). After this event, there is no record of these two groups meeting together.

In this chapter we will discuss the membership of the early *Ekklesia* (Messianic/*Nazarene*) Community and how it changed as God continued revealing His will to the Apostles.

~ Synagogue Membership ~

Membership in the Jewish Synagogues was based upon either being an ethnic Jew or a Jewish proselyte. While

uncircumcised Gentiles could attend Synagogue, they were not allowed full fellowship without undergoing the physical rite of circumcision, thereby becoming "Jewish." Thus, an uncircumcised Gentile was treated as a second class citizen and, in the first century, could not enjoy table fellowship (meals) with Jews for fear of making them ritually impure. This was especially true in Jerusalem where ritual impurity would prevent a Jew from participating in Temple worship. Those in the Diaspora, and other parts of Judea and the Galilee, could not go to Temple anyway because of the distance, so this rule may not have been as important to them.

In the first few years of the *Ekklesia* (c. 31 - 40 CE) membership requirements in the Messianic (*Nazarene*) Community would have been the same as those of the non-*Nazarene* Jewish Community with one exception: the acceptance of the blood sacrifice of *Y'shua HaMashiach* as atonement for sin was required in order to be a *Nazarene*. *Y'shua* was both a personal and a communal Savior, and those who accepted His blood as payment for their sins automatically came into fellowship with one another regardless of their ethnic or religious background:

"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] His Son cleanses us from all sin." (I John 1:7)

It is apparent from this verse that not only are members of the *Ekklesia* (*Nazarene* Community) to believe in *Y'shua*, they are to conduct their lives in a certain way ("walk in the light"). Thus, for the first several years of its existence, the *Ekklesia* (*Nazarene* Community), like the Jewish Synagogue, consisted of four categories of people. Those four categories were:

- ◆ Natural born Jews.
- ◆ Proselytes (who had, through conversion, obtained equal status with natural born Jews).
- ◆ Samaritans.
- ◆ God Fearers.

The last two categories need some clarification because of the way in which they were dealt with in the normal Jewish Synagogue and because of the ramifications their new status in *Y'shua* came to have within the *Ekklesia*.

~ Samaritans ~

Those who became known as the Samaritans were a special category of people when it came to being admitted to the Jewish Synagogue. They were a Gentile people who had been brought into the land once occupied by the northern ten tribes of the House of Israel -- those who had been taken captive by the Assyrians and removed from the land in 722 BCE. In place of the removed Israelites, the Assyrians brought in other people groups to repopulate the land:

"Then the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities." (II Kings 17:24)

These new people had problems with wild animals, so they requested that the king of Assyria send them a priest from the House of Israel to help them:

"And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they did not fear the LORD [YHVH]; therefore the LORD [YHVH] sent lions among them, which killed some of them."

²⁶ **"So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, 'The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land.'"**

²⁷ **"Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, 'Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land.'"**

²⁸ **"Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD [YHVH]."** ²⁹ **However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put them in the shrines on the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities where they dwelt."**

(II Kings 17:25-29)

Thus it was, that the original religion of the Gentile people (who were now called Samaritans) consisted of their own previous pagan worship mixed with the semi-Torah/Pagan worship of the House of Israel.

Things changed, however, during the 4th century BCE, when the king of Samaria erected a Temple on Mount Gerizim which is said to have been a duplicate of the Temple in Jerusalem. This was done because a man of the Levitical Priestly line (a descendant of Aaron) had married the daughter of the king of Samaria and was forbidden to perform his duties as Priest at the Temple in Jerusalem.

From that time on, a sacrificial system and worship similar to that found at the Temple in Jerusalem was conducted on Mount Gerizim. As part of their religious practice, the Samaritans kept the commandments of the *Written Torah* and circumcised their male children. In 129 BCE, John Hyrcanus (from the family of the Maccabees) destroyed the Samaritan Temple.

During the time of *Y'shua*, Samaritans could convert to Judaism by doing three things:

- ◆ Denouncing worship on Mount Gerizim.
- ◆ Being immersed in a *mikveh* (meek'-vah = immersion pool).
- ◆ Bringing a sacrifice to the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Samaritans were not considered to be Gentiles in the Pagan sense of the word because they kept *Written Torah* and circumcised their male children on the eighth day. Therefore, it was not necessary for them to go through the lengthy training process as did a Pagan Gentile. This is probably why Samaritans were accepted into the Messianic/Nazarene *Ekklesia* without question prior to the acceptance of pagan Gentiles:

"So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans." (Acts 8:25)

Thus, it would seem, that during this time period (before the baptism of Cornelius), the requirements for membership in the *Nazarene Ekklesia* was identical to that of the non-Nazarene Jews. The only criteria which was different for the *Nazarenes* was the requirement to accept *Y'shua* as Messiah and Savior. During this time it is probable that Gentiles who wanted to become members of the *Nazarene Ekklesia* would have undergone circumcision, although there is no historical record, of which we are aware, that confirms this practice.

~ The God Fearers ~

For pagan Gentiles, admittance into the Synagogue consisted of a much more rigorous program. Gentiles could attend Synagogue (and many did) but in order to become a full-fledged member, they had to take a training program which lasted about one year. Those Gentiles who committed to that training program were called *God Fearers* or *Proselytes of the Gate*. In other words, they were in training to become Proselytes. During the time period of their *Torah* training they could not have table fellowship with the Jews because it was assumed they did not fully understand the *kosher* food laws and because they may still have been dabbling in Paganism.

Upon successful completion of the training program, the *God Fearers* had to do three things:

- ◆ Be circumcised (if they were male).
- ◆ Be immersed in a *mikveh*.
- ◆ Bring a sacrifice to the Temple in Jerusalem.

At that point they were no longer considered to be *God Fearers*, but full Proselyte members of the Jewish community.

~ Cornelius ~

The Roman Centurion Cornelius was already one of these *God Fearers* in training, prior to Peter's vision of the unclean things:

"There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, ² a devout man and one who feared God [a God Fearer] with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always." (Acts 10:1-2)

God used these two men, Peter and Cornelius, to demonstrate His will concerning the admittance of the God-Fearing Gentiles into the *Ekklesia*:

"Then he [Peter] became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. ¹³ And a voice came to him, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' ¹⁴ But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.' ¹⁵ And a voice spoke to him again the

second time, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.' ¹⁶ **This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again."** (Acts 10:10-16)

The fact that Peter had never eaten anything "common" indicates that his manner of living was according to the Orthodox Judaism of his day. He not only kept Biblically *kosher*, but, in addition, he did not eat meat unless he knew that it had been *kosher* slaughtered (according to *Oral Torah* traditions) and that all due tithes had been paid upon the animal. Therefore, this vision was very puzzling to Peter, for it seemed to contradict everything he knew about *kosher* foods. No wonder Scripture says he "pondered" the vision.

Meanwhile, Cornelius had sent men to fetch Peter and bring him to Caesarea. While Peter visited there, the meaning of the vision became obvious. It was not about eating unclean food (which is forbidden by the *Written Torah*), rather it was about associating with Gentiles. When the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit) fell upon the uncircumcised Gentiles, Peter felt compelled to immerse (baptize) them in a *mikveh* (immersion pool) in the name of *Y'shua*. Thus, Cornelius and his household became members of the *Ekklesia* (Messianic/*Nazarene* Community) without the men undergoing circumcision. This act set in motion a division between the *Ekklesia* and the non-*Nazarene* Jewish community, as well as causing serious dissension within the *Ekklesia* itself.

~ The Sticking Point ~

Within the *Ekklesia*, the sticking point was not that Peter had immersed Cornelius and his household into the Body of Messiah -- it was because he had entered the house of a Gentile and partaken of a meal with them. In other words, Peter had partaken of table fellowship with Gentiles:

"And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. ²⁸ Then he said to them, 'You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.'" (Acts 10:27-28)

At issue was the relationship between those who were circumcised and those who were not. This was also the main point of contention when Peter returned to Jerusalem and met with the Jewish *Nazarenes* there:

"Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. ² And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, ³ saying, 'You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!'" (Acts 11:1-3)

~ The Middle Wall of Partition ~

It is clear that the *Oral Traditions* of the Pharisees had served to build a wall of social partition between the Jews and the Gentiles which was never intended by God. The *Written Torah* does not forbid Jews from entering the house of a Gentile or eating with them -- as long as they serve meat that is Biblically acceptable and has been properly slaughtered.

