

## **ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 108:**

### **“FAMILY SANCTUARY:**

#### **Restoring the Biblically Hebraic Home”**

**John D. Garr, Ph. D.,**

**Founder and President of the Restoration Foundation**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,**

**Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University**

**December 25-2003**

### **MAY THE LORD KEEP YOU AND RICHLY BLESS EACH ONE OF YOU DURING THIS COMING YEAR!!!**

At the threshold of the new year, 2004, it is well to reflect upon the year 2003 which will soon slip away into eternity past. May I share some reflections from three different perspectives: our family, our church, and our world.

#### **Our Family**

At the personal level, I feel like praising God by using the words of the Israelites when they entered into the Promised Land: “The Lord our God . . . has preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed” (Jos 24:17). Truly, this has been my experience during this past year as I have travelled over 100,00 miles to a dozen foreign countries and across the USA conducting a total of 42 weekend SAB-BATH, SECOND ADVENT, and CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE seminars. The Lord has preserved and protected me everywhere I went.

Moses reminded the Israelites of God’s protection, saying: “I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot.” (Deut 29:5). In my case, my clothes and shoes did wear out during this past year, but my health, especially my voice, held up very well during the whole year. I was reminded of God’s protection last Sabbath, December 20, 2003, when finally I was home to enjoy a heartwarming family reunion. Surprisingly, I could hardly speak, because of a miserable cold and sore throat. Could it be that the Lord waited until I had fulfilled all my 2003 speaking engagement, before allowing the

flu bug to visit me? Sometimes sickness is a much needed humbling experience to remind us that we are mortal human beings, constantly dependent upon God for health and strength.

On Sunday, December 21, 2003, my wife and I celebrated our 42nd wedding anniversary. As we sat around the table with all our family members, I could not help but thank God in my heart for having blessed us with such a lovely family, consisting of two sons, a daughter, two daughters-in-law, and four grandchildren. Our daughter Loretta is currently serving as professor of nursing at the School of Nursing of the Florida Hospital. She has won the heart of her students who asked her to be their speaker for their pinning ceremony. To share with you the joy of our happy family reunion I am attaching our latest family picture which I hope you can open.



Our older son, Daniel, is a very successful architect and builder, currently building several prestigious homes close to Lake Michigan. His wife,

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Michelle, is the 7th and 8th grade science teacher at the Andrews University Ruth Murdock Elementary School. They are blessed with two lovely children, Christian and Lauren. Our younger son, Gianluca, is a successful lawyer working in Chicago for one the largest law firms in America. His wife, Silvia, is dedicated to bring up their two daughters, Isabella and Gianna, in the fear of God.

## **OUR CHURCH**

During 2003 our Seventh-day Adventist church has experienced considerable growth in some developing countries and ethnic groups. The statistical report of the General Conference projects our global membership at the end of 2003 to stand at 13,493,840. This represents a growth of about 600,000 members during this past year.

While in some developing countries our Adventist church is experiencing encouraging growth, in some Western countries our church is struggling to survive. I was made aware of this sad reality during my recent speaking engagements in several European countries. In Great Britain, for example, our church has grown primarily among such ethnic groups as the Caribbeans, Hispanic, Portuguese, and Filipinos. Among the native Britons, there has been a steady decline. My estimate is that less than 10% of the 21,000 members of the British Union Conference are native Britons. This means that the total indigenous British membership is less than 2000, which is about a third of what it was 40 years ago when I studied at Newbold College. In Scotland, for example, where I canvassed for four months in the Summer of 1957, our membership has declined from about 600 members 40 years ago to about 200 members today. If the present trend continues, in some countries our Adventist presence will disappear within the next 20 to 30 years.

## **The Challenge of Church Decline**

Church growth is suffering even in North America among the Caucasians and black Americans. The only significant growth is taking place among such immigrant groups as the Hispanic, Filipinos, Koreans, Indonesians, Samoans, and Portuguese (Brazilians). Few years ago, there was considerable growth in the black churches, but this is no longer the case today. During this past year I have spoken in several black churches with over 1000

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members on the conference directory, but less than 200 members in the pews. No attempt is made to update Conference directories, because it could have a disconcerting effect. The result has been a financial retrenchment in some conferences. For example, this past year the Northeastern Regional Conference was forced to fire 48 workers and the Florida Conference 20 workers. Similar actions have been taken by other conferences.

Several factors are contributing to the stagnation or even decline of our membership in some Western countries. It is not the intent of this report to explore such factors. What stands out in my mind is the crisis of identity experienced by an increasing number of our members. I was made aware of this crisis in my recent lecture tour in Europe, when I was asked to address this issue in one of my presentations. To overcome the stigma of sectarianism and gain acceptance in the evangelical community, the tendency has been to minimize the doctrinal and lifestyle differences, and maximize the similarities. The result has been the development of a relational form of Adventist religion, which minimizes doctrinal beliefs and lifestyle practices. Promoting a relationship with the Lord is seen by some as being more important than defining this relationship in terms of obedience. The result is that an increasing number of Adventists are losing their sense of identity and mission.

### **A Lesson from History**

As a church historian I am reminded of the fact that the early Christians were called “misanthropists,” that is, “haters of mankind,” because they rejected some of the popular social practices of their time. They dressed modestly, they did not wear rings, earrings or elaborate hairstyles, they spoke respectfully without cursing, even when martyred for their faith, they did not attend the popular shows at the arena where gladiators fought with wild beast or between themselves, they did not participate in the “Emperor Cult,” and in various pagan festivities. Above all, Tertullian (about A. D. 200) tells that pagans could not understand how Christians could love their enemies more than pagans could love their blood relatives.

Gradually Christians lost their identity by adopting pagan beliefs and practices. In researching the history of the wedding ring for my book *CHRISTIAN DRESS AND ADORNMENT*, I learned that initially Christians did not wear a wedding (betrothal) ring. Eventually they adopted a plain iron or bronze ring as a sign of marital fidelity. Church leaders rightfully approved

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the plain marital ring because of its protective function. But it was not long before the plain iron ring to express conjugal fidelity evolved into elaborate gold rings set with gems and worn on several fingers to display wealth, pride and vanity. This was true not only of the laity but also of the clergy. In fact, bishops and popes came to love their rings so much that they wanted to be buried with them. This explains why the most splendid collection of episcopal rings have been found in sarcophagi (coffins) of bishops and church leaders.

In many ways the evolution of the Christian church from purity to apostasy can be traced through the lifestyle of its members. The reason is simple. What we believe determines what we practice. As the Christian church gradually adopted the platonic, pagan dualistic view of human nature with the mortal body and immortal soul, saving the soul became more important than caring for the body. This resulted in two extreme tendencies. Monastic orders treated the body with contempt, often depriving it of food and cleanliness, to ensure the salvation of their soul. Wealthy Christians and most church leaders indulged in the pleasures of the flesh: food, drink, extravagant clothing, and various forms of entertainment, since they believed that their soul was not stained or polluted by their body.

In many ways the Reformation attempted to recapture, not only the beliefs of the Apostolic church, but also the purity and simplicity of primitive Christianity. It is not surprising that Christian Lifestyle was an important issue in the Post-Reformation period, especially among Calvinistic churches. Revivalists like John Wesley, the Founder of the Methodist Movement, spent considerable time teaching people how to live the Christian life. It is interesting to read some of Wesley's eloquent sermons on Sabbathkeeping, drinking, dress, adornment, and entertainment. Today, he would be a *persona non grata* in the Methodist church that he founded, because his standards have long been forgotten.

The primary concern of many Evangelical preachers today is to teach people how to be saved, rather than how to live the new life in Christ. For them, lifestyle issues like Sunday observance, drinking, dress, adornment, entertainment, divorcing and remarrying, family worship, Christian education, business ethics, civil and political responsibilities, are not the real the Gospel, because they belong to the material sphere of our existence and not to the spiritual realm of the soul.

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In a subtle and deceptive way the historical dualistic mentality is still affecting Christian beliefs and practices today. It is a mentality based on a faulty, unbiblical conception of human nature. We have seen in the previous newsletter that in the Bible the soul does not exist apart from the body, because the soul is the animating principle of the body. This means that the way we treat our body affects our soul, that is, our spiritual relationship with the Lord.

The unique contribution of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is its commitment to help people recapture the wholistic view of the Gospel commission to save the whole person, not just the soul. This entails teaching people how to honor God with their whole being, including the proper use of Sacred Time (Sabbath, daily worship) and of Secular Time (daily work, recreation), the stewardship of their finances, healthy diet, good eating habits, exercise, abstinence from drugs and alcohol, wholesome entertainment, church and civil responsibility. Obviously, such habits cannot be developed during a three weeks evangelistic crusade.

