

The "New" Church of God Messenger
A Newsletter for the People of God
September 25, 2021 --- Issue No. 34

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Articles

Edifying the Church of God Through the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

by Church of God Group (Christchurch, New Zealand) (Cont. from Issue #33)

Christ and Love

Christ's love for us was so great that He was willing to suffer and give up His life for us. "Greater love has no man than this, than he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Christ desires that we have this greatest expression of love for one another. "As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). Our lives are to be living sacrifices to our Lord and Saviour and to each other (Romans 12:1).

We hope, in this study, to demonstrate how the gifts of the Holy Spirit, expressed in love, are used for the "building up of the church", in the care of one another and show how they are as relevant to this age as any other.

Why Study the Gifts?

This Bible study arose because a small group questioned why miracles of healing are not commonly seen in our fellowship. A similar situation existed in the Corinthian church, in Paul's day. Paul told the Corinthians it was because they were "not discerning the Lord's Body" (I Corinthians 11:29-30). Are we the same? Paul tells the church; "For you are the Body of Christ and members in particular" (I Corinthians 12:27). In this context he tells the church that he would not have them "ignorant concerning the spiritual gifts" (I Corinthians 12:1), and continuing, he expounds the operations of the 'Body of Christ' and how these gifts are disseminated.

This paper focuses on the "love chapter" as it sits within this 1st letter to the Corinthians, (i.e., from I Corinthians 11:17 to the end of chapter 14) and asks us to reflect on the command to love and to learn to live in harmonious fellowship with the brethren. We explore the "tools" God gave us to care for and uphold each other, as He builds up the church. We are led to ponder the breadth and depth of the power of the Holy Spirit and ask why we should not be blessed with similar gifts today. The study shows how the distribution of spiritual gifts is to all, not a few, according to God's grace; that we are to desire spiritual gifts - to eagerly and earnestly seek for God to bless us with these gifts, in expressing love and care for each other in miraculous and powerful ways. This paper also shows how we must submit to Christ as He leads us via inspiration of the Holy Spirit to exercise the gifts.

The Greatest Gift of All

The greatest 'gift' we receive from God is His Spirit. (This word 'gift' is from the Greek "dorea" - kindness, gratuity, or favour.) The Holy Spirit is a gift of immeasurable value available to all who are called to salvation. Peter said, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

It is God's purpose and plan, to bring us to the fullness of Christ - to become His son, or daughter, with His divine nature. We are to be fellow heirs with Christ in God's very own family "And I will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (II Corinthians 6:18). And "... if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." (Romans 8:17). Receiving the Holy Spirit is the beginning of an incredible transition from what we are now to what we will be like in God's Kingdom.

It is through this power of the Holy Spirit that we receive the 'gifts', which are the subject of this paper. These gifts, from the Greek "charisma", are miraculous faculties or endowments, hence are at times referred to as the charismatic gifts. In Romans 12 Paul challenges us to seriously examine ourselves to determine what gifts we have and use them to the best of our ability (Romans 12:3-8).

Why Paul's Letter to the Corinthians?

The timing of the letter seems to be looking towards the Passover season, a time when we are instructed to examine ourselves before partaking of the memorial service commemorating Christ's death. It is in the context of

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discerning Christ's broken body (Passover) and understanding the church to be the "Body of Christ", that the congregation needed correction.

The letter to the Corinthians addressed their attitudes, not the least of which were divisiveness and contentiousness. In I Corinthians 11:17-18 Paul comments on the divisions in the church in which their "meetings cause more harm than good" (verse 17), and he corrects their attitudes by developing an analogy of the church as a "body" of which Christ is the head.

The letter to the Corinthians shows striking parallels with the church today, and Paul's instruction about cohesiveness in the body for health, well-being and strength is equally an exhortation for the church now in this age. Each of us can reflect on how our attitudes, words and actions either build up or tear down the loving bonds of the Spirit.

What Makes a Healthy Church?

A healthy church works together in love and is firmly linked to Christ through the Holy Spirit. Christ had likened Himself to a vine (John 15:1-8) and we individuals to the branches which must abide in Him. The branches reach out and wrap themselves around one another and hug one another for support and a place to grow. We know that we must produce much fruit, but without Him we can do nothing (verse 5).