Because Cornelius was a *God Fearer*, we might assume that he had already learned about the food issue and was careful not to serve Peter and his entourage food that was unacceptable.

The same issue (social intercourse between Jew and Gentile) was also the primary reason the Apostle Paul was arrested at the Temple. When Paul gave his testimony before the Jews at the Temple he had the full attention of the crowd as he spoke to them in Hebrew:

"Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.' ² And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent."

(Acts 22:1-2)

Paul told the crowd about meeting *Y'shua* on the road to Damascus and there was no adverse reaction. It was not until he mentioned the word Gentile that trouble arose:

"Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'" ²² And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!' ²³ Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, ²⁴ the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him." (Acts 22:21-24)

Apparently the Temple attending non-*Nazarene* Jews wanted nothing to do with Gentiles or with anyone who ministered to them.

~ Membership Rule Change ~

For the *Ekklesia* (Messianic/ *Nazarene* Community), the membership rules had now changed, but they had not changed for the regular Jewish Synagogues. Likewise, many *Nazarene* Jewish Believers did not readily accept the rule change either. However, those changes were confirmed, and a compromise solution was worked out, with "those of the circumcision" at the Jerusalem Council:

"And after they had become silent, James answered, saying,

"Men and brethren, listen to me: ¹⁴ Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

¹⁶ **"After this I will return**

And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which

has fallen down;

I will rebuild its ruins,

And I will set it up;

¹⁷ **So that the rest of mankind may seek**

the LORD [YHVH],

Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,

Says the LORD [YHVH] who does all these things."

[Amos 9:11-12]

¹⁸ **"Known to God from eternity are all His works.**

¹⁹**Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰ but that we**

write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood."
(Acts 15:13-20)

In this manner, Gentile Believers in *Y'shua* were brought into full fellowship with their *Nazarene* Jewish Brethren without having to first go through a year or more of conversion studies, be physically circumcised, and agree to keep the *Oral Torah*. However, Gentiles still had to learn and keep the *Written Torah* commands as evidenced by this key verse:

"For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."
(Acts 15:21)

The new Gentile Believers were expected to attend Synagogue on the Sabbath and learn the precepts of the *Written Torah*. In this way, they would learn about the *Written Torah* commands concerning food and become sensitive to the beliefs of their Jewish Brethren.

Uncircumcised *Nazarene* Gentile Believers were not obligated (by the Messianic *Ekklesia*) to keep the "Whole Law" as was the practice in Orthodox Judaism at that time. In Jewish eyes, keeping the Law included observing the *Oral Torah* traditions and customs, in addition to the commands of the *Written Torah*:

"Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you [Gentiles] become circumcised [converts to Judaism], Christ [Messiah] will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law."
(Gal. 5:2-3)

For the *Ekklesia* there were to be no second-class members. Full membership included the following categories of people, all of whom were treated as equals, even though they were on different levels of understanding and spiritual development:

- ◆ Natural born Jews.
- ◆ Proselytes.
- ◆ Samaritans.
- ◆ God Fearing Gentiles.

The requirements were:

- ◆ Profession of faith in the atoning blood of Messiah *Y'shua*.
- ◆ Immersion into the family of God in the name of *Y'shua*.
- ◆ A willingness to learn and keep the *Written Torah* commands.
- ◆ For the *God Fearing* Gentile converts -- a willingness to follow the four minimum requirements approved by the Jerusalem Council (so that social intercourse and table fellowship could be established between the Circumcision and the Uncircumcision, while they were learning *Torah* every Sabbath in the Synagogue).

In Paul's teaching, a Gentile convert must not be circumcised in order to satisfy the membership requirements of the Jews, for that would place him into *Pharisaic* Judaism with all of its *Oral Torah* demands. However, since the Gentiles were learning *Written Torah* each Sabbath, it would seem logical that if a Gentile became convicted by the *Written Torah* to be circumcised, he would not be prevented from doing so. This, however, would be a personal decision, not one that was forced upon him by the *Ekklesia* or the non-*Nazarene* Jewish leadership of a Synagogue.

~ The Final Break ~

A full break with non-*Nazarene* Orthodox Judaism and the members of the *Ekklesia* did not occur until 132-135 CE, at the time of the *Bar Kochba* Revolt. During that revolt, Rabbi Akiva declared that *Bar Kochba* was the Messiah. Those who were followers of *Y'shua HaMashiach* knew that was not true and therefore their conscience did not allow them to continue in *Bar Kochba's* army. So, the *Nazarenes* either deserted or refused to participate, which caused them to be considered traitors to Judaism and no longer welcome in the Jewish Synagogues.

After the Second Jewish revolt was put down (in 135 CE), the *Nazarenes* were permanently forbidden to attend Jewish Synagogues. However, they (as members of the Messianic *Ekklesia*) continued to follow the Synagogue pattern, at least for a time.

~ Hiding the Synagogue ~

Sometimes, our English translations of the Bible hide the fact that the first century *Ekklesia* met in Synagogues and not in "Churches" as we understand the term today. (Let us remember that the word *Ekklesia*, which is usually translated as "church," is actually referring to the body of Believers, not to a building.) A case in point can be found in the Epistle of James:

"For if there should come into your assembly [Greek: *sunagoge*] a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, ³ and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, 'You sit here in a good place,' and say to the poor man, 'You stand there,' or, 'Sit here at my footstool,' ⁴ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?"
(James 2:2-4)

As you can see, the Greek word from which the English word "assembly" is derived is none other than *sunagoge* and should be translated as "synagogue" just like it is 55 other times in the King James Version. If James (*Ya'acov* or Jacob) wanted to convey that the people were meeting as a "church," he would have used the word *Ekklesia*. However, he used the word *sunagoge* because that is the venue in which the *Ekklesia* was meeting.

In all fairness, there are a few English translations which do use the English word Synagogue in this passage, but many follow the "Church" tradition of the King James Version and translate it as "assembly."

~ Lessons for Today ~

It is evident that God intends that everyone who comes to faith (trust or confidence) in Messiah *Y'shua* is to be accepted into full fellowship in the Body of Messiah (*Ekklesia*). One does not have to pass a test on the *Written Torah* to qualify -- one needs only to accept (come to the deep conviction) that *Y'shua* died for our sins and that total forgiveness comes to us through His shed blood and not through the Temple sacrifices:

**"For I desire mercy and not sacrifice,
And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."**
(Hos. 6:6)

**"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats
could take away sins."** (Heb. 10:4)

However, after receiving forgiveness, we are instructed to begin a "walk in the light:"

**"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we
have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus
Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] His Son cleanses us from all
sin."** (I John 1:7)

In the first century it was clear that a Pagan Gentile who accepted *Y'shua* would gain full table fellowship in the Messianic Community if he agreed to the four minimum requirements for fellowship:

**"But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have
written and decided that they should observe no such thing,
except that they should keep themselves from things offered
to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual
immorality."** (Acts 21:25)

It was also clear to the first century convert from Paganism that he was becoming part of a Jewish sect (the Sect of the *Nazarenes*) and that he was also expected to learn to live his life based on the rules (commandments) of the *Written Torah*:

**"For Moses has had throughout many generations
those who preach him in every city, being read in the
synagogues every Sabbath."** (Acts 15:21)

The situation is not so clear cut today, for most of the millions of people who profess Christ (Messiah) no longer follow the *Torah* Standard. Conditions today in the Christian Church, are similar to the way they were in the time of the Judges when:

"... everyone did what was right in his own eyes."
(Judges 21:25)

This *antinomian* (against law) attitude greatly complicates the membership drive for a new Messianic Community. For example, how can a brotherhood of Believers be established if part of the Community insists on keeping the seventh day Sabbath while another part keeps Sunday? The same is true if two or three subgroups within the Community insist on keeping different versions of the Biblical Calendar.

Each Messianic Community will have to work these details out in their own way. Some might prefer a return to the Jewish

practice of requiring a training period for prospective members (who might need some proper *Torah* training) before they enter a Community where they would actually live in close proximity with other Believers (even though people who were undergoing this training would be accepted as full fledged members of a Messianic Fellowship).