### **Our Greatest Need**

The greatest need of our Adventist Church today is for a genuine SPIRITUAL REVIVAL AND REFORMATION. In ancient Israel every year the trumpets were sounded throughout the land on the First Day of the Seventh Month (Feast of Trumpets, known as *Rosh Hashannah*) to inaugurate the solemn TEN DAYS OF REPENTANCE which terminated on the Day of Atonement. Jews still refer to these 10 days as “Days of Awe” or “Days of Repentance.” During these ten days the Jews were and are invited to reexamine their lives, repent of and forsake known sins, and prepare themselves to stand before the judgment seat of God on the Day of Atonement—the Day of their Final Cleansing and Restoration.

As God’s people in ancient time needed every year to hear the Trumpet Call to repentance, so God’s church today needs to hear at least one a year God’s loud voice saying: “Fear God and give glory to Him for the hour of his judgment has come” (Rev 14:7). What I am proposing is not a literal resurrection of the Feast of the Trumpet, but its spiritual application to our church needs.

We use to have in our Adventist churches the “FALL WEEK OF PRAYER,” with a special reading for each day. The time has come to resur-

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rect and give new life to such a practice. If as a worldwide church we were to devote one week each year to spiritual introspection, reexamining our lives, and seeking God's cleansing grace, the identity crisis we talked about before would be largely resolved. Our appearance will show how God's grace has changed our life from inside out. Our greatest need is not merely new methods of church planting, but primarily a fresh experience of the cleansing and enabling grace of God in our lives.

Such an experience will reenergize us and equip us to touch the life of others. Fortunately, we do not have to wait for the deliberations of church administrators to make this happen, because it can begin right now in the sanctuary of our hearts and of our homes. This is why I have chosen to post for this newsletter, an inspiring and informative Bible study on FAMILY SANCTUARY, by John D. Garr, Ph. D., Th. D . I will tell you more about him and his essay later on.

## **OUR WORLD**

The year 2003 will go down in the annals of history as the year when American troops and their allies in few weeks won the Iraqis war, but have failed so far to establish a lasting peace in the country. Acts of terrorism continue unabated in Iraq and other parts of the world, claiming the lives of soldiers and innocent people. More American soldiers have lost their life since the Fall of Baghdad, than during the war itself.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the war or terrorism is far from over. America and few Allied countries cannot police the world, eradicating terroristic organizations. Striking some major terroristic targets, does not diminish their ability to operate, because their organization consists of a loose network of thousand of small cells consisting of five or six people, who receive intensive religious and military indoctrination. These cells are scattered in many parts of the world.

We have entered into a new age when the FEAR OF TERROR is becoming part of our daily life. Jesus predicted this endtime condition preceding His coming, saying that there will "distress of nations in perplexities, . . . men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world" (Luke 21:26). What is unique about this endtime paralyzing fear, is that the enemies are no longer the superpowers, but sincere Moslems who are willing to sacrifice their lives as suicide bombers for the sake of their personal salvation and of the advancement of Islam.



In a scholarly and well-documented essay entitled “Understanding Suicide Terrorism: Genesis and Future of Suicide Terrorism,” Scott Atran notes that “the fact that the number of suicide attacks by Al-Qaeda (or its allies) and by Palestinian bombers one month after Baghdad’s fall (5 in Israel, 3 in Saudi Arabia, 5 in Morocco) was higher than for every month in the preceding year suggests that, contrary to earlier claims by President Bush and others in the U.S. Administration and media, the war on terrorism has not appreciably diminished the scourge of suicide attack—the most devastating form of terrorism” (<http://www.interdisciplines.org/terrorism/papers/1/23>).

### **Terrorists are not Ignorant Cowards**

With compelling reasoning and documentation Atran argues that contrary to popular perception, suicide terrorists are not “crazed cowards bent on senseless destruction who thrive in poverty and ignorance. Recent research indicates they have no appreciable psychopathology and are as educated and economically well-off as surrounding populations.”

A good example is the 19 men who carried out the September 11 attack. “All 9/11 attackers, including 15 Saudis and 4 others of Middle Eastern origin, were young, single males from middle class families. All were recruited in Europe by religious organizations connected with Al-Qaeda, when most were enrolled in a secular higher education curriculum. No ‘personality’ defects were evident before the attack, and none discovered in hindsight (despite intense scrutiny).” (A. Karatnycky, “Under our very noses,” *National Review*, 5 November 2001; available at [www.freedomhouse.org/media/0501nr.htm](http://www.freedomhouse.org/media/0501nr.htm)).

Atran cites numerous scholarly studies that show that “Suicide terrorists generally are not lacking in legitimate life opportunities relative to their general population. As the Arab press emphasizes, if martyrs had nothing to lose, sacrifice would be senseless. ‘He who commits suicide kills himself for his own benefit, but he who commits martyrdom sacrifices himself for the sake of his religion and his nation... The Mujahed is full of hope’” (A. Krueger, J. Maleckova, NBER Working Paper no. w9074, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, July 2002; available at <http://papers.nber.org/papers/W9074>. A. Krueger, “Poverty doesn’t create terrorists,” *New York Times*, 29 May 2003.)



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**Terrorist Receive Intense Religious Indoctrination**

It is well to remember that suicide terrorists are NOT people without a hope for a better tomorrow, but they are “full of hope.” The intense indoctrination into the teachings of Islam, brainwashes them into believing that by sacrificing their life to kill the infidels, they save themselves and advance the cause of Islam. Most Muslim are NOT terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslim who receive intensive religious indoctrination.

To counter anti-Moslem sentiments, the media characterizes the terrorists as fanatical maniacs who do not represent Islam’s teachings. This view can hardly be supported by the teachings of the Koran. In my research on “Violence in the Bible and Koran,” posted in Endtime Issues No. 85 and accessible at my website, I have shown that Muhammed clearly taught his followers to advance the Islam religion by means of the sword: “Fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war). But if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity [become Moslem], then open the way for them.” (Sura 9:5).

Men recruited for terroristic activities receive an intensive religious indoctrination, which lasts, according to some sources, about 18 months. The emotions of these recruits are manipulated by charismatic teachers who make them believe that by sacrificing their life they save themselves, their families, while advancing the cause of Islam.

In view of the religious nature of suicide terrorism, the first line of defence should be, not merely preventing bombers from reaching their targets, but primarily reducing drastically the receptivity of potential recruits by helping them understand the senselessness and immorality of suicide terrorism as a means of personal and national salvation.

We need to help our Muslim friends understand that the teachings of the Koran on the use of violence to advance the cause of Islam, are immoral and to be condemned by all peace-loving people. We need to help them understand that the sword of itself never brings peace to the world. Above all, we need to help them discover the beauty and power of the message of the Gospel—which is a message of love and forgiveness, a message of peace through internal transformation, rather than through external suppression of enemies and territorial expansion.

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This strategy of embarking in a worldwide educational program designed to help sincere suicide bombers to understand the senselessness and immorality of their missions, will be largely ignored, because it is not politically correct. The alternative is to fight suicide terrorists militarily. Such a war on terrorists will drag on indefinitely, because their religious fervor constantly inspire new recruits to join new cells in order to trained to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their eternal destiny and the advancement of Islam.

Simply stated, in spite of all the political rhetoric, terrorism is here to stay and to grow, because among the 1.3 billion Moslems around the world, there is a vast reservoir of impressionable men and women, who are willing to be indoctrinated by charismatic Mujadins. These teachers manipulate the emotions of the recruits, inspiring them to become martyrs for the cause of Allah, and thus enter immediately into the pleasure of Paradise.

The escalation of terroristic activities reminds of Christ's endtime prediction: "And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold" (Matt 24:12). The intensification of wickedness, manifested especially in the senseless destruction of human lives and property, serves as a constant reminder that soon, very soon, our Savior will come to destroy all forms of wickedness and to establish everlasting peace and justice.

## **NEW RECORDING OF SABBATH/ADVENT SEMINARS**

Many people who have attended my newly revamped PowerPoint seminars on the SABBATH, SECOND ADVENT, and CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE, have urged me to produce a fresh VIDEO and DVD recording of my presentations. The aim is to make these timely messages available to TV stations, churches, and institutions around the world.

It took sometime to find a suitable time and place for this recording. I was looking for a cozy sanctuary with a good screen that comes down toward the center of the platform, so that I can stand besides it while delivering each lecture with about 100 PowerPoint slides. After visiting several churches in the proximity of Andrews University, I chose the brand new Michiana Fil-Am SDA Church. The church is located only a mile away from our Andrews University campus on 8454 Kephart Lane, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

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For those coming from out of town to attend the TV taping, Kephart Lane branches off HWY 31 at the corner of the RITE-AID PHARMACY in Berrien Springs. Just drive down one mile on Kephart Lane and you will see the new MICHIANA FIL-AM SDA CHURCH on your left.

