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THE SOLIDARITY OF THE NEW ISRAEL

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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CHAPTER I

THE SOLIDARITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT ISRAEL

The New Testament Israel, or ecclesia, has been the subject of exhaustive study in recent years. A pressing question in this field is that of the relationship between the solidarity of the Israel of the Old and New Testaments. Some have held that there is no particular significance in this relationship.¹ They regard the New Testament Church as the pure product of the teachings of Jesus without any antecedents whatever. Others have found the New Testament Church to be the essential continuation of the Old Testament Israel.² The truth, as usual, lies between these extreme positions. A proper understanding of the relationship is essential to a proper presentation of the doctrine of the Church.

The solidarity of the Old Testament Israel can be effectively presented in terms of five concepts which were basic to the Old Testament Israel and which have been the center of much of the recent discussion concerning the New Testament Israel. These five concepts are that of the covenant; of God's mercy or grace; of the qahal, with its related concepts of holiness and "the Remnant"; of the Kingdom of God, and of the "Suffering Servant." All five of these are so interrelated

¹E. F. Scott, The Gospel and Its Tributaries (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930).

²John Bright, The Kingdom of God (Nashville: Abingdom-Cokesbury, 1953).

that it is impossible to discuss one without referring to others.

The covenant idea is at the very center of all Old Testament history. We are primarily concerned with the covenant which was solemnized at Sinai. The covenant or agreement was instigated by God because He was gracious. "The covenant itself is an act of grace It was as a result of this unmotivated, unmerited, spontaneous love that the covenant came into existence."³ God's chesedh coming to man in the b'rith evoked a pledge of obedience on the part of the Israelites. God freely offered abundant blessings to them. He, however, gave them many regulations which they had to observe.⁴ Twice Moses read the book of the covenant to the people and twice they responded and said, "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient."⁵ Then "Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words."⁶ The free nature of the covenant offer and the abundant material and spiritual blessings contained in it moved the Children of Israel to make a sincere

³Walter Roehrs, "The Grace of God in the Old Testament," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXIII (December, 1952), 904.

⁴Exodus 19:5.

⁵Exodus 24:3-7.

⁶Exodus 24:8.

and honest promise of obedience. It must not be forgotten that a great multiplicity of rules for the conduct of the Israelites was added.

This agreement gave form and meaning to the relationship between God and man for the following centuries. It became the basis for the solidarity of the Old Testament Israel for hundreds of years. The covenant gave to the nation of Israel its character of a corporate personality⁷ or "Kollektivperson."⁸

It is important to remember that the covenant was made with the people as a whole, not with individuals. This is the Old Testament point of view. The people are regarded as a whole, and individuals share the benefit of the covenant as members of the nation. The religious subject or unit in the Old Testament is the people of Israel. This subject came into existence at the Exodus.⁹

Although this idea of the corporate personality of the clan or tribe was common among early Semitic tribes,¹⁰ it achieved its purest embodiment and greatest significance among the Israelites. When an individual sinned, as in the case of

⁷Otto Baab, The Theology of the Old Testament (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), p. 56.

⁸Wilhelm and Hans Moeller, Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments in heilsgeschichtlicher Entwicklung (Zwickau, Saxony: Johannes Herrmann, 1935), p. 186.

⁹A. B. Davidson, The Theology of the Old Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), p. 241.

¹⁰David Jacobson, The Social Background of the Old Testament (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1942), pp. 114-119. See also William F. Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 174.

Achan,¹¹ or David,¹² the entire nation suffered until the guilt was expiated.¹³ It was not unheard of that an individual would offer his life to rescue the nation.¹⁴

But even in this corporate personality, the individual did not disappear completely. "It is sometimes supposed that Jeremiah and Ezekiel discovered the individual. This is a gross exaggeration."¹⁵ Man was never regarded solely as a member of the community. If that had been the case then there would have been no personal responsibility or morality. Although the covenant was offered to the nation as a nation, each person entered it by an individual act of submission to God's commands. The rite of circumcision must be viewed in that light. It is, of course, very true that as the idea of individual submission and responsibility faded, the covenant relationship deteriorated.

During most of the period of Old Testament history, Jehovah

¹¹Joshua 7:1-26.

¹²II Samuel 24:1-25.

¹³Edersheim calls attention to this fact in his commentary on the story of Naboth's vineyard. He speaks of "solidarity of curse and of blessing, of judgment and of promise, because all have sprung from a common stock." Alfred Edersheim, The Bible History--Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), VI, 51.

¹⁴Moses did that in Exodus 32:30-34. Isaiah proclaimed the idea that the "Suffering Servant" could offer His life for the nation. In the New Testament we find the same idea in Romans 9:1-3.

¹⁵H. H. Rowley, The Re-Discovery of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 210.

dealt with the nation of Israel as a corporate personality.

All of His contacts with it were of a religious nature.

The only aspect under which Scripture regards the constitution of Israel, is its religious aspect. The Israelitish State is everywhere regarded as a religious community; in other words, as that which we call the kingdom of God or of Jehovah. To the Scripture writers it has no other aspect of interest, but under this aspect they embrace all its fortunes and vicissitudes In other words, Israel is the people of God, and all that happens to it illustrates in some way its relations to God.¹⁶

The history of Old Testament Israel is the story of man's repeated rupture of the covenant relationship. God always kept faith, but repeatedly man violated his solemn promise of obedience. The prophets saw with inspired clarity that the "Sinaibund" could not serve as the foundation for any lasting solidarity. The old covenant was finally abrogated by God Himself and was replaced by the New Covenant, the diatheke of the New Testament.

The covenant relationship was designed to accomplish three purposes by God. First, it was to be the means whereby the Lord could establish His gracious reign within the hearts of the Children of Israel. His overwhelming love and the abundant mercies which He freely offered to them were to move them to yield cheerful obedience to His commands and to trust in His mercy to the fullest extent. Secondly, the covenant was set up in order to create a people who would be an empirical mani-

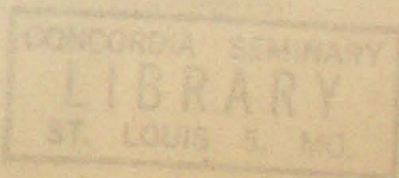
¹⁶Davidson, op. cit., p. 235.

festation to the world of the nature of God's love and holiness.¹⁷ Finally, because the Lord foresaw the failure of the Old Covenant due to the wickedness of men, He used it to set apart a people to carry the Messianic promises of the New Covenant.

As we have seen, the covenant concept is inseparably linked with the concept of chesedh. Most scholars of the Old Testament seem to agree that "in all its varied shades of meaning chesedh is conditioned upon there being a covenant. Without the prior existence of a covenant, there could never be any chesedh at all."¹⁸ But this does not mean that God's chesedh and man's promise of obedience are of equal importance in the covenant. Even when used of the relationship of men with men, chesedh comes to mean an act of benevolence especially from those in higher stations, and hence also means gracious deliverance. This meaning of chesedh gradually becomes the dominant meaning when the word is applied to the Lord. It takes on the meaning of grace and favor. According to the pure concept of covenant, man is also expected to fulfill his covenant obligations. But because he regularly fails to do so while God remains faithful, the word chesedh

¹⁷ Isaiah 60:1.2.15.16.

¹⁸ Norman H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), p. 119.



takes on unmistakable coloring and meaning of something undeserved, of grace. Yes, inasmuch as man, having been unfaithful to God, has no claim to God's chesedh, yet hopes for it from God, it assumes the character of forgiving grace. Hence it transcends the Old Testament covenant concept of a mutual relationship of obligation and becomes filled with the meaning of universal, Messianic, eschatological salvation.¹⁹

In mercy God had linked Himself firmly to the people in the covenant relationship so that at the dedication of the Temple Solomon could remind the people that the Lord keeps "covenant and mercy (chesedh) with His servants."²⁰ "The believer could, therefore, appeal to the mercy of God because he knew that God remembered for His covenant and repented according to the multitude of His mercies."²¹ But at the same time God does not give up His sovereignty.

Israel could rely upon Jahveh's favor and protection only in so far as they obeyed his commands. He had not involved himself inextricably in the fortunes of the nation but had remained free to sever the relationship into which he had entered by an act of grace.²²

The solidarity of the Old Testament Israel was initiated and maintained by the grace of God.

The Hebrew word qahal always finds its Greek correlative

¹⁹Roehrs, op. cit., p. 902

²⁰I Kings 8:23.

²¹Roehrs, op. cit., p. 901. The Scripture quotation is Psalm 106:45.

²²Cuthbert A. Simpson, Revelation and Response in the Old Testament (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), p. 102.



in the word ecclesia²³ in the Septuagint; both words may be literally translated as "gathering." Although qahal is used of a general non-religious gathering in several Old Testament passages,²⁴ it is most generally used with a religious connotation. The Children of Israel are often referred to as the congregation of Israel, the congregation of Jahweh and the congregation of Elohim. The possessive genitive in each expression indicates that this assembly has meaning and purpose only as long and in so far as it is related to the merciful purposes and gracious activity of Jehovah.

Thus defined, qahal has the same meaning in the Old Testament as ecclesia in the New Testament. This definition is correct linguistically, but the history of God's people in the Old Testament reveals fundamental differences between the ideal of qahal and reality. The qahal received its form and purpose from the covenant. The "Sinaibund" was the basis for its solidarity. Its members had pledged themselves to keep all the words of the Lord. But there were many periods when very few of the Children of Israel made any effort to walk with God. It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish sharply between the real and the ideal qahal. The real qahal consisted of all

²³Karl Ludwig Schmidt, "Ecclesia," Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1932), II, 530. The Woerterbuch will be hereafter referred to as TW.

²⁴See for example Genesis 35:11, 28:3, 48:4.

members of the tribes of Israel plus the circumcised proselytes. The ideal qahal consisted of those who were conscious of God's chesedh and who strove to meet their covenant obligations. God's original intent was that the two would be identical. That was the thought which remained uppermost in the thinking of the majority of the Children of Israel. Throughout their history they believed that every Israelite was also an "Israelite indeed." They felt that every Israelite in the flesh was a member of the holy nation and therefore a true child of the Holy One of Israel. Speaking through the prophets, the Lord revealed that Israel as a race had forfeited its claim to be His covenant people, but that He in mercy had chosen a Remnant out of Israel to be His people. The importance of this thought for the New Testament church cannot be overemphasized. The solidarity of the Remnant was not based upon any mechanical covenant pledge but upon the fact of the individual's submission to Jehovah in faith and trust.

This fact becomes apparent in the Old Testament concept of holiness. Qadosh was used of things closely connected with the religious life of Israel. Everything that stood in positive relation to the cult was spoken of as qadosh. The substantive qadosh always designated a condition, not an action. A person is holy because he stands in the covenant relationship by virtue of his submission to the Lord. At Sinai the thought of holiness enters into the relationship of Jehovah and His people. Because God dwells in the midst of

them, they shall be an holy people.²⁵ The expression gadosh am inseparably mingles the religious and national elements of Israelite life. God's call to the people to be holy is so charged with power that before its bright light the profane are scattered. God calls Himself the gadosh yisrael and His application of this title to Himself necessarily implies two separate courses of action in regard to the people. The first is that God must be zealous in gathering for Himself a gadosh am. This thought is emphasized primarily in the so-called Deutero-Isaiah. But God must also stand in judgment over against everything that is not holy. This is emphasized particularly in Proto-Isaiah. Both these courses of action inevitably lead again to the concept of the Remnant. Old Testament history is the story of the creation of a people whose solidarity rested upon the fact of their personal holiness to take the place of people whose solidarity was based upon external obedience to the covenant. This history does not find its inception but its fruition in the New Testament ecclesia and its related concept of hagios.²⁶

In passing we should note a few perversions of the doctrine of the gahal and the gadosh am which appeared in later Israelite history. Three are particularly important. The first is the erection of a rigid wall of exclusion between Jew and Gentile,

²⁵Deuteronomy 7:6; 26:19. Cf. Jeremiah 2:3.