Other Communities might be willing to accept such people into their Community right away, with the understanding and promise that the newcomer would abide by all of the Community practices and rules whether they initially agreed with them or not. Hopefully, in this type of situation, over a period of time and diligent teaching, newcomers would come to understand and fully accept the customs of the Community to which they had attached themselves. In either case, it would require patience and love on the part of all parties involved:

**"But let patience have its perfect work, that you may
be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."** (James 1:4)

~ Summary ~

Historically the early *Ekklesia* (Messianic/*Nazarene* Community) met in Synagogues with non-*Nazarene* Jews. For the most part, these Synagogues were run by non-*Nazarene* Jews, unless the leadership itself had heard the Good News and accepted *Y'shua* as the promised Messiah. In some cases, where persecution existed, the *Ekklesia* (Messianic/*Nazarene*) Jews would have formed their own Synagogues early on. This was probably especially true in Jerusalem, where persecution of the *Nazarenes* began early. However, in the Diaspora it is likely that all Jews (both *Nazarene* and non-*Nazarene*) would have met together for a longer period of time.

As the membership rules began to change, more trouble arose in the mixed Synagogues, until finally there was a complete break. While such breaks may have occurred in certain individual Synagogues even before the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the final and complete break did not occur until 135 CE, at which time the *Nazarenes* and non-*Nazarene* Jews went their separate ways.

The record of membership problems in the first century *Ekklesia* was given to us in Scripture for a reason. We believe it was recorded so that Messianic/*Nazarenes* down through the ages would be able to understand the membership criteria God wants for His *Ekklesia*.

As the Apostle Paul pointed out time and again, it is not a long training period and physical circumcision which make a person a part of the Body of Messiah. Rather, it is complete Faith in the Blood of *Y'shua* as the medium through which sin is forgiven and Brotherhood is established:

**"... there is one God who will justify the circumcised by
faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then
make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the
contrary, we establish the law."** (Rom. 3:30-31)

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~ Government ~

For this reason I left you in Crete,
That you should set in order the things that are lacking,
And appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.
Titus 1:5



we turn now to the governmental structure of the First Century Assemblies (the *Ekklesia* or Messianic Congregations) which was based upon the pattern developed in the ancient Synagogue over a period of centuries. This chapter will show how the early *Ekklesia* of Believers (the Messianic or Nazarene Community) organized their congregations.

~ Synagogue History ~

It is next to impossible to set an actual date for the origin of the Synagogue, especially as it functioned in the 1st century CE. It seems to have developed over the centuries as a result of the religious circumstances and needs of the people. This is not to say that the Synagogue was not based on a Biblical standard, for (as will be covered later) it certainly was. Lee I. Levine, in his book *The Ancient Synagogue*, has this to say about the historical traces which have been found:

"The earliest 'hard' evidence we have for the existence of a synagogue appears in a number of inscriptions from Ptolemaic Egypt which mention a *proseuche*, commencing with the third century BCE. To date, about twelve such inscriptions and papyri have been discovered from the Hellenistic period, and the earliest archeological remains of a synagogue building on the island of Delos in the Aegean indicate a late second-century or possibly mid-first-century BCE date of construction." (p. 19)

The full flowering of Synagogue government took place in the 1st century CE throughout both Judea and in the Diaspora.

Most scholars believe the Synagogue emerged in the 6th or 5th century BCE, although some date it as far back as the 9th or 8th century. Many see the Synagogue as being established by Ezra and Nehemiah. A very early example of a Synagogue *Torah* reading in Scripture is the one which occurred on *1 Tishri* (*Rosh HaShannah* or *Yom Teruah* = Feast of Trumpets):

"Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD [YHVH] had commanded Israel. ²So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. ³Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ⁴So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; ..." (Nehemiah 8:1-4)

Whatever the actual initiation date of the Synagogue, it is evident it developed fairly early in the history of Israel and/or Judea.

~ Synagogue Function ~

The local Synagogue provided a number of basic needs for the members of its congregation, especially outside of Jerusalem where there was no Temple worship. The local Synagogue served the following primary functions:

- ◆ Community Center
- ◆ School for Learning *Torah* (*Beit Midrash*)
- ◆ Place of Worship
- ◆ Court of Law (*Beit Din*)
- ◆ Social Welfare

Thus, the Synagogue became like a mini local government. In a small village there might be only one Synagogue, while in a larger town there could be two or more. In a large city there would have been dozens depending on the Jewish population. If a Synagogue became too large, they were required to take ten men who knew the *Torah*, along with their families, and organize a new Synagogue. (We do not have a definition of what was considered to be "too large," but it is obvious they did not desire to have Mega-Synagogues.)

In the first century it was common practice for the local Synagogue to be the focal point for a member's family. The members of the Synagogue were expected to trade within their Synagogue. Thus, if one man in the fellowship was a tailor, the members were expected to buy their clothes from him, rather than go outside the Synagogue family.

~ Synagogue Government ~

Each Synagogue was governed by a Board composed of at least three members, but usually seven. In later years it was common to have a Governing Board of twelve. If members of the same family sat on the same Governing Board they had only one vote between them.

Members of the Governing Board were not paid. If they were required to work full-time for the Synagogue, they were given a subsistence wage and had to supplement it with other income. Often, these men would earn their living by teaching. They were certainly not rewarded with wealth for their work in these often demanding positions.

All communal offices were appointed by the Governing Board, with the concurrence of the Synagogue membership. This is a very important point, for it meant that the Governing Board was expected to observe the wishes of the Community when it came to filling offices. An example of this practice occurred in the Messianic *Ekklesia* when the Apostles ordained Deacons to help with service duties:

"Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said,

"It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. ³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.'

⁵ "And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, ⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them." (Acts 6:1-6)

Exactly how the congregation selected these seven men is unknown. In whatever manner it was done, Scripture makes it clear that approval was required by both the congregation at large and the Apostles as the ordained leaders.

This same practice was also true when vacancies occurred within the Governing Board itself. When a member needed to be appointed he was first agreed upon by a consensus of the Board, but the new member also had to have the support and approval of the general congregation.

In an earlier example, the Apostles selected a replacement for Judas:

"And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, '... of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus [*Y'shua*] went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.'

²³ "And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, 'You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen ²⁵ to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.'

²⁶ "And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles." (Acts 1:15, 21-26)

In this case, the 120 disciples proposed two qualified men that could fill the vacancy left by Judas. Rather than select one of these men over the other, the Apostles asked God to choose through the casting of lots. Once again it shows the involvement of all of the members of the Community in choosing leaders. Some feel this was actually a secret ballot cast by the Apostles, while others see it as a 1st century equivalent to the flipping of a coin. No one knows for sure how it was done.

~ Leadership ~

The Governing Board was led by the *Nasi* נָשִׂי (Nah-see' #5387) or President. He was selected from among the board members, served for one year, and could not succeed himself. However, a former *Nasi* could serve again after at least one year off. This practice insured that no one person could become "Dictator for Life" of a local Synagogue. It also gave

others the opportunity to learn and develop their leadership skills.

~ Board Responsibilities ~

The Governing Board conducted all of the affairs of the Synagogue Community. They gave special attention to the distribution of funds to the poor, the widows, and the orphans. This practice was tempered by the following principle found in the *Written Torah*:

"When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD [*YHVH*] your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰ When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. ²¹ When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean *it* afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow."

(Deut. 24:19-21)

If the Synagogue was located in an agricultural based community, the laws of gleaning applied. This meant that those able bodied people, who were not earning a living at a regular job or business, had to go out in the fields to glean for food. In other words, they were not allowed to sit at home and not actively participate in their livelihood. If gleaning did not provide sufficient means of support, their income was supplemented by money donated to the Synagogue for this purpose.

In practice, all wage earners (who did not pay tithes to the Levites because tithes were required only on agriculture increase) were expected to give a percentage of their first day's wages each week to help support the poor, the widows, and the orphans. If a person gave 60 percent of his first day's wage he was said to have a "good eye." If he gave 50 percent of his first day's wage he was said to have a "middling eye," and if he only gave 40 percent of his first day's wage he was said to have an "evil eye." The term "evil eye" was a Hebrew idiom for a stingy or greedy man:

"A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, And does not consider that poverty will come upon him."

(Prov. 28:22)

Assuming that wage earners and businessmen in those days worked six days a week, a person who gave 60 percent of his first day's wage was really giving 10 percent, or a tithe, of his income for the support of the needy.

According to the Apostle Paul, a person who was poor but able-bodied, was not to get a free handout, but was to be put to work:

"For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. ¹¹ For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. ¹² Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*] that they work in quietness and eat their own bread."

