

Hebraic Insight

Learning for Life

BIBLE LESSONS FOR FAMILIES, STUDY GROUPS, AND CONGREGATIONS



GOD AND COMMUNITY

Treasures, Old and New

(Matthew 13:52)



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God and Community

Among the richest parts of the Hebraic heritage of the Christian faith is the focus on family and community that God designed, gave to the Chosen People, and extended to the Gentiles through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Family and community have been the defining elements of Jewish culture for centuries and of the Hebraic people before them. Without these two foundational elements, the Jews would never have survived as an identifiable people. With them, they have even thrived, excelling beyond the norms in the societies in which they have lived. This is because the Jewish community recognizes the *mishpachah* (family) as both the nuclear family, the extended family, and ultimately the entire nation of Israel.

From the time of the formation of the nation of Israel at Sinai, the people were subdivided into small groups for both protection and accountability. It is in the environment of small groups that communities thrive, as each group becomes a subcommunity of the whole. Communities provide for social interaction, interactive study, and prayer and worship experiences. These three dynamics provide for a vibrant, healthy community.

It is time for the Christian church to recognize the problems inherent in a congregation-based experience that is largely performance and audience focused and has little room for interactivity. It is time that congregations be birthed out of true community. It's time for all believers in the God of the Bible to return to the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.

Hebraic Insight

*In-depth Bible study resources for individuals, families, and congregations
focusing on the Hebraic foundations of the Christian faith.*

(Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible.)

Editor & Publisher

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GOD AS COMMUNITY

Far from being the solitary old man envisioned by most people, the God of the Bible is actually a community of three divine persons in one being of substance, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Being coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal, these three dwell together in a perfect community of oneness by means of their mutual encircling and interpenetration. Without the principles of the divine community, God simply does not exist.



KEY TEXT: *“Jesus also was baptized, and while he was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son, in you I am well-pleased’ (Luke 3:21-22).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Luke’s account of Jesus’ baptism is significant in that the three persons of God were manifest simultaneously. Discuss how Jesus was witnessed by the Holy Spirit and by the Father when the Spirit assumed a bodily form and the Father spoke in an audible voice from heaven. This manifestation of God was predicted by Isaiah 48:16-17 where the Messiah is sent by both the Lord and his Spirit. How does this event manifest God as community?
2. The Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit were manifest together when in concert, they as One created the universe. Confirm this truth from the language of the creation narratives by evaluating how “in the beginning God created heaven and earth” (Genesis 1:1) by issuing his spoken Word (Genesis 1:3; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16) and by moving with his Spirit (Genesis 1:2).
3. The heavenly Father is eternally unknown and unrevealed according to John (John 1:18) and Paul (1 Timothy 6:16). Discuss the role of the Word of God (manifest as Jesus in the incarnation according to John 1:1-3, 14, 18) as the revealer of the Father to humanity. Compare John’s description with the Lord’s revealing himself to Samuel by the Word (1 Samuel 3:21). Analyze also the role of the Holy Spirit as the personal manifestation of God who moves upon creation (Genesis 1:2) and indwells believers (John 14:26).
4. The most fundamental instruction in Holy Scripture about God is summed up in the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Hebrew word *echad*, which is translated “one,” means

utterly unique; however, it also speaks of composite unity in diversity which is confirmed by the fact that *echad* also has a plural form, *abadim*. Also, the Hebrew word *yachid* means one in the sense of singularity. Paul draws upon this truth as he explicates the *Shema* thus: “. . . for us there is but one God, the Father . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ . . .” (1 Corinthians 8:6), showing that the Father is *Elohim* (“God”) and Jesus is *Yahweh* (“LORD”). Discuss the manifestation of Father and Son in the *Shema*, the first commandment (Mark 12:29).

5. If Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are *echad*, they must be so in absolute oneness. This necessitates their being coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal. Confirm their coequality from Philippians 2:6. If the three persons are equally God, they must be one in substance. What is God’s substance (John 4:24)? Confirm that Father, Son, and Spirit have always existed and will always exist as you read Micah 5:2 (the Son) and Genesis 1:1-2 (the Spirit).

6. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit manifest plurality of person but oneness of substance by means of their mutual encircling, indwelling, permeating, and interpenetrating one another in a process called perichoresis or circumincession (reciprocal existence in one another). Thus, they are not separate beings but the one God of biblical monotheism. Discuss the absolute uniqueness in the unity of the divine community. Is it any wonder, then, that God created humanity as two-in-one to mirror the oneness of the divine image?

7. The reason that God is called Father (Jeremiah 31:9; Malachi 1:6) is to underscore two things: 1) God’s personhood and 2) God’s relationality. Confirm the truth that God–Father, Son, and Spirit–manifest both distinct personality and relational mutuality. Analyze for yourself how oneness in the community of faith is designed to image the invisible God, the Three in One, in the earth. Is this how the body of Messiah reveals God to humanity?

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word *אֶחָד* (*echad*) means “to unite, to join together, to be in unity.” While *echad* can also be used as the numeral *one*, it clearly means “the only one; the incomparable.” The *Shema*, therefore, can be translated as “The LORD [is] our God, the LORD alone.” Since *echad* describes Adam and Eve as “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24), it can be translated as “compound unity,” a unity in diversity that makes two (or three) one. The same *echad* can be achieved in the church in fulfillment of Jesus’ prayer to the Father “that they all may be one in us” (John 17:21).

God is perfect relationality, a perfect community. The fact that three persons–Father, Son, and Spirit–dwell together in one being of substance with absolute unity is testimony to the fact that communion within and among the divine community and true mutuality of relationship are central to the very being of the One God of the Bible.

THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH

The community of believers in the earth has always been and will always be a community of faith. Acceptance before God is predicated solely upon the unqualified faith of both the individual and the community to believe God and to observe his instructions. Salvation that has been necessary for humans since the sin in the Garden of Eden is effected solely by the gift of God's grace and one's exercise of faith to accept God's provision for life.



KEY TEXT: *"Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6, NIV).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Gaining or maintaining acceptance before God is achieved solely by grace through faith. This immutable divine principle was established clearly in Abraham, the first human whom God chose. Because he "believed God," God accepted his faith and credited to him righteousness or acceptance before God (Romans 4:3; James 2:23). Discuss how Abraham was "saved" when God chose and called him out of Babylon into the Promised Land.
2. No one has ever been "saved" by his own works, even works of obedience to God's Law (Galatians 2:16; Titus 3:5). Those who think that their status before God is gained by works are condemned in Scripture as legalists (Galatians 3:11; 5:4). Analyze the dangers that are involved in thinking that one can be saved by his own good works. If one could be justified by works, was there any real need for the death of Jesus on the cross?
3. No one has ever been "saved" by his knowledge, even extensive knowledge of the Bible. One of the earliest heresies that attacked Christian faith promoted that believers are saved by esoteric knowledge. Gnosticism gave people a false sense of self-importance generated by what they thought they knew. The problem with knowledge is that it puffs up (1 Corinthians 8:1). How do you think that one can keep a balance between the need to search for truth while at the same time keeping one's focus not on self but on God alone.
4. Paul and Silas made the most succinct statement possible on the manner in which people are saved: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (Acts.16:31). Then, Paul detailed the process this way: "If you confess with

your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:9-10, NAS, NIV). Confirm the foundational truth of Christian experience that hearing God’s Word creates faith unto salvation (Romans 10:14).