In Paul's analogy of the body, Christ is the head and as such directs all we do. We, the brothers, and sisters of Christ, are seen as "members" of the body. Paul says that each part is apportioned a role or function according to God's grace. As in the body, even those parts we hide in modesty have primary functions, imperative to the health of the whole body. If one part is sick, injured or cut off it affects the well-being of the whole person. Likewise, in the church, when individuals suffer, the church as a whole suffers (I Corinthians 12:14-27).

By comparing our close relationships to the inter-dependence in human anatomy, Paul demonstrates that each person in the church has a part to play in the maintenance (health and well-being) and work of the church. For each member to participate, God grants specific gifts through the Holy Spirit. There are different gifts, services, and workings but God works them in all men (I Corinthians 12:4-6). Each of us is to use our gifts for the healthy functioning of the whole body, appreciating one another's gifts and depending on one another. I Corinthians 12:27-31 shows how the "parts" should have "equal concern for each other".

All of Us Can Have These Gifts

The scriptures are clear: the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to "profit withal" (I Corinthians 12:7). I Corinthians 12:7-11 (NIV) states: "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one just as He determines." The scriptures say we are to eagerly desire the greater gifts, i.e., those that profit the most (verse 31).

Through that one and self-same Spirit, God has set the members in the Body as it pleases Him (I Corinthians 12:18). Note that this "one body" is in effect, the working Body of Christ (verse 27). Many members baptized into one body, all drinking of the same Spirit (verses 12-14) and each essential to the effective working of the whole body, as we submit to Christ the Head.

In the past, it has been implied that only the 'ordained' ministry has gifts as part of their consecration into a role, but I Corinthians 12 shows that we are all able to be filled with the power of the Spirit - Christ in us - and exercise the gifts that God grants us, and indeed we must do to be effective in the work we are called to do.

Power from on High

Jesus promised that the disciples would be "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Paul expounds on these gifts of power and how they ought to be recognized and utilized for the functioning and work of the "Body of Christ". It is Christ's work being done through us and in us. "We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). We individuals *are* the work of God,

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and we are called to *do* good works. Christ also told us “These things you will do and greater works than these.” It is by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ in us, that “greater works” will be done (John 14:12). Dare we believe that we could do greater works than Christ?

Now let’s look at these powerful gifts: word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, diverse tongues, and interpretation of tongues, manifestations of the one and self-same Spirit (I Corinthians 12:11). These are not normal or common talents, but amazing and miraculous expressions of God’s power, through His people. We all ‘drink’ of the same marvelous Spirit, the well-spring of which is the Father through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who promises us Eternal Life.

Love is the Foundation

We are exhorted to follow the way of love, and eagerly desire spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 14:1). Paul says that although it is possible to be most spectacular in the manifestation and expression of the gifts, this has no meaning unless love motivates our every undertaking on behalf of Christ (I Corinthians 13:3). Love and respect toward one another are paramount to the outpouring of miraculous gifts upon the children of God. Speaking in tongues, having the gift of prophecy, understanding mysteries, performing miracles, moving mountains, bestowing gifts, or even being a martyr – without love, these are meaningless expressions of self-promotion (I Corinthians 13). We must, in love, treat each other as we would our Saviour. After all, is that not what we commit to when we wash each other’s feet?

When we come together for fellowship and worship, shouldn’t there be even more to our Sabbath meetings? Shouldn’t they reflect the loving expression of the work of the Holy Spirit in us, for the benefit of the church and its members (I Peter 4:10-11)? Paul asks; “What good am I to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?” (I Corinthians 14:6). For us to benefit one another in this way, we must seek and utilize these amazing gifts. “Forasmuch as you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that you may excel to the edifying of the church” (1 Corinthians 14:12). The gifts are holy. They are powerful and they are to be used to the benefit of all of us - to build up, to teach, to nurture, and to inspire.

Jesus rejects any work that does not stem from love for Him toward the brethren. “If you, did it for the least of these, you did it for me.” Likewise, if you did not, if you saw “my” need, but did not act - if you did not help “these, the least of my brethren”, you ignored the Lord’s need (Matthew 25:31-46).

Chapter 13 of I Corinthians, the love chapter, concludes with this thought. So many things will pass away which at this time seem important, (including the gifts), but love will endure forever. Do we love? Are we lovingly caring for each other’s well-being? Only each individual can answer this.

