

# The Importance of the Local Church in the Life of the Believer

## Historical Background

### Israel



#### From Egypt to Solomon

Exodus 25, 26 & 38

Leviticus 16

The tabernacle was the centre of the life of the Hebrew nation during the wilderness wanderings and their early history in Canaan



#### From Solomon to the Captivity of Babylon

II Kings 25; II Samuel 6 & 7

The temple of Solomon was destroyed by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. This destruction destroyed the identity of the Israelites and was prophesied by Jeremiah consistently throughout his prophetic ministry



#### From the Return of the Captives to the Romans in AD 70

Nehemiah, Ezra, Haggai & Zechariah

The returning exiles, under the benevolent hand of Cyrus the Great rebuilt the Temple and in the first century BC Herod the Great expanded it into a magnificent structure. The Romans levelled it in AD 70 & so it remains



### What remains today?

The foundation of what was the western wall of Herod's Temple and of course the Temple Mount is all that remains today.

In the 1967 Arab-Israeli war the Jews recaptured the western wall precinct from Jordan and is today known colloquially as the wailing wall



### Synagogues in the first century

Following the return of the exiles from Babylon, the second temple was constructed in Jerusalem, but a considerable diaspora of the Jewish people existed. To meet their daily spiritual needs, synagogues (meaning "learning together") arose wherever there existed a Jewish community. The synagogue movement is still very much in existence today

## The Function of the Tabernacle/Temple in the Life of Israel

### The Priesthood

King David arranged the priesthood into **14 divisions or sacerdotal courses** (Hebrew: מִשְׁמָר mishmar) for the purpose of organizing their service at the Tabernacle. They had multiple tasks related to both sacrifice and worship. This priestly organization persisted up until the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in AD 70

### Sacrifice

In the OT, the priest acted as the intermediary between both the nation and the individual and God. This intermediary function was performed by the sacrifice of animals brought to the tabernacle/temple by penitent individuals. The individual Jew considered God so holy that they did not dare to communicate directly with Him. In fact, the name YHWH is never uttered by a Jew and the name they use for God is Ha'Shem meaning the Lord. When communicating even today the Jew will write God as G\_d for fear of offending His holiness.

### Worship

Once again, the priest acted as intermediary in offering incense on the altar of incense located in the holy place of the tabernacle/temple. Individuals could also worship God by singing psalms and studying Torah

## The Church

### Some early allusions to the church age in the life of Christ

In Jesus interaction with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in Samaria (John 4.1-25), when she challenged Him about where it was traditional to worship, He indicated to her that they who want to worship God must henceforth worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. In worship, Jesus cares not for;

Your wealth

Your possessions

Your location

Your posture

Your language

Your natural abilities

Your achievements

..... ONLY your heart

In Jesus interaction with Nicodemus (John 3.1-21), a member of the Sanhedrin and a ruler of the Jews, He introduced the necessity to be "born again" the church age means of entry into the body of Christ

In Matthew 16.18 and again in 18.15-20, Jesus refers directly to "the church" but these are the only two occasions in which he did.

### Paul's description of the church in the New Testament

Paul uses three very distinctive metaphors to describe the local church in his letters to the Corinthians and the Ephesians.

#### Body

In I Corinthians 12.12-30 he uses the human body as a metaphor for the church, showing how, like the human body, it is made up of many parts with individual functions. In the case of the church these functions are based around the spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit at conversion

#### Building

In Ephesians 2.19-20 & 4.16 he uses the metaphor of a building "fitly framed together" to describe the church in much the same way as he used the body in his letter to the Corinthians

#### Bride

In Ephesians 5.22-33, he uses the metaphor of marriage to describe the church as His bride. This metaphor finds its origins in the Jewish arranged marriage protocol in order to reinforce the teaching of Christ to Nicodemus regarding being born again and also to highlight Jesus claim to His disciples in John 14.1-3.

The church is further described by Paul by his use of the Greek word ecclesia which means “a called out assembly.”

### **The purpose and function of the local church in the life of the believer**

God ordained the local church as His provision for the born-again believer as we serve Him and wait for His Son from Heaven.

#### **Sacrifice**

The local church creates for the believer opportunity and space to offer unto God the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13.15). The word “sacrifice” (Gk: “thusia”) comes from the root thuo, a verb meaning “**to kill or slaughter for a purpose.**”. Praise often requires that we “kill” our pride, fear, or sloth—anything that threatens to diminish or interfere with our worship of the Lord. We also discover here the basis of all our praise: the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ

The first meaning of a “sacrifice of praise” is that our worship, our praise and thanksgiving, must flow from a heart that is obedient to God, generous to the poor, and unsullied by worldly affections. There is an intrinsic connection between worship and holiness

#### **Worship**

In the local church, worship is any act that attributes reverence and honour to God. In the New Testament, various words are used to refer to the term worship. One is “proskuneo” which means to bow down to God. Worship in the church age may reasonably be described as any act, based upon the use of ones spiritual gifts that blesses the body of believers and brings honour and glory to God. (Ephesians 5.17-20).

#### **Teaching/Training**

The local church is a place where God has provided gifted individuals (evangelists, pastor/teachers etc) whose role is to teach and train believers to gain knowledge and understanding of God through the written Word so they can apply scriptural principles in wisdom to the way they live before the world (Ephesians 4.11-15)

It is also a place where the teaching/Training provides the believer with edification (spiritual, moral or intellectual instruction for the personal growth and maturity of believers) to equip them for the work of the ministry (community evangelisation cf Matthew 28.19-20)

#### **Fellowship**

A place for people of like faith and practice to regularly gather and interact for the purpose of social enjoyment and personal encouragement. Christian fellowship is far richer than mere social interaction however as in its fullest expression it encompasses;

Relationship

Partnership

Companionship

Stewardship

Fellowship in the body of Christ is certainly no side issue. It was one of the four things the early church devoted itself to (Acts 2.42). It is a means of support and encouragement to others and of ministry in the Saviour's enterprise on earth.

### **Protection**

It is clear from I Corinthians 5.1-8 and I Timothy 1.20 that to be outside of, or maybe better, disconnected from the local church is to invite the destructive activity of the devil upon oneself. The local church offers the born again believer an umbrella of protection from such activity (cf Luke 22.31-34)

### **Refuge and Comfort**

Refuge and comfort is closely linked with fellowship. Paul makes it clear in I Thessalonians 4.18 that one objective of the local church is to "comfort one another."

### **Social Identification Creating Opportunity for Personal Evangelism**

Identifying as a born again believer and making a lifestyle choice to be devoted to attendance as they were in the early church may offer opportunity to be a witness for Christ. The reason for saying this is because people watch and if they see that what you believe you both live and are devoted to they may be open to a discussion of why you are who you are (Acts 4.13).

Your open commitment to the local church is best described by Paul in his letter to the Romans; "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*"