

The People of God: The True Community

Preface To The Study

Some who read this paper will be disappointed. There will be a number of disappointing omissions. The first is a whole body of material which constitutes the life and practice of the community. An appendix deals briefly with these elements. However, a problem has been raised by another Living Faith Study (No. 27), 'The Nature of the Church in the New Testament'. This of course covers the church in its life and practice. Indeed it has been difficult not to duplicate a number of elements included in that study. It is best therefore for the reader of this present paper to read the Living Faith Study No. 27. The second omission is the relation of present day communities to the Biblical theme of the Community of God.

In one sense such a discussion, though seemingly most pertinent, is in fact irrelevant. One might as well seek to formulate a thorough-going ecclesiology and measure present churches by it! If communities form themselves that is simply a fact of life and current history. Whether communities are Biblical or not is a large question, and few are competent to handle such an inquiry. What has to be determined is (a) What are the motives and purposes for the formation of communities? and (b) How do they relate to Biblical principles of community? It would not be easy to formulate the answers.

Related to this is the whole matter of church history. Rightly speaking the true community of God is the church of God within the community of man. Man in grace is not to be separated from man in nature. The community of God is not only the people of the church. The community of God is for the community of man. If it is not of the world yet it is in the world and it is for the world.

What we can be sure of is the indescribable dynamic of community. This is seen in the sects and the cults, and indeed all forms of religion which demand social groupings. The drive for fatherhood is certainly behind the acceptance of, and dependence upon, the teacher, rabbi, guru and master. Current rejections of natural fatherhood or parent fatherhood must be considered in any assessment of community developments. When we say 'drive for fatherhood' we are really saying, 'drive for familyhood'.

This present study does not cover in any detail the matter of the fatherhood of God, the Sonship of Christ, the familyhood of man within or without the community of God. Likewise it does not cover the matter of the relationship of the people of God to the Kingdom of God although there is a small appendix touching on these matters. When it comes to the related subject of the gifts ministerial and charismatic, that too is a subject demanding much detail. The reader of our present paper is therefore recommended to read LFS. 11, 'Fatherhood, Sonship, and Family: Heavenly and Human', LFS. 14, 'The King, the Kingdom of God, the King-ship', and LFS. 3, 'The Giver, the Gifts, and the Giving.' In addition, some readers may wish to take up the wider theme of proclamation by the community. It is treated in LFS. 10, 'Gospel Proclamation'.

The life of the community of God is certainly linked with authority and responsibility, or the question of obedience would be redundant. A close study of eldership may convince some that this ministry is not merely of the bene esse of the church, but its esse, in which case LFS. 22, 'Eldership in the Scriptures' could be useful. No less useful would be 'The Basis and Practice of Christian

Counselling' (LFS. 32), which helps to set forth the functional principles of creation and life, with some suggestions for Christian wisdom.

These comments simply serve to show how vast is the subject we have tackled and to underline how much more we have to know than we know. Certainly this present study, as all other Living Faith Studies, is only intended to be a stimulus to further research, and an aid to sharing our insights with others who have traversed this field.

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1. Introduction

'I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' This is a statement made time and again by God. It is first made, in essence in Genesis 17:7-8 where God speaks of a covenant with Abraham and his descendants and says, 'I will be their God'. It is made in the form above in Leviticus 26:12. In Deuteronomy 7:6 Moses tells Israel, 'For you are a people holy to the Lord your God: the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth'. He adds, '...it is because the Lord loves you.'

A glance down a concordance will make it very clear that Israel is God's people. Perhaps the most common expression, and one which is used hundreds of times is 'my people', showing the intimate relationship of God with His people. What God does for, to, and with, this people is really the entire story of the Old Testament, and it continues into the New Testament. A study of the prophets will show that this is also the great theme which occupies their thought, exhortations and predictions. 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people' is more predictive in the prophets because it is pointing to a greater day for Israel. The statement now becomes the promise of a relationship which has not really been known in this quality or degree in the past, rich as that may have been. Hence the statement is of a wonderful future time. In the ultimate it is eschatological. The prophecies of Isaiah abound in references to 'my people', whilst Jeremiah and Ezekiel use the exact statement we are studying, and use it liberally. We will need to look at these, but for the moment we can agree that it is a significant statement.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 speaks of the regeneration of Israel as a nation. In verses 15 to 28 the prophet speaks of the reunion of the two sections of the nation - Judah and Ephraim - so that 'they will be one in My hand'. God says He will gather His people out of every nation, and cleanse them, 'and they shall be my people and I will be their God'. After promising them the everlasting covenant (a term used in Genesis 17) God says He will set His sanctuary in their midst. He concludes, 'My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' This is the statement made in Revelation 21:3, and it refers there, not only to Israel, but to all the people of God, for in the N.T. the promise of the covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34) embraces not only the believing of Israel, but the believing among the Gentiles. This is why Hebrews quotes the work of Christ as being the fulfilment of the promise of Jer. 31:31-34 in 8:8-12 (cf. 10:16-17).

We conclude then that the subject of the people of God, and God as the Father of His people is a truly significant theme through Scripture. We will want to know why this is, and how in fact it obtains.

2.The People of God and The Peoples

In Acts 17:22-30 Paul is seeking to teach pagans about God. They have some knowledge of their own, and he is seeking to both correct and supplement it. Amongst other things he says, ‘And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him.’ He adds, ‘He is not far from each one of us.’

In 14:15 of the same book, and still addressing pagans, he says, ‘ We also are men of like nature with you, and bring you good news that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways, yet he did not leave himself without witness for he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.’

These two statements, amongst many others in Scripture indicate that God has not chosen Israel as His favourite nation and ignored the remaining peoples. There were those, doubtless, in Israel who thought so, but the enlightened knew God to be ‘King of all the nations’, and the Psalms constantly speak of Him ruling all the peoples of the earth, as also the eschaton when all the peoples of the earth would gather to worship Him. We will seek to see the difference between the ‘people of God’ and ‘the peoples of God’.

(i) The People of God

(a) The Selected, Chosen People

Since this is the theme of our study we will not deal with it here in detail, but simply trace a panoramic sketch of the theme. The first people of God we meet are those Adam's descendants commencing with Seth. Abel is spoken of in I John 3: 10ff, as being a child of God, in contrast to Cain who is said to be ‘of that Evil one’, i.e. Satan. Genesis 4:25-26 indicates that Eve knew Seth to be a true substitute for the slain Abel. Genesis 5 then traces Adam's descendants from Seth and not from Cain. Cain's genealogy is given in Genesis 4:17-24 and thereafter mention is not made of it. Seth's progeny are indicated as being godly. When, then, in Genesis 6:1-4 ‘the sons of God’ are mentioned they are thought by one school of interpretation to be the children 'of Seth, whilst ‘the daughters of men’ are concluded to be the descendants of Cain.¹ Their inter-marriage brings about a state of deterioration.

The choice of Noah and his family to be saved indicates that the true people of God will be preserved by this act of grace. Hence in Genesis 10 the genealogy of Noah's descendants is given, that is the families of Japheth, Ham and Shem. These need to be studied for the intimations of the future concerning them. The family roll-call of Ham is informative, especially in its mentions of Nimrod and Canaan. In 9:25-27 Noah has uttered his blessings and cursings upon his sons. Shem comes in for special blessing and Ham (i.e. his son Canaan) for special cursing.

¹ One school of interpretation understand ‘sons of God’ to be angels, and the daughters of men to be women with whom they cohabited, thus producing a race of giants. It is doubtful whether angels are functionally sexual. It is also doubtful whether this exegesis can be sustained on other grounds.

In Genesis 11 a more particularised list of descendants of Shem is given, leading up to Terah the father of Abraham, and then to Abraham himself. With Abraham and the covenant God makes with him begins the particularised theme of the people of God. It is to Abraham primarily that God makes the promise that He will be the God of Abraham's family. However, with that promise is also a universal promise that through Abraham will He bless all the nations of the earth. The same Abrahamic covenant which marks out Israel as the people of God also points to the fact that the other nations will receive blessing or cursing through this very people. However, the positive outcome will be the blessing which will come through Israel to all the nations:-

‘I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse:
and by you shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves.’
(Genesis 12:3, cf. 18:18, etc.)

The careful selection of Isaac to be the covenant-heir of Abraham (as against Ishmael), and again the choice of Jacob (as against Esau) shows the intention of God to have the kind of people He wishes to create. What has to be kept in mind is that Israel is not God's 'choice' people, or His favourite people, but His chosen people. Hence such statements as, ‘For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set His love upon you, and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your forefathers’ (Deut. 7:6-8).