²⁶Otto Proksch and Karl Georg Kuhn, "Hagios," TW, I, 88-107.

particularly after the Exile. This was, of course, done in a futile effort to preserve the purity of the nation.²⁷ The second trend was a strongly apocalyptic movement. Since the qahal was not purifying itself through the historical process, it must be necessary for God to step into history and create the qadosh am. The third development was that of Pharisaism. The ideal of the Pharisees was "a community whose major business would be to become the holy people of God by scrupulous observance of the law."²⁸

Related to the development of the qahal and the idea of the Remnant is that of the kingdom of God. The rich New Testament development of the concept of basileia tou theou is present in embryonic form in the Old Testament. In the New Testament the term is commonly understood to mean the gracious activity of God in the hearts of men through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and the sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit.²⁹ Through this activity, God gathers a people for Himself. This concept is not at once apparent in the Old Testament to the superficial reader,³⁰ but it does emerge as the dominant note

²⁷Proksch and Kuhn call attention to the fact that tahar, purity, is closely connected with qadosh. Generally speaking, tahar refers to ritual purity and its use with qadosh thus indicates the trend to emphasize external matters which appeared so early in the Old Testament qahal. Op. cit.

²⁸Bright, op. cit., p. 170.

²⁹This is the definition of Martin Luther. Cf. F. E. Mayer, "The Una Sancta in Luther's Theology," Concordia Theological Monthly, XVIII (November, 1947), 805.

³⁰Baab, op. cit., pp. 156f. But cf. Ex. 19:5.6.

in the history of Israel. God's purpose with the children of Israel was to create an holy people among whom He reigned as King in the hearts of all the individual members. This was His purpose with the covenant at Sinai. To lead the Israelites to surrender themselves to Him, He showered His goodness upon them abundantly during the Exodus. He faithfully chastened them when they permitted something else to usurp His place of supremacy in their hearts. During much of Israel's history, the prophets and spiritual leaders used the rich spiritual experiences of the Exodus to call the people to repent and to submit themselves again to God. Baab and others suggest that the monarchy became for the Israelites a visible representation of God's spiritual kingship.³¹ All the prophets emphasized the kingship of God over the world. They pleaded with the Israelites to recognize this fact. As it became apparent that all Israel would not acknowledge this, the prophets were led to think in terms of a Remnant, of the real kingdom of God within the external kingdom of God. Thus Amos called on the people to renew their covenant pledge and to cease from their mechanical, hypocritical service. Hosea believed that God's judgment would fall upon the people because of their sins, but he also believed that a Remnant would be purified by this judgment and would learn again the ancient purity and loyalty.³² Isaiah believed that the line of David would continue. He could

³¹Baab, op. cit., pp. 162-164. Bright, op. cit., pp. 45-70.

³²Hosea 2:14.15, 9:10, 11:1-4, 13:4-6.

look forward to a coming Prince who would establish the rule of that line forever.³³ Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, had "gone clean down to the end of hope . . . had lost confidence in all that men trust in," and so could see and speak clearly of the absolute necessity of God's love and of the enduring structure which God alone could build.³⁴ He completely rejected the idea that the state could be the vehicle of the Kingdom of God. "In loneliness of spirit, Jeremiah laid great stress on the inner and individual character of religion"³⁵ without losing sight of the corporate nature of the Remnant. In this emphasis, which is also found in the Book of Malachi, is to be found the heart and essence of the Kingdom of God.

With the terrible spiritual history of Israel in mind, the prophets placed considerable stress upon the fact that the Kingdom of God was to be realized in the future.³⁶ They often spoke of a great event in history which God would initiate by stepping into the stream of history to establish His kingdom on earth. But it should not be forgotten that all of them believed that the purified Remnant of Israel was already included

³³Isaiah 9:6-7. But even the house of David must pass through judgment. Isaiah spoke of the shoot springing up from a stock that had been cut down to the stump. Cf. chap. 11.

³⁴Bright, op. cit., p. 116.

³⁵Ibid., p. 122.

³⁶Cf. Daniel's vision of the four kingdoms. Daniel 2:1-49.

in the plan of God's gracious activity. Thus viewed, the Kingdom of God was for the prophets an "already--not yet" situation, just as it is in the New Testament.

One final Old Testament concept remains to be considered and that is Isaiah's teaching concerning the "Suffering Servant." All are agreed that this thought is of tremendous importance for a true understanding of God's activity in Old Testament times. Delitzsch calls attention to the fact that the expression "servant" is used in different senses in the second half of the Book of Isaiah. In chapter 41:8 the word definitely means Judah. In 42:1 it must be a person because of the strongly personalized and individualized characteristics. Delitzsch, therefore, concludes that the idea of the servant of Jehovah assumed

to speak figuratively, the form of a pyramid. The base was Israel as a whole; the central section was that Israel which was not merely Israel according to the flesh but according to the spirit also; the apex is the person of the Mediator of salvation springing out of Israel.³⁷

He further points out that the Messiah is regarded as the center of the circle of the promised kingdom, the second David; as the center of the circle of the people of salvation, the second Israel; and as the center of the circle of the human race, the second Adam. Israel's true nature as a servant of God

³⁷Franz Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah, translated from the German by James Martin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), II, 174.

which had its roots in the election and calling of Jehovah, and manifested itself in conduct and action in harmony with this calling, is all concentrated in Him, the One, as its ripest fruit.³⁸

Bright speaks of the Suffering Servant as

the coming Redeemer of the true Israel who in his suffering makes the fulfillment of Israel's task possible; he is the central actor in the 'new thing' that is about to take place; he is, we might say, the 'new Moses' in the new Exodus now shortly to begin.³⁹

He goes on to say

As the Servant, prophetlike, proclaims the righteousness of God to the world, so must Israel; as the Servant, priestlike, mediates the salvation of God to men through His suffering, so must Israel. As the Servant gains a victory and a Kingdom through His sacrifice, so must Israel know no other royal path.⁴⁰

Thus Isaiah's concept of the "Suffering Servant" brings the only message of hope to Israel. Israel according to the flesh had forfeited all claim upon the chesedh of Jehovah. A new Israel had to arise, an Israel of individual calling and decision; an Israel that was inseparably connected with the "Suffering Servant" and an Israel which found in the "Suffering Servant" both its reality and its true destiny. The glory of the New Testament ecclesia lay in the fact that its members recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Servant.

³⁸Ibid., p. 175. For a fuller discussion of this subject, see infra, pp. 25-29.

³⁹Bright, op. cit., p. 150.

⁴⁰Loc. cit.

These five concepts give us a clear insight into the solidarity of the Old Testament Israel. It was called into being alone by the chesedh of God and was originally founded upon the covenant at Sinai. Repeated violations of the God-man relationship made it necessary for God to reject the nation of Israel as His chosen people and to select a Remnant as the carriers of the Messianic promise and the imperfect manifestation of His goodness to the world. Only those belonged to this solidarity in whose hearts God had established His reign, or, as we would say in the New Testament, only those who believed in the Lord God. This Remnant could claim God as their loving Friend only because of the redemptive activity of the "Suffering Servant." The Remnant existed already in Old Testament days but looked forward to a great future, beginning with the climactic event in history of the Incarnation. Its members were marked by their efforts to lead pure and holy lives, and by a deep loyalty to each other.

But we must not lose sight of the sharp line of distinction between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant God offered His people life and peace, but also gave them a multitude of laws and regulations. Through keeping these, the Israelites showed proper fear for the name of the Lord.⁴¹ While ultimately the eternal salvation of every member of the Old Covenant depended upon the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ, the laws played such a prominent role in their religion,

⁴¹Malachi 2:5.

and its "do's" and "don'ts" often created attitudes of fear, despair and easy hypocrisy. In the New Covenant God offers life and peace freely through Jesus Christ and does not rest the covenant upon any condition in man. This marvellous love of God moves man to dedicate himself to the Lord's service in gratitude, but this vow is not the completion of the covenant.⁴²

The solidarity of the Old Covenant with its basis in external obedience and racial ties is maintained by the majority of the house of Israel during the days of the New Covenant. This majority refused to recognize God's plan for a new solidarity based upon the work of the Suffering Servant. The chief lesson of the history of the Old Covenant is that man's natural wickedness makes it utterly impossible for him to meet any covenant demands set up by the sinless God, and that man can become a friend of God only as God in love and mercy initiates, continues and concludes the relationship in Christ Jesus.

⁴²Cf. Julius Koestlin, The Theology of Luther, translated from the German by Charles E. Hay (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publications Society, 1897), II, 444. He calls attention to Luther's keen insight into the "ethical nature of faith as being in itself a proper attitude and disposition toward God and the divine Law." Luther also pointed out repeatedly that the good works which the believer performs are not part of the price which God requires before He will call a man His friend.

CHAPTER II

THE FOUNDATION FOR THE SOLIDARITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT ISRAEL

The Old Testament Israel, as we have seen, was the community which God called into being through the establishment of His covenant. The community was given its form through the covenant, and was guided in its daily life by the same norm. It was basically a corporate institution and its solidarity rested upon the covenant. The covenant was God's gracious expression of interest in the people and at the same time His plan for blessing them temporally and eternally. The covenant rested solely upon God's mercy, and its promulgation resulted in the development of the gahal.

But what of the New Israel? Why was it called new? Was it also a community thing? What was the foundation for its solidarity? Some answer to these questions will be sought in this chapter through a study of the person and work of Jesus Christ, including the idea of the Suffering Servant; a study of the nature of baptism and of such expressions as ecclesia and hagios. Our study in this chapter will reveal deep-rooted and striking similarity between the two Israels, and at the same time will disclose the fundamental differences between them.

The New Testament Church is rightly called the "new" Israel because it was founded on a fresh act of revelation

inaugurating the final era.¹ The New Israel came into being because Jesus of Nazareth lived, died and rose again. This historical fact marked the dividing line between the two, and in Jesus' life we find the distinguishing characteristic of the New Israel. Jesus is the center of the New Testament Church. He is the foundation of its solidarity. He is everything to it. A Christian cannot make a purely objective study of the importance of Jesus Christ, for he is himself too much involved with Jesus to maintain absolute objectivity.²

The Book of Acts has very little to say about the details of Jesus' earthly life, but it contains abundant testimony to the central importance of Jesus in the Church. A brief analysis of the objects which St. Luke uses with euaggelidesthai bears this out. Thus the disciples preached "that Jesus is the Christ,"³ or "peace through Jesus Christ,"⁴ or "that Jesus is the Lord,"⁵ or "Jesus and the resurrection,"⁶ or simply "Jesus."⁷ Dodd's analysis of the apostolic kerygma also points to Jesus

¹R. Newton Flew, Jesus and His Church (Chicago: Abingdon Press, 1938), p. 143.

²Cf. Heinrich Brunner, The Mediator, translated from the German by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1947), p. 360.

³Acts 5:42.

⁴Acts 10:36.

⁵Acts 11:20.

⁶Acts 17:18.