Developing the Fruits of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit - the indwelling of Christ - perfects patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance in us. These are the ‘fruits’ of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The fruits of this great gift – the Holy Spirit - are developed as we interact with God through prayer, study and fasting, and through developing and nurturing loving relationships with others (especially those in the Body of Christ), until we come to perfection in the fullness of the stature of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). It takes time for these attributes of God to be developed to the extent that they fully motivate and direct the way we behave. Love is the greatest of these attributes.

It is important to understand the difference between the fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts. The fruits of the Spirit are ultimately common to all who have God’s Spirit and are the result of having that Spirit. They are to be developed as we grow in grace and knowledge. Spiritual gifts are not common to all; they differ from individual to individual. They are spiritual tools to be used for edifying brethren and for the congregation to help one another work together with love and respect.

When we have God’s divine nature, we will extend His love within us to others, especially the brethren whom He has called into the congregation, or Body of Christ (I John 3:16). Love is a deep-seated aspect that permeates all of our thoughts and actions. This “agape” love is the first great commandment that Christ mentioned - to love God with all our hearts, minds, and souls (Matthew 22:37-38). Using the gifts for their intended purpose - to edify other members of the Body fulfils the second great commandment to love our neighbor. We express His love through the gifts.

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The Gifts and their Purpose

Different gifts serve different purposes. Let’s examine Paul’s discussion regarding the role of prophecy versus speaking in tongues. “But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort” (I Corinthians 14:3). However, the person “speaking in tongues” speaks to God (verse 2). Acts 2:2-11 shows that the miraculous gift of the ability to speak in foreign languages was given as a witness on the day of Pentecost.

The purpose of gifts of healing, teaching and knowledge are self-evident, but gifts of prophecy, words of wisdom, working of miracles, tongues etc. seem somewhat mysterious to our modern thinking. Paul makes it clear that however they are manifested, the gifts are for the building of the church and to develop our love for one another.

One example of the gifts in practice is seen in Paul’s letter to Timothy. Paul refers to the prophecy given through the laying on of hands on Timothy and implores Timothy to pursue this work wholeheartedly. In the context, it appears that Timothy’s gifts were to teach and preach (I Timothy 1:18 and I Timothy 4:11-16). Why is it we do not see this type of ministering to each other in our church today more specifically in regard to gifts other than preaching and teaching?

We too can ask and trust God to anoint us each with miraculous power for the benefit of our brethren.

Seek the gifts

“Desire spiritual gifts... (I Corinthians 14:1) so you may excel”, for the building up of the church (verse 12). We look for these miracles in our lives as we struggle through our trials, i.e., a word of exhortation from God to come from another’s lips to fortify a brother or sister in a personal challenge (word of wisdom or revelation). A prophecy or revelation may be given for the whole church or for an individual, e.g., as a confirmation of a gift of the Spirit. If, for God’s work, a mountain needs to be moved, we would be able to say, “Go from here to there.” (Matthew 17:20) and it will go (worker of miracles). Christ has confirmed to us that whatever we ask “in His name” will be given (John 14:13, 15:16).

We may tend to shy away from miracles because of the flamboyant behavior shown in some religious programs on television. The authors of this paper are not advocating this type of showmanship, but do feel that we, as the Body of Christ, need to acknowledge that miraculous gifts *are* for the Church of God. We are exhorted to desire them amongst us for the church’s edification. We should ask for that which is aligned with Christ’s purpose and will. As we have already seen, Jesus told us; “These things you will do and greater than these” (John 14:12-14). He offers us this power of the Holy Spirit.

Will He Find Faith on the Earth?

Believe. The gifts - these holy, uncommon, miraculous gifts are not latent or inherent talents, they are miraculous expressions of God’s love, and are offered to us, to desire, to ask for, to seek, and to use.

Christ said, when He returns will He “find faith on the earth”? Consider what He says here. When Christ visited his hometown, not many miracles were performed, because of “their lack of faith” (Matthew 13:57-58).

These out-workings of the Spirit are evidence of faith. The church, each one of us, will be empowered and upheld by the Spirit of God as we believe. It is imperative that love, and only love, guides this pursuit. It is imperative that the church believes, seeks, and accepts in faith what it has not dared to fully embrace in this age.

By Much Prayer and Fasting

God desires us to be earnest, not lukewarm, or disinterested (Revelation 3:15-16). Remember when the disciples, on their first independent evangelistic tour, sought to cast out a particular demon, but were powerless? Christ’s response was “These come out only through much prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29).