(II Thess. 3:10-12)

We are aware of one modern Community which has a rule that if you visit them for more than three days you will be expected to help with the chores. In our opinion this is a good rule, since what we have witnessed in some other Communities are a few who do all the work and others who primarily freeload. Now, of course, if someone is unable to work because of illness or accident, that is another matter. However, many people who are laid up can still perform some worthwhile tasks that help the Community as a whole.

In the ancient Synagogue the Governing Board was responsible to set weights and measures, the price of food, and the rate of wages. According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*: "The board was responsible for the safety and the social and intellectual welfare of the community."

In some cities, where more than one Synagogue existed, all the Synagogues in the city were led by a citywide Governing Board, with each Synagogue's Board serving in a subordinate role.

~ Judging ~

The *Nasi* (president) of the Governing Board of a Synagogue ordained a head judge known as a *Zaken* זָקֵן (Zah-kehn' #2205). This person was the final authority on ritual, civil, and political questions. The *Zaken* could often decide minor money matters when there arose such a conflict between members. On all other disputes, a three judge panel was required to make binding decisions. This group was called the *Beit Din* בֵּית דִּין (Bait (#1004) Deen (#1777)) or House of Judgment. The *Beit Din* was also responsible to decide criminal cases. These men were required to be *Torah* scholars so they could properly interpret the law. They were selected from the ranks of the Governing Board:

"You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's."
(Deut. 1:17)

The *Beit Din* of the local Synagogue acted like a local court of law in our modern world. If a matter was too difficult for them to decide, or if there was a conflict of interest, or if the protagonists were from different Synagogues, then the matter would be referred to the citywide or regional *Beit Din*, which would consist of more members and would be composed of men from all the various citywide or regional Synagogues.

The next step up in the court system was the *Small Sanhedrin* composed of 23 members. It has been speculated by some that the Jerusalem Council, mentioned in Acts 15, was a *Small Sanhedrin* organized for the purpose of resolving disputes within the Messianic Community (*Ekklesia*).

The Supreme Court of all Judaism (to which the very early *Ekklesia* would probably have been subject) was the Great Sanhedrin of 70 members, plus a *Nasi* (president) which met at the Temple in Jerusalem. They were the only ones who could decide capital crime cases which carried the penalty of death.

~ Ekklesia Practice ~

It is clear from the Greek Scriptures (New Testament) that the early *Ekklesia* communities also had functioning courts (*Beit Din*).

Paul told the Corinthians they should not take a brother before the secular courts of the day, but should resolve their differences within the Messianic Community:

"Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? ²Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? ³Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? ⁴If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church [*ekklesia*] to judge? ⁵I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? ⁶But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!"
(I Cor. 6:1-6)

Paul expected the Messianic *Ekklesia* at Corinth to resolve their disputes within the context of the Community, not in pagan courts of law. The model for doing this would have been the *Zaken* in minor money matters -- for other matters, the *Beit Din* of the local Messianic Synagogue, or the citywide or regional *Beit Din*.

Y'shua pointed to the Synagogue *Beit Din* as the way to resolve disputes which could not be satisfactorily settled by personal negotiation or before selected witnesses:

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." [Deut. 19:15] ¹⁷And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. ¹⁸Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."
(Matt. 18:15-18)

When one understands the function of the *Beit Din* in the context of the local *Ekklesia*, it is clear that, as a last resort, a person could be brought before the *Beit Din* of the congregation for a final decision. If the person refused to follow the dictates of their decision, then he was to be removed from fellowship until such time as he was willing to comply.

There is much confusion about the phrase; **"...whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven..."** (v. 18) This does not mean that Messianic Believers can get together and change doctrine because they happen to agree to do so. What it means is that whatever the *Beit Din* decides in a case that has come before them, that decision is bound in heaven (**"... for the judgment is God's."** Deut. 1:17). If they find the person guilty, then he is also said to be guilty before God in heaven and must repent, make amends, or restitution (whatever is

required). However, if they find him not guilty, then he is also presumed not guilty before God in heaven. All of this is, of course, based upon the premise that the *Beit Din* will make an impartial and righteous judgment in the matter:

"You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor."

(Lev. 19:15)

As with the Governing Board, the *Beit Din* members were not paid for serving in this capacity.

~ Other Leadership Positions ~

The only paid position in the Synagogue was that of the *Shamash* שַׁמַּשׁ (shah-mahsh' #8120) or *Chazzan* who was hired by the Governing Board. This person was required to maintain the building and the *Mikvah* (Meek'-vah = immersion pool), conduct the service in the Synagogue, call up the Readers for the *Torah*, translate the *Torah* reading from Hebrew into the vernacular language as it was being read, and carry out any punishments handed down by the *Beit Din*. The *Chazzan* or *Shamash* was also responsible for the disbursement of funds to the widows and orphans.

Also appointed by the Governing Board were the teachers of the young. A teacher had to be married and at least forty years of age. The teachers were paid by the parents of the children, however their salaries were often supplemented by the community at large. We do not know exactly how that money was collected. It may have been taken from the money given each week for social welfare, or perhaps a special collection was taken from time to time.

~ Positions in the *Ekklesia* ~

It is time now to turn to the Greek Scriptures (New Testament) and examine the various offices and functions described therein to see their correlation to the way things were handled in the Synagogue. We have already seen how there was some correlation in the area of making judgments concerning disputes within the congregation.

~ Elders ~

In the Greek Scriptures the term Elder always comes from the Greek word *presbuteros* (#4245). It is defined as "older, senior, or elder." This term is used both for "Elders" in the Jewish community as well as later on for "Elders" in the *Ekklesia*:

"As soon as it was day, the elders [*presbuteros*] of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led Him into their council, saying, ⁶⁷ 'If You are the Christ [*Messiah*], tell us.' But He said to them, 'If I tell you, you will by no means believe.'"

(Luke 22:66-67)

In Hebrew the equivalent word is *Zaken* (#2205):

"So the LORD said to Moses: 'Gather to Me seventy men of the elders [*zaken*] of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them

to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you."

(Num. 11:16)

In the first century, these were the men who were ordained to sit on the local Governing Board of the Synagogue. As already mentioned, nominations for vacant positions came from the other Elders (*Zekanim* - pl.), however, they had to be approved by the entire Synagogue Community. A Synagogue Elder held office for life, unless removed by the other members of the Board for some kind of misconduct. In the Messianic *Ekklesia*, Elders were also ordained by other Elders:

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders [*presbuteros*] in every city as I commanded you ..."

(Titus 1:5)

The role and function of the Elders can be traced back to the Old Testament Community, for, according to the *Written Torah*, each Community was to have a body of Elders:

"Then the elders [*zekanim*] of that city shall take that man and punish him; ..."

(Deut. 22:18)

In the *Ekklesia*, the Elders were to rule:

"Let the elders [*presbuteros*] who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine."

(I Tim. 5:17)

~ Bishops ~

In Greek, the word translated as Bishop is *episkopos* (#1984 & 1985). It is defined as: "superintendent, to oversee, or inspect." The equivalent word in Hebrew is *pakid* פָּקִיד (pah-keed' see: #6496 & #6485) which is defined as: "a superintendent, overseer, or officer." However, in the Synagogue, the person who functioned in this capacity was usually called the *Nasi* or President of the Governing Board.

As previously mentioned, in the ancient Synagogue the *Pakid* or *Nasi* could only serve for one year at a time and he was not paid. Each year a new *Nasi* (*episkopos* in Gk.) was chosen by the Governing Board of Elders. Once his term was up, he was no longer called the *Pakid*, *Nasi*, or (in Greek) the *Episkopos*.

The Bishop (*episkopos*) was to have certain qualifications:

"For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, ⁹holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."

(Titus 1:7-9 [see also I Tim. 3:1-7])

Since all of the *Zekanim* (Elders or *Presbuteros*) sitting on the Governing Board would probably eventually serve as Bishop, it was important that all *Zekanim* (Elders) meet the same qualifications of Titus 1 and I Tim. 3.