⁷Acts 8:35.

as the center of the Church. He summarized their message under six points. (1) The age of fulfillment has dawned. (2) The ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus introduce the new age. (3) By virtue of His resurrection, Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of God as the Messianic head of the New Israel. (4) The Holy Spirit in the Church is the sign of Christ's present glory and power. (5) The Messianic Age will shortly reach its consummation in the return of Christ. (6) Repentance, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit and salvation are given to those who enter the select community.⁸

The use of the word onoma in the Book of Acts bears out the same fundamental truth. Onoma is used thirty-three times in the Book of Acts either directly with a name of Jesus, or in such a way that there is no doubt that Jesus is meant. The expression, "the name of Jesus," is never used in the Old Testament. The corresponding expression, "the name of the Lord," ordinarily refers to the person and to the glory of the Lord in His essence. In the New Testament, "the name of Jesus" is almost always used in an active, dynamic sense. The disciples baptized people in the name or into the name of Jesus, they performed miracles in the name of Jesus, they preached in the name of Jesus, they called on the name of Jesus and they were willing to suffer shame for the name of Jesus.

In Acts, onoma Iesou includes everything that Jesus stands

⁸Flew, op. cit., pp. 168f.

for and everything that He did. His Messianic dignity, divine authority, memorable sufferings, the peculiar services and blessings which He conferred upon men are all included in the term.⁹ The fullness of Jesus' nature and work manifests itself in His name. He was called "Jesus" by the angel, which name brought into perfect focus the purpose of His incarnation and mission: autos gar sosen ton laon autou apo ton hamartion auton.¹⁰ In Acts 4:12 St. Peter sums up the entire onoma idea when he says, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

The early Christians were consumed by a love for Jesus Who had given Himself so that they might inherit eternal life. Their faith, their hope, their lives rested upon the name of Jesus. To all of them, Jesus was the living, active, vital force in the life of the Church. The power which was resident in His name is reflected in the fact that the onoma formulas never took on a standardized form in the Book of Acts. They occur in twenty-six different forms in the Book. Onoma is used with seven different prepositions. It is found in every case. With epi one finds to onomati Jesou Christou,¹¹ and

⁹Joseph H. Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: American Book Company, 1889), p. 448.

¹⁰Hans Bietenhardt, "Onoma," Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1950), V, 272. The Woerterbuch will be hereafter referred to as TW.

¹¹Acts 2:38.

to onomati autou.¹² With en one finds en to onomati Iesou Christou tou Nadzoraïou,¹³ en to onomati tou kyriou,¹⁴ en to onomati Iesou,¹⁵ en to onomati Iesou Christou.¹⁶ With dia the striking expression dia tou onomatos tou hagiou paidos sou Iesou is used,¹⁷ as well as simply dia tou onomatos autou.¹⁸ With huper the expressions are tou onomatos mou,¹⁹ tou onomatos tou kuriou Iesou,²⁰ simply tou onomatos²¹ and tou onomatos tou kuriou hemon Iesou Christou.²²

Peter healed the lame man in the name of Jesus²³ and in the subsequent investigation, the Pharisees equated onoma and dynamis with their question "By what power or by what name did

¹²Acts 4:16, 5:28.40.

¹³Acts 3:6, 4:10.

¹⁴Acts 9:29.

¹⁵Acts 9:27.

¹⁶Acts 10:48.

¹⁷Acts 4:30. A fuller treatment of this passage will be found infra, pp. 25-28.

¹⁸Acts 10:43.

¹⁹Acts 9:16.

²⁰Acts 21:13.

²¹Acts 5:41.

²²Acts 15:26.

²³Acts 3:6.

you do this?"²⁴ Paul expelled the demon from the girl in the name of Jesus Christ.²⁵ The healing of Aeneas furnishes an important insight into the full meaning of onoma. Peter said, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you."²⁶ In Peter's understanding, onoma was equivalent to the praesentia Christi.²⁷ It should be mentioned here that the Book of Acts knows nothing of a magical repetition of the name as a formula which would heal, irrespective of the faith of the sufferer or the petitioner.

The name of Jesus Christ is also the substance of the Gospel message. Philip preached the good news of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.²⁸ Jesus told Ananias that Paul would bear His name before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.²⁹ Before his conversion St. Paul thought he should do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth,³⁰ but after his conversion he preached boldly at Damascus "in the name of Jesus."³¹ The authorities at Jerusalem forbade the

²⁴Acts 4:7.

²⁵Acts 16:18.

²⁶Acts 9:34.

²⁷Bietenhardt, op. cit., p. 277.

²⁸Acts 8:12.

²⁹Acts 9:15.

³⁰Acts 26:9.

³¹Acts 9:27.

apostles to preach any further in the name of Jesus.³² The name of Jesus was so real to the disciples that they were ready to suffer and die "for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."³³ The devotion of the early believers to the name of Christ was so apparent that they were soon being called by His name.³⁴

The absolute importance of the name of Jesus Christ for the early Church appears also in the actual titles applied to Him: so, for example, in the pregnant sentence from St. Peter's Pentecost sermon: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."³⁵ The title kyrios had been applied to Jesus in the Gospels, but not always in its full meaning.³⁶ In the Book of Acts it is the New Testament equivalent of Jahweh,³⁷ and it is definitely and clearly used in that sense of Jesus of Nazareth. The apostles ascribed to Jesus Christ the attributes which had heretofore been reserved for the Father.³⁸ They themselves believed on the name of Jesus with the same confidence which their fathers had reposed in Jahweh,

³²Acts 4:17f., 5:28.40. It is significant to note that the Jerusalem authorities carefully avoid the use of the personal name of Jesus.

³³Acts 15:26. See also 5:40f, 9:16 and 21:13.

³⁴Acts 11:26.

³⁵Acts 2:36.

³⁶Matthew 7:21, 25:37. John 20:28.

³⁷Claude Welch, In This Name (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 173.

³⁸Acts 2:33, 3:15, 1:24, 7:59 and 10:38.

and they urged their hearers to do likewise. Pisteuo eis is used in these passages and it has the meaning of committing oneself wholly to His lordship and saving control. The phrase Christos kai kyrios is a complete and adequate Christology. It sums up the faith of the first Christians in the name of Jesus.³⁹

The Book of Acts clearly presents Jesus of Nazareth, Christos kai kyrios, as head of the Church and the sole constitutive factor of the New Israel. He is the foundation for its solidarity. He is, in fact, the solidarity of the Christian Church. This truth will become more readily apparent through a study of the "Suffering Servant" concept in the early Church, and also through a study of the Sacrament of Baptism.

The detailed studies of Zimmerli and Jeremias⁴⁰ have established the fact that the "Servant" passages in the second half of Isaiah's prophecy refer either to the collective Israel or to the Messiah. The term, ebed Jahweh, when used of the people of Israel, emphasizes that this people was created by God, chosen by Him and gathered from the ends of the earth by Him. Jahweh exhorts His servant to put aside all fear. He promises Him freedom. He does all these things with no matching response on the part of Israel. The servant is blind and powerless. He is to bear witness to the majesty and glory of

³⁹Flew, op. cit., p. 163.

⁴⁰W. Zimmerli and J. Jeremias, "Pais," TW, V, 653-713.

God simply in the role of a passive recipient of wonderful gifts. A "turning" is the only action postulated for the servant.⁴¹

In other passages, the ebed is clearly the promised Messiah. The second half of Isaiah's prophecy presents the Servant as One Who will manifest Himself most clearly as an overwhelming act of God's grace. His work would be to restore Israel and to accomplish a complete external and internal change in her. The blind will see and darkness will be lifted. This Servant is to be a Light not only for the Jews, but also for all the world. He will be exposed to a great deal of suffering and shame, but the suffering is to be vicarious. The Servant willingly endures all that Jahweh places before Him and He never doubts that God will see Him through and will deliver Him. The work of the Servant is not just something between the Lord and Himself; it involves many people, including even kings who will shut their mouths because of Him.⁴²

In the Septuagint translation of Isaiah, ebed is always translated by pais, although in the other books the translators sometimes used pais, sometimes doulos, or oiketes, therapon, huiois or uperetes.⁴³ By 100 B. C. pais theou comes to be used generally, although not exclusively, of the Servant of God,

⁴¹Ibid., p. 661.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 668-672. The passages from Isaiah are chiefly 42:2, 49:5f, 43:8, 49:7, 50:4-9, 52:13 and 53:12.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 672-675.

specifically the Messiah.⁴⁴ Hellenistic Jews were more inclined to understand the pais theou of Isaiah 40-66 in the collective meaning, while Palestinian Jews ordinarily gave it the Messianic interpretation.

The expression, pais theou, is used only eight times in the New Testament, and with one exception, Matthew 12:18, its usage is peculiar to Luke. In Luke 1:54 the reference is to Israel and in verse 68 of the same chapter to David. In Acts 4:25 the reference is again to David, but in the others, Jesus is meant. In both passages in chapter three the expression is ton paidon autou, but the thoughts of the verses are clearly related to the ebed concept of Isaiah. In verse thirteen, St. Peter told the crowd at the temple that they had not healed the lame man through their own power, but that God had glorified His Servant Jesus through the miracle. The basic function of the Servant was to glorify God by preparing for Him a people who would willingly serve Him. The use of the word edoxasen in this quotation from Isaiah 52:13 is particularly significant. Through the miracle, the Father had not only glorified the Son, but at the same time had glorified Himself by revealing Himself more fully as the Father, the Loving One. As He had foretold in the Old Testament, so He was now glorifying His name in the life and work of Jesus, in His death and resurrection, and in the continuing power of His name in the Church.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 677. 680.

⁴⁵Cf. Bietenhardt, op. cit., p. 271.

Verse twenty-six of chapter three also applies the entire ebed concept of Isaiah to Jesus. In the congregational prayer in the last verses of chapter four, the expression used twice is ton hagian paida sou Iesoun and tou hagiou paidos sou Iesou. The suffering referred to in verse twenty-seven is under the guidance and control of the Father, according to verse twenty-eight, and this is another important facet of the ebed idea. Verse thirty is strongly reminiscent of Isaiah forty-two and sixty-one. Further evidence that the early Church adored Jesus as the promised Servant is found in St. Paul's commission to carry Jesus' name before Gentiles and kings.⁴⁶ The Church must have compared this command, so strange to them, with the words of Isaiah 52:15.

The work of the Servant, as we have noted before, consisted in this that He was to create a new people who would love God. He does this by uniting Himself with the people, by becoming one with them, and then paying the penalty of their transgressions and destroying the power of the devil in the people's place. The work of the Servant necessarily involves a community of the saved.

The "Servant" becomes through his expiatory suffering the creator of the new people of God. So close is the connection that we must speak of an "inclusive relationship" between the Savior-servant and the saved community. The existence of the Savior and the People of God are bound up with each other.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Acts 9:15.

⁴⁷Archibald M. Hunter, The Message of the New Testament (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1944), p. 58.

The comments of Franz Delitzsch quoted above are very pertinent here.⁴⁸

The solidarity of the New Testament Church, then, rests in the person of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant, the true Israel, Who created the new people of God. This conclusion brings us at once to the subject of baptism and its role in the solidarity of the New Israel. The Book of Acts has no well-developed baptismal theology, although the Sacrament itself played an important role in the early Church. The importance and meaning of the Sacrament lie in the standard baptismal formula, "in the name of the Lord Jesus." This formula occurs four times in the Book of Acts, although in three different grammatical constructions. Twice the Greek has eis with the accusative,⁴⁹ once e π i with the dative, or locative,⁵⁰ and once e n with the dative.⁵¹ Robertson feels that the notion of sphere is the true sense of eis when it is used in the baptismal formula.⁵² Since onoma stands for everything that Jesus is, to be baptized into His name means to enter into such a close relation with Him that the baptized person receives all the blessings of Christ's redemptive

⁴⁸See supra, p. 14.