When, out of love we desire these gifts, understand that we put ourselves forward to work for Christ. We are not our own. It will require courage, faith, time, and sacrifice. This is why we must fast and pray to seek God’s grace as one who is prepared to join Him and work for Him. To humble ourselves so we may be pliable and effective tools in His hands. To ensure all we do is always from love, never from pride, vanity, or self-promotion. Prayer with fasting is a powerful spiritual tool because it demonstrates humility, earnestness and complete devotion and submission to God and His will.

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How well are we doing in the greatest love of all? Are we ready to lay down our lives for our friends? It is time to seek these gifts through God’s power, grace and glory and give the Holy Spirit full reign.

When will our stories to each other be wondrous evidence of God at work amongst us, as we, in love, minister to one another? Think how this is different to the stories we now tell. We will speak of healings, miracles and prophecies, and blessings as power from on high inspires our meetings and our lives.

Surely when we are expressing love in accordance with the scriptures and inviting and allowing full expression of the Spirit of Christ in each of us, the Church will rise up glorious, powerful, and worthy, without flaw, as we see her in Revelation?

Conclusion

In this paper we have shown through Paul’s writings and other scriptures, how God blesses His children with the Holy Spirit, which in turn empowers us to care for one another within our fellowship body, the church. These wonderful gifts are far greater than natural talents as they impress on us the very power and love of God toward one another. The blessings of the gifts are made available for all of us, and we are urged to desire them, seek them, and use them to serve each other individually and to fortify the church as a whole.

We hope this study will prompt our fellowship groups to read again I Corinthians 11, 12, 13 and 14 and similar chapters, in order to understand more fully, and to be more open to seeking, accepting, and using these gifts given by God to His children. There is an Almighty potential we are yet to witness in these coming years. The power of God must outstrip the confusion of the Evil one. We are the instruments by which God will accomplish His will. Have we, in the church, overlooked the breadth and depth of the POWER of the Holy Spirit and missed, or even dismissed, the miraculous gifts available to us, thus not operating as effectively as Christ intended?

This paper emphasizes how love and only love must guide all we do in Christ’s name, for the work of the church, for the brethren and for the sake of the Gospel. It is the authors’ heartfelt desire that love, expressed in our care for each other, grows more meaningful, as the “time” draws near. We wait on God, with you, dear brethren, to see His power manifested in the church through the miraculous gifts as we respond to this exhortation by Paul to give love pre-eminence in our relationships.

This paper is not an exhaustive study, it is written to share some learning gained from studying the gifts of the Spirit.

Sharing Our Lives at the Feast
by Mark Schindler (Charlotte, North Carolina)



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One of the great blessings that God gives us every year is the command to keep His holy days. As with all of His laws, they do much more for us than they do for Him. As a loving Father, He provides for our every need, and the holy days are a need that we do not fully realize that we have.

The holy days give us a chance to spend extra time together. With other members of God's church, we sing hymns, pray, and hear His Word expounded in a setting suitable for drawing us closer to each other and to God. Just as importantly, it gives us time to spend fellowshiping and encouraging each other while sharing "war stories."

One of the best times for this, of course, is the Feast of Tabernacles. We have a whole week to spend together in one place. Each year my family seems to meet certain people that make the Feast even more special than it already is, and from them, we receive some particular point of encouragement or inspiration. Two such instances demonstrate for us the liberty from fear that can be produced by absolute love and trust in our great Creator God.

Heart Problems

At a recent Feast of Tabernacles, we were fortunate to spend time with a couple that we had met at previous Feasts. This time, we had the opportunity to get to know them. We talked quite a bit about our families, friends, hometowns, common goals, what we had been studying and learning, successes and failures, and all the things God's people share when they get together at His feasts.

One day, we started talking about how wonderful it is that God has given us this opportunity to be part of His great plan. We agreed that, even though it is tremendous, sometimes it just seems so hard to step out in love and faith and put absolute trust in Him. We began sharing stories of how God had intervened in our lives, and they told us the story of their child who, as a baby, came down with a life-threatening, congenital heart problem.

They stayed up for nights on end. Constantly imploring God to intervene and heal their child, they spent weeks watching the baby struggle to live. The wife was beside herself. She believed that God would heal, but He had not done so, and their baby was slipping away.