(b) The people of Covenant Promise

The divine election of Israel is shown by promise. This promise, given to Abraham, was that he would become a great nation (Gen. 12:2, 18:18). The promise was sealed by a covenant act (Gen. 17:1-5). Abraham was required to render obedience for his part, whilst it was not to be doubted that the Initiator of the Covenant, God, would for His part keep His promise. The accounts of the lives of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not told merely for historical or character interest, but because their lives related closely to promise. Both Paul (Galatians ch. 3) and the writer of Hebrews (ch. 6:9-20) make much of promise. Both they and other writers in O.T. and N.T. make much of covenant. The theme of covenant embraces the redemptional promises, the locational promises (Palestine), and the national and universal promises, Israel being the priest-nation among all the nations (Exod. 19:5-6), and all nations coming to universal blessing through Israel. Hence the covenant made with Abraham is particularised to Israel as a people in the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 24), and later the Davidic Covenant (II Sam. 7) which develops into promises connected with the Davidic Messiah. In addition the promise of a New Covenant appears (e.g. Jer. 31:31-34) which will supersede the Mosaic Covenant. Looked at closely it is really the fulfilment of the Abrahamic Covenant and this is made clear in the Benedictus of Zechariah in Luke 1:68-79, and confirmed by Paul in Romans 4 and Galatians 3.

Whilst it is true that the covenant with Abraham demanded obedience it is even more true of the Mosaic covenant. The New Covenant is unconditional, being ‘all of grace’, but of course the reception of its blessings are contingent upon obeying the Gospel of Christ.

(c) The People That is Holy

Exodus 19:5-6 states that Israel is to be a holy nation. Leviticus 11:44

and cognate passages show that Israel is a people set apart for God. Just as the furniture of the tabernacle (and, temple) are holy to God, although not innately holy, so is the people of God. They are to be the priest-nation 'among all the peoples of the earth', and whilst this is not defined, as such, yet it must mean in some sense that Israel is a moral and prophetic witness to God, even if it does not exercise a proclamatory ministry. Its rejection of idolatry, and its cleaving to God is a sign of its love to God, as also God's love for it. This is also its purity as a people. God has given it a heart to love Him: He has circumcised its heart (Deut. 30:6).

(d) Israel is a People Trained by God

God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land is tied to His judgement of the Amorites. Not until their iniquity is ripe ('fulfilled') may He destroy them and give the land to the Abrahamic people. Genesis 15:12-21 outlines the area and states the time. Thus the formation of this covenant-people was pre-planned. When they are taken down to Egypt it is that they may come to know their God in the great deeds of His deliverance. Moses is told the name of God, Yahweh, the great I AM THAT I AM. He speaks to Moses of 'My people' (Exodus 3:7) and 'My people Israel' (Exodus 3:10, cf. 5:1, 7:16). He says to Pharaoh, 'Israel is my first-born son'. Moses speaks to God of 'Thy people' (Exodus 5:23).

This people is trained during the time of slavery in Egypt, and the events of the forty years in the wilderness. God's greatness and love is revealed to them in His acts of deliverance, guidance and providence. They are nomadic during this period, and have given to them a law which helps to shape them as a nation. Unfortunately their settlement in Canaan shows that they had not fully realised their identity as the true people of God. Instead of clearing pagan inhabitants from the land they often gave themselves over to the gods of the land, doubtless attracted by local worship, and doubtless giving power to local deities.

The history of Israel is that of a people being trained in law, rebuked in idolatry, growing in nationhood. The great success of David and Solomon was that of kings who unified their people, but the kingdom split into two on the death of Solomon. As Jerusalem was the authentic place of worship syncretistic forms of worship flourished in the Northern Kingdom.

The Books of the Kings and Chronicles tell of the rise and falling of dynasties, especially in the Northern Kingdom. In the South the Davidic dynasty holds sway. Both kingdoms are finally weakened and then destroyed. The prophets foretell that it will happen, and they teach that this is the judgement of God upon their failure to be His people in truth.

The repentance of the people had been foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy. Repentance would bring restoration, and this, too, was effected. Returning from exile the people gathered in Jerusalem and its environs. Ezra-Nehemiah tells of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, and the building of the second temple. This work was attended with prophetic communications and encouragement from God.

Throughout the people of God have the ministry of prophecy in rebuke, warning, teaching and encouragement. God never ceases, in one way or another, to communicate with them. This is done by prophetic word, visitations by angelic messengers, acts of God, and even judgements. The temple cultus and the rituals all speak of the goodness and greatness of God in providence, presence and redemption. Thus the people is shaped.

God teaches by punishment and chastisement. He also teaches by prophetic prediction. The Abrahamic promises which were consolidated by the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob, and which flowered out into the occupation of Palestine

take on new forms with the training and suffering of Israel, especially in its exilic and post-exilic periods. Prophecy is the means by which God shapes His people into expectancy of richer things to come.

(e) Israel is a People of Prophecy and Prophets

The view is taken by some scholars that Israel evolved in its conceptual understanding of God. If this is merely a conceptual evolution then there can be no certainty about its objective reality. Israel claims to be a nation with a revelation of God, and this revelation is primarily prophetic. Hence when God promises Abraham that he will be 'father of many nations' and that in his seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, the promises are prophetic. Abraham himself is a prophet (Genesis 20:7). Jacob is also a prophet. Genesis 49:10 speaks of all the nations coming to the obedience of the prince of Judah. The Psalms speak of a great King who is the Prince of God, and the prophecies have the various themes of Messiah, Prince, Son of man, and the like. Out of these prophecies grows expectancy of a great Vindicator, and one who will establish the new Kingdom (of God) in which will be peace and prosperity, and in which Israel will emerge as the great people of God. To Israel the other nations will defer.

Also the prophets speak of the Day of the Lord. This day will vindicate God in His dealings with both Israel, and the nations of the earth. The end-time will bring a time of complete righteousness and peace. With this is also the judgement of evil and disobedience. Finally there will be a new heaven and a new earth. These prophecies relate to Israel (Isaiah 65:17ff and 66:22f).

Doubtless this is why, at the time of the birth of Jesus, Israel was expectant of Messianic visitation, and the coming of the Kingdom of God. Idolatry as such, had been cleansed from Palestine, and the pure Temple worship had been substantiated. Whilst it is true that much religion had become institutionalised, and elements of corruption were present, nevertheless there was a true remnant waiting for the fulfilment of the prophecies. The New Testament clearly verifies this fact.

(ii) The Peoples of God

(a) The Beginnings

The term 'peoples of God' is apt to be confusing. It is not meant that such peoples are Godly. It simply means (a) that all the nations of the earth belong to God who is Creator, and (b) that out of these nations God will ultimately fulfil His plan and purpose by gathering His elect.

We have seen that God is interested in nations. The inclusion of family trees in Genesis 5, 10, and 11 is indication that the Hebrew Scriptures show the interest of Hebrews in other nations. Further there are many references to the other nations. Israel lived in constant consciousness of these nations. However, it is God's view of these nations which is well portrayed. Already we have seen that the Abrahamic Covenant promised blessing for all the nations of the earth, a point which is also prominent in the N.T.

What, then, is the attitude and intention of God for the peoples of the earth? In the creational mandate given by God (Gen. 1:28ff) man is told to be fruitful, multiply and replenish (fill up) the earth, subdue it, and have dominion (lordship, stewardship) over it. The picture is of the human race possessing the creation and its elements and controlling them. It would be expected that man would move across the face of the earth, as one race, and in gracious ways utilise what is available whilst also caring for it. This mandate is repeated in

Genesis 9:1-7. The rebellion of man as shown in Genesis 6 brings upon him the judgement of God - the Flood. After the flood mankind is given a universal covenant relating to the creation and judgement. God will not judge man in this way again, and will ensure the rhythm of the seasons is kept so that man can keep his sanity and not be afraid of rain. Out of Noah's progeny it is from Nimrod, Ham's grandson that the principle of human kingdom arises. He hunted men. The development of the kingdom principle, as, say, against the principle of covering the face of the earth in a loose confederation of families is developed in the building of the tower which has come to be called Babel.

The principle behind this was (a) The building of a city, (b) A high tower, and (c) The making of a name. Briefly this meant the gathering of people at a point, the building of a watch-and-defence tower, and the setting up of themselves in their own right and autonomy. These went directly against the creational mandate, for they said, **'Lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth'**, i.e. the creational mandate.

(b) The Gentile peoples

The confusion of man by the proliferation of languages prevented a monolithic structure, an autonomy of the whole human race against God. Something of such a principle is indicated in Psalm 2:1-3 where the peoples and the nations set themselves against God, seeking to establish their own independence against God and His Messiah.

It is the selection from the descendants of Shem, namely Abraham (cf. Nehemiah 9:7) which makes Abraham's family the people of special covenant. By the time Israel is a nation in Palestine the people are 'my people' and God is 'their God' as against the other nations. In the Septuagint the Greek word *ethnos* is used for the nations other than Israel. As in the N.T. it has certain connotations, such as 'heathen', i.e. not the people of God; 'pagans', i.e. worshipping other gods, but generally it simply means the nations which are not Israel. It is sometimes used in Greek history as meaning the common people, this with a derogatory sense attaching to it.