That the chief function of the Bishops (*Episkopos*, *Pakid*, or *Nasi*) were to be the overseers is evident:

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [episkopos], to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20:28)

It is evident that *Y'shua* is to be both a Shepherd and a Bishop of each one of us:

"For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd [poimen] and Overseer [episkopos] of your souls." (I Pet. 2:25)

~ Deacons ~

The English word Deacon comes from the Greek word *diakonos* (#1247, 1248, 1249) and means: "to be an attendant, to serve, to wait upon, to minister." This word is usually translated as "minister," occasionally as "servant," and rarely as "deacon." Today the term Minister is the most common English term used for someone who pastors a church, or has credentials from an organization to perform marriages. One thing *Diakonos* (Minister) does not mean is to be a lord. It means just the opposite -- to be a servant:

"But Jesus [Y'shua] called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant [diakonos]. ²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave -- ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'" (Matt. 20:25-28)

In Hebrew the person fulfilling this function was called the *Shamash* שָׁמַשׁ (shah-mahsh' #8120), defined as: "to serve or minister." Another term for the person fulfilling this specific function is *Chazzan*. In later years that word became synonymous with Cantor.

The Deacon (*diakonos*), *Shamash*, or *Chazzan*, was the person who was responsible for the upkeep of the Synagogue building, running the service, and distributing alms to the poor. It was the only full-time paid position in the Synagogue, and there was generally only one person who functioned in this position within a single Synagogue.

However, it seems clear from the New Testament that the function of serving the people was not to be held by just one person (as it apparently was in the ancient Synagogue), but that all Believers were to be servants of each other. This concept is very important for a successful Messianic Community:

"As each one has received a gift, minister [diakoneo #1247] it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (I Pet. 4:10)

In other passages this term is used for those who, like Paul, were in leadership:

"... of which I became a minister [diakonos #1249] according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power." (Eph. 3:7)

It is in this capacity of leadership where the term is occasionally translated as Deacon:

"Likewise deacons [diakonos #1249] must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, ⁹ holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. ¹⁰ But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless." (I Tim. 3:8-10)

Whether someone is a *Diakonos* by ordination or by serving the needs of other people in an unordained capacity, the bottom line is that they are to be Servants or Ministers, and not try to be lords over the people.

~ The Work of Service ~

An important Scripture which gives titles to those who serve in certain functions, within the *Ekklesia*, is found in the book of Ephesians:

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ [Messiah], ..." (Eph. 4:11-12)

This verse is usually used to describe the "fivefold offices of the church." However, these are not called "offices" in Scripture and they are really not offices at all, but functions within the Body of Messiah. Dr. David Stern, in his *Complete Jewish Bible*, uses the term "the work of service."

~ Apostles ~

In Greek, the word Apostle comes from *apostole* (#651) and it means "commission." In Hebrew the companion word is *shalach* שָׁלַח (shah-lahkh #7971) and it means "to send away."

An Apostle is a person who has been sent forth on a specific mission. During the time period of the mission, that person would be a *Shalach* or an *Apostole*. Once the mission was completed, that person was no longer deemed to be an Apostle, with the exception of the twelve Apostles, plus Paul, who were sent on life long missions by Messiah *Y'shua* Himself. Therefore, they were *Shalachim* or Apostles for life.

It would be perfectly normal for a local congregation to designate one of their members to be an Apostle to accomplish a specific task. Perhaps that person would be sent forth to another congregation, as was Barnabas:

"Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch." (Acts 11:22)

For that period of time Barnabas was a *Shalach* or Apostle. It does not mean that he was considered to be a perpetual "Apostle," as were the twelve.

~ Prophets ~

The English word Prophet comes from the Greek *prophetes* (#4396) and is defined as: "a foreteller or inspired

speaker." In Hebrew the word is *Navi* נָבִיא (nah-vee' #5030) and it means an "inspired man."

Normally, we think of the word *Navi* or *Prophetes* (Prophet) as meaning someone who prophecies or foretells future events:

"And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet [prophetes] named Agabus came down from Judea. "When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'""

(Acts 21:10-11)

This is the same manner in which it is used in the Hebrew Scriptures:

"In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet [navi], the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, 'Thus says the LORD [YHWH]: "Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.'"" (Isaiah 38:1)

However, like *Prophetes*, the word *Navi* does not require that a person so designated must be able to foretell future events, for the definition means "inspired man." God told Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet even though we do not have any Scripture record that he foretold future events, although he certainly was "an inspired man:"

"Now therefore, restore the man's [Abraham's] wife; for he is a prophet [navi], and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours." (Gen. 20:7)

~ Evangelists ~

The next function found in the *Ekklesia* is that of Evangelist. In Greek this word comes from *euaggelistes* (#2099 from #2097) and it means: "to announce good news." A similar word, *basar* בָּשַׂר (bah-sahr' #1319) is found in Hebrew and it too means "to announce:"

**"How beautiful upon the mountains
Are the feet of him who brings good news [basar],
Who proclaims peace,
Who brings glad tidings of good things,
Who proclaims salvation,
Who says to Zion,
'Your God reigns!'"** (Isaiah 52:7)

Anyone in the ancient Synagogue who consistently proclaimed God's Good News would have been considered a *Basar* or Evangelist.

One aspect of Evangelism is not only to proclaim the Good News of *Y'shua's* atoning sacrifice, but also to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God to this earth:

"Now after John was put in prison, Jesus [Y'shua] came to Galilee, preaching the gospel [euaggelion] of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵ and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel [euaggelion].'" (Mark 1:14-15)

~ Pastors ~

In Greek, the term Pastor is *poimen* (#4166) and is defined as "a shepherd." In fact, the only time *poimen* is translated as "pastor" is in Ephesians 4:11. All other occurrences of this word are translated as "shepherd." In Hebrew the companion word is *roeh* רֹעִי (roh-ee' #7462) and it is defined as: "to feed as a flock, to pasture, to tend, to guard or care for."

King David was a good shepherd for Israel for he led them according to God's Law and God's will:

**"He also chose David His servant,
And took him from the sheepfolds;
⁷¹ From following the ewes that had young He brought him,
To shepherd [roeh] Jacob His people,
And Israel His inheritance.
⁷² So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart,
And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands."** (Psalm 78:70-72)

In the New Testament, Paul equates those who are Bishops (*episkopos*) as also being *Poimen* or Shepherds of the *Ekklesia*:

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [episkopos], to shepherd [poimen] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20:28)

~ Teachers ~

Finally, the Teacher in Greek is *didaskalos* (#1320). It means: "an instructor, doctor, master, or teacher." In Hebrew the term is *yarah* יָרָה (yah-rah #3384) and is defined as: "to follow as water, to point out, to teach." *Yarah* is the root word for *Torah*. It means to instruct or teach the word of God. In Israel, the Priests and Levites were supposed to be the *Yarahim* (teachers) of the people:

**"And of Levi he said: ...
¹⁰ They shall teach Jacob Your judgments,
And Israel Your law."** (Deut. 33:8, 10)

The writer of Hebrews admonished those Messianic Believers who had been in the faith long enough that they ought to have been ready to teach others -- yet they were still living on the milk of the word, rather than the meat:

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers [didaskalos], you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe." (Heb. 5:12-13)

In the end, it is *Y'shua* who is both our Good Shepherd and our Great Teacher:

"I am the good shepherd [poimen]. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ... ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. ¹⁵ As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay

down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.'" (John 10:11, 14-16)

"You call me Teacher [*didaskalos*] and Lord, and you say well, for so I am." (John 13:13)

~ Parallel Functions ~

As we can see, the functions in the *Ekklesia* closely parallel similar functions found in the Synagogue. It is our opinion that Paul patterned these functions of Ephesians 4:11 upon what he experienced in the Synagogue. Paul was not attempting to leave behind the Synagogue and establish a whole new religion and church "system." By using the Synagogue pattern, it was particularly clear to the Gentiles that what they had entered into, when they accepted *Y'shua* as their Lord and Savior, was a very Jewish Community structure -- a structure that was based on the teachings of the *Written Torah*.

~ Another Community Model ~

There is one other Community model found in Scripture which needs to be addressed at this time. That is the record of the very early attempts of the Messianic Believers to live in Community. This model does not speak about structure, other than to show that one of the Apostles was in charge. Rather, it speaks about the relationships which those early Believers were willing to accept in order to live together:

"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus [*Y'shua*]. And great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. ³⁶ And *Joses*, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet." (Acts 4:32-37)

Imagine the excitement of the new Believers. It was so great they were willing to do whatever was necessary so they could live together in Community and share their faith with others. They were willing to give up their own personal belongings, land, and even houses, in order to live together, thereby enabling those who were poor to not have to go out into the world to beg or glean for food. This was indeed the love of *Y'shua* in action:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

However, their idyllic attempt at Community was sullied by the actions of a husband and wife, Ananias and Sapphira. Even though the Messianic Believers were living in Community to such a degree that they were sharing their possessions -- total sacrifice of all one's belongings to this ideal was not required. What was required was complete honesty:

"But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. ² And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of *it*, and brought a certain part and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself? ⁴ While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.'"