Finally, she asked her husband what he thought they might be doing wrong. Why was God not intervening? After all, they trusted His Word. They knew His Word says, "I am the LORD who heals you" (Exodus 15:26). She believed this with all her heart. Her husband simply told her, "You've got to let the child go!"

It was as simple and as hard as that! Healing could not take place until she truly believed that God is a loving God, and that fear could have no part in her worship of Him! She had to believe—absolutely—that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). She had to trust, even if their child died, just as Abraham had faith with Isaac, "that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Hebrews 11:19).

What an inspiring testimonial of fearless faith in our loving God and all that He is! Once the parents' minds were set, once they extinguished their fear and believed the Almighty Creator God and loved Him enough to trust Him, God healed the child, who lives to this day! Though it may have ended another way, they were convicted. They would accept God on His terms because they put aside fear and loved Him!

To hear God glorified like this should give us an encouraging boost! This should make us eager to continue on to the life of liberty set before us.

Barrels of Air

Several years ago, at the Feast of Tabernacles in St. Petersburg, Florida, we heard another uplifting story of Christian courage. Each year that we attended the Feast there, one of the highlights was special music. For some reason, that site had one of the finest choirs and amazing soloists. Perhaps the best soloist—and certainly the most inspiring—was a man named Barry Yoder.

When he performed his baritone solo for special music, it was comparable to the world's finest opera performances. His booming voice could probably fill the 10,000-seat arena without a microphone! He seemed to have barrels of air for lungs.

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But there was a catch. When Barry came on stage, ushers carried him up the stairs in his wheelchair. When he fellowshiped among the congregation, he sat in a chair that unfolded into a bed if necessary. An oxygen tank was strapped to it, and tubes ran from the tank into his nostrils because he was always short of breath!

My family had the privilege of sharing a meal with Barry and his wife, two wonderful people. I vividly remember Barry—who could not finish even a sentence without becoming short of breath—explaining to my children how he could not make it through a stanza in the hymnal without gasping for air. But when it came time for him to glorify "the Boss" (as Barry liked to call our Father), he put aside his fear of failure and embarrassment. He went right up on stage to use the powerful voice God had given him. His only desire was to return to God the glory that was rightfully His.

Barry would never take any credit for his performance. He just said, "It's not me who does the singing up there. It's the Boss that does it. Every day I have is a day given to me to do a job that the Boss has given me. Do you know that I died twice from heart failure last June? The doctors gave me up for dead, but God brought me back. I'm not sure why, but I know there's something that He still has for me to do."

I knew that one of the reasons God brought him back was so that he could declare the love of God before our kids that day. They could see a man who did not fear the possibility that he might fall down and make a fool of himself before all those people. He would do this because he absolutely loved and trusted his Father in heaven.

Truth Applied Glorifies God

These two stories illustrate an extremely important aspect of why we should keep God's holy days: the encouragement we can give one another to continue in the Way. In a 1988 sermon John Ritenbaugh said, "Truth, liberty, and freedom go hand in hand, but truth will produce liberty only as it is applied." Barry Yoder and the couple with the ailing baby applied God's Word to their lives. They lived it, and it became part of their very way of thinking! Their love for God and His Word delivered them from fear, and by this love of God working in their lives, they won another measure of freedom from the bondage of Satan's world and his way of thinking. Beyond that, it was produced, to some degree, in those with whom they had shared their experiences.

Slowly but surely, we must all learn the lesson Paul speaks of in I Corinthians 6:19-20:

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

These people have learned this lesson and glorified God by going through their trials while trusting Him and putting fear aside. Afterward, they have encouraged others with their experiences. What better forum does God give us to do this than at the Feast of Tabernacles?

Togetherness at the Feast

In I Corinthians 12:12, Paul writes about how the church has many members but is one body. We all have different responsibilities, as well as different circumstances and events to shape us in our individual lives. It all comes down to "the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (verses 25b-26).

He writes later:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. (II Corinthians 1:3-5)

In verse 14, he concludes, "We are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Are we rejoicing together as a body, lifting each other up, and working together? The Feast of Tabernacles gives us the opportunity to do this more than any other time of the year. *But it takes love.*

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It also takes dropping the defense mechanisms that human nature sets up to protect the self from getting too close to others. In another 1988 sermon, John Ritenbaugh remarked:

The more two people love one another, the less they fear what the other will do. Maybe we don't really love God the way that we profess that we do. Fear comes from over-concern about the self. Fear is bondage produced by self-centeredness. Fear is the opposite of love, and fear makes a person rooted where he can't do anything at all!