The taping will be done by the Andrews University Media Center, known as “International Learning Systems.” The crew, directed by Larry Bothe, tapes almost every Sabbath the Pioneer Memorial Church divine service. Their studio is well equipped with the latest digital technology for both taping and editing the recordings.

The first trial run of the taping will take place on Sabbath, January 3, 2003, at the 11:00 a. m. divine service. The title of my PowerPoint meditation is “HOW TO BUILD A HAPPY, LASTING MARRIAGE.” With the help of 100 PowerPoint slides I present seven biblical principles for building a happy, lasting marriage. This meditation is largely drawn from my book THE MARRIAGE COVENANT. The purpose of this trial run is for me to become accustomed to the platform setting and for the crew to test the logistic of their equipment.

The official taping will take place two weeks later on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, January 16, 17, and 18, 2004. God willing, during these three days we will tape a total of 7 lectures, 5 of them on the SABBATH and 2 on the SECOND ADVENT. The newly developed PowerPoint CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE seminar will be taped at another date in the near future. I have invested over 3000 hours developing the PowerPoint seminars and I am looking forward to offer them on VIDEO or DVD format to our churches and institutions in America and overseas.

On numerous occasions I have been asked, “When will you present your seminars at Andrews University?” Finally, the time and place has been set. If you live within a driving distance from Andrews University, you are welcome to attend any or all the lectures, which have been warmly received by audiences in many parts of the world. For the sake of those interested to attend the taping sessions, I am posting the schedule of the time, title, and a brief summary of each presentation.

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**FRIDAY EVENING: January 16, 7:30 to 8:30 p. m.**

**“My Search for the Sabbath at a Vatican University”**

This opening PowerPoint presentation is the human interest story of the Sabbath in my life. With the help of 110 slides, I take the audience in a visual way through my pilgrimage of faith, sharing the providential way the Lord led me to a Vatican university in Rome in my search for a deeper understanding and experience of His Holy Sabbath Day.

The pictures include Pope Paul VI and the gold medal he donated me for earning the *summa cum laude* academic distinction. I will mention briefly how some religious leaders in different parts of the world are presently responding to the message of the Sabbath. This gripping testimony will warm your heart.

**SABBATH MORNING: January 17, 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.**

**“The Sabbath and the Savior”**

This is Christ-centered meditation presented with 100 PowerPoint slides. The meditation suggests seven ways in which the Sabbath can help us experience the presence, peace and rest of Christ in our lives. The seven points of the sermon are essentially a nutshell summary of the seven chapters of my book *DIVINE REST FOR HUMAN RESTLESSNESS*.

**SABBATH MORNING: January 17, 11:30 to 12:30 a.m.**

**“The Sabbath as a Time of Service”**

This is a practical mediation on how to keep the Sabbath to gain the greatest blessings out of it. With the help of 100 PowerPoint slides, I explain how the Sabbath offers us time and opportunities to serve God, ourselves, and others. Our fellow believers in many parts of the world have appreciated this meditation, because it suggests practical principles and examples on how to make the Sabbath a day of joyful celebration of God’s creative and redemptive love.

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**SABBATH AFTERNOON: January 17, 4:00 to 6:00 p. m.**

**"The Sabbath Under Crossfire:  
A Look at Recent Developments"**

This informative lecture on the latest Sabbath/Sunday developments has drawn capacity crowds everywhere. In many ways the lecture summarizes the highlights of my book **THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE**. With the help of 120 PowerPoint slides, I discuss two significant recent developments. First, I examine the unprecedented attacks against the Sabbath by Pope John Paul II, Catholic and Protestant scholars, and former sabbatarians. Second, I give an update report of the unparalleled rediscovery of the Sabbath by scholars, ministers, and various religious organizations. This is a lecture you do not want to miss.

**SUNDAY MORNING: January 18 - 10:00 to 11:00 a. m.**

**"From Sabbath to Sunday: How it Came About?"**

In this PowerPoint lecture I present the highlights of the research done in Vatican libraries in Rome on how the change came about from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity. The research was published in my dissertation **FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY**—a book which has been translated in several languages and has circulated far and wide around the world. The focus of the lecture is on the role of the Bishop of Rome in leading Christians away from Sabbathkeeping to Sundaykeeping. This lecture provides much valuable information that you do not want to miss.

**SUNDAY MORNING: January 18 - 11:30 to 12:30 a. m.**

**"The Certainty of the Advent Hope"**

This PowerPoint lecture is largely drawn from my book **THE ADVENT HOPE FOR HUMAN HOPELESSNESS**. The lecture (100 slides) is divided into two parts. The first identifies five major factors which are causing many Christians to neglect or reject the hope in a soon-coming Savior. The second part articulates five major reasons for believing in the certainty of Christ's imminent Return. Special attention is given to the unprecedented fulfillment of some of the endtime signs given by Christ and clarified by NT writers. This presentation will revive the certainty of the Advent Hope in your heart.

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**SUNDAY EVENING: January 18 - 7:00 to 8:00 p. m.**

**“Living the Advent Hope”**

This practical meditation delivered with 100 PowerPoint slides, invites us to reflect upon what does it mean to live in the joyful expectancy of our soon-coming Savior. To make the presentation practical, I focus on five distinguishing characteristics of an Adventist lifestyle. The purpose of this study is to help us appreciate more fully how the Blessed Hope should motivate to live goodly and balanced lifestyles.

Please accept my personal invitation to attend any or all of the lectures on January 16, 17, and 18, 2004. I look forward to a blessed time together.

### **A THANK YOU NOTE**

Words fail to express my appreciation to all of you who during this past year have taken time to interact with me and to encourage me in my ministry of biblical research. Thank you for sharing this newsletter with your friends and to encourage them to subscribe. May the Lord richly bless your life and work during this coming year with His wisdom and grace. **A HAPPY AND BLESSED NEW YEAR TO ALL OF YOU!!!**

### **INTRODUCTION TO ESSAY**

This is the first time I am inviting a non-Adventist scholar to contribute an essay to our newsletter. The reason becomes evident as you begin reading the essay. A word of introduction about the author, Dr. John D. Garr, will help you to appreciate more fully the essay you are about to read.

In previous newsletters I reported on a unique development of our times, namely, the rediscovery of biblical truths such as the Sabbath by scholars of different persuasions. Dr. Garr is a shining example of this development. He stands out for his commitment to rediscover and restore the biblical roots of the Christian faith. To accomplish this objective, he founded the RESTORATION FOUNDATION as an educational resource that brings together scholars of different persuasions who are committed to restore the biblical and Hebraic foundation of the Christian faith.

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About 10 years ago Dr. Garr launched the RESTORE journal, with the goal of “Restoring the Biblical Hebrew Heritage to the Christian Believer.” The contributors are all reputable scholars of different persuasion. You will enjoy reading especially the Spring 2000 issue, which is exclusively devoted to the Sabbath: RESTORING SHABBAT: TIME FOR GOD AND FAMILY. He invited me to contribute an article: “The Good News of the Sabbath.” You can order copies at Dr. Garr’s website given below. If you have a problem to order a copy, feel free to contact me at (269) 471-2915. I do have a limited supply on hand.

Dr. Garr is an academician with a pastor’s heart. He has authored a dozen of books where he explains great biblical truths in terms that lay persons can understand and apply to their lives. Recently he sent me a review copy of his latest book FAMILY SANCTUARY: RESTORING THE BIBLICALLY HEBRAIC HOME. As I began reading the book, I was captivated by its powerful summon to recapture the biblical vision of the home as a place of fellowship and interaction, study and learning, and prayer and worship. The book challenges Christians to make their home a family sanctuary and a center for spiritual development.

I called Dr. Garr to ask him permission to share with you chapter 3 of the book, which is entitled “THE DOMESTIC TEMPLE.” He graciously emailed to me the chapter in digital format. The following chapter is entitled “Sanctuaries in Time,” and deals with the biblical Sabbath and other divine appointments for the family and the church. Dr. Garr is a friend of our Adventist church. He has visited Andrews University, delivering some lectures.

For complete information on this book and Dr. Garr’s many other books and publications, consult [www.restorationfoundation.org](http://www.restorationfoundation.org) or write: Restoration Foundation, P. O. Box 421218, Atlanta, GA 30342 or phone (678) 615-3568. *Family Sanctuary* is available for \$15, plus \$3 shipping and handling.