5. Just what is faith? Some think that it is intellectual assent to a set of premises or agreement with a creed. Biblical faith, however, is far more than just a mental exercise: it involves the entire human person. It involves both **hearing and doing what God has said. This is why** *emunah*, the Hebrew word translated “faith,” is more accurately rendered “faithfulness.” *Emunah* comes from *aman* (“confirm, support”), the same root as the word *emet*, a contraction of *emenet* (truth). Faith, then, comes from truth, hearing God’s Word (Romans 10:14). *Emunah* involves belief in what God has said and then taking action on that belief. Discuss what James meant when he said one is justified by faith and by works (James 2:24). Is true faith(fulness) hearing and obeying God?

6. “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). The Hebrew word *emunah* implies “absolute assurance.” One can never hope to “prove” God: one can only choose to believe or not to believe. As a matter of fact, what we “understand” is by faith (1 Corinthians 13:2). Faith to believe God in spite of what appears to be reality to the five senses is a choice that a believer makes. Consider how you can grow in faith and manifest faithfulness by following Abraham’s example.

7. Faith bonds the community of believers together. Every Christian community is rightly called a “community of faith.” Open confession of faith in the living God is the foundation of true biblically Hebraic community. How does faith bind you together with your fellow believers in the body of Messiah?

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word for faith, אֱמוּנָה (*emunah*), literally means “firmness” or “faithfulness.” The Greek word for faith is πίστις (*pístis*), which means: “conviction” or “belief,” implying intellectual assent. *Emunah* retains the Hebraic insight that true faith involves hearing and obeying (as in the *Shema*: “Hear [and obey], O Israel. The LORD our God is one LORD.”). Faith comes from hearing God’s Word, for אֱמוּנָה (*emunah*) is virtually synonymous with אֱמֶת (*emet*), meaning “truth,” both from from the אָמַן (*aman*), meaning “to support” and in the *Hiphil*, “to believe.”

The foundational nature of faith to the life of the Christian cannot be overstressed. As a matter of fact, all biblical religion and experience is rooted in faith, which is generated in the human heart by the hearing of God’s Word and is actualized when in an exercise of free will, one chooses to believe God and to do what he has instructed in his Word.

CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

For centuries, Christians have generally misunderstood the nature of the church. Most believers have given little thought to establishing a biblical understanding of what the church is, when it began, how it is to function, and what its role is in God's plans for humanity. As a result, the church has suffered an identity crisis and has languished in misconceptions about its purpose that have limited its potential to be what God intended it to be.



KEY TEXT: *"Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18, NAS).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. When Jesus announced to his disciples that he would build (or restore) his church, he was acknowledging the fact that divine revelation had come to Peter as to who he was: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). It was on this foundation of faith that Jesus was both Messiah and Lord that the church was to be built. Analyze the importance of the foundation of faith and its basis in the person and work of Jesus for the life and welfare of the church (1 Corinthians 3:11).
2. The English word *church* is derived from the Greek word *kuriakos*, which means "belonging to the Lord," a term that conveys very little detail about the entity called *church*. This lack of clarity has given rise to many meanings for the word *church*, including a building set apart for worship and the worship activities that occur in the building. What does the term *church* mean to you?
3. In order to gain an understanding of the church, it is necessary to turn to the Greek and Hebrew languages of Scripture. In the Apostolic Scriptures, the Greek word that is translated "church" is *ekklesia*, which was used in secular Greek literature to describe the convocation (or "calling out") of the citizens of a Greek *polis* (city-state) to vote on issues of public concern. This term is used exactly twelve times in the New Testament. Discuss the apostles' use of Greek terms and culture to describe their experience.
4. The Greek word *ekklesia* also lacks clarity as to the true nature of the church; therefore, it is needful to return to Hebrew, the language in which Scripture was either written or thought. This process is facilitated by using the Septuagint Version of the Hebrew Scriptures which was translated from Hebrew into

Greek in the third to fourth centuries B.C. by seventy scholars in Alexandria, Egypt. The Septuagint uses the Greek word *ekklesia* to translate the Hebrew word *kahal*. The word *kahal* comes from the root word *kol*, which means “voice.” Its meaning is clear: the *kahal* was the people whom God had summoned by his voice to join him in a covenant at Sinai. From its Hebrew foundations, the word *church*, then, means the community “called out” by God to be in covenant with him. Consider the importance of knowing this fundamental truth to the task of understanding the church and its mission.

5. A second Hebrew word was used to describe the *kahal* (community) when it was engaged in corporate worship in one of Israel’s “holy convocations” (being called together). This word is *‘edah*, which means “congregation.” It is interesting that the word *‘edah* also means “witness,” which underscores the fact that the *kahal* (community) is “called out” to be a congregation for bearing “witness” to God. Israel did this by proclaiming the *Shema* three times daily: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD.” The word *‘edah* is translated into Greek as *synagoge*, which means “meeting” or “assembly. Discuss the importance of public proclamation in the context of a congregation.

6. The “church,” then, began when God summoned Israel out of Egypt and entered into a covenant with them so that they became his community and his congregation. Is there any reason for anyone to believe that the “church” today is anything more than the people of God?

7. Congregations of Jewish-Christian believers were still being called synagogues some thirty years after Jesus’ ascension. The Greek word translated “assembly” or “meeting” in James 2:2 is *synagoge*. Discuss how this fact helps confirm the continuity of the “church” from the “church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38) to the church of Jesus Christ in the new covenant era.

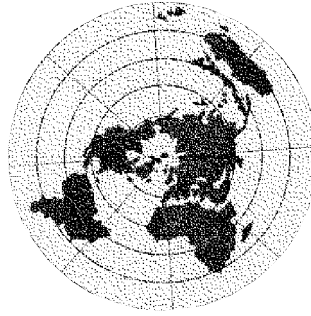
WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word קָהָל (*kahal*) means “assembly,” “congregation,” or “community.” It was translated as ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*) in the Apostolic Scriptures. The word *ekklesia* has been translated as “church” in English versions of the Bible. The word קָהָל (*kahal*) is from the root קוּל (*kol*) which means “voice.” Another Hebrew word, עֵדָה (*‘edah*) is translated “congregation” and described the *kahal* when it was assembled for a holy convocation (“calling together”). The word *‘edah* was translated in Greek as συναγωγή (*synagoge*), meaning “meeting” or “assembly.”

The church has always been comprised of the people who are “called out” by God’s voice to be in covenant with him. The church that was born on Pentecost at Mt. Sinai was born again on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, confirming the fact that the ministry of Jesus was a reformation of Judaism that maintained the continuity of biblical faith.

BIBLICAL PATTERNS FOR COMMUNITY

One of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the Christian church at large has been its abandonment of the biblical patterns for community in favor of concepts and systems adapted from Greek and Roman cultures and religions. It is time for the church to recover the patterns of community that were employed by Jesus and the apostles that transformed converts into disciples and joined them into supportive, productive communities.



KEY TEXT: *"See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain "* (Hebrews 8:5, NIV).