The carry-over from Babel means generally that the Gentiles do not know God. We have to be careful in making a simple generalisation as there are mentions of people like Melchizedek and Jethro, who may or may not have been of Semitic origin. However, it is in a passage such as Deut. 32:8 that we find God's settlement of the nations:- 'When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage'. This appears to mean that, as Paul says, 'And he made from one (man) every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation'. The Deuteronomy passage infers that Israel is God's special people, and that the nations are linked with the 'sons of God', i.e. the angels, and this could well mean they are under the aegis of principalities and powers which are celestial. At least that is one interpretation, and has been linked accordingly with Genesis 28:12f, Daniel 10 and 11 where the controlling powers of Greek and Persia are angelic, and John 1:51 where the rise and fall of angels is contingent upon Jesus.

The Gentiles are Israel's neighbours when Israel is in Palestine. Some even live amongst Israel in Palestine (Judges 3:1). These Canaanites and others entice them into idolatry, and away from the worship of Yahweh. Sometimes these tempting deities are well outside the land, such as the religions of the wives of Solomon and Ahab - to name two. We read then, of 'the abominations of the Gentiles' (cf. I Kings 14:24, II Kings 16:3). Some of these nations are used by God to punish Israel (cf. Habakkuk, Hosea 8:10, Amos 9:9).

These nations must not go beyond the bounds, in punishing, which God Himself has set for them (Isaiah 8:9, 10:5). Because God uses the nations for judgements does not mean they are not evil. This is the problem Habakkuk faces. He eventually realises that the invasion of the Chaldeans does not authenticate that nation as a people, for Israel will, in the ultimate profit from its chastisement, whilst the Chaldeans will come under judgement for their own sins.

There are indications of God's government of the Gentiles. The Psalms abound in references to the nations. Psalm 9:17 says, 'The wicked shall depart to Sheol, all the nations that forget God'. The Psalmist prays, 'Let the nations be judged before Thee!' Psalm 2:1f, as we have seen, speaks of the nations, kings and peoples plotting against God. Ultimately they are all defeated by God and His Messiah. Psalm 22:27-28 speaks of the fact that 'all the families of the nations shall worship before Him, for dominion belongs to the Lord, and He rules over the nations'. This theme of His universal rule is well-known to Israel. All nations must bow down before Him (72:11), and God keeps His eyes on all the nations (66:7). Psalm 67 is devoted to the universal worship of God by the nations. This is the God who sits above the nations and rules them. He also gives them the blessing they need. The New Testament is clear on this point also.

Paul speaks of God giving good seasons, rain and (so) food, delighting the hearts of men. He says as we have seen that He gives to all men life and breath and everything. Jesus says the Father sends His rain upon all men, and causes His sun to shine on the just and the unjust. With God there is no partiality. God's government, God's creation, and God's providence is for all the nations, without partiality. What then of Israel as the chosen race? What, also, of the matter of redemption?

The Gentiles and Salvation (O.T.)

We have noticed that Israel alone does not hold exclusively to God, although she alone is God's chosen people. 'The Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage' (Deut. 32:9). However, we have also seen that the covenant with Abraham was to bless the whole earth. 'In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed' (Gen 12:3, 18:18). In the O.T. we have the story of Jonah and Nineveh. God cared enough about Nineveh to destroy it, as He had about Sodom and Gomorrah. Jonah did not wish to go because he knew that once he preached Nineveh would repent, and God would have mercy and refuse to destroy them. Elijah's actions are such that he extends the influence of Yahweh, in the eyes of the people, beyond Israel (I Kings 19:15). In II Kings 5 the healing power of Israel's God reaches Naaman the Syrian. Daniel brings great knowledge of God to his captor kings, and the LXX version of Daniel 9:6 states that the prophets have reached out to every people on earth. Certainly in Amos there is a series of oracles or 'burdens' concerning various of the nations. Isaiah warns Damascus, Egypt and Assyria (Isa. 17:1-11, 20:1-4, 37:33-35), whilst the title conferred on Jeremiah is 'a prophet to the nations' (1:5). He certainly addresses a message to the nations (12:14-17). In Zechariah 2:10-11 the prophet says, 'Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I will come and dwell in the midst of you, says the Lord. And many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of you, and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you.' The growth of Israel in the light of God's covenant grace is outlined in Isaiah 60, 'For the nation and the kingdom that shall not serve you shall perish... The sons of those who oppressed you shall come bending low to you.' It is said directly of Israel, 'The least one shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation' (cf. verses 12, 14, 22).

There are many other intimations concerning the Gentiles, and these relate to their salvation. In Isaiah 41:1ff, God addresses the coastlands and the peoples. In 42:1-4 the delightful servant of the Lord is anointed with the Spirit to 'bring forth justice (Hebrew: mishpat) to the nations'. This servant will not fail or be discouraged until 'he has established justice in the earth: and the coastlands wait for his law'. This is why in Isaiah 11:10 the Spirit-anointed Messiah is the one who is 'an ensign to the nations: him shall the nations seek', why in 42:6 he is 'as a covenant to the people and a light to lighten the nations'. In 49:6 it is written 'I will give you as a light to the nations'. In 49:22 it is written that God will 'lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples, and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.' In many of the prophecies the future of both Israel and the nations is tied up together. This verifies the promises of Genesis 12:3 and 18:18, for this is the way of their fulfilment. **'The nations shall see your (Israel's) vindication and all the kings your glory.'**

The Gentiles and Salvation (N.T.)

When it comes to the N.T. fulfilment of these matters their truth is not difficult to discover. Mary the mother of Jesus sings her Magnificat and ends it with 'He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his posterity for ever.' Zechariah speaks of the same Abrahamic covenant, and sees its mercy of fulfilment about to break on Israel. Simeon quotes of the Saviour as 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel'. John the Baptist sees no particular advantage per se in blood descent from Abraham. God is concerned with the heart of faith and repentance. Stones can replace the harder stones of unrepentant Jewish hearts! Jesus has certainly only come to 'the lost of the tribes of Israel' (Matt. 10:6, 15:24) and to gather 'the children of God scattered abroad' (John 11:52), which at first sight seems to mean the dispersion of Israel. However, that is not all of the matter. Jesus tells of those who will come from 'east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, whilst the sons will be thrown into outer darkness'. 'From east and west' signifies the Gentiles. This means that the Kingdom of God now has wider connotation than Israel, a point which dawns upon the listeners of some of Jesus' parables. For example in the parable of the invitation to the Great Wedding feast the invited reject the invitation and the servants are told to go out into the highways and byways, and bring in the maimed, the crippled and the blind which is again a reference to the Gentiles. In the powerful story of the leasing of the vineyard to tenants, the tenants are said to have killed not only the messengers of the owner, that is his prophets, but also his Son. Jesus says that he will take the tenants and destroy them and give the vineyard to other tenants. 'Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruit of it.' This horrifies his hearers. In Luke 20:16 it is recorded, 'When they heard this they said, 'God forbid!''

There is, in the N.T. a very wide view of God's love. In Matt. 5:43-48 Jesus makes it plain that God is Father to Israel, but at the same time His love goes out to all men fully and impartially, whether Jew or Gentile. It is the world which Jesus has in view. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah is also to 'lighten the Gentiles' and to 'preach justice to the nations'. God has said, 'I will give you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.' (Isa. 42:6, 42:1, 49:6.) Hence John records, 'For God so loved the world'. In the N.T. it is not just Israel (although it is that), nor even the church, but it is the world. God sends His Son into the world. Jesus sends his disciples into the world. They are to go not only to 'Jerusalem and all Judea' but also to Samaria, and then to 'the ends of the earth', that is to the Gentiles. Paul says (II Cor. 5:19), 'For in Christ God reconciled the world unto himself'. The wide concept of 'all things' is apparent in the Pauline epistles.

It does not take us long to realise that the Book of Acts is not a mere chronicling of the apostolic ministry, or the life of the church, but it is apologia for Jew and Gentile alike to read, that there is, to quote Harnack's phrase 'a third race', that is that God is out to embrace both Jew and Gentile in a new people. Hence the special ministry of Peter to Jews and Paul to Gentiles. Hence also the basic conflicts which arise from a misunderstanding of God's salvific purposes for the Gentiles. It is a battle which is won, but in our study we will need to rationalise its elements as we look at the true community, the people of God which includes both Jews and Gentiles.