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**FAMILY SANCTUARY****Restoring the Biblically Hebraic Home****By John D. Garr, Ph. D., Th. D.,****Founder and President of the Restoration Foundation**

Adam and Eve communed with God when he came to their garden home in the cool of the day.<sup>1</sup> They did not go to a shrine that God had built for them. God came to them in their home, the very first house church. Their home was a natural place for worship and communion. It needed no embellishment or grandiose, imposing facade. Everything was simple. It was just Adam and Eve—the first family—and God. The progenitors of the human race walked with God in a sweet communion of blissful joy and fulfillment.

Even after the fall, the human family was not given a physical sanctuary in which to repose for interaction with God. Indeed, the process continued as the simple act of “walking with God.”<sup>2</sup> For those descendants of Adam who remained faithful to God, the Eternal was ever-present, not some distant, unapproachable being or one who could be approached only in the confines of a specific space. The prototype in heaven was replicated in the human family on earth. The heavenly sanctuary, as it were, came down to man and was manifest in the home. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, was so dedicated to this divine walk that he was translated from earth to God’s presence.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequently the divine order for family disintegrated when the sons of God were joined to the daughters of men.<sup>4</sup> Finally, only Noah had maintained the purity of his lineage,<sup>5</sup> and as a result he “found grace in the eyes of the LORD”<sup>6</sup> and saved humanity in his family sanctuary, the ark. Salvation from the deluge was accomplished in the context of family. The family, therefore, was the locus for spiritual relationship in the beginning of time, and it remained so in the patriarchal age.

**THE ABRAHAMIC FAMILY OF FAITH**

Sarah and Abraham’s tent was a shining example of the a family sanctuary, a home church. Though theirs was a transient, nomadic existence, they had a fixed and continuing sanctuary, their family. Their tent was their place of meeting, fellowship, study, and prayer. Though Abraham appeared before the priest-king of Salem to make an offering and receive a blessing,<sup>7</sup>

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his principal venue for interaction with God was his own home, with his own family and the myriads of guests who frequented their portable sanctuary.

Rabbinic tradition asserts that Sarah's tent was open on all four sides, demonstrating the profound hospitality of her home. It also suggests that Sarah was such a powerful prophetess that she is believed to be the first woman to whom the powerful ode of praise recorded in Proverbs 31 was sung. This home was so godly that it could welcome the Lord himself into its fellowship. Accompanied by two angels, God came to the sanctuary of Abraham and Sarah's tent.<sup>8</sup>

Abraham became the father of the faithful because he believed God and immediately carried out his divine instructions.<sup>9</sup> He also ensured the fact that his descendants after him would do justice and love mercy by instructing them in their family sanctuary.<sup>10</sup> Abraham's faithfulness in family worship and teaching gained him the favor of God and was among the divine reasons for his election as the progenitor of the faith race.

Until the time when God brought the Hebrew descendants of the patriarch of faith to Sinai and there constituted them as the nation of Israel, all the worship functions of the Abrahamic family were carried out in the context of the family. Even the great event that brought their freedom from Egyptian slavery was manifest not in a corporate worship experience but in each individual Israelite home.

“Place the lamb's blood on the doorposts and lintels of your houses,” the Israelites were instructed. “Remain in your houses, eating the roasted lamb and the bread of haste (*matzoh*).”<sup>11</sup> Surely God could have had Moses instruct Aaron to sacrifice one lamb for all of Israel in a solemn public ceremony. One great liturgical exercise for all would have made more sense! But, the action that brought salvation to Israel was a family affair. Moses had instructed the Israelites: “Each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.”<sup>12</sup> God was going to deliver all of Israel; however, the method that he would employ for their deliverance was manifest one family at a time through house-church worship that lasted the entire night!

From the time of the Exodus until the present day, the primary annual worship experience for the descendants of those who were delivered from Egypt has been the Passover. The divine appointment has been celebrated from year to year for millennia in the context of family as it was on that first

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Passover night. Parents and grandparents lead each family in this act of remembrance that God enjoined that night upon the Israelites throughout all their generations, forever. All family members, from the oldest to the youngest, celebrate the fact that they were personally delivered from Egypt. The entire celebration remains foremost a family worship experience. In the spirit of the hospitality that is so essential to the Jewish mindset, the family sanctuary is also expanded to include extended family members (aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, and nieces), friends, and even strangers. The family sanctuary is not a closed, exclusive circle. It is an open, inclusive company that invites others to share in the sanctity of familial worship and fellowship.

Following the Exodus, the Hebrew family became God's nation, a kingdom of priests.<sup>13</sup> Assembled at Sinai, all the families of the Israelites were organized into one extended family, the corporate assembly of Israel. The newly birthed nation received a constitution, the Torah, an outline of God's instructions to his children. Within that constitution were instructions of how the unified family of Israel as a corporate entity should worship in covenant with God. In effect, the thousands of home churches in the Sinai desert became history's largest mega-church, one of perhaps two million people! Corporate and community fellowship, study, and worship are essential and can be of any size that is practical; however, the fundamental unit of every corporate body must always be the family.

### **GOD'S TENT—MAN'S TENT**

In order to facilitate corporate worship and to systematize and standardize a uniform order for personal and family devotion, God instructed Moses to build a sanctuary, a *mishkan* (tabernacle). The sanctuary was to be portable, housed in a tent. God's sanctuary was to go with the people, not vice versa.<sup>14</sup> The central elements of that material structure were transportable, designed to accompany the Israelites wherever they went. God's house had no fixed dwelling place. It was simply with his people. Just as God had maintained personal contact with the foundational entity of his society, the home, so the tabernacle in the wilderness was established to function in the midst of the camp of Israel: God's tent was right in the middle of all the family tents of this transient people.

The implements and appliances of God's house were not mystifying objects that were beyond understanding of all but a monastic, priestly class. They were objects that reflected ordinary Hebrew family values. The laver that demanded ritual purity of the priests and the sacrifices was but a formal

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manifestation of the Israelites' concern with personal cleanliness. "Change your garments and be clean," their father Jacob had already commanded them after his encounter with God at Peniel.<sup>15</sup>

The table of shewbread merely underscored their understanding that God was the one who brought forth bread from the earth and rained down bread from heaven for their sustenance in the desert.<sup>16</sup> The menorah reflected the light that had symbolized the divine presence in their homes long before it did so in the sanctuary. The altar of incense reflected their love of spices and the smells of sweetness in contrast to the malodorous scents of life among the various animals that were essential to their nomadic existence. The portable sanctuary, therefore, was patterned after the Israelite tent home, dating back to Sarah and Abraham's tent and beyond.

After Israel inherited the Promised Land, the focus of worship remained with the family. The primary vehicle for social and worship activities was the home. No greater illustration of this truth can be found than in the narrative one of Israel's most exhilarating corporate worship exercises. When King David returned the Ark of the Covenant to prominence in Israel, he led the assembled multitude in ecstatic praise, dancing before the Lord with all his might. What a profound public demonstration of passionate devotion to the God of Israel! David's thoughts, however, were not lost in this profound exercise of public worship, a momentary existential experience. He immediately retired to his home for this express purpose: "David returned to bless his household."<sup>17</sup>

Even though there were priests in Israel who had been specifically commissioned with the responsibility of bestowing God's blessing on the children of Israel,<sup>18</sup> David remembered his primary role as the leader of his household and returned from a great corporate worship exercise to the sanctuary of his home so he could bless his family. David's home, not the congregation or its establishment for religion, was his primary sanctuary of blessing and the place for his personal devotion.

Subsequently, David wanted what he had in the splendor of his palace to be replicated and even superseded in a national sanctuary for all Israel.<sup>19</sup> He purposed to build God a house. God did not specifically give instructions for this structure as he had for the tabernacle; however, he allowed Solomon to complete the task. At that time, the official religion was established in the temple.

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**THE MINI-TEMPLE**

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After many generations, the political leadership and the temple cultus became so corrupt and oppressive that God himself summoned a pagan king to destroy both. Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian overwhelmed Jerusalem, destroyed the palaces and the temple, and led the people away in chains of captivity. Faced with the loss of the very implements and system of worship that they had come to trust, the Israelites were challenged to find an alternate means of worshipping God. By the rivers of Babylon, they hung their harps on the willows and lamented, “How can we sing the LORD’s songs in a foreign land?”<sup>20</sup>

Their grief over the loss of their corporate sanctuary could not, however, suppress their passion for worshipping God. After a time, they recognized that God could again be worshipped in the context of their own homes and in corporate exercises in the same ways in which he had been honored before either the tabernacle or the temple had been built. They came to realize that the center of worship had always been the home and that the corporate exercises of worship to which they were called<sup>21</sup> could be fulfilled outside the temple cultus. What eventually became formalized in their understanding and belief was first a practical reality in their lives. Their homes became mini-temples. Then, as families assembled for fellowship and corporate worship, their meetings became mini-temples.