Are we stagnating because we are misusing the time God commands us to come together before Him? At the Feast, we are not only to assemble for services, but we are also *to dwell together* for a week—like a family. Are we really sharing our lives so we can benefit and grow from each other's experiences? Or are we avoiding our brethren because we fear the embarrassment or rejection of really getting to know one another?

"Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18), and if we really love one another as we say we do, then we will use this time to share our trials and triumphs—and grow together! This indeed is one of our stated goals: "Till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

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The House of God: Where it was Built?

by Samuel S. Martin (Israel)

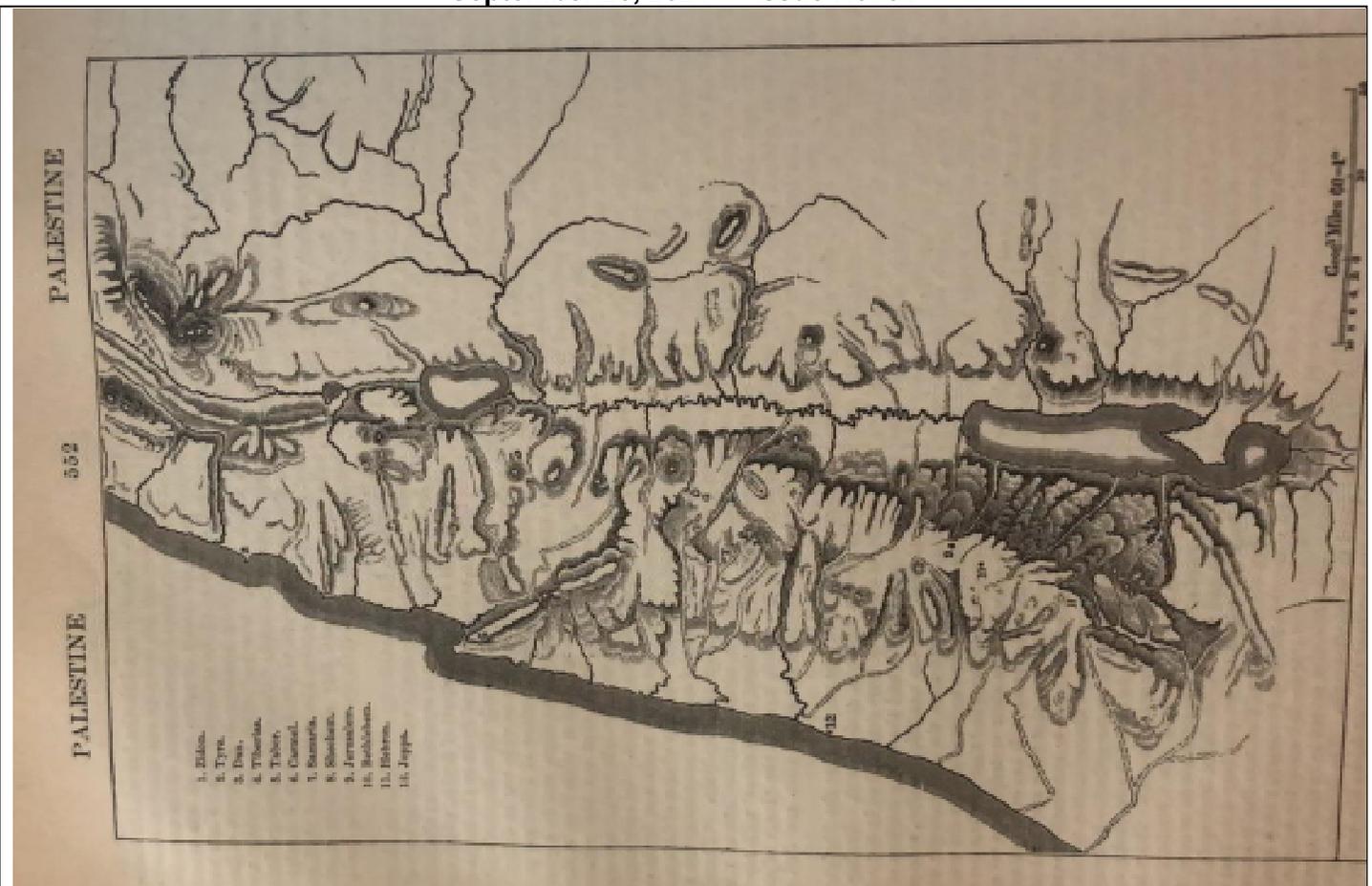
When Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, at that time, God dwelled among the Israelites in a moveable tent which was called “the Tabernacle.” Moses constructed this tent according to a pattern that the LORD had shown him when he was on Mount Sinai.