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. The pattern or model on which the earliest church was fashioned by Jesus and the apostles was as ancient as the household of Sarah and Abraham. Their tent was divided into three sections: one for meeting the public, the second for the family, and the third for the intimacy of the married couple. When the Tabernacle in the Wilderness was constructed, this same pattern was employed with the Outer Court (Exodus 27:9), the Holy Place (Exodus 26:33), and the Holy of Holies (Exodus 26:34). Discuss the number *three* and its application in the tent of Abraham and the Tabernacle.
2. Solomon's Temple was also constructed according to the same pattern that was derived from Sarah's tent. Analyze the kind of activities that were permitted in each of the areas of the Temple.
3. When the Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Israelites were taken to Babylon, the formal order of worship that had been established in Israel no longer existed. Initially the people said, "How can we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:4). It was not long, however, before the Word of God that was in their hearts erupted, and they began to worship as their ancestors had done—in the context of their families. Consider the ongoing importance of worship and learning in the home to the perpetuation of the Jewish people throughout their generations.
4. As extended families began to gather together for prayer and study, a new tradition emerged among the captive Israelites: the *meeting*. These gatherings were similar to the "holy convocations" in primitive Israelite culture, and they took place in homes. In these events, the Jews carried out all the functions of

the Temple except the offering of sacrifices (which were restricted to the Temple by Scripture and tradition). Discuss the need for more than just personal or family devotions and the value for corporate prayer and study.

5. The group gatherings of extended families for fellowship, study, and prayer eventually came to be known as synagogues (from the Greek word *synagōgē*, which means “meeting” or “assembly” (not a building!). This tradition that began of necessity in Babylon was maintained when the leaders of post-exilic Israel returned to the Holy Land to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. The people had come to realize that their survival had not been predicated on the temple but on their own families and communities. If all the church buildings and formal assemblies were destroyed today, how would you and your family survive, and how would you pass Christian knowledge along to your children?

6. Eventually, the meetings of the Jews came to be identified by names that described their functions. Like Sarah’s tent and the Tabernacle and Temple, these were three in number: meeting, study, and prayer; therefore, the synagogue was called *Beit Knesset* (House of Meeting), *Beit Midrash* (House of Study), and *Beit Tefillah* (House of Prayer). Discuss how your family and Christian community should be a focus for meeting (fellowship), study (religious and secular education), and prayer (including all aspects of worship).

7. The threefold pattern for community was clearly manifest in the earliest church. In Acts 2:42, the record is clear: the church “continued steadfast” in the apostles’ teaching (*Beit Midrash*), table fellowship (*Beit Knesset*), and prayer (*Beit Tefillah*), and the community experienced maturity and explosive growth. Confirm for yourself the reformation (Hebrews 9:10) that Jesus brought when he said, “Upon this rock I will build my [community]” (Matthew 16:18). Would the church be more effective today if it returned to its Hebraic roots?

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew phrase *בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת* (*beit ha-knesset*) means a “house of assembly [meeting].” The phrase *בֵּית הַמִּדְרָשׁ* (*beit ha-midrash*) means “house of study.” The phrase *בֵּית הַתְּפִלָּה* (*beit ha-tefillah*) means “house of prayer.” These terms describe functions of the *עֵדָה* (*edah*) or “congregation,” a meeting of the *קָהָל* (*kahal*) or “community.” The Greek word *συναγωγή* (*synagōgē*), which translates *עֵדָה* (*edah*) is from the verb *συνάγω* (*synágo*), meaning “to gather together.” This confirms that earliest Christian assemblies maintained the three functions of the ancient Jewish synagogue.

Jesus did not start a new religion: he reformed the “church in the wilderness” while maintaining the pattern of synagogal Judaism. In doing so, Jesus maintained the divine law of immutability in which God always maintains the divine patterns while ever using new manifestations and applications of those pattern for the good of humanity.

A COMMUNITY OF WELCOME

God has never separated his people into an elitist, exclusivist environment that deprecates other human beings and shuts them out from the fellowship of the community of faith. Hospitality and welcome, therefore, have always characterized the Hebrew peoples. Abraham, the patriarch of faith, welcomed strangers into the fellowship of his home, and the Israelites were commanded by God to treat the strangers with dignity and respect.



KEY TEXT: *“You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. . . . The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself” (Exodus 22:21; Leviticus 19:34, NKJ).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In Jewish *aggadot* (traditions), it is said that Abraham and Sarah’s tent was open to all four sides so that strangers from any direction could come into their fellowship and be blessed by the one who was commissioned to be a blessing to the nations. Discuss the rich symbolism of this idea, considering the nomadic life that the early patriarchs lived.
2. The great example of welcome was established in Abraham who entertained three “men” who came to his encampment on the plains of Mamre. As soon as he saw the “men,” he ran to meet them, invited them into his home, and offered them refreshments and food. Sarah “quickly” prepared bread while Abraham’s servants killed a calf and prepared meat for them. Immediately after their warm welcome, the Lord promised Abraham and Sarah that the son of promise would be born. After the time of food and fellowship, Abraham even accompanied the Lord to point out the way to Sodom. Read the entire story of Genesis 18:1-33 and discuss the dynamics of welcome and hospitality as part of the Hebraic idea of community.
3. When Job recounted the virtuous things that he had done, prominent among the things in his list was his affirmation that he always opened his “doors to the traveler” (Job 31:32). Discuss the virtue of remaining open to entertain others, even total strangers, and to do good to them.
4. In a fine example of Hebraic hospitality, the Shunammite woman had a room furnished with a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp for Elisha the prophet.

Jewish tradition has long taught the valuable lesson that the Jewish home should be one that is open to everyone, including strangers. This is especially true at Passover, when it is customary to welcome non-Jews to share the event. Consider the story of 2 Kings 4:8-11 and see what examples you can derive from it that will confirm to you the nature of the Hebraic welcome.

5. The open-door policy that was maintained in Hebraic culture is an example of what should be a culture of welcome in the Christian family and community. A true Hebraic family or community will be a culture of welcome, opening doors and hearts to embrace all whom God sends and ministering to them the grace and peace of Messiah Yeshua. Consider practical ways in which one may manifest the principles of Hebraic welcome in today's world.

6. The Christian community that Jesus established was designed to be a "whosoever will" community. Jesus commanded that the Gospel of the Kingdom be preached in all the world to all people (Matthew 24:14; Acts 1:8). The offering of salvation to all humanity involves both the spiritual and the material. "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2, RSV). Additionally, one of the requirements for church support of widows was "if she has shown hospitality to strangers" (1 Timothy 5:10). How does the universal nature of the Gospel impact your views on hospitality and welcome?

7. The open door must begin, however, with those of the community of faith. There can be no separatism, elitism, or exclusivity if the Christian church maintains its Hebraic foundations. Historical denominational barriers and the promotion of exclusive ecclesiologies that have promoted conflicts represent aberrant behavior that is foreign to the biblical mandate. Discuss how the Hebraic community is a fellowship that welcomes everyone.

WORD STUDY

When Abraham left Assyria and entered the Promised Land, he became the first עֲבֵרִי (*ivri*) or Hebrew (meaning "to cross over" or "from the other side)." He was, therefore, a stranger גֵּר (*ger*) in the land, practicing a culture of hospitality, welcoming into his home those not of his family or faith. This practice of welcome extended through the Israelite nation into the Christian church. The Greek word φιλονεξία (*philonexia*) means "love to strangers" or "hospitality." Every truly Hebraic community must be a culture that welcomes everyone into its fellowship.

One cannot function within the Hebraic foundations of the Christian faith without practicing the ethic of welcome. God brings into his house whosoever will, and he expects his children to welcome and serve all without quarreling over opinions. Hebraic community is one that has open arms, embracing everyone with welcome and hospitality.

A COMMUNITY OF EQUALITY

The Christian community was designed to be a Hebraic fellowship in which all believers are one in the Messiah without distinctions to race, ethnicity, or social status. It was also designed from the beginning to be void of hierarchies in which some exercise dominion over others and exploit them spiritually, emotionally, and materially. In Messiah there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female. All are one in the one new humanity of faith.