In the exile, the emphasis of worship was returned to the people, to the family, and to the extended family, the synagogue. There was no temple, no formal material structures dedicated exclusively to worship. The synagogues were meetings (reunions), and the synagogues assembled in homes or in public places. The family was the church, and the church was the extended family, the congregation.<sup>22</sup> Buildings were not the object of worship: God was! And God could be worshipped in the most humble of sanctuaries, even in the hovel of a slave family’s hut.

When Israel returned from captivity to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, the newly discovered (perhaps even newly restored) institution of the synagogue continued. Worship could be maintained even without a central geographical focus. It could be manifest in each meeting of the people, whether just a single family assembled for study and devotion or in a meeting of hundreds or thousands of extended family members (the synagogue).

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Eventually, the sages of Israel came to view each Jewish home as a *mikdash me'at*, a small sanctuary or mini-temple. As such, the home was viewed as a small version of the ancient temple in Jerusalem. What had functioned for millennia without formalization was finally recognized by Israel's spiritual leaders. The Jewish home remains to this day a mini-sanctuary. The one institution that God designed as foundational for relationship among his earthly children is to be replicated in each individual home around the world. In reality, the tabernacle and temple were merely extended manifestations of the home. The undeniable importance of the home as the center for spiritual development is clearly underscored by its formal recognition in the Jewish community as a temple in miniature.

## A DOMESTIC PRIESTHOOD

In order to carry out the functions of sanctuary, some form of priesthood must be manifest. In Israel's sanctuaries, God ordained the tribe of Levi and more specifically the sons of Aaron to fulfill this role. The functions of the priesthood were threefold: to make sacrifices for sin, to teach God's Word, and to lead in corporate worship. Each of these functions remained fully operative when the first-century New Covenant community emerged.

First, Jesus himself entered into the Most Holy Place in heaven once and for all time, offering his own blood to atone for all the sins of humanity, past, present, and future.<sup>23</sup> Though all will not believe and will not, therefore, be saved from their sins, provision was made in that one event of redemption to atone for all human sin. For the church, the sacrificial role of priesthood under the Sinai covenant was reversed. Whereas the Aaronic priesthood had offered men's sacrifices for sin to God, the priesthood of all believers in the church offers Jesus, God's only sacrifice for sin, to men, saying, "Be reconciled to God."<sup>24</sup> By being the witnesses that he commissioned them to be,<sup>25</sup> this royal priesthood literally sacrifices the gospel of God, offering it to humanity.<sup>26</sup>

Second, the leaders both of the community and the family were commissioned to teach the Word of God. They underscored God's instructions for mankind by both being living witnesses, fulfilling those instructions in their own lives, and by continually reinforcing the responsibility of individuals and the community of faith to be obedient to the law of Christ.

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Third, the Christian leaders and heads of household were to lead in acts of worship and praise to the Almighty. All believers everywhere are to do all that they do to the glory of God,<sup>27</sup> to offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to his name,<sup>28</sup> and to ascribe greatness and honor to the Most High God. When a truly Hebraic understanding of worship is present in the church, the exercise of reverence both in congregational and familial settings is continual.<sup>29</sup>

In the New Covenant community, the three functions of priesthood are carried out on four levels. First is the High Priest, Jesus, who atones for sins, teaches righteousness, and engenders worship. Jesus is the High Priest in the temple or sanctuary in heaven.<sup>30</sup> The second level of priesthood is manifest in the leaders whom God has positioned to provide oversight and protection for the community of faith in all of its various levels of manifestation. These are the leaders or priests in the spiritual temple,<sup>31</sup> the congregation. The third level is the priesthood in the home, with the head of each household charged with the responsibility of instructing the family in ways of righteousness and leading in worship. Parents are leaders or priests in the temple of the home.

The fourth level is the priesthood of all human beings and more particularly of all believers. Since every human body is designed to be a temple for God,<sup>32</sup> anyone can function as a priest to approach God for himself to obtain the forgiveness of sins and acceptance into the family of God. The only mediator is the High Priest himself.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, all believers who have come to faith in God function as priests on a continuing basis,<sup>34</sup> having direct access to the High Priest for the forgiveness of sins, for understanding of God's instructions for mankind, and for direct worship of the Heavenly Father.

In Christian history, it is the third level of priesthood that has been generally neglected. This is the area that demands restoration for the health of the church in general and for the well-being of individuals in specific. The church has been very careful to give preeminence in all things to Jesus the High Priest. A proper understanding that priesthood extends to all believers has also been prominent in much of Christianity. Additionally, Christians have generally manifest a biblically mandated show of respect for leaders in the church who have been chosen to lead the faith community in things pertaining to God. In the process, however, the organized church and virtually all believers have neglected the important level of priesthood that should function in every home.



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It is a simple fact of history that familial worship predated corporate worship, not vice versa. As a matter of fact, corporate exercises were merely extensions of familial worship to the extended family and community. This in no way obviates or minimizes the importance of or the need for organized approaches to corporate worship. It does underscore a long-neglected vital element in the life of the corporate worshipping community that Christians call church. The biblical family was and always will be the locus for spiritual growth. If the family is first a mini-temple, then the congregation is a mini-temple in the expanded dimension for which it was designed.

If the home is a temple, then it follows that a priesthood must be represented in the home. A temple without a functioning priestly office and ritual is nothing but an empty shell, for the sole reason that a temple exists is to facilitate the worship exercises that pertain to the physical structure.

In order to make a home a temple with a functioning priestly office, however, one must have a clear understanding of the principles and practice of priesthood. All the functions of the priesthood in the ancient temple in Jerusalem, therefore, must also be manifest in the home as they are in the corporate community of believers. The form and detail may be somewhat different, but the principles must be faithfully replicated.

The head of each household—ideally the father—should function in a priestly role toward the rest of the family. The firstborn sons of ancient Israel belonged to the Lord. Apparently, God intended that they would make up the priesthood; however, they were redeemed and replaced by the Levites.<sup>35</sup> Since leadership in the home has been biblically delegated to husband and father, he should assume the responsibility of leading his family in things pertaining to God. The ideal, however, is not always the real, for human weakness and sin militate against the ideal. In situations of human brokenness, substitute means are demanded.

Because the church has removed priesthood functions from the home, it has largely emasculated its male members. The church has relegated most of the males in society to a position of being engaged in “secular” work and therefore not doing God’s work. For this reason, most males do not see a role for themselves in the church. Christianity has come to recognize as “men of God” only those who are fulfilling roles of public ministry. The rest of men are seen as laborers whose function it is to support their families and the organized church.

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The truth is that all men who are believers are “men of God,” sharing equally with the “men of the cloth” this title and function. Work itself is worship, and there is no dichotomy between spiritual work and secular work. It is all spiritual, for it fulfills the divine command, “Six days shall you work.”<sup>36</sup> It should come as no surprise, therefore, that one of the words for worship in Hebrew is also the word for work: *abodah*. The church desperately needs to close the centuries-old clergy-laity gap by understanding that all of its members are men and women of God, not just those who are employed professionally by the church. It also needs to restore the biblically Hebraic understanding that husbands and fathers have a God-given responsibility to be “men of God” in their own homes, leading their families in things pertaining to God.

Every man’s work must also be understood from a biblical perspective as being a “ministry.” The work of ministry is not the exclusive province of those who are gifted to lead the corporate community of believers. It is a function of every man and every woman. The “ministry” of work in every man’s life must, however, be emphasized because work was assigned to the man after the fall of Adam and remains man’s chief source of self-worth.

When all Christian men come to understand that their work is God’s work and that it is a ministry, they are elevated to a state of equality with those men who are leaders in the church. There are no longer two tiers of manhood and worth, clergy and laity. There are simply different functions, different gifts, different administrations. Whereas some are gifted to teach, preach, counsel, or lead in worship, all are gifted with the ministry of working to provide for themselves and their families.

When all work is seen as worship and a ministry, all men can emerge from church-inflicted emasculation to assume the roles of leadership to which they were ordained. Since they are doing God’s work throughout the day, they can come to their homes and continue God’s work as priestly leaders of their own families. Wives and children can find in their own homes the righteous man who demonstrates all the characteristics of Psalm 1 and Psalm 112. Families can delight in the priestly leadership of their head of household rather than reserving respect and awe for “the Reverend.” Much of the counseling load of the clergy would simply disappear.