In the book of the Revelation the prophecies relate to the nations. It can be seen that humanity is divided into two sections, those who have the mark of the beast and belong to the Babylon world system, and those who refuse the mark of the beast. The latter are a great multitude and are out of every nation, people, kindred, tribe and tongue. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (see Rev. 7:9-14, 19:1f). Ultimately in chapters 21 and 22 the city of God descends from heaven, and God is said to be with His people. It is said of the city, 'By its light shall the nations walk, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it... they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations Likewise the river of life which flows in the middle of the street of the city has on either side the tree of life, 'and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations

Thus we con to the conclusion that the people or nations of the earth are designed for God's people, i.e. those who come by faith and repentance, because of the redeeming work of Christ. It is this which we now wish to view.

3. Messiah and The People of God

Psalm two is a significant starting place for this subject. However it must also be linked with the covenant promises to Abraham. Only when we see that from the beginning, indeed from before the foundation of the world God's intentions towards His creation (then to be) have been consonant with His love and His goodness, do we understand the dimensions of man's rebellion as executed in the Fall of Adam, and in the description given in Romans 1:18-32. God's intentions for man, revealed in the prophets and in the N.T. Scriptures show us that these intentions were centred in Christ as the mediator of His redemptive work, and His work of ultimately glorifying man and the creation.

(i) Abraham and Christ

Paul emphasises in Galatians 3 that the universal blessing promised to the nations was in the seed of Abraham, and, more particularly, in the single seed, Christ. In Romans 4 he emphasises that Abraham was to be the Father of all nations, and he was to inherit the world. This gives us the universal aspect of the covenant. Those who are persons of faith are the children of Abraham. He by faith believed he would be such a father, i.e. of many nations. By faith men become his children. However it is not faith in him, but faith in Christ, for he is the Seed. He is the Messiah.

Jacob prophetically spoke of him in Genesis 49:10 when he said that 'unto him shall be the obedience of the nations'. It is concerning this obedience that Paul speaks in Romans 1:5 'the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.' Doubtless this is why Christ says, 'Make disciples of all nations' (Matt. 28:18-20). Paul alludes to this in Romans 15:18 'to win obedience from the

nations', and in 16:26, '...is made known to all nations.. to bring about the obedience of faith'.

When then we come to Psalm two we see disobedience of the nations. 'Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and his anointed (messiah) saying, 'Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.'" As the Psalm progresses it pictures the Lord laughing at them and defeating them. He does this by setting His king (anointed, messiah) upon the holy hill of Zion, by declaring the decree, 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,' that is He has made him His King as His son. He then tells the son to ask of Him and He will give him the nations as his inheritance and the end of the earth for his possession. He too will destroy all that is rebellious. The kings and rulers are therefore to submit, that is to render to him the obedience of the nations, as set forth in Genesis 49:10.

We can see then that the seed of Abraham, which Paul in Galatians 3 calls Christ is the Messiah of God who defeats the nations, and subdues them. To him is to be the obedience of the peoples.² This is how Abraham inherits the whole earth (Rom. 4:13) because by faith they are also the children of the father of faith, Abraham. Yet, as we have seen it is faith in Christ.

(ii) Messiah's Defeat of Evil: His Winning of the Nations

Man's initial rebellion, and the rebellion of celestial powers both come together in the system which opposes God called 'the world'. This is not merely the created world, although it certainly exists within that and seeks to subvert that. We have seen that angelic powers control the affairs and events of nations, and seek to oppose the sovereign rule of God and His good ruling powers. What is required is to defeat the grip that Satanic powers have over man, and reconcile him to God. This the Son of God comes to do. The terms 'Son of God' and 'Messiah' (or, 'Christ') are almost synonymous, hence 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of God'. In I John 3:8 it is said that the Son of God comes to 'destroy the works of the devil'. It is clear that sin, death, Satan, the world-powers which are evil, and the flesh are all powerful forces which hold men in their grip. It is also evident that they are composite parts of the one total (evil) system. None works without the others. The conscience in this context becomes tyrannous, whilst the law and the wrath of God appear as dominating enemies.

By going to the Cross and destroying guilt Messiah has broken the bonds of Satan, his powers, death, and the flesh. He has eased man from the wrath of God, from his tyrannical conscience, and the bondage of the law. Man is now free to come to God through Messiah. Hence when Christ commands his disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every man, he has man's liberation in mind. When he commands them to make disciples of all nations, he has the peoples of the world in mind. When he says they will witness, through the power of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem and all Judea, Samaria, and to the 'end of the earth', he is saying that these nations shall turn to him, thus fulfilling the Abrahamic promise of blessing to all the nations, and the Shiloh promise of Genesis 49:10. As we have seen Paul interprets this 'obedience of the nations' in Romans, and makes it clear that to believe Christ is to obey the Gospel. Those believing constitute

² For a fuller treatment of Messiah as such, see 'The Person and Work of Christ', N.C.P.I. 1978, Short Term Bible School notes.

the true people of God. They constitute the multitude in heaven, and the eschatological city of God.

(iii) Messiah and the Jew and Gentile

(a) Proclamation

We have seen that Jesus in his earthly ministry came primarily to the lost of the tribes of the house of Israel. We also have intimations of intention towards the nations other than Israel, especially the revelation of his Father's love and intention for all the world. Specifically, what has been called 'the great commission' was given by him with all the nations of the world very clearly in view.

In Matthew they are to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. That is they are not merely to make disciples from among the nations - although that is also true - but they are to make disciples of all the nations, i.e. each nation or people is to become a disciple. Then they are to effect obedience from these disciple nations.³

In Mark the Gospel is to be preached in all the world to persons. The Lord works with them as they do this. In John 1? Jesus speaks of sending his disciples into the world, and in chapter 20 says 'As the Father has sent me so send I you.' They are to take the universal message of forgiveness. In Luke they are to take the universal message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins 'to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem'. In Acts 1:8, as we have seen, the order of proclamation is to the Jew, the Samaritan, and the Gentile. In this sense then Messiah has come to draw out of the three - Jew, Samaritan and Gentile - his people, the true community, the church of the living God.

(b) Reconciliation: the New Humanity

Reconciliation to God must carry with it also reconciliation to man. 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them' (II Cor. 5:19). The man who is reconciled to God may now relate to others through God. This reconciliation is through the Cross (Col. 1:21f). Another way of saying it is that the man who comes to the Father (by the Son) comes to the Father's (other) children.

The big problem however is, 'Are the Gentiles included in Messiah's work? May they be reconciled to God, and having thus been reconciled may they be reconciled to the people of Israel, and Israel to them?' This question certainly occupied the early church. We have seen in some of the O.T. prophecies that the Gentiles were to relate to the Jews when Messiah came, and that Messiah was to be 'a light to lighten the Gentiles'. We are not told explicitly that Jews and Gentiles are to merge together and become one people of God. Paul in particular has teaching which speaks of the two racial divisions becoming one humanity - Harnack's 'third race'.

In Romans 16:25-26 Paul says, 'Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation

³ We must of course understand that 'nation' is simply 'a people', i.e. a tribe, or an ethnic grouping. In many of contemporary nations there are incorporated many peoples, i.e. many nations, e.g. there are many nations (of aborigines) in Australia.

of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages, but now is disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith...' From this point of view Paul is pointing to the Abrahamic promise and the theme of Messiah and obedience. However, in Ephesians 2 he has another, though complementary, approach. He makes it clear, commencing at verse 11, that Gentiles were utterly excluded from the commonwealth of Israel. They were 'strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.' In Romans 9:4-5 he has spoken of the exclusive rights and privileges of Israel, 'To them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is Christ.' By what means, then, may the Gentiles participate in the promises, covenants, etc.?

Paul's answer is that the Cross has destroyed the enmity between Jew and Gentile and man and God. Christ has broken down the dividing wall of hostility. This wall which separated Jew and Gentile was epitomised by the parapet wall in the temple between the court of the Gentiles and the court of sacrifice. Gentiles could watch but not participate - under pain of death. Christ in dying did the following things:-

- (a) He fulfilled the law so that no longer did it obtain as a Jewish law. He paid its penalties and so fulfilled it. He also fulfilled it in the sense that Paul speaks of (if not here then) in Romans 10:4, 'For Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified'. In the sense that Christ bore the sins of both Jew and Gentile he also destroyed the enmity between man and God. Man is now free to come to God.
- (b) The effect of his Cross is to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God. This meant the end of hostility between Jew and Gentile, the main cause being the (seeming) exclusivism of the Jew. That could not now exist. Those 'who were far off' (the Gentiles) and those 'who were near' (the Jews) now through Christ (the reconciling Cross) have by the Spirit, together, access to the Father.

Access is a powerful word, meaning that man is not excluded from the presence of God. Also the word 'Father' indicates the new nature of Jew and Gentile as brothers. Paul concludes, 'So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.' This household of God, in one sense, is a new creation. It is 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstones.' The Gentiles are no longer alienated from the commonwealth of God.