KEY TEXT: *“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Human equality began with the Adamic creation. God formed one humanity from the dust of the earth and later surgically removed part of that humanity to form a separate being that manifest gender-specific existence: male and female. Since both genders were from the same source, they were consubstantial (of the same substance) and they were coequal (with distinctives but no subordination). All subsequent generations of humanity were also coequal. Only the element of sin brought about inequalities based on gender, race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. Discuss the creation narratives of Genesis 1-5 and the clear ontological equality of all human beings.
2. The elevation of one people group over another is the highest form of idolatry, for it either creates a superhuman species or it identifies a subhuman species. In any case, it promotes one individual or group as ontologically superior to others. Putting anyone between humans and God is idolatry. Discuss inequality and God’s commandment against idolatry (Exodus 20:3).
3. When God chose the Israelite nation, he did not do so because they were in any way superior to the rest of the peoples of the earth. Instead, he chose them because they were to be his witnesses to the nations. Father Abraham was chosen and blessed so he could be a channel of God’s blessing to all the families and nations of the earth (Genesis 18:18; 22:18). This is why Israel was commanded to treat the strangers in their midst as equals (Exodus 12:48; 23:9; Isaiah 56:6-7). Is there any room in the community of faith for self-exaltation and elitism? How would you go about combating this spirit?

4. The synagogal movement that emerged during and after Israel's Babylonian captivity has been recognized as the world's first experiment in the democratization of religion. With the destruction of their temple, the Jews were forced to create a new system for meeting, study, and worship. Naturally, this grassroots development emphasized the equality of every community member. Discuss the impact of the synagogue upon religion and world systems.

5. Peter confirmed the inherent equality of all human beings when he made this declaration: "I most certainly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35, NRS). God himself then confirmed the fundamental truth that Peter spoke by giving the Holy Spirit to Gentiles in precisely the same manner in which he had given it to the Jewish apostles (Acts 10:44-46). Explain the reasons for God's giving the same spiritual empowerment to the Gentiles that he had given to the Jews. Does this confirm universal equality?

6. Paul emphasized what he had learned from his teacher Gamaliel, who, in turn, had learned from Hillel when he argued that every person should be "fully persuaded in his own mind," thereby establishing a principle of equality in worship and service of God (Romans 14:5). How important is it to human equality for each individual to have the power of free choice in what he or she does or does not choose to believe and practice?

7. Paul laid down the principle of a community of equality in Ephesians 2:15: "He is our peace, who made both groups into one . . . that in himself he might make the two into one new humanity." He established this truth in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Discuss how oneness and unity can be achieved only if there is equality.

WORD STUDY

When Paul spoke of "one new man," he used the Greek word *ἄνθρωπος* (*anthropos*), which means "humanity," not a "man." God was bringing forth a "new humanity" from the only two nations that he recognizes by making Jew and Gentile one. Jesus prayed that all believers would be one just as he and the Father are one, a oneness expressed in the Hebrew word *אֶחָד* (*echad*). Just as Father, Son, and Spirit are one in coequality, so the community of faith is one by the coequality of its members. In Messiah, there are no gender, ethnic, or social distinctions.

When God created humanity, he made them one. In this oneness, male and female were consubstantial, having been made of the same substance, and they were coequal. Divisions have been imposed upon humanity by sin and disobedience. In the Messiah, however, God has provided the means for reestablishing equality and making all one.

A COMMUNITY OF DIVERSITY

God is ever a God of diversity. The profound differences in the vast creation on planet earth and beyond reflect the very nature of his creative handiwork. Not even two snowflakes are exactly alike! This same principle of diversity is manifest in the heterogeneity within the community of faith. While joined together in one body, every member of the community is unique and possesses gifts and callings necessary for the whole body.



KEY TEXT: *“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, NAS).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Diversity is fundamental to God’s creation. An almost innumerable number of species of plants and animals were created by God to inhabit the earth (Genesis 1:21). Amazingly, sometimes in the most minute details these species interrelate and even have symbiotic relationships in which their diversity complements and permits them to exist. Compare this characteristic of the natural world to the diversity and complementarity that should characterize the community of faith from a purely Hebraic standpoint. Do we really need one another, or can we be successful in Christian life by being alone?
2. Everyone in the body of the Messiah is an individual as well as a member of the community. This is Paul’s assertion in 1 Corinthians 12:27: “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.” This means that every person is equal with every other person and has his or her own uniqueness. It is improper, therefore, for one individual to insist that every other individual be exactly like himself in order to be accepted in the community. Paul even instructed the church to receive those who were perceived as being “weaker members” of the body “without passing judgment on disputable matters” (Romans 14:1, NIV). Discuss the importance and value of individuality in the context of community as well as the concept of salvation in both individual and corporate senses. How does God redeem us in both contexts?
3. Paul gave an extended discourse to the church underscoring the importance of diversity in 1 Corinthians 12:4-10. Consider the variety of spiritual

gifts and how they complement one another for the good of the body.

4. Paul also uses the analogy of the human body with its different organs that are completely unlike yet are absolutely essential to the life and health of the human entity. Notice the statement that the Spirit distributes the gifts “to each one individually just as he wills” (vs. 11). If members of the community do not allow other members to express diversity of thought and action, are they not quenching the Holy Spirit that gives diversity of gifts?

5. Consider Paul’s metaphor of the human body in 1 Corinthians 12:14-26. The conclusion that he reached is this: “But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body just as he desired.” Are you confident in God’s ability to give gifts and place members in the community according to his will so that all the community profits? Expand upon not only the importance but also the essential nature of diversity in the community of faith..

6. The principle of diversity also extends to pluriformity, which simply means that God desires diversity in thought and activity rather than absolute uniformity as most of the church has assumed in history. Pluriformity is unity in the midst of diversity whereas uniformity is a false unity that is restrictive and debilitating because it does not profit from the strength of diversity and mutuality. This means that each member of the community should be “fully persuaded in his own mind” as to beliefs and to actions in response to those beliefs. Consider Romans 14:5-14 as you analyze the concept of pluriformity that gives every member individual freedom without judging one another.

7. A truly Hebraic community is one of diversity. Jewish thought continually emphasizes the “on the one hand . . . on the other” dialectic that holds various views in dynamic tension rather than forcing them into a straight jacket. Discuss ways in which you can contribute to the diversity of your community.

WORD STUDY

In describing the bountiful and diverse creation of God, Genesis 1:21 used the Hebrew word שָׂרָצַח (*sharatz*), which literally means “teeming” or “swarming.” This is a graphic depiction of both the numbers and the diversity of the creation. In describing the diversity in the body of Christ, Paul used the Greek word διαίρεσις (*diáiresis*), which means “distinction” emphasizing the distinctives of the gifts and administrations of the Holy Spirit. Paul argued that every member of the body should pursue peace and the things that build up one another.

A Hebraic Christian community is one in which every member gives all the other members the space to be themselves and to be fully persuaded in their own minds as to what they believe and practice. This pluriform approach to faith and practice limits the spirit of legalism and judgmentalism that is debilitating to the entire body of Christ.

A COMMUNITY OF FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship is vital to the welfare of any community, particularly a Hebraic Christian community. Social interaction creates a climate of trust and an environment where mutual input and submission are possible. One cannot overestimate the importance of the interconnectivity that a fellowshiping community can facilitate nor its impact upon the social, psychological, and spiritual well being of the members of the community.