⁴⁹Acts 8:16 and 19:5.

⁵⁰Acts 2:38.

⁵¹Acts 10:48.

⁵²A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), pp. 591f.

work. 53

Epi, according to Robertson, implies a real resting upon, not merely the idea of over.⁵⁴ To be baptized epi to onomati then has much the same meaning as eis to onoma. The phrase with en means to rely or rest on the name of Christ, to be rooted in His name. Thus all three forms of the baptismal formula contain the same basic thought of being put into intimate connection with Christ and His saving work. Baptism is properly the sacramentum initiationis of the Christian Church. As such, it takes the place of the Old Testament rite of circumcision. But just as the new covenant is more wonderful by far than the old, so also baptism is far superior to circumcision.

Circumcision served the following purposes in the old covenant as Eckhardt has pointed out, namely (1) to remind the people of natural sinfulness, (2) to receive the child into the covenant of grace, (3) to mediate forgiveness, (4) to pledge God's righteousness and blessedness to the infant, (5) to separate the infant from the uncircumcised, and (6) to pledge the recipient to observe the whole Law as he grew up. The foundation for circumcision was the goodness and grace of the covenant God.⁵⁵ Baptism served the same purposes in relation

⁵³E. Koehler, "The Meaning of the Formula of Baptism," The Concordia Theological Monthly, XIV, (April, 1943), 242f.

⁵⁴Robertson, op. cit., pp. 600. 604.

⁵⁵E. Eckhardt, "Beschneidung," Homiletisches Reallexicon nebst Index Rerum (St. Louis: Success Printing Co., ca. 1914), p. 391.

to the new people of God, with the important difference that it was always performed in the name of the Lord Jesus. This meant that the person baptized was united with the full and victorious power of the risen Lord, the Christos kai kyrios, the Suffering Servant Who had completed His work in behalf of His people.

What happens in baptism is nothing more nor less than that which is effected by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel. In the Sacrament, as well as in preaching, it is God Who works to bring the person into the community of saints, into the close union with Christ.⁵⁶ For New Testament writers, baptism is always the mighty working of the holy God with sinful men.⁵⁷ The baptismal formula of the Book of Acts implies all that is stated in St. Paul's powerful development of it in Romans six. Thus, according to New Testament teaching, Christ was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, that is, to submit Himself as our substitute to all the demands of God's Law. Christ's work for the Church began with His baptism and culminated in His suffering, death and resurrection. Now when a person is baptized, either as infant or adult,⁵⁸ he becomes

⁵⁶Paul Althaus, Was ist die Taufe? (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1950), pp. 1-7.

⁵⁷Albrecht Oepke, "Baptismos," TW, p. 538.

⁵⁸Against Karl Barth's view presented in his book Die Kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1943), see Althaus, op. cit.; Oscar Cullman, Baptism in the New Testament, translated from the German by J. K. S. Reid (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1950), and Pierre Marcel, The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism, translated from the French by Philip Hughes (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1953). Marcel's arguments against Barth must be evaluated on the basis of his own Reformed premises.

a sharer in all that Christ's work has gained for Him, and a member of the new body which Christ created through His atoning work. While some of what Oscar Cullman says in his book, Baptism in the New Testament, strays too far from exegesis into speculation to be entirely acceptable, his emphasis upon the solidarity which the believer secures with Christ and with Christ's Church through baptism is thoroughly Biblical.⁵⁹

Nygren speaks of this same corporate identity of the individual with Christ, although he approaches the subject in terms of the two aeons. He says this:

Just as Adam is the head of natural mankind, so Christ is the head of the new humanity, the head of the Church In Adam the fate of the human race was determined once and for all. To be human is to stand under the sovereign power of death, the lot which has befallen all the children of Adam But now, in like manner, the fate of the new humanity has once and for all been determined through Christ He arose as the first, as the head of the new humanity, the new creation, which is the Church.⁶⁰

Through baptism we are united into the soma Christou, as St. Paul says in Romans six.⁶¹

The New Testament teaches clearly that Christ's work was to create a new Israel of God. In the New Testament this new people, which is being gathered together through the preaching

⁵⁹Cullman, op. cit., pp. 22-39 et passim.

⁶⁰Anders Nygren, This is the Church, translated from the Swedish by Carl G. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), pp. 8f.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 10. See his remarks on this same subject in his commentary on Romans.

of the Gospel and the practice of baptism, is called the ecclesia. The New Testament ecclesia is in many respects identical with and a continuation of the Old Testament qahal. The similarities between the rite of circumcision and the Sacrament of Baptism have already been mentioned. Whenever ecclesia is found in the Septuagint, it is a translation of qahal, although qahal is also rendered by synagoge.⁶² Ecclesia does not in itself have a technical meaning, but its force must be determined by the context. In most cases this can be easily done. Qahal came gradually to be used more specifically of a gathering for religious purposes. The word first received its religious connotation in the gathering at Mount Sinai, and this must always be kept in mind when one seeks the true and full meaning of its New Testament counterpart. Although the word originally was used primarily of a gathering of men for war or council, after the time of Ezra, women and children are generally included in the term. As a matter of fact, the Septuagint quite regularly distinguishes between synagoge and ecclesia, and uses the former word for a gathering of men only and the latter word for a mixed group.⁶³

In secular Greek ecclesia is the standard expression for the political gathering of the people. In the New Testament it is plain that the ecclesia

is in fact the company of men who have been called out of the world by God, also when the emphasis is not on ex: and this is already the qahal Jahweh,

⁶²Karl Ludwig Schmidt, "Ecclesia," TW, II, 532.

⁶³Ibid., p. 533.

even though it does not specifically speak about an "out of."⁶⁴

Thayer defines ecclesia as a company of those who

hoping for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, observe their own religious rites, hold their own religious meetings, and manage their own affairs according to regulations prescribed for the body for order's sake.⁶⁵

In the Book of Acts, ecclesia is used generally to mean local congregations. In Acts 5:11, 8:1 and 3, and 11:22, the local congregation in Jerusalem is meant. In Acts 15:41 and 16:3 the word is used in the plural of the local churches which St. Paul had founded on his previous journeys. In Acts 7:38 Stephen used the word in the sense of the Old Testament gahal Jahweh. Its usage in Acts 9:31 refers to the "invisible Church" and points to the inner connection between the Old Testament gahal and the New Testament ecclesia.

Christ's purpose to found a new gahal has not been seriously questioned since the studies of Adolf Harnack.⁶⁶ Flew's analysis of Christ's purpose in regard to the community sums up the spirit of the Gospels and the Book of Acts nicely. He points out that Jesus concerned Himself with the selection and purification of a Remnant which was to be the nucleus of the New Israel. Further, says Flew, Jesus concerned Himself with the establishment of a community of people who would live

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 534.

⁶⁵Thayer, op. cit., p. 196.

⁶⁶Flew, op. cit., p. 25.

on a lofty ethical level. Finally, Jesus as the destined Messiah, gathered a community into close relationship with Himself, and this corporate relationship is their guarantee of fellowship after death.⁶⁷ He also points out that the kerygma of the New Testament Church contained both the idea of the ecclesia and also the power which brought the ecclesia into existence. "The Word of God, the supreme and final revelation of His will for mankind, is the constitutive factor of the Church."⁶⁸ The growth of the Word of God is at times used as a synonym for the growth of the Church.⁶⁹

The Word of God, the kerygma of the Church, in essence was the announcement that Christ is Lord and that the Suffering Servant is completing the work of creating a new covenant people which has taken the place of the qahal in God's gracious plan and activity. Thus, it is correct to say that the ecclesia of the New Testament at the same time replaces and continues the qahal.

The ecclesia had four outstanding characteristics, which were originally present in the Old Testament qahal. The absence of one or more of them eventually brought about the perversion of the qahal. The first characteristic of the ecclesia, as we have seen, is a deep appreciation of the grace

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 78-80.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 169.

⁶⁹Acts 6:7, 12:24, 19:20.

of God as it manifested itself in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This should have been at all times the outstanding mark of the qahal, but it often disappeared and was finally replaced by the Israelites' conviction that the true glory of the qahal lay in the fact that its members were children of Abraham. Members of the ecclesia are favored by God far above the members of the qahal in that they can know Jesus personally through the Gospels. Jesus' gift of the Spirit is an additional privilege granted to the members of the ecclesia after He had returned to heaven.

The second basic mark of the ecclesia is that of solidarity or unity.⁷⁰ The unity of the ecclesia showed itself most dramatically in an active love for the brethren. The first members sold their possessions so that the needy might be helped.⁷¹ The whole church prayed when one of the members was in trouble.⁷² Individuals in the church were "full of good works and acts of charity" for the less fortunate.⁷³ The entire company of believers mourned when death took one of their members.⁷⁴ St. Paul and others were deeply concerned

⁷⁰Cf. infra, pp. 68ff. for a discussion of the solidarity in terms of church organization.

⁷¹Acts 4:32-37.

⁷²Acts 12:1-17.

⁷³Acts 9:36.

⁷⁴Acts 9:37-41.

about the welfare of the starving saints at Jerusalem.⁷⁵ This concern for the brother's welfare was strong in the gahal, but eventually it became a concern which was limited to those who were of one blood. The unity thus came to mean a national unity.

A third mark of the ecclesia which distinguished it sharply from the gahal in its later history is its burning passion for the unsaved souls among both the Jews and the Gentiles. St. Paul is the quintessence of this spirit, but it is by no means limited to him. St. Peter was a bold advocate of mission work among the Gentiles after his experience with Cornelius.⁷⁶ The Church at Jerusalem took an active interest in the mission work that was done among the Gentiles in Antioch. Barnabas was sent to consolidate the new believers and to instruct them further.⁷⁷ The Apostolic Council reflected the serious concern which the Jewish Christians showed for the spiritual welfare of the Gentiles.⁷⁸ The ecclesia never forgot Jesus' words: "I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth."⁷⁹

⁷⁵Acts 11:27-30.

⁷⁶Acts 10:1, 11:18.

⁷⁷Acts 11:19-24.

⁷⁸Acts 15:1-35.

⁷⁹Acts 13:47.

Brunner's comment is worth repeating here:

From the very outset the revelation of the Bible is not concerned with the individual as such. The individualism of philosophy, of mysticism, and moralism is alien to the spirit of the faith of the Bible. It is always regarded as a matter of course that the people of God are meant. The imperfection of the Old Testament is not that the people and not the individual soul receives the revelation, and is the object of the divine reconciling and redeeming process, but that this people is primarily a nationally limited magnitude. Therefore the New Testament fulfillment of the revelation was not in the direction of deepening the personal religion of the individual, but was an extension of the "people of God" to the world of the Gentiles.⁸⁰

The fourth essential mark of the ecclesia is that of purity. The Old Testament Israel included this concept under such words as qadosh and tahar. As we have noted above, in the Old Testament qadosh is used to indicate all things which stand in a positive relationship to cultic institutions, be that God Himself, or man or inanimate things.⁸¹ In the New Testament hagios is used in this same cultic sense. But for Christians the concept took on a new meaning. It was spiritualized and was usually related to the person and work of Christ, who had become the "Mittelpunkt" of a new sanctuary, in that He was Himself the priest, the offering and the Temple of God.⁸²

Further, in the New Testament the concept of hagios had a definite group flavor. The Jerusalem mother-congregation

⁸⁰Brunner, op. cit., p. 587.

⁸¹See supra, pp. 9-11.

⁸²Otto Proksch and Karl Georg Kuhn, "Hagios," TW, I, 107.

is spoken of as being filled with the Holy Spirit through their reliance upon the name of the holy child or Servant, Jesus.⁸³ In other words, God was creating a new holy people in the midst of the so-called gadosh am, and this new people was to carry out the world evangelization program which the Old Testament gadosh am had neglected.⁸⁴

The Book of Acts frequently uses the word hagioi of the members of the Jerusalem church, but the term is by no means limited to them. In the remainder of the New Testament, it is also used regularly of the members of the mission churches. All Christians are God's saints because of their connection with Christ, the Holy One. In virtue of this connection, they are living in the new order under the reign of God and are looking forward eagerly to the consummation of holiness when Christ shall come again.⁸⁵

These basic concepts will be treated from a practical point of view in the next chapter. In concluding this chapter, it should again be emphasized that the character of the ecclesia, as it is presented in the Book of Acts, is a continuation of the character of Jesus. The ecclesia received its origin, its nature, its purpose, and its characteristics from His indwelling presence.

⁸³Loc. cit., cf. Acts 4:30.31.

⁸⁴This paper limits itself to the Book of Acts, but the subject of the inclusiveness of the New Testament Israel cannot be closed without at least citing references to such important passages as the following: Romans 11:17, 15:12; Ephesians 5:26; I Corinthians 1:2, 6:11; Romans 15:16; and Ephesians 2.

⁸⁵Flew, op. cit., p. 142.

CHAPTER III

THE SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

Hans Lietzmann said of the early Church:

Its members were Jews: they wished to be Jews and to remain so; they attended worship in the Temple, and Solomon's portico was their favourite meeting place. They remained faithful to the Law and zealously insisted that Jesus had not come to end the Law but to fulfil it In addition, they accepted the scribal and Pharisaic exegesis of the scriptures.¹

This point of view is an accurate summary of the Jewish Christian attitude as it appears in the Book of Acts. Thus, St. Peter and St. John went up the temple to pray at the ninth hour.² Cornelius, we read, deserved St. Peter's help because he was a man well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation.³ When St. Peter returned from the house of Cornelius, the Christian leaders rebuked him because he had broken the Old Testament law and had gone into the house of uncircumcised men and had actually eaten with them.⁴

When a number of Pharisees became believers, they were still of the opinion that a man could be saved only if he were

¹Hans Lietzmann, The Beginnings of the Christian Church, translated from the German by B. L. Wolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), I, 74-79.

²Acts 3:1.

³Acts 10:22.

⁴Acts 11:3.

circumcised and if he kept all the laws of Moses.⁵ The decision of the Apostolic Council encouraged the Gentile Christians to avoid offence to their Jewish brethren by observing the law at least in not eating strangled meat and by abstaining from the unchastity so prevalent among the Gentiles.⁶

St. Paul circumcised Timothy so that he could work more effectively among Jews and Jewish Christians who were still very conscious of their historic traditions.⁷ The apostle himself paid considerable attention to his personal relationship to the ceremonial law. His departure from Philippi was immediately after the days of Unleavened Bread, and this remark permits us to assume that St. Paul had observed this festival.⁸ He hurried from Philippi to Jerusalem in the hope that he could be there to celebrate the feast of Pentecost.⁹ He told Felix and King Agrippa that he had always been most scrupulous in the observance of all the customs of his people.¹⁰ He was perfectly willing to take the four men into the temple so that other Jewish Christians would know that he revered the laws and customs.¹¹ To the Christians at Rome, St. Paul said:

⁵Acts 15:5.

⁶Acts 15:28-29.

⁷Acts 16:3.

⁸Acts 20:6.

⁹Acts 20:7.

¹⁰Acts 23:1, 24:12.

¹¹Acts 21:24.

Brethren, though I had done nothing against the people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.¹²

Ananias was a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived in Damascus.¹³ The leaders of the Jerusalem church told St. Paul that there were in Jerusalem thousands of believers who were "all zealous for the law."¹⁴

F. J. Foakes-Jackson makes the following observation concerning the Jewish Christian regard for their laws and traditions:

According to tradition, James, the Lord's brother, was so typical a Hebrew saint that it is even conceivable that he might have become even more honored in a Jewish Christian church than Jesus Himself. His virtues, manifested in his asceticism, his prayerfulness, and his strict observance of the Law, and crowned by a martyr's death just before the fall of Jerusalem, were eminently calculated to evoke popular admiration.¹⁵

The use of the term adelphos, for believing and unbelieving Jews alike, by St. Peter and St. Paul further indicates the desire on the part of the Jewish Christians to preserve the solidarity into which they had been born.¹⁶

¹²Acts 28:17.

¹³Acts 22:12.

¹⁴Acts 21:20.

¹⁵F. J. Foakes-Jackson, Studies in the Life of the Early Church (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1924), p. 21.

¹⁶H. F. von Soden, "Adelphos," Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1950), I, 144-146. The Woerterbuch will be hereafter referred to as TW.

But it gradually became apparent that there were essential differences between the solidarity as it existed in the minds of the unbelieving Jews and as it had been presented to the Christians in the Pentecost experience and the teachings of the apostles. These differences were crystallized and presented most systematically in Stephen's reply to his accusers,¹⁷ although they had become evident earlier.¹⁸ He pointed out to the members of the Jewish council that they had broken the solidarity of Israel themselves by crucifying Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. He pointed out, secondly, that the temple was passing as the center of worship, for Jesus was to be worshipped by peoples of all lands. He stated, finally, that it was now the purpose of God's Holy Spirit to create a new people who would worship Jesus, since they, the old people, had resisted the Spirit when they crucified Him.¹⁹

Thus, in spite of their devotion to the laws of the people and the centuries-old traditions, the Christians were forced to accept the fact of a split, primarily and basically because of their devotion to the person of Jesus Christ. They soon began to apply to themselves the term, "The Way," in a sense which implied that they were on the unique and peculiar way to heaven. Those of "The Way" were those who had accepted the full

¹⁷Acts 7:1-50.

¹⁸Acts 4:1-3, 5:12, 5:29.

¹⁹R. Newton Flew, Jesus and His Church (New York: Abingdon Press, 1938), pp. 176f.

revelation of Jesus Christ, along with all its consequences as far as a new ethical way of living was concerned.²⁰ Here again we see the centrality of Jesus in the faith and life of the Church. His living presence in the Church made the break with their brethren inevitable, however much the Jewish Christians regretted it. This break bears out the truth of Maurice Goguel's statement that

the historical reality of the personality of Jesus alone enables us to understand the truth and development of Christianity, which otherwise would remain an enigma.²¹

Though they no longer could agree with the non-Christian Jews as to the meaning and the real nature of the solidarity, the Christian Jews continued to manifest deep love for their countrymen. They wanted their brothers and sisters to join them in this new fellowship which had been constituted by God's great act of sending His Son into the world. They worked and prayed that other Jews would confess that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus had stipulated that the leaders in the early Church must be men who had been witnesses to everything that He had done.²² Those who had been intimately associated with Him personally were commissioned as the first witnesses in

²⁰Ibid., p. 157.

²¹Maurice Goguel, cited in L. W. Sweet, The Head of the Corner (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 212.

²²Acts 1:22.

Jerusalem and in all Judea and empowered with the Spirit for that witnessing.²³ The impact of Jesus' personality became apparent in the way the disciples carried on mission work among their own people. Their zeal and their witness give further evidence that Jesus is the source of the new solidarity, the Creator of the New Israel.

An analysis of St. Peter's sermon on Pentecost Day shows that Jesus Christ as Lord was the substance of the apostolic message.²⁴ He began by recalling for his hearers God's promise to pour out His Spirit upon His children. Then he warned them of a day of judgment which would come upon all those who had rejected the Spirit. He reminded them that they could escape in that day only by calling upon the name of the Lord. And then he pointed them to Jesus as the clear and full revelation of the "name of the Lord." He told his hearers that they had killed Jesus but that He had not been bound by death. His resurrection, according to St. Peter, was full proof that He was the promised Messiah Who would bring peace and joy into men's hearts. The apostle also proclaimed to the people that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised seed of David who would set up the everlasting Kingdom of God. Then St. Peter repeated his personal witness to the fact that Jesus had risen. He told them that the phenomenon which they were then witnessing was the first step in the establishment of the New Israel. Further,

²³Acts 1:8.

²⁴Acts 2:14-36.

according to St. Peter, it was the apostles' determination, by the grace of God, to carry this message of the crucified and risen Lord into all the earth until all nations had heard His name. St. Peter concluded his sermon with the mighty testimony of verse 36: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

The apostles approached the unbelieving Jews with love and patience. St. Peter assured them that God had sent Jesus to them first of all to bless them by turning every one of them from their wickedness.²⁵ Even though they had been arrested and threatened with terrible consequences if they spoke any more about Jesus, the apostles nevertheless came to the Temple at daybreak and taught.²⁶ At Salamis,²⁷ Antioch in Pisidia,²⁸ Thessalonica,²⁹ Berea,³⁰ Corinth³¹ and Ephesus,³² St. Paul made his first approach in a new city to the Jews, even though God had commissioned him primarily as the apostle to the Gentiles.

²⁵Acts 3:25.

²⁶Acts 5:21.

²⁷Acts 13:5.

²⁸Acts 13:14.

²⁹Acts 17:1-2.

³⁰Acts 17:10.

³¹Acts 18:4.

³²Acts 18:19.

The incident at Ephesus is particularly indicative of the apostle's warm love in Jesus for his countrymen, because it followed immediately after the terrible curse which he had pronounced upon the unbelieving Jews in Corinth for their stubborn refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah.³³ Apollos followed the example of St. Paul and preached first to the Jews, confuting them powerfully in public, and showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.³⁴

The apostles' zeal for their countrymen is evidenced also by the blessings which the Holy Spirit poured out upon their efforts. Three thousand souls were converted on Pentecost Day.³⁵ Five thousand were added a short time later.³⁶ In chapter five of the Book of Acts we are told that "more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes."³⁷ And in chapter six we read that "the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith."³⁸ Thus the "church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria . . . was built up."³⁹ In chapter twenty-one St. Paul was reminded by the church leaders in

³³Acts 18:6.

³⁴Acts 18:24-28.

³⁵Acts 3:41.

³⁶Acts 4:4.

³⁷Acts 5:14.

³⁸Acts 6:7.

³⁹Acts 9:31.

Jerusalem that there were many thousands among the believers who were still zealous for the law.⁴⁰

The apostles' message was always the same. They called upon their hearers to repent and to turn to the Lord.⁴¹

St. Paul admonished the Ephesian elders to continue as he had done, "testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."⁴² Before King Agrippa the great apostle witnessed to the fact "that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles."⁴³

Further light on the practical development of the new solidarity in Jesus will be gained from a study of the break between the Christian Jews and the non-Christian Jews. An effort will be made to determine precisely how this rupture was related to the new concept of solidarity which the Christians were sharing in Christ Jesus. Significantly the first opposition came from the side of the non-believing Jews. The Sadducees were angered because the disciples were preaching in Jesus Christ the resurrection from the dead.⁴⁴ The Sanhedrin charged

⁴⁰Acts 21:20.

⁴¹Acts 5:14, 9:35, 11:21, 24.

⁴²Acts 20:21.

⁴³Acts 26:23.

⁴⁴Acts 4:2.

the disciples to stop preaching "in this name."⁴⁵ The synagog of the Freedmen strongly opposed the preaching of Stephen because he was speaking words "against this holy place and the law," and because he preached that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy "this place" and would change the customs which Moses had delivered unto them.⁴⁶ On another occasion the Jews charged the Christians with acting against the decrees of Caesar by saying that there was another king, Jesus.⁴⁷ The unbelieving Jews planned to ambush and kill St. Paul because they felt he had polluted the temple. But here it should be noted that the ambush was planned two years after the alleged offence had been committed. Their hatred of St. Paul must have stemmed from something deeper than the offence itself. Twice St. Luke reports that the Jews opposed the Christians because they were jealous, that is, because they were filled with an envious and contentious rivalry.⁴⁸

An analysis of these passages and a detailed study of Stephen's speech in Acts, chapter seven, indicates that the Jewish opposition to the Christian message was based upon the Jewish fear that their religio-national solidarity would be destroyed when the Temple and the Law were no longer revered as they had been for centuries. All students of the Jewish

⁴⁵Acts 5:28.

⁴⁶Acts 6:13-14.

⁴⁷Acts 17:7.

⁴⁸Acts 13:45, 17:5.

nation in the inter-testamentary period and the early New Testament period come to the conclusion that the Jews were a tightly-knit group and that in their thinking, survival depended primarily upon the preservation of the law and the Pharisaic and rabbinic traditions. Lietzmann traces this development among the Jews from the time of the captivity, and comes to the conclusion that:

the law was the centre of their thought and practical life and, in continually renewed metaphors and applications, was lauded as Israel's most precious and sacred garment. Indeed the emphasis slipped from its moral to its ceremonial side, for it was the very prescriptions for worship and for cleanness which were felt as defence-work against the burning sea of heathenism round about.⁴⁹

He states further that at the time of Jesus, the Jews themselves felt that temple worship was not enough. Rather for them the decisive factor was to be found in personal conduct in fulfilling all the prescriptions of the law.⁵⁰ Albright points out that by the fourth century before Christ, the normative theology and basic legalistic system of Judaism had been clearly fixed and that the Jews considered these formulations to be rigidly binding.⁵¹ He also shows that the Maccabean revolt was basically motivated by a desire to preserve the purity of the temple worship. Between 175 and 165 B.C.,

⁴⁹Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 34f.

⁵⁰Loc. cit.

⁵¹W. F. Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1940), p. 265.

the high priests Jason and Menelaus had introduced the cult of Zeus Olympius into the temple and had espoused a religion which in fact was the reorganization of Judaism as a Syro-Hellenic religion.⁵² To destroy this new religion all pious Jews, regardless of party and creed, rallied to the support of the Hasmoneans with a fanaticism that carried them to a surprising victory.⁵³

These experiences had left bitter memories in the minds of Jews of all classes. They had learned from the experiments of Jason and Menelaus that temple worship could be corrupted. It was not a totally reliable defense against heathenism. Therefore, they concentrated their attention on the keeping of the Law, and, as indicated above, made it largely a matter of ceremonial observance. These people were keenly aware of any threat to the Law, because they felt that such a threat was also an attack on their very existence as a nation. When it became apparent that the proclamation of the name of Jesus Christ would rob their ceremonial observances of all value, the majority of the Jewish race launched a bitter fight against Christianity. St. Paul is himself the outstanding example of this attitude prior to his conversion. He was zealous for the law and in his opinion at that time the new faith would rob the ceremonial law of any value. For this reason he persecuted those of this faith unto death.⁵⁴

⁵²Op. cit., p. 271.

⁵³Op. cit., p. 272.

⁵⁴Acts 7:58, 8:1.3, 9:1.2.21, 22:4, 26:9-11.

In his reply to the attacks of the Freedmen, Stephen sought to show his opponents that the real meaning of the Old Testament revelation was to present the grace and love of God for a rebellious people. He reminded them that Moses had already called their attention to another Prophet Who was to come and whose coming would be the greatest event in God's dealing with them. He cautioned them against the belief that they had merited God's favor by their obedience. In conclusion, Stephen told his hearers that they had always resisted the Holy Spirit, as their fathers had done, and that they had climaxed their resistance to the Spirit by killing the Righteous One, whose coming had been told beforehand.⁵⁵

The disciples, in contrast, were so filled with the power of Jesus' presence through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that they would not alter their teaching to satisfy the legalism of their compatriots. They were convinced that they had no choice but to tell those things which they had heard and seen.⁵⁶ "Every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."⁵⁷ Stephen chose to lay down his life rather than to deny his Savior.⁵⁸ His fearless testimony was climaxed by the unique privilege of seeing the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.⁵⁹ Saul was able to arrest many who would

⁵⁵Acts 7:52.

⁵⁶Acts 4:20.

⁵⁷Acts 5:42.

⁵⁸Acts 6:8 to 7:60.

⁵⁹Acts 7:56.

not deny that they were disciples of the Lord and followers of "The Way."⁶⁰ James chose death by beheading.⁶¹ Peter and the other apostles were imprisoned several times and scourged on other occasions.⁶² A great persecution arose following the murder of Stephen and many believers left their homes and their families so that they might preserve their loyalty to Jesus.⁶³

The real cause of the bitter enmity which the unbelieving Jews felt toward the Christians must thus be traced to their fear that the solidarity of this new group, based as it was upon individual adherence to the name of Jesus, would destroy the traditional Jewish solidarity which had come to be based upon nationality and ritual observance of the ancient laws and customs.⁶⁴ The unbelieving Jews would not admit to any relationship between Jesus of Nazareth and the Law which they professed to venerate so highly.⁶⁵ The apostles pointed to the resurrection of Jesus as the only basis for the hope of immortality, while the other Jews were convinced that immortality belonged to those who were sons of the covenant by birth or by proselytization.⁶⁶ Both Jews and Christians agreed that a day

⁶⁰Acts 9:1.2.

⁶¹Acts 12:2.

⁶²Acts 4:1ff., 5:17f., 40, 12:3ff.

⁶³Acts 8:1.

⁶⁴Acts 6:13.14, 7:1-50.

⁶⁵Acts 3:25f.

⁶⁶Acts 3:29-33, 4:18, 5:29-32.

of judgment and catastrophe was at hand. But for the Jews this was the day when their earthly kingdom would forever be established and all non-Jews would be excluded, and thus God's promises to Abraham would be fulfilled.⁶⁷ The Christians viewed this day as the day on which Christ would return to confirm in His kingdom many from the east and from the west who had looked to Him in sincere repentance and faith.

The steadfastness of the Christians in face of the bitter opposition from their countrymen underscores again the truth that Jesus Christ was the constitutive factor in the new solidarity. There were many compelling reasons why the Christians should have sought to tailor their doctrines so that they could make common cause with the other Jews. Together, for example, the Jews and the Christians could have raised a strong voice against the corruption rampant in the Roman Empire. Some might have argued that this would be most pleasing to God. Then, too, the Christians could have enjoyed the favorable position of being a religio licita, and thus would have been in better position to carry out their mission program. They could have used the temple and the network of synagogues for their meeting places. Possibly by making common cause, the Christians could reform the Jewish abuses from within. By tempering their course and their words, they could have escaped the fierce persecution which their countrymen poured out upon them. Less compelling reasons have often shaped church policy of later centuries. In the face of these great

⁶⁷ Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 29.

pressures, why did the ecclesia choose the opposite course? They did so primarily because they valued loyalty to the person and teachings of their Founder above any temporary advantage that they might have gained by diluting their confession of Jesus. The disciples summed up their position when they told the Sanhedrin that they could not but speak the things which they had heard and seen.⁶⁸ The leaders of the New Israel realized that true solidarity and strength depended upon a pure and uncorrupted relation to the Lord Jesus. They realized that the solidarity of the ecclesia was not based upon numbers nor upon taking the course of least resistance. They also realized that as the world had hated their Founder, so they too must of necessity expect to be hated by the world. The indwelling and impelling power of the Holy Spirit led them to see the truth of these things,⁶⁹ and no considerations of racial ties, personal safety, or numerical strength could change their minds.

The early Church also had to deal with Jewish influence coming from some who were bona fide members of the Church. There was a sizable number of believers who were zealous of the Law.⁷⁰ There were many sincere converts from Judaism who believed that it was necessary to be circumcised according to the custom of Moses to be saved.⁷¹ Believing Jews of the party

⁶⁸Acts 4:19f.

⁶⁹Acts 1:5.8, et al.

⁷⁰Acts 21:20.

⁷¹Acts 15:1.

of the Pharisees told St. Paul in Jerusalem that it was "necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses."⁷² At the Apostolic Council St. Paul spoke against this trend and witnessed to the centrality of Jesus by reaffirming his faith that the Gentiles would be saved through faith in Jesus, just as the Christian Jews themselves would be.⁷³ James declared his conviction to the assemblage that they were building a new house of David, which, according to prophecy, would include Gentiles.⁷⁴ The Council ruled that circumcision was not necessary, and sent its decision to the churches in the provinces in the hands of Barnabas and St. Paul, both of whom had risked their lives for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁷⁵ Thus again it was the influence of the person of Jesus Christ that enabled the ecclesia to resist this pressure.

Lietzmann calls attention to four historical factors which kept the Church from being overwhelmed by the Judaizing reaction. He mentions the celebration of Sunday in place of Saturday, to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus; the choice of Friday to replace Thursday as the first fast day, to commemorate the death of Jesus; the choice of Wednesday as the second fast day in the place of Monday, and the presence of Hellenists in the

⁷²Acts 15:5.

⁷³Acts 15:11.

⁷⁴Acts 15:13-18.

⁷⁵Acts 15:25.

Church who counteracted the Judaistic influence.⁷⁶ Thus, even from Lietzmann's practical point of view as a historian, the person of Jesus emerges as the dominantly constitutive factor in the New Israel.

The Book of Acts reveals clearly that the New Israel was almost destroyed by the Judaic background and Judaistic pressures which were presented by many of the members. The first Jewish Christians were products of their training and their environment. The manner in which they overcame their attitudes toward the Gentiles and launched a world-wide mission program casts important light upon the nature of the solidarity of the New Testament Israel.

The Jews in Palestine had little interest in their Gentile neighbors. The proselytes referred to in the Book of Acts are generally Gentiles who lived outside Palestine.⁷⁷

In Palestine . . . it is quite likely that communal friction between Jews and Gentiles had brought missionary work almost to a standstill, but the propaganda of the Dispersion was more or less at its high-water mark at this period.⁷⁸

While the Jews paid lip service to God's command to seek to bring all people into the qahal, they denied it in practice in two ways. In the first place, most Palestinian Jews refused to have anything whatsoever to do with Gentiles.⁷⁹ In the

⁷⁶Lietzmann, op. cit., pp. 85-90.

⁷⁷Acts 14:1.4, 18:4.

⁷⁸Wilfred L. Knox, The Acts of the Apostles (Cambridge, England: The University Press, 1948), p. 71.

⁷⁹Acts 11:3.

second place, all of them insisted that the Gentile must become a Jew, either by submitting to all requirements, including circumcision, or at least by submitting to the observance of the Law.⁸⁰ Evidence indicates that most of the proselytes had been attracted to the Jewish religion by its high moral standards, and not by the message of redemption through the work of the Suffering Servant. This typical Jewish attitude toward prospective Gentile converts is shown in St. Peter's reaction to the rooftop vision, when he refused to touch the meat which the Lord had offered him because it was not ceremonially acceptable.⁸¹ Other members of the Jerusalem Church were shocked to learn that Peter had actually eaten with uncircumcised men.⁸² When St. Paul told the unbelieving Jews that he had been sent to preach to the Gentiles, they cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he ought not to live."⁸³

The disciples could not immediately divorce themselves from this inherited attitude. They, too, reflected an abhorrence of the Gentiles for some time following Jesus' ascension. For a period of what may have been several years, the

⁸⁰Acts 15:1-5.

⁸¹Acts 10:13.

⁸²Acts 11:3.

⁸³Acts 22:22.

Church's work was limited to Jewish people who were either natives of Palestine or Jews from the Diaspora who happened to be in Palestine, or to those Gentiles who were at least proselytes of the gate.⁸⁴ While it is true that the apostles had a burning desire to bring in as many of their countrymen as they possibly could, it took time for the Lord of the Church and of history to impress upon them that their mission must include the Gentiles. Although Jesus had commanded them to witness unto the ends of the earth,⁸⁵ it seems that this phrase was understood at first to mean only those Jews who were scattered unto the ends of the earth in the Diaspora. St. Peter's Pentecost sermon was addressed only to the House of Israel, to the "men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem,"⁸⁶ to the men of Israel,⁸⁷ to those who were his brethren by birth,⁸⁸ and to "all the house of Israel."⁸⁹ It may well be that St. Peter's statement that God's promise was made not only to his hearers and to their children but also "to all that are far off" was limited, in his mind, to the Jews in the Diaspora.⁹⁰

The first break in this exclusive Jewish-Christian solidarity came when Philip followed Christ's footsteps into Samaria

⁸⁴Acts 2:11.

⁸⁵Acts 1:8.

⁸⁶Acts 2:14.

⁸⁷Acts 2:22.

⁸⁸Acts 2:29.

⁸⁹Acts 2:36.

⁹⁰Acts 2:39.

and established a flourishing mission in that area.⁹¹ We do not read that Philip was commissioned by the Jerusalem Church to undertake that work. It is more likely that he went there to escape the persecution which was raging in Jerusalem at that time.⁹² After he had begun the work, the Jerusalem Church sent Peter and John as their representatives to sanction this mission.⁹³ It is of interest to note that no feeling of joy is ascribed to the Jerusalem Church over the conversion of the Samaritans, although this is reported in almost every Gentile conversion mentioned in later chapters of the Book of Acts.

The next lesson in the nature of the new solidarity was also furnished through the activity of Philip. He was commanded by the Spirit of God to make the acquaintance of the Ethiopian eunuch, and thus became God's instrument to bring this Gentile into the Church.⁹⁴

Chapter nine forms a bridge between Philip's work in chapter eight and the vision of St. Peter in chapter ten as it relates the story of the conversion and preparation of St. Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles.

The next lesson concerning the true nature of the new solidarity was given to St. Peter at Caesarea, and it proved to be

⁹¹Acts 8:4-13.

⁹²Acts 8:1-4.

⁹³Acts 8:14-17.

⁹⁴Acts 8:26-40.

a most difficult lesson for that sincere man of God to master. The new principle is stated in these words, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common."⁹⁵ To teach St. Peter the practical meaning of that rule, the Lord caused the servants of Cornelius to appear at Simon's doorway immediately following the vision. This coincidence made a powerful impression on the apostle, and he went down to Caesarea with the servants of Cornelius. To these Gentile proselytes he preached the same message which the apostles had proclaimed among the Jews, "preaching the good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)."⁹⁶ The believers who had accompanied St. Peter were amazed when the Holy Spirit was poured out "even on the Gentiles."⁹⁷ Through this experience St. Peter learned that God showed no partiality, but that in every nation anyone who feared Him and did what was right was acceptable to Him.⁹⁸

When the apostle returned to Jerusalem he was sharply criticized by those believers who felt that circumcision was necessary to salvation.⁹⁹ He related the entire experience to them, concluding with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the household of Cornelius.¹⁰⁰ The apostle's internal struggle and his apparent unwillingness to go to the house of

⁹⁵Acts 10:15.

⁹⁶Acts 10:36.

⁹⁷Acts 10:45.

⁹⁸Acts 10:34f.

⁹⁹Acts 11:1-3.

¹⁰⁰Acts 11:4-17.

Cornelius is reflected in his question directed to the brethren at Jerusalem, "If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"¹⁰¹ When the brethren heard this, "they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life.'"¹⁰²

This incident marks a most important stage of growth in the spiritual understanding of the Jewish Christians. At this time they were taught that the old Jewish national concept of the gahal had to be completely abandoned because it was contrary to God's original plan and because it would destroy the new solidarity which God was establishing upon the person of Jesus Christ. The new fellowship was based on the fact that a man had come to know Jesus as his only Savior,¹⁰³ that he feared God and did what was right before God.¹⁰⁴

This fundamental truth was not learned completely and finally even by those who were involved. We read, for example, that

those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus, and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great

¹⁰¹Acts 11:17.

¹⁰²Acts 11:18.

¹⁰³Acts 11:17.

¹⁰⁴Acts 11:34f.

number that believed turn to the Lord.¹⁰⁵

When Barnabas saw that the grace of God included also the Greeks, he was glad, "for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith."¹⁰⁶

Had the first members of the ecclesia failed to grasp this fundamental note of universality, they would have lost their place in the spiritual history of the world, in the same way that this had happened to the members of the qahal. It is important to note how thoroughly the Lord explained this point and how carefully and patiently he convinced these first Christians. First, Jesus commanded the disciples to witness unto Him in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.¹⁰⁷ The gift of tongues on Pentecost was to teach this same lesson, but it was not fully grasped at first, perhaps because there were present in Jerusalem Jews of the Diaspora who spoke in all these tongues.¹⁰⁸ St. Peter failed to apprehend the full scope of Joel's words that "who-soever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."¹⁰⁹ The same apostle quoted, without full understanding, the Lord's promise to Abraham that in his posterity all the families of the earth should be blessed.¹¹⁰ The Lord of the Church used

¹⁰⁵Acts 19:21.

¹⁰⁶Acts 19:22-24.

¹⁰⁷Acts 1:8.

¹⁰⁸Acts 2:5-11.

¹⁰⁹Acts 2:21.

¹¹⁰Acts 3:25.

persecution to force the Church to extend its outreach to include the Gentiles. St. Paul was called for the express purpose of being God's chosen instrument to carry God's name before the Gentiles, and kings, in addition to the sons of Israel.¹¹¹ The combination of these explicit commands, the experiences of St. Peter and Philip, and the driving insistence of St. Paul, in conformity to his special calling, led the Church to realize its true nature and its marked differentiation from the fossilized gahal.

But the inclusion of the Gentiles was only one half of the great problem which the New Israel had to face and solve in order to be true to its calling and its nature. Having opened the doors to the Gentiles, the Church was next racked by the question of how the Gentiles should be admitted. St. Paul argued that they should be admitted on the basis of faith alone. Those of the circumcision-view insisted that they must also be circumcised and be pledged to keep the law of Moses. At Caesarea St. Peter apparently did not insist on circumcision or the pledge.

The Church at Antioch seems to have adopted this liberal attitude from the first, and the churches formed in Asia Minor during the missionary tour of Paul and Barnabas included not only Jews but an even greater number of Gentiles who were not required to be circumcised or otherwise to observe the Mosaic law.¹¹²

This pressing problem was brought to a head when repre-

¹¹¹Acts 9:15.

¹¹²F. F. Bruce, The Acts of the Apostles (Chicago: The Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, 1952), pp. 287f.

sentatives of the Jerusalem Church began teaching at Antioch that unless believers were circumcised according to the custom of Moses, they could not be saved.¹¹³ Bruce points out that such men would naturally refuse all social intercourse with uncircumcised persons, including common participation in the Eucharist.¹¹⁴ Even St. Peter wavered at Antioch and, at least partially, inclined to this point of view. St. Paul recognized in St. Peter's action the thin edge of the wedge which would cleave the Church and eventually destroy the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. Therefore, St. Paul opposed him forcefully.¹¹⁵ At the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem the New Israel was again fighting for its life, as it had done a few years earlier when St. Peter returned from Caesarea. The decision of the Apostolic Council firmly established the principle that Jews and Gentiles alike would be saved by faith in the Lord Jesus. It should be noted that St. Peter played a decisive role in the formulation of this decision. The suggestion of the elders that the Gentiles refrain from blood and from things strangled and from unchastity was clearly within the limits of Christian liberty and brotherly concern, and did not touch upon the fundamental question of how a man was saved. Through this controversy, the Church was freed from any man-made laws or any national traditions. It was freed for its true work of pro-

¹¹³Acts 5:1-5.

¹¹⁴Bruce, op. cit., p. 288.

¹¹⁵Loc. cit.

claiming the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to Jews and Gentiles alike on equal terms.

The vision of the first Church leaders was soon focused on the Gentile world more strongly than on the Jewish world. In part the destruction of Jerusalem and the flight of the Judean Christians to Pella, where they rapidly lost their spiritual vitality,¹¹⁶ accounted for this development. The historical fact of the tremendous success which followed the work among the Gentiles was another factor. The Ethiopian eunuch was followed by Cornelius and his household. Then came Sergius Paulus.¹¹⁷ These individual conversions were followed by the conversion of large numbers from among the Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia and Iconium.¹¹⁸ Lydia and the jailer at Philippi became the first-fruits of the Gentile harvest in Europe. Corinth and Ephesus were also the scene of conversions from among the Gentiles.¹¹⁹

The Church's program of work among the Gentiles was encouraged by the existence of proselytes who had already learned much of God's purposes through their study of the Old Testament. Many of these readily accepted the message of the New Israel as the consummation and fulfillment of that teaching which they had learned. Cornelius belongs in this category, as does one

¹¹⁶Lietzmann, op. cit., p. 235.

¹¹⁷Acts 13:12.

¹¹⁸Acts 13:44, 14:1.

¹¹⁹Acts 18:4, 19:7f.

of his soldiers.¹²⁰ Lydia was a proselyte of the gate.¹²¹ In Thessalonica, the ranks of the Church were swelled through the conversion of a group of devout Greeks.¹²² In Corinth, St. Paul found a sizable group of Greeks gathered in the synagog when he spoke to the Jews.¹²³ The rapid expansion of the work among the Gentiles points again to the tremendous vitality which the living presence of Jesus Christ gave to the Church.

A final basic factor to consider in this discussion of how the ecclesia grew to be true to its nature and calling is that of the role of St. Paul. The Lord of the Church had chosen him for the specific purpose of carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles. In a vision, He said to Ananias, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and sons of Israel."¹²⁴ The Holy Spirit moved the Church at Antioch to commission St. Paul and Barnabas for the work to which God had called them.¹²⁵ When his countrymen would not listen to them, St. Paul announced the judgment of God against them. He further declared that from that time on he would take the Gospel to the Gentiles.¹²⁶ Before the angry mob in Jerusalem and again before King Agrippa, St. Paul showed that he had never

¹²⁰Acts 10:7.

¹²¹Acts 16:14.

¹²²Acts 17:4.

¹²³Acts 18:4.

¹²⁴Acts 9:15.

¹²⁵Acts 13:2.

¹²⁶Acts 18:6.

lost sight of his great calling to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles.¹²⁷ At the Apostolic Council St. Paul let God's mighty acts among the Gentiles speak for the freedom of God's grace for the Gentiles. By his own zeal for the Gentiles, he forced the Church to give more attention to them.

Thus, through a combination of strategic factors, the Lord led the Church to understand ever more deeply and radically its new nature and its new calling. He showed its members that the solidarity of the New Israel must be a universal solidarity, or it would be no solidarity at all. He enabled it to shake itself free from the nationalistic exclusiveness which had both perverted and fettered the qahal.

One significant area remains to be discussed, and that is the subject of the internal life and organization of the New Israel. While the information which the Book of Acts gives on this general subject is limited, it is nevertheless quite instructive. As we have seen, the qahal was to have been characterized by unity and purity.¹²⁸ Over the centuries, the members of the qahal came to understand unity as a national thing and purity as a ceremonial thing. The New Israel showed a genuine understanding of these two marks. Their unity consisted in common devotion to the Lord of the Church and, in Him, to each other. After Jesus had ascended, the brethren and the women returned to Jerusalem and with one accord devoted themselves

¹²⁷Acts 22:21, 26:17f.

¹²⁸Cf. supra, Chapter I.

to prayer.¹²⁹ On the day of Pentecost they were all together in the temple.¹³⁰ Day by day they attended the temple together and broke bread in their homes.¹³¹ With one accord they lifted their voices in praise to God after St. Peter and St. John had been released by the Sanhedrin.¹³² With one accord, they gathered in Solomon's Portico.¹³³ Those present at the Apostolic Council reached their decision with one mind.¹³⁴ We are further told that the "company of those who believed were of one heart and soul."¹³⁵ The Christians continued in daily fellowship,¹³⁶ and they cheerfully shared their goods with one another.¹³⁷ The love feast was an important part of their life together.¹³⁸ The Jewish Christians were at first not willing to offer this same full unity to the Gentile converts. The strict Jewish Christians would not eat with an uncircumcised person, even though he might be a proselyte or a convert. But the apostles saw clearly that this restriction on the full unity of the Church

¹²⁹Acts 1:14.

¹³⁰Acts 2:1.

¹³¹Acts 2:46.

¹³²Acts 4:24.

¹³³Acts 5:12.

¹³⁴Acts 15:25.

¹³⁵Acts 4:32.

¹³⁶Acts 2:42.

¹³⁷Acts 4:32.

¹³⁸Acts 2:47.

would lead eventually to the loss of the solidarity, and so they pleaded with the Apostolic Council to establish no false divisions within the fellowship.

The love of the believers for one another was an outstanding feature of their unity. The New Israel was determined to follow the Lord's command to love one another. The words agapan or philein do not occur in the Book of Acts, but the true spirit of agape is contained in the behavior of the believers. The following observation concerning the meaning of agape applies in every sense to the Church of the Book of Acts:

The organic principle, laid down once for all in the law of neighbourly love, is here completing its organising task: once the readiness of any Israelite to help those who share with him the life of the Covenant nation, it now means serving fellow-members of the new people of God--making the salvation of the brotherhood the supreme object in life. 'Beloved' and 'Brother' become interchangeable terms. 139

Outsiders were deeply impressed by the mutual love of the Christians. No group took better care of its own members than the Christian Church,

which cared for its members in sickness, found them employment and rescued them from the debtor's prison, surrounded them with human kindness when they were living and provided for their orphans when they died. 140

The force of Jesus' personality showed itself in their relation-

139 Ethelbert Stauffer, "Love," Bible Key Words, translated from the German by J. R. Coates (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), p. 58.

140 E. F. Scott, The Gospel and Its Tributaries (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), p. 94. Acts 4:32-37.

ships with one another within the ecclesia.

The members of the ecclesia were also deeply concerned about purity, and for them this meant purity of doctrine and daily life. They knew that purity of doctrine must be preserved so that the Spirit of the risen Lord might remain with them.¹⁴¹ When Ananias and Sapphira disturbed the purity of the Church by their hypocritical action in regard to the sale of their property, St. Peter took prompt and vigorous action.¹⁴² Very possibly he had in mind the serious consequences of Achan's sin against God and against the qahal and the severe punishment which God meted out to him.¹⁴³ The discussion concerning the necessity of circumcision also threatened the purity of the solidarity, but the wise suggestion of the Apostolic Council preserved both the purity and the unity. The believers were determined to preserve the purity of the doctrine which Jesus had entrusted to them, for they knew that only thus could they also preserve His power in the Church.

Jesus intended that His message and the power of His person should be brought to the world through the organization of the Church.¹⁴⁴ Thus the subject of the Church's organization is also germane to this study. The nucleus of the Church

¹⁴¹Acts 2:42.

¹⁴²Acts 5:1-11.

¹⁴³Joshua 7:1-26.

¹⁴⁴The discussion in chapter two supra has answered the claims of E. F. Scott and others that Jesus did not intend to found the Church but that rather the Church sprang out of His message. Scott, op. cit., pp. 95f.

in its first years was the company of the apostles. Their position in the Church derived primarily from the fact that they had been selected by Christ Himself, had been trained by Him, and had been commissioned by Him directly to be witnesses of His resurrection. The word apostolos has this technical meaning in the New Testament, except for two unusual usages. St. Paul applied this term regularly to Himself because he had been called personally and had seen the risen Redeemer. In the other case, the term is applied in the Book of Acts to Barnabas.¹⁴⁵ The term also includes the idea that he who has been sent has also been authorized and empowered by the Lord Jesus to complete his mission.¹⁴⁶ The apostles were no closed ruling body but they certainly exercised "an ill-defined but lofty authority in matters of administration and government."¹⁴⁷ Thus they sanctioned Philip's mission approach to the Samaritans by sending St. Peter and St. John to Samaria.¹⁴⁸ They definitely occupied a pre-eminent position in the counsels and in the general leadership of the community.¹⁴⁹ When the dispute arose between the Jews and the Hellenists concerning the widows, the apostles called the brethren together and suggested a course of action to them.¹⁵⁰ Only in this passage are the apostles referred to

¹⁴⁵K. H. Rengstorf, "Apostolos," TW, I, 412f.

¹⁴⁶Loc. cit.

¹⁴⁷Flew, op. cit., p. 190.

¹⁴⁸Acts 8:14f.

¹⁴⁹Flew, op. cit., p. 181.

¹⁵⁰Acts 6:1f.

as "The Twelve." The paramount spiritual authority given to the apostles by the Lord, while in itself not organizational, did help the early Church achieve a more closely-knit organization than would have been possible without this central authoritative body.¹⁵¹ Conceivably, a large number of independent and unrelated congregations might otherwise have sprung up. The spiritual oneness under the one apostolic Word of the Lord fostered an organizational oneness.

But the apostles did not long occupy a position of outstanding importance in a governmental-organizational way. Undoubtedly many of them had left Jerusalem to do work in other lands. But the real reason for the fact that the apostles came to occupy a relatively unimportant position is found in the very nature of the apostolate and of the solidarity of the New Israel. The apostles led men, not to themselves, but to Christ. Everyone who joined the ecclesia found himself in a personal and unique relationship to the risen Lord. The word mathetes in the New Testament means one who has entered into a personal relationship with Jesus as the result of a personal call.¹⁵² While it originally meant one who had been called by Jesus while He was on earth, it soon came to include all who had been called by Him through the Apostolic Word. The presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all believers confirmed their personal relationship with Him.¹⁵³ All who were obedient to the

151A. C. Hervey, "Acts of the Apostles," The Pulpit Commentary (Chicago: Wilcox and Follett Co., ca. 1941), I, 232.

152Rengstorf, op. cit., pp. 447f.

153Loc. cit.

faith were in spiritual communion with the Head of the Church. Thus the humblest disciple was in essence equal in authority to the apostles.

In the first years of the ecclesia, the Jerusalem Church occupied a central position of importance and even of authority. Thus this Church sent St. Peter and St. John to Samaria to complete Philip's mission work. St. Peter was asked to give an account of his journey to Caesarea. When a congregation sprang up at Antioch, the Jerusalem Church sent Barnabas to wish them Godspeed. Teachers from Jerusalem were listened to with particular respect by the churches in the provinces.¹⁵⁴ The circumcision dispute was referred to the Jerusalem Church for discussion and guidance, and its suggestion was received with joy by the other churches.¹⁵⁵ It should be noted, however, that St. Paul and Barnabas, too, played important roles in this meeting. St. Paul reported on his success among the Gentiles to the Jerusalem Church regularly.¹⁵⁶ But the center of activity gradually shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch, and then farther west. The Church at Antioch commissioned the first missionaries among the Gentiles.¹⁵⁷ Possibly the apostles and disciples were thus carefully preparing for the day when the Jewish curse upon themselves and their children would bring about the destruction of Jerusalem. More likely it was the

¹⁵⁴Acts 15:1.

¹⁵⁵Acts 15:22-31.

¹⁵⁶Acts 18:22, 21:19.

¹⁵⁷Acts 13:1-3.

abundant vitality of the presence of the Master which led the disciples to seek new bases from which they could operate among the Gentiles with maximum efficiency.

The Book of Acts indicates that a presbyterian form of government existed in the early Church. But it also indicates that all the believers were drawn into the discussions and planning of the Church whenever possible.¹⁵⁸ A negative answer must be given to the question of whether the solidarity of the New Testament Israel required one certain form of church government. The form of government does not belong to the essence of the Church, nor does it in any way constitute a factor in the real solidarity of the Church.

. . . .

In conclusion, a few general observations can now be made concerning the solidarity of the New Testament Israel. Essentially it was the same sort of solidarity which should have held together the Old Testament qahal. In both cases, the solidarity was originally constituted by a gracious act on the part of Him Who was the Head of both. The qahal was constituted by the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. The New Testament ecclesia was constituted by the giving of God's Son on Mount Calvary. "The spiritual homogeneity of the two covenants rests on the identity of the divine head of both," as G. A. Findlay has

¹⁵⁸Acts 2:42, 4:23-32, 6:2.

expressed it.¹⁵⁹ The gahal lost its true solidarity by an exclusive emphasis on external matters such as race and ceremonial observance of the Law in place of the spiritual unity and purity for which God had originally created it.

The New Testament Israel was originally designed by God to be the fulfillment of the gahal, but because the gahal had become essentially perverted, it actually replaced it in God's economy. The solidarity of the ecclesia was constituted in the person of Jesus Christ. The members of the early ecclesia realized this point and sought to preserve the spiritual unity and purity of the ecclesia in and through Jesus Christ. In internal matters the ecclesia was closely knit together. In the spirit of brotherly love it could solve the various disputes and problems which arose. It manifested a burning desire to share Jesus with the members of its own race and with the Gentiles. At the same time, it maintained a solid front toward both the Jews and the Gentiles, and so, in its early years, was not corrupted by influences from either of these two sources. The power of the ecclesia flowed from the fact that its members stood in close personal relationship to the resurrected Christ, even though most of them had not known Him during the days of His flesh. The Spirit of the Son was the important factor in preserving this personal relationship. The ecclesia, in conclusion, manifested both a real determination to preserve its

¹⁵⁹G. A. Findlay, "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians," The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n. d.), II, 858.

own unity and purity of doctrine and life, and at the same time displayed a burning zeal to share the Savior with all men everywhere.

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