Paul then works out the implications of this. He says that he is a special messenger of the truth that has not been made known to the sons of men in other generations. This truth is a mystery, i.e. closed to the uninitiated but open to the initiated. The mystery is this - 'the Gentiles are fellow-heirs (with the Jews), members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.' This is the stunning truth of the Cross. In it a new humanity is minted. This is neither Jew nor Gentile. It is not an amalgam of both. It is something which was not before. It is the new true community of God. It is the true Israel of God. It is the people of God. We shall now proceed to examine this people having seen that it is redeemed from its former Jewish and Gentiles states, and is composed of those from 'every nation, and people, and kindred and tribe and tongue'. It is also intended to comprise those peoples in the ultimate when there shall be 'the healing of the nations.'

4. The People of God: The True Community

(i) The O.T.: The Community of God

We have already traced the people of God in the O.T. We have seen that it devolves through Abraham to the children of Israel. This is a closely knit people, with its laws, its sacrificial cultus, its prophets, priests and kings. It is a theocracy without a king in the initial stages, and a theocracy with a king in its later stages. The fact that some kings overstepped the boundaries of their delegated authority does not invalidate the principle of theocracy. The things which belonged to Israel such as the law, the glory, the covenants, the promises, the patriarchs, Messiah and the sonship, ideally welded this nation into a rare and exceptional community. At the same time its full being as community was contingent primarily upon its love of God and its obedient loyalty to Him. There were even expedients created for the exigencies of rebellions and idolatry, namely the chastisement of the nation, and the turning of it back to God.

If we wish to understand the community of the church as we find it in the N.T. then we must surely understand the community of Israel. The roots of the new community are deeply in the old. Pentecost brought both continuity with the old and discontinuity.

(ii) The O.T.: Intimations of The New Community

We have also seen in the prophets that a new community was anticipated. For the Jews it was the full possession of the prescribed boundaries God has set out for the people in Palestine. Morally it was to be a time of righteousness, peace and prosperity. Communally it was to be covenantal, God dwelling in the midst, and Israel being His family. The Gentiles were to be lightened by their Messiah who would usher in the Kingdom of God, and so the Gentiles would gather to derive benefits from the community of Messiah. In this time God would be manifested as the Lord of all the nations, and they would come under Him. Israel would be the eschatological community.

(iii) The N.T.: Intimations of The New Community

Leaving aside the fact of Israel's chequered career under the bondage of a number of nations, the problems of internal government, as also the prominence of law, and the control of the Temple by the Sadducees, there was great anticipation of the Messianic community at the time of Jesus. Not only had false messiahs arisen, and these with disastrous consequences, but there were communities such as those of the Qumran scrolls, the Essenes and the like which were messianically oriented. The arrival of the prophetic and pneumatic John the Baptist brought a rich response. 'Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea and all the region round about Jordan, and they were baptised by him in the river Jordan confessing their sins' (Matt. 3:4-6). He was proclaiming

- (a) The Kingdom of God,
- (b) The (new) forgiveness of sins through Messiah (John 1:29, Mark 1:4), and
- (c) The outpouring (or, baptism) of the Holy Spirit.

Whilst it is true he gathered a community about him he called himself the precursor to Messiah and the kingdom of God, especially in the terms of Isaiah 40 which includes the repentance of Israel (John's theme) and the coming of the Lord to renew His people and His land.

Some of John's disciples recognised that the logical step to take was to follow Jesus to whom John pointed as the one who would take away the sins of the world and baptise with the Holy Spirit. He was the

true Messiah of the Kingdom. Jesus, as we have seen gave intimations of the Kingdom to come. He said to his disciples, 'Fear not, little flock, it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom'. He also said, 'Shall not your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?' He spoke of the flock, and said that there were others he had who were not of the fold of Palestine. He would bring them and there would be one flock (John 10:16). He may have meant dispersed Jews or the Gentiles or both. When his death has to be not only for the nation 'but for all the children scattered abroad' (John 11:52) it may have meant dispersed Jews, or the elect Gentiles. He uses the flock image with Peter in a post-resurrection appearance. Significant, also, is the fact that he calls the disciples 'brethren' (John 20:17, Matt. 28:10). This is significant in the light of his teaching of Fatherhood and brotherhood. It points to family.

In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus speaks about building his church. It is to be in the future. He uses the word *ecclesia* which reasonably equates the Jewish *qahal*, the term used for the congregation in the wilderness. Jesus also speaks of something of the gathering and discipline of that church (Matt. 16:18-19, 18:15-20). It is generally agreed that Jesus evaded the idea of community as such because of the inflammatory nature of teaching a messianic community. At the same time he speaks much of the Kingdom and on any score this was known as the community of God, even if the prime emphasis was on the rule of God.

(iv) The Birth of The New Community

Jesus' high-priestly prayer of John 17 is the prayer for total unity between those who were to preach the word (proclaim the Gospel) and those who hearing it would believe. Jesus said that the glory the Father had given him he had given them 'that they may be one'. He is anxious for this unity. In some senses he has already taught unity by the serving of one another in humility. Now the word preached is to produce results in that many will repent, turn to God and receive remission of sins. Also, when the Spirit would come (at Pentecost) then he would lead them into all the truth. This is what he did. The apostolic doctrine crystallised that day (Acts 2:42). At the same time 3,000 people came under the Lordship of Christ. Together with the 120 baptised in the Spirit, they formed the new community. It was community under Messiah's Lordship. They also had to 'separate themselves from this crooked generation', i.e. those who rejected Christ. The Sanhedrin had done that virtually, and the early acts of the church under the Holy Spirit polarised the Jewish elders, setting them against the Gospel. In this sense Pentecost was an event of the birth of the church which had simultaneously continuity and discontinuity with the old *qahal*. It was in fact the new *qahal* but it stemmed from the old. All who were present at Pentecost were Jews.

The new community was not at first called the church⁴ (*ecclesia*), but as the Book of Acts proceeds the term is used often. It may have been more in use by the time Luke wrote the Acts than it was at the time of the formation of the *ecclesia*. It does not really matter. What matters is that suddenly there was a new community.

⁴ For the subject of the church see LFS. No. 27 'The Nature of the Church in the N.T.' (N.C.P.I., 1978).

(v) The Nature of The Community

The book of Acts and the Epistles reveal as much of the nature of the church as we require to know. From the commencement it was a community of love. It cared for its members. Many sold their goods and possessions and placed them in a common pool to meet the needs of every person. It was a community of caring in that it continued to supply the poor even from as far abroad as Asia Minor and Europe. It also had an arrangement for widows and their care. Much of this caring is detailed in the pastoral letters.

We have seen that the unity of the church was something that emerged amid stress and tension. Men like Barnabas and Paul seemed to have a wider view than many at Jerusalem. They saw the Gospel was universal, and the community of the faithful not limited to Jewish Christians. However, they had a hard battle to fight. The three events of the outpouring of the Spirit at Jerusalem, Samaria and Caesarea correlate with the Jewish, Samaritan and Gentile community situations. The further work of the Spirit of unity (Ephes. 4:3) was to maintain unity amongst the people of each of these ethnic groups and then to make the ethnic groups one. This is Paul's thesis in I Cor. 12. Far from being a discourse on the gifts of the Spirit it is a study on the unifying power of the Spirit. Hence Paul says, 'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and were all made to drink of one Spirit.' Speaking in Galatians 3:26-29 of baptism itself he says that 'as many as were baptised into Christ put on Christ', and he adds, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' This is what Jesus' high-priestly prayer was aimed at.

To achieve this unified community was in practice not an easy task. Doubtless the reconciliation with the Father, through the Cross opened the way to reconciliation with the true brethren. So much so that John can say (I John 3:14), 'we know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. However, the Jews at Jerusalem who had become Christians had to struggle to accept the Gentiles, and some wished to Judaise them. That is, they desired them to come under Mosaic law, and to be circumcised. They did not realise the implications of law mixed with grace. Paul, however, worked out these implications very powerfully, and finally won the day. The epistles to the Romans and the Galatians are his monumental work on these issues. As we will see, the fifteen chapter of Acts was decisive for Jew-Gentile unity on prophetic Biblical grounds.

The community was under the rich order of gifts and pastoral ministry. The gifts covered such ministries as apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. The various gifts such as miracles, healings, governments, prophecy, tongues and interpretation were aids to the ministry of love. In I Cor. 13 Paul points out that gifts without love are useless. Doubtless love without gifts is also an anomaly seeing that loving is giving (John 3:16, I John 4:11, etc.). These gifts met the social and personal needs of the members of the church. The order of ministry such as bishops, elders and deacons was also intended to serve the community needs under a hierarchy of love and authority. Hence ministries and gifts were not arbitrary but were used for the needs of the church, especially to build it up in love. They were indispensable to the essential unity of the community.