KEY TEXT: *“What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ . . . if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:3, 7, NAS).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. The first function of the biblically Hebraic community was that of the *Beit Knesset* (the House of Meeting or Assembly). The ancient synagogue was called a *beit midrash* because it functioned as a place of assembly or meeting for fellowship, both social and spiritual. Why have so many Christian churches not understood the value of personal interaction on a purely social level? Why do so many churches also have a high level of anonymity among the individuals in the congregations? Is this healthy?
2. The church is not, however, merely a social club. Its *raison d'être* is based entirely in its faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Christians are Christians solely because they have fellowship with the living God through his Son Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, no community lives eternally in the realm of spiritual things. People are human with human needs emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. Discuss how interpersonal relationships are necessary for people to fulfill their God-given need for fellowship.
3. From the very beginning, God created humans for interpersonal relationship. He created two to be one, and the means of their being one was through fellowship. No one is an island without the need for fellowship and for the accountability that fellowship brings. Discuss ways in which believers can impact one another's lives through social and spiritual fellowship. Is it possible for the community of faith to achieve unity without fellowship?

4. Fellowship is based on love. It fulfills both of the two greatest commandments of Scripture: “Love God” and “Love your neighbor” (Matthew 22:37-40). As a matter of fact, the entire Torah is contingent upon these two commandments so that it is completely fulfilled in one word: love (Galatians 5:14). The love of God that is “poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5) is manifest in fellowship with God and fellowship with humanity. Discuss ways in which you can demonstrate love through fellowship.
5. Fellowship with leadership in the community of faith is also important for the spiritual welfare of the members of the community. Consider the earliest Christian community’s devotion to fellowship with the apostles as well as to their teaching (Acts 2:42). In this instance, the fellowship was connected with breaking of bread. How important is the ancient practice of “table fellowship” to the community of faith today?
6. This passage speaks clearly to the three functions of the assembly (synagogue) in Second-Temple Judaism which was the matrix from which the Christian community emerged, for the believers continued in the apostles’ “teaching” (*beit midrash*), “fellowship” (*beit kneset*), and in “prayers” (*beit tefillah*). How important is fellowship in preparing a community of believers for effective study and effectual, fervent corporate prayers?
7. True fellowship involves the mutual submission that Paul discussed in Ephesians 5:21: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (NIV). Sharing fellowship fulfills Paul’s instruction in Romans 15:2: “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.” Mutuality is rooted in equality and flows from manifest love. Evaluate ways in which believers can respect one another when they view each other as equals. How does this implicit equality facilitate mutual submission and thereby augment fellowship?

WORD STUDY

The Greek word κοινωνία (*koinonía*) which is translated “fellowship” actually means “sharing.” It is through fellowship that one can love one’s neighbor as oneself (Leviticus 19:18). The Hebrew word for neighbor is רֵעַ (*rea*) or רֵעָא (*reya*), which means “friend,” “fellow,” or simply “another person.” This was the subject of debate between the rabbis and Jesus. Loving one’s neighbor implies sharing and fellowshiping with mutuality. The Hebrew word for meeting or assembly is קִנְסֵת (*kneset*). This is the community engaged in fellowship and mutual sharing.

A truly Hebraic Christian community begins with fellowship—with people sharing in their mutual devotion to God and to one another. Within the context of equality and mutuality, true lateral relationship can be manifest and true lateral accountability can lead to spiritual growth and maturity on the part of all the members of the community.

A COMMUNITY OF STUDY

The Hebraic Christian community must be a community of study, for learning is the foundation of true discipleship on which the Christian faith rests. Life is for learning, and learning is for life. This is especially true of a community of believers in the God of the Bible. Those who are growing toward maturity in Christ are actively engaged in study of God's Word and in its application to their lives through discipline and devotion.



KEY TEXT: *"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39, NIV).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In whatever circumstances they found themselves, the biblical peoples were among the most educated people on earth. This is because they were committed to study and learning. Jewish tradition suggests that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, was the world's first scientist (man of knowledge). The name *Enoch* in Hebrew is *Hanokh*, which comes from the root word *hanakh*, which means "to dedicate" or "to train" (and hence, "to educate"). *Hanakh* is the root of the word *Hanukkah*, the Festival of the Dedication. Enoch was said to have "walked with God" and to have "pleased God" (Genesis 5:22; Hebrews 11:5). How does study position one to walk with God and please God?
2. The Hebraic people have always been engaged in study and learning, especially in the Word of God. Even when there were no written texts, the biblical people were devoted to memorization of the words of God so they could acquire knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. An excellent example of this is Bezaleel of whom God said, "I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship" (Exodus 31:3-4). In a time of limited knowledge, Bezaleel was gifted to create the appliances of the Tabernacle. Analyze Exodus 31:1-11 to see how God gives knowledge that is both spiritual and material.
3. In Hebraic thought, there is no dichotomy between spiritual and secular understanding. All knowledge and wisdom comes from God. This is the truth that is encapsulated in the declaration of Elihu to Job: "Truly it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding" (Job 32:8).

When God assured Daniel that at the “time of the end . . . knowledge will increase” (Daniel 12:4), he included knowledge about God and about the universe. Consider the truth that all knowledge comes from God.

4. Solomon was a major proponent of erudition (acquired knowledge) and of the labors of achieving it. “The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7). He acknowledged that “the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body,” but he also concluded that in the end, man had one duty: “Fear God and keep his commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:12-13). Analyze the implications that if one begins with study of God’s Word, all other study serves to strengthen the human person and to impart wisdom.

5. A righteous person delights in God’s Word and meditates in God’s instruction day and night (Psalm 1:2). This truth underscores the need for diligence and discipline to the process of learning. Do you consider learning, both spiritual and secular, to be a vital and central part of your life? Why?

6. Learning begins in the tiny *Beit Midrash* of the family. Parents are required by God to teach their children. This was the primary reason for God’s choosing Abraham (Genesis 18:19). Notice Paul’s commendation of Timothy’s home-based education (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). Discuss Isaiah’s observation: “The father shall make known your truth to the children” (38:19, NKJ).

7. Hebraic learning is generally interactive. It is the “come-walk-the-road-with-me” methodology employed by the ancient sages of Israel. It is the use of discussion in which all members of the community participate, share their thoughts, and learn from one another. “In the multitude of counsellors is safety” (Proverbs 11:14; 24:6). Consider the need for group study as Christians learn to function as a *Beit Midrash*, a community of study.

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word תּוֹרָה (*torah*) that has been translated as “law” actually means “instruction.” Fundamentally, it means “hitting the mark” with accuracy (from its root word *yarah*). Since learning is the process of receiving instruction, it follows that knowledge has its base in God’s Word. The two Hebrew words that are precisely in the middle of the Torah (Pentateuch) are דָּרַשׁ דָּרַשׁ (*darosh darash*) which means to “search diligently” (the intensive form of “to search”). From this fact, the sages understood that they were to search the Torah with intensity.

Without learning, humankind is inevitably enslaved in ignorance, apathy, superstition, and confusion. It is important for the community of faith to engage in the foundational essence of the Hebraic family and community by experiencing the *Beit Midrash* learning dynamic, for it is both spiritually and intellectually stimulating and liberating.

A COMMUNITY OF PRAYER

Prayer has been fundamental to all biblically Hebraic experience both for individuals and for communities. The Bible is literally filled with records of prophets, kings, sages, apostles, and, yes, the Messiah himself engaged in prayer to the God of creation but, more importantly, to the God of his people. Scripture also records many of these prayers so believers in all ages can profit from hearing the outpouring of their human petition to God.