“And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them. In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.” (Exodus 25:8,9 NRSV)

This tabernacle existed for almost 500 years because from the Exodus from Egypt until the time the Temple of God was built was 480 years. (1 Kings 6:1)

When the children of Israel entered the promised land, it was described like this: “For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you.” (Deuteronomy 8:7-10 NRSV)

This is a very general description but let us look at a map and a more scholarly examination of this holy land.



When we look at this map there are some things that we must understand about the land in question. Note the following quotation: "The geographical position of Palestine is peculiar. It is central, and yet almost completely isolated."

This is such an important observation.

It is one of the most centrally located of lands, with the primary focus of the land being Jerusalem: "Thus saith the Lord God, This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her." (Ezekiel 5:5)

But, nonetheless, it is indeed isolated and this is something that the LORD wanted.

"Palestine is, by its peculiar situation, almost isolated. Connected physically with the great body the Asiatic continent, it is yet separated from the habitable parts of it by the arid desert of Arabia." (*ibid.*)

This is an important point. When one looks at the previously referenced map of the country, when you look at Jerusalem, starting on the top of the Mount of Olives and heading east, from that point on the zone changes from Mediterranean Zone to a Desert Zone. Standing on the top of the Mount of Olives, if one looks to the west, the topography is much greener whereas looking east, it is much drier.

Building the House of the LORD in Jerusalem

Later on, in the time of Solomon, he built a Temple (or a holy house for the LORD) in Jerusalem. (I Kings 6:1) This house lasted for about 400 years before it was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar in the 6th century BC. (Jeremiah 52:13)

A new Temple was built in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, and it was this Temple that our Lord Jesus spoke about saying: "As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the

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temple. Then he asked them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:1-3 NRSV)

The Temple was located on a mountain just to the west of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

What we want to now look at is the wider question of the place that the LORD selected for His house to be built. This information is very important because the LORD did not just haphazardly choose Jerusalem for His house. He chose this city for a number of reasons which we are going to examine.

What we have to realize is that the region where the LORD selected to build His house has profound and important teachings associated with it. Only those who really seriously study the holy land and the city of Jerusalem itself can really comprehend this matter in the right way.

What does the LORD’s selection of Jerusalem as the city to build His House tell us about Him?

The city of Jerusalem is a very important one to the three monotheistic faiths. Having said that, many who study the Bible or even those who have visited Jerusalem really understand in depth what the selection of this city meant to the LORD and what we can learn from His selection of this city for His house from which His divine teachings were to be given to the world.

Let us look at a number of points about Jerusalem which can help us better understand the mind of the LORD regarding His selection of this city.

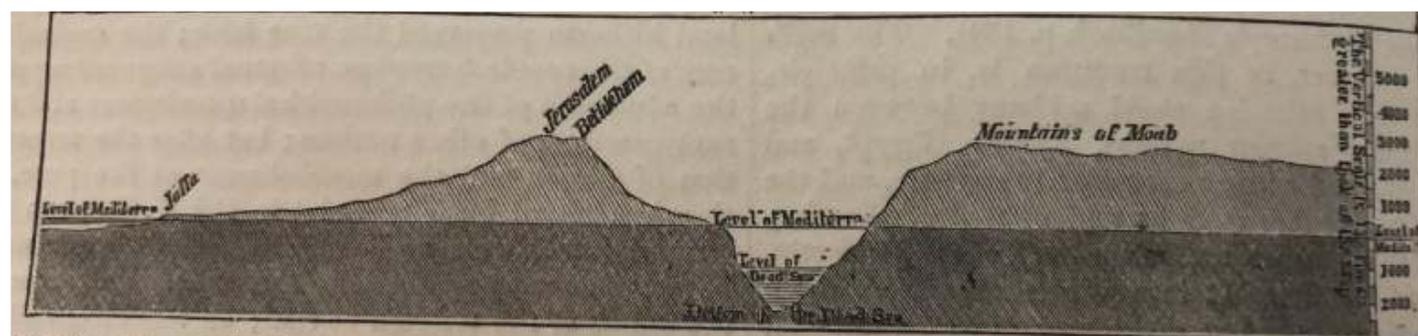
Jerusalem is a city which is at a higher elevation in the land of Israel