(Acts 5:1-4)

It is possible to speculate that Ananias and Sapphira saw the esteem which *Joses* (Barnabas) received from the Brethren when he sold his land and gave all of the proceeds for the support of the Community. It seems possible that Ananias wanted to receive that same kind of recognition, but not at the expense of the entire amount he had received. Perhaps he needed a portion of the money to pay off debts, or for some other reason. We just do not know his motivation for saying that he was giving the entire proceeds from the sale while not actually doing so.

However, we do know what the real problem was, it was lying to the Apostles and to the Community. This is a valuable lesson to all who might wish to form a Community where possessions are held in common. In such a situation there must be complete honesty and trust between the brethren.

In the early years of the 20th century, when Israel was being resettled by Jewish immigrants, it was common practice for them to pool their resources and live on a *Kibbutz* where everything was held in common. However, the principles of the *Kibbutz* movement did not stem from Scripture, rather they stemmed from Communism, for many of those early settlers were not religious, but secular in their approach to life, and many of them had suffered poverty at the hands of capitalists; some even from those among their own people. Despite their lack of religious motivation, God still used them to bring the Jewish people back to the Promised Land, just as He said He would do.

Today, in Israel, the *Kibbutz* movement is nearly dead. In its place is the *Moshav*, where people still live closely together and help one another, but where individuals are allowed to have personal possessions. The *Moshav* is another Community model which, we believe, needs to be explored by Messianic Believers.

~ Synagogue Success ~

Just how successful was the Synagogue government in the first century? We believe the success of the local Synagogue depended on Righteous Leadership, the willingness of the members of the Congregation to adhere to the government which had been established, and the willingness to work together to establish Righteous Relationships.

For those who were raised in an observant Jewish home, the manner in which the Synagogue functioned would have seemed perfectly normal and would probably have worked quite well -- unless there was authority abuse by the leadership. However, for those coming from a Gentile background, who had grown up in a pagan setting, the Synagogue organization would have seemed foreign. A modern example would be the efforts of our government to get countries who have only known authoritarian governments in the past to suddenly embrace democracy and be able to make it work as it does in the United States and Western Europe.

It appears that many of the problems which Paul encountered with the various congregations in the Diaspora (other than the issue over circumcision of the Gentiles), probably stemmed from misunderstanding or reluctance, on the part of Gentile Believers, to accept the structure and authority of the Synagogue. Some of those problems will be addressed in the following chapter.

~ Summary ~

It is evident from a close comparison of the New Testament Scriptures concerning *Ekklesia* government with the ancient Synagogue practice, and with the Old Testament Scriptures, that a definite correlation exists. To compare:

- ◆ Elder (*presbuteros*) = *Zaken*.
- ◆ Bishop (*episkopos*) = *Pakid* or *Nasi*.
- ◆ Deacon (*diakonos*) = *Shamash* or *Chazzan*.
- ◆ Apostle (*apostole*) = *Shalach*.
- ◆ Prophet (*prophetes*) = *Navi*.
- ◆ Evangelists (*euaggelistes*) = *Basar*.
- ◆ Pastor (*poimen*) = *Roeh*.
- ◆ Teacher (*didaskalos*) = *Yarah*.

In addition, there was the practice in both groups of having the congregation approve of those who were appointed to offices. The records also indicate that both organizations had internal courts of law (*Beit Din*) to resolve disputes between Brethren.

Scripture, both Old and New Testament, gives us a marvelous model for our modern day Fellowships and Communities, where we can meet together in praise and worship of Almighty God as was so eloquently expressed:

**"Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD [YHVH]
for His goodness,
And for His wonderful works to the children of men!
³² Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of
the people,
And praise Him in the company of the elders."**

(Psalm 107:31-32)

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~ Difficulties ~

And I also say to thee,
That thou art a rock,
And upon this rock I will build my assembly,
And gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
Matthew 16:18 YLT



It is one thing to lay out all of the theories of good government and good relationships, and quite another to put those theories into successful practice. Not only do the Scriptures show us how to establish a Messianic Community that has the potential to succeed, it also warns us of some of the possible pitfalls. This chapter explores some of the difficulties the Apostles encountered as they spread the Good News around the known world; establishing local Fellowships, Congregations, and Communities.

Most of the information contained within comes from the Epistles of Paul because he wrote the most letters and also because he was working primarily with those Congregations in the Diaspora which had a large number of Gentile converts.

~ The Issues ~

Following is a list of some of the issues which confronted the First Century Assemblies as they began to expand throughout the Middle East, and portions of Europe. This list is not meant to be comprehensive -- rather it will cover some of the things which went wrong and how the Apostles attempted to deal with them. Many of the items on this list will overlap:

- ◆ Persecution
- ◆ Circumcision
- ◆ Cast System
- ◆ Idolatry
- ◆ Sexual Immorality
- ◆ False Teachers
- ◆ Division

~ Persecution ~

The first major problem which the early *Ekklesia* (Messianic Community) faced was persecution by other members of the Jewish Community. This began soon after the Ascension of *Y'shua*. The first Messianic Believers to feel the effects of persecution were the Apostles themselves, because they were on the front lines teaching the Gospel:

"Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, ¹⁸ and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison."

(Acts 5:17-18)

The Apostles had no doubt that God was with them because an Angel opened the prison doors for them, in the middle of the night, so they could escape. As instructed, the Apostles went back to the Temple the next morning and continued to teach. As a result, they were brought before the *Sanhedrin* (Council) which commanded them to stop teaching about *Y'shua*. Their reply showed that they had no fear of men:

"But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'³⁰ The God of our fathers raised up Jesus [*Y'shua*] whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.³¹ Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.³² And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." (Acts 5:29-32)

After much discussion, and some wise advice from a member named *Gamaliel* (the teacher of *Shaul* or Paul), the Council released the Apostles with a beating and a warning not to teach about *Y'shua*. Despite the beating and warning they continued to preach the Good News:

"So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.⁴² And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus [*Y'shua*] as the Christ [*Messiah*]." (Acts 5:41-42)

One key to dealing with persecution is to not show fear by backing down. This does not mean that, as *Nazarenes* (followers of *Y'shua*), we should be belligerent, but rather that we must be able to stand firm in the truth, trusting our Father in heaven to support us.

The Apostle Paul also suffered much persecution, having received beatings on a number of occasions. Yet, he continued to preach the Gospel boldly:

"But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict." (I Thess. 2:2)

In the early decades of the *Ekklesia*, many Believers were put to death (especially in Rome) for their faith in *Y'shua*, just as many of the men and women of old had been:

"Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented --³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.³⁹ And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us." (Heb. 11:35-40)

As we progress through this *History of the Faith*, it will become apparent that, in many instances, the neighbors of the true *Ekklesia* spoke highly of the *Nazarenes*. In most cases, it

was the Church and the government authorities who carried out the persecutions. Even today, as Messianic Believers, we can expect to receive persecution, in one form or another, from outsiders who do not understand our motives.

Paul advised:

"Do all things without complaining and disputing,¹⁵ that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ [*Messiah*] that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." (Phil. 2:14-16)

~ Circumcision ~

The whole issue of circumcision was a breeding ground for discontent within the *Ekklesia*, from the time Cornelius and his household were baptized (Acts 10) without being required to undergo the rite.

The controversy over whether or not Gentiles needed to be circumcised, in order to fully join the Jewish Synagogue, was an issue not only within the Messianic *Ekklesia*, but between them and the non-*Nazarene* (unbelieving) Jewish brethren as well.

Prior to the forming of the *Ekklesia*, Gentiles who were not physically circumcised were not considered to be part of the Synagogue, unless they were *Proselytes of the Gate* (*God Fearers* in training). Even then, they were treated as second class attendees in the Synagogue. Today, a Gentile who was circumcised at birth by a doctor, must still have blood drawn by a *moel* מוֹעַל (moow-ehl' #4135 = a Rabbi who performs circumcision) if he wants to become a Jewish Proselyte.