KEY TEXT: *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16, NIV).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. It has been said that everything is accomplished by prayer and nothing without it. This is a truth that is foundational to the Hebraic Christian experience, for believers are entirely dependent upon the guidance and support of God for proper direction and success in their lives. It is a simple fact that God “hears the prayer of the righteous” (Proverbs 15:29). Consider ways in which both individuals and the community can be more diligent in prayer.
2. In order to help his children remember to pray continually, God instituted a prayer system for his people that included three “hours of prayer”: morning (third hour of the day), noon (the sixth hour), and evening (the ninth hour). David said, “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray” (Psalm 55:17). Daniel was cast into the den of lions because “three times a day he . . . prayed” (Daniel 6:10, NIV). How will observing the hours of prayer impact your life?
3. The term *hour of prayer* was not used in Scripture until the book of Acts (3:1). Consider all the great events of the Bible that occurred at one of the hours of prayer as you read 1 Kings 18:36; Ezra 9:5-9; Daniel 9:21; Mark 15:25; Matthew 27:45-46; Acts 2:15; 3:1; 10:3; 10:30; 22:6.
3. Paul instructed believers to “pray unceasingly” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). He prefaced this word with “Rejoice always.” Perhaps the key to being able to rejoice always is to pray unceasingly. God instituted a system among the Jewish people in which they could speak short sentence blessings and prayers that were offered continually throughout the day. Will praying unceasingly help you “give thanks” in “everything,” “quench not the Spirit, and “avoid every kind of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:18-19, 22)? Discuss continuing in prayer.

4. The Hebraic concept of prayer is very different from its Gentile counterpart. The Greek word for prayer means “to wish for.” The German word means “to beg.” The English word means “to entreat, implore, or beg.” The Hebrew word *tefillah* means “to judge oneself,” implying self-examination. Approaching the God of Israel is not like a slave or a serf’s begging from a wealthy lord. It is like sitting with one’s father or friend, learning his will, and receiving the favor and the blessings that he has already prepared for us. How does this Hebraic insight strengthen your understanding and practice of prayer?
5. God specifically declared to Isaiah that his house would be called “a house of prayer for all people” (Isaiah 56:7). Though this applied directly to the Temple, it also speaks of every assembly of God’s children, whether in the home or in corporate worship exercises. It is for this reason that the ancient synagogue was called a “*Beit Tefillah*,” which literally means “House of Prayer.” God has promised that he “will hear from heaven” when his people “humble themselves and pray” and seek his face (2 Chronicles 7:14). Consider ways in which prayer can become a greater focus in your home and congregation.
6. For the Christian believer, *the* prayer is the one Jesus taught his disciples to pray. This prayer, however, was not a revolutionary development of something that had never been heard before. It was a simple précis of a number of prayers that the Jewish people had been praying in their temple and synagogues. Study each sentence of this prayer in Matthew 6:9-13.
7. The prayers of the saints are described as the sweet-smelling incense that is offered by the angels on the golden altar in heaven (Revelation 8:3-4). This teaching was a continuation of David’s prayer in Psalm 141:2 in which he connected prayer, incense, and the hour of prayer (evening sacrifice). Discuss the idea that prayer is a sweet odor in the presence of God.

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word תְּפִלָּה (*tefillah*), meaning “prayer,” is from the word פָּלַל (*pillel*), which means “to judge” or “to roll out flat.” Because תְּפִלָּה *tefillah* is a *hithpael* form of the verb פָּלַל (*pillel*), its implied meaning is “to judge oneself” moreso than being judged by God. Judgment is literally rolling everything out flat before God so that there are no inconsistencies. The Hebrew concept of prayer, therefore, implies approaching God for his direction so that believers are not merely begging for their own wants but are seeking to conform to God’s will and his very best for their lives.

Prayer is foundational to Hebraic Christian concepts of community because it gives believers the opportunity to come before God as individuals and as communities to seek his guidance and to confirm to his will. Prayer that is offered in conformity to God’s Word is both powerful and effective, accomplishing God’s purposes in human lives.

A COMMUNITY OF CELEBRATION

The biblical community has always been a worshipping family, one that has featured a wide range of celebratory exercises that are designed to bring glory and honor to God. The primary reason for humans to exist on this planet is to worship and honor the God who created them in his image and likeness. It is through acts of praise and worship that the Hebraic-based community celebrates the goodness of God in the land of the living.



KEY TEXT: *"Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary. . . . Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 150:6).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. God has essentially commanded his people in all generations to celebrate. He has given festivals for that specific purpose, including the seven Torah festivals outlined in Leviticus 23. Interestingly enough, the Hebrew word *chag*, meaning "festival" comes from the word *chagag*, which literally means "to dance in a circle." These festivals are also called *mo'edim*, or "appointed times." God, therefore, has established appointed times for "dancing in a circle" or demonstrably celebrating the glorious events of salvation history. Discuss the concept of eternally established appointments, celebrations, and festivals.
2. God is the author of human emotion. It is not, as some have assumed, a bodily function that erupts and interferes with or overwhelms the rationalism of the human mind. God himself manifests emotion—loving, hating, being jealous, expressing anger, showing compassion; therefore, God is not just the Supreme Intellect. Jesus, likewise, expressed all the emotions of a proper human being—joy, sorrow, love, compassion, and the like. Discuss the good that would result if Christianity followed the example of the Jewish people and became more expressive of emotions in worship.
3. Celebration involves both the intellect and the emotions. First, one needs to understand truth about God and to realize just how God desires to be praised and worshipped. Then, one must engage every fiber of his being—mind, spirit, and body—in the exercise of expressing love and devotion to the one who created humanity in his image. This is the essence of the first and foremost commandment: "You shall love the LORD you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Discuss what it means to love God and to celebrate his goodness.

4. The Israelites were commanded to participate in “holy convocations” that were generally connected with one of the seven festivals. These were literally a “calling together” (the meaning of the Hebrew word *mikra*, which is translated “convocation”) of the people for the express purpose of worshipping God. Consider the importance of “assembling yourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25) for worship that cannot be accomplished in individual isolation.

5. In Jewish tradition, celebration in congregation or holy convocation focuses on corporate prayers. The *Siddur* (prayer book) is a guide that is used for the outpouring of prayers and praise of the Almighty. While there is much celebration of joy in the Jewish community at large, the emphasis on prayer in the synagogue keeps the focus on God. Discuss the importance of prayer as a part of the corporate exercise of celebration and worship.

6. A Hebraic Christian assembly can employ a wide range of the arts in devising ways in which people actively or vicariously can enjoy the worship of the Divine. This can be achieved through music, singing, pageantry, and dance. Since everyone is not skilled in all of these means of praise, it is possible for individuals to express spiritual gifts in particular forms of praise and worship while others celebrate vicariously. What means of praise and worship do you believe bring honor to God and a sense of joy to the human heart?

7. In an ultimate sense, it is both the duty and responsibility of every believer to participate in the celebration and worship of the corporate community. David said, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord” (Psalm 150:6). Regardless as to the degree of talent or the lack thereof, everyone can praise the Lord and celebrate his goodness in some way. As individuals join together in honoring the King of the universe, they are a community of celebration.

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word *חַג* (*chag*) means “festival” or “feast.” This word is the foundation of the word *חָגַג* (*chagag*), which means to “celebrate,” to “dance,” to “stagger,” or to “reel,” which gives the indication that celebrating God’s festivals is not merely a cerebral exercise but is a very visceral, emotional experience. While praise and worship can be done individually, it is prescribed as a corporate exercise. God summons his people to a convocation (*מִקְרָא*—*mikra*), a calling together at his appointed feasts (*מוֹעֲדִים*—*mo’edim*) for the purpose of worshipping the Creator.