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Men who have recovered this accurate biblical and Hebraic understanding of their own roles do not have to dominate their wives and children in abusive codependencies in order to gain the respect they feel they need. They realize that they are men of God, responsible to exhibit the qualities of love and tender mercy that Christ manifests toward his bride, the church, and that God himself continually extends toward all his children. Assuming the role of priest in the home places an awesome responsibility on a husband and father. He cannot be a dictator with everyone serving his whims. He must be a facilitator, in love serving both his wife and his children and setting an example of right and generous conduct that those little ones who will replace him on earth can follow. He must sacrifice his own ambitions and “needs” for the sake of love for his family in the same manner in which Jesus gave his life out of love for the church.

### **A HOME CHURCH**

Original Christianity was simply an extension and full manifestation of the model of community interaction, study, and worship that had developed during the Babylonian exile and had become normative for the society into which Jesus and the apostles were born. The synagogue (meeting or assembly) was the dominant functioning expression of daily and weekly exercises of worship throughout Israel and the Jewish diaspora in the first century. The synagogues were not buildings; they were meetings of people. Judaism adopted the Greek word *sunagwgh*, (*sunagoge*) meaning “meeting or assembly,” to describe this phenomenon.

Though the temple and its priesthood maintained an important role in their lives, the temple cultus had come increasingly to share roles of worship with the synagogue in the everyday lives of the Jewish community of Jesus. It was in this matrix that Jesus and his apostles lived their lives as part of a dynamic Jewish community. It was in this setting that they worshipped and expressed their devotion to God.

The Jewish people had discovered during the Babylonian captivity that they could worship God without the temple and without a functioning priesthood. When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple, the people simply reverted to the worship that had originally been in the homes and extended families before the introduction of the priesthood and its attendant cultus. Meetings sprang up in Jewish communities in the captivity as dutiful, worshipping Jewish families cried out to express public devotion to their God. The foundation of a tradition that has transcended more than two millennia emerged. The synagogue was born.

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The earliest synagogues were simply extensions into community-wide models of family worship exercises. First the Jews worshipped God as families; then families came together in communities to worship corporately, thereby multiplying the worship dynamic. The synagogue was never the model that was then replicated in the home. The domestic meeting was rather duplicated and expanded in the synagogue. As always, the family was the foundational model in the corporate community, not vice versa.

Two of the functions of priesthood were immediately manifest in these meetings. First, there was teaching of the Word of God. Second, corporate prayers were offered in the name of all of Israel. Eventually, prayers and acts of piety even came to be viewed as substitutes for the temple sacrifices. This was especially true after the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., when the rabbis at Yavneh recognized what their fellow Jews—the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles—had come to understand, that worship was not restricted to the temple and was more than sacrifices and offerings.<sup>37</sup>

In the midst of this passion for study and worship, however, a new social order was also emerging. The synagogue became a societal meeting dynamic, a mechanism for social interaction, a true place of meeting. It became a Jewish community center. Biblical human interaction provides for both social relationship, worship, and study. Any worshipping community that neglects any of these three areas is deficient.

Social relationship, study, and worship became the three functions of the synagogue. Eventually, the synagogue became known as a *Beth Knesset* (house of meeting),<sup>38</sup> a *Beth Midrash* (house of study), and a *Beth Tefillah* (house of prayer). In the latter case, the prophetic description of the temple itself<sup>39</sup> became a term of identity for the synagogue. Except for carrying out the sacrificial system, the synagogue had become a mini-temple (*mikdash me'at*) in itself. Indeed, its three functions replicated the distinct areas and furnishings of Israel's wilderness tabernacle as well as the three compartments of Abraham and Sarah's tent.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the three synagogal functions were the features of earliest Christianity that developed from the matrix of Second Temple Judaism. Jesus and his disciples were not engaged in establishing an alternative priesthood or a new religion for their Jewish family. They simply continued in complete continuity with the religion and the systems in which they had been reared and with which they were totally

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comfortable. There was no lurching demand for an innovative religious form or substance. They were Jews, their religion was Judaism, and they abandoned neither identity.

What the disciples sought to do was to make their understanding that in the person of Jesus the Messianic expectations of their Jewish family had been fully realized and that God's promise to bring salvation to Israel and the world had brought completion and fulfillment to their ancient system of praise, worship, and service. Large portions of the first-century Jewish community in Israel and abroad came to share this prophetic insight. What eventually came to be thought of as a Gentile religion was in reality one of the most dominant forms of first-century Judean and Galilean Judaism.

### THE SYNAGOGAL MINI-SANCTUARY

The synagogal model was perfectly manifest in the first days of the empowered congregation that eventually came to be known as the church. The disciples' dynamism and impact upon their fellow Jews was said to have been the result of their continuing in the apostles' "teaching," in "fellowship" (including breaking of bread), and in "prayers,"<sup>40</sup> precisely the three functions and appellatives of the synagogue.

The earliest Christian believers were steadfast Jews, functioning as a community in a *Beth Midrash* (apostolic teaching), a *Beth Knesset* (fellowship or social interaction), and a *Beth Tefillah* (prayers)—nothing more and nothing less. As they continued in this tradition, "the LORD added to the congregation daily those who were saved," as many as 5,000 in one day! "Myriads" (tens of thousands) of Jewish Pharisees<sup>41</sup> and large numbers of temple priests<sup>42</sup> openly professed their faith in Jesus as Messiah. Additionally, many signs and wonders were done by the apostles in this dynamic community setting.

Another significant development in the earliest church was the fact that the community "broke bread from house to house."<sup>43</sup> The breaking of bread was an ongoing exercise of fellowship within the Jewish community that has been described by theologians as "table fellowship." People gathered around the tables in their homes and shared food and fellowship, study and worship. The Christian synagogue was a house-church movement. Corporate worship was first a family exercise in which other members of the larger community were invited to share food and fellowship in a purely social

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exercise of community building. Then came the exercises of studying God's Word together and joining in corporate prayers. There was no temple, no cathedral, no church, not even a chapel. There were homes! Family worship was the focus of the earliest congregation of Jesus, the church of Christ.

Leaders emerged from the heads of household, not from a professional clergy class. The earliest trans-local leaders were the apostles themselves who had been trained at the feet of Jesus. They did not, however, see themselves as a replacement for the priesthood in the temple. As a matter of fact, they continued to worship at the temple<sup>44</sup> and even decades after Jesus' ascension recognized the temple priesthood and committed themselves to temple ritual.<sup>45</sup>

## CHRISTIAN CONTINUITY

Neither Jesus nor his apostles intended to create a new religion. They sought only to reform through restoration the religion of their ancestors, the religion that God himself had authored at Sinai and had now perfected at Calvary. They were not attempting to establish a new social or religious order called the church. They *were* continuing in the rich, centuries-old tradition of the Jewish synagogue.

More than three decades after Pentecost, the local manifestations of the church were still called synagogues at least among the Jewish Christian diaspora.<sup>46</sup> The word *church*, along with all of its attendant implications, was a Medieval misrepresentation of what the Greek word *ekklesia* and its Hebrew counterpart *kahal*, meant to Jesus and the apostles. The word *church* that appears in most English version of the Bible should always have been rendered "congregation."

Since the earliest leaders of the church in no way viewed themselves as a new priesthood, they continued as laypersons, servants of the people. The fundamental term applied to all the leaders, including Jesus himself<sup>47</sup> was *diakoneo*, servant or minister.<sup>48</sup> Nowhere in the record of the Apostolic Scriptures are Christian leaders called priests. They functioned in priesthood roles only in the context of synagogal worship, not in the form of temple worship. They fulfilled the priestly functions of teaching and leading in worship; however, they were viewed by others and considered themselves to be servants in the truest synagogal sense.

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God's intention from the beginning was that all of Israel would be a "kingdom of priests."<sup>49</sup> Each Israelite was to function as a priest with access to God for himself, then for his family, and finally for the community. When Jesus fulfilled forever the sacrificial and liturgical system of the tabernacle and temple cultus, he became High Priest of a new priesthood of all believers, the "royal priesthood."<sup>50</sup>

In order for Jesus to be priest, the order had to revert to its original schema, the one employed by God that had made Melchizedek, the king of Salem, the priest of the Most High God when the Abrahamic faith and religion emerged.<sup>51</sup> God's eternal High Priest was his first and only begotten Son.<sup>52</sup> His priesthood was based in his being the first begotten among many brethren,<sup>53</sup> the head of the family of God. The continuing priesthood of believers was based in its service to the family and the extended family and in roles of leadership in home, synagogue, and congregation.<sup>54</sup>

The principle of the priesthood was manifest in ancient times in the priesthood of the head of the household. It was the responsibility of the head of each family to fulfill the roles of priesthood, to lead the family in matters of social interaction, in matters of study, and in matters of worship and prayer.