However, in the 1st century, the term "circumcision" meant more than just the physical act of removing the flesh of the foreskin. It signified that the person taking this path had also taken upon himself the "yoke of the *Torah*:"

"In rabbinic theology the yoke is a metaphor of great importance. It is the symbol of service and servitude, and in accordance with the principle that the Jew should be free from servitude to man in order to devote himself to the service of God, the 'yoke of the kingdom of man' is contrasted with 'the yoke of the kingdom of heaven.' The doctrine is fully enacted in the statement of Nehunya b. ha-Kanah: 'Whoever takes upon himself the yoke of the Torah, they remove from him the yoke of government and the yoke of worldly concerns, and whoever breaks off the yoke of the Torah, they place on him the yoke of government and the yoke of worldly concerns' (*Avot* 3:5). The 'yoke of the Torah' here presumably refers to the duty of devoting oneself to study but 'yoke' is used in a more specific and restricted sense. The proclamation of the unity of God by reading the *Shema* is called 'accepting upon oneself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven,' while the acceptance of the fulfillment of the Commandments as a whole, referred to in the second paragraph of the *Shema*, is called 'accepting the yoke of the Commandments,' and it is this which determines the order of the paragraphs. In *Avot* 6:6 the phrase 'bearing the yoke with one's fellow' means

'sharing his burdens.'" (*Encyclopedia Judaica* - CD-Rom Version from the article: *Yoke*.)

The understanding among the *Pharisees* was that the "yoke of the *Torah*" included all of the *Oral Torah** traditions and customs of the people which were added to the *Written Torah*. When the Jerusalem Council met to discuss this issue, Peter mentioned this 'Yoke:'

"Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10)

Peter was not speaking about the 'yoke' of being physically circumcised or of obeying the *Written Torah*. He was pointing to the 'yoke' of the *Oral Torah*, which the *Pharisees* insisted all Proselytes must keep. This is why the Apostle Paul later wrote:

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ [Messiah] has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage [Oral Torah].² Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ [Messiah] will profit you nothing.³ And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law [both Oral and Written Torah].⁴ You have become estranged from Christ [Messiah], you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.⁶ For in Christ Jesus [Messiah Y'shua] neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love." (Gal. 5:1-4, 6)

This is, of course, a very complex subject for which there is not adequate space in this article. It requires indepth study, for the issue of physical circumcision still arises in Messianic circles. Some say a non-Jew should never be circumcised, some say all male Messianic Believers should be circumcised, and others say that it is optional.

What we do know from Scripture, is that the Jerusalem Council decided that Gentiles could be brought into full fellowship in the Messianic *Ekklesia* by agreeing to four requirements, which did not include circumcision:

"And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' ...

⁵ **"... some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses [Pharisees understood this to mean both Oral and Written Torah].'⁶ Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.**

¹⁹ **"Therefore I [Ya'acov or James the Nasi of the Council] judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,²⁰ but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.²¹For Moses has had throughout many generations those**

who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." (Acts 15:1, 5-6, 19-21)

Circumcision was a big issue then, and it is still an issue today in some circles. Therefore, it is an issue which needs to be agreed upon before forming a Messianic Community. One suggestion -- if women have an opinion on this subject, they should express it only to their husbands as per Paul's instructions:

"Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.¹² And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." (I Tim. 2:11-12)

~ Cast System ~

The dual issue of circumcision and ritual purity created a Cast System within the 1st century Jewish Synagogues. This was the **"middle wall of separation"** (which had not been intended by God) about which Paul spoke:

"But now in Christ Jesus [Messiah Y'shua] you [Gentiles] who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ [Messiah].¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances [dogma #1378], so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity."

(Eph. 2:13-16)

This passage does not "do away" with the *Written Torah* commands, rather the Greek word *dogma* means the decrees of man which were added to the *Written Torah*. It was the demands of the *Oral Torah* which built the "wall of separation."

Through the blood atonement sacrifice of Messiah Y'shua, both Jew and Gentile are now reconciled with God and therefore can also be reconciled with each other. God is not a respecter of persons, but is willing to forgive all people of their sins, both Jew and Gentile, if they come to Him through Y'shua seeking forgiveness.

Old habits are hard to break, and while Simon Peter was the most instrumental of all the Apostles in bringing uncircumcised Gentiles into the Messianic *Ekklesia* and speaking against forced circumcision at the Jerusalem Council, it was Peter himself who reverted back to his old Jewish training when he came to Antioch:

"Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed;¹² for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy." (Gal. 2:11-13)

* For more information on this important subject please write for our booklet *Which Law?*

Antioch. However, when those of the sect of the *Pharisees* arrived (who are said to have "come from James"), they were still practicing the old Synagogue Cast System and refused to eat with the Gentiles. Peter, for whatever reason, subsequently withdrew himself from the table of the Gentiles and went to eat with the circumcised Jewish Messianic Believers. His action caused other circumcised Jews, who were residing in Antioch, to do the same. Paul took issue with Peter's action:

"But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before *them all*, 'If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?'¹⁵We *who are Jews* by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,¹⁶ knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], even we have believed in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*], that we might be justified by faith in Christ [*Messiah*] and not by the works of the [*oral*] law; for by the works of the [*oral*] law no flesh shall be justified." (Gal. 2:14-16)

Some people become confused by Paul's statement "you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?" (v. 14) thinking it means that Peter and Paul were now eating unclean food when they were alone with the Gentiles. Unclean food* was not the issue here, the issue was Table Fellowship, the practice of circumcised Jews to not eat with Gentiles because they might become ritually contaminated through contact with them. It was the Synagogue Cast System still in effect.

The Cast System in Messianic Fellowships is not limited to circumcision. More commonly, it can rear its head against those who are down and out, or because of race:

"My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], the Lord of glory, with partiality.² For if there should come into your assembly [*synagogue*] a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes,³ and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, 'You sit here in a good place,' and say to the poor man, 'You stand there,' or, 'Sit here at my footstool,'⁴ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵ **"Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? ⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well; ⁹ but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors."** (James 2:1-9)

From time to time these issues are still a problem today and they need to be addressed in a loving and Scriptural

* For more information on this important subject please write for our booklet *To Eat or Not To Eat*.

manner when they arise. All Believers are equal in status before God through *Y'shua*:

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus [*Messiah Y'shua*].²⁹ And if you are Christ's [*Messiah's*], then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:28-29)

This does not mean that people are not different from one another, for they are. Men are still men and women are still women. Race is still a visible difference between people, and social rank can, at times, be a consideration with some. However, when it comes to status in the *Ekklesia* and before the throne of God, we are all at the same level. One is not better than another. The Cast System has been eliminated by Messiah *Y'shua*.

~ Idolatry ~

One of the four requirements for Gentile membership was to:

"... abstain from things polluted by idols ..."

(Acts 15:20)

There are a number of facets to this requirement, the first being to not eat meat offered to idols, and especially to not bring such food for *Ekklesia* fellowship meals.

The practice in the 1st century was for the meat left over from idol worship in the pagan temples to be offered for sale in the market. Such meat would be extremely offensive to a Jew, not only because it had been used in a pagan temple ritual, but also because it most probably would not have been bled properly (*kosher* slaughter) -- which was another of the requirements for Gentile Believers:

"... abstain from things ... strangled ..."

(Acts 15:20)

Another aspect of the anti-idolatry requirement was for Gentiles not to go back to the pagan temples for any type of worship or fellowship. Messianic Believers are not to have anything to do with idols, for we have become the Temple of the living God:

"And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

'I will dwell in them

And walk among *them*.

I will be their God,

And they shall be My people.' [Lev. 26:12]

¹⁷ **"Therefore,**

'Come out from among them

And be separate, says the Lord.

Do not touch what is unclean,

And I will receive you.' [Isaiah 52:11]

¹⁸ **"I will be a Father to you,**

And you shall be My sons and daughters,

Says the LORD [*YHVH*] Almighty."