Finally, but certainly not least of all these, the church was the community of proclamation. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, under the Lordship of Christ and built up by the gifts and ministries, it was to proclaim the good news of Messiah, and lead men to redemption, and to consequent inclusion in the community of God. In fact gifts of any nature would atrophy if they were not used towards this end.

God primarily loves the world, and whilst it is true He loves the church, it is also true that the church is in existence to tell this love of God to the world, for which Christ died.

If then we can see this community in all its elements we can see how it transcends the old Hebrew qahal, and provides the home and background for true growth and maturation. We will see, then, how significant it is in both time and eternity.

5. The Eternal God and His Community

One thing we have seen is that the community of God is time-wide and worldwide. It is not a locally planned and executed unit. It is not a commune. It is composed of the sons (and daughters) of God, wherever they are, and whenever they are. Israel was a congregation which today we would call ethnic. Nevertheless Israel as God's community was not over and against other ethnic groups as such, but was called to be God's priest-nation among the nations. In Acts 10:34 Peter says, 'Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.' He must mean that God's people have not been confined solely to Israel.

When we come to consider some of the figures or homologies of the community we find them deeply ingrained within Scripture. These are the figures of the household, of the family, the vineyard, the bride, and particularly in the N.T., the body. There are other figures such as the vine, the flock, and perhaps the haul of fishes. We are now in a position to examine some of these in detail.

(i) The Eternal God

Each one of these figures will relate or correlate with some aspect of the nature of God. For example in the O.T., especially in Ezekiel 34, God is the true Shepherd. Hence His people will be His flock, a theme in which Israel delights. It must be seen that He is not like a shepherd, but the Shepherd, the archetype from which the mundane reality takes its being and character. Let us look at some of these aspects of the nature of God in order to understand those elements which correlate with the archetype.

(a) God is Father

This is a theme seen in the O.T. Arguing back from Luke 3:38 and Acts 17:28 many see that God is Father as Creator, or as Creator He is Father. This may well be implied in Isaiah 63:16, 64:8 and similar passages, although they refer to Israel in their setting. However, when it comes to the community, then without doubt God is Father, and not, merely, like a father. Recent researches into this area have shown that Israel recognised the Fatherhood of God, although they awaited a more brilliant revelation, naturally, in and through the person of His Son. Paul says (Rom. 9:4) 'To Israel belonged .. the sonship'. Israel was corporately a son of God (Exodus 4:22, Hosea 11:1, etc.) but also all Israel were the children of God (Deut. 14:1, 32:6, cf. Jer. 3:4, 14, 22).

The New Testament reveals God clearly as Father in a universal way, but not in a universalistic manner. It has been said, 'God is the Father of all men (origination) but not all men are the children of God'. This is because in the Fall they abdicated their true relationship with God. To be in His image and likeness is for many scholars to be a son of the Father. However, it is in Christ

(not Adam) that full sonship was planned (Ephesians 1:3-7, I Cor. 2:6-10, cf. Romans 8:30, I John 3:1-3). Such become sons in the fulness of time. See Galatians 4:4-6.

Unless we understand the significance of God's Fatherhood as revealed by Christ we might even miss the whole point of the N.T. John 1:14, 18, 14:1-10, Matt. 11:27 tell us that God is Father. In the O.T. the word 'God' was not a name for God. God's only name was YAHWEH. Exodus 3:13-16 expounds the name as 'I AM WHO I AM', i.e. 'I AM'. Jesus says in his high-priestly prayer, 'I have manifested thy name to the men who thou gavest me', and, 'I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known'. He gave only one name, that of 'Father'. Doubtless this was not simply the word 'Father', but also all that it means - its nature, action, and so on. He had said, 'He that has seen me has seen the Father'. He says, 'I kept them in thy name', and 'Keep them in thy name' (John 17:6, 26, 12, 11). This revelation of God as Father must mean that when we look at the figures (or, homologues) of household and family, then we must understand them in the light of His Fatherhood, as also Messiah in the light of his Sonship. Thus when Jesus says (John 8:35), 'The slave does not continue in the house forever; the Son continues forever, so if the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed', then that freedom is related to house or household. When he says, 'In my Father's house are many dwelling places', he must again be alluding to the domestic household of God. In the light of these matters we may now look at the household of God.

(1) The Household of God

In the LXX and the N.T. the words *oikos* and *oikia*, which are virtually synonymous, are used in the following contexts:

- (a) **For buildings such as a house, the temple, and a palace.** The temple can be called 'the house of God', or, 'the house of the Lord'. This was so when the house of the Lord was in fact a tent (tabernacle). The tent of course was normally where the family dwelt. This is seen in Acts 15:16, 'I will rebuild the dwelling (tent) of David'. A tent is as much a house as is a solid building. Israel looked upon the temple as the house of the Lord but also, symbolically its own house.
- (b) **That family which constitutes all under the one roof, tent, house, habitation.** There is no word for the modern 'nuclear family' in either the Hebrew or the Greek. The term household is used to cover all who dwell together, i.e. more than one generation, and includes servants also. In the N.T. when households are baptised (Acts 16:31-34) it means precisely this. Likewise the house or household can refer to a clan, a tribe, and even a race. Thus we read of 'the house of Israel', 'the house of Judah', 'the house of David', etc.
- (c) **In both O.T. and N.T. it is used to refer to the whole community of God, the people of God.** In this sense the whole community is not necessarily localised.

The question is, 'Are these three ideas related?' The original tabernacle or tent was understood to be the dwelling place of God, although not in the mere spatial sense (cf. Acts 7:44-50). Yet every tent was understood as a domestic dwelling place. In Ezekiel 37:27-28 God says, 'My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary is in the midst of them'. It seems that the sanctuary symbolises and epitomises God and His community.

In Numbers 12:7 God says of Moses, 'He is entrusted with all my house' This must mean, 'my people, my community'. In this context Moses is the servant of God. Israel then is the household of God, His community, i.e. 'my people which are called by my name' (II Chron. 7:14). Within this community are the family- households, and the tribal households, and the dynasty households.

In the N.T. the household of God is the Christian community. Paul says clearly, 'the household of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth' (I Tim. 3:15). In Ephesians 2:11-22 Paul says the Gentiles are alienated from the community of Israel, but because of the Cross Jew and Gentile together have access by Christ and the Spirit to the Father. Hence both are members of the household (oikos) of God. He then identifies this family with the sanctuary (naos), i.e. the temple of God, and this sanctuary is living, i.e. it is composed of the members as stones. This becomes the dwelling place of God. This is very close to Ezekiel 37:27-28 and so to Revelation 21:1-4 where the people of God (the city of God) is the dwelling place of God with His people.

Peter carries on this concept. In I Peter 2:4-10 he posits that the people of God are living stones in the temple built into 'a spiritual house' (oikos). He goes on to tell them, 'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people....' Later in the epistle (4:17) he says, 'For the time has come for judgement to begin with the household of God...'

The writer of Hebrews (3:1-6) refers to Numbers 12:7 where Moses is servant of the house, the people of God, Israel. The writer now refers to it on a wider basis. He says of the Christian community, 'We are his house' (oikos). He obviously means that the house of God has continuity from Israel to the Christian church. Also he refers to Christ being faithful in the household as a Son, Moses being only a servant. In John 8:34-35 Jesus speaks of the Son abiding in the house forever, and the slave not dwelling there forever. He says, 'If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed', obviously meaning that those liberated by the Son will not be slaves, and so may abide in the house (oikia). In John 14:2 Jesus said he was going to his Father's house to prepare dwelling places for them, i.e. places within the community of God under the Father.

In Revelation 3:12 Jesus says he will make the overcomers pillars in the temple of God, that is they will be stalwarts in the whole house-household. In I Cor. 3:10-12, Ephes. 2:20, and II Tim. 2:19 the foundation of the house is mentioned, Christ being the cornerstone (Acts 4:11, Ephes. 2:20, I Peter 2:4). Pillars are again mentioned in I Tim. 3:15, and the whole idea of building is brought forward in I Cor. 3 and in Ephes. 4:11-16.

What of course is so wonderful is the fact that this household is of Jews and Gentiles. The argument James uses at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) is precisely on the matter of building (or, rebuilding), and it is 'the dwelling of David', i.e. the renewed Messianic community. The quotation from Amos 9:11-12 is the closest thing to an O.T. prophecy which includes the Gentiles in the rebuilding of God's people. Bruce in the International Commentary (ad.loc.) says, 'James meant that God had clearly shown His pleasure that the new community which was to display His glory in the world should be drawn from Gentiles as well as Jews

We conclude then that the household of God is God's people stretching from the beginning of time through to eternity. It is an awesome thing in that God is head of the household, and were it not for the revelation of Him as Father all in the household would be slaves rather than children, servants rather than brethren. The Son is over the household, for his Father. The church in the N.T. has discontinuity with the Hebrew qahal in that that was under law, and the new people is

under grace. It has continuity in that it is the new true Israel of God. This does not exclude 'Israel after the flesh' for 'all Israel shall be saved', but even so that salvation must be by faith in Christ.