## THE FAMILY ALTAR

In Jewish homes, the table is more than an appliance for dispensing food. It is an altar. As a matter of fact, the family table is considered to be an altar parallel with that on which the sacrifices were offered in Israel's ancient sanctuaries, both the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple in Jerusalem. This comparison is established in the fact that the Prophet Malachi described the temple altar as being a *shulchan* (table).<sup>55</sup> If God's altar is his table, the sages reasoned, then man's table must also be an altar. This is why Paul, the rabbi from Tarsus, argued that one could not partake of the Lord's table and the table of demons,<sup>56</sup> comparing the ecclesial altar with the altars in temples that were the focus of idolatrous worship of the Greek pantheon of gods.

Unfortunately in a large portion of modern homes, the table is little more than a feeding trough. Grace is rarely said at the table, and in more and more households, the family almost never gathers as a unit around the table. The table or the bar or even the refrigerator and/or microwave, has become little more than a vending machine in a transportation terminal. Everyone grabs a bite in insulated and silent anonymity and quickly moves on. What few words



that are exchanged are yelled over the din of private music piped in through earphones that virtually silence all competition or over the roar of television's mindless, empty laugh tracks. This lack of sanctity for the family table is graphically illustrated in a recent radio commercial for furniture. When the delivery men are told to place the refrigerator in the den next to the television, they wonder, "Won't that make it hard to cook?" The homeowner replies, "Of course not; one of the slots in the home entertainment center is reserved for the microwave!"

Even if the family on occasion eats together, little thought is given to the sacredness of the occasion or of using the time to affirm familial relationships and to strengthen commitment to God. In the modern world, success and pleasure have become the supreme pursuits, the gods to which homage must be paid and endless time devoted. The most valuable of all resources is readily expended upon these empty, unsatisfying deities. What the quest for success does not devour, the lust for pleasure is lurking in the shadows to consume. Nothing is left but the often drug-induced lapse into oblivion that masquerades as sleep.

Understanding the table as an altar elevates mealtime from the mundane to the sublime. The table is not just a food-distribution appliance. It is a sacred place, a spiritual object. What is done there, including the consumption of food, is to be done with reverence and honor to God, the supreme provider. Even eating itself becomes a spiritual exercise, done with the expectation that when one has eaten and is full, he is then to praise the Lord for the bounty of his provision. This was God's first worship instruction to Israel. Israel's first liturgical exercise was to be a prayer of blessing and thanksgiving for God's dietary provision.<sup>57</sup> The God who is blessed at the beginning of the meal as the Sovereign who brings forth bread from the earth is again blessed as the giver of both a good land and the food that it produces.

This most ancient of worship formulae is called in the Jewish community the *Birkath haMazon*. It features a blessing of praise to God for being the one who feeds the entire world. It continues with thanksgiving to God for providing a good and fruitful land with which he constantly sustains his children at every hour. It concludes with a prayer for God to have mercy upon his people Israel and upon Jerusalem and petitions God to continue to feed, nourish, sustain, support, and relieve his people.

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## A PLACE OF MEETING

The family sanctuary is first a place of meeting. Just as Israel's wilderness sanctuary was called the tent of meeting, so the family table must become a place of fellowship for the entire family. The home must be a small version of the synagogal *Beth Knesset*, a place for secure interpersonal relationship.

The modern family spends far too little time in interpersonal interaction in the home. Individual time demands upon father, mother, and children are so great that there is no time for corporate familial interaction. Time is gobbled up by life's "important" activities, leaving the family-time plate empty and the relationship cupboard bare. The home has become more a depot than a dwelling. It is like Grand Central Station, where different family members come steaming in on different concourses at different times and then head off in another direction with little more than a nod or a grunt. Then society laments the condition of its youth. Parents are clueless. Even the church seems helpless. Why are children murdering children? Why are young minds fried on drugs? "We don't understand; we've given them everything," parents moan to themselves. The answer is so simple that it is too simple: too many modern parents give everything to their children except time. The average American father currently spends all of two minutes a day with his children!

Each family needs a designated place and specified time for social interaction. Time is needed to talk about the events of life and to listen to one another's needs and concerns. Just like God's children need to meet with him, family members need to meet with one another. Children need quality time on a purely social level with their parents. Other times can be set for instruction and worship exercises. All of life, however, is not wrapped up in these important functions. Time must be made for conversation and interaction so that children can develop the social skills needed for successful life. Meeting around the table in the total absence of entertainment devices and media materials is a vital part of the family sanctuary. When social interaction occurs around a table that is recognized as an altar, it will inevitably be wholesome.

## A PLACE OF STUDY

The table as an altar is designed to be a small version of the synagogal *Beth Midrash*, a place for studying God's Word. Herein is manifest another profound Jewish concept that has been largely lost to the Christian under-

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standing: study is worship. Most Christians conceive of worship as something that is done in church with one's eyes closed. Study is recognized as necessary for a successful life; however, it is not generally considered to be worship.

When we analyze the biblical concept of worship, however, we discover that it entails more than enraptured euphoria or existential emotion. The Hebrew word for worship is *hk;v*; (*shachah*), which means to "prostrate oneself" (as in the presence of the Deity). This word graphically demonstrates the ultimate submission that worship demands. The Greek word for worship, *proskune,w* (*proskuneo*), is even more graphic, implying the action of submission parallel with a dog licking its master's hand. True worship is not a struggle to achieve warm fuzzies. It is prostration—lying flat on the ground before God. Every fiber of one's being is submitted to God and his instructions. One may not be required literally to prostrate himself; however, the attitude of the heart must be one of submission to God if true worship is manifest.

Study, therefore, is a high form of worship, for it is study of the Word of God, with a view toward doing the Word, that is the very essence of submission to God. The idea of acquiring knowledge of God's Word with no commitment to doing it is foreign to Judaism. While knowledge of the Word of God for its own sake is the paramount virtue in Judaism, erudition without action is unthinkable. The emphasis is always on the doing. Jews have an insatiable desire to know God's Word, but they also have an unquenchable passion to fulfill it. Greeks study only to know; Jews study in order to know and to revere!

The foundational declaration of Jewish faith, the *Shema* ("Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one") rests on the word *hear*, a word that means "hear and do."<sup>58</sup> Israel's initial response to God's thundering discourse from Sinai was, "All that you have said, we will do and we will hear [intelligently]."<sup>59</sup> In a supra-logical formula, Israel confessed that they would do and then understand (hear). God's instructions are ineffable. In order to understand them, one must first do them. This, in turn, requires the supreme submission of studying in order to do before understanding comes.

Study in the Jewish home, then, is a high form of worship. It is another of the worship exercises that transpire around the family altar, the table. The bread from the earth is consumed as an exercise that leads immediately into the consumption of the bread from heaven, the living Word of God. Every Christian home would well profit from this example so that mealtime would

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feature both earthly and heavenly food, nourishing both the outer and the inner man. When this approach is taken, bread from the earth (*lechem min ha-aretz*) becomes bread from heaven (*lechem min ha-shamayim*), the manna of ancient times that was bread from God's table.

One profound, residual benefit of consuming the Word of God is the fact that it strengthens covenantal relationships. The spiritual bonds that cement familial relations are ever strengthened by the ingestion of God's Word. Human relationships are polished to pristine purity by mutual commitment to God's revealed will. Unity that is so much needed in both the domestic scene as well as in the ecclesiastical situation is fostered when individuals come to the full knowledge of God's Son, the person of his Word.<sup>60</sup> Just as the sanctifying truth of God's Word unites disciples of Christ in a unity parallel with that of the Heavenly Father and the divine Son,<sup>61</sup> so the living Word cements the bonds of family solidarity.

Sharing God's Word around the family altar puts everything that is needed on the table to build strong Godly character in all family members. It demonstrates the fact that God's instructions apply to all. Parents are responsible to speak and then to model divine insight before their children so that the children can imitate their parents in lives of faith and purity.

## A PLACE OF PRAYER AND WORSHIP

The family table/altar also is designed to be a center for worship, a miniature version of the synagogal *Beth Tefillah*. A relic of pre-modern society is a slogan that still says it all: "The family that prays together stays together." This saying has never been more truly manifest than in the traditional Jewish home, where prayers and blessings are continually spoken, especially around the table. The table is a center for spiritual development as well.

Virtually all of the worship exercises that believers experience in corporate, congregational devotion can be enjoyed in the sanctity of the family sanctuary. Heads of household can lead families as priests in their homes just as leaders of congregations lead their assemblies in worship. Even Christianity's most central recurring sacrament, holy communion, can be shared in the context of family worship, for both its ancient Jewish precursors were family events.