Every Christian community should be a community of celebration, for God has designed humanity in such a way that there is a human need to reach out beyond oneself and offer praise and thanksgiving to the Creator. Celebration constantly renews a vibrant exuberance that provides for a happy and Spirit-inspired community of faith.

A COMMUNITY OF BLESSING

From its inception with Abraham, the Hebraic community has been designed by God to be a community of blessing. The blessing that God gave to Abraham was that through the patriarch all the families of the earth would be blessed. Blessing, therefore, is a continuing opportunity and responsibility for the community of faith, for in blessing the individuals of the community have the power to extend God's blessing to one another.



KEY TEXT: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. From the time that Abraham was chosen by God, he was blessed to be a prophetic intercessor for the blessing of the nations. Confirm this truth as you read the account of Abraham's call in Genesis 12:1-3. Does God ever bless anyone solely for the benefit of the person whom he is blessing, or does he bless to meet human need so that, in turn, others may be blessed by observing his blessing and thereby causing the blessing to be multiplied?
2. Abraham's life was filled with moments of deference when he interceded for others, even those who were not worthy. Consider his deference to Lot (Genesis 13:7-12), his petition for mitigating the judgment of Sodom (Genesis 18:17-33, and his prayer for Ishmael when God confirmed the promise of Isaac's birth (Genesis 17:18). How important was Abraham's faith in his being able to defer blessings to others and to pray for their well-being?
3. David was one of the great celebrators in biblical history. How could anyone exceed his "dancing before the Lord with all his might" when the ark was being returned? David, however, did not become consumed in his own joy and celebration. Instead, he "blessed the people in the name of the Lord." Interestingly enough, however, David immediately retired from this public demonstration of celebration to "bless his household" (2 Samuel 6:18, 20). Discuss this fine example of the blessing dynamic in the truly Hebraic community. How can you be a blessing to your family?
4. Blessing in the name of the Lord is an act of faith that is parallel with and perhaps equal to the faith for miracles. Hebrews 11:20-21 adds the names of Isaac and Jacob to the list of those who performed miracles by faith simply

because these patriarchs blessed their children and their grandchildren. Consider how faith in God will motivate parents to bless their children and members of a Hebraic community to bless one another in the name of the Lord. Is it important that believers obey God's instructions to bless their children? Do you think that the blessing that God dictated to Moses in Numbers 6:24-27 has power when you pronounce it in faith over your family? What does it mean that by such blessing God's name is placed upon the children?

5. It was totally in keeping with the Hebraic and Jewish tradition in which Jesus was reared and in which he lived his life that he was one who continually blessed. First, he blessed the Father for his provision (Mark 6:41; Matthew 26:26; Mark 8:7). Then he blessed the little children (Matthew 19:14-15) and his disciples (Luke 24:50-51). As a matter of fact, blessing the community was Jesus' final earthly act before he ascended to heaven. Expand upon ways in which Jesus set the example for blessing in the context of community.

6. Paul employed the Hebrew method using repetition to establish an intensive or a superlative when he said, "Blessed be the God of our Lord Jesus . . . who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing" (Ephesians 1:3). The repeated use of the word *bless* underscores its great importance to the believers. Is there any blessing that God will ever withhold from his obedient children (Psalm 84:11)? Reflect on ways in which God's blessing on your life has been used to extend his blessing to others either in word or in deed.

7. Believers should never return curses for curses. As a matter of fact, they are commanded to render "blessing" (Luke 6:28; Romans 12:14) and to "rejoice" when persecuted and abused (Matthew 5:12), and the reason for maintaining an attitude of blessing even in the face of curses and persecution is so "that you might inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9).

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word בָּרַךְ (*berakah*) comes from the Hebrew root בָּרַךְ (*barak*), which means "to kneel." This concept of blessing brings to mind the way in which the camel, the ancient means of transporting a "blessings," either received or delivered the "blessing" by kneeling. The Hebrew letter ג (*gimel*), meaning "camel," pictures the act of kneeling. It is only when believers function in equality that they are able figuratively to kneel in mutual submission to one another so that they can either give or receive a blessing through the gifts of the Spirit.

A Hebraic Christian community is one that continually functions in a dynamic of blessing God, of blessing one another, and of being blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. By opening doors of fellowship, by providing instruction, and by joining in effectual prayer, the community of blessing becomes a blessing to everyone.

A COMMUNITY OF SERVICE

While most human organizations have focused on self-serving agendas developed by often avaricious and power-hungry leaders, the Christian community, as designed by Jesus on the foundation of Hebraic truth, has always been centered in a mindset of service one to another, both within the community of faith and to those who have not yet joined this family. Service must ever be *the* hallmark of every truly Hebraic Christian community.



KEY TEXT: *“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. The men of Judah who returned from Babylonian captivity to the desolation of what was once Jerusalem and the Temple had a clear answer as to their identity: “We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth and are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished” (Ezra 5:11). They identified themselves as “the slaves of the God of heaven and earth,” for the word *abad* is Aramaic for “slave” and corresponds to *eved* in Hebrew, the same word used to describe the Israelites as “slaves” in Egypt. These Israelites understood themselves to be servants of God and of the people. Consider how this example was followed continually in Israelite history. How does it apply for today’s community?
2. Paul established a solid principle of service for everyone in the community of faith when he instructed the believers to submit “yourselves one to another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). This is a form of lateral service and accountability in which every member of the body of the Messiah submits voluntarily to all other members to show reverence for Christ. This is the way in which believers fulfill Paul’s instructions in Philippians 2:3-4: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit . . . do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” Discuss the Hebraic Christian principle of lateral submission and accountability.
3. The freedom that believers have in Christ is a wonderful experience; however, it can be exploited through the manifestation of rugged individuality that becomes egocentric and self-serving. This is why Paul instructed the

believers not to use their new-found freedom in Christ as an occasion for the exaltation of the flesh. Instead, they should serve one another in love. If all the community of faith were a loving, serving community, would all of the needs of the individuals and the community be fully met?

4. Paul said that the *charismata* (gifts) were distributed by the Holy Spirit to each individual in the body of Christ so that through the service of each individual, the entire community would profit (1 Corinthians 12:7). Consider the impact that spiritual gifts would have in the body if every member exercised them solely for the benefit and blessing of other members.

5. Abraham demonstrated the true servant's heart when he resolved a dispute between his herdsmen and those of Lot by giving Lot the part of the promised land that Lot desired and taking what was left for himself (Genesis 13:7-11). Does God bless those who sacrifice to serve one another?

6. A fine example of the Hebraic community service mentality was demonstrated by a young Mesopotamian girl in Genesis 24:10-21, who not only gave water to a total stranger but also offered to water his camels! Analyze the actions of Rebekah and evaluate how her servant's heart contributed to her becoming the wife of Abraham's son Isaac. Did she serve Abraham's servant for any personal benefit? Did she go beyond what anyone would have thought necessary? What lessons can you and your community learn from Rebekah?

7. Even in the glorious kingdom in the age to come, Jesus will still manifest the spirit of service that he required all of the members of the community of faith to demonstrate: "Truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them" (Luke 12:37). Discuss the servant mindset of Christ and how each believer should imitate that mindset for the benefit and profit of the entire community.