When it comes to the purpose and usefulness of the household, we see more of these elements under the homely figure or homology of the family. We must emphasise however that community as a thing in itself, or a methodology for living are ideas totally foreign to the people of God. Community was the proper form, and the natural expression of the household of God under the Son and the Father.

(2) The Family of God

We have already seen that there is no word for the nuclear family in either Hebrew or Greek. This does not mean there were not nuclear families, since there always have been. However it means that 'family' was a far wider concept than one set of parents and children, since people lived in households. In some instances the term 'household' has been translated in recent years as 'family'. After all, we also have to start from where we are, if we would understand, and this, of all, is the century of the nuclear family! We must then seek the idea of family, not from the type of family current in the O.T. or the N.T., but from the revelation of God as Father.

We have already seen in the O.T. that God is known as the covenant-Father of Israel. It is doubtful whether any domestic warmth accompanied this view. Paul could say, 'To Israel belonged...the sonship' (Rom. 9:4). We have seen that in Exodus 4:22, and Hosea 11:1 this is a corporate concept, but other references (e.g. Deut. 14:1, and 32:6) indicate personal sonship of each (true) Israelite.

It is the Son himself who in his coming into the world reveals the Father. He spells out divine Fatherhood in the human terms of his own Sonship. He prays to the Father, and directs others to pray to Him as Father; 'Our Father...' In the Sermon on the Mount he gives warm and gracious views of God as Father. Doubtless this Fatherhood is also Kingship of the Kingdom of God, but it is, nevertheless, warm. Whilst the term brethren has been one much used in the O.T. amongst Israel, yet it has a new and fresh connotation. The passage of Matt. 23:8-10 strikes an order: 'Teacher', 'Father', 'Messiah'. Hence the correlatives 'brethren' (with teacher), 'children' (with Father), and 'servants' (with Messiah the Lord). The term disciple which is found often in the Gospels becomes 'brethren' in John 20:17 and Matt. 28:10. The Acts uses the term disciples but rather as a designation from outside, to others. Within the community the term is 'brethren'. This should be studied closely. With the new revelation of God's Fatherhood comes a new revelation and understanding of family. It was impossible to have this full view prior to the actual filial-paternal revelation by the Son and the Father in the Gospels.

In the epistles the term brethren is strong. Brotherly love is personally taught by God (I Thess. 4:9), and is the goal of regeneration (I Peter 1:22). It is the sign of new life (I John 3:14), and the evidence of true love for God (I John 4:20, 5:1). Notice the term 'heavenly Father, or, 'Father in heaven' to denote the transcendent Fatherhood. One works 'down' from the divine to the earthly and never 'up'. Passages such as I Cor. 8:6, Ephes. 3:15, 4:6 indicate the order of the family rests upon the Father and the Son. Hebrews 2:9-14 shows the Son is the pioneer of salvation, and is not ashamed to call us 'brethren'. Indeed, as Romans 8:28-30 indicates, all in the family are being shaped into the image of Christ's glory, the glory of the elder brother.

The implications of this more domestic approach to the household are many and most dynamic. The term 'access' which we saw before means that whereas the temple (which to some degree corresponds to household: see above) gave no access to any

save the high priest and he only once a year at the time of the atonement, now access is into that very holy of holies. Indeed Christ is the new and living way into the very presence of God. Awe does not diminish, but loving affection grows. This manifests itself in the holy love of the brethren for one another, in serving, and in sharing the fruits of the Gospel. Likewise the passage concerning temple and sanctuary, such as in Ezekiel 37 and Revelation 21 are more intimate. God dwells with His people, but now. He dwells as Father. The potential for family love lies in this relationship.

The family of course must be holy. The Father is holy ('Holy Father!' 'Our Father, hallowed be thy name'. 'If you invoke Him as Father..') and so must the children be. In II Cor. 6:14 - 7:1 Paul quotes Isaiah 52:11, 43:6 and Hosea 1:10 to show that God will have His children holy. Here 'people' and 'sons and daughters' are equal in meaning. Hosea 1:10 is exegeted in Romans 9:24-26 to show that God has called not only from the Jews (the clean people) but also from the Gentiles - the unclean. They too are to be called, 'sons of the living God'. In regard to this Peter tells the Gentiles at Caesarea that God makes no distinction. At the Council of Jerusalem he says the same thing, adding 'he cleansed their hearts by faith'.

When this holiness of the sanctuary is matched by the holiness the Father has given to His children, then although awe may be no less, love is increased in the true domesticity of the beloved family. Warm family understanding gives greater meaning to the lofty truth of the household of God.

(b) God is Creator

The doctrine of creation is intimately related to that of redemption. Redemption redeems that which is created and is therefore a part of creation. Isaiah 43:6-7 carries on the theme of the purpose of creation, 'I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons and my daughters from the end of the earth, every one who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.' This conforms with Ephesians 1:3-14 where Paul points out that God created with a view to the ultimate glorification of His children, and planned such in Christ, so that at the end His children would be (a) To the praise of the glory of His grace, and (b) To the praise of His glory. Isaiah 63:16 says, 'O Lord, thou art our Father, our Redeemer from eternity is thy name.' That is, God was eternally Redeemer, as Father, as Creator. Hence to glorify His creation was His intention before time. Out of His Creator-Fatherhood being He plans His people.

(c) God is Shepherd

Many times in the O.T. God refers to Himself as Shepherd. Ezekiel 34 expounds this figure richly. God says, 'I, myself, will be the shepherd of my sheep.' Psalm 23 is of course the shepherd psalm, well known and loved. However, in Ezekiel 34:23 God says, 'And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.' Again this community is Messianic, having David over them. When in John 10 Jesus refers to himself as 'the good shepherd' he means 'good' in the sense of 'true', i.e. the one appointed by God. He alone can lead the flock. He knows and calls them by name. Other shepherds are false. The fold in Palestine has part of the flock. There are others - scattered abroad. Eventually there will be one flock (community) and one shepherd. In Ezek. 34:30-31, God says, 'And they shall know that I, the Lord their God am with them, and that they, the house of Israel are my people, says the Lord God. And you are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, says the Lord.'

Jesus is of course 'that great shepherd of the sheep', reflecting the Shepherd of Isaiah 63, and being the Shepherd of Revelation 7 where the great multitude (people) of God gather before the throne. 'For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.' This parallels the description of God's people in Rev. 21:1-5.

(d) Other Elements of His Eternal Being

The community is also under the figure of the branches of the vine. Old Israel had been the vine, and the vineyard, as expounded in Isaiah 5. Christ now claims he is the true vine, i.e. the good vine, perhaps the archetypal vine, the fontal vine. They are community in him. Yet they are there for a purpose, to glorify the Father by bringing forth fruit. The Father is the vine-dresser. He is careful to purge and (so) fructify His people.

Paul uses the figure of the body to show how integrated is the people of God, and how interdependent its members. Again this body exists as the very body of Christ himself, he being the head. The whole body obeys the head, yet each member is also obedient. Again the body is there (a) To grow into maturity (Ephes. 4: 11-16), (b) To be fruitful in the operations of love through gifts, services, and workings (I Cor. chs. 12-14).

Paul uses the O.T. figure of the Bride. Israel was bride to God. This thought is used in the prophecies. In this case it is the relationship of the people of God to God that is emphasised. In the N.T. the love of Christ the bridegroom is stressed. The people of God being wedded to Christ in Revelation 19 is contrasted with the harlotry of the false woman, Babylon, the people who are anti-God and who bear the mark of the beast. Revelation 21:22-27 shows the purity of the eternal city and all who enter must be pure. In Rev. 7:14 all have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. It is these whom the Father shelters from the burning heat, and wipes away their tears.

(ii) The Triumph of God in His Community

We come now to our conclusion in regard to the plan of God and His community. Two triumphs appear, one in time, and the other in eternity. In time we see two triumphs:- (a) There is a holy people of God, and (b) There is an obedient, proclaiming and saving people of God.

(1) **There is a holy people of God.** We have already seen in the O.T. that God designed His people to be holy. Israel was holy in that it was separated unto God. However, its practical holiness was deficient because of idolatry and rebellion. Exile was intended to purify it of idolatry; overtly idolatry was destroyed. Stephen, however (Acts 7:38ff), points out that Israel was incurably idolatrous. It is clear at the same time that amongst Israel was the holy remnant, or holy seed (Isaiah 6:13). Christ was the true remnant, the true holy seed, and from him springs the renewed community.