The first thing that we have to understand about Jerusalem is its elevation. Many people who study the Bible might not realize this matter or think it important, but not recognizing this geographical fact would be a missed opportunity for learning.

According to accurate measurements, the highest elevation in the Jerusalem area is a point called Nabi Samuel, which is 908 meters (2,979 feet) above sea level. Most of the city is located about 750 meters (2,460 feet) above sea level.

The LORD chose this city at a higher elevation. It is not mountainous but still it is at a higher elevation than the sea and this has a number of implications.

What we can see from this outline map looking at the natural features of the holy land, we can see on the left, Jaffa, which is on the sea and in the middle, we are seeing Jerusalem and Bethlehem, which are on the western mountain ridge. Then, heading east, we can see how steep the down slope is to the Dead Sea and then heading further east up again to the mountains of the country of Moab, which is modern day Jordan.



Outline Map of Palestine, showing the natural features, with section of the country from east to west

Iron Sharpening Iron

New American Standard Bible (Proverbs 27:17)
As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

In regard to: Was the Sop Leavened or Unleavened? (John 13:26-27)

Article by John W. Ritenbaugh
Comments by Ray Daly (Lincoln, North Dakota)

I don't feel that whether the bread at the Passover meal was leavened or unleavened matters all that much. Only the fact that they could legally eat leavened bread for all 24 hours of the 14th. Though had to get rid of leaven by the end of the day. There is no mention that individuals couldn't get rid of it sooner than the 14th.

Editor's Note: I would agree with the fact that leavened bread could be legally eaten on the 14th of Nissan. However, if you are doing the bread, the wine and foot washing together on the 14th as many people do, according to scripture you cannot eat leavened bread with the wine which represents the blood of Christ. **Exo 34:25 Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven; neither shall the sacrifice of the feast of the Passover be left unto the morning.** Also, there is no command anywhere in scripture telling us to keep the Lord's Supper on the early part of the 14th. The Passover meal, bread, wine, and foot washing should all be done on the 15th after sunset as the day is starting. Laura Lee

In regard to: The Christian Sabbath

Article by Catholic Mirror 1893
Comments by Ray Daly (Lincoln, North Dakota)

Regarding the article on the Catholic's changing the Sabbath to Sunday. I think many understand that the CC, while they changed the day of worship from the 7th to the 1st, they did not necessarily dismiss the Sabbath altogether. They admitted they made Sunday the day of their worship but doing so primarily because of the "vision in the sun" that Constantine saw, and it was he who established the 1st day as the day of observance. Until said change was made, the Roman church was observant of the Sabbath as well. And had been doing so from the time they left Babylon in the 500's BC, and many migrated west.

However, what I would like to point out is, that in the not too distant future, it is very likely that Rome will once again begin to observe the 7th day. Look at it from the prophetic teaching of Rev. 6:16. Where the entire earth will see the Lamb sitting with the "Face" on a throne. Since almost all Christianity believes in the coming of the Messiah, would they not try to please him when they see him in that vision? As well, Islam is expecting the coming of a Messiah. So also, the Hindu and Buddhist religions. And it is obvious that none of those seeking said Messiah would even begin to expect him to be a "Sunday Messiah".

We are told that the "beast will hate the whore". Or, the Germanic military will hate the Roman whore", because she will change the day of worship back to the 7th day. This will be the way it was in the early 300's. With the "Sunday" observing Germanics fighting against the "Sabbath" observing Romans. BTW. Did you know that Constantine, before seeing the sign in the sun, not only observed the Sabbath, but as well, he observed much of the law of Moses?

A final thought. We are told that just before "the real end", that the man of sin will do works that, "if it were possible, would deceive even the elect". I doubt if the Sabbath observing "elect" would be even the least deceived, if the man of sin pushed Sunday observance.