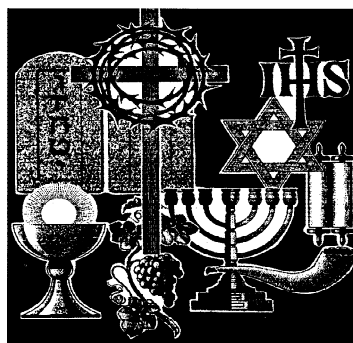
WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word עֶבֶד (*eved*) literally means "slave" or "servant." This is the word that Jesus used when he said, "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matthew 23:11). When Paul commanded Christians to "serve one another" (Galatians 5:13), he used the Greek word δουλεύω (*douleúō*), which means "to be a slave to." When he instructed believers to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21), he used the word ὑποτάσσω (*hypotássō*), which means to "subordinate" or "to yield." Christian life *must* be characterized by service.

A community of faith that operates in the spirit of love one for another will always be characterized by a mindset of service. Love is not love unless it is demonstrated through self-sacrifice and submission to the needs of others. The Hebraic Christian community is one in which each individual seeks the benefit of all the family of God.

RESTORING HEBRAIC COMMUNITY

For far too long, the church has been focused on event Christianity, a performance-based, audience-based system that provides for congregation but very little community. Believers have been urged to be “in church” every Sunday to observe either a liturgical or a homiletical performance. It is now time for restoration of Hebraic practice so that Christians can “be church” seven days a week by experiencing relationship in community.



KEY TEXT: *“This is what the LORD says: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies, and walk in it, and find rest for your souls” (Jeremiah 6:16, NRS).*

SPRINGBOARD FOR DISCUSSION:

1. For four thousand years, God’s religion for his people was focused in the context of family and community. Judaism and its spiritual antecedents functioned in a domestic and familial environment that featured a simple walk with God in faith and obedience. This was the “ancient path” wherein was the “good way.” God does require what is past, as Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 3:15. Does God appreciate innovation over continuity and faithfulness?
2. When Jesus became incarnate, he did not abandon the work in which he had been engaged for four millennia. He unequivocally declared that his mission was not to destroy but to fulfill (Matthew 5:17-18). Jesus made use of a rabbinic concept that faulty interpretation of Scripture “destroyed the Torah” and proper interpretation “fulfilled the Torah.” He implemented a reformation of restoration (Hebrews 9:10) by renewing the Spirit of the Torah and fulfilling (by “filling full”) its sacrificial and ceremonial requirements through his life, death, and resurrection. Discuss Jesus’ ministry as a reformer.
3. Neither Jesus nor his disciples abandoned the synagogue in favor of a better “church.” Jesus continually taught in the synagogues “as his custom was” (Luke 4:16). The earliest Christians continued steadfast in the three dynamics of the synagogue: fellowship, study, and prayer (Acts 2:42). They functioned as a community of faith. Consider the lifestyles of Jesus and the apostles. **Did they go to church**, or did they focus on *being* the church by being the community described in the Scriptures? How does this impact your life?
4. When the church began to distance itself from the Jews and Judaism and to

disdain its Hebraic roots, it gradually moved from a domestic environment into the public arena. Congregations met in homes which allowed freedom of expression to all members of the community. In going public, the church lost many of these freedoms and embraced organizational models from the Greco-Roman world. Discuss the transition of the church away from Spirit-led community life to that of ritual and eventually sacramentalism.

5. Malachi 4:6 predicts that Elijah will come before the “day of the LORD” to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. Perhaps the intention of this prophecy is that a spirit similar to that which motivated Elijah will be present in the world in the day of preparation for the return of the Messiah. This would be a move of the Holy Spirit for restoration (as Elijah restored God’s altar) and renewal (as the Israelites turned from Baal to serve the living God). Discuss the implications of restoration for today’s postmodern societies.

6. Restoration and renewal have been occurring in the church since the turn of the sixteenth century. It began with a group of “Christian Hebraists” who insisted that the church should return to the Bible only, a motto adopted by Martin Luther as “*sola scriptura*.” They began to study the Bible in its original Hebrew language and tried to restore the Jewish roots of Christian faith. How important is it to know that the Protestant Reformation was birthed in a Hebraic renewal movement? How does that impact your thinking?

7. Martin Luther declared that reformation is an ongoing exercise: “*ecclesia semper reformanda*” (“the church always being reformed”). What the Reformers of the sixteenth century began is continuing today as God is causing people to turn to the Fathers of their faith, to the Jewish roots that produced Christianity. There, they are finding the model for restored community. Discuss the reformation of restoration that you are experiencing in your life.

WORD STUDY

The Hebrew word דֶּרֶךְ (*derek*) means “way” or “road.” It can also mean “course of life” or “moral character.” It is closely associated with הָלַךְ (*halak*) which means “walk.” Both Jeremiah and Jesus spoke of the “paths” in which believers should “walk,” the narrow way! *Halak* is the root of הִלָּכָה (*halakah*), which means “the way one should walk.” The earliest Jesus movement was called “The Way” in context with its Jewish matrix because it maintained continuity with the same principles of community that had characterized the synagogue for centuries.

A significant move of restoration is underway around the world to renew the church’s Hebraic foundations for both faith and practice. A significant part of this renewal movement is the recovery of the biblical principles of family and community. The church is going home by restoring its Jewish roots and becoming a truly biblical community.



HEBRAIC CHRISTIAN

GLOBAL COMMUNITY™

Sharing, Equipping, Serving

Hebraic Christian Global Community's mission is to facilitate the move of God to restore the Hebraic foundations of the Christian faith to all believers without any distinction as to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or denominational affiliation. We seek to extend the dominion of God through the interconnectivity of individuals, ministers, ministries, congregations, organizations, and denominations, demonstrating the practical unity of the body of Messiah by standing unequivocally for biblical truth, speaking with a community voice, and serving both the Hebraic heritage community and the church at large by means of corporate action, collaborative ministry, and strategic planning.

An untapped dynamic force exists around the world in the Christian believers who have been impelled by the Holy Spirit to return to the faith of Jesus and the apostles by restoring the church's Hebraic foundations. This latent force is an unvoiced multitude made up of scattered and isolated individuals and small communities that need, even yearn, to join together in a more consolidated witness—in this case, to the truth about Christianity's long-observed biblical roots.

Many—if not most—of those who have begun to investigate the roots of their faith and to find practical ways to implement those truths in their lives and in the lives of their communities have found themselves experiencing the “Elijah Syndrome.” They think they are all alone in a cave in an isolated desert, with the howling winds of insanity racking their spirits. They also tend to wonder if a Jezebel is not in hot pursuit, seeking to destroy them. Someone needs to speak God's Word to this situation: “Thousands have not bowed their knee to Baal!”

Hebraic Christian Global Community proposes to be such a comforting and challenging voice, and we propose to do it as a still, small voice of confirmation, not a thundering tempest of condemnation and judgmentalism. We propose to help all the believers in the world understand that their faith in inherently Jewish because it is faith in the Jewish Messiah, anchored in the Jewish Scriptures, established in the God of the Jews, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As Jesus said, we understand that “salvation is from the Jews.” We understand that every authentic expression of Christian faith that is being experienced by believers everywhere has a Jewish root. All we have to do is to help our fellow Christians discover these truths for themselves. As we perceive the need of God's people and the timing of God's move to meet that need, we find that we are aligning ourselves with God's purposes in the earth. We do so in awe of the responsibility that this calling entails, and we do so with great humility, recognizing that in biblical terms, we have been called as stewards of the mysteries of God and as servants of all of God's people. Meeting the human need for spiritual renewal is the highest calling in the service of God and humanity.

Restoring Ancient Paths, Finding a More Excellent Way