The most prominent antecedent of communion was Passover, which was first celebrated in individual Israelite homes where extended family and friends were invited into the family sanctuary to share the lamb.<sup>62</sup> Jesus himself continued the tradition that he had received from his Jewish family by celebrating the Passover on the night of his betrayal.<sup>63</sup> It was then that he took the unleavened bread and wine of the traditional Passover observance and instituted holy communion by pouring new meaning into the ancient ritual and enjoining his disciples to celebrate Passover thereafter in remembrance of his death.<sup>64</sup> Communion, therefore, was instituted on the night of a Passover that was observed in a family setting.<sup>65</sup>

Communion is also anchored in the weekly *Shabbat* meal, which is introduced by *berachot* (blessings) to God for the provision of wine and bread. The blessings that Jesus himself spoke over the bread and wine were the same benedictions that his ancestors had recited as they celebrated *Shabbat* with their families. As he instituted a new Passover order, Jesus very likely spoke these same time-honored words: “*Barukh attah Adonai, Elohenu, Melekh ha-olam, ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz . . . Barukh attah Adonai, Elohenu, Melekh ha-olam, borey pri ha-gafen*” (Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth . . . Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.” These blessings were given on *Shabbat* first in the context of family and then in corporate worship.

Communion was originally celebrated in the context of family. There was no need for a priest or minister to bless the bread and the fruit of the wine, for neither needed blessing.<sup>66</sup> Both elements of communion are inherently good. They are not profane and do not need to be blessed in order to make them holy. Rather than blessing things, the familial priest is qualified to bless (praise) the Lord, and each participant can discern in the bread and “fruit of the vine” (grape juice or wine) the body and blood of Jesus as he eats and drinks it.<sup>67</sup> The bread and wine of communion can be shared in the family setting at any time that food would normally be consumed in the family sanctuary.

What better way is there to teach children that Jesus is the bread of life and that his blood cleanses from all sin than to “do this in remembrance of [him]” in the intimacy and security of the home? Having so received the communion of the living Christ in their family sanctuary, families are prepared to celebrate and receive the larger community of believers into the

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continually expanding family circle of the church that is in communion with one another and with the living Lord.

If the most sacred of Christian worship experiences can be shared in the context of the family sanctuary as well as in the corporate sanctuary, virtually any act of worship can be celebrated in the context of the family. What the familial priesthood has administered in the mini-sanctuary is expanded and magnified when the priest-leader of the congregation celebrates in the corporate family sanctuary.

### **RENEWING THE FAMILY SANCTUARY**

Much like Solomon's temple, the family sanctuary has suffered destruction both as a conceptual idea and as a practical reality. Something akin to Babylon has overwhelmed this ancient, biblically Hebraic formula, replacing it almost exclusively with corporate sanctuaries and public worship. Now it is time for a restoration to take place akin to that of the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, of Joshua and Zerubbabel, of Haggai and Zechariah.

The home that has for so long been relegated to a position of relative unimportance as a mere social convention now must be restored to the position of honor that it had in biblical times as a family sanctuary. In a day of growing violence against the fundamental societal unit, it is imperative that both the Jewish and Christian communities hold up the biblical standard in the face of the onslaught. The family must be restored as the center for spiritual and societal development.

Each home must view itself as a sanctuary, a mini-temple in which all the functions of biblical community life have their beginnings and are fully manifest. Doing so will restore a God-consciousness to both the church and society that will transcend the nominal Christian or Jewish experience. It will return the family of God to a face-to-face relationship of walking with God. It will be Eden renewed in the family sanctuary!

Adopting these biblically Hebraic views will empower families to make their homes such powerful sanctuaries of blessing that extended family, friends, and even strangers will welcome the experience of warmth and joy that inclusion in this circle of love affords. By providing familial social interaction, teaching, and worship, the home will become one of the church's most effective agents for evangelism and community development. The

church will multiply itself by the number of its families, and the kingdom of God will advance through the domestic temple, the family sanctuary.

## ENDNOTES

1. Genesis 3:8.
2. Genesis 5:22.
3. Hebrews 11:5.
4. Genesis 6:2.
5. Genesis 6:9.
6. Genesis 6:8.
7. Genesis 14:18-19.
8. Genesis 18:1-10.
9. Romans 4:11.
10. Genesis 18:19.
11. Exodus 12:8, 11, 22, paraphrased.
12. Exodus 12:3, New International Version.
13. Exodus 19:6.
14. Even though the camp of the Israelites moved when the divine cloud that marked the place of the sanctuary moved, the sanctuary was clearly designed to be with the people.
15. Genesis 35:2.
16. Exodus 16:15.
17. 2 Samuel 6:20.
18. Numbers 6:23.
19. 2 Samuel 7:5-8.
20. Psalm 137:2-4.
21. Israel was commanded to engage in corporate worship exercises in addition to their worship in the context of family. These were the convocations (calling together) which God required of them (cf. Leviticus 23:2). Exercises of family worship never exempt believers from the requirement to assemble together in the corporate sanctuary (Hebrews 10:25). It is in the context of community that worship is fully expressed and accountability is maintained. As a matter of fact, many of the most prominent prayers in the Jewish community cannot be prayed except in the company of ten men, the *minyan* or quorum for prayer. This is also when asked about the size of their congregations, rabbis answer in terms of families, not individuals.
22. Church as a spiritual entity was first manifest at Sinai. The Greek word that is translated “church” in English versions of the Scriptures is actually



evkklhsi,a (*ekklesia*) in the Greek. The word *ekklesia* was used in the Septuagint Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures (the version most commonly used in the first-century Gentile church) to translate the Hebrew word lh'q' (*kahal*), which simply means "congregation." The *kahal* was the "church in the wilderness" to which Stephen alluded in Acts 7:38.

23. Hebrews 9:12.

24. 2 Corinthians 5:20.

25. Acts 1:8.

26. Romans 15:16. This passage is accurately rendered, "That I should be the liturgist of Jesus Christ, sacrificing the gospel of God."

27. Colossians 3:17; 2 Corinthians 4:15.

28. 1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 13:16.

29. 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18.

30. Hebrews 8:2; 9:24.

31. 1 Peter 2:5.

32. 1 Corinthians 6:19.

33. 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6; 9:15.

34. 1 Peter 2:9.

35. Exodus 22:29; Numbers 3:12.

36. Exodus 20:9.

37. cf. John 4:21-24; Hosea 6:6; Mark 12:33; Hebrews 10:5-6; 1 Peter 2:5).

38. An important part of the *Beth Knesset* was the *Beth Din*, the house of judgment. Justice was dispensed in Israel in the context of the community meeting (*knesset*).

39. Isaiah 56:7.

40. Acts 2:42.

41. Acts 21:20.

42. Acts 6:7.

43. Acts 2:46.

44. Acts 3:1; 22:17.

45. Acts 21:26.

46. James 2:2. In this passage: "If there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring . . ." the word rendered *assembly* is *sunagwgh*, (*sunagoge*) in Greek and should be translated "synagogue." Since all Christians know that the word *synagogue* can be applied only to the Jews (or to the "synagogue of Satan" as in Revelation 2:9; 3:9), it could never be used as a term to identify a Christian congregation; therefore, translators of the Scriptures have universally rendered the word *sunagoge* in this passage as "meeting," or "assembly."

47. Romans 15:8.

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48. Ephesians 3:7.
  49. Exodus 19:6.
  50. 1 Peter 2:9.
  51. Hebrews 5:6-10.
  52. Hebrews 1:6; John 1:14.
  53. Romans 8:29.
  54. Though the emphasis in Jewish worship in the synagogue has involved virtually everyone, certain parts of the liturgy have been performed by the *kohanine* (“priests”), those of Aaronide ancestry. These include the pronouncing of the priestly benediction.
  55. Malachi 1:7, 12.
  56. 1 Corinthians 10:21.
  57. Deuteronomy 8:10.
  58. Deuteronomy 6:4.
  59. Exodus 24:7.
  60. Ephesians 4:13.
  61. John 17:17-21.
  62. Exodus 12:4.
  63. Luke 22:15.
  64. Jesus considered his disciples to be his adopted family (cf. Matthew 12:48-50).
  65. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.
  66. The idea that a priest is required to bless the elements of communion is based in the neo-Platonic and even Gnostic idea that the material is inherently evil and therefore must be “blessed” in order to become “holy” and not profane. The biblical idea is that everything God made was “good” and is to be used for good according to his instructions. The Jewish *berakhot* (blessings) tradition always involves blessing God, not things.
  67. 1 Corinthians 11:29