(II Cor. 6:16-18)

There are forms of idolatry other than bowing down to idols or participating in a pagan temple worship:

"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." (Col. 3:5)

Human beings are capable of making almost anything in their life an idol -- anything that comes between them and their dedication to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If members of a Messianic Community begin finding more interest in outside endeavors, to the point where they neglect their commitment to the Community, problems can arise. This does not mean that every outside endeavor is a form of idolatry, however, it does mean that all of us need to guard against the pulls of the flesh lest they take us far astray:

"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." (Gal. 5:16-17)

~ Sexual Immorality ~

Another requirement set forth by the Jerusalem Council was:

"... abstain from ... sexual immorality ..." (Acts 15:20)

This is a problematic area in this modern era because of the overwhelming selling of sex on television, the Internet, and in books and magazines, and in the movies. One can hardly even go into a shopping mall without being inundated with sexual images and innuendoes. No wonder so many Christians (including Messianics) find themselves ensnared in sexual problems ranging from adultery, to pornography. Paul expressed it clearly in just two Greek words:

"Flee sexual immorality [*phuego porneia*]. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." (I Cor. 6:18-20)

What exactly does "sexual immorality" imply? In the King James Version, the English word used is "fornication," and it technically means sexual activity between two unmarried people. However, the Greek word *porneia* (from which it comes) has a much broader meaning, and can even be a metaphor for the eating of meat offered to idols:

"1) illicit sexual intercourse 1a) adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals etc. 1b) sexual intercourse with close relatives; Lev. 18 ... 2) metaph. the worship of idols 2a) of the defilement of idolatry, as incurred by eating the sacrifices offered to idols."

The word *porneia* is the source for the English word pornography.

Nothing can destroy relationships within a Community faster than when people begin engaging in illicit sexual activity. The anger and jealousies which are aroused can even lead to murder. All members of a Messianic Community must be fully aware of how devastating such behavior can be to the welfare of the entire Community, and guard both themselves and others from such activity:

"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ [*Messiah*]." (Gal. 6:1-2)

~ False Teachers ~

A very real problem in any Community is when False Teachers invade the group and begin teaching their own brand of doctrine:

"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." (I Tim. 4:1-3)

If this was a problem in the 1st century, when Paul, Barnabas, Apollo, and other leading men were there to teach Truth, it is a much greater problem today as we try to reconstruct the Truth, after so many false and pagan doctrines have crept into Christianity down through the centuries. Who is to say what is true and what is not? Whenever a doctrinal issue comes up, everyone claims they are basing their view strictly on Scripture. Yet, despite all of the Scripture based "knowledge" available, great disagreements continue to occur.

How can such problems be resolved? Sometimes they simply cannot. It points again to the necessity for the leadership of the Community to set the doctrinal standard for that group of people. Sometimes the doctrinal issues boil down to an interpretation of a few words, or even a single word. Paul instructed Timothy concerning this type of disagreement:

"Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. ¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (II Tim. 2:14-15)

There are so many doctrines on which we can all agree, why do some have to make such giant issues of the few points of disagreement? Granted, a few of them might be of great importance, however most are not. Too many of us tend to "major in the minors" when it comes to doctrine. It has been our observation that many of these types of disputes are more about vanity than they are about finding a real solution to the problem which divides.

Both the Apostle John and Jude (the half-brother of Y'shua) attacked a more serious problem head on. John spoke about a test to identify those who were attaching themselves to the doctrines of the antichrist:

"Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. ...* ²² Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus [Y'shua] is the Christ [Messiah]? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also."

(I John 2:18-23)

John elaborated further:

"By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach] has come in the flesh is of God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach] has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit of the Antichrist*, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world."

(I John 4:2-3)

At the time John wrote this letter, the *Gnostics* were beginning to gain followers among the Messianic Believers who were not well grounded in the Faith. One of their main doctrines was that "Jesus" did not come in the flesh, but merely inhabited the body of a man until just before the crucifixion when his "spirit" departed, leaving this "host" body to die. Messianic Believers need to be aware of this heresy, for that same spirit of untruth still exists today in other doctrinal forms.

It was Jude who attacked the problem of False Teachers most vigorously. He accused such people of sneaking into the *Ekklesia*:

"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴ For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ [Y'shua HaMashiach]."

...
¹⁰ "But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. ¹¹ Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. ¹² These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving *only* themselves. *They are* clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; ¹³ raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

¹⁴ "Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints,' ¹⁵ to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly

way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.'" (Jude 1:3-4, 10-15)

These are strong words, and we must be very careful not to use them loosely by applying them to people with whom we disagree. That is the fine line a Messianic Community must walk when dealing with people who are seemingly teaching false doctrine. The ideal, of course, is to make every attempt to bring them to a full knowledge of the Truth as taught by the Scriptures:

"Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, ²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins."

(James 5:19-20)

~ Division ~

All of the above categories relate in some way to this final one, for they all cause divisions within the Body of Messiah in general, and within specific Messianic Fellowships or Communities in particular. Sometimes, a legitimate difference of opinion about doctrine or practice can cause a division. Such problems need to be worked out by the Messianic Community within the framework of their method of resolving disputes.

However, there is another kind of division which sometimes occurs. It comes from the individual who just likes to make trouble:

"These six things the LORD [YHVH] hates,

Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:

¹⁷ A proud look,

A lying tongue,

Hands that shed innocent blood,

¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans,

Feet that are swift in running to evil,

¹⁹ A false witness who speaks lies,

And one who sows discord among brethren."

(Pro. 6:16-19)

A situation of this type can prove to be very difficult to resolve because often the person who is sowing the discord appears to be kind and friendly, while at the same time feeding discontent in the Community. The main tool this type of person uses is *Lashon Hara* לָשׁוֹן הָרָע (Lah-shown' #3956 Hah-rah' #7451), the Evil Tongue:

"Keep your tongue from evil,

And your lips from speaking deceit.

¹⁴ Depart from evil and do good;

Seek peace and pursue it."

(Psalm 34:13-14)

Ya'acov יַעֲקֹב (Ya ah'-cove = James #3290) emphasized the troublesome nature of the human tongue:

"But no man can tame the tongue. *It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.* ⁹ With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so."

(James 3:8-10)

(For a comprehensive examination of the Evil Tongue, write for our booklet *Guarding the Tongue*.)

The Apostles have quite a bit to say about the never ending problem of division. While *Lashon Hara* can be a problem whenever people gather together, divisions can also occur when someone holds to a false doctrine (as already mentioned):

"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. ¹⁸ For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." (Rom. 16:17-18)

In this case, Paul believed that the ones causing the division knew exactly what they were doing and were teaching false doctrine so that they could gather their own following.

Other cases could involve someone who is misbehaving in some way:

"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*], that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us."

(II Thess. 3:6)

Here Paul recommended that the discordant and divisive individual be isolated from close fellowship. It is not clear from this passage if that means the Community as a whole should take action to isolate the individual, or if it merely means that those who see the problem should withdraw from close contact with that individual. In any case, other passages indicate that the best way to handle such a situation is to first take the person aside and talk with them, as *Y'shua* commanded in Matthew 18.

Jude, the half-brother of *Y'shua* lists a number of personality traits which can cause serious division in a Fellowship or Community:

"These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. ¹⁷ But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ [*Y'shua HaMashiach*]: ¹⁸ how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. ¹⁹ These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit." (Jude 1:16-19)

~ Additional Thoughts ~

There is no doubt that the First Century Assemblies had their share of troubles, for it is all laid out in Scripture for us to read. Using their example as a point of reference, it is clear that Messianic Communities should not be attempted unless all involved are cognizant that many problems and trials can arise.

If a Messianic Community understands the perils of intimate Community, and has developed a mechanism for dealing with problems as they arise, there is hope that the Community can survive whatever the adversary throws their way:

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." (Eph. 6:11-13)

It is very important to deal with problems immediately, and not let them remain hidden where they can fester and worsen. On the other hand, we must not be too quick to accuse, but have all the facts before making a decision:

"The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him."

(Prov. 18:17)

It is also important that all problems be dealt with in an atmosphere of love, not in anger and accusation. The first and foremost goal should be reconciliation of the parties involved, as long as it is done within the framework of Scripture. It should be remembered that the main characteristic that identifies the followers of *Y'shua* is love for one another:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

Lastly, there is the possibility of physical deprivation, which can also present huge problems to a Messianic Community, especially if some feel they are not receiving their rightful share. However, history shows that often it is persecution and lack of physical needs which draw Believers closer together rather than driving them apart. When the chips are down and the going gets tough, people tend to lay aside some of their less important differences in order to survive; both as individuals and as a Community:

"Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! ¹⁰ My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. ¹¹ Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord -- that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful." (James 5:9-11)

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." (Rev. 3:21)

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