Ephesians 1:3-4 speaks of the intention of God that His people be 'holy and blameless'. We saw in Acts 15:7-9 that God no longer considered the believing Gentiles as unclean, but made no distinction and incorporated them into the people of God 'cleansing their hearts by faith' through the Spirit. This is the 'sanctified by faith' of Acts 26:17-18. It is the 'washing' of I Cor. 6:11, and 'the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit' of Titus 3:5. It is the transference of Exodus 19:5 to the new people of God in I Peter 2:9-10, 'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may

declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people, but now you are God's people: once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.' It is the people of whom Paul says, 'This is the will of God, your sanctification... For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness.' (See I Thess. 4:3, 7.) In II Cor. 6:14 - 7:1 he calls them to separate from unclean elements.

This holiness, whilst present and practical is not perfect. Paul calls for 'perfecting holiness' (II Cor. 7:1) and the writer of Hebrews exhorts 'Follow after holiness' (Heb. 12:14). The holiness is assured eschatologically (Ephes. 1: 3-4, Rev. 7:14, 21:27, cf. 21:8), and meanwhile Christ purifies his church 'by the washing of the water and the word' (Ephes. 5:26), and 'his blood goes on cleansing from all sin' (I John 1:7). As the community lives it is in practice the holy community. This holiness is only understood by faith, and it is anticipated in hope (I John 3:), but is worked out in love. It is God's triumph that He has taken sinful mankind and created His holy people from that material. It is those who have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb who worship Him day and night in the Temple, serving Him for all eternity.

(2) **There is an obedient, proclaiming and saving people of God.** Obedience was God's call and condition of the Mosaic covenant. Obedience was the keynote of Abraham's life (Gen. 26:4-5) and was demanded of Israel (Exodus 24:7, cf. Deut. chs. 27-30). Again that obedience was ever only rendered by the holy remnant. Entrance into the new covenant is by 'obeying the Gospel' (II Thess. 1:8, Rom. 10: 16, Acts 6:7, etc.). This obedience is the act of repentance and faith, and brings salvation (I Peter 1:2, 22) and leads into the life of obedience (Matt. 28:20, Rom. 6:17). Again, out of sinful humanity Christ has created the obedient people of God.

Part of that obedience is the proclamation of the Gospel. The great commission as set out in the final chapters of the Gospels and in Acts 1:8 means that this new community exists to proclaim. Its proclamation is the reign of God, the Kingdom of heaven. It brings the good news of God's saving grace to mankind. This is in Jerusalem and all Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The Gospel is proclaimed 'by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven' (I Peter 1:12, I Cor. 2:4f, I Thess. 1:5, etc.). The Book of Acts testifies to the fact that the new community is Spirit-filled and 'cannot but tell the things (which it has) seen and heard' (Acts 4:20), so it proclaims 'all the words of this life (Acts 5:20)', and finds that proclamation is God's only way, as it is God's dynamic way, of saving men and women (I Cor. 1:17-21). Paul cries, 'Woe unto me if I preach not the Gospel' (I Cor. 9:16) and insists that only when this is done is he clean from the blood of all men - a reference to Ezekiel 3 on warning men and women. Jude exhorts, 'And convince some that doubt; save some by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.' All the ends of the earth have to look unto God to be saved. They are saved by Christ as Lord of his church, directing his people. These people he has baptised with his Spirit and so they have proclaiming power (Acts 1:8).

(iii) God and His Eschatological People

What is clear is that the community of hope⁵ lives in anticipation of the prophetic consummation to history. What has been promised to it for the end-time,

⁵ * For a wider treatment of the theme of hope and the elements for which the people of God live in hope see LFS. 26 'The Biblical Doctrine of Hope' (NCPI, 1978).

that is in eternity, is holiness, justification, sonship, peoplehood, the Lordship of the Lamb, the freedom from all forms of stress, purposefulness, and the tender love of the Father as He dwells in His people, they being His dwelling place. (Ephes. 1:3-4, Gal. 5:5, Ephes. 1:4-7, Rev. 21:1-5, 7:17, TI Peter 3:13). It cannot be fully comprehended as to the nature and privileges of God's people. Their glorification is of such nature as to confound present comprehension (I John 3:1-3, Rom. 8:18ff, Phil. 3:21, I Cor. 15:51ff, I Cor. 2:6-10). Without doubt this people who will see the face of God Himself (Rev. 22:4, cf. I Tim. 6:15-16), and be like Him are the fruits of God's great creative, redemptive and restorative acts.

What concerns us is the present eschatological community. Above, we have seen their holiness, and their proclamatory ministry. At the same time they are locked in battle with evil powers, working out the victory of Christ won on the Cross and by the Resurrection. They fight with spiritual weapons (TI Cor. 10:3f, Ephes. 6:10ff) and battle against every evil force. They are expected to be conquerors and overcomers. Romans 8:31-39 speaks of the odds against which they battle but claims 'In all these things we are more than conquerors...' Likewise Rev. 21:7 says that they who overcome will inherit all things and be called the sons of God. The seven letters (Revelation chs. 2 and 3) promise special rewards to those who are conquerors. Hence the eschatological community is co-operating with its Lord (Rev. 19:11-14) to bring about the final defeat of evil (I Cor. 15:24-28, Phil. 2:9-11, Rev. 11:15).

It is when they share in this manner that it can be said, 'Henceforth, blessed are they who die in the Lord. Blessed indeed, for they rest from their labours and their deeds do follow them!' (Rev. 14:13).

(iv) Conclusion: The People of God

If Israel of all is the only people of God, then the agent of community has become the goal of community, and this in the elitist sense. God's love is for His whole world. 'God so loved the world', is the signet statement of God's universal love. A love such as His cannot limit itself. His is true love, love par excellence. Hence He must win the nations of the world. The great theme we have seen of the nations becoming subject to Messiah (Gen. 49:10, Psalm 2, Phil. 2:9-11) is all 'to the glory of the Father (Phil. 2:11, I Cor. 15:28, etc.)'. This Fatherhood presupposes familyhood, and so that nations come into the Eternal City (Rev. 21:22 - 22:5). If vindication is needed then God is vindicated as Creator (I Peter 4:19), Redeemer, and Restorer. He has created His children for His glory (Isa. 43:6-7). He has redeemed them for His glory (Ephes. 1:5-14), and He has glorified them for His glory (Romans 8:18ff).

Thus the family of which Revelation 7:9-14 speaks is the fruit of the travail of the soul of Messiah. This is seen in the Messianic Psalm 22 which was evidently in the mind of the writer of Hebrews in 2:9-14. Here Christ is not ashamed to call men his brethren, the children whom God has given him. This is stated in Psalm 22:

22-31. The whole passage should be read in the light of the travail of the Cross. Messiah cries, 'I will tell thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee. ... All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord. And all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.' We must distinguish between what is universal, and what is universalistic. God's holiness precludes any form of universalistic salvation. His Person as holy love precludes other than universal salvation. It is the nations who will enter the eternal city. His Father's heart will only then be satisfied when the fulness of His family is with Him and His Messiah, His Son, Deliverer and Elder Brother.

- APPENDIX ONE -

The Life and Practice of The Community

This is a broad subject. Relationships within the community are those of true love. Brotherly love is not mere affection, but a love which causes total concern one for the other. God Himself teaches this love (I Thess. 4:9). It is very close to the ultimate in love (John 15:13, I John 3:16). It is for this purpose that one is redeemed (I Peter 1:22).

The outworking of love in relationships is clear enough in I Tim. 5:1, 'Do not rebuke an older man but treat him as you would a father. Treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity.' Paul then goes on to say how this works out with widows, and how the rule of elders is indispensable to the life of the church.

It is doubtful whether those interested in communities as against the community of God's people will find directions indicated as such. The Christian community was not a commune. It was not closely localised, although it existed in a locality. It was light and salt within the community as a whole. This community was not specialised in the principle of a community.

- APPENDIX TWO -

The Community and The People of God

The Kingdom of God is the reign and rule of God, in all history and across all time. In the richest sense it is the reign and rule of God over His faithful people. It is the Father who is King (of the Kingdom). It is the King who is the Father. Hence the Kingdom of God cannot be co-terminal with the church or the community of God's people. However, these people 'enter the Kingdom', are 'of the Kingdom' and suffer 'for the Kingdom'. (See Matt.18:1, Acts 14:22, Rom. 14:17, I Cor. 6:9, Col. 1:13, II Thess. 1:5.) The Kingdom is not a localised realm, enclosed within a perimeter. It is the living, loving reign of the Father. Hence it has family connotation ('sons of the Kingdom'). All within the community are the people of God from the beginning of time to the end. The church, stemming from Pentecost is that community of people who have come under the reign and rule of God. Nevertheless the faithful of God have always belonged to His Kingdom, just as they too, have come to belong to the people